

Adyashanti's teaching on the No-Self Experience

Nini Praetorius – on behalf of Adyashanti¹

Abstract. In this paper an attempt is made to present Adyashanti's rich and profound rendering of the lived experience of No-Self. To fully understand what this state entails, it is necessary to view the trajectory of forms and qualities that consciousness can take during the spiritual unfolding, and how the experience of No-Self fits in into the overall arch of awakening *from Ego to Self*, and *from Self to No-Self*. This presentation is based on a Study Course by Adyashanti, called the *Experience of No-Self*, and addresses and thoroughly discuss issues concerning Ego, Self and No-Self, defined as particular acts and types of consciousness, and the shifting from Ego to Self and from Self to No-Self - and the ensuing loss of will of Ego and Self. Finally, the paper presents what is entailed in letting go of both Ego and Self, and elaborates on the human expression of life beyond self - and thus of becoming what we eternally are.

“The falling away of self is the most significant, bewildering and liberating spiritual event in one's entire life, and perhaps the least understood.”
Adyashanti²

Introduction

Adyashanti was one of the first spiritual masters to be invited to this Frontiers Research Topic. However, numerous Sangha meetings and retreats already planned well into the future bade him to decline. Only a couple of weeks later, however, Adyashanti launched a live online study course with the title “Experiencing No-Self” - so after renewed exchanges I was given permission to write this paper on the basis of - and with extensive use of quotations from his teaching in this eight hour long study course about the lived experience of No-Self.

Adyashanti sets out in this course, firstly, to *explore* the precarious territory of No-Self and to *understand* exactly what the experience of No-Self is; secondly, to account for how No-Self fits in within the overall arch of awakening; and thirdly, to guide the evermore numerous spiritual seekers who nowadays appear to be approaching the realisation of No-Self, and who are struggling with and getting stuck in the various phases on the path

¹ <http://www.adyashanti.org/>

² The quotations and representations of Adyashanti's teachings in this paper stems from his online Study Course *The Experience of No-Self*, http://www.adyashanti.org/index.php?file=productdetail&iprod_id=588

towards it - as well as in the wide variety of different, highly significant, yet potentially confusing, moments of this very state itself.

The notion of No-Self figures prominently in the teachings and debates within different Western spiritual cultures - and so do discussions of all sorts of corollary philosophical and theological issues about this state and notion. Adyashanti has no intention at all to take part in these discussions, let alone to develop a new philosophy or theology about No-Self. Now, philosophical inquiries as to what this notion refer to and implies; or how one may function without having or experiencing a self; or how there can be free will if there is no self etc., are not necessarily worthless or without merit, according to Adyashanti. However, such discussions do not get to the heart of the matter, which is the *direct experience of No-Self*. Quite on the contrary; philosophical wonderings and quandaries about No-Self are as far away from the actual experience of No-Self as sitting in your room thinking about the sun is from experiencing the actual sun itself. You can sit in your room and think of the sun, but it doesn't make you warm. Thinking of the sun has nothing to do with the sun, nor with the actual lived experience of the sun. Even worse, all the corollary philosophical questions that the mind can occupy itself with, often boils down to a very sophisticated means of holding on to self.

In what follows an account will be attempted of Adyashanti's rich and profound rendering of the lived experience of No-Self. To fully understand what this state entails it is necessary to view the trajectory of forms and qualities that consciousness can take in one's spiritual unfolding, i.e. how, according to Adyashanti, it fits in into the overall arch of awakening. That is to say, the arch of awakening *from* Ego to awakening *to* Self, and awakening *from* Self to awakening *to* No-Self .

The paper is divided into four parts corresponding to the four sessions of Adyashanti's study course of Experiencing No-Self:

Part I, *Ego, Self and No-Self*, introduces Adyashanti's concepts of Ego, Self and No-Self, which he defines as *acts* of consciousness and *forms* that consciousness may take. During this presentation the following issues are addressed: The transcendence of Ego or Self vs. the falling away of Ego or Self. This part is concluded by a first, general outline of the features and aspects of the No-Self Experience.

Part II, *The Continuum of Ego, Self and No-Self* , presents Adyashanti's view on the entanglement of Ego and Self in what is called the Egoic state, and the development of Witnessing in Spirituality. Moreover, he elaborates further on the shifting from Ego to Self, and on the continuum of the higher Self to No-Self. He then details further aspects of experiencing No-Self and accounts for the Loss of Will and Motivation of Ego and Self.

In Part III, *The Nature, Qualities and Dimensions of No-Self*, Adyashanti first explains what it means to Letting Go Completely, of Ego and Self, and how it is experienced. Next he elaborates on the Expressions of Life Beyond Self and on what Becoming What We

Eternally Are entails. Finally, Adyashanti describes relating from and trusting Divine Wisdom and Love.

Part IV, *How things are experienced beyond self*, first presents Adyashanti's view of why describing life beyond self experientially is essential. Here he also explains the difference between the conditioned mind of ego and self, and the un-conditioned mind beyond self. This part concludes with a detailed description of the very different forms of conventional, feeling-based love, through to the transition of love beyond self.

Part I: Ego, Self and No-Self

“Any moment of transcendence is a mortal blow to the ego. It begins the ego's demise. ... You see that what you thought defined you is not actually what you are, but something which exists within you.”
Adyashanti

Ego

It is well known that within philosophy and psychology there are many definitions and complex theories of ego. However, according to Adyashanti, ego is actually something very simple: Ego is simply *self concern*, *self obsession*; it's to be identified with one's inner psychology – meaning all the self referencing ideas, thoughts, opinions, judgments, story lines – all of that. This portrayal, says Adysahanti, is not meant in a judgmental way, or to say that there is something wrong about it, or that it shouldn't be like that. It's just simply defining ego as what it basically is, i.e., *the act* of consciousness being obsessed with the inner psychology. The very immature ego is completely obsessed with its own self concern; everything becomes filtered into 'how is this for me?', 'what do I think about this', 'what's my judgement about that'? That is, everything becomes filtered through the ego, the act of self concern

More specifically, says Adyashanti, ego is the act of being trapped in an *identity* and a world view predominantly viewed through one's self concern. That's basically how everybody starts out with an ego development. A more grown up or mature ego, a healthy ego, will eventually begin to reach out beyond its own self obsession and be concerned and truly care about and have feeling for something beyond itself. For example, concern for the loved ones, the family, and perhaps it would go a little bit wider, to the local community, people in one's religion and culture and maybe country. Then it could go to something much vaster, to humanity at large.

As the ego matures it starts to outgrow and relinquish its obsessive self concern, and its orientation is no longer completely fixated in its own psychology, its own story. However,

ego even in its higher sense, in its higher desires, is still the self centred act of desire, craving, wanting and aversion, of pushing away, rejecting. ‘I don’t want this’, ‘I do want that’. This is *the movement* of the ego, not what ego is *doing*, but what the ego *is*, and this movement of desire and aversion contributes to its self centred orientation.

