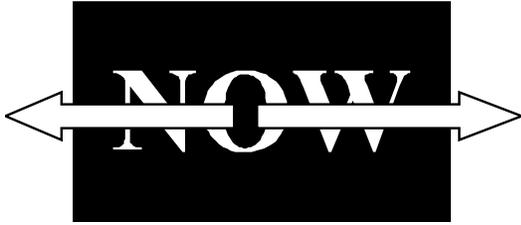


Issue 135—November 2008



Harding Meetings—81 Greville Street  
Next Meeting—November, date to be advised  
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*The Nowletter appears between 8 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. The content is based **primarily on contributions from readers** and subscription is free.*

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Editor's Note,

I often wonder if there will be anything to put in upcoming issues but you manage to keep me supplied. Thank you, and keep it coming. In addition to some interesting travel input, this issue includes extracts from a conversation on the LookforYourself email conference I thought worth recycling as it deals with difficulties some of us have with the claims of Neo-Advaitists and/or with the language they choose to present their findings. I couldn't include the full exchange for space reasons but it can be accessed at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lookforyourself/>

Look for the thread, *Inexplicably it Comes – by Adyashanti* —it starts with November message 38189.

**Harding Meetings – usually every second month (next meeting probably mid-February). I will circulate the proposed date. Anyone wishing to add their name to the list for notification of these meetings please send me an email or phone 02 9419 7394)**

### Nothing Special from Colin Drake

Recently, in commenting on an earlier article, somebody described *awareness* as ‘nothing special’ as if they were disappointed by this. There are two different interpretations of ‘nothing special’ (noting that the phrase only contains one negative) which will be considered in turn:

1/ ‘Something of no importance’ (OED, Oxford English Dictionary) or something which is not ‘better, greater, or otherwise different from what is usual’ (OED). Whilst it is true that *awareness* is not ‘different from what is usual’ it can be argued that it is ‘greater’ than any thing, and is certainly of great importance. The first thing to note is that *awareness* is not a ‘thing’ (an object) but the ‘constant, conscious, field of subjectivity’. This is certainly not ‘different from what is usual’ for being always present it is completely usual (‘habitually occurring’ OED). As this is the ‘field’ in which all things arise, exist and subside, then this is certainly greater than any thing, and is of greater importance than any thing.

2/ ‘Not anything’ (OED) which is ‘better, greater, or otherwise different from what is usual’. This is almost correct in that *awareness* is not any thing, and is better, greater, and different than any thing; although as shown previously it is ‘usual’. It is different in the sense that *awareness* denotes consciousness totally at rest, aware of all movement occurring within it, whilst any thing is a movement occurring in consciousness itself. Therefore *awareness* is better and greater than any ephemeral thing, that being just a movement which arises in, exists in and subsides back into consciousness at rest, that is *awareness* itself.

So, allowing for some reservations, the definition of *awareness* as being ‘nothing special’ can be said to be fairly accurate. Also from a common sense point of view *awareness* is unexceptional, in the same sense that the air we breathe is unexceptional, for it is always present and we could not exist without it. However the fact that oxygen exists in the atmosphere, at breathable levels, is exceptional compared to any other planet that we know, which makes it even more exceptional than *awareness* itself! For without the sub-stratum of *awareness* (consciousness at rest) nothing would exist at all! Which implies that the definition of ‘nothing special’ (in a universal sense) only applies to *awareness* itself ... that which is ‘not any thing’, and ‘habitually occurring’. This is why recognition of oneself as pure *awareness* feels like ‘coming home’, for *awareness* is always present and the ‘home’ from which one strays when one identifies as the mind, body, or indeed as any ‘thing’ at all. Indeed ‘*home is where the heart*’ (the ‘central, innermost’ OED) *is*; not a physical location but the ‘central, innermost’ essence of everything.

The problem is that enlightenment, freedom, moksha, liberation, nirvana, call it what you will, has been described in such glowing terms that we expect it to be an ecstatic, unforgettable, experience. Whereas, the realization that deeper than body/mind one is *awareness* itself may seem so obvious as to be ‘nothing special’. The consequences of this realization may lead to ecstatic experiences, but these should not be confused with the realization itself. However, if this realization is ‘cultivated’ so that one becomes completely identified with *awareness* itself, then this is enlightenment, freedom, moksha, liberation, nirvana.

*Colin Drake*

### Travellers Tales from Ireland & Russia from Margot Mann

The bus driver laughed when we told him our Dublin address, possibly because it is the centre of Dublin nightlife for tourists and Trinity College students, and we seemed unlikely participants. The late summer flower baskets were still looking beautiful when we arrived at The Temple Bar Hotel.

On a tour of Trinity College, the student guide told us that George Salmon, the provost, finally agreed to let women into the college in 1904, saying he “agreed with his head but not his heart.” He died soon after from a massive heart attack. The Book of Kells is housed at the College: the only time it has left Ireland, when it came to Australia, it returned damaged, so it will never be allowed out of the country again. The guide thought it sustained some damage on the trip back to Ireland.

There is a statue in front of the College of one of its famous alumni, Oliver Goldsmith. He is said to have written several nursery rhymes, including Hickory Dickory Dock and Jack and Jill. Oscar Wilde, another famous alumnus, was very tall and boxed for Trinity. He later taught Art and Aesthetics at the College. The library Long Room at Trinity is modelled on the one at Cambridge but is two metres longer (very important.) The books in the library are shelved according to size, not content. Henry Moore was commissioned to make a sculpture to stand in the forecourt of a newer, aesthetically unattractive library at the College. Moore was said to have been so disgusted by the ugly appearance of

this building that he offered to make a gift of the sculpture on condition it would not be located anywhere near it. The guide pointed out that the exam room at the college is opposite the chapel, so on exam days there is a steady trickle of students from one to the other.

Late season hedges all over Ireland were glowing with sprays of orange ombretia and red fuschia. As we drove away from Dublin we were cautioned to “yield to weaving cyclists”, “watch for severe bends”, or advised to take a “jaunting cart” and be driven by “jarveys” who would give historical details of tourist attractions. Irish farmers won’t permit public walking paths through their fields as they do in England and Wales. They want to be compensated for such an intrusion. The result is that walkers must use back roads.

