

# Time Alone Passing

## Foreword

I recounted my most significant early experiences of [witness consciousness](#) in this document that I circulated among friends in 1991, several months after leaving the ashram with which I'd been closely involved for ten years. Besides telling of spiritual awakening, I reveal what I learned, over the course of nearly two decades, about what [Ken Wilber](#) calls guru theater--the scene of the distressing and confusing events that sometimes occur when a guru has dictatorial power over the details of disciples' lives. Seeker beware. But even in America--culturally far removed from their Asian roots--gurus, lamas and roshis have done much to promote the spiritual growth of their students, despite the damaging, and certainly counter-productive, abuses of authority. Whether directly [pointing out the nature of awareness](#) or providing practices, teachings and settings that support and guide aspirants in their unfolding, the Eastern teachers have, on balance, helped much more than they've hurt. On the whole, they've been a great blessing in this world. That blessing is now extending through Western teachers such as [Douglas Harding](#), [Toni Packer](#) and [Advashanti](#), personal favorites among a throng of instructors with a gift for pointing out. In recent years I've derived the most benefit from philosopher, scholar, psychologist, accomplished meditator and pundit--just don't call him Guru, he insists--Ken Wilber. His wonderfully detailed, all-inclusive map of consciousness unites the recognition that our spiritual journey is always already accomplished--we will never be the witness any more than we are right now--with the fact that most of us do feel we're on the way to a destination that is more or less elusive, however much we may have glimpsed it or hung out there. He demonstrates that we can make the surest, steadiest progress by taking up appropriate practices in as many of the facets and levels of our lives as possible, thereby creating a well-integrated, finely-tuned, highly-energized vehicle for the trip (to a non-place we never left). From examples he gives it's clear that, if not most, many of the practices that one may choose are ancient ones, as are the methods described in Time Alone Passing, any of which could find its rightful place in an "[integral transformative practice](#)," as Wilber terms the overall program of practices that he encourages one to design and follow, with the guidance of a qualified teacher, such as [Judith Blackstone](#) or [Andrew Weil, MD](#) (his new plan is [here](#)).

June 29, 2002

# TIME ALONE PASSING

## **Meditation and Death**

My interest in meditation comes from my childhood terror of death. At first I dreaded losing my parents; soon I feared my own death. I wondered what death would be like. I tried to imagine a total blacking out, a complete cessation of awareness. Yet in my closest approximation to an imaginary death I retained a sense of self; I was still there observing and reporting on my own demise. What is this self, I wondered, this stable witness of an evanescent world?

True death, I reasoned, would obliterate every vestige of me, as when in deep sleep. (The similarity of death to sleep prompted me to examine the process of falling asleep; one night I had the sensation of my awareness descending from my head to my throat region, indeed falling.) I wouldn't really be there at all, so why be afraid? But that was the point: I didn't want to not be. I was terrified of altogether vanishing.

I entered high school an agnostic, looking to science through the eyes of science fiction for the key to immortality, dreaming that a scientific breakthrough would someday give us replacements for our bodily parts, including our brains. In fantasy I saw myself as being essentially present (thoughts, feelings and memories intact) in a body entirely artificial. Given this possibility, I could occupy two such bodies, I thought. But how I could retain my identity while leading two lives I couldn't imagine.

Pondering the nature of my innermost self, which I assumed was my mental process, I searched for the origin of that process, the source of thought. One night as I lay in bed I concentrated intently, thinking about thinking, trying with all my might to track thought to its lair. The thought arose that this is futile, thought in search of itself. In the next instant there was a brilliant flash of light and an equally astounding lack of thought, both flash and lack having been "in my head" according to the resumed thought of the following moment. I and my thinking at one once again, I noted my body: taut, shaking, fists clenched.

In college I read [Paramahansa Yogananda's \*Autobiography of a Yogi\*](#) which inspired me to learn meditation. The book convinced me that there was an ancient, proven technology for the exploration of inner space and the quickening of the soul's evolution. The spirit behind the words had touched my soul, evidently, for in terms such as spirit and soul Yogananda lavishly described the euphoria of religious experience that I myself had begun to feel while reading his account. God was quite believable and I eagerly accepted the invitation to unite with Him via the "scientific" method of meditation. Merging with God seemed almost too much to hope for, but it also seemed like the only worthwhile thing to do.

