



# AWAKENING YOUR UNIQUE SELF

## **The God of the Encounter: The Glory of the Personal**

By Dr. Marc Gafni

The realization of the personal which has been derided as the separate self or ego is so important that I want to ask you to enter this even more deeply with me. You need to feel a sense of this realization in your own being. You need to feel the love and care implicit and explicit in the loving personal address of the Cosmos.

There is clear a moment in where you will need to move beyond separate self and realize the underlying unity of all that is as the seamless coat of the universe. You will need to transcend the merely personal to realize the next station on the road to your enlightenment. This will engender in you a profound love. It will open your heart in a radical and unconditional way. It will move you beyond alienation into full integration and power.

However, and this is a huge caveat, you will have to not merely transcend but to transcend and include the personal. That means that when you enter into the realm of the transpersonal space in which we are all expression of the one, you will need to realize in joy that you are a distinctive unique expression of the one . You must transcend your separateness even as you must retain your Uniqueness. The ego when purified of its grasping and freed of its fixations is harbinger of your Unique Self. The personal is essential to your full enlightenment as your Unique Self. Enlightenment always has a personal perspective. Enlightenment according to the Sufis and the Kabbalists is an expression of purified personal essence. Anything less will make you insane. Remember, Insanity means a loss connection with reality. Sanity means a full joyful embrace of reality. Enlightenment is no more or less than sanity. Reality is not only impersonal. It is also profoundly personal.

In order to be able to realize the personal plus not personal minus nature of your enlightenment you need a deeper feeling and understanding of the realization of the personal. Remember that the personal is achieved



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both in the life of the individual and the life of humanity with the evolutionary achievement of the experience of separate self. It is a transmission of something of this realization that I wish to share with you in these pages.

The most powerful expression of this realization is in the prophetic encounter with the divine mystery. This encounter runs like a thread from Abraham and Sarah to Moses, Miriam, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and the larger legions of prophecy. As America's second president John Adams has already noted, the best of everything Western man knows about freedom, love, ethics and responsibility emerges from the great encounter between the finite and the infinite.

The Encounter with other marks the emergence of the pre- personal slumber. The baby encounters other even as the emergent human being who experiences his separate self turns to other. The encounter – relationship – is born as the central dynamic of human existence.

In the encounter between separate selves, love is born.

In the encounter the infinite creative intelligence – which is the underlying ground of the kosmos -reveals itself to you with compassionate face. Full of care, challenge and concern.

The encounter is an actual experience, which engages all the sense of man. At the same time it is well beyond any limited material apparition of deity.

The knowledge of the presence is conveyed with irresistible force even as the presence remains invisible to the naked eye. The encounter is not philosophical abstraction or metaphysical speculation. The knowing is not derivative. It is immediate. The presence is directly felt and recognized. The nature of the experience is



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induced as an absolute certainty. Not certainty of dogma, not certainty that it is true, that you are true. You are fully affirmed in the encounter.

The experience combines two very different qualities. Radical love and radical danger. The presence by the very fact of its overwhelming power seems to threaten the very life of the person to whom it is addressed. Moses hears the voice and hides his face. Face means his singular individuality, which feels threatened by the encounter itself. We have scripture on this. “Did every a people hear the voice. speaking from the midst of the fire and live?”

The sense of peril resulting from direct contact with the divine ground has nothing to do with any ideas that the people are sinful are the god wrathful. It is more like the famous question of the Bhagavad-Gita Gita, suppose a thousand suns should rise together in the sky” what would happen to our reality? How can the individual hope to survive contact Source. Source incarnates all the energy and power in the Cosmos and infinitely beyond.

Presence by its very nature overwhelms all individual existence. This strange and awesome paradox is resolved not by theory but in the very experience of the encounter itself. The living presence of the divine “which is the suchness and substance of all that is” not only IS but is also FOR man. The person experiences an overpowering concern, in which they are held, cared for, recognized and loved- within the very encounter itself. So the paradox of the encounter is that it is one the hand overwhelming and at the same time radically affirming. The individual is rendered powerless, almost lifeless before the divine even as the individual is enlivened and empowered.

The core of the encounter is three fold. The revelation of love and concern for man, the calling of man to responsibility and action, and a radical affirmation of the dignity and meaning of human personhood and



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individuality.

To sense this more deeply, hear directly the description of the encounter by one of the great master prophets Ezekiel: “I fell on my face, then the spirit entered me and set me on my feet and spoke with me”. Ezekiel is overpowered and yet retains his personal identity. In all of the reports of the encounter the same paradoxical quality is apparent. The divine reveals itself as all consuming energy and at the same moment hides the full intensity of infinity, holding the prophet in the protective embrace of divine love. Overwhelmed by the presence in the encounter man finds himself affirmed. There can be no encounter with nothing. If human individuality is overwhelmed into nothingness there can be no encounter. God invests with man the evolutionary impulse to stand up again and unfold his individuality. Even as he experiences his nothingness he is affirmed as dignified, adequate, responsible and beloved. Man is granted a measure of independence. He is free to be himself because god cares for and affirms him. God hides in his revelation in order to preserve the personality of man. The Wholly other reveals itself as friend sustainer preserver. This is what the prophets used to call the Humility of God.

