

Loving the Truth for Its Own Sake

Interview with A.H. Almaas by Toshan Ivo Quartiroli

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The Diamond Approach, the path created by Hameed Ali, better known by the pen name A.H.Almaas, emphasizes loving the truth for its own sake. This research takes place through a process of inquiry that includes the subjectivity of the researcher and his personal history as a way to reach objective knowledge of the soul and of the divine. In this interview, Hameed Ali speaks about the research, the researchers and the nature of the soul.

"I know that some teachings say the world is an illusion, but I think it is an oversimplification that does not communicate what is intended. It is a catchy phrase, but the truth is subtler and more interesting." – Almaas

Toshan Ivo Quartiroli: The search for the truth in the West (including the scientific, philosophical and metaphysical) developed through different stages. In the Scholastic tradition, the subjectivity of the inner contents was taken into account, then came Descartes, who rejected this tradition. For the sake of a "clear and distinct perception" he deemed it necessary to detach ourselves from our subjectivity and take an objective, "God-like" approach. After all, according to the Judeo-Christian view, God created man in the last day of creation, and in the image of God. According to this belief the creation is something external to human beings, something that existed before the human mind and soul were around. So, in order to know the creation and the creator's mind, man should trace God's path and look for what is beyond the human. And, since man was born in sin, there wasn't much good to discover anyway. Copernicus's view of astronomy, no longer earth-centered, was possible from this new approach, as were many other scientific and technological developments. The modern era was characterized as being scientific, materialistic and "objective" one. But Kant was already starting to sabotage this paradigm, saying that we will never know the "thing in itself". Later on, came quantum physics with the uncertainty principles and then the Gödel theorem limiting the scope of formal systems. In this post-modern era there is no more safe terrain for the truth. Your inquiry technique seems to be a new stage in the pursuit of truth, since it is fuelled by both the subjective and objective approaches to reality, and you affirm that the inner knowledge can be even more objective, clear and precise than the outer one. This reverses the foundations of the western culture between inner/subjective and outer/objective. How can you have objective truth in the realm of the human experience and how do you inquire into that?

Hameed Ali: This is a good question and it will be important for people who grew up in the West to understand this point, for it may influence the way they look at spiritual experience and enlightenment. First, the way I work with truth in terms of objectivity and subjectivity does not actually reverse the foundations of Western culture. In fact, it rather goes back to the real foundations that our modern West has all but forgotten. In other words, the way I teach the Diamond Approach is a development of the Western way of researching truth, but done in a way that unifies what has been dissociated in the last few hundred years. It is a new stage but a stage that basically develops potentials that already existed in Western history.

Originally, as in the old Greek culture or the old Hebraic/Christian origins, or as the scholastic tradition that you mention, there was no dissociation between the objective and subjective views of things. The separation and dissociation happened around the age of enlightenment, even though it began earlier in the development of Christian thought. I think the separation served Western civilization for it led to Western science and its technological advances, but at the same time it created a dissociation that is not inherent in reality and knowing, which has its own alienating effects.

In my understanding, knowing is much deeper than it is viewed now by our positivist philosophy. Knowing has a mystical or intuitive ground, which is the direct knowing of content of experience, usually

termed gnosis. The Greeks understood this well in their concept of Nous, the higher or divine intellect. Plotinus clearly taught that knowing and being are inseparable in the Nous. But Western thought, which understood the Nous kind of knowing both in Greek thought and Hebraic thought, developed in such a way to separate the two dimensions or elements of it. In the Nous kind of knowing there is the presence of Divine Mind or Intellect, which is a field or ground of awareness, and there are the forms that manifest within it as objects of knowing. The forms are forms of the field of presence, but since this presence is the presence of consciousness this field knows these forms. It knows them directly because they are forms of its own field; its knowingness pervades all the forms.

The development of Western thought, for various reasons good and bad, dissociated the ground of knowing, the being or presence, from the forms that this ground manifests. These two elements became then, generally speaking, emphasized and developed in two different fields. The ground of being became the concern of the field of metaphysics, religion and mysticism; and the forms became the concern of the newly developing scientific fields. Religion and mysticism started emphasizing that the ground of Being, or monotheistically the divine presence, is mysterious and inherently unknowable. And that its experience is antithetical to logical and scientific or experimental kind of inquiry.

In the scientific and positivistic direction, what remained of the ground of awareness and knowing became simply the individual knower, the self with its knowing mind. The forms of knowledge became disconnected objects not directly related to the knower. And knowing became the observations of the separate self of objects of knowledge. The idea developed, as you mention with the help of Rene Descartes, that the forms exist on their own, and can be known as they are if the self observes them from a distance and not interfere with them with its subjectivity. So objective knowledge developed to mean knowing the objects of knowledge without the subjective biases of the self or researcher.

