

TELL ME WHO YOU ARE Jake Chapman



*THE
EXPERIENCE*

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FOREWORD

This book provides an authentic and inspiring account of what it is like to take an Enlightenment Intensive. The author has clearly captured the essence of what an Intensive is all about and provides the reader with an experience that is the next best thing to taking an intensive. The descriptions of the subjective struggles that go on during intensives are delightfully handled and are a source of inspiration. The book also gives the reader accurate information about Enlightenment Intensive groups.

The author has also managed to convey the quality and essence of genuine enlightenment experiences in a way that I have not seen in print before. This is a real feat and clearly rests on the author's own experience. The whole thing is presented with authority, clarity and compassion. This is a real contribution to the literature of personal growth and enlightenment. I personally found it inspiring and deeply moving.

Charles Berner
(Originator of the Enlightenment Intensive Group)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my debt to the many people who have made it possible for me to write this book. Most important, my wife, Eva, who has travelled this path with me. It was she who first told me about Intensives and with whom I have spent hours and hours talking about them. In many ways, this is a book about what we have jointly learned; it just so happens that I am the one doing the writing.

Next I wish to acknowledge the enormous amount of support, encouragement and information that I have received from Charles Berner whilst writing this book. He has read versions of the manuscripts and pointed out shortcomings and possible additions, as well as answering my many questions about the whole business of Intensives and enlightenment.

I will always be in debt to Katya Betz, the Master who guided me through the long Intensives that I have taken. In the process of doing this she showed me what being a Master was all about; she showed me how to serve others in their search for the Truth.

Similarly I can never thank Lawrence Noyes enough for all his time and energy. He was the Master who led me through the Master's training course and held my hand while I learned how to be a Master of an Enlightenment Intensive. Both Katya and Lawrence have also assisted directly by commenting on drafts of the book and generally encouraging me to complete the project. Then there are all the people who have shared this process with me on the Intensives I have taken as a participant, cook, monitor or Master. They have all been an amazing source of inspiration. I am encouraged each time I witness another's struggle to experience the Truth. And not least I am eternally grateful to the Truth for having blessed me ...

Finally I would like to thank Daniel and Ellen Dacre for making this version of the book available on the web. This was a labour of love, one that I greatly appreciate.

PREFACE

As the title suggests this book is about the process of self discovery – the process of discovering who exactly you are. The process described in detail here is a cross between a spiritual retreat and a psychotherapy group; in fact it includes the main features of each with the overriding orientation of self discovery.

Each weekend, thousands of people in the western world, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, go off to a workshop, a group or a retreat. For almost all of them the goal will be self discovery in some form. For those choosing a spiritual retreat it may be couched in terms of discovering God or the Divine; for those selecting therapeutic workshops it might be expressed in terms of resolving conflicts or neuroses in the person's life. But although these goals start off sounding very different, they actually converge quite rapidly into a process of self inspection, and then to self discovery and finally to some insight, resolution or experience. It does not matter whether a person sets off to sort out their relationship problems with their spouse, or to understand why they feel distant from other people, or to talk about sexual difficulties, or to discover the truth about God, the Divine or Enlightenment – in all cases these undertakings require deep self inspection. And in all the successful processes used the participants come to realise that all the obstacles that they experience in life are within themselves, that fundamentally they want to be loved and to have their love accepted – and within such a relationship there is the possibility of divine revelation of some sort.

It is difficult to talk about or discuss many of these issues without running into “taboo areas” or areas where people have strong beliefs and prejudices. Many people deeply immersed in the therapeutic world would object strongly to the use of terms such as “God” or “Divine” in discussing their process of self discovery; and many of those involved in spiritual retreats might object to regarding the process of seeking God as one of self inspection and dealing with one's own neuroses and problems. Nevertheless the processes are the same. They are couched in different languages, and the theoretical frameworks supporting the practices appear to be irreconcilable – and of course it is precisely this intellectual superstructure that makes them look so different. But where is the difference between a man crying with remorse at the recognition that he has held others away and denied their love, and another man

weeping at his sinfulness and lack of openness to the divine in others? The processes boil down to the same issue because all the difficulties we experience in our lives are of our own making. Both in the therapeutic and religious worlds, people who discover this simple fact and are willing to start to sort themselves out, rapidly find that their life begins to work better and that their relationships become more rewarding, and that they naturally start to treat others better.

I doubt whether this brief exposition has persuaded anyone to revise his or her views on these matters. I know from my own experience that beliefs in this area tend to be held very strongly. It is as if they form the bedrock on which our basic approach to life is built. This is how it should be; one's deepest sense of oneself and one's view of the purpose of life is precisely what can give meaning to existence. So I have not written the above paragraphs to try to shift this bedrock. Rather what I am aiming to do is to let you, the reader, know that this is the subject matter of this book. It is about that stuff, those beliefs and deep meanings.

The book is really a statement of where I have got to in my own process of self discovery. I clearly recognise that I am at the beginning of the road. But I also recognise, from the fact that my life works so well and from the quality of my relationships, that I am on the right track. And what put me on the right track is what I have written about.

The process of self discovery described and discussed here is called an Enlightenment Intensive. This is an intensive three-day workshop during which the participants set out to have an enlightenment experience of who they are. The process makes use of a carefully designed technique of contemplation coupled with structured and formal communication. Each day begins at 6 am and ends around 11 pm, all the time the participant is awake she or he is contemplating their "question". Everyone starts with the question, "Who am I?" In the course of the three days they will be given the instruction, "Tell me who you are", no less than 140 times, so these words come to have special significance for everyone who has participated in one of these workshops.

On the first Enlightenment Intensive that I took the Master began his talk on the first evening by saying, "Enlightenment is a bullshit word. People have all sorts of crazy ideas about what it means to get enlightened. What we are here to do over the next three days is go for

the Truth. And you should know that the Truth is a bitch.” I have now taken and Mastered many Intensives, and I know exactly what he means! In this book I want to dispel some of the “crazy ideas” that people have about enlightenment. Whilst it is true that an enlightenment experience has the power to transform a person’s life, and often does, it is not in the ways that people expect. The more crazy expectations are that an enlightenment experience will somehow “make you” into a saint or guru or holy person and that from then on you’ll walk around the world in white robes working miracles and dispensing wisdom. Well I suppose that could happen – but the truth is usually far more mundane. Enlightenment experiences usually show people what they have to do in order to get their life to work a bit better; they usually show the person how to take more responsibility for what happens to them and how to treat others better. They also give people a very strong push towards taking their own spiritual life a lot more seriously – but there are years of hard work between one enlightenment experience and sainthood! All this will be made clearer in the course of the book.

Another aim I have in writing this book is to give you some idea of what actually takes place in an Enlightenment Intensive. This is actually more difficult for several reasons. Most important, there is no way that sitting there reading these, or any other, words will ever give you anything like the experience of participating in an Enlightenment Intensive, any more than reading a book about therapy will solve problems or reading a religious book will give one a real relationship with the divine. The difference between the reading and experiencing is akin to the difference between reading the menu and tasting the food in a restaurant – and if you only ever read menus you get to be very, very hungry.

Another difficulty stems from the fact that everyone experiences an Intensive in a uniquely personal way. Each participant will go through their own particular versions of heaven and hell, with their own admixture of joy, pain, bliss, boredom, intimacy and love. In the next couple of hundred pages I will be able to give you some glimpses into what it was like for some other people — and as you’ll see the variety covers a broad spectrum of human experience – but it would be a mistake to regard the examples I have chosen as being anything more than examples. Indeed, it is the emphasis on personal experience and discovering one’s own Truth that gives the Enlightenment Intensive format such power. The process is not based on any spiritual dogma, nor any body of therapeutic theory. Yet amazingly people find that it is

consistent with them all; I personally find no difficulty in seeing it as completely consistent with Jungian and Reichian therapy, Zen Buddhism, Sufism and Christianity – all of which have given me a great deal of knowledge and inspiration. And of course, the reason why it is open to all these views is, as argued in the first paragraphs, that all the processes of self discovery come to the same thing in the end – one’s self!

Enlightenment Intensives have been a popular growth group for more than twenty years, yet this is the first book about them to be published in the English-speaking world. This is not as strange as it may at first appear. The originator of Enlightenment Intensives, an American scientist, Charles Berner, spent almost a decade giving Intensives and refining the structure and technique used. It is quite clearly his contribution to the whole area of personal growth. And he elected not to write a book about Intensives. He wrote many training manuals, he taught many students, made tapes of what he had learned, but never wrote a book. And whilst he was active it would have been quite inappropriate for anyone else to write a book. However, Charles Berner, now known as Yogeshwar Muni, has retired from the world. He now spends his days in meditation. He led his ninety-ninth, and last, Intensive in 1976. And so there is now an opportunity to share with the rest of the world the amazing technique that this man developed. His work has literally transformed the lives of thousands and thousands of people – including mine. There is no way to measure or compare such a contribution. I feel privileged to have shared in the fruit of his work and to be able to convey it to others, so that they too may benefit.

This book has two quite distinct parts. The first part is a description of an Enlightenment Intensive from the perspective of someone participating for the first time. It is fictional. As is conventional in such matters, I have fabricated all the names and incidents in these chapters of the book. All the incidents bear some relationship to events that actually did take place on Intensives; but the details are deliberately made different so as to avoid any embarrassment. Throughout I have maintained the spirit of what takes place and attempted to convey the spectrum of reactions that participants have to the enormous range of phenomena that occur. Also, in the same vein, you will not find any answers to the questions worked on in an Intensive. This follows the well-established Zen tradition of not disclosing the words used by people who have solved their “koans”. It is not to hide “the Truth” – the

reason for not giving you any “answers” is that the whole point of the exercise is not to get an answer but to experience the answer – and in this sense describing the words that people use is just clogging your mind with more material that will have to be dumped to make room for your own experience. (Don’t worry if that wasn’t very clear – it will make more sense by the end of the book!)

The second part of the book is rather different. It is more concerned with answering the sorts of questions that people who hear about Intensives want answered – and indeed people who have read the first part of the book tend to have similar questions. So here I go into the theory behind intensives in some detail, tackling issues like, “what is enlightenment?” “How does an Enlightenment Intensive actually work – what are the psychological processes involved?” In order to illustrate the points made in this part, I make use of other people’s own descriptions of their experiences. This use of other people’s material broadens the scope of the book considerably, and will give you a flavour of how profoundly different, yet basically similar, these experiences can be.

There is a well known phenomenon in the whole area of Enlightenment. It is summed up as follows. “He who knows is silent, he who says a lot knows little.” I leave it to you to judge the paucity of my knowledge by the volume of this book! For a long time it was a puzzle to me why I should find myself writing this sort of material, when I knew that I had hardly begun to scratch the surface of what it was all about. What became clear was that it was precisely because I had only just started on this path that it was appropriate for me to write for those who might be contemplating starting. Those further on down the path may have forgotten the issues facing a beginner – to me they are still very vivid.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE: ARRIVING

It all began more than three months ago. I had been invited to a New Year's party in St. John's Wood by some old friends who had heard that Josephine and I had split up. I went along mostly to avoid sitting at home by myself when I knew that everyone else would be having a good time. I was also quite interested in seeing whether there were any new people at the party; in my relationship with Josephine I had largely retreated from the "party scene" – just one of the many issues that we argued about. I had established that Jo wouldn't be there; she was going to Birmingham with her new man.

The people were really much as I remembered them, from five, maybe ten years earlier, all dressed up, drinking too much, talking too loudly, looking around desperately for someone to pay attention to them – or even better, admire them. I was rather shocked to see how little had changed, and felt more than a bit superior. I hadn't quite made up my mind whether to get drunk or not; and then I saw her. It is really hard to say exactly what it was that made her so obviously different from everyone else. She wasn't particularly beautiful, nor was she plain. She wasn't dressed strangely and she had no make-up on. But there was something about her that was quite striking – to me at least. I saw that apart from a couple of other women who were clearly old friends, no one else was paying her much attention. Looking back on it, my memory of her has a sort of glow around her, with a very special sort of light in her eyes. It is really hard to put into words, but if you saw it you would know exactly what I mean, and, like me, you would be unable to forget it.

I manoeuvred myself round the room until I was fairly well squashed against her. I made some inane remark like, "I haven't seen you here before, have I?" to start the conversation. She looked at me with a kind smile. The light in her eyes was even more striking close up. Her eyes were wide open and she seemed to positively absorb me with her gaze – for a moment I knew what a rabbit must feel like when caught in the headlights. But her kindness swept away the fear and to my relief she made it easy to talk together. Her name was Jude and she was a free lance photographer. We spent most of the evening together. I lost

interest in drinking and in the rest of the party and just became totally absorbed in this strange woman. I think I probably told her my life story in the first hour, and the conversation just went on and on, deeper and deeper. I was struck by how easy it was to be open with her. She seemed to really listen to what I said, and her responses showed a genuine sense of understanding — not sympathy, not analytical understanding, just a real human warmth and empathy.

As I talked about what had been happening to me over the last few months I noticed that I was beginning to feel lighter. The sense of despair and heaviness that had been around me ever since I first found out about Jo's lover seemed to be dissolving. I commented on this and she wasn't surprised. In fact she said it was what she would expect. She said that talking and being heard without judgement always helped her feel better about problems; and right now she was feeling extremely open — which helped the process even more. I was puzzled and asked her to explain. To cut a long story short she told me about a weekend group that she had recently participated in. It lasted three days and consisted of a lot of meditation and talking, and she said it was the most amazing thing she had ever been involved with. The group was called an "Enlightenment Intensive". As she talked about the group she became even more alive. She was literally shining at me, her cheeks were glowing, her eyes sparkling and her whole being was just ... well, alive and fresh and ... present. And it became clear, as she spoke, that she attributed her sense of well-being to this "Enlightenment Intensive", in fact she was absolutely insistent that her present state was a direct result of doing the group.

I remained sceptical. She was puzzled by this, and laughingly called out for a man she knew to be at the party. A deep voice somewhere off to the left replied, "Coming". A few moments later a small man, about 45 years old and going thin on top, struggled through the crowd and settled down beside us. She introduced him as Terry and said that he too had just come back from the Enlightenment Intensive. I looked at him and, with a shock, realised that he too was "alight". His eyes were also wide open, and had the same bright quality as hers; he too seemed to radiate a sense of well-being and aliveness. I looked down at the empty glass in my hand, wondering whether someone had dropped me something while I wasn't looking. But a quick look around the rest of the room dispelled that idea. All the rest of the revellers were looking more and more dead as they drank more and more. No, there was no doubt about it. Whatever an Enlightenment Intensive was it had certainly created

something amazing in these two people. And I resolved there and then that I wanted some of what they had — so I began to quiz them about what the Intensive was, where it was held, how one joined the group, whether you had to go through any sort of preparation and so on.

It all sounded too easy. You just wrote off to the organisers, asked them when the next group was and, if the date was convenient, sent a deposit. And that's how it all began.

Some months later, I was on a train to Salisbury, on my way to my first Enlightenment Intensive. Two weeks previously, I had received a letter giving me instructions as to how to get to the venue for the group; it was in an old country house seven miles outside Salisbury. The letter also told me what I had to bring, and what to leave behind. I was told to bring a sleeping bag since there wouldn't be enough beds for us all. And I was told to leave behind books, food, cigarettes and anything that might distract me. It was a bit formal, but clear and precise. The letter also made it clear that there were rules which I was expected to abide by, and if I didn't then I could have my money back and leave. I must admit that I was more frightened than excited – though I had no idea what I was frightened of.

At Salisbury station I waited for a taxi with my little yellow brochure about Intensives conspicuously on display – the letter had suggested this as a ruse for sharing a taxi with other participants. Sure enough just before the taxi arrived two other people came up to me, both brandishing their little brochures. One was a plump middle-aged woman called Doris and the other was a young man called Tom. Tom looked about 25 and had that “perpetual student” look about him. He was carrying a rucksack and wearing the “blue-jeans” uniform. Doris was quite different, she looked like a business woman; smart, efficient and clear about what she wanted. It was Doris who gave the taxi driver directions while Tom and I climbed into the back seat. After we had introduced ourselves I asked them whether they had been on Intensives before – Doris had but Tom hadn't. Tom said he had done all sorts of other meditation groups and had heard that Intensives were really hot stuff, so he had to try one. Doris smiled quietly at Tom's exuberance. She said she had done one Intensive a year for the last three years and that it always had a transforming effect on her life. As she spoke I recognised a faint glimmer of the aliveness that I had seen in Terry and Jude on New Year's Eve — that was exciting. But the stuff about her life changing sounded a bit more ominous.

We arrived at the place ten minutes later. This was no ordinary country house but an enormous Queen Anne mansion set in beautiful grounds which were just visible in the fading light. The house seemed to fit the occasion – it was magnificent and reflected the same mixture of excitement and awe that I was feeling. At the same time the bright lights and open door were clearly inviting us in.

What struck me most as I entered was the orderliness of everything. I had the sense that everything in the Hall, and probably in the rest of the house too, was in exactly the right place. Over to the left there was an old oak table with a sign saying Reception. There were two or three people standing at the table talking to the two people sitting behind it. Over to the right was an old chest on top of which was a display of brilliant red flowers. At the back of the Hall a broad staircase divided after six steps, one branch going up each side. The wood block floor was partially covered with patterned rugs and around the walls there were delicate watercolours of country flowers. Just in front of the chest on the right an open door revealed a very large, well-lit room in which there were at least a dozen people, some sitting quietly, others talking in hushed tones.

One of the people behind the table led the party of three upstairs, pointing out parts of the house as he went. The woman left at the table beckoned us over, and introduced herself as Mary. She said that she was one of the monitors for the group. We told her our names, which she ticked on a long list, and then we paid her the outstanding balance of money for the group. I was surprised at how reasonable it was since it included three days' full board. She then collected from each of us a registration form. This had been sent with the letter telling us how to get there and had on it questions about our state of health, why we had come, how we had heard about the group and so on. By the time all that was done the other monitor, Barrie, had returned from upstairs. Now it was his turn to sit at the table as Mary led us upstairs. She first took Tom and me to the men's bedrooms; there were three of them. Each had about six or seven beds in them, some of which were clearly taken. I chose a bed near the door of the second room. Mary pointed out the bathrooms and said that we should come downstairs for some tea after settling in. She then went off to show Doris the women's bedrooms, which were up another flight of stairs at the end of our landing.

Tom had chosen a bed in the same room and he talked as he pulled

things out of his rucksack and organised himself. I realised that he was chattering to cover up his nervousness – when I am nervous I retreat into a shell, he just had the opposite reaction. After I had taken off my coat and changed into some old slippers I wandered around a bit, exploring the house.

When I went up the other side of the main staircase I found that most of the doors had notices on them saying Staff Only. There were also a few marked Private. On our side of the staircase all the rooms were used as bedrooms for the participants; four for the women and three large ones for the men. There were also four bathrooms on our side of the house, and more toilets on the ground floor. One was next to the very large room I had noticed earlier, the other was next to the dining room, another gorgeous room fitted out with oak tables and chairs, each table having a small vase of flowers and table lamp. There was a large pot of tea on the side table, with cups and fruit laid out. There were about a dozen people scattered around the dining room, some drinking tea, some talking, some just sitting, staring vacantly. Everywhere was immaculately clean and tidy – but not in a dead sort of way. The house seemed to have a smooth, friendly sort of order to it.

Inside the main room there was a distinct atmosphere of excitement. There were two or three groups of people talking quite animatedly, all looking bright and eager. Quite a lot of people seemed to know each other – I felt even more apprehensive and wished that I could find an easy place to hide. I sat on a cushion with my back propped up against the wall and quietly looked around the room. Almost immediately a youngish woman, maybe in her early thirties, left one of the groups and came over to me. She introduced herself as Jan. It was easy to see that same brightness and sparkle in her eyes, so I said, “You’ve done this before, haven’t you?”

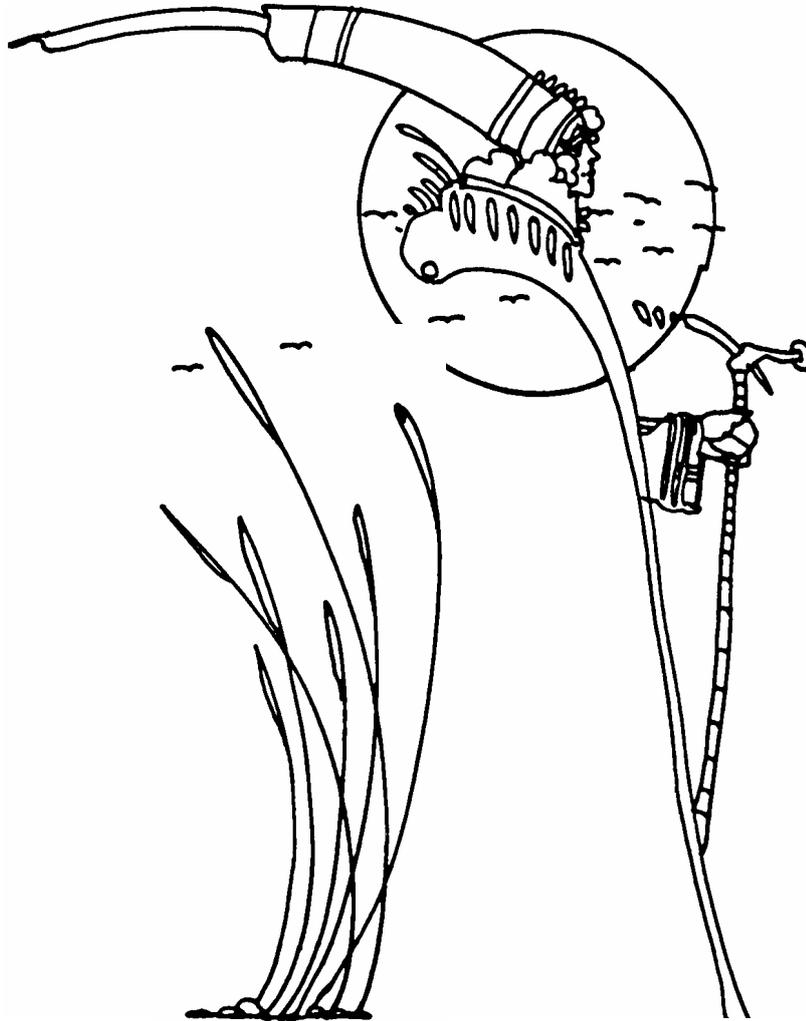
“Yes,” she said, “how did you know – have you been on an Intensive with me?”

