

## Discourse one:

# Some Basic Definitions

In order to discuss the challenge of knowing, exploring, and being Spirit with a capital “S,” we need to say what the word “Spirit” is pointing to in our actual experiences and how those experiences are related to all the other interior dynamics we can contemplate. The following “definitions” are not dictionary definitions. Indeed, they are not definitions of mere words. These definitions are a list of **see-for-yourself-with-your-own-attentiveness Glossary of Elemental Awarenesses**. Clarity on this short list of topics is a giant step toward a comprehensive exploration of consciousness, stages of consciousness, Spirit, and religion.

1. Attentiveness (sometimes called Mindfulness)
2. Intentionality
3. Sensation
4. Thinking
5. Objective Reality
6. Consciousness
7. Personality and Ego
8. Emotions
9. Desires
10. Spirit
11. Soul

## 1. Attentiveness (sometimes called Mindfulness)

Various forms of resurgent Buddhism are appearing on the North American continent, and I am finding that these “Spirit movements” are provoking me to clarify many of my basic definitions. The term “mindfulness” is very important in these Buddhist teachings. This term is used to point to that quality of inwardness that is the essence of effective meditation and the key to finding human fulfillment. The term “mindfulness” does not point to the thinking mind, but to a more general quality of our essential inwardness. Often, we use the term “mind” to mean everything that goes on in our inward life. But I want to reserve the term “mind” for a more narrow use--a word that points to the “thinking” dynamics of our inward life.

So instead of using the term “mindfulness” I will use the term “attentiveness” in these discourses. I do not intend thereby to reject the wisdom that contemporary Buddhism is bringing to the West, but rather to incorporate that wisdom into a language usage that is more congruent with Western philosophy and with the sort of Christian theology that I find most helpful.

Allow me to begin this discourse by asking you, the reader, to focus your attention on attentiveness itself. A simple experiment can get us started. Draw in a deep breath. Let out this deep breath. You can experience this breath happening. Air comes in through the nose. The chest moves. Air goes out the nose. The chest moves again. In doing this simple exercise, you can also experience your own **volition** as you choose to take this deep breath and as you choose to let it out.

Next, allow me to involve you in another simple attentiveness experiment: let your body

do the breathing. Without choosing to do anything about the breath, just be attentive to it. Focus your attention on the very beginning of an in-breath and follow it to the end. Notice the little pause. Focus your attention on the very beginning of the out-breath and follow it to the end. Notice the little pause. Do this a while until these dynamics become vivid to you. Now let your attentiveness process attend to the actuality that you are “attending to your breathing.” Finally, simply attend to the process of attending itself. Notice that you do not have any doubt that the process of “attentiveness” is going on.

Though you and I have just been communicating through the medium of names and concepts, we are talking about something (attentiveness) that is not a name or a concept but an ongoing process that precedes all naming or languaging. Language may be assisting us in our “look” at attentiveness, but attentiveness itself is not a name, not a concept, but a process which we have named and are talking about with each other.

With our own attentiveness we can see that attentiveness is a process that precedes the process of thinking, of naming, of languaging. We can also see that attentiveness to our sensations, to our feelings, to our thinking, and to attentiveness itself provides us our confidence about what is real or not real. More on this later.

## **2. Intentionality**

Next, let us notice that our attentiveness has both a passive and an active aspect. We experience the active quality of attentiveness when we “pay attention” to some specific process. Attentiveness includes choice or freedom. We can pay attention to our breathing or choose to pay attention to something else. The meditative practice of paying attention to our breathing can be seen as an exercise in building up the active power of our attentiveness in order to “pay attention” and to be “at attention” in all the living of our lives. This is the active aspect of attentiveness. We sometimes call this aspect “intentionality.”

Attentiveness can also be a passive process. Intense inputs grab our attention: they grab our attention before we even have time to consider whether to pay attention or not to pay attention. A very loud noise usually gets our attention. Our attention may also be grabbed by the sight of a big truck moving toward us as we are walking across a street. Our attentiveness is a process that is always going on with or without our choice. Our attentiveness tends to be drawn to the most urgent matters first. As life gets more complex or novel, we have to use our thinking minds to figure out which matters are most urgent and therefore intentionally choose which matters to pay attention to first.

These reflections upon our everyday experiences indicate that passive attentiveness and active intentionality are two aspects of the same basic process.

## **3. Sensations**

I want to use the word “sensations” to mean our raw pre-languaged contacts with our surroundings. By “sensations” I mean bodily sensations--sensations experienced by our attentiveness from inside our bodies. The types of bodily sensations include: sounds, tastes, touch as felt inside the toucher, smell as pure signal in the nose before we image it or attach memories to it. Sights are the hardest to see as pure sensation, for we so immediately combine our interpretive images and words with the light signals that strike our eyes. Pain and pleasure may also be counted as bodily sensations. And there may be others: chemical reactions in our digestive tract, interactions with electromagnetic waves, interactions with

gravity. Perhaps there are others. But let us focus on the big five: sound, sight, touch, taste, and smell.