Now, in the Diamond Approach, we agree with this definition of objective knowledge: that it is knowledge free of the mixing in it of the subjective biases of the knower. However, we do not share Descartes view that the way to objectivity is by sterilizing the situation of inquiry, by removing the subject from the field of inquiry. First, we know from our fundamental understanding of knowing that we cannot completely separate the knowing subject from the object of knowledge. We cannot because the knowing subject is nothing but the collapsing of the field of presence and awareness into a knowing self. We also know that these objects of knowledge are nothing but the reification of forms that arise in this field, and inseparable from it. Hence, Descartes formula works only as an approximation, and cannot be applied absolutely. I think Quantum theory has already discovered this limitation as formulated in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which simply means that we cannot totally dissociate the observer from the phenomena observed.

Descartes' formula worked as an effective approximation, and still works effectively in most fields of scientific inquiry because these fields cannot penetrate to the regions where this approximation collapses. We can actually view Descartes' philosophy of science as an approximation similarly to how Newton's classical theory of physics is a good working approximation to the laws of physics. Now we know that Newton's physics collapses at the two extreme ends of the scale of physical measurements, where the general theory of relativity and quantum theory have replaced it as more accurate in the domains of macro and micro distances, respectively.

When it comes to understanding consciousness and the nature of the soul and God, Descartes' approximation is again not adequate. Mysticism has always understood this and knew that true understanding of spiritual realities can only happen through direct experience, through knowing by being, by identity of knower and known. However, mysticism and most spiritual teachings believed that logical or rational knowledge are antithetical to such mystical knowing or gnosis, what the Hindu termed jnana, and the Tibetans yeshes. So it has been believed now for a long time that mystical or direct spiritual knowledge can only be vague, intuitive, mysterious, nonconceptual, incommunicable and so on. This is, in my view, due to the same dissociation, believing that the specifics and precise forms are separate

from the ground of being and knowing, and that to pay attention to such specificity will disconnect us from mystical experience.

In the Diamond Approach, we agree more with the ancient Greeks, like Pythagoras, Plato and Plotinus, that the ground of being, the nous, is the ground of the platonic ideas, the various forms of manifestation. In other words, we take the view that direct mystical knowing and the knowing of specific forms in precise details, can be wed, because they are originally one and nondual. This means that we can have a mystical knowledge, which is knowledge by identity, that can be precise, clear, specific and detailed.

This has two consequences that respond to your question. First, there can be scientific knowledge that is direct knowledge; meaning precise and detailed gnosis of forms of manifestation. There is no dissociation here, and hence it is free of Descartes' approximation. In fact, because we are not relying on an approximation, but on the truth of reality, our knowledge can be totally precise and clear. It can penetrate to regions not accessible to the ways of inquiry that depend on Descartes' approximation. This is necessary for understanding consciousness, existence, soul, God, spirit and so on. They are like the micro and macro of scientific measurements, but in the field of psychology and metaphysics.

But how about objectivity; how do we assure objectivity, or assure that our subjective biases are not involved in this knowing?

I think the belief of many spiritual teachings that the mystical experience is antithetical to mind and reason opens such experience to such subjective biases. And this has been the criticism of scientists and philosophers of science of this kind of experience. However, Descartes' approximation will not work, for it will dissociate us from the mystical element, that of direct experience, or knowing by being. However, there is another way, a way that the Diamond Approach applies in quite an effective manner. This is to include into our inquiry not only what we experience or know, but the subjective pole itself. We include looking into the knowing subject, the self, in the inquiry into spirit, God, or whatever. Our inquiry is always not only into what we experience, but also into our attitudes and reactions to our experience. This way we see our subjective biases, and how they influence our experience. By seeing through these subjective biases our knowledge of what is going on gradually becomes more objective.

As we see our biases, beliefs, positions, desires and so on, they begin to dissolve, especially because our inquiry is motivated by the love of truth for its own sake. Since we truly want to know what is going on, we are willing to surrender our biases because we can see directly how they obscure the truth we love. Our objectivity expands as our knowledge deepens. Objectivity expands as subjective biases are seen and surrendered. This is a process that continues throughout the path of inquiry into experience, where the truth of experience gradually manifests as our biases are exposed and surrendered.

We find different degrees of objectivity, where each degree is objective within the subjective framework we work with. In other words, if we use the framework that we are separate individuals in the ordinary world, then objective truth means something different from objective truth in a framework that does not hold such assumptions of separate individuality. Again, objectivity means something different depending on whether we assume existence and nonexistence are two antithetical opposites or inseparable and coemergent.

This approach does not participate in Descartes' approximation because it recognizes that it is not possible to isolate the self from the object of inquiry. It relies on the view that the awareness and knowingness of the self is the field that constitutes the substance of all the objects of inquiry. It achieves objectivity by clearing the knowing awareness from its subjective biases. It first includes these biases in its determination of what is going on, but in deeper stages of the path, it can inquire free of these biases. The dissolution of these biases and positions at some point include the dissolution of the belief in a separate self, and the belief that the objects of study are separate objects from the inquirer.