In meditation I dissociated briefly from the chatter of my mind, which indicated that I was not my mind, but I (or my mind) was not convinced that I was a deathless soul fundamentally free of matter. As my meditations intensified, my doubts about the spiritual nature of ultimate reality increased.

I entertained the frightful hypothesis that I was the creation of a God who ran the universe simply to torture me, giving me false hope of liberation, even blissful tastes of a seemingly, at least hopefully, eternal salvation, only to make the poison of the truth more bitter as my hope, like a crystal chalice full of the elixir of meditation, dashed on the rocks of a demonic, material reality.

The quiet space of meditation took on an ominous feeling. As my mind stilled, the remaining sense of "I" seemed tiny in a vast inner space filled with a presence that this "I" felt threatened by, a conscious presence "I" knew must be God. Apparently "I" would have to disappear in order to merge with God. I was terrified; I felt that I was meeting death. In the culmination of this process I had the distinct impression that God was looking with a giant eye in the upper back of my head right through me at everything I saw both externally with my physical eyes and internally with my own mind's eye. With an inner plea of complete desperation I yielded to God my vain effort to attain Him. In that moment of release, utterly humbled, my consciousness and God's presence in me were the same, and clearly always had been. So ended my fear of death, and began a bout of spiritual pride. Though I told no one, I presumed to be enlightened.

I started thinking about going to Hawaii.

## Sky of Nectar

I went to Hawaii for the first time about a month later, in January of 1974. Offering my services as a teacher of meditation, I posted an ad that drew the attention of some students of [Guru Maharaji](#), the chubby young "Perfect Master" of the Divine Light Mission. In May I learned his meditation techniques.

The four techniques, together called Knowledge, were divulged in a closed Knowledge Session to which one typically gained entrance only after showing the Guru's representative authority, an initiating and intimidating Mahatma, that one was prepared to "surrender" to Maharaji, surrender being necessary to permit the influx of "guru's grace" without which the supposedly secret techniques would supposedly not work. Evidence of surrender was regular attendance at followers' meetings, voluntary performance of work for the organization and finally, declaring before the group and the Mahatma one's acceptance of Maharaji as God incarnate, the true Guru, concluding with a full-length prostration before his picture.

I had gone to few meetings; I had done no work. But when I formally asked the Mahatma for Knowledge and in response to his query truthfully denied that Paramahansa Yogananda was my guru, he said, "Who am I to stand between you and the Lord?" He motioned to the picture of Maharaji. I lay prone, stretching out my arms in a posture of submission, thinking, "I'm bowing to my true self of which Guru Maharaji is a token."

His devotees were called premies (rhymes with "gem seas"; Hindi for divine lovers). They were friendly. The premies, my curiosity about the techniques of Knowledge, and a dream had attracted me to Maharaji. In my dream I saw him become empty space, which reminded me of my encounter with God in meditation. I took it as a sign that I should ask for Knowledge. I had already made plans to see Maharaji in Massachusetts in July, simply to meet an enlightened being other than myself. The dream gave me a rationale for playing the follower; certainly I could show devotion to a symbol of empty space, of the God-state that I had realized. By becoming a premie I would also be closer to my new friends and hundreds of potential friends, all premies. And I would learn the mysterious nectar technique.

Nectar was the only one of the four techniques of Knowledge that really baffled me, given my research and what I could elicit from the premies. I guessed, correctly as it turned out, that the light, music and word techniques were basically the same as methods taught via mail by Yogananda's [Self-Realization Fellowship](#) and were, as I learned later, published in several books.

Children press their eyes and see subjective lights that scientists call phosphenes. This is a hallowed ancient yogic practice. So, too, is shutting the ears with one's thumbs and listening to inner ringing or other sounds a beloved pastime of kids and yogis alike. Premies call it music, to Yogananda it was Om, the universal syllable that permeates creation, not to be confused with the premies' word. The most elusive technique of the four, the word is the sense of life itself, often approached by means of the breath: feeling the breath, listening to it or silently repeating "so" with the in breath and "hum" with the out.

