

From Heart Dweller

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Essence

Essence is our true nature, our true self. It is part of God. It is the personal part of God within me. But the nature of essence is that there is no difference between the part and the whole. This differentiation or separation is the experience of ego. And for ego there is no essence, for the only way that we can know what it is like to be in essence, to be in the presence of God, to be within Reality, is to taste. We cannot know by reading, hearing, or imagining. Reality can only be experienced by Reality. We have to be real, open, and turned on, on an organismic level. Mental abstractions are only mental abstractions, and Reality is beyond that, although it can include them.

At the beginning we have only ego's experience, the experience of the dream we call reality, the experience of samsara. It is the nature of this experience to be mostly aware of a lack, of a wrongness. Something's not right. Something is missing. It cannot be just like this. There must be something else. The majority of humanity tries to avoid this experience of lack by distracting themselves, by filling themselves with all sorts of worldly occupations, by anesthetizing themselves. Few recognize this experience of something missing for what it is, and set out on the spiritual path to retrieve the lost jewel, our essence. It was years ago when I started feeling the first stirrings of the inner call. I felt I wanted to be free, to be loose. I didn't know how. I didn't know what being free meant. I only felt dissatisfied, a divine discontent for the way I was—although judging from exterior manifestations I was fine, okay. My motivation was essentially suffering, pain, discontent. I felt my energy blocked, dammed, but I didn't really know what the alternative would feel like. I felt as if I were a huge hurricane trapped in a small and constricted body. I wanted to get out. I wanted to breathe, to fly, to live. I knew I was dead, but I didn't know what being alive would be. I was in such a great frustration and I didn't know how to get out, or so I thought at the time.

All the time
Agony!
Ecstasy
When shall I taste you?

The river is struggling
Angry and impatient,
It must flow
It must live through.

The invisible rock
The obstinate block
I must shatter
I must pass through
This cannot go long
It mustn't go long
It must open up
The seed must explode through.

Energy is delight
I must seize upon the time,
Body or nobody
Freedom must come through

The bird must sing
Darkness is no place
Pain is no remedy
Release, come through.

Enough, enough implosions
Emptiness must bloom,
Unity is hungry
It must come true.

Why the agony
Why the distance
Why all this blue
It couldn't be true.

The waves must meet
Oneness must take place of the wall,
I am tired of walls and veils
Come, break through.

Suffering is the usual motivation that starts people on the path. Not always, but mostly, and that was how I started. When the Buddha was awakened he formulated what is called the “four noble truths,” which are the basis for all his teaching. The first noble truth is that of suffering, that man is living in constant suffering, always frustrated, always discontented; whatever we do, we always end up suffering. This is a fact of life. People don't really know what happiness is, or how to achieve it, although everyone is running as fast as they can, each in his own way, to catch up with this elusive promise. The second noble truth is about the origin of suffering, the alienation from essence. The third is about the cessation of suffering, finding essence or entering Nirvana. The fourth noble truth is the existence of the path, by which we remember what we have forgotten, our true nature.

The truth of suffering is important, for this discontent with samsara is essential for setting on the path. It is our true self creating an itch inside us to start looking, to start waking up. This discontent is the first intimation that we are asleep, and with this intimation comes the hope of waking up or unfolding. We are given hints, intimations, insights, dreams, memories, and so on, from deep within that we are to wake up and embark on a journey. First, these hints or voices are very shrouded with unclarity, doubts and insecurity. Suffering is a way our deepest self cries out for attention, calling upon us to look for the jailed princess, to liberate her from the dragon that took possession of her. It's the beginning of the heroic quest.

This suffering, this divine discontent, is a heavenly message, and should be acknowledged as such. We always respond, whether we know it or not. However, in the West, there has arisen with modern civilization and its emphasis on comfort, an attitude that looks at this discontent as a disease that has to be uprooted or silenced. Most psychotherapeutic schools deal with this discontent as a wrongness, as a disease, and strive to eliminate it, instead of seeing it as a creative expression, a symptom. It is a symptom of an alienation from our true origin, beckoning us to listen, to pay attention, to heed the call, to begin the search and embark on the journey of Return.

