

Note to the reader

This book is intended for educational purposes and personal reflection. It does not constitute medical advice or psychological support and does not replace consultation with a qualified professional.

The Path to Awakening is a tool for reflection and practice intended to support a personal journey toward greater awareness and clarity. It draws freely from the teachings of various thinkers and Masters from different traditions and historical periods, without claiming to provide an exhaustive or official interpretation of their teachings.

The exercises and reflections presented in this book are invitations to inner exploration. They do not guarantee any particular outcome and should not be considered a method that can ensure awakening or achieve it within a specific timeframe.

If you are experiencing a period of significant psychological suffering, emotional distress, or if you are facing difficulties that have a major impact on your daily life, it is recommended that you seek help from a qualified professional.

Furthermore, this book does not aim to promote any religion, particular belief system, or any form of ideological adherence. On the contrary, it encourages readers to maintain a critical mind, to verify for themselves what is presented, and not to accept any idea as an absolute truth.

Finally, everyone progresses at their own pace. Each person is free to make the proposed exercises their own, adapt them to their personal

circumstances, and discontinue their practice if it causes significant discomfort.

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MODULE 1 : Introduction

“
**Everybody wants to change the world, but
no one thinks of changing himself.**
”
— Leo Tolstoy

Presentation of the Program

Welcome to this program, designed to support you on your own path to awakening.

This guide has been written in the simplest possible language so that it can be accessible to everyone. Its purpose is to support those who feel drawn to the path of awakening, without relying on sophisticated terminology or grand theories.

By building a bridge between traditional teachings and the challenges of modern Western life, this book offers an approach that remains faithful to the science of awakening while staying accessible to all.

All proceeds from the sale of this book will go to the nonprofit behind this project, which supports people who wish to develop greater

awareness. If these teachings are beneficial to you, you can also make a donation through the author's website¹.

Your support will help fund the creation of a retreat center for everyone walking the path to awakening.

What Is Awakening?

Awakening is a state of consciousness in which the sense of self fades, freeing us from its demands.

When a person awakens, they no longer identify with **the self**².

The personality is still there, of course, but the self that suffers, fears, or constantly seeks reassurance gradually loses its hold.

This makes the mind steadier and allows for wiser choices.

More specifically, when we stop clinging to what is impermanent, futile, and unnecessary, we stop longing for the very things that cause us suffering.

Through awakening, we open up a vast inner space that can be put to good use, in the service of something greater and more beautiful than ourselves.

Realizing awakening makes it possible to avoid suffering and to place our qualities at the service of others.

¹ www.maeltourrene.com/en Or <https://www.helloasso.com/associations/la-voix-du-zen/formulaires/1>

² For a clearer understanding of the terminology, please refer to the glossary at the end of the book.

Program Summary

The Path to Awakening is therefore a tool designed to support a personal journey toward awakening.

To this end, the program proposes several stages of learning:

- Learning to welcome emptiness within ourselves.
- Becoming less identified with the self.
- Developing a clearer understanding of what we experience.
- Freeing ourselves from conditioning in order to gain greater awareness, and thus greater freedom.
- Putting ourselves at the service of others, or of a purpose in life that is less centered on ourselves.

The program also includes practical exercises to help anchor the learning more deeply.

To avoid any confusion, it is also important to clarify what this program is not:

This is not a personal development method. The goal is not to seek a fleeting sense of well-being, or to improve one's abilities or performance.

Nor is it a guide to spirituality. We will not be exploring concepts such as the soul, reincarnation, the law of attraction, repeating numbers, intergalactic beings, or twin flames.

It is even less an initiation into religion. The aim is not to answer the question of whether God exists.

So if you are looking for a New Age or esoteric approach, this program will probably not be what you are looking for.

Who Am I?

Who I am is not important. I am a being on the path of awakening, just like you.

I spent a large part of my life in ignorance. Following a difficult childhood, I lived a life focused on social and material success. That obsession eventually led me into an existential dead end.

Like thousands of others, after going around in circles for a long time, I went through a phase of spiritual opening. I began to question the meaning of my life, my deepest identity, and the existence of something greater.

Then, after looking in vain for answers outside myself, I began to open the door to my true nature.

Meeting a Tibetan lama helped me realize that beyond spiritual opening lies a far more essential path: the path of awakening.

Advice

Our lives are all very full, and whatever teaching we follow, willpower alone is not always enough.

In truth, we all have good reasons to scatter ourselves: children, work, smartphones, and the distractions of worldly life.

Yet all of this is trivial compared with what the realization of awakening can bring.

So the wisest advice is this: take the time you need to devote yourself fully to this learning.

Better still, take a holiday and go on a retreat dedicated to awakening. Far from our usual routines, we can practice much more effectively and focus all our attention on what is essential.

However, if a group setting is not for you, it is essential not to remain alone with your doubts. Being guided by someone who knows the path can make all the difference.

That is why it is strongly recommended that you join the support group available through the author's website.

Finally, this program is built according to a logical progression. To benefit from it fully, you are asked to follow the modules in order.



Which Teaching?

Before going any further, it is important to keep one thing in mind: we do not all attach the same meaning to the concepts and words we use. Each of us interprets them through the lens of our own history, beliefs, and personal experience.

Moreover, we live in a time when certain words have become so overused that they seem to have been stripped of their deeper meaning.

Words such as love, freedom, and happiness, for example, can refer to very different realities from one person to another. The word spirituality is no exception and therefore needs to be clearly defined.

For many people, spirituality is a way of living one's relationship with God. This is true for those who follow a religious path, whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or otherwise.

For others, spirituality is a way of explaining the meaning of life, the workings of the universe, and invisible realities. This often leads to elaborate theories such as the law of attraction, life mission, the existence of the soul, angels, spirit guides, twin flames, and so on.

This is close to what is commonly called New Age spirituality in the West.

For still others, spirituality is synonymous with faith—that is, a personal strength one can rely on to face the upheavals of life. This sometimes reflects a desire not to belong to a religious community.

To clarify certain key concepts in this teaching, a glossary is provided at the end of the book.

Truth Is a Pathless Land

Whether we are religious, spiritual, or atheist, one thing is certain: no one can claim to possess absolute truth without falling into sectarianism.

If an ultimate reality exists, it surely transcends us, and we perceive only a tiny fragment of it, depending on our point of view. Some great teachers have taught outside any dogma, any community, and any religion.

One example is Jiddu Krishnamurti, the twentieth-century philosopher who remains a major figure on the spiritual path.

Krishnamurti was born in southern India in 1895, into a modest family. At the age of fourteen, while playing on a beach with his brother, he met Charles Leadbeater and Annie Besant, two leaders of an influential Western esoteric organization, the Theosophical Society.

It is said that when Leadbeater first saw the boy, he exclaimed: “There is no trace of ego in this boy’s aura! So he must be the Vehicle of the World Teacher!”

Convinced that they had found the messiah they had always been seeking, Leadbeater and Besant adopted Krishnamurti and raised him in London so that he could lead the Order of the Star, an organization created to prepare for the coming of the World Teacher.

But Jiddu Krishnamurti possessed an extraordinary independence of mind, shaped by his difficult childhood and fragile health. The further he went into mystical teaching, the more he rejected the idea that he was the messiah everyone expected.

That is why, in 1929, he addressed an assembly of followers and dissolved the Order of the Star, which he himself had been leading.

He declared in particular: "Truth is a pathless land." From then on, he taught freely around the world, without disciples, without religion, and without any system, until his death in 1986.

On religion and dogma

"Truth is a pathless land. You cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect."

"Belief is a purely individual matter, and you cannot and must not organize it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallized; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others."

"Hindus, Christians, and Muslims are conditioned. There is no freedom in conditioning. Conditioning divides people. Wherever there is division, there is conflict and violence."

"To be free of conditioning requires choiceless awareness —an attention in which thought does not interfere. Such attention is beyond psychological time."

— Jiddu Krishnamurti, 1929

The Buddha's Teaching

When we speak of awakening, the Buddha naturally comes to mind.

Indeed, Siddhartha Gautama devoted his entire life to the realization of awakening. So what was his teaching?

Unlike the major religions, the Buddha was concerned with neither God nor the soul.

Nor did his teaching propose any elaborate theories or sophisticated concepts such as spirit guides, angels, life missions, soul contracts, and the like.

Instead, the Buddha taught something far simpler and more practical : observing and understanding what is right before our eyes, without judgment.

Indeed, observing phenomena with calm and clarity leads us to ask the right questions: Who am I, really? What is manifesting in my life? What is the cause of my suffering? And above all: how can it end?

To this last question, the Buddha offers what may seem like a radical answer: the dissolution of the self in order to reach awakening.

A Western Blind Spot

When speaking of the Buddha, many of us tend to associate Eastern spiritual traditions with exotic religions and obscure beliefs: karma, rebirth, nirvana, awakening, and so on.

Indeed, monastic life, renunciation, the sangha, traditions, ritual objects, and the study of Sanskrit texts all act as obstacles to discovering the Buddha's teaching for us Westerners.

The cultural gap is immense.

Most of us are shaped by the dualistic religions that have formed our history and culture: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and so on. All these religions taught us that the soul and God are two distinct entities.

So it is hardly surprising that we feel skeptical when faced with the Buddha's teaching, which recognizes neither the soul nor God.

But let us say it plainly: Westerners tend to be proud and self-reliant.

It is not enough to believe in reincarnation to know the richness of Eastern traditions.

It is not enough to practice yoga or meditation once a week to claim the title of yogi — let alone awakened.

In truth, many of us in the West are deeply preoccupied with the self.

We pamper it like a treasure: massages, manicures, gyms...

We place it on a pedestal, like a spoiled child: the most beautiful, the smartest, the most deserving, the most productive...

We put it on display on social media, from every angle.

We keep it constantly entertained: through culture, entertainment, social outings, and reality TV.

So it is no surprise that so few Westerners are drawn to traditions that recommend the exact opposite: quieting the self.

If you would like to learn more about the Buddha's teaching, an optional module is available in the section "Going Further."

Freedom Above All

Of course, the path to awakening is not limited to Eastern traditions.

Many masters have shown that it is possible to walk this path outside any established religious framework.

Among them, Rudolf Steiner, George Gurdjieff, and Jiddu Krishnamurti marked their time with the depth of their reflections on consciousness and inner transformation.

The teaching presented here draws on this heritage while remaining free of any tradition, dogma, or religion.

However, it is essential to understand that this program is only a tool in service of your own journey.

It does not claim to hold any absolute truth, nor does it aim to impose a worldview.

Each person remains free in their beliefs, convictions, and personal experience.

Going further: **The Blind Men and the Elephant** (*An Ancient Indian Tale*)

Once upon a time, in a land bathed in light, there lived six blind men from India. All were known for their wisdom, curiosity, and desire to understand the world. One day, they learned that an elephant had been brought to their village. Since none of them had ever encountered such an animal, they decided to go and meet it in order to deepen their knowledge.

The first man, walking carefully, extended his hands and touched the elephant's broad, motionless side. After a moment of silence, he said, "This elephant is like a wall. It is vast, solid, and impenetrable."

The second, having found a tusk, examined it carefully with his fingertips. "No," he said calmly. "The elephant is like a spear: smooth, rigid, and pointed at the tip."

The third, drawn to a supple movement, grasped the trunk as it curled through the air. He followed it with his hands, then said softly, "I think this elephant is more like a snake."

The fourth placed his palms on one of the animal's powerful legs and thought for a moment. "To me, the elephant is like a tree with a strong, rooted trunk."

The fifth, touching the broad ear, was struck by its shape and texture. "This is something different," he murmured. "In my view, this elephant looks like a large fan."

Finally, the sixth brushed against the moving tail and took it in his hand. “I understand now,” he concluded. “The elephant is nothing other than a light, living rope.”

Then each man shared what he had perceived, sincerely believing he was speaking the truth. But their voices soon mingled, clashed, and turned against one another. Each defended his truth with passion, convinced he understood the elephant better than the others.

The six men fell silent. A quiet peace descended upon them. Each understood that he carried within himself only one facet of reality, and that only by listening to others can we glimpse the whole.

A deep peace settled over them as they realized that each carried only one facet of reality, and that only by listening to one another could they begin to glimpse the whole.

Pause

**What are my beliefs?
And who—or what—has shaped them?**

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MODULE 2 : Awakening

**“While personal development seeks to soothe the
"self," awakening has the power to dissolve it.**

”
— Maël Tourrene

What Is Awakening?

Awakening is a particular state of consciousness whose effects endure over time.

It should never be confused with more common states of consciousness such as euphoria, romantic infatuation, meditation, gratitude, or a fleeting sense of well-being.

Nor is it a state of mystical ecstasy or the feeling of being connected to God or to the Universe.

So how can awakening be defined? And how can it be recognized?

It is characterized by a quieter, steadier, and clearer presence within ourselves.

More precisely, awakening gives rise to a clear perception of reality together with a complete disidentification from the self.

An awakened person sees the world as it truly is. They understand the roots of human suffering and perceive the connections that unite all living beings.

They no longer act primarily out of personal self-interest, but naturally place themselves in the service of life.

As a result, their choices become wiser, and they gradually cease to feed the causes of suffering, whether for themselves or for others.

Awakening Is Already Within Us

The awakened state is not something we need to create. It is simply veiled by mental agitation and by identification with the self—the deeply rooted conviction that we are separate, independent individuals.

Awakening is therefore not an acquisition, but a revelation.

It is the recognition that we have become deeply identified with the self, when in reality we are all connected by something far greater than ourselves.

Awakening requires no special quest and no extraordinary achievement.

And yet, returning to this state of being can feel like the greatest challenge of our lives.

Why?

Because we have spent our entire lives filling ourselves with beliefs, concepts, knowledge, emotions, possessions, expectations, desires, distractions, and noise.

The awakened state is hidden beneath everything we have come to believe is important—if not essential.

If there were only one quest worth undertaking in order to realize awakening, it might simply be this: **to unlearn everything, so that we may welcome emptiness.**

For it is in emptiness that reality reveals itself.

Awakening Is Not Magic

As we have seen, awakening is not a magical phenomenon.

Throughout history, thousands of women and men have realized it, and many great teachers have described it.

Awakening is therefore not a myth. It is a lived reality. Nor is it found at the edge of the universe. It is already here, within each of us, in this very moment.

If so many human beings have realized awakening, then so can we.

Of course, awakening unfolds only under certain conditions. It requires a sincere willingness to look within, together with the discipline needed to cultivate a deeper level of awareness. It is an inner path that each of us must clear for ourselves.

Whatever obstructs the way must be recognized and let go of consciously.

This calls us to question our beliefs, our certainties, and even the concepts through which we understand the world.

No one can do this work for us.

There is no magic wand.

There is no savior.

To believe otherwise is simply another illusion—one that only prolongs the journey.

“

To die is nothing. What is terrible is not to live.

”

— Victor Hugo

The First Signs of Awakening

The doors of awakening open when we realize that **the sense of self is not necessary in order to experience life.**

Before we reach that point, however, there is often a more common phase that many people go through: **a spiritual opening.**

Broadly speaking, this is a period of metaphysical doubt about our existence, followed by an opening to what is unseen.

A person who feels called to a spiritual path is not yet awakened, but they begin to question death, the meaning of life, and the nature of existence. They feel drawn by a mysterious force that they call the Universe, God, Nature, Life, Source, or the Cosmos.

This process can arise in a variety of ways:

- **A difficult childhood** that turns the person away very early from the distractions of worldly life and gives them a certain clarity about the world. (Example: Jiddu Krishnamurti.)

- **A growing weariness** with patterns that seem to repeat endlessly, followed by a moment of awareness or a sudden inner shift. (Example: Eckhart Tolle.)
- **A major event** that creates a sense of shock and tears away the veil of ignorance: the loss of a loved one, illness, the feeling that nothing makes sense anymore, and so on.
- **Exposure to spiritual teachings**, for example during a retreat or a wellness workshop.
- **An experience that deepens compassion and devotion** and leads to the deep conviction that death is only a passage—for example, a near-death experience, the visit of a deceased loved one, or witnessing someone in great distress.