Ireland’s big industries are horses, golf and B&Bs (tourism). There were 8 American women at our guest house at Doolin, opposite the Aran Isles, who resolutely set off every day to play golf in rain and strong winds. They said they didn’t mind the wind so much, but they didn’t like the rain. One night a couple arrived late at this B&B and it transpired that they had no sooner arrived than they were obliged to set off for Cork, to exchange the “distinctive” case, exactly like their own, that they had mistakenly taken from the airport carousel. “But,” said our landlady, leaning forward confidentially, “the best part is he would be dead in a day without his medication and she had packed it in the case.”

Nearly every house in Ireland is a B&B. We stayed in one beautiful home near Roscommon where the owners obviously didn’t need the money. We had a cup of tea in our room and then drove to a nearby town for something to eat. When we returned, our tea cups had been replaced and the knickers and socks I had washed and left on the towel rail had disappeared. Later the man of the house knocked on the door and said “If you’re wondering where your knickers are, they’re drying on the Agar.” They weren’t even my best pair.

We visited Strokestown House, a famous Irish home in use until its last owner, Olivia Pakenham-Mahon, died in 1982. The old kitchen was huge and filled with every gadget and cooking aid, including a charcoal water filter. A balcony ran along one side from which the lady of the house would drop the day’s menu. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Olivia Pakenham-Mahon wanted the kitchen dismantled and replaced by a smaller, more modern space. The architect compromised by building her a kitchen within the old kitchen, which has since been removed. It was important that none of the gentry should have to look at any of the workers and so deliveries of food, etc. had to be made through a dark tunnel on one side of the house. In the toy room was a beautiful miniature china teaset, with real silver cutlery and tiny crystal goblets. The schoolroom was yellow as that was thought to be good for the brain, and all the desk seats were angled in such a way that whoever sat in them would be forced to write with their right hand.

This was mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and the lord and master of Strokestown House was interested in photography and had his own dark room, but the only photos surviving are of his family and other gentry, so an opportunity to document the lives of others less genteel was lost.

As was the custom of the day, men waited after dinner until the ladies withdrew before getting out the port and cigars. And relieving themselves. Our guide showed us a small hatch outside the dining room where a chamber pot was kept, which was passed around, under the table, by the gentlemen. A risky business, one would think.

Even now, Irish potato farmers spray their crops two or three times in the growing season with a mixture of copper sulphate and washing soda, to prevent blight. We read harrowing stories about families hit by the famine in the Famine Museum. Landlords were encouraged to pay for their workers to migrate to Canada, but often they could not afford to.

A strong impression of Ireland as we were driving around, was of many tumble-down grey stone buildings, churches, fences on the one hand, and of modern new bungalows on the other - unlike England, where you can see how different buildings have evolved using different materials, over hundreds of years.

As we were queueing to board the aircraft for our flight from Heathrow to Moscow, the large TV screen in the passengers’ lounge was showing pictures of an Aeroflot flight to the Urals, which had crashed killing all 88 on board.

The Russians love strong leaders. “We love strong leaders like Putin,” said our St. Petersburg guide. “We know you in the west liked Gorbachev and Yeltsin and perestroika, but they were not good for Russia. At the moment we are forging strong links with Asia and trying to be polite to the West.”

Russians also love talking about the legacy of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great – both strong leaders, you could say. Catherine the Great killed her husband and then murdered her son so that her favourite grandson, Alexei, could succeed her as Czar.

Russians, by and large, are not a happy lot. Perhaps it's the weather – the temperature never got beyond 10 degrees in Moscow in mid-September, and we were told they only get 65 sunny days a year in St. Petersburg. We got three of them. Other St. Petersburg statistics supplied by our guide were: 75% of the population smokes; life expectancy for men is 59%, women 73%; and there are 5 females for every male. In spite of the cold, September is a good time to visit Russia because it is near the end of the season. At the height of the season, 40,000 people visit The Hermitage every day and it is difficult to see the exhibits. When we were there it was just comfortably crowded, and as I was strolling down the Grand Staircase, I bumped into a woman from my Sydney tap dancing class. They say that if you spent a minute looking at each exhibit at The Hermitage, it would take you 12 years to see everything.

We were proudly shown many examples of the skill of craftsmen hired to restore palaces and great houses after the Second World War. Our guide pre-empted questions about the cost of the gold leaf used to restore the decorative baroque interiors by saying it was thought that money spent on the restoration of important buildings would lift the spirits of the rank and file.

Four of us drank sweet berry tea from fine Russian porcelain at the Astoria Hotel, famous for being the potential venue for the celebration party Hitler promised his supporters when he crushed Leningrad in the Siege. It never happened. We ordered one slice of chocolate cake, and four forks.

We were often warned about pickpockets, who seemed particularly active in St. Petersburg. Alan was targeted by three young teenage girls as we were boarding the metro one night. One of the women in our group saw what was happening and the girls ran off. She later discovered that a small purse had been removed from her own backpack. It contained a toothbrush.

After a shocking northern summer, London turned on a few sunny days for us before we flew home. There are large numbers of Polish people working in London, particularly in the hospitality and building industries. A local joke goes that two-thirds of Poles are depressed and the other third is in London. However, Poland has not been particularly affected by the global financial crisis and Poles are going home again as they can now earn as much at home as they did in London.

After wearing an anorak every day for six weeks to keep out chill winds and/or rain, the temperature was an unseasonably hot 35C when we landed in Sydney. Bliss.

## **Letter from India 1 —from Riche du Plessis**

### *Meaning and Time*

On travelling in India one soon becomes aware that the people of this country cope with the concept of time far better than we do in the west. On every pavement one observes individuals waiting, or just sitting, perhaps observing themselves without showing any evidence of being bored.

By comparison we, in the West, suffer this problem of time for, no matter what we do; boredom manages to seek us out. We then need to create elaborate schemes, attempting to prevent the onset of boredom. As we know, such schemes are never foolproof. Waiting is evidence of this.

