

**Five Reasons You're Not Enlightened  
(And Five Ways to See That You Already Are!)**

Ken Wilber

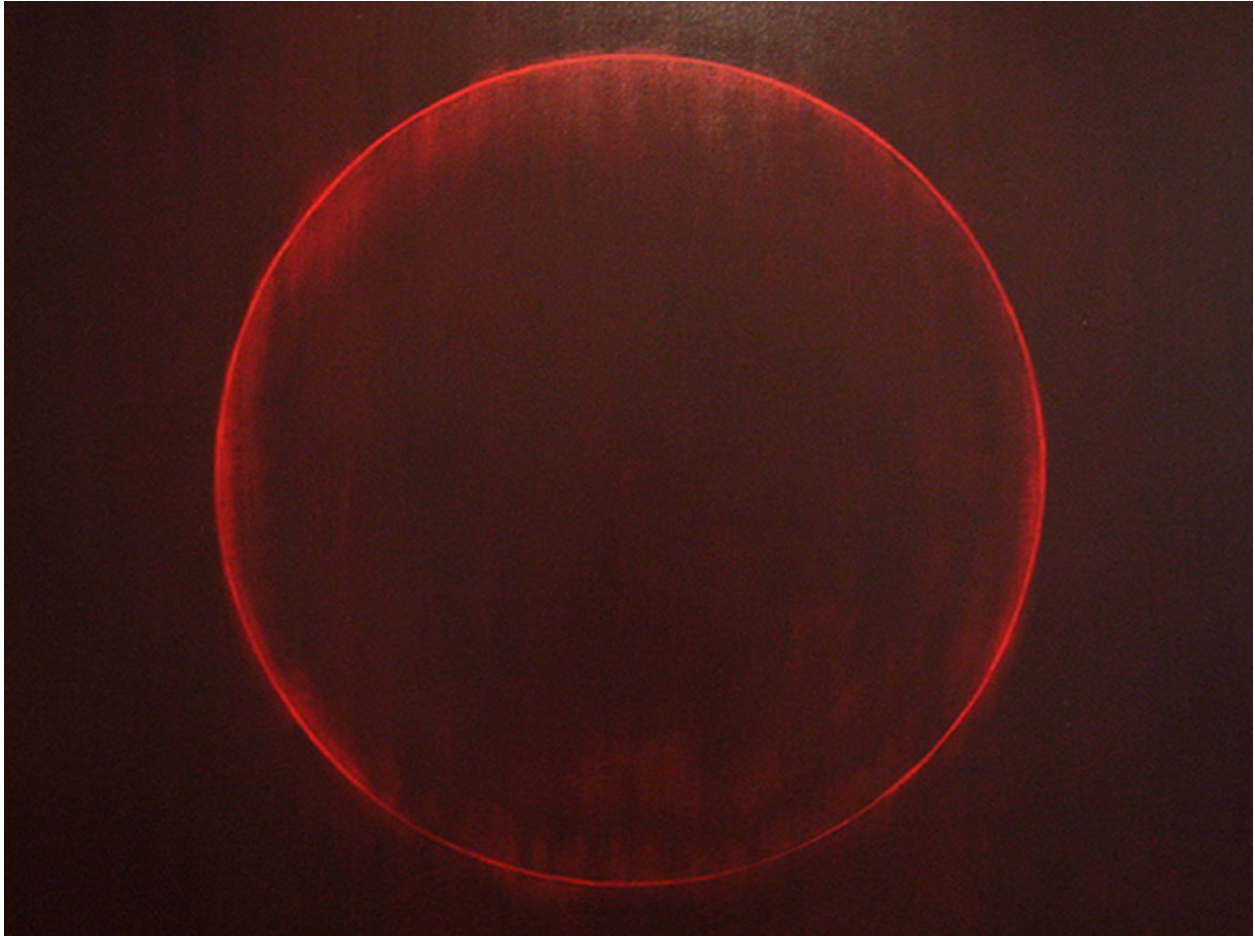


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If nothing is separate from Spirit, if everything is one with God, then why is it so hard to see it? In this exclusive new teaching by Ken Wilber, we explore five simple shifts of perspective to help you recognize your own already-enlightened condition, right here and right now—five different interpretations of nondual consciousness at the heart of some of history's greatest spiritual traditions.