“
Cultivating humility is cultivating the ego. The
truly humble are unaware of their humility
”

— Gandhi

The Traps of the Spiritual Ego

As long as **the sense of self remains** at the center of experience, a person going through a phase of spiritual opening cannot awaken.

More importantly, this is precisely when greater vigilance is required.

The sense of self has no intention of giving up its central role, and it is remarkably skilled at creating new forms of identification.

One of its most common traps is to convince us that our feelings, intuitions, and beliefs are reliable, when in reality they are often being subtly appropriated by **the spiritual ego**.

As a result, we begin to notice signs, synchronicities, repeating numbers, and meaningful coincidences everywhere.

We may feel guided by an invisible hand or believe that we are receiving messages from a divine force.

Yet this very tendency to expect something from outside ourselves shows that the sense of self is still quietly directing the experience.

Another common trap is the belief that our spiritual opening is unique—that we have been specially chosen to experience it.

The sense of self eagerly embraces this idea, convincing us that what we are going through is exclusive to us, when in reality it is part of a universal human process.

If we are not careful, we may even begin to feel spiritually superior to others.

A spiritual opening can also create the illusion that we have reached unconditional love, that we no longer have an ego, or that we have arrived at the end of the path.

In reality, none of this is true.

The consequences of our past actions continue to unfold, and we continue to experience their effects.

How could it be otherwise?

Despite the illusion created by the sense of self, we have never truly stepped outside the cycle of suffering.

A Critical Mistake

Perhaps the greatest mistake of all is to confuse a **spiritual opening** with awakening.

If we become convinced that we are already awakened, then the journey comes to an end before it has truly begun.

After all, why would we continue seeking awakening if we believe we have already arrived?

This trap is particularly difficult to recognize because the sense of self is remarkably resilient. Whenever it feels threatened, it simply reinvents itself in a subtler form.

During a spiritual opening, our entire perception of life can change dramatically.

Our attention shifts from the ordinary concerns that once occupied us—work, daily routines, personal ambitions, and the pursuit of pleasure—to something that feels vastly larger: the Universe, God, unconditional love, the sense of being connected to everything.

And this is precisely where the trap closes.

The mind has discovered something larger, but the sense of self quietly claims it as its own.

It now identifies with something grander than before, yet identification itself has never disappeared.

On the contrary, it has simply become more refined.

The spiritual ego delights in this new identity.

It may even persuade us that we are more conscious, more evolved, or somehow different from everyone else.

Awakening is entirely different.

In awakening, the sense of self is no longer directing the experience.

There is nothing left to defend, nothing left to prove, and no identity left to enhance.

This is why truly awakened people feel no need to proclaim their awakening.

They are not intoxicated by extraordinary experiences or caught up in emotional highs.

Nor do they define themselves in opposition to society or believe they possess hidden truths that others cannot see.

Instead, awakening is always accompanied by equanimity—a profound stability of mind and heart.

From this stability arise clarity, simplicity, and a quiet presence.

Pause

**Have I already fallen into this
kind of trap?**



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“
The wound is the place where the light enters.
”

— Rûmî

The Turning Point

When we experience a spiritual opening, it often feels as though we are floating on a cloud.

Yet sooner or later, many people are faced with a painful impression: it feels as if they have come right back to where they started.

Despite the spiritual opening, the law of cause and effect continues to operate relentlessly.

Old afflictions return.

Old wounds are reactivated.

The same patterns repeat themselves, again and again.

When we are faced with this, it is only natural to think: “Well then, was that all there was to it?”

But in the midst of doubt, another trap opens before us: we are tempted to consult psychics, mediums, and other people who claim to know the invisible.

We watch videos in which online gurus explain that the energies of the moment are heavy, that we are going through a Saturn cycle, or that galactic beings will come to our aid.

Perhaps that is true.

But all of this takes us further away from awakening.

In reality, the feeling of being at an impasse on the spiritual path is a good sign.

It shows that the **sense of self is beginning to crumble**.

It shows that awakening is within reach—provided we do not hand over our personal authority to just any guru.

Panic All Around

Sometimes the feeling of being stuck turns into a genuine crisis.

The clearest example is a panic attack: the person feels as though nothing makes sense anymore, that everything has become empty. They are convinced that they are going to die.

And in a certain sense, that is exactly what is happening: the sense of self really is beginning to fade, and its disappearance really does bring a loss of meaning. The emptiness that sets in can be difficult to face.

Another example is a gradual withdrawal from worldly life. This may take the form of wanting to take a break from going out, from social interaction, or of realizing that one needs to slow down at work. Often, friends begin to pull away, which can reactivate old wounds such as rejection, abandonment, or betrayal.

What we sometimes take for a panic attack, a temporary depression, or a withdrawal into ourselves often turns out to be the first signs of awakening.

It is a sign that the sense of self is panicking because it feels itself being pushed into the background of experience.

But let us be honest: almost always, the sense of self resists and ends up winning the day. Why?

Because we are terrified of emptiness.

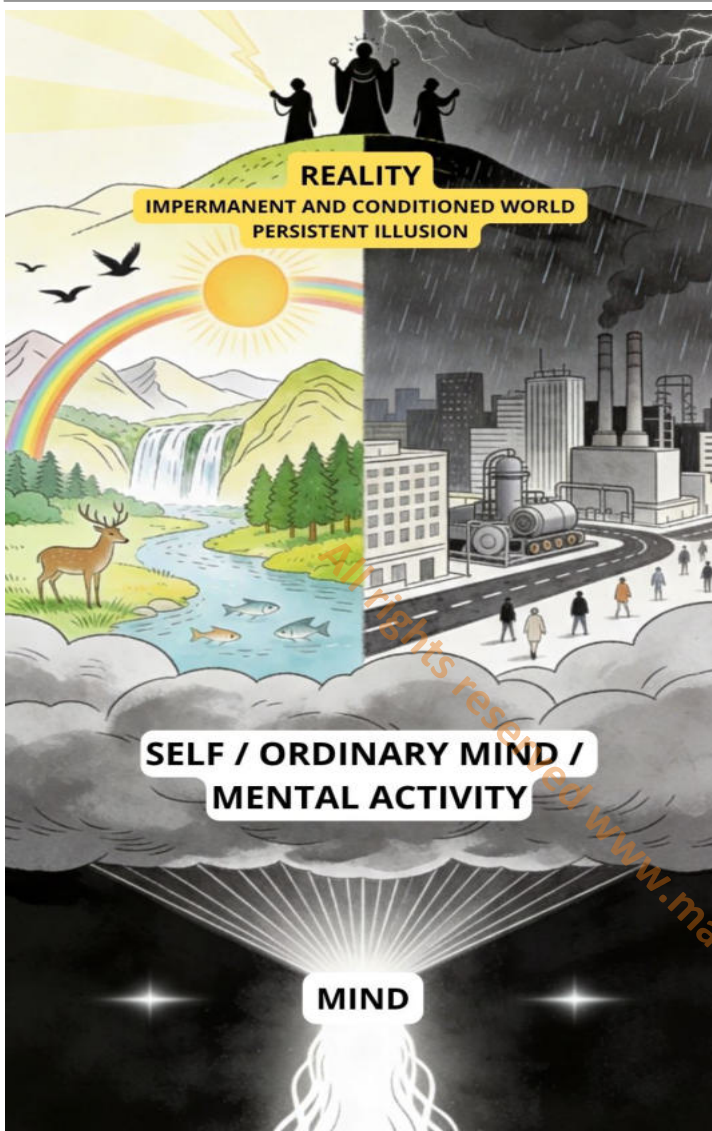
Because the sense of self refuses to be abandoned, demoted, or die.

Because we do not yet know that something else exists beyond it.

That is precisely what we will explore in the next module.

MODULE 3 : Becoming Aware of Our True Nature

This illustration, together with its detailed explanation, shows us the path to awakening.



Understanding the Illustration

The illustration is divided into three parts.

1. Mind

Mind is the spacious emptiness from which all experience arises. Since we are all connected to it, we share the same nature, the same essence.

2. The Mist

The mist represents our identification with **the sense of self**, along with the restless activity of the ordinary mind—our thoughts and emotions.

As long as this mist remains, we cannot perceive reality through the eyes of **Mind**.

3. Our Perception of Reality

Our view of the world is therefore filtered through our perceptions.

Reality appears solid, stable, and permanent.

Yet it is none of these things.

Everything is impermanent, constantly changing in response to causes and conditions.

Likewise, what appears to us as solid matter is, at the deepest level, nothing more than a dynamic interplay of electromagnetic forces.

The world we perceive is therefore not reality itself, but a **persistent illusion**.

How Is Awakening Realized?

The first step is to clear away the mist: to calm thoughts and emotions, quiet the ordinary mind, and gradually stop identifying with the sense of self so that we are no longer ruled by its desires and afflictive states.

The second step is to see the world as it truly is, directly through the eyes of Mind: impermanent and conditioned.

For a clearer understanding of the terms, please refer to the glossary at the end of the book.

What Is Our Contact With Mind?

As noted above, Mind is our shared essence. Our true nature.

We are certain to be connected to it when:

- We are thinking nothing.
- We are feeling nothing.
- We are observing nothing.
- We are doing nothing.
- We are identified with nothing.

At that point, we begin to understand that entering into contact with Mind is more difficult than it first appears.

And for good reason:

- Our minds are constantly filled with the noise of our thoughts.

- We fill ourselves with emotions because we cannot bear to feel nothing.
- We automatically observe and analyze whatever our senses perceive.
- We are always doing something.
- We are strongly identified with our sense of self, which wants to be reassured, soothed, improved, pampered, and so on.

And to top it all off, on the rare occasions when we are not doing all of this, we are not even aware that we are in the presence of Mind. In other words, we almost always remain unaware of our true nature.

What Is the Nature of Mind?

By nature, **Mind is empty, calm, and stable**. To see this, all we need to do is sit for thirty seconds without thinking about anything and without any intention of observing.

We then notice that the observer has disappeared, yet this has not prevented us from having the experience.

We notice that the temporary absence of a “self” has given way to an empty, calm, and stable presence.

This is the nature of Mind.

But let us go further:

Mind is **empty** because, in appearance, there is nothing. Yet this nothingness is inhabited, since it contains everything, including ourselves.

Mind is **calm** because nothing can disturb the moment—unlike thoughts, emotions, sensations, and so on.

Mind is **stable** because it is always present, and its nature never changes.

Let us remember that we are simply observing what exists, without trying to create concepts or activate the ordinary mind.

That is why we are speaking here of the nature of Mind. We are not trying to define what it is, even though some happily call it God, the Source, the Universe, the Tao, or simply life.

By contrast, **we can say what Mind is not:** it is not our ordinary mind—that is, our thoughts, our mental activity, or our emotions. It is not our observing “self” either. It is neither our ego, nor our individual consciousness, nor our identity, nor our personality.

★ To help you put these teachings into practice, targeted exercises are provided at the end of each module.

Going Further

In the illustration, we can see gods at the top of the hill. According to Buddhist beliefs, these deities are fully part of the impermanent and conditioned world. More precisely, gods are like us: they eventually disappear over a certain span of time, and they remain subject to the law of cause and effect, even if they have no physical body and even if nothing negative can happen to them. Of course, this does not prevent them from helping us, since they have the power to do so.



“

We need silence as plants need light.

”

— Thích Nhất Hạnh

Learning to Clear the Mind

When we interrupt the flow of our thoughts without any intention of observing anything, we can be certain of being in contact with our true nature.

We realize that we can exist, for a time, without thought, without emotion, without consciousness, without being identified with a “self.”

At that very moment, we are like Mind: **empty, calm, and stable**. We need nothing else.

Our body continues to function on its own while the outer world goes on its way, without our intervention being necessary.

This is precisely where we must avoid making a serious mistake: filling ourselves with something else.

On the contrary, we must learn to welcome and become familiar with emptiness within ourselves.

To help with this, the next section offers a short meditation: the path of Samatha. Let us take this time together to practice it.

A Step Toward Meditation

Meditation can be a source of anxiety, because everyone projects concepts and assumptions onto the word.

For this reason, it is easy to dismiss meditation as time-consuming, inaccessible, obscure, boring, culturally distant, and so on.

It is therefore essential to demystify meditation before going any further.

In the West, meditation is almost always seen as a tool for personal development.

By making use of a moment of stillness and reconnection with oneself, the practitioner seeks to calm the mind, improve concentration, and regulate emotions.

For most people, then, meditation is aimed at the well-being of the self, with the goal of helping it adapt to worldly life—work, social life, entertainment, and so on.

In this program, meditation does not have that purpose.

When we meditate, we seek to unite with the nature of Mind so that we place ourselves in the best possible conditions to reach awakening.

The Samatha Path Meditation

The meditation we are about to learn is inspired by the Samatha path. As we practice it, we seek two goals that support one another in a virtuous cycle:

- **Reducing mental agitation**

When we meditate, we allow the flow of thoughts to come and go without letting them develop into elaborate lines of reasoning. By stepping back from our thoughts, we come face to face with emptiness. With daily practice, we learn to welcome it. Gradually, the mind becomes less agitated. We become steadier. We act with greater calm and clarity. By preventing the formation of reasoning at its root, we stop creating concepts and beliefs. Deprived of their fuel, old patterns begin to fade and wounds begin to heal.

- **Disidentifying from the self**

Through meditation, we realize that no self is needed in order to observe the nature of Mind. As the practice deepens, we see more clearly that the self is constantly demanding things: it wants to be reassured, to control everything, to explain everything. Little by little, distance develops. We stop identifying with it. And because we are calmer and no longer afraid of emptiness, a new inner space opens up.

How Do We Practice?

Two conditions

- Adopt a comfortable, relaxed position .
- Choose an object of concentration: your breath, an object in the room, a tree, a mantra, and so on.

Two goals

- Let thoughts arise without observing or controlling them.
- Remain immersed for as long as possible in the nature of Mind—empty, calm, and stable.

Two tools

The lightning bolt: if a thought arises, use the lightning bolt to dissolve it before it has time to form complex reasoning or chains of association that pull you out of the meditative state.

The lasso: if you drift out of the meditative state, use the lasso to bring yourself immediately back to the object of concentration you have chosen.

My advice

- Let go: Do not try to force a particular state of well-being, and do not create tension by trying to block thoughts.
- Forget the self: Focus on the object without any specific intention, and do not try to observe anything—not even

yourself, your breath, what you are thinking, or what you are feeling.

The lightning bolt: You can imagine a bolt of lightning shattering a thought the moment it appears. You can also replace the lightning bolt with another image: a cliff (the thought falls into emptiness), an axe (the thought is cut apart), clay pigeon shooting (you shoot at the thought as if it were a moving target), and so on.

Be careful not to wait for a thought.

The lasso Very often, the flow of thoughts is too strong to be stopped, and reasoning pulls us out of the meditative state. That is normal. Above all, avoid judging yourself. The only thing to do is to bring your awareness back quickly to the object of concentration.

It is completely normal at the beginning of the practice to experience difficulties. The age in which we live leaves little room for silence; we have few opportunities to do nothing and be alone with ourselves. This can be unsettling, and it takes time to get used to it. Let us be kind to ourselves.

Moreover, the self is not used to being pushed into the background. That is why thoughts may seem to run wild during meditation. If tension arises while practicing, it is simply the self stirring in every direction so as not to be forgotten. This is a known process, and it settles once we become aware of it.

States of Existence

The Eight Realms in Buddhism (Aṣṭa-gati)

According to Buddhism, all beings are reborn into different states of existence depending on their karma and level of consciousness, ranging from the most intense suffering to spiritual awakening.