Waiting for a bus, or a train at Central, we impatiently check our watches more frequently than we would normally. We stand up, walk around for a while, fidget with whatever is within reach, or read anything, scrutinize the advertisements, listen to music on an MP3, in order to occupy our thoughts. We behave this way because we are bored.

Seldom do we go further in attempting to understand boredom. But it is a simple statement. It is like a politician saying inflation is the result of a previous government's policies. Yet we know that inflation has multiple causes; the cost of crude oil, the world food crises, the high revenue resulting from mineral exploitation, etc. I believe that the same is true of boredom; it is the consequence of a more fundamental phenomenon-, our experience of time. And hidden somewhere within this phenomenon is the key to finding meaning in our lives. To fully unravel the mystery we need to examine three things, and establish, if we can, a relationship between boredom, time and meaning. This will allow us to discover how we can deal with time and meaning, and how this relates to the society in which we live. To begin, let's first try to understand what happens when we are bored.

German philosopher Martin Heidegger uses the example of waiting for a train at a suburban station when describing boredom. First we begin to feel uneasy, and then search for any distraction. We constantly think of things that we could be occupying our time with. It seems that we are wasting time, waiting on a train station, doing nothing. Heidegger believes that such boredom is evidence to us of our existence through our direct experience of time. It is a very physical experience. Without the distractions of books, newspapers, the MP3, other people, we are unarmed in such an experience. Time pushes down on us, applying pressure, and we are uncomfortable with it as we are not capable of dealing with 'raw' time. We then become aware of many distractions, and more frighteningly, we become aware of ourselves. With nothing to distract us from time we see our own existence stretched before us and, suddenly, we begin to feel very insignificant. We feel ignored by the world as it passes us by, seemingly uninterested in providing us with any meaning.

Why does our experience with time and the awareness of our existence scare us so much? JP Satre, I think, believed that this was because of the vacuum, or gap, created by awareness. This is obvious to the opposite situation to boredom; when busy at work. Then we talk of 'time flying', or claim that we were unaware that it was so late. Satre argues that this is because, in these circumstances, we are not aware of our existence, that we are merely playing the role of a waiter, engineer, doctor, much as an actor plays a role, but are never truly these objects. On the other hand, an object can never be aware of itself. A box is always a box. It is not playing at being a box, it is not aware of its 'boxiness'. The gap between the object we are playing and ourselves is increased when we experience time. At the train station, when we experience time directly, we feel this gap painfully as our boredom increases.

Imagine yourself in a boat in the middle of a lake. The boat has a leak, but it not too serious as long as we make certain we empty the excess water out of the boat. As long as we are doing this, our existence has meaning and purpose and we are aware of nothing else. However, if we fix the leak, we are suddenly aware that we are merely floating on the lake, with time on our hands, but our next concern would be about reaching land, whereas, previously, we were not aware of that concern. Our meaning was previously simple since our time was occupied by ensuring that we removed the excess water. This shows that, without purpose or meaning we become bored due to our experience with time, which leads to a renewed search for meaning. Meaning, therefore, can be either of two things; in the simple sense it is a temporary distraction (as at the train station) or it is a more fundamental meaning for life. Both are based on the same principle- the avoidance of boredom.

The boat example raises an interesting side question: Should we fix the leak at all? Plato might argue that we should fix the leak only if we are capable of dealing with the consequences of doing so- here, dealing with time

In Plato's 'ideal society', based on a simple rural community, he believed that life would be simple providing only the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter to its members. Though members would not be self-sufficient, some would excel at producing food, others at building houses, and others in supplying clothing. All would spend their time perfecting their skill or talent. A fair barter system would exist. There would be no free time as all members would industriously work at their occupation and this would be the key to the society's success. Our skill is our meaning and gives us the ability to deal with (or hide from) time, and thereby avoid boredom.

If such a society ever existed in the past, why would anyone wish to leave it? The answer is simple. It is because such a society is, in fact, unsustainable. In such a society the gap between our awareness would be almost insignificant. This tiny awareness of time would lead to a desire for what Plato calls 'luxuries', and the need for luxuries formed the basis of the complex, civilized society of today. Plato's idea of 'luxury' was somewhat different to our understanding of the word. To Plato a luxury meant a desire for more than the essential elements of shelter, food, clothing. This could include the development of a better tool for tilling the land, a storage facility for food during the winter, thus creating the situation where one does not live from moment to moment.

While such advances would seem innocent and harmless, the process would result in the creation of free time. With free time people would begin to create more luxuries; perhaps perfumes, confectionary, brighter coloured clothing. This could lead to the creation of fine arts and then to the accumulation of highly valued materials such as gold or silver. In short, Plato's 'ideal society' would not be sustainable. Plato himself argued that humans moved from the 'ideal society' to a more 'civilized' one, due entirely to our desires for luxuries. The highest of all luxuries, it could be argued, is our desire for more free time itself. But each advance that leads to more free time results in the need for further luxuries to prevent the onset of boredom and ensure that the gap of, and in, our awareness of self does not increase. Ultimately this must lead, in a vicious cycle, to our situation in modern-day society.

Let's investigate this cycle by, say, looking at the way we deal with vision. Our eyesight shows signs of weakening. We visit an optician and get prescription glasses. We are told not to wear them all the time and, for a while, do so. But after a while our desire for 20/20 leads us to wearing them constantly. The glasses are, in fact, intended as crutches for the eyes, not a replacement and, by constant use, we soon need the use of a stronger lens, and then trapped in the cycle, growing

more and more dependant on the crutch and eventually not be able to see without it. Our society is doing the same to us in relation to time, making us incapable of dealing with it.

In life the glasses are replaced by luxuries. The initial realization of free time allowed us to sample luxuries. Not satisfied, we desire even more extravagant luxuries in the belief that they will satisfy our cravings. But as we satisfy our increasing demand for luxuries, we discover that the cravings only increase. Trapped in the cycle, the only apparent solution to us is to increase the strength of the very essence of the problem.

