

THE PERSONAL SELF, NO-SELF, SELF CONTINUUM: AN INTUITIVE INQUIRY AND
GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF NO-SELF AS
INTEGRATED STAGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS TOWARD ENLIGHTENMENT

by

Laurel A. McCormick

A dissertation submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Transpersonal Psychology

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Palo Alto, California

November 19, 2009

I certify that I have read and approved the content and presentation of this dissertation:

Genie Palmer, Ph.D., Chairperson

Date

Brian L. Lancaster, Ph.D., Committee Member

Date

Harry T. Hunt, Ph.D., Committee Member

Date

UMI Number: 3397100

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI 3397100

Copyright 2010 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This edition of the work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Copyright

©

Laurel A. McCormick

2010

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum: An Intuitive Inquiry and Grounded Theory Study of the Experience of No-self as Integrated Stages of Consciousness Toward Enlightenment

by

Laurel A. McCormick

The purpose of this dissertation was to elucidate the experience of no-self at advanced stages of consciousness toward enlightenment and to discern qualities of the living out of the experience. Research focused on explicating people's genuine perception of the experience of no-self as dissolution of ego, loss of meaning, and distress, which qualities were apparent in extant literature. An innovative research method consisted of combining the intuitive inquiry method with grounded theory as a way of verifying intuitive inquiry information, conclusions, and procedures in a pragmatic, analytical research process toward theoretical results. Semistructured interviews of 12 adults (7 women, 5 men; 24 to 70 years of age, average 55; 9 from the United States, 2 from Canada; 3 were aware of no-self since childhood, 9 became aware of no-self as adults) from the United States and Canada and from diverse ethnic and spiritual backgrounds evidenced no-self as a continuing experiential and integrative process of self, no-self, and Self toward higher stages of consciousness. Participants recounted experiences of no-self related to witnessing, exceptional human experiences, and living daily life; they also described awareness of experiences of personal self dis-identification and/or radical personal self dis-identification. Results pointed toward participants transcending or going beyond current level of ego, and additionally evidenced the transformational process of postdevelopment toward embodiment of integrative changes in self in relation to the world. The emptying self of ego allowed higher

consciousness to come in, and at the same time, there was still functional ego. The process of embodying no-self experiences was vital to integration of changes in consciousness. This intuitive inquiry and grounded theory qualitative, exploratory study produced theoretical results, which may be substantiated by future research. The study of no-self as lived experience may further understanding of self, ego dissolution, and transformation of self toward higher states of consciousness, and may contribute to the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology.

Acknowledgements

Twelve people graciously stepped forward to participate in my dissertation research study. The phenomenon of no-self was relevant and outstanding enough in their lives for them to volunteer to share deeply intimate aspects of their lived spiritual journeys. As these participants recounted their oral histories, they laid bare aspects of their personal and spiritual development related to no-self and the living out of no-self. Their narratives are the heart and soul of my dissertation. I deeply appreciate the generosity of spirit of each of these individuals, and dedicate this body of work to them.

To my dissertation committee: I am thankful for your belief in and contribution to my work. Genie, your guiding presence has been a gift to my study.

I would also like to thank all the people, animals, and beings who have touched my life—with intimate gratitude to my mother, a rare, generous Jewel of a person; and to my father, who is Evermore in my heart. Most of all: to Jason, the heart and sun of my existence.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
List of Figures.....	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
No-self in the Enlightenment Process.....	1
Defining “Self” and “Ego”.....	2
Defining Enlightenment.....	2
Enlightenment as Spiritual Development	4
The Concept of No-self.....	5
Related Literature and Rationale for the Study of No-self.....	6
Declaration of Research Question	9
Overview of Research Method	10
Chapter Summary	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	13
No-self in the Enlightenment Process.....	13
Defining No-self and the Experience of No-self	14
Psychological, Developmental, and Spiritual Theories of Self	17
Theories of Self Related to No-self	18
Empirical Studies of No-self.....	20
No-self as Mystical Experience	25
Defining Mysticism and Mystical Experience.....	25
Qualities of Mystical Experience.....	26
Mysticism as a Spiritual Process.....	27
The Experience of No-self as an Advanced Stage of Spiritual Development	33

Mysticism and Stage Theories of Growth in Consciousness.....	34
No-self in Spiritual Traditions	38
Christian Mysticism	40
The Buddhist Doctrine of Non-self.....	42
Hinduism: Advaita Vedanta.....	45
The Experience of No-self	46
Three Portrayals of the Experience of No-self	47
Discussion and Final Definition of the Experience of No-self.....	53
Transpersonal Psychology in Relation to the Experience and the Living Out of No-self	55
Chapter Summary	56
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	58
The Experience of No-Self and the Intuitive Inquiry Method.....	59
Cycle 1: Clarifying the Research Topic.....	61
Cycle 2: Developing the Preliminary Lenses.....	64
The Preliminary Lenses for the Study of the Experience of No-self.....	66
Cycle 3: Collecting Data and Preparing Summary Reports.....	67
Cycle 4: Transforming and Refining Lenses	82
Cycle 5: Integration of Findings and Literature Review	84
Grounded Theory Exploration of the Experience of No-Self.....	84
Constructivist Grounded Theory.....	85
Pragmatic Groundwork in Data Analysis	86
Chapter Summary	93
Chapter 4: Creating Intuitive Grounded Theory.....	96
Cycle 3: Writing the Participant Stories	98
Grounded Theory Analysis of Participant Transcripts	98

Grounded Theory Procedure Used in Writing the Participant Stories.....	101
Cycle 4: Transforming the Initial Intuitive Inquiry Lenses to Theory.....	103
Grounded Theory Analysis of Participant Stories	105
Theorizing Continued as Draft Writing of Results	110
Cycle 5: Integration of Findings and Literature Review	112
Chapter Summary	113
Chapter 5: Transforming the Preliminary Lenses.....	115
Relevance of Participant Stories to Research Results.....	115
Overview of Participants’ Demographic and Spiritual Backgrounds.....	116
Analysis of Participant Demographic Survey Data	116
Framework for Transformation of the Preliminary Lenses	117
Foundational Lenses	118
Process Lenses	121
Descriptive Lenses	124
The Paradoxical Nature of Articulating No-self.....	125
Conditions of Experience Reveal Awareness of No-self.....	127
Chapter Summary	129
Chapter 6: Reformation of the Preliminary Lenses Toward Theory	130
Experiential Awareness of Self and No-self as Evolution Toward Enlightenment.....	132
Two Classifications of Participants: Group A and Group B.....	132
The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuing Process	136
Awareness of Personal Self and No-self Related to Transformation	138
Evidence of Witnessing as a Stage of Consciousness	147
A Radical Personal Self Dis-Identification.....	150
The Living Out of the Experience of No-self: The Transformative Aspect of No-self..	154

Further Transitions Deepen the Experience of No-Self: Loss of the Egoic Aspect of Personal Self.....	154
Inner Experiential Awareness of No-self: A Range of Distress.	162
The Living Out of the Experience of No-self: The Process of Integration.....	170
Group A: Integration After Radical Personal Self Dis-identification.....	170
Group B: Integration After Awareness of No-self Experiences and After a Radical Self Dis-identification.....	172
The Mind-Body Aspect of Integrating No-self.....	176
The Process of Embodying a Realization Is Vital to Integration.....	181
Unification: Further Emptying and Transformation of Personal Self	183
The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum: Transformation as Unification	183
Changes in Personal Self in Relation to the World.....	184
Loss Related to Changes in Personal Self in Relation to the World.....	185
Loss Related to Positive Changes in Self in Relation to the World.....	186
Allowing or Surrendering Leads to Further Transformation	193
Why Would Anyone Want to Commit to a Path of Enlightenment?	194
Unification: Evolvment of Functional Self Toward Further Enlightenment	196
Experiential Descriptions of Unity or Oneness	196
Unification: Evolution of Self Continues	199
The Need for and Value of Research on the Topic of No-self	202
Chapter Summary	203
Chapter 7: Discussion	206
Overview of Chapter.....	207
Participants' Demographic and Spiritual Backgrounds.....	208
Universality of Spiritual Exploration and Commitment to Spiritual Exploration as a Process Related to No-self.....	209

A Brief Discussion of Perennialism and Contextualism Related to Participant Experience of No-self	211
The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum as Experiential and Integral Awareness of a Process of Unification.....	223
Experiential Awareness of No-self: A Continuing Process of Personal Self, No-self, and Self	223
Experiential Awareness of No-self: Stages and States of Consciousness	231
The Living Out of No-self: Integration Toward Enlightenment.....	245
The Inherent Process of No-self: Letting Go, Allowing, Acceptance, and Surrender.....	253
The Personal Self, No-self, Continuum Toward Unification	257
Chapter Summary: The Theory of No-self as a Continuum Toward Self	262
Pictorial Guide Serves to Outline the No-self Continuum	262
Theory of No-self as Continuum Toward Self	262
Chapter 8: Completion of the Hermeneutic Circle of Inquiry Into the Experience of No-self ..	265
Integration of Findings and Literature Review	265
Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research	272
Intuitive Inquiry	273
Grounded Theory	275
Limitations and Delimitations.....	276
Grounded Theory Embedded Into Intuitive Inquiry: A New Approach to Research	277
Intuitive Knowing Qualified by Pragmatic Analysis.....	277
Theoretical Analysis Used in This Study.....	278
Future Research Studies—Combining Intuitive Inquiry With Grounded Theory	279
Implications for Future Research.....	280
Implications for Transpersonal Psychology.....	280

Implications for Future Research Toward Deeper Understanding of Evolution of Consciousness.....	282
References.....	287
Appendix A: Personal Types of Intuition.....	301
Appendix B: Initial Participant Selection Criteria.....	303
Appendix C: Revised Participant Selection Criteria.....	304
Appendix D: Demographic Survey.....	306
Appendix E: Initial Participant Recruitment Flyer.....	309
Appendix F: Revised Participant Recruitment Flyer.....	310
Appendix G: Initial Participant Recruitment Letter.....	311
Appendix H: Revised Participant Recruitment Letter.....	313
Appendix I: Letter to Clarify Participant Selection Criteria.....	315
Appendix J: Advertisement for Participants.....	316
Appendix K: Advertisement Prescreening Survey.....	317
Appendix L: Participant Informed Consent Form.....	322
Transcriber Consent Agreement.....	325
Appendix M: Guiding Questions for Participant Interview.....	326
Appendix N: Participant Stories.....	328
Dave’s Process of Returning Home to Unification.....	328
Brahma’s Journey to Self as Eternal Being.....	338
Ariel’s Signs of Awakening to the I AM.....	348
AJ’s Life Process of Embodying Buddhist and Taoist Principles as No-self.....	356
Moon’s Images of Growing in Awareness of No-self.....	364
Robert’s Lived Recognition of Awake Awareness.....	374
DBear’s Awakening to Unity: Surrendering to Life Itself.....	385
Anam Cara’s Significant Moments in Realizing I AM.....	394

Doublespiral: Always Being the Sea of Awareness	405
Leita: Awareness of Higher Mind From Childhood to Present	414
Clara’s Encapsulation of No-self: It’s All One Thing	429
GY’s Noetic Experiences Toward Becoming the Ground.....	437
Appendix O: Sample Transcript Analysis Documents	453
Key to Color Coding Individual Participant Transcripts Prior to Composing Stories ...	453
Sample of Levels of Coding Involved in Analyzing a Section of One Participant’s Transcript	454
Sample of Earliest Axial Coding	456
Sample of Levels of Grounded Theory Analysis Used in Creating One Participant’s Story Title	457
Appendix P: Sample Documents: Intra- and Interanalysis of Participant Stories Toward Theory	458
The Number and Color Codes for Transformation of the Initial Intuitive Inquiry Lenses	458
Sample Selection From One Participant’s Story Intra-Analysis Document	459
Cycle 4 Emerging Themes and Categories	461
Sample Selection From One Group’s Interanalysis Document	463
Appendix Q: A Visual Guide to Understanding the Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum ...	465
Appendix R: Participant Demographics	468
Appendix S: Participant Spiritual and Religious Profiles	471
Appendix T: Types of Experiences Related to No-self Reported by Participants.....	473
Appendix U: Spiritual Evolvment—What Helped	475

List of Figures

Figure		Page
1	Intuitive Inquiry Cycles Embedded With Grounded Theory Analysis.....	95
2	Successive Rounds of Grounded Theory Performed in Intuitive Inquiry Cycles 3 and 4.....	97
3	The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum: Group A and Group B Process Differences.....	166
4	The Personal Self, No-self Self Continuum as Transformative and Integrative Embodiment of Self—A Process of Evolution of Self Toward Higher Stages of Consciousness	205

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is the lived experience of no-self? The goal of this qualitative study was to understand, describe, and discover the experience of no-self as dissolution of egoic or illusory self in 12 men and women. No-self is a process wherein a person's sense of experienced self dissolves (Berkow, 2003; Carter, 1990; Hunt, 2007; Puhakka, 1998, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987) either immediately or over time. An individual may experience mild to considerable distress (Adyashanti, 2002, 2006; Hunt, 2007; Puhakka, 2007; Roberts, 1993, 2005), as he or she may be aware of a change in the sense of personal self or "I." This research study focused on elucidating people's genuine perception of the experience of no-self as dissolution of ego and as loss of meaning and suffering in advanced stages of spiritual development before the final stage of unity as oneness.

