

CLASS at Wisdom's Goldenrod, Hector, NY
with Anthony Damiani (AD)
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PB PARAS; EGO

TOPIC: PB Paras

SUBJECT: Ego

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BOOKS READ FROM OR REFERENCED:

- Paul Brunton, *Notebooks*
- Paul Brunton, *The Quest of the Overself*
- Plotinus, *The Enneads* (MacKenna translation, 4th ed.)

PLOTINUS QUOTES READ OR REFERENCED: VI.7.6

NOTE: Earlier transcript versions exist, including Scan File 1984 0411C2-32R27.PDF.

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1984 04/11 at Wisdom's Goldenrod

PB Paras; Ego

Readable Edited Transcript

THE EGO IS A COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS CIRCULATING AROUND AN EMPTY CENTER; THE FEELING OF BEING IS FROM ANOTHER LEVEL

[Audio File 1984 0411a Begins]

[Note: Audio File begins with AD commentary.]

PB: "The ego is a collection of thoughts circulating around a fixed but empty centre. If the habits of many, many reincarnations had not given them such strength and persistence, they could be voided. The reality--MIND--could then reveal Itself." (8.2.37)

AD: Well we're using the word 'thinking' but we don't mean that because we use 'thinking' in a much more exalted sense--where real effort has to be made. But if you watch the constant metamorphosing of thought that's going on in your mind, it tends to have a certain structure. It tends to repeat itself. But what it's talking about, and what it's constantly repeating: there's nothing there. If we stop, put out the lights, and just let the first thought come into your mind and let it go, and you'll see that what it's referring to, there's nothing there. The thought itself is empty; there's nothing to it. It's insubstantial. It's a phantasmagoria. If anything shows up the nullity of our existence, it's when we engage in that kind of activity all the time. Try reading it again.

(Q: quote read again)

AD: It's the first part that has to be understood in all its force--that this gossamer thread of thought which is constantly metamorphosing itself from instant to instant about nothing, about nothing. And yet, because of its structure, its dynamics, around something which, as we said, is insubstantial, we are chained to it. The rest is quite secondary if you understand this.

LdS: So if I go searching in my meditations for this fixed center that I sense or I feel, I won't be able to find it.

AD: There isn't any. We speak about thought, fantasizing or metamorphosing, changing from instant to instant. What's the center around which it is doing that? Is there some pole there, that it wraps itself around? Or is it its insubstantiality, its LACK of a center. For heaven's sake, the most direct way to understand it is just go over it in your mind what you do all the time, how you're preoccupied with nullity. But because that preoccupation is repetitive, you think there's some reality to it. You know, like if you say something enough times, you'll believe it.

AH: In the past we've spoken of that center as the I-thought.

AD: I'm speaking right now, Andrew, not the past. I'm speaking right now. Just watch your mind. Watch the way it repeats itself, how thought after thought changes from one thought to another, right in front of your very eyes, and this tends to be repetitive and tends to have a certain power, and you think it's ABOUT something. You have the thought, and you think it's about some THING. And it's not. It isn't about anything.

AH: Is it mine? Does it belong to me?

AD: That's the very thing that's depriving you of finding out who this "I" is, because you're preoccupied with what is NOT "I." You're preoccupied with this process that's always going on.

You mean it never occurs to you, when a thought is going on in your mind to strike it out, smash it, destroy it, and say, "You! You are an S.O.B. You deprive me of my peace of mind!" Doesn't it occur to you? No, huh? Let's go to the next quote then.

PB: "To trace the ego to its lair is to observe its open and covered manifestations, to analyse, comprehend, and note their everchanging ephemerality. Finally it too turns out to be but a thought structure--empty, and capable of dissolution like all thoughts." (8.4.387) (Quote reread)

TS: This next quote is part of the same idea.

PB: "There is no real ego but only a quick succession of thoughts which constitutes the "I" process. There is no separate entity forming the personal consciousness but only a series of impressions, ideas, images revolving round a common centre. The latter is completely empty; the feeling of something being there derives from a totally different plane--that of the Overself." (8.2.31)

(Q: some discussion, then quote is re-read, then more discussion; approx. 5 minutes)

JG: Suppose the first part of the quote is being practiced and done, or suppose someone can recognize that to some degree. Is it then that you reach that emptiness? Do you then have a feeling that there IS something there despite the emptiness? Is that what he's saying? Or, is he saying that you recognize that your daily thoughts are really about nothing and still you have in that daily life the feeling that there IS really someone or something, and that feeling comes from the plane of the Overself?

TS: I think it's the latter.

AD: I think Johanna said the right thing. When you do investigate, when you're looking at your thoughts, you analyze, and you see there's nothing there. You understand the illusory nature. You understand that fundamentally the ego is of an illusory nature. There's no reality there. But nonetheless there is the experience that you are real, that there's something real. And there you could, of course, distinguish between two things. On the one hand, existence, and on the other, the fundamentally illusory nature of the ego.

JG: So you would have an insight of both . . .

AD: In the depths of your heart you know that you REALLY ARE. But when you look out at the world around you, when you look into your mind and watch these thoughts come and go, and try to present you with some kind of panorama or view, you can see that it's all false. But the feeling that there is some reality is coming from the depths of your heart. That is real.

JG: You're not speaking about a special meditation?

AD: No, I'm speaking about the most ordinary thing possible--that every time you look into your mind and you watch your thoughts changing, one after the other, and you persist in looking at this, after a while

you begin to see that you're identifying with something that's absolutely illusory, that has no existence, that practically is and isn't at the same time.

And to be preoccupied with that is for you to reduce yourself to this illusory kind of being. Whereas if you stay removed from that, if you keep that at a distance or, better still, if you don't permit it--then you would feel something quite different. Fundamentally, you'd be feeling something coming from your own reality, the reality that you really are.

But the fact that this is not understood shows you people are not really introspecting into yourself. You're not looking at the thoughts that the mind is constantly throwing up at you and making you subservient to them. You've got to see that. That's the most important thing about these quotes.