Objectivity is complete when there is no more separate self to hold biases, which is the same station as recognizing that all the forms of manifestation are forms that our awareness and presence assumes. This is the enlightened view that we arrive at by learning to be truly and fully objective. This view actually transcends the uncertainty principle of quantum theory, because there is no more an observer separate from the observed. We see that the uncertainty principle is true as long as there is duality, but in the enlightened view there is no more duality of observer and observed. It is one phenomenon that knows itself totally, completely, objectively and precisely, but nondualistically. It knows itself by being itself with full and diamond sharp discrimination. Here, we see that even the uncertainty principle is an approximation, a finer one than Descartes' but an approximation nevertheless, because it ends up making our knowledge probabilistic. I believe Einstein had an inkling of this when he could not adopt the quantum view completely; he thought God does not throw dice.

I think this kind of inquiry, which is totally open minded and totally open-ended, unifies the scientific logical investigative attitude with the mystical approach of direct experience. This way was known in the ancient Western world, as attested to by Pythagoras' use of mathematics in spiritual inner work, but did not develop much because of the bifurcation between religion and science that began in the renaissance and the enlightenment. There is no reason why it cannot develop further, as we have done in our work, and there is no reason why science cannot adopt it, at least in principle. It is difficult to practice such inquiry scientifically because we still do not know how to include the subjectivity of the researcher into his research, but I think at some point we will need to, if we are serious about finding the secrets of existence. There are already some indications of such development in some scientific areas, as in the view that we need to include consciousness to have a unified theory of the universe.

I go into more detail into this view of knowledge in the book, Inner Journey Home, and I discuss further the implications for Western thought and culture. The discussion in the book builds up with the deepening and expanding understanding of reality that the Diamond Approach makes available.

Quartioli: You teach that there is an objective common core in every human being regarding how the soul manifests itself and functions, that goes beyond the personal history conditionings, beyond beliefs and self-images. But at the same time the personal history can go as deep as preventing or facilitating the union with the divine. For instance, a difficult merging stage with the mother or a cognitive belief such as "there is just one son of God and nobody else can merge into him in this lifetime" can prevent the merging with the divine. How did you discriminate between what is common in the soul of human beings and what is personal history or culturally induced? Is this common part the same thing as what is called the "perennial philosophy", that sees a common core among the different spiritual traditions?

Ali: It is the brand of inquiry we practice in this path that makes it possible to know what is historically incidental and what is inherently universal. When we inquire into our experience and perception we begin to see the presence of our subjectivity in it, forming or patterning it. As we see through these subjective beliefs, positions, ideas and so on, and recognize them as such, they begin to dissolve. All historical and cultural influences are content of this subjectivity. Since they do not exist inherently in the present moment, but are carried into it from the past through memory and conditioning, understanding them tends to melt them away. However, the elements of the experience that are inherently present and are not carried from historical influences, do not dissolve, because they are truly present. Understanding them tends to reveal them further and show their inherent reality. In other words, inquiry just as other spiritual methods in general, tends to dissolve the ordinary mind with its content. All cultural and historical influences are content of this mind, of the nature of thought, and hence will dissolve under the scrutinizing eye of inquiry.

What remains will be what is fundamentally present. Also, patterns or patterned processes that remain will be seen as fundamental. However, fundamentally existing does not necessarily mean universal, or objectively common to all people. For it might be genetically determined, for example, by one's heredity. But here the scientific approach helps a great deal. Just as science can determine whether some properties of objects are common to all the classes of such objects, as in the example of properties of

water to all water molecules. Science does this in many ways, but one important way is the principle of repeatability. As long as we can repeat the results for any experiment we ascertain it is determined to be valid. We do the same in our work. We do not only ascertain whether something is fundamentally present, but whether repeated observations and inquiry with many people lead to the same result. So again it is the principle of repeatability.

The Diamond Approach actually has a kind of intelligence in its inquiry that gives it the possibility to ascertain whether something is fundamental or not, and whether it is universal or not. This has to do with the intelligence of the Diamond Guidance, the essential intelligence that guides the inquiry. When this guidance is integrated, which partially means we can inquire while seeing our subjective biases, it becomes clear what is fundamental and what is universal. I use both this direct intelligence and the scientific method combined to arrive at objectivity regarding these matters. I discuss our inquiry and its intelligence and objectivity in great detail in my book, *Spacecruiser Inquiry*.

Is this common part what is called the perennial philosophy? Yes and no. Yes, if by perennial we mean what is universal to all souls. However, my understanding is that the perennial philosophy goes further than this. It takes the view that all spiritual teachings of mankind are different formulations of the same truth, experience or perception. Then it is no. I do not think that it is true that the Buddhist void is the same thing as the Sufi love, and both are the same as the Christian Father, and all of these are the same as the Taoist Tao, and so on, but formulated differently.

