

Convention 1977: Question Period on the Meaning of Death

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This is our forty-seventh convention. The first convention was held in 1930 up the canyon of Tuttle Creek, and there we ultimately built an ashram of rock in the shape of a balanced cross symbolizing the principle of equilibrium or balance which is the fundamental aspect which governs the universe, both subtle and gross, and of which the law of *karma* is a derivative. We may not hold any more conventions, although I would like to complete the forty-ninth, but the load has become heavy.

This morning my tape is on the subject of meditations upon death. It is three hours long. There will be three sessions.¹ It is as though it were a movement out on the ocean of knowledge in which the first tape will deal with material that belongs more to the shoreline, the shallower portions of that sea. The second tape may be said to go out into the deeper portions of the continental shelf. But the third tape will deal with problems that belong to the deeps. None of you should have any trouble with the first tape. This I find is the most difficult problem I've ever attempted to deal with and all that I've accomplished is a definition of the problem with some suggestions of steps that may be taken in its resolution. The purpose may be defined as, how to die without dying. That paradox, I think every one of you will be able to resolve and state in more understandable terms by the end of the three tapes. We start with the tape now.

This morning I plan to say something about contributions, and so forth. In the old Assembly of Man there were dues, and so forth. I annulled all the principle of the employment of dues. The only contributions are those which are chosen by the individual to make himself. One of the Brothers has said that for a spiritual service, no charge can be made and no gift accepted. With this position, I am in full accord. But associated with a spiritual service there may be a material facility provided which costs, which has to be maintained, and there also may be ordinary intellectual effort, which has cost its effort in the past. For that a contribution can be made. The problem is how do you determine that which is truly spiritual? This has been for me a difficult problem to define. The word 'spirit' and 'spiritual' is used often in a very loose sense. Sometimes people speak of what is only a subtle phase of vital feeling and call it spiritual. It is not so. To come to a usage which is more determinate, in philosophy there is a school of philosophy that is sometimes called Spiritualism. This is not the popular use of the term. This is Idealism, a philosophy that is oriented to that which is conscious. It sprang up with the work of Immanuel Kant. But that is not the sense in which we are using the term, and at last I think I have isolated the true and essential meaning. That which arouses an "induction" is truly spiritual. This is the awakening to another way of consciousness, a kind of

¹ See the audio recordings, "Meaning of Death," parts 1, 2, and 3.

consciousness that is essentially spiritual in its nature, a quality of consciousness—not a system of ideation, not a sensuous state. Many of you have had glimpses of this, and in some of the tapes there is the power to awaken such an induction. For that, no charge can be made nor gift accepted.

Also, there is a practice more or less common in the Orient, rare in the West, and that is: persons who come before an individual with spiritual capacity will drop on their knees or fall into full prostration. This is in effect a demand made upon the senior for a spiritual value. The senior is not fond of it; nonetheless, it's a demand made upon him which he must respect. This is a sample of what is meant by the truly spiritual factor. And to what is it related? It is related to that which I called last Convention the "transcendental component," or that which Dr. Carl G. Jung called the *numen*. When this is present, then we have the presence of the truly spiritual factor. Now, here we're not dealing with anything like theistic or theological speculation, nor with questions of pure belief. It's a matter of actual experience and fact. There are some individuals in this world who are bearers of the transcendent component. It is something very definite and determinate. Always there are in the world some, usually very few, who are bearers of this factor, and this world would be in a sad state if there were none such. I know it to be a fact after 41 years of experience of it. In other words, the spiritual factor is involved in relationship to the transcendent component, the vertical factor in consciousness. And in connection with that, no charge can be made nor material gift accepted. If anyone feels that he wants to make a contribution there is only one he can make and that is self-dedication.

Now, in our tape this morning we covered only the surface of our subject. We will go into somewhat deeper waters this afternoon. There will be a little more on the after death experience that has been reported in the literature, and then we'll go into more fundamental material. But first, let us open the window somewhat. It's getting kind of close and warm.

We are out near the outer edge of the continental shelf in the ocean of knowledge. Presently we will plummet to the depths. I shall stop the tape at the time of deepest penetration to make a statement to see if I can bring a realization of what is involved. I do not get the feedback that indicates that there is understanding of what is involved. We'll try to make it clearer.