We could use this analogy to our everyday experience to understand how modern society makes us incapable of dealing with time. Heidegger claimed that we experience time directly in situations such as waiting for a train. This results in boredom as we are unable to deal with such a direct experience of time passing. If we wait for a train each day, or for some reason experience 'raw time' each day, we can learn to be more comfortable with the situation, gradually increasing our fitness to deal with time. Our encounters with time result in boredom because we are not 'fit' enough to deal with it. Unfortunately our present-day society does not provide for such training. Everywhere we look technology provides us with more ways to avoid experiencing time. When we wait for the train we 'fill the gap' with newspapers, radios, the MP3, the mobile phone, or the technology that best allows us to avoid experiencing time. There is now virtually nowhere to go in order to experience time. We are always busy and therefore, according to Satre, not aware of our existence.

Our society covets and values such technological developments. We feel uncomfortable with the experience of time as it presses down on us, so we believe that anything which relieves this pressure is a virtue. But by not training to handle time we are failing to reap the benefits of a clearer experience of meaning.

If we continue to approach time by avoiding it, are we not in danger of creating an entire society incapable of dealing with it? Like an addiction, we will need increasing luxuries to distract us in every facet of our lives to ensure that we do not experience boredom. By so doing we will attempt to cover up the increasing gap created by our awareness of self, but this in turn will become increasingly difficult as we realize more free time. Eventually, like the crack in a windscreen, it will become too large to ignore.

Plato argued that this outcome could be avoided if philosophers became kings of the world. A sweeping statement based on the belief that philosophers, have clearer understanding and therefore better solutions. This may sound similar to the TV politician saying that he has the solution to each of society's problems. But Plato argued that philosophers would make better rulers because they are the only ones who embark on a search for the 'true' truth, concerned with discovering the unchanging reality which is the true object of knowledge. So, by seeking and finding what is eternal and unchanging, the philosopher can eliminate the problem of time. We can consider this unchanging element as our meaning. Our true meaning is that which persists through time, and not that which simply occupies time. 'Removing the water from the boat' is not our real meaning, but only something that occupies our time, an artificial means of dealing with time.

The man sitting at the edge of the road in India, without the MP3, newspaper, mobile phone, appears to understand this. But how can we apply it to every-day life in our society? Perhaps we can do so by taking the philosophical search for truth as an alternative way of looking at the world. Normally, to contemplate beauty, we need to observe a beautiful object. We cannot think of beauty without as existing by itself, independent of the object, because we rely on our senses to perceive beauty. As a result, in the absence of the object, we encounter boredom. What I think Plato is saying is that the philosopher is freed from this dependence (of a beautiful object) because he/she is searching for the unchanging reality of beauty, that their senses are providing only an indication of beauty. Thus the philosopher need not be distracted by the senses to occupy time, but instead uses time to find the unchanging element of meaning.

What this means is that we do not continually rely on our senses to provide us with a stimulant or means of distraction. We don't need the MP3. We can train ourselves to use our minds to search for eternal truths to deal with the boredom we feel while waiting for the train, trying to find something that persists through time so that we might become comfortable with our awareness of our existence.

This need not entail becoming a Tibetan monk meditating for ten hours a day. But if we can become comfortable with time we can be released from the cycle that forces us to create more free time we cannot deal with. We'll understand that boredom is our inability to deal with time, and we'll accept that that we need to learn how to deal with it. Waiting for the train is the training. The longer you endure the boredom, the more capable you become in dealing with time. So, next time you are on the platform, don't look for a distraction or try to occupy the time. Rather, recognize that the boredom is your inability to cope and accept the need to learn how to deal with it. Acknowledge the gap created by your awareness of your existence, and become less dependent on external distractions and more capable of realizing a meaning in life that is not simply occupying time. At the very least, a lesson that I have already learned in India, is that waiting for the train has become a less painstaking experience.

## Adyashanti—Yes and No from the LFY Conference

*"Inexplicably It Comes"* - by Adyashanti. Transcribed from a talk in Pacific Grove, California on June 9th, 2006 (Contributed by Michael)

Inexplicably it comes. When you least expect it. For a reason you can never know. One moment you are striving, figuring, imagining, and then, in the blink of an eye, it all disappears. The struggle disappears. The striving disappears. The person disappears. The world disappears. Everything disappears, and the person is like a pinpoint of light, just receding until it disappears. And there's nobody there to witness it. The person is gone. Only, only awareness remains. Nothing else. No one to be aware. Nothing to be aware of. Only that remains itself. Then it's understood, finally and simply.

Then everything - all the struggle, all the striving, all the thinking, all the figuring, all the surrendering, all the letting go, all the grabbing hold of, all the praying, all the begging, all the cursing, too - was just a distraction. And only then is it seen that the person was, is, and ever will be no more than a thought. With a single thought, the person seems to reemerge. With more thoughts, the world seems to reemerge right out of nothing. But now you know.

The incarnation is nothing more than a thought. A thousand incarnations are but a thousand thoughts. And this amazing miracle of a mirage we call the world reappears as it was before, but now you know. That's why you usually have a good laugh, because you realize that all your struggles were made up. You conjured them up out of nothing - with a thought that was linked to another thought, that was then believed, that linked to another thought that was then believed. But never could it have been true, not for a second could it have actually existed. Not ever could you have actually suffered for a reason that was true - only through an imagination, good, bad, indifferent. The intricacies of spiritual philosophy and theologies are just a thought within Emptiness.

And so at times we talk, and I pretend to take your struggles seriously, just as I pretended to take my own seriously. You may pretend to take your own struggles seriously from time to time, and although we pretend, we really shouldn't forget that we are pretending, that we are making up the content of our experience; we are making up the little dramas of our lives. We are making up whether we need to hold on or surrender or figure it out or pray to God or be purified or have karma cleansed - it's all a thought. We just collude in this ridiculous charade of an illusion pretending that it's real, only to reveal that it's not. There is no karma. There is nothing really to purify. There's no problem. There is only what you create and believe to be so. And if you like it that way, have at it!

