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CHAPTER TWO

THE METHOD OF INQUIRY

The Diamond Approach aims to deepen our experience of the present moment and expand our potential for authentic fulfillment. It has adapted and integrated many methods, including meditation and awareness practices, Reichian breath work, and psychological methods of focusing, questioning, interpretation, confrontation, support, and mirroring. It incorporates these methods in individual, small group, and large group formats. The books in Ali's Diamond Mind series include case studies of students working with him and give a flavor of the methods of the Diamond Approach. One is included in this chapter.

Within this eclecticism, the central practice of the Diamond Approach is what Ali calls *Inquiry*. It exemplifies the Diamond Approach's orientation to growth and self-realization and leads to understanding and experiencing in a complete and experiential way. Inquiry is the practice; understanding is the result. Ali uses the term, understanding, in a specific way in the Diamond Approach. This understanding is not merely an intellectual picture. It incorporates intellect, heart, body, and intuition in the pursuit of the truth of our nature. Eventually, understanding becomes a merging of awareness with the dynamic unfolding of the present. Then, presence and understanding come together, and Inquiry is spontaneous. Ultimately, understanding is the action of Being on the mind. Being reveals itself through the mind as understanding.

This kind of experiencing is antithetical to ego-identification, attachment, judgment, defensiveness, and reductionism. It is characterized by joy in the unending discovery of truth and peace in

the fullness of Being. It is fueled by strength and determination to experience yourself and your life fully. And it is compassionately open to whatever is to be found without a trace of rejection, prejudice, or preconception.

Understanding involves being fully present with your immediate experience. It also involves being present with the unfoldment of experience; thus understanding is dynamic, not static. Understanding requires kindness to yourself, awareness, and dedication to the truth, no matter what the consequences. The Diamond Approach's method of Inquiry leads to this holistic understanding in a way that is open, sincere, discriminating, and genuinely curious.

The Practice of Inquiry

Inquiry encourages and enables open-ended exploration into your immediate experience without preconceptions or prejudice about the outcome of that exploration. Any experience can be the starting point for this search. From here it proceeds in an integrated way which includes perceptions, memories, insights, emotions, body sensations, intuition, and awareness of subtle energies such as chi. As this exploration proceeds from one experience to another, your awareness opens to deeper levels of experience and, eventually, to Essence. As the Inquiry continues, deeper levels and dimensions of Essence are revealed and integrated. In this way, Inquiry leads to growth, healing, release, and fulfillment. Its ultimate outcome is freedom and the experience of your true nature and full human potential in whatever way it manifests.

While a "recipe" for the practice of Inquiry is not possible, some guidelines may be helpful. It is always done in the present, as a focused exploration of immediate experience. Thoughts, memories, associations, feelings, and insights may arise into the present moment, but these are approached in the "now." Generally, it is a good idea to avoid explanations or long accounts of previous experiences. Instead, you can track these thoughts and memories in the present. You might, for instance, say to yourself in the course of an Inquiry practice, "Now I am remembering an argument I had last week." You may even describe it briefly, but only as the memory of it is present here and now. You will probably also

notice feelings or body sensations triggered by the memory. These are, of course, also arising in the present moment.

The attitude of Inquiry is open-ended and goal-less. It allows experience to unfold in whatever direction it naturally flows. There is no particular end-state to achieve. Inquiry calls for the willingness to encounter any sort of experience from the most difficult to the most sublime.

Understanding our tendencies, resistances, preferences, idealizations, beliefs, and patterns is necessary for Inquiry to proceed. While Inquiry itself helps to provide this understanding, the Diamond Approach employs various models and methods to explore the student's character structure and psychodynamic makeup. The Enneagram of personality types is one useful view which can be used to "jump-start" and catalyze Inquiry. Knowing, for instance, that I tend to get judgmental, distant, or hostile when I begin to touch my inner wounds, helps me to recognize and disidentify from them. Then, I have a better chance of understanding them and their unfoldment.

Usually, you hold a particular question or experience as the focus of Inquiry. This focus provides a thread to follow throughout the Inquiry. Inquiry is not free-association or mindfulness meditation, although these practices are useful in supporting Inquiry. Instead, you keep this focus and pursue it throughout the practice of the Inquiry. Inquiry includes awareness of body sensations, memories and associations, emotions, thoughts, intuitions, and energetic qualities. It can be helpful in the practice of Inquiry to track which of these dimensions of experience are being used or avoided. For instance, if you find mostly emotions, ask yourself what body sensations, thoughts, or memories go with the emotions. Similarly, if you are primarily aware of thoughts, examine the body sensations, emotions, and the texture or energy of the experience.