These states of existence are divided into eight realms. Whether symbolic or not, **they offer a remarkable snapshot of what we may experience as human beings.**

- **Hell Realms (Naraka) (naraka)** : A state of existence marked by anger and aversion. This corresponds to states of rage, hatred, despair, extreme heat or cold, with no respite. Examples: mental illness, confinement, severe trauma, hatred that devours from within, lingering guilt, war, famine, and so on.
- **Hungry Ghosts (preta)** : A state of existence marked by attachment and habit. This corresponds to an inability to understand the law of karma, leading to perpetual desire and chronic dissatisfaction. Examples: addictions and dependencies (alcohol, sex, drugs, gambling, emotional dependence), a sense of inner emptiness, obsessions and endless pursuits (money, success, happiness, the meaning of life, fame, and so on).

- **Animals** (tiryagyonī) : A state of existence marked by fear, habit, and submission. This corresponds to an existence dominated by instinct and the inability to question the established order.

Examples: being ruled by a compulsion, by fear or anxiety, blind obedience or submission to authority, never questioning what one experiences or has been taught, and so on.

According to Buddhism, as long as we remain in these first three states of existence, awakening is impossible. The next three states are considered more favorable.

- **Humans** (manuṣya) : A state of existence marked by discernment and the ability to choose. Being born in a human body is ideal for choosing awakening, because this state of existence offers a mixture of pleasure and pain that sharpens discernment and strengthens free will.

Examples: wanting to break free from a repeating pattern, a realization following illness, bereavement, or a breakup, a difficult childhood (not having access to the distractions of worldly life, feeling as though one had to grow up too quickly, and so on).

- **Demigods** (asuras) : A state of existence marked by power and wealth. This creates an existence based on comparison with others and on the struggle to maintain one's status.

Examples: pride, jealousy, the world of business, politics, the media, celebrity culture, and so on.

- **Heavenly Gods** (deva) : A state of existence marked by pleasure, beauty, and indolence. This state is not very

conducive to awakening, because the self experiences no affliction and therefore no suffering.

Examples: having everything one needs and living in ease, spending one's life in a meditative state, withdrawing from the world, thinking only of one's well-being and beauty, and so on.

Here we see a paradox: the realm of the gods (heavenly gods and demigods) is considered less favorable to awakening than the realm of human beings. The next two states concern awakened beings.

- **Solitary Awakened Ones** (pratyekabuddha) : These are beings who have attained awakening but do not seek to awaken others. At death, in the absence of compassion, they leave the cycle of rebirths (nirvana).
- **Bodhisattvas** : These are awakened beings who spontaneously orient their existence toward the well-being of others, even if this means delaying their nirvana.

Going further: The human realm, the only one favorable to the realization of awakening, lies between hell and the gods, at the center of the balance of states of existence. Here we find the Middle Way, or the concept of Yin and Yang: two complementary forces which, through their balance and constant interaction, generate and harmonize all phenomena in the universe.

★ Exercise 1: Self-Remembering

The flow of our thoughts is a powerful conditioned process that is difficult to interrupt.

In the Samatha path meditation, we saw that it is more effective to cut thoughts off as soon as they appear than to try to control them once they have turned into chains of reasoning.

When we let them overwhelm us, these chains of reasoning turn into concepts and beliefs. As we have seen, this process is essential for creating our reality. It helps us navigate, in particular, a stable and structured world.

But these same concepts and beliefs also fragment our experience: what is originally a unified reality is then broken up into a multitude of small identities, categories, and separations.

There is a real risk of becoming trapped in a mental and sensory prison.

As we have seen, meditation is the easiest way to step outside all conditioned processes—thoughts, emotions, sensations, and so on.

But in everyday life, it is entirely possible to press the pause button, to freeze the frame for a moment and bring more awareness to a moment when we are subject to our own mechanical nature.

This is what G.I. Gurdjieff calls self-remembering.

The exercise therefore consists in cutting off reasoning the moment it appears. Exactly as we do in Samatha meditation—but this time in daily life.

Of course, this is a real challenge, because in everyday life we are literally governed by the mind: we are flooded with concerns about work, children, money, what we did yesterday, what we need to do tomorrow... not to mention metaphysical questions!

At this stage, the main thing is to observe our behavior: does the mind ever give us moments of respite, or are we completely trapped in the ceaseless flow of our thoughts? Can we cut off reasoning, even briefly, before it is born? How many times is that possible over the course of a day?

It is recommended that you do this exercise in a calm and playful spirit. For example, we can put on the costume of a thought hunter (a brain buster 😊) and shoot faster than our shadow at any thought that arises, so that it does not degenerate into reasoning.

You can practice for a few days to see whether you can sustain it over time.

MODULE 4: Calming the Mind and the Emotional Life

“

Trying to understand everything is a trick of the self to keep us away from our true nature.

”

— Maël Turrene

Stopping the Thinking Machine

As we saw while practicing Samatha path meditation, it is very difficult to stop the flow of thoughts for more than a few seconds.

In a sense, we are thinking machines: our mind is constantly analyzing, anticipating, and imagining.

This capacity is of course precious, because it allows us to adapt to the world we live in, but it becomes overwhelming when the mind no longer finds any rest.

At the same time, our lives are marked by many demands: work, family, projects, finances, social relationships, and so on.

In trying to hold everything together, we eventually become saturated. That is when stress begins to settle quietly into our already overfilled lives.

The mind then becomes even more active: we worry about the future or brood over the past, which keeps us in a constant state of tension.

We should also remember that our Western way of life makes things much harder. We are not only running in all directions, but we are also constantly fed noise, music, stimuli, emotions, information, and so on.

In these conditions, how could the mind ever calm down?

How to stop the thinking machine

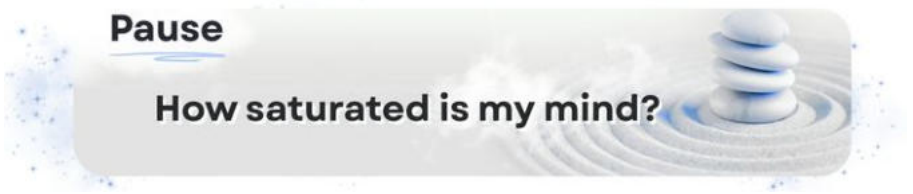
There are many stages involved before the agitation of the mind can be soothed.

For each difficulty we encounter, we will apply **several remedies**:

- Reconnect with the timeless present, here and now.
- Learn to observe ourselves in all circumstances.
- Stop filling ourselves with thoughts and emotions.
- Prevent our thoughts from turning into reasoning, and then into concepts.
- Stop paying attention to the flow of residual thoughts.
- Learn to work with negative emotions.

Once we have calmed the mind, we must then learn to:

- Welcome silence.
- Become familiar with the emptiness that connects us all.
- Understand that there is no danger in remaining in emptiness.



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“
The greatest challenge is to be yourself in a world
where everyone is trying to make you be someone else.
”

— E.E. Cummings

Don't Take Anything Personally

Our relationships with others are the source of most of our afflictions. Love causes suffering. Friendship causes suffering. Family causes suffering. Work relationships cause suffering.

In reality, emotions are like ping-pong balls. Anger, sadness, disgust, and even joy... most of these emotions do not belong to us: they are passed to us by others. And we pass them on in return, most of the time unconsciously.

Yet there is a radical way to stop, right away, all the afflictions that arise from our relationships with others: do not take anything personally.

To illustrate this concept, here is an entirely invented tale for the occasion, entitled: *The Master, the Disciple, and the Matches*.

A disciple once asked his Master why anger seemed to spread so easily from one being to another.

The Master did not answer. He simply placed about ten matches side by side, then nudged one of them ever so slightly out of line.

He lit the first one.

The flame immediately spread to the second, then the third, the fourth... Soon, the whole row was engulfed in flame. Then it stopped abruptly at the match that had been moved just a little.

The disciple watched the scene in silence.

The Master smiled and said: “Anger, blame, and hurt are transmitted in the same way. Each person receives them, then passes them on in turn. But it is enough for just one being to step aside for the fire to stop spreading.”

The disciple understood that true strength was not in putting out other people’s fire, but in no longer giving it fuel.

By becoming aware that **each of us can stop emotional contagion**, we relieve our mind of an unnecessary burden.

The three exercises that follow are intended to relax the body, encourage the free flow of energy, and calm the mind. Practiced daily, they help soothe the ordinary mind so that it may better welcome emptiness, an essential step on any path of awakening.

★ Exercise 2: Four-Step Relaxation

1. Heart Coherence

Choose a time when you are sure you will not be disturbed. Sit in a comfortable position and breathe calmly according to the following rhythm:

- Inhale = 5 seconds
- Exhale = 5 seconds
- Do this for 5 minutes.

Advice:

- Close your eyes and relax.
- Focus only on the breath.
- Do not think about anything in particular, and do not try to observe anything.

Benefits:

- Reduces stress and anxiety.
- Improves concentration.

It is entirely possible to do this meditation using a 6- or even 7-second rhythm if that feels better.

Ideally, practice it three times a day, or more if anxiety is significant.

2. Breathing Consciously

Air is our first nourishment. We can go several weeks without eating and several days without drinking, but only a few minutes without breathing.

With each inhale, we bring our body the oxygen essential to the proper functioning of our cells.

We need to realize that breathing is just as vital as eating.

In other words, the quality of our breathing is just as vital as the quality of the food we take in.

Sadly, most of the time we breathe automatically, unconsciously. Because we are stressed by so many things, our breathing becomes jerky and shallow, and each inhale uses only about half a liter of air.

By taking back control of our breathing, we engage the diaphragm consciously. Our breathing then becomes fuller, and the volume of air we inhale can double, or even triple.

This richer “air nourishment” supports gas exchange, sustains cellular activity, and helps balance the nervous system.

Breathing mindfully is therefore crucial if we want to care for our health.

In addition, taking back control of the breathing process has another benefit: it temporarily interrupts our own mechanical functioning.

The exercise therefore consists in breathing consciously as often as possible, calmly and deeply.

For example, you can keep a sheet of paper with you and make a small mark each time you breathe consciously.

In this way, each small mark on the page becomes one more step toward interrupting our own mechanical functioning.

Be careful not to force your breathing, as this could lead to chronic hyperventilation and, over time, generalized fatigue.

3. Releasing the Postural Muscles

The postural muscles—the muscles in our back, neck, calves, hips, and elsewhere—work constantly against gravity to keep us upright, whether we are standing or sitting.

Some muscles may remain contracted even while we sleep. This is especially common when we are under stress or have experienced trauma.

In any case, as many as 600 muscles are called upon at different times in everyday life. This requires a considerable amount of energy from the body, especially when we are in a state of hypervigilance caused by fear or stress.

It is therefore essential to consciously relax our muscles as often as possible.

Advice:

- Lie down in a comfortable position.
- Listen to the accompanying video.

- Let your thoughts come and go without paying attention to them.
- Do not try to observe anything.

Benefits:

- Calms the nervous system.
- Relaxes the muscles throughout the body.
- Reduces fatigue.
- Improves overall muscle tone.

4. Gentle Body Shaking

Gentle Body Shaking is a fundamental exercise inspired by traditional Chinese medicine.

Its purpose is to create gentle, rhythmic movements that **help stimulate the circulation of energy and bodily fluids**—water, blood, lymph, and so on.

The shaking motion acts like a wave moving through the body's tissues, joints, and fascia.

This exercise is particularly valued for its relaxing and revitalizing effects. It helps release muscular tension, improve overall circulation, and restore a state of physical and mental relaxation.

Practiced daily, it helps disperse stagnation and release tension that has accumulated in the body.

Advice:

- One minute of practice twice a day is sufficient.
- The movements should be gentle.
- The movement should begin in the feet and ankles and naturally travel upward through the body.
- Focus on the sensation of bouncing rather than shaking.

Contraindications:

Do not practice this exercise if you have:

- Joint conditions, particularly knee problems.
- Cardiovascular problems.
- Recent injuries or pain.
- Balance disorders.

If in doubt, always seek medical advice.

★ Exercise 3: Avoiding Emotional Contagion

Life gives us countless opportunities to practice. For example, if tomorrow we find ourselves dealing with someone who is judgmental, becomes angry, or complains, we can respond in several ways:

- We can play along and begin judging, getting angry, or complaining ourselves. This is obviously the worst possible response.
- We can withdraw and criticize the person's behavior inwardly. This is also a poor choice, because we are still feeding a negative thought and remain at risk of becoming emotionally affected later in the day.
- We can respond with compassion. Understanding that the other person is caught in their own afflictive states, we can smile and invite them to show greater restraint.

The exercise, then, is to adopt the right attitude the next time we encounter this kind of situation—whether with family, at work, or among friends.

MODULE 5: Putting the Self in the Background

“

The self is a fabrication of thought. As long as you do not see it as it is, you cannot free yourself.

”

— Jiddu Krishnamurti

What Is the Self?

We have spoken at length about the self...

But what exactly is this self? Who are we, really?

Identity, ego, consciousness, and personality are complex notions that can be defined in countless ways, depending on each person's experience. There is therefore no single definition of the self.

And yet, this self certainly seems to exist. We are convinced of it because we are deeply identified with it. Besides, without this self, would we still be someone?

Definition

Since everyone has their own definition of the self, it may be useful to offer one here. So, who am I?

1. A Physical Body — I Move

- This is the material aspect of the self.
- It can be identified by its solid form, which I can see, feel, and touch.
- This physical body needs food, water, and air in order to exist.

2. A Mental and Emotional Body — I Think, I Feel

- This is the immaterial aspect of the self.
- It can be identified through my thoughts, emotions, and sensations.
- This mental and emotional body needs impressions in order to exist—that is, what I perceive through my six senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste, touch, and intuition.

3. A Personality — I Am

- This is the conscious aspect of the self.
- It can be identified through my beliefs—the concepts I hold—and my behavior—the actions I take.
- This personality, or individual consciousness, needs a self in order to exist: the certainty that I have an identity, that I am a unique individual, separate from others.

The self is therefore a process of identification that has gradually solidified around these three bodies. Like ivy slowly embracing a stone until it covers it completely, it has woven such a dense web that it is

now impossible to untangle its threads or trace them back to their origin.

Conditioned Nature

It is interesting to note that without any one of these three parts, the self simply does not exist.

Without a physical body, there is no mind to analyze and interpret thoughts and emotions. Without this nourishment, no personality can emerge. Without a personality, there can be no individual consciousness. And without consciousness, there is no self.

These three parts are therefore interdependent: none can exist without the others. Just as a garment cannot exist without the threads that make it up, the self is conditioned by nature.

For example, if I neglect my diet, my physical body will become ill. This illness will affect my psychological state, and I will begin to generate negative thoughts and emotions. These afflictive states will eventually alter my personality—and therefore the self.

Here we encounter the law of cause and effect once again: nothing exists independently, since everything is the consequence of something else.

It is essential to understand that everything ultimately comes back to this law. It lies at the heart of understanding reality, and we will explore it in greater depth in the next module.

Impermanent Nature

Since everything depends on changing causes and conditions, nothing remains identical from one moment to the next—whether matter, emotions, sensations, or thoughts.

In other words, everything is impermanent.

Even the mountain that has stood here since we were born will eventually disappear on a geological timescale. It is shaped by wind, water, tectonic movements, volcanic activity, human activity, and more. Contrary to appearances, its nature is therefore unstable, constantly changing, and impermanent.

This is a physical reality, once again governed by the law of cause and effect.

Of course, persistent illusion deceives us: we see the mountain as stable, solid, and eternal. We cannot imagine for a moment that it might disappear. **We firmly believe in this mirage.**

And what about us? Let us ask ourselves the right questions: Are we the same person we were ten years ago? Have our beliefs not evolved? Have we not changed our minds about certain subjects? What is truly stable within us? Are we like this mountain—a mirage destined to vanish?

In reality, everything with which we identify rests on shifting ground: our body deteriorates inexorably, our personality keeps changing, our beliefs are as fragile as the flame of a candle, and our emotions flow through our fingers like a thin stream of water.

But what is not changing and impermanent by nature? Can we name a single thing that escapes this rule?