Different kinds of spiritual practices are meant to loosen up this adherence to and boundedness of ego. First and foremost because our ego orientation is self defeating, i.e. in the sense of being the cause of the vast majority of suffering that people experience. When someone is really bound in the ego, says Adyashanti, one has a feeling of being encased and enclosed and small and isolated. So spirituality is initially trying to support the letting go of being so bounded of ego, i.e. by supporting the opening up to something bigger; this could be by tapping into the higher ego’s morality, which is the concern of all being and the welfare of all life; or it could be tapping into a love of God, or it could be into existential questions such as: What is reality? What is really true? These are all ways that ego looks for a deeper truth than itself, its self concern and self obsession. And it is ego being more in touch with more mature aspects, indeed, it’s actually the very highest function an ego can take - and spirituality helps one getting there. There are all kinds of means of going about loosen this sort of self obsession, for example prayer, meditations, contemplation and spiritual inquiry. Of course, says Adyashanti, one often realises that ego is a very mercurial *verb*, a very mercurial *movement* of consciousness; for a long time it will keep forming itself into new identities.

So, what initially happens when you get involved in spirituality is that you no longer experience yourself as an isolated human being. The ego takes on a deeper identification; now you are a Christian, a Buddhist, a Jew or any of the other – a Hindu. That is, the ego re-identifies with a spiritual identity. The ego can play almost any game you can imagine, it’s extremely mouldable. Indeed, one of its main tendencies is to keep turning itself into new forms all the time. And this continues - until we start developing a kind of wisdom and become familiar with the ways the ego “shape-shifts”. When at a certain point you start to see the whole movement of ego, says Adyashanti, something *deeper* starts to recognize it.

Ego and Self as forms of consciousness

Adyashanti uses two terms, ego and self, to denote two *different forms of consciousness*. *Ego*, as we have seen, is a form of consciousness being obsessed with its own self concern. *Self*, on the other hand, is that which looks at ego; it’s the act of *reflecting* within. Put differently, self is the *act of self-consciousness*, and self-consciousness is what self *is*. Ego, then, is what self consciousness *reflects upon* when it looks inside. What self consciousness sees and experiences in its center, in its own inner personal psychology, is what we call ego.

Now, when you have a deep experience of going beyond that ego identity and transcending it, says Adyashanti, you start to experience and know yourself *not* to be the ego. The ego may be there, i.e. all your thinking, feelings and inner psychology: but you know that it doesn’t really define you. In other words, when you go to a deeper dimension of

experience, a wider dimension, you see that what you *thought* defined you is actually *not* what you are, but simply something that exists within *experience*. This kind of insight is often very profound and freeing, very liberating, says Adyashanti. It's a kind of an ... 'AHA!, I thought I was what I *felt* and what I *imagined* and all my *judgments* and *opinions* – I thought that all of that was me'. Even worse than that – I thought all that was *true*. In the moment of transcending it, you realize a bigger dimension of experience: and all you thought you were is now something that exists merely as your *experiences*. Adyashanti describes it this way:

“So, when you have awoken to a deeper dimension of being ... it often feels like you have transcended ego - and for a while it can seem like the ego is completely non-functional. You can be in a complete state of flow which is what it feels like not to be trapped in ego; it feels like a flow, a certain kind of ease and a certain lack of self-consciousness – a lack of egoic consciousness, actually. And that feels very easy and flowing and open and free and dynamic and vital. It is also simple, quiet and quite beautiful. And for a while since that experience of revelation may be in some instances quite overwhelming and empowering – it may seem like the ego is completely gone. But in many instances, probably most, some amount of the egoic structure will automatically, literally automatically, start to try to put itself back together. It can never put itself back together in the same completeness once you've seen through it. However, it differs from one individual to the other how much the ego puts itself back together”.

One of the ways the ego put itself back together is by trying to hold on to a moment of spiritual revelation - in other words, by trying to hold on to a moment of awakening. The ego thinks 'I want this and I don't want to lose it'; but, Adyashanti reminds us, as soon as you think 'I don't want to lose this wonderful and beautiful experience', it is still self concern. And as soon as there is self concern, you start to *grasp* at what you don't want to lose. And as soon as you grasp at it, your grasping *solidifies* the experience of ego. Now, says Adyashanti, you can't actually lose the deeper dimension of being, but you can succumb to the ego *re-contracting* upon itself.

It is quite common during one's spiritual encounter with the facets and structures of ego that one will be longing for the revelation that brought it about. Part of the journey will be realizing that in order to get beyond the ego again, you have to stop grasping - even at revelation. It's only ego that sees itself as *other than* – and therefore tries to sustain that experience and possess it or grasp it and own it. However, all kinds of grasping, no matter what kind of grasping, no matter what level the grasping is happening at, is essentially an egoic activity. Again, this isn't to judge it or condemn it or to make it wrong; it's just saying 'call it what it is'.

In conclusion, ego is *a movement* of consciousness, according to Adyashanti; it's a *verb*, a form that consciousness takes. There's not an entity in there called ego. The question of why it takes that form, says Adyashanti, is one of these philosophical questions that keep you spinning on the periphery of experience and never diving in. Most questions will keep

you spinning on the periphery of something much more profound, so it is really not useful to ask why.

The impossibility of the egoic state of knowing what's beyond its own domain

Now, there is the *transcendence* of ego, and then there's *falling away* of ego. Falling away of ego would mean that grasping at all levels and pushing away at all the levels ceases. People think of the non-egoic state, i.e. when there's no ego, in all sorts of ridiculous ways, according to Adyashanti. However, ego cannot imagine anything beyond its own domain. It tries, it thinks it knows, but it doesn't. So all the ideas that the mind or ego has about what the state beyond the ego is going to be like are just egoic ideas.

Only when we go beyond it do we realize this, and realise that before that we knew nothing about it. Spiritual teachers at all times have been suggesting to people to let go of what they think they know, especially concerning deep spiritual states of being. So, one should not worry about what's around the next corner, says Adyashanti, because thinking that we know, indeed that we could possibly know, is a defence against realizing it, against your own unfolding.

The experience beyond Ego

When you *transcend* the ego there's a sense of relief, according to Adyashanti, the constriction and the friction which is ego cease. The aversion and desire used to create a friction inside, but now it's gone – as well as the self images and ideas about ourselves, about others, about the world; 'am I good?', 'am I bad?', 'am I wrong?', 'am I worthy?', 'am I unworthy'? All this conflicting emotional turmoil that ego is made up of is gone. When we connect with a much deeper impulse within ourselves, says Adyashanti, all of a sudden we feel an interior *unification*, a smoothness, a flow, a sense or a lack of anxiety, a lack of a kind of boundedness. When ego drops away, that sense of psychological boundedness drops away with it.

According to the teachings of Adyashanti one of the great mistakes so often made in modern days spirituality, is that the experience of *transcendence* of ego is erroneously taken to be the *falling away* of ego. Another, and even worse, is that the transcendence of ego is mistaken for the falling away of *self*. However, they are completely and absolutely different things, as we shall see in the section which follows.

The falling away or “death” of ego

In contrast to the momentary transcendence of ego, the permanent falling away of ego is often precipitated with the feeling of a kind of death. Ego doesn't have to die to merely *transcend*; indeed, it doesn't have to do anything in order to transcend - and that is one of the nice things about it. As a matter of fact, according to Adyashanti, this non-doing is actually one of the access points to transcending the ego: that is, to stop doing *anything* about it. However, often in spiritual work we're obsessively trying to do something about

our ego – and that’s actually what keeps us bound to it. So when we stop doing this, even for a moment, then consciousness can go beyond, it can *transcend*.

