

Enlightenment: Myth *and* Reality

- an imagined dialog in four parts -

by

Paul Breer

Part Three

Next Monday Morning

PB: I'm glad to see the two of you again especially you Stephanie. I was afraid I had driven you away with my comments about Zen.

Stephanie: I can't say that I'm delighted to be back, Paul, but I am curious about your take on enlightenment especially as it relates to your personal experiences.

Brian: (*smiling*) Be careful, Steph. You know what curiosity does to cats.

Stephanie: I'll take my chances.

PB: I don't dispute the reality of the enlightenment experience. It is as breath-taking as the Buddhists, Hindus, and Taoists have made it out to be. My quarrel is with the way it has traditionally been interpreted.

Stephanie: You don't see it as a spiritual experience.

PB: Not any more. I see it as a purely physical event brought on by the temporary suspension of our ability to orient ourselves to the world. In the ordinary, differentiated world, the world we live in every day, we are constantly orienting ourselves with our sense organs, with our ability to organize those sensations into perceptual fields, and with the cognitive labels, concepts, and judgments we apply to the objects in those fields. We get to see the world as undifferentiated only when we suspend all three of these orienting processes. One way to do that is through meditation.

Stephanie: Are you saying that a person in the enlightened state is disoriented that she doesn't know where she is? That sounds a little ridiculous to me.

PB: I'm saying that she is *non-oriented*, not *disoriented*.

Brian: I don't get the difference.

PB: A person is disoriented if she is trying to get oriented but can't. In the non-oriented, enlightened state, there is no attempt to orient oneself to others, to the environment..... no attempt to locate oneself in time and space nor any attempt to evaluate or conceptualize what is happening.

Stephanie: Well, yes like I said, what one grasps in *satori* is the reality which underlies the surface world of phenomena. Maybe we're not so far apart as I thought.

Brian: But Steph, isn't Paul contending that the whole thing is physical you know..... the different kinds of orienting and what you grasp when you stop orienting? I don't hear anything about spirits yet. So far it all sounds like psychology or neurology.

Stephanie: Perhaps. I'm a little confused. Paul, you said that you found Freud's view of enlightenment as fetal regression too simple. Is your own theory any less reductionistic? You don't talk about returning to the fetal state but isn't this non-oriented state of yours a similar kind of regression. Aren't you still going back to a simpler way of being in the world?

PB: I don't see it as going back to something previously experienced. As you said in our last meeting, enlightenment is an adult experience not something a fetus with its undeveloped brain and nervous system is likely to be capable of.

Brian: (*frustrated*) I don't get it. What is so great about being non-oriented? I thought from everything Steph has told me that enlightenment was a really powerful, mind-shattering experience the kind of thing people have been willing to die for. You know the kind of eye-opener that changes your life forever.

PB: I don't disagree. It's all of that. Once it happens to you, enlightenment throws every other experience into the shadows and I include falling in love, giving birth, saving someone's life, winning an election, or discovering oil in your backyard. The only thing I am disputing is the meaning we traditionally attach to it. Over the years I have come to see it not as a glimpse into the Absolute but as a physical event in which the neurological mechanisms we normally use to orient ourselves to the world are temporarily turned off.

Stephanie: So you *are* a reductionist. You're really saying that enlightenment is *nothing but* a neurological event in which certain orienting functions are suspended.

PB: Yes that's precisely what I am saying only I don't like the "nothing but" phraseology because it demeans what some people would consider the loftiest state we humans can attain.

Brian: But Paul, you're saying that it's all physical that is has nothing to do with anything spiritual. So what is so lofty about a shift in the way our brains function?

PB: I said that other people namely the Buddhists, Hindus, and Taoists would consider it lofty. I see it as illuminating as more profound or fundamental than anything we have experienced before.

Brian: Fundamental?

PB: In the sense that it goes deeper than other experiences. It is as if we were looking at the world the way it is when no things exist yet. No boundaries, no lines or colors, no objects of any kind yet "IT" is vividly present.

Brian: That sounds like a contradiction ... or a paradox ... I'm not sure which. How can something be vividly present and have nothing in it that you can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch?

Stephanie: But that's exactly what the Heart Sutra teaches us. "IT" is beyond anything our minds can take hold of. There's really nothing that you can say about it. Most teachers refuse to say anything at all about it.