Sound is perhaps the easiest sensation to be aware of in its pre-imaged form. Sounds just happen to us all the time. We cannot entirely close sounds out. As you read this page, you are also hearing whatever you are hearing in the space where you are now sitting or reclining. Watch your attentiveness move to those sounds. Perhaps you find that a bird is chirping, though you don't see the bird; you just hear the chirping. And you don't hear the word "chirping;" you hear the sound itself. Notice the exact quality of the sound you are listening to right now. Notice that **naming** what you are listening to is not the same process as **attending** to the sound itself.

The sound we might name "chirping" is a raw happening in your inner world of experience. We assume that there is a bird chirping somewhere in our surroundings. But we may find that it is not actually a bird but a recording of bird sounds. The sound itself does not tell us what is going on in the surrounding "world." We have to investigate and put together some pictures that illuminate whether that sound is issuing from a real bird or from a recorded bird or from something else entirely.

Let us focus again on the sound itself. As our attentiveness is attending to a sound, we can notice that each of these is different: the sound, our attending to the sound, and our thinking about the sound. Before there are the words "chirping" or "bird" there is this sound to which we are attending. Notice that our **thinking process** is coming up with the **interpretation** "chirping" and "bird." What is the "thinking process" as an actual process in our inward being? And what does this word "interpretation" point to?

We often assume that our attentiveness can simply look outwardly in the same way that our attentiveness can look inwardly. But no, our attentiveness is not located "out there" but "in here." When we use our in-here-attentiveness to "look" carefully, we see that our attentiveness only "sees" our attentiveness attending to sounds and sights and other inputs. We do not "see" the external world directly. What we can "see" directly is our "thinking minds" making the assumption of an external world and interpreting as present in that world such "things" as chirping and birds.

Sensations as I am defining this term are something different from emotions and desires. Desires are generated from within the body and move toward some outward need. Sensations are generated by outward events and move toward our attentiveness. Emotions are generated within the body in connection with how a person's particular personality is reacting and interacting with outward encounters and challenges. I will say more about desires and emotions after I define "personality."

## 4. Thinking

Sensations precede their interpretation, yet sensations are constantly being interpreted. I want to name this entire interpreting process "thinking." Thinking is so automatic and so continuous that we seldom stop to think about thinking itself. So let us slow down our minds enough to attend with pristine attentiveness to our own thinking process. When we are attentive in a persistent fashion, we can discern these three truths:

(1) Attending, sensing, and thinking, though interrelated, are three distinct processes. Our attending can attend to attending, sensing, and thinking and distinguish them one from the other.

(2) When our thinking has lost connection with our attending, thinking becomes gibberish disconnected from the practical tasks of understanding and living our lives.

(3) On the other hand, if thinking did not exist, then our attending to our sensing would be meaningless. If we actually were attending to our sensing without any use of our thinking faculties, our sensations would be “just a blur.” Whenever any meaning, like “bird” or “chirping,” is attached to our sensations our thinking process has come into play.

In order to see this third point more clearly, we need to notice that there are two interrelated processes of thinking: one which we human have in common with the other mammals and a second one which is unique to the human species. I will return later to explain how we know that there is this distinction between humans and the other mammalian species. But for now, let us simply notice with our own attentiveness these two types of thinking within our own inner lives.

I want us to look first at the type of thinking we humans share with the other mammals. I will call this “image-using.” By an “image” I mean an inward process that happens in our “minds” like a rerun of a small video tape of some previous experience. All mammals (and other species as well) deploy this process. If the sensations of some currently happening experience significantly match an available “rerun-tape” then that current experience occasions the rerunning of this tape which then “interprets” the present experience. These biological memory tapes are unusual tapes, for they are complete with smell-memory, sound-memory, sight-memory, taste-memory, feel-memory, pain-memory, pleasure-memory and whatever other sensation-memory the species is capable of sensing and rerunning. I am calling each of these “tape-reruns” a mental “image,” for it is not currently happening: it is being rerun in the “mind” of the animal (human or otherwise). And these reruns are a means whereby the animal can interpret whatever current happenings are keying these particular reruns.

As an example, let us suppose that in the past you ate some spoiled pineapple and got quite sick. Now, when you see pineapple, you don’t want to eat it. The old tape plays and this rerun interprets the pineapple as bad food even though the current pineapple may be perfectly safe. The taste of pineapple might also start this old tape and incline you to spit out the pineapple in disgust.

Clearly, this has been a useful process for animal life. Imaginal reruns enable animals to learn from their experiences. The “intelligent” use of this image-rerunning process is very well developed in cats, dogs, horses, chimpanzees, gorillas, porpoises, whales, as well as human beings. When we say that a dog is intelligent, we mean that the dog’s image-using process is effective in enabling this animal to learn quickly how to relate past experience to current signals and to do appropriate behaviors as a result. This same process is working in our human minds, and we can watch it work from the inside. We can “see” that this process is very complex and mostly unconscious to us; but when we are attentive enough, we do see these imaginal reruns happening. We can inwardly “observe” our pre-language, imaginal thinking taking place. We can watch it ordering and employing vast memory banks of imaginal reruns to interpret our experience and select our practical behaviors.