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**Ken Wilber:** Five reasons you're not enlightened – it's an interesting question, it's an interesting topic, because the esoteric traditions uniformly maintain that there literally is nothing but Spirit. And so all of them have to have some theory, some doctrine of Maya, of illusion, of... if there is only Spirit, why don't I know that? What is going on? What am I doing? What am I *illusorily* engaged in that allows me to miss this absolute, radical fact.

And so as you look through them, as I say there are dozens of minor ones, but there are five really sort of major, significant influential ones, and the first is the Madhyamika of Nagarjuna. And this is actually the first of the nondual traditions. So it was the first to really ask this question.

The religious engagements up to that point all through the great axial age had a notion of suffering and alienation and sin and separation, and that was that any manifestation, the world of the many, was itself the cause of suffering. And that in itself intrinsically it was marked by, samsara was marked by dukkha, suffering. And you were born in sin, you were born in suffering. And in order to get out of suffering and into release, you had to get out of the manifest world and into the unmanifest world. You had to get into nirvikalpa samadhi on a permanent basis, which ended up in a state called nirodh, which was absolute pure unmanifest absorption. And anything else just wasn't it. It was very like spending your life in deep dreamless sleep. So of course in deep dreamless sleep there is no pain, and there's no desire, and there's no ego, there's no suffering, and there's no pain... there's nothing!

And so this was the goal in one way or another of the great axial religions, it was the goal of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. Suffering was defined as movement of mind, and so you were to get into just a complete *non* movement of mind, a complete formless absorption. And it's a strange situation, but it was ubiquitous around the world, and in this state of unmanifest absorption of course was pure infinite Spirit. But Spirit without any qualities, without any form, without any characteristics, and this radically unqualifiable infinite Emptiness.

Nagarjuna was one of the very, very first to point out that this itself was actually a dualistic state, because it separated infinite and finite, nirvana from samsara, formless from form, and that therefore it couldn't be ultimate. And what we really see happening here is pushing from *turiya*, pure formless Emptiness, into *turiyatita*, into nondual, where emptiness is not other than form, form is not other than emptiness. And the activity that stopped us from seeing this he termed *dristi*, and it basically means concepts, but it also means a feeling, it means anything that has an opposite. And of course all concepts make sense only in terms of their opposite. There's pleasure/pain, up/down, in/out, finite/infinite, nirvana/samsara, and it's our tendency to create these create these opposites that creates the world of duality. And the idea then is... knowing the world through opposites was known as *vijnana*, but there as another way of knowing the world, which is *prajna*. And this was a nondual, non-conceptual, nondual mode of knowing.

And one of the ways to... one of the little exercises I use to get you into a state of just pure awareness without any conceptual operation is to: ask yourself, how do you feel physically? So you start to get a sense of what that is. How do you feel emotionally? How do you feel morally? How do you feel mentally? Now how do you feel from all of those angles at once?

And as soon as you hear that question, there's a silence in the mind as you're looking for an answer, there's a quiet, there's no immediate answer that comes up. And that's because you have an awareness that isn't conceptualizing and that isn't feeling. It's just pure unqualifiable awareness. And that's an example of *prajna*. That's an example of being in pure awareness without concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, feelings, and so on. And so, remaining in that state, sooner or later allows you to have a realization of Ultimate Reality, where emptiness and form are not two. Where samsara and nirvana are not two. Because it's an awareness that doesn't break reality into opposites. And so this type of awareness is the fundamental practice of the Madhyamika and in many cases Mahayana schools of Buddhism.

