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Watching, Witnessing, and Willingness

by Jon Mundy, Ph.D.

*The life of the serious spiritual devotee becomes
increasingly orchestrated by the Self rather than the ego/self*
Dr. David Hawkins

A man hears of a guru who knows three secrets, the three most important things anyone can know. These secrets will enable him to master all of life and unlock the mysteries of the universe. He travels over the most difficult of terrains to find this guru going over many hills and through numerous valleys. Finally after years of searching, he finds him. He explains to the guru how long it has taken him and all the difficulties he had to go through and would the guru please tell him the three secrets that will enable him to develop a mastery of life. The guru looks at him and says, “*Very well then, one-pay attention, two-pay attention – three-pay attention.*”

Watching the Mind

The first experience I can recall of (seeing) watching the mind occurred when I was 15 years old, while hunting in the woods as a farm boy in Missouri, in the 1950’s. There is something that you do when you hunt. We called it “freezing.” You go into the woods and stand perfectly still. You become motionless and soundless. If animals are not down wind from you and they cannot smell you, they will begin to appear in the woods sometimes walking right out in front of you. Squirrels, for example, can smell and hear well but they can get very close before they see you. In this way, I once caught a baby possum that walked right up to my boot.

One day while freezing in the woods, I decided to play a game. I would disappear. I would just be eyes on the world – nothing more than that. I would be invisible – I didn’t even exist. No one could see me. There was no one there. I pretended I was a camera mindlessly recording this scene in the woods. There was no hunter hunting, no thinker thinking, no planner planning, no doer doing. There were just eyes seeing without “definition.” It was wonderful – very freeing. I withdrew for a few moments, the intention of wanting anything. I just witnessed. The experience was simple, pure, and unclouded. It was what it was and nothing else mattered. And then came the question “Who was the observer?” Or better, “What was having this experience?” and then again “Who wanted to know?”

The ego is totally confused about reality, but it does not lose sight of its goal.

***It is much more vigilant than you are,
because it is perfectly certain of its purpose.***

You are confused because you do not recognize yours.

A Course in Miracles T-11, V. 7 1-5

In several instances in the workbook, it asks us to “*watch our minds.*” The interesting question is of course “*what is it that is watching?*” The Course asks us to stop projecting. One does not, however, *just* stop projecting. It’s not like a light switch that we can just turn off. The first step is *simply to be aware of how incredibly projective we are.* Once we begin to see how projective we are, we begin to develop some control over our judging minds. We can then

“begin” to lay some of the judgment aside. To watch the mind is different than identifying with it. To watch the mind from a detached position is educational, non-stressful. It can be done with composure and serenity. Once we are “watching,” we cannot then be “wallowing.” Once we see the mind, we can begin to develop some control over the mind.

The Unwatched Mind

*Spiritual devotion is a continuous inner lifestyle
that incorporates constant watchful awareness*

Dr. David Hawkins

Several times in the Gospels, Jesus asks us to “watch,” to be vigilant, alert, attentive and observant. (Matthew 24:42, 25:13, Mark 13:33-35 Luke 21:36, 14:38, etc.). I’ve heard preachers talk about these sections as though what we should be watchful for is the devil and those who are enemies of God. God, however, does not have enemies. God could not have enemies. The Course speaks of darkness 180 times but never as though it was something *outside* of us.

According to the Course, there is no one here who has not entered into darkness (T-25. III. 6:1). We may think of darkness as ignorance or unawareness, we may think of it as – seduction into unconsciousness, of failing to pay attention. How many times have anyone of us not done something – and then said to ourselves – “That was stupid! Why weren’t you paying more attention?” When this happens, you have to ask the question, “Who is it that asks you why weren’t you paying attention?”

The ancient Greeks had a saying “*soma sema*” “The body is a tomb.” Mahatma Gandhi said the body was a prison. I sometimes think of life in this world like that of being in prison. The body is the cell in which we have been placed. Our task in this world is to figure out how to be free “in the mind” while still living in this world. Another analogy is that this world and all of life is a dream and our task is to awaken. The first task, in this sense, is to become aware of how trapped we are, how much we are “caught” in the “dreaming of the world.” We must first become aware of the fact that we are dreaming in order to find “freedom from the dream.”