However, there is an innate fear within the ego of going beyond itself, since the ego can’t *know* anything beyond itself. So when consciousness starts to move beyond the ego, to the boundary of the ego, the ego is going to feel, literally, experientially, that it is going to die. It’s not so much that it *is* going to die, but it cannot *know* what’s beyond itself. All this has nothing to do with what’s beyond ego. But it has everything to do with what ego *imagines* is beyond itself; since it can’t imagine anything beyond itself, it can only conclude that it’s a kind of annihilation. Fortunately you are not ego, essentially, since you *can* go beyond it!

But the ego can’t make its own disappearance happen. It can’t get rid of itself any more than your foot can outrun itself. Any effort by ego to get beyond itself is just another act of self concern and self obsession. To relinquish that, however, is often a very scary thing for ego, very disorienting. So, it tends to clutch until it’s ready to not clutch. And when it’s ready to not clutch, to stop doing, it just doesn’t clutch anymore. That’s grace.

What Self consciousness reflects on when Ego falls away

When ego finally falls away there’s an experience of great peace and a lack of division, psychologically. And what *self consciousness* then reflects upon is this lack of division. So your sense of your own being is no longer the ego which fell away, but it becomes an empty center, an aware empty space. When it reveals itself as that empty center, it reveals itself as – *divine*. However, according to Adyashanti, not divine as in philosophy or theology; it is *experienced* as divine; as precious and un-conditioned, almost as the origin, the un-manufactured source of life; as something of extraordinary meaning. Although you can never verbalize what the meaning is, it is of an extraordinary significance – it’s to be *unified* within. So, the act of self, which is just self-reflecting, used to look upon ego, but now ego is not there. Instead there is a kind of emptiness, which reveals itself to be divine, to be an infinite ground of being. One could go on describing all this forever, but each person has to experience it for themselves.

When that inner sense of divinity, of wholeness and completeness becomes mature, then, according to Adyashanti, you see and intuit that the same divinity is *everything*; so you know that everything and everyone is that divinity, no matter what their experience is; no matter what they are going through, and no matter what form it takes: a human being, a cloud, a rock, a force, a wave, ocean, a lake, a can of garbage in the city. There’s a sense of that astounding divinity everywhere.

But as it really matures, this astounding quality of divinity starts to lessen, since there’s no reflection on what *it’s not*. In other words, you forget the old state of egoic being and now the divinity inside and outside becomes more like just a lived reality; it takes on a kind of normalcy. Everybody thinks that they will be walking around in ecstasy all the time, ecstasy for the Devine, for God. According to Adyashanti you may well experience moments of ecstasy, but as spirituality matures you no longer mistake your ecstasy for God.

Ecstasy is simply one *form* that experience took for a moment; for an hour maybe, or for a month or however long. This is one of the more challenging and confusing parts of the realisation of going beyond ego. That is, mistaking spiritual *experiences* of reality for *reality* itself. There is still a subtle separation between you as a self and your experience of self. It's like when you meet another person. 'Hello, how are you'? You say, and you talk to them, and you share your stories and viewpoints, and you are getting to know the person. However, your *experience* of them is not *who* they are; your experience of them is *your experience* of them. It's not the same as who they are. Your experience of someone is very different from their experience of who they are.

This is what we are always mistaking, says Adyashanti: our experience of something or someone for what someone or something actually is. We forget that what someone actually is, is completely different from our experience of them or it.

When one starts to realise this, it can be very disconcerting, because for a long, long time we have made this fundamental error of thinking that our experience of things is what they are. And we take this right into spirituality and think 'my experience of divinity, my experience of God and the truth is what the truth of God or divinity is!' However, self in its seed form is the act of self-consciousness; it's self-conscious looking within, i.e. on its experiences, and in a certain sense just as before, identifying with that which it experiences.

No-Self is when self consciousness stops

The word self does not denote an entity or a thing or a somebody looking with or being self-consciousness. The experience of no self, says Adyashanti, is when this looking within stops. Indeed, when self consciousness stops, there's no reference within any more. It doesn't mean that you wouldn't see anything or hear anything or taste anything or feel anything; it doesn't mean that you fall into some state of unconsciousness, or that you go blank. However, you are falling into a state of *un-self consciousness*. Again one can't say why it happens, nor can self consciousness stop being self conscious – for everything self consciousness does to not be self conscious is an act of self consciousness. It kind of wraps itself up.

Self consciousness is just a *particular type* of consciousness, says Adyashanti, and we cannot understand what it is - until it's not there anymore, says Adyashanti. It's like ego, you cannot fully understand ego until it's not there any more. Then you understand it. Self is the same way, we can't really completely understand it experientially, until it's not there, and then you understand it, because, you *know*. It is what's no longer there. Then the understanding of it is quite obvious, quite simple. When self falls away, there's no alternative *identity*, it is not exchanging a little identity for a bigger identity, or an egoic identity for a divine identity. No-Self means essentially: *no identity*.

It's hard to think of one self – here is where the language breaks down, says Adyashanti – in any other terms than a self, and also to think of oneself in any other terms than an identity. We start with an egoic identity, small, very well defined even though it's very chaotic. And

when that drops away, then our identity goes into a vast state, and we'll say: 'I am awareness'. Awareness is something which is very transparent; it's not like an ego, it's very transparent and very quiet; it's very unifying, and it's very whole. When we have a very deep experience of awareness, well then it sees itself as everything it's aware of. That's also another identity though, so spirituality in one sense is the going from a less true identity that is more dense and confined and solid to a more transparent and vast. The more true the identity is, the less confined, the less solid, the less defined - until identity finally just drops away entirely. And in that case one can't say anything, because all statements would be kind of identity statements. They are claims, they are definitions, but in the real experience of No-Self there is no claim, there is no 'I am this, I am not that'; there is no identity, there's no description.

Anyway, there is an obviousness of *what* it is, according to Adyashanti - for example, you may say that it is the infinite knowing itself, recognizing itself. The knowing of what it is, is not as an act of self consciousness. That's not conceivable to the way our minds are hooked up. Unfortunately, when we run into something that's not conceivable, says Adyashanti, our minds start to form a new *ideology* and a new *philosophy* about it instead of staying with the fact that what is beyond self is not conceivable to self or ego or mind, full stop. One of the great barriers to all this are all the projections that the mind has. There are endless ways of mind imagining what this is going to be like, instead of just confessing that it can't possibly know - until it does.

As we have seen, all these states and transitions having been described, occur on a kind of trajectory, a spectrum; from a dense, contracted identity of ego to more subtle, more transparent identity, which is more unified - until it gets almost entirely unified, seeing itself as everywhere and everything. And then that last act of self consciousness falls away, and there is just the *infinite* experiencing and knowing *itself*. According to Adyashanti, there are different kinds of awakenings on this trajectory or spectrum, and, as we have seen, it is easy to mistake one for the other and to condense everything down into one thing.

Part II: The Continuum of Self and No-Self

“When you're in self, you're experiencing life through the beautiful medium of self, or whatever is left of self. When self falls away there is nothing between. There's just the Infinite experiencing itself from within itself.”

Adyashanti

The entanglement of self with ego and the development of the sense of witness

According to Adyashanti, self is the unseen subject or witness of all experience and all perception. Self is in this sense the 'I'. When people are talking about themselves they say: 'I feel this, or I feel that'. 'I' is consciousness surveying the field of perception and then commenting on it. However, you cannot experience what the self is; it can never be made into an object of observation. Self is what is watching your thoughts, is noticing your feelings; self is what looks at ego and self can even talk about ego. This way of using the language puts a distance, at least conceptually, between self and ego.