“No,” I said, “it’s just that I recognise the sparkle in your eyes”. And then I told her about how I had first heard of Intensives. By the time I had finished I noticed that I was feeling a lot more relaxed, and the room was beginning to fill up with people. A few minutes later Barrie came in and said in a loud voice, “FIVE MINUTES TO THE FIRST LECTURE.” I heard him repeat this call in the dining room and at the top of the stairs.

I thought that there were quite a lot of people in the room already, but in the next five minutes the number doubled. By the time Barrie came back about five minutes later there must have been more than forty people in the room. They were all organising themselves so that they could face a large armchair which was set in the bay window at one end of the room. I hadn't noticed the chair before, but now it was the focus of attention. There were small tables to each side; on one there was a jug of water and two glasses, on the other a table lamp and a box of tissues. Barrie spent a minute counting all the people in the room, then disappeared again. A few moments later a man entered carrying a wadge of papers and purposefully strode across to the armchair. Barrie and Mary followed him into the room, and after shutting the door they found themselves places to sit at the back.

The room hushed. The man, now sitting in the armchair, looked quietly around the room and said, "Welcome ... welcome to this Enlightenment Intensive. My name is Peter and I am Mastering this Intensive."

He paused and looked around the room again. I noticed that he seemed to want to catch everyone's eye as he looked around. He went on to talk about the purpose of the next three days. He said that this was a fantastic opportunity that we had given ourselves, that we could really have a taste of the Truth, a taste of the enlightenment that saints and mystics through the ages had written about, eulogised over and been inspired by. He said it was amazing that in just three days we really had a chance to experience this for ourselves, especially since the more traditional methods for seeking enlightenment took years of devoted effort. He made it clear that the next three days would not be easy. "This isn't a short cut method. Whatever barriers or obstacles are standing between you and enlightenment will have to be faced. Using a fast technique simply runs you into those barriers faster. So be prepared. Make a commitment to go through the barriers, be determined to stick it out, want the Truth more than you want anything else, especially more than you want to be comfortable." He didn't talk for long, but I felt I already knew this man. He had an air of simple openness about him, and what he said I found inspiring. It was as if he reached inside me and touched a place that I didn't know existed before – but once it was touched I knew it had always been there. I felt elated and excited – and was sure that everyone else in the room was feeling the same.



ENLIGHTENMENT MASTER

He explained how we would each have a question to work on. Since this was my first time I would be working on “Who am I?” Other people could work on other questions like “What is life?” and “What is another?” The point, apparently, was not to get an “answer” to the question. As Peter said, “you can go into any library and easily find the correct answer in any of several spiritual books written by the great masters. But that’s not the point. You would not be any better off because you would still not know. You would just have another belief, another idea about who you are. What this Intensive is all about is you,

directly experiencing, for yourself, the truth of who you are. What characterises an enlightenment experience is that there is no separation between you and that which you experience. There isn't any process in between. It's not you seeing yourself, nor you sensing yourself, nor you feeling yourself – those are all indirect experiences – indirect because there is you, a process and yourself. An enlightenment experience has no process, because there is no separation – you are directly conscious of yourself. And once you have had that experience then it is with you always. It doesn't depend upon a particular set of beliefs, it doesn't depend on how you feel – it just is, and you know it. So don't be satisfied with smart sounding answers – go for the direct experience of who you really are.” He urged us to start pondering our question right away, and make a commitment to ourselves to really go for an enlightenment experience. I didn't need much urging – it was what I had come for, and it sounded great.

Peter went on to explain some of the rules of the Intensive; they weren't as bad as I feared. They were things like no smoking, no drinking alcohol or caffeinated drinks, no unnecessary talking, following the schedule. The strangest rules were about not shaving; no make-up and perfumes, no jewellery and no watches. But they are not hard things to do without for just three days. At least that's what I thought. But at the end of the lecture, after Peter had invited questions, one woman raised her hand and asked whether the no jewellery rule meant that she should take off her wedding ring. Peter just said, “Yes”; but it was said in that tone of voice that leaves no room for doubt or argument. The woman was obviously upset and muttered something about not having taken off her wedding ring for forty years. Peter looked at her for a while and then gently said, “The point is for you to discover who you really are, and to give yourself the best opportunity for that you should drop all the things that you are identified with – you are not a wedding ring, nor even just a wife. Let it go.” Then addressing all of us he said: “Don't pay attention to your image over the next three days — your image is not what you are here to discover, so let it go. You can always put it back on again at the end of the three days.”

Someone else asked about making a phone call the next day. Peter said that was out of the question, but one of the monitors could make the call for her. It became clear that for the next three days we were expected to spend absolutely every minute of every day contemplating our question. We would be told when to get up, when to eat, when to rest, when to go for walks and when to be in the main room. Anything

that required us to put our attention on the outside world was to be done for us by the monitors. I began to feel as if I had stepped out of the world for a time – and honestly it felt quite a relief. I was now definitely more excited than nervous. The last instruction we were given was to get a good night's rest. We would be woken up at 6 am the next morning. And we were to start contemplating our question right now. A few people went up to the Master and asked him questions – I don't know what about. I was struck by the patience and kindness he showed towards everyone. And he did that without dropping his quiet sense of authority. Nor did he lose a sense of formality — his smiles were friendly but did not invite a sense of triviality. I wandered out of the room at the tail end of the main bunch of participants. I went into the dining room and decided to have some of the tea that I had passed up earlier. It was still hot, in fact so hot that I was sure that someone must have recently put out a fresh pot. But to my surprise it wasn't ordinary tea. It was herb tea. Of course – no caffeinated drinks! It tasted quite nice in fact, but I had no idea what it was.

There were a few other people in the dining room, but slowly, one by one, they drifted off to bed. When I left there were still a few people drinking tea, and there were another two talking to the monitors in the Hall. There was someone waiting outside each bathroom, so I went to my bedroom and sorted out my sleeping gear. It was easy enough to put the sleeping bag under the duvet. The bed was quite low, but comfortable. Later I realised that it was actually just a bed base – the mattress that normally went on top of the base was on the floor across the room with someone else sleeping on it!

When I came back from the bathroom I realised that I felt self-conscious about getting undressed in a room with six other men. But no one else seemed to be taking any notice of anyone else, so I just got on with it. The room was also quite dark; the only light came from the landing lights just outside the door – which meant that I was undressing in what seemed like a spotlight! I wish I hadn't chosen the bed right by the door!

I finally made it into bed. Then I realised that everyone else was already in bed, so it was up to me to shut the door. I struggled out of the sleeping bag, shut the door and then fumbled my way back in the dark. As I lay in bed the house seemed very quiet, it was difficult to imagine that there were forty to fifty people sleeping in it. My mind was buzzing. I went over some of the instructions that Peter had given us

and remembered to start asking myself the question. Who am I? I said it to myself in different ways inside my head. Who am I? Who am I? Who Am I? Well I'm a man, I'm 41 years old, I'm a businessman, I am a father and have two sons ... but who has two sons? Who is that? I began to see that there were thousands of answers to the question and each one led to another. Oh well, that's what I'm here to discover. Who am I?

CHAPTER TWO: DAY ONE

The next thing I remember is a voice saying: “TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF YOUR INTENSIVE, YOU HAVE FIFTEEN MINUTES TO GET UP, GET DRESSED AND BE READY DOWNSTAIRS FOR THE FIRST LECTURE”. By the time I had rubbed the sleep from my eyes the room was a hubbub of activity, and I noticed that one tall grey-haired man was already making a bee-line for the bathroom. It seemed that he had done this before. When I had waited in the bathroom queue for more than five minutes I knew he had! I scrambled into the group room feeling quite jarred by the rush to get everything done. We were a sleepy-looking lot, with a few souls still dozing, propped up against the radiators or walls. Barrie and Mary were bustling around, counting people and trying to work out who was already in the room and who wasn't. At one point Barrie gave one of his loud calls: “IT'S TIME TO START.” Hurried footsteps in the upstairs hall came quickly downstairs and the woman who had asked about the wedding ring came into the room, red eyed and tired. Once we were all in the room Mary left and a moment later the Master walked in looking as fresh as a daisy, beaming all over his face, looking as if this was the start of a beautiful summer holiday. He sat in his chair and took a full minute to look around the room — he made a point of looking everyone in the eye, and those that looked as if they were asleep woke up with a start as his gaze settled on them. By the time he spoke there was an air of anticipation in the room; we were suddenly awake.

‘This morning I am going to tell you more about what will be happening over the next three days and what it is that you are going for. I will also describe the technique that you are to use and the daily schedule. By the time I have finished you will know everything about the group. I will then invite you to agree to follow the schedule and abide by the rules of the group. If for any reason you are unable or unwilling to do so then you can leave and we will return your money, less the deposit. If, on the other hand, you decide to take this opportunity then you should know that I and all the other members of the staff will do our utmost to give you the very best opportunity of having the deepest possible enlightenment experience.’ He was speaking slowly and clearly, making sure that the message was getting into our befogged brains. He had notes with him but wasn't looking at them; all his attention was going out to the forty or so people in front of him.

I found myself totally absorbed in what was going on. I wasn't wide awake, but was in that state where little things are capable of absorbing all my attention. I realised, with a start, that I had just spent a couple of minutes staring at the back of one young woman's head a short distance in front of me. Another time I caught myself being totally caught up in the beautiful flowers on the table beside the Master's chair. But Peter repeated his instructions often enough for me to understand what he was saying, even though I knew I had missed bits. He elaborated on the distinction between direct and indirect experiences. It sort of made sense intellectually, but I didn't really know what he was on about — I suppose because I had never had what he called a "direct" experience. I was, however, struck by what he said about why it was worth going for. "Everyone's experience is unique to them. However there are characteristic words that people use when they have had a direct experience. It brings a sense of peace, a deep contentment. Some people recognise it was what they have always been looking for, without knowing it — and for others it is just the most hilarious cosmic joke that they should have to struggle so hard for something so obvious. Some people weep with joy, others are filled with love, some are in bliss for hours and others find it perfectly normal. It doesn't matter what it feels like, nor what your reaction to it is. The point is to have the experience. Then you know who you are, and you won't be blown around by other people's ideas of what you should be like — and better still you won't be pressuring yourself to be someone different. You will know who you are, and that will give you the ability to act from your real self — and that's what works." As he was speaking I realised that he was totally convincing because he was speaking from his own certainty and his own experience.

He went on to describe the "technique". This took place in the "enlightenment exercises" which were done with partners. We had to sit opposite each other and take turns at doing this technique. The technique involved both contemplation and communication. Basically what I got from what he said was that you had to contemplate your question. That seemed to involve directing your attention at yourself whilst asking the question, "Who am I?" Then, when something occurred as a result of your contemplation, you had to tell it to your partner. While it was my turn my partner was not supposed to respond in any way to what I said; no smiles, nods, frowns or comments — just listen. The contemplating and communicating went on for five minutes, then there would be some sort of bell and the roles would reverse. The

process would continue through eight five-minute periods at the end of which we would be instructed to do something else. The points which Peter emphasised most, were firstly intending to have a direct experience, secondly being open to whatever occurs when we contemplate our question, thirdly communicating what occurs clearly and, most important, persisting with the technique all through the day.

When he read out the schedule the day seemed to be really long. Generally we would do one of the Enlightenment Exercises and then something different, like a meal or a walk, then another exercise and then something different again. And that went on through about a dozen of the exercises — I guess that the day was going to end around midnight — and we had started at 6 am! Because we were not wearing watches we would be told exactly what would be happening next, and in general we would be given five-minute warnings before the start of each period. Finally he read out the list of rules. There were a few that I hadn't heard the previous evening, the most important one being that we must not comment or pass judgements, positive or negative, on any other participant in any way. He was quite insistent about it; I got the sense that if anyone broke that rule it would be treated as a serious matter. Then he repeated the terms of the contract that he wanted us to enter into and we were sent off to the dining room for some tea – herb tea of course.

The atmosphere in the dining room was quite different from the night before. No one spoke. There was an air of seriousness. Most people were studiously looking at their tea or at one of the plants on the tables. I took my tea and noticed a small notice that had been put up by the honey pot ... “Only one spoon of honey”. I joined the people studying their tea. It's strange, but as soon as people stop talking they tend to avoid each other's eyes as well. In a way I felt uncomfortable being around people in such a strange way – but there was also a sense of relief. I don't like “socialising” at the best of times — here I didn't have to.

After what seemed like just a few minutes Mary came into the room and announced: “FIVE MINUTES TO THE FIRST EXERCISE.” I noticed that both the monitors gave announcements really clearly and concisely — there was no attempt to be pleasant, nor to order people about. We queued up to rinse our cups at the sink at one end of the dining room and then quietly walked into the main room. The room had been transformed. Previously there were piles of cushions spread

around the room. Now the cushions were arranged in two neat rows running the length of the room. At the ends of the rows furthest from the Master's chair there were hard-backed chairs in the place of cushions. There were ten pairs of cushions or chairs on one row and eleven on the other, so that meant that there were forty-two people in the group.

As people filed into the room they went and sat in one of the empty places. I decided to go and sit on a cushion where both places were empty. I just sat there wondering who would come and sit opposite me. I noticed an attractive woman in the next row sitting on her own and toyed with the idea of going and sitting opposite her, but I thought that would be a bit obvious, so I just sat and waited. Not for long. A plumpish man, looking as if he was perpetually out of breath, came and sat opposite me. He smiled self-consciously and then looked away. I noticed that most people were again studiously looking at anything but the person in front of them.

Then the Master came in and stood in front of his chair. He reminded us of the technique and of the way that each exercise is started (you have to give a specific instruction to the person starting to contemplate — in my case it was: "Tell me who you are?").

Then he said, "Find out your partner's question."

The fat man said, "Who am I?"

I said, "The same."

Then the Master said: "Those of you facing the fireplace give your partner their instruction and begin."

I was facing the fireplace, so I said: "Tell me who you are."

My partner quietly looked at me for a moment and then looked down, as if deep in thought. Then he looked up and said, "I am really sad. Last night listening to the Master's lecture I realised that what he had said about not needing to pressurise myself into being different was really right. I have spent most of my life trying to make myself something different and I am really fed up with it." Then he looked down again. This time when he looked up I could see a tear in his right eye and he said, "You know, I really don't have the foggiest idea of who I am —

after all these years of striving to be different it is shattering to realise that I could just be myself — whoever that is.” He closed his eyes this time. I continued to look at him, but became aware that two places down the row the woman who had not wanted to take off her wedding ring was quietly crying. I was also aware that most of the other communicating partners were talking quietly — a bit like at a funeral!

My partner made another couple of remarks about how affected he had been by the previous evening’s lecture. Then, towards the end of his next communication a bell sounded and Mary said, “THANK YOUR PARTNER”

I looked at my partner and said, “Thank you.”

He smiled and Mary said, “CHANGE OVER,” whereupon he said, “Tell me who you are.” I suddenly felt on the spot. What do I say to him? What do I do now? While a thousand thoughts raced through my head I felt Barrie lean across next to me and talk to the person next to my partner. She had apparently given the instruction wrongly, so he was telling her what she should have said. I was grateful for the distraction. Then I realised that I was actually embarrassed. There was this man sitting opposite me, wanting to know who I was, and I didn’t have the foggiest idea of what to say. What made it worse was that he was just steadily looking at me. I suddenly knew why he looked down and closed his eyes so much! I closed my eyes, mostly to escape from having to look back into his eyes. I felt a sense of relief once I had shut my eyes, and then, slowly the panic died down and I remembered what I was supposed to do. Who am I?

I remembered some of the things that I had thought before going to sleep the previous evening and decided to tell my partner about them. I found it a bit disconcerting that he just continued to look steadily at me. He wasn’t staring, but nor was he responding in any way. And I realised that it was the lack of response that was unnerving me — I was used to people smiling or nodding or giving some sort of signal that they heard me and approved of what I was saying. I quickly finished what I was saying and closed my eyes again. Again the sense of relief, again remembering, “Who am I?”. This time I had a memory of the party that New Year’s Eve and how it had got me here — so I told him about that. I hadn’t got very far into my account when ding, the bell went.

“THANK YOUR PARTNER.”

“Thank you,” said my partner.

Another ding and, “CHANGE OVER.” At the third ding of the bell I said, “Tell me who you are.” This time he started by completing what he was part way through saying at the end of his previous turn. Then he went back to staring at the carpet.

When he looked up again he said, “I am a bank manager,” and immediately looked embarrassed. I suppose that outside banks being a bank manager isn’t a very popular role to play. I had to suppress a smile — if only my bank manager would do something like this ... maybe he would be a bit more human. Then I realised that he might very well do something like this — I just had no idea who my bank manager was as a person. My partner started to talk again and I had to push away more thoughts about how I don’t take the time to see people as people in my life. He was saying something about being unseen by other people in his life and how he was starting to believe that he was just a bank manager and not a real person. I began to feel really warm towards this man. He was sharing his world with me, and it was fascinating. I wondered whether everyone in the world had the same sorts of internal struggles.

I didn’t wonder for long; the bell went, “THANK YOUR PARTNER,” ding, “CHANGE OVER,” and there was my partner saying, “Tell me who you are.”

I started to complete the story of how I had heard about Enlightenment Intensives, but realised that this was really a bit of a cop-out, so I cut it short and closed my eyes again. I noticed that I was decidedly less nervous now — and suddenly realised that maybe I should be communicating things like how I felt. So I opened my eyes and told my partner about how I had been feeling nervous and that it was getting less — and as I told him I could feel my shoulders relaxing. I remembered something that Jude had said at the party; talking about what is going on with you helps get rid of it. So I communicated that to my partner as well. When I closed my eyes again I found myself wondering whether I was doing the technique correctly. As I sat there I became aware of other people talking around me, and listening to them it seemed that they were all doing more or less the same as me, so I felt reassured. And then I realised that all that needed to be communicated

also.

I had only just started when the bell went again. “THANK YOUR PARTNER,” ding, “CHANGE OVER.” This time when I said, “Tell me who you are,” I felt as if I meant it, I really wanted to know who this man was behind his bank manager facade — and it was also very clear that he wanted to break out.

By the end of the period all my nervousness had disappeared. I was actually beginning to enjoy this. And I looked around the room at the other participants from a new perspective. Who were all these people? What were their lives like? What were their struggles about? The period ended when five bells sounded in quick succession: ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, and after the final “THANK YOUR PARTNER,” Mary said, “STAND BY.”

Then the Master said, “Now it is time for an eating contemplation period. Throughout this period you should continue to contemplate your question. Who is it that is eating? ... Breakfast is ready for you in the dining room.”

We walked out of the room in silence. The large table on one side of the dining room was covered with bowls. Half were filled with porridge, the other half with yoghurt. We could either have porridge, with butter and “One spoonful of honey”, or yoghurt with an apple. I chose to have porridge, and wondered what would happen if the last people in didn’t want what was left. In fact the last people to come in for breakfast were the monitors, and behind them came Peter. They took one of the remaining bowls each — and I noticed that there were in fact a few extra bowls left.

It was the strangest breakfast I had ever had — and not because of the food. It was strange because no one spoke. There was just a quiet concentration on eating. And since there was nothing else to do, no work to rush off to, everyone was eating slowly. And the combination of eating slowly and quietly was quite an eye-opener. The food tasted so much more — and I noticed the texture more — and I even remembered to ask myself, “Who is it who is eating this?”

I was still feeling a little groggy, so I decided to go for a walk. After washing up my bowl I collected my coat and shoes and set off to explore the garden. It was a formal English garden, the part in front of

the house being mostly lawn with flower beds arranged alongside many of the paths. To the left of the house the garden narrowed to a single lawn with an old summer house against the high stone wall that enclosed the estate. To the right the garden spread out with a number of magnificent old trees and gave way to views over sheep fields spattered with mature oaks. Behind the house was an old walled garden, but before I could start to explore that or what was behind it I heard Barrie call out: “FIVE MINUTES TO THE NEXT EXERCISE.”

I hurried back to the house, put my coat and shoes away and found myself one of the last to enter the main room. As luck would have it the attractive woman I had spotted last exercise was one of the few without a partner, so I went and sat opposite her. This time I was more aware of the people around me, up and down the row. We were all sitting quite close together — if I swung my arm around I would clock my neighbour in the face with my elbow. I was surprised that in the previous exercise I hadn't been more distracted by what the others were saying.

When he started the exercise the Master said, “At your first opportunity communicate to your partner whatever occurred as a result of your contemplation during the breakfast period, then continue doing the technique.” He quickly ran through the steps of the technique and then said, “Find out your partner's instruction ... those of you facing the fireplace give your partner their instruction and begin.”