Ancient mystical schools and religious traditions saw it for what it is and proceeded to utilize it as a tool and energy for awakening, instead of trying to silence it. Some of those traditions sought to impress upon the seeker the degree and depth of his suffering, focusing his attention on his suffering and the suffering of the world in general, to awaken greater energies for the work, to dramatically motivate him for a long and hard journey. In Buddhism, the first noble truth has to be experienced, seen in one's daily life, for it to be a living teaching. It is well known how and why Gautama Buddha left his family and wealth after he was exposed to the suffering around him, and renounced all the luxury and comfort for a life of wandering and hardship, to look for the answer to life's riddle.

It's true that there is such a thing as neurotic suffering—suffering that ego uses for manipulation, to uphold the illusion of its existence. It is important that we isolate this kind of fake suffering and expose the pride behind it. Yet, this must not blind us to the creative suffering, the divine discontent that is a fuel for the hero in his mission. Still, therapeutic approaches see a cure as the disappearance of suffering, the silencing of discontent and the yearning for the journey Home. Frequently, cure does mean the end of discontent, the end of searching, which is usually called adjustment or adaptation. The individual might become adjusted, might adapt to the environment, but this will be at the expense of the greater life. One might feel discontent no longer, but neither will one experience what it is to be truly alive, to be truly a human being. One's search will be blunted, the call of essence will be silenced. This is a murder, a real violence done to the most precious part of us.

Many people even embark on the path, have some therapeutic experiences, some emotional satisfaction, and then believe that was it and abandon the quest. Such a person has not tasted the divine nectar, has not glimpsed the

divine presence, the real luster of Reality. When the tiger tastes blood it will not settle for anything else. So when a person tastes what it's like to be one's essence, there will be no final rest till one *is* this essence. This does not mean that others are experiencing this rest. In fact, they are only asleep, anesthetized to their condition.

We often mistake emotional experiences for spiritual ones. We have experiences of emotional catharsis that feel good. But then we make the mistake of seeing such experiences as spiritual. The person who has tasted cannot be deceived. Emotional release, intellectual clarity, or physical pleasure are good, useful, and necessary. Yet they cannot substitute for the real experience of the divine. They are very pale, insubstantial experiences compared to the real ones. A true spiritual experience involves the whole being; it originates from a much deeper part of us than any emotional experience. It is real food for our essence, not dream food like emotional satisfaction. It is a different mode of experiencing, like being transported to a different planet, with a different body, and a much expanded and evolved perceptual system. It is hard to describe the difference between the two modes, because I know that for myself I could not have understood the flavor of real experience before I tasted it, regardless of how much I heard or read. My true nature, my essence, eclipses with its radiance any pleasure or satisfaction I have from any normal emotional experience, regardless of how dramatic or deep it is. There is no total satisfaction outside of essence. Even the meaning or sense of total or real satisfaction cannot be known except by essence. Ego has no idea of what true satisfaction is; it only knows counterfeit gold, not real gold.

This does not mean that emotional experiences cannot be spiritual. In fact, frequently, spiritual experience is very emotional. But we have to distinguish between real emotions, the true energies of a free body, and the neurotic compulsive patterns we call emotions. Being in essence feels like my body is filled with a very different kind of energy than usual. The energy feels real. It has the flavor of truth. The truth sense in essence is direct, certain; just like when drinking water I know it is water. The certainty is not intellectual or emotional. I just know it is true because I taste truth. I know real gold from counterfeit gold because I have experienced both. Normal experience is counterfeit gold, and lacks the sense of truth. Something substantial is missing. Real experience is so substantial, so true, so packed with reality; it is like gold hammered and beaten till it becomes lustrous. In fact, the sense or experience of truth does have the quality of gold.

