



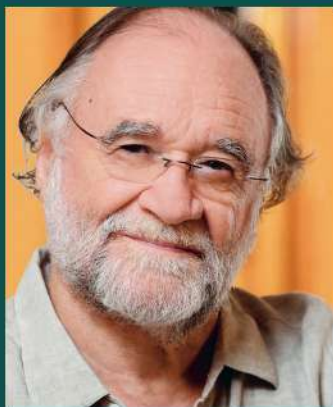
John David

*The Pointless Joy
of
Freedom*

Talks Inspired by Ancient and
Contemporary Spiritual Wisdom

The Pointless Joy of Freedom

A 4x6 grid of 24 portraits of spiritual leaders and figures of faith. The portraits are arranged in four rows and six columns. The first row includes a golden Buddha statue, a man with a beard and tilak, an elderly woman, a man with glasses and a yellow shawl, a man with a long white beard and blue turban, and an elderly man with a white beard. The second row features a man with a mustache, a man with a goatee, a smiling man, a man with a white beard and glasses, a man with glasses, and a man with a white beard. The third row shows a man in a black turban, a woman with long dark hair, a woman with dark hair, a man with a white beard, a man with a white beard and glasses, and a man with a long white beard. The fourth row includes a man with white hair, a man with glasses and a white beard, a man with a white beard, a man with a white beard and glasses, a man with a long white beard and orange shawl, and a man with a long white beard. The portraits are set against a dark green background.



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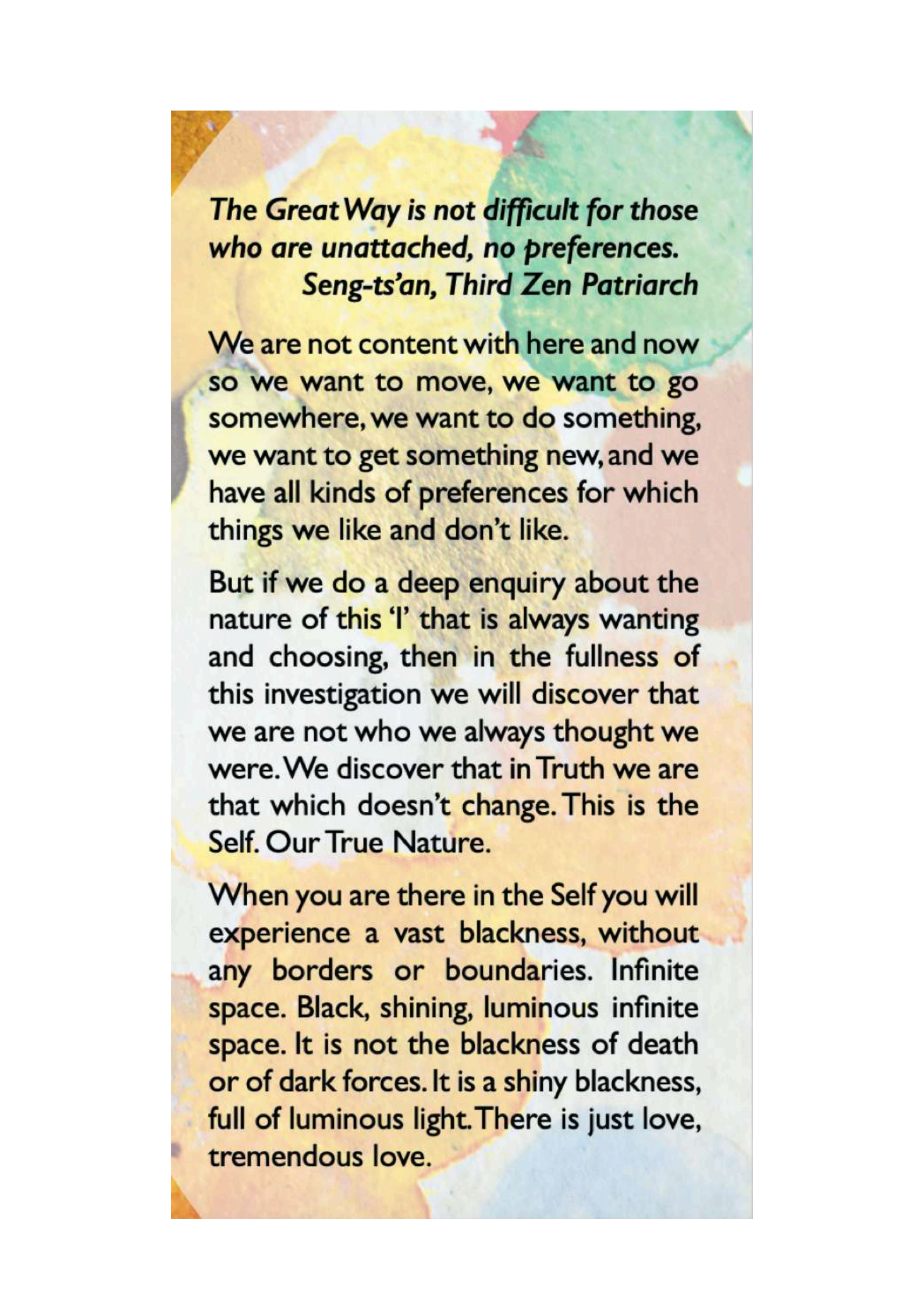