Brian: So you and Paul are in agreement on this?

Stephanie: It would seem so. But I have only my books and lectures to go on. Paul has some personal experiences that he is referring to. Either way we seem to be pointing in the same direction. But a major difference remains. Zen teaches us that in satori we awaken to the Truth of existence while Paul is saying that we awaken simply to a new kind of physical experience more elemental than any we have ever had but no less physical for that reason. Am I right, Paul?

PB: Pretty much. I see enlightenment as very special in the sense that it presents us with a vision of the world where we see right through the surfaces and outlines of the things our senses tell us are there. What we grasp at that moment, using what Watts calls *floodlight* rather than *spotlight* consciousness, is an empty, unbounded Space that seems to emerge from behind or within each object in our perceptual field. This Space is the Undifferentiated world I referred to earlier. It is impossible to describe what lies within this spaciousness because the orienting mechanisms that

normally divide the world into objects and then label them have been temporarily suspended. And this kind of “seeing” that is, seeing without seeing any *thing*is what makes the experience very special but not in the sense that it takes us out of the physical world into a realm that transcends the material universe.

Stephanie: I like what you are saying Paul. It is consistent with what I have read in my travels through Zen all except the punch line. I view the enlightenment experience as seeing into a Reality that goes beyond the physical one of our everyday consciousness. You, on the other hand, see the whole process as something purely physical.

Brian: I’m not sure it makes all that much difference whether it’s physical or spiritual. What I’d like to know is how you get there. How do you “suspend” these different levels of orientation, Paul? I realize that meditation has got to come in here somewhere but I’m not sure just where.

Stephanie: I’d like to hear what you have to say about methods too but I think it would help if you filled in the big picture first. How are these different levels of orientation related to each other and to the state of enlightenment?

PB: O.K. Let me give you some names first. I call the three levels of orientation *sensation, perception* and *cognition*. The big picture goes something like this: In the fundamental Undifferentiated state, there is no orienting of any kind going on. The individual sees no lines or colors, hears no sounds, has no sense of where he is or that he even exists. He is awake extremely awakebut his awareness is devoid of any subject or object; he does not even have the sense of a bounded perceptual field. We might say that he sees infinite Space but even this is saying too much. What he grasps at the moment of enlightenment is beyond what any words like “infinite” and “Space” can capture.

Brian: (*chuckling*) Pardon me folks but that sounds a bit “wacky” to use a term that’s been kicked around here. How can you be aware without being aware of *anything*?

Stephanie: Take my word for it, Brian, you can.

PB: Aware may not be the best term for it, Brian since it implies some kind of object, something you are aware *of*. Perhaps *awake* would be better. It is easier to imagine how you could be fully awake without being aware of any *thing*.

Brian: So this is the enlightened state that everybody seems to want. What makes it so hard to get there? Why can’t we just stop orienting or whatever it is that we do that keeps us from seeing the light?

PB: Like all animals, we need to orient in order to survive. We need to take the information coming to us from the outside information like light and sound wavesand organize it in a way that allows us to make choices about what is friendly, what is dangerous, when to approach, when to run and so on. At the simplest level we orient ourselves by sorting those light and sound waves into discrete sensations. This happens so fast that we are not even conscious that it is happening. Within milliseconds we move to the second level of orienting what I have called the level of perception. Here we organize those sensations into objects things like cars, trees, self, and others. As we fill in the perceptual field with objects, we simultaneously locate them in time and space. I'm here; the oncoming car is 100 feet away, etc. Again, the orienting happens so quickly that we are unaware that it is happening. We simply assume that the cars, trees, people, etc. exist independent of our perceiving.

Stephanie: But you're saying that those objects don't really exist until we create them?

Brian: (*with raised eyebrows*) That's wild.

PB: We don't *create* them from scratch. We *construct* them using the raw materials presented to our consciousness. Like all animals, we play an active role in combining these materials in a way that makes the world a more stable, predictable place in which to move around.

Stephanie: I seem to remember reading something like this in one of my Buddhist psychology books.