So we see that the divine self-revelation in the encounter is dual. Radical presence, which is overwhelming, coupled with radical love, which is affirming of human dignity and preserving of human individuality.

The encounter invites man into fellowship with God. Communion and even Union are the divine invitation. But for the prophet and the Western spirituality that he birthed, there can be no identity between man and god for in identity man is absorbed and the fellowship is lost.

It is precisely this fellowship of prayer and prophecy, which we might refer to as the second face of God. In this pointing out instruction, God in the first person would be the face of god you feel flowing through you in meditation. God in the third person would be the face of God reflected in your radical amazement at the wonder and infinite intelligence displayed in every nook and cranny of existence. God in the second person is



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in the mystery of the encounter between God and Man. A relationship of intimacy is revealed between the finite and the infinite. All of the infinite power, glory and intelligence of the first person and third person of the divine were felt and revealed as relationship in the second encounter between the prophet and God. The precise flip side of prophecy is prayer. In their essence they are the same. Both are expressions of the fellowship between man and god. The difference is simply this. In prophecy god initiates and god invokes. In prayer, man initiates and man invokes.

What is key to grasp here is that the second person of god is not a primitive metaphor for the simple people who cannot quite grasp the depth of god as principle or Tao or spirit or the evolutionary impulse. God in the second person is not, as so many American spiritual teachers have suggested, a left over touching trinket of the old religion. Not in the slightest. The full integral realization of enlightenment feels in the core of it's being all three faces of God. Central is the face God the lover and beloved. This is God for whom we yearn. This is god of whom we know that wherever we fall, we fall into God's hands. This is not a product of projection, childish fantasy or immature imagination.

This is a knowing of the presence, which emerges directly from enlightened realization.

The personal caring compassionate embrace of the divine is a profound realization of the eye of spirit. If a teacher has not realized the personal embrace of god as part of their realization they would do well to bow their head in humility and yearning instead of dismissing that of with which they no direct contact or realization.

None of this means that God is your grandfather in the heaven waiting to give you candy. Your realization of God in the second person has little to do with a cosmic vending machine dressed as your favorite uncle. Rather God is the trans- personal nature of all that is.



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The transpersonal is not pre- personal. God is more than personal, not less than personal.

God is Personal Plus not Personal Minus. It is somewhat like saying God is not physical. That does not mean that God is less real or less concrete than the physical. It means that the flatland of the merely physical cannot even begin to express the absolute sensual pulsating realness that manifests in the direct first person experience of the divine.

God is not merely impersonal. When you say impersonal you think of person with whom we cannot make contact. Impersonal means without the possibility of love and intimacy. In both the experience of God in your first person as cosmic consciousness or your experience of God in the second person Encounter, you will realize that radical love, intimacy and contact is the very quality of the experience.

## **God in the First Person:**

All at once I found myself wrapped in a flame colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire and immense conflagration somewhere close by in that great city; the next I knew that the fire was in myself. Directly afterward there came upon me as sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among other things, I did not merely come to believe, but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is on the contrary, a living presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have an eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then; I saw that all men are immortal; that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle of the world, of all worlds, is what we call love, and that the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain. R.M. Bucke}



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## **God in the Second Person addressing man:**

I will be united with you in marriage forever

I will be united to you in marriage through justice and righteousness

I will be united with you in marriage through overflowing love and compassion

I will be united with you in marriage in complete trust

And you will erotically know the divine

~ Hosea the Prophet: 2: 21- 23

Only someone who lacks both of these realizations can identify all that is as merely a process or impulse.

Realization teaches that the all that is expresses as a process or an evolutionary impulse but that God is process plus personal not process minus personal.

## **Entry Five: Love and the Encounter**

What emerges from the encounter in love is the affirmation of the infinite adequacy worth and dignity of the separate self. What emerges from the encounter in love is the embrace of the separate self as an essential station on evolutionary road, Up from Eden. You ascend up from the pre personal consciousness of Eden to the dignity and glory of being God's beloved. You are affirmed in your infinite adequacy and charged with genuine responsibility for the good. The ego- separate self or what is often called the individual is a great triumph. To fully understand the gifts of ego we need to look at it's alternative, the bad death of the ego.