During the practice of Inquiry, remember to sense your body, breathe, and stay aware of the present moment. It is important to hold your experiences with a compassionate, spacious, and nonjudgmental attitude. The practice of meditation is a strong support for this orientation. For this reason, students of the Diamond Approach are encouraged to practice meditation techniques, including concentration, mindfulness, and certain visualizations, as foundations for the practice of Inquiry.

Inquiry generally leads to a shift in experience. This shift may feel like an insight, a release of energy, a strong (or subtle) emotional state, or a spaciousness in your awareness. However, these kinds of shifts are not its aim, and they are not final. Instead, they may open you to a deeper experience of Essence or to a deeper issue that needs to be understood. This distinguishes Inquiry from apparently similar processes in psychotherapy and many spiritual disciplines. Inquiry is not aimed at any particular behavior change or psychotherapeutic outcome. Nor is its goal to evoke any particular state or spiritual quality.

Initially, Inquiry is done as a specific method, either alone or with others and usually with the guidance of a teacher. Eventually, Inquiry becomes more and more a part of your life, and we understand and digest experiences more deeply as they occur. Healing and growth, whether psychological or spiritual, occur as a natural development of your soul. Inquiry is a tool for guiding, empowering, and supporting this development. At first Inquiry is a technique, then a practice, and finally a way of being.

Techniques which support Inquiry

Specific techniques can support Inquiry. One method used in the Diamond Approach is a dyadic process in which one person asks a question repeatedly while the other gives whatever answers come to mind. For example, a student of the Diamond Approach exploring difficulties in experiencing emotions might work with the question, “How do you block your feelings?” or “What’s right about blocking your feelings?” By answering this question again and again for twenty minutes, new insights, experiences, or understanding can emerge. This understanding, in turn, is used to continue the more open-ended practice of Inquiry. The student will use the insights garnered from this repeated question to take the Inquiry to a deeper, more revealing level.

Teachers of the Diamond Approach frequently use body-centered therapeutic techniques to open blocked energy flows and emotions during a student’s Inquiry. For example, a person experiencing a block in the throat might be instructed to yell as loud as possible several times to open this block. A block in the pelvis might be opened by bouncing the hips on a mattress or stamping vigorously on the ground.

To the extent that the practice of Inquiry uncovers these blocks, they can be incorporated into the Inquiry, examined with open-mindedness, and used to lead you to greater self-realization and development.

One of the early difficulties that can arise in these kinds of explorations is the tendency to judge our experiences. We evaluate them in terms of our standards derived, for the most part, from our histories of conditioning, rejection, and the judgments we grew up with. The function of this inner critic or superego was perhaps once useful to us, enabling us to get by in our early life situations, but we often continue to identify with it and let it color our experiences. This restricts our experiences and our potential, causes us unnecessary suffering, and acts as a major impediment to self-exploration. The Diamond Approach offers a view of the superego based on both psychological understanding and on the knowledge of Essence. Defending against this inner critic by developing a sincere understanding of it and challenging it with strength and energy, along with compassion for ourselves, is an important support for the practice of Inquiry.

Another aid to Inquiry is a focused task or question that you may carry for days or even weeks. For example, if you find that you tend to suppress your emotions, you may watch for specific instances of this suppression in your everyday life. If you are working on a tendency to be judgmental and critical, take notice of the specific ways you do this. (Be careful, of course, not to suppress your feelings about suppressing your feelings or to judge yourself for being judgmental.) After several days of this, you can come back to a more focused Inquiry process with greater awareness. You may also take on a task aimed at expanding your awareness and understanding, such as deliberately expressing a feeling three times each day or, in the interest of increasing awareness, deliberately *not* expressing a feeling three times a day. Bring your curiosity and openness to these tasks. The point of these kinds of exercises (whether they are body-centered therapeutic techniques, behavior-oriented tasks, or cognitive, emotional, or energetic explorations) is to expand the openness and flow of understanding and, specifically, to support Inquiry.