PB: I'm sure you have, Steph. Buddhists have talked this way for ages. And I agree with much of what they have to say about the part we play in making the world appear the way it does. But they go too far when they insist that we actually *create* our world *ex nihilo* using our minds alone. That point of view assigns far too much power to consciousness as it addresses the material world. In Buddhist psychology the mind is seen as non-physical and imbued with the power to shape the physical world in any way it wants. I prefer to see everything as physical mind and matter alike and assign to consciousness the role of constructing and shaping the objects of perception out of the raw data presented to the organism but not creating them.

Brian: That's a little less "wacky" than what I thought you were saying at first. But still strange. It's strange to think that the trees and houses and stars we see *out there* do not really exist in and of themselves. Somehow they need us to be what they are.

Stephanie: Maybe they don't need *us* exactly. From what Paul says, I gather that any creature with eyes and a nervous system would do.

Brian: But, if I understand this correctly, a mouse looking over there (*points out the window*) is not going to see the same tree that we see or, let me say that better it's not going to construct the same tree that we construct

Stephanie: because its eyes and brain are different from ours. Sure. That makes sense to me. I've heard Buddhists talk that way before.

Brian: O.K. So what? What's this got to do with enlightenment?

PB: We've been talking about different levels of orientation first the simple sorting of raw data into discrete sensations then the organizing of these sensations into recognizable objects located in time and space. Both kinds of orienting occur instantaneously every time incoming data from the environment strikes one of our sense organs. The orienting is hard-wired into the organism and that's true for every organism that exists. You can't survive in this world without this ability to orient ... and to do it immediately.

Stephanie: And the orienting takes us out of the Undifferentiated state?

PB: This Undifferentiated or Nirvanic state is what we experience before any orienting begins. But because the orienting mechanisms kick in so quickly, we never or rarely get to experience it *consciously*. The potential for seeing into the Undifferentiated is there every time we respond to a stimulus but it remains out of awareness for just about everyone. The exceptions, of course, are those individuals who have learned from years of meditation how to suspend the orienting process.

Brian: But I thought you said there were three levels of orienting?

PB: Yes. I've mentioned the first twoorienting by converting incoming signals into discrete sensations and then orienting again by organizing those sensations into a recognizable perceptual field.

Brian: So far that sounds like something any chipmunk or deer is capable of doing or rather *has* to do in order to survive.

PB: True enough but this is as far as the orienting process goes for non-human animals. Given our capacity for thought and language, we humans have taken it a step further. Unlike your chipmunk and deer, we go on to orient ourselves

cognitively by labeling the objects we have constructed and, once we have them named, we classify, judge, analyze, and compare them. Some of the names we give them are concretelike water, star, bear, or stone. Others are more abstract like country, sports, fuel or travel. Some reach an even higher degree of abstraction by piggy-backing one concept onto another. I'm thinking of words like freedom, infrastructure, science, and civilization. Whether concrete or abstract, words serve to keep us mentally oriented. They provide us with a cognitive map of where things stand relative to each other. Without them that is, without language we should be no better at orienting than our cousins the chimpanzees.

Stephanie: I can see how important it is for our survival that we stay cognitively oriented. But it sounds to me like all this labeling and evaluating gets in the way of finding one's True Self. If you want to become enlightened, don't you eventually have to get beyond all words, beyond language itself? Don't you have to enter that wordless state that Zen teachers refer to as the state of No-Mind?

PB: My point exactly. The Undifferentiated lies hidden beneath all this orienting. It is there in every thing we experience, every image, every sound, every smell. According to Choygam Trungpa, the late Tibetan Buddhist, we get a glimpse of IT every time we see a bird, take a drink of water, or hear the wind. That glimpse happens at the very beginning of each experience, prior to any kind of orienting. It is so brief, however, (he argued that it lasts less than a millisecond), that it rarely reaches consciousness. Becoming enlightened, then, involves peeling off all layers of orienting so that we can grasp the IT that precedes every image, sound, smell, taste or touch.

Stephanie: The way you describe it, Paul, makes it all seem within reach. So where do we start? From what I have been taught in Zen, it would seem that the easiest layer to peel off is the last one to be added what you call the cognitive layer.

PB: Yes. The strategy is to start with the cognitive layer, move down to the perceptual layer, and then finally to the sensation layer. The Undifferentiated is revealed when all three layers of orienting have been temporarily turned off.