My new partner was also working on “Who am I?” and so I said: “Tell me who you are.” She looked at me as I spoke and for a while afterwards, but I had the sense that she wasn't really seeing me — not the way the bank manager had. In fact I was quite struck by how cool and distant she appeared. After a while, without ceasing to look at me, she started talking in a quiet and controlled voice. She was talking about being a woman and being fed up with all the men in her life. In fact she was quite bitter about men. I felt uncomfortable because I felt that in an underhand way she was also getting at me. I was quite relieved when the bell went and we changed over. I quite quickly closed my eyes and noticed the sense of relief again. Then I remembered the instruction about communicating what occurred over breakfast, so I reported my new experience with porridge. But there was no escaping the sense of fear and unease with this woman — so I talked about that too. I remembered what the Master had said about not involving my partner in my communications, so I just said things like,

“I feel afraid and uneasy,” and, “I feel uncomfortable when I am disliked.” To my surprise it worked; I started to feel better straight away. In fact I started to feel a sense of confidence. I realised that normally when I was afraid I bottled up everything and that in some way that weakened me. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed talking about what was happening inside me.

The rest of the exercise seemed to pass quite quickly. The woman continued to talk about her dislike for men and how much she felt her life constrained by them. I found it easy just to listen to her, mostly because I didn’t feel any connection with her. In fact I thought that she didn’t really believe what she was saying herself. I got the sense that she had said all this a thousand times before; it was more like listening to a tape recording than a person.

Towards the end of the exercise I heard someone in the other row start to shout really loudly: “I AM FED UP WITH TALKING LIKE A LITTLE MOUSE. I CAN TALK LOUDLY IF I WANT TO. SHIT I AM FED UP WITH BEING A LITTLE MOUSE.” I was pleased that she wasn’t sitting opposite me shouting like that!

At the end of the exercise the Master said that there would be another enlightenment exercise, but that first we should take a five-minute break. During the break people walked around, went off to the toilet, stretched or just lay resting. I began to take an interest in the other participants — who were these people? Looking around I realised that they probably covered the entire spectrum of people. There were roughly as many men as women, maybe a few more women. The age span was from about twenty to sixty-five. There were people who looked very trendy, people who were very scruffy, smart people, tall people, short people — in fact just about every kind of person. But now I was looking at them in a new light — I was wondering who would be the best partners. I was quite struck by the fact that I felt I really made some sort of progress with the bank manager, mostly as a result of the sense of closeness I had with him. The exercise with the attractive woman had been a bit of a waste of time — I didn’t really want to disclose anything of myself to her. As I was thinking that, I realised that she probably had the same effect on all men, so no men ever shared their inner lives with her. She would always see men as being cold and distant ... and almost before I had finished thinking that, I was wondering what it was that I was doing to keep my images of men and women intact.

“IT’S TIME TO CHOOSE A NEW PARTNER FOR THE NEXT EXERCISE.” The people who had been outside the room hurried in and there were thirty seconds of chaos as people settled down in new positions and the monitors straightened up the two rows. My new partner was a fairly young man dressed in very loose red clothing. He had very baggy trousers which seemed to have elastic around the waist, thick red socks and a sort of orange-red floppy jumper. He seemed very bright and happy and I was pleased to have an immediate sense of closeness with him. He was working on what life is, so after the Master’s instruction to “Give your partner their instruction and begin,” I said: “Tell me what is life?”

My partner smiled and then I felt a hand on my shoulder and Barrie lent into the row and said, “Your partner’s instruction is, tell me what life is. Give your partner his instruction.” I didn’t know where to put myself, I felt a fool; no, I felt like a child at school who has just been corrected by teacher. In an embarrassed tone I said: “Tell me what life is,” and was relieved to feel Barrie retire from behind me.

My partner was still smiling and with a twinkle in his eyes said: “Sometimes I think that the formality of this group gets in the way of what is really important.” I knew he was referring to the good sense of closeness between us, and I immediately felt easy — and quite a lot closer to this new partner.

I was struck by the way he contemplated. He looked down at the back of his hand and quite steadily gazed at it. After a while I twigged that he was focusing on the life that was in his hand. It seemed odd to me, to me life was a lot more than what could be seen in the back of a hand.



WALKING CONTEMPLATION

However, what he communicated indicated that in fact by contemplating this part of life he was tapping into all the other aspects as well. He talked about the sense of irrepressible energy in life, how it showed up all over the place all the time; he talked about his own life being like a growing plant, unfolding towards the sky, reaching upward in its own particular way; and he talked about life being precious to him, how he loved people, plants, animals, rocks, rivers, all of it. I felt that he was a very soft and sensitive person. He also communicated very clearly and simply; I had no trouble really understanding what he was saying and feeling. But most of all I was struck by his single-mindedness in doing the technique. When he focused his attention on the back of his hand it was as if his whole being was doing it. He was completely unperturbed by anything happening around him (and at one point the person next to him screamed out: “CHRIST I HATE HER!” so loudly that I almost jumped out of my skin). I reasoned that since he wasn’t working on who he was he must have done an intensive before. So the way he was doing the technique was probably the right way, and I resolved to start to really focus on who I am in that same single-minded way.

I noticed that if, when I closed my eyes, I put my attention fully on myself then I became acutely aware of strong thoughts and feelings about myself. I am a successful businessman; I don’t know whether I am a good lover or not; I feel I am wasting my time most of the time; I am very shy; I wish I could be easy with other people; I want people to like me, but fear that they don’t; I am unsure of how to do the technique — in fact I am unsure about how to do anything right.

As each of these was communicated to my partner I felt myself sinking deeper and deeper into myself. The exercise was over all too quickly. After the last bell my partner reached across and offered to hold hands; I accepted and was pleased to feel the simple warmth of friendly physical contact.

Next we had a walking contemplation period which was one hour long. “You should only walk as fast as you can contemplate. The point of this exercise is to enable you to contemplate your question in a different way. This is not a nature walk, nor is it a break from doing the technique — you just do it in a different way. You put your attention on yourself, intend to have a direct experience and be open to whatever comes up. Then repeat those steps, and allow your contemplation to go deeper and deeper.” We filed out of the room in silence, except for the woman who was still crying about taking off her wedding ring. People

went off to their rooms to collect coats and outdoor shoes. It was early spring so there was no need to wrap up, but it wasn't yet warm enough to walk out without a coat.

I quickly headed off towards the walled garden at the back of the house. Behind the garden there was a very large orchard and beyond that a paddock. I walked slowly around the orchard and reflected on what had happened so far.

I was still unsure about doing the technique properly, but I was also quite clear that I was discovering things about myself and others that I had previously not suspected.

I realised that I was actually quite upset about the thought that I never knew whether I was doing things correctly. I could see how that pervaded most of my life. I was shy because I was unsure whether my approach would be right; I was tentative in bed with women because I was unsure what they wanted of me; I failed to take some of the best opportunities in my business because I was unsure what was the right thing to do. As I walked around the orchard the sadness grew and tears rolled down my cheeks. I was pleased to be alone and not in an exercise. I found a corner of the orchard hidden from the main path and sat on an old tree stump, and just let myself cry. There was a lot of despair wrapped up in this issue for me — I was quite surprised and also relieved — somehow it felt good to be getting in touch with this.

It didn't seem to be more than a quarter of an hour later that I heard Barrie call out: "FIVE MINUTES TO THE NEXT EXERCISE." I walked back to the house slowly, reflecting on what I would say to my next partner. I hoped I would get another good one.

I did. It was Jan, the woman I had talked to the previous evening. Her question was, "What is another?" so for the whole forty minutes we were both aiming to discover who I was! I found it easy to share with her what had happened in the orchard, and to my surprise I found myself quietly crying while telling her. It was a surprise because I very rarely allow others to see me crying. The more I talked about being unsure the more I realised it coloured my whole life. I also realised that of all the things that Peter had said about a direct experience of oneself, the thing that attracted me most was the sense of certainty he had talked about and displayed in himself. But by the end of the exercise the issue had begun to subside and I was beginning to reflect on how I always

wanted things from people with whom I had relationships. To some degree I thought that this was prompted by Jan talking a great deal about how she was always demanding things of others.

For most of the exercise she was reporting things like: I want admiration from others; I want more from everyone I know than they are willing to give me; I want more warmth and contact from other people; I want my father to recognise me as a capable person. Some of these wants were obviously quite upsetting to her and she occasionally cried. It was another good exercise for me.

Next was lunch contemplation! Another opportunity to contemplate who it was who was eating. The lunch consisted of a bowl of vegetable soup with a freshly baked roll and a salad with cauliflower and nuts. I was totally absorbed by the different flavours and textures; everything tasted so delicious and new. I realised that I normally eat food in a rush and am also usually doing something else, in fact I always make a point of doing something else. If there's no one to talk to at a meal then I will read a book or newspaper, I never give myself the opportunity to just sit and eat quietly, putting all my attention on the food.

After lunch I felt tired so I lay on my bed for a while. I woke up with a start; Barrie was giving a "FIVE MINUTE" call. I had a slight headache. My partner in the next exercise was one of the older women on the Intensive, between fifty-five and sixty-five I would guess. She was also working on: "What is another?" and seemed really determined to work at it as hard as she could. I remembered my resolve to do the technique more persistently and in a more focused way, and realised that my resolve had lasted about ten minutes! But this new partner reminded me and we had a very good exercise together. I found her intense eye contact a bit difficult to cope with in the beginning, but by the end I appreciated it — she really listened to every word I said. She spent most of the period telling me about how bad her life with her husband was, how he always wanted sex and she didn't, how she thought he was repulsive and then felt guilty because he clearly loved her a great deal. I could really understand her struggle and it rang a few bells about the things Josephine had said before she left. For me the period was a bit jumbled; I started off telling her about my unwillingness to eat quietly, and that led to my unwillingness just to be quiet with myself and how much I had appreciated doing these things today. I thought about other things that I don't normally give myself; time to myself, time to get in touch with my feelings, time to do

nothing. And behind it all I could feel my headache growing.

After the exercise it was time for another lecture from the Master. I found it difficult to stay awake towards the end, and found my attention wandering quite often during the lecture. But I did get some useful information. Peter said that the first day was usually the worst day on an Intensive because it was the day when we withdrew from life and the normal distractions. He said it wasn't uncommon for people to suffer physical symptoms, like headaches and nausea, especially if they normally smoked cigarettes or drank a lot of strong coffee. He warned us that we might feel really tired by the evening, but that we had to keep focusing on doing the technique, no matter how tired we became. He also said that we should check that our intention was to have a direct experience of the Truth. "It's not enough just to sit there and go through the motions. You have to really intend to have this experience. You didn't get to this intensive by saying to yourself: 'Well, maybe I'll go,' or: 'I hope to get there some day'. No, you got here because you intended to get here; you set out to get here, and you made it. Those who were undecided, or who thought that hope was enough are still back home. It's harder with a direct experience because you don't know what it is that you are going for, but you can still intend. You can intend to be at one with yourself, to have direct consciousness of yourself, for there to be no separation between you and yourself. You can intend to have some experience other than your normal range of feelings, thoughts, perceptions and sensations."

That all really got to me because I had completely forgotten about the intention part of the technique. It was what my best partners had had, but I hadn't been able to put my finger on what it was precisely.

Peter also warned us that if we were doing the technique correctly then we would almost certainly run into a crisis. "A crisis is anything that you think you cannot get through. As you go for the Truth there's a part of you, which I'll call your mind which will do everything in its power to stop you. And there's a lot in its power! You might feel so ill that you cannot go on. You might feel so upset that you cannot go on. You may figure out that this is all a lot of nonsense and the sensible thing to do would be to go back home and get some of those chores finished. It might be physical, emotional or mental — or any combination of these —but it will totally get you. You'll be convinced that you can't go on. Well, at that point congratulate yourself — you are doing well, and that's why your mind is making it so tough. Just persist. Forewarned is

forearmed. A very wise man once defined discipline in this business as, 'going ahead anyway'. That's all you have to do — go ahead — face the crisis, see it through, persist — want the Truth more than you want to be Comfortable." I just hoped that my headache wasn't going to get any worse.

The period after the lecture was a silent sitting contemplation. We all just sat still and silently contemplated our question. For the first few minutes it was quite good. I was very determined to have a direct experience, whatever that was, and I had resolved really to focus my attention on doing the technique correctly. I had some thoughts about being a child and remembering my mother being in a bad mood; everything I did on such occasions seemed to make her worse; I could never do anything right. I wondered why I was remembering such things and got caught in trying to understand how this group worked. Then I had to fight off sleep. I would focus on myself, begin to contemplate and then this wave of beautiful tiredness would rise up and invite me to surrender to sleep. Sometimes it seemed quite irresistible, at other times it just made it a lot more difficult to maintain a focus. The period seemed to go on and on ... and on. Peter had said it was a twenty-minute exercise — it seemed more like hours, with the last hour being a constant struggle just to stay awake. I was really pleased when it finally came to an end.

"At your first opportunity communicate to your partner what occurred as a result of your contemplation during the sitting period, then continue doing the enlightenment technique. Find out your partner's instruction. Those of you facing the fireplace give your partner their instruction and begin." The words were always the same — and I felt reassured by that.

My next partner was a very earnest young man. He had a strange habit of pursing his lips and sucking in air just before he spoke. I was so caught up with watching this mannerism that I hardly heard what he was telling me. I reported my struggles during the sitting period and then tried to do the technique in a really focused way. I noticed that the harder I focused on myself the more my headache hurt — so I decided that straining like that wasn't the right way. During the exercise I remembered more things from my childhood — they seemed unconnected to anything else, but I communicated them anyway. I also noticed that the sense of sadness at not knowing what to do crept back once or twice. But I didn't feel any sense of closeness with my partner

— he was totally concerned with his own world and once or twice I looked up to see him watching someone else down the row. I thought: “Well, I’m not going to share anything with you Charlie,” and retreated back into my shell. I was pleased when the period ended.

After the exercise it was time for working contemplation. Barrie read out an interminably long list of jobs we could choose from; helping in the kitchen, sweeping the hall, hoovering the main room, polishing, cleaning windows, weeding, carrying logs ... It went on and on. I chose weeding in the walled garden. I thought an outdoor job might help clear my headache. I don’t remember much about the period. At one point I thought that pulling out the weeds from the vegetable patch was a bit like trying to clear out some of the junk in my head — and I also thought that the more thoroughly weeded the garden (my head) was then the more prolific the fruits would be later. A pretty metaphor — but no help with the headache.

At the end of the working period we had a snack and then it was time for a one-hour rest. I can’t remember when bed seemed so wonderful in the middle of the day. I quickly passed into a deep sleep, oblivious to the coming and going of other people in the room. After what seemed like a moment I heard the familiar call from the landing: “FIVE MINUTES TO THE NEXT EXERCISE.” With relief I found that my headache was much better, it was now just a dull ache at the bottom of my skull.

I felt a lot better by the time I reached the main room. Only half the participants were there, the rest were still on their way from the bedrooms. As I sat waiting for a new partner to plonk down in front of me I remembered a dream that I had during the rest period. I was lost in a large town and couldn’t speak the language of the people there. I was looking for a certain place and had its name written down on a piece of paper. But when I showed it to people they just shook their heads or shrugged their shoulders. I decided to give up looking and went into a church built with black and white bricks, almost like a Lego church, but very beautiful. Inside the church it was very peaceful and I knew that here I would find what I was looking for. When I showed the piece of paper to a monk he shook his head, then led me to a small crypt and showed me a gravestone — on it were the same words as on the piece of paper.

It was strange for me to remember a dream at all; I have only

remembered about half a dozen dreams in my whole life, and most of those were nightmares. This dream felt significant, and as I related it to my partner at the beginning of the next exercise, I could feel myself becoming very emotional — not sad or happy, just full of feeling. Then the bell went and I pulled myself out of the state to listen to my partner. He was annoyed about something that someone else had done during the work period — it obviously involved another participant because he wasn't saying what or who. It was quite frustrating listening to him because I really wanted to know who had done what to get him so angry. But I also admired the way that he let himself get angry without saying anything that anyone else could take as a judgement. At one point he was so livid he half hissed and half spat out through clenched teeth, "there are some people that I could cheerfully kill right now," and he gestured as if he was wringing a chicken's neck. I was surprised at how easy it was not to be affected by it all. In normal life I would be terrified by such a direct display of anger. I realised I was feeling safe here. During the rest of the exercise I kept returning to the dream or the sense of not knowing what to do, and recognising that there was some connection between the two. My partner's anger passed after two five-minute periods and then he started to cry, and explained that the only reason he was upset at what he had seen during the work period, was because he had behaved the same way towards someone in the past. I still didn't know what the behaviour was, but I felt very close to him. He was just so genuine.

"Now it's time for another eating contemplation. Remember to continue to contemplate throughout the period. It is really important not to stop, not for a moment ... Dinner is ready for you in the dining room." And sure enough it was. A bean and vegetable casserole with rice. It was delicious. As I began eating, it occurred to me that the Intensive was incredibly well organised. Our food was always ready for us — and it had only just been put out because it was piping hot. I felt very grateful towards whoever it was that prepared the food.

After dinner I lay down on the floor of the main room and contemplated who I was. By now the question had lost all meaning; a voice inside my head repeated it mechanically. But the sound of the words directed my attention towards myself, and after a while something would come into my consciousness. As I lay there looking at the ceiling I remembered a Christmas two years ago, spent at Jo's parents. We had had the most awful row, and all because her mother had been very upset by something that I had said. I didn't know what it was that had caused the

problem — and that just made matters worse. Things had become so intolerable that I went out for a walk, and when I came back Jo and her parents were surprised; they said they thought I had gone home. I was clearly unwelcome, but when I asked Jo if it would be best if I went home, she just flew into a rage and said that she would never forgive me for what I had done that day. As I remembered tears came into my eyes. True to her word she had never forgiven me, she had hardened towards me and everything I did was wrong. “FIVE MINUTES TO THE NEXT EXERCISE.”

My partner this time was the tall grey haired man I had noticed this morning. His question was: “What is life?” When I gave him the instruction I got it wrong again. I said: “Tell me what is life.” He raised his hand — and I felt awful.

One of the monitors came over and told me to give him the instruction: “Tell me what life is.” I gave the instruction and felt a tight knot in my chest and a sinking feeling in my stomach. The grey-haired man turned out to be a therapist, and he had a very kind and soft voice. Several times he seemed to be saying things to comfort me, but I could never be quite sure — he could have been talking about something different. When it was my turn I had to struggle to focus at all. I didn’t want to tell him what was happening inside; I felt ashamed of my own feelings and incompetence. I got as far as telling him I was ashamed, but didn’t say what about. Throughout the exercise I struggled with how to express what was happening — and all the time I was feeling more and more uncomfortable. My headache started to get worse and my legs hurt — presumably from sitting on cushions all day. My partner was clearly concerned for me and seemed to be half making suggestions as to what I could do to feel better. He would say things like: “I always spend some time on chairs in an intensive, especially whenever my body starts to hurt.” I was grateful for his suggestion — but also felt uncomfortable with his concern. I was relieved when the final bell went.

“Take a five minute break.” That meant that there was another exercise following straight on from this one. I slowly stood up and made a bee-line for one of the chairs being vacated at the end of the row. It was certainly a relief to sit upright with my back supported. Opposite me was an old man, probably in his sixties, overweight and scarred, but with very bright eyes. He talked with a foreign accent — might be Spanish or Greek. During the exercise with him I noticed that he rarely

stopped talking. He would just start talking about one thing, it would lead to another, and then another and so on right up to the end of his turn. He told me about his experience of a two-week intensive the previous year and how he wanted everyone to do two-week intensives. I found it a relief to sit and listen to him — it was quite entertaining. But when it was my turn his eyes seemed to pin me to the spot and I couldn't do anything but the technique. And each time I thought, "Who am I?" my head started pounding harder, the knot in my chest became tighter and I felt afraid. I described most of the physical symptoms in my communications, but it was becoming more and more of an effort just to keep going. I just wanted to close my eyes and drift off to sleep. I wanted to get away.

The old man sensed this and began to talk about some of the hard times he had had in his life. He had been in Russia during the second world war and had watched his two brothers shot by the Germans. He had watched his grandmother die of starvation a year later and had himself gone without food for a month. Tears came to his eyes as he talked of his brothers, and my problems seemed insignificant compared to his. But then it was my turn again, and the headache pounded away, I felt nauseous and struggled to remember what I was supposed to do.

The final bell was a relief. It was time for another walking contemplation. I was pleased to be able to get away from everyone, and to have some fresh air. But during the walk the pain in my chest got worse, my headache eased for a time but came back with a vengeance when I started to reflect on all the things that had occurred to me during the day. And I was feeling very tired. I began to wonder what I had let myself in for. I walked around the orchard again, and remembered the tears I had shed there earlier in the day. What was happening to me? I am normally a very unemotional and calm person — and here I was on a meditation course crying, feeling all sorts of things, being ill ... what was going on? Who was this feeling so sad? Who had a headache? Ouch! — that made it worse. This process was supposed to make me feel better, it was supposed to help me find out who I really am — but if this is who I really am I'm not so sure I want to know. In fact I'm sure I don't want to know, I don't want to be a blubbing wreck with a headache. No one else seems to be having this sort of pain — perhaps this just isn't right for me. The thoughts went round and round, on and on. I was feeling more and more desperate, and at each turn my headache seemed to get worse until in the end I had literally to hold my head to ease the pain.

“FIVE MINUTES TO THE NEXT EXERCISE.” I started back towards the house.

“At your first opportunity communicate to your partner what occurred as a result of your contemplation during the walking period, then continue doing the enlightenment technique. Find out your partner’s instruction ... those of you facing the fireplace give your partner their instruction and begin.”