Inquiry and Essence

The various Essential qualities and dimensions of Being are closely tied to Inquiry. For example, the Essential aspect of Strength provides the passion and drive to pursue your experience. Essential Will

provides support and perseverance. Awareness provides clarity and open-mindedness. Compassion provides healing and open-heartedness when dealing with deep and difficult experiences. Essential aspects provide specific foundations for Inquiry.

At the same time, these qualities are freed and recovered through the practice of Inquiry. Along with leading to the experience of more Essential states, Inquiry leads to qualitatively deeper dimensions of Being. For example, exploring your personal issues of hurt in a particular situation may bring out Essential Compassion on a personal level, experienced as tenderness and care. As you continue to inquire, the experience may deepen into the experience of compassion on a more universal level. With further Inquiry, this compassion may lead beyond itself to an unconditional Divine Love and trust, pure presence, or emptiness. None of these deeper experiences negate the sense of compassion; rather, they give a sense of completing it.

Inquiry and Diamond Guidance

The most central aspect needed for Inquiry is Diamond Guidance. This is the Essential aspect which provides the capacity for discriminating questioning. As we practice Inquiry, many questions and directions are possible. Rather than suggest strategies to use, the Diamond Approach recognizes that Being itself can direct the process of Inquiry. The Diamond Guidance is the quality of Being which does this. It is called Diamond Guidance because it is free of personal bias and personal history. The reference to a diamond suggests the objectivity, clarity, preciousness, and precision of this freedom.

Let's say you are tracking your experience and you find yourself on the verge of tears when you think about an incident from your past. At this point, you might explore the particulars of that incident in more detail, inquiring into how it came about, what caused it to hurt you, what images of yourself were involved. Or you might explore the feeling of the sadness itself, asking what kind of tears are these or feeling the sadness as a body experience. You may not explore the sadness at all, noticing that it goes away quickly and that underneath it is a simple tenderness or a feeling of anger.

Without the operation of the Diamond Guidance, Inquiry tends to be guided by expectations, theories, and past experiences. You might remember a similar tearful feeling which was associated with

not being valued or seen accurately. Based on this past experience, you look for the same connection. However, the sadness you are feeling may be related to something very different. You may approach your feeling with a belief that tears are good to feel and so you are drawn to releasing them. However, this may be a time where letting the feeling develop without a release will lead to new experiences. On the other hand, you may feel that tears are bad and intellectualize them when it would be more helpful to simply let them flow.

When we are completely open to the flow of questions and experiences, we can begin to experience this aspect of Essence directly. Working through the barriers to this aspect frees our capacity to be guided by Essence. These barriers include thinking that we already know, a fixation or clinging to answers or beliefs from the past, and a fear of the unknown. To be open to Inquiry and the Diamond Guidance means giving up control over our experience, and it means allowing the flow of Being to take us where we need to go. It brings careful and caring discrimination and an elegant kind of perception, at once precise and relaxed.

Teachers and Groups

As with most forms of deep psychological and spiritual work, a working relationship with a teacher is helpful or even necessary in practicing Inquiry fully. At first, the teacher tracks the student's unfoldment and provides mirroring, guidance, and support for the student. This guidance and support occurs on several levels, both obvious and subtle. Eventually, the student embodies this guidance, and Being becomes the Teacher. The teacher may also manifest the particular qualities the student is working on, providing a direct and supportive influence. Yet from another perspective, the real "teacher" is always Being acting through a human being.

Most students are part of a larger group studying the Diamond Approach. As in other forms of spiritual work, the group supports the individual's work in a number of ways. The group can strengthen an individual's resolve and perseverance during difficult stages of work, and the group setting facilitates the emergence of personality issues that might not emerge so readily in individual or solitary work. Since the orientation of the Diamond Approach is to do the work of spiritual development in the midst of one's life,

group work with the support and guidance of a teacher reflects this in-the-world quality of the Diamond Approach.

In the selections that follow, Ali describes understanding (as he uses it in the Diamond Approach) and illustrates many of its dimensions. In the first selection, he shows how understanding has the richness and power to take us on the complete journey of self-realization, finally dissolving itself into the mystery of the unfoldment of a liberated life. The second selection is an account of a student's work session with Ali. This session demonstrates the method of Inquiry and the natural movement from personality issues to Essence. (He uses a pseudonym to protect the student's confidentiality). The third selection is an excerpt from Ali's journals of his own Inquiry, edited later by him for clarity. It illustrates how Inquiry can be integrated into our everyday lives.

