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NONDUALITY: A SPONTANEOUS MOVEMENT “TO” AND “FRO”

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Introduction

Nonduality is an idea we can think and talk about. More immediately, it is a state into which we disappear or a state from which we appear. But even to call it a “state” is to grasp at something static and solid in a situation that is essentially fluid and ungraspable. Perhaps a better way to think and talk about nonduality is simply as “appearing” or “disappearing.” Better yet, of course, is to not think or talk at all, for all such activity sets up a duality between the talker and that which is being talked about.

When one freely gives oneself to the activity of appearing and disappearing, there is no self and no concept of nonduality but just an effortless flow that does not grasp at any identity or concept and is imbued with a natural sense of wellbeing. Moments of such flow occur in psychotherapy spontaneously and far more frequently, I suspect, than is generally realized. They are easily missed because they tend to be subtle and fleeting. Moreover, therapists and clients alike often actively and mostly unconsciously flee from these moments and the impending loss of self that comes with them.

Those who have tasted the natural wellbeing associated with a momentary disappearance of the self may try to recapture it, and if they are therapists, perhaps set up conditions that could bring it about for their clients as well. Such efforts, however, proceed from the standpoint of the self as a distinct and enduring identity. From that standpoint, the disappearance of the self—nonduality—is something to be captured or attained by some sort of technique or spiritual practice. The one who is doing the capturing or attaining is, of course the very self that constitutes itself, paradoxically, in the very act of trying to capture or attain. Many spiritual practitioners have found themselves dead-ended in this paradox. What happens to them at this dead-end? They may quit their spiritual pursuit right then and there, perhaps with a sense of defeat and despair, or with a sense of relief and liberation. Or they may doggedly continue in their pursuit. All of these may happen to the same person at different times. It depends on where the person is “coming from” at the time.

One place the person may be coming from is the viewpoint of the self who experiences nonduality as something distinct from itself even while perhaps intellectually knowing better, and who then seeks to capture or recapture it. Another is the viewpoint—not really a viewpoint at all but perhaps more akin to a boundless “viewspace”—of the boundless and ungraspable flow of reality into which the self naturally and spontaneously disappears and from which it naturally and spontaneously appears. Understanding or *being* this state is the same as *seeing* it. In contrast to the limited viewpoint of a self, a “viewspace” that excludes nothing sees that there is movement into and out of it—a “pendulation,” as Lumiere characterizes it (in Prendergast et al., 2000, p. 255) At this fundamental a level the movement is spontaneous and natural and so needs no explanation. On the other hand, an enduring sense of identity is *not* natural but an artifact, and so cries for understanding: how does it come about? In this chapter, I invite the

reader to inquire with me into the activity that brings about and maintains the sense of identity of a separate self.

I call the activity that creates and maintains the sense of self “fixating,” and the resultant self the “fixated self.” From the standpoint of the fixated self, nonduality is fixated as well, as a state to be grasped or a concept to be understood—an object for the subject that is the fixated self. But the object, paradoxically--and tragically--can never be attained by the subject that seeks it. The quest for nonduality or “nondual experience” exposes the root of alienation, of loneliness, of self-doubt, and of the myriad forms of human suffering in a way that no other quest does.

A self that is not fixated naturally disappears and appears, or “goes into” and “comes from” states of nonduality. In the following pages, we will as well explore this natural activity, its manifestation in speech and behavior, how it occurs in the psychotherapeutic encounter, and the qualities of presence and connection associated with it. Finally, we will address the issue of talking about nonduality. Therapists, as much if not more than other people, like to talk and think. And when nonduality or nondual wisdom becomes a concern to us, we can’t help but talk about it. Most of the ways we talk and think about nonduality tend to fixate it, but there are also ways of talking and thinking about it that tend to unravel the fixation and deliver us from a state of separation to a nondual “coming” and “going.”