Ego, on the other hand, is really the 'me'. And 'me' is really a psychological process, i.e. thinking, feeling, memory, judgment, opinions, ideas; all of that goes into the Ego. The orientation of the lower form of ego is aversion and desire, 'I don't want that' and 'I do want this', 'I like this and I don't like that'. 'I am trying to avoid certain parts of life, of my self and people'. Aversion and desire, wanting and not wanting, are very intimate parts of the ego structure.

When the ego identification is deep and profound, says Adyashanti, then 'I' and 'me' are *fused* in experience. In other words, the self or 'I' is identified with my ego and *is* anything it identifies with. That's the egoic state of consciousness, the egoic identity: 'I am what I think I am, what I feel that I am, what I imagine that I am, or judge that I am'. And of course Ego projects that onto the world; people are my judgments of people, the world is what I think it is.

Now, in many forms of spirituality, the initial instruction is to begin to develop the *sense of the witness*. So instead of being completely identified with your thoughts, your feelings, your imaginings, or whatever, you are taught various ways to watch them. This is emphasised in almost every esoteric religion as a means of disengaging ego. Developing the sense of being the watcher implies creating a sense of distance; a distance that will lessen the identification. Thus, if you are watching something, you are not quite as identified with it. Therefore, spirituality emphasises that when you are meditating just watch your feelings, your thoughts. Let all perceptions just go by like a river passes by. In other words, you are taught to just be the witness. However, what you are really being taught is to *disengage* or *dis-identify* with the ego, and to engage in self, that is, the 'I', the witness, the most subjective experience of yourself. It's even in the structure of our language: 'I see this', 'I'm experiencing happiness', 'I am experiencing joy', 'I remember this'. There is always this I, the witness, the subjective experiencer. And then we go on to describe what we witness, what we experience, what we felt, what we thought.

Generally, though, in the egoic state of consciousness the self-ego arch has collapsed, at least experientially, says Adyashanti. Self and ego are experienced as one and the same thing. I am my ego. I am what I think, I am what I feel, all that. However, spirituality knows from its deep understanding of inner life, that ego and self are actually two distinctly different things. The self is the witness, and you can never see the witness or subject. You can only see what the witness witnesses. Spirituality tries to emphasise that as a way to disengage from the lower nature of the ego when they say: you are not what you think, but the *awareness* of what you think; you are not what you feel, but the *awareness* of what you

feel. You are not your body, but your *awareness* of your body. And if and when there is a fundamental shift in the identity, when the trance is broken, and the identity leaves the ego/me arch, it naturally goes back to the self, the witness, the unseen subject of all experience. Witnessing, then, is consciousness; it is the aware witnessing of all experience and the subject as well.

The shift of identity from ego to self and from identity of self to No-Self

When your identity shifts from ego to self, it is extraordinary liberating, very freeing: it's like waking up from a dream - because it is literally waking up from a dream. A dream of 'me' and ego. And now you experience yourself to be *self*, and what self is. Again, we usually don't call it self. We just say: 'I am consciousness', 'I am awareness', 'I am presence', and 'I am emptiness'. Indeed, it has all these qualities. It is empty in the sense that you can't see it, you cannot grasp it. It is transparent like the sky; we cannot see or grasp it. It's a kind of pure awareness, pure consciousness – pure in the sense that there is nothing to see; it is the *seeing* of things, not the things that are seen. This is pure self.

To have awakened is to awaken *from* ego to self. Now, self, the unseen witness of your life, has an extraordinary dynamic capacity within itself. Self, as we know, can identify with Ego, that is, identify with 'me' or my thoughts or beliefs or opinion. And that makes one feel very separated and isolated and very small. So self, when fused with ego, can experience itself as extraordinarily small, isolated and defended. However, self can also experience its own subjectivity, what it *is*, as something infinitely vast. It can go from infinitely small and contracted to something infinitely vast and expanded. The highest form of self identification is: 'I am all that exists'. That is, the highest form of identification is that of *unity*; and absolute unity is where self experiences itself to be non-separate from everything in existence.

In the experience of unity, according to Adyashanti, you do not have any sense of self as we conventionally think of it, that is, like we think of ego. When self is in its most exalted state, it has no limitation to its sense of being, no borders or boundaries; its sense of identity is *universal*. This experience of self in its highest form may be problematic for our understanding of the deepest realms of spiritual experience, since it is often mistaken for the falling away of self, i.e. for the No-Self experience. But all the experiences mentioned here are actually indicative of the falling away of ego.

When one moves into No-self, whether it is a momentary transcendence of self or self actually falls away completely, we are losing any sense of *subjectivity*. We lose the subjective self, the unseen self, and all the definitions that go with it: 'I am a me, the watcher, awareness or witness'. That is, even what may be considered the higher forms of self drops away. For in this form there is still a separation between 'I', the watching and what is watched, says Adyashanti; that's a higher form of duality. The highest experience of the sense of self is when the distinction between the witness and the witnessed starts to fall away. Then the witness becomes truly universal. However, a moment of self-transcendence or when self falls away is when these experiences fall away with it; that is,

the experiences of self in its highest capacity. This does not mean that it is delusional in the way ego is, on the contrary, it's extraordinary and profound.

The effect on the transition to No-Self on personal will, desire and motivation

So what is the No-Self state – and what is the effect of the transition to No-Self? Now, it's not really correct to talk about a No-Self *state*; rather it's more correct to view the No-Self being on a spectrum. Let's for a moment go back to ego. As you wake up from ego, says Adyashanti, ego is not just a thought, it is not just a belief; it is also desire and aversion - which is a kind of energy: 'I want, I don't want', etc. It's what we experience as *personal will*. However, personal will is not just what one wants and what one doesn't want; it is also kind of a basic *energetic* quality of motivation; motivation for everything, actually. From getting out of bed in the morning to waking to the breakfast table, to putting you clothes on, and to go to work. Everything you do during the day all needs a kind of motivation. When there is no motivation the ego is powerless, it's like an electrical appliance in your kitchen that you have unplugged from the wall. It can't do anything without the electricity. Ego can't do anything without personal will and without the energy that it gets from it to animate the ego.

So, as ego starts to fall away, says Adyashanti, we experience this loss of personal will. Even if you transcend ego for a moment, you set in motion the inextricable ebbing away of the personal will. It's like if you had a very small pinprick in a tire – from that point on you are losing air. - This can be a particularly confusing part of spiritual awakening.

The loss of personal will actually comes from a lack of identification with the *subject* of the personal will, the one who is carrying it out. So when you wake up from the egoic identity, the energy of will stops flowing to that egoic identity.

Just like ego, self also has a kind of will, however a different kind of will than the ego. The ego has an obvious 'I want', 'I don't want' kind of will. 'I want to be loved', 'I want to be approved of', 'I want more power', 'I want money,' 'I don't want to experience that', 'I do not want to know that', and so on. That egoic personal will is pretty obvious. The self will, says Adyashanti, is very different from that. The will of the self is really the will or desire towards God. That's the higher will of the self. Self has a will and a motivation, but its motivation is much more around love, without any reason or gain. The ego will loves – but it wants something in return. In the higher form of self there is no desire for any returning of the love, it's a natural out-flowing of self, of love and compassion, altruism. These are the kinds of will to be loving and compassionate, which are beautiful and radiant; it's expansive – indeed, it's what everyone wants when you speak of spiritual awakening and enlightenment. What you want is peace, freedom, love, compassion, radiance, the presence of God. All that comes from your higher self: desire for its own sake, where there is no 'what' is it getting 'me'.