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BEING AND UNDERSTANDING
From Diamond Heart Book Three:
Being and the Meaning of Life
(Chapter Eleven, Pages 149-160)
A. H. Almaas

The human potential for understanding is both a curse and a possibility for great fulfillment. The elements of the mind—memory, conceptualization, thinking processes, creation of images, projections into the future, and so forth—become the basic ingredients of our suffering. Ideas and experiences from the past, from early childhood as well as later on, good and bad, form the foundation of your assumptions about who you are. Your mind holds on to these childhood happenings and stores them in its memory. They become the building blocks of what you think you are, and then you're stuck with them.

What understanding gives us is the possibility of actually seeing through this process. Without understanding, you'll just identify with these old self-images and go on believing that you're a person who has such and such a quality, who is weak or dumb, who eats too much or gets taken advantage of, or feels

nervous at parties, and so forth, self-image upon self-image. And you'll go on like that for the rest of your life, which is what most people do.

Understanding offers the possibility of seeing that you're taking yourself to be a certain self-image. Then you can start to ask yourself why. A person who has grown up thinking, "I'm a jerk" or "I'm a bitch," now begins to question the idea. "I seem to behave like a jerk, and deep down I think I am, but why?" "When people talk to me I often respond as if I'm a bitch, but why? Why do I still believe it about myself?"

If you use your understanding, you notice that not everyone behaves like a jerk, but you do. If you investigate, if you let yourself be open and curious about it, you'll find out what is happening. You might discover that your father was a jerk, and you liked him and wanted to be like him. What's more, you liked your mother very much and she liked your father, so you figured, "I'll be a jerk like my father and then they'll both like me." Most of the time, this kind of decision is completely unconscious. You go around being a jerk, even though everyone gives you a hard time about it, because it helps you feel that Mommy and Daddy are always there liking you.

Now, if you use the point of view of understanding, you can get to the origin of this pattern. "I believe I'm a jerk and continue believing it, because that way my mommy and daddy like me, and I feel lovable." When you see this, you see how that part of the personality was created. You see that it's unnecessary now, in present time, because not everyone who matters to you now likes jerks. Maybe your mother liked your father that way, but not everyone is like that.

Of course, the process of understanding can go deeper. You might wonder, "What's this big deal about people liking me? Why do I want people to like me? I always wanted to be a jerk because I thought then people would like me. Now I discover that they don't necessarily like me that way at all, so I'll immediately try to find a new way to behave so that they will." You decide that the best way to do this is to become self-realized. So, why do you want to be self-realized? Because you want people to like you. You *still* want people to like you. And if you pursue understanding, you investigate the issue.

If you didn't seek understanding, you'd just go around trying to make people like you, which is what most people do. But if you apply understanding, in time you'll see why you do that, and you'll see

not only that it doesn't work, but that it's not necessary for your happiness. It's utterly superfluous and not what you deeply want to pursue. So, this shows us something about the usefulness of understanding.

However, understanding is also something much deeper. We've just seen how it reveals the falsehood, but we have not yet seen how it reveals the truth: understanding reveals what you are not and what you are. You see that you're not actually a jerk. But then you wonder, "What am I if I'm not a jerk? Maybe I'm a good, loving person." Okay, so you become a loving person. Then after a while you begin to investigate yourself again, not according to whether you're a jerky person or a loving person, but in terms of whether you're a person at all. When you begin to investigate self-image at this level, you begin getting closer to the truth. You start seeing that the notion of a person is another idea formulated by the mind. But the idea of a person is not something you learned only from your parents; it's human conditioning.

However, our deepest nature is not that of a person. We can manifest as a person, but at the deepest level, we are something that is the source of the person. When we come to the understanding that reveals the truth rather than the falsehood, then it is functioning more as a process of unfoldment. Then understanding, which has seemed to be the equivalent of looking at something objectively, is no longer separate from the process of unfoldment itself. Seeing one layer of our reality and understanding it, is the same thing as that layer coming out, unfolding like a flower opening up. Understanding becomes the same thing as the process of actually living your unfoldment. Because you understand your experience of joy, for instance, you experience yourself as joy. You become light, happy and joyous; you start joking and become bubbly and can't stop laughing. What does understanding mean then? Part of it, which is revealing the falsehood, sees whatever barrier stopped you from being joy. Then you understand what it is to be joy. To understand what it is to be joy means to be joy consciously, means to actually feel it as your very atoms.