(Q: pause)

PB: "The ego is nothing more than a shadow. Its stuff and reality are merely that transient ever-changing play of light and colour. It exists--a word whose very meaning, "to be placed outside," is also metaphysically true. For he who immerses himself in its consciousness places himself outside the consciousness of Overself." (8.2.29)

(Q: pause)

PB: "The teaching that the ego does not exist--repeated so often in so parrot-like a way--can help no one, can only create intellectual confusion and thus harm the search for truth. But the teaching that the ego is only an idea--however strongly held by the mind--and as such does exist, can help everyone in the struggle for self-mastery and can throw intellectual light on the search for truth." (8.2.27)

(Q: some discussion 3-4 minutes; then first quote read again-- the ego is nothing more than a shadow, then 3 minutes of discussion--portions of discussion excerpted below.)

LC: Isn't the idea that the ego as a thought has an existence, but if you place yourself solely in that existence you're cutting off your link with the Overself--

AH: To say the ego doesn't exist is silly; to say it has being is also silly.

CdA: I thought existence was defined as that which stands outside of its principle. The ego stands outside of its principle so it has existence.

DB: If the ego is something we fabricate by concentrating on our own consciousness and so removing ourselves from the Overself's consciousness (er)...What does the quote say? (para reread)

DR: It's important to distinguish between the ego's consciousness and the Overself's consciousness. (para reread again)

AP: I think the meaning of the last (part) could be "he who immerses himself in thought," that would be the meaning.

AD: Of what, Anna? Of ego consciousness?

AP: In this thought stream, yes. Let's discuss what is the ego consciousness that immerses himself in the thought stream.

AD: That is the ego consciousness, Anna. If you're immersed in the thought stream, you're in the ego's consciousness, yes. If you're not immersed in it, then you're in the Overself's consciousness.

AP: Yes, that's what I mean.

RamS: But in ordinary life you are all the time involved in that ego consciousness. The pure consciousness is that which belongs to Overself. That is what we're searching for.

AD: I'm trying to make it much more available. I'm trying to speak in a much more practical way. I'm saying something like this: if you pay attention to your thoughts, you're in the ego. Ignore them, you're out of it.

RS: Yes I am saying almost the same thing.

AD: Good--if you're saying the same thing . . .

RS: But I'm saying that all the consciousness I have here now is ego-consciousness, and if I get out of it then I would be in that pure consciousness.

AD: See how subtle it is? Very very subtle. Just a shift in attention, and emphasis--if the attention shifted into the thought, identifies with the thought--you're in the ego consciousness. Shift the attention out of the ego consciousness, don't identify with the ego, the thoughts, and you'll be with the Overself. But I know you won't try it; you won't believe me, you won't believe me.

RS: No, I believe it and I understand it.

AD: Do it! (laughter)

RS: But I think unless we can get rid of the thoughts, we are not in that consciousness.

AD: Like if tomorrow morning I've got to go to the dentist and get a tooth pulled out--it's just an example--and so all night I'm thinking about the dentist, I spend eight hours thinking about the dentist, worrying about it. So I'm living in the ego consciousness, whereas if I push that thought aside and don't go into it, don't identify with it, then I won't be living in the ego consciousness, I won't be suffering anxiety, I won't be in pain. But every time I lapse, and every time I think, "Ah! The dentist tomorrow," boom! I'm in pain. "Get out, get out, quick, hurry up, get out of the ego, get out . . . Oh! I feel better."

RS: The thoughts might be away from the dentist and still there might be some other thoughts.

AD: Oh, no, no, no! no, no. It's an ANALOGY. The whole idea is if you get out of the thought of the ego, don't get into another one. STAY OUT OF THOUGHT! Stay out of it!

RS: But this is very difficult.

SHOW FAITH IN THE HIGHER – DON'T IDENTITY WITH THOUGHT; THE POWER TO UNDERSTAND IS THE SOUL WITHIN YOU

AD: Remember we spoke about it last week? We said, you show your faith in the higher when you reject the thoughts that the ego is proffering you to identify with. Every time you push away the thought, and you refuse to identify with it, you're showing your faith in the higher power.

AH: Anthony, is there a way to show faith in the higher power?

JG: Without doing that?

(Q: laughter)

AH: Is there a way via thought to show faith?

AD: Do you really want to get into the business?

BS: Last week we called it mistaken thought.

AH: Like what if I have very spiritual thoughts? Very sublime, metaphysical . . . (laughter)

AD: You notice the way already a pride and greed are coming in? "I've got very spiritual thoughts. I've got to be better than everybody else: There's no doubt in my mind about it."

HS: But what if they're REALLY spiritual? Really. (More laughter)

CdA: Do you know what that means, Herbert?

AH: It seems to mean something I don't want to come to grips with. It seems to mean not having any; the best ones are not ones at all.

AD: He said the best ones are the ones you refuse to identify with them and then you will know something about spirituality, because it will actually be happening.

KD: If you just take a practical situation, if I'm paying attention, if I'm listening to the quote and I'm not being distracted by thoughts; I'm certainly not in the state of the Overself consciousness. If I'm listening intently--that's not the Overself consciousness. I know what you're saying about being distracted by thoughts; I mean that makes sense, that's what we try to do when we meditate.

AD: Tell me: if you listen very intently, and you understand what I'm saying, who is it that understands? Whose power is it?

KD: Well, you're talking about the understanding, obviously not the ego.

AD: Answer my question.

KD: It's not the ego.

AD: We're speaking here quietly, we're making some remarks, and you're listening. And of course it's obvious that you have to listen to the thoughts I'm expressing, and you're not in the Overself consciousness, sure. But then you suddenly understand what I'm saying. To whom does that power to understand belong? To the ego?

KD: No.

AD: Like for instance, when we understand the illusory nature of the ego, do you think it's the ego that understands that? So the power to understand, that power by which you understand, is the divine within you.

KD: So does that mean that that power to understand, that is the divinity within, that's what you're saying. Can that be an ongoing occurrence if you get rid of thoughts? If your attention isn't being distracted and absorbed by this repetitive thinking process, then there can be some kind of contact with the World-Idea, with the wisdom that's unfolding.

AD: There would be a much more spontaneous operation of the intelligence, which is, like we said, the divinity within us.

KD: So that's like the birth.

AD: Yes, the birth.