Fixating the Self

Most psychological theories assume the fixation of the self from the start. They differ widely as to how the self is constituted or when, but most agree that once it has been constituted, it’s *there*. It may be subject to modification, even to falsification, but in its basic ontological existence, the self is there. In every psychotherapeutic encounter, says the premise, the client’s self is there, and the therapist’s self is there, and the two interact. It seems, then, that nothing needs to be done to bring the self into existence or to keep it going. All that activity was done in the past. The job of psychotherapy may be to change or transform one or both of these selves, but through it all neither therapist nor client doubt that they endure without having to do anything about it.

Questioning this premise seems pointless when one considers that conditioned patterns of fixating the self were laid down early in one’s life. They are deeply ingrained in our brains, and so it does indeed seem that nothing needs to be done to maintain and perpetuate the fixated self. But let us look more closely. What are these conditioned patterns and how are they being maintained right now? Notice how, paradoxically, in positing the conditioned patterns as *already there*, the consciousness that does the positing creates a division between itself and those patterns. Notice the activity of fixation in the very resistance to letting go of the assumption of the fixated self.

Can we take a step further and suspend this activity?

You might stop reading for a moment to observe this activity going on in your body and mind right now. Notice the subtle tensions, pushes and pulls in the body and thoughts and images and other subtle activities like alertness and readiness to look, to reflect, and so on in the mind. You don’t have to clearly discern all that’s going on there; it’s enough to make contact with the feel and texture of it. Then consider this question: if all that activity suddenly stopped and were not there, would *you* still be there? . . .

The intellectual answer (at least to a good Buddhist) is “no.” But this question may awaken us to the fact that, contrary to that intellectual position (if that’s what yours is), a feeling of subjectivity had accompanied the experience of observing thoughts and sensations. It is very subtle, but perhaps you can discern the *activity* that creates that feeling as an ongoing pulling back and perhaps slightly pulling in to form something like a point of subjectivity. Notice also how this activity creates a space between the point of subjectivity and whatever is the object for it.

If you have been able to observe the activity of pulling in that forms the point of subjectivity, you will have also noticed that this activity, and the point of subjectivity, are extremely unstable. The pulling in tends to spontaneously relax and flow outward, and with that, the point of subjectivity also tends to spread and dissolve. There is no permanence to this kind of subjectivity. Something else needs to happen for the self to fixate itself as an enduring observer or enjoyer of experience.

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The self fixates itself by resisting one or the other of the two spontaneous activities, *pulling in* and *flowing out*. This resistance tends to keep in place the tension and the space that separates the subject of experience from its object. The fixation of the self can happen in one of two ways, depending on which activity—the pulling in or the flowing out—is being resisted. Put differently, the self can fixate itself as either subject or as object.

When the pulling-in activity is fixated, the self takes up a permanent position as a subject or a “bystander” witnessing whatever is going on. The sense of self is preserved by not letting oneself be absorbed in anything. In fixating itself as subject, the self positions itself with the affirmation “I am.” This is the way, for example, of some spiritual practitioners who seek liberation or enlightenment by cultivating detachment. The effort to fixate the self as a subject is usually associated with a lot of self-consciousness and of being cut off from the world. In more extreme cases, as in schizoid states, there may be a sense of unreality about everything and an experience of self clinicians call “depersonalization.” R. D. Laing (1990) describes a schizoid patient whose existence as a self had become so tenuous that he had to keep constant vigil, day and night *watching himself* lest he cease to exist. In less extreme and more everyday situations, the attempt to “center oneself” is often nothing more than a fixating of the self as a subject. People can fixate the self as subject by taking an attitude, or holding an opinion, about ideas or practices.

When the flowing-out activity is fixated, the self secures a permanent position as an object. It grasps and hold onto things, persons, ideas, or practices it considers precious or as worthy of striving for. It identifies with these objects and becomes them. For example, I am smart, not a push-over, etc., or I am a spiritual practitioner, a humanistic psychotherapist, a seeker of wisdom, etc. In fixating itself as an object, the self takes on an identity, “I am this, I am that.” Some contemporary spiritual seekers fixate the self as object in a rather convoluted way, by denying that their self is their true identity and attributing their true identity to the “Higher Self” or Brahman or something else.