No-self in the Enlightenment Process

In the following quote, Roberts (2005) described what happens when one has an experience of no-self:

The divine's breaking through the center of consciousness shatters the ego like a hole made in the center of ourselves. . . . Offhand we would imagine that a permanent breakthrough of the divine into the unconscious would be a wonderful, blissful experience. But in fact it is . . . the shattering or falling away of the self-center . . . [and] there is no ego anymore to experience the divine. (p. 20)

This also illustrates how the concept of no-self is the process of awakening from the illusion of being a personal, separate self as a shift in consciousness from the individual toward interconnectedness or nonduality (not two), in that the person's consciousness itself is transcended by no-self experiences (Adyashanti, 2002; Blackstone, 2007; Braud, 1998; Carter, 1990; Epstein, 1993; Puhakka, 1998; Walsh, 1994; Washburn, 1988; J. White, 1995; Wilber, 1986).

Roberts (2005) further explained that with an unexpected breakthrough into the void of the unconscious, there comes the sense of nothingness and emptiness, wherein it seems that the divine is “absent or lost” (p. 21). She defined this phase as the “Dark Night of the Spirit” (p. 21), a term which comes from St. John of the Cross, and stated that one is left to live out no-self as dark night and as loss of Presence (as felt sense of the divine) in everyday life prior to unity as oneness (Roberts, 2005). Chapter 2 of this dissertation further delineates no-self as loss of meaning and as suffering in the daily living out (or integration) of the experience.

Defining “Self” and “Ego”

The term “self” refers to the whole individual—his or her personal identity, being, and experience. Currently, the American Psychological Association defines self as “consisting of all characteristic attributes, conscious and unconscious, mental and physical” (Vanden Bos, 2007, p. 827). “Ego” is also a term that refers to the self, specifically to “the conscious sense of self” (p. 316). For general purposes in this text, these definitions are used; however, the two words may have slightly different meanings among certain psychologists, authors, or researchers, as well as in different spiritual traditions. In these cases, the particular definition is provided.

Defining Enlightenment

The following is one definition of enlightenment:

All the greatest teachers from every tradition have said the same simple things: You are already free. You are already joined with the divine. You are already enlightened. Your very being is spirit itself. You are the way itself. In your realization of your own nothingness you have realized the nothingness itself. (McCloskey, 2004, p. 197)

This is an illustration of how it is often said that enlightenment is the ultimate in *nonattainment*. Not only are we already enlightened, but also in the nothing or void, there is nobody to become enlightened. It is described as a shift in awareness or perception that we are not separate—an awakening from the illusion of having a fixed, personal identity to realization of the

interconnectedness of all (or oneness; Adyashanti, 2002; Balsekar, 2002; Blackstone, 2007; Lumiere & Lumiere-Wins, 2003; Prendergast & Bradford, 2007; Walsh & Vaughan, 1980; Welwood, 2000; Wilber, 1995).

This shift from awareness of oneself as an individual to realization of oneness is also known as direct experience of “ever-present Nondual awareness” (Wilber, 2006, p. 74). Well-known author and transpersonal theorist Ken Wilber (1995) provided a rich explanation of nonduality:

When all things are nothing but god, there are then no things, and no god, but only *this*. No objects, no subjects, only this. No entering this state, no leaving it; it is absolutely and eternally and always already the case; the simple feeling of any and all states . . . prior to the split between inside and outside, prior to the seen and unseen, prior to the rise of worlds, ever present as pure Presence, the simple feeling of being: empty awareness as the opening or clearing in which all worlds arise ceaselessly. I-I is the box the universe comes in. Abiding as I-I, the world arises as before, but now there is no one to witness it. I-I is not “in here” looking “out there”: There is no in here, no out there, only this. It is the radical end of all geocentrism, all biocentrism, all sociocentrism, all theocentrism, because it is the radical end of all centricism, period. (pp. 309-310)

In other words, enlightenment as nondual awareness is sustained consciousness of oneness as selflessness and is enduring as present-moment being. It is also noted that the terms nondual wisdom and nondual awareness are also used to reflect a temporary accessing of nondual consciousness (Blackstone, 2007; Caplan, 2007; Fenner, 2007; Prendergast, 2003b; Puhakka, 2007; Wilber, 1995, 2006), which “expresses itself as and through a radiant heart (love) and illumined mind (wisdom) . . . experienced as being vast, free, spacious, heartfelt, and present-centered” (Prendergast, 2003a, p. 2).

Enlightenment and how to become enlightened are topics explored in and among the subjects of psychology, psychiatry, spirituality, anthropology, sociology, ecology, and philosophy, among others. In the past few centuries, articles, journals, anthologies, books, and volumes have been written on the subject. The term “enlighten” is synonymous with shedding

light on or informing what was previously unknown or dark. In the introduction to his edited book, *What is Enlightenment?*, J. White (1995), former Director of the Institute of Noetic Science, posited the following as the most important point to understand about enlightenment:

the value of mystical and transformative states is not in producing some new experience but in *getting rid of the experiencer*. Getting rid, that is, of the egocentric consciousness which experiences life from a contracted, self-centered point of view rather than the free, unbound perspective of a sage who knows he or she is infinity operating through a finite form. (p. xii)

This description illustrates where the experience of no-self fits into enlightenment as a process of “trans-egoic development” (Braud, 1998, p. 37) that extends “beyond the usual limits of ego and personality” (p. 37) toward interconnectedness or Oneness. For purposes of this dissertation, enlightenment is defined as “realization of the truth of Being” (J. White, 1995, p. xiii). The truth of Being is an enlightened state, wherein one “is beyond ego and all socially conditioned sense of “I”” (p. xiii) to the point where one can realize, perceive, or *Be* life as illuminated by truth of Oneness.

Enlightenment as Spiritual Development

Enlightenment can be understood as a process of going beyond the notion of self as a fixed, separate entity (Blackstone, 2007; Carter, 1990; Epstein, 1993; Puhakka, 1998; J. White, 1995; Wilber, 1995). In addition, transpersonal theorists generally agree that spiritual development involves going beyond the current functioning of ego toward oneness (Walsh, 1994; Washburn, 1988; Wilber, 1995). Spirituality is equated with people’s experiences of what is divine, pious, religious, mystical, or transpersonal (Ellwood, 1980; Happold, 1963/1984; James, 1902/1991; Otto, 1932/1960; Roberts, 1993; Stace, 1960/1987; Underhill, 1911/1974). There exists a multitude of definitions of spirituality; however, for purposes of this transpersonal, interreligious dissertation, I sought an open and inclusive conceptualization.

Edward Canda, a professor of social welfare at the University of Kansas, is author of books and numerous articles on spirituality as a holistic, integral aspect of the psychospiritual therapeutic process. Accordingly, he proposed an all-embracing definition of spirituality:

I conceptualize spirituality as the gestalt of the total process of human life and development, encompassing biological, mental, social, and spiritual aspects. It is not reducible to any of these components; rather, it is the wholeness of what it is to be human. This is the most broad meaning of the term. Of course a person's spirituality is concerned with the spiritual aspect of experience. In the narrow sense of the term spirituality, it relates to the spiritual component of an individual or group's experience. The *spiritual* relates to the person's search for a sense of meaning and morally fulfilling relationships between oneself, other people, the encompassing universe, and the ontological ground of existence, whether a person understands this in terms that are theistic, atheistic, nontheistic, or any combination of these. (1990, pp. 43-44)

As described above, spirituality is understood as inherent in all individuals and inclusive of all traditions and nontraditions. This is conducive to this dissertation research on the experience of no-self as both dissolution of self and as loss of meaning, without being limited by theism or to a particular tradition.

In addition, transpersonal theorists generally view enlightenment and spiritual development as a process and posit this in stages in order to help us understand and envision spiritual development. Chapter 2 presents no-self as mystical experience and as spiritual process by elucidating qualities and stages of growth in consciousness.

The Concept of No-self

Spiritual teachings and practices all over the world, from ancient to modern times, agree that a goal of spiritual development is loss or diminishing of individual self as represented by conditioned mind or ego (Epstein, 1993; E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987).

Spiritual traditions attend to the process of going beyond ego toward oneness through philosophy and practice. In Buddhist philosophy, the concept of *anatta* refers directly to no-self and addresses ending the human condition of *dukkha* (suffering; Loy, 2001; Michalon, 2001) by

dissolving self into the state of *nirvana* or enlightenment (Berkow, 2003; Carter, 1990; Hunt, 2007; Puhakka, 1998, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987). Therefore, no-self is not nonduality and it is not unity as oneness, but rather it is a process in enlightenment. Chapter 2 further clarifies and defines the concept of no-self as dissolution of ego and illustrates how a person may experience a loss of meaning and suffering in stages of mysticism prior to unity as oneness.

Related Literature and Rationale for the Study of No-self

Within the field of transpersonal psychology, theorists agree that the goal of transpersonal development and practice is to break down ego-centered values and beliefs toward dissolution of self (e.g., Braud, 1998; Kalff, 1983; Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992; Louchakova, 2004; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993; Washburn, 1988; Wilber, 1995). Self-transcendence is the goal of becoming enlightened (Loy, 1998; Puhakka, 1998), and the self not limited by ego has the capacity to become true or complete *Self*, alternately designated as Divine Self or Higher Self. The work of psychologists Jung (1964/1978), Assagioli (1965), and Firman and Gila (1997) and of philosophers Hussurl (1931/1960) and Hegel (1977) laid the foundation for current theories of a psychology of self and no-self.

Many theorists have discussed self in relation to no-self. For example, Puhakka (2007) wrote about dissolving the self, letting into nonduality as oneness, and the fear of dissolution of ego. Berkow (2003) proposed a psychology of no-thingness, explaining how seeing through self-conceptualization of self-as-object dissolves the illusions of self (and self-image) as a constructed form. Thus, in dissolving self, one may heal and know self as no-thing, not as an object of perception, but as inseparable and undivided oneness.

The concept of self is studied in and among numerous branches of psychology; therefore, there is a plethora of research on ego and self, including empirical research on self-concept and

spirituality in relation to disease and psychopathology. Theoretical phenomenology of self has been studied in relation to spiritual traditions, psychologies, and theories (e.g., Chirban, 1986; Engler, 1984, 1993; Hunt, 2007; Loy, 1998, 2001; Wilber, 2006). While analyses and theories of self related to no-self are helpful to therapists and to individuals interested in spiritual development, it is acknowledged that theories based on psychological or spiritual theory are not empirical.

An area of research most directly related to this investigation of no-self is the topic of mysticism, wherein mystical experience is defined as occurring in relation to the “art of union” (Underhill, 1914/1986, p. 23) with oneness. Within the field of mystical experience, several comprehensive reviews exist, such as those of Hood (1994), Lancaster (2004), and Wulff (2000). Additionally, comprehensive studies have demonstrated positive aspects of dissolution of ego and self transcendence in spiritual/mystical development (Hood, 1989; Koltko, 1989); however, these studies did not directly address the experience or the living out of the experience of no-self. Frysh (2007) attempted to study no-self in relation to adults who had grown up in households of spiritual teachers; however, she did not find evidence of no-self among participants. Puhakka (1998) performed a qualitative study of dissolving the self. Chapter 2 presents an outline of this study, which supported the theoretical view that spiritually mature individuals let go of the sense of self as separate; it also elucidated dissolution of self as a quality of a population with specific Zen practice among residents of a monastery.

Empirical research exists with regard to growth of higher states of consciousness (e.g., Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989) and spiritual transcendence (Hawkins, 2006; Hunt, 2007; Lancaster, 1993) has also been studied with regard to dissolution of ego. In addition to theories of self and no-self, there exists an abundance of writings regarding the beginning stages of

spiritual development (methodology, advice, theory, psychotherapeutic issues) and the ending stages (theory, viewpoints of enlightened individuals). It appears that the intermediate stage of spiritual development is a growing field of investigation both in transpersonal psychology and in spiritual development. While there is some empirical research regarding the intermediate stages and the penultimate phase of spiritual development, there appears to be little research on the experience of no-self or dark night as dissolution of self, as suffering, and as the loss of meaning, or as the living out of the experience.