In nine different instances the Course asks us to be “*vigilant against*” the subtleties of the ego and the darkness buried within.

*Your mind is filled with schemes to save the face of your ego,
and you do not seek the face of Christ.*

The glass in which the ego seeks to see its face is dark indeed.

But where you look to find yourself is up to you.

A Course in Miracles T.4, IV 1:7&9

*You do not realize how much you listen to your gods,
and how vigilant you are on their behalf.*

A Course in Miracles T-10, III, 10: 4

*When you are anxious, realize that anxiety comes
from the capriciousness of the ego, and know this need not be.*

You can be as vigilant against the ego’s dictates as for them.

A Course in Miracles T-4. IV. 4:1-2

The Shadow

The darkness lurking within is describe by Dr. Carl Jung as the shadow. The shadow is an unconscious complex containing the repressed aspects of consciousness. It is a knot in the unconscious, a place of unconscious feelings and beliefs, detectable through behaviors that are “out of character” or hard to account for in light of what we claim to know. The shadow represents traits we are ashamed of. Denial, projection, alcoholism, drug addiction, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsion behavior, and anger are all manifestations of shadowy material. The shadow is an assortment of the traits we harbor and prefer to notice in others but never, of course, in ourselves.

The tricks of the ego are every conceivable negativity known to human consciousness; any fault, any violation of integrity; inattentiveness and lack of concentration which keeps us from the focus needed for ego transcendence; laziness, tiredness, and passivity are also tricks of the ego. According to Jungian Analyst Marie-Louise von Franz, the shadow takes the form of greed, envy, jealousy, the desire for prestige, aggressions, and similar "tormenting spirits," what in Jesus' day were known as demons or bad spirits.

*Everyone carries a shadow,
and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life,
the blacker and denser it is.
At all counts, it forms an unconscious snag,
thwarting our most well-meant intentions*
Dr. Carl Jung

The shadow lives in the basement safely away from awareness. Whenever we deny any issue in life – for example, insisting we're not having trouble with alcohol when it's obvious that we are; over-spending, over-eating, or over-doing anything, unresolved issues go underground. Not only do we bury what we don't want to look at, it takes a great deal of energy to keep the shadow repressed.

*You do not recognize the enormous
waste of energy you expend in denying truth.*
A Course in Miracles, T-9. I. 11:1

The shadow is slippery -- hard to catch, grounded in fear, drama, and competitiveness. It represents everything we do not wish to acknowledge in ourselves. When I was working as a parish minister, I once encountered one of the most daunting things one can encounter in life, an individual who was ostensibly a very kind person, with a very mean mind.

Bringing the Shadow to the Light

*Bring, therefore, all your dark and secret thoughts to Him,
and look upon them with Him. He holds the light,
and you the darkness. They cannot coexist when both of You together look on them.
His judgment must prevail, and He will give it to you
as you join your perception to His.*
A Course in Miracles, T.14.VII.6:8-11

According to Jung, the Course, and much of modern depth psychology, it is important that we look at our dark side least in our righteousness we start to project our shadow on others.

As long as these shadow tricks of the ego are acted out, rationalized, denied, perpetuated, and nurtured, we suffer. The ego maintains its separated state by creating conflict between ourselves and others. “I’m smarter than you.” “I am better than you,” “I am more special than you.” All these attitudes are put into the service of maintaining the separated state of the ego. “I versus you,” creates a spirit of one-upmanship.

