

Chapter 5

The Restoration of the Spirit Flow of the Soul

The process of Spirit realization begins by paying attention. Paying attention is a flow. Awareness is a flow. Consciousness is a stream, a river, that is always flowing. Sensations flow. Emotional feelings flow. Thinking is a flow. Decision-making is a flow. Action is a flow. The human organism is in constant motion. Even unconscious processes flow. The blood is a flow. The digestive system is a flow. Aliveness is a flow.

Flow presupposes time, movement from past to present to future. We can say that consciousness takes place only in the NOW, but this NOW is a flow. The NOW of consciousness includes memory of the NOWs that have preceded it. The NOW of consciousness includes anticipation of the NOWs that may or may not follow. The static woodenness of human language is inept in expressing how all of our conscious experience is NOW and only NOW and yet a flow from past to present to future. The mysteriousness of time and the mysteriousness of consciousness are mingled together in one mysterious mingledness.

“Awareness” and “consciousness” are two nouns that are used to point toward the very same flow. Here is a distinction that explains to me why we have both words instead of just one. Consciousness exists in all animal life, perhaps plant life as well. And consciousness has been highly developed in the intelligent other-than-human mammals among whom we live and whom we love as members of our own families. Yet even in these remarkable beings, consciousness is not conscious that it is conscious. That mode of consciousness which is conscious of being conscious I am calling “awareness.” “Consciousness” is the larger category; “awareness” is type of consciousness – that is, the consciousness of being conscious. Such consciousness (i.e. awareness) is manifest in the human species. It may have been manifest in earlier humanoid species, but the human species is the only remaining species on this planet in whom awareness is clearly manifest. It will not refute my point if someday we prove that a chimpanzee or dolphin or octopus has made this leap. A grasshopper is certainly not conscious of consciousness. Reptiles are not either. But humans are. At some point in the evolution of life on this planet the leap was made into the consciousness of consciousness. This leap is the birth of that quality of aliveness that distinguishes humanity from the other conscious beings. This leap defines what we mean by the word “awareness.”

We often relate to our pets as if they were aware, but this, I believe, is a projection of our own awareness upon a mode of consciousness which is pre-aware. I do not say this to demean animal life; I say this to provoke our awareness of the wondrous actuality that awareness is. It is because of awareness that human beings can create languages, art forms, cultures, and highly organized societies. It is also because of awareness that human beings can fall into delusions, craziness, and malice that is unknown in the lives of other forms of life. Awareness is what enables both human grandeur and human depravity.

The nouns of human language appear static and fixed; we use them to represent “things” that endure in the memory of the mind. But in actual conscious experience there are no “nouns.” Every actuality is a process in motion. We might say that every “thing” is a verb. Yet even this statement is misleading, for verbs too are static pictures in the mind’s treasury. So in our actual experience there are no “verbs” either. The mind’s language attempts to stop the flow and reflect upon it, but the flow never stops. And even the mind itself is a flow that never stops. Awake or asleep the mind flows on, doing its endless work.

Meditators have found it helpful to focus the conscious mind on attending to the breath. The breath is a flow – inflow and outflow – inflow and outflow. Persistent meditators can put their awareness on the flow of the mind: they can watch the mind focusing or failing to focus on the flow of the breath. Experienced meditators can also focus their awareness on the flow of awareness itself, watching awareness focusing or not focusing on the mind focusing or not focusing on the breath. When the flow of awareness focuses on the flow of awareness focusing on the flow of awareness, we are experiencing an experience that no noun can hold.

The noun “awareness” points to an inner flow that is not synonymous with sensations or feelings or thoughts. Awareness is that core or center point of our conscious existence where sensations are sensed, feelings are felt, thoughts are thought, decisions are decided, and actions are enacted.