Brian: So what do you do? Just stop talking? Start grunting?

Stephanie: (*laughing*) You've been doing that ever since we met, Brian.

Brian: How come I'm not enlightened, then? Or am I?

PB: There may be a layer or two to go still. What do you think, Steph?

Brian: Are you implying that I have not yet plumbed the depths of my being?

Stephanie: You're on your way, honey. Just don't stop now. But seriously, Paul, what can you tell us from your own experience about this top layer ... the cognitive one? Did you manage to get through it while you were still attending sesshin?

PB: I did have a minor breakthrough ... a *small realization* as the Roshi called it.

Brian: I'd like to hear about it.

PB: I can give you the short version or get out my notes and read you what I wrote about it afterwards.

Brian: Let's do the short version.

Stephanie: No, I want to hear the whole story. There may be something in it that could help me in my own practice. Brian, you could take a walk if you want. Maybe you have to go to the bathroom?

Brian: (*grumpily*) I'm O.K. (*pause*) just how long is the long version, Paul?

PB: I can't remember it's been years since I've looked at my notes (*walks over to a file drawer and pulls out a sheaf of papers*).

Brian: (*apprehensively*) Looks like a lot of notes.

Stephanie (*reassuringly*) Don't worry, honey, we'll wake you when we're done.

PB: (*reading from his notes*) O.K. here goes.

"I had been working on my first koan, Mu, for years and had made little progress in solving it. A book I had just read (*Autobiography of a Yogi*), a book filled with stories of miraculous turns of events and superhuman powers, served to sharpen my awareness that nothing in my life had changed at all since I entered the path. Practicing zazen two hours a day and attending week-long sesshin at the Zen Center in Rochester was hard work. After almost five years of what seemed to me Herculean effort, I was beginning to lose heart.

“In the midst of my depression I remembered that a friend had given me a tab of LSD, inviting me to try it if I should be so inclined. At this point, with Yogananda's miracles still dancing in my head and feeling extremely frustrated with my own lack of progress, I felt very inclined. The next morning (a brilliant October morning in Thetford, Vermont) I hiked to the top of Houghton Hill which offered a 360 degree view of the White mountains of New Hampshire to the East and the Green mountains of Vermont to the West. I meditated for an hour and then swallowed the acid.

Stephanie: It sounds like you were pretty desperate. Five years is a long time. By the way Mu is the koan I'm working on too. I guess all beginners start with that one.

PB: “The rest of the day was spent in agony; instead of releasing me from my trap, the acid made me more conscious of it. I actually felt as though I were in a cage. While I writhed amidst the rocks, the autumn sun rose and fell; the air grew chilly but no relief came. In desperation, just as the sun was about to disappear for good, I shrieked to the sky and hills around me, "When will it be?" The answer came immediately. I heard an inner voice say, "November the 15th."

Brian: Voices? That's a bit strange for you, Paul.

PB: (*continuing*) “It took me several minutes to figure out that November 9th was the date of my next week-long sesshin in Rochester, making the 15th the next to last day of that retreat. From years of experience, I knew that a sesshin typically reaches its peak on the 6th day.

Stephanie (*turning to Brian*) In Zen a sesshin is a time and place set aside for intensive meditation. I've only been to one so far a three-day retreat up in Burlington.

PB: “Something was clearly in the wind; I raced home, ecstatic with hope and anticipation. That hoped was short-lived, however, as in the course of the next few days I became plagued with doubts about the authenticity of the experience. ‘Wasn't it simply a matter of my unconscious, stimulated by lysergic acid, playing tricks on me,’ I asked. It took the most bizarre series of events in my life to restore the belief that there was more to it than that.

“On the fourth day after taking the LSD, I was driving to work when just outside of the five-tiered garage at Dartmouth Medical School where I always parked my car, I heard a voice say, "Park your car down here on the ground

today." It was the same soundless, bodiless voice I had 'heard' on Houghton Hill. Being a neophyte in these matters, I did what I was told and parked my car on the ground. After a day in the more familiar waters of community health, I returned to the parking lot whereupon I immediately heard the voice again saying, "You are going to see a green Datsun." I found this prophecy strangely picayune for someone as grand as I naively assumed my 'guide' to be. Nevertheless, grateful that something novel was happening to me, I began looking around for green Datsuns as I headed for my own car.