This is the . . . and I want to see if I can make you realize it.² This experiment that I speak of takes place after the Realization I am *Atman*—not the idea I am *Atman*, but the Realization; and that Realization implies the death of ego identification, the mystic death.³ This was something I had sought for, for twenty-four years after departure from the academic world. The departure from the academic world I learned later was a very wise move. I met, not long ago, a man who tried to go both ways. Valuable as the academy is in many respects, the effect of the academy is adverse to any subject matter whatsoever. That subject matter is reduced to classification in conceptual terms, and the academician tends to take his refuge in the conceptual consciousness and looks upon everything else as subordinate. To attain the Realization, he must face the overthrow of

² Problems with the microphone make it difficult to understand some parts of this recording.

³ See the audio recording, "Meaning of Death," part 3, for a discussion of this "experiment."

that authority, and that's like facing a kind of intellectual death. Academicians are particularly afraid of this. I once talked to Dr. Vasant Merchant about it. She confirmed it. It's hardly compatible with the continuation in the academic milieu. One could return to the academy, but one could hardly make the breakthrough while in the academy.

What you have to face may be illustrated by a figure. Suppose we go back to the days before Columbus when the common thought was that this world was flat and it had an edge. And suppose you went to the edge of that world and the direction from the guiding power was leap over. Leap into the void. And here, where there is no map, where no philosophy can guide you, where there's no more than man, have you the confidence to leap into the void? That is the test. The *bhaktis* are particularly capable of this; and even though one follows the path of knowledge, he must have this that belongs to the path of the *bhakti*: the faith and confidence to leap into the unknown on the guidance of that inner voice, which is the voice of the *numen*. And you know not whether it's a leap into disintegration of the psyche or victory. This is the test that one faces. This is where it becomes deep diving; where one has only confidence and faith on which to rest. Use every manual as far as manuals can go. Use maps as far as they can go. But in the end, one must be able to leap into the void following the voice of the inner guidance. When he so leaps, he may find himself in perfect security in another realm of consciousness. But he does not and cannot know that beforehand. Failure would be worse than death. It would be psychical disintegration. Success means the supreme victory. I want you to realize what's involved here. It's greater than the risk of the adventurer on the physical surfaces or the one who goes forth into space in a capsule where death may be the outcome of it—death of the physical body. But he faces on the path the possible disintegration of the psyche beyond the power of any psychologist. Ultimately, there's no avoidance of faith and confidence for the critical steps. That was involved in this experiment. This experiment took place on the level of the Realization of the *Atman*. It's beyond that.

Participant: It seems that the most serious point that you made was the—very convincing to me—was that there comes a moment when one must abandon all concepts and take a leap into the void.

Wolff: Right. Right.

Participant: —and that, uh, one feels that that's so empty but that's the real—that's the moment.

Wolff: That's the real test of it.

Participant: That's the real truth because it's not something we do lightly.

Wolff: Not at all.

Participant: But, uh, how do you reconcile that with, uh, laying down all the Buddhistic concepts—*Dharmakaya*, *Sambhogakaya*, *Nirmanakaya* . . . and all the various . . . that's also . . .

Wolff: Well, when you've gotten that far, when you've got as far as those vestures, you've already passed over this crisis. That's beyond the crisis.

Participant: But if you abandon the concepts, then you've abandoned the concepts. Those things don't exist anymore.

Wolff: Oh, uh, no, no, no, no. At that moment that it is, but they come back. They come back as powers that you wield, not as commanding principles.

Participant: That's the subtle point, I think. Because otherwise one would say, well what am I giving up? I can take an examination and if I pass it I'll get A+ and otherwise I'll get B, and otherwise I'll just have to have many happy non-returns. So, uh, I mean that's not giving up concepts, if you know what you're going to get afterwards.

Wolff: Uh, no, it's not. But one will find that at some point he has to make the leap.

Participant: That I believe.

Wolff: Yeah. Now,—

Participant: I don't know about the other things, really. When it comes right down to it, I don't know. I don't know that those concepts are any more eternal, or more than projections from—

Wolff: They're not eternal. They're instruments, which renders functioning possible.

Participant: Maybe somehow they are concepts that refer to a quantum leap, and at this level they're not comprehensible.