So, self has a very beautiful, very pure motivation when you tap into it. And when your awakening is on that level, it's very beautiful; in a certain sense it is an exalted and inspired state of being, says Adyashanti. On the one hand, self is unseen and unseeable, it has no form; it's the ultimate subject, the unseen subject of our experience. On the other hand it's

also completely empty – there is no *there* to it. But it is not a dead emptiness, because there is an alive quality to the emptiness. But in that emptiness there is no motivation or will akin to the egoic will; for example a motivation to go out and fix things or yourself or somebody or the world.

What you find in the emptiness is a kind of *radiance* of boundless love and well being. Even though it comes from self it's a kind of selfless love, it is love which is *un-self concerned*, that is *un-self obsessed*. It reaches out, and it loves all things unconditionally. The reason it does so is that in its higher realization of self, it notices itself to be the common thread within all being. Your un-seen self and everybody else's un-seen self is the *same* self. It has no history, it has no past to it, it has no form, it doesn't have any of these defining characteristics –it's not male or female in the way your egoic identity can be. It's very, very pure and profound – and it is *universal*.

The transition from the different forms of motivation of the ego, self and No-Self

So, when the ego drops away, there is a kind of loss of the personal will. This can be confusing enough: “what do I do, where do I go, what's my motivation, what's my orientation now that it is not egoic?” That can be like staying in a limbo zone, not really knowing what moves you until you connect with the higher aspects of self. ‘Why am I here’, ‘what am I supposed to do’, ‘what is supposed to motivate me’? Love is! The highest motivation of self is love: the radiance of boundless love is the energy that drives it.

Now, according to Adyashanti, the will at the level of self takes many different forms, from self-centred to universal. However, often when one kind of self-will is falling away, the other more abundant kind of will or energy isn't readily apparent. There is a dying out process during which you are somehow in transition. This can be quite disorienting. It would be nice if you transitioned very quickly or immediately from one to the other, i.e. from self-centred will to the boundless loving kind of will. Occasionally it happens that way, but it is relatively rare.

When self starts to drop away, then the self-will - in terms of universal will at the highest level - drops away. That's even more disorienting, says Adyashanti. For some people who are really grasping on to that higher level of self, it can be most disappointing and difficult when it all starts to fall away. It's very nice when egoic personal will falls away - it feels good, although it might be disorienting for a while; but essentially it feels good, freeing. When, on the other hand, self will falls away it's like the good stuff is falling away, indeed, all the benefits of ones spiritual realization. Again, what we are losing is the unseen self: The unseen self that we see in all things, the unseen self, which is sort of the unseen witness, the absolute subject of all our experience. When that falls away, there is a kind of will that is lost with that too. According to Adyashanti, that kind of will cuts more to the bone, and the loss of it is more fundamental than the loss of egoic personal will; it's a motivational force and energy, which in its highest form of self is exalted, radiant, and a kind of energy and motivation that moves you. And when self starts to fall away, that kind of energy starts to fall away with it.

Part III reveals what, according to Adyashanti, takes the place of this energy, indeed of will in any form or quality.

Part III: The Nature, Qualities and Dimensions of No-Self

“In the relinquishing of self, you do not receive grace; all experiences of giving or receiving are based in ego or self. Instead we weep from the eyes of grace, from the heart of grace”
Adyashanti

The transition to No-Self

Here is first how Adyashanti, in potent poetic form, describes the experience of letting go of and relinquishing self and all awareness to the eternal void - and what ensues:

... To die to all self, is to relinquish all awareness, to that light which shines only as divine darkness. For that dark light is eternal void, it is the devourer of all selfhood, the I-ness, the me-ness, both finite and infinite. That dark void is the light of eternity; it is all without distinction, infinitely full in potential and expression yet infinitely void in its substance and ground. That which is non-material is itself the material existence of all created things. There is no here no there, it always stands right before your eyes. It moves from an unmoved place without cause or reason but always in perfection; it is grace, not given or received, but grace as it is onto itself. For that death onto itself neither gives nor receives but becomes what eternity is.

To die into that dark light is an annihilating *death* to all selfhood. Or a birth to the ever abiding ground beyond all distinction. When that ground moves, divine knowledge and love incarnate, and when divine knowledge and love incarnate the ever abiding ground shines with brightness. And where there is not true love and knowledge that ground shines not, and is subdued as egotism like the sun does an eclipse. So let us humanly abide in a humble and loving heart, never forsaking the divine knowledge beyond all distinction, nor the infinitely loving heart of God which is our own“.

According to Adyashanti, there is often an experience of great fear when we open to the dark light, to the voidness, because it feels like an annihilating presence. If you let yourself go into it, you sense that you will never come back, you will just be annihilated. Of course at that moment, says Adyashanti, many will pull back – instinctively – whether they consciously decide it or not. Pure survival instinct will kick in and enforce this pulling back from that dark light, from that annihilating void. And many will come back into their selfhood – relieved they weren’t devoured - but also strangely anticipating and desiring to come to that point of reckoning once again. One is so repelled by it and so drawn to it

simultaneously. It seems like a complete annihilating void to self – and in many ways it is - because it is annihilating the last selfhood. This is not only taking away all the comfortableness of the human condition or, conversely, of the sadness, sorrow and despair, says Adyashanti. But it is also the dropping away of so many sacred and beautiful spiritual experiences and states that we have been in: From bliss to unity and beyond.

And yet, only when we finally relinquish our hold through an unreserved *desire for truth* and *yearning to know* what lies on the other side of that vital encounter with the void, that's what pulls us through. When finally letting go takes place, the moment of being an ego, a self, even an infinite self, disappears. In fact it is likely that all experience, even awareness disappear. And you will only notice the disappearance when you come back from it. But in that disappearance is the possibility of the falling away of the self.

And then follows the resting in and the acknowledgement and understanding of that ground of being, which is absolutely without *otherness* – even of the otherness of reflecting on yourself. That ground is the ground beyond all experience. However, that ground, which is fundamentally *void*, is also an infinite *potential*. Without itself being something material, the infinite is the potential of all material existence and of all created things. It is not simply the *essence within* things; it is not the *presence within* all things. It is actually the material existence *of* all things. That may sound contradictory or paradoxical; the material existence of all things is itself not material. But that's how it is.

Seeing from the Eyes of Grace and from Divine Knowledge which is un-selfless love

In the relinquishing of self, says Adyashanti, we do not *receive* grace, we are not *given* grace, because all experiences of receiving or giving is based either in ego or self. Rather, we see *from the eyes or heart of grace*. So again, paradoxically, we become at that moment what we eternally are and have always been; and still, there is a necessity of *becoming* what we have always been! The deeper we move into the lived encounter with the deepest, most fundamental nature of reality, says Adyashanti, the more paradoxical it becomes – that is to say, to the *mind*. However, to *experience* it doesn't seem paradoxical at all – it is simply so.