The words were always the same. The bell was always the same. The question was always the same. The whole thing was beginning to be absurd — worse than absurd — it was bloody stupid. Here I was going through hell and for what? Some hocus pocus experience that only lasted a fraction of a second! I must be mad to be doing this. I communicated some of these feelings to my partner and noticed, with some satisfaction, that quite a few other people were also communicating their dissatisfaction with what was going on. My partner, a rosy cheeked, middle-aged woman, didn’t get a good deal from me. I was feeling very pissed off and was beginning to say so. But each time I started to let myself feel really angry my head just hurt so much I had to stop. I just couldn’t go on. I didn’t know what to do — everything I tried seemed to make it worse — and now the sense of wanting to be sick was growing and I felt afraid that I was actually going to be sick.

It got so bad that in the middle of my second five-minute period I raised my hand for a monitor to come. Mary was there in a moment. “Yes?” she said, “what is it?”

“I can’t go on,” I said, “I’ve got to go and lie down, I’ve got a terrible headache and I’m going to be sick. Everything I do seems to make it worse. I want to go to my bed.”

She came forward more so that she could look into my eyes, her eyes were very soft. “You can go through it,” she said, “remember what the Master said in his lecture — if you feel you cannot go on you are in a crisis — and that’s because you have been doing the technique. You just have to persist. You have to face it down, it will pass.”

“But I am physically ill,” I said, “this hasn’t got anything to do with doing the technique. There’s something wrong with me and I’ve got a headache and I’m going to be sick.”

“If you want to be sick we can bring you a bowl,” she said “Your headache is probably the result of not drinking coffee — do you normally drink a lot of coffee?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Well that’s almost certainly why you have a headache,” she said. “Just keep going, you can get through it.” She was so obviously sincere, and I could remember what the Master had said in the lecture, that I decided to continue.

I smiled wanly and said, “OK.” By now it was half way through my partner’s turn, so she quickly thanked me and then I gave her her instruction. While she was talking I reflected on what was happening —it certainly had all the characteristics of the sort of crisis the Master had talked about — that meant I was doing OK — great, I would continue. I wouldn’t let a headache defeat me.

But as if to prove who was master the headache just got worse and worse during the next two periods. Towards the end of my last period it became intolerable and I felt I just couldn’t go on. If this was just a crisis well, it had got me. The final bell went and I began to cry. I couldn’t control it. The tears just rolled down my cheeks and my chest heaved. I could half hear the Master talking about some breathing exercises and then I saw people filing out of the room. I just fell on the floor and sobbed, and sobbed ... and sobbed. I felt totally defeated, totally broken. I couldn’t do anything right, nothing could help me, no one loved me — at that thought the tears and sobs came back with more power.

Then I felt a gentle hand lifting me up, and another hand supporting my back. Peter was kneeling over me. He looked into my eyes and said, “Tell me what’s happening to you.”

I struggled with the tears and said, “I can’t do anything right, no one loves me.”

He said: “You should communicate these things to your partners; this is a safe place. And the communication lets them go. Dare to allow your partner to see your grief, and do the technique as well as you can.” As he spoke I realised that I had been holding back on the whole issue of

not being able to do things right. I hadn't said anything about the row with Josephine that I remembered earlier. And I felt totally supported by him at that moment, physically and emotionally. I looked into his eyes and just let myself cry and cry; it was an amazing experience, crying, looking into another's eyes. I felt completely accepted.

He said: "Keep going, you are doing fine, you can see it through."

I let myself cry some more and then said, "OK." I was actually feeling considerable relief — I felt as if a dam had burst. The sickness had passed and there was no longer a knot in my chest.

I sat up straight; Peter said, "Thank you," and went back to his chair. A few moments later the other participants filed back into the room.

The next exercise was the last of the day. My partner was a very young-looking woman with bright cheeks. She seemed full of energy, but then so did everyone else — I presume that the breathing exercises had perked everyone else up. When it was my turn I just let it all out. The grief about losing Jo, the despair at never being able to do the right thing, the times when I felt so alone and lost. And then I realised why I had been remembering things about my mother earlier on — I often felt that way with her. In my next five-minute turn I realised that I had spent all my life trying to do things right for my mother — for my bloody mother — the bad-tempered old cow. I was so angry — and then so sad. I felt I was being hurled around emotionally from one feeling to the next. And I kept making all these connections. How Jo was like my mother, how they both never said what they wanted but always told me off for not getting it right. SHIT, WHY DIDN'T THEY JUST SAY WHAT THEY WANTED. BECAUSE THEY JUST WANTED TO MAKE ME FEEL BAD - THE BITCHES. Good grief, was that me — shouting? YES THAT WAS ME SHOUTING. I SHOULD HAVE BEEN SHOUTING YEARS AGO INSTEAD OF LETTING THEM WALK ALL OVER ME. And that was what I didn't do right. I never looked out for myself. I was always so worried about doing what they wanted me to do that I never thought of what I wanted. It just went on and on. I felt like a new man emerging from an enormous struggle. I was now crying with joy — and gratitude. Gratitude for this partner, just sitting there, listening to me, accepting whatever I said. Gratitude to Peter and Mary for seeing me through. And gratitude to myself for giving myself this chance.

By the time the final bell went I was totally, but totally exhausted. But at the same time I felt refreshed. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before, crying and shouting — and with other people around! But it was OK. I realised that during the day different people had in fact been crying and shouting too — I wasn't the only one.

As I looked around the room everything looked a lot brighter. I noticed that several other people looked to be in pain, and almost everyone was very tired — the perkiness from the breathing exercises seemed to have disappeared. I dimly heard the Master saying something about a snack in the dining room and how important it was to continue to contemplate our questions right up to the moment of falling asleep. I couldn't face anything; I crawled upstairs, took my clothes off, slipped into my sleeping bag and passed out into a deep, deep sleep.

CHAPTER THREE: DAY TWO

I found myself in a cold stone room. Looking out of the window I could see into a small, bare courtyard. There was a gallows in the centre, fenced off by iron railings – but the gate looked well used. With relief I discovered that the door was open – somehow I knew it should have been locked. I crept down a passage, very frightened, but determined to find a way out. It seemed as though I had been in the cold room for a very long time; each time I passed a window looking out onto the open countryside the brightness of the sky hurt my eyes. I climbed up some stairs and found myself in a large empty room — it used to be the armoury. I walked along its length; it was very, very long. At the end I went up some more stairs and into a little turret. This was an observation room, full of an old wizard's tools — a telescope, a retort, books, a balance and several vials containing strange coloured liquids. I belonged in this room; it used to be my room! Suddenly I knew a way out; I just had to drink some of the yellow liquid, or was it the red one?

“GOOD MORNING. TODAY IS THE SECOND DAY OF YOUR INTENSIVE. YOU HAVE FIFTEEN MINUTES TO GET DRESSED AND BE DOWNSTAIRS READY FOR THE FIRST ENLIGHTENMENT EXERCISE.”

I struggled to get out of the dream – oh yes, who was that dreaming? Who is this waking up? I lay quietly, letting the question sink into me. It seemed to go down and down and down. Yesterday it had been in my head all the time. Now the question was going down, through my chest and reaching into my stomach. It felt good to be there. And it was effortless; it just sank, leaving behind a sense of quiet – and openness. As I lay there thoughts bubbled up about the dream — the cold room was my head; I had lived all my life in my head and never knew that the sun was shining outside. I felt tears forming in my eyes, partly with sadness and partly with the joy of releasing myself from an old prison. But by now the room was almost empty – and I still wasn't out of bed. I jumped up, pulled my clothes on quickly and headed off for the bathroom.

There were long queues at all the upstairs bathrooms, so I went downstairs to the toilet by the dining room. There was a small washbasin there, enough for me to clean my teeth and splash my face with water. A minute later I was in the main room looking around to

see who had not yet got a partner. Most of the people sitting on their own I had already worked with, so I went and sat at an empty pair of cushions, waiting to see what today would bring.

It brought a young woman, about twenty-five years old, wearing heavy glasses and a smile. I remembered her from the night before — she had looked awful, now she was smiling and bright as a button. I smiled at her — I guessed she must have had a similar memory of me! “Give me your attention for a moment.” It was the Master, standing relaxed and smiling in front of his chair. “Remember that all you have to do is to do the technique, and do it again and again. You don’t have to force anything to happen, you shouldn’t resist whatever happens - just intend to have a direct experience of the Truth, focus on yourself, be open to whatever occurs and then communicate that to your partner. You’ll find it easier to do the technique today – but it will still require persistence from you. Now find out your partner’s instruction ... those of you facing the fireplace give your partner their instructions and begin.”

In unison about twenty people said: “Tell me who you are,” mixed in with a few, “Tell me what life is,” and, “Tell me what another is.” It really did feel easier today. I recounted my dream and my reflections on it to my partner. On her turn she described how she had gone to bed feeling certain that she would leave the next morning. But now she felt so full of energy, and was really committed to going for the Truth. She said that the experience of getting through the tough time had shown her a strength she didn’t know she had. My turn again; I related some more of what had happened the previous evening. It was easy to share, in fact I felt as if I just wanted to tell everyone in the room what had happened. It was still amazing to me. Her turn, and she quietly began to tell me some of the thoughts that had driven her to despair yesterday evening – how she felt she was worthless and that no one cared about her and how she had been mistreated by her husband before she left him. There were tears in her eyes, and behind the tears a glint of hope and warmth. My turn, and I felt that we were just going deeper and deeper into something new, this partner and I. I felt so close to her – in a sense it felt indecent. The only previous times that I can remember feeling this close to anyone was in bed with a woman – and here I was talking intimately with a woman without even knowing her name. And it was such a relief – I didn’t have to perform sexual miracles to be able to share like this. I communicated that too. Then it was her turn, and it was obvious that the closeness was affecting her too. We smiled at each other with tears in our eyes and love in our hearts. The final bell came

and it was as if a magic spell had been broken – and I remembered feeling that I was a wizard in the dream.

“It is now time for a physical exercise period. You should aim to move your body vigorously for the whole of this period, which is fifteen minutes long. You are going to be sitting a lot again today, so give your body a treat; have a brisk walk or a run, do yoga or running on the spot. Do whatever you feel is appropriate. And all the time continue to contemplate your question. At the end of the period you will be called in for some tea.”

I elected to go for a short run. I remembered the pain in my legs yesterday and thought that they probably needed the exercise most. I ran around the garden – about twenty other people were doing the same. It was a fabulous morning. The sun was up in a clear sky, the grass was still moist from the dew and there was a crisp clarity in the air.

During the tea break I noticed that most people were looking good this morning. One old man, rather overweight, was looking very sad and the woman who hadn't wanted to take off her wedding ring was crying – in fact I think that every time I had seen her she had been crying. A man with very frizzy hair was still out of breath from whatever exercise he had been doing – he smelt a bit, but it was fresh, human smell, not at all objectionable. I also realized that I felt very warm towards everyone; it was something we were all doing together. Although we weren't talking in the normal social way (the silence during the breaks was now very welcome) there was a very strong sense of being in it together. I felt supportive towards the others, and also felt support from them. This was all at an unspoken level, but it was very nice. For once I felt I was "in" a group – and that I didn't have to find out the “right thing to do”.

In the next exercise I partnered a woman who had an extremely irritating habit of looking down each time I began to speak. In the first five minutes I waited until she looked up and then repeated what I had said – but she just looked down straight away again. I began to feel really annoyed at her – who did she think she was anyway? Somewhere in my head I could see that it was just a habit she was into – but I really didn't like it. By the end of the exercise I was beginning to raise my voice about how pissed off I was at people who annoyed me. I nearly said, “at people who look away,” but stopped myself just in time – but boy, did I want to say, “at people who look away”!

Next it was breakfast. I was able to contemplate my question most of the way through breakfast – who had got so angry? Sometimes I got caught in wondering what had happened to the wonderful warm feelings of earlier – but remembered the Master’s advice – just accept whatever happens, don’t force it, don’t resist anything. The exercise after breakfast was with the woman who didn’t want to take off her wedding ring. It turned out that her husband had died eighteen months earlier and that she had not really allowed herself to grieve over his death. No wonder she was crying so much – and all started by such a small thing!

I began to see how all the aspects of the Intensive fitted together – on the first day everything seemed designed to shock everyone out of whatever pattern they were stuck in in life – and in the place of the normal pattern there was the pattern of the Intensive, with its regularity, schedule, rules – and always the same old question. I overheard someone down the row say, “You know, by the end of this intensive I will have been asked that stupid question one hundred and forty times by thirty-five different people – and on top of that I probably ask myself the same fucking thing ten times for every one time someone else says it. I think this is a brain-washing technique – not a way to expand my consciousness.” I chuckled inwardly – the question certainly seemed totally absurd to me now – at least to my intellect – but not to all of me.

My contemplation had continued to deepen throughout the morning and there was a sense in which I felt that the question was now like a point of something right in the middle of my abdomen – and to contemplate it I just had to put my attention there. By just sitting there with my attention focused on that point everything seemed very easy. And after a time something would occur to me. Most of that exercise I was reporting things about feeling shy and how I normally coped with it. In the exercise following straight on I went through a very quiet patch with not much occurring. But it still felt all right. My partner was feeling very negative about the whole process and was talking about wanting to go home. He said, “This is just a total waste of time. I haven’t discovered anything new about myself – just the same old stuff that has been coming up in therapy for years – it’s always the same – doing this won’t change it. I would be better off spending the weekend in bed resting.” He was really quite bitter about it all. I wondered what the staff felt hearing people going on like this; they were obviously totally committed to the process – and here was this man just

dismissing the whole thing as a waste of time. I found myself wondering whether it would be best for him to go – I was getting annoyed with his complaining after a time – he wasn't a good partner. The next period was a walking contemplation. As I walked slowly around the garden I found it easy to maintain a sense of contemplating – it was as if a door had been opened inside me, and now it was open it was easy to travel through it into the depths of who I am. I am a quiet man, I am gentle and loving, I like children, I miss being with my sons, I like sharing with other people ... I like feeling love for others. My fear of being unacceptable is what holds me back most ... I am still worried about doing the right thing – God, will that fear ever leave me! I began to appreciate the frustration being expressed by my last partner. Maybe I should just learn to live with the fear rather than get rid of it. I am a beginner in this business. I wonder what it's like for people here doing their tenth Intensive. Did they continue to find out new things about themselves, or were they simply trying to get a direct experience – whatever that was? Whoops! I haven't been intending to have a direct experience recently. I had been so caught up with the newness of this inner exploration that I had forgotten what I was supposed to be doing. What would it be like to be directly conscious of this one, of me? How would I know? Who would be conscious of whom? It was getting crazy; it didn't make sense any more.

“FIVE MINUTES.” The call rang out around the garden and slowly all the walkers headed back towards the house. I was reluctant to return; I was really enjoying this new freedom.

My next partner was a very quiet middle-aged woman dressed in a sort of boiler suit. She had very striking eyes and a sort of fixed smile. I wasn't sure about her at the beginning, but after a couple of five-minute periods I felt very warm and close to her. She was quietly going through hell. She was working on, “What is another?” and was facing some very painful memories about the rows she had had with her first husband just before he died in an accident. She was struggling to forgive herself. At the same time she had been starting to stand up for herself in the rows, for the first time in her life – and she didn't want to go back on that. She didn't make a lot of fuss about the obvious internal agony she felt. Her eyes would sometimes moisten with tears, but she never raised her voice – she just grimly did the technique. It was only by really listening to her that I was able to see the inner struggle – I wonder how many people in my life I neglect by not listening to them like this? Does everyone have their own version of hell?

“OH FUCK THIS I’VE HAD ENOUGH, I’M GOING.” With that the man I had partnered before the walk stood up and started to walk towards the door. The Master was out of his seat in a flash and gently put his hands on the man’s shoulders and began to guide him back towards his seat. The man turned and faced the Master, pushing him away angrily.

“FUCK OFF YOU LIAR. THIS IS A FUCKING NONSENSE. YOU WON’T HOODWINK ME ANY MORE.” The Master just stood there looking him in the eye. Almost everyone in the room was paying attention to the drama taking place in the middle of the floor – a few souls were communicating what was happening to them and all the listening partners were still watching their partners, but almost everyone was sitting as if holding their breath.

After a while he said, “You should continue with the technique, communicate what’s coming up to your partner.”

“YOUR FUCKING TECHNIQUE - ITS NOT GETTING ME ANYWHERE – AND I’VE BEEN TELLING THAT TO EVERYONE ALL MORNING.”

“Then you should come and talk to me about how you are doing the technique,” said Peter simply. “If you do it correctly it will work.”

“CRAP,” said the man, “YOU ARE JUST A CON AGENT AND I’M GOING – NO MORE OF YOUR STUPID STORIES FOR ME.”

“You are free to go,” said the Master, “but it’s clear to me that right now you have run into something you don’t want to face – which means you have been doing the technique correctly. You now have an opportunity to face whatever it is that is coming up – come and tell me about it.” With that he walked back to his chair – and slowly the man followed. Everyone breathed again – and the room broke out in a general hubbub of voices. All this happened while it was my turn to communicate – so when the man and Peter were ensconced in conversation I reported my fear and surprise at how the whole thing had been handled. I watched Peter talk to the man now – he was just giving this man his attention as if nothing untoward had happened – and I could see that the man was beginning to cry.

I was more shaken than I realized by the drama. During the lunch

period that followed I went back over the scene several times. What puzzled me most was the Master's reaction – or rather total lack of reaction – and to the whole thing. He seemed just to ignore the outburst and concentrate on giving the man advice on how to proceed. I recognized that in life I had seen people handle such situations in one of two ways – either they shouted back and the person who shouted loudest got their way – or the person shouted at was so frightened that they cried, gave in or just went away. Now I had seen a third way of coping – and it seemed so simple – and so natural. I saw how I was a coward; I would do anything to avoid such a confrontation – well, maybe I could learn to change that – I had let too many bullies get away with things that I knew were wrong. Following on the same track I remembered a similar realization after watching a film about Gandhi – then I had seen my own cowardice – and had seen that it was inner strength, not physical strength, that counted. For some reason I began to cry. I felt grateful that there were some good people in the world, people who could show me how to behave. And I could also feel a resolve inside myself to start to behave better myself. I could do most of what I did in life better – I could listen to people better, I could cease to be controlled by my own fear, I could say what I thought was right ... I was so caught up in these thoughts and realisations that I hadn't finished my lunch when the five-minute call was given. I continued to eat until the washing-up queue disappeared, by which time the plate was clear – so I washed up and went to the main room.

The only place left was opposite the woman who shouted a lot. Oh well, I thought, an excellent opportunity to put aside my fear and face this. She actually looked very young and quite fragile, but I would guess she was probably over twenty-five. Sometimes she spoke in this quiet mousy voice about people she liked and disliked. Then she would just let rip: "I HATE PEOPLE WHO JUDGE ME. I HATE PEOPLE WHO DON'T SEE ME -THE BASTARDS." And when she let rip it was full blast – much louder than the man in the previous period. I found that if I steadily kept looking at her eyes then the words just went past me. Once I stopped looking and was totally caught by the words – and I felt guilty and weak – and she just shouted even louder. By the next period I found I could maintain my eye contact with her quite easily – and in fact I saw that when she was shouting she was actually frightened – she wasn't really angry at all, there was fear, not hatred, in her eyes. In her next five-minute period she actually began to talk about her fear, and in her last period she was quietly crying about it all. I was very moved by her tears; they were very real, very desperate. It felt like

a little victory – my first test of standing up to anger – passed.

Lecture was next. It was a relief to pay attention to someone else – I was also intrigued by what Peter was going to talk about. “Well, you are beginning to find out what a project this is. It’s not easy going for the truth. There are times when this place resembles a battle ground – people screaming and crying, hurting and in pain – and all you are doing is sitting there, in this nice warm room, asking yourselves the question, Who am I? We laughed – yes it was absurd – yes it was tough. “You see, the harder you go for the Truth the harder your mind is going to try to stop you. It’s been in control all your life, it thinks it already knows the truth, it doesn’t want to know about any other ideas. In every religion and mythology this struggle is documented – the Pilgrim’s Progress, stories of heroes going out and fighting dragons and monsters to get to the beautiful princess. These are all descriptions of this struggle. One of the more celebrated descriptions is that in the Bhagavad Gita. To the uninitiated reader this is simply a description of a bloody battle between a hero and armies and monsters. But the monsters have sanskrit names which mean things like jealousy, greed, hatred, arrogance and ego. So there is another level of meaning here and at this level the battle the hero is really fighting is with his own mind – and it is an awesome struggle. While fighting one monster he found that when he cut off its head three more grew in its place. If you start to fight arrogance it can be like that – you struggle and struggle and then you win a bit, and you say to yourself, ‘Boy, aren’t I a good person, I just defeated my arrogance – I’m much better than that person over there who thinks himself so superior.’ Or you face your fear, and you are afraid of the fear of being afraid. You notice that you are being critical and judgemental and you are critical of the judge inside yourself! It just goes on and on. You just have to see it through. And it’s the most difficult thing that anyone can ask you to do.

“I have my own favourite version of the metaphorical journey. It begins by climbing the mountains of the intellect – you go through a stage of presenting all the ‘answers’ to your question. For some people this stage can last a day, for others a few hours, and for still others many days. But finally the intellect is exhausted – it gives up trying to answer the question. Next you encounter the bogs of despair – or in Pilgrim’s case the ‘slough of despond’. Here hope deserts you, you wonder why you ever started this thing – and some of you who have taken Intensives before may remember; ‘Oh yes – last last time I got to this stage I vowed I would never do another one of these again.