For twenty years John David (formerly Premananda) has been dedicated to guiding hundreds of sincere seekers of Truth to freedom. His clear message is not only in his words

but also in his strong energy and presence and in his daily life. Through his example, he shows us that there is no 'spiritual life'. There is just life, and the whole focus is simply to be present for every moment.

John David travels between the three International Satsang and Arts communities, Open Sky House, which grew up around him in Germany in 2004, in Ukraine in 2013 and in Spain in 2015. Here he holds regular retreats as well as broadcasting live SatTV via the Internet.

He is a painter, author and filmmaker. His books include *Papaji Amazing Grace* and *Arunachala Talks*. He has four books that also have companion films: *Arunachala Shiva*, the *Blueprints for Awakening* series – *Indian Masters* and *European Masters*, and *The Great Misunderstanding*. His other films are *Satori – Metamorphosis of an Awakening*, *Art from Inner Stillness*, and the latest work about his life and teachings, *The Pointless Joy of Freedom*.



The Great Way is not difficult for those who are unattached, no preferences.

Seng-ts'an, Third Zen Patriarch

We are not content with here and now so we want to move, we want to go somewhere, we want to do something, we want to get something new, and we have all kinds of preferences for which things we like and don't like.

But if we do a deep enquiry about the nature of this 'I' that is always wanting and choosing, then in the fullness of this investigation we will discover that we are not who we always thought we were. We discover that in Truth we are that which doesn't change. This is the Self. Our True Nature.

When you are there in the Self you will experience a vast blackness, without any borders or boundaries. Infinite space. Black, shining, luminous infinite space. It is not the blackness of death or of dark forces. It is a shiny blackness, full of luminous light. There is just love, tremendous love.

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CHAPTER 2



Our Conditioning

By looking at our structures and our conditioning, and shining light on them, we begin to be less affected by them. This is transformation, the movement to become more and more open and aware so that these old structures are no longer what we identify with. Then we have the opportunity to see who we really are.

Choose a Conscious Life

Chögyam Trungpa was a legendary Tibetan Buddhist master who inspired the Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. He was a free spirit who indulged his passions and was often drunk! He was his own person. I liked that.

The Sangha is a community of people who have the perfect right to cut through your trips and feed you with their wisdom, as well as the perfect right to demonstrate their own neurosis and be seen through by you. The companionship within the Sangha is a kind of clean friendship – without expectation, without demand, but at the same time, fulfilling. True Sangha is only possible within a container of love, intimacy and trust. It takes commitment, willingness, time and patience to create this much-needed environment.

Chögyam Trungpa



Chögyam Trungpa

1939 - 1987

John David's book selection

*Cutting Through Spiritual
Materialism*

Chögyam Trungpa was a Buddhist meditation master, scholar, teacher, poet, artist and originator of a radical re-presentation of Buddhist teachings to the West.

He was exiled to India from Tibet at a young age. In 1963, Chögyam Trungpa moved to England to study at Oxford University. In 1967 he moved to Scotland where he founded the first Tibetan Buddhist practice centre in the West. In his first steps as a teacher in 1969, he published *Meditation in Action*, the first of fourteen books on the spiritual path.