My understanding is that each genuine teaching refers to something fundamental and universal for all human beings, but they do not necessarily refer to the same fundamental and universal truths. There are many fundamental and universal truths, as there are many dimensions and facets of true nature or reality. Each teaching tends to emphasize a certain fundamental and universal truth, dimension or facet. So they are talking about the same thing, but not exactly. The differences are not simply due to different formulations or conceptualizations. They are more due to different emphasis and different facets of truths. More exactly, they are different because the various teachings have different logoi of teaching. Each teaching has its own unique logos: language, view, logic and dynamic. The same with the Diamond Approach; the understanding of essence and soul is unique to it. You can find similarities with other teachings, but you won't be able to find sameness. I discuss the question of logoi of teachings in *The Inner Journey Home*, in an appendix.

Quartioli: In the Diamond Approach I haven't seen much emphasis on enlightenment, as it is discussed in other traditions or schools. What is the role of this "event" in your teaching? In particular, what do you think of the "sudden" enlightenment Advaita-like? Is it possible to by-pass the practices and the psycho/spiritual inquiry and be permanently liberated?

Ali: I use the concept of enlightenment sparingly because I use it in a technical way. I do not mean simply the experience of true nature, the recognition of true nature, or even the realization of or abiding in true nature, whether nondual or not. Many people, including many teachers, use the term in these above senses. That is why I usually use the concept of realization, which I differentiate from enlightenment, even though I am aware that many teachers use the two terms interchangeably.

By realization I mean the ability to abide in true nature, to recognize and be true nature. Since true nature has many dimensions, or degrees of subtlety, there are degrees or levels of realization. Also, because there are many degrees of completeness of realization of our capacity of abiding in true nature, there are many levels of realization. Hence, realization can develop and mature, by realizing true nature in subtler, deeper or more total ways, and by the completeness of such capacity of abiding. This implies that one can attain a degree of realization but there still remain some obscurations, issues, unworked out personal or historical conditioned manifestations, or the possibility of the arising of such.

When realization becomes full and permanent I call it enlightenment. This has two sides. One is that there are no more obscurations or the possibility of the development of obscurations. No more issues, no

more inner lack of clarity and no more inner limitations of one's experience. The other is the full and permanent awareness of the totality of true nature, in all its subtlety and dimensions, with the total freedom for it to manifest in whatever way necessary. Together they imply permanent living in the fullness of the real world, without holding to any particular teaching or perspective, or view of enlightenment or need for it.

Since many teachers use enlightenment to mean what I refer to as realization it obviously has a place in the Diamond Approach. It is an experience that begins a permanent kind of attainment. There are many kinds and degrees in the Diamond Approach. What is called sudden enlightenment basically refers to a distinction between building up to an experience or discovering it whole. I think the distinction happened mostly in the history of Buddhism, because of the distinction it has had between emptiness and Buddha nature. The schools that believe the ultimate reality is emptiness tend to think of gradual enlightenment, because emptiness is realized by chipping away at the self. The Buddhist schools that believe the ultimate reality is Buddha nature, which is some eternal presence, tend to think of sudden enlightenment. This is because you discover it as it is, since it is primordially complete and whole. However, in both there is a path where practice needs to be done continually. This is the case in Zen, the most well known teaching that teaches sudden enlightenment. Zen definitely includes long term practice, even though it believes in sudden realization. Furthermore, as it is well known, Zen conceptualizes many kinds and degrees of Satori, or realization. It is said that after every satori there is another satori. In other words, even in schools that formulate their teaching as sudden enlightenment or realization, it is not usually envisioned as one cataclysmic experience that finishes the whole path, without any remaining practice, work or integration.

This is the case in Advaita Vedanta too. Otherwise, how can we understand the different degrees of depth or expansion of realization of their various gurus and teachers?! Just the fact that a teacher says he is enlightened does not mean he is enlightened to the degree of another teacher, or has the same kind of enlightenment. Also, it does not mean that he or she has no more work to do. Usually, the traditional teachings, like Vedanta, conceptualize the work needed after such experience as integration. But integration is not a matter of going about your business and everything just happens on its own. Otherwise all Vedanta teachers will be the same in depth and power of their realization. The integration is actually a matter of seeing through ignorance, habits, positions, assumptions, patterns and so on. This is not different from the work one does before such experience, except that now one is informed by the wisdom from this experience, and possibly by the continuing remaining in such experience.

I think when we do not have the debate as Buddhism had, that of between emptiness and eternal ground, there is not much point in the distinction between sudden or gradual enlightenment. Essence is discovered as it is; it is not built up gradually. At the same time the mind sheds its ignorance or attachment to such ignorance piecemeal.