But we cannot continue this absolute farce indefinitely. We cannot continue to pretend this game we play, indefinitely. It's impossible. Everything comes back to nothing.

And then it's a bit harder to hold a straight face consistently for the rest of your life.

Responses' with the respondents name preceding the greeting.

1)Alan: Hello Michael, I'd be interested to hear what it is about the Adyashanti piece that you find so compelling. I read it several times but it remains essentially meaningless for me. Is he claiming that there is no objective reality, as that term is usually understood, or is he saying that what I'm calling objective reality is simply condensed thought? Or is he claiming that nothing exists at all and, by illusion, does he mean 'things are not as they seem' or that nothing, as opposed to no-thing, exists at all. The notion that you create your own realities smacks of Anthony Robbins and the self-help brigade. Oh, by the way, I just made sure John McCain flattened that upstart Obama! Strangely, I have experienced something like his pin-point dis-appearance so I have a vague idea of where he's coming from but it didn't arrive with an urge to deny the creation. In what sense is it a mirage? Am I missing something? How do you see it? When I have raised this sort of query in the past the guru involved has never responded except to say that when I wake up I'll understand! What a cop-out! Alan M.

2)Steve: Hope you don't mind me butting in. Finding my True Nature meant completely changing how I see everything. I was a small person in the world along with large numbers of other people - then I found it is not like that at all. Quite the opposite in fact.

If someone realises this and they feel compelled to tell others about it, that person has a major problem. How to get across something that is radically different from the normal view of the way things are. Adyashanti is attempting to show people their True Nature with words and existing concepts. I think I understand what he is attempting to say, that I am nothing but I am all that I experience. I can conjure a wonderful world out of linked thoughts, concepts ideas, beliefs. But that world is not a "real" world.

Or, put another way, the question, "Is there an objective reality?" is a meaningless question. The only things anyone can say about that reality are generated by thoughts, concepts etc. The only reality I know is the reality of my True Nature, what I am.

So I go through life "as if" most of what I perceive around me is real. But I have no certainty that it is. Adyashanti calls this "pretending" which I think is misleading and gives the wrong impression. I wouldn't say I "pretend" to care about those struggling around me.

I do not if anyone has found their True Nature from the words and concepts that Adyashanti uses. But maybe some have. Of course Douglas' way is much simpler. No complicated concepts, just a pointing to where to look. Steve L

3) Jim: Hi Alan, I was glad to see you are doing a series called Secular Mysticism in the Nowletter. Have you read the book by Andre Comte-Sponville called The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality? I think you'd like the book, at least the third section called Can There Be an Atheist Spirituality. It's about his personal spiritual experiences. The first two sections (Can We Do Without Religion? and Does God Exist?) are pretty standard fare, and I imagine you wouldn't care for or even agree with what is written in these sections, but I think you would find the third section inspiring, as I did. Can There Be a Secular Mysticism? I think Headless Seeing is just that, despite its being supported by countless ideas of the Western and Eastern religious mystics. At its core, it is secular, not religious. As Douglas said, the quotes from the mystics of the world are not cited as proof of Seeing. Proof by way of testimony is not needed. Seeing proves itself in the Seeing. Nothing further is needed.

It's understandable, I suppose, that we have many books addressing (debunking?) Western religious ideas. It's just as understandable that we have few, if any, debunking Eastern (Indian) religious ideas. Somehow we can look past the religious aspects of Indian spirituality. We didn't grow up with them. But we are mesmerized by the spiritual ideas of the Indian gurus. No one debunks these ideas because they aren't generally very well known. I appreciate your questioning these ideas. They have great currency in "spiritual" circles such as look-for-yourself. To me they are dangerous (and repellent) ideas, because they claim to know too much. Headless Seeing has a lot to demonstrate, but none of it requires accepting Western or Eastern spiritual dogma. Jim

4) Michael: Hi Alan, Please see my "guesses" preceded by \*\*\*\*\* identifying the part of Adyashanti's talk I'm referring to.

Inexplicably it comes. When you least expect it. For a reason you can never know. One moment you are striving, figuring, imagining, and then, in the blink of an eye, it all disappears. The struggle disappears. The striving disappears. The person disappears. The world disappears. Everything disappears, and the person is like a pinpoint of light, just receding until it disappears. And there's nobody there to witness it. The person is gone. Only, only awareness remains. Nothing else. No one to be aware. Nothing to be aware of. Only that remains itself. Then it's understood, finally and simply.

\*\*\*\*\* When turning my attention "inwards" (which is impossible in my experience and a topic for future exploration perhaps), per Douglas Harding's experiments, no\*thing\* is there/here to be or could be seen or not seen. Whatever is looking is invisible to itself since it is that which is doing the looking. In other words, I can't turn around fast enough to see myself, or \*that\* which is doing the looking or perceiving (aka: Awareness). Upon further investigation (calm, non-strategic, non-labeling, non-end gaining looking), it's further realized that \*that\* which is seen/perceived is not separate or distinguishable from \*that\* which sees/perceives. In fact, \*they\* is not a "they" or twosome. There is only \*one\* or "not two", but this isn't realized by a "realizer". When the movement, mechanism, or urge to "perceive" some\*thing\* or understand or grasp some\*thing\* is not operative, everything disappears. It's the efforting or intention to grasp, understand, or be up to something that generates and keeps regenerating the "separate self sense" that expresses itself as the "perceiver/thinker/me" as opposed to and is over and against the "perceived/thought/you or other. Another way of expressing this is that the "sound heard" is the same as the "hearing of the sound" and there is no "hearer". Only "sound-ing" occurring. The "hearer", the "hearing", and the "heard" are one singular happening. When 100% of non-

strategic attention (aka: Motiveless Awareness only) is placed on simply, merely, only, and just hearing (being Aware minus the "intender" and "intention" to be aware", the "hearer" vacates the premises.