We laughed, and the Master chuckled at his own story. “You know even Charles Berner, the man who started this business, made that resolution on his first Intensive. ‘I’ll never do another one of these,’ he said to himself – but the call of the Truth was too strong – he took lots more.

“When you have struggled through the bogs, then you may enter the forests of emotions. Here you can get really entangled with feelings – things that get you going round and round in circles for hours and hours. Here you should know that it is essential that you just keep doing the technique – it got you into the state and it can get you out again. Finally you struggle free of the forest and then you find yourself in a desert – a real empty desert. This is a totally featureless landscape – absolutely nothing. You contemplate and it’s like looking into a dark bottomless pit – there’s nothing there. Some people are driven crazy by this stage – they think it’s awful to have an empty mind. But do you know how long traditional meditation techniques take to get to this stage? Years! And here you are in that state after two, maybe three days. You should rejoice! At last part of your mind is quiet enough for something else to occur. If you persist through this stage then at some point, in the distance, you will see this beautiful land – a place where you feel blissful, where everything you look at is beautiful. Those awful partners of yesterday are suddenly like angels ... ooh, this is it! you think, this is great ... No it’s not! It’s just another state. It is no better to hang on to good states than bad states – they are just states that you go through. Don’t get caught here – keep doing the technique – you must persist in wanting the Truth – not just to feel good. So you persist – you carry on, and after a while you see it – the beautiful crystal palace. OOOOOH!! This is too much – oh wow! this is absolutely divine – oh! I never imagined anything could be so beautiful. You just stare in awe. You go up to the Master and say: ‘I’ve seen it – and it’s so beautiful, I never knew.’ And he will say – now get inside it. There is still a separation between you and it – between you and what you are seeing. Remember that what you want is a direct experience of the Truth – a state of no separation.

“So you go back and continue to do the technique. You get back to the crystal palace – and you start to explore it to find a way in. But there are no windows – no doors – there is no way in. At this point you may adopt one of a number of strategies. Some people just sit down and weep – they give up – there’s no way in, they have been defeated at the

last. Others, of a more tough nature, back up a few hundred yards, put their head down and they charge – they charge straight at the palace ... and krumpf – they hurt their head. No matter how hard they try they cannot break into the palace of Truth. What you should know is that the only way to get into that palace is to intend to be there. You cannot make it happen. That's a tough one. Your mind will simply freak out at that. 'Oh yes I can, I can make it happen — if I just do the technique a little better, if I just promise to be a really good person, if I can just get the Master to like me more.' There's no end to the ways your mind will squirm on that one. But the fact of the matter is that this change of state of consciousness cannot be forced – it either happens or it doesn't. You set up the conditions best by doing the technique – and from then on you just have to persist – whether or not you think it can happen for you, you just persist anyway. And if you are carried into the palace, into that other state of consciousness, then you'll know why I am urging you on – why the beauty of the palace or the blissful feelings are as nothing compared to that moment of union with the Truth. Of all the different people I have seen go through this or similar processes, on one thing they are all agreed – it was worth it. No matter what they went through, no matter how tough it was, no matter how long they took — they said: 'I would do it again for that moment.' Such is the power of the Truth.

“Now don't expect to go literally through all the stages I have been talking about. I have been talking metaphorically – you probably won't see a desert or a crystal palace – but you may well have equivalent experiences – things that hold you up or take you off the technique. All you have to do, all you can do, is to intend to have a direct experience, to focus on yourself, or life or another, be open to what occurs and then fully communicate that – then go back, and intend again.

“Almost every time you communicate you will be communicating stuff from your mind – things that have to be cleared away to make room for the Truth. What you are saying might have some validity – but you are not directly experiencing whatever it is – and you'll know this when you communicate. But one time you might have a direct experience and not know it – until you communicate it – then you'll know it – if you fully present it you will fully connect with it. So don't hold back on your communications. Fully present what has come up. If it's not the truth it will go away all the quicker – and if it is the truth then it won't go away, it will stick and the more fully you communicate it the better you'll know it. Some of you are still reporting what occurs, talking as if

it's not happening to you – dare to present it fully. Dare to be it for that moment – it is by being it that you enter into union with the Truth – not by talking about it.”

He went on to talk about refinements to the way in which we do the technique – things to look out for. Throughout the talk everyone sat as if spellbound listening to this Master. It was inspiring – well, at least I felt totally inspired. I also felt that he really knew what we were going through – he knew how tough it was, and he really wanted us to make it through. But as he made clear time and time again, only we could do it, we had to face our own inner demons and travel our own journey to the end.

During the sitting contemplation which followed the lecture I found that I could now hold my attention on myself easily. And as I did so it was as if I was entering an ever larger internal space. At one point I saw images of beautiful caves, one after another, and I was travelling through them. Another time I felt I was in an enormous internal church – and I felt quite small, humble and in awe of something. Towards the end of the period I started to feel really sleepy and had to struggle to keep awake – but not for long – soon it was time for the next enlightenment exercise – another round of five-minute periods with a new partner.

There was now a new sense of purpose in the room. Maybe I was just projecting my own feelings about what was going on – or maybe everyone else had also been inspired by the lecture. It didn't matter. I noticed several moments of perfect silence during the period – when all the contemplating partners were contemplating together, none of them was communicating. Each time it occurred I got a sense of excitement, as if something was about to happen. And the first person to break the silence always did so reverently – as if they too felt the atmosphere. I continued to feel like an underground explorer in my inner world – I went on boat trips across underground lakes, explored beautiful golden caves and was generally amazed at the brightness and vividness of these internal images – it was like watching a movie running inside my head. My partner, a rather serious and smart looking man, was reporting his amazement that it had taken him so long to see quite obvious things about himself – how he always wanted to be in control, how he always thought he was right, how he automatically assumed that he was better than other people. I had to stop myself from laughing at his final remark: “I wonder whether everyone imagines that

they are better than other people?” It was such a crazy image, all these people wandering around, each thinking they were better than all the others – and it was probably true too!

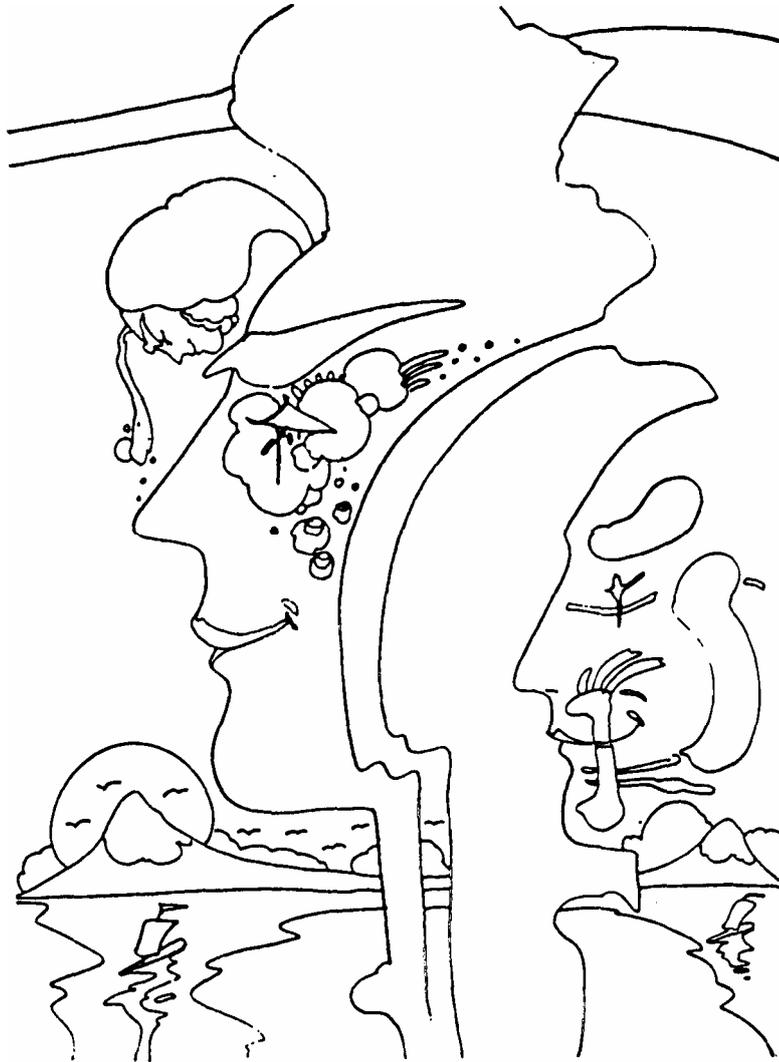
Then it was time for work period.

The two monitors entered the room and it was only then that I realised that we had been alone with the Master since just after lunch. Barrie read out the list of jobs again. I elected to do the same job as yesterday – it was a good job and I felt I would be able to contemplate well whilst doing it. And I was right. It was quite different squatting in the garden contemplating – I felt quite alone, even though there were other people not far away.

I spent quite a lot of the time reflecting on all that had happened in the incredibly long day and a half that I had been at this place. I wondered how much more could happen – I felt that I had already accomplished more in this time than in years of thinking about myself or talking things over with friends. What made this process so powerful? All too soon I heard the now familiar refrain: “Five Minutes,” and began to tidy up and head back towards the house. Now it would be time for a snack and then a rest period. I was tired and ready to rest.

I woke up with a start. The room was quiet; three of the other men sharing the room were still sleeping soundly. I couldn't see or hear any reason why I should have woken up so suddenly. Who woke up? Who woke who up? Why “I” did – “I” wanted to get on with this, this was exciting. I felt fully awake now and full of energy. Who has all this energy? ... Nothing ... Who just observed that there was nothing? Who just asked that question? There's clearly someone in there – he is the one who observes what comes up and communicates it ... But that's the one I want to experience directly! How can that one see itself? Who is it who is asking these questions? ... Nothing. It was like looking into a starless black sky, with a sense of expectancy and urgency, waiting for something to appear. I was very calm – but at the same time expectant and excited. I decided to get up and spend the remaining time walking. I had only just got downstairs however, when Mary gave a five minute-call for the next enlightenment exercise.

I walked outside for a few minutes, breathing in the fresh air deeply. Looking at the sky was the same as looking inwards – it was empty of form but full of something. Who is it who thinks such things? Who?



WHO AM I?

Who is it? My next partner was a small, wiry man, probably in his mid-fifties. If he had had a small goatee beard and been dressed in a cloak he would have been my archetypal wise old man. It felt good partnering him. I described to him what had been happening to me during the work, snack and rest periods. As I talked about it I realized that it felt as if I had shifted down a level. I was now quite aware of being closer to myself than before. In fact the way I described it was that there was now less stuff between my awareness and the one who was aware – previously there had been piles of thoughts and feelings and ideas – now there was an emptiness – but still a gap. My partner didn't say very

much about himself because there wasn't anything to report – he contemplated for long periods of time in each five-minute period and simply said things like, “It's very peaceful in here, I feel very relaxed and safe, very content, and there is nothing disturbing my awareness.”

Even though he was not reporting any deep personal secrets or despair I felt very close to this man; he was so simply sincere and open. And he was a very good listening partner – even when I contemplated for a long time with my eyes closed I still felt his attention on me, and whenever I opened my eyes, there he was, quietly and steadily looking and listening. At one point I had a fantasy about spending a lot of time with this man sitting by a camp fire up in some foothills – I didn't know how to communicate it without involving him – so I left it.

Next on the schedule was dinner, another eating contemplation period. At a point during the dinner one man, sitting in the corner on his own, burst into hysterical giggles. The giggles proved to be infectious and a few others started to laugh at his giggling. Then another man was caught with a giggling fit with a mouthful of food – and as he spluttered it over his plate almost everyone around him started to laugh or smile. There was something about the silence that made the situation even more hilarious – I can remember times at school when we were told to be quiet when giggles and laughter seemed totally irresistible – and it was similar now – though, of course, no one had said that we had to be quiet. In a way the laughing brought the group closer together; we were sharing in another way – rather like being a bunch of naughty children together. This was heightened by one of the monitors, Barrie, coming into the room and saying, in a very serious voice, “Contemplate your question.” The noise quietened down and people returned to their food and their question.

After dinner I partnered another attractive woman. She was about thirty and had very alluring eyes – I could imagine her being very, very seductive should she choose to be. But here she was working on her question just like everyone else and after the first few minutes I stopped seeing her as a potential bed-mate and just listened to her story. The giggling during dinner had obviously prompted school memories for her too – memories of being at a boarding convent school. It sounded horrible. I thought nuns were supposed to be loving and kind – but these she was describing were verging on the sadistic. One image affected me very strongly – one punishment used at the school was to force the girl to stand for several hours at the end of a very cold, stone

corridor wearing just a pair of knickers. My partner described a time she had been unjustly punished in this way and how she felt totally humiliated by the experience. She was fourteen at the time and was very shy of her new breasts, but she wasn't allowed to cover herself in any way.

Although I was moved by what my partner was describing in her turns, and although there was often a great deal of noise in the room, my own contemplation continued to be very simple, with nothing really happening. I closed my eyes, put my attention on me, the one who observes what happens, intending to be at one with that one, and then waiting ... and sensing this enormous sense of emptiness, of nothingness. As I explained to my partner, it is rather difficult to put into words because it is almost the total absence of anything, and words tend to evoke the idea of there being something present.

There was another enlightenment exercise following straight on from the first. In the second I had another woman partner, this time an American with a very full sense of presence. She was into a fantasy about travelling through space and communing with the stars. I was still looking into this enormous emptiness. Other people in the room were going through some very loud things. The man who had started the giggling at dinner continued to see everything in a hilarious fashion and periodically burst out with uncontrollable laughter. The man who had wanted to leave earlier in the day was getting angry again, but this time at all the noise in the room – it was apparently distracting him from his contemplation. The woman who had cried for more than a day and a half about her wedding ring and dead husband had been infected by the giggles – and now she was singing songs that came to her when she contemplated. There were two very touching snatches of song – one sounded like a beautiful requiem, the other a song of celebration for the new day. I caught a glimpse of her face – it was totally transformed – she was now bright and alive, with colour in her cheeks ... and she had that look in her eyes! Had she had an experience? Or was it just breaking out from her time of grief and sorrow that put the sparkle there? How could anyone tell? Towards the end of the exercise I noticed that the Master was standing watching her – he seemed pleased – but was it just to see her happy or because she had had an experience? Whatever it was, she and everyone around her were enjoying it enormously and there was a sense of joy and excitement throughout the room.

At the end of the period the Master gave some advice. “This is a build-up process – what that means is that as you persist in going for the Truth you build up the energy you need to break through into the other state of consciousness – into the enlightened state. It is important that you don’t waste that energy. The second evening is often characterized by very high energy states – that’s fine – but don’t blow it. Direct your energy into wanting to have a direct experience – don’t just let off steam and have a good time. Keep your focus – through good states and bad ones – persist. Now it is time for a walking contemplation period. During this period you should maintain your contemplation – only walk as fast as you can contemplate. You may sit but should not lie down during this period. It is a silent contemplation period – the only exception to that is if you wish to come and talk to me or the monitors. You will be called five minutes before the next exercise.

The room sobered up immediately. There was still the sense of excitement – but it seemed to be directed back into doing the technique. I guessed he’d done it dozens of times before, but I was nevertheless impressed by the way that he had taken the group’s energy and directed it back on course – he was like the helmsman on this ship we were all in together. I felt in good hands – he obviously knew where we were going.

By the time of the evening walk the sun had already gone down, so the landscape was illuminated by that characteristic twilight light – and and this evening the colours were all pastel, and all tinged with mauve. I felt I was walking in a magic land. The sky was clear and already a few stars were visible in the east. It was beautiful to watch all these fellow travellers slowly walking around this beautiful English country garden, some stopping to gaze in wonder at the beauty of a flower, others steadily pacing along the gravel paths, and still others sitting on rocks, logs or low walls just looking at this magic world. Tears came to my eyes, tears of joy at being here, at seeing this and sharing it with these other travellers of the inner world. I had a powerful sense of belonging; this is where I should always be – everything was so simple and natural. Nothing was any effort – and I felt such love for all these people. And I didn’t even know their names! And that didn’t matter either.

As it got darker and darker the scene went through a thousand and one changes. The colours softened and slowly disappeared altogether, the people in the shadows disappeared – only to emerge later when they

moved to another spot. With surprise I realized that I had forgotten to contemplate my question – I had been so enraptured. But it didn't seem to matter. The sense of belonging, of rightness, of simple love for others – that seemed more important than anything else.

And then: "FIVE MINUTES," and it was time to head back towards the house, put my shoes and coat away and re-enter the ... stage? Lion's den? No ... to get back on board this ship and start rowing again.

My partner was a very, very large woman with a masculine-looking face. She must have weighed twenty stones. But there was something about her ... Earlier in the intensive I had heard her swearing a lot – especially about men, her father in particular. But now she seemed much, much softer. She was working on: "What is another?"

I went first and described to her the beauty I had witnessed during the walk, and the sense of belonging and rightness – especially the belonging and rightness. They were new experiences for me, at least at the depth that I had then experienced them. I kept repeating the words as if there was something else in there that I wasn't quite getting.

When it was her turn she just started to cry – very gently. She said "God has been so kind to me, I just never knew, I never knew ... Oh God why have I ever mistreated them so ..." and she was lost in tears for a while. "Others are just so beautiful," she said. "I never knew what the word 'divine' meant before this evening. Now I know. It means 'divine' ... there is no other word for it. I just want to kneel down and worship everyone. I want to pray for forgiveness for every time that I have ever mistreated another person." She was lost in tears again for a while. Then it was my turn again and I felt overflowing with love. It wasn't the sort of love I paid much attention to before – it wasn't a sexual love, nor a demanding, wanting-to-be-with type of love – it was just an overwhelming sense of ... well, pleasure, at seeing another being, joy at their existence, devotion to whatever they wanted from me ... and I was so full up, I felt I would burst. I smiled and smiled – and this twenty-stone woman just smiled and smiled at me – and to my amazement I started to feel sexually aroused. I couldn't believe it! I couldn't imagine a less desirable woman – she even had hair on her chin and big flabby arms that rippled when she laughed ... and here I was being turned on to her! It was obviously nothing to do with what she looked like! But it was real enough – in fact if it continued much longer I was going to find it very uncomfortable to sit cross legged!

Ding – phew – saved by the bell! Ding. “Thank you.” Ding. “Tell me what another is.”

It transpired that in the exercise before the walk she had had a direct experience of her partner – who was a man. She had spent the last ten years hating men, running women’s liberation groups, organizing lesbian societies and magazines – and here, suddenly, crushingly, she had experienced this man directly – and she experienced him as being divine. Her tears alternated between the joy of discovery and the pain of recognising how she had mistreated men in the last few years And some of her women friends. I didn’t fully understand all the connections she was making – she seemed to be clicking on insights at the rate of ten a minute – and it was hard to keep up. My understanding was that she had also directly experienced other people during the walking period and had realized that everyone was divine and that the only correct way to behave towards other human beings was to treat them as divine beings. She also saw the many ways that she held back her love for others by her ideas and beliefs. “Goddammit I’m so full of shit and ideas that there’s no room for love in my life! Well that’s going to change! Oh those people – they are there all the time – just carrying on being divine ...“

Her eyes opened even wider; her face was filled with love and adoration and tears streamed from her eyes – and then from my eyes too – there was no way I could stop it. We just looked at each other through the tears with love and smiles ... and I got it – I a glimpse of what she meant by the divine in others, and it took my breath away.

Ding – damn that bell! – Ding. “Thank you.” Ding. “Tell me who you are.”

I didn’t know what to say. I felt totally overwhelmed, so full I couldn’t stand it – so I closed my eyes. There was an incredible buzzing in my head which soon became intolerable – so I opened my eyes again. I felt like a child totally at a loss as to what to say or do – so I pouted my lips together and flipped them with my finger, making a silly bubbling sound.

“This is crazy,” I said. “I haven’t the foggiest idea what’s happening to me – but it’s wonderful, whatever it is.” Slowly the energy calmed down. By the end of the five minutes I was more or less able to contemplate again, and was communicating things about how my

sexuality was completely constrained by culturally fostered ideas of what was and wasn't beautiful. By the end of the whole exercise I was beginning to feel exhausted – I couldn't take much more of this!

Now it was time for breathing exercises. My God, what a long way I had come since the previous evening – whew! The breathing exercises were done on the lawn alongside the house. We all trooped out into the fresh evening air and found a space where we could swing our arms around. Mary then led us through a series of exercises that involved breathing in set ways whilst moving our arms and bodies in particular postures. At one point we had to whirl our arms around whilst holding our breath – and a few people collapsed into paroxysms of giggles at this point. Towards the end it started to spit with rain. On one exercise we had to place our hands on our hips and breathe in whilst leaning backwards. Just as we all leant back a gust of rain came down, wetting everyone's face – at which point most of the group burst into laughter – this really did seem bizarre!

The laughter carried on into the next exercise. One person tried to stop laughing and started to snort, and it sounded a bit like a pig. Someone else began clucking – and then a loud voice from the end of the row said, "Well in this farmyard there were two pigs ..." Everyone roared with laughter. Someone else mooed like a cow. Another loud voice said – "You never see cows doing enlightenment intensives – they're much too sane to need to do this!" Now the room was in uproar with laughter – many of the listening partners had given up and were rolling around laughing with tears streaming down their faces. Peter got up from his chair and purposefully strode down the aisle between the two rows. Order was generally restored. There was another outburst when someone else said, loud enough for us all to hear: "What do you think a schizophrenic cow would be like?" But the Master's presence down the row reminded us all why we were here – and what he had said earlier about directing our energy into the process. By the end of the period I, and I think everyone else, was back on course – striving to have union with themselves, or life or another.