Within this chapter and Chapter 2, no-self is discussed as mystical experience and as spiritual process through the writings of Hood (2006), James (1909/1967, 1902/1991), Myers (as cited in E. F. Kelly et al., 2007), Stace (1960/1987), and Underhill (1911/1974, 1914/1986). Mystical teachings and practices all over the world, from ancient to modern times, concur that one of the goals of the spiritual path is loss, death, or diminishing of individual self as represented by conditioned mind or ego (Epstein, 1993; E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007). In the literature review, no-self and ego-dissolution are reviewed within the contexts of Christian mysticism, the Buddhist Doctrine of No-self, and the Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism. These traditions were chosen due to the wide representation of ego dissolution in psychological literature. This knowledge sets the stage for understanding the experience of no-self as gradual or immediate dissolution of self.

Roberts (1993) described what happens when the self is no longer useful and one goes beyond the self into “life without a self” (p. 13), which she perceived as being

characterized by the falling away of self and coming upon “that” which remains when it is gone. But this going-out is an upheaval, a complete turnabout of such proportions it cannot possibly be missed, under-emphasized, or sufficiently stressed as a major landmark in the contemplative life. It is far more than the discovery of life without a self. The immediate, inevitable result is an emergence into a new dimension of knowing and being that entails a difficult and prolonged readjustment. The reflective mechanism of the

mind—or whatever it is that allows us to be self-conscious—is cut off or permanently suspended so the mind is ever held in a fixed no-moment out of which it cannot move. . . . The journey then, is nothing more, yet nothing less than a period of acclimating to a new way of seeing, a time transition and revelation as it gradually comes upon “that” which remains when there is no-self. This is not a journey for those who expect love and bliss, rather, it is for the hardy who have been tried in fire and have come to rest in a tough, immovable trust in “that” which lies beyond the known, beyond the self, beyond union, and even beyond love and trust itself. (Roberts, 1993, pp. 13-14)

While this description informed us as to what the process is and, in general, what can be expected, some questions may remain lingering in our minds: What was the actual initial experience of no-self? What was the lived experience of the new perception of knowing and being in everyday life? While there is existing literature on no-self, this dissertation on no-self as initial experience and as lived experience seeks to illuminate the experiential process of no-self and may contribute innovative qualitative research data to the field of spiritual development.

Declaration of Research Question

This research on the experience of no-self provided insight into the question, “What is it like for someone to have an experience of no-self as loss of meaning and as suffering and to live out the experience?” The concept of no-self appears in nondual traditions and in mysticism. Current spiritual, theological, and psychological literature addresses ego-dissolution in beginning and advanced stages of spiritual development. While there is some *literature* on individuals’ lived experiences of no-self as dissolution of ego (Berkow, 2003; Carter, 1990; Hunt, 2007; Puhakka, 1998, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987), there is little research on lived experiences of no-self as dissolution of ego. This exploratory research addressed this gap by elucidating people’s direct perception experiences of no-self as a dissolution of self which occurs in advanced spiritual development before the final stage of unity as oneness. The intuitive inquiry method was used to conceptualize, explain, and interpret participant interviews. In addition, grounded theory was used to explore the possibility of the data producing a new, empirically based theory and/or of

the data confirming the current writings of psychologists and enlightened individuals whose research is not empirically based. The research on no-self was an interreligious study; accordingly, participants were sought from diverse spiritual and cultural backgrounds and from diverse locations across the United States. Research findings may potentially be generalizable and of interest to spiritual and psychological practitioners, as well as to anyone going through living out the experience of no-self or who knows such a person. The dissertation research may progress the field of transpersonal psychology by contributing to interreligious, mysticism, and nondual literature and by increasing current understanding of dissolution of ego and discernment of signs and symptoms of no-self, with the goal of promoting, versus pathologizing, spiritual growth.

Overview of Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory study was to understand, describe, and discover the experience of no-self as the dissolution of egoic or illusory self and as loss of meaning and suffering. Data gathered from semistructured interviews and investigated through the intuitive inquiry method elucidated what it is like for someone to have an experience of no-self and to live out the experience. Participants were asked to describe an event or events of no-self, including how everyday life and their sense of self had changed in relation to the world.

The intuitive inquiry method is ideally suited to investigate complex dimensions of human experience. The exploration of the experience of no-self is a topic that requires in-depth, reflective discernment to conceptualize, explain, and interpret data; Anderson (1998) specifically designed the method to do just that. The method involves intuition and compassionate ways of knowing to guide the selection of the research topic, data analysis, and presentation of findings.

In addition, it uses a hermeneutic structure of five recursive cycles to provide structure and precision to the intuitive process (Anderson, 2004).

Anderson (1998, 2004) stated that the research topic chosen for the intuitive inquiry method must be one that is compelling for the researcher. The topic must also be one that the researcher is willing and able to reflect upon deeply; additionally he or she must be agreeable to allowing himself or herself to be personally transformed by the subject matter.

My dissertation topic has been literally and experientially claiming me at least since 1999, as I followed my heart intuition in life choices, including career and educational decisions, and as surety along my spiritual path. I can see and understand how everything in my life so far has articulated recent life situations right down to my current experiential and didactic involvement with no-self. I feel that somehow the universe has been propelling me throughout my entire life toward this time of writing and ultimately publishing my dissertation. I have known for almost 2 years that part of my purpose here as a human being is to clarify and elucidate qualities of advanced spiritual growth. The experience of no-self is currently my lived, spiritual reality. The topic is one that enlivens and honors my own experience.

The intuitive inquiry method is ideally suited for engagement with experiences of no-self as dissolution of ego, in that the method is intended for transformational topics of study and is ideal for exploring inexplicable, transpersonal experiences (Anderson, 1998). In addition, Anderson (2004) stated that the method has the potential to generate theory. As exploratory research, the study of the experience of no-self was viewed as having the potential to generate theory from the data. Despite the lack of empirical research on the experience of no-self, there exists a body of literature on no-self written by psychotherapists and enlightened individuals that is not grounded in research. Incorporation of grounded theory with intuitive inquiry provided a

pragmatic structure which through which to analyze the phenomena evidenced in participants' lived experiences of no-self; it also allowed new theory to emerge from this study and provided a potential foundation for further research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter delineated the concept of no-self as dissolution of ego and as loss of meaning and suffering within the context of enlightenment and spiritual development and outlined the study. Chapter 2 portrays literature related to no-self in mysticism and as spiritual experience in an effort to further elucidate the concept of no-self. The intuitive inquiry and grounded theory methods involved in this exploration of no-self are explained in detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Research results are presented in two chapters: a framework for transformation of the initial lenses is presented in Chapter 5, toward understanding the rectification of the lenses in the direction of theory put forward Chapter 6. The discussion of results is contained in Chapters 7 and 8.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is organized in the following manner: First, no-self is examined in relation to the enlightenment process and transpersonal psychology. Empirical and scholarly literature from psychology, religion, philosophy, and social service publications is then reviewed with the goal of identifying the gap in literature regarding the dissertation topic. Next, no-self is discussed as mystical experience and in spiritual traditions. Finally, three examples of awakening into no-self are provided as further evidence of the occurrence of no-self experiences and as basis for a discussion of living out the event.

Woven into this chapter are descriptions of no-self from literature, which illustrations serve to contribute to defining and clarifying the research topic. Included are scholarly references as well as writings of enlightened individuals who are often quoted as experts in mystical, spiritual, philosophical, or psychological literature. The writings of exemplars provide retrospective and experiential knowledge of no-self and enlightenment and further substantiate scholarly references, which are often prospective.

No-self in the Enlightenment Process

Transpersonal theorists agree that the point of transpersonal development (that of self developing beyond the mature adult ego) and of transpersonal practice (or inducing transpersonal experiences) involves transcendence of the ego (e.g., Braud, 1998; Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992; Louchakova, 2004; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993; Washburn, 1988; Wilber, 1995). They agree to this in general no matter how it is stated, and also they agree that transcending ego is achievable. Ego-centered values and beliefs are broken down as a “gateway for the experiences of the transpersonal” (Kalff, 1983, p. 103). Indeed, this may be true to the extent that Koltko (1989) suggested that one of the main goals of transpersonal practice “is to realize the intimately human

state of consciousness of ‘no-self’” (p. 491) and Puhakka (1998) stated that enlightenment or “self-transcendence is the universal aim of the spiritual quest” (p. 156). This leads to the notion of transcendental self, in which self is left behind in order to *be* the Divine Self (Loy, 1998).

There are many other terms used in lieu of enlightenment: illumination, liberation, self-realization, cosmic consciousness, pure silence, awakening, and pure consciousness, among others. In this paper, the term enlightenment is used whenever possible; however, different spiritual and psychological writers use other descriptive terms for enlightenment. In these cases, specific definitions are provided, as I would not wish to presume that all nondual or mystical writers or psychologists would substitute the term enlightenment for their expression. In addition, it is generally understood that enlightenment is possible (Bucke, 1901/1966; Deikman, 2000; McCloskey, 2004; Stace, 1960/1987; Washburn, 2000; J. White, 1995; Wilber, 2006) and that spiritual development and enlightenment can happen to anyone—the traditional and nontraditional believer, or nonbeliever (Adyashanti, 2002; Canda & Furman, 1999; James, 1902/1991; E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; King, 1984; Lancaster, 2004; Louchakova, 2004; Stace, 1960/1987; Wilber, 1995). This view is also contained within the Advaita texts and the teachings of the Buddha (Noss & Noss, 1994; H. Smith, 1959).

Defining No-self and the Experience of No-self

Walter Stace (1886 to 1967) was a British educator and philosopher who wrote on the subjects of mysticism, philosophy, and religion. In the book *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Stace (1960/1987) cited evidence from major spiritual traditions both in the East and the West that oneness with the Universal Self, the One, the Absolute, or God emerges after dissolution of self as individuality. He noted, with regard to the self, that it is “curious how the words ‘fade away’ and ‘melt away’ keep reappearing in the descriptions which we cull from different cultures,

times, lands, all over the world, without apparently being due to any mutual influence” (p. 119). In his writings, Stace clarified the process of “dissolution of individual self as the disappearance of the ‘I’ by its fading away into infinite being” (p. 121).

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, no-self was described as a process of the ending of suffering (Loy, 2001; Michalon, 2001) by dissolving self into nonduality (Berkow, 2003; Carter, 1990; Hunt, 2007; Puhakka, 1998, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987). No-self was also described as a dark night period wherein one experiences a loss of felt presence prior to unity as oneness (Roberts, 2005). Therefore, no-self is not unity as oneness and it is not nonduality, but rather it is a process in enlightenment. Other spiritual, philosophical, and psychological authors have further elucidated no-self by using similar terms. Sleeth (2007) stated that “the self is ‘in the way’ of the Self” (p. 39) and further elaborated that “only by letting go of” (p. 39) the false or illusory understanding of self is one able to find Self as truth and wisdom. Lancaster (2004) portrayed no-self as “detachment from the empirical self (the immediate sense of ‘I’)” (p. 107). Carter (1990) used the phrase, “the self we come to forget is the ego” (p. xxxii), and while Deikman (2000) described the spiritual path of learning to “forget the self” (p. 314), Berkow (2003) referred to it as “dissolving self-referencing” (p. 207). Additionally, Puhakka wrote about “dissolving the self” (1998, p. 135) and “the fear of disintegration of ego” (2007, p. 161). Hood (1994, 2002) discussed self-loss in mystical experience and posited that “unity devoid of attributes, entails the loss of the reflexive self” (2002, p. 2). These descriptions may connote a negative aspect of no-self; likewise, other authors have explained it as a “drastic process of unselfing” (Underhill, 1911/1974, p. 400); a “loss of individuality” (Stace, 1960/1987, p. 113); a “loss of ‘I’” (Brown, 1986, p. 276); a “getting rid . . . of the egocentric consciousness” (J. White, 1995, p. xii); and a

“‘metapathological’ crisis of loss of meaning, nihilistic despair, and death of feeling” (Hunt, 2007, p. 227).

The descriptions just discussed point toward the more extreme levels of distress that may result from experiences of no-self and which are the focus of this research. Additionally, J. White (1995) went so far as to say that enlightenment is when “the ego dies and you are reborn into life” (p. xxi), and Almaas (1988/1994) described it as a “divesting [of] ego, and personal consciousness itself, of all existence” (p. 471). This might lead to the conclusion that the ego actually dies; however, this may not be the case, as Epstein (1993) explained

belief in the ego as concretely existent is, in some sense, transferred to the belief in egolessness as concretely existent. It is not that ego disappears, but that belief in the ego’s solidity, the identification with ego’s representations, is abandoned in the realization of egolessness. (p. 123)

By way of further explanation, Washburn (2000) described transforming “the ego from within” (p. 201), and similarly, Epstein (1988) gave the explanation of “change and development within the ego” (p. 62).