In reality, fixating the self as subject and fixating the self as object both occur simultaneously, or they can alternate rapidly. But often there is a preponderance of one or the other type of fixation, which confers a particular flavor to the personality. For

example, people who tend to fixate as subject are often described as “introverts,” while people who tend to fixate as object are described as “extraverts.”

As in any encounter between persons, in psychotherapy therapists fixate the self and clients fixate the self. Therapists fixate the self whenever they come from an agenda to control or direct, or even just to “facilitate” what’s going on with the client. Fixation of the self is at the heart of clients troubles. More severely troubled clients fail to fixate a self in a coherent pattern that is acceptable by the standards of the community. But such a failure is *not* the same as not fixating the self. A therapy where the therapist comes from a fixated self—so long as his or her self has a more coherent and successful pattern of fixation--can be helpful to such clients. But a therapy, or a moment in therapy, that embraces the client unconditionally without fixation of self on the part of the therapist can hold the client with a depth of acceptance and love not possible when the therapist is coming from a fixated self.

The Self Naturally “Comes” and “Goes”

When examining the feeling of subjectivity in the previous section, we noted the essential instability of the point of subjectivity when it is not fixated. The activity of pulling in that creates the subject-point constantly gives way to the opposite activity of flowing out that dissolves it.

We can witness the natural coming and going of the self in anything we do.

Allow your attention to make direct contact with something, say a candle flame or the flow of sensations in your body. Now if you allow that contact to become deep enough to absorb the observer-you, the distance between you and the object tends to collapse. You find yourself in the flame, or you find the flame in you. Sometimes the space between you and the flame collapses so completely that you are gone, and the flame and everything else is also gone. This “gone” moment typically does not last, however. In the next moment, you the observer are there and so is the object. But it is a new-born you, a fresh you, and a fresh object as well. This is probably familiar to you in and out of meditation practice. If it is, then what typically follows is probably also familiar to you. The self fixates by grasping at the object, trying to make the “gone” state (which is really just a memory image of what just happened), now become a desired “One” state, happen again. At this point a painful battle may ensue in which the self is divided against itself, trying not to fixate itself yet the harder it tries the harder it fixates itself.

Why does the division within consciousness happen in the first place? I know no answer to this question though, arguably, we can trace the rise of human civilization to that division. I suppose our brains are wired that way. We don’t need to do anything to make it happen. In fact we are not yet there to make anything happen until after consciousness has divided into subject and object. The sense of self and the urge to do something arise with that division. If at that moment we didn’t do anything about it, the polarization and division would just as naturally de-polarize and dissolve, and with it the sense of self would disappear. And then it would appear. And again disappear. This appearing and disappearing of the self would just go on naturally—if we did not interfere with the process to fixate the self as “me” or “mine.”

Examples of the natural coming and going of the self abound in everyday life. Whenever you go fully into a relationship or an activity of any kind, your self is gone. You are so absorbed in that activity—for example, sweeping the floor, meditating, or attending to another person—that nothing of you is left to stand back and watch. In such moments you forget yourself. Your self is gone. In the next moment someone calls your name or something else catches your attention, and the self is there, wondering, “Who is calling me?” “What is that?” In the next moment, you may be fully engaged in some other activity, or with another person, and the self is again gone. In this way, the self may come and go, effortlessly appearing and disappearing in the natural flow of the activity we call life. This natural coming and going of the self can be seen in the play of children whose spontaneity has not yet given way to the anxious self-consciousness that comes with the pressure to fixate the self according to the expectations of family and community.