No.

In reality, everything that exists has been in constant motion from the very beginning.

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“

**Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will
direct your life and you will call it destiny.**

”

– Carl Gustav Jung

Why Is the Self a Problem?

We all have countless reasons to identify with a self: our first name, age, gender, childhood wounds, profession, nationality, family, beliefs, desires, personality, and so on.

And yet, when we practice Samatha path meditation, we discover that we do not need a self in order to experience what is happening.

In truth, the self is far from being the center of our world.

Our body functions on its own: we breathe without being consciously aware of it, our heart beats autonomously, and millions of cells are produced every second without any intervention on our part.

Our mind is autonomous as well. Our thoughts, emotions, and interpretations of what we perceive arise for the most part without any conscious decision.

Our behavior is often automatic. The self is absent when we walk or drive. We do not need it when we eat, read, and so on.

When the Self Takes Over

And here is the most striking part: on the rare occasions when we do need the self, we find that it is never at peace:

- We worry about the future.
- We are afraid to take action.
- We are suffering.
- We need attention.
- We compare ourselves with others.
- We become jealous, proud, angry, and so on.

In reality, the self is like a child: it demands a great deal of our time and energy because it constantly needs reassurance.

But sometimes it becomes tyrannical and takes control. This is what traditional teachings refer to as **being taken over by the self**.

It may take the form of anger, fear, sadness, craving, or any other emotional state. When this happens, we are unable to disidentify from the self. We are under its control.

The essential task, then, is to learn to recognize the moments when we are being controlled by the self.

Here are several striking examples.

The Main Areas in Which the Self Takes Over

- Some people are deeply invested in their physical appearance. They devote time to enhancing a body that is nevertheless subject to impermanence. Examples include intensive weight training, an obsession with clothes, jewelry, fragrances, skincare products, and so on.
- Some people are deeply invested in their **professional** lives. They devote themselves to work that is also subject to impermanence. Examples include the pursuit of social advancement, working themselves into burnout, or neglecting their family to build a business.
- Some people are deeply invested in **money and material possessions**. They devote time to accumulating things that are likewise impermanent. Examples include managing investment portfolios or real estate holdings, spending money on unnecessary things, and collecting stamps, cars, and so on.
- Some people are deeply invested in their **social relationships**. They devote time to building connections that are also subject to impermanence. Examples include the search for love, social outings, intense friendships, a savior complex, belonging to a community, and so on.
- Some people are deeply invested in their **inner experiences**. They devote time to consuming forms of entertainment that are themselves impermanent. Examples include travel, culture, movies, media, spirituality, wellness, personal development, and so on.

Of course, this is not about criticizing the life choices that may be perfectly legitimate for different people. It is about becoming aware that these choices are, most of the time, unconscious and conditioned by the desires of the self.

The Dance of the Small Selves and the Mind

In reality, we can see that countless small selves emerge in our daily lives, precisely where our wounds run deepest: our physical appearance, our work, our possessions, our relationships, our emotions, and so on.

That is why one small self may decide in the morning to live a healthy lifestyle, only for another to rush to the nearest fast-food place that evening.

When these small selves become active, we lose all ability to discern clearly. We are taken over by anger, irritation, weariness, craving, disgust, or fear. We are controlled by them.

Then, a moment later, our thoughts resume their dance, and we forget that we acted under their influence: images of this morning's breakfast, the words a friend said on the phone, the grocery list, an email we received yesterday, a bill we will have to pay, the taste of the burger we just devoured...

Carried away by the flow of our own conditioned thoughts, we forget that these small selves even exist—until they emerge again.

In reality, we are controlled alternately by our small selves and by the mind. We hardly ever get a moment's respite.

It is therefore essential to ask ourselves the following question: **When are we truly acting consciously?**

The Illusion of a User Manual

Of course, we are all caught up in this dance between the small selves and the mind. This is a universal human experience, and it gives rise to the same patterns and the same afflictive states in all of us:

- The feeling of being lost, accompanied by a dizzying loss of meaning.
- The sense that we are missing out on our own lives.
- Anxiety, low moods, and even depression.
- Weariness from being at the mercy of our emotions.
- Distress in the face of dysfunctional relationships.

And as if that were not enough, we often feel as though we are going around in circles: we suffer, but we can never clearly identify what is causing our suffering.

So we search in every direction for something that might relieve us:

- **Therapy:** There are many types of practitioners—psychologists, psychoanalysts, hypnotherapists, and others—and some forms of therapy can be lengthy and very expensive.
- **Personal development:** Who has never read a personal development book in search of a solution to their problems? Who has never tried a behavioral approach to break a bad habit?
- **Esotericism and spirituality:** Oracle cards, attempts to connect with the unseen, astrologers, and mediums can all

appear to be signposts that reassure us and sometimes claim to show us the way.

- **Wellness:** Yoga, exercise, relaxation, meditation, and reconnecting with ourselves in nature can all be powerful tools for helping us feel better.
- **Energy work:** Reiki, energy healing, positive affirmations, holistic approaches, and now quantum healing can be very useful, especially when we do not understand what is causing our suffering.
- **Medicine:** How many people take antidepressants? How many take anti-anxiety medication? How many take both at the same time?

All these methods can be appropriate, effective, and sometimes essential for calming the self and helping it adapt to worldly life.

However, **they do not place the self in the background of experience**, much less enable us to realize awakening.

Worse still, some practices can reinforce identification with the self to such an extent that the process of disidentification becomes extremely difficult.

Failing to understand this is a major obstacle on the path to awakening.

That is why it is essential not to go from one therapy to another without any clear direction, or to wander aimlessly from one spiritual approach to the next. If this is what we are doing, we urgently need to become aware of it and seek appropriate guidance.

“

From birth, they decide your name, nationality, religion, or tribe—and you'll spend your life smilingly defending what you never chose.

”

— Omar Khayyam

The Process of Disidentification

We have come to understand that calming the self is essential, but not enough. We must go further and begin the process of disidentification.

So what can we do to disidentify from the self?

- **Meditation:** The Samatha path, or any other Zen-inspired practice, can immediately move the self into the background of experience. By far, this is the most effective technique—provided that our aim is to recognize Mind, rather than to achieve a sense of well-being. If we practice correctly every day, we can be certain that we are sowing the seeds of awakening.
- **Learning to observe ourselves:** We can learn to observe ourselves in moments of distress, excess, or euphoria, and identify which small self has taken control. The exercise *The Small Selves and the Enneagram* at the end of this module can be a valuable tool for this.

- **Adding a qualifier:** When we think, “I’m worthless,” we can rephrase it as, “I’m having the thought that I’m worthless.” This simple addition creates distance. By practicing this exercise regularly, it gradually becomes automatic, and the self eventually loses its hold.
- **Locating the self:** We can ask ourselves: “Where is the self?” Is it in our head? In our thoughts? Does it exist in a stable form? No. Questioning the very existence of the self weakens our belief in an unquestionable identity.
- **Avoiding “I”:** As often as possible, we can replace “I am angry” with “There is anger,” or “I am sick” with “My body is sick.” This transforms identification with a condition into a temporary event.
- **Putting our personal story on hold:** Let us imagine for a moment that we have lost our memory. We no longer have access to our memories; we have no first name, no profession, no family, and no social role. What would remain? Would this prevent us from existing?
- **Listening more than we speak:** In our social interactions, we can listen to others without automatically offering our opinions. This allows the self to settle down. It gives others room to express what they feel, without our constantly trying to outdo them with more words or personal experiences.
- **Taking a step back from the world:** We all tend to practice selective empathy. We are moved by a news story and feel sadness, anger, or disgust. Yet tragedies happen everywhere, all

the time: children die of hunger while the world remains indifferent, and people sleep on the streets in plain sight. Every year, tens of billions of animals are killed by human beings.

When we realize that experience is universal rather than personal, we gain perspective on the information that reaches us. This does not make us insensitive. On the contrary, understanding the universal dimension of experience deepens our compassion. With this realization, the self gives way to “we.”

Of course, the process of disidentification can take time. The self is tenacious and has no desire to let go. That is why we will need to practice these exercises regularly, so that our identification can gradually take root less deeply and eventually loosen its hold.

The Emptiness of the Self

When the self is at the forefront of experience, any attempt to disidentify from it can be perceived as a threat to our very survival.

Consider someone who is identified with an emotional small self. If that person suddenly stops feeling anything, the self may feel as though it is disappearing—and immediately sound the alarm.

This sense of emptiness acts as a powerful warning signal that prevents disidentification. Any attempt to move away from the self may be perceived as a threat, giving rise to anxiety, fear, panic, or intense suffering.

Of course, no one dies or loses their mind as a result of this process. Like any fear, the sense of panic and loss of control experienced by the self has no real substance.

Reaching the end of this process is a matter of practice and letting go.

That is why it is advisable to persevere and, above all, to seek the guidance of someone experienced and compassionate throughout this process.

The Shift in Identity

Once we manage to disidentify from the self, it has no choice but to move into the background of experience. Its presence is no longer as “useful” as it once seemed.

This marks an important turning point.

From then on, the stream that sustains the self gradually begins to run dry. Like a flame deprived of fuel, our former identity slowly dissolves. We no longer need to refer constantly to ourselves in conversation. We feel less interested in our personal story and less inclined to place ourselves at the center of worldly life.

The understanding that our experience is universal gradually becomes more certain.

Of course, this process takes time, because the conditioned stream of the self is extremely powerful. After all, we have been feeding it for a very long time.

What does this mean in practical terms for someone beginning this process of awakening?

- **Greater serenity:** Since the self is no longer necessary in order to experience life, there is no longer any reason to worry so much about it. We are less caught up in thoughts such as, “Who do I think I am?” “I’m trying to attain awakening,” “I feel bad,” or “I need this; I don’t have enough of that.”
- **Silence begins to emerge:** The person is freed from the constant inner chatter and can enjoy a deeply restorative calm. They feel more focused and effective, and less irritable. Their mind becomes clearer.
- **Inner space opens up:** The self, which once occupied so much space, has receded, creating an unexpected sense of openness. The person feels their awareness shifting away from the self and toward a more expansive reality. Their capacity to listen and their intuition improve, while their presence in the world becomes more vivid. A new stability begins to take root.
- **Attention turns toward others:** No longer needing to feed the self’s demand for attention, the person naturally turns toward others. After all, what else is there to turn toward?

★ Exercise 4: The Small Selves and the Enneagram

While it is often easy to recognize the small selves of other people, it is much more difficult to remain objective about ourselves.

Here is a short, non-exhaustive list of the small selves with which we most often identify. The aim, of course, is to recognize which one has taken control so that, little by little, we can let it go.

This list is inspired by the Enneagram, a system that describes nine broad personality types, each with its own underlying motivations, fears, and characteristic ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

The system was introduced to the West by G. I. Gurdjieff in the early twentieth century, although it appears to have much older roots, including Sufism and medieval Christian mysticism.

To help you discover your Enneagram type, you can find several tests online.

Once you have taken the test, the aim is to determine which small selves are associated with your Enneagram type.

It is worth noting that each Enneagram type has a dominant wing—the number immediately before or after the main type. It is therefore important to consider not only your primary Enneagram type, but also both of its wings.

Studying the Enneagram is highly recommended for anyone on an introspective path. One of the best books for exploring this system in

depth is *The Wisdom of the Enneagram* by the American authors Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson.

We all know people who seem to check every box associated with a particular Enneagram type. Recognizing them can be a fun way to approach this exercise.

Enneagram Type 1: The Perfectionist

The Inflexible Small Self

“There is a right way to do things, and I must stick to it.”

Rigid and perfectionistic, with little tolerance for deviation.

The Critical Small Self

“It’s never good enough.”

Constantly corrects, criticizes, refines, and points out flaws. Gives condescending advice.

The Beyond-Reproach Small Self

“If I let up, everything will go wrong.”

Monitors, organizes, and controls. Seeks moral and behavioral correctness. Prone to inner tension, fatigue, and burnout.

The Angry Small Self

“That’s not fair. That’s unacceptable. I’ve had enough.”

Suppresses anger or directs it at others. Easily irritated on principle.

Enneagram Type 2: The Helper

The Indispensable Small Self

“People need me, so I have value.”

Makes itself indispensable. Assumes others need help and wants to save them. Anticipates everyone else’s needs.

The Seductive Small Self

“If people like me, they will love me.”

Uses charm, adapts its image, and seeks approval and attention. Wants to capture other people’s gaze.

The Emotional Small Self

“What I’m experiencing is overwhelming.”

Often cries to attract attention. Tends to identify completely with whatever emotion it is feeling.

The Victim Small Self

“After everything I’ve done for you...”

Seeks gratitude, validation, and emotional reciprocation.

Complains in order to attract attention.

The Dependent Small Self

“I need the other person; otherwise, I am nothing.”

Frequently asks for advice or favors in order to attract attention. Struggles to be alone and remains in relationships even when they are painful.

Enneagram Type 3: The Achiever

The Performance-Oriented Small Self

“My worth depends on what I accomplish.”

Always focused on goals, competition, productivity, and results.

The Image-Driven Small Self

“I have to be someone people admire.”

A chameleon that adapts in order to embody a valued image. When taken to excess, this small self suffers from low self-esteem and needs approval in order to feel that it exists.

The Uncertain Small Self

“I don’t know who I am.”

Feels incomplete and fragile. Disconnects from its emotions and struggles to remain authentic.

The Deceptive Small Self

“I come first, no matter what.”

Distorts or exaggerates reality and presents things in a way that serves its own interests.

Enneagram Type 4: The Individualist

The Unique Small Self

“I’m different from everyone else, anyway.”

Defines itself through its uniqueness and feels profoundly misunderstood.

The Emotional Small Self

“I need to feel deeply in order to escape emptiness.”

Clings to intense emotions and needs to feel in order to feel alive. Amplifies emotional experiences.

The Incomplete Small Self

“I’m missing an ideal. Other people have what I lack.”

Tends to idealize what is absent or inaccessible. Compares itself with others, focuses on what is missing, and envies them.

The Wounded Small Self

“I suffer, therefore I am alive.”

Identifies with a wound and clings to suffering. Prone to melancholy.

Enneagram Type 5: The Investigator

The Expert Small Self

“If I understand something, I can control it.”

Accumulates knowledge in order to feel grounded and secure.

The Skeptical Small Self

“I distrust everything. I have my doubts.”

Keeps things at a distance, questions, and doubts.
Reluctant to commit.

The Intellectual Small Self

“I keep my distance.”

Tends to repress emotions. Conceptualizes and rationalizes in order to maintain distance.

The Solitary Small Self

“Hell is other people.”

May appear detached or apathetic. Struggles to share its inner life and avoids becoming part of the group.

Enneagram Type 6: The Loyalist

The Guardian Small Self

“What if the worst happens? My role is to prevent danger.”

Protective and responsible, sometimes to the point of smothering others.

The Dogmatic Small Self

“That’s just the way it is.”

Strictly follows established rules and stigmatizes anyone who seems too free. Struggles to break free from conditioning.

The Obedient Small Self

“You have to follow what is reliable.”

Looks for a reassuring authority or framework. Remains loyal to the group.

The Inclusive Small Self

“The group matters, and everyone should contribute in their own way.”

Tends to reduce everything to the collective, without considering that others may sometimes need to be alone.

The Fearful Small Self

“I obey because I’m afraid of being rejected.”

Indecisive and anxious, constantly seeking security. Tends to follow rather than lead.

Enneagram Type 7: The Enthusiast

The Optimistic Small Self

“Everything will be fine.”

Tends to minimize difficulties and push aside anything unpleasant.

The Dissatisfied Small Self

“There might be something better somewhere else.”

Constantly seeks new experiences and gives in easily to the lure of change.

The Hedonistic Small Self

“Seize the day.”

Seeks pleasure, stimulation, and excitement. Struggles to be satisfied and always needs more.

The Insensitive Small Self

“I only appreciate people when they are doing well.”