Despite the cited descriptive differences, the word *dissolution* is synonymous with softening, breaking up, vanishing, disappearing, melting, and dispersing; thus, this discussion points to *no-self* as being defined as *dissolution of ego*. I believe that this definition is respectful of individual theoretical and theological differences and of writers’ creative license in description of what is essentially the ineffability of the experience of no-self. The term *dissolution of ego* also reflects the perception that “survival self is still needed to function in the world, but it must not be the boss if a different experience of reality is to be made possible” (Deikman, 2000, p. 311) in enlightenment.

For purposes of this study, no-self as dissolution of ego is viewed as a progression wherein ego or the internal, self-referent “I” dissolves. In congruence with developmental or

stage models of spiritual development, and as further elucidated in this chapter, an individual may over time or immediately perceive the world with no “I” or no-self, in that a person may have one or many experiences of no-self that dissolve personal “I.” An experience of no-self is defined as an occurrence or an event that elicits either instantaneous or gradual dissolution of ego; however, it is noted that this is a working definition. Further review of literature contained in this chapter delineates the experience of no-self, resulting in a more descriptive definition as including both no-self events and the living out of the experiences. This dissertation investigates the experience of no-self as dissolution of self and as loss of meaning and as suffering in advanced spiritual development prior to unity as oneness. The expanded definition of no-self as including both dissolution of self and the experiential living out of the darkness, void, and meaninglessness is also delineated as analogous to the most recent analysis of the definition of transpersonal psychology (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007).

Psychological, Developmental, and Spiritual Theories of Self

As discussed previously, the self is comprised of the whole human, as being and experience. “Self” with a capital “S” is understood as the self’s capacity to become complete or true Self not limited by ego. Engler (1984) stated that any clinician would “understand that all psychological growth comes about by being able to renounce outworn, infantile ties to objects and to give up or modify self-representations that have become restrictive, maladaptive or outgrown” (p. 26). The sense of “I” as ego produces a sense of self out of an objective sense of experience (Engler, 1993) This causes us to experience ourselves as real and present in time and space based on memories and current conscious internal and external input. This is a brief overview of psychological, developmental, and spiritual theories of self.

Many theorists have discussed self in relation to Self. Jung (1964/1978) developed a theory of Self as archetype involving the developmental process of achieving personal wholeness and meaning. Husserl's transcendental ego (1931/1960), Hegel's soul (1977) and Sartre's (1957) nonpositional consciousness are also theories inherently based on Self as archetype. Assagioli (1965) added to Jung's work to develop a model of the psyche that suggests a process of how self can access Higher Self, as the wisdom of the collective consciousness, in the process of going beyond self-actualization to self-realization. Firman and Gila (1997) described this process in the following manner: "This abiding dependence of 'I' upon Self amounts to an ontological union of 'I' and Self. . . . So complete is this union that it may be called 'nondual,' a unity transcending any sense of duality, isolation, or separation" (p. 45). The works of these psychologists and philosophers laid the foundation for current theories of a psychology of self and no-self.

Theories of Self Related to No-self

The study of self is discussed in and among the theories of self psychology, ego psychology, developmental theory, cognitive theory, object relations theory, dynamic systems theory, social psychology, cultural psychology, and consciousness theory. While it is not possible to examine all theories of self related to no-self, this section contains a broad review of some of the most relevant theories related to no-self. One such example is that of Berkow (2003), who proposed a psychology of no-thingness—a study of "the human being as that which is not-a-thing, not an object of perception" (p. 185). This model is based on several psychological and spiritual theories that one mistakenly self-conceptualizes one's identity and self-image from projections of a self-as-object who views relationships, things, and people as objects and as other, rather than knowing self as inherent in and related to all. In other words, seeing through

this self-construction dissolves the illusions of self (and self-image) as a constructed form, specifically as objectified self. The psychology of no-thingness addresses both the relationship of the psychotherapist to self (i.e., his or her own knowing of self as no-thing) and also redefines the psychotherapist's role with clients. Thus, Berkow's psychology of no-thingness addresses "dissolving self-referencing . . . and suffering" (2003, p. 207) and resolving anxiety regarding the unreal self as "split being" (p. 193). This can move the individual away from the illusion of projected reality, toward healing and knowing self as "unsplit reality" (p. 195) or no-thing.

Other examples of theories of self, which are related to no-self, include the following: transpersonal psychologists Engler (1984, 1993) and Loy (1998, 2001) performed comparative analyses of Buddhist and Western psychologies with regard to transcending ego. Blackstone (2006, 2007) discussed the intersubjectivity of nonduality. Wilber (2006) discussed self transcendence in relation to several different psychologies and theories, and Chirban (1986) presented a Christian contemplative view of the spiritual path. While analyses and theories of self related to no-self are helpful to therapists and to individuals interested in spiritual development, it is acknowledged that theories based on psychological or spiritual theory are not empirical.

In addition to the above texts on self related to no-self, there are countless historical texts, which have been written by or about the sages, mystics, and saints, and also contemporary texts (e.g., Adyashanti, 2002, 2003, 2006; Almaas, 1988/1994; Balsekar, 1989, 1993; Maharishi, 1967, 1967/1992), which present these individuals' lived wisdom on the subjects of enlightenment, nondual awareness, no-self, and the living out or integration of these experiences. These personal revelations may be closer in line with the proposed study of no-self, in that enlightened individuals may recognize and elucidate true experiences of no-self as dissolution of

ego as advanced stages of spiritual development. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to thoroughly review all previously cited texts and theories, the wisdom of such authors is referenced throughout this dissertation.

Empirical Studies of No-self

As noted above, the concept of self is studied in and among numerous branches of psychology. Therefore, there is a plethora of research on ego and on the concept of self. An area of research most directly related to this investigation of the experience of no-self is the topic of mysticism, wherein mystical experience is defined as occurring in relation to the “art of union” (Underhill, 1911/1974, p. 23) with oneness. Within the field of mystical experience, several comprehensive reviews exist, such as those of Hood (1994), Lancaster (2004), and Wulff (2000). Additionally, Hood’s (1989) examination established self-loss as the delimiting feature of unity experience, and Koltko (1989) cited numerous sources and studies that demonstrate a positive relationship regarding mystical/spiritual development, including deep spiritual experiences, and mental health. While these two comprehensive studies supported spiritual/mystical development as positive aspects of dissolution of ego and self transcendence, they did not directly address the experience of or the living out of no-self.

Kaisa Puhakka, a psychologist and author, performed a qualitative study of dissolving the self. This research involved investigating how the Rinzai Zen teachings of Zen Master Joshu Sasaki Roshi were being understood and implemented at the master’s monastery (Puhakka, 1998). In this study, Puhakka interviewed 12 people (3 nuns and 9 monks) who were staff and students of the Zen monastery and uncovered 11 themes. Reported themes were substantiated through spiritual, psychological, and philosophical references; not all themes were backed by quotes or descriptions from participants. Most themes concerned monastic life with regard to

aspects of the master's teachings. The theme of "self-transcendence" (1998, p. 156) related to dissolution of self. In this study, *dissolving* was defined as "that act of true love which is the total giving of one's being to the so called other" (p. 135). Puhakka reported that informants in the study described a common theme of dissolution of the self as a fluidity of self

where the self arises to meet and make relationship with the situation at hand, whether this be a task that demands attention or another person. When the situation passes, the self also passes. When a new situation arises, a self arises afresh to meet it. (p. 156)

This research supported the theoretical view that spiritually mature individuals let go of the sense of self as separate (e.g., Berkow 2003; Miller, 1994) and elucidated dissolution of self as a quality of a population with specific Zen practice and who live in a monastery. A limitation of this study was that the researcher did not state what method was used to discern themes, or describe the process. While this research elucidated a quality of no-self, future research may confirm permeable boundaries between self and other as an aspect of no-self and also elucidate qualities of no-self among those living in contemporary Western society.

Theoretical phenomenology of self related to spiritual transcendence has also been studied. One study is that of Louchakova (2007) who examined the phenomenology of self leading to ego transcendence. Other researchers have combined philosophy and empirical literature to study self and no-self. For example, Haskar (1991) combined moral philosophy and philosophy of the mind with empirical evidence arising from split-brain and multiple personality cases to examine no-self as evidence regarding the nature of self. Detailed review of two studies (Hunt, 2007; Lancaster, 1993), which combined mystical philosophy and empirical literature and which are most related to this study no-self, are presented next.

Brian "Les" Lancaster, a well-known British psychologist, author, and researcher, proposed a theory of self related to no-self, which supported the mystical view that "'I' exists only as a conditioned frame of reference for other mind events" (1993, p. 520). The author

compared empirical studies on forms of disassociation from memories (e.g., amnesia, blindsight), along with other neuropsychological research, with mystical philosophy and posited a model of how “I” is constructed. Lancaster suggested that representations of “I” are stored in memory as “I-tags” (1993, p. 518) and that conscious connections are made through a consciousness system, such as Gazzaniga’s (1988) left brain *interpreter*. Lancaster’s theory supported the mystical standpoint that “‘I’ exists only as a conditioned frame of reference for other mind events” (p. 520) and explained that the interpreter provides self-commentary to “unify a person’s experience” (p. 520). He proposed that I-tags enunciate how in no-self experience, “the sense of ‘I’ is devoid of real substance or continuity” (p. 522). A limitation of this study was the fact that limitations of cited empirical studies were unstated. A search of library databases did not provide evidence of acceptance of the *I-tag* notion by the scientific and spiritual communities; however, future empirical studies may confirm the theory.

Harry Hunt, a psychologist, teacher, and author of numerous articles on religion and mysticism, also performed an investigation which included empirical literature as a basis for theory. In an article entitled, “*Dark Nights of the Soul*”: *Phenomenology and Neurocognition of Spiritual Suffering in Mysticism and Psychosis*, Hunt (2007) viewed spirituality through the lens of classical mysticism dark night of the soul experiences as spiritual suffering or metapathology in a penultimate stage of spiritual development. This research addressed two questions: (a) How is directly felt realization of Being/ness even possible?, and (b) How is it that with experiential deletion of felt spiritual presence (as dark night or dissolution of self) people show characteristics paralleling schizophrenic and schizoaffective conditions? With regard these questions, Hunt cited psychological, phenomenological, and neurocognitive theory and research. One example of cited psychological empirical research is that of Hood et al. (2001), which study showed that

introvertive or “self-loss” (p. 693) mystical experiences are associated with psychological dysfunction—specifically, psychoticism, depression, and somatization of stress. Hunt cited additional empirical and theoretical studies through which to view the anhedonia at the core of the negative symptoms of schizophrenia in order to shed light on the penultimate dark nights of spirituality. In the dark nights,

a deepening of mystical witnessing reveals a nonsubstantiality *within* (author emphasis) previous enhancements of presence—only to be transformed into more subtle levels of unitive mysticism with a more complete letting go of the boundaries of self. We could say that schizophrenic anhedonia distills the despair of the spiritual dark night, without its previous tacit assurance of a steadily expanded presence. Indeed, some of the pain of the “dark night” comes from the memory of this contrast and the awareness of a seemingly complete loss of meaning in the very midst of its ostensibly authentic realization. This broader context “contains” spiritual despair as a “meta” version of the more total life context of suffering in the patient. (Hunt, 2007, p. 220)

In other words, the despair of the dark night seems to come from the comparison of emptiness within oneself compared to the felt presence and fullness of previous spiritual experiences, and the dark night seems to be an emptying process which serves to further dissolve self toward unity as oneness.

Hunt (2007) cautioned that the spiritual path toward enlightenment should be taken seriously, as this path may entail metapathology as “crisis of loss of meaning, nihilistic despair, and death of feeling” (p. 227) similar to early onset phases of schizophrenia and to its chronic terminus in anhedonia and social withdrawal. This is a process of “semantic satiation through which previous realizations of meaning undergo inevitable loss of significance” (p. 227) in order for emergence of the new, in cycles of emergence and satiation. Hunt grounded his study in psychological research and in historical mystical experience and elucidated qualities of dark night experiences; however, it is unclear whether some of his perceptions came from literature or from personal experience. Hunt’s study is pertinent to this research in that it elucidates qualities

of dark night and dissolution of self as experiential deletion of felt spiritual presence and loss of meaning. Future research may substantiate Hunt's findings.