The following year he married and moved to the United States, where he established his first North American meditation centre, Tail of the Tiger in Barnet, Vermont, and various others were founded in North America throughout the rest of his life.

At these centres students were introduced to the possibility of integrating meditation practice and study into their everyday lives. He passed away in 1987, likely as a result of heavy drinking and smoking habits, which contributed to his reputation as a teacher of 'crazy-wisdom', often drinking in his spiritual meetings.

Recognised by Tibetan Buddhists and by other spiritual practitioners and scholars as a preeminent teacher of Tibetan Buddhism, he was a major, albeit controversial, figure in the dissemination of Tibetan Buddhism to the West.

Dear John David,

I want to make a change in my life. All my friends and family around me are nice, but I see they are more unconscious than me and I feel it is not helping me to become clear. My question is: If I want to transform myself is it necessary to put myself into an environment where the people are more conscious than me?

I feel a bit unsure because I also want to walk away from all the stress of my life and spend time alone. I find it hard to decide between throwing myself into a supportive spiritual group and finding a place where I can become quiet and be alone.

This is a universal question, but there's not a really universal answer because at a certain level of understanding we are very different, each one. Everyone's path is unique, although actually there is no path. Even the idea of wanting to transform yourself is in fact a wrong idea. To transform yourself still contains the notion of the small self. Someone is here who can transform themselves. This is still within the personal.

We all need a different kind of situation. For the right person at the right time it's wonderful to spend time alone and it might be very good to go and be quiet in nature. For another it might be helpful to be in a supportive spiritual Sangha.

The danger of being alone for a long time is that you might not really know what you have to look for. In the Himalayas there are many famous caves where people have stayed for many years, and I'm sure

they got their benefits. If you choose to live with other people around, in a community, then you have the advantage of constant energetic support and, as Chögyam Trungpa says, ‘... *a community of people who have the perfect right to cut through your trips and feed you with their wisdom.*’ But equally, you’re never really alone. So again it depends on what’s going on in your life.

Our whole community has become quieter over the years and we’ve noticed that new people get the benefit of being able to jump into this pool of quietness. Both situations have their advantages, and probably both are essential at different times.

Silence is also possible in community. Perhaps sometimes in our community we don’t have enough of that. How to judge it? Everybody has to find their own kind of naturalness about such things. What causes us stress? What causes us to not feel quiet? Almost certainly it is our conditioned mind. We have certain structures of thought and some of these disturb us.

Of course if you go and be alone then you could be sitting there quietly but with a whole pile of structures in your basement. You might go into the cave with a very busy mind but after thirty years there isn’t much thinking left. But not everybody wants to spend their life in a cave. If you are someone who sees the benefit in getting support to see the structures of your mind then, as an alternative to a cave, I would suggest that spiritual community within society is quite a good option. Of course the whole effort is to come to silence.

A spiritual community provides the space and encouragement for you to become aware of the unconscious mind structures that govern

your life. For example, if you have the idea 'I'm not intelligent enough' then in the workings of daily life you're confronted with this idea and encouraged to become aware of its affects.

By looking at these structures and shining light on them we begin to be less affected by them. This is the transformation that you're talking about. The movement is to become more and more open and aware so that these old structures are no longer what we identify with.

Most of us are wounded by our conditioning. We are molded into shape by our families and society and never really know who we are beneath or beyond our conditioning. It muddied the waters. Working together in community provides many mirrors that offer us the chance to see ourselves, to know who we are. Interactions with people who are also interested in knowing themselves provide a profound mirror in which we can see all the things we are not, which is not always comfortable. In this process, we then have the opportunity to see who we really are. This mirroring is one of the greatest values of community life.

Resistance to the Flow of Life

Adyashanti is an American teacher living near San Francisco and feels like a kindred spirit, even though I have as yet not met him. I like his direct, no-nonsense approach. His book, *The End of your World*, where he talks about the characteristics of awakening, has profoundly touched me as he finds words to explain things that I know but find hard to express.