At that level, understanding becomes clear, or you begin seeing what it is: Being and awareness of Being at the same time. Being is our true nature, right? Essence is Being. So you're being whatever aspect of Essence is arising, like Joy. There is awareness of that Being, which is different from the way a child perceives. A child doesn't have understanding. A child has Being, but a child isn't conscious of that Being. The child is happy, but doesn't know that it's happy, doesn't consciously feel it. Happiness is

expressed, but not consciously experienced. You can tell that the child is happy, or the child is contented or peaceful, but the child's mind is not conscious of it.

Understanding, then, includes the mind becoming an expression or a channel for Being. Mind becomes connected to Being, not separate from it like it was when you were a child, or like it was when you were an adult just seeing your issues. At this level understanding becomes the unity, the interface, the meeting of Being and mind. You are Being, but there is also awareness of the beingness. This consciousness of beingness is understanding.

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AN INQUIRY WITH A STUDENT
*From The Pearl Beyond Price:
Integration of Personality into Being:
An Object Relations Approach
(Chapter Three, Pages 37-40)*
A. H. Almaas

Sandy is a married woman in her thirties who has been working with the author in a group situation. Her explicit reason for being in the group is to understand herself, to grow, and to learn to be more herself. She was sick for some time, and has been back in the group for only a couple of months. She begins speaking, obviously with some guilt about what she is feeling. She relates hesitatingly that she almost did not come to the group meeting this particular evening, and has been feeling increasingly unwilling to come to the sessions. When I inquire whether she knows the reasons behind her feelings she says that because she was sick for a long time and did not have fun, now she feels she would rather go out and have fun rather than sitting in group sessions and scrutinizing herself. When I ask what she means by having fun, she grins and says it is doing what she wants to do, and relates that she resents coming to the group because she must abide by a certain schedule and accommodate herself to a structure imposed on her from the outside. So in the group sessions she has been feeling frustrated, hemmed in and resentful.

I indicate that I agree that it is good for her to have fun and enjoy herself, and that I understand how her illness has curtailed her life. I then inquire about why she feels imposed upon and restricted by

coming to the group, when it is her choice to be in the group and benefit from the work done in it. She responds by affirming that it is her choice, that she understands the benefits of participating in the group, and that she does not understand why she feels so frustrated.

As we inquire further into her emotional states, she sees that she feels she is losing something by adhering to a certain structure and schedule: she feels she loses her freedom, and this makes her feel frustrated. She relates then that this pattern is not new for her. She has had the same conflict in almost every job she has had, and actually lost some jobs because of it. Even jobs she has liked, she could not completely enjoy because of this conflict. So she leaves what she is doing, even though it is useful to her, in order to avoid feeling this overwhelming sense of frustration and heaviness.

We see here that Sandy is recognizing the present situation as part of a pattern that she has repeated many times in her life, which has brought her much discontent and frustration. As she becomes aware that her reactions to the group structure are repeating this pattern, she becomes more motivated to explore her state. As she continues, she tells me that she knows that this pattern has to do with her relationship to her mother, that she always felt restricted by her, not allowed to live her life as she wants. But she is frustrated, she says, because she has seen this pattern many times, and has understood its genesis for a long time, but there has been no change.

I point out to her that it seems she does not know how to have the freedom she wants except by saying "no" to a situation she feels is restricting. It becomes clear to her that she believes that freedom is gained only by doing what she chooses to do, and many times this means not doing what others want her to do. I point out to her that "freedom" acquired in this way is nothing but a reaction to the situation, and that a reaction is not a free choice, since it is determined by the other and is not a spontaneous response. It is simply a compulsive, automatic reaction.

Here she admits that she does not usually enjoy the freedom she believes she is gaining, but continues feeling frustrated, and, in addition, leaves activities and situations that are actually useful to her. She acknowledges also that even when she believes she is gaining autonomy by removing herself from some situation, she still feels the lack of the true freedom she wants.