The last method revealed in the Knowledge Session was nectar. The Mahatma instructed us to try to touch our uvulas with the tips of our tongues. He inspected our efforts, mouths agape like a nest of hungry chicks awaiting a feeding from Mom. I curled my tongue back, straining. "Good!" he said. I felt nourished, relieved. The session ended, the door opened, and out flew a flock of fledgling premies.

Glad to be out of the hot, crowded room, I walked down the stairs of the Divine Light Mission ashram at 29 Kawanakoa Place, Honolulu. I opened a French screen door, stepped outside and turned to look at the beaming face of an individual who called himself, in accord with a typographical error made somewhere in the Mission, Sky. Called Skip by his former schoolmates, Skipper by his Navy veteran father and proud Baptist mother who had prayed for the birth of this their only child--Harold--this very one, my new acquaintance, Sky, opened wide his mouth. Of his tongue only the underside of the root could be seen. The rest of it was pressed behind, above and beyond the uvula and the soft palette, gone somewhere up into the reaches of the nasopharynx, swallowed by his brain for all I could tell. Sky was doing nectar.

I left Hawaii the next day to see Maharaji in Amherst, then spent some time at home in Kansas City en route to a year's stay in the Encinitas, California, environs of my prized enlightenment. There I befriended hatha yoga teacher David Williams and sundry affiliates of the Hare Krishna movement, including one Nicety Swindle. (Five years later her father--a professional hypnotist, con man and micro-cult leader--nearly defrauded me of six thousand dollars.)

Two years after the Knowledge Session I was living in the room where it had been held. No longer an ashram, the house was home to premies, Sky among them, seeking a balance between meditation and sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. I thought that he had found the magic point of equilibrium. Sky, whose hidden-tongue trick I had tried hard to do until I could, I now regarded as my guru. I was encouraged by his being many things that I was not: musical, spontaneous, never without a girlfriend or good grass or a quip or word of good cheer. Benefits from my association with Sky and my outright attempt to imitate him endure. After hanging out with him for a few months, however, I discerned his mere mortality. When I left for K.C. in October, 1976, I felt much more his brother than his disciple.

## Goodbye Gurus

In the course of a couple of years, I fell under and rose above the spell of the notorious [Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh](#) (several years before his debacle in the United States). After a few of his kind had duped me I knew that I wasn't enlightened. Nevertheless, I believed that there were honestly holy persons to be found; I detected one in the person of [Swami "Baba" Muktananda](#).

Baba expounded a subtle Kashmiri philosophy that titillated my intellect. I loved chanting with his devotees, whose testimonials were powerful. I wanted to believe it all, and to and behold: I did. For ten years, with an occasional doubt, I kept the faith. I worshiped Baba and then his successors--[Gurumayi](#) (once called Malti) and her brother--as pure vessels of the spirit, virtual forms of God.

The revelation of the "celibate" brother's liaisons forced his retirement and reawakened the doubts I'd had when I read an expose of Baba's philandering in the Winter 1983 number of "Co-Evolution Quarterly" (now "The Whole Earth Review"). Gurus surround themselves with self-serving scriptures, most of which tout their purity and perfect detachment. But sooner or later they cite texts to explain unusual behavior. The gist is: being beyond the constraints of mortals and morals, a guru may sometimes act as demons do; but however demonic a guru's actions may seem, they are in fact beneficial to any and all parties who may be involved. Gurumayi knew that her brother was screwing around. Yet people came up to him and bowed low in obeisance, right under her nose. She kept his love life secret; it was not held up as an example of the devilish play with which gurus sometimes bless their disciples. After finally ousting him, she quietly disapproved of the sex and said that she had tolerated his being a guru for so long to save the honor of the lineage and the guru's throne. She excused her delay in doing what she thought was right--ejecting her brother from guruhood--saying that it couldn't be done hastily lest she and her cult be disgraced. In the event, getting rid of him was a painful struggle that dragged on for months: so much for gurus' omnipotence. At last, he left. Upon getting word from the victorious Gurumayi, thousands of his now former devotees took his pictures off of walls and altars, cut them out of books and magazines, and burned them. At her command, the organization erased his name ([Swami "Gurudev" Nityananda](#)).