Another way to put it is that it is "free from the pairs." And the pairs are what the Upanishads refer to as the opposites. And the Upanishads define enlightenment as being free from the pairs. So free from thinking in terms of polarities. Free from approaching the world in terms of opposites. And that's just such an ingrained habit, that's such an inherent form of thought that it takes these types of exercises to get out of thinking in pairs. And so Brahman is defined as "One without a second." So it's One without an opposite, there is no opposite to Brahman. And so being able to get into that state of awareness that is free of pairs, free duality, free of polarity, is *prajna*. And that is the fundamental approach of the Madhyamika school, is being able to rest in that awareness, how you feel from all angles at once, and in that silence, in that quiet, is awareness free from the pairs. And in that awareness is the door to freedom.

So for Madhyamika our problem is dualistic concepts, it's concepts that all of opposites that have meaning in terms of opposites, and we are constantly stuck in that. All of our thoughts are based on opposites, this is good, this is bad, I want to do this, I don't want to do that, and so on. And so it's an entire network of opposites that we are caught up in, and that we are literally enchained in. And it condemns us to partiality and fragments and non, truly non holistic types of awareness. So that's one of the main ones, and that was one of the first ones to come along, because historically Madhyamika was one of the first schools of religion that pushed into *turiyatita*, that pushed into the nondual state, where emptiness is not other than form, form is not other than emptiness. Where nirvana and samsara are not-two. And the only way to get into that state is to get into awareness that is non-polar, non-opposite, non-thinking only in terms of in/out, up/down, good/bad, true/false, and so on.

And the idea that there's a reality that isn't based on those opposites is surprising for most people, because they just can't conceive of a reality that isn't based on these types of opposite thinking. So a practice of non-conceptual, non-polar, non-opposite thinking is *prajna*, and it's *prajna* that opens the door to nondual reality. And it's still a fundamental practice and

foundation of virtually all of the subsequent schools of Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism, and so-on. So it's a really fundamental sort of basic practice.

And the once that arose right after that was Yogacara, this was the third turning of the wheel of Buddhism. And remember that for Theravada, and since so many of the axial religions, the ultimate state is one without any phenomena at all, it's one of pure formless absorption, with nothing arising, no objects, no phenomena, no things, no forms, no desires, nothing. Just pure radical formless infinite unmanifest absorption. And for Yogacara, following on Nagarjuna, Yogacara said "wait a minute, it's not the existence of phenomena that's the problem, it's that we objectify it, that we see objects out there separate from the subject in here. It's the subject-object duality." And so when we can realize our oneness with phenomena arising, then any phenomena is fine, and phenomena is not the problem, *objects* are the problem. So seeing that table, that's phenomena, that's not the problem. Seeing that table as an object out there, separate and apart from me, split from me, dualistically cut off from me, then *that* is the problem.

So I gave an example yesterday about, most people in the native disposition feel that they are *in* this room. But there's a way that you can just flip it, and see that this room actually exists *in* your awareness. And if you feel into that, you can feel that this room is arising in your awareness, and you actually are surrounding the room, and the room is arising in you.

And so under those circumstances the room is not an object out there, it is a phenomena arising within your awareness, and you are one with this room that is actually in your awareness, the room is arising and existing *in your awareness*. Clouds float by, *in your awareness*. The mountains out there are arising *in your awareness*. So this is a fundamental shift into a type of Big Mind awareness, where everything is arising within your consciousness. It's not arising outside, it's arising within. And as long as it's arising within, then it's not a problem, there's no separation, there's no objectification, there's no splitting of the world into a subject versus an object. There's simply everything that's arising, and it's arising within your Big Mind.