At this point I ask her what it is exactly that she wants to experience by having her freedom. She says she just wants to be herself, to be free to be herself. She believes that if she does what she chooses, she will be herself as herself, the way she really is, and not the way others want her to be.

I ask her to tell me more specifically what it means to be herself. In her past work she had often felt that "I don't know what I want," and now she realizes that she has never looked at the situation from the perspective of what it really means to her to be herself. She was wanting something, which she somewhat vaguely associated with autonomy. Now she finds it hard to describe more specifically what she means, and the very asking of the question puts her into deeper contact with herself. Here, I ask what she is feeling now. She says she is much less frustrated, and that she feels okay. I ask her what kind of okay, what does she really feel in her body? She says she feels calm and peaceful, and the issue of autonomy no longer feels significant.

I express surprise that she feels so peaceful, and not concerned about what was such a bothersome issue. I ask her to tell me more about the calm feeling. She says she feels the calmness especially in her belly, and that the calmness also feels strong. The strength somewhat surprises her, because when she was sick she was feeling mostly weak. I keep asking her to pay more attention to the calmness, to describe it more specifically. She feels the strength and calmness growing in her, filling her chest.

I ask her what she means by the feeling filling her. Here she realizes she is not only feeling an emotional state, but that the calmness and strength are effects of a sense of fullness in her body, which was in her belly but now increasingly pervades her body. The more she senses this fullness, the more it expands. The effect is that she feels a fullness of presence that is calm, peaceful, and collected. This makes her happy and contented.

I ask her to recall her desire for autonomy and freedom. Here, she realizes that now she feels she is being herself. The presence of the calm fullness makes her feel present as herself. The more the fullness, strength and calmness expand, the more she feels present, present as herself. She experiences herself as a being, a presence, a fullness. She is not an action or a reaction. She is not a feeling or a thought or an image, but a firm, strong, full and exquisitely alive presence.

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INTIMACY

*From Luminous Night's Journey:
An Autobiographical Fragment
(Chapter One, Pages 1-8)
A. H. Almaas*

Late afternoon, just back from my office, after a full day of eventful teaching sessions with students. I lie down in bed, mildly tired. I can feel the psychic layers that I have taken on from students peeling off, one by one. As each layer peels away, it reveals its content—emotions, thoughts, images, physical tensions. This process leaves me clearer and lighter. The lightness opens further, revealing spaciousness. Consciousness manifests as empty, transparent space, light and clean.

In this spaciousness my own thoughts and feelings appear: a constellation of thoughts and subtle feelings, all related to images and impressions about my identity, about who I am. This psychic cluster, like a cloud in the spaciousness of mind, provides the mind with the familiar feeling of identity, an identity totally dependent on memories of my past experience. Contemplating the totality of the cluster, without taking an inner position about it, I recognize that it is a mental phenomenon. On seeing this, I become distinctly aware that it is external to me. The feeling-recognition is: “this is not me.”

The focus of attention spontaneously shifts. The psychic cluster gently fades away, almost imperceptibly, like a cloud slowly dissipating. When it is gone, what is left is simplicity, a clear and simple sense of presence without self-reflection. There are no thoughts about the experience, no feelings about it, only the simplicity of presence. Clarity, space, stillness and lucidity bring a sense of a crisp cloudless sky around a snow-capped mountain top.

The sun is about to set, and the windows open on the East, so the bedroom is somewhat dark. The sun illuminates some of the hillside, while the rest is steadily cooled by the expanding gentle shade. The flowers in the pots outside the room appear bright; the green leaves glisten. Lucidity pervades everything: the flower pots, the trees, the distant clouds, the deep blue sky. All is pristine, undisturbed by wind or thought.

In the lucidity of space, a question appears, carefree and delighted: "And what is me?" Nothing recognizable by memory. I experience myself, without a feeling of self, as the simplicity of presence, which is now a simplicity of perception, a bare witnessing. There is no inner dialogue, and no commentary on what is perceived. The perceiving is without a perceiver, awareness without an observer. Without self-reflection, the simplicity of presence is merely the simplicity of witnessing. I am a witness of all in the field of vision, a witness with no inside. The witness is merely the witnessing. The only thing left from familiar experience is the location of witnessing, which seems to be determined by the location of the body. The body is relaxed and clear. The sense of the body is more of luminosity than of sensation, witnessed as part of the environment.