That incident shook me. Her handling of the affair showed weakness and hypocrisy. But, liking the people, the food and the low rent at Gurumayi's gorgeous Honolulu ashram, I stayed on. A summer as house captain of the ashram gave me a direct view of cult politics. I didn't like the petty power plays and neurotic infighting. Still a devotee, I moved to the Big Island in September, 1990. Soon, I read an article in [Yoga Journal](#) about the secret misadventures of [Swami Rama](#), whom I had long admired as an exemplary guru. His image fell from its esteemed place in my mental gallery of saints, a rumble went through the fissured

old foundation of my belief, and it all came crashing down. My illusions about the sanctity of gurus and their cults lay shattered.

## Questions and Answers

Do you still meditate?

Yes. My [mantra](#) has gone from [Om Namah Shivaya](#) to Om Guru to Om. Listening to ringing in my ears or birds and crickets singing is effective. I still sit and feel my spine, letting it move, doing nabho or khechari mudra (the tongue tip touching the uvula or up in the nasopharynx), with gyan (sometimes spelled jnan, also called chin) mudra (thumbs touching index fingers). I concentrate on my finger and tongue tips, feeling my breathing, relaxing, feeling my whole body and then, perhaps, no body at all.

It sounds as though you practice Guru Maharaji's Knowledge. Do you do the light technique?

Meditation techniques the world over share a common basis: the human body. There are many variations, but sound, sight and feeling are elements of prime importance. I neither stop my ears nor press my eyes. I do see a pleasant blue shimmering when, eyes closed, I concentrate on my visual field.

I take it that you like to meditate. Do people, liking meditation, fall for gurus because they teach meditation?

I like to meditate. More than meditation, and more subtly, gurus teach guru-worship. People fall for gurus for the same reasons that they adore movie stars and sports figures. The latter two varieties of cultural heroes don't explicitly claim to save souls, however. The relationship of devotee and guru is more closely mirrored by that of client and psychotherapist. A therapist who has any inkling of Freud's most important discoveries sees his or her interactions with clients in the revealing light of the concept of transference. The typical follower has a strong transference to the guru. Read the final sections, if not the entirety, of Ernest Becker's

book *Denial of Death* for an illuminating discussion of transference. For the basics look in C.G. Jung's *Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice*.

Do you know that psychotherapist spells PsychoTheRapist?

Yes. My friend Peter showed me that on the business card of Reginald Swindle, a con artist who purported to be a psychotherapist.

Existence seems so unlikely, utterly improbable compared to the simplicity of eternal nothingness, plain old nothing, nothing at all. Does the question "Who am I?" have any relevance to anything?

If we look to our perceptions in subjective awareness, wherein we also constitute these words and thoughts (although the process of so constituting them is outside our conscious awareness) we see in the ever-changing mind the same creation and destruction that occurs in the universe at large. The universal and the individual are not identical. Yet the individual is no more or less likely to exist than the totality of existence itself.

"It is as likely to be born twice as to be born once or a million, zillion times," one of the once-born concluded after introspectively looking for who, in his case, had been born. You, he, she, they die, and all life, dying, goes on. But the "I" of myself came to "me" in a conscious thought after, by some years, I first spoke the word "I" and that was some time after I as a body was born. In infancy, in reverie, dream, fantasy, daydream, surprise, orgasm, deep sleep, in senile decline towards death and in death itself "Who am I?" is an errant question. One does not require a driver's license, a social security number, a passport or a birth certificate in order to die. The pertinent question is not posed by the grammatical sentence "Who am I?" but entails scrutiny of the meaning to oneself of the first person singular pronoun as a fundamental pointer to selfhood: "What is I?"