Awareness is not simply passive. Awareness is also active. Awareness is both attentionality and intentionality. Awareness is both the flow from the surroundings into the center of awareness and the flow from that center of awareness as a response back into the surroundings. Awareness is both encounter with otherness and response to otherness. Awareness can become aware that the aware self and the other-than-self are aspects of one overall flow of reality; nevertheless, awareness emerges as an awareness of otherness. The newborn infant does not at first differentiate between itself and its mother. This state of infantile merging includes a truth about life, namely that all things are merged as well as capable of differentiation. But until the infant begins to differentiate itself from that which is other than itself, there is no awareness of awareness. Awareness of awareness includes awareness of self and awareness of others. Awareness is awareness of the flow from other to self and from self to other. Awareness is an awareness of relationship, of being encountered by the other and responding to the other. And this awareness of self and other is maintained, not lost, when awareness becomes aware that self and other are also merged in one overall flow of actuality.

Spirit realization is a journey toward fulfillment within the dynamic of awareness. My cat does not have to worry about such fulfillment. She is herself already and has never experienced the option of not being herself. But I began to fall from being myself long before I was three years old and fell away still further before I began to be aware of having fallen. As I will discuss in detail later, the fall is a fall into mistaking my sense of reality for Reality. I am NOW aware of both my potential for falling and my potential for being restored to being my true being. Spirit Realization is the journey toward full restoration. Perhaps full restoration is not a state known to human beings. Nevertheless, we need the image of full restoration, not as a goal to reach someday, but as an actuality in the present which each of us is capable of manifesting. Jesus, the Buddha, and others have been poetized into a symbol of full restoration. Whether or not these individual human beings ever reached full restoration, we do not know. We do not even have a measuring stick by which to measure whether or not they did. We simply have these persons in our lives as a symbol that full realization is a potentiality of our humanity – that our fallen mode of living with its despairing unhappiness is not our only potential.

Finally, full realization is not a static state; it is also an ongoing flow. To the extent that we arrive at being ourselves, we arrive at being a flow of awareness that is unrestrained by the fixations and solidifications that our falling away has constructed. The realization of Spirit is the restoration of something that was lost in the development of our personality. From the rigid box of past-oriented personality habituation, Spirit

realization is a recovery of the flow of Spirit, a release of the already-in-motion angels moving up the ramp of our soul from here to Eternity.

There are three “steps” or “dynamic flows” in each specific happening of Spirit restoration. Here are my names for those dynamic flows: (1) the knowing or awareness dynamic, (2) the being or presence dynamic, and (3) the doing or response dynamic.

(1) the *knowing* or awareness dynamic of Spirit restoration

The first step, the first dynamic flow of Spirit restoration is becoming aware of the delusions in our understandings, styles of living, and customary behaviors. Awareness of delusion also means awareness in relation to that Reality about which we are deluded. The experience of delusion and the experience of Reality are two sides of the same experience. The experience of Reality is an awakening from sleep, from the sleep of delusion, from that walking sleep that includes our specific, active, ongoing estrangements from realism. This awakening happens as a result of Reality’s action on our lives. When living in delusion we can only act from our delusion. Delusion must be broken through from beyond the cocoon of the delusion in which we are living. Awareness of delusion is a gift given by THAT which is greater than our delusion.

(2) the *being* or presence dynamic of Spirit restoration

The second step, the second dynamic flow of Spirit restoration is becoming present to the benevolence of Reality. This means being present to the actuality that our true selves are held in a loving embrace by the Overallness of which we are part. This benevolence includes what is sometimes called “forgiveness.” “Forgiveness,” in this context, means that we are continually being welcomed home to Reality without punishment for our having strayed away. “Forgiveness” does not mean that our delusions and estrangements are excused or that their effects are not tragic or that their consequences do not continue. Nor is forgiveness a mere guess, a mere story, a mere doctrine of the mind. Forgiveness is a dawning in the soul, a felt experience that Reality is welcoming, welcoming in spite of all our futile attempts to destroy Reality, flee Reality, or resist Reality. Forgiveness is a dawning in the soul of a welcome home in spite of all our persistent attempts to sink into cynical futility or into raving despair. The human soul is a prodigal who, after trying the paths of unrealism, is returning home. And when this returning occurs, “Home” runs to meet us and celebrates our return with a major feast. This is the second step of Spirit Restoration: to simply notice our welcome by Reality, a benevolent Reality that accepts us in spite of the fact that this Reality also opposes all our delusions.