Wolff: They're not comprehensible?

Participant: How could they be comprehensible if they belong to another dimension not yet attained? And if one belongs in that dimension, and the concept no longer exists but one embodies or represents it, that—that has always been somehow an issue.

Wolff: I don't get you. Why, you're not clear to me.

Participant: Okay.

Wolff: What is it? Try again.

Participant: At a certain point, well this is what Dr. Melvin was saying, you're concept must be released in order to take the leap, so that the concept is somehow a tool for, for what? For abstracting or rationalizing, or holding one's logical or rational facilities now, but doesn't have any reality after the leap has occurred. Or does it have reality—

Wolff: No. No, you still use it for, uh, communication.

Participant: Right.

Participant: Otherwise, you could not say a thing.

Wolff: You see what I said—when I was using that figure between the point-I and the Space-I that I had to use images, in some case, and patterns, visual, or you might say sensory images and conceptual patterns, to suggest a way of consciousness that was neither sensuous or conceptual. But I used this for communication, you see. That is the point. That value remains, so far as I know. So, if you're going the path of mastery, you will need it all the way. If you're going the path of *nirvanic* withdrawal, you won't.

Participant: So, basically you're just giving up attachment to these things and then once you've given up attachment, then you have the control. They no longer control you.

Wolff: No, you have greater control than ever.

Participant: Right.

Wolff: You can use them better than ever.

Participant: Right.

Wolff: They take a place of subordination. You can use them more powerfully than you could before.

Participant: That seems to be the point.

Wolff: Yeah.

Participant: You should own them. They shouldn't own you.

Wolff: That's right. That's the whole point. But I think a good many in the academic community are owned by them.

Participant: Practically everybody.

Wolff: Yeah. That's the problem of the academician. But he has resources; better resources than others if he can make the step.

Participant: How do you get the faith though?

Wolff: Hmm?

Participant: How do you get the faith to believe that you won't be, uh, the psyche won't be torn apart?

Wolff: How do you get them? Well, cultivate the power of faith and confidence—the thing that's easy for the *bhakti*. Now, then, the fact is, this is a relationship between you and the *numen*, and if you have built up a confidential relationship there, it isn't hard.

Participant: Perhaps it has to do with stopping judgment of others?

Wolff: Hmm?

Participant: Perhaps it has to do with stopping judgment of others.

Wolff: Hmm?

Participant: Perhaps it has to do with ceasing to judge others. I mean if one ceases to judge others and can see not only others more clearly, but one's self more clearly and therefore be able to let go and have faith and trust. But making it to the unknown without holding on to this concept of how you can do those things, and at that point all sorts of very subtle and deep feelings within that you might have to be confronted with that are released—or not released, but with each person, they their own deep feelings that like the ego holds onto the concept what he thinks is real and this has to be left behind.

Wolff: Well, we do seek security through a great many of our concepts.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Wolff: For instance, that's true in the religions. Religion teaches certain concepts and you hang on to those. You seek a certain security. There comes a time when you'll have to abandon those if you're going to go further. You see. That leap. But that doesn't mean that you won't use them again. You will, but they occupy a subordinate position, you see, not a ruling position.

Participant: Once one goes into the Clear Light, there are no concepts that one can come back with from that experience?

Wolff: I don't know why you couldn't because I've spoken about this division of consciousness.

Participant: So the experience of not being able to bring back concepts means the division wasn't there.

Wolff: Yeah. Be able to carry two consciousnesses at the same time. That's why I was able to write *Pathways*, you see, because I had the recording consciousness there. If you're completely abandoned to the consciousness, when you come out you might be unable to say anything.

Participant: According to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, when a person dies the polarity of consciousness immediately switches and one no longer is operating on the objective plane. The objective plane appears as little sparks and the internal plane then becomes the objective plane, or the subjective plane becomes more real than the objective plane.

Wolff: Yeah. There you have a quantum leap.

Participant: Okay. Now the polarity is switched. How are you going to maintain a rational—

Wolff: Combination of two—

Participant: —frame of reference in a nonlinear situation. In other words, it's impossible to maintain both at the same time.

Wolff: How do you know it's impossible?