Before looking at the bad death of the ego it is worth mentioning that there is a way to kill the ego without suffering all the horrendous consequences that I am about to outline. This is the good death of the ego. To accomplish the good death of the ego you have to distinguish between separateness and uniqueness. We saw



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earlier that the evolution of eastern teaching required the discernment of this distinction in order to transcend ego and separate self even while embracing Unique Self. We saw as well that the west need to make the same distinction between separateness and uniqueness , which would allow the west to retain the goods of individuality through Unique Self and thereby let go of its grasp of Separate self. But at this point to we need to turn to the bad death of the ego in order to see why the ego-separate self is so important to man's healthy evolution towards enlightenment.

## **Really Bad results of the Bad death of the Ego**

Below are highly influential contemporary American spiritual writers talking in glowing terms about the death of the ego. The source is Aldous Huxley and some of the leaders of his circle. Huxley is particularly important because he was one of the most influential voices in bringing eastern mysticism to American shores. Huxley most famous book in this vein was the classic little tome, the Doors of Perception in which Huxley, is directly influenced by Eastern mysticism. In Doors of Perception he passionately preaches the virtues of a non-self. The goal in many passages is to dissolve individual consciousness and replace it with cosmic consciousness. According to Huxley, with Ego death comes blissful passivity. Man gives up all of his ambitions. There is no more desire to act. Aggressions disappear and tolerances increase. Knowledge of the meaning of life is no longer dependent on the unreliable tools of logic and rational thought. One is blissfully freed from "the world of selves". In this state according to Huxley one finds true enlightenment and love. Huxley and his circle write compelling verse.

"All the harsh, dry brittle angularity is gone is melted...Merged with all life...your individuality and anatomy of movement are moistly disappearing. You control is surrendered to the total organism.

"When controls dissolve in a milieu of trust, the world within is glowing serene and meaningful".





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The ego is dead

Killed during its last hysterical ravings

To become we

The problem with all of this is straightforward and simple. If you are a non-self there is no possibility of love between me and you. What is love without an I and a thou? We is the Union between two individuals. If there is no individuality there is no love. As one writer critiqued Huxley, Once the I is killed and the thou is dead too, there can be no we either. A herd of non-egos is not a we. What can brotherhood or sisterhood mean among non-selves.

One influential teacher from Huxley's circle tells his students to use the moment of egolessness for the attainment of love. But we know that love is between individuals. So love is not a possibility without there be two.

For the non-ego and non-self there can be no freedom either. It can be neither oppressed nor liberated. Freedom for a non-self can only mean freedom from having to be a self. In that sense the dead might also delight in their freedom. In this formula the dignity of the personal is effaced in order to heal alienation. The problem is that alienation is healed by man losing himself through the dissolution of his separate self-ego sense. With the death of the ego all the goods of individuality including love, freedom, ethical judgment obligation and responsibility.

All of these goods of spirit are attained by the evolution of the human ego. It is in the experience of the egoic separate self that man discovers responsibility and love in the encounter with other and the encounter with the loving ground of all being incarnate in the personal face of God.



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This however is not the end of the story. It is true that without the experience of a self, there is no possibility of genuine love and responsibility. But it is no less true that without the separate self – ego, there is also no fear and suffering. With the emergence of the experience of a separate self, what has been called the birth of the ego, comes fear. The more you experience your selfhood as an independent expression of life, cut off from the larger currents, the more you fear your own extinction

You realize very clearly that your body will not sustain you forever even as you realize its frailty and vulnerability right now. You seek to protect yourself against death. You feel like you should not die. You sense that you are part of the quality of infinite existence, which does not die. It is for this reason that the thought of your own death terrifies you. You mistakenly think that the part of you that is immortal is your separate self. So you seek ways to make your separate self immortal.

An animal that is rooted in the natural world lacks both the awareness of his own selfhood and the death terror that comes with it. With your newfound awareness as a separate self comes not only love but also raw terror. As a result of your terror of non existence you engage in the most elaborate strategies to cover up your fear of death by giving you a sense of belonging in the world.

Your feeling is that if you belong to the world you are safe from death. This is not a logical or rational feeling. But then neither is your terror of death. So you begin the great competition for status, belonging, money and goods. You think, this will give you a sense that you belong in this world, that you will live forever. The entire project of culture including the murder, destruction, war and competition that lies at its heart, is at a very elemental level, a desperate struggle to overcome the terror of your own non-existence.

Your experience of being a separate isolated ego puts you in direct competition with the rest of the human race. It also puts you in the position of constantly needed to protect your existence. It forces you to compete



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with the rest of the world for every form of resource from money, to shelter to love. The great mystical teachers were not at all wrong in pointing to your illusion of being a separate isolated ego as the root source of your suffering.