Tends to deny other people’s suffering in order to preserve its own inner peace.

The Gluttonous Small Self

“I need to fill myself up, or I feel empty.”

Consumerist and vulnerable to addiction and frustration.
Can sometimes be superficial.

Enneagram Type 8: The Challenger

The Powerful Small Self

“I have to appear strong so that nothing can hurt me.”

Asserts itself, dominates, and imposes its presence. Wants to remain at the center and prove that it can be trusted.

The Controlling Small Self

“If I’m not in control, someone else may control me.”

Strives to remain in charge under every circumstance.
Never lets go and refuses to listen to others.

The Unfiltered Small Self

“I tell it like it is.”

Feels compelled to be direct and challenge conventional codes of behavior. Can sometimes be brutal.

The Defiant Small Self

“No one tells me what to do. I’ll do whatever I want.”

Strongly resists authority and constraints. Stubborn and guided only by its own will.

Enneagram Type 9: The Peacemaker

The Peacekeeping Small Self

“I have to avoid conflict at all costs.”

Erases itself to please others and smooths things over.

Takes proactive steps to prevent conflict.

The Disappearing Small Self

“It’s better not to feel too much.”

Disconnects from emotional intensity, withdraws, and minimizes its own importance.

The Procrastinating Small Self

“We’ll deal with it later. It will probably work itself out.”

Puts things off to avoid tension or difficult decisions.

Hesitates constantly and remains passive in the face of events.

The Overadapted Small Self

“I adapt so that the other person feels comfortable.”

Puts others before itself, even at the cost of denying its own needs.

The Lazy Small Self

“What’s the point?”

Sensitive to a loss of meaning and inclined to make the least effort possible in order to conserve its energy.

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★ The Observing Small Self

We are all alike: we move back and forth between long periods in which we are caught up in the ceaseless flow of our thoughts and brief moments in which one of our small selves is suddenly triggered.

When our small selves take control, we come under the influence of anger, pride, jealousy, fear, doubt, and so on.

When our thoughts develop into lines of reasoning or concepts, or project us into some hypothetical future, it is the inertia of the mind that is directing our daily lives.

The purpose of the following exercise is to become aware of the alternation between these two phases.

Practical Exercise

1. **Identify one or more moments during the day when a small self takes control.** This might happen in a difficult situation, during a social interaction, or in response to an impression that leads to anger, irritation, sadness, judgment, or another emotional reaction.

Once the episode has passed, recognize that this small self took over and that you identified with it, however briefly. Then accept that this is what happened.

2. **Identify several moments during the day when the mind takes control.** This might involve a complex train of thought, becoming lost in your thoughts for several minutes, or

imagining a situation that is causing you concern. The opportunities are endless.

During the episode or shortly afterward, recognize that the mind has taken over. Then, without judgment, place it in the background so that your mind can become clear again.

It is advisable to do this exercise calmly, without remaining on high alert or waiting anxiously for one of these episodes to occur. Doing so could create unnecessary tension and interfere with the experience.

It is also advisable to approach the exercise playfully. For example, we can imagine that we are detectives: once we realize that we have been taken over, we mentally replay the scene in order to examine its causes and effects. Our investigation is successful if we can accept what has just happened.

★ Exercise 6: The Quiet Small Self

The self loves to talk. It loves to comment, compare, give advice, pass judgment, tell its stories, and prove that it knows best.

So, if we want to calm it, we must invite it to be quiet—not by suppressing it harshly, but by offering it something it does not know very well: silence.

We therefore choose a time when someone would like to talk about what they are going through. During the conversation, we focus entirely on listening.

Instructions :

- Let the other person speak without interrupting.
- Avoid bringing the conversation back to our own experiences: no “Me too.”
- Do not offer unsolicited advice or pass judgment—no “If I were you, I would...”
- Of course, we can encourage the other person to continue by asking questions.

During the exercise, we also pay attention to our own reactions: the urge to speak, give our opinion, or share a personal experience. We simply notice these impulses without acting on them.

This exercise gives the other person space to express themselves while strengthening our own capacity for listening, attention, and presence.

By remaining silent as much as possible, we avoid unnecessary chatter. The self then speaks only when there is something essential to say.

Of course, this exercise will be more difficult for some people than for others. If you find it difficult to remain silent, it may be a sign that further introspective work is needed.

MODULE 6 : Seeing the World as It Is



Before going any further, we need to take stock of what we have learned.

Progress Check

We have calmed the mind

- Our thoughts pull us into lines of reasoning and conceptual thinking less often.
- We experience fewer negative emotions than before and are better able to work with them.

The self has moved into the background of experience

- We have realized that we are identified with a self most of the time.
- We have understood that this self is not actually necessary in everyday life.
- We have seen that the self is often a burden because it constantly demands our attention.

- We are therefore beginning to disidentify from it.

We have created inner space

- We have become more familiar with inner silence.
- We feel calmer and more present.
- Our ability to listen and observe has improved.

Observe, Then Feel

As the self gradually fades into the background, an essential realization begins to emerge: our beliefs, emotions, judgments, and even the way we relate to others are deeply influenced by the subjective filter of our personality.

We begin to understand that our view of the world is neither neutral nor objective. It is shaped—and often distorted—by conditioning and by the demands of the self.

We therefore need to make a fundamental shift in perspective. Instead of placing blind trust in our beliefs and impressions, we must first learn to observe the world as it is and understand how it works.

Our feelings are never entirely reliable guides as long as they are influenced by the self. They are more likely to lead us astray than to show us the way.

This module is intended to help us make precisely this complete shift in perspective.

Clarity and Insight

Let us take another moment to assess where we stand on the path to awakening. Have we practiced enough?

If so, we can now stop looking at the world through the eyes of the self.

To do this, we must observe the world as it is and understand how it works at the deepest level.

In other words, we must stop seeing everything from a self-centered perspective and stop being deceived by the persistent illusion of a solid, permanent reality.

We will call this new way of seeing the world **clarity**—or **insight**, as it is known in various Eastern traditions.

Let us look at exactly what this entails.

Pause

Am I ready for clarity of Mind ?

“

Only the heart can truly see. What truly matters is
hidden from the eyes

”

— Saint Exupéry

What Is the Clarity of Mind?

Clarity—or insight—is the ability to look at the world no longer through the eyes of the self, but directly through Mind.

Before going any further, we should remember that we are all connected through our shared nature, which is the nature of Mind: empty, calm, and stable.

- **Welcoming emptiness** allows me to realize that I continue to exist even when I am no longer identified with a self.
- **Returning to calm** allows my awareness to perceive the world without the filter of mental fog.
- **The stable nature of Mind** allows me to move through this conditioned and impermanent world with confidence.

When we fully realize our shared nature, **another quality of Mind is revealed to us: clarity.**

The clarity of Mind acts like a photograph of the present moment. It reveals the world as it is, beyond persistent illusion, beyond duality, belief, and conditioning.

In other words, we gain a much more accurate overall view of what is happening—instantly and effortlessly.

Let us look at exactly what this entails.

Insight in Detail

1. Our perception of what happens to us is no longer distorted by mental fog

- The mind no longer creates judgments. It allows whatever it perceives to arise without interpreting it.
- There is no longer any “This is good; this is bad,” “This is fair; this is unfair,” or “I like this; I don’t like this.”
- The mind no longer creates problems or threats. It allows whatever it perceives to arise with calmness.
- There is no longer any “I feel bad because this is happening to me,” “What is going to happen?” “I’m afraid of this,” or “I hope that happens.”
- The mind no longer tries to understand or analyze everything. It has a complete, instantaneous view of what is taking place.
 - There is no longer any “This reminds me of...” “That makes sense because...” “How is it that...?” or “Why is this happening?”

In other words, the mind no longer needs to filter reality. It recognizes reality as effortlessly as a key fits into a lock.

2. What happens to us is fully understood

- We are no longer deceived by persistent illusion. We understand that the world around us is empty and constantly changing.
- We see beyond duality, which prevents us from identifying with a wound, being drawn into conflict, or falling back into a familiar pattern.
- When a situation arises, we understand that it is the result of prior causes.
- Because we fully understand what is happening to us, we act wisely:
 - We do not try to escape a situation or take advantage of it.
 - We avoid any action that would produce a negative result.
 - We stop clinging to everything that is impermanent and gives rise to afflictive states—objects, concepts, and people.
 - We take care not to harm others, because we understand that we are all connected through Mind, through emptiness.

“

Telling the truth in a time of universal deceit is a
revolutionary act.

”

— George Orwell

How Do We Develop Clarity?

Since clarity is an essential part of our shared nature, it is already present within us inherently.

In other words, insight is simply veiled in people who have not yet awakened.

That said, we need to distinguish between two different situations:

1) The veil over clarity is naturally very thin

This is the famous Cassandra myth: some people have always possessed a powerful instinct and the ability to see what remains hidden—things that others seem unable to notice. They may warn people about danger or deception, yet no one listens to them.

This is often the case with people described as anti-establishment or conspiracy theorists. Their intuitions are frequently accurate, but without genuine clarity of Mind, they remain trapped in their

struggles, their wounds—rejection, injustice, and so on—and their own inner preoccupations.

In this situation, **a simple moment of awareness may be enough for clarity to appear** all at once. It is as though the veil suddenly tears apart, allowing the person to escape the prison of duality. They no longer feel compelled to struggle endlessly to convince others.

This can happen:

- When we manage to disidentify from the wound that has been controlling us: “I’m different,” “I’m a victim,” “This is unfair,” “I know better than everyone else,” “I’m going to prove to the world that...,” and so on.
- When we follow an introspective path and enough inner space opens up for us to realize that we already possess insight.
- When a teaching or a teacher acts as a mirror, helping us recognize that this clarity has always been within us.

2. The veil over clarity is very thick

This is the more common situation. Most of the time, we do not have the ability to see what lies beneath the surface. We are not accustomed to questioning reality—although, naturally, the self will insist otherwise.

In this case, we need to practice in order to uncover our clarity:

- Welcome whatever happens without judgment, expectation, or mental questioning.

- Strengthen our intuition by realizing that we do not need to think everything through in order to understand.
- Study the mechanisms of cause and effect, and understand how this law operates in our lives so that we stop creating negative consequences.
- Observe the impermanence of everything around us and let go of our attachment to objects, concepts, and people.

The rest of this module will offer practical ways to train and gradually uncover the clarity of Mind.

Even when the veil over clarity is naturally very thin, we still need to practice. Why? Quite simply because the mind can become agitated again, the self can step back into the foreground, and we can always become attached once more to what is impermanent.

“

God smiles at those who lament the consequences
while holding the causes dear.

”

— Bossuet

Understanding the Law of Cause and Effect

According to the law of cause and effect, nothing happens by chance, since every situation arises from causes that came before it. In Eastern traditions, this law is known as **karma**, a Sanskrit word meaning “action.”

Contrary to popular belief, karma does not refer to divine punishment or reward. It describes a natural process in which every physical action—an act—or intentional action—a thought or emotion—produces a corresponding effect.

It is therefore a general principle observed in physics, not an esoteric theory.

Everything that happens to us is thus the result of seeds we have planted ourselves, either in this life or in another—if we believe in past lives.

Understanding this law enables us to take back control of our lives and shape our future.

Indeed, once we stop acting in ignorance of causes and consequences, we can fully exercise our free will and finally make sound decisions.

Conditioned Streams

From the very beginning, every reality has arisen from a continuous chain involving billions of causes and effects. In this program, we will refer to this process as conditioned streams, a continuum, or karma.

For example, the Earth did not suddenly appear. After the formation of galaxies and stars, it emerged as the final stage of a cosmic chain that began with the Big Bang—if we accept that theory.

Of course, the same applies to us as human beings.

It is important to understand that the law of cause and effect arises from movement. We are dealing here with conditioned streams that begin at point A and lead to point B. There is therefore an underlying force that sets actions in motion.

All we need to do is observe a seed sprouting to see this for ourselves. If tiny shoots can push themselves upright and eventually grow into enormous trees, then some extraordinary force must be at work.

Depending on our beliefs, we give this force different names: consciousness, will, life, the Tao, kundalini, the breath, or God.

How Does This Law Work?

Let us look at a concrete example to understand it more clearly.

I decide to take a ski vacation in Aspen, Colorado → A week later, I arrive in Aspen → The next day, I go skiing → I fall and break my leg → I am taken to the hospital → A charming travel nurse treats me → We fall in love → We get married a month later.

This example of conditioned streams reveals several important points.

1. Independent conditioned streams intersect

- If I had not decided to go to Aspen, I probably would never have met the beautiful nurse.
- I almost certainly would not have met her if she had not been working a temporary assignment at the hospital that day.

2. “I decide to take a ski vacation in Aspen” is not the beginning of the story

Contrary to what we might think, this decision is itself the result of an earlier stream of causes and conditions.

Let us look at what happened a month before:

I have a dentist’s appointment and enter the waiting room → I sit down and flip through a magazine while waiting for my turn → An article about a ski resort near Aspen catches my attention → I use my smartphone to find out exactly where the resort is located.

This example shows us that conditioned streams are both **unbroken**—everything arises from a previous cause, going all the way back to the beginning—and **interconnected**, since countless different streams intersect with one another.

Unless we are omniscient, it is impossible to see the full picture or trace every stream back to its origin.

In our example, the picture changes when we look at the situation with greater clarity.

The following statement:

If I had not decided to go to Aspen, I probably would never have met the beautiful nurse.

Therefore becomes:

If I had not made that appointment with the dentist, I probably would never have met the beautiful nurse

Someone who possesses clarity of Mind is therefore one step ahead: they understand that conditioned streams are actually far more extensive than they appear.

Residual Karma

According to the law of cause and effect, every event that enters our lives is the result of conditioned streams. Nothing happens by chance.

In reality, what we call “chance” or “destiny” is nothing more than the unfolding of residual karma.

Of course, we believe that certain events come out of nowhere because it is impossible for us to identify every conditioned stream that has contributed to their occurrence from the very beginning.

A few examples:

I am walking down the street → I stop to greet someone I know who is walking along the opposite sidewalk → A flowerpot crashes to the ground at my feet.

It is pouring with rain → I step into a bookstore to take shelter → I come across a book that will change the course of my life.

I am caught in traffic → I miss my train → The train crashes into a truck at a railroad crossing.

I know that I have a one-in-19-million chance of picking all six winning lottery numbers → I buy a lottery ticket → I win the jackpot.

These examples are intentionally simplistic. Their purpose is not to deny the existence of an invisible or divine force. They simply show that what we call “destiny” always originates in a cause that came before it.

Challenging the Law of Cause and Effect

So, can we lessen or even prevent the emergence of residual karma? Is it possible to intervene and alter the course of a conditioned stream?

The answer is clearly yes, and the surest and most effective way to do so is through **free will**.

Here are a few more concrete examples, once again deliberately simple:

I have blood tests that reveal high cholesterol → I change my diet → My cholesterol level decreases.

My coworker no longer speaks to me because I behaved terribly toward him → I invite him to dinner and apologize → Our relationship improves.

Obviously, **the more powerful a conditioned stream is, the harder it becomes to alter its course**. If you have smoked two packs of cigarettes a day throughout your life, it becomes more difficult to escape the possible consequences of that harmful habit.

In other words, the odds are no longer in our favor.

Some Eastern religions maintain that it is possible to reduce the impact of residual karma. Tibetan Buddhists, for example, pray to Vajrasattva and make offerings to him in order to purify their karma.

In the West, we pray to saints and ask them for miracles. And we have to acknowledge that many miracles are said to have occurred through the intercession of figures such as the Italian priest Padre Pio and the Lebanese Maronite monk Charbel Makhlouf.

In the case of the seventy officially recognized miracles at the French pilgrimage site of Lourdes, science has been unable to explain how people who were seriously ill and close to death could recover instantaneously.

Against all expectations, this suggests that **our own continuum can be profoundly altered** by forces that defy any rational explanation.