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The coming and going of the self is our natural state and so is available at any time. It ceases to be available only when the self becomes a problem. For spiritual practitioners the self is a problem because it’s there when we don’t want it to be there, or it is limited in its capabilities, wisdom, etc. when we’d like it to be unlimited. So the self is a problem that needs to be solved either by eradicating it or improving on it. You might sit down to meditate with a goal to solve the problem of your self. In the quiet of the sitting the self may dissolve. But then someone might call your name, and the self arises and not only arises but immediately fixates: “Hey, you are disturbing *my* meditation, interrupting the attainment of my goal!” If the self is not a problem and you sit down to meditate, then there is nothing to attain and no disturbance. Someone calls your name, the self arises, you give yourself fully to attending to the person who calls, and, without any goal to attain the self is gone. You may then decide to return to the meditation or pursue some other activity, and at that moment the self arises again.

In the natural coming and going of the self the problem of the self is gone—not solved but simply gone. We can see that the self need not be banished or even improved in any way. We can also see that the self really cannot be banished or improved; when it comes to the self’s own projects, fixing is the same as fixating. When this understanding reaches deep into our bones, it allows us, as psychotherapists, to manifest a space of acceptance for our clients that is not just a matter of approach or even attitude on our part but is ontological, with a tremendous power to heal.

“Coming From” Nonduality: Original speech

The sense of self arises in the division of consciousness that simultaneously creates subject and object. But where does the self “come from”? In a way, it comes from nothing. But this is not a “nothing” as opposed to “something.” In other words, the self does not arise from an “absence” of something. Absence has a trace of that which is absent. A self may be fixated around that something and carry its trace. But the nothing from which a self arises anew has nothing to do with absence and carries no trace of what is absent. In Buddhist literature that from which the self arises is called “emptiness” (*sunyata*) or “suchness” (*tathata*). It is what we have in this chapter called “nondual”

reality or awareness. When nondual reality first divides to manifest a consciousness polarized into subject and object, a space of expression is created between the subject and object poles. This is self “coming from” nonduality.

If you have ever watched a person having an insight, a real “aha!” moment, you may have witnessed a self arising. In the actual moment of insight, the person’s self disappears, leaving her with vacant eyes staring into space and perhaps a slightly dropped jaw. In the next moment, a smile spontaneously spreads on her face, and an “aha!” accompanying that smile may be the first expression of her newly arising self. We usually identify “insight” with that expression, or even more likely, with the content of its verbal expression. In grasping at the content to verbalize it, however, the self is fixating itself. But in the prior moment, often signaled by a spontaneous smile, the self arose afresh. And prior to that moment, there was a “nothingness” that was the womb from which the insight was born. All expression that is truly original is born from that womb.

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After a sesshin at a Rinzai Zen monastery, I engaged a fellow practitioner in a conversation. He was nearing fifty, had practiced Zen for 25 years, and was an internationally known mathematician. I was curious about how his creativity was faring in middle-age, as I had heard that mathematicians usually peak in their early to middle twenties. “On the contrary,” he said, “I find myself becoming more creative over the years, as I get closer to my real self.” He laughed, and added, “you know, I am talking about nothing really.” He then described how, sitting in the Zendo, he becomes one with himself and everything is gone including himself, and then, out of the nothingness, mathematical relationships in three-dimensional form spontaneously float up. To me his description captured the essence of creation—something coming from nothing.

Speech that spontaneously comes from nothing and is the expression of a self arising afresh is creative in this literal sense that it comes from nothing. It is very different from the far more common speech that comes from notions of a fixated self and expresses the reactions of a fixated self. “Original speech,” as I call the former, has nothing to do with having high novelty value or shock value. The content of what is being said is often not important, but the qualities of saying it always are. Original speech is simple, spacious, and usually sparse. No words are said that are not meant, and nothing that is meant is left unsaid. It is simple because there is no hidden agenda to preserve or validate the existence or esteem of the self.

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When I was a child growing up in Finland, my family spent the three summer months of the year in the country. Across a meadow and a patch of woods lived our closest neighbor, an old man named Heinonen who was indigenous to the region. The ritual that started our summer was a visit to Heinonen. My parents had taught my sisters and me to respect the customs of the indigenous folk who were famous for their sparse speech. We sat quietly by the door as Heinonen puffed on his pipe. The grandfather clock standing against the wall ticked away time that had slowed to near halt. Everything was quiet like a still lake at sunset. “Sooooo,” said Heinonen. A couple of more puffs, and he continued, “The swallows have come.” His words dropped like pebbles onto the surface of the lake creating circles that rippled outward. The ripples gently rocked us who were

immersed in the lake. The clock kept ticking, and eventually one of us dropped a pebble that sent a ripple back, “yeah, so they have.”