As a second example of imaginal thinking, let us picture ourselves playing a game of tennis. To play effectively we have to pay attention to the ball. We have to watch it into our racket. But we are not using the words “ball” and “racket” to do this. We are using a flow of memory pictures. We are predicting in picture fashion which way the ball is moving

or may move. We are feeling the racket in our hand and moving it to meet the ball. Language can even get in the way here. If we start thinking linguistically about how to hit the ball, this can mess up our imaginal thinking and thus our tennis game. A beginner at tennis may find it helpful to say “bounce” when the ball hits the court and “hit” when the racket meets the ball. But the purpose of such language usage is to get beyond language thinking and focus attention on our imaginal thinking. The “thinking” that is most immediately crucial for playing the game of tennis is that continuous flow of images of ball movement and that continuous flow of images of arm and racket feeling. We are not thinking through our tennis stroke by saying “ball, ball, ball, ball” or “racket, racket, racket, racket.” We are using image-thinking to think our way toward striking the ball in an appropriate fashion. Practicing our tennis is in large measure a practice of paying attention to this image-using process of intelligent engagement with the world. Linguistic thinking may also enter our tennis playing as we strategize our game, but imaginal thinking is foundational not only in tennis but in all athletic activity as well as in walking to the next room.

Most species of animal life conduct their entire lives with nothing but image-thinking. Humans, in addition to image-thinking, also use symbol-thinking. By “symbols” I mean mentally constructed entities that **stand for** rather than merely **rerun** experiences. The words on this page are examples. Linguaging is one type of symbolic thinking. Making music is another. Painting a picture is another. Dance is another. All the arts are means of symbolizing. Language is only one part of the symbol-using that humans do. The other animal species do not perform this symbol-using type of thinking. (Some argue that chimpanzees, gorillas, and dolphins can use symbols; but if so, they do it in a rudimentary way.) Though we cannot enter inside the minds of other species to see whether they use symbols, we can watch their behaviors and see that they do not build cultures, write books, do art, construct theories about the origin of the cosmos, envision the mystery of their approaching death, contemplate the mystery of their birth, and/or get lost in their thoughts. The thinking of the other species is very practical and thoroughly grounded in imaginal reruns of their everyday experiences.

It is amazing to me how intelligent a species can be without using symbols. My daughter has a very smart dog who can recognize and perform appropriate behaviors in response to over 100 word commands. Nevertheless, it is my contention that this smart dog does all of this with image-processing. These “humanly spoken words” function in the mind of the dog as imaginal signals not as symbols that stand for something. The remarkable intelligence in our animal companions should instruct us to trust our own image-using intelligence more.

Symbol-using thinking combined with imaginal-rerun thinking characterizes the powerful thinking that humans do. Symbol-using permits us to disconnect from currently happening experiences and from currently happening imaginal reruns of earlier experiences. Consider yourselves solving a math problem. Numbers are a good example of just how abstract symbols can be. Practical reality can be entirely abandoned in the process of performing mathematical manipulations. Numbers and other mathematical symbols may have been derived from practical reality, and they may be useful in practical applications later. But in and of themselves, numbers are sheer abstractions. Four apples, four dogs, four trees, and four days have in common the abstract characteristic “four.” My cat, I am quite certain, does not notice the “four-ness” within such dissimilar things.

Abstract thinking is the gift that makes the human mind so powerful, and it is also a source of problems in our human living. Symbolic thinking allows a human to become

estranged from the here and now of living--to become literally lost in dream-worlds, fantasies, illusions, delusions, and a myriad of other warpings. Humans can live in their memories of the past, taking them for the present. Humans can live in their hopes for the future, taking them for the present. Humans can behave in the present in oddly comical and tragic fashions because they are not noticing the actual present in which they are living. Dogs and cats do not have this problem. That is part of their charm and their living lesson to us humans.

So holding in our “minds” this brief description of imaginal and symbolic “thinking,” let us return our focus to the process of attentiveness. Notice that our attentiveness does not attend directly to an outward world. Our attentiveness can “see” sensations--that is, sounds, sights, feels, smells, and tastes. But the outward world of objects is built by our image-using and symbol-using minds as a means of interpreting sensations that would otherwise be a blur. Our attentiveness then attends to these images and symbols, to these thoughts as they flow through our inward being. Thereby, our attentiveness “sees” the outward world.

Let me review this entire dynamic of “seeing” the outward world. Attentiveness pays attention to our sensations which are being interpreted by our inward processes of thinking as objective objects which are confronting us. Attentiveness then pays attention to those interpretations as guides for making appropriate actions. When all these inward processes are working well in coordination with each other, these inner guides (these interpretations) can be amazingly good in assisting us to function in the external world. We are intelligent beings. But if we attend with our attentiveness to the actual processes going on, we see this astonishing truth: **all outward processes are but guesses constructed by our human thinking.** We live our lives without a direct vision of the external world. We live within a world of best-guess interpretations of what is transpiring. Sometimes our guesses work. Sometimes our guesses don't work. Sometimes we can't tell whether our guesses are working or not. This is one of the most shocking awarenesses that a human being can have: **the outward world is itself one of those best-guess interpretations.** Our attentiveness is not experiencing the outward world directly.