In my personal case, very early on I had an experience that can be called enlightenment where the ego totally dissolved into the ocean of consciousness and love. There was a total cessation of consciousness that lead to such cosmic perception. But that experience began a whole path that revealed many qualities and dimensions of true nature, and where I went through the ego segment by segment, issue by issue. This path was again punctuated by discoveries and realizations that can be called sudden enlightenment. After many years on the path I finally arrived at the place of the initial enlightenment, but then the unfoldment continued to further stations and newer levels of realization. So in a sense, my journey combined both the sudden and gradual paths. I believe this is what usually happens to most individuals, regardless of what teaching or path they follow.

There are rare instances of individuals suddenly finding themselves in the absolute, and remaining therein, without them going back to integrate other dimensions. But this is not the usual, not even in Vedanta or Zen. And even in such cases there is still the work of integration. I do not think there is a way of totally bypassing working out one's ignorance and patterns, unless we are content with partial realization.

We also need to remember that in the Diamond Approach we see that there are two threads for the path. One is that of discovery and realization of true nature. The other is that of individuation of the soul, which is the maturation of the human being. This latter one is bound to be a gradual development and growth for it has to do with integrating one's life's experience and capacities into one's realization.

Quartioli: Which are the most important qualities that a researcher should integrate in his path?

Ali: The most important, in my view, is loving the truth for its own sake.

This implies having a totally open mind, totally open to whatever truth we may find. Also, the researcher needs to have an open-ended attitude, not expecting or wanting any particular end or result. This means it needs to have the attitude of pure scientific research. Otherwise, one's research will be biased by one's own subjective desires and goals. The researcher also needs a heart involvement, where there is passion, enjoyment, playfulness, and involvement without attachment. It helps a great deal to have courage, intelligence and focus.

I discuss all these in detail in *Spacecruiser Inquiry*, where I spend a whole chapter on each of these qualities as they pertain to inquiry and research.

Quartioli: How is it that the behavior of some of spiritual teachers is sometimes questionable around power, sex and money issues? Is it because they are "beyond" human values and morality or because they are actually "below" because they haven't worked out the psychological issues concerned?

Ali: Spiritual teachers are just like other human beings. If they have not worked through some personality conflicts and issues these can manifest as such behavior. Such unclarified personality tendencies can even become more exaggerated under the pressure of greater expansion and energy that comes from realization. This is similar to ordinary individuals when they attain to positions of power or wealth; these situations sometimes exaggerate their already existing tendencies.

It is true that some traditions talk about crazy wisdom or something like that, but these traditions think of that as a quite rare and advanced possibility, that is rarely attained. I think the known stories of aberrant or questionable behavior of teachers usually indicate that these teachers are of limited realization. There is no such thing as a neurotic enlightened being. When teachers are neurotic or behave in a strange way it usually indicates that they have not worked out some personality issues and animal tendencies. So even though they have attained to a measure of realization the realization is not complete, which means it is not enlightenment yet.

When we understand this situation then there is nothing unusual or difficult to understand about such stories. Some people cannot understand such stories because they assume the individuals are fully enlightened, so they have to find some far out explanations or just get confused.

Quartioli: For a long time the human soul has been considered out of the domain of western science. When finally psychoanalysis came, what was looked for was mainly the dark side, neuroses and psychoses, evidently a deep belief that somehow the soul was created as corrupt. Even in the spiritual circles the ego, after all a part of the human soul, is often considered an enemy to be "ignored" or even "killed". How do you consider the ego. Could the ego be a "helper" in inquiring and recognizing the truth of the deepest parts of the soul?

Ali: Can there be ego apart from the soul? Not possible; all of our experience of ourselves has to be of our soul, whether free and hence experiencing its essential nature, or identified with some kind of image or concept, and hence it is ego. In other words, ego is nothing but a manifestation of our soul, our individual consciousness, that is structured through concepts and impressions from past experience. In this situation the soul experiences herself through this lens of concepts and impressions, and this lack of

immediacy and oneness appears as the alienated self, what spiritual teachings refer to as the ego. It is not exactly the ego of psychoanalysis, but what most people refer to as their sense of self.

Such identification with history and previous experience is the primary obstacle to spiritual realization, because such realization is nothing but the soul experiencing herself not through any filter, but directly, immediately in the moment. When the soul experiences herself and the world with this kind of immediacy she recognizes the presence of her true nature, and recognizes it is her ontological truth. Because the soul misidentifying itself is the primary obstacle it is frequently considered the enemy of the spiritual path. It is the enemy but it is not an enemy that simply wants us to fail or be unhappy. Hence, what it needs is not aggression, or killing, which is not possible because we cannot kill our soul, but understanding and love, that will allow it to open up and surrender its identification and rigid beliefs and positions.