JG: So it's a very impersonal affair.

AD: Yes. You make it personal by intruding with your reactions and preventing it from operating. And that's why I point out: if you have faith in the higher, you do not pay attention to this stream of thoughts that is constantly transforming itself from one into another, the senselessness that goes on and on ad nausea. You just reject all that, and you keep your mind still. I'm not saying that every other moment you're going to be inspired with illuminating thoughts that will remake the world. I'm not saying that. But there will occur to you at moments where the intelligence will spontaneously respond to whatever the situation calls for. And that spontaneity of intelligence is the divinity within you, and right then and there you'll be experiencing that higher power within you. You don't have to have a world-devastating illumination and the light of a million suns shining to be in the Overself. (pause) He's so close, and?/but? we fail to recognize him all the time. That's our problem.

KD: When I heard you first talk about that, that if you get rid of thoughts then you can experience this Overself consciousness, about the shift in attention. The way I first started thinking about it was that my normal thinking would be replaced by some light or some great thing, and that's putting it in the place of another thought.

AD: That's another thought you have, sure. It's always ducking the issue, so to speak.

KD: So what you're describing, why it's so difficult, is because--

AD: It's not difficult.

KD: It's not going to be another object of my thinking. It's not going to be another content.

AD: Yes. Another point we made was that when we understand the penetration, the depth of penetration, the way the dragon penetrates through all of these things, so that it entices us. Like if you have a thought, if you have an image in your mind, you could experience the fascination and glamour that the dragon is trying to suck you into the thought. All you have to do is have an image: you're cooked.

CdA: Is that glamour or fascination part of the very nature of thought? Is there any explanation for that glamour? It seems very pivotal because you're fascinated by it. Is it just a tool the ego uses, that fascination?

AD: That would be certainly part of it, sure, that it's used by the ego. But why do you have difficulty understanding that? It's the very nature of imagery to bind us to it.

CdA: Is that because we've created it ourselves?

AD: Yes, we've created it, sure, and it's also our past, and the past is always something that we look back to with nostalgia.

(Q: some student discussion on light and color)

(Side 1 of original cassette tape digitized as 1984 0411a Ends; Side 2 Begins)

(Q: discussion continued)

HS: Anthony, when you say as we sit here and we talk, and then you say something such as "don't identify with the thoughts as they arise and you are the Overself consciousness"--would that be incorrect?

AD: You have to go on, Herbie.

HS: If you say something such as that and you say if you understand it--the understanding that you're talking about would be like that non-identification with the arising of the thought? It wouldn't be like "Oh, I understand what you mean, don't identify with thought as it arises."

AD: I think maybe we'd better put this in the proper context. If, let's say, you're just by yourself sitting down, and you allow thoughts to occur, one after the other, and you identify with these thoughts. And you experience them to the extent that you can, to that extent, let's say, that you have identified with the lesser, with the ego consciousness, there's nothing you're going to know. You're not going to find out anything, because the thoughts are always about the past, the known, what has happened. And they're not going to tell you anything, they've got nothing to offer. But they'll go on and on and on. And I repeat this: the identification with that is to believe in the ego, to live in the ego consciousness until you get nauseous.

Now, the other thing was in a different context. I think I was trying to explain to Kathleen how she can see that you can live in the Overself consciousness. We're talking, we're having a discussion, and in the discussion, some very, let's say, some very subtle points are being made. And in the process of following very attentively to the points that are being made there's a kind of discussion in jnana (Q: knowledge) is taking place. There may come a point where you understand something, and at the same time you'll experience a certain happiness, a quiet happiness. And I'm pointing to that and saying that's the divinity within you that understands these things, not the ego. The ego doesn't understand these things, but the divinity within you understands these things. Now obviously when I speak about the divinity within you, it would be like what we refer to as the soul within the person. It's the soul inside that understands these things. And you can, temporarily or briefly, experience living in the Overself's consciousness.

Now if you think that the Overself consciousness must be some extra rapture and ecstasy, where you swoon because you're so ecstatic, it doesn't have to be that way. The Overself consciousness could be very peaceful and very quiet; you could experience the nobility of its peace and the certitude of its understanding. It could be that way, too. And it would be experienced in a discussion taking place about some very subtle point.

HS: If it is a discussion that's taking place about a subtle point, and the point is made that the Overself consciousness is experienceable in terms of its certitude . . .

AD: And understanding.

HS: Would the understanding of that be . . .

AD: Wouldn't that be like being in the Overself's consciousness?

HS: Just to understand it, right here?

AD: Isn't that why you stopped to ask again? Because you doubt that that is it--that understanding of these things. You say, "But can it be such a trivial thing?" It's not trivial. Rather, it's because we're so gross, that we see it as so ethereal and so trivial. If we were capable of to some extent purifying ourselves, then that trivial point that we're talking about could become quite important. But, I think you got the point: that it's the Overself within, the soul within, that understands.

JG: And that's why you get so happy. Thoughts never make you happy; they never keep their promises.

AD: They never do; that's right.

THE WORLD-MIND ORGANIZES THE WORLD-IMAGE; THE WORLD-MIND'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD-IDEA; EGO'S SELF-LOVE

PB: "Let them not waste so many words about or against this little ego of ours, decrying its character or denying its existence, but try to understand what is really happening in its short life. Let them find out what is actually being wrought out within and around it. Let them recognize that the Governor of the World is related to it and that we are steeped in the Divinity whether we are aware of it or not." (8.1.130)
(Quote reread)

AD: That's what we try to do Monday night (Q: in astrology class), don't we?

TS: The way in which the form of these thoughts is part of the World-Idea and insofar as that thought is steeped in Divinity there is a certain--

AD: If we say that the Governor of the World, the Lord of the World is what has organized the World-Image and all the creatures within it, then of course there's a very intimate association between the Lord of the World and the structure of your ego, and what the Lord of the World, so to speak, is trying to accomplish. By combining certain ideas to manifest something about yourself, so that you look at an aspect--a septile, a quintile, or whatever--and you see something about the way this idea is manifesting YOU, then the Lord of the World is trying to show you something about yourself. You're supposed to try to understand what is going on within you and around you. Otherwise, how could you cooperate with the World-Idea, without a knowledge of these things? But you'll see that that applies very well to what we're doing on Monday night.