## 5. Objective Reality

We often think that we can look outside of our bodies at the surrounding world with the same ease that we can look inside at our own personal experience. But when we explore “Who is doing the looking?” we discover that the “looker” is found only in our own inwardness. When we talk about looking at our inner realm we are talking about an inner looker looking at our inward sensations, feelings, or thoughts. And when we talk about looking outside our bodies, we are also talking about the inward looker doing this looking.

So how does this inward looker get outside our bodies to do this looking? Obviously it doesn't. Going outside our bodies to look at what is outside our bodies is not what actually happens. The inward looker is looking only at sensations coming to us as inside experiences. We are assuming an objective world which we have never “seen” directly. We only “see” our inward sensations, then we construct as the meaning of those sensations an objective world which we assume to be the source of those sensations. This assumption of an objective world is a very useful assumption; we could not walk down a flight of stairs without it. But we have never actually seen or heard or felt an objective world. We have assumed it.

Inner awareness is the locus of all our experience of what we might call “truth” or “reality.” When we speak of truth as something out there in the world we have departed

from our actual experience and created a story about this imaginary person being out there with eyes looking at things, discovering things, and knowing things. But when we look carefully with our own attentiveness, we see that there is no person out there. The only looker we have ever experienced is our own attentiveness and this attentiveness is inside, not outside. All confidence that something is true must be traced back to inward experiences inside a living experiencer.

Our attentiveness, if it is persistently attentive, can see that the human thinking process has constructed this good guess of an external world. We simply assume as self-evident that there is, in addition to our inner realm of experience where attentiveness dwells, an outer realm from which the various sensations are arriving. It turns out that the guess of an outward, surrounding realm is a very workable guess. This guess interprets our experiences in a useful fashion. We would not be functional beings without this guess. Nevertheless, the outward world is an image in our animal minds. All animal life, not just humans, apparently have such an image.

Let me illustrate this with my cat. She is in the bedroom in near sleep when she hears the sound of a tuna can being opened (or perhaps it is just a few molecules of tuna smell that has reached her nose). Images start flying through her head: the taste of tuna, the drama of eating it, the route to the kitchen, the way to make her legs move, etc. All these images combine to guide action, namely the experiment of going to the kitchen to see if tuna is indeed being served in her cat bowl. It may not be. It may be that this tuna is just for human consumption and something less wonderful is being offered to her. If this is the new situation she faces, perhaps she meows her protest loudly--hoping for some change in the tuna distribution. If not, she may sulk back to the bedroom and scratch out her protest on the rug. This colorful sequence of actions is guided by a complex flow of images intelligently orchestrated to try out stories that work or don't work or somewhat work in getting or not getting this tuna.

Since I have not been inside my cat's head, my story is a bit of fiction, but my story is, I believe, to some extent true. My cat does think with images about her surroundings. And my story about my cat is an example of my own story-building about the world I live in. I can build this story about my cat's intelligence because I do myself operate in this intelligent fashion. It is my direct experience of my own intelligent processes that allow me to intuit such processes in my cat. Because I use language and other fancy symbols, my imaginal/linguaged story-telling is more complex than that of my cat's, but I, like my cat, am assuming an objective world I have never seen directly. I am constructing from the sound of tuna can lids, tasty smells, and other sensory inputs imaginal story sequences that I try out as experiments of action. I am informed by memories composed of such images and symbols. I am constantly reordering my images and symbols in order to predict new futures and construct new actions for the new situations I face.

The scientific method is a sophisticated version of such practical cat-thinking. A community of scientists begin with a given body of remembered knowledge including its workability and unworkability. Then they make a guess creating some slightly novel rational construction. They then devise a way to test out this guess with an experiment. They do the experiment. (It may be a very complex experiment that takes months to complete.) Then they see if the results of this experiment support or do not support this guess of new rational knowledge which they have made.

So what is objective reality? What is objective knowledge of reality? Objective thinking is a useful game being played in the inner processes of living beings. Objective reality is an

image (and among humans a sophisticated nest of concepts) created by those living beings. Scientists work communally in their quest for objective knowledge, and this tends to create a sort of communal authority for their work. But the truth of our scientific knowledge finally resides in the actual experiences of inwardly thinking human beings.

As conscious beings we can watch ourselves thinking. We can know that our thinking is a type of playfulness. Thinking, however serious its consequences might be, is nevertheless like playing a childhood game. We can realize that the concept of “objective reality” is just one of the elements of this playful game of thinking. And lastly, we can know that the fullness of the REALTY that we actually face is only partly ordered by the game of thinking.