"Turning down the row where I knew my car to be, I stopped. There, to the right of my VW bug where no one had been parked in the morning, was a green Datsun. I was immediately struck by how dark a shade of green it was, there having been no hint in the 'message' as to what shade I should expect. Reeling from the shock of all this extra-rational activity, I stumbled into my car and proceeded to head for home. I had just backed up and turned to go when the voice returned a final time, saying, 'Look out your rear window.' When I did, my eyes came to rest on the license plate of the green Datsun. There were just two letters on it: MU.

"With hope renewed, I spent most of the next two weeks meditating in preparation for the November 9th sesshin. By the time I reached Rochester my energy was soaring. Coming into the Zen Center, I greeted the Roshi wildly, picked him right off the ground (he was so light he seemed hollow), and proceeded to inform him that this time I was going to make it; I was going to get through Mu. He seemed pleased with the 'news' and asked me if I knew on which day it was going to happen. When I responded immediately with Friday (November 15th), he nodded knowingly, adding that 'Friday morning would be an especially good time.' For reasons I could not explain either then or now, I replied with, 'No, it's going to be Friday afternoon.' Even in our private meetings (dokusan) throughout the week I made no attempt to fill him in on why I thought anything special was going to happen this time, let alone why it should happen Friday afternoon. He just took my word for it and did his best to help me.

"So did his two monitors, those unsentimental servants of Manjusri who roam the aisles bringing their long oak kiyasakus to bear full force on the shoulders of anyone thought to need encouragement. Because of my brash prediction, I was singled out for more than the normal quota of blows (which years earlier while in a resentful mood I had calculated to be 700 - 800 per person per week). I also found notes under my cushion prodding me to work even harder which, in the culture of 'heroic' Zen, meant giving up lunch breaks, rest periods, supertime and, or course, sleep. I did it all, giving myself over to Mu

24 hours a day, alternately sick with fear that, come Friday, nothing would happen and absolutely convinced that satori was but a few days away.

“Three times a day I took my turn going upstairs for a brief meeting with the Roshi. In the beginning, his questions were no different from those he had been asking me for the past four and a half years. "What is Mu?" "What is the color of Mu?" "How tall is Mu?" "If the world were to end tomorrow, would Mu end too?" My answer was always the same, "I don't know," the only variation being the degree of frustration with which I said it. On the morning of the sixth day, however, he surprised me by asking two new questions, "What is Mu in the bus station?" and "What is Mu underwater?" I was already at my wits end. Being challenged with two new questions which I was no better equipped to answer than the previous ones brought my frustration to a boil. 'Well, Paul,' he said in full awareness of my agitation, 'two others have already made it; you're close but if you want to get through Mu this time, you are going to have to work harder.' Whereupon he rang his little bell indicating that the interview was over.

“By the time I got back downstairs and situated myself on my cushion, my skin was peeling from the interior heat. 'What is Mu?,' I screamed to myself silently. 'What is it?' 'What is it?' 'Mu, Mu, MU, MU, MUUU, MMUUUUUU . . .!!!' Suddenly I experienced an elevation of consciousness that I immediately recognized to be different from any state of mind I had ever known. There were no thoughts left; even the questioning had disappeared, leaving nothing but the voiceless, wordless screaming. And then it happened. Several cushions to my right a meditator went jhrrrrt! Instantly I knew that it could not be called a fart; it was too vivid to be called anything at all. I had been catapulted into that world, Korzybski's "unspeakable" world, where words no longer fit. In my astonishment, I suddenly "heard" Mu in the bus station, and then Mu underwater. I knew the answers to the Roshi's questions! I really knew! Immediately one of the monitors who had been observing my behavior from behind yanked me off the platform and whispered urgently, 'Go see the Roshi.'