*Again and again have you attacked your brother,
because you saw in him a shadow figure in your private world.*
A Course in Miracles, T-12.V.3:6

*The alertness of the ego to the errors of other egos
is not the kind of vigilance the Holy Spirit would have you maintain.*
A Course in Miracle T-9, III. 1:1

Bringing our dark and secret thought to Him means being really honest with ourselves. To transcend the ego, we need a good deal of willingness and one-pointed focusing. To heal on the outside, we begin by healing on the inside. This means bringing the shadow to the light. Not other peoples shadows – our own. Until we bring the shadow to the light we’re at its mercy. Not till we are willing to look at our darkness are we able to dissipate the shadow’s energy and truly be able to help others.

*Watch your mind for the temptations of the ego,
and do not be deceived by it. It offers you nothing.
When you have given up this voluntary dis-spiriting,
you will see how your mind can focus and rise above fatigue and heal.
Yet you are not sufficiently vigilant against the demands of the ego to disengage yourself.
This need not be.*
A Course in Miracles, T-4.6:1-4

*Watch your mind for the scraps of fear,
or you will be unable to ask me to do so.*
A Course in Miracles, T-4.3:7

Watch carefully -- be very honest -- hide nothing. Secret thoughts separate us from others; they isolate us and cause depression. As Alcoholic Anonymous says, “We are as sick as our secrets.” Only by being willing to look at what lies buried inside will we begin to feel free and whole again.

*If you will really try to do this, you have taken the first step toward
preparing your mind for the Holy One to enter.*
A Course in Miracles, 4. III. 8.1-3

Temptations, Trials, and the Lessons of the Shadow

Spiritual discipline often means hard work but the return for such commitment is awareness

of our true reality.

*Even those who no longer value the material things of the world
may still be deceived . . . as investment has been withdrawn from the world's material gifts,
the ego has been seriously threatened.*

*It may still be strong enough to rally under this new temptation
to win back strength by guile.*

*Many have not seen through the ego's defenses here,
although they are not particularly subtle.*

A Course in Miracles, M, 52. 5:1-4

When a proud mother once announced to Mullah Nasruddin, “My son has finished his studies.” Nasruddin replied, “No doubt God will send him more.” Zen Master Dogen said that a Zen Master’s life is one continuous mistake. According to mystic Bernadette Roberts, in order to reveal the full strength of the souls’ cementedness in God, there is need of trials and tests of every kind. Only in this way can there arise the revelation of “that” which is in truth. She thus writes:

*Trials alone are the vehicles of unity’s revelation, so much so that the most terrible of
human trials is the herald of the greatest of human revelations.*

Bernadette Roberts, *The Path to No Self*, page 93

Enlightenment does exist. It is possible to awaken.

Unbounded freedom and joy, oneness with the Divine,

Awakening into a state of timeless grace –

these experiences Are more common than you know and not far away.

There is one further truth, however:

They don’t last . . . after the honeymoon comes the marriage.

Jack Kornfield in *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, Introduction

Freedom from ego requires perseverance, alertness, and a readiness to stay awake. Enlightenment is an extraordinary experience. It involves a leap to an entirely new state of being. Having made the jump, it can be a precarious position. The older I get, the more I discover how much “stuff” I left buried in the cellar. I think I’m beyond anger and then I discover some irritation and realize -- I’m not there yet. As we can barely see the ego ourselves, we should welcome the honest critique of friends.

If you think you are enlightened, go and spend a week with your parents.

Ram Dass

Take an enlightened master from India, plop him down in Kansas, give him a \$2,000 a month mortgage, 3 kids, a dog and a cat, a wife who nags, a boring job with an annoying boss, insurance bills and taxes, and see how long enlightenment lasts. If you think you are enlightened, try raising a teenager. As a part of the Interfaith Movement, in New York City during the 1970’s, 80’s, and 90’s, I worked with eight different gurus. Six of them took rather heavy falls and the shadow appeared in the misuse of power, alcohol, sex or money or most likely, all of the above.

The brighter the light, the darker the shadow

It's not unusual to come to the feeling that we have achieved a profound insight into the nature of the psyche. Some "mystics" feel called to share this information. Some of them have been brilliant. The problem is Specialness -- "thinking that you are someone." Among the things the Course says do not exist (the world, time, hell, the devil, fear, and the past) is "inequality." We are all equals here. We come through different terrains of biology, heredity, environment, education and wealth, but none of it makes any one of us "better" than anyone else.