We should therefore never underestimate the power of prayer—or, for those who are not religious, the power of intention.

If you would like to explore this subject further, please refer to the module entitled **“Going Further.”**

The Continuum of the Self

Like everything else that exists, our self is also shaped and driven by conditioned streams. Here are some concrete examples:

I have always trusted other people—it is simply in my nature → I fall victim to a massive scam → My ability to trust begins to erode.

My father always dreamed of becoming an artist and consistently neglected me → I want my father to take an interest in me → I pursue an arts education.

I have never been particularly drawn to spirituality → A friend tells me about Maël Turrene’s *Path to Awakening* program → I realize that I am already awake.

Moreover, if we believe in past lives, residual karma is said to explain the gifts and disabilities we are born with, as well as our physical characteristics.

Here is a personal story to help illustrate the idea:

One day, a medium told me that, in a previous life, I had chosen love over loyalty to my family. Unable to accept my decision, my father had allegedly shot me straight through the heart. As it happens, in this life I really do have a hole in my chest, caused by a congenital condition known as pectus excavatum.

★ Exercise 7: I Accept What Changes

When something negative happens, suffering is a natural response. But would we suffer in the same way if we were less attached to what is disappearing or changing?

For this exercise, **identify someone or something you lost in the past** that caused you considerable pain.

It could be the end of a romantic relationship, the loss of a loved one, a pet, a possession, a job, or anything else.

We have all experienced this kind of pain at least once in our lives.

Now that time has passed and done its work, what do we feel when we think back to that loss? What seemed unbearable at the time—does it still feel just as overwhelming today? What has changed?

Looking back, can we identify why we were attached to that person or thing? Was that attachment appropriate? Was it something we consciously chose?

Are we currently attached to something or someone in a way that could lead us to relive a similar experience?

MODULE 7: Toward Freedom



Letting Go

Now that we have explored insight and understood the law of cause and effect, we need to integrate these teachings into our daily lives and gradually free ourselves from our conditioning.

True awakening can only emerge through putting these teachings into practice.

This module offers guidance to help you move forward on this path with confidence.

Stop Looking at the World Through a Keyhole

We now understand that Mind knows everything directly and instantaneously.

Once we develop insight, there is no longer any need to devote our time and energy to trying to understand everything about the world.

In fact, the moment we try to explain something, we have already stopped looking at it through the eyes of Mind.

This becomes even clearer when we realize that our senses perceive less than 1 percent of what actually exists. Most of our fears and worries arise precisely from what we perceive through the extremely limited lens of our five senses.

On top of this, the mind tries to make sense of this tiny fragment of reality by constructing increasingly complex concepts, theories, and lines of reasoning.

We must recognize once and for all that this way of operating does not bring us closer to the truth. On the contrary, it takes us further away from it. As we lose simplicity, we also lose the clarity of Mind.

Practicing Trusting Acceptance

Having studied the law of cause and effect, we understand that we create our own karma: whatever comes to pass does so because we have made it possible.

From this perspective, our only choice is to meet whatever happens with trusting acceptance.

This does not mean passively submitting to events. On the contrary, it means responding intelligently. As people on the path to awakening, we now understand that our free will allows us to steer conditioned streams in a more favorable direction.

In reality, we have only one task: **to accept what happens and make the best choices we can in order to improve our future karma.**

The following traditional Chinese tale illustrates this idea with striking clarity.

The Old Man and the White Horse — A Chinese Taoist Tale

Once upon a time, in a village nestled against a hillside, an old man lived with his son. Their only possession of any real value was a white horse, which they used to transport supplies from the nearby town.

One day, the horse escaped and disappeared into the forest. They searched for it in vain. The neighbors, saddened by what had happened, came to the old man and said:

—What a disaster! Your only horse is gone. What will you do now?

The old man replied calmly:

—It is true that the horse has run away. We will see what comes of it.

A few days later, the horse returned, accompanied by a wild mare. The neighbors were amazed and came back, this time to congratulate him:

—How fortunate! Now you have two horses!

The old man replied with the same serenity:

—It is true that we now have two horses. Perhaps that is a good thing. Perhaps it is not.

Some time later, the old man's son mounted the mare in an attempt to tame her. The horse threw him to the ground, and he broke his leg badly. Once again, the neighbors came, deeply concerned:

—What a tragedy! Your son can no longer walk. You will not be able to do anything anymore.

The old man replied:

—He is injured. We will take care of him. The future will tell us what this means.

Not long afterward, war broke out. All the young men in the village were forcibly conscripted, except for the old man's son, who was deemed unfit because of his injury. The neighbors returned, deeply moved:

—You have been spared. Your son has been able to stay by your side. What a blessing!

The old man simply replied:

—He remains with us. That is how things are. Whether it is a blessing, I do not know.

Do Not Become Attached to Anything

We have said it repeatedly: whatever we perceive here and now appears stable to us. Yet this is a persistent illusion, because **everything is constantly changing**. For example:

- In less than an hour, the morning dew will have completely disappeared.
- Tomorrow, this caterpillar will have become a beautiful butterfly.
- In twenty years, my physical appearance will have visibly changed.
- In two hundred years, the house I live in will have been destroyed.
- In less than five hundred years, the Roman Empire collapsed.
- In a few million years, the Alps may be beneath the sea.
- In a few billion years, the Sun will stop emitting light.

Once again, nothing is ever created or lost; **everything changes form**.

This means that nothing will survive our death. Depending on our beliefs, it is not even certain that our own consciousness will survive us.

It is therefore essential to understand that everything we become attached to causes us unnecessary suffering. We should therefore let go of all attachment immediately.

This does not mean becoming insensitive. We can respect every person and every living thing without becoming attached to them.

Here are a few concrete examples:

I love my children, my partner, and my friends, BUT:

- I allow them complete freedom to make their own life choices.
- I do not worry about them.
- I understand that my life would go on even if something were to happen to them.

I love animals, BUT:

- I do not become so attached to them that I feel the need to domesticate them.
- I do not keep them in cages.
- I understand that their loyalty does not belong to me.

I take care of my home, BUT:

- I understand that someone else will live there after me.
- I know that I can move elsewhere if circumstances force me to.
- I accept that it could disappear through termites, a natural disaster, or some other event.

Free Will

As we have seen, it is impossible to be truly free as long as we remain trapped in our conditioning and our own mechanical patterns.

A human being remains a machine until they awaken their consciousness.

Breaking free from this condition requires us to remember ourselves constantly, especially in every moment that we are not living consciously.

When we step out of the conditioned streams that govern us, our consciousness opens onto much broader horizons. New possibilities emerge, along with new responsibilities.

We then begin to glimpse what free will truly means.

A fundamental question naturally arises: with the level of consciousness I now possess, in which direction will I guide my life? What meaning and intention will I bring to each of my choices and each of my actions?

It becomes clear that the foundations on which my former life was built are no longer compatible with awakening.

We begin to understand how far-reaching these questions are, since they affect so many areas of our lives: work, health, family, leisure, money, and much more.

Staying Aware of Our Purpose

What truly drives us in each act of daily life? What deeper intention lies behind our gestures, habits, ambitions, and reactions? How much awareness do we bring to each of our goals?

Let us consider a few concrete examples:

- Is my work simply a way to secure financial stability, or does it also answer a need for recognition, power, social advancement, revenge, or personal validation?
- When I share something on social media, is it a sincere desire to share something meaningful, or a subtle way of seeking validation through other people's attention?
- When I post comments on social media, am I genuinely contributing to the discussion, or am I simply trying to be right and reinforce my sense of individuality? Is my comment being driven by an old wound—an experience of injustice, rejection, betrayal, or something similar?
- When I help someone, is it a genuinely free act, or do I consciously or unconsciously need to be seen as a “good person”?
- When I seek to learn, meditate, or grow spiritually, is it an authentic opening, or am I constructing a new identity? Is it simply another self to reassure or keep occupied?
- When I buy a piece of clothing, is it for comfort, or is it meant to attract others or strengthen the image of my individuality?

- When I exercise, is it to take care of my health, or to push beyond my limits, be admired, or respond to a fear of aging?
- When I listen to someone speak, am I truly present with what they are experiencing, or am I merely waiting for my turn to talk about myself?
- When I clean, cook, or carry out simple everyday tasks, am I acting mechanically, or am I able to bring some awareness to what I am doing?
- When I create a work of art, a piece of music, or a video, is it to glorify a small self? Is it simply a way to pass the time? Is it merely intended to entertain someone—or perhaps to make them laugh or uplift them spiritually?
- Why am I listening to this music? Is it to sustain a particular emotion within me, or to release it? Am I using it to fill an inner void?
- Once I have enough money to live comfortably, do I tend to accumulate more or seek to profit from what I have? Or am I able to share my resources and offer what I have to the world?

In other words, **am I capable of living my entire life consciously?** More deeply, does the way I live bring more beauty into the world? Are my actions intended to help others along their path?

Let us take a moment to remember ourselves and answer these questions as honestly as possible.

★ Exercise 8: I Accept What Is

The residual karma generated by our past actions will sooner or later produce its effects. This is inevitable, and unless a miracle occurs, no one can escape the law of cause and effect.

The next time a negative event occurs in our lives, however, we can choose to respond with greater wisdom.

The exercise is therefore to apply the following advice the next time residual karma comes knocking at our door.

What to avoid

- Becoming angry with ourselves or with others.
- Replaying the event over and over, and remaining trapped in feelings of injustice or frustration.
- Denying the consequences of what has happened or trying to control them.
- Allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by panic or anxiety.

What we can try to do

- Sit quietly for a few seconds, without thinking about anything or deliberately trying to observe.
- Recognize that whatever happens always has prior causes, even when those causes are beyond our understanding.

- Since the event is not the result of chance, acknowledge that it was bound to happen.
- However painful it may be, accept the fact that it has occurred.

This is undoubtedly the most difficult exercise in the program. It confronts us with pain and forces us to respond in a way that goes against our instincts, because certain conditioned streams—those of injustice, sadness, anger, and so on—can be extraordinarily powerful.

And yet accepting everything that happens, even our own death, is the only way forward if we want to avoid adding more fuel to the great wheel of karma.

It is also recommended that you practice Exercise 10 in the program, entitled **“Giving and Receiving.”**

MODULE 8 : Toward Compassion

“

**Life does not force us; it draws us like a river
flowing toward the sea.**

”

— Rûmi

Falling and Rising Again

So how do we know whether we are awake?

Awakening is often described as a revelation—a sudden moment in which something is unveiled.

A person who awakens is said to be struck by lightning. They know, with absolute certainty, that they have just awakened.

Yet accounts of awakening are as varied as the people who experience them. Some describe an experience during a pilgrimage, others during a spiritual retreat, a teaching, or a particularly significant event.

However, like any state of consciousness, awakening can be unstable. This is why someone who has not become fully awakened will generally “come back down” fairly quickly.

Awakening: The Solution to Everything?

Some approaches present awakening as a definitive cure for suffering. This idea needs to be qualified.

In reality, nothing—absolutely nothing—can free us from impermanence and therefore from suffering.

That is why, during periods of doubt or in the face of particularly difficult obstacles, someone who has experienced awakening may feel as though they have returned to an earlier state of consciousness.

Nevertheless, we must be careful not to allow this relapse to become permanent. Meditation is a reliable way to remain rooted in the nature of Mind, provided it is practiced correctly.

So, if we feel that the state of awakening is slipping away, let us remember that all it takes is a few seconds of meditation to merge with Mind, whose nature is calm, stable, and clear.

We can also practice Exercise 9, **“Toward Gratitude,”** at the end of this module. It is a simple exercise that can quickly help us return to a more positive state.

The Final Illusions

If awakening nevertheless remains difficult to sustain, this difficulty is often connected to a profound sense that life has lost its meaning.

After all, succeeding in life, accumulating material possessions, gaining recognition, finding love, seeking happiness, and pursuing social relationships—none of these things hold the same meaning for

someone who is awakening. They understand that becoming attached to everything that is impermanent leads to suffering.

So what is left to do?

- **Create?** Yes, creation is a noble activity. But today, all it takes is a single click for artificial intelligence to create music, a song, a drawing, or a book—often better than we can.
- **Help** those who are suffering? This is essential. But is it not like trying to fill the Danaids' bottomless barrel? Wars always return, and people remain unaware of the causes of their suffering. They continue to suffer, again and again...
- **Meditate** in a cave? Become a monk? It is better than doing nothing: by refraining from action, we bring conditioned streams to an end—and nature benefits from the fact that we pollute it less. But if we have already attained awakening, what would be the point?

As we can see, even the noblest activities have lost their meaning. Quite simply, there is no longer a self to give them meaning.

At this stage, one essential ingredient is still missing for awakening to be complete.

The Gentle Fragrance of Compassion

Compassion is the ability to recognize the suffering of others and to feel a sincere desire to relieve it.

Let us summarize:

- Identifying with the self causes us to suffer.
- Attachment to what is impermanent—the persistent illusion—causes us to suffer.
- Failing to understand that every action produces a corresponding effect causes us to suffer.
- The only remedy for suffering is realizing our true nature.

This is where everything comes together: beings suffer because they have not awakened.

When we understand this, a wave of compassion washes over us.

Are we really going to leave our brothers and sisters trapped in the endless cycle of suffering? Or will we do everything we can to pass on to them the flame of awakening?

Now that we are awake, do we truly have a choice?

The Two Compasses

As we saw at the beginning of the program, it is easy to mistake a “simple” spiritual opening for awakening.

As time goes by, one question often returns for those who are sincerely walking this path: Am I still on the path to awakening? Despite my best intentions, am I truly moving forward, or have I lost my way?

The pace of everyday life—work, family, friends, responsibilities, entertainment, and so on—can easily draw us away from what matters most and fuel these doubts.

Before bringing this program to a close, I would therefore like to offer you two compasses. They will not answer all your questions, but they will help you recognize the right direction and find your bearings again whenever doubt sets in.

Equanimity

Equanimity is the ability to remain inwardly calm and steady, whatever the circumstances.

It means meeting pleasant and difficult moments with the same sense of perspective, without being swept away by euphoria, fear, anger, or discouragement.

This does not mean ceasing to feel emotions. It means learning not to become their prisoner.

Equanimity is therefore your first compass. Here is how to use it.

When doubts arise and you wonder whether you are still on the path to awakening, ask yourself:

Am I at peace, or am I agitated?

Recurring agitation is always a sign that we are moving away from the state of awakening. The word *agitation* should be understood broadly here.

- **An agitated mind**

This may involve inner preoccupations, intrusive thoughts, a need to understand everything, or a tendency to create concepts. If this is the case, practice meditation on the Path of Samatha until the mind becomes calm.

- **Difficulty living in the present moment**

This may involve dwelling on the past, regret, excessive projection into the future, or fear of what lies ahead. If this is the case, the exercises **“I Accept What Changes”** and **“I Accept What Is”** may be helpful.

- **External preoccupations**

These may include negative emotions such as jealousy, pride, anger, a sense of injustice, frustration, sarcasm, and so on. If this is the case, we can practice the exercises in the module **“Putting the Self in the Background,”** along with the exercise entitled **“Avoiding Emotional Contagion.”**

- **Feeling trapped in a pattern or addiction**

In this case, we can meditate on the impermanence of all things and revisit the module “**Seeing the World as It Is**” in order to stop clinging to what causes us suffering.

Altruism

Altruism is the willingness to act for the good of others without putting our own personal interests first.

It means choosing to place our vital energy at the service of others, with sincerity and kindness.

This does not mean neglecting ourselves or sacrificing our own well-being. It means giving the well-being of others as much importance as our own.

Altruism is therefore your second compass—and by far the more important one. Here is how to use it.

When doubts arise and you wonder whether you are still on the path to awakening, ask yourself:

Do what I want and what I do serve the common good, or do they primarily serve my personal interests?

It is easy to be deceived by the ego when walking a spiritual path. You must therefore remain especially vigilant and observe yourself carefully.

Let us consider a concrete example.