“I flew up the stairs and down the corridor into the little room where he sat waiting. Barely prostrating, as one is expected to do at both the beginning and end of dokusan, I blurted out, 'Someone nearby just went jhrrrrt! and I know that it cannot be called a fart. And I know what Mu in the bus station is and Mu underwater.' The Roshi seemed strangely unmoved by my discoveries. After confirming my answers to his two new questions, he calmly asked, 'Now, Paul, what is the color of Mu?' I was speechless. 'How tall is Mu?' Nothing came. 'Well, Paul,' he summed up unceremoniously, 'you've had a small realization, but there's still a long way to go. Don't let up now.' As he reached for his little bell, my whole body drooped. Despite my glimpse of 'suchness,' I was still

unable to answer his old questions. And now time was running out. It was already Friday afternoon.

“For the next two hours, I drove myself with the fanatical zeal of a mountain climber who finds himself only yards short of his goal as a heavy rain begins to fall. I continued on throughout the supper hour right up to the final gong at 10:00. Then I collapsed into my bed, not waking until forced to do so by the 4:15 gong the next morning. Following breakfast and a two-hour sitting period, I returned to my bed exhausted, hoping to sleep for another 30 minutes. Mu would not let me be. I was ready to concede that it was all over but something deeper in me said no. ‘What is the color of Mu?’ ‘How tall is Mu?’ Like a pair of bulldogs oblivious to all but their grip, they took me by the throat and would not let go. I found myself examining those questions now in the light of what I had discovered the day before. The jhrrrt! that could not be called a fart ... that was Mu and Mu in the bus station that too was beyond words. If so, Mu must be that raw ‘isness’ of things that exists before we give them their names or even conceptualize them as things. In that case, the color of Mu must be Oh, my God, I've got it. And the height of Mu that's the same question. How could I have been so stupid. It's all so simple, so wonderfully simple.

“I wanted to fly up to the Roshi's room and tell him everything but knew that I had to wait until after lunch. As I began walking out to the dining room, the SQUEAKKKKKKK of the floor boards exploded in my head drowning out all thoughts even the thought that the floor boards were squeaking. At lunch I sat alone, unwilling to speak, uninterested in conveying to my colleagues what was happening. From where they sat they probably noted that I had picked up an apple and was eating it but that fails miserably to communicate what was actually happening. What was happening? It was simple. CRRRRRUNCHHH, CRRRRUNCHHHHH!

“Following lunch I decided to avail myself of a hot bath. Kneeling there on the bathroom floor, waiting for the tub to fill, I was once again swept into a world so raw unto itself that I had no *idea* of what was going on. I can tell you now that I was watching and listening to the water spurt from the faucet into the tub, but at the time I could not have said that. There was only SPLASHITYSPLASHITYSPLASH... and no thoughts about it, no labeling, no evaluating, no observer, no object.

“When I finally burst into the Roshi's room, I knew I had the answers. ‘Ask me anything,’ I shouted, supremely confident in my new knowledge of Mu. Calmly he led me through all the questions that had tormented me so exquisitely

for years. Somewhat less calmly, I shot them all down like so many buzzards that had darkened my skies too long. At the end he paused, acknowledged that some small sliver of understanding had indeed penetrated the well-defended recesses of my mind, and proceeded to assign me my next koan. Heading down the stairs, I was more preoccupied with his lack of congratulations than with the glories of Mu, which tells you something about how far I still had to go and how wise he was to avoid feeding my already substantial ego.

Stephanie: Whew! And then what?

PB: *(still reading)* "Five months later I returned to Rochester for the last time. Try as I might, I could not generate the same do-or-die kind of zeal I had mustered for the previous sesshin. Without the LSD-inspired 'oracle' to propel me, I fell back into a strong but unfanatical rhythm, probably good enough for the triathlon or scaling K-2, but not powerful enough to shake off the heavy crust of ego that continued to envelop me..... *(pausing)* Since that final sesshin my awareness of Mu has deepened, although it has yet to go beyond what the Roshi referred to as phenomenological reality. Losing myself wordlessly in music, faces, eating, sex, and dancing has become commonplace, even without long hours of meditation. But I have yet to see the world as One."

Brian: Amen. Nicely done, sir. I heard every word. When did you write it all down?

PB: The notes were written in 197530 years ago.

Stephanie: Paul, I love that story I don't mean story in the sense that you made it up. It's a wonderful description of something very personal. I find it inspiring. And the absolutely magical way it all started with the green Datsun and MU on the license plate! How could you doubt the existence of a spiritual realm after that? Someone or some force was clearly helping you, wouldn't you agree?