A direct, frontal, introspective assault on one's I may yield a cataclysmic silencing of its monosyllabic sounding, and associated rumblings, in one's mind. The effective assault (assault is an apt term, for it is a forceful approach to a well-defended realm) will sweep before it doubts concerning the nature of "oneself," "mind," as well as "I" which in all likelihood will not be the last to go, the last to be heard, the last thought. But go it will, and all the other words too, retreating to who knows where. Who, where, know: they will all go, as will I....

The I comes back of course. After many approaches to it, not all so direct, the search and attack comes to truce, treaty, and eventually, tryst. Life lives on, "I" changes, yet its fading into oblivion is always the same silence. Death is certain: a one out of one probability; one for all and all for one.

There is so much suffering in the world: cruelty, injustice, disease, war, poverty, starvation, schizophrenia, childbirth, television. Could you speak a little on the problem of pain?

Ouch! We might as well ask, Is life worth living? The belief that it is helps make it so, according to William James. In a context of euthanasia Robert Misbin observes that a physician's primary duties are to save lives and relieve suffering, but often he cannot do both.

What about karma?

You go to a guru. She tells you that there's only one thing between you and her exalted state of being. It's your karma, your history of good and bad deeds, with the emphasis on bad. You feel bad, guilty. Don't feel bad, she says, all you have to do is see God in everyone and you'll be free like me. Great! you think, feeling good, until you get discouraged trying to see God. Damn, must be my karma; I'll chant more. That's fun and authorized: good. Well I've been chanting for seven years now; I must not be fully surrendered. If I were I wouldn't have any more of this blasted karma. I wish I didn't feel guilty because she says I shouldn't feel guilty. God I feel bad. I'd better move into an ashram. In India. That should get my karma. Yes sir I've got dysentery and hepatitis but I'm sure burning a lot of karma. I sure am glad I've got the grace of such a great guru keeping me alive....

Originally meaning causality, karma is a term typical of Indian philosophy, referring to everything while explaining nothing. For those who misuse Hindu thought, either as manipulators or as victims, it is an important word in the management of guilt and the guilty. So long as the disciple rationalizes his guilt with notions of karma and associated misconceptions, and looks on the guru as the one who understands the deep karmic mysteries, the guru will retain her hold over her disciple and victim.

Do gurus know all this?

No. Gurus were disciples themselves; they are as little aware of the real dynamics of the system as we are of our digesting and assimilating our last meal.

How did it begin? Who started it? When and where?

I don't know. How did language or the universe itself begin? How could one really know? Let the search for first causes rest.

I try to meditate but I can't relax. What can I do?

Try glossolalia: speaking pseudolanguage, the speaking in tongues of Christian charismatics. Start by repeating a syllable or two or three; lalala... or banana, banana,... will work. Enjoy the mindlessness of that for a while, then let anything flow out. Experiment; express different feelings in your new language, with corresponding tones, cadences and gestures. Try it silently, like a mantra, with just your inner voice.

Stretching, shaking, yawning, singing and dancing will help you relax. If you need stronger unwinding, get well out of earshot and away from anything hard or sharp, hyperventilate for ten or fifteen minutes, then let the pseudolanguage totally loose. Bring along a courageous spirit: your own self, or someone who won't recoil from spastic contortions and a frothing mouth.

Is life real or is it a dream?

Someone once answered that question by saying that life becomes real when you know it's a dream. Life is. Let yourself think it's real and it becomes a dream, and vice versa.

Will you please tell us a dirty story?

The guru sometimes sits on her throne, but she always sits on her butt. That may not be a story, though it has a moral, and it's not too dirty, though it mentions the pelvic area. Now here's one with reproductive acts and organs and, be forewarned, male chauvinist piggishness. Leave if you're faint of heart and leave the door open behind you because *phew!* someone in here isn't faint of fart. All right then. This is the story of

### **Fred the Pornographer**

Fred lives alone in his cave, detailing the couplings of humans with each other, with animals, with inanimate objects. He's friendly to his houseplants. They're green and healthy.

He searches for the love he's heard is hidden in biology. He loves to eat and perhaps his philodendron loves him, and he it, he supposes ...but what of romance? Oh, he's had his affairs, some lasting for years, with fidelity and tender feelings of the heart. But with all that said and done what remains as the common essence of the most intense moments--the great sex and the fierce fights--and what, too, stuck him to the stage for every act of each play seems to him, upon reflection, to be lust: the wonderful desire to fuck and, of course, to have someone to fuck.