And so under those circumstances, there's nothing *outside* of your awareness. So there's nothing that you can fundamentally desire, there's nothing that you can fundamentally crave, there's nothing that you fundamentally lust after—because it's all arising within you, in this very awareness right now. All of these things are arising *within* your awareness, and likewise there is nothing *outside* of your awareness that can hurt you. So there's no fear, there's no threats, there's no anxiety-inducing objects that can hurt you. And so that's the Yogacara view, is that when you see that phenomena are not the problem, but the objectification of phenomena, seeing them apart from you, seeing them outside of you, seeing them separate from you, then that creates a split, a division, a break in reality. And you're on one side of this break, and the world's on the other side of this break, and therefore you're in a broken, fractured, painful world.

But when you can see with just a slight switch of awareness that objects are arising *in your awareness*, where else are they arising? And so as they arise within your awareness, you have a fundamental sense of oneness with them, you're not separated from them, you're not pushing them outside, you're not seeing them as something that exists *outside* of what you are. And so again this is a way of seeing, another way of talking about Big Mind, and seeing everything that is arising *within* your Big Mind. And it's not that you have to get in the state of unmanifest absorption. *Anything* can arise, as long it arises *within* your awareness, within your Big Mind. And then under those circumstances you are fundamentally one with everything that's arising, and fundamentally therefore at peace with everything that's arising. There's nothing outside of Big Mind, because if you can think of something outside of Big Mind, that would be within Big Mind. And so there's nothing that can threaten you, nothing that can hurt you, nothing that can harm you. And that's a fundamental, ultimate reality, the actual structure of reality, in the universe, is that there is only consciousness, and consciousness, as Schrödinger said, is a singular the plural of which is unknown.

So there's one Big Mind, one True Self, one Consciousness, and therefore everything is existing *within that Consciousness*. And so there's no room for partiality, fragmentation, splitting, breaking, it's all radically One. And there's a radical feeling of being One with the All, that arises as you rest in Big Mind, as you rest in awareness as such, unqualifiable awareness as such, *in which* everything is arising.

And so, that's the Yogacara view, founded by the brothers Vasubandhu and Asanga, and became the foundation of things like Tantra, because since *everything* is allowed to arise, and everything is sacred in its arising, then there are no impurities, there are no things that can't be used. So sex, alcohol, meat, etc. can be used in tantric rituals as a way to prove your oneness with things that are arising, you can even prove your oneness with things that other schools took to be sin and taboo, but not when you see that everything's that's arising is allowed as long as it's not objectified, as long as it's not pushed outside of awareness. So it's a consciousness-only school, and maintains again, that consciousness is a singular the plural of which is unknown, and consciousness itself is radically empty. So the emptiness schools and the consciousness schools often join together, and consciousness itself is this vast open emptiness *in which* everything is arising moment to moment. And that way uniting consciousness and emptiness into essentially the same notion. And that's still sort of still the fundamental basis of tantra.

So, part of the practice is taking things like this room and just starting to work with it and start to switch from the sense that you're in this room to the sense that this room is *in* you, this room is actually arising in your consciousness, you're actually embracing this room, and it's arising moment to moment in your own fundamental awareness, and that's fundamentally where it exists. And so working with examples like that and starting to feel how everything that's arising is arising *in* your awareness. And that converts objects into just mere phenomena just arising moment to moment within your Big Mind, within your fundamental awareness, and that Big Mind is the ultimate reality *in which* all things live and exist and have their being. And it's

by not seeing those things arising within you that they appear to arise exterior to you and that creates the subject-object dualism and as Krishnamurti would say, in the separation in between the subject and object lies the misery of humankind. And so it's a way to get through that duality and into a sense of oneness, and a texture of oneness, and a sense of being one with the All, fundamental[ly]. And that was Yogacara, third turning of the wheel.