## 6. Consciousness

The notion of two realms (an objective realm and a subjective realm) is a notion that presupposes looking at reality from the perspective of the objective realm. When we view reality from the inward place of attentiveness, there is no objective realm and there is no subjective realm. There are no realms at all; there is just one REALITY. Attentiveness is experiencing one REALITY. The objective look, as we have noted above, is an inward game being played by the thinking mind. Both the objective look and the inward look are the looks of a looker we often call “consciousness.” Consciousness is doing all the looking--the inward looking and the outward looking. Consciousness of REALITY is the one and only “looking” that is going on.

Nevertheless, the quest for wisdom or knowledge of REALITY does include these two aspects: (1) the contemplative approach to inward wisdom and (2) the scientific approach to objective knowledge. Both of these are valid quests, but only the contemplative approach to REALITY can see the unity of these two approaches. One conscious being is making both of these approaches to REALITY.

The objective look cannot “see” consciousness itself, but only the outward results of consciousness. As conscious beings playing the game of outward lookers, we customarily define “consciousness” as the inward capacity to be aware of surroundings and to be responsive to them. By this definition, a bacterium is clearly conscious. A virus may also be thought of as conscious. A rock, however, is not conscious--neither is a molecule, an atom, or a quark. Some thoughtful persons have attributed a form of inwardness to these “inanimate” beings, but what precisely is this inwardness like? An atom is not sensitive and responsive in the sense that a living cell is sensitive and responsive. The inwardness of an atom may possess a range of options, but these options are quite rigid, statistically speaking. An atom may have a type of unpredictability, but it can manifest no basic departures from its set statistical range of options. A living cell, however, is unpredictable in a much more fundamental fashion. We might say that cells decide things, try things, invent things. Life did not have to evolve in the way it did. Life is in many ways a wild and unpredictable phenomenon. Such options an atom does not possess. Its inwardness is a vastly different sort of inwardness than that of a living cell. So let us not refer to the inwardness of an atom as a form of consciousness. Let us reserve this precious word “consciousness” to indicate the inwardness of living beings. Animals, plants, fungi, microbes all possess some form of consciousness.

Continuing to play the game of looking objectively at all conscious beings, we can say that human consciousness is more complex than the consciousness of the other animals or plants or fungi or microbes. We have already indicated that part of the nature of this additional complexity resides in our symbol-thinking which our evolution has added to our



image-thinking. Symbol-thinking has provided the human species with a capacity for high abstraction and with this capacity comes the capacity for distancing ourselves from reality and thereby having the capacity to relate more consciously to the whole of reality. We can stand back and observe the inevitability of our approaching death and thereby experience the Awe of that final ending in a manner that other species do not experience. This same capacity provides us with a similar reflection upon the equally uncanny reality of our having been born at all. The coming into being of the whole cosmos is similarly attention-getting to our abstract symbol-using consciousness. Every aspect of every being in all its coming into being and in all its going out of being becomes an experience of unfathomable mystery. The symbol-using being is fated by the very existence of this capacity with also being a mystery-experiencing being. Such mystery-relatedness is part of the nature of human consciousness.

Using our objective reality game, we can examine human consciousness as an outward manifestation operating alongside other types of conscious beings. But the reality of consciousness is only known by consciousness itself. Consciousness is known through the contemplation of consciousness by consciousness. We cannot describe our own consciousness except from the inside of being conscious. We cannot intuit the consciousness of another animal species except from the inside of being conscious ourselves. We cannot directly see another human being's consciousness. We intuit consciousness in one another through the experience of consciousness within our own lives.

So what is consciousness as an inwardly experienced process? Attentiveness/intentionality is the center of it. This is what we mean when we say, "I have a body, but I am not my body. I have feelings, but I am not my feelings. I have thoughts, but I am not my thoughts." I am my attentiveness and my intentionality. Attentiveness/intentionality is the ongoing process in which I experience my consciousness to be centered. This will be further clarified as we consider personality, ego, emotions, desires, and Spirit.

## **7. Personality and Ego**

Each of us has a life history. In the course of that life history each of us has developed a personality. Through all that we have attended and intended, we have formed some habits of attending and intending. These habits comprise our personality. These habits guide our attentiveness and our intentionalities. We don't decide everything all over again at every moment. In most cases, we simply follow the program we have already built up over the years of our lives. Only when this program does not work for us do we bring to bear the energies needed to change the program or to act outside the customary program.

Sometimes we say that the habits we have built up are "just me." Identifying in this way with our current habits, we tend to go on running our habitual program even when it no longer works for us. We may be unconscious of the fact that we have built this program and that we still (deep down somewhere) have the power to change this program of habits.

"Personality" defined as a program of habits, is both an outward process of habitual behaviors and an inward process of habitual priorities for our attention and for our impulses to action. Our personality serves us; we could not function well without a set of habits that work for us most of the time. But our personality, our habit-patterns, can also be a straight-jacket limiting our attentiveness and our responsiveness in the situations we confront.