TS: When the question came up earlier, "Do we fabricate the ego?" I was thinking that it's really the World-Idea that fabricates the ego--insofar as that the structure of thoughts and the structure of ideas that are given to reveal something--either can be given to be mistaken as an identity, or can be as a process of revealing some identity. But the agent that fabricates that would be the World-Mind or the Lord of the World and the entity that inhabits that would be the individual Overself.

AD: Maybe you could also see that, insofar that the Lord of the World--or let's call them the lords of karma--that bring about this fabrication, your ego, for whatever number of years, (pause) it must love that very much. In other words, the Governor of the World, who creates what we look upon as the natal chart, it must love that very much. It loves it completely, but the mistake is that the ego now appropriates that for a kind of self-love. Insofar that it mistakenly understands the love that the World-Mind has for the Ideas, the World-Idea, the ego mistakenly understands that as love for itself. (pause) (Q: this paragraph seems to be spoken with much emotion.)

JG: Is that self-conceit?

AD: Yes. After all, the Creator of the world loves what he does. (Q: spoken with emotion.)

JG: But the ego thinks It did it for him.

AD: Yes.

AH: In regard to what you just explained, you'd be able to say at once that from the point of view of the ego there's an empty center. If the ego takes the view that its center of the Lord of the World--there's a kind of conceit there.

AD: Yes, you're saying the same thing.

AH: What you've described and what was said earlier tonight could be seen in a contradictory way--that, on the one hand, several quotes have suggested that the ego has an empty center. You've just described the ego in a way that one could imagine its center was the Lord of the World. That would seem an INCORRECT interpretation of what you said.

AD: That would be incorrect. You could think of an empty center. Remember the analogy we used? There's a tree standing by the bank of a river, and it is reflected in the river. And the river, as it is traversing, as it's moving on, so to speak, and the tree is reflected in the river, that constant and incessant changing of the water in the image of the tree--that would be like the continuity of thought which we call the ego. But insofar that there--when you say it has a common center, it has an empty center, it would be the same like imagining that this river is flowing all the time: The image reflected in the river doesn't have what you might call CONSTANT BEING, but the being of the image is being incessantly changed from moment to moment. That would be like the ego. It has the form, it has a form: the image of the tree in the river. It has this form. But that which constitutes it is incessantly being changed from instant to instant. So there's nothing THERE at any one time. You no sooner say, "That's it," the water has moved on, and other particles have taken its place. And this is always going on.

And the ego is also something like that. There's always thoughts, thoughts which are preoccupied about themselves, but they never stand still long enough to be able to say they ARE.

AH: I'm trying to understand, as well as I can, what you meant when you talked about the love the Lord of the World has for the Ideas and how that must not be misappropriated as this kind of self-conceit.

AD: Well, it's inevitably appropriated as self-conceit. But don't be concerned about that. That's difficult. It should be obvious that the World-Mind LOVES the World-Idea. That should be obvious?

AH: Yes.

AD: Ok. You take it up from there. What would the consequences be?

AH: But how to understand that without arriving at a conclusion of aggrandizement of myself as ego? It's hard for me to thread that needle.

AD: So one could see that there's a misunderstanding that's going to take place, that the ego's going to misunderstand this love that the World-Mind has for the World-Idea and appropriate it for its own use. Let's not get stuck there. Let's go on to another one.

THOUGHT IMPRISONS, CESSATION OF THOUGHT RELEASES

PB: "There would be no hope of ever getting out of this ego-centered position if we did not know these three things. First, the ego is only an accumulation of memories and a series of cravings, that is, thought; it is a fictitious entity. Second, the thinking activity can come to an end in stillness. Third, Grace, the radiation of the Power beyond man, is ever-shining and ever-present. If we let the mind become deeply still and deeply observant of the ego's self-preserving instinct, we open the door to Grace, which then lovingly swallows us." (8.4.417) (Quote reread)

(Q: note: see 3/28/84 quote 7, "Until it is brought . . ." (8.4.153))

AD: So Elaine, if we think about it, did you ever experience that the whole of the perceived world is like one huge prison, that the blue sky and the white clouds and the bosom of the earth, the flatness that goes on as far as the horizon, ever experience that as bondage, as being a prison? It's strange. Some people would say, "How could you feel like a prisoner? You look out, and there's thousands of miles in front of you." But one experiences there like he's enclosed in a circle of thoughts that he can't get out of. That's why he experiences a certain bondage. The bondage is to these thoughts, the circle of thoughts. And he may not be able to explain it intellectually, but that's going on. He's a prisoner of his own thoughts.

Then the second thing he says is that mind can be brought to a point of cessation. In other words, another way of looking at it would be to say, "Mind doesn't have to think these thoughts! If mind doesn't have to think these thoughts, then I'll be free."

EM: No matter how many times you say that, it's hard to imagine.

AD: I know; you cannot imagine it, because thought cannot conceive its own cessation. That's out of the question. But we could try to make a leap and use an analogy. If you have a dream and you're in the dream and you know that everything that you're perceiving in the dream is nothing but a cluster of thoughts, sensation. But somehow you're locked into it, you can't get out, and then the dream character finds a book in the dream library and the book tells him that the master stroke is to stop the mind from thinking, so the dream character sits down and says, "I'm going to meditate; I'm going to stop thinking," and so he stops thinking and the dream disappears! There's no thoughts any more; he's not thinking. So he momentarily experiences freedom. But then thought resumes, and he's back in jail again. But he's witnessed the fact that thought is what imprisons us. Cessation of thought is what frees us. And the third step?

TS: (Oh, yes.)

AD: Is the radiation of Grace. That's very difficult because that's like saying, "When we are free, when we experience ourselves free of body, free of mind, then the "you" that's there experiences a certain Grace which is from the soul, altogether different." I won't go into the third one.

But those are three important points to remember. First, thought imprisons us. Secondly, since thought is the product of thinking, and one can learn to cease thinking by having thinking thinking about itself, then the way out is found. Just like when we said thoughts are coming into your mind, and I tell you, "Don't identify with them. Don't give them any attention. They'll die." At the moment that you stop giving them attention, it's like you're making an attempt to cease thinking, and you get out of that bondage to these thoughts that are trying to suck you in and say, "Here I am! Identify with me and you'll be happy!"