A community is flowing and it moves and as soon as you don't move with it, something falls behind in you. The teaching weakens if it doesn't stay fresh. Your own realisation falls if you don't move with it. That's why I always suggest to live in a state of discovery. Not a state of discovery where you are looking for an ultimate conclusion for that's the greatest illusion of all. Live in a state of discovery because that's how the Truth lives.

Adyashanti



Adyashanti

born Steven Gray in 1962

John David's book selection

The End of Your World

Adyashanti is an American spiritual teacher and author from the San Francisco Bay area who offers talks, online study courses and retreats in the United States and abroad.

In his 20s he studied Zen Buddhism and at age twenty-five he began experiencing a series of transformative spiritual awakenings. While sitting alone on his cushion he had a classic awakening experience in which he '*...penetrated to the emptiness of all things and realised that the Buddha I had been chasing was what I was.*'

For the next few years he continued his meditation practice, while also working at his father's machine shop. Finally, at thirty-one, he had an experience of awakening that put to rest all his questions and doubts. In 1996 he was invited to teach by his master Arvis Joen Justi. He first started giving talks to small gatherings, which grew over the years. He changed his name to Adyashanti, a Sanskrit term for primordial peace.

His talks focus on awakening and embodying awakening. He downplays any affiliation with Zen. '*The Truth I point to is not confined within any religious point of view, belief system, or doctrine, but is open to all and found within all.*'

He has authored several books: *Emptiness Dancing*, *My Secret is Silence*, *True Meditation* and *The End of Your World*, as well as producing audio and video recordings. Presently he lives in the Bay area with his wife Mukti. Together they founded the Open Gate Sangha, a non-profit organisation devoted to his teachings and meetings.

Dear John David,

When I feel resistance to the flow of the community I try to see what it is in me that doesn't want to move. Almost always I can see that I am angry with the way things are. I don't want to trust and let go into that. I am resistant to freshly approaching the new challenge.

I can see that the resistance doesn't really help me because I fall behind even though I really want to believe I have a good reason to be resistant. This quote from Adyashanti points to a possibility to live without long-lasting resistance building inside, to surrender more into the flow of what is. What do you suggest to do when resistance comes up and how to live without it?

This resistance that Adyashanti is talking about here is in the context of community living, but you can also take it as resistance to life itself. The world is anyway a big community and this same resistance can also be experienced in any family or relationship situation.

Adyashanti is suggesting that we live in the moment. One of the problems of a spiritual community is that we come together because we are interested in Self-realisation – some kind of big bang that will happen one day in the future. He calls that *'the greatest illusion of all'*.

We expect that something wonderful will happen in the future and he suggests that what is much more important is that you live in a state of discovery and not focused on this big bang. What if it doesn't happen? Better to live in the moment, and live in the moment with openness, because everything that happens in each moment contains

the possibility to see or understand something. If you see the simple daily happenings as unimportant and are always waiting for this special something, you can miss your whole life.

The big bang idea is rather common in post-communist countries like Russia and Ukraine. There can be the idea that if I just hang around there will be a miracle; there'll be some kind of secret transmission and I will just pop. Unfortunately, this means that there is often a reluctance to take responsibility for your own awakening, and part of that is not taking the advice of the teacher seriously.

I received a rather shocking email this morning. I'm going to read it because it describes many people's situation.

Dear John David,

You are right. For a long time I haven't done spiritual work, no surrender. When the retreat is finished, I will go again to my habits. I know this. Heart opens only for a short moment. No responsibility, only using the master's love.

This is from someone who's been visiting my retreats for almost three years and actually is quite surrendered to the community and the work of the community. But she says she doesn't do any spiritual work and she knows at the end of this three weeks, when she's been back in Ukraine for about a week, she will do all the stuff that she did before she came here. She can see she takes no responsibility inside herself. This is a difficult situation for the teacher because he doesn't want people dependent on him.

When you decide to take responsibility, then the guidance and support of the teacher can make everything go much better. The idea that you just come and spend time with the teacher so you get to feel good, your problems disappear, and you run around happy for a week or two and then the teacher leaves and everything crashes back to how it was before is almost completely useless.

A big part of the spiritual work is to examine your own bullshit, which is probably not your own bullshit but actually just 'the' bullshit. It's all in your own hands. We give enormous power to certain sectors of society, for example our governments and churches. Why do they get this enormous power? Because all of us are completely brainwashed. We don't even question what we've been told and taught.