When we relate to the ego with aggression and rejection, who will be doing that to the ego? It has to be the ego, because true nature, or the soul not separate from true nature, cannot reject or hate. It can only have the attitudes of true nature, which are love, wisdom, understanding and so on. In other words, the rejection simply makes us more identified with the ego position.

The ego can be a helper in the path in the beginning stages. This is because we cannot be our soul at the beginning without being the ego. So at the beginning it is the ego who does the work, who practices the inner path. It is in reality always the soul, but here the soul is identified with the ego concept. In time ego becomes transparent and begins to dissolve. This means the soul begins to experience herself without this lens of concepts and historical impressions. Without this lens we begin to see reality, what we are and what the world actually is. So in some sense the ego dies, but this does not mean there is actually a separate entity that dies. It is more that the soul sheds this ego concept. We can experience this as some kind of death, but this is because we still believe we are the ego and believe the ego is actually a real and existing entity. What dies is our ignorance, not an entity called ego.

Quartioli: You see in the essential aspects of strength, compassion, clarity, joy and others the bridge between the human and the divine. There is a strong debate about genetic engineering. It seems to me like there could be a temptation to look for the "essence" of the human being, in particular for his "best" attributes, on the biological level. Do you think that the DNA manipulation can help in integrating the essential states or rather is just a dangerous way to "play God"?

Ali: These spiritual qualities are actually nothing but the attributes of the divine, as it manifests and becomes immanent in the world and the soul. We can experience them in our individual soul and relate to them as our qualities, or essential qualities arising from the divine, and this way they function as bridges to the divine in its transcendent dimension.

It is my observation that sometimes it is difficult for some individuals to experience certain spiritual or essential qualities, and this seems in rare instances to be due to genetic deficiency. I think it is possible that we need our full genetic make up for our bodies to be transparent vessels for the divine qualities. This reminds me of the discoveries in genetics that there exists a joy gene, just as there is a maternal gene. But these, joy and maternal nourishment, are two essential qualities, and there could be other essential qualities partially governed by specific genes. This observation supports the view that we need our body to be as whole and complete as possible for us to experience our essential potential. So if we lack a certain gene, or if our brain or body has some kind of incompleteness, this can mean some difficulty in being open to particular qualities. And just as in genetics a gene is just one determining factor, missing one gene does not mean it is total lack of access, and possessing it does not mean automatic access.

If this view has some truth, then it is possible to think that genetic engineering can help in providing the missing genes, which can give us the normal or average openness to a particular essential quality. But this is not the same as genetic engineering giving us enlightenment, because we already possess almost all the genes required anyway.

This is as far as I can tell. Whether DNA manipulation can help us integrate essential states beyond that, is something I do not know. I think the potential of genetic engineering for spiritual realization is possible, but I doubt that it will replace the need for inner practice and work.

Quartioli: I have arthritis since I was a very young man. As for many other people who experience chronic body discomfort, this has been both a stimulus and a frustration on the path. Did the limitations you have with your body influence your spiritual unfoldment and your teaching? How in general is the connection with the body according to the Diamond approach?

Ali: My body limitation of course influenced my spiritual unfoldment. The polio I got when I was about two years old created a vulnerability and physical dependence on others which helped me become a socially sensitive individual, but also inwardly autonomous. It also gave me the necessity to turn inward to experience life. The actual mechanics of having to use a crutch to walk has affected my body in a way where I could not ignore my inner sensations. So I developed an inner sensitivity and a dynamic inner life that have always been independent from external situations. The polio created a limitation in terms of physical and social functioning, but it also allowed some inner strengths to develop.

It seems that we can turn physical limitations to our advantage, or we can by adequately coming to terms with our limitations learn from them and develop in ways that are not ordinary. I think this requires first some other supportive factors, like healthy upbringing, some talents and so on. The main thing is that we do not give up and become bitter but face our limitations and learn to be open to life and experience. I think most people tend not to face their limitations adequately; they become bitter, blaming and depressed or deficient. But sometimes an individual can deal with the situation, developing different qualities and capacities to deal with it or compensate for it.

The nature of the physical limitation is also important. Some limitations can interfere with our capacity for perception, thinking, insight, feeling and so on. In these situations it is more difficult to face the situations adequately, and it becomes less likely that an individual will develop and grow from the limitation. This is obvious in the case of pain. Some pain still leaves us able to think, contemplate and feel, if we face it and do our best. But some pain is of a nature that makes this application of capacity difficult, and will need a bigger fortitude than is usually available to the average human being. It does not mean it is impossible to develop in such cases, but it is more difficult and will require more supports. And hence, only rarely will an individual succeed in dealing with the situation adequately for inner growth and development.