The term “ego” can be defined as the mental picture of who I see myself to be when I assume that my attentiveness/responsiveness is limited by my personality. Such an “ego” is an illusion, for I, in my attentiveness/responsiveness, am not actually limited by my personality. My personality is not an illusion; it is that very real structure of habits that I have built up over my lifetime to assist me in the living of my life. But the attentiveness/responsiveness that we experience as the centering and regulating core of our personal life, is not finally limited to an “ego” that is consistent with the habits of my personality. This core “I” is not an ego; “I” am something more. We will explore this further in the section on Spirit.

With these definitions of personality and ego in mind, we can clarify another important dynamic of our inward lives--emotional feelings.

## **8. Emotional Feelings**

Emotional feelings are not the same as the sensations coming to us through our bodies from our surrounding life situations. Emotional feelings are related to that program of habits we have called “personality.” Like sensations, emotional feelings are felt in the body. Emotional feelings are produced by the body, but they are produced in accord with how the personality perceives its encounters and responses within the current processes of living. If we understand that we are going to be shot to death at dawn, our body produces emotions appropriate to how we are relating to that prospect. Fear may be one of those emotions. If we have just lost a loved one, grief may be one of those emotions. If someone we love is choosing to leave us, sadness may be our emotional feeling. Similarly, gladness, relief, joy, and anger are feelings produced by our body in accord with how our personality computes its relationships with the current actualities of living.

This understanding of emotional feelings is important. It makes clear that we do not simply choose to feel however we want to feel. We feel the way we do feel because our bodies are computing how our personality is confronting life in some specific manner. Therefore, our emotional feelings are clues to us about what we are actually facing. But these clues are different from the clues given to us by our sensations. The difference is that emotional feelings are also clues to us about who we are as a program of habits. Emotional feelings tell us as much about our personality as they do about our external situation. Therefore, what our emotional feelings are telling us can be confusing to us. Are our feelings telling us something about the external situation or something about ourselves as a personality? It is probably both, but which is which? Are we fearful because the external situation is truly dangerous, or because we are the type of personality who finds this sort of situation more challenging than it actually is? Or perhaps we are fearful because the current situation reminds us of something dangerous that happened long ago and our personality has learned to be panicked around such situations. All this is very complex. My point is only this: emotional feelings derive their quality from both the situation being faced and from the personality doing the facing.

Becoming more clear about a situation will change the way we feel. Becoming a different program of habits will also change the way we feel. However we feel, our feelings are never the basic problem to be dealt with. All feeling are good feelings. Our bodies, in producing emotional feelings, are doing their best to tell us information we need to know. Grief may mean that we need to understand ourselves to be in a situation of loss. Relief may mean that we need to understand that some situation of crisis has past.

Our emotional life is complex, because our lives are complex. Our emotional feelings are being produced by both real and delusory perceptions of our life situation. Our emotional feelings are being produced by both the sane and the neurotic aspects of our personality. Our emotional feelings are being produced by both the old personality that is dying away, and the next personality that is coming into being.

We can indeed change the way we feel by making choices that incrementally change the quality of our personality. We can also change the way we feel by putting ourselves into a different situation. But given the situation and given the personality we now are, emotional feelings are dependable. They are telling us the truth. Our body through its emotional feelings is doing its best to give us useful information.

Emotions tend to be impulses to action, but we do not have to act upon these impulses. On the other hand, we do not have to suppress our emotional feelings, and we may choose to act in accord with the impulse-tendencies of our feelings. Emotional feelings can be fully felt and skillfully used to guide the living of our lives.

## **9. Desires**

Our desires are at least as complex as our emotional feelings. At their most elemental level, desires are simply the impetus of the body toward its basic needs: food, water, sex, comfort, avoidance of pain, and survival. All species of animal life seem to have such desires. These basic desires are part of the wholesome functioning of our bodies assisting us toward survival and wellbeing.

But human desires become very complex as they mingle with our emotional lives and with the strivings of our personality to change or not change, to find more life or to avoid more life.

The Buddha saw the source of all our needless suffering in our desires, but he was not speaking of our basic natural desires. He was focusing on those more complex desires which he called our “cravings” and our “aversions.” Wanting our supper is not our problem. Our problem is our craving to become something we are not and can never be. This might be craving to live without need of food or craving to be able to eat the entire candy store without consequences. Human cravings can become very complex, but all these complexities can be boiled down to this basic formula: wanting to be less mortal than we actually are.

Our aversions are also related to this elemental striving to be less mortal than we are. Let us not equate “aversions” with reactions like pulling our hand away from a hot stove or fleeing some actual danger. The aversions which are causing unnecessary suffering in our lives are our various “desires” to be rid of a life which contains insecurities, frustrations, disappointments, humiliations, old age, and death. Our desire to be rid of such “negative” aspects of our normal lives increases our suffering. Human life is limited; it includes both coming into being and passing away. About half of our experience is the passing-away part of our lives. If we are pushing away from us the passing-away half of our experience, then we are pushing away our actual lives. “Aversion” means rejecting the lives we cannot be rid of. “Craving” means obsessing for lives we can never have. The sufferings of normal finitude cannot be avoided, but the sufferings brought upon us by aversions and cravings can be avoided, says the Buddha.