Participant: I said according to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, one is presented with various instances where you can choose between the Clear Light and between something that looks like the Clear Light; but if one takes the second alternative, then one can go into the god realm, the zombie ghost realm, the animal realm—the various realms. If one takes the first opportunity, one can go into the Clear Light, but there's two Clear Lights—

Wolff: Yes. In the first—in the . . .

Participant: —and then there's all divisions of the *bardo* which are very nonlinear, I mean they're like Jung's, they're like, uh, the language of the unconscious because they're completely irrational.

Wolff: Irrational zones.

Participant: And yet it's not anything that we can think of in some of the objective terms. If we're to believe it.

Wolff: Yeah. But you notice the lama instruction—keeping a correlation with his objective consciousness, so that he doesn't forget. In other words, that implies carrying this objective consciousness in.

Participant: But the person needs to be read—the dying person needs to be read this. From the objective plane the communication is taking place to the subjective dying person, so when you're reading this material for the dying person they can hear you, and they're being instructed about what to do when they see certain things in the *bardo*—

Wolff: Yes.

Participant: —what to choose. Because they've lost of certain ability to really be able to distinguish. They've lost the rational ability to really—

Wolff: Yes. And this is reestablishing it. See, this is reestablishing it.

Participant: But could it be done without the second person? That's the point I'm asking?

Wolff: Oh, well, that's another question.

Participant: By a master probably, but by the—by even, it's said in the *bardo thodol*—even by lamas. It is said in the *Vajrayana*—

Wolff: They read to them, too. Yes.

Participant: —who have been given the actual experience while alive since under normal circumstances in training you're given the death experience. You're taken through all of the various visions in the *bardo*. You know what they are ahead of time. And even then when you die you need to have the instructions from the external, objective plane. Apparently it's a very complicated experience.

Wolff: It's a difficult transition, no doubt. But I would avoid saying it can never be done without, uh, the reading by the lama. That's too extreme. We don't know that.

Participant: But I'm saying the rational—there is a polarity switch that makes it extremely difficult.

Wolff: Makes it difficult. The double consciousness is no doubt difficult, but I think it's a key to mastery.

Participant: Dr. Wolff?

Wolff: Yes.

Participant: I was just wondering about this, uh, this thing you finally found out—the question you wanted to ask yourself was about your identity. I'm curious how you came to that question. Uh, you mentioned earlier in the tape. There were three things involved in it, the, uh, the analytic psychology thing, and, uh, and aspiration, and something else.

Wolff: Well, now, it's not analytic psychology. It's self-analysis—

Participant: Oh, I'm sorry.

Wolff: —in Shankara's sense of the word. He's seeking yourself, and you sever your identification from anything objective whatsoever.

Participant: All right. What I—I guess I am asking you what—how did you come—did you—is that the way you started the search, with that question in your mind?

Wolff: Um, after I got a hold of Shankara. I started before I got a hold of Shankara, but when I got a hold of Shankara, it did the work. I had to find him first. It took awhile to find him.

Participant: Dr. Wolff?

Wolff: Yes.

Participant: Correct me if I'm wrong, but, uh, in mathematics, as I understand it, there is good argument, uh, to the concept that the number 2 is a nonexistent number, that you must move to 3 to understand 2; and this concept has been incredibly fascinating to me in my own work, for the split that you're talking about, to me, automatically implies that there is a third space that you have not yet analyzed that is witnessing the recorder and the event going in and watching the relationship between these two.

Wolff: Mm-hmm.

Participant: In other words, it's the triangle that is forming.

Wolff: Mm-hmm.

Participant: And I, um, your area of High Indifference has been invaluable to me to resolve paradoxes, just as you reflected the answer back to the gentleman that if he understood the area of High Indifference, he could then perhaps understand how you can maintain this paradox, uh, that he was creating in his statement of a linear—it was a linear statement that he was creating and the experience is actually linear-nonlinear. So, I was looking at, uh, the split that you're talking about—someplace, such as the work of Ramana Maharshi, which discusses the aspect of the dream world and the outer reality as one and the same, that the same component of consciousness which witnesses the dream, not the experiencer in the identification of the dream process, but that can perceive the dream, is the same perceiver which perceives this dream, this outer reality, uh, that we go through. Therefore it isn't two different components of our beingness and compartmentalized. There is somehow an integrated consciousness, which is this third state that he talks about that is witnessing both, so that both realities, dream and awake state, are nothing but a myriad of dreams and wake states to this perceiver that resolves these differences.