PB: There was a time when I saw the whole experience as evidence that I was being guided along the path to enlightenment. But as the years passed, I began to have doubts. Take the business of the green Datsun. Looking back on the weeks following the experience, I recall that with each telling of the story I became more certain that there was no green Datsun next to my VW when I parked in the morning. I am more realistic now. I think what actually happened is that I saw the Datsun when I parked in the morning but forgot about it by the time I returned in the afternoon. It certainly made the story more interestingmore magical to claim that there was no Datsun there originally. And the

MU on the license plate? I subsequently found out that in the region around Hanover, New Hampshire, probably a quarter to a third of all license plates started with MU.

Stephanie: But what about the voices? The one that told you it would all happen on November the 15th which it did. And the one that told you to park on the ground? How can you discount all that?

PB: I think it was all due to the LSD I had taken a few days before. The “voices” were clearly my own. It seems obvious to me now that they came from my own unconscious where knowledge of the upcoming sesshin dates was stored. I’m not sure about the voice that told me to park on the ground that morning but I would guess that it too originated somewhere in the unconscious part of my mind.

Brian: Do you think you would have had the same kind of awakening experience at the Zen Center if you had never taken the LSD?

PB: No..... not because the LSD showed me what Mu wasbut because it raised my hopes and gave me the energy for breaking through.

Brian: You’re referring to the voices? The ones that told you it would happen on November 15th?

PB: Yes.

Stephanie: Magical or not, it seems like the experience in Rochester opened your eyes to something you hadn’t seen before. I guess you might say that you saw what exists behind words, behind language. Would it be fair to say that when you heard the jhhhhrrrrt! that could not be called a fart, you had suspended cognitive orienting? At least temporarily.

PB: I think so. Labeling, evaluating, comparingall these cognitive activities represent the outer layer of the onion the layer that has to be peeled off first if we are eventually to experience the Undifferentiated. And when you peel off that layer that is, when you suspend cognitive orienting you enter what seems like a new world. All sensations have been enhanced, making objects brighter, clearer, more palpable so palpable that words no longer do them justice. In this state of heightened awareness, words can only constrain. Empty in themselves, they lack the power to impart the flavor of the experience itself. They are revealed as mere sounds vibrations to which we attach specific meanings but vibrations none the less. As Korzybski was fond of saying, "The

word is not the thing" and, "The map is not the territory." To which Alan Watts added, "You can't get wet in the word water."

Brian: So, when you drop the words, you see the world more like an animal does. You feel the water directly. You don't feel it through a conceptual screen in your head.

PB: Exactly. You're not thinking, "This is water." Like other words, the word "water" actually diminishes the experience; it robs it of its vividness.

Stephanie: So when your mind is extremely clear, as it is after a week's meditation, you enter a new world where everything is bright and dazzling..... your mind extremely alert and sharp. Would you call that world satori? Would you say that you had an enlightenment experience, even briefly?

PB: No, I wouldn't. Despite the new clarity and intensity of sensation which it brings, parting the veil of language still leaves the world divided into objects. Trees are still separate from birds, even when we stop labeling them as such. Butterflies are not confused with the flowers they land upon. We remain subjects perceiving objects. We are still oriented to time, place, and identity. We may have removed the outer layer of orientation but there are two more layers to go.

Brian: Before we move on I have one little question. Since animals don't apply names to things..... I know they use signals but they don't have a language like we do does it follow that they are closer to enlightenment than we are?

PB: Not really. Yes, they have one less orienting layer to peel off but without books or speech, they have no way of knowing that enlightenment even exists.....or what is required to get there. Paradoxically, it is our ability to orient cognitively that makes enlightenment a plausible goaleven though it saddles us with another layer to be peeled away.

Stephanie: (*taking Brian's hand*) How good of you not to fall asleep, Brian. Now it's probably time for us to head back to Burlington.

Brian: (*stretching*) I could use a little lunch.

Stephanie: Thank you, Paul. I know that we still disagree on some fundamentals but I have learned a lot listening to you. I hope it's O.K. with you if we come back to hear the rest.

PB: I'll look forward to seeing you next week. Is Monday still good for both of you?

Stephanie: I'll make sure that it is. Goodbye, Paul.

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