There was a snack and one more exercise before the end of the day. During the snack period there was an occasional outburst of more giggling, but it had lost its edge. Most people were now concentrating on their question again. During the last exercise, which I shared with an eager, bespectacled man who was into cycling and yoga, I returned to the vast emptiness once more. In a way I was pleased to be back there –

I had had enough of the overwhelming feelings from earlier in the evening. By the end of the day I wasn't completely exhausted, as on the previous night. Indeed most people still looked quite fresh and alive. But when my head hit the pillow I recognized that it was indeed time for sleep – I began to contemplate who I was and a beautiful sense of oblivion just crept up over me, coming up from my toes and enveloping me like some enormous blanket.

CHAPTER FOUR: DAY THREE

When I woke up it was still dark; everyone else was still fast asleep. I vaguely remembered a dream about a waterfall. It was a very beautiful waterfall and I had to find a way through it into a treasure cave behind it – but I was too afraid to just walk under the water. An old Indian was in another dream. He would never give me a simple answer to a question. I always felt frustrated by his response, and yet some time later I would see that what he had said was simply the truth and, had I been able to hear it, very helpful. I remember that in answer to one very important question (which I couldn't remember) I had to know that I was loved, and always had been.

I gave up trying to remember any more about the dreams and began to ask: “Who am I?” again. It was a strange experience – I didn't have to remember any more; the question was just asked inside my head, and I felt my awareness slide down, down to the point inside me where it came to rest. I was someone pleased to be here, pleased to be awake and working for the Truth. I decided to get up and go to the bathroom early – that way I could avoid the normal queue and subsequent rush.

I got dressed and headed off towards the bathroom. To my surprise three of the four bathrooms were already occupied by other early risers – it sounded as if one of them was having a bath. I wondered just how early it was. Maybe I had woken up at 2 am and should go back to sleep. The question of time had not occurred to me before that moment. And just then I heard Mary and Barrie talking at the bottom of the stairs – well, if they were up it was probably close to waking time anyway. And indeed it was. Before I had finished slowly washing and cleaning my teeth I heard them giving the familiar early morning call. I went downstairs and walked in the garden for a while – another surprise. There were five people out there before me! It was another beautiful morning. As I stood outside the door drinking in the cool crisp air and watching the dew drip from the leaves, I had a strong sense that today was my day. As I formed the words in my head, ready to report to my first partner, they somehow missed the sense of what I had experienced since waking up. Who decided that? Who?

“FIVE MINUTES TO THE FIRST EXERCISE.” I turned around and went into the main room. The room was about half full and with surprise I noticed that I had already partnered almost everyone there.

There was one quite old woman sitting in the chair at the end of the row that I had not yet partnered, so I sat opposite her. She looked quite cross – I wondered whether she wanted someone else as a partner – but the chair was comfortable, so I stayed put. During the exercise it became clear that she was angry at herself for not making more effort earlier in the Intensive.

“Here I am in the third day,” she said, “and I feel like I’m only just beginning. Dammit I should have been focusing more on the first day. I think I’ve left it too late this time.”

I was surprised to hear anyone talk like this – there was a third of the time remaining – and at the rate that I went through changes here that was a very, very long time. So it was clear that this woman just wanted to beat herself up about not working hard earlier – maybe that was her way of winding herself up for the last day. I suddenly noticed that I was going off on these long trains of thought about what she was saying instead of just giving her my attention and listening. I pulled myself back – and noticed that in fact I was afraid of her anger. What was that I had learned yesterday ... oh yes, just look into her eyes. I did, and lo and behold, suddenly there was this nice old woman in front of me. What a transformation!

When it was my turn I reported the dream snippets and experience in the garden, and then struggled to find a way to talk about what had just happened in the first five minutes. The one thing we were forbidden to do was to talk about any other participant in any way whatsoever – so I ended up making some very general and wishy-washy statements about paying attention to people.

Right at the beginning of the next period the old woman leant forward and said, “I know what I was hearing, and I was really grateful for the real contact.”

I was taken aback – she seemed to be flouting the rules – but then it was OK. What she said was vague enough to be technically within the rules – but I knew what she meant, and she knew that I knew – and then she smiled and I smiled and it was OK. We had a good session together. I was mostly aware of the large empty space that I had been in quite often the previous afternoon and evening. After communicating her anger and frustration she began contemplating for long periods of time with, “nothing happening in here.” I realized that we were both in

versions of the “desert” described by Peter in the previous day’s lecture.

During that first exercise there were many times when the whole room was suddenly silent. They were more moments of pure magic and I felt that the combined efforts of twenty people contemplating was almost tangible. I found it easy to contemplate deeply now, even when there was noise and chatter right next to me. The vast empty space inside was changing colour and had a new sense to it – but it was still empty of content. I was able to maintain my contemplation during the physical exercise period that followed, and during the tea period after that.

Before the next enlightenment exercise Peter gave us another pep talk. “You should know that this is a three-day process. If most people could get enlightened by doing this for two days we would make it a two-day group – but the fact is that for most people it takes about two and a half days – so we make it a three-day group. So today is the day. All the efforts you have made up to now will stand you in good stead. You have all made progress. Just keep going. Persist in doing the technique. Do it when you feel awful, when you feel blissed out, when there’s nothing happening, and when you think you will drown in the waves of emotions. You can, and should, do the technique in every state. And you can get enlightened at any moment. You don’t have to be in any particular state for it to happen. Just want the truth more than anything else, focus on your question, be open, and fully present whatever comes up – that’s all you have to do, that’s all you can do. Now find out your partner’s question ... those of you facing the fireplace, give your partner their instruction and begin.”

He always made it sound so simple – just want the truth more than anything else, just focus and be open ... sometimes it was that simple. But right now it was getting more and more difficult. Each time I returned to put my attention on myself I found it harder and harder to remember what I was doing – each step of the technique was becoming like a mountain to climb over.

My new partner was a very petite woman with short ginger hair and very wide-open eyes. She actually looked as if she was out of her head on some drug or other – and this general image was reinforced by things she was saying. “We are all children of the universe. Our task is to learn to love each other. There is nothing else other than love – it’s all right here, right now, and we don’t see it.” The words made sense,

but the way she said them left me wondering where she was – at one point I had the idea that she was reading from a book inside her head and was saying the words out loud to try to convince herself. No matter how hard I looked into those eyes I failed to find anyone home – it was a bit disturbing.

Maybe it was just me. I noticed that I was feeling more and more distant from everything around me. It seemed as if the room was in a different reality from me. And the technique was becoming more and more unreal. The more I tried to focus the less sense anything made – every effort seemed to be taking me away from myself and the question. And in her turn this woman in front of me was still talking in that disconnected way that left me wondering whether she knew I was there listening. (Maybe I wasn't!)

By the end of the period I was feeling so strange that I decided to go and talk with the Master about it. He had been urging us to come to him if we needed any help or advice, and I noticed that other people went to talk to him at the end of periods. So when the others started to walk out for breakfast I went against the flow towards his chair. But someone else got there first. It was the bank manager – and he was alight with something. His cheeks were flushed and he was beaming from ear to ear. As he talked I saw Peter light up too. He smiled and smiled and reflected the little man's brightness in the light in his eyes. I heard Peter say, "You should communicate that to at least your next two partners. It is essential that you communicate the actual experience – don't talk around it or what led up to it – present the actual essence of what you experienced." The little man nodded eagerly. Then Peter said, "Thank you," the little man said, "Thank you," and he went off to breakfast on cloud nine.

There was someone else waiting to see the Master too – and she approached him first. She was a fairly old lady, short and very intense. She seemed very happy. She went up to Peter and said, "I know who I am, I am the light!"

Peter looked at her and said, "How do you know? Tell me what you experienced."

She said, "Well, near the beginning of that last exercise I was contemplating and then I just saw this bright bright light, and I knew it was me ... I just knew, there was no doubt ... and I'm so happy!"

Peter continued looking at her and said, “Who saw the light? Who knew?” Her face fell, she looked shocked and puzzled. She seemed to be totally stopped in her tracks.

She thought for maybe a minute and then said, “Do you mean that it wasn’t me? I was so certain!”

Peter said, “The point is that there was still a process – there was you, the light and you seeing it and you knowing it. The seeing and the knowing are processes – and what you are after is consciousness of who you are without any process. So it was not a direct experience.”

“Oh! Yes, I see,” she said. “I understand, thank you.” She turned away, obviously disappointed.

I felt nervous approaching the Master. Maybe I should only come and talk to him if I thought I had a direct experience. I sat on the floor next to his chair and looked up into his face. My fear just dissolved. There was instant contact, I knew he was there, I knew he could see me, and I knew it was OK. And that certainty of contact seemed to transform my state instantly. I sat looking for a while and then explained what had happened since I sat there. Then I told him about the problems I was having with the technique and the sense of unreality I had experienced in the last exercise. “Tell me how you are doing the technique,” he said. So I described what I did as best as I could. He listened attentively, then said, “Tell me again what it is exactly that you put your attention on.” So I described the spot in the middle of me that I focused on. “Is it always the same spot?” he said.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Well,” he said, “you are probably getting stuck by trying to locate yourself in a particular point in space. When you do the technique you should aim to focus on your most immediate sense of who you are right at that moment, and that will usually change over time. Sometimes you may be in that central location, other times you may be in your head, other times you may feel that you are in your heart, and other times you may not be able to locate yourself in any place at all – yet you can have a sense of who you are to direct your attention towards. By getting fixed on one place you can get separated from who you actually are – and then you are trying to experience an idea of yourself – which is a recipe for wandering around in cloud cuckoo land!” He paused, and

then asked, “Do you have a sense of yourself right now?”

I reflected for a moment and said, “Yes, I am all of me sitting here.”

“Right,” he said, “put your attention on that and intend to have a direct experience of that one – now what happens?” As I put my attention on this new sense of myself I felt an overwhelming sense of relief – and joy ... and more joy. It was like coming back to something beautiful and familiar. I described what was happening; he smiled and said, “Remember that it’s the Truth you want, not just a nice feeling. And remember to allow that sense of yourself to change as it will – don’t try and force it or hold it fixed. OK?”

“Yes,” I said, “thank you.”

“Thank you,” he said, and I went off to breakfast. On the way out I noticed that there were four other people waiting to talk to him. When did he get to eat his breakfast?

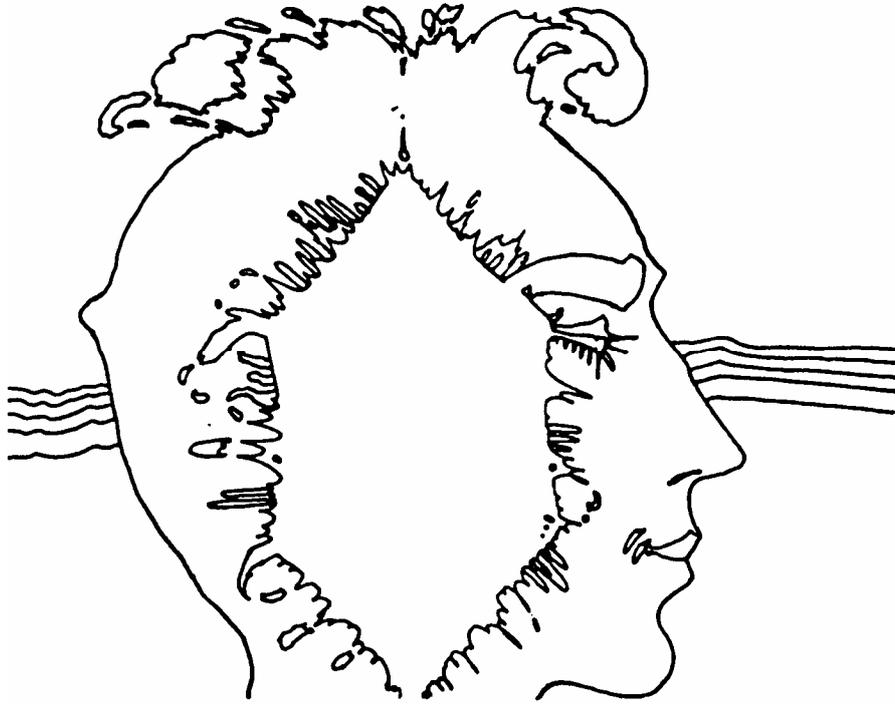
Throughout the breakfast period I was oscillating between intense joy at being back in touch with myself and gratitude to Peter for his simple guidance. I felt that he had looked right inside me, seen what was going wrong, and very gently helped me put it right. And now here I was again – feeling close to myself. But who was close to whom? Who was this in here? As I asked the question I felt something akin to a surge of fear in my stomach – it was as if I was just starting to go down in a lift. Who am I? What was my sense of myself right now? Well, it was this total being, full of feelings, breakfast and ideas ... putting my attention on that one, being open ... and there was an enormous sense of peace. It was like coming home. “FIVE MINUTES.” I joined the washing-up queue with my bowl and spoon and a while later found myself in the main room again.

This time all the people I had not yet partnered already had partners, so I had a second turn with Jan. It was nice to be with her again; it felt very safe and familiar – even though she looked very different. I noticed that her face was a lot more relaxed than on the first day, and her eyes were different. I looked around and realized that everyone’s eyes were different from the first day; they were all wider, more open and somehow deeper. I wondered what I looked like. I rubbed my bristly chin. Not shaving for three days meant that I hadn’t looked in a mirror at all. But come to think of it I didn’t remember seeing a mirror

anywhere to look into!

It was time to start. I went first and described what had transpired since the end of the last exercise – talking with Peter, the sense of joy and then the shift and a sense of being much closer to myself. As I spoke I felt that there was something missing – something that I wasn't communicating – like a word on the end of my tongue that wouldn't come. Jan described how she was stuck in the ways that she saw other people. "You know," she said, "everyone in the world is either my mother, my father or my brother. Everyone. I don't see real people. I just see pale imitations of my family. Old people are like my grandparents – and I expect them to behave the same way, I want them to behave the same way. I'm offended if they don't! It's the same with everyone – I see them through a filter that was formed when I was a child. The filter is like a wall in front of me – and it keeps me separated from others." She was very desperate about it all – she so wanted to be closer to others, to experience them directly. I struggled on through the whole period with the same material that came up at breakfast. Joy, gratitude, happiness at being back, and all the time a sense of something missing. I went over it at least four times – and still I had that sense of something missed out. Then it was time for a five-minute break before the next exercise.

I lay on the floor looking up at the ceiling. I decided to stop trying to remember what I was missing saying and resolved just to do the technique. I put my attention on myself again ... and it was like slipping into another world. Suddenly I knew! I knew who I was, I knew what I had avoided saying, and for what seemed like an eternity I ... well I was. Then I was back in this reality again. Did that really happen to me? What was it? Was it real? A thousand questions burned through my brain. And I remembered Peter's advice — "If you think you've had an experience, do the technique – go back into it – deepen it! Have some more!" So I put my attention on myself again – wish – there I was again, just me, being me ... what is there to say? Back again. Tears flowed from my eyes, laughter came from my mouth. I sat up and looked towards the Master's chair – he was looking directly at me with a big grin from ear to ear. He knew! I felt like jumping for joy. Could I do it again? I closed my eyes – ouch! that hurt – it felt like my brain was on fire in there. So I just put my attention on myself again. Nothing happened. Oh! no, I so want the Truth, I ... wish, there I was again oh God, I've always been here. It's so obvious. It's so simple. In that instant I knew that I had experienced myself at breakfast time too – but



THE EXPERIENCE

I hadn't realized that was what was happening. I also knew that the previous evening I had touched this same place when I was walking in the garden. And I remembered one other time, when I had gone off walking on my own years ago, and I had climbed to the top of a hill really early in the morning – and as I got to the top the sun came up – I touched this place then too.

“IT’S TIME TO CHOOSE A NEW PARTNER FOR THE NEXT EXERCISE.” I flopped onto the nearest cushion, oblivious to the hustle and bustle around me. I didn’t know what to do with all the energy I felt surging through me. My cheeks were burning and I was finding it hard to sit still. My new partner was a bright-eyed man wearing glasses and an impish grin. I felt shy, embarrassed; I didn’t know where to look.

“Tell me who you are,” he said.

I looked up and knew that he really wanted to know. “I’ll show him,” I thought, and so did the technique again ... nothing. Dimly I remembered

the words, “You cannot make it happen, you just have to want the Truth more than anything else and trust that it can happen for you.” I knew that those words were true. I felt my desire for the Truth – it was enormous – yes that’s what I want, more than anything else. Back to the technique. “I am shy” – I heard the words being spoken out of my mouth. “I am embarrassed to show you who I am. I know who I am, I just found out, just now, but I am too shy to show anyone else.” I put my attention on myself again, intended, waited ... still nothing. I looked up into my partner’s eyes — and then I realized I had not allowed myself to really make contact with this man. No wonder I was shy! I was hiding myself from him and not allowing myself to see him either. As I looked into his eyes I cried. He was just as shy as me, it was easy to see, but he was prepared to be there, to keep looking at me. Tears filled my eyes. I opened my mouth as if to say something and ... wish. This time it came with a bolt of energy that straightened my back. And I was there, being seen by this other being. It seemed like an eternity. I have no idea how long it was really. I didn’t say anything – there was nothing to say. Eventually I heard the bell. “Thank your partner” – we thanked each other from our hearts, then it was his turn. He just beamed and beamed. He said he felt a rocket go up his spine a short while ago and now he didn’t know what the hell was going on but it was wonderful. I could see him – I don’t mean that I could see his physical form. I was aware of him, who he really was. He was a very kind, wise being, very open to life and eager to find opportunities to support and serve others. He was beautiful. I remember wishing that he would do the technique – I was sure that if he did he couldn’t help but experience himself – he was peeking out all over the place. But he seemed to be content to enjoy the wonderful feelings of bliss and newness. When it was my turn again I looked around a bit. There was a woman down the row who was “showing” too! And another man in the row behind my partner. Then I noticed the Master standing there looking down at me. He looked kind and I felt he wanted me to do something. Oh yes – I remember him saying that it was important to present the experience to people, that it was by presenting it again and again that we made it more available to ourselves and in our everyday life. So I described what had happened in the last period and how I experienced myself. I noticed that as I talked about it other facets became apparent. The sense of coming home that I had felt was literally correct – I had come home to myself, my real Self. And that real Self loved others, loved them totally and unconditionally. In fact that real Self knew nothing but love. Love and joy – it knew joy every time it contacted another human being. Suddenly there were a thousand things to say, and I remembered the twenty stone woman from

the previous evening and how she had been flooded with these sorts of insights. It was like a door to a new level of awareness had been opened. And I rushed in to explore this new territory.

My partner did start to do the technique, mostly because the Master was standing right behind him (at least that was what I thought) and I could see he was on the very brink of experiencing himself. He would contemplate and this sense of aliveness would build up and up and just as I was sure it would burst he would stop and report something that he had thought or felt. We had an amazing time together; we were both just bubbling with energy, aliveness, joy and love. It was amazing. At one point I said, "This is mind blowing," and then realized that it was literally true, my mind was being blown apart by the experience and realizations. It would never grip me again in the same way. I was sure of that! How crazy to get caught in that unreality when there was all this to enjoy – wow! Another literal; to "en joy" something meant to let the joy in me and the joy in another mesh together so that we enjoyed each other. It went on and on and on. After the final bell we hugged each other for a while – it felt really wonderful to have physical contact with another human being.

It was now time for walking contemplation. I waited to say thank you to Peter, but there were a string of people wanting to see him and I figured that their needs were greater than mine, so I went out for a walk. The world was a different place. There is no way to put into words all the new feelings and perceptions that I took in during that hour. I felt I was walking in the Garden of Eden – maybe I was, maybe this is what is meant by that image in the Bible. Amongst other things I went off on an excursion into the "real meaning" of Christianity. All the words I had mouthed as a child suddenly made sense in a whole new way. And words kept changing their meaning – "holy" stopped being a sort of unattainable and rather aloof state and became a sense of being whole. Love ceased to be a commodity traded for sex and became a way of being, a state of consciousness. Towards the end of the period I started to think about other people in my life, particularly my mother, my children and Jo. I saw how I had neglected them all and wished that they were all here right now so that I could share this love with them. But then it was time to go back for the next exercise.

I found myself with the bank manager again. He was still bright and sparkling from his experience earlier in the morning. We just talked and talked about all the things that were happening for us. It was really nice

to share this part of the process with him; it felt like a completion of the really nice beginning we had made on the very first exercise. Goodness, that was only just two days ago – it seemed like two lifetimes ago. He had been going through very similar sorts of realizations, about the meaning of his life, how he treated himself and others, things he wanted to put right and so on. At the end of the period we hugged for a long time. Before I had the chance to stand up Barrie came up and gently said, “The Master would like to talk to you before you go to lunch.” Peter was busy with someone else, so I sat and waited. Sitting there I reflected on all that had happened — and decided to do the technique again ... nothing ... but there was a new sense of peace ... then, for what seemed like a fleeting microcosm of a moment, I touched that other state of consciousness again. And the desire for more surged up in me. It was not the sort of desire for more that I experienced with sex, chocolate and ice-cream – it couldn’t be because the me that craved like that wasn’t present in those moments. No, the desire was more a recognition of an age-old longing to be there ... oh hell, the words are so difficult, so inadequate.