\*\*\*\*\* Now I can't say for sure what Adyashanti is saying since all I can do is "interpret" what I "believe" he is referring to or pointing toward or expressing as his direct experience. Keeping this in mind, my sense of that speaking from and according to the body's point of view, there are "objects" \*out or over there\*. From a mental point of view, \*what is\* are just and only "experiences". From the absolute point of view, all there is is Awareness as modifications of itself. No self, no others, only \*this\* as is and as is not.

5) Janet: Hi Alan, I know what you mean...I half/understand what Adyashanti piece is saying. I think that's because it's only half the truth. recognizing no-thing, yes, but there are many appearances. If you told someone they are an illusion, essentially non-existence to you, it might not be appreciated. I take everyone/thing as serious or non-serious as it requires at the moment. recognizing no-thing and essentially all it forms is the whole truth. I can't explain everything that appears, but that's not necessary to be whole. Janet

6) Hi Jim, I like your grounded headlessness - nothing to believe, the seeing is its own proof. Alan, I was thinking this morning of the idea that the world is an illusion. Then I thought of the question, if a tree falls in the forest and there's no one there to hear it, does it make a sound? I think that in what might be called the first stage of the baby or infant, there's no tree or sound without you being there. However, as an adult, you accept it has an existence independent of observers. As a seer, you accept both points of view. (Well, I do!) All comes from this void and dissolves back into it, and has no existence apart from it, and yet... I accept the objective world, other observers - existence beyond my experience. Richard

7) Alan: Thank you Michael, Steve, Janet, Chris, Simon, Richard and All for your help with my Adyashanti difficulties. I can go along almost completely with your inserts to the Adyashanti piece Michael but it still leaves a reader wondering about the non-existence of everything or whether thought is, in fact, all there is. And it may well be, I realized as I wrote, that the quotation is taken from a talk in which my objection is addressed by the speaker himself.

Somewhere or other I remember Douglas saying that when confronted by radical claims of this sort he asked himself, at what level might it be true. It seems to me that Adyashanti and his fellow non-dualists might well be correct at the level of sub-atomic particles where we are all buzzing energy or whatever goes on down there. Whether the word thought could be used to describe that ground level is questionable though. What is missing, in my opinion, is the necessary qualification of such a claim and, maybe, a school of nano-spirituality.

At the level of being at which I find both first and third person perspectives, it is not possible to describe the lived actuality as a dream, a mirage, nor to insist that you and I do not exist.

*Adyashanti: Everything disappears, and the person is like a pinpoint of light, just receding until it disappears. And there's nobody there to witness it. The person is gone. Only, only awareness remains. Nothing else. No one to be aware. Nothing to be aware of. Only that remains itself. Then it's understood, finally and simply.*

He is saying everything disappears but you are saying the separation of observer and observed disappears or dissolves. I think you are right and he is befuddled.

Michael: From a mental point of view, \*what is\* are just and only "experiences". From the absolute point of view, all there is is Awareness as modifications of itself. No self, no others, only \*this\* as is and as is not.

Alan: I think I'm with you but awareness and 'this' are now one, and awareness is 'this' if non-duality is to be treated as a meaningful term. Adyashanti seems to be insisting on the complete elimination of content, removing the 'this' or 'what is' leaving an awareness-free awareness. I don't think it is possible for first personhood to disappear up its own awareness.

If he then went on and said "everything is awareness" he returns the whole to itself in its fullness, but he doesn't do that, he sticks with his discovery of emptiness. Which I think is Janet's point.

Richard says: All comes from this void and dissolves back into it, and has no existence apart from it, and yet... I accept the objective world, other observers - existence beyond my experience.

Yes, I am very comfortable with that and I wonder, if instead of aligning headlessness with the non-duality tradition, we look upon it as a revolutionary extension of our dual role.

This is a perennial issue for me and without apparent resolution. Whenever I see the forces of extreme non-dualism with their legions of pure consciousness on the horizon, I rush to the barricades. I see Headlessness as radical dualism rather than an appendage to traditional non-dualism. I think that is similar to Jim's position.

Steve's Question: What is your strongest idea or insight which supports or arises out of seeing.

I would say 'openness is all'.

And that leading to the unfolding of the meaning as well as the experience of such statements as 'enjoying the world aright' (Traherne), aperspectival awareness (Gebser), the end of history (Schloss) integral awareness (Wilber and the phenomenological cognitivists (if that's really what they call themselves?) Anyway, thanks folks. I just had received a rave review of Tolle's A NEW Earth from Greg Campbell. Has anyone read it? I saw a couple of his Oprah video exchanges which looked promising. Alan M

8) Michael: Hi Alan, et al... Perhaps another way of stating it is "Openness AS all". Alan, in regards your saying, < I can go along almost completely with your inserts to the Adyashanti piece Michael but it Still leaves a reader wondering about the non-existence of Everything or whether thought is, in fact, all there is, isn't that "thought itself" that is that is doing/being the "wondering about the non-existence of Everything or whether thought is, in fact, all there is?"

In regards to "disappearance", when I or the body goes to sleep at night, everything disappears. If/when there's no "efforting" to see or perceive some\*thing\*, or that mechanism is rendered inoperative, "things" as perceptions, sensations, etc are generated, hence no "perceiver". Perhaps it could be said that one is so fully conscious that there is no self-consciousness. In other words, the separate "me" sense (aka: observer, thinker) is inoperative so fully so that there is nothing perceived since for a perceived some\*thing\* to be some\*one\* has to be perceiving. When there s simply, merely, only, and just perceiving, both the perceiver and perceived "collapse" away, or perhaps more accurately stated, aren't generated via thought/attention. I think the difficulty arises because some\*one\* wants to grasp or get this. Wants to be "present" to see it. This very efforting itself actually serves to prevent this from taking place. And of course if/when it does take place, no\*one\* is there to grasp or experience it as it is not some\*thing\* that can be experienced by an experiencer. The two can't be in the same "place" or be occurring at the same time...and yet they always do and are. Some ol' character once said that it's akin to wanting to be present at one s funeral. :-)) Michael A.