The alchemists did not choose gold to represent essence because gold is rare and expensive. The choice is much more intuitive and experiential, because the quality of truth or realness in essence has a substantiality and luster that feels like experiencing gold. It's like solid light, light that is packed so densely that it becomes substantial and weighty. It just feels real, true. Even as I am writing, the word "real" seems to shine with this quality of realness, and the word "true" seems pregnant with Truth. Words at this level carry the truths that they are symbols for. The sense of gold in truth is also the same as the letter "T" in Truth. Just feel the experiential difference between "AH" and "T" and you will feel how substantial and dense "T" is, and that's the quality of "T"-ness or realness in the experience of truth. It is like "AH" is the beginning, the opening, and then the whole alphabet, the whole creation is compressed, packed, impressed in the one letter "T." "AH" (Aleph) is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and "T" (Tav) is the last one, and the whole of the alphabet is seen as the process of creation by the Kabalists. The density of "T"ruth is not physical. It is intuitive density, that feels almost like a substance. But it is a substance that is more substantial, more weighty, more real than material substance.

Essence has many qualities. In the Koran "Allah" is the name for God that contains both the transcendental and immanent aspects of Him. He is immanent through 99 qualities, or the 99 names of God. The transcendental aspect is the Absolute; the qualitless, nameless Dharmakaya. The qualities of God are the virtues of essence when a man wears them. They are colorful and varied, just like the round flowers on the peacock tail. Spiritual experience is experiencing God in one of his divine qualities. Experiencing God in his nameless, formless state cannot even be called an experience. It is beyond any categorization or conceptualization, for it is the experience of the Truth sublime.

The Koran lists 99 major divine qualities, like generosity, humility, power, beauty, perfection, gratitude, etc. These qualities are different specific forms of energy, that are experienced in the body. And since in essence there is no separation, these qualities pervade the whole environment in such experience, filling the air (literally) and the objects nearby with the specific vibration of the particular virtue. That is why it's recommended to keep the company of holy men, for vibrations are contagious.

Majesty is an actual, experiential truth, and not an abstraction or a role. It is a specific mode of energy flowing through the body, an experience of being that can only be described as majesty. It is not the majesty of a king, although a king may reflect it in a pale way. I can see the quality of majesty more in nature. I can see it in the imposing presence of snow-covered mountains or in the expanse of the desert.

One time when I had just finished making love with my girl friend, I felt so quiet, so serene, so contented. I was lying down on my back, and she had her head on my belly. I was just being, and looking around the room. At one point the whole environment was transformed. Everything became majestic. Everything acquired majesty. I felt like a king and she a queen. It was not a fantasy. It was not a mental experience. It was an actual state of being. My body became straight, my chest went forward, my gestures became royal. Even my thoughts had a royal, regal quality to them.

In humility energy becomes gentle and warm. I feel my heart as a very intimate, compassionate dwelling. My posture changes. My shoulders become rounded as if I want to embrace my heart with my shoulders. The posture exudes humility. It is a posture of feeling just myself, no more and no less. No pretending, no claims. My heart feels as if filled with a very pure fluid that is shining gently from every one of its atoms. My whole body feels gentle, delicate, but my posture is not expansive like that of majesty. This posture is very common in the middle East, especially among Sufis. It gives the impression that the Sufi is in the presence of a powerful and majestic force, which is exactly the case. It is as if the heart becomes the center, melts in surrender, and the chest becomes concave around it. And there is no tension; for it is a state of fullness, not deficiency or fear.

In abundance and love my heart is like a spring or fountain. Very warm sweet fluid spreads out all over the chest, penetrating the body, filling it with exquisite satisfaction. I feel that I am one hundred percent satisfied and contented. I don't want anything else, absolutely, nothing else. The fluid feels like honey. It has the feel and texture of honey. It wells out in great abundance. My friend looks into my eyes and says: "You look sweet." I feel sweet. I am all sweetness. I discover that my mouth tastes sweet, as if there is honey in it. There is no question of whether I love myself and others. I experience myself as love. I experience everybody and everything around me as love. Even the walls are made out of love. There is only love and nothing else. It is the basic substance of existence.