Original speech has the qualities of extraordinary clarity and vividness as well. These, and the simplicity, and most of all, the truth of it that “seems to directly touch itself,” (Hunt, in Prendergast et al., 2003, p. 181) confer it tremendous power.

Sometimes original speech takes the form of images.

Some years back I saw a young man in psychotherapy. He was brilliant but extremely inhibited except when he could talk in abstract ideas far removed from his personal life. The sessions had been painfully stilted for months, and often I wondered why he kept coming when I wasn't really helping him. Eventually I threw in the towel but kept showing up just because he did, and then a small breakthrough happened. He began to talk about himself, haltingly, hesitantly, his voice almost choked off. There were long silences in our sessions. In one of those silences, an image came up for me, seemingly from nowhere but compelling in its vividness: a table of feast, decorated with flowers and brimming over with delicacies beyond imagination. The feast was being offered to my client and he stood in front of it, looking at it hungrily struggling to swallow with a parched throat. “Go ahead, you can do it. You can have it,” I found myself whispering to him, surprised at myself, and yet not surprised. He was taken aback as if he had just been found out, but he also looked at me with a new kind of curiosity. Three weeks later, he told me that he had befriended a young woman and that he had just asked her out and she had agreed. This was the beginning of not just the first relationship in his life but of a long journey to a full life in the world.

“Going Into” Nonduality and the Fear of Disintegration

Going into nonduality happens in moments when the self dissolves and is gone. In the earlier example of a person having an “aha” experience, the person is “going into” nonduality in the moment just prior to the smile spreading on her face. In that prior moment, the person's jaw is slack and eyes are vacantly staring in space. As far as her “self” is concerned, it's not there. Prior to being “gone,” it was there, engaged in thinking that perhaps came to an impasse, and suddenly the thinking and the structure of the self which the thinking created and maintained were all gone. In everyday experiences of insight, the “gone” moment is infinitesimally short, so short that one is barely aware of a discontinuity in the flow of thinking and experience. Afterwards, the discontinuity is filled in by memory, and one typically describes the experience of insight by saying something like, “suddenly something happened” and “I experienced a shift in my consciousness. “But when it actually happened, there was no “I” experiencing anything; the self was “gone.”

These moments of self being “gone” often become noticeable to practitioners of certain kinds of meditation. This is the case especially in Buddhist meditative practice. The dissolution of the self then becomes the desired goal of practice. The practitioner, hoping to “go into” nonduality, “gets into” trying to dissolve the self instead. But the self cannot dissolve itself. It cannot really even *allow* itself to dissolve, for that, too, sets up a duality between the one doing the allowing and the state that is supposed to be achieved by doing it. Notice how “allowing” can be a mental attitude that fixates the self.

The dissolution of the self happens spontaneously. The good news is that dissolution of the self is absolutely easy, no effort is required. The bad news is that we don't want to give up the effort. It has come to define our identity. We also want to see returns. We have worked hard to end our separate existence, to "become one with" nonduality, and when it finally happens we insist on being there to witness and celebrate it. Spiritual practice can be a trap, a way of fixating the self that turns the dissolution of the self into a prized goal. It can become a vicious cycle of fixation: the more difficult the attainment of the goal, the more we value the quest for it and the self that engages in that quest--which intensifies the conflict between the quest and the fear of our own disintegration, thus fixating the self even more.

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Some of us work as therapists for clients with severe disturbances. Such clients sometimes manifest an intense and desperate fear of disintegration. As therapists, we would like to be able to embrace this fear and lovingly hold it for our client, until he or she can tolerate and accept it. But when we fear our own disintegration, we hold our client's fear in an anxious, fearful way, not in loving and welcoming way. Our severely disturbed clients can take us to the edge. Sometimes love and care overcome fear, and we let ourselves fall off the edge. In such moments, who is to tell what is spiritual practice and what is psychotherapy practice? We can be grateful to our clients, just as we are to our spiritual mentors and teachers.