At school we had a class called religious study. It wasn't religious study, it was a study of the Protestant Church, and actually it wasn't study at all. It was a deep conditioning, brainwashing. When I was a little boy in school of course I didn't know I was being brainwashed. We've all been brainwashed and we don't even know it; we've given away all our power. We don't even know we've given away our power because maybe we've never had any, so it seems natural not to have any.

To many of you who've been living with communism for many years under the Soviets, what you really want is your own self-centred life, but unfortunately it doesn't work here. Choosing to hold onto your ego, your personal movie, will block the flow of energy. You have to be ready to let this melt away.

You have a choice now: Do you continue to surrender to your ego, to your personal wants, or do you surrender to your higher Self, to conscious presence and to the community? Our minds are very clever, so we have very good ways of creating strategies to explain our resistance.

In the question I am asked, 'What do you suggest to do when resistance comes up and how to live without it?' Very simple: surrender to the flow of life and then you'll never feel resistance. It's the same as surrendering to existence. Existence is a kind of intelligence that has organised perfect conditions for life on this planet. You don't have to do anything about that; it's a given. You just have an open heart and say yes and then life is unfolding from moment to moment. That's very simple, but not easy to do it of course. The resistance comes from our ego, from our ideas. My idea is different from the ideas of the people around me: 'I don't think we should paint that blue; much better if we paint it orange.'

By simply following these egoistic ideas you miss the opportunity to *'live in a state of discovery'*. You have to see what is going on with this resistance. Is this something old from your basement – your conditioned mind – or is this something fresh coming from the moment? If it is coming from the moment you can speak to the others and say: 'Hey guys, we need to meet about this; perhaps it would be better if we tried it like this ...' Nothing wrong with that. The other resistance is: 'It's very important that I go to the dentist tomorrow. I have to go and I don't care what happens around me.' This kind of resistance is a constant sabotage of the energy of the community, and ultimately a sabotage of your own awakening.

The Role of the Master

Osho was my first spiritual master. He was a controversial character who attracted many people in the 70s and 80s through combining the eastern and western spiritual and material cultures and creating a powerful field and support for inner work and awakening.

I came to Osho's ashram in a very mysterious way, at a time in my life when I wasn't consciously thinking about being part of a spiritual community. Yet I remember that as soon as I walked through 'The Gateless Gate', as the main entrance is called, I felt an enormous sense of coming home, like I had come to a place where I really felt accepted and deeply nourished. My following fifteen years of coming and going there completely changed my life, both through the presence and power of Osho and also from the amazing transformational energy of the community.

With me illusions are bound to be shattered. I am here to shatter all illusions. Yes it will irritate you. It will annoy you. That's my way of functioning and working. I will sabotage you from your very roots. Unless you are totally destroyed as a mind there is no hope for you.

Osho



OSHO

1931 - 1990

John David's book selection

*The Book of Secrets: 112
Meditations to Discover the
Mystery Within*

Osho was a mystic, guru, and spiritual teacher, born in India. After an awakening at the age of twenty-one, he travelled throughout India in the 1960s as a public speaker and professor of philosophy. He was a critic of socialism, Mahatma Gandhi and institutionalised religions, and he controversially advocated a more open attitude towards human sexuality. In 1970, Osho settled for a time in Bombay, initiating disciples known as neo-*sannyasins* and expanded his spiritual teaching and work. In his discourses, he gave his original understanding and views on the writings of many religious traditions, mystics, and philosophers from around the world.

He moved to Pune in 1974, where his disciples established a foundation and an ashram for his presence and work, which also later moved to Oregon in the USA. In the ashrams a variety of transformational tools such as meditations and workshops was offered to the residents and visitors.

His ashram is today known as the Osho International Meditation Resort. His teachings emphasise the importance of meditation, awareness, love, celebration, courage, creativity and humour. Osho's teachings have had a notable impact on western New Age thought, and their popularity has increased markedly since his death.

Dear John David,

A lot of fear comes up when I hear this quote from Osho. It feels like I can say a lot of nice things about spirituality but when it really comes to it my ego doesn't want to go. It is quite clear to me that the master's role is to challenge the ego, to destroy the illusion. Did you experience this with your masters? And did this contribute to your awakening?