BS: Can Grace give you an insight into the reality of the world?

AD: It can, Bert. It can take that form; it could take many forms. That's one form it takes; it shows the unreality of the thoughts that we live within.

BS: The reality of the world would be its unreality, is that what you just said?

AD: It takes a little Grace, like we were just speaking about--this understanding that can occur, to recognize that we are imprisoned within our own thoughts. It may take a little Grace to understand that, or to understand that perception, insofar that it comports possession, limits the person to his possessions, and binds him hand and foot to these possessions, and so he's not free. You see what I'm saying? That perception could actually limit your infinite freedom.

And so for most people, of course--we have the interesting example of Krishnamurti where he had a moment of experience, of the experience of being without body and mind, where he thought he was going to pass out. For most people it would be that kind of a thing, where if the body and mind is taken away, then the person temporarily swoons or passes out, doesn't know what's going on. But after that, that kind of Grace will show, show them the way further on. But those are the three important points. It's the first two that we're concerned about. The third one takes care of itself.

LR: Are you equating perception with the thoughts of the ego?

AD: . . . No, I think I would say perception, the way I generally use it and even now, is that it belongs to the epistemological subject.

LR: So one could still have perception and experience the consciousness which is the Overself?

AD: And experience what?

LR: The consciousness which is the Overself.

AD: The Overself? Yes.

LR: It doesn't mean that perception is wiped out.

AD: Yes. You have to remember that this is just an analogy or an example. It occasionally occurs to people that the world is stale, flat, and a nuisance. You must have had the experience that everything just felt--it was worthless. All I was trying to point out is there is an experience, right there, that the person is

feeling the bondage of thought. He knows in his heart that he's in prison. That was the point of that analogy.

BS: The other side, of course, is the stillness. Not being in bondage would be freedom. The stillness would be the freedom.

AD: Well, the stillness could be right there in the perception is what the point she wanted to make; but I just wanted to try to make it simpler by separating the two things.

LD: Can the ego be equated with perception? We spoke of the Chaldean configuration as being the field of perception and also the configuration of the ego. Aren't they equatable?

AD: Not equatable, but they're concomitant. You're not going to have one without the other.

LD: They're not the same.

AD: No. Otherwise then your language wouldn't be able to hold up any distinction between the perceived world and the ego. But when you say ego, you don't mean the perceived world, do you? And when you speak about the perceived world you don't mean the ego but you know that they're concomitant. You're not going to have one without the other.

LD: . . .

AD: I'm sorry. I don't know what you're getting at.

LD: Is it so that that perception and the ego are identical.

AD: Alright, if you want.

STARTING A RATIONAL INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF EGO

PB: "So long as we persist in taking the ego at its own valuation as the real Self, so long are we incapable of discovering the truth about the mind or of penetrating to its mysterious depths. It is a pretender, but so long as no enquiry is instituted it goes on enjoying the status of the real Self. Once an enquiry into its true nature is begun in the proper manner and continued as long as necessary, this identification with ego may subside and surrender to the higher." (8.4.386) (Quote reread)

KD: It's interesting that he stresses inquiry and not meditation. He doesn't say go meditate and stop all thinking. He emphasizes inquiry. You have to use thought to penetrate into the ego.

RG: But does that exclude meditation? Could that be inquiring meditation?

TS: Like "Who am I?"

KD: No . . . I just think that that point of inquiry implies understanding; more of a philosophic inquiry, a penetration and attempt to understand, rather than an exercise, rather than...

AD: Rather than not thinking.

KD: Right. You always say observation is looking. I think that might be included in what he meant about inquiry.

AD: Yes, the ego will always pretend that it is the reality, and if it is not challenged, it will go on doing so. And even when it's challenged, the challenge has to be based on an understanding of how to undermine it, alright, and what criteria you'll use.

Now, the way it's presented when we read about it, you know, the ego affirms that it is the reality. And most of us think we could push it aside and say, "You're not real." But the slightest inconvenience--like if you're walking across the street, a car comes by, and you'll jump; the totality of your being will be involved in making a leap of about 28 feet. Or someone calls you a name or something and the totality of your ego comes up and defends itself. We have to think of the ego under these circumstances.

We're not to think of the--well, you know, "He's a nice fellow, the ego. I meet him every day; we come here; we sit down, have a cup of coffee. He's a real nice fellow." That's not the ego. The ego is the guy that, when you really say, "I don't believe you," he says, "Oh, no? We'll find out!" And so, if there's any unpleasant news, you'll see like a gut reaction turn you inside out; and you'll faint or swoon--that's the ego I'm talking about. That's the guy who's got it all. Now he's the one who says, "I'm real." Not the guy that you meet when you drink your coffee. That's not the guy. It's this guy here who says, "I'm real, and you're going to kowtow."

TS: What does he mean by "an inquiry begun in the proper manner"?

AD: I would think that that means the use of your critical faculties, your rational understanding. Like if you take the first three chapters of *The Quest of the Overself*, he goes through a very rational analysis of the ego, and the net result of that analysis is that you're not the ego. You remember that, right? And he goes to the point where he points out that we are not even our perceptions. I mean, he goes through a very careful analysis in those chapters. I would say that that's one of the ways that you could start off an inquiry into the nature of the ego, which is rational and firmly based on the reasoning processes.

(Q: several attempts to formulate the following question)

WHO SEEKS FREEDOM FROM EGO?

DB: What is it precisely that has an interest in resisting these reactions, and responses, and thought processes?

AD: This question always comes up in one form or another. Remember when Plotinus speaks about, in the sense that he answers the question, "Who is it that wants to do this?" And he points out that it depends upon which phase of the soul is dominant. [Note: See Plotinus, VI.7.6.] Is it that phase of the soul which is completely immersed in the ego and dominated by the ego which wants to have an understanding of the ego? Is it that phase of the soul which is engaged in critical understanding and trying to understand the world around it--in other words, the reasoning phase of the soul? Is it that phase of the soul which wants to know?