A client in a psychotic state may manifest not the fear of disintegration of the self but the actual disintegration. The fear may be there as well, though it is not always. A therapist who works from the premise that one fixated self is encountering another feels compelled to hold onto the fragments of the client's self where the client no longer can—or perhaps just does not care to—do so. In such a situation, the therapist's fixated self enters into the struggle for the survival of the client's self. Sometimes the struggle is won, but often it is not, and in any case there is a great deal of anxiety involved, at least for the therapist if not for the client. Disintegration of the self is very different from dissolution. In disintegration the fixated self attempts to hold onto fragments of self-identity, and these may or may not be recovered into a reintegrated identity. In dissolution there is no holding onto anything. Often when working with psychotic clients, I feel grateful for having had the opportunity, in highly structured meditation situations set up so as to remove any need to hold onto a self, to witness my own disintegration fear and its giving way to dissolution.

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Several years back, I met a client for the first time at a county jail. He had been picked up by the police and charged with Disorderly Conduct. He had been in and out of the mental health and prison system for decades, and had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. On this occasion, I was asked to evaluate him to see if he was competent to stand trial. It became quickly evident that the man was in an acute psychotic state, and his speech was incomprehensible—"word salad" is the technical term for the way he was speaking. I tried to understand him to no avail, and yet he obviously wanted to communicate something. I offered him a piece of paper and a pen to write it down with, but his sentences were a syntactic jumble. Perhaps because of his urgency, I felt

compelled to be truthful rather than humor him, and so wanted him to really get it that I did not understand him no matter how I tried. In the end, naked and spent, I just sat there with him for a few more minutes before I left. Three months later while walking across the front lawn of the local state hospital, I heard someone calling, “Hi Dr. Puhakka, do you remember me?” It was the same man, now coherent after three months on medication, and he was very happy to see me. How did he recognize me and remember my name which even people with minds in fine working order usually don’t? Somehow, while he and I were both “gone” sitting there in the county jail, we had met somewhere where intact egos (fixated selves) don’t set foot in.

Nonduality in the Psychotherapeutic Encounter: Being Present

Presence is valued in our psychotherapeutic culture, and so being present can easily become something that therapists “try” to be or feel they “should” be. When we try to be present, we position ourselves in a particular way, “in here” or “out there.” Thus, ironically, being present can be just another way to fixate the self.

Presence that is nondual has nothing to do with particular ways of being present. We could say that nondual presence is a radical presence for nothing is excluded from it. It is a spacious presence in direct contact with everything. It is also unconditional presence: nothing can be done and nothing needs to be done to bring it about. Nothing is required of the other in nondual presence—not even that the other be present.

The last point is very subtle and its significance is easy to miss. I had missed it for many years without, of course, realizing that I had missed it. As a therapist I felt my job was to help my clients to be present *with me*. I tried to use the relationship with my clients therapeutically, to bring them into presence through relationship with me. Then one day I realized that I had been working on an *assumption* all along. This assumption was that I could not be in contact with my clients unless they were in contact with me. That contact is mutual and reciprocal seemed intuitively compelling, and so I had never questioned it, never even realized that I had accepted it as a premise to “come from” into the therapy work. But one day I realized it, and the realization freed me up to be present and connected unconditionally, regardless of whether my client was present “with me.” My fixation around reciprocal presence was unraveled and my self was free to “go into” nonduality in the presence of another, to be in full contact with her even when she was not with me. Nondual presence has no requirement for reciprocity. It did not require me to withdraw from it because my client did. It did not require me to be or do anything. And just as important, it did not require anything of my client. I had “understood” before that nonduality is unconditional and requires nothing. But now that understanding had a new depth and a new presence in the therapy room.