There is one dissertation that attempted to study no-self. Frysh (2007) published a qualitative psychological dissertation titled, *The Experience of Self: An Exploration of the Understanding Gained as a Result of Growing Up in the Household of a Spiritual Teacher*. This heuristic research included investigating sense of self or of no-self through in-depth accounts of 6 adult coresearchers and resulted in 13 themes that arose as a result of being raised by a spiritual teacher. Two emergent themes related to sense of self: "sense of self influenced by parents' teachings" (p. 143) and "trying to find independent self" (p. 145). While Frysh viewed no-self as pertinent to her study of self, and briefly cited the no-self concept as relevant to two participants' spiritual traditions, she did not find evidence of the experience of no-self among any of the 6 coresearchers. Results of this study suggested the importance of spirituality in raising children. A major limitation was the small sample size of 6 participants. In addition, in concluding remarks Frysh (2007) suggested that there was a large gap in the literature regarding the understanding of the psychospiritual experience of self/no-self of children raised in households with spiritual teachers. It appeared that the author did not perform a broad literature search of no-self; therefore, perhaps her specifically identified lack of literature (and small sample size) may have accounted for the absence of no-self as an emergent theme.

There exists an abundance of peer-reviewed articles and books regarding no-self as dissolution of ego in the beginning stages of spirituality (and the literature review presents evidence of this). There are also some articles and books authored by or about enlightened individuals, including anthologies of interviews of highly-regarded spiritual teachers, whom would be considered near the end of spiritual development. However, there is little research on

the stage of spiritual development prior to unity as oneness. Additionally, the conclusion of a thorough investigation of empirical research of no-self is that it appears that there are few qualitative and quantitative studies on the topic of no-self as experience, and that there are no intuitive inquiry investigations of no-self as dissolution of ego. This research on no-self as initial experience and as lived experience was viewed as having the potential to contribute innovative qualitative research data to the field of spiritual development and to illuminate experiential no-self.

No-self as Mystical Experience

Defining Mysticism and Mystical Experience

Evelyn Underhill (1875 to 1941) was a Christian contemplative, psychologist, and the author of many writings on mysticism and religious practice, including the classic, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. In this text, Underhill (1914/1986) defined mysticism as “the art of union with Reality” (p. 23). She noted,

Mysticism, then is not an opinion: it is not a philosophy. It has nothing in common with the pursuit of occult knowledge. On the one hand it is not merely the power of contemplating Eternity[;] on the other, it is not to be identified with any kind of religious queerness. It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God: the achievement of here and now of the immortal heritage of man. Or . . . it is the art of establishing his conscious relation with the Absolute. (Underhill, 1911/1974, p. 81)

Mystics are not only the sages of the great religious and traditions of the world (e.g., Lao Tsu, Buddha, Muhammad, the Vedic sages, Jesus, Moses, and the prophets), but also, the mystic is someone who has achieved or who is pursuing communion or conscious awareness of the unitive state. Additionally, Hood (2006) described both the nonduality and the paradoxicality of mysticism by stating that it is self-authenticating in that it can be both “a self-fulfilling and self-effacing experience of oneness” (p. 135).

Over the past decade there have been a wide variety of definitions of mystical experience. At one extreme is the intensity of the experience in that the event “leads always to an upheaval of the total personality” (Neumann, 1948/1968, p. 381). Others, such as Scharfstein (1973), have referred to mysticism as an ordinary everyday occurrence. Hood (2006) stated that “there are two forms of mysticism: one integral to any and all faith traditions and another that can emerge out of and be independent of any faith tradition” (p. 132), a distinction that is not always recognized. Therefore, in accordance with the holistic definition of spirituality, mystical experience is not linked to the interpretation of any particular spiritual view or the interpretation of any religious school or tradition; it is defined as an experience that is “self-authenticating for the mystic in all its ineffability” (Hood, 2006, p. 135).

Qualities of Mystical Experience

William James (1875 to 1941), often acknowledged as the father of transpersonal psychology, wrote a general ontological description of the mystical state in the classic psychology of religion text, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1991). He proposed “four marks” (p. 292) present in mystical experience: ineffability (defies verbal expression), noetic quality (provides intellectual insight), transience (not sustainable for long periods of time), and passivity (sense of lack of personal will or of having been acted upon by a higher power). Although James wrote from an objective and third-person view, his contributions to the field of transpersonal and spiritual psychology include the belief that religious experience should be studied in order to understand human experience.

Of the above four qualities of mystical experiences, James (1902/1991) stressed *ineffability* and *noetic* as being the key traits, qualities which E. F. Kelly and Grosso (2007) described as merging “together in conjunction with states of consciousness that somehow pass

beyond all ordinary forms of sensation and cognition and yet seemingly come into contact or even unity with some sort of higher reality” (p. 499). James’ writings on mysticism serve as historical anthologies elucidating phenomenological mystical experience, as do the writings of many others, including psychiatrist Bucke (1901/1966), educator Happold (1963/1984), philosopher Stace (1960/1987), and psychologist Underhill (1911/1974).

Mysticism as a Spiritual Process

In general, transpersonal psychologists and theorists view enlightenment as a process; many of these writers posit their own stages and describe qualities. Some enlightened individuals, who state that there is no one who actually becomes enlightened and that there is nothing to do, may seek to describe the path in stages. While stage theory only represents a prospective or retrospective view of spiritual development (a view which may depend on the writer’s own spiritual growth) it is recognized that stages can help us to understand and envision the process. Within the scope of this paper, Underhill’s (1911/1974) stages of mysticism, as a practical and transcendental spiritual process, are explored.

Evelyn Underhill’s stages of mysticism. Underhill (1911/1974) described the mystic as having a passion for love dedicated to living in union with oneness. Wilber (2006) suggested that the reason Underhill’s spiritual stages continue to stand the test of time is because her research represents a survey of “the stages of felt experiences or *conscious events in the “I” space*, as apprehended and seen from within, as it unfolds over time under the discipline of spiritual practice (*or meditative states training*)” (p. 96). Additionally, her research includes mystical experiences of some of the most highly regarded saints and sages (Wilber, 2006).

In Underhill’s (1911/1974) description of the spiritual way of the mystic, she proposed four developmental stages of consciousness, the first of which is the “Awakening of the Self”

(p. 176), an *unselfing* in which a person's sense of self enlarges to encompass the world and the Absolute, Love, or God. The next stage involves "Purification of the Self" (p. 198), a cleansing, stripping, and purgation of the old self—mortification of attachments and desires—and a remaking of character in preparation for the next stages. In stage three, "The Illumination of the Self" (p. 232), the person is illuminated with and awakened to Divine Presence on the experiential level, often with visual and heightened sensual perception.

Most pertinent to this dissertation research is the fourth stage. Underhill (1911/1974) called this stage "The Dark Night of the Soul" (p. 380), which is a descriptive term taken from the famous poem written by St. John of the Cross (trans. 1908; trans. 2002), a 16th Century Spanish Catholic friar and mystic. It is also the name of several book translations and commentaries on the verse, and the term *Dark Night of the Soul* is widely recognized as a desolate time in spiritual growth. Underhill views the period of dark night of the soul as the stage before union with oneness. As a second stage of purgation, it is characterized by inner darkness, dryness, and detachment of the senses and of spiritual consciousness. This stage is described as "a drastic process of unselfing . . . not likely to take place without stress" (1911/1974, pp. 400-401). The dark night or unselfing is typically a gradual process, although it can be quite prominent. It is psychologically described as "an example of the operation of the law of reaction from stress. It is a period of fatigue and lassitude following a period of sustained mystical activity" (p. 382). The purpose of this profound level of emptying is preparation for the fifth and final stage, "The Unitive Life" (p. 413) described as living in the transcended reality of love, union, and oneness.

Walter Stace's classifications of mystical experience. Walter Stace (1886 to 1967) was a British philosopher who wrote on perennialism and mysticism. Stace (1960/1987) identified five

principle features of mystical experience, which concurred with writings of James (1902/1991) and Underhill (1911/1974), among other writers. These five features are (a) the objectivity or reality of the experience, or the noetic quality; (b) the generation of strong positive feelings (e.g., joy, peace, blessedness) in the experience; (c) apprehension or connection to a sense that the experience is divine or sacred; (d) the paradoxicality in and of the experience; and (e) the ineffable quality of description. Stace also grouped mystical experiences into two types: introvertive and extrovertive, with the five principle features being present in both. The extrovertive type is common in the earlier stages of mysticism, with the distinguishing feature that ordinary reality remains after the experience, but now with apprehension of unity or oneness of all and also of expansion of self as nature or an object. An example of this type would be a sense of merging into an aspect of nature, for instance a tree; and in the unity as tree and self, experiencing an inner sense of being and perceiving as tree-ness.

The second type, introvertive mystical experiences, occur mostly in more advanced stages of mysticism and are easily identified as a more extreme version of the extrovertive type. These events alter one's perception of reality with resulting perception of pure unity consciousness. Stace (1960/1987) explained,

One may also say that the mystic gets rid of the empirical ego whereupon the pure ego, normally hidden, emerges into the light. The empirical ego is the stream of consciousness. The pure ego is the unity which holds the manifold of the stream together. *This undifferentiated unity is the essence of the introvertive mystical experience.* (p. 87)

Stace emphasized "the dissolution of individuality" (p. 119) as a transformation of the sense of self and noted the paradox of introvertive mystical experiences, which, because they have no content, are "often spoken of by the mystics as the Void or as nothingness, but also as the One and as the Infinite" (p. 86).

In a comprehensive evaluation of writings of Buddhist, Christian, Sufi, and Hindu mystics, and also of Bucke (1901/1966), James (1902/1991), and Underhill (1911/1974), Stace (1960/1987) identified seven characteristics of introvertive mystical experiences:

1. The Unitary Consciousness; the One, the Void; pure consciousness
2. Nonspatial, nontemporal
3. Sense of objectivity or reality
4. Blessedness, peace, etc.
5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine
6. Paradoxicality
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable. (pp. 131-132)

It is notable that characteristics 3 through 7 are identical to characteristics of extrovertive mystical experiences (Stace, 1960/1987). In addition, the nonspatial, nontemporal characteristic is not present in extrovertive mystical experience, suggesting that

the extrovertive experience, although we recognize it as a distinct type, is actually on a lower level than the introvertive type; that is to say, it is an incomplete kind of experience which finds its completion and fulfillment in the introvertive kind of experience. The extrovertive kind shows a partly realized tendency to unity which the introvertive kind completely realizes. In the introvertive type the multiplicity has been completely obliterated and therefore must be spaceless and timeless, since space and time are themselves principles of multiplicity. (Stace, 1960/1987, p. 132)

This quote raises two essential points, the first being that extrovertive events result in *understanding* of unity consciousness as the “Unifying Vision” (Stace, 1960/1987, p. 131). In contrast, introvertive mystical experiences result in *perception* of the nature of unity consciousness as oneness and the void, or as Stace stated, of “universal self or pure ego or pure consciousness” (p. 133). Stace elucidated the second point by stating that, in introvertive events,

Consciousness or mind is a higher category than life, the top rung of the ladder of life. The extrovertive mystic perceives the universal life of the world, while the introvertive [mystic] reaches up to the realization of a universal consciousness or mind. (p. 133)

In other words, Stace viewed introvertive mystical experiences as being of a more advanced type than extrovertive events. This is in concurrence with Underhill’s (1911/1974) fourth stage and

with her view of the time of dark night of the soul as being the spiritual juncture before union with oneness.

Research on Stace's classifications of mystical experience. Stace's (1960/1987) phenomenologically researched classes and qualities of mysticism have been conceptually supported by perennialist philosophers (e.g., Forman, 1990) and challenged by contextualist philosophers (e.g., Katz, 1978). Chapter 7 presents a discussion of study results in relation to this philosophical debate in a section entitled, A Brief Discussion of Perennialist and Contextualist Philosophy Related to Participant Experience of No-self.

Additionally, the mysticism model has been empirically studied, most notably through research by Ralph Hood and colleagues (Hood, 1989, 1997; Hood et al., 2001; Hood, Morrison, & Watson, 1993; Hood & Williamson, 2000) through the use of the Hood Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975). This scale is a renowned measure of mystical experience based on Stace's work and worded so as to avoid specific religious language.

Of interest with regard to this discussion of no-self is recent research by Hood et al. (1993) and Hood and Williamson (2000) which identified both an introvertive factor, defined as "devoid of content" (Hood & Williamson, 2000, p. 234) of mystical experience, and also defined an extrovertive factor, defined as "unity amidst diversity" (2000, p. 234) of mystical experience—concurrent with Stace's (1960/1987) model. Both studies also identified an interpretation factor of mystical experience. Hood and Williamson, additionally, found ineffability correlated to the introvertive factor, with the conclusion that "ineffability is at least sometimes more indicative of the introvertive" (2000, p. 234) mystical experience, defined as being "devoid of content" (p. 234), than of the extrovertive type. This finding is in contention

with Stace's (1960/1987) view of ineffability as being characteristic of both the introvertive and extrovertive types.