It is very easy to become involved in spirituality because you have nice ideas about it. You are not so happy with your life and you look to something like spirituality as a way of making it better. In the beginning it is quite easy. You read books, watch a lot of videos and begin some spiritual practice.

This is the beginning of how we come into our interest in spirituality. The master can have a rather amusing, charismatic energy. In the beginning it is often like that. Then, as the student starts to actually hear what is being said, there grows more connection between them. You come to the meeting and you leave feeling good, energetically good. Maybe you feel peace for several days. Everything is fine.

As this process goes on something begins to change. You think you are listening and hearing, but almost certainly in the beginning you are not. As more understanding comes stronger energetic things are happening to you, so the whole connection between you and the master begins to shift. At the same time you start getting more in touch with your own movie. Not in the absolute sense, but, for

example, as someone from Hamburg with a Jewish family and certain ideas, and so on. We identify with these different movies.

Gradually the master's role is to act as a mirror, reflecting back for you to see how you are identified with a certain kind of story. We have a friend here from Italy; his story of course includes pizza and spaghetti. We have here someone from Hamburg, his story probably includes lots of rain, and I don't know what else ... hamburgers of course! There must be a lot of hamburgers around in Hamburg. Someone from Italy will have a totally different story. It depends on many different factors.

All this is going along quite nicely until one day the master says something about Jewish people. He is saying it in passing, to everybody, but actually there is a Jewish person from Hamburg sitting in the room and he takes this on board. 'Oh!' Suddenly something happens. Out of all the many things that have been spoken this thing is taken strongly because it touches some belief. This belief suddenly gets a shock, it gets challenged.

This is a strong moment, because as Osho says, *'Illusions are bound to be shattered. I am here to shatter all illusions. Yes it will irritate you. It will annoy you.'* This goes on and on. As you surrender more to the teacher, as you spend enough time with the teacher for him or her to really get to know you, then he or she will find all kinds of little devices to provoke you. If you get provoked then it almost certainly means the teacher can see a hook that needs looking at.

We all have many of these. I remember in my own case I had a typical English middle-class character, with all kinds of ideas about

England, British people, European civilisation. Then I went off to Japan. In Japan, as you know, they have toilets that are just a little hole in the floor. They lie and sit on straw mats and eat their food with chopsticks. Can you imagine how primitive that seemed to a 'sophisticated' middle-class European? I was very defensive, but the longer I stayed the more effect they had on me and my initial stay of a few months went on for some years. At this time I had to really look at what my ideas were. This was very painful sometimes; it made me quite vulnerable.

At one time in Japan I was living alone in the middle of Tokyo in a small apartment. It was one box, one room; you could not even call it an apartment. It was on the roof of an office building. Some friends of mine had arranged that I could use it for free. I lived there for a few years. It was my cave.

Later when I went to Osho this process continued. In the beginning I was completely excited to be there, to see what was going on, to experience meditation for the first time. I was excited about so many people sitting together in silence in the big hall. I was totally touched by the master, arriving in a Rolls Royce, wearing beautiful clothes. This was very impressive. It was all great fun in the beginning.

But in the years that followed there were many very difficult moments, moments when I felt extremely vulnerable. I remember one workshop where I felt very good, really good, marvellous in fact. But apparently my behaviour had become quite strange and I was disturbing the workshop. I got to meet one of the organisers of the ashram who suggested I take a few days off the workshop, sit down by the river, go to the park, chill out a bit.

What was that about? Was that a great spiritual experience I had? Was that a glimpse of the Absolute? Probably if I was asked at that time I would have said yes. I would have not known what a glimpse of the Absolute was anyway. I felt absolutely wonderful. I didn't really care if I disturbed anything. Almost for sure if I look back at it, what had been going on that day, or for some days or weeks, had put me on overload. I couldn't handle it. It was too much. It was disturbing my ideas and my sense of myself too much. My identity had been challenged too much or too quickly. So I lost the plot for some days.

I remember some very strong moments. Everywhere birds were singing, the sun was shining, the garden itself was like a jungle around the meditation room. Nevertheless, I also remember many times sitting almost in desperation. Somehow I had become so challenged that I was left in shock, maybe, or deep vulnerability. Something like this. This went on and on, for several years even. In the end there was an awakening. It came through the challenges. Spiritual work involves your ego, your movie, how you identify with yourself. This has to gradually be worn away, worn down.