I smell something in the air. My friend smells it too. She says it is jasmine. We look around to see where the fragrance is coming from. We cannot find the source. I discover that I am the source, it is coming out of my pores. Jasmine fragrance fills the whole house. My heart is a very deep ocean full of honey. I feel I am in a garden. Everything is fresh, green, as if cleansed with pure water. There is a sense of purity, translucence and virgin newness. I listen to music. I experience it as drinking water. I drink the music for hours. I feel as if I have been thirsty for all my life and now I find the water I have been looking for. I drink to my heart's content. With all of this there is no hallucination, no distortion of the environment, of my sense of myself. Everything feels as if awakened to its own intrinsic nature. My body is so open that I feel the food in my stomach before I feel hunger. My organism is faster than my head. I understand what I want to say only after I say it. There is no inhibition, no blocking at all. This is a state of *baraka*, of the presence of blessing, the divine energy. I express this state of being in a poem:

Traveler in the desert
Seeking my heart's desire,
Drawn by a vague memory
From immemorial past,
Guided by a subtle taste
On my thirsty lips.
When one day
In the middle of the desert
There appears suddenly
As if out of nowhere
A beautiful garden,
Lush green
With running streams
And cool breeze,
With a fragrance of jasmine
That's so sweet
And so young.
The deeper I go into the garden
The greener the green
And the sweeter the fragrance,
Until I come into the center.
There I behold
With a joyful wonder
The source of the sweet fragrance;
A fountain of abundance,

Spreading out fluidly
Like the tail of the peacock,
Pouring luminous colors
And showering rainbows.
It's so clear
And so pure
Like the nectar of jasmine,
A syrup so sweet
For it is honey.
I drink and drink
Until my heart is fully satisfied
And my thirst totally quenched.
Knowing with certainty
That there is absolutely nothing else
That my heart desires,
My body and soul
Joyously melt
Into a thickening ocean
Of sweet honey,
And reclining on a tree
With complete ease
Total contentment
And supreme happiness
I lie down
Close my eyes
And take a long awaited rest.
Here a sweet melodious music
Deliciously seeps into my ears.
I feel that I do not hear
Rather drink the sweet music,
That seems to flow like water
From the fountain of Kauther.
I open my eyes
To see my hands
Playing on a harp
A song of love,
And to my delight
I discover that
The harp is naught
But my own heart.

Sometimes this fullness comes only when there is total stillness and complete absence of distractions. All normal ego chatter and excitement quiets down and disappears. My heart becomes peaceful, serene, and still. There is absolute absence of any movement in my heart, no emotion of any sort. Into such a state of serene emptiness blessing can pour—the strings of my heart are gently plucked with divine hands.

Stillness in the air
Naked serenity
No expectations
Only existence

• • •

And a pool
Of green water
Clearer than a diamond
Purer than innocence
Still amid the stillness,
No quiver
No wave

In utter vulnerability
And forgetful silence,
Yet ever new
And ever fresh
In its serenity.

• • •

A virgin butterfly
More tender than silence
And lighter than the breeze,
Of joyous yellow
And splendid red,
Dances above the water
Oblivious to the multiplicities
Creating the world
With a flutter of the right wing
And destroying it
With another of the left one.
In one of its perfect sweeps
At the bottom of the crescent
Consumed in its total dance
It lightly touches
With the tip of its wing
The surface of water.
The touch
Stirs the stillness
And creates a circular wave
That expands on the surface of the pool
Sending gentle ripples
Throughout the clear green water.
The gentle translucent vibration
Penetrates the serene pool
Descending deeper and deeper
Into the thickening water
Loosening its molecules
And diving to its innermost secret.
There to find
Shining in magnificence
Splendor upon splendor
The source of all
The giver of life
Luminous
Inexhaustible
Everpresent
Comforting
Radiant
Golden
Sun.

The Sun illumines the whole cosmos. It is the Real Sun behind the sun, the source of life. Light emanates from the heart and turns all of reality into light and love. This heart is not the heart-chakra, the anahata. It is the Heart that Rumi refers to; it is the Heart center, the Christ center.