Time does not seem to pass; it has come to a stop. When the psychic constellation that has given me the familiar sense of identifying myself ceases, the sense of the passage of time is gone. In the simplicity of presence, time does not pass, for the sense of the passage of time is simply the continuity of the feeling of the familiar identity.

Simplicity of presence, when it is complete, is timelessness. Timelessness is completely being the simplicity of presence. Timelessness is not an idea, a thought in the mind. It is the fullness of the experience of presence of Being, pure and prior to thought or self-reflection.

A few days later...

Upon waking up in the morning, I find my attention riveted by a feeling of hurt in the heart. The hurt is warm and sad. It feels like the heart is wounded in its very flesh. The hurt leads to a gnawing sensation in the mobius, the subtle center at the sternum. The gnawing is painful; it feels physically grating, but also emotionally difficult. A frustrated feeling has become stuck at the lower part of the chest, turning into a gnawing sensation. I feel all this mixed with the feeling of hurt and sadness.

I contemplate the hurt, the sadness and the physical contraction. Holding all in awareness, while intimately feeling all of the nuances of the ongoing experience. The contemplating awareness embraces the content of experience with a feeling of warm kindness and with an attitude of curiosity, not knowing what the hurt is about, but interested to find out. The gnawing sensation responds to the motiveless inquiry, and begins to soften as the contraction at the mobius center relaxes, revealing an unexpected

element to the sadness: loneliness. The hurt turns out to be the pain of feeling lonely. The feeling of loneliness wets the sadness with more tears, and the hurt expands into an emptiness underlying the sadness. Now it is deep, sad loneliness.

But why, why am I feeling lonely?

There does not seem to be any reason for it. I am still in bed, my wife, Marie, lying asleep beside me. I feel my affection for her, but this does not touch the sad loneliness. The loneliness continues even though I am not alone.

I get up, go to the bathroom to wash, the loneliness following me, filling the space of the bathroom with its teary sadness. The question continues to live, while I shave: what is making me feel lonely? Here, memory reminds me of the experience of the last few days, that of the simplicity of presence and witnessing. Reflecting on it, I intuit that there is a connection between the experience of simple presence and the feeling of loneliness. My curiosity intensifies, a throbbing sensation at the forehead begins to luminate.

The throbbing lumination at the forehead reveals itself to be a diamond-clear and colorful presence. The more passionate the naturally curious contemplation is about the loneliness, the more alive and brilliant becomes this presence, manifesting spacious and discerning clarity. I recognize the variegated, scintillating presence as the discriminating intelligence, the true *nous* [the dimension of universal concepts and the source of knowing, the "Divine Mind" or Gnosis], which appears as a presencing of the intensification of consciousness, at the center of the forehead, to reveal the meaning of experience. The intensification of inquiry coincides with a greater and more definite presence of the discriminating intelligence, revealing its exquisite sense of delicate precision.

The experience now is a field of sadness, loneliness and emptiness, combined with the memory of the simplicity of presence, all opening up to the scintillatingly alive presence of the *nous*. Insights begin to radiate out from the scintillating consciousness. Perceptually, the operation of the *nous* appears as a multicolored glittering radiance; affectively, it is a delicate and pleasant expansive clarity; cognitively, it is the spontaneous arising of insight.

The understanding unfolds: the sense of simplicity in the experience of presence is finding myself as the presence of Being, totally and purely, without thoughts or feelings about it. There is simplicity because there remains only the purity of presence, with no memory and no mind. This absence of mind, in the completeness of being presence, is tantamount to the absence of everything that mind carries. During the experience of the last few days I saw how the mind creates and carries the sense of familiar identity of the self, which it accomplishes through memory and self-reflection. What I did not see then, but was implicit in the experience, is that the mind carries also the sense of the other—of another person—again by using memory.

Here, I remember the insight of the object relation psychologists: the sense of self develops in conjunction with the sense of other, first the mother then all others. The understanding is that the familiar sense of identity develops from early on within a field of object relations, always in relation to another person. This sense of self becomes a felt continuity by the memories of these experiences of oneself coalescing into a fixed structure in the psyche. Hence, this psychic structure also contains the memories of interactions with significant others.

When I felt the sense of familiar identity disappear I did not see that this also meant the disappearance of all impressions of others. In other words, as the activity of the mind comes to a stop, all the feelings dependent on the internalized memories disappear. This understanding shows me that the sense of familiar identity always includes, explicitly or implicitly, the feeling of others. The feeling of self swims in an atmosphere of internalized relationships.