Unfortunately, if it happens too suddenly very often there is a reaction, a resistance, and people leave. They stop working with the teacher. They make the teacher wrong in some way. That convinces them that it's fine and they go off to find another teacher, or not find any teacher. Care is needed, because by going from teacher to teacher you are never really allowing yourself to be deeply challenged, and the identification you have with your false self is never ground down and then gradually polished away. This process is actually the real

work. The problem we have is that we can't recognise the true Self. Why? Because we are identified with the false self, we believe ourselves to be the false self.

Unless we are challenged we don't understand what our false self is about, and we don't see that it is just an illusion, just a story. If we come from Italy it is a story that involves spaghetti and if we come from Hamburg it is a story that involves hamburgers! This is not a very crucial part of our identity. It's quite easy to give up on spaghetti or hamburgers. Nobody has real problems with these, but as things get closer and closer there can be a lot of resistance to really seeing and allowing things to slip away. So many good spiritual prospects are actually sabotaged by leaving the teacher.

It happens to almost everybody, we get super resistant – 'now I have to go ... anyway this teacher is no good, he always says the wrong things ... I don't like the colour of his beard.' When you come to this point, it is a great moment. That is not the moment to run away. It's exactly the moment to look inward and examine with brutal honesty what is going on. You can even share it with your teacher directly. People tell me all kinds of things you don't normally talk about, and I don't mind at all.

I remember many times in my early days trying to look inside, feeling something, but not getting in touch with what it was about. It took years before I was able to access what was going on and was able to express it. This is not something that happens so quickly for most people. Not for me anyway.

Did I answer the question? Yes, of course it is a funny situation with the ego. We are completely identified with something that we call ego, our identity, who we think we are, and yet the same ego is bringing us to the spiritual master and putting itself in this dangerous situation where the master's role is to challenge it. In the beginning the ego is a little bit ready to be challenged, but at a certain point it is definitely not ready to be challenged anymore. This is a very delicate tightrope walk. It is the razor's edge. This is something everybody experiences when they do spiritual work.

Did this contribute to my awakening? I would say that almost every day of the whole fifteen years I was active with Osho, and later with Papaji, I was being challenged. Through this challenge a great understanding happened and a lot of things dissolved and fell away.

Looking back, I see that by spending time with Osho, following his advice and teachings, my ego was grossly diminished by the time I got to Papaji. This work of grinding and polishing away the ego is an essential part of the spiritual work. When you get so uncomfortable that you have to go away, that is exactly the moment where there can be a big shift. So don't just run away.

Did you trust Osho from the beginning, or did you question him as a spiritual master?

I'd been introduced to him by a friend in Japan and I was completely not interested. Then later on, in a strange twist, I found myself in Mumbai and I remembered this friend who'd told me I was ready for an Indian master. I thought he might be staying at Osho's ashram

and I went looking for him. That's how I ended up there. I wasn't consciously planning it.

I was one of these very mindy people: 'Why? Why do you think that? What's that about?' My mind was going crazy. I was questioning everything. So I would say I fell in love with the master slowly. It's a gradual thing for some people. At some point I decided to become a sannyasin and get a name from Osho. That was a big decision. Once I made that decision, once I received the name, there was tremendous euphoria. Not exactly surrender, but some kind of movement towards surrender. This was pretty important.

Is it important to be given a name by a master?

I don't think it's so important.

What is the reason then that you give names?

Well, I try to find a name that marks some kind of potential that I can see in that person. The name is to encourage that particular aspect of the person at that time.

Some people have had two or three names, but it's not so serious. It's a playful thing, but also I'm suggesting that if you take a name it means that you're accepting me as your teacher. So if somebody asks for a name they should be ready for that aspect as well. In that way it's a recognition of our connection.

The other thing that I would say is that you must have a living master rather than a dead master. You can project as much as you like onto a dead master, but if you have a living master of course he or

she is almost certainly going to be in your face, saying things that you never expected them to say. That's one of the games the masters play. They try to drive you a bit crazy.

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