I moved up closer to the Master’s chair and realised that he was actually involved in what looked like an argument with the young man in red baggy trousers. Actually it was the young man who was having the argument; Peter was simply responding to what was being said and, in different ways, pointing out why the experience being presented was not a direct experience.

“But I know, for absolute certainty, that what I experienced was true,” said the young man.

“That may well be the case,” said Peter. “On Intensives people have many accurate and valuable insights about themselves, and those insights may also have an important effect on the person’s life as you have suggested. Nevertheless they are not direct experiences. There is no direct union with the Truth. In all that you have told me there remains a process whereby you are thinking of something – there’s you, the thinking and the something – and that is an indirect experience.”

“But not in that moment of certainty,” said the young man.

“At that moment what were you conscious of?” said Peter.

“Of being totally certain,” said the man.

“Who was certain?” said Peter.

“I was,” said the man. There was a pause, and then he added, “but what you’re getting at is that I wasn’t conscious of myself. I knew something about myself, but not who I actually was. Is that it?”

“Yes,” said Peter, “what you are going for is direct consciousness of yourself, union, no separation.”

“I get it,” said the man, “thank you.”

“Thank you,” said Peter, and the man moved away.

Peter was free now so I went and sat at his feet again. We smiled at each other. He said, “Tell me what has been happening for you. Tell me what you experienced.” So I told him. At the point where I said, “I knew,” he asked, “What exactly were you conscious of at that moment?” I took myself back there – and wish – there I was again – I looked at Peter; there were tears in his eyes. He said, “Yes, that’s you, and you see it is still accessible to you. So continue presenting it to your partners. There’s plenty of time for thinking about it and talking about it later – continue to present it. Can you tell me now what you are conscious of?” I told him and I cried, and more tears came to his eyes – he was obviously moved. I said that I was grateful to him for his guidance. He said that he was grateful to me for sharing my experience with him. With that I went off to lunch – but by then there was another person waiting to see him.

As I was eating my lunch I thought that the most powerful aspect of talking to the Master was the immediate and total sense of closeness and contact I experienced. I thought about trying to explain it to some of the people back home and realized that it was almost impossible to put into words – one had to experience it to understand. The direct experience was the same. I had been able to say who I was to the Master, but the reason why he knew what I meant was because he had shared in the experience for a moment – so he already knew me, and the words were a confirmation. So I would never be able to tell anyone about it in any meaningful way, but I could communicate it – by golly I could communicate what I had found; that was easy, all I had to do was be myself. Actually to live from that place – wow! What an idea. I guess that the holy men and women of the world are able to contact that place at all times – but it wouldn’t be necessary to do that to live from that

Truth. I could live from the Truth even though it wasn't always in my consciousness. Then I remembered the Master's instructions about not getting caught up in thinking about it, but to reconnect to it and present it to my partners. So I started to do the technique again.

I found it quite impossible to contemplate with my eyes closed now. Any time I shut my eyes I was aware of an incredible whirling of energy inside my head and an inability to think or focus on anything. But it was easy to do the technique with my eyes open. I could easily put my attention on myself now – after all I knew exactly where to put it – and what's more I knew who was putting whose attention on whom! I began to see the enormous joke in the whole enterprise – how silly, how absurd! But there I was doing it again anyway ... nothing. I realized that I was actually just waiting to enter that other state of consciousness – I wasn't being open at all! And that was obviously a mistake. The last time that I had gone back there had been when I was just being open to what was occurring – not when I was trying to force it to happen, or waiting for it to happen. “FIVE MINUTES.” Good grief – that period seemed to go in no time at all. I had to hurry the last of my lunch and was one of the last to get into the main room.

I was partnering the grey-haired man that I had spotted on the first morning and partnered on the first day. He was quite tall and had the air of being a teacher or university don. He spoke very clearly and precisely, with the inflection of a BBC news-reader – but with a lot more warmth and humanity. I noticed that the warmth and friendliness were a lot more apparent now than on the first day. His question was, “What is life?” and he was obviously struggling with doing the technique. He complained that sometimes the object he chose to focus on vanished from his awareness – other times the object stayed there and he felt as if he were looking at a blank, brick wall – which he interpreted as his mind refusing to be open. He was getting quite desperate, but not making a lot of noise about it.

I described what had been happening to me and reverted to doing the technique as well as I could. Surprisingly some new material came up – thoughts of not deserving this, of not being good enough. I simply communicated these things and noticed that although they were occurring in my consciousness I didn't believe them! In about the middle of my second five-minute period I touched the direct experience again and for a moment was able to present myself to my partner. And then as I spoke I connected to the words fully and knew that I was

telling him, in Truth, who I was. It visibly affected him. His eyes opened wider, he seemed to relax and breathe deeper and a sort of hope came into his eyes to replace the despair that had been there. When it was his turn he contemplated whilst gazing into my eyes – “I have been blind,” he said. “I have been looking everywhere for life, everywhere except where it is most obvious.” He carried on looking in my eyes. Then he said, “It is really crazy how I let my mind tell me what to do; it has been leading me up blind alleys for the last day at least.” It was as if a spell had been broken; suddenly he was in contact with life again and he was on the trail once more. He was now able to contemplate deeply and was making significant discoveries about the connections between how he did the technique and life right up to the end of the exercise. I was sure he was close to a breakthrough.

Next it was time for lecture. I noticed that today everyone was more wide awake and attentive than on either of the previous days. Partly we were not so tired – we had become used to this gruelling concentration. Partly we now all knew that this Master knew his stuff and was likely to say things that would help. But mostly, I guess, because the end was getting near, and those people who hadn’t yet had a direct experience wanted every bit of advice and inspiration that they could squeeze from this lecture. He spent the first half of the lecture talking about the final barriers that people face when they go for the Truth. He said, “The physical barriers on the first day, as you uncouple from life and go through withdrawal for nicotine, caffeine or TV, can be quite hard. But the emotional crisis that usually comes along sometime on the second day is worse. But the final barrier – now that can be a killer. More people drop at the final barrier than at any of the others – usually because the mind will save up the very worst thing to this point – just as you are sure you have made it through it will throw its worst ghoulie at you. For some people this is a fear of death, for others of madness – and for some it might be the fear of failure. Fear can come in a thousand disguises – don’t take any notice of it – just do the technique anyway!

“But probably the biggest barrier, the one that gets most people, is all the different versions of ‘I don’t deserve it’. People imagine that they have to be perfect, that they have to have solved all their hangups and neuroses before they can get enlightened. Well I can assure you that that is not the case. I have seen a lot of very seemingly screwed-up people get enlightened!” We laughed, some with obvious relief.

“The sense of not deserving it runs very deep,” he continued, “and it has

a real basis. The point is that at some time in your life you will have mistreated people. And you know that. You don't need the concept of some punitive Father in the sky keeping a tally of your errors and mistakes – you know when you mistreat someone – and that causes you to believe that you don't deserve to be enlightened, to be graced by Truth. Well, you should know this – you only acted badly towards others because you didn't know who you were, what life is about or what another truly is. You were acting out of ignorance – and of course you made mistakes. The way to put an end to that is to gain some wisdom – that's the only counter to ignorance. When you know who you are, what life is about and what others are, you will just naturally behave correctly towards other people. You know I used to think that saints and holy people had to work really hard to behave so well – well they don't – it's just the easiest thing in the world for them. They know, they couldn't possibly behave any other way knowing what they know. So quit beating yourself up for being ignorant and go flat out to get the wisdom you need to treat others better.”

Everyone in the room had their attention riveted on what he was saying. I was breathless – this was so obviously true, and so totally different from the stuff I had been taught at Sunday School as a child – this made so much more sense than the punitive version. “For some people,” he went on, “even this is not enough. They figure that they have been so bad that they should suffer more before they can deserve a direct experience. Well you can go ahead and suffer if you wish – but there is a quicker way out. You see, when you make yourself suffer the chances are that in the process you'll hurt others around you, and that will stack up more stuff to be worked off by suffering. It's not a smart approach. A quicker way is to resolve to start to treat others better – and you can do that right here by being a really good listening partner. And you can resolve to continue treating others well when you get outside. But it comes back to the same thing in the end – you'll treat others best if you have a direct experience. Let me put it this way – the world needs more enlightened people, people who really know, people who can act from the Truth – in fact the world's desperate for such people. So if you cannot do this for yourself, do it for the world, do it for someone you love – do it for your children.” At those words one of the women sitting against the wall on the right-hand side broke into uncontrolled sobbing. Peter paused for a moment, and then continued. “I want you to know that although this ‘experience’ has been held up as the goal of these three days, that isn't what it's all about really. What it's really about is getting more people to live more from the Truth more of the time. I

don't sit up here so that some of you can go back home with this spiritual medal and put it up on the mantelpiece for everyone to admire. I do this because I know, from my own experience, that if you experience the Truth, and if you live from it, then you, your life and those around you will be transformed for the better. Harmony will replace strife and love will win over fear and vengeance. All of you have already experienced some of this over the last two and a half days. There have been forty-two people here in this room facing their minds – coming up with incredibly anti-social, painful and horrible feelings, thoughts and memories. But this structure has shown you a way to behave towards each other so that this material can be allowed and doesn't affect you. Had this been a free-for-all weekend many of you would be feeling hurt and aggrieved right now, there may even have been some physical fights. As it is you are all enormously more loving and open than when you came in here three days ago. You cannot see it clearly because you have all become more open together – but it's clear from out here. And you have got there by treating each other well, by not responding to each other's minds, by facing your own mind, by going for the Truth."

He paused for a while, looking round the room in his familiar way, making eye contact with each and every one of us. "Now you have half a day left. You have a fantastic opportunity. You have worked hard, you have a lot of the energy you need to break through stored up, there is the necessary love and contact between you, you know how to do the technique – now you just have to persist. Put all thoughts of the end of the intensive to one side. You should know that I have personally witnessed four people who had direct experiences of the Truth in the last five-minute period of the last enlightenment exercise of the group. So keep going for it – right up to the final bell at 9.30 tonight."

Then he told us how the schedule would be different for today – no working period, a shorter rest, one exercise after dinner, then a walk and then the final exercise. But next we had the sitting contemplation.

This was probably the biggest disappointment to me of the whole Intensive. I felt inspired, ready to throw everything I had into going deeper into who I was. But as I contemplated I felt myself drifting up – back towards the surface reality. It is hard to describe – but I knew that I had lost contact with the place where I experienced myself. I still knew – that knowledge would always be there now – but it was no longer directly accessible to me. And I was tired. I was very, very tired – a sort

of emotional exhaustion. At the end of the sitting contemplation we had a five-minute break before the next exercise, so I went to talk to the Master about what was happening – maybe I was doing something wrong again. He listened to what I had to say and said that it was often the case that when an experience had been fully communicated then it went flat. He asked me what I wanted to do.

I thought for a moment and said, “You know, I am actually really interested in working on the question about life.”

“That’s fine,” he said. “At the beginning of the next exercise tell your partner that your instruction is, ‘Tell me what life is’. And remember always to put your attention on something that is actually life to you at that moment – not an idea of life, but something real. You have plenty of time to work on this question.”

I felt quite energised at the thought of working on a new question. “What is life?” I looked around me and chose the red flowers beside the Master’s chair – whew, they were life all right. Just looking at them they seemed to pulse energy at me.

It was good working on the new question. The tiredness was replaced by an eager curiosity as I started in on this new area. Life is energy. Life is the flow. Life is the transformation of energy. Life is what is everywhere. Life is the source of energy. Life is irresistible, it cannot be stopped or checked or suppressed. Life is in everything. The answers flowed out in a long stream all the way through the exercise. My partner was the woman who, on the first day, had kept looking away each time I went to speak. She did that just twice in my first five-minute period – the rest of the time she was able to keep looking at me. I could see that she was struggling with incredible shyness and I felt very empathetic towards her.

Next it was a snack period. Each day the snack in the middle of the afternoon had been a delicious, freshly cooked currant bun. Before the snack we could all smell the aroma of cakes cooking, and were all looking forward to another bun. But to our surprise the snack today was a small yoghurt drink with a little paper cake-case with four nuts in it. I laughed – it seemed so crazy – but other people were looking really disappointed. The next exercise was largely dominated by complaints about the snack. In the first five minute period there must have been five or six people shouting about the snack; “I WANTED A BUN TODAY –

I DIDN'T WANT A SILLY LITTLE DRINK AND NUTS" "FOR CHRIST'S SAKE – FOUR NUTS! THEY CALL THAT A SNACK – WE'RE NOT SQUIRRELS" "HELL I WAS PISSED OFF AT THE SNACK." On and on it went – they were really angry. A few other people were finding it hard to keep a straight face. A group of adult people shouting to each other because they hadn't had a bun when they expected to! In my turn I was coming up with "life is the unexpected"; it is unpredictable, it cannot be controlled. And later I was into my life, what a mess it had been at times, how it seemed inevitably to go from one thing to another, how it wasn't under my control and so on. By the third five-minute period, my partner's second turn, everyone had finished with the snack and had returned to the technique – everyone except one person – the man who had almost left on the second day. "I'M SORRY BUT I AM STILL REALLY PISSED OFF ABOUT THAT BLOODY STOOPIID SNACK – I FEEL INSULTED – I FEEL OUTRAGED. IT WAS DISGUSTING." He would quieten down for a while, and then, just as everyone was getting back to contemplating he would start up again. "SHIT, WHY COULDN'T THEY HAVE GIVEN US A BUN. I WANTED A BUN FOR MY SNACK - THAT'S WHAT I WANTED. I DON'T WANT THE FUCKIN' STUPID TRUTH – I JUST WANTED A BUN FOR MY SNACK." At that the room packed up with laughter. The Master stood up in front of his chair and began to walk down the centre aisle. The laughter quietened down, but not the fellow who wanted a bun. "WHY COULDN'T THEY DO US A BUN TODAY – WHY NOT? THEY'RE JUST MEAN BASTARDS – THAT'S WHY. DO THEY THINK THAT STARVING US WILL GET US CLOSER TO THE TRUTH? I DON'T CARE IF IT DOES - I

This time he joined in the laughter at himself because he could see how absurd it was. Again the room settled down to contemplation. Everything went fine until the beginning of my partner's next turn. Then, "I'LL TELL YOU WHO I AM, I'M SOMEONE WHO WANTED A BUN FOR HIS SNACK. I'M SOMEONE WHO IS REALLY PISSED OFF THAT I DIDN'T GET A BUN – THAT'S WHO I AM." The room packed up again. I found it hard to contain my laughter — tears of mirth rolled down my partner's face. "I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYONE THINKS – I AM REALLY REALLY PISSED OFF AT NOT HAVING A BUN, AND I'M GOING TO CONTINUE EXPRESSING THAT UNTIL IT GOES AWAY – THAT'S WHO I AM." More laughter – but this time I realized that it sounded as if he was still doing the technique through all this, and that, of course, was why the Master wasn't trying to stop him. "I'M A VERY

ANGRY PERSON. I USUALLY BOTTLE UP MY ANGER, BUT I'M NOT GOING TO ANY MORE – THAT SNACK WAS THE LAST BLOODY STRAW! I'M FED UP WITH BEING – AFRAID – FED RIGHT UP! UP TO HERE! I AM NOT AFRAID – I'M ANGRY.” The tone had changed now. And strangely people were now able to carry on contemplating – even though he was making even more noise. The last I heard was, “You know I really am not afraid – all these years I have been telling myself I am afraid – and I'm not. I'm angry, ANGRY, ANGRY ... THAT'S WHO I AM ... am ... I am ...,” followed by an amazing chuckle that sounded as if it came from the bottom of his belly. At the end of the period I looked down the row; he was smiling – I was pretty sure that he had really found out who he was!

Next it was time for a rest. I debated whether to bother resting today – in the event I was sufficiently weary to go to bed, but I noticed that many other participants were either sitting contemplating or quietly walking around the garden. When I lay down in bed I quickly went to sleep; I was more exhausted than I thought. I woke up before the end of the period and had time to walk in the garden before the next exercise. There was a beautiful blossom on one of the ornamental trees in the formal part of the garden. It consisted of very small white flowers, quite close together in bunches of twelve to twenty heads. I picked a small bunch and used it as the focus of my contemplation. What is life? What is the life in these beautiful flowers? I don't think I had ever really looked at flowers that totally before. Of course I had admired them – but I had never really seen them like this.

During the next exercise, which I shared with a nice old lady who had a very broad northern accent, I explored my relationship to life; how I took it for granted, how I tried, unsuccessfully, to control it, how little I really took in of my environment, how I regretted the neglect of nature – in a way similar to my regret about relationships I had neglected. As I explored I realized that this was all going to change – I felt like someone who had been woken up from a level of unconsciousness – there were so many things that I now knew that I couldn't neglect or forget. At times it felt quite overwhelming, at other times I was just so pleased to have taken the step. The old lady from the north was also working on what life was – but she had been working at it for the whole three days and was now in a stage of quiet contemplation with nothing much coming up. It was clear that she knew what she was doing and where she was going – she smiled benignly at my innocent discoveries; I sensed that she had known these things all her life.

Dinner was a very quiet period for me, but not for everyone. The imminent end of the Intensive was beginning to cause some people to get really desperate for an experience. At the end of the exercise one woman stayed on her cushion and shouted, “LORD WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO? PLEASE BLESS ME” and then she broke down into sobs muttering something about only having any idea of a God when she was in need. Others paced around the room, some queued up to talk to the Master, others spoke to Mary and Barrie. There was a sense of urgency in the air.

Before the start of the next exercise the Master gave a short talk. “Well, in the jargon of Intensives this is known as the last lap – you have one exercise, a walk and then another exercise. If you’ve been waiting to make your move, well make it now.” We chuckled. “Remember there is plenty of time left – it can happen right up to the last bell. Don’t try and force it – that’s a major error. If you feel desperate then communicate that – but then persist in doing the technique precisely – keep your intention, be open, fully communicate whatever occurs, and then contemplate once more. The biggest mistake is to stop doing the technique correctly – don’t give up, don’t force it, just persist. At your first opportunity communicate whatever occurred as a result of your contemplation during the dinner period, then continue to do the technique. Now find out your partner’s instruction, and those of you facing the fireplace give your partner their instruction and begin.” The repetitious use of the same words to start every exercise, the regularity of the schedule and the technique – these all formed a sort of routine which really carried on through everything. I had another new partner, a very attractive woman of about twenty-five who spoke with an upper-class accent. I had noticed her crying and shrieking earlier in the Intensive; now she was calm and very present. Her question was, “Who am I?” and she started by telling me that she had just realized what a fraud she was. How she had come to the Intensive feeling better than everyone else and quite sure that she was ready for an enlightenment experience. Now she knew that there were basic things wrong with her life that she had been busy covering up. She had lied to herself about how she felt about things and people; furthermore she had allowed her therapist to convince her that she was over her problems with men and relationships – and she knew she wasn’t. As she said this tears came to her eyes and she said, “I don’t think I will ever get over my problems in relationship to men until I discover who I really am. In every relationship I lose myself, I become this pretty appendage to my man –

and after a while I hate him for it – but it’s not what he does – it’s me – I don’t know who the hell I am – so how can I have any sort of relationship?” She was obviously really upset by it all, but she wasn’t making a big fuss about it. And as soon as the feelings subsided she was back contemplating again. During my turn I talked about the enormous variety in life, how it was always bringing me surprises and new opportunities – and how I usually dismissed them because they didn’t conform to my petty expectations.

On her next turn my partner went down and down into the despair of not knowing who she was. She saw how this was like a disease in her life. She tried to find out through relationships, through sex, through therapy, through her work as a designer – and now she saw it as all hollow, meaningless – meaningless because she, the real her, wasn’t involved. “I’ve gone AWOL,” she said – and I don’t know where the hell to find me. During my turn I explored more of my assumptions and preconceived ideas about life. I had an assumption that only things that moved or grew were alive – but what about rocks? I assumed that at death everything ceased. I assumed that life was purposeless. As each assumption surfaced I could see that it was just an idea or a belief – I had no grounds whatsoever for any of them. In fact I was pig ignorant about life. I didn’t know the first thing about it. In her next turn my partner’s despair deepened. What could she do? This process hadn’t worked for her – it was too close to the end to get a direct experience now. She was sentenced to continue her sham of a life knowing that she didn’t know who she was. It was worse now that she knew what was missing. Down and down she went – it was like watching a balloon collapse. The energy drained from her face, her posture became hunched and defeated. At the bell she gave a wan smile as I said, “Thank you.”

The enormity of my ignorance about life got to me. I really had not got the foggiest idea what life was, what it was there for, what I was here for – nothing. And yet I walked around acting, doing things, pretending to know. I began to empathise more with my partner’s despair – I too was a fraud, and the only way out seemed to be a direct experience – which I couldn’t make happen. I carried on doing the technique and slowly started to climb out of the hole I was in. Well, I could certainly start to act from myself more; I could also decide to treat others better – there were lots of things I could do until I found out what life really was about. Then I saw that as a real cop-out – I was settling for some ways of getting myself to feel better instead of really persisting in going for the truth.

I was aware of how my partner and I were caught on very similar issues. I don't know whether that was because we were influenced by each other, or whether it was just a coincidence. Whatever, on her next turn she was immediately more hopeful and set about doing the technique rather than wallowing in despair. But the despair came back even harder for her.