My Enemy, My Friend

*Those that make you return, for whatever reason, to God's solitude,
be grateful to them. Worry about the others, who give you delicious comforts that keep you
from prayer.
Friends are enemies sometimes and enemy's friends.
Rumi*

Jung called the shadow "our sparring partner." It is also our teacher and our awakener, the opponent who exposes our flaws and sharpens our skills. Fortunately, the shadow dissipates as we demonstrate willingness to look at it. When our shadow does manifest, usually as some form of temptation, we'll know it is time to *listen to its message* rather than *act on its impulses*.

The Watched Mind -- Looking at the Shadow

Our shadow side sometimes acts out so terribly, we **have to** notice. The first place to look for the shadow is in obvious "big" ways, i.e., acting out through various addictions. Until the shadow is brought into the "light of day" and accepted with love and forgiveness, it runs--or perhaps *ruins*--our lives. The Observer Self is the tamer of the shadow. If we deny the shadow, it grows stronger. When we look at it instead, we gain stability, lose self-righteousness, and become flexible instead of defensive and rigid. My best friend is the one who will push me to be more honest, to take a good look at the dark side, least it remain buried. If the shadow seems too hard to accept, ask for the help of a therapist or good friend, but the main thing is to be willing to be honest with ourselves thereby turning it over to the Holy Spirit.

Be Vigilant Only for God and His Kingdom

As long as you must be vigilant against anything, however, you are not recognizing this mutual exclusiveness, and still believe that you can choose either one. By teaching what to choose, the Holy Spirit will ultimately teach you that you need not choose at all. This will finally liberate your mind from choice, and direct it towards creation within the Kingdom.

A Course in Miracles T. 6:5. C.4.

Willingness

The Course tells us repeatedly that it takes "willingness" to overcome the ego. However, it says, it just takes "a little willingness." Once we have demonstrated our willingness to face any problem, and be honest about our part in misperception, we can then choose to see things differently. Once we've really overcome an addiction, for example, then it truly is no longer a temptation. You know it's no longer an addiction when you don't even think about it anymore.

*In your practice, then, try only to be vigilant against deception,
(of the ego) and seek not to protect the thoughts*

*you would keep to yourself.
Let the Holy Spirit's purity shine them away, and bring
all your awareness to the readiness for purity He offers you.
Thus will He make you ready to acknowledge
that you are host to God, and hostage to no one and to nothing.
A Course in Miracles T-15. IV. 8 8-10*

It is not enough to watch and witness the dreaming of the world. To heal our belief in the ego, we must go further, recognize our part in the dreaming, and then be willing to relinquish our role as guardian of our thought system. We must open our mind to the Holy Spirit. Only this way can we receive the help which will bring us back to God once again. Once we “begin” to turn our thought system over to Him and let Him lead the way, we will find ourselves being very gently led back to God once again.

*The escape from darkness involves two stages:
First, the recognition that darkness cannot hide.
This step usually entails fear.
Second, the recognition that there is nothing you want to hide even if you could.
This step brings escape from fear.
When you have become willing to hide nothing,
you will not only be willing to enter into communication
but will also understand peace and joy.
A Course in Miracles T-1, IV. 1:1-5*

*The dreamer who doubts the reality of his dream while he is still dreaming is not really healing
his split mind. You dream of a separated ego and believe in a world that rests upon it.
This is very real to you.
You cannot undo it by not changing your mind about it.
If you are willing to renounce the role of guardian
of your thought system and open it to me,
I will correct it very gently and lead you back to God.
A Course in Miracles T-4.:3-7*

*Be careful of your thoughts, for your thoughts inspire your words.
Be careful of your words, for your words precede your actions.
Be careful of your actions, for your actions become your habits.
Be careful of your habits, for your habits build your character.
Be careful of your character, for your character decides your destiny.
Chinese proverb*

Peace,

Jon