DB: My suspicion is that it would be that phase that has gotten itself completely wrapped up in the ego's functioning.

AD: If it got completely wrapped up in the ego's functioning, I don't think it would be able to be interested in anything else.

DB: Unless it became so unpleasant.

AD: Well, if it became that unpleasant, and it was completely identified with the ego's functioning, it would accept that as inevitable. That part which doesn't accept it as inevitable evidently is a little different than that part which is identified with the ego.

But, if we could stop the discussion there because it can go on forever. You have to try to remember that any time we speak about these things we must keep in mind the context of what we're saying. If we're saying that there's a part of our consciousness or if, in looking into ourselves, we identify ourselves with the images which are thrown across the screen, and we say, "Well, that's who I am," then you're speaking about the soul as THAT. If you're speaking about the person who is looking at the images that are spun out across the screen and reasons about them and tries to find a way to understand what is going on, then you could say, "THAT'S the soul," and not the fellow who's identified with the images. And if you can go further and say that there's a part of you which brings about the cessation of thought, by having thought preoccupied with itself, then you could say, "THAT'S the soul." So let's not go over this endlessly every other week. Let's try to keep in mind that it's only in terms of the context of what the soul is identified with--that's what we're talking about. Ok, now ask your question.

DB: So would you say that this self-enquiry takes place within the rational part of the soul?

AD: Well, who do you think would ask such a question; who do you think would ask the question, "Why this endless, stupid suffering?" Do you think it's going to be the animal?

DB: No, but it's that rational soul insofar as it's associated with the animal.

AD: Yes.

DB: So it's the rational soul as identified with the animal for whom this is a problem.

AD: So when we speak about the soul we could speak about a portion of it which is completely irrational, immersed in the body; we could speak about a portion of it which is rational and thinks about these things; we could think of a portion of it which is absolutely intellectual. And so the question always has to be asked with that in the background. So who is it that is sick and tired of being transfixed, or transposed, or nailed to the cross of suffering? Is it the stupid animal, Brother Ass?

DB: No.

AD: You got the point then. Let's read some more of that quote then.

[Audio File 1984 0411a Ends]

[Audio File 1984 0411b Begins]

WHAT IS THERE IN THE POWER OF TRUTH THAT RELEASES YOU FROM IGNORANCE?; EGO AS EVOLVING MATRIX OF TENDENCIES

AD: But this other guy you believe him. This other guy says, "I WANT you!" --BOOM--That's the ego! Read it again.

PB: “So long as we persist in taking the ego at its own valuation as the real Self, so long are we incapable of discovering the truth about the mind or of penetrating to its mysterious depths. It is a pretender, but so long as no enquiry is instituted it goes on enjoying the status of the real Self. Once an enquiry into its true nature is begun in the proper manner and continued as long as necessary, this identification with ego may subside and surrender to the higher.” (8.4.386) (repeat)

KD: What is it about inquiry that has the power to divest this ego of that fundamental anxiety that it operates with--that total reactive tendency? What is it about that inquiry? I know you’ve given examples about how to go about doing it, but it can’t be the conceptual understanding we operate with.

AD: Well, yes; it would be more than conceptual. But I think the question you’re asking is more like this: what is there in the power of Truth that releases you from ignorance?

KD: Yes.

AD: What is there, if we take a lesser example: you see the sun rise, and you go around for a couple of hundred thousand lives believing the sun rises. Now by that time it should be a thoroughly ingrained habit, with no possibility of it ever being dislodged. But somehow you reach a certain point of understanding--someone explains to you what is really happening--and now you understand that it isn’t the sun that rises. It seems that there’s a power in reason that disabuses you from illusion.

KD: What is that?

AD: What is that power that truth has? I can’t tell you that. (Q: softly)

KD: It sounds like, whatever this mysterious inquiry is, that we have to do with what we call *jnana*.

AD: Yes, to understand the nature of the ego and everything that’s related to it.

KD: Is it because enquiry uses the very thing, thought that has created this problem? --Is that the reason you’re getting at the very--the very warp and woof of what’s created this habit, this wrong habit?

AD: I thought your question was much more fundamental and that is: As we said, what is the power that Truth has that compels us to believe in it?

KD: And is that in the thinking. What is it that you’re bringing into the problem? What is it that you’re using that DOES have that power to divest that ego, that fundamental reaction that’s so basic to our being? We react to so totally and in an unconscious way. That’s at the root of our being. What is it about inquiry that can reach that? Because all MY notions of enquiry are of this trivial conceptual understanding that comes today and is gone tomorrow. Where is that power in inquiry? How is it brought down into my life activity?--that can penetrate into this problem, into this ego, and dissolve it, divest it of its power? What are we bringing into our life activity that he’s calling inquiry? You say this constant inquiry is part of it? (Of) what you’ve been talking about the last several weeks, this constant observation of the way the mind functions? Does that gather you into this attention so that you’re no longer stuck in the contents of--into these thoughts?

AD: Well I think you already asked 12 or 13 questions. (laughter)

AP: Isn't it so, that you're deep inside and you have to make a commitment that you really want to be free of the ego, or want to be free . . . And that is the inquiry, to study those as they turn up in consciousness, as they begin to show themselves, because then the circumstances of life will conspire to draw them out. When that happens, if you are honestly committed, you would watch them and see them and know . . .

KD: But that's at the level of the ego, making a commitment.

AH: Who makes the commitment.

AP: The commitment is on a deeper level.

KD: But everything real that has happened to me has happened in spite of me.

TS: But doesn't that come back to the question, that the understanding that occurs when thought is still, is that presence of the Overself and it is the act of the Overself. If the Overself is what first knows the ego, certainly it can penetrate its ignorance. And doesn't it seem it is that understanding as a rational act of the soul, that is the power of truth?

(Q: 2 minutes discussion among students on who makes this commitment)

AH: How can the ego decide to destroy itself? . . . When thought has turned on itself . . . Obviously we get interested in the quest and make a commitment and then by and by we understand that, "Well, that was silly; it was really the ego that made the commitment." It's like a dog chasing its own tail, or sending a thief to catch a thief.