Research by Hood et al. (2001) confirmed and extended the previously cited 1993 and 2000 studies by employing a three-factor solution to the Hood Mysticism Scale, which involved three versions of the scale—the original nontheological version plus two other language versions with explicit reference to *God* or *Christ*—along with several psychological measures. These versions were given as of part two studies involving questionnaires given to university students in the United States and Iran, with a Persian translation available to Iranians. This research showed evidence of the common core (Forman, 1990) aspect of Stace's (1960/1987) work, lending empirical support to the debate that introvertive mysticism can be found within all major faith traditions. In addition, concurrent with Stace's research, the introvertive factor was linked with qualities of unity and timelessness. The Hood et al. (2001) research also “provided a cross-cultural confirmation for the conclusion that mystical experience can predict psychological dysfunction” (p. 703), specifically as psychoticism, depression, and somatization of stress.

Empirical research on mysticism using the Hood Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975) is currently focused on addressing limitations of previous research. Procuring religious and demographic diversity among sample populations may correct issues with adequate sampling, especially regarding median age of sample populations. This also relates to recent work in constructing and validating variations of the scale that uses specific language of different religious orientations. Stace's (1960/1987) work classifies mystical experience in two categories, and not as stages of spiritual development. Perhaps a future version or versions of the Mysticism Scale, or another measure, will be able to confirm aspects of mystical experience not only among people from different religious traditions and no tradition but also among people of all ages

whom are at different stages of spiritual development. This level of quantitative research may contribute to contextualizing stages of spiritual development.

The Experience of No-self as an Advanced Stage of Spiritual Development

E. F. Kelly and Grosso (2007) described the negative aspect of introvertive experiences as being “highlighted by descriptors such as ‘emptiness,’ ‘void,’ ‘obscurity,’ ‘darkness,’ ‘nothingness,’ ‘silence,’ which recur throughout the mystical literature” (p. 507) and are “common across all spiritual traditions” (Lancaster, 2004, p. 107). As noted in the previous section, these experiences alter one’s perception of reality by transforming or dissolving self (Hunt, 2007; Lancaster, 2004; Stace, 1960/1987) with resulting perception of unity as oneness (Hunt, 2007; E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987; Underhill, 1911/1974). Furthermore, they occur in advanced stages of mystical and spiritual development (Hunt, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987; Underhill, 1911/1974).

Harry Hunt (2007) called the advanced stage of “accelerated ‘unselfing,’ or loss of egocentricism” (p. 226) the “penultimate stage of mystical experience, prior to its classic completing in states of all encompassing felt unity” (p. 213). In this penultimate stage, Hunt agreed with other writers (e.g., E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; Roberts, 1993; Stace, 1960/1987; Underhill, 1911/1974) that the mystic may encounter a form of suffering and loss of meaning, such that he or she may experience “a felt dissolution of the ordinary social-personal sense of self” (p. 213) and numinous experience. This emptiness is felt as a painful diminishment of spiritual presence or God/Being/Isness, which is remembered and compared to prior experiences at more expansive, positive, or illuminating stages of spiritual development. Hunt posited that the reason for the emptiness is due to

A process of felt deletion [which] can be understood as a kind of inevitable semantic satiation, with progressively more subtle levels of realization initially experienced more

as the loss of previous more definite understandings rather than as a “something.” . . . Specific felt meanings must disappear under any sustained gaze, which alone may also allow their later reemergence in renewed forms. . . . They only give way, if they do, when the individual . . . sees and surrenders unconscious boundaries of self and world that have stood in the way of the more positive subtleties of nondual unity. (p. 214)

In other words, as unconscious layers of limited self dissolve, an individual can experience levels of Being that he or she was previously unaware of. As a result of the penultimate stage of loss of self or egocentricism (Hunt, 2007), compassion, empathy, and equanimity emerge (Hunt, 2007; Lancaster, 2004)

Mysticism and Stage Theories of Growth in Consciousness

Myers theory of Subliminal Self. F. W. H. Myers (1843 to 1901) was a psychologist and author of numerous books related to psychical and mystical research and on consciousness and personality. E. F. Kelly (2007), E. F. Kelly and Grosso (2007), and E. W. Kelly (2007) have provided a comprehensive examination of Myers’ theory of the Subliminal Self, including analysis of critics and proponents; therefore, the following review is based on these authors’ analysis of Myers’ numerous, but now scarce, publications. Critical to this discussion is a review of key definitions. Subliminal Self is a theory of consciousness that attempts to view the mind and the personality as paradoxical unity and multiplicity (E. W. Kelly, 2007). Myers believed in eternal Unity; in his writings, the terms *Individuality*, or *Self*, refer to the “overarching unity of the psyche” (E. F. Kelly, 2007, p. 590). The terms *personality* or *self* refer to outwardly perceived and transient memories, ordinary awareness, or supraliminal self and the endless number of selves and personal patterns (E. W. Kelly, 2007). There is only one Self, and while the self appears as infinite varieties of Self, the self can never contain all the pieces of the Self. The term *subliminal consciousness* refers to psychological processes that are beyond ordinary awareness. The lower-case term *subliminal self* is the occurrence of ordinary memory, while the *Subliminal Self*, alternately called *Individuality*, refers to the greater Self (E. W. Kelly, 2007).

The Subliminal Self is composed of supraliminal and subliminal functional areas and systems (E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007). The ordinary supraliminal self, only a small part of the psyche, occurs in reaction to the environment; additionally, a subliminal self or subliminal selves may also occur under unusual conditions. The Subliminal Self theory is an attempt to affirm that mind is both unity and multiplicity through increased knowledge; hence, it is a *tertium quid* theory. Myers' theory proposes that we all have an "all-inclusive consciousness embracing the entirety of our conscious mental activity both supraliminal and subliminal, evolutive and dissolutive" (2007, p. 588). Supraliminal consciousness functions along and "possibly together with one or more subliminal streams of consciousness" (2007, p. 590) as part of Subliminal Self, as the overall unity of the psyche or Individuality.

Is higher-order consciousness possible? Independent of Myers' theory (as cited in E. F. Kelly et al., 2007), James' (1900) psychical research also showed that higher-order consciousness is plausible and is compatible with mundane consciousness (E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007). Additionally, James (1909/1967) concluded that this higher consciousness occurs regularly in conjunction with mystical experiences. He noted,

Those who have had such experiences distinctly enough and often enough to live in the light of them remain quite unmoved by criticism, from whatever quarter it may come, be it academic or scientific, or be it merely the voice of logical common sense. They have had their vision and they *know*—that is enough—that we inhabit an invisible spiritual environment from which help comes, our soul being mysteriously one with a larger soul whose instruments we are. (p. 267)

In other words, people who have had mystical experiences cannot be dissuaded from knowing that they are proof of higher consciousness. E. F. Kelly (2007) saw that Myers' and James' (1900, 1909/1967) reports are evidence of transcendence of supraliminal self compounded by the unanimous voices of numerous mystical traditions. In echoing the opinions of critics of Myers' theory of Subliminal Self, E. F. Kelly (2007) also acknowledged that the

evidence is inconclusive in demonstrating a higher stream of consciousness. However, he does believe that the research of Myers and James “have identified a more or less correct position of the overall structure and dynamics of the human psyche” (p. 595) and that, although unproven, Myers’ theory of subliminal self is a “viable and useful working model capable of guiding further research” (p. 595).

The seven levels of conscious of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917 to 2008) began his worldwide spiritual teaching in 1958 and continued to promote techniques of human development toward higher states of consciousness for about 50 years. Three of Maharishi’s (1967/1992) seven states of consciousness consist of the typical states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. In addition, he proposed a Hindu Vedic psychology of development toward four higher states of consciousness: transcendental or pure consciousness, cosmic consciousness, God consciousness, and unity consciousness. The fourth state, transcendental or pure consciousness, may be experienced intermittently by stilling the mind, as through Maharishi’s (1967/1992) techniques of Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the TM Sidhis (or spiritual teachings; A. Campbell, 1974; Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989).

The fifth state, cosmic consciousness, is the first of the permanent *stages* of enlightenment (Maharishi, 1967). This stage narrows the separation between self and Self (A. Campbell, 1974; Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989). The conclusion of this state is stable establishment of an individual’s field of awareness in the cosmic or universal “field of pure intelligence or pure consciousness, as the ‘Self’” (Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989, p. 314). In the resulting sixth state, called God consciousness (Maharishi), there is no separation between self and Self—The individual perceives the world through God consciousness or Self as pure consciousness (A. Campbell; Dillbeck & Alexander). The seventh state, Unity consciousness

(Maharishi), is the final stage of development of consciousness, wherein “one is said to fully realize one’s own nature and also all of physical existence as expressions of an underlying unified field, the field of pure consciousness” (Dillbeck & Alexander, p. 318). Numerous theoretical and empirical research studies have supported growth of higher states of consciousness, as posited by Maharishi, toward physiological and psychological health (e.g., Alexander, 1988; Alexander, Davies, & Dixon, 1990; Alexander, Heaton, & Chandler, 1994; Banquet & Sailhan, 1974; Gelderloos, Hermans, Ahistrom, & Jacoby, 1990; Hebert & Lehman, 1977; Travis, 1994).

Hawkins’ calibrated levels of consciousness. David R. Hawkins is a renowned psychiatrist, author, researcher, teacher, and lecturer. Hawkins’ (2006) research included mapping “evolutionary levels of consciousness . . . in order to achieve more optimal levels of consciousness” (p. xviii). He posited a scale of (a) eight levels of falsehood, as lower levels of consciousness; (b) eight levels of truth, as higher levels of consciousness that are to be transcended; and (c) a final “Self” (p. 370) level. Hawkins viewed the Self level of enlightenment as being statistically rare; furthermore, he said that prior to the final level, “the illusion of the void “ (p. 243) is a phase to be avoided:

The limitation (incompleteness) of the Void is reached as a consequence of intense dedication to the pathway of negation: however, [what is] missing is the realization that . . . Divine Love . . . is the primary quality or essence of Presence. It is profound and unconditional, with no subject or object. It is not an emotionality, but a condition or a state that is liberating rather than limiting. The Void . . . is comparable to infinite, empty, conscious space. (p. 300)

In other words, the void is not an endpoint, but a phase that culminates in Allness. Hawkins posited that “all students should be instructed ahead of time as to how to handle very advanced states of consciousness” (pp. 302-303), because knowing what happens in the end is essential—”otherwise, there is an unconscious resistance due to fear or ignorance” (p. 303). Thus, one can

avoid the deceptive power of the appearance of the void as dark or as nothingness, rather than as Love.

Hawkins' (2006) calibrated levels of consciousness provide a practical guide to understanding evolution and surrender of the ego at all stages; however, it is unclear whether what is identified as necessary for transcending ego at each level is based on opinion rather than scientific verity. In addition, a review of literature did not uncover dissenting opinions or acceptance of Hawkins' theory.

Myers' theory (as cited in E. F. Kelly et al., 2007) of subliminal self was presented earlier in this chapter because of its historical significance as being one of the earlier and more famous studies and because of its relevance to the study of mysticism. Hawkins' calibrated levels and the Maharishi's seven levels were presented due to the fact that these theories have related empirical research. It is also noted that there are numerous theories published in peer-reviewed, philosophical, religious, and psychological books and articles regarding stages in spiritual growth and mysticism (e.g., Brown & Engler, 1986a, 1986b; Cook-Greuter, 1990; Hixon, 1984; Koplonitz, 1984; Washburn, 1988; Wilber, 1986). It seems that many people who have experienced awakenings seek to analyze their spiritual development or to provide insight for others who may follow a similar path. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an anthology of stages or theories of consciousness; however, significant theories presented in this text represent an overview of highly regarded mystics and researchers.

No-self in Spiritual Traditions

This section briefly outlines how different spiritual traditions conceive of the concept of no-self. Watts (1995) explained,

As one and the same pain may be described either as a hot pang or as a cold sting, so the description of this experience may take forms that seem to be completely opposed. . . .

But as the beating of the heart may be regarded as something that *happens* to you or something that you *do*, depending on the point of view, so another will feel that he has experienced, not a transcendent God, but his own inmost nature. One will get the sense that his ego or self has expanded to become the entire universe, whereas another will feel that he has lost himself altogether and that what he called his ego was never anything but an abstraction. One will describe himself as infinitely enriched, while another will speak of being brought to such absolute poverty that he owns not even his mind and body, and has not a care in the world. (pp. 16-17)

The above quote illustrates the variety of perceptions of no-self. Mystical teachings and practices all over the world, from ancient to modern times, concur that one of the goals of the spiritual path is loss, death, or diminishing of individual self as represented by conditioned mind or ego (Epstein, 1993; E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; Lancaster, 2004). Regardless of terminology such as ego death, dissolution of self, or the term *fauna* in Sufism, the process is the same, in that the self-reflexive *I* “is a barrier to more spiritually effective forms of consciousness” (Lancaster, 2004, p. 107).