We can think of our body as one dimension of our life. We are each a soul, with essence as true nature, but with a body as a vessel or vehicle for experience and action in the world. The soul is the vessel for essence, and the body is a vessel for the soul. And just as the soul needs to be transparent to essence for her to experience and recognize it, the body as the most external vessel for our experience needs to be transparent to the other dimensions. And just as the soul can be transparent to essence in some of her manifestations but not in others, the same way with the body. The body can be transparent in some ways to the soul and essence, but not in other ways. It can be transparent in the heart region but not in the belly region, or in the head but not in the heart. This will make our access happen more predominantly through one center or another.

The most important quality for the transparency of the body is sensitivity, just as it is for the soul. This means that the most important thing is not whether certain organs or parts of our body are healthy and strong and normal, as much as how sensitive they are to inner experience, and how they affect the soul's sensitivity. The factors influencing sensitivity can be physical but usually they are the psychological consequences of the physical situation or limitation.

By sensitivity I do not mean being sensitive as in reactive or too tender; I mean the capacity to experience greater and greater intensity and quality of stimuli without disruption or closing down.

Quartioli: The world is in an ecological, social and political turmoil. There are teachers who say that what is happening is just an illusion, maya, and we shouldn't be concerned unless our "body/mind" is mechanically programmed to take care of that. It could be another form of attachment, but the prospect of ending this incredible experiment of life moves something inside me. Can the researchers of the truth have a role in healing the world soil and soul?

Ali: I know that some teachings say the world is an illusion, but I think it is an oversimplification that does not communicate what is intended. It is a catchy phrase, but the truth is subtler and more interesting. When we begin to recognize the ego view of the world as basically conceptual, this view appears as an illusion. We perceive the world as an illusion, but upon inquiry it turns out that this sense of illusion has to do with the fact that we are still seeing the ego view of the world, and recognizing it as an illusion. It does not say anything about what the world is. But when we look directly and immediately, which means the ego concepts of the world have dissolved, the world appears real, but as an expression of light and presence. We find that the ego perception of the world is a distortion of the true condition of the world, the real world.

In this real world we have two ways of being in it. We are either the true nature of the world, what makes it real, which transcends the forms of the world; or we are true nature manifesting itself as the individual soul, a condition where we experience our self not only as the transcendent but also as an organ or action and perception for the transcendent.

In this real world, everything appears perfect and right. However, this does not mean that the details of the world, the patterns of events, is perfect the way we think perfection is. It is more that we are seeing the underlying nature of the world, which is purity and perfection.

In other words, we can see the true perfection and still recognize that the pattern of events is not healthy for human beings, and that is when true nature manifests its love and compassion. We can get concerned in the sense that our compassion leads us to see suffering and feel the tendency to help alleviate it. At the same time we see that the primary problem is not the individual pattern of events but the ignorance of true nature, that underlies the painful pattern of events. We recognize that only through the dissolving of ignorance can a human being be liberated, but we can also see that for this ignorance to dissolve our compassion and love act in ways that flow with a more healthy pattern of events. In other words, the more we are realized the more we see the true reasons of suffering and conflict and what actions will help. Actually, the action of true realization is always towards healing the world, but may not manifest as what we expect it to be. But it can. But is there such a thing as action in the world in the condition of realization?

In the transcendent condition we see that nobody can act, that all action is basically the transformation of the appearance of the divine being. In other words, there is no such thing as individual action. But this is a subtle place, because even though this is the experience of the realized individual, this individual appears to act in ways that tend to heal the situation around him or her. So it is true it is an illusion to try to do something, but this kind of understanding goes along with a degree of realization where the events around this individual begin to move towards wholeness. Therefore, even though one is not taking an individual action the pattern of events does transform to reflect the perfect qualities of realization, like intelligence, love and compassion. Also, looked at from the side of people near this individual this individual appears to act in ways that are healing and wholesome.

In the embodied condition where we are the soul inseparable from its source, a cell in the divine being, we see that we can take individual action, but this action is actually the action of the divine happening through us. So there is the sense of individual action but the recognition that there is only one mover. In this condition we experience ourselves as acting effortlessly in ways that heal the situation, both people and environment.

Therefore, attachment here is not to the action of helping the world, but to the perspective of believing in individual action as an ultimate truth. If by wanting to help the world we are merely holding on to our belief in individual action as ultimate, then it is an attachment that reflects an illusion. But action can flow without us taking this position, when we are free of this position. Such action can appear as part of the universal unfolding of the appearance of the world, or as the action of the divine manifesting through an individual soul.

If we look at the history of realized individuals, they all contributed to healing of their environment, whether human, animal or inanimate. A better way of saying it is that truly realized individuals contribute to the overall evolution of humanity and the world towards greater awareness of true nature.

Quartioli: Do you think that the social and educational system could help in the recognition and the integration of the essential qualities in children?