I create a work of art—a song, a piece of music, a painting, a sculpture, a book, and so on.

First, I identify the deeper desire behind the project

- Is it to make money?
- Is it to become famous or get people talking about me?
- Is it to leave a mark after my death or have my name remembered by history?
- Is it to share my own feelings or beliefs—or to impose my version of the truth?
- Is it to be admired and receive praise?
- Is it to prove my worth or compensate for a personal insecurity, such as a sense of inferiority or a desire for social revenge?
- Is it to gain power or influence?
- Is it to reinforce an identity? For example: “I am an artist, and this is my work.”

Then, I recognize that these desires are incompatible with awakening

I allow more noble motivations to take root within me, such as:

- Sharing or preserving knowledge, for example through a book.
- Comforting or inspiring others, or helping them release an emotion that has become stuck—for example, through a sad or uplifting song.

- Bringing greater beauty into the world.
- Acting out of pure passion, without expecting anything in return.

If you realize that your choices are still being guided by personal desire, revisit the module **“Toward Freedom”** and practice **“Self-Remembering”** again.

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“
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
”

— The Gospel according to Matthew

Carrying the Flame

We have reached the end of this program. And yet the journey is only beginning. Although, as we already know, nothing truly begins and nothing truly ends.

In an earlier module, we spoke about the force we call life—or the divine breath.

This mysterious force has propelled conditioned streams through emptiness from the very beginning. It is what enables a tiny shoot to grow into a gigantic tree in next to no time.

Of course, this force does not act only upon matter. It also accompanies our thoughts, intentions, choices, actions, and everything else.

If we reread the module entitled “**The States of Existence**,” we understand that truly living in the human realm gives us the ability to direct this force, like a laser beam.

One question therefore remains: in which direction will we allow this force to carry us? Will we choose virtue—or suffering?

Confluences

Thank you for following this program all the way to the end.

I hope it has helped you in some way along the path to awakening.

If it has, please feel free to make a donation, according to your means, to the author's organization. A QR code at the end of this book will take you to the appropriate webpage.

If you have questions, need support, or simply want to share your experience, join the dedicated group on the author's website.

Thank you for being present on this path ☀

Supporting One Another

If you are wondering how you can pass on the flame of awakening, here are a few suggestions:

- Tell the people around you about this program and share the link on social media.
- Volunteer your time at a retreat center.
- Place your financial resources, donations, and skills at the service of awakening.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all of you who journey from one life to the next toward awakening. If you have made it this far, it is surely not by chance. May we one day attain complete awakening and bring the cycle of suffering to an end.

Thank you to the beings who have already awakened here and now, and who devote their lives to serving others.

Thank you to the great Masters who awakened before us and who guide us invisibly in the timeless present, with such compassion.

Maël Tournere

★ Exercise 9: Toward Gratitude

When we are going through a difficult period or struggling to regain our inner balance, certain simple practices can help us recentre ourselves.

One such practice is to withdraw for a few moments to a quiet place and take three deep breaths to ground ourselves in the present moment. Here and now, in this state of calm, nothing negative is happening—we are completely safe.

We can then give thanks to life for offering us this gift.

Gratitude is readily available wherever we are. It is a powerful antidote to the impermanence that governs everything. We might, for example, give thanks for the sun on a summer day, smile at a passing stranger, watch a bird as it feeds, listen to crickets singing in nature, or thank life for our good health, for being loved, and so on.

Even when everything seems to be going wrong, there are always a thousand reasons to give thanks to something greater than ourselves.

As French Master Selim Aïssel says:

*“Many people are born into deeply conflicted families. Others are born in countries at war, while still others are born in regions where people are starving [...] And here I am, living a relatively peaceful life, with a reasonable degree of material comfort. **Why me?** Even though this question has no answer, since it is connected to karma and destiny, we can always choose an attitude. That attitude is gratitude.”*

★ Exercise 10: Giving and Receiving

This final exercise is directly inspired by **Tonglen**, a practice from Mahayana Buddhism.

Very often, we do not know what to do with another person's suffering. When faced with someone who is in pain, the most common responses are excessive empathy, discomfort, or avoidance.

This exercise invites us to approach the situation in a completely counterintuitive way.

It involves adopting a particular breathing practice: breathing in the other person's suffering and breathing out our true nature, with all its qualities.

We can imagine the other person's suffering entering through our nostrils and dissolving in our hearts. As we breathe out, we offer the other person our calm, confidence, stability, clarity, compassion, gratitude, love, and so on.

Through this invisible breath, we offer the person in distress an opportunity to recognize their true nature, in a way that resembles **darshan**, the experience of receiving a teacher's or a sacred figure's presence.

Of course, Tonglen is not a practice everyone can undertake immediately. We need to be grounded in our true nature and able to look at the other person through the eyes of Mind.

It takes practice, but the results can be miraculous.

MODULE 9: Going Further

“He who is master of himself is greater
than he who is master of the world.”

— Buddha

Discovering Buddhism

Siddhartha Gautama, known as **the Buddha**, was born around 563 BCE into a royal family in northern India.

At the age of twenty-nine, he renounced his privileged life and left his family in search of an answer to one of the great questions of human existence: suffering.

After several years of ascetic practice, reflection, and meditation, he attained awakening. From this experience emerged a teaching that has continued through the centuries and reached us today.

This module offers an introduction to the foundations of the Buddha's teaching. It does not claim to be exhaustive, nor does it attempt to cover the richness and diversity of the various Buddhist traditions.

Before going any further, it is useful to travel back 2,500 years in order to better understand the context in which this teaching arose and to discover some of its echoes in our own time.

History Does Not Repeat Itself—It Insists

First of all, it must be said that the period in which the Buddha lived was particularly remarkable. At that time, major philosophical and spiritual traditions were emerging almost simultaneously in different parts of the world.

In India, the Buddha and Mahavira, a major figure in Jainism, appeared on the scene. In China, Confucius and Laozi were teaching, while Socrates, Pythagoras, and Plato were making their mark in Greece.

Several centuries later, Jesus would in turn leave his mark on the spiritual history of the Middle East and the Western world.

It is also possible to draw a parallel between the Buddha's time and our own. In both periods, profound social, economic, and cultural transformations led many people to question the meaning of existence and how to live a just and fulfilling life.

The Buddha was obviously not responding to modern consumer-based materialism. Yet he was already addressing universal concerns that remain remarkably relevant today: attachment, desire, dissatisfaction, fear of death, the causes of illness, and the search for lasting happiness.

Like other great thinkers of his time, the Buddha offered a path for living with greater awareness, clarity, and serenity in a world undergoing constant change.

It is striking to observe that the tensions running through humanity in his time are still present today. On the one hand, some people sought salvation through extremely rigorous ascetic practices: prolonged fasting, severe deprivation, bodily mortification, or intensive meditation. On the other, some favored a life devoted to pleasure and immediate gratification.

This same duality is more relevant than ever. Even today, some people choose a way of life based on simplicity, renunciation, or spiritual discipline. This is true, for example, of monks living in the monasteries of the Tibetan mountains, as well as of many people in the West who deliberately adopt a minimalist lifestyle.

Others, by contrast, live in environments characterized by material abundance and the pursuit of comfort—whether urban, technological, or consumerist.

Added to this are concerns specific to our own time: declinist narratives, eco-anxiety, and environmental or social crises, all of which influence the way we inhabit the world and give meaning to our spiritual quests.

Having experienced both extremes himself—from an opulent princely life to the rigors of ascetic existence—the Buddha was one of the first to formulate the principle of the **Middle Way** with such clarity: a path that avoids both excessive deprivation and excessive indulgence.

This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why his teaching continues to resonate so powerfully today.

More than twenty-five centuries after it first appeared, it remains an invitation to seek balance, clarity, and inner peace in a world that, like the Buddha's world, is marked by deep divisions and constant change.

To explore the subject further, I strongly recommend Daisaku Ikeda's excellent book *The Living Buddha: An Interpretive Biography*, the published English title of his biography of Shakyamuni.

We will now examine the Buddha's teaching in broad outline, without making any claim to be exhaustive.

1. Suffering (Dukkha) and the Cycle of Rebirth (Saṃsāra)

Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda)

The Buddha observed that nothing arises without a cause. Everything originates in causes that came before it. This is the law of cause and effect.

This applies not only to matter, but also to whatever animates it—personality, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, the ego, and so on.

For example, mountains form because tectonic plates collide. Under the influence of anger, the body becomes tense and relationships grow

conflictual. You are reading this book because some force prompted you to pick it up.

It is worth noting that science reaches the same conclusion: nothing arises without conditions.

This is not a fatalistic or deterministic doctrine. We are certainly shaped by prior causes, but we can also create new ones consciously.

It is precisely within this space that freedom emerges.

Impermanence (Anitya) and Emptiness (Śūnyatā)

Not only does nothing arise without a cause, but everything has been constantly changing for billions of years.

For example, the apple that has fallen from the tree will decompose and nourish the soil. The emotion we are feeling right now will have disappeared within a few seconds. Even a mountain that appears eternal will eventually be eroded by the forces of wind and rain.

This is the famous quotation attributed to Lavoisier: “Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed.”

Not only is everything impermanent, but everything is also empty. Why? Because matter is composed of 99.99 percent empty space.

We believe that a mountain is solid because the electrons in our hand press against the electrons in the rock. Its apparent solidity is therefore electromagnetic rather than material.

Surprisingly, 500 years before the Common Era, the Buddha had already understood these scientific truths.

To summarize: everything that appears tangible, solid, and unchanging is in fact only a persistent illusion that we cling to as unquestioningly real—as though we were dreaming.

The Self Is a Mental Construct and Does Not Exist Permanently (Anātman)

From the very beginning, everything has encouraged us to believe that we are individuals among many others: our bodies, our names, our desires, our thoughts, our emotions, our beliefs, our personalities, and so on. This seemingly undeniable self has been woven through the course of our personal history, like ivy winding around stone.

And yet our bodies grow old, our emotions flow and fade, our thoughts drift away, we change our minds countless times, and our personalities are constantly evolving.

Even our consciousness sometimes seems to disappear. Where does the self go when we are asleep, when we lose consciousness, or when we are affected by illness—psychosis, Alzheimer’s disease, amnesia, and so on?

Ultimately, when we look closely at who we are, we never find a stable self. We find only processes of identification whose origins are conditioned.

So if everything gradually erodes and everything eventually disappears, **what remains to say “I”?**

The Buddha answers this question decisively: “There is no fixed, eternal, or independent entity that can be called ‘me.’”

How can that be? Is our individual consciousness therefore like the mountains—a persistent illusion? Empty and impermanent? Are we a person, or are we no one?

Here we touch upon a sensitive issue for those of us on a spiritual path. How could we possibly not believe in our own existence? Can we even imagine such a thing?

We can see that Buddhism proposes a belief diametrically opposed to that of most religions and spiritual traditions: the absence of a self or individual consciousness, as opposed to the idea of a soul that survives death.

The Three Poisons (Triviṣa)

According to the Buddha's teaching, three causes lie at the root of suffering:

Ignorance

Symbol: the pig

Ignorance means failing to understand the law of cause and effect and failing to recognize the impermanent nature of reality.

For example, it may involve disregarding the consequences of our actions, identifying with a permanent and solid self—spending an entire lifetime trying to become someone—or being convinced that a mountain is motionless and solid.

Attachment / Craving

Symbol: the rooster

Attachment is a constant, unsatisfied desire.

For example, it may involve making the accumulation of wealth the purpose of one's life, becoming emotionally dependent on someone, being blinded by the entertainment industry, constantly seeking out new emotions in order to feel alive, or consuming food, culture, and everything else to excess.

Aversion / Anger

Symbol: the snake

Aversion is hostility toward whatever we perceive as different from ourselves.

It includes any thought that reinforces the belief that we are separate from one another. Examples include racism, rivalry, jealousy, distrust, and similar attitudes. It may also involve refusing to forgive or believing that we are superior to someone else.

Afflictions Keep Us Trapped in the Endless Cycle of Suffering (Saṃsāra)

Saṃsāra refers to the endless cycle of everything that arises from a previous cause. There is no distinction or moral judgment here: this karmic wheel includes everything that exists, whether material or immaterial, and whether it is perceived as positive or negative.

In practical terms, as long as we remain under the influence of the three poisons, we generate a stream of causes and consequences (*saṃskāra*) that continues to feed the endless cycle of suffering.

There are, of course, moments of respite, but they are deceptive. Happiness, for example, slips through our fingers because it is like everything else: impermanent. As long as we continue to seek it, and as long as we believe we can hold on to it, we remain trapped in *saṃsāra*.

Entering the Stream of Awakening (Sotāpatti)

We have seen that:

- The self is a mental construct with no independent existence (*anātman*).
- The world around us is a persistent illusion. We perceive it as stable even though it is constantly changing (*anitya*).
- Ever since the Big Bang, everything—absolutely everything—has existed as the result of prior causes, although we are not aware of all the conditioned streams involved.

When we fully realize all of this and become unwaveringly convinced of it, something extraordinary happens. Like a star drawn toward a black hole, we become irresistibly oriented toward awakening.

From a psychological perspective, *sotāpatti* is therefore a profound reorganization of our cognitive structure. Discovering that there is no self at the center of experience disrupts the process of identification: the personality remains, but the self begins to crumble or even collapse.

In disbelief, the *sotāpanna* realizes that experience continues without “him”—or “her”—and that this has always been the case.

From that point on, the *sotāpanna* understands that thoughts and emotions are not produced by the self, but are processes that exist independently. They realize that the body does not need a self in order to breathe or digest on its own.

The lingering doubt connected to the existence of the self can no longer hold, and the *sotāpanna* is relieved of a burden they have carried on their shoulders.

A sense of inner calm follows, along with renewed confidence and a quieting of the mind. The following image perfectly conveys what the *sotāpanna* experiences.

Let us imagine a pilot who has always believed that they were personally flying the airplane. One day, they discover that the plane has an “autopilot” mode: it flies according to the laws of physics and predictable responses, conditioned by everything that came before.

Freed from the burden of responsibility, the pilot can now sit back and enjoy the journey.

More precisely, the pilot may still sit in the cockpit, but whatever they do, the plane is capable of flying without them.

Of course, *sotāpatti* is not complete awakening—not by a long shot. It is a transitional stage during which the *sotāpanna* continues to live like an ordinary person, as a result of prior conditions.

They still experience anger, desire, and afflictions of all kinds.

The next section describes the conditions that lead to complete awakening.

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2. Awakening (Bodhi) and the Cessation of Afflictions (Nirvāṇa)

Buddha-Nature

The Buddha's entire teaching rests on the understanding of one crucial point: **we are already awake.**

Indeed, we have been awake from the very beginning. This nature is simply veiled by the thick fog of the mind—our thoughts and emotions—and by our obsession with the self with which we are so strongly identified.

Awakening is therefore not something to be sought. It is not a state we must find somewhere else. It is better understood as a realization, an unveiling, a revelation.

Without understanding this fundamental truth, awakening is impossible, because a being who is already awake keeps searching everywhere for a path that does not exist.

Seeking awakening is like spending an entire lifetime looking for your glasses when they are already sitting on your nose.

Calm Abiding, Insight, and the Dharma

Calm abiding (*śamatha*), insight (*vipassanā*), and the Dharma—the Buddha's teaching—are the foundations of awakening.

When we are under the influence of afflictions such as anger, fear, sadness, greed, jealousy, pride, arrogance, and feelings of lack, we

cannot recognize that another reality exists beyond the self. It is therefore essential to restore calm abiding.

When we firmly believe in the persistent illusion of everything around us—including the illusion of our own self—we cannot recognize that something else exists beyond that self. It is therefore essential to restore clarity and insight.

Finally, the teaching—or the Master—allows someone who has attained calm and clarity of mind to realize that they are already awake. In other words, it reveals their true nature to them by holding up a mirror.

If these three conditions are not present, complete awakening is impossible. This triad is therefore at the heart of the Buddha's teaching.