At this level of consciousness self-reflection does not exist, only divine knowledge that knows and recognizes itself. This is the knowledge of non-distinction and non-otherness. This knowledge is received in its reality as *un-selfless* love. This is not the selfless love of human beings trying to act selflessly; that is of course a perfectly noble endeavour, a stage in one's development and consciousness. Adyashanti is not talking about a *desire* to act selflessly, but about *being* selfless. *And that has its greatest expression in love*. Selfless love is self-less; it's a quality of love that arises from the very ground of being, which is beyond all distinction. Even beyond love.

Selfless love is a kind of love which can't be turned on or off. There is no option in it. It is an indiscriminate love of what is. It loves what you humanly like and what you humanly don't like so much; what you would prefer or not prefer. It is an indiscriminate love that cannot be denied, it cannot be held back, no matter what. It's not the same as falling in love. You fall in love - and you can fall out of love. You give love and you can pull your

love back. But this selfless love comes directly from the ground of being, not from any self. There is no choice in it. It's like the sun, it just is what it is. It just shines.

According to Adyashanti, there are some amazing, beautiful qualities of this fundamental knowledge *cum* love - absolutely beyond all imagination. One can never possess it or hold it, utilize it. Because in order to hold something, to utilize it, to be in relationship with it, you need a kind of separation. When self has fallen away there is nothing using it, nothing using knowledge or love; there is just *being it*. In the being of it we can have no image of what it is going to look like. No portraying or image like of e.g. a saintly person or even a holy person, or a person who conforms to one's spiritual or religious ideas. To go beyond self is to go beyond all that, however beautiful and noble it may be.

It is also a return to an absolute simplicity and ordinariness. It's an extraordinary ordinariness. If you want to be extraordinary, says Adyashanti, then you should stay in the higher dimensions of self, where you are expanded and you see yourself in everything; where there is a great sense of unity, of power and dynamics. But when we go beyond self, when it finally falls away, it doesn't express itself through all those powers and dynamics. In fact it is quite easy to miss!

“Doing” beyond the falling away of any personal will, desire and motivation

When the personal will falls away there are often a lot of questions about 'how do I do this?', 'how do I know that?', 'What moves me in life when I no longer have the personal will?', 'What moves my practical doing'? Getting up, having a job, relating to and carrying for a family' and all that. Just like in the cases when ego and different dimensions of self drop away, it is not uncommon that there is a *transition period*, where the remaining trace of self falls away. And that transition period can be very disorienting. One may go through phases where it seems like there is nothing at all to draw upon. However, says Adyashanti, it is useful to realize that you *can* actually move and you *can* do; however, not from personal motivation or even personal energy. But you can move and do, for example, from *necessity*. And you can move and do from *love*; love for your life or for your family, if you have a family, wife, husband, children, friends or who ever. There can be a moving from love, which is not the same as personal motivation. Instead, you are doing as an *act* of love, and not because you want anything out of.

When self falls away, *doing* becomes actually simple. It's the *mind* that wants to know 'how do I do that'? However, says Adyashanti, you really cannot translate this into the stuff that ego can utilize. None the less, from that dimension beyond self, *reality itself* moves in just the most obvious way. It just does *the next obvious thing*, and that's how it is happening. Incidentally, this is available to everybody no matter what state of consciousness you are in: *Just to do the next most obvious thing*. However, often when we are entrapped in various forms of identity, says Adyashanti, we are not simple enough; we are not clear enough, or quiet or empty enough to see just what's the next most obvious thing to do. If we have a bunch of personal motivation in there, which are fighting and vying for position, then we can't see what is the next most obvious thing to do. In fact, we may not even want to know what the next most obvious thing to do is. We only want what we want to do.

But from the dimension beyond self, from that ground of being beyond all distinction, which is in each of us, one of the most obvious ways it moves, e.g. in practical moving, day to day, is to do the next obvious thing. It does not necessarily move from causes and reasons. It moves from something prior to causes and reasons: Something else moves it. *What* that is, we cannot really put into words. You can't control it. You can't do it. We just notice it. "Oh well, something simply seems to know what to do the moment it really needs to know what to do". When ego and self aren't in there vying for position, says Adyashanti, that simple knowing becomes more and more obvious and more and more simple. And when we are not in our mind, trying to figure it out, and not being so disoriented and anxious about all that's happening, we know that there is actually an inner movement; very simple and beautiful. It doesn't have why's or guarantees, or saying: "yes everything will be ok", nor telling you: "yes you can be certain that it's the truth". That's not how reality moves, that's more human *mind-stuff*.

All these questions may be understandable, but they are based in fundamental *existential anxiety*. The realm beyond self has no existential anxiety at all. It's always there, available; but generally we never chose it. Nobody has ever told us or suggested to us that there is a dimension of our being, of our actual experience, with no anxiety that holds no weight. Where there are no psychological dilemmas that sees life through their lenses. There is something else within each of our being, says Adyashanti, which is always there and that moves with the most profound simplicity and quietness. It moves in the absence of personal motivation and ambitions.

That's why as long as we are tied up in our personal motivations it is very hard to access it. However, life does move in the absence of "motivation" or "cause". And we all have it: it exists in each of us, according to Adyashanti. It's not that some people have it, some people don't. There is no hierarchy in all this. It is really not a matter of *how* to access it as much as where we are living from. Granted, the transition from the dropping away of the personal will into no-will can, as we have seen, be quite confusing and disorienting; most people grapple around a bit with it – or a lot with it – for many month or years. Sometimes it doesn't take that long, but in general it seems to take month or years to really have it falling into place.

Trusting that the Ground of Being will find its way through your Human Expression

However, it shouldn't and needn't be too upsetting that everything beyond self doesn't just immediately becomes totally clear. Because it finds its way. Indeed, according to Adyashanti, it is really helped along when there is a deep trust. A deep trust that that which is beyond self is finding its way through your humanness, through your human expression. It may not do it like snapping your fingers, although revelation and insight can happen that way. But for the *fullness* of that revelation to *embody* itself through your humanity rarely happens that quickly.

You cannot tell anybody either how to do it any more than you can tell someone who is learning to walk how to walk, or to ride a bike when learning to bike. You can encourage them, you can say: "well get up and trust the process, something knows how to find its way"; if you just keep getting up you will find that it *does* find its way.

There is something inside all of us that we can trust, even if we can't understand it; you can't manipulate it either or make it happen, nor come into a deeper trust. According to Adyashanti, though, it is not unusual that even in the state of No-Self, there are pockets of confusion or hesitation and fear of what is happening, and thus there are still things that has to be seen through, in order that this divine knowledge and love can embody itself through your humanity.

So, part of understanding this is not to ask 'how do I do it', 'how do I move from the divine ground', says Adyashanti, it is to see that the natural impulse, the natural movement is coming from the divine ground. It requires humility and deep trust to really embody and express this divine ground through our humanness.

Part IV: How things are experienced beyond self

“Love can start to undergo a transformation where the experience of it goes from being emotionally based to love that is not based in feeling and emotion. It's not defied by experience at all”
Adyashanti

The importance of describing No-Self from an experiential point of view

In his teaching so far Adyashanti has been trying to convey in an experiential and straight forward way the falling away of ego and self, and what lies beyond self – without regard to whether it is comforting or discomfoting. Often, according to Adyashanti, these things are talked about in ways that doesn't make sense. Or, they are talked about overtly philosophically - maybe based in experience - however, dressed up in kinds of sales pitch statements. There may be lots and lots of talk about No-Self and different classifications of awakening and so on, which are very beautiful and profound. But talking about how it is *experienced* is literally almost unknown of, and almost *heretical*. And Adyashanti's style of teaching is, so he contends, actually verging on the heretical, because he teaches about these things from an experiential point of view, which is not encouraged in most spiritual traditions. And for good reasons. For if or when we get caught in these experiences, then they often just become new objects of fascination or worship or ways of comparing. So, there is a danger in any way we try to share this.