(3) the *doing* or response dynamic of Spirit restoration

The third step, the third dynamic flow of Spirit restoration is responding to the dawning of this forgiveness, this welcome home in spite of all our deluded living. For an experience of Spirit restoration to become complete, we must choose to be in the relation to Reality that Reality is taking toward us. This response, this choosing, this doing is a non-doing, an effortless letting be of the benevolence of Reality. This third dynamic of Spirit restoration is an effortless letting be of the welcome home that is being extended to us. We bring nothing to the process of restoration except surrender. We do not have to perform some ritual, join some group, believe some doctrine, accomplish some trial, achieve some virtue. Nothing at all is required except surrender

to the actuality of our welcome home by a forgiving Reality.

These three dynamics may go on in quick succession, so quickly that we may not notice that there are three distinguishable dynamics. For example, there was a time in my life that I was unconsciously resistant to being the father of my children. I told myself, "I am too busy to have children." My resistance came to a head when I faced having another child. During this period a simple realization came to me: the only actual life I had was the one that was joined to these children. As my despair over fatherhood began to ease, I realized that I had experienced all three of these dynamics. I had experienced despair; I had noticed the "welcome home" to my actual life, and I had accepted this welcome. As a consequence my despair faded and I began to feel reconciled to being both busy and the father of these children.

In this instance my mind had been nurtured for many years in an articulate trust in the benevolence of Reality. My surprise and attention focused on step one, on the advent of some fresh awareness of my despair and deludedness. In other instances, we may agonize for years over some recurring awareness of some painful estrangement. Our surprise and attention might focus on the dawning that this estrangement is forgiven or on the realization that a healing of our lives can be completed by our mere surrender to this forgiveness. In whatever way our awareness may focus on one or two of these dynamics, all three of them are happening in any restoration of our Spirit being.

I will illustrate these three dynamics again with this brief novelette. A man has a deep aversion to being alone – so much so that he appears to be a clinging person to all his friends and lovers. After a especially painful rejection in which his last lover points out this clinging behavior, he is sitting alone in his room. He experiences his aloneness as if it were a big hole in the center of his being. He becomes aware that he has been attempting to fill this hole with friends and lovers and that the hole just never fills. He notices the hole directly and wonders just how deep and how vast it actually is. As he contemplates this question it dawns on him that there is nothing wrong with this hole being a hole. In fact it is not a hole; it is just being alone. He says to himself, "Everyone is alone, and I am always going to be alone." He feels ashamed that he has been so obsessed with filling this unfillable hole. Then he notices that his alone self is not actually ashamed, his alone self is quite content to be alone. Aloneness, it seems, welcomes him to this quite wondrous aloneness. As he notices this and submits to just being alone, he begins to smile. In the days and weeks that follow, he notices that this willingness to be alone and to allow others to be alone is helping him in his intimate associations. People like to be with him. He finds that he can be alone and with others at the same time. He feels a deep relaxation pervade his whole being. After a successful date with a new female acquaintance, he laughs right out loud as he drives home in his car alone.

Such restorations happen in all areas of our lives. Some happen in arenas of small importance; some happen in arenas of huge importance such as: our entire vocation, our perspective on the whole of planetary destiny, or an awareness of a deep aspect of our journey of Spirit that seems beyond telling in words. But all restorations follow this same pattern: *knowing* our estrangement, *being* a dawning of our forgiveness, and *doing* the nondoing response. Paul Tillich called this threefold dynamic "grace." The hymn "Amazing Grace" aptly says, "And grace will lead us home." Grace is there at every step on the journey home to our true nature, our healed soul, our Spirit being, our ramp from here to Eternity.

This journey home is actually an endless journey. We can arrive home many times along life's way, but home is so huge that total arrival is always still ahead of us. Spirit realization is a process not a place in the road. At each moment in which grace (Spirit healing) is happening: (1) we are *knowing* some new aspect of Reality and our estrangement from it, (2) we are *being* some new dawning of our forgiveness – our welcome home, and (3) we are *doing* some new acceptance of our forgiveness and thus embracing the consequences of living some new aspect of our true being.