How can these sufferings be avoided? The Buddha says they can be avoided by non-clinging. “Non-clinging” has a more gentle meaning than those strict asceticisms that tend to hold all of life at arms length. Non-clinging means openness to all aspects of life’s abundance as well as all aspects of life’s limitations. Non-clinging means abounding in our abundance in the realization that all abundance is temporary. Non-clinging also means living with equanimity through times of loss, grief, and sadness.

In Christian heritage the challenge to live “in but not of the world” is very similar in meaning to this “non-clinging” of Buddhism. Both the best of Buddhism and the best of Christianity have seen authentic living as a middle way between life-denying asceticism and delusory indulgence.

For example, the seven deadly sins developed in Christian heritage each picture a normal desire twisted into some search for a life that can never be. **Greed** is the desire to have more and more and more unendingly. Greed is not simply wanting what we practically need for our optimal functioning. Greed is wanting to be unbounded, unlimited, totally knowledgeable, totally secure, totally gratified, totally righteous. Greed is a form of self-torture as well as a mistreatment of others. **Jealousy** is another unrealistic craving. It is more than wanting loyalty; it is the unrealism of insisting that those we love must always love us back and love us best. Similarly, **lust** is not merely having sexual and other bodily desires, but having an obsession with this or that particular fulfillment as “necessary” to make our life worth while. **Envy** is the outlandish desire of wanting to be some other person with some other life than the sorry life with which we are stuck. **Sloth** is more than a simple desire for rest and recreation; it is the rejection of life’s tough challenges. Sloth is an escape into sleepiness and the stubborn rebellion of “I don’t want to and you can’t make me.” **Rage** is more than having and expressing our normal angry feelings; rage is an unwillingness to abide the human condition. Rage may manifest as a refusal to discipline our anger--we “lose it,” as we say. Rage may be a violent volatility toward others, but rage may also suppress anger into a self-destructive force. Perhaps the most deadly of the seven deadly sins is **pride**. Pride in this context is not our wholesome self-respect or self-affirmation. The deadly sort of pride is the desire to always be right in every action--right because we possess the correct teachings, right because any deed done by “a person of my stature” is always right. On the other hand, pride can take on a weak form--the style of never doing anything for fear that it will not be good enough for me to be proud of it. All our obsessions with judging others and with judging ourselves are forms of pride. Self-affirmation is wholesome, but pride in an unrealistic craving to exalt our mortal lives to some absolute status.

Clearly, all these deadly “desires” are complexities constructed by the unwillingness of us human beings to be content with our actual finite lives and with the simple basic desires of our bodies and with our bodies’ normal fulfillments and normal frustrations.

## 10. Spirit

“Spirit,” as I wish to use this term, will be further defined in all the discourses of this book. In this section of discourse one, I will begin my elaboration of this vast subject.

First of all, the desires described in the previous section as cravings, aversions, and the seven deadly estrangements can be called “expressions of evil Spirit.” By “evil Spirit” I mean Spirit refusing to be Spirit--Spirit fleeing away from being Spirit. Evil Spirit is an expression of the reality of Spirit in human existence. Evil Spirit is an example of how the

pathology of a process can bear witness to the presence of the healthy process that has become sick. Note that birds and cats are not afflicted with cravings and aversions and the seven deadly estrangements. The other species are content with their finite existences. Indeed, they appear to be fundamentally unconscious of the passing nature of their lives. It is the expanded consciousness of humans that makes possible these characteristic pathologies.

A more positive vision of Spirit can be defined in relation to our experience of being a personality. When the Buddha speaks of “non-clinging” or the New Testament speaks of “dying with Christ,” the self, as we usually conceive of the self, is being surrendered. That is, our personality is being given up as that with which we fundamentally identify.

Spirit is the awareness that none of our usual “I” definitions are valid. I have a body, but I am not my body. I have a thinking mind, but I am not my mind. I have feelings, but I am not my feelings. I have a personality, but I am not my personality. I can watch my feelings arise, stay a while, and disappear. I can watch my thoughts arise, stay a while, and disappear. I can even watch my personality change. I am not now the personality I was as a child. I will not be the same personality a decade from now. If I identify with the personality I used to be, am now, or may one day be, I miss being the “I” that I truly am. The true-I, the deep-I is that attentiveness that attends to the passing show of my personalities and all other aspects of my finite processes. The deep-I is also that intentionality that participates in designing the next personality that I will become. This deep non-clinging to the selves I have become and this deep intentionality that forges selves I have never been before are experiences of Spirit with a capital “S.”

The journey toward fully becoming Spirit might be pictured by viewing my personality as a block of ice. A block of ice is rigid; it has some square corners. Square corners do not always fit well into the actual course of living. But if the same stuff that is this block of ice melts into liquid water, then it will flow quite easily through any passage. Becoming Spirit is like this: it means the melting of the stuff of my personality into a flexible, flowing quality. In other words, becoming Spirit adds nothing and subtracts nothing from the everyday process of my life. Becoming Spirit melts the plain old stuff of my life into a new flow. So being Spirit can be described as being “no-self” if “self” means something stable and permanent. This, I believe, is the essence of what the best of Buddhism means by “no self” and “enlightenment.”