But especially when we are going into the realm beyond self, says Adyashanti, it really has to be described in experiential terms for it to have an impact, and for it to have direct application. One of the great mistakes which exist nowadays in many traditions, including the modern so called no-tradition traditions, says Adyashanti, is mistaking the *realisation* of No-Self and the *falling a way* of self. As a lived experience, even for people that realise that there is no separate self, their day to day experience is often based more in self or ego

or both than in No-Self. Having had a deep realisation of what exists beyond self, and realising that self doesn't exist, is not the same as the day to day *living* beyond No-Self, where the self has fallen away. So, we can have these moments of realisations and insights, even moments of actually experiencing something beyond ego or self, i.e. transcendent moments. But that does not necessarily mean that, fundamentally, it is where we are living from. Those moments may actually alter and transform our experience, indeed, our whole world view, but very often we are still fundamentally living in the same place.

So, there can be *momentary transcendence*, even a sustained transcendence of self. But, ultimately, it is different from the *falling away* of the self. To transcend something is not to have it disappear, it's just to experience something else, something other or beyond. But essentially, transcendence is a kind of vacation. They can be extraordinarily freeing, can even shift our identity to a certain extent, so they must not be under-valued. It is very common that we get sort of a foretaste, i.e. we transcend for a moment, or for a day or a month to an experience, which is completely different from what we normally identify with. And then we end up kind of where we began – except it is in some fundamental sense different, because we now *know* that there is something beyond. That knowledge fundamentally transforms where you are. So, many people have had this kind of going forth and back – “I've got it! I've lost it!”. But when the ego or self falls away there is no reference point there anymore, and thus no going anymore.

From the conditioned mind of ego and self to the unconditioned mind of No-Self

The conditioned mind is what we are taught to do, literally. It filters anything in from the medium of our own conditioned judgments, opinions and ideas. Indeed, says Adyashanti, we have been taught to filter all the incoming impressions, e.g. people we meet, relationship that we have, events that we go through, through the medium of our own conditioned mind. Conversely, we are unconsciously imposing our judgments, beliefs and opinions onto life, other people and existence. However, they do not belong in life, indeed, they have nothing to do with life. They are just our particular programming. The unconditioned mind first starts to come into our experiences, when we suddenly *realise* that we have been spending most of our life experiencing life through a filter. A filter that operates automatically and unconsciously like a program in a computer. It means that you do not experience anything or anyone as they actually are, in themselves, but only through the medium of your opinions, judgments and beliefs, that is, through your conditioned mind. When you really see that, it is, first of all, shocking. Coming upon the unconditioned mind is literally to step out of that, but it also requires that one has an *interest* in seeing things from the view point, say, of the person you are talking with. You begin to have an interest in what life looks like when seen from that person's point of view, through their eyes. Not how do *I* experience them, but how do they experience themselves. In order to do that you have to be able to put aside you own belief structures and judgments, and be really interested in how things look like from their point of view. Or, take life itself – how does life look like from its own point of view, and not from my point of view? Life does not share my belief or my opinions, clearly, or my judgments. It operates completely independently of them; indeed everything in life operates independently of my beliefs. Still, we ask, ‘why isn't life the way I want it to be?’ The short and true answer is: Because life

doesn't operate according to your conditioned mind. From reality's and life's point of view our opinion and ideas are completely irrelevant. Only we value them – until we don't. If you are not interested in how things are beyond your own idea and beliefs, you will never come upon what they are, or see them as they are independently of those beliefs and opinions, and thus see them from the un-conditioned mind beyond your own self interest; how you want the world to be.

This seems very rudimentary, but just think if we all came upon the unconditioned mind! Because you understand someone else's point of view, says Adyashanti, it does not necessarily mean that you go along with it, but only that you see it, and you know it, and that changes the entire relationship with another human being, and it changes the relationship with life, with existence, indeed, with everything. How this relates to the existence where self has fallen away, is that *then* we are seeing reality from the point of view of reality. We are seeing eternity from its point of view. We are seeing from God's point of view. We are not experiencing God anymore, or relating to God, or relating to our existence or life anymore. We are seeing from the point of view of life and existence and eternity. And in one sense we are becoming eternity and seeing from God's or the absolute truth's point of view. That's the relationship between the unconditioned mind and No-Self.

It's not that we cannot have any personal points of view, but we see them as not significant. What is significant and relevant is seeing from reality's point of view and from truth's point of view. When you really come upon just how much you see or have seen life, others, yourself and existence from the point of view of your conditioned mind, it's a big relief, because you are no longer wondering why life or other people do not see things like you do – you are just not obsessed with it anymore. You have dropped it. They do not see it the way you do, because it is not their job to see it the way you do, says Adyashanti. They do not have any interest in it either, nor the capacity for it. When you start to see this, it often starts as something which is quite small, quite ordinary, but which can grow into something vast and extraordinarily meaningful, i.e. from the un-conditioned mind and all the way to the mind of God.

Experiences of different dimensions of conventional love and love beyond self

One of the things that really changes drastically when one begins to awaken from ego is the experience of love. From the ego's state of consciousness, love is primarily to find through certain feelings and emotions. Take for example falling in love. What it means to fall in love with someone is to feel in a particular way when you're around him or her, or when you think about him or her. Falling in love is associated with some sort of *feeling-state*, e.g. of expansion, well-being, happiness, poignancy, intimacy, closeness, a merging kind of union. From the ego's point of view all these states are defined almost entirely from feeling. When we get into a higher form of love, for example, divine love, or love of God, according to Adyashanti, they are also feeling states, though different from, say, friendship or romance. Love of God and love of reality is a higher quality of love, but, fundamentally, it is based in feelings. That's why when the feelings of love changes we say: 'I've fallen out of love. Why? Because I don't *feel* this way'.

So, because they are feelings-states that kind of love is love that one may fall in and out of. It's a kind of love that can come and go, there's nothing permanent about it. This is not to say that it's bad, but just that it is limited and impermanent, transitory. When it happens that you are falling in and out of love at a drop of a hat, then you know that your whole experience of love is based on feelings and emotions - and pretty much nothing else. However, that's the kind of love we're taught. We are taught that there are basic feelings of love, and there are the elevated and sublime love of God.

But as your consciousness starts to undergo a transformation, then love starts to undergo a transformation as well, according to Adyashanti. As strange as this may sound, it's a transformation where your experience of love goes from being feeling and emotionally based to love that is not based on feeling and emotion. Indeed, it isn't defined by *experience* at all. As your consciousness gets more evolved, your experience of love evolves, and one of the first indications of love evolving is that it gets less feeling- and emotion-based, and less and less possessive. In other words it becomes less self oriented. The deeper, more evolved forms of love that are still based in feeling, is love which is altruistic and causes us to want the very best for the other - whether it feels good for us or not. It's a love that's not self oriented, although it's still based on emotion.