Wolff: There clearly is something that identifies a dream and identifies a waking state, and of course I am that, in the last analysis.

Participant: Exactly. Exactly. So it's not the recorder that to me is important, for that is setting up the witness, and the witness to me is, is, uh—we don't have to go through the death process to learn this. Uh, we can go through merely the shift in meditation recognizing that there are states of consciousness that one comes to in meditation, and to me to set up the witness state, that which can observe not only, um, the differences in states of consciousness, but somehow bring through the integration of them, uh, is the key to these shifts. It's the de-identification of one level, identification with another, and simultaneously, this completely creates a quantum jump, and that is simultaneously, non-linearly, we have another area that is watching a linear process.

Wolff: Well, now of course I was speaking about the relative consciousness on the sidelines, which is watching the process—

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Wolff: —and, uh, while there was a jump in the process, there was not a jump in the witness on the sidelines. Otherwise there couldn't be a report of the jump.

Participant: Exactly. Exactly. And this—this witness somehow is capable of being all things, whereas the portion that's jumping is sequential—sequential states of consciousness. It can't be both things simultaneously. But the witness on the side resolves this; it's capable of being both simultaneously—

Wolff: Mm-hmm.

Participant: —which is absolutely fascinating. The other thing that's very interesting in your, um—which I had never heard before but, uh, to me moves me—is the discontinuity concept that you brought through mathematically, for in the energy work of the *Kundalini*. Um, we now suspect that a very small change in whatever this energy is, is capable of creating vast changes in the physical material world, or your body—that a very minute amount of this energy creates vast changes. So, to me this is representative of this mathematical equation that you talked about, that there is a—somehow a unbelievable jump up, or a major change in y , there's a very small change in x due to these—these shells, these quantum leaps, that, uh, exist—

Wolff: Mm-hmm.

Participant: —that we're just beginning to understand. But to me in my everyday life this isn't something that we have to go and work towards the death process to get into, that in your very daily experiences through meditation, or your—your nighttime experiences in going into altered states of consciousness, your different states of consciousness, is in preparation for what I sense you're moving to right now, which is the final Realization in your lifetime, of doing this consciously, uh, in your—in your supreme moment coming up.

Wolff: Mm-hmm.

Participant: But each of us have the opportunity in meditation or in going to sleep at night in the practice of maintaining the witness to be able to observe, uh, two different states of consciousness simultaneously. To me we are not linear beings. We're n th-dimensional and that we have multidimensional—

Wolff: Mm-hmm.

Participant: —healing power. That once we can make the jump to the fact that we can observe and experience simultaneously many things going on, which is very hard for a rational linear mind to understand, we make this unbelievable jump in consciousness, and we begin this process through meditation and in your nighttime work. Uh, any of you that are familiar with Castaneda, I'm—although some of his work to me is relatively, uh, uh, sort of shamanistic, but when he talks about when you reach a point of being able to ask your hand to move in a dream, he's talking about the very phenomenon of coming into control over both states of consciousness from this third point that controls not only this reality, but the dream reality. When you can consciously face yourself in a dream and

look at your right hand—you remember he asked Carlos, when you can finally look at your hand in a dream and know that you are looking at your hand, you have finally reached that state of consciousness that integrates this reality with the dream reality.

Wolff: Mm-hmm. It's the combination of the two in this case.

Participant: Of the six yogas of Naropa, two of them are wanting to be yogas that enrich your body. The idea is to wake up both in the dream state and to wake up in this state into what. . .

Participant: Exactly. And to me, uh, this is our work, uh, in meditation—I can't think of—to me meditation is not to go off into bliss states, it is to learn the mastery over shifts and quantum leaps . . . Uh, that to me is essentially the work of meditation. The evolutionary process seems to take its own course and function, but the—the ability to shift levels of consciousness and to know when a change of consciousness has taken place, is available to us. When we were talking about dream states and so on, to me the analysis of dream states is probably one of the most valuable, for me, uh, teaching mechanisms that I know of personally, for to me the dream states are, uh, of many different levels, and I have had the experience of cosmic experiences in dream states, uh, that are equivalent to my other mystic experiences. So what I'm saying is that the dream state is not a lesser state of consciousness. The dream state may bring in certain levels that we call the astral, or whatever you want to term them, and they may be relatively primitive, but they're simultaneously capable of bringing in superconscious states that are unavailable to the identification with normal reality, or the outer mind, or the conditioned mind state.