Ali: Definitely, and this happens sometimes in small ways. The question is not whether they can but whether they will. And this means whether the people behind such systems are wise enough to include such education in the systems. There have been instances in history where wise individuals in the position of power supported spiritual teachings and values, which helped their spread in the greater society. This happened in the Jewish tradition, the Sufi tradition, the Buddhist and others. Usually this happens in some of the communities in society, which probably included the education of children in some instances. An interesting example is of the Greek and Roman times, when some people in power sent their children to study with the wise of the time, like Plato in Alexandria and Plotinus in Rome.

Quartioli: The Vedas produced not only spiritual knowledge, but as well the scientific knowledge of ancient times. It is said that this knowledge has been discovered by enlightened beings through some meditative stage. Could the inquiry technique that you teach be applied to medicine, physics, cosmology, social science, and other specialized fields? How different this would be from the current way of the scientific research?

Ali: Without any question. The inquiry in the Diamond Approach is a way of doing research and investigation, and it can be applied to any field of endeavor. It has been my wish for this to happen at some point. It will need to be modified some to fit the particular field, and find ways of how to include inquiry into the consciousness of the researcher.

At the present time our scientific method tries to separate the researcher as we have already discussed, but there is no absolute reason not to include the researcher. It makes it a better approximation than the Cartesian one. However, it is not as simple and easy as the Cartesian method of trying to separate the researcher as much as possible from the object of research. The average individual cannot do it, and this includes most of our scientists. I think if it happens it will have to be by scientists who already have some realization, and appreciation of consciousness and its nature. I think it will be interesting to see how our science will develop from this deeper and more encompassing perspective. It could be a revolution in the philosophy of science similar to what Einstein did in physics.

Quartioli: I heard you say that there is a relationship between the essential aspects and the endocrine system. Could you say something about this?

Ali: I do not know much about it. But I do know that just as the energy-shakti and chakra system is connected to the nervous system and the various plexi, the essential aspects and the lataif system are related to the endocrine system and its glands. Experientially, the shakti energy is similar to the flow of electrical charge, and the essential presence is similar to the flow of fluids. I think it will be an interesting research for somebody to do in order to find the specific particulars of the correspondence.

Quartioli: Your school has been more like a mystery school, with little advertisement, and your books, even if highly valued by researchers, were self-published and didn't reach the mass market. For a couple

of years now you have been publishing your books with a big publisher and your new book, Inner Journey Home, will have a strong promotion. What are the new challenges and how do you feel about having more media and mass attention? What will be the subject of "Inner Journey Home"?

Ali: It has been my function to put out the Diamond Approach in all the ways I can. The idea is to reach as many of the people who can resonate with it and use it as possible. I do this through teaching, teacher training, some public events, and through the publications. Part of the function of the publications is to make available to people the new paradigm and insights of the Diamond Approach. It is not as effective a way as teaching, but has its usefulness, for it is educational in the good sense of the word.

Whether this will require mass media and attention is not clear to me. I myself tend to be private and do not like mass attention. But if this begins to happen in a way that helps to put out the teaching to more people then I will go along with it as part of my service to the teaching. By publishing through Shambhala part of the intention is to widen the audience the books can reach. This is not really the level of mass media or attention.

We are not trying to have the teaching be done in a mass scale, for our work is teacher intensive and we can accommodate only what our teachers can handle. However, the books have no such limitation, and can reach much larger audiences without the school having to deal with many new students, even though this will put some pressure on us.

The Inner Journey Home, which is appearing in the spring of 2004, is partly a book about the soul, and partly an in-depth overview of the path of the Diamond Approach. The first part of it is a detailed discussion of the soul, her nature, properties and functions, dimensions, development, realization and maturation. The Diamond Approach develops the ancient Western concept of the soul, as spearheaded by Socrates and developed by the esoteric branches of the monotheistic traditions, to include the modern notion of self and the modern field of psychology. The emphasis is on how the soul is what we are, our individual consciousness, which has essence as its nature and ontological ground, but also possesses what we call mind, heart and will as some of its dimensions and capacities. The book goes into the details of how the soul develops into the normal self through ego development, and how and why this alienates her from her essential nature.

This is recognized as some of the stages of a larger process of development, which includes the essential development, realization of true nature and the integration of that in the world as the individuation and maturation of the soul. The book then goes into an in depth discussion of the essential nature of the soul, the dimensions of true nature, and their realization and integration in the path. It includes a quite detailed, deep and subtle discussion of true nature. The book ends with a discussion of the journey of descent, and the integration of all dimensions in the true Reality, the true condition of existence, and its relation to the notion of a personal God.

An important thread that goes through the book is that of connecting the teachings of the Diamond Approach with the Western tradition of thought, and discussing how it possesses a positive vision of possible evolution of Western culture and values. It does this by looking at the dissociation and unity of the notions of God/Being, self/Soul and world/Cosmos.

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Toshan Ivo Quartiroli is a Diamond Heart student and publisher of Innetnet magazine.
He can be reached at ivo@innetnet.it