The Nature of Mind (Cittatā)

When we manage to disidentify from the self, we realize that something else lies beyond it: Mind.

So what is Mind according to the Buddha?

It is what appears when we calmly observe what is happening here and now: an empty, stable, clear, and calm presence.

Empty, because on the surface, there seems to be nothing there. And yet Mind contains everything that exists.

Stable, because Mind is always present, unlike the self, whose nature is impermanent.

Clear, because Mind recognizes the persistent illusion at every moment. It cannot be deceived by what merely appears to be permanent, unlike the self, which clings to it.

Calm, because Mind cannot be disturbed, unlike the self.

The image of the sky helps us understand the nature of Mind. Clouds may obscure the light or allow it to shine through; they may bring lightning, snow, or rain. But once the clouds have passed, the sky always reappears—empty, stable, clear, and calm.

Here we can see that the self appears to coexist with Mind. More precisely, it is an emanation of Mind, just like thoughts, emotions, mountains, and the universe.

In other words, just as a wave exists without ever being separate from the ocean, the self exists without ever being separate from Mind.

The Cessation of Afflictions (Nirvāṇa)

When we realize that we are already awake, we stop seeing reality through the eyes of the self. We see it directly through the eyes of Mind.

From then on, we become aware at every moment that we are not this self. We realize, with astonishment, that it is Mind that generates thoughts and emotions—not “us.” We also see that the entire world around us is a persistent illusion arising from the manifestation of Mind.

What does this change in practical terms?

Before awakening, the self was the only means we had of apprehending reality. Yet, as we have seen, the self clings to concepts and to whatever it believes to be stable and permanent. Deceived by impermanence, it consequently generates all kinds of afflictions and concepts: feelings of lack, greed, fear, and so on.

In the state of awakening, the agitation of the self subsides because it is no longer at the forefront of our consciousness. Better still, we can choose when it appears and for what purpose—rather like putting on a costume to play a role.

Since our self now appears only when appropriate, we stop adding negative causes to the karmic wheel. From that point on, the stream of afflictions arising from previous causes and their effects gradually begins to run dry.

Little by little, we leave saṃsāra.

Intermediate States of Consciousness at the Time of Death (Bardo)

As we have seen, everything that exists has been driven by the uninterrupted force of causes and effects since the Big Bang. These streams—or continuums—carry absolutely everything along in their dance.

An apple falls from a tree and nourishes the soil. That soil becomes ideal for a flower to grow. Then, carried by the wind, a thousand other flowers may bloom in every corner of the world.

Of course, we are no exception to this rule. Our bodies, thoughts, emotions, personalities—everything we are—is constantly changing, carried along by an infinite number of prior causes.

Like water flowing away between our fingers, we do not know where our own stream of consciousness is taking us.

So what really remains of us at the moment of death?

In the ***Bardo Thödol***, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, we are told that after death we continue to perceive manifestations of Mind.

An extraordinary light may appear. A state of love and peace may envelop us. Beloved people may manifest before us. If our consciousness is troubled, however, an anxiety-provoking environment may also appear: terrifying forms, entities, strange sounds, and so on.

Some people draw a parallel between these accounts and reports of near-death experiences. Yet according to the *Bardo Thödol*, this entire scenery is merely a persistent illusion—a pure projection of the mind. We must therefore be careful not to become attached to it.

Why? Because if we firmly believe that these manifestations of mind are reality, we become like prisoners trapped inside a vivid dream. But the dream will dissolve, and we will be drawn toward a new body, a new birth, and a new self.

In reality, according to the *Bardo Thödol*, these manifestations primarily offer one final opportunity to recognize the luminous nature of Mind. Whoever recognizes it is no longer swept along by the cycle of rebirth.

We can therefore see that even beyond death, the current of our consciousness does not escape the conditioned cycle of causes and effects—saṃsāra.

Only Buddha-nature makes it possible to end our habitual identification with a self and thereby leave the cycle of rebirth.

The implications of awakening are, as we can see, truly overwhelming.

“

In the heart of darkness, faith paints a trail of light.

”

— Maël Tourrene

A Step Toward Prayer

Everyone goes through difficulties in life, and it is perfectly natural to seek support in order to overcome them.

Faith, prayer, and devotion can provide precious inner strength, without requiring us to commit to any particular religion.

Every year, thousands of people report witnessing miracles—evidence, perhaps, that faith really can move mountains.

It would be a shame to deprive ourselves of these powerful tools simply because a particular religion or form of spirituality makes us uncomfortable.

For those who feel drawn to this path, it is possible to call upon certain deities or spiritual figures, depending on the needs or circumstances we encounter.

And of course, according to our individual traditions and sensibilities, other beings of light or deities may also be invoked. Here are a few examples.

Compassion, Love, and Guidance Toward Awakening

Dainichi Nyorai is the central cosmic Buddha of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. He corresponds to the Buddha Mahāvairocana, whose name means “Great Light.”

His feminine counterpart is **Dai Marishi-Ten (Marīcī)**. She symbolizes the ability of the awakened mind to pass through the illusions of the world without becoming attached to them, while protecting practitioners from inner and outer obstacles.

Unlike Siddhartha Gautama, these two deities do not represent human beings who lived on Earth. Rather, they represent ultimate reality and universal wisdom permeating the entire universe.

Together, they are regarded as the source of all Buddhas and as an expression of the awakened nature present in every being.

Here is a mantra that may be used to ask for help on the path to awakening. It may be recited 108 times:

Om Gate ! Gate ! Paragate ! Parasamgate ! Bodhi svaha (“Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone completely beyond—awakening, hail!”)

Padmasambhava who lived in the eighth century and is also known as Guru Rinpoche—“the Precious Master”—is one of the most revered figures in Tibetan Buddhism.

Regarded as the founder of the Nyingma school, the oldest tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, he is credited with adapting Buddhist teachings to the Tibetan cultural context and transmitting numerous methods of meditation and inner transformation.

Beyond the legendary accounts surrounding his life, Padmasambhava remains a major figure on the spiritual path. He symbolizes the ability to transform obstacles into wisdom and to reveal the awakened nature present within every being.

Here is one of the most powerful Tibetan mantras: the **Vajra Guru Mantra**. According to Sogyal Rinpoche, reciting this mantra just once is equivalent to receiving the blessings obtained through practicing the Buddha’s complete teaching:

Om Ah Hum, Vajra Guru Padma, Siddhi Hum (O Padmasambhava, grant me the supreme realization.)

Good to know: According to Tibetan tradition, Padmasambhava once consecrated a statue depicting him and declared, “It looks like me.”

For this reason, many practitioners choose to recite the mantra while gazing at his image. Images of this statue are readily available online.

Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ in Christian tradition, is revered as a symbol of purity, compassion, and intercession.

On a spiritual level, Mary represents a maternal and protective presence in the world, guiding human beings toward trust, prayer, and mercy.

She is often invoked for support and consolation, as well as for help in cultivating compassion and remaining faithful to one's beliefs.

Jesus-Christ is also a central figure in Christianity, but he may also be regarded as a universal spiritual guide.

He embodies compassion, forgiveness, and unconditional love, showing through his life and teachings how to live with integrity and kindness toward others.

His words and actions inspire us to transform suffering, develop patience and understanding, and cultivate empathy in our relationships.

Through his example of sacrifice and service, Jesus teaches the importance of generosity, moral courage, and perseverance in the face of life's challenges.

His actions and teachings continue to inspire reflection on the path of an ethical and conscious life—one accessible to everyone, regardless of religious belief.

Health and Healing

Bhaiṣajyaguru, known in Japan as **Yakushi Nyorai**, is the Medicine Buddha and the Buddha of healing and benevolent light.

More than a healer of the physical body, he symbolizes the complete healing of mind and karma.

The lapis-lazuli blue light that radiates from his presence offers clarity, purification, and wisdom capable of dispelling our inner obscurations.

On a spiritual level, Yakushi Nyorai guides practitioners in transforming suffering into awakening, cultivating compassion, and creating the conditions for health and serenity.

In Japanese Buddhism, he is invoked to protect and strengthen not only the body, but also the heart and mind, enabling practitioners to progress along the path to awakening with confidence and balance.

Here is the mantra used to invoke Yakushi Nyorai. It may be recited 108 times:

Om korokoro sendari matōgi sowaka (Homage to the Medicine Buddha, the great healer—may healing manifest swiftly)

Saint Charbel (1828–1898), a Lebanese monk and hermit of the Maronite Church, is now one of the most revered spiritual figures in Eastern Christianity.

He lived a life of profound simplicity, devoted entirely to prayer, silence, meditation, and deep union with God. After his death, his reputation spread rapidly around the world because of the many healing miracles attributed to his intercession: more than 30,000 testimonies have reportedly been recorded to date.

Many people say they have experienced relief from chronic pain, serious illnesses, or conditions considered incurable after praying to Saint Charbel, making a pilgrimage to his tomb, or using blessed oil or objects associated with him.

Beyond the question of miracles, Saint Charbel embodies the power of inner contemplation, silent presence, and spiritual perseverance. His life reminds us that the deepest transformation often arises from a humble heart and genuine compassion for all beings.

Whatever our personal beliefs, his example invites us to rediscover the power of silence, prayer, and selfless love as sources of inner peace and ways of supporting others.

Good to know: It is traditional to pray to Saint Charbel on the 22nd of each month. This custom began after the reported healing of Nohad Al-Chami in 1993. According to the account, the saint asked her to return to the monastery at Annaya on the 22nd of every month to give thanks.

Since then, thousands of worshippers around the world have devoted this day to prayer and contemplation.

Abundance and Material Protection

Jambhala is revered in Tibetan Buddhism as a source of prosperity, protection, and spiritual abundance.

More than a mere provider of material wealth, Jambhala represents the liberation of the mind from fear and scarcity, enabling practitioners to cultivate generosity, confidence, and inner balance.

His practice aims to transform attachment and greed into wisdom and compassion, while encouraging the ethical and altruistic use of resources.

Jambhala is invoked to overcome obstacles related to poverty, stress, or insecurity, while supporting the practitioner's spiritual path with discernment and abundance.

Vasudhara is the goddess of wealth, abundance, and prosperity, revered primarily in Tibetan and Nepalese Buddhism.

She symbolizes infinite generosity and both spiritual and material fertility, inspiring practitioners to cultivate generosity, gratitude, and altruism.

On a spiritual level, Vasudhara helps remove obstacles to personal and spiritual flourishing, transforming the fear of scarcity or insecurity into confidence and inner abundance.

Purifying Karma and Seeking Forgiveness

Vajrasattva, whose name literally means “Diamond Being,” is the deity of the complete purification of karma in tantric Buddhism.

His adamant nature symbolizes an indestructible and immaculate mind, capable of dissolving all the mental and karmic impurities accumulated over the course of many lifetimes.

By reciting his mantra, practitioners seek to purify past negative actions, remove spiritual obstacles, and clarify the mind, thereby preparing the ground for profound transformation and progress toward awakening.

This purification is not merely symbolic. It helps transform the mental and emotional habits that obstruct wisdom and compassion, strengthening a mind that is stable, clear, and indestructible—like a diamond.

Here is the mantra used to invoke Vajrasattva. It may be recited 108 times:

■ **Om Vajrasattva Hum**

“

Very little is needed to make a happy life

”

– Marcus Aurelius

A Step Toward Renunciation

Renouncing the entertainments of worldly life does not mean rejecting joy or beauty. It is a way of freeing ourselves from whatever reinforces the illusion of the self.

The Buddha's teachings explain that attachment to sensory pleasures and emotional stimulation sustains craving (*taṇhā*), the source of dissatisfaction and the cycle of suffering.

Being passionately devoted to a particular artist, constantly seeking intense emotions through music, films, or other cultural works, or spending long hours entertaining ourselves in front of screens may seem harmless. Yet these habits contribute to constructing an identity around our tastes, preferences, and opinions.

This construction reinforces the idea of a solid, separate self.

In the same way, attachment to social relationships and to the need to be recognized, loved, or surrounded by others can become another form of distraction that turns us away from inner observation.

Trying to multiply our interactions, please others, or maintain a particular image of ourselves in their eyes fuels both desire and the fear of loss—two mechanisms that keep the mind agitated.

In this context, renunciation means becoming aware of these habits and gradually reducing their hold over us—not through rigid asceticism, but in order to recover an inner space of silence and clarity.

As we detach ourselves from distractions and incessant stimulation, the mind can turn toward its deeper nature, which is more stable and peaceful than the passing emotions offered by society.

Renunciation Is Not Sacrifice

This process of renunciation may nevertheless give rise to fear and understandable resistance.

When we begin to detach ourselves from the entertainments, relationships, or possessions with which we have identified, a sense of emptiness may arise.

This feeling is reinforced by a society that constantly promotes distraction, consumption, and stimulation. Advertising, the media, and the economic system encourage us to fill every moment with content, purchases, or interactions, leaving little room for silence and introspection.

Giving up these habits may make us feel as though we are cutting ourselves off from others, drifting away from our friends, or stepping outside the rhythm of collective life.

Yet, as we have already seen, this process of disidentifying from the self gradually leads toward a state of simplicity and inner freedom. It is often described as moving closer to emptiness—that is, to a space no longer cluttered with desires and fears.

In this state, the self does not disappear. It simply stops being at the center of every concern. It becomes something we put on consciously and appropriately when needed, especially in order to act wisely and help others, rather than an identity we must constantly defend or reinforce.

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“

**The beginning of wisdom is the
definition of terms.**

”

— Socrates

GLOSSARY

Self

Identification with an individual consciousness formed from multiple conditioned aggregates—physical body, sensations, emotions, thoughts, personality, and so on. Synonyms: identity, ego, individual consciousness, “I.”

Small Self

The part of our personality that suddenly takes control without our awareness. Examples include an angry, jealous, anxious, proud, or spiteful small self.

Self Takeover

Moments when we are controlled by a small self. Examples include aversion—an outburst of anger, hatred, jealousy, and so on—or a period of craving involving food, sex, money, and so forth.

Mind Takeover

Moments when we are controlled by the mind. Examples include a period of daydreaming in which we become caught up in the flow of our thoughts, a phase of anxiety that clouds our perception, a fear that sends our thoughts into a loop, a period of mental exhaustion, and so on.

Afflictions

States of consciousness that affect us negatively, such as anger, jealousy, sadness, disgust, pride, spite, idleness, and so on.

Distraction

Attachment to anything that distracts the self and gives it a relative sense of existence: social life, the arts, culture, emotions, media, games, sports, travel, and so on.

Ordinary Mind

Everything that arises in the mind and contributes to the construction of our personality: thoughts, emotions, beliefs, identification with a self, and the experience of being an individual consciousness capable of observing itself.

Mind

An empty, stable, clear, and calm presence that appears when the flow of thoughts temporarily comes to an end and there is no longer a self attempting to observe. Synonym: true nature.

Awakening

A state of consciousness in which the self is no longer at the center of experience, allowing us to see the world through the eyes of Mind as it truly is: impermanent and conditioned.

Karma

The uninterrupted stream of causes and effects that has continued from the very beginning. Synonyms: continuum, conditioned streams, the law of cause and effect, destiny, chance.

Persistent Illusion

The process through which we become firmly convinced that a continuum is stable, even though it is constantly changing. Examples include believing that matter is solid or becoming attached to something that will eventually disappear.

Timeless Present

A state of presence in which consciousness lies beyond the concepts of time and space. Synonym: here and now.

Self-Remembering

The act of remembering our own presence while we are acting, thinking, or perceiving the world. Its purpose is to move beyond automatic functioning and live with a more awakened awareness.

Worldly Life

A way of life centered on the concerns of the ordinary mind: seeking pleasure, avoiding suffering, desiring recognition, accumulating material possessions, pursuing distractions, and dealing with concerns related to the self.

By contrast, the path to awakening consists in gradually freeing ourselves from this identification in order to discover a peace and clarity that no longer depend on external circumstances.