"It's quite hopeless," she said; "I'll never get out because I have no faith in myself, this process or anything." She was silent for a while. "You know that is so true – I have no faith in anyone or anything – I don't believe anything will work." She was alert, as if this insight had put her on a different track. "What if I did have faith? What if I trusted that I really was all right? I remember that in one of my guided fantasies a wise man gave me a scroll. On it was written, 'You are what you have always wanted to be, you always have been, you have just forgotten.' What have I always wanted to be? Oh! no." For a moment her face seemed to contort in pain, then she sat up very straight and tears welled in her eyes. Very quietly she said, "I am perfect, and I had forgotten." She sobbed and sobbed. She held her head in her hands, covering her face. Through the tears and her fingers she said, "I have spent so long trying to be better, trying to make myself perfect – and I am! Oh God, it's so simple ... I thought I would have to change to be myself." She broke down into more sobs. When she finally looked up her face was transformed. The tears had washed away all the anguish – here was a new born woman, a beauty. Smiling. She opened her mouth to speak and then the final bell went.

We sat looking at each other for a while, then I squeezed one of her hands and left for the last walk. I felt very charged up, full of emotion. I had been honoured to witness the struggle, the transformation and the emergence of a new person. It was beyond words, but one of the experiences I would never forget. As I walked around the garden tears flowed down my cheeks. I remembered some of the things Peter had said on the first evening about the Truth – Yes what I had found was something I have always wanted, but didn't know it, and yes it was worth it – worth it a thousand times over. I was crying with joy as I walked, and with gratitude, and with the sadness that I had tolerated in my life; I was crying for these other people who had shared this with me. I noticed a few other people in a similar state – tears rolling down their smiling faces as they walked around this beautiful garden, contemplating who they were, what life was or what another was. What a process! I recognized that I had stopped contemplating my question –

it was as if I had had enough. Maybe I could get more, but right now I felt full to overflowing. I couldn't take any more in. Life was overflowing. Life was full of glory and love – and so was I.

“FIVE MINUTES TO THE NEXT EXERCISE.” I was sad too; the last time that I would hear that call – at least for a time. The last time to sit down opposite another human being and listen and be heard in this way in this place. I looked around the room – who should I partner for the last exercise? I chose the woman with heavy glasses with whom I had had such a lovely time the previous morning. She was obviously pleased when I sat down opposite her. She was busy rubbing her legs, especially her knees – one of the hazards of sitting on cushions for three days is very stiff legs! She looked very good, full of life and very soft. I figured she must have had an experience sometime earlier – the people who had not yet had an experience were now mostly contemplating every moment they got – some of them very desperate, others just determined.

For me that exercise was a gentle run down to the end. It felt as if a mad roller coaster was finally approaching the end of the line and it was soon going to be time to get off. My partner seemed to be having the same experience. Was this because we picked each other as being in a similar place, or was it because we were influencing each other, or was it just another coincidence? For other people it was obviously quite heavy. Some people were screaming in despair. One woman called out, “I KNOW – I KNOW ... no I don't, dammit!” Many other people were saying how much they appreciated everyone else here, how they felt love for everyone, how wonderful it had been. By the time the last bell sounded it was a noisy and happy ending. Almost everyone was smiling and hugging their partner. One man started to cry at the end – I think because he had not had an experience – but it might have just been at the wonderful sense of togetherness in the room. There were several other people looking very disappointed, but they were smiling through the sadness.

“Give me your attention one last time! There are some things I want to say to you all.” People shuffled around the room so that they were close to the Master's chair and hugging one or two other people as well. Peter quietly looked into each person's eyes as he scanned the room. He was obviously happy – and tired. “Well, that was an Enlightenment Intensive,” he said. “It was much like any other – some hell, some heaven – some insights, some experiences – some hilarious moments, and some moments of precious purity. Thank you. Thank you for

allowing me and the rest of the staff to serve you in this way. It has been a privilege, and inspiring. Thank you for following the rules and my guidance.” He paused, obviously full of emotion. “You have all made progress,” he said, “whether you have had an experience or not. You all know more about yourselves – you have all faced up to your minds – and that’s a tough number. I am really encouraged by witnessing your struggles – encouraged to face more of my own mind.” He paused again and seemed to gather himself together again. “There are also some things you need to know now. Firstly, experiences can happen after the Intensive, in fact they often do. So continue to be open to that possibility. And if an experience does happen for you then communicate it to someone. Ideally set up a little exercise like those you’ve been doing for the last three days with someone you know will be open to what you want to say. If that’s difficult phone someone up – you can always phone me – I’m a real junkie for hearing about direct experiences; you won’t bore me!! Next you will probably feel full of energy tonight; don’t let that fool you. You have been through a fairly stressful process – get some sleep tonight. Remember to take all your valuables and belongings home. You can stay over tonight; there will be a do-it-yourself breakfast in the morning between seven and nine.” He paused and became a little more serious. “I also want to urge you to take whatever you have learnt here and put it into your life. If you are puzzled as to how to do that you can talk to me this evening, or tomorrow morning, or indeed at any time in the future. And if you are going back home to someone who hasn’t been on the Intensive be very tolerant of them. They are going to be wondering what you are like. You all look weird ... ” We all laughed. “Your eyes are so wide open it looks as if you have been tripping on some chemical for a fortnight!” More laughter. “Seriously, you should be prepared for the normal world. People won’t give you five minutes to think of what to say – they won’t sit there listening to you – they’ll interrupt!” We rolled around laughing. “That’s what it’s like out there – so go gently, and be especially gentle to those close to you who might fear that you have changed in a way that excludes them. Oh yes! If a policeman stops you as you are driving home and says, ‘Tell me who you are’ ... ” When the laughter had died down and people had dried their eyes he continued, “Do remember to be gentle with each other this evening. You have been sharing the most intimate details of your lives together – now you have the job of relating in a more social way. You might find it a bit overwhelming. Well trust that – take as much as you can, then retreat for a time, then take a bit more. Don’t force it ... Now I have some very special thanks to make. I want you to join me in thanking the people without whom this Intensive

could not have happened. First, Pam the cook, who prepared delicious food with love, served on time every time – Pam, I thank you for your devotion to us all.” There was a hearty round of applause for Pam who, standing at the back of the room, placed her hands together in prayer and bowed slightly towards us. “And the monitors, Barrie and Mary. You know it is impossible to do this work without people who can be totally trusted to share in working towards the Truth. And Barrie and Mary are devoted to the Truth, and they have been devoted to you over the last three days – finding their ways into many of your hearts with their love and advice. Thank you Barrie and Mary for all you have done.” There was another long round of applause. “Well, that’s it. That’s the end of this Enlightenment Intensive – thank you all again.”

“And thank you too, Peter,” called out a voice from the back of the room, and everyone clapped and said their thanks to the Master.

CHAPTER FIVE: AFTERGLOW

It certainly did feel strange now that the intensive had finished. I suddenly didn't know what to do – here I was in a room full of people that I didn't know, and yet I did know some of them. I had got closer to some of these people than to almost anyone else in my life, and yet I was suddenly feeling extremely shy. I started to talk to the woman I had shared the last exercise with – her name was Cathy. It turned out that she had done quite a few intensives before. We were just starting to share our experiences on this intensive when Peter made another announcement. “I forgot to mention that if any of you are interested in future Intensives, or in learning how to meditate every day, or in other aspects of holistic yoga, we have some brochures and leaflets up here on these things. More important, I forgot to mention that Pam has kindly prepared a small party for us – in the dining room there are some cakes, fruit and tea ready for you.”

I continued to talk to Cathy, asking her how this intensive had compared with others she had taken. She said that this one had been very good, especially for her – but that she had always got a lot from Enlightenment Intensives whether or not she had an experience. As she spoke I realized, with a little sadness, that we were already stepping back from the closeness we had shared before.

“How do you cope with this transition back to normal, social reality?” I asked.

She smiled, and immediately I felt closer to her. “By doing what you just did,” she said, “talking about what is really happening to me, instead of the normal trivia, and trusting that someone will be out there to share with. So I suppose that what I try to do is to take the Intensive into my social world rather than drop it. That closeness and contact between people is just the most wonderful part of it all to me. I hate to lose it!”

Jan came across. She was an old friend of Cathy's. She gave us both a hug. In a while they were talking about other people that they knew here. I excused myself and drifted off towards the dining room. On the way through the hall I decided that I would go for a walk around the garden – I wanted to be alone for a while, and it was a very calm evening. As I wandered across the lawn I reflected on everything that had happened over the last three days. It was difficult to believe. The

anguish and despair of that first evening, the headache – and all those tears. The struggle always to be “doing the right thing” and how that preoccupation kept me isolated from other people. The amazing closeness I had shared with Cathy, Jan, the bank manager – and others. The experience – me, yes me, I had had a direct experience of the Truth!! That was amazing! I could hardly believe it. I wondered whether everyone had an experience or only some people? What would it be like to do this and not get one? I decided to ask Jan or Cathy or someone when I could.

The memories came back again – remembering how I had loved everyone, how I normally held myself away from love, how I neglected people close to me that I really did care for. I renewed my resolve to treat them better. And then I remembered my promise to myself to act more from my real Self – and less from the frightened boy who didn’t know what to do. I realized I was acting from myself right now; it was easy – I just had to allow my Self to do what I wanted to do, without fear that someone else would be upset by it. If they were, well, that was really their business. I chuckled – I remembered overhearing someone talking about a book that they had recently bought, which was called “What Someone Else Thinks Of Me Is None Of My Business” – the title was enough!

I looked up at the sky, clear dark blue with stars beginning to be visible. It was so vast. I remembered the sense of vastness in the experience – and as I stood there I felt very close to it again. Tears came to my eyes; I was so grateful that I had found out. And at the same time I knew that I had only just begun – there was so much more to explore! I slowly walked back towards the house – I wanted to be near those people again.

In the dining room I spotted the bank manager sitting quietly at a table, sipping some tea, looking very relaxed. I gathered some cake and tea and joined him. “I was so pleased to see you have an experience,” I said. “I felt very close to you from the very first exercise.”

“Thank you,” he said. “I was pleased for you too, especially after the hard time you had on the first evening.” This had been his first intensive too, so he couldn’t answer all my questions. But he did point out that as far as he was concerned he had got more than he had hoped for from the first two days – it really wouldn’t have been a disappointment to him if he had not had an experience.

After a while I spotted Jan on her own, so I quizzed her about how many people she thought had had experiences. “Oh, about the normal number,” she said, “about a third. For some reason it’s usually between a quarter and a half of the group who get it. It’s also easier for first-timers like yourself – when you’ve done a few the experiences seem harder to come by.” She said that in small intensives there were usually fewer experiences – apparently she had been on an intensive with only six participants. “You really get to know the others then,” she said, “you partner everyone two or three times a day!”

Later on I heard stories about other intensives, things that people had experienced, crazy things, beautiful things. It was a very easy group to be in. But before long I began to feel very weary, and so went off to bed for the last time in this house.

In the morning, after breakfast, I found Peter quietly walking around the garden alone. I went up to him to thank him for all his efforts and encouragement. “It was a real privilege,” he said. “I hope that you will be able to find ways to live from the Truth that you have experienced. You will find that at times it will fade, but it will never disappear – and whenever you are in a crisis, in a really difficult spot, just ask yourself who you are – and remember – and the situation will transform before your eyes.” I thanked him again and then returned to the house to collect my things and begin the journey home.

Three of us had arranged to share a taxi to the station at ten o’clock. The taxi arrived, we said a round of goodbyes and were on our way. One of my companions was Doris, the lady who shared the taxi on the way. “Well, how did you get on?” she said. “It looks as if you had a good time.”

“That’s an understatement,” I said. We talked all the way to the station. Doris and I were both catching the London train; our companion, the earnest young man who pursed his lips, was going the other way – to Bristol.

It wasn’t until we had said goodbye to him that I began to notice the other people! They all looked awful! I mean really awful. I was overwhelmed by the pain that was visible in everyone’s face. They all looked so lonely – well, almost all – there were a few bright souls who were happy enough. But the rest – I was really shocked. I remembered what Peter had said about not knowing how open we had become

because we were all in it together – he was so right. I looked at Doris who was smiling at me – “Yes, it’s quite a shock, isn’t it,” she said. “After the first intensive I took, I cried and cried at the pain and misery that I was seeing for the first time in my life.”

“What do you do now?” I asked.

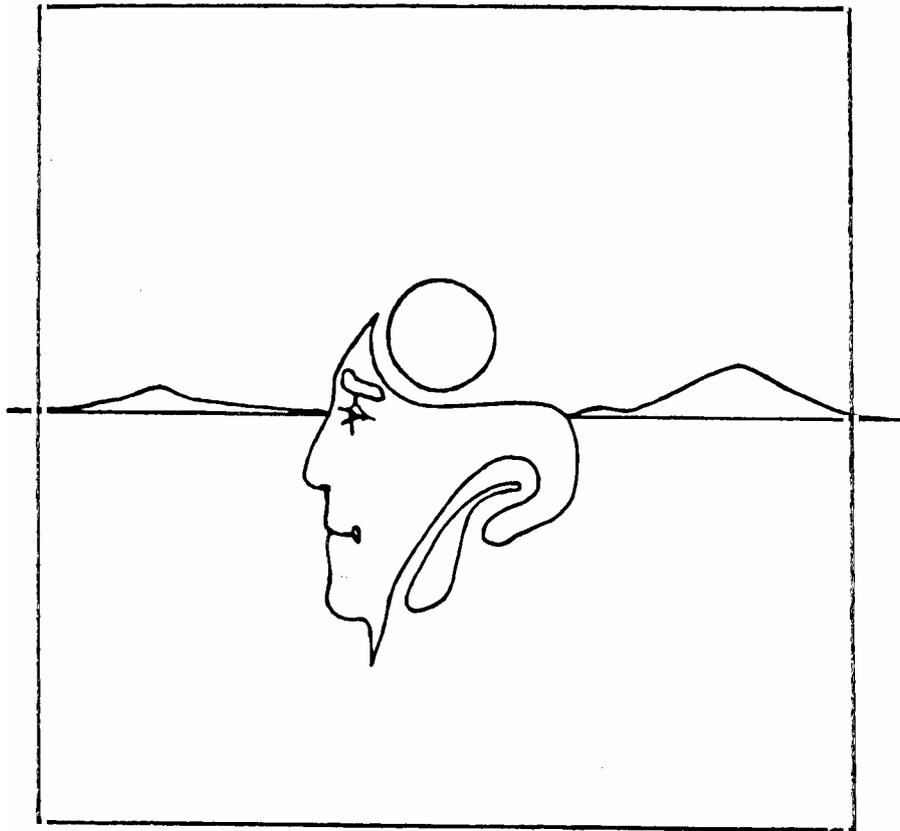
“Well, I have become used to seeing it, in fact I see it most of the time now – I am fortunate in living with a group of people who are all into spiritual growth in one way or another, so we can stay in touch with this greater awareness. And I do what I can – I am available to those in my life – and on good days I go around smiling and manage to help a few people feel better about themselves.” I was still overwhelmed when a particularly pained person walked by – I felt that I couldn’t bear it – it was too much. Doris said softly, “One of the reasons we close down is because it is difficult to bear seeing the reality around us – it really is difficult.”

In a daze I followed her through the busy throng, through the ticket barrier and onto the train. It was a relief to be on the train – we were early and had the end of the carriage to ourselves. “Sit quietly and remember who you are,” she said. I smiled at her with gratitude and sat back, closed my eyes and struggled to remember who I was.

Slowly I felt the sense of calm return. I remember in one of his lectures Peter had said something like, “The issue is this – you are in a consciousness expanding technique – now, do you want your consciousness expanded or not? I warn you, you might not like what you see – your consciousness is contracted for a reason – expand it and you’ll find out what that reason is!” His words now made sense – at the time they had been a bit puzzling. I was struck by how much more I had to learn – I had just started to explore a whole new universe. The really good thing about it was that I felt out of the trap I had been in all my life; the really scary part was that I was being blown around emotionally – from agony to ecstasy at the drop of a hat!

It was really good having Doris with me on that journey. She gave me all sorts of basic, practical advice. Don’t try to do too much at first, just observe what’s what. The biggest task, she said, would be looking after my self well enough so that I didn’t fall back into the old trap and forget all about this other world.

I quizzed her about what she did, how she coped. She said that she meditated every day and that this renewed her resolve and intention to stay out of her particular prison. She also went along to different sorts of groups – often with people in her house. She was following one of the yoga courses that Peter had mentioned at the end of the intensive, and she said that this helped enormously. It involved taking on a particular aspect of her life every six weeks. She had just finished examining and experimenting with her diet – fasting one day a week and cutting out certain foods. Previously she had worked on her dreams, on postures and looking after her body and on how to make her life more rewarding – materially as well as emotionally. “The thing is to actually do something different in my everyday life,” she said. “It’s no good leaving my growth and spiritual development to one three-day group a year – that gives me a really good kick up the spiritual arse, as well as an emotional clear-out. But the real work is done in my everyday life, living it differently, treating others better, remembering who I am, not forgetting myself or others, not being ruled by fear.”



THE STEADY STATE

She went on to describe what the other people, who lived in the same house in south London, did. Two of them were following a guru called Da Free John and went to meetings in London every week. They had similar exercises to do – cleaning up their diet, not drinking alcohol or caffeine, not taking any drugs. Another person went to a Gurdjieff group once a week. Doris said he was sometimes very weird – he would try to go a whole week without using the word ‘I’ – and would talk about himself as “this one” or “it”. One woman in the house was involved with a Red Indian group. Doris said that she found this the most difficult to understand, but that it was obviously doing her friend a lot of good. The last person in her house, Don, wasn’t following any particular line of work – he went along to all sorts of things and found his own way. He was apparently a Jungian therapist and as well as things like Enlightenment Intensives he went on Sufi retreats, Zen workshops and sesshins.

I sat listening spellbound. I had never heard of half these names or activities before. Apparently all the people in the house regularly did Intensives and the intensive format did not conflict with any of these other practices. “You see,” said Doris, “we are all working towards having more of the Truth, more enlightenment, in our lives. Different approaches suit different people – but the goal is always the same. And an Enlightenment Intensive is actually the most direct way to have a direct experience – it really is the fastest and most successful method. But that doesn’t lead to instant solutions in your life. A direct experience opens the door – but you have to walk through it, you have to work hard to change the habits you have formed throughout your life – it’s fast, but it’s not an instant solution.” She said that one of the best things to do when I got home was to write down everything that happened to me on the Intensive. “Make a record that you can go back to – because at some point in the future you’ll lose touch with it – and there’s nothing like reading your own account of your own experience to remind you of what it’s all about. Then find out what is on offer – go to introductory evenings, try different things out. Find out what suits you best, what feels right for you.”

We talked and talked, and all too soon we were pulling into Paddington, and it was time for us to go our separate ways. As I watched her disappear down the escalator I suddenly felt very alone – my last link with the Intensive was gone. I made my way home. I noticed that in every crowd of people there were usually two or three who looked alive

and happy – I tended to focus on them, doing my best to ignore the years of pain and suffering written on the faces of the others.

Back home at last. Everywhere looked different. I was struck by how dirty the place was. I resolved to clean it all thoroughly as soon as I could. But first – a cup of coffee! I hadn't had any tea or coffee for three days; I was salivating at the thought of the first sip. Surprisingly I found it didn't taste that good – it was far more bitter than I remembered and I ended up putting more sugar in the cup. Then it hit me. I noticed that I felt a bit frazzled, then I noticed that my heart was pounding and my mind started to race. I couldn't sit still – what was happening to me? Caffeine! Good grief – is this what it did to me! Well, that would be one thing that I could do without! I made use of all the furious mental activity to start writing this account of my first Enlightenment Intensive. (I was already sure I would do more.)

I made more discoveries and had further shocks later in the week. In the office I was struck by the fact that I had never seen the people I worked with before. It's a small firm which I had co-founded ten years earlier – and I had never stopped to look at the people I spent a third of my life with! I was delighted to find that they were really nice – and they were pleased to have a new me in the office. In their ways everyone commented on the differences they saw in me – “It's nice to see you at peace with yourself.” “You seem much softer now, whatever you did it obviously did you good.” “It's much nicer in the office now. It wasn't bad before, but now, well, it's nicer.”

One of the other shocks was to find out what alcohol did! I habitually have a drink at lunch time. Two days after I got back to London I went into the office just before lunch – I thought it would be a good idea to have just a short time there and then come back home. I went off to lunch on my own, as usual – and by half-way through the meal I was beginning to feel really depressed – and twigged that it was the alcohol. It really affected how I felt emotionally – I seemed to lose touch with myself and be left in this limbo, feeling a mixture of anger and depression. This sensitivity to alcohol wore off – or at least it seemed to. About a month after the intensive I had some drinks with clients and didn't notice such a severe reaction. Mind you, by then I was aware of having lost touch with a lot of the awareness that I had during the week after the intensive.

Quite a lot of things came to the surface during the first week back

home. I saw more clearly how I isolated myself from other people. I also saw how I didn't give myself time just to be with myself – even though I was hiding from other people I never actually did what I wanted to do, so I didn't give myself the chance to enjoy myself. I found that once I started to do that then I had more time and energy to be with others. Jo came by for a visit in the middle of the week – that was an eye-opener. I had always seen her as the masterful one in our relationship – this time I saw how lost and lonely she was, how her bossiness was a cover for not knowing what to do or where she was going. She pretended to be uninterested in what I had been doing – but continued to ask leading questions about it all! I felt sorry for her in a way, a completely new feeling towards her. I was also pleased that I was now on my own. I felt that my life was really just beginning, and I didn't want the complication of having to sort out old fights. I wanted to explore this new territory – not look back.

I felt pretty raw and open during that first week. It was good having the insights and realizations, but it was also a relief when it wore off and I could get back to more mundane things like working, cleaning the house and so on. Although a lot did just “wear off”, the core remained. I would never be the same person again. Now I know who I am ... I wonder what life is?