AD: But that's the way it is, as paradoxical as it sounds. The ego is a cluster of tendencies, cravings, etc., and there comes a point when the ego has a sufficient cluster of tendencies which wanted to find out about itself. So if you think of the way I just spoke to David, if you think of this as a sliding scale, if you think of attention or consciousness as having within it, or capable of assimilating, the lowest dregs to the highest, if you think of consciousness containing all these different tendencies, then one could easily enough see that the ego could reach a certain maturity where the tendencies to seek out truth or to seek goodness can become predominant. I don't see why you speak about "take a thief to catch a thief." That's all Zen talk. That's all nonsense--who else is going to do the work?

AH: There's all these devious kinds of tricks that the ego uses to usurp for itself whatever understanding comes.

AD: And in turn?

AH: And in turn, lay the groundwork for its own demise.

AD: No. Not demise. In turn it lays the groundwork for its own suffering, from which it then learns. And then has to continue.

It's better to keep it THIS way. It's better to keep to the paradoxical nature of the problems we're confronted with in trying to understand the ego, than to throw it out or to make out they don't exist. This IS my ego. This is the way it is. It's a bundle of contradictions. On the one hand it desires the good but on the other hand doesn't hesitate to steal or to rob or to do whatever it thinks would give it happiness. Is this so?

AH: Yes.

AD: Is it possible for me to affirm, more and more, the tendencies towards the good rather than the bad? Well, then this will make sense of education, culture, civilization. That's what it's all about, to give these tendencies--to strengthen them, and weaken the others. But if this process continues--and it can continue indefinitely and for a very long time--then it's the ego that has to struggle with itself. But isn't this the way it is? What the hell are you looking for birds in the sky?

AH: It seems peculiar.

AD: It's not peculiar.

AH: It seems there is a peculiar aspect to a spiritual quester's endeavor in that it is the truth that he seeks, and that when the ego gets frozen in regards to its search for truth, there's a kind of crystallized state of egoity or inflated spirituality that really can't be dealt with.

AD: Don't worry, it won't last indefinitely.

AH: Well, for a few lifetimes.

AD: Not even. You have no guarantee of what's around the corner, let alone the next life. (pause) Or tomorrow. As crystallized as your ego is, it could be pretty thoroughly crushed within a few minutes. Now let's get back to the point. Read that quote again.

PB: "So long as we persist in taking the ego at its own valuation as the real Self, so long are we incapable of discovering the truth about the mind or of penetrating to its mysterious depths. It is a pretender, but so long as no enquiry is instituted it goes on enjoying the status of the real Self. Once an enquiry into its true nature is begun in the proper manner and continued as long as necessary, this identification with ego may subside and surrender to the higher." (8.4.386)

Billy: I liked what Kathleen brought up about--what is it about this inquiry that can begin to get the opportunity to get out of the ego? What is the power of understanding that somehow can accomplish this? I was thinking, the understanding is coming from the soul into LIFE activity. It's an activity of LIFE and coming from that place you begin to see the dead weight of the ego--that the ego is taking itself as being a living thing . . . and somehow life activity is bringing out the true nature of the ego's emptiness and from that process there's more and more of an allegiance to what a person understands (as what that life?) is, what the understanding is, and how (?).

AD: I thought she was asking a very fundamental question which I get scared of, too, sometimes. That is, like the world appears, alright; there's an appearance of the world. And I start analyzing that appearance. And in a short while I'm reduced to a state of absolute uncertainty. I don't know what is really out there any more. If I go through a systematic analysis of experience, and here's the world that appears, and I analyze it, and I begin to recognize that it is NOT what it appears to be. And I thought that her question, which I don't want to get into, is: what is this strange power? What is it? I don't know.

CdA: Do you mean, what is this strange power of Truth?

AD: This strange power of understanding, when a person understands something.

CdA: The power actually has some transformative effect?

AD: Well, if you say it changes your view of reality, of course.

CdA: So you're asking what is the nature of that power?

AD: I'm not asking; I begged off the question. I didn't want to get into that.

THE PRACTICAL MEANING OF SURRENDER: ATTENTION REMAINING SELF-ABSORBED

KD: PB was still in that state of enquiry, he was still inquiring, I get the impression. It's like an attitude, an activity that prevents the crystallization that our habitual thought processes normally put us in.

AD: Maybe we could answer the last part of the question. That I think is available to us. Where he (Q: PB) speaks about once that power to identify with the lower is released from that process, then it can be offered up to the higher. Do you follow that? I prefer that you always look at this in a practical way. If, in other words, we'll say something like this: You're looking, you're observing your mind, and you notice that there's a tendency on the part of the mind or some part OF you to always identify with the images that are taking place. And you notice it after a while; it doesn't take much. But you begin to see: any image arises, there's a part of you that immediately identifies with it. "I'm going to be a great composer, great writer," Boom! I'm identified with that thought. "What should I make for dinner tonight?" It doesn't matter because I'm not eating, nor is anyone else. But the thoughts go on, and you keep identifying. (laughter)

Now, that power to identify with the various thoughts--I think what he's saying is something to this effect--if it is freed from that tendency to identify with any of the images that occur, NOW what happens? And I think he says NOW it must be offered to the higher; it must be surrendered to the higher. Isn't that right? If we think about it practically, then that means that instead of looking at the images which are going on all the time in my mind, I ignore them but lie in a state of quiescence. Do you think? In other words, what will that attention do if it's not going to identify WITH the images? To say "surrender it to the higher" is the quotation, but what does that mean, "surrender to the higher"?

HS: The attention remains in its self, in its source?

AD: Yes. It remains self-absorbed. That's a practical way of understanding what that surrender means. See, because, now we're speaking about work that must be DONE on oneself, and this has to be done as often as possible, at any opportunity or moment that circumstances or time permits.

AH: Is this to suggest that the very practical meaning of this is that the ego can't surrender except in this way--by getting out of the way is the way the ego surrenders?