Dzogchen was another major response to the question "if everything is spirit, why don't I see it?" And for Dzogchen, everything exists right now just as it is in this perfect timeless present or now-moment. And for Dzogchen there is *only* now, so *seeking* is an activity that takes us away from the now moment, orients us towards the future, and denies the reality of the present moment. And for Dzogchen it's not that you have to get in touch with the now-moment, it's not that you have to like pay attention or try to focus on the now-moment, as with all of these schools it's that the now-moment *is* always-already the case, there's nothing that you're aware of except the now-moment. So if you think of something in the past, that thought exists right now. When the thing actually occurred in the past, it occurred right now. When you think of something in the future, that thought occurs right now, when that thing happens in the future, it'll happen now. So there's only this endless now-moment, and part of the cause of our suffering is we are constantly existing in time, constantly running through the field of time, wanting this wishing for that, seeking for this, seeking for that, and so we're never really focused on the only reality that there is, which is this pure, timeless present, this pure Now moment.

And so simply recognizing the now-moment and resting in the now-moment is a path to realizing the actual texture of reality, the actual nature of reality. You're welcome to think about the past or future, but just realize that those thoughts are occurring *in* this ever-present now-moment, and that there is no other time than now. And that this is not something that is *hard* to achieve, it's something that is impossible to avoid. You're never, ever, ever, aware of anything except the now-moment. And so in that now-moment you are liberated from the chains of time, you're liberated from temporal reality, and ushered into timeless eternity. Wittgenstein said "if eternity is thought of not as everlasting time, but as a moment of timelessness, then eternity belongs to those who live in the present." And so it's simply resting in that timeless present moment that frees you from the chains of time, frees you from the slavery of being caught in perpetually fragmented, linear, strung-out stream of time.

So there is only now, only the timeless present, so rest in the timeless now and allow all things to arise *just as they are*, and if you're having negative or uncomfortable thoughts or feelings, then you can just use the technique that I mentioned before, just videotaping them. The whole point is just to be able to rest in the now without condemnation, judgement, identification, and sometimes that can be hard. And a little kind of trick for that is just to imagine that you're photographing it, that you're videotaping it. And so you don't want to change anything, you simply want to take a photograph of it *exactly* as it is. And so you can just imagine that you're just videotaping your interior states, whether they're uncomfortable, unpleasant, negative, bad, and just dedicate yourself to taking photographs of it, and just getting the exact photograph of

exactly what it is—you don't want to change it, you just want to be present with it. And as that muscle strengthens of being present with the now-moment, then you get better and better and better and better at resting in the timeless present and not getting lost in the stream of time. So videotaping it is one kind of gimmick, one sort of way of doing that.

And the idea then is that as Urygen Tulku put it, reality, things are real just as they are. So it's resting in exactly the way things are moment to moment, without trying to change them or alter them, or make them better or worse or whatever, it's as they are arising they are arising as perfect ornaments of Spirit. Why? Because everything is Spirit. And everything that is manifesting is just an ornament of Spirit, and so this is why you don't want to change it, this is why you don't want to alter it, because it is, just as it is, perfect. Hence the name the Great Perfection. And the reason that people suffer is that they are always trying to get someplace else, they're always trying to seek, they're always trying to engineer a different state from the state that they have at the moment. Whereas if they could *just* be in touch with that moment, just as it is, there would be an enormous freedom and liberation from the binding, contracting, seeking, addictive, grasping movement that causes so much pain and suffering and carpet burn and so on. So, just as it is, which is the name of one of his books [*As It Is, Volumes I and II*] is a summary of Dzogchen's view of Spirit, and everything that is manifesting is ornament of Spirit, just as it is. So resting in that, in the present moment, videotaping it if that helps, allows you to start aligning yourself with this ultimate reality, with the only reality there is, which is Spirit and its pure manifestation.

So that also precludes seeking, because even seeking enlightenment, or seeking to get in touch with the now, keeps you out of it. And seeking to find Spirit, seeking to find spiritual enlightenment, *assumes* that it's not present, and so the very search reinforces the illusion that it's not something that's already present. And so it's this tricky task of simply recognizing the present moment just as it is and not attempting to change it, move it, seek, grasp, or move into some future state that's thought to be a better state than now, because it's just that attempt that cuts you off from pure timeless Spirit now, and it's ornamental manifestations. So it's a matter of *recognition* that the only time you're aware of is now, and a *recognition* that that is Spirit, and *not* an attempt to create something different.