These flavors of essence, of the God within, have the stamp of the theistic Judeo-Christian-Moslem traditions. There are other ways, other flavors of Reality, depending on which approach we take. Each approach must employ some concepts and ideas, at least at the beginning of the path. These concepts and ideas are bound to influence the experience, for we always experience through the filters of our concepts of reality. If I am a Christian, I have Christian experiences. If I am a Hindu, I have Hindu experiences. If I am Buddhist, I have Buddhist experiences. This does not mean that these experiences are not valid or not true. However, all the systems must meet, and they

meet exactly at the experience of Reality that is beyond concepts. It is the experience of the Truth, the One Reality, Allah, Dharmakaya, the Absolute. In this experience, which cannot even be called an experience, all concepts fall away and the truth is seen directly, naked, with no filters whatsoever. This can only be done experientially. The unity of approaches cannot be seen intellectually, for the unity is in the nonconceptual Reality which is beyond intellect.

I have been involved in the past few years with Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism mainly. The approach is totally non-theistic. There is no concept of God. There is only what is, and enlightenment is seeing that there is no such thing as an individual self. While treading the path following the Buddhist approach my experiences changed and acquired different qualities. Even my values went through some transformations. Essence is not personal at all. It is only the experiencing of reality the way it is, without distortion of concepts. This experience of no personality is called "sunyata." In Buddhism the approach is geared to the realization of the nonexistence of a center we call ego. Still, even in Buddhism, essence has qualities that are transcended only in the experience of Dharmakaya, which is the direct experience of Buddha nature. There is, however, what is called the five Dhyani Buddhas, which are personifications of different qualities or energies of Buddha-nature.

In my experience, essence assumes the qualities of clarity and openness. These qualities are not only mental perceptions, they are very specific states of being that are experienced in the body, the heart, and the mind, and sometimes even beyond them. Clarity becomes a crystal kind of clarity, like a diamond that is just washed with pure oil. It's a clarity that allows room, more space, and creates openness in the heart and mind. I feel my head empty, but quite alive. There is translucence, a shining and bright quality to awareness. My mind is balanced, serene, in a state of equanimity. Whatever arises—sensations, feelings, thoughts—are seen very clearly, for what they are, just as they are. No judgment, no commentaries. Just bare awareness. Awareness becomes very subtle, becomes even aware of itself. It is an awareness without an observer. It's like everything is awareness. There is no center for this light. Light is everything, is everywhere.

My heart is open, empty like an open window. This is true literally and metaphorically. The heart is so empty and so relaxed that everything can pass through, anything can happen and pass away. There is room for everything, and there is no attachment to anything. There is the sense of openness or nothingness. It's like there is no barrier between me and the world, and there is complete allowing for reality to take place. This is what is called compassion in Buddhism and it cannot be divorced from openness, which is the emptiness of the heart from any preconceptions or prejudices.

Fleeting clouds
Bright as snow,
Come and go;
So do the foreboding ones
After their tears let go.
Like empty sky,
Clear and immaculate,
Is my heart's peacefulness;
Not an iota of dust
Can cling to its emptiness.

So Buddhism really emphasizes the virtue of non-attachment. For a long time I experienced a conflict between the theistic approach which emphasizes abundance and love, and the Buddhist approach which emphasizes emptiness, openness and compassion. I had experiences of both, and both felt very real and true. I accepted both flavors but I still felt a conflict between them. This conflict sometimes gave me a great headache for it comes even in the simplest daily experiences and transactions.

One day I am in the rose garden. I am lying on my back on a bench. There are rose bushes all around me. I can smell the sweet fragrance filling the air. It is a warm day. My heart is peaceful. My mind is quiet. I am looking up, immersed in the sky. Aha! I see it. Green and blue; that is the marriage between theism and non-theism, between Sufism and Buddhism. My heart opens up. It feels roomy and spacious. A very sweet and precious feeling winds within this spaciousness, like a melody in the summer air. This is the marriage between abundance and emptiness. Around me is all abundance, fullness, fertility, the earth, green plants, bushes, roses, bees. But wait! The sky, the blue and clear sky. A spaciousness that opens and opens, endlessly. They meet; the earth and the heaven, the abundance and the emptiness, the green and the blue. Khidr, the green guide of the Sufis meets Vajradara, the blue Adi Buddha, the source of the Mahamudra teaching. They are two sides of one reality. And I experience this

reality right in my heart, within my body. Emptiness adds more room, creates greater space within me to experience more fullness. The fullness gives me the contentment that allows me to relax, let go, and be more open. A sense of spaciousness, for I see the open, clear, blue sky filling my sight and my body. At the same time, a sense of exquisite sweetness, of utmost gentleness. Such a melody of an experience. My heart expands to include all the environment, the green bushes, the red roses, the bees, the blue sky, the clouds.