In Christian heritage, Spirit is often pictured as a wind that blows through the whole of my life. “This wind blows where it wills, we do not know where it comes from or where it is going,” but we can see the leaves move on every tree. So it is with Spirit; Spirit moves every leaf in the content of our lives. But Spirit has no content of its own. Spirit is contentless.

Christian heritage also pictures Spirit as a more-than-personality “I”-- the “I” that is acting in a cosmic I-THOU relationship. This “Spirit-I” is pictured as an encounter with that contentless Mystery that is the Source and Tomb of all content. This Spirit-I is pictured as a response through all the content of my life toward my encounters with this contentless Mystery. So pictured, Spirit is a relationship--a relationship of encounter and response. Spirit, so pictured, lives in my life as an ongoing story of being continually encountered by the Infinite through the finite contents of my life and of continually responding to these encounters. This picture does not give Spirit any content. Spirit is the freedom to receive with equanimity whatever content comes. Spirit is also the freedom to respond in a creative way to whatever content comes and thus participate in bringing into being new content.

Such Spirit is a Real Presence blowing in our lives, yet Spirit has no content. Thus Spirit, as described in such Christian teachings, can also be characterized as a “no-self” --where “self” means some sort of permanent content.

Perhaps the term “Spirit-I“ is a paradox, for Spirit is not an “I” in the customary “ego” sense. Yet this strange “I-ness” can be called my “true-self,” (my “Spirit-I,” my “Spirit-no-self”). I can identify more and more with my Spirit-I and less and less with being the finite dynamics of my personhood. I, the Spirit I, can be non-clinging to any personality I have been, still am, or might yet become. I, the Spirit-I, can be non-clinging to any feelings I have or don’t have. I, the Spirit-I, can be non-clinging to any thoughts that come to me or that I construct so carefully to say what I want to say. I, the Spirit-I, can be non-clinging to any inward sensations or to any conditions in my outward situation. I, the Spirit-I, can be content with the passing of all content. And I, the Spirit-I, can be creative, a co-creator with the Infinite Mystery in creating the next arrangement of content on behalf of all beings.

This last sentence hints toward another amazing realization: Spirit is not only freedom from all content but compassion for all content. In both the best of Buddhism and the best of Christianity, we hear witnesses to the presence of a compassion or a love that is far deeper than our emotions or our desires. Spirit love, so understood, is not an affection or a desire but a motivity and an action of our intentionality. Spirit love appears as a result of finding our Spirit freedom in the midst of trusting the ongoing gift of the fundamental fabrics and processes of our lives. Let me put it this way: the Spirit-no-self when acting within the realm of finite contents is called “compassion.”

This opening definition of “Spirit” is not the end of my discussion of Spirit. All the other discourses in this book define further what I mean by this grand and slippery term.

## 11. Soul

“Soul” is another slippery term. In the music community “soul” often means the realization of the emotional center of our bodies. The term “heart” is also used in a similar fashion.

In Jungian psychological thought, “soul” means the collective personality of the human species. Such “soul” is our mammalian/human depths formulated in archetypes build up by human cultures to express those depths. “Soul,” so defined, is mostly unconscious to individual persons, but it is nevertheless a finite dynamic--not a relationship with the Infinite.

In popular Western religious culture, “soul” is defined as a type of substance--a non-material substance. “Soul” is pictured as an ethereal substance or a ghost substance. It can be shown that many generations of religious thinkers have used this substantialistic soul imagery to point to the same realities which I called “Spirit” in the previous section.

But ethereal substance is not a literal reality observable by scientific rationality nor an inward reality that can be attended to by contemplative processes. “Ethereal substance” is poetry--a creation of the religious imagination of the human species. Furthermore, “ethereal substance” is obsolete poetry, part of that system of obsolete poetry that includes supernatural places like “heaven” and “hell” and all the gods and goddesses, angels, demons, and devils who dwell there. As you may have noticed, I described “Spirit” in the previous section without reverting to any of that obsolete poetry.

My conclusion is that the term “soul” is not needed any more. It might be used to mean the same thing as “Spirit.” It might be used to mean some aspect of our finite personalities, but in that case other terms are less confusing. Perhaps the word “soul” can be a general term for the entire interior life, But in my religious thinking, I am going to view the word “soul” as an obsolete substantialistic term used in times past to point to the dynamics of “Spirit.”

### **Poem One: Alert**

I am an alert deer.  
Dread gets my attention  
and I can move quickly  
in many directions.  
I am a surprise  
and hard to predict.

A fear of real enemies  
is the alertness of a deer,  
While my alertness is  
dread of a mysteriousness  
no deer can know.

And I am unpredictable  
in a manner  
no deer can match.

Dread of the Unfathomable  
is my essence.

Surprise  
is my being.