Requisite for this interreligious study is an understanding of each participant’s spiritual tradition(s) or nontradition (Lancaster, 2004; Sahadat, 1985; Wulff, 2000). While it is beyond the scope of this section to review all mystical traditions, Chapters 5 and 6 present the mystical perspectives of all participants, with omitted traditions or nontraditional spiritualities portrayed in relation to individual participant stories. What follows here are brief reviews of no-self and ego dissolution in Christian mysticism, the Buddhist Doctrine of no-self, and the Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism. These three traditions were chosen for a closer examination of dissolution of self due their wide representation in psychological literature. Quotes from individual mystics were added as poignant depictions of no-self.

Christian Mysticism

The classic poem *Dark Night of the Soul*, written by St. John of the Cross (1542 to 1591), is translated to describe varying degrees of desolation and despair on the spiritual path to God or the Kingdom of Heaven. St. John of the Cross observed the following:

The greatest affliction of the sorrowful soul in this state, is the thought that God has abandoned it, of which it has no doubt; that he has cast it away in darkness as an abominable thing . . . the shadow of death and the pains and torments of hell are most acutely felt, that is, the sense of being without God” (trans. 1908, pp. 84-85)

It is noted that the dark night is not thought of as evil (May, 2004); rather, St. John’s spiritual journey was one of burning desire for union with God as the Beloved. The path was one of death of all desires and senses and an emptying of intellect and form of God (Ullman & Reichenberg-Ullman, 2001).

The dark nights consist of two basic parts: the dark night of the spirit and the dark night of the senses, which overlap and which may occur together (May, 2004; St. John of the Cross, trans. 2002; Underhill, 1911/1974). It is in the passive dark night of the spirit that one releases attachments to memories, ways of being, thought processes, and desires as false gods. It is a time of experiencing self as nothing, a void of earlier perceptions of God, and an emptying of satisfaction with God and self as imperfections. It is a process characterized by *letting go* and, thus, it may be experienced by individuals on a continuum as being a fearful and painful process to a more gentle process of releasing from rigidly held beliefs and into spiritual poverty.

Other writers have sought to find a doctrine of no-self in Christian theology. Three such examples (Cousins, 1990; Roberts, 2005; Zum Brunn, 1990) are presented as illustration of a common theme of no-self found in Christianity. Cousins (1990) stated that it is widely accepted in mysticism that “not-self” (p. 66) occurs as superficial self diminishes from consciousness. In an analysis of the writings of Meister Eckhart (1260 to 1328), the writer noted that the purpose of

what Eckhart described as the desert, or internal poverty, is to strip the mystic of everything, including God. This emptiness and detachment is the divine abyss and negation of superficial self wherein there “is only the not-self” (Cousins, 1990, p. 69).

Zum Brunn (1990) reviewed the writings of Marguerite Porete, a 13th to 14th century Christian mystic who was burned at the stake for heresy. The author stated that Porete viewed the self as an individual whose purpose is to become God; as such, self is less than nothing when attached to self (selfish). In wishing for and desiring Love, one annihilates selfish will and discovers freedom from a self that dictates actions, desires, and fears. This annihilation causes the individual to become one with God through Love; thus, Porete viewed God as Trinity: the Lover, Beloved, and Love.

Bernadette Roberts (1991, 1993, 2005) is author of three books on no-self from the Christian contemplative perspective. She is a former Carmelite nun with a master’s degree in education and has also worked as a teacher. In her book, *The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey*, Roberts (1993) described not only her own experience of no-self but also her search for a doctrine of no-self in Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

After living in the unitive state with God for more than 20 years, Roberts (1993) experienced an emptiness of self, along with the disappearance of a personal God. “What remained was not known. There was no life, no will, no energy, no feelings, no experiences, no within, no spiritual or psychic life. Yet, life was somewhere, because all else went on as usual” (p. 87). Roberts described her terror of living in the silence as the void of the unknown she called no-self, a term not used in Christian theology. In her search for the meaning of her difficult experience of no-self, the closest she could come to finding a Christian doctrine of no-self

appeared within the dark night writings of St. John of the Cross. She also equated suffering to loss of self in the act of surrendering and viewed the life of Christ as illustration of this concept.

The Buddhist Doctrine of Non-self

He is a bhikkhu [Buddhist devotee living a virtuous life] who has no attachment. He who has no thought of “I” and “mine” whatever toward his mind and body, he who grieves not for that which he has not, he is, indeed, called a bhikkhu. (Naranda Thera, 1963/1993, pp. 278-279)

At the core of the Buddha’s *dharma* (teaching) are the concepts of *The Four Noble Truths*, which writings address the issue of seeking happiness and avoiding suffering (Dalai Lama, 1997; Michalon, 2001; H. Smith, 1959). The essence of the First Noble Truth lies in recognizing that life is *dukkha* or suffering, due to perception of a sense of separate self. In the second, the cause of *dukkha* is *samsara* (the cycle of death and rebirth) and attachment to the pursuit of happiness. The Third Noble Truth teaches that the end of suffering lies in *nirvana* or enlightenment—which everyone can obtain via the Fourth Noble Truth, the path of leading a compassionate life. The Noble Eightfold Path is instruction in the way of leading a virtuous life.

Another important concept is that of *anicca* or impermanence: Everything is viewed as impermanent. The Buddhist definition of “self” or “I” differs from that of the West, where it is taken for granted that the self is an enduring entity (Michalon, 2001). The Buddhist concept of self is viewed as being comprised of the aggregates of body or mind which create the image of the human being (Goldstein, 1997); in other words, self is abstract (J. Campbell, 1999).

Two of three types of *dukkha* consist of *dis-ease* and impermanence, which contribute to the sense of self (Loy, 2001). The third kind is that of the physical and mental aspects of the mind, which are interpreted through ego and which constitute ego-self. The problem of suffering arises when we identify with self as “I” and with the contents of mind. Therefore, the concept of no-self or *anatta* proposes “that if one is not a self, if the ego is a construct leading to

dukkha/suffering” (Michalon, 2001, p. 207), what follows then is to end dukkha by deconstructing self (Loy; Michalon).

Epstein (2006) stated that in Buddhism, all ideas of self are “potentially imprisoning because of our inherent tendency to cling unproductively to whatever gives a sense of security” (p. 224) as a type of narcissism. The author pointed out that Buddha proposed that identifying with the contents of the mind as “self that does not exist” (p. 224) is not necessary; the goal is to free oneself from mind constructs as subjective self. Epstein explained,

Self as experience is indeed the starting point of the Buddhist investigation, but things get complicated rather quickly when the subjective self is made an object of contemplation. . . . Self as experience reveals the presence of a self that can never be truly experienced; yet this self, the self of awareness, is clearly an essential and vital aspect of who or what we are. (p. 224)

Awareness or observation of self, according to Epstein, “only deepens the mystery of our being rather than clarifying it” (p. 224) and awareness “sharpens” in meditation.

Samhadi, or absorption in meditation, is a training through which one may achieve the state of awareness called Buddha mind (H. Smith, 1959). Meditators may experience *sunyata* or emptiness, which in Buddhism is said to be a realization of the “non-affirming negative” (Hopkins, 1987/1995, p. 128) of the existence of an inherent “I.” In other words, a meditator may experience emptiness and realize that there is no self to whom this emptiness is happening. The emptiness is not real, and thus one does not need to fear or cling to the experience of emptiness—or to any experience or feeling at all. “Emptiness is a mode of perception, a way of looking at experience” (Bhikkhu, 1997, p. 53). The purpose “of sunyata is to deconstruct the self-existence of things” (Loy, 2001, p. 170) as a way of being. In this manner one may begin to end the cycle of suffering in the pursuit of happiness through non-clinging to perception.

Thus, we can understand the Buddhist perspective that the most questionable duality is self versus nonself and being versus nonbeing (Loy, 2001). The ego-self causes feelings of

separation, discomfort, and emptiness. Self and nonbeing “arise together, in relation to each other, and therefore they should be able to disappear together by collapsing back into each other” (2001, p. 172).

By letting go into or by realizing the *sunyata* (emptiness of being and self), the sense of self can die (Loy, 2001). In the emptiness, the no-thing-ness, there can be a fearless forgetting that causes the normally automatic reflection of consciousness to be erased. Sometimes one may have a despairing experience of sunyata. Loy further stated that here it is recommended that one throw oneself completely over the cliff into the nothingness. Letting go into sunyata, however it is experienced, is the point in becoming groundless and yet grounded as cessation of desire to become anything. This leads to an *interior sense of self* that is grounded, “has always been grounded . . . as one manifestation of a web of relationships which encompasses everything” (p. 170) or nirvana.

The Buddhist ultimate state of nirvana is the extinguishing or extinction of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (enlightenment); as such, it is a state devoid of all suffering and characterized by bliss (Hopfe, 1994; Noss & Noss, 1994). Paradoxically, nirvana is also indescribable as it is “not this” and “not that.” In Madhyamika Buddhism, Taoism, and some Zen schools, there is no thing such as Higher Self or Consciousness, but only the flow of ever-changing objects as perceived by the human senses as real—as opposed to objects as intrinsically real in themselves (Blackstone, 2006).

The Buddhist doctrines of anicca and anatta indicate where Buddhism differs from Hinduism regarding the nature of self. Hindu belief posits a Higher Self, while Buddha taught that belief in self or Self was a distraction from enlightenment (J. Campbell, 1999; Premasiri, 1990).

Hinduism: Advaita Vedanta

He whom all desires enter as waters enter the ever-full and unmoved sea attains peace, and not he who cherishes desires. . . . When a man acts without longing, having relinquished all desires, free from the sense of “I” and “mine”, he attains peace. (Maharishi, 1967, pp. 122-123)

The term “Advaita Vedanta” literally translates into “nondual” and “Vedas,” the Hindu holy texts of knowledge. The branch of the Vedanta system of nondual Hinduism called Advaita Vedanta was founded by Shankara, who asserted that *Brahman*, the impersonal god viewed as Ultimate Reality, is “all there is,” permanent, infinite, nonempirical, and eternal (Hopfke, 1994; Noss & Noss, 1994; Rock, 2005). All else is an illusion misperceived as real by a person’s ignorance or *avidya* or nonknowledge. In Advaita, the individual’s *jiva*, or living substance, is believed to be the same as *Brahman* (impersonal god as total reality). The cycle of rebirth ends when ignorance is lifted with the knowledge that the soul is identical with Brahman.

Due to Brahman being infinite, it cannot cause or create anything; therefore, the universe and everything in it is regarded as Brahman. Paradoxically, the empirical world is phenomenal and thus is unexplainable except by *maya* or illusion. In other words, it is real when perceived by humans as distinct from Brahman, and it is unreal (Noss & Noss, 1994; Rock, 2005). The following common Advaita analogy may help to clarify this point. The notion that a rope, as an object of sense-experience, appears to be a real snake is a result of ignorance. When the snake is perceived, the rope is nonexistent—this is illusion as illustration of how *maya* creates normal waking consciousness. Thus, *Brahman-Atman* is the state when one perceives his or her inner self or *atman* to be one and the same as Brahman.

This is accomplished by the “lifting of the veil of ignorance that prevents one from knowing that the soul is and always has been identical with Brahman” (Noss & Noss, 1994, p. 127). One such method of removing the illusion of *maya* is through discourse. The *Advaita*

Makaranda is a text written between the 11th and 15th Centuries by Sri Laksmidhara Kavi (trans. 2004; trans. 1990). The discourse through reason and logic establishes the nondual “Brahman as me” (trans. 2004, p. ii), and tries to remove the questions and doubts that arise in the mind regarding direct realization of Absolute Reality. This is illustrative of one of the Vedic paths, that of acquisition of knowledge through listening, reflection, and meditation, which can take one into transcendence that is self-transcending (Sri Laksmidhara Kavi, 1986/2004, 1990). “Liberation as de-individuation . . . is a special state of knowledge (Ram-Prasad, 2000, pp. 36-37). It is Self-knowledge that functions to de-identify the individual from the contents of consciousness (Menton, 2005; Ram-Prasad, 2000). As such, it is self-destructive of maya, as the lower type of knowledge, in favor of knowing ourselves as Brahman-Atman and higher knowledge (Noss & Noss, 1994; Ram-Prasad, 2000). The de-individualizing, self-denying knowledge destroys the individualistic tendencies of the mind in a manner similar to no-self discussed in previous sections on mysticism.