Transcending conventional feeling-based love

But when transcending self happens, you realize that there is a deeper, even more profound love that's not defined by how you feel. When you connect with this deeper kind of love, it can be very confusing, because it is so far outside of what we are taught. As soon as you've stopped feeling – for example feeling that your heart is swelling when you think of a loved one – it can be quite disorienting. Before this transition almost all of our descriptions of love are in some way feeling-based - even if it's *Agape*, or the selfless love of all beings. Even the altruistic and universal love of God is still *feeling*. But at some point, paradoxically, you start to *experience* a kind of love which is not based simply in experience. Instead, you *know* love - whether you feel it or not. This is the beginning of the transformation. When you begin to realize there *is* love whether you feel it in the given moment or not, and thus that there can be love which completely transcends how you feel, then, eventually, you realize that deeper more fundamental aspects of love exists, which cannot be defined in any way whatsoever by how you feel.

This deepest form of love is *divine* love. However, according to Adyashanti, it's not the love of God, love of truth or the love of divinity; nor is it God's love of you or receiving the love from the whole. Rather, it is the love *of* God, the love *of* reality, not *for* it, but *of* it. In other words, it is love experienced through the mind and eyes of God, or through the mind and eyes of the ultimate, or through the mind and eyes of eternity. When you begin to realise that, even if only momentarily, you really start to recognize that from that point of view, love is not a feeling or an emotion. This doesn't necessarily exclude feelings and emotions – there may be overflowing feelings of love: but once you begin to realize a love which is not a feeling or an experience, then you know – even if your mind cannot make

sense of it – then you recognise that the deepest divine love is God recognizing God as everything and in everything.

This recognition, not the *idea* of a recognition, not a *belief* in a recognition, but the *actual recognition* of it, is seeing through the eyes of eternity, and that seeing is a kind of knowing. It's *knowing*, because once you go beyond self, you are out of the realm defining anything through *feeling*. The truth of anything is not defined by feeling or emotion at all. You're completely in a dimension where reality is no longer playing out on that playground. It doesn't mean you become cold or distant and aloof; if you do, says Adyashanti, coldness, and being distant and aloof are *feeling* states, and not the deep and profound love being talked about here. It's beyond that.

And then again, the old mind would say: I know what it's like to be intimate, it feels sort of close and yummy and mergy. It's that feeling state that's so familiar and so priced, and that we're so drawn towards. However, what Adyashanti is talking about here, is Absolute intimacy - not Relative intimacy. Relative intimacy is a feeling of intimacy and closeness. It's beautiful and lovely. But in Absolute intimacy, there is no closeness to it. You have to have some manner of two things to have closeness. In Absolute intimacy there's no closeness, because there is no apartness. That is to state it philosophically, of course. Experientially it is the *knowing* of a deep, deep profound love with no basis in feeling and emotion.

Strangely, the more anchored you become in this, says Adyashanti, i.e. when it becomes reality to you, then it often happens that people will perceive you as being more and more loving, more and more compassionate, and they may project on to you that you are *feeling* more loving, and therefore that you are *being* more loving, because you are feeling more loving. According to Adyashanti, however, you are being more loving, because you have discovered the absolute depth of love; where love and truth are one thing. Where divine knowledge is love and love is divine knowledge.

That great Zen master, Dogan, made the statement: “to know yourself is to lose yourself, and to lose yourself is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things”. To lose yourself, says Adyashanti, is when the self falls away. That's the realm of divine love, or God's love. Not God's love as an individual receives it, but God's love as God sees it – transcending experience. People comes in to this bit by bit, according to Adyashanti; it creeps up on them – and they start to recognise it, and they kind of go like: “Uhm, that's odd, I really know in the deepest part of my being that there's unshakeable love – say, for a particular person – but the love I am experiencing isn't itself an experience. It's deeper than an experience; it's more profound.

It is a strange thing when you begin to come into this in a deep way, says Adyashanti. And this divine love, which is beyond experience, is also *indiscriminate* love in the sense: it simply loves. There is nothing personal about it; it doesn't love one thing, or one person, or situation and exclude all the rest; it loves what is. It loves what is, because it is what is. So there is no choice in this love.

Freedom

There is so much talk about freedom in spirituality, and right up to self realisation there is a greater and greater sense of freedom. However, says Adyashanti, freedom falls away when self falls away. There is no sense of freedom, indeed, freedom doesn't make sense anymore. It literally does not compute, at a certain point. In other ways it does compute – and rightfully so. But freedom falls away when self falls away. Where is the freedom when love that cannot be turned on or off? In divine love, you are stuck with it! There is love – no matter what. There is no such thing as falling in or out of love. It's not possible to fall out of it. So, there is no freedom in that. No freedom to choose what to love and what not to love. There is no freedom in divine love – you are stuck with it!

However, it doesn't feel as if you are stuck with it, says Adyashanti, that's just a matter of speaking. It's not like bondage, because freedom is only relevant in contrast to its opposite, which is bondage. We only experience freedom of any kind – even extraordinary vast and liberating – in proportion to how much bondage there is. When there is no more sense of bondage or limitation, there is no sense of freedom. There is no lack of freedom either – that's the beautiful part. There is freedom of being free from freedom – and certainly freedom of the psychological drive to experience freedom. Because remember, all experiences are contained in self, they are expressions of self. This is not said in a derogatory way, because self is amazing – it is, according to Adyashanti, pure spirit. Indeed, the unseen self is pure spirit; it's not ego, it's not self obsessed, or all that egoic nonsense. Self is the most amazing thing there is – it's where all the good stuff is: more and more freedom, more and more feelings of unity, more and more of the highest feeling states of love; and bliss and all of that. No-Self is going beyond concepts, you are going beyond feelings and emotions, because you are going beyond the medium that is experiencing it, beyond everything going through that; that is experience experiencing itself through experience.

The threat of the un-known beyond self

Beyond self – here we really run out of words. We talk about the direct experience of No-Self, however, it's an experience which cannot be defined by feeling-states, but neither is it un-feeling; neither is it the opposite of feeling, e.g. distant or cold or detached, because that's all feeling. So, we do not have words in our language to talk about anything beyond that. That's also why when we begin to come near that, ego or self sees this as very threatening, because the whole way of perceiving and experiencing life is being threatened – and self feels it and it knows it to be true, and it knows that it can't know what it will be like on the other side. Self knows that it can't know. And it is true that it cannot know. That's why it gets so afraid – and it projects the fear, says Adyashanti, into the unknown, into eternity. So eternity that's what is scary, the void is scary, infinity and silence is scary, because it's going to annihilate me. But this is all experiences and none of those belong to eternity. Those all belong to self. For, there is no fear in eternity, in the absolute, in truth or in divine love. All the fear belongs to self. All of what it is so afraid of, of what might lie beyond its own experience, all of that fear belong solely to itself. It's no indication of what lies beyond it. Which is good news, very good news, says Adyashanti.

Unfortunately, however, the love and knowledge, which is beyond self that Adyashanti is talking about, is a kind of love and knowledge that you find no encouragement of in society, nor any acknowledgement either. As a culture, we do not even know that it exists. In fact, says Adyashanti, we would be terrified of it. However, it is part of the great silence of what exists beyond self. Moreover, this is the important thing, not the actual falling away of self, but what exists beyond self: How is life seen beyond self? How is life seen from the eyes of eternity? How is life seen from the eyes of God?

That's what is beyond self.