Talking About Nonduality: Paradox

Finally, I want to return to the observation I made early in this chapter, which is that psychotherapists, perhaps more than many other people, like to think and talk. Especially when talking about nondual awareness, we are not “coming from” that awareness. The self is fixated by thinking and talking, and much of the time we express a

fixated self in our transactions. Still, the situation is usually somewhat fluid, and a fixated self tends to dissolve—unless it actively engages in an activity that tends to fixate it more. Whenever the self affirms itself as subject vis-à-vis an object, fixation occurs. We discussed this earlier in the chapter. Here I would like to explore possibilities of thinking and talking that do not fixate the self but, on the contrary, tend to dissolve it.

Is it possible to talk about nonduality without turning it into an object? Just the requirements of English grammar seem to rule it out. Yet there is a way of talking that can evoke a direct, intuitive seeing in which the subject-object structure unravels even as it is being created by the talking, even as it is set up in a speaking and listening situation. This is the way of paradox, and it begins with the recognition that, when talking about nonduality, talking is not just different from the real thing but actually negates the very thing that is being talked about. What makes a paradox a paradox is an impasse from which there is no way out. Such an impasse is created when one affirms nonduality. In doing so, a duality is set up between that which is affirmed and that which is not (or which is implicitly denied). But in setting up that duality, one is affirming the very thing one did not want to affirm.

Can you feel the impasse? Can you notice how the mind does not want to stay with the impasse but tries to escape as quickly as possible? One way to escape is to space out, to let the mind get all fogged up. Another way to escape is to look for a solution to the paradox—some way of showing that it's not *really* a paradox. For example, we might think, "Ah, but true nonduality affirms everything *and* its opposite. It's the inclusive "both/and" stance. But if you examine this "solution," you will see that affirming the "both/and" stance" just creates another dualism (between it and what it is not). There really is no escape from a genuine paradox. Staying with a paradox is much like koan practice, of which Lin Chi, the founder of Rinzai Zen, said, it's like having a red hot iron ball stuck in your throat. You can't swallow it and you can't spit it out (Watson, 1993).

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Nondual wisdom traditions all recognize paradox at the heart of their own talk and walk. Their teaching devices often employ paradox, though not all of them are as brutal as koan practice in Rinzai Zen can be. When we stay with paradox and don't space out or run to solutions, the structure of consciousness that's caught up in the paradox becomes transparent, and starts to soften. We begin to see—not just believe, but actually and immediately see-- how a stance or position about anything sets up a dualism. We no longer feel we need to take positions or beliefs, our own or anybody else's, very seriously. This lack of seriousness expresses the loosening of the fixated self. It is spacious and light, and very different from the inflated boyance of someone who dismisses everything because he or she knows it all. It is also different from the subtle superiority of someone who is keen on pointing out the paradox in other people's positions and how they are caught up in it, and finally, it is different from the deflated cynicism of one who is disillusioned and who doesn't care anymore.

There is nothing wrong with positions as such. Taking them seriously is the problem. Whenever we feel that we need to hold a position, or that we need to dismiss a position, we get serious. Whenever we are serious, the self is fixated. On the other hand, when the need to take positions is gone, we can be more spacious, holding whatever positions are put forth lightly and gently, playfully. Our clients come in with all sorts of

positions that burden them and make them serious. Therapists sometimes add their own positions to the mix, which creates heaviness, anxiety and often confusion. At other times, therapists take their client's position seriously and find themselves as disempowered as the client is by it, unable to offer much help. Not taking positions seriously frees up in the therapist a knowing that has nothing to do with thinking. It is a direct, intuitive knowing that simply sees what is there. This "seeing" can just as well be characterized as "feeling." It is very intimate and touches what it sees/feels directly. Empathy is intrinsic to it. Not taking positions opens up space for this knowing to spontaneously arise. The self that affirms no positions but "comes from" nonduality expresses it.