This normally ever-present atmosphere of an interpersonal world ceases in the experience of the simplicity of presence, allowing presence to be alone. This aloneness of presence is its simplicity. Recently I have been experiencing it as simplicity, but this experience shows me that I have unconsciously reacted to it as total aloneness.

Here, the feeling of emptiness deepens into a dark abyss, and the loneliness disappears into a singular state of aloneness, existential and fundamental. A hint of sadness remains, in the form of a subtle, warm feeling pervading the deepening emptiness. The throbbing presence at the forehead again scintillates brightly; this time emerald green outshines its other living colors. The sadness reveals

associations with the state of aloneness: times in childhood when I was left alone. In the emptiness of the mind float memories of a sad and lonely child, left alone, sometimes forgotten.

Recognizing that the source of the feeling of loneliness is my association of the painful loneliness of the past with the state of aloneness of presence in the present, liberates the sadness, allowing it to evaporate, leaving a sense of transparent depth to the dark abyss, a spacious depth. The feeling is centered in the chest, as if the chest region has become void of everything, except for a subtle lightness which curiously feels deep. Feeling within the chest, inquiring with no goal in mind, I find no sense of solidity. The chest feels empty, but curiously quiet, peaceful and still. I recognize the state as a luminous black spaciousness, which is the unity of stillness and space. There is immaculate, glistening emptiness, but the emptiness has a sense of depth. The depth seems to be the felt aspect of the blackness of space. It is like looking into, and feeling into, starless deep space.

The depth, although void, has a soft texture, an exquisite gentleness. There is a sense of comfort, safety and a carefree trust, as if the vastness of intergalactic space has mysteriously evolved into a gentle and loving medium. It is not a cold space, not an impersonal space, but a space that feels exactly like what the human soul has perennially longed for: the warmth of mother's breasts, the softness of delicate velvet, a quiet shining blissfulness and an endless generosity.

My chest has become an opening into an infinitely deep and dark space, which feels clear and void of all extraneous things. Also, inseparable from the transparent voidness, is the presence of love itself. Now I can taste the pleasurable sweetness of love on my tongue, and throughout the whole chest cavity.

As I proceed to the dining room, I feel myself inseparable from the total stillness of this loving space. The mind is quiet and peaceful, the body relaxed and its movements easy. As I begin breakfast with Marie, the sweet quietness envelopes us. We talk about the practical things of the day, but now I begin to recognize another dimension to the loving void.

At the beginning this seems to be related to our easy and simple conversation, where the peaceful sweetness divulges itself as a delicate contact between us, a subtle intimacy. I like the gentle intimacy, and awareness gently focuses on its exquisite sensation. There are lightness and depth, spaciousness and softness,

clarity and sweetness. The feeling of intimacy is not new in my experience. However, I slowly realize that I feel intimate not only with Marie, but also with the food, with the table cloth, with the chairs, even with the walls. I feel intimate with everything I am aware of, in an atmosphere of gentle quiet and relaxed openness. Everything seems to have now this quality of softness and contactfulness. More accurately, everything seems to be bathed in this intimate spaciousness, as if everything is sharing itself, with total generosity and complete openness.

Intimacy discloses itself as an inherent quality of this black inner space. The intimacy is not only a matter of me being intimate with another person, or with the environment. It is not a matter of a subject intimately relating to an object. The chest cavity is pervaded by the essence of intimacy, a black spaciousness inseparable from delicate lovingness.

At this point the jewel-like *nous* at the forehead manifests mostly black radiance, coextensive with the sensation of delicately faceted, satin, liquid energy.

The more I recognize that intimacy is a quality of spacious consciousness, the more distinctly I know it: velvet-fine openness, deep spaciousness, delicate softness, sweet stillness. The chest has become an entrance into an exquisitely heartfelt night sky. All of this distills itself into something unique and utterly human: intimacy. It is as if the space is a refined consciousness intimately in contact with its very nature at each point of its spaciousness. And this total openness and contact becomes an intimacy with everything, totally independent of mind and memory.

No loneliness and no sense of aloneness. Simplicity of Being has ushered me, through the door of aloneness, into its inherent intimacy.