The bright sun
Shining with fullness
Sends its messengers of warmth
Through the dew-covered leaves
The fresh green leaves
Of the rose bushes
Under the clear blue sky
The sky of openness.
The blue
And the green
The clear open sky
And the fertile earth,
Give their abundant blessing
To the making of honey,
The substance of love
The full expression
Of the golden sun.

This experience only relates the two paths, and gives the difference of flavor in each approach. This perception made me see that there are many ways that the heart can manifest. It showed me that love is not only a feeling I feel in my heart, but that a higher form of loving is to have the open heart that allows others to be themselves. It is not imposing on reality.

Here love for Truth, devotion to God, replaces suffering and discontent as a motivation on the path. Instead of asking God's forgiveness I start singing His praise and glory. I no longer care to assuage my pain. My heart longs for the presence of Truth. All I want is to be my true nature, my essential self, for I love this God within my ribs. I have tasted the honey and no amount of pain or suffering will equal that exquisite rest of heart when I am with the Beloved. Love for truth is my motivation, it's what spurs me on the path. Alleviating suffering is not my concern anymore. Suffering has done its job. It has shown me the face of the Beloved. Now it can go, it can stay, do what it may. I am concerned only with loving my true self, only in serving the truth sublime.

Such a delight
Such a joyful wonder
To love thee
O shining golden sun.
My heart spills over
With the golden nectar
At the touch
Of your dazzling gaze.
Take your face away from me not
For what am I without your magic?
Naught in naught,
An empty ditch,
A dry river,
A dead shell.
You turn your lips with a smile,
And I turn into a fountain,
Spreading life
As a rainbow.
You become sad
And the whole world grows dark
And my tears flow
For you, for me
And for the absence

Of the golden sun.
O substance of my heart
Avert your gaze from me not,
O fragrance of my heart
Withdraw your favor from me not,
O color of my heart
Let the clouds cover thee not,
O nectar of my heart
Without you I am not.
For I am the dust
That dances joyously
In the glory of your radiance.
May you be content
With my humble presence,
Then the world may revel
In your brilliant splendor.

In fact, all along, love of Truth has been the motivation, the only motivation towards the only goal there is. Love of truth is a quality of essence, and it manifests itself in many ways. In the beginning it manifests as suffering, as divine discontent. It disguises itself in a form that can be recognized and appreciated by the seeker. At the beginning, the seeker cannot recognize love of Truth in its naked reality, for he has no sense of what "love" is and no sense of what "truth" is. There comes a time, however, when this messenger of the divine, this love of truth for its own sake, throws away its disguises and veils and appears in its true, shining nature.

I experience love of truth in two modes. One is that I see that only truth works, and nothing else. It is a practical matter; wisdom born out of difficult life experience. It is a fact that truth sets me free, and only truth. I am convinced that only truth is ultimately useful. Lying, self-deception, ignorance, fear, running after the gratification of desire, all of these lead to only darkness and suffering. The light of truth is the liberator.

The other mode is more devotional, and is close to my heart. I just love truth. I love seeing truth. I love experiencing truth. I appreciate truth for just being truth. I delight in the truth. Truth is my very nature, and the very nature and essence of everything. Of course I love truth, for I love who I am, for I love reality, for I love Love. My heart quickens with joyful pleasure when it experiences truth, this gold of reality, this sun of experience. I don't understand it. I don't know what happens then, neither do I care to know. I just go beyond myself with joy. My heart spills over with the honey of love when I behold Truth, the prince of Reality.