9) Jim. The experiments are directed at Seeing an overlooked "duality" in our field of vision. The Tube experiment narrows the field so that we can see what is otherwise not obvious. What we see on the near side differs from what we see on the far side. Yet both "sides" are made present by a single sense, a single eye, a single vision. This is what life is. Life is awareness (presence).

This duality or asymmetry that is seen in the Tube is the design of conscious life. Yet conscious life itself is single. The "sides" seen in the Tube are locations in a single field rather than separate presences. For that reason they are non-dual, not two. They aren't two separate awarenesses. They are like the poles of a battery.

This is totally different from the non-dual tradition of India, which calls what we see in the Tube a mirage or a dream. So what if what we see on the far side is temporary? So what if it resembles a dream? So what if a dream resembles waking life? Even a mirage has its reality! Why isn't the temporal real? So what if it's fleeting? Would you rather it were frozen forever? Would you call that living? Life has its dynamic side and its stable side. Side, aspect, view -- it doesn't matter what you call it. Without the temporal side, you're dead! Not blissful dead, plain dead!

Michael said that looking inward is impossible. That's okay. There's no need to look inward when it's all in plain sight anyway. You can see the near side of the visual field without pointing or going cross-eyed. You can see where seeing begins just as well as you can see where it bumps up to an object. The near and far are the two ends of a single visual presence.

Adyashanti wants to get past "...all the struggle, all the striving, all the thinking, all the figuring, all the surrendering, all the letting go, all the grabbing hold of, all the praying, all the begging, all the cursing..." Why? I don't get it. Aren't those things part of living? Sometimes we strive. Sometimes we relax.

For me Seeing is different from Indian non-duality. It takes in my whole being (and non-being). It makes me whole and complete. I find it enriching and satisfying. All for now, Jim

8) Janet: hi jim, i like how you put it. Seeing goes by present evidence. its available to everyone. its right out in the open. the whole kit and kaboodle. the only key is Seeing/realizing this openness for yourself. then its clear. the adyashanti piece and some non-duality practices really have no evidence to their claim that everything is an illusion/dream. to me, it is nothing more than speculation. i suppose if they want to argue that its all thought, well, yes, speculating IS. thats just my 'take'. what do you think?

some nondualist practices may leave a lot of people befuddled, too. i mean, i have a hard time just 'believing' something, without the evidence/proof. i can be a very difficult 'faithful' follower! i really have a hard time with that. i don't know if its my fault or not. maybe i just like it simple. love, janet

Michael, who started this ball rolling brought it to a halt by providing another long piece in which Adyashanti, as I suspected, seems to agree with us on this question. Too big to fit in here but well worth a visit to [http://www.adyashanti.org:80/index.php?file=writings\\_inner&writingid=34](http://www.adyashanti.org:80/index.php?file=writings_inner&writingid=34)

## Secular Mysticism II from Alan Mann

A note on the final two Friday Forum meetings in the October series at Blavatsky Lodge.

I started out by underlining my approach to these meetings by explaining my assumptions: mysticism is simply the actual revealed, there is no such thing as an enlightened person, just realization... (I thought it might help to consider whether integration might be a more accurate term than enlightenment?) and, finally, there are many valid points of view all, seemingly, pointing to what is, right now.

I received the letter from Jim Clatfelter, which appears as item 3 in the Adyashanti exchange, in response to my note on this subject in the last NOWletter and some parallel exchanges on LookforYourself email conference. Thank you Jim and further input from readers would be appreciated as this subject has stirred up quite a number of alternative views.

In these last two meetings of the series we covered a lot of ground, it was suggested a more appropriate name than secular mysticism might be 'radical empiricism'. The reason being that empiricism seems to be the word most associated with what is actual and demonstrable but nevertheless usually excludes the wholeness of being, to include wholeness would be the radical bit.

Meeting three was dedicated to what Krishnamurti and Bohm had to say about these matters. During dialogue three of the unpublished tapes, Krishnamurti asks, '...can I can have an insight but go on in the same way? I have accepted reality as truth. You explain that reality is not truth. How will I break that energy of conditioning? The answer is that a new energy, not of reality but of truth, comes into play'. Bohm then says; 'Everybody is expecting a pass mark in the field of reality'. I like that! The expectation of a resolution at the level of knowledge, third-person perception is, I think, a major reason for perpetual confusion. The best example being the idea that I, the me, can become enlightened.

I quoted a letter from a friend who knew Krishnamurti, Bohm and Harding. (I don't think he'd mind his name being attached but I can't get clearance in time so he appears anonymously.)

... So I will add that last night I was at dinner with a former senior member of the Brockwood staff, who has now been to visit Douglas Harding, and we talked about almost nothing else but Krishnamurti and Seeing, and the connections (or non-connections) between the two. Someone asked whether I thought Douglas was enlightened and I said I felt no human being was enlightened and recalled an incident when Douglas was asked the same thing and said, "of course Douglas is not enlightened - he's too opaque", at the same time shaking his right cheek between thumb and forefinger. I also recall Krishnamurti saying, "...you don't have to go to India or Tibet to find enlightenment - enlightenment is where you are"... and I certainly feel that if you take a good look at where you are you don't find any human being.

Later in the Bohm – Krishnamurti, taped dialogue, referred to above, they went on to say:

Bohm: What does the tradition say about how this is going to happen?

Krishnamurti: 'Because it is empty (the drum) it is vibrating'. *(They had previously talked of the mind that is empty like a drum can resonate with truth)*

Bohm: 'The material thing is vibrating to the emptiness'.

Krishnamurti: 'Is truth nothingness?'

Bohm: 'Yes, if it is not reality it must be no-thing'.

Krishnamurti: 'You are saying the mind must be unoccupied – by reality. There must not be a thing in it put together by thought. Thought cannot think about emptiness'.