So 100% of the enlightened mind is present right now. And it's simply a matter of being able to recognize that pure timeless now as the manifestation of Spirit itself. So it's a matter, as all of these are, of recognition, not of creation. It's recognizing something that's already the case, and not something that has to be brought into existence. And that's the big difference between these nondual schools and schools that attempt to get you into partial states. So for those you have practices and yogic practices and shamanic practices, all of those are designed to get you from one state to another. The nondual traditions are designed to have you simply recognize that it's already present, recognize that it's already happening, recognize that there is only now, recognize that there is only pure unqualifiable awareness, recognize that that's already happening, recognizing that that *is* the *present state*, and not something that you have to work on

to bring into existence. So it's a path of recognition, not the path of work, or the path of practice, or the path of creation. And it's a path of recognition because there is only Spirit, and it's a matter of finding ways of recognizing that, *not* ways to bring that into being.

The fourth, and one of the most influential, is Vedanta. And for Vedanta the problem is that we see many instead of a fundamental oneness. And this fundamental oneness that I am supposed to see, supposed to recognize, is the True Self, or this pure I AMness. And like all of the other forms of Spirit, I Amness is something that you are already fully aware of right now. You are completely aware of a sense of I Amness. And it's also the only experience you have that is ever-present and non-changing. So you can think back five weeks ago and you probably can't remember what you were doing exactly, but you do know that I Amness was there, that I Amness was present at that time, and you were aware of that. That was part of your experience at that time. You think back five years and you can't remember what you were doing or what was happening, but I Amness was present. You can think back five centuries, I AMness was present, because, before Abraham was, I AM. I Am is this pure sense of being, but it doesn't enter the stream of time. So it's unborn, and it's undying. It is the one thing in you that is pure Spirit, and that is eternal, that is timeless. It doesn't enter the stream of time, isn't born, is your original face, the face you had before your parents were born, and is the one feeling-constant that you have right now that is unchanging. And this I AMness of course is true self, and therefore the overall number of I AMnesses is one.

Everybody in this room has the same essential feeling of I AMness, because I AMness isn't identified with a particular characteristic or trait or feeling or identity, it's the pure Witness, it's the pure Self, and that itself is without quality, is without characteristics, is without *any* sort of qualities at all. And that's exactly how every single person in this room feels. So that I AMness is... there's only one in the entire world, it looks out through all eyes, it hears through all ears, it feels through all senses. And it is one with pure Spirit. And it's how pure Spirit manifests in you, is the sense of I AMness, the sense of pure mirror-mind, the sense of pure witnessing. And because it's a pure, a true Self, a pure subject, it can't be seen as an object. So you can do the standard dis-identification which we've done a fair amount before: I have sensations but I am not my sensations, I have feelings but I'm not my feelings, I have thoughts but I'm not my thoughts, I have desires but I'm not my desires. I have a separate self, and I can think about that right now, but in addition to that thought there's an awareness of that thought, and what is that infinite awareness except I AMness?

So I AMness is that constant awareness of all of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations, it's identified with none of them; does not enter the stream of time, and does not exit the stream of time, and so it is your pure, true Self. So the practice is to rest as everpresent, timeless, formless I AMness, as the rest of the world rises and falls and disappears and only I AMness remains unchanged moment to moment. And so you're having these experiences right now of this world arising. Three weeks from now, this will all be gone. You won't remember hardly any of it. But what you will be is I AMness, you will be that pure, true Self, that pure Witness.



And the more you rest in that Witness and let go of phenomena, let go of objects, then the more you are resting in your true self, the more you are resting in Big Mind and the more you rest in Big Mind, the more you are self-liberated, the more you are liberated from this narrow, partial, fragmented, broken, small self in a world of objects that are impermanent. Come, stay, torture you awhile, and leave; it's the nature of manifestation.