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Thinking and talking are kinds of doing. But there is another kind of doing that, as therapists, we feel even more compelled to do, and that is helping our clients. As "nondual therapists," we understand that nondual presence cannot be made to happen, that clients cannot be made to "go into" it. But if we cannot at least facilitate its happening, if we cannot at least gently invite our clients to join us in "going into" nondual presence, what good are we as therapists? Especially, what good are we as practitioners of "nondual psychotherapy"? These are compelling questions, and writers on the topic seem to fall on one or the other side of a divide in answering them. Some say yes, we can do something to facilitate nondual awareness and presence in our clients. Others say "no," there is nothing that can or need to be done because nondual awareness is always present and doing something to bring it about only sets up a duality that gets in the way. In fact this controversy is as old as the spiritual traditions that first introduced nonduality as an idea and a practice. In the context of those traditions, the controversy typically centers around the question of whether awakening is spontaneous and unconditional (i.e. not dependent on practice) or whether awakening is gradual and something that can be cultivated by practice. *The sacred mirror* (Prendergast et al., 2003) to which the present volume is a sequel, offered compelling takes on this issue on both sides of this age-old controversy. For example, John Prendergast suggested in that volume that clients can be engaged in a kind of eye-gazing he calls "sacred mirroring" which, he says, "tends to welcome presence into the foreground of awareness for both client and therapist." (p. 90). Sheila Krystal offered that EMDR reprocessing can "naturally recondition the client around the universal themes of impermanence," etc. which increases the possibility for the emergence of nondual awareness. (pp. 122-123) Stephen Bodian suggested that forms of spiritual inquiry can be, and have been used as teaching techniques in nondual wisdom traditions (pp. 233-243). But others in the volume emphasize that nondual awareness cannot (and need not) be attained by methods or procedures of any kind. For example, Dorothy Hunt states, "What is awake and aware does not require years on the meditation cushion. . . In fact, it cannot be acquired and it cannot be lost. It does not come and go with states of mind" (p. 167). In a therapy that expresses nondual awareness, Dan Berkow says, "there is no demand that a client change, stay the same, move to a different psychological space, nor retain the present sense of one's place and image" (p. 193) In an interview with Adhya Shanti in the same volume, the question was repeatedly posed to him as to what if anything we can do as therapists to help people awaken or maybe even facilitating awakening. (pp. 79, 86). He was clear

that it is not the job of the therapist's (or anyone else's, including himself) to wake people up. The job (his and perhaps ours as well), he said, is to be oneself (pp. 79, 89-87).

Who is right? Let's say, everybody is, and nobody is (and I am not sure even this is right!). The interesting thing about this controversy is that no matter how the dividing line is drawn, for example between the "gradual enlightenment" schools of Buddhism (e.g. Soto Zen or Theravada) and the "sudden enlightenment" schools (e.g. Rinzai Zen and some schools of Tibetan Buddhism), the lines of the controversy are redrawn within each side of the divide, and the debate continues unabated. Those who believe that awakening is guaranteed by doing the practice correctly and patiently may find that their efforts come to naught. Yet those who believe that no practice or "facilitating," is necessary or even possible cannot help but practice and "facilitate." My Rinzai Zen fellow practitioners did not believe that practice can "get them to" enlightenment; nevertheless, they kept practicing. And the Roshi taught us even as he kept telling us that he had nothing to teach. After a grueling *sesshin*, we sometimes mused about this paradox. At some point, it seems wiser to call what we did nonpractice (an option favored by Fenner in *The sacred mirror*). But to talk about nonpractice or nontherapy does nothing to ease the discomfort of the paradox, the red hot iron ball that one can neither swallow nor spit out.

There seems to be no solution to this controversy, and I must confess that I am not unhappy about this state of affairs. As a final remark, let me simply say that paradox is an antidote to seriousness, and so a gateway to openness and humility. Awareness of paradox can be a powerful cure for the therapist's professional countertransference—his or her seriousness about him or herself as a therapist. As therapists we often cannot help but "try to do something" for our clients, cannot help but facilitate nondual awareness in them. But if we recognize what we are doing with full awareness of the red hot iron ball stuck in our throats, we may just burst out in laughter.