And it does cause him to wonder; it causes him no end of wonder, and he wonders whether either the lust itself or the wonder of it will ever cease.

He tried to imprison his lust, but it always escaped. That angered him, so he tried to kill it. It taunted him. Longing for the secret of its strength he tortured it for years (it merely laughed) until he looked in a mirror and saw that he was torturing himself.

With the joy of release he abandoned the dungeon of the torturer and the tortured, the delusion of self-restraint. He entered a bright valley and a fragrant garden. He fed on ambrosial celestial fruits. He drank the wine of the Gods. He fell in love.

Fucking to his heart's content, he had attained the blessed state: lust fulfilled. So he thought. Then where fulfillment had been came a growing emptiness, a need for refilling. There were difficulties. There were personalities attached, alas, to the female genitalia.

Sex could be heaven on earth and women could be angels, but the farther they strayed from bed--first to the bathroom, then the kitchen, and eventually, heaven forbid, outdoors--the more they became like devils. For Fred sex was as sublime outside, day or night, as in any room under any roof.

The problem, then, was one of distance from the maternal function. Women were meant for fucking, for bearing and rearing kids, for cooking and keeping house. Obviously.

Fred shared homes with several women. Some were mothers, some not. Some he made mothers, some of these for the first time, others not. He never married. His kids are grown, scattered around the globe.

He lives alone in his cave, writing, painting, playing his pipes, chimes and lyre--worshiping his little god lust as though a Creator.

Fred is the priest of a singular cult; he is the saint of fuck, and the doctor of the most catholic church, the church of every begetting and misbegetting, every fornication, real and imagined, every night and every day, of everyone ever born. His creed is not a credo but a credamus, all-inclusive, for every generation of humanity past, present and future: We fuck, therefore we are.

This is no more a belief than the fact that the sky is blue, but the thought of it--that I am because of fucking and in fucking I have my *raison d'etre*--is the bedrock upon which Fred stands, sits, dances and shits. It is very hard rock. It is ancient and has been turning into humus for eons; jungles and cities are on it. When Fred thinks his bedrock thought he thinks the world. It feels good, like eating, or seeing his philodendron. It might as well be love.

Fred is happy. With roots sunk deep in the lust of ages he is many plants: flowers and food for the weary and hungry. He is chiseling a rock, now, inscribing a poem, watching a letter form as chips fall near the mouth of his cave. Around him are the fruits of his labor: carved in trees and logs, cut into stone, fluttering on banners in the breeze--all crafted with the love of a throbbing member kissing the dripping lips of a warm waiting

quim.

He hears approaching footsteps: a pilgrim, a devotee come to admire, no doubt.... Yes, a man in pink, brown, red, yellow and purple rags with green, blue, black and white beads down the front, muttering something. He's repeating a phrase, something about a bayou, Fred thinks. A mossy bayou. Fred imagines Cajun country...the man's home; he hears him saying, "Home, a mossy bayou," over and over. No, that's not quite it; the vowels sound that way, but.... Fred strains to listen, the swampy picture in his mind dissolving. The ragged man turns, walks away. A leaf--no--a slip of paper drifts to the ground behind him.

Fred, shaking his head, frowning, says, "Home, a mossy bayou," as he fetches the paper, tattered and grungy. On it is written:

At the time of sexual intercourse with a woman, an absorption into her is brought about by excitement, and the final delight that ensues at orgasm betokens the delight of Brahman. This delight is that of one's own Self. O Goddess, even in the absence of a woman, there is a flood of delight, simply by the intensity of the memory of sexual pleasure in the form of kissing, embracing, pressing, et cetera. --*Vijnana Bhairava* lxix-lxx

Om Namah Shivaya Om Namah Shivaya Om Namah Shivaya

"Aha," says Fred, "Home, a mossy bayou, home, a mossy bayou...."

[Vijnana Bhairava](#)

[Home](#)