So Vedanta says we suffer because we have a case of mistaken identity, we have identified with the small, separate, finite self. But there's something that is aware of that finite self, and that's an infinite self, that a pure I AMness, that I-I. And to the extent that I identify with I-I, with I AMness, I'm freed of my enchained existence to a small, fragmented, set apart, separate self contraction. And so we suffer because we suffer from a case of mistaken identity. This is just not who we are. And so switching to our true Self is the way that we find liberation, or moksha.

Then there's several in the West, but one of the one's that is somewhat unique is the Christian contemplative. Christ said I give you a new command, which is to love each other as I have loved you. According to the Course in Miracles, the opposite of love is not hate but fear. And the Upanishads say wherever there is *other*, there is fear. So small-self is separate from others, and therefore the foundation of the small self is anchored in fear, is anchored in contraction. It's not anchored in love. And so the cure is "let this consciousness be in you which was in Christ Jesus, that we all may be one." And the consciousness in Jesus primarily was one of infinite love.

And so the separate self was born loveless, was born in sin, and it must open itself to loving unity with the All, so as to awaken to this ever-present love. Now love is a sense of being one with another. And so the more your love expands, the more you find oneness with everything that's arising, until you can eventually love the All, and find yourself one with everything that is arising, everything that is manifesting. Everything that is arising moment to moment is something that can be a ground for your love. And one of the other ways of saying it is the emotion of Big Mind is love. Love, unity, touching, oneness, these are all essentially the same thing. Love has though this warm quality to it, that emptiness and nonduality and so many of these others don't.

And so that's one of the things that makes it interesting, it's sort of the affective line, carried to infinity. Even compassion is kind of cold, it's not really a bubbling over warmth. It's just sort of an obligatory, you know, I take care of you... So one of the techniques that you can use for this is to imagine somebody that you love dearly, and vividly picture that person, and feel that love that you have for them, and then separate the love from the person. Concentrate on the heart region, and just feel the love and feel it separated from the person that you love, so that you're really focusing on the feeling, and not on the person. And then take that feeling and expand it to everybody in this room, and just feel that feeling going out and going out and going out and embracing and encompassing and surrounding everybody in the room, in a perfectly

non-judgmental, perfectly accepting, perfectly loving fashion. And then imagine that love as a bright, brilliant white light or cloud expanding out of this room into everybody in this city. And then imagine it to everybody in this state. And then everybody on the planet, and the planet itself. You just keep expanding and expanding and expanding and expanding into the entire Kosmos, the entire universe. And that state of all-present, all-pervading love is the fundamental texture of reality, it's the fundamental texture of Big Mind, it's the fundamental texture of consciousness-as-such. It's just that affect component-dimension to it.

And so there's a warmth from the heart that is going out and embracing everything that's arising. And so of course you're also one with everything that's arising, because to love is to be one with, to be united with. And so deeply allow yourself to feel into that love and feel into that oneness with the entire universe, and *that is* the ever-present nature of reality. That is the ever-present nature of what is, moment to moment. And so if you are finding it hard to do that, as I said the other day, then you can let Jesus do it. God is the love with which I can love. And so have god move into you and love through you into everything that's arising. And if you're not strong enough to do it, God is.

So, we are not enlightened because we conceptualize, we objectify, we get caught in time and seeking, we differentiate the oneness of I AM, and we're loveless. And these are all really different aspects of the same thing, they're really all ways of seeing the essentially same factors of ultimate reality, and what's so fascinating is how different traditions have fastened upon each one, and made it foundational for their practice. We can use any or all of them, or whatever others that we come up with, but these have been five of the most influential historically, and five of the ones that are really in a sense pretty significant, and ones that make sense in a certain profound way. So... five reasons we're not enlightened. And these of course are all *illusory* reasons, because there still is really *only* Spirit and its ornaments and its manifestations, including all of these contractions, those are also nothing but Spirit, so it's a *radical* realization, there's simply *nothing* that can prevent self-liberation, and seeing that is the trick, is the ultimate trick to the whole game.