You must evolve beyond the ego. You must deconstruct the illusion of the separate self. This is the key to your spiritual evolution. This is the path that can free you from most of your suffering. Most people of the world are afraid to go down this road because they are afraid that if they do they will lose themselves. This is a fear based on a gigantic misunderstanding. The core false assumption is that your uniqueness is identical with your separate self. Therefore if you transcend your separate self you are leaving your individuality, uniqueness and specialness behind. That is precisely what is not true. As you transcend your separate self into the spaciousness that is the ground of all being something absolutely radical in its delight takes place. Your personal Uniqueness rises out of the ground of your impersonal enlightenment.

You seem to leave behind the personal by moving beyond the illusion that you are a separate self. But after you have transcended your identity with your separate self-ego the personal comes back on line as your Unique Self. But this time your Uniqueness is genuine. It is more evolved, powerful and pure. It is true that your separate self- ego already held the great goods of individuality. But those goods were compromised by all of the grasping delusion of the ego. With the emergence of the ego Other became enemy, greed; jealousy, horrendous stress, anguish and murder became part of man's every day experience.

Before the separate self-ego emerged we had no record in the world record of people talking about their suffering. {fn original source cited in *Up from Eden*} The emergence of separate self – ego created at the same time, the emergence of other. Put simply the emergence of me creates in its wake the emergence of you. If I am I then you are you. The Upanishads, great spiritual teaching of the east, says, where there is other there is fear. Where there is fear there is suspicion, anxiety and stress, which in turn creates more fear. What then



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follows is doubt and defense, which gives birth to projection. I project my hostility onto you. I then move to protect myself against your hostility. And then, before you know it, the entire cycle of death destruction is in full bloom.

If you want to bypass this entire process you must go to the source of the trauma. The source of the trauma is the original error of perception. This was the error of self-perception. When you emerged as a self you thought that you were alone, separated from everyone else. You felt that you needed to develop deep defenses and armor to protect yourself from all the other selves. I am not talking about skillful means you deployed to take care of yourself in the world. That was necessary and important. Rather, I refer to your entire core stance in the world which was one of fear. Every move you made was to protect yourself from one person and win approval from another person. Usually by pretending to be someone that you are not. This is the source of all of your anxiety and fear.

If you could just move beyond the fear which comes from your experience of being a separate isolated self – ego in an unfriendly world, everything will shift. This is the shift that changes everything. If you could but experience the true reality of fully interconnected in a friendly universe which supports your existence, loves you and desires your presence, it would all be different. If you could break free of the illusion of your being a disconnected isolated monad called an ego and perceive reality clearly, then your whole story will turn.

This is the animating impulse that moved eastern spiritual teaching, motivated by love, to seek to free you from the illusion of separate self. Their great mistake was to jettison Uniqueness along with separateness by conflating the two in a way that was both unnecessary and wrong. This confusion of separateness and uniqueness forgot that you could be both part of the whole and a distinct part at the same time. The recovering of that memory is essential to healing the fractured and broken self. The dignity of the part can be held even as you are connected to the whole. You are part of the seamless coat of the universe. Seamless but



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not featureless. You can transcend your exclusive identification with your part nature, the ego. even as you identify with the larger whole. But that does not mean that your unique part nature is absorbed in the whole. Rather it is integrated in the seamless coat of reality without compromising its unique features.

Funny thing is that the ego busting ego school of spiritual teaching seems to have lost touch with its otherwise finely tuned sense of paradox. The ego busters have adopted an either or position in regard to ego -separate self. The choice is stark in their presentation of things. Either you realize that you are not separate, you realize that you are one with all that is, or you're separate and alienated from all that is. Either you are identified with the whole or you are disconnected from the whole- deluded by your identification with your part nature. This presentation of things demands that a false choice be made and undermines most contemporary spiritual teaching. Genuine realization yields a deeper and more paradoxical wholeness as the truth of how things are. You are both a unique part and part of the whole at the very same time. You have dis-identified with ego, realized some genuine enlightenment in your felt identity with the larger whole, even as you delight in your post egoic Unique Self.

At this point you can open your heart to a second huge space of insight. The same bad set of choices is offered by popular spiritual teaching in relationship to God. The east rejected the idea that god might be beyond the world. For much of the east and for many western mystics, divinity is the ground of being. God, if that term means anything all, is the animating substance and energy of all that is. This is a great realization and insight that wells up from intensive spiritual practice and contemplation. But it is not the whole story. The second great realization and insight of spiritual practice is that there is a divine, which you encounter from beyond world and nature and self. All that is has a personal face that loves, cares and holds you with infinite intimacy, tenderness and grace.

Clearly this is not a different divine. Rather these two mystical realizations reflect the two faces of God. Two



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faces of all that is.

To force a person to make an either or choice between a divine force within or beyond world/self/ nature is a bad choice and a wrong choice. The God of the encounter is revealed by the eye of the spirit through the deepest of spiritual practices and meditation. This face of God is no less real then the god within. Both are revealed by different sets of profound spiritual practices and meditations.