Having reached that point and realizing we'd done quite a lot of talking if not thinking about emptiness, we tried a few experiments—with mixed results. The simplicity of these exercises is very daunting to the spiritually inclined, notwithstanding the message of the mystics. *Till we see our Nothing we cannot understand the value of our Being*, said Traherne. I think it is our hanging on to our precious thingness that keeps Love at bay. In response to an objection that what I was talking about was all too simple, we started our fourth and final meeting by looking at complexity; at the level of complexity Ken Wilber has charted with such skill. We listened to a taped discussion between Wilber and Diane Hamilton which touched on the transition from the mental/pluralistic stage of consciousness to an integral awareness and the level of simplicity, which in Diane Hamilton's case is accessed by the Big Mind process, and by some of us through the experiments.

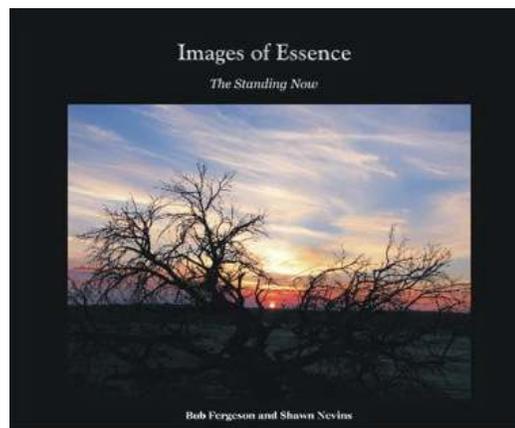
We tried the points of the compass, or Foursome experiment, which provides an excellent interpretation of the Nishitani quotation about freedom. For detailed commentary on the Foursome experiment see the Schloss/Articles page of [www.capacitie.org](http://www.capacitie.org).

... True equality (freedom), on the contrary, comes about in what we might call the reciprocal interchange of absolute inequality, such that the self and the other stand simultaneously in the position of absolute master and absolute servant with regard to one another. It is an equality (freedom) in love. (*I would say LOVE upper case as opposed to the lower case love of relationship*)

We looked at George Schloss' graphic of the Gebser progression showing the stages of human consciousness, the transition to integral awareness, courtesy the experiments, and looked at how the attempt to sustain the realization as knowledge in time ensures that it withers.

*Alan Mann*

Art Ticknor has drawn my attention to a new book of photos by Bob Ferguson and poems by Shawn Nevins that TAT has published recently.



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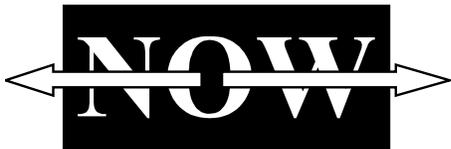
**A NEW EARTH"—Review of Eckhart Tolle's latest book from Greg Campbell**

Could it be that  
 at the core of our profound economic, social, environmental, political,  
 and even individual problems there is but  
A Single Source ?  
 This sounds radical but it is what Eckhart Tolle Proposes  
 in his latest book.  
After reading this book I find myself in full agreement.  
 Furthermore,  
 after reading this book I see that the so-called  
 "Four Noble Truths"  
 are actually an Ancient Therapy which can lead to a Way of Life -  
 "The Bodhisattva Path"  
 which has the potential to Transform each of us -  
 one apparent individual at a time.  
 Eckhart, although not identified with any particular Spiritual Tradition,  
 Honors the Single Truth to be found in all Truly Transformative Traditions.  
 Yet it was simply Years-Long Dedication to  
Intense Investigation of his own Suffering  
 which lead him to The Very Same Terminal Insight which Transformed Gautama into  
 The Buddha.  
 So naturally his Chief Recommendation in the book is this:  
The Reader should Investigate Ego as Constantly and as Profoundly as Possible.  
 And naturally enough  
 he therefore provides probably the most insightful "map" of ego  
 yet developed by Humanity !  
 And as if all of these Insights were not enough,  
 Eckhard even claims that certain people who read this book  
and who thru life circumstances have sufficiently prepared themselves,  
 will be Transformed such that they can throw the book away !  
*This is True.*

*In Conclusion,*  
*this is the Most Profound and Transforming Book*  
*I have ever read and thru it*  
*I have Finally Seen*  
*The Great Indescribable Glory of*  
*that Life which uninterruptedly allows*  
*Suffering into Consciousness.*  
 It is  
 "The First Noble Truth" -  
Crucifixion made Conscious !

**Thank You, Thank You, Thank You...**

*(Everyone seems to have read the latest Tolle book except me. If any of you feel moved to add your thoughts to Greg's I'd like to include them in the January issue. December is taken up with my interview of Donald (Ingram) Smith following the publication of the second edition of his book "The Transparent Mind".)*



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Academy of the Word Seminar Programme Dr Alex Reichel (02) 9310 4504 – 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays– Polding Centre, Level UB, 133 Liverpool St., SYDNEY. 00 - The New Phone Number is (02) 9268 0635. Second Tuesday 6.15pm - *Healing & Well-being* - Fourth Tuesday 6pm - *State of the World*

Blavatsky Lodge of The Theosophical Society Level 2, 484 Kent St., Sydney (near Town Hall Station) Talks Programme Every Wednesday at 2.30pm and 7pm – Printed programme available 02 9267 6955 and at – [www.TSsydney.org.au](http://www.TSsydney.org.au) Email: [contact@TSsydney.org.au](mailto:contact@TSsydney.org.au)

Mountain Heart Retreat – Meditation retreats of two or four days offered in a peaceful bush valley in the southern tablelands close to Braidwood, NSW. Phone Maria Bakas on 02 4842 8122 or 0421 5476 65

LookforYourself (Harding) Meetings - Approximately bi-monthly, by email notification of date and programme. See upcoming dates at top of page 1.

Krishnamurti DVD Screenings followed by Dialogue – Every Thursday 7.15pm at Blavatsky Lodge, address above.

Melbourne. 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday, 2 to 5pm, Room MR B311 Level 3, CAE Bldg. 253 Flinders Lane, Joan Deerson (03) 93862237

Andrew Cohen Discussion groups – Sydney 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in the month-3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday in the month - Andrew Cohen teachings. Enquiries: Graeme Burn 0416 177 012 or Christopher Liddle 0406 755 758

Eckhart Tolle Group – Enquiries: Marion Northcott 9967 8067