Wolff: There is what Aurobindo calls a waking up in sleep, which is not a dream. Uh, it would have a different quality from a dream. Now, maybe that's what you're referring to.

Participant: Well, the best way that I know of discerning the dream level is by the color of light of the dream, for when the super-vivid, not brilliant, but super-vivid light illuminates the dream state, you are in a superconscious state which invariably, in my experience, is not only one of profound importance for you, but it is usually prophetic. It is usually involved in a sequence that is bringing some higher order of your own being into your outer awareness in preparation for an event that is coming up; that a dream that is involved in normal illumination of light usually deals with your personality ego level; and dreams that are involved in the relatively subdued lighting, usually greenish or brownish, is usually dealing with the astral-emotional level, uh working out on that level. There are other levels where one feels almost a heaviness, uh, tremendously logy, uh, sensation which, um, in my personal experience, is working in denser matter than even this plane, that the consciousness is returning as a redemptive aspect into a more solid area . . . Rather than going into, uh, a lighter more expansive plane, it's going into a more compacted plane. Uh, but I find these invaluable in my own interpretation of dreams; and to answer your question though, uh, on how does one begin to find out about projection. Uh, you do it by an everyday, ever moment of your waking life you view the external mirror back to you to see yourself; and when you do that, you will find out what you project out onto this reality. And eventually, after you have owned everything you have put out there and know that you have created it, you then begin to see what's out there,

and you begin to discern what you have projected versus what's real. This is the only way I know, but this begins now; it doesn't begin after you have an illumination. It, uh, and two areas that I know of immediately that help people accelerate through this phase is one, tarot, and the study of the tarot, and the other is the study of dreams. And dreams are very slow, but profoundly influential in your own projective technique, because there's nothing else responsible for your dream other than you. In the tarot nothing else is responsible for your interpretation of the cards other than you initially, until you have finally looked at every possible projective technique you put out there, then you begin to see the cards; and what you begin to see is the cards contain everything, not just the specific narrow interpretation that you usually give them in the first place. Dream work, I think is still the royal road, but its so slow, and the tarot card reading is probably, and is in my experience, the most rapid way to see projective technique in operation, for when you lay out a series of tarot cards, you're looking at a dream, and you may see your own ideas reflected back at you. And the way I do this in group work is, I will ask a group—I'll give them all tarot cards. I'll ask them to each one select out of the tarot a card that they particularly are attracted to, and then I'll ask to give the interpretation of that card. Meanwhile, I've asked all the other people in the group to pull that card out and see what they feel about it, and as the person gives their interpretation, all the other 20—20 other people or whatever it may be—suddenly begin to see that person's interpretation which they had never seen in the card. They couldn't see it because they were into their own projection upon the card. This is a very rapid way of dealing with projected . . . I'm finding out this mechanism constitutes a whole course, I think, and a . . . Um, the I Ching is not quite as effective, although it's the same thing.

Participant: So, how do you bring your dream through? Do you wake up suddenly and know you've been dreaming? It's vivid? Uh, it's, it's—you realize it's right there but you can't bring it in. You know you've been dreaming something that's important, but it does not come through to the outer consciousness.

Participant: Well, this is why I insist that meditation of some form or another—and I'm not talking about formal meditation. I'm talking about informal meditation. Each of you have your own way of going in, but this is what I call state-bound consciousness. It's just like when you're sitting in the presence of somebody like Dr. Wolff, and moving up in an expanded area, you may step out of here and in an hour's time not remember really what he talked about. I have been in the presence of other heightened people where it isn't possible when I enter my ordinary state of consciousness to remember what they said; but through the process of meditation, you may return to the state where the information is bound. Wherever you were taken in a heightening process with another person or in a meditative experience, or a dream experience, it doesn't disappear, it is there, but the information is state-bound. Our task is to break down the partitions of consciousness and be able . . .