AD: Well, again you see the difficulty of speaking in such absolute terms. We spoke about the fact that there are images, and I can identify with these images, and to the extent that I identify with these images, to that extent I'm living in the ego-consciousness. Now, to the extent that I disidentify with the images, try NOT to live in the ego-consciousness, I get closer to the Source, to my OWN consciousness which is more than the ego-consciousness. Now I think the point we have to make here is: if we try to describe these things, instead of have these absolute categories, like "ego"--[Q: to] think of it as a fixed entity, is

very harmful--but if you think of it in this contextual way, that the word 'ego' means according to the way I'm using it, it is not a thing that is fixed. And then I could deal with my problems; I could communicate and talk to you. But as soon as you start using it in this reified way, I'm in trouble, and so are you.

So we're saying, we'll go back to the practical thing that we're talking about. And I'm looking at my own mind, and I'm watching all the thoughts. They're always trying to draw me in: "Come here, come here! I want your attention, kid. I want you to be preoccupied with me all the time. Me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me." That's all the ego.

Ok, I keep fighting that tendency! It's the ego fighting its own tendency! You say paradox--the thief set out to catch a thief. I don't like those kinds of things, because the truth of the matter is: I (Q: ital) am interested in my own evolution; this little ego here, stupid as it is, wants to evolve and become a little better. So it has to fight and struggle with its own tendencies to become a little better. So to say "Well, the ego won't succeed"--Like hell it won't! It will succeed, given enough time and raw circumstances, it'll succeed. It will NOT succeed in crucifying itself and destroying itself; we KNOW that. But the long evolutionary development is its business, and of course in conjunction with the World-Idea. But it is its business. So the EGO has to do these things. Nobody out there is going to come here and do it for me. OK? So let's stick to this paradoxical nature of the reality we're confronted with so that we could deal with it.

Alright, then, let me go on. So these images are in my mind. The attention wants to go and identify with them. I resist it. When I say "I" I'm talking about THIS ego resists that. "No, I'm not going to do it!" "Oh, come on. Look at how lovely I am! Come on in." "No! I won't!" So you fight it. You keep pushing it away. Eventually, little by little, you DO begin to resist this enticement that thoughts are always, so to speak, exercising. It is YOU--you as the ego--that's succeeded somewhat. Little by little, you get to a point where you can disidentify with the process and say, "No, I'm not going to look. I'm going to keep the attention absorbed, or let's say, wrapped up in itself, self-attentive." Then when I do this here, I'm liable to, let's say, a higher understanding.

If we describe it like this, if we keep in the realm of the practical, in the everyday activities of your thinking, you'll be dealing with metaphysics in this really very practical way. And it will at least--as far as I'm concerned--it'll give me some indication that you DO understand metaphysics in a PRACTICAL way. See because when you read about metaphysics and then you talk about it in a class, that's fine. But then when you start talking about the way you're working it out, applying it on yourself, it's a whole different ballgame. Because in the very description of the work that you put yourself through there'll be a revelation or at least an illustration of how much you understand of these teachings. So you see what I'm saying: By actually looking at the fantasies, by saying "I'm not going to identify with them." In other words, bringing this metaphysical work right down home. Read another one.

PB: "If I love the ego, then I fear other men or the opinion of other men. I will so act as to please them rather than the higher will." (8.3.162)

AD: Try another one.

AH: What's wrong with that one? Can we discuss it?

AD: It's too obvious.

AH: I didn't understand it.

AD: Alright, discuss it.

(Q: para reread, 2 minutes student discussion.)

DEVELOP IMPERSONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

PB: “So long as the ego’s rule is preserved, so long will the karmic tendencies which come with it be preserved. But when its rule is weakened they too will automatically be starved and weakened. To start this process, start trying to take an impersonal detached view.” (8.3.84)

(Q: some comments by students 5 minutes, some of which are below.)

HS: What you’ve got is habits.

KD: You can’t be in a state of inquiry and in a habitual--

TS: The thing is to make that inquiry as impersonal as possible.

HS: That previous quote was showing the direction that you’d be heading toward, toward more impersonal willing, detached looking.

AH: Impersonal way of understanding that the doer is not the ego.

AD: I think all he’s saying there is the way to start weakening these karmic tendencies is to be impersonal, develop an impersonal consciousness. Analyze them, and continue to do so. The impersonal consciousness or the impersonal--the understanding in itself is basically impersonal, and it helps you get detached from them. Not overnight, but gradually(?)/eventually(?). (Q: last word hard to hear.) You have to keep analyzing, from the point of view of the impersonal consciousness, your habits so that you could weaken them. That’s the same way, like if you stop eating and you starve yourself. There’s a weakening of these habitual tendencies. It acts in a similar way when a person analyzes and tries to understand the nature of his cravings, and objectify them. That very process of understanding and objectifying the nature of his cravings, that process of objectification, brings about disidentification with them. So basically I think that’s what he’s talking about in that quote.

HE: Does this go hand-in-hand with--it seems he wants to emphasize the will or just rejecting the thought of the craving as it comes up--of not identifying with the thought. (Q: the exercise of the will to reject the thoughts?= paraphrase)

AD: Yes, but you see I think of it not so much as the will, an act of the will; I think of it as an act of seeing, of knowing. Because if I say, “I’m going to will this,” then I start getting greedy. The ego comes into play; effort is going to be made. “I want to be better than the other guy.” Whereas if I just try to observe very clearly, “this is what’s going on,” then the consequences will be that the intelligence would will spontaneously operate on that.

HE: Once you actually SEE what’s really happening you just won’t identify with it.

AD: You first have to see what is REALLY happening before the true, spontaneous intelligence can operate on it. But we don’t see what’s truly happening. We see what we THINK is happening, which is a whole different ballgame. (Q: rings bell)

HE: What we spoke about before as watching, observing and not identifying--is that an exercise that you have to begin in meditation or while one is not going about his daily business?

AD: Do it every time the thought arises. Every time the thought arises, try to experience this witnessing or this impersonality of consciousness. Or you could say, try to observe, try to see. But there's no one there that sees anything, because as soon as you say there's someone there, you're no longer seeing, you're like in a corner of the room or in the balcony somewhere. But if you speak about just seeing, there's no one there. There's only that which is seen, which will include who's seeing and what he is seeing. And the best way is to try to do it every time you think of it. Pure observation, pure looking, pure seeing. Alright. Thank you.

Students: Thank you.

[Audio File 1984 0411b Ends]