The Experience of No-self

No-self implies that self is not real, as illustrated by the following quote from Loy (2007):

Buddhist denial of self arguably points more directly at the root of the problem: not the dread of death . . . but the more immediate and terrifying (because quite valid) suspicion that “*I am not real right now*”. If the self is a delusive construct, there is a subtle yet significant distinction between fear of death and fear of the void: Our deepest anxiety is our own groundlessness, which we become aware of as a sense of *lack* that motivates our compulsive attempts to ground ourselves, in one way or another. (p. 174)

Dissolution of self can occur abruptly or can be a gradual process, and can be experienced as mild to considerably distressful to the individual (Almaas, 1988/1994; Loy, 2007). Almaas explained the experience of no-self as a state of “absolute Absence” (p. 461) such that one experiences a loss of Presence through the realization “of the void” (p. 461), and one also loses what was previously “a continuous and incessant sense or feeling of self or I” (p. 463). This

stage can be a “long and difficult process, in which one must pass through the dark night of the spirit, and attain the station of complete mystical poverty” (p. 471). The experience of no-self can be “dumbfounding to the mind” (p. 463), as one’s consciousness comes to rest in unity as oneness and no longer in ego perceiving a sense of self awareness. The following section may serve to illustrate these points regarding the experience of no-self in the enlightenment process.

Three Portrayals of the Experience of No-self

Suzanne Segal. The experience of Suzanne Segal (1956 to 1997) is an extreme example of distress and suffering that occurred in living out the experience of no-self. Segal (1996) was a spiritual teacher and psychologist who wrote *Collision With the Infinite: A Life Beyond the Personal Self*, which described her 10-year experience of life without a personal sense of “I” and of living in terror and fear of the emptiness and void. A brief synopsis of Segal’s (1996) experience of no-self is presented herein.

While pregnant and standing in line at a Paris bus stop at age 27, Segal felt her ears pop and her consciousness was split in two, resulting in her continuously perceiving awareness through a witnessing state. A few months later, her sense of personal self disappeared forever. Segal (1996) described this state as,

The personal self was gone, yet here was a body and a mind that still existed empty of anyone who occupied them. The experience of living without a personal identity, without an experience of being somebody, an “I” or a “me,” is exceedingly difficult to describe, but it is absolutely unmistakable. . . . When the personal self disappears, there is no one inside who can be located as being you. The body is only an outline, empty of everything of which it had previously felt so full. The mind, body, and emotions no longer referred to anyone—there was no one who thought, no one who felt, no one who perceived. Yet the mind, body, and emotions continued to function unimpaired. . . . Thinking, feeling, perceiving, speaking all continued as before, functioning with a smoothness that gave no indication behind them. (pp. 54-55)

With this complete disappearance of her sense of self, Segal (1996) continuously felt terror and confusion, as the mind desperately tried to make sense of the situation. In spite of all

the inner turmoil, her outward functioning continued even better than before. During this period of fear and searching, she managed to get a Ph.D. in psychology and to raise her daughter. The feelings of fear continued for almost 10 years, despite seeking the help of several psychotherapists, all of whom sought to pathologize her undiagnosable experience of no-self (Segal, 1996, 2003).

Finally, the fear abated when Segal (1996) found the explanation she was seeking in the Buddhist concept of no-self and, subsequently, the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and spiritual teachers who supported her experience of awakening. Although she received a great deal of assurance, Segal still did not immediately experience joy; rather, she later transitioned into unity—or what she called “emptiness recognized as vastness” (p. 107), which “broke fear’s grip” (p. 132) and caused joy to arise. Segal came to realize that her first few months of witnessing at age 27 correlated to Maharishi’s (1967/1992) Cosmic Consciousness; that realization of oneself as no-self is God Consciousness (Maharishi, 1967/1992); and that Unity Consciousness (Maharishi, 1967/1992) is “when the substance of all creation is perceived first and distinctions second” (Segal, 1996, p. 133).

Segal was able to live the vastness, to publish her book, and to work as a spiritual teacher and psychotherapist for a short period of time before she died in 1998 of a brain tumor. Segal’s (1996) writings denote her desire to educate people that enlightenment may not always be perceived as blissful, as the following illustrates

The worst fear we encounter as human beings is the fear of annihilation. What happens, then, when annihilation occurs and still something remains? The Buddhists say that we have then stepped into the truth. The *skandhas* [ever changing human components of name/form, feeling, conception, impulse, and consciousness] remain but their truth (which is that they are empty) is revealed. This was my direct experience. But why had no one ever mentioned how bizarre and frightening the “step into truth” can be? (1996, pp. 109-110)

Segal (1996) advised psychotherapists that traditional therapy tends to “pathologize human experience across the board and measure success according to how well we conform to definite ideas about what our human experience should look like” (p. 151). Her legacy includes her descriptive narrative of her transcendence and the following two suggestions:

The first is to see things to be just what they are, because that is how the vastness is always seeing things. Thoughts are thoughts. Emotions are emotions. The body is just a body. It's the mind's interpretation of things that ends up creating suffering. . . . The mind is constantly interpreting in this way, while the vastness just looks around and sees that things just what they are. The second suggestion, which is actually a non-suggestion, is to follow the obvious, because that is how the mysterious doer behind everyone's life is constantly revealing the truth of each moment. (1996, p. 163)

In other words, even though the mind may “freak out” (p. 147) when it initially experiences the vastness and may “devalue” (p. 147) the vastness, Segal advised that one can perceive thoughts and emotions without judgment by not clinging to any emotion or experience, and that one can recognize the impermanence of states of being as he or she presently experiences them.

Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa (1910 to 1997) was a Roman Catholic nun of Albanian descent who answered the call of God at age 18 and took her initial vows as a nun in 1931. After teaching at a convent school in India for several years, she dedicated her life to alleviating the suffering among the poorest of the poor, first in Calcutta and later throughout the world. In 1950 Mother Teresa opened her own Catholic religious order, the Missionaries of Charity, to serve all those poor, unloved people who were often ignored by society. Within 20 years, she became world renowned for her lifetime humanitarian efforts; Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

Mother Teresa's letters to her spiritual directors were preserved and have been recently published as a book entitled, *Mother Teresa of Calcutta: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta.”* The book, edited by Father Brian Kolodiejchuk (Mother Teresa, 2007), describes Mother Teresa as a classic mystic, in that her spiritual life is

characterized by the following quote “If I ever become a Saint—I will surely be one of ‘darkness.’ I will continually be absent from Heaven—to light the light of those in darkness on earth” (pp. 337-338). This quote typifies not only her devotion, but also her later stages of spiritual development as “the dreadful reality of life without God, which she likened to hell” (p. 250).

Mother Teresa wrote

Now Father—since 49 or 50 this terrible sense of loss—this untold darkness—this loneliness this continual longing for God—which gives me that pain deep down in my heart—Darkness is such that I really do not see—neither with my mind nor with my reason—the place of God in my soul is blank—There is no God in me—when the pain of longing is so great—I just long & long for God—and then it is that I feel—He does not want me—He is not there—. . . God does not want me—Sometimes—I just hear my own heart cry out—”My God” and nothing else comes—The torture and pain I can’t explain” (2007, p. 2)

The quote above illustrates the depth of her mystical despair as spiritual darkness and as life in the slums of the world. Her vow of poverty manifested on many experiential levels:

As for me—what will I tell you? I have nothing—since I have not got Him—whom my heart & Soul longs to possess. Aloneness is so great.—From within and from without I find no one to turn to.—He has taken not only spiritual—but even the human help. I speak to no one & even if I do—nothing enters my soul.—I was longing to speak to you in Bombay—yet I did not even try to make it possible.—If there is hell—this must be one. How terrible it is to be without God—no prayer—no faith—no love.—The only thing that still remains—is the conviction that the work is His—that the Sisters & Brothers are His.—And I cling to this as the person having nothing clings to the straw—before drowning.—And yet, Father—in spite of all these—I want to be faithful to Him—to spend myself for Him, to love Him not for what He gives me but for what He takes—to be at His disposal.—I do not ask Him to change His attitude towards me or His plans for me.—I only ask Him to use me—to teach & help my Sisters & Brothers & our Poor to love Him, since I could not love Him.—How beautifully the Sisters & Brothers love God.—How much they try to live up to whatever He gives them through me. (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 250)

Although Mother Teresa lamented over and was tormented by spiritual dearth, with the help of her spiritual directors, she eventually came to understand the darkness not as her “sinfulness and weakness” (2007, p. 3) but as her own process of spiritual purification. She also

came to view the dark night of the soul as an essential part of her holy mission. Mother Teresa vowed to dedicate her life “to bring the light of faith to those living in darkness” (p. 3) and became renowned as a source of love and light in darkness in the world. After her death in 1997, the Vatican began the process of establishing her sainthood; thus far in the canonization process, Mother Teresa was beatified in 2003 and was bestowed with the title of “Beloved.”

Douglas Harding. Mystic, author, architect, and philosopher Douglas Harding (1961/1986) was born in Suffolk, England, and was raised in a fundamentalist Christian sect called the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren. At age 21, he left the sect due to philosophical differences. He received a degree in and worked as an architect. Harding (1961/1986) also studied philosophy in his spare time—focusing on the question “What am I?” (p. 1). He found the answer to that question at the age of 33. While standing on a ridge in the Himalayas gazing at the spectacular view, he stopped thinking for a moment and experienced present moment awareness in the following manner:

What actually happened was something absurdly simple and unspectacular: just for the moment I stopped thinking. Reason and imagination and all mental chatter died down. For once, words really failed me. I forgot my name, my humanness, my thingness, all that could be called me or mine. Past and future dropped away. It was as if I had been born that instant, brand new, mindless, innocent of all memories. There existed only the Now, that present moment and what was clearly given in it. . . . It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing, this hole where a head should have been was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing. On the contrary, it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything—room for grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, and far above them snow-peaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky. I had lost a head and gained a world. It was all, quite literally, breathtaking. I seemed to stop breathing altogether, absorbed in the Given. Here it was, this superb scene, brightly shining in the clear air, alone and unsupported, mysteriously suspended in the void, and (and this was the real miracle, the wonder and delight) utter free of “me”, unsustained by any observer. Its total presence was my total absence, body and soul. Lighter than air, clearer than glass, altogether released from myself, I was nowhere around. . . . It felt like a sudden waking from the sleep of ordinary life, an end to dreaming. It was self-luminous reality for once swept clean of all obscuring mind. *It was the revelation, at long last of the perfectly obvious.* It was a lucid moment in a confused life-history. It was a ceasing to ignore something which (since early childhood at any

rate) I had always been too busy . . . or too scared to see. It was naked, uncritical attention to what had been all along staring me in the face—my utter facelessness. . . . There arose no questions, no reference beyond the experience itself, but only peace and a quiet joy, and the sensation of having dropped an intolerable burden. (pp. 1-3)

Harding went on to become a renowned spiritual teacher and author. In his book, *On Having No Head: Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious*, Harding described the above experience of no-self and his process of making sense of “the headless void” (p. 6) through Zen Buddhist writings. In the introduction to Harding’s book, Houston Smith suggested that the book’s central idea is that “annatta, no self (read: no permanent, individual self) is not only the key to Buddhism; rightly understood it is the key to life” (H. Smith as cited in Harding, 1961/1986, p. viii).

Harding (1961/1986) theorized “eight stages of the Headless Way” (p. 35), which involve “seeing into Nothingness” (p. 76) as a process of deepening and maturing spiritual development. The stages progress through “The Barrier” (p. 70)—stage 7—the dark night of “self-surrender, self-abandonment, . . . dying as the separate and illusory ego (I am a somebody) and being reborn as one and truly egoless Ego (I AM)” (p. 73). Stage 8 represents “The Breakthrough” (p. 73) into ananda or “real and lasting joy” (p. 74).

Harding’s (1961/1986) experience of no-self seems to be representative of a more gradual and certainly less terrifying example of dissolution of self than Segal’s (1996) experience. Mother Teresa’s (2007) dark night and Harding’s headless void experience all seem to have been interpreted within and exemplified through a specific faith tradition. In addition, all three of the no-self, dark night, or void experiences illustrate the point that at this stage in spiritual development, there is no going back once the illusion of egoic mind has been seen through and of how ordinary life must go on (Kersschot, 2004).

Discussion and Final Definition of the Experience of No-self

Although we can identify Stace's (1960/1987) seven characteristics (ineffability, paradoxicality, divine nature, peacefulness, objectivity, perception of void or oneness, and nonspacial/nontemporal quality) of introvertive mystical experience in the above description, one might wonder, "What exactly happened? What was the event?" The three previously cited examples of experiences of no-self (Segal, 1996; Harding, 1961/1986; Mother Teresa, 2007) are illustrative of two major points worthy of discussion in this paper: the ineffability of the experience and integrating the experience into ordinary reality; this also raises another question, "What is the impact of living out the experience no-self on the life of the experiencer?"

Viewing the above events of no-self through Stace's (1960/1987) introvertive model, it is apparent that the experiencers' perception of reality was altered, with the result of a noetic perception of pure unity consciousness. The experience, as perfection of something greater than self, causes awe even at what is normally thought of as imperfection, and the foundational part "of the experience seems to be the conviction, or insight, that the immediate *now*, [author added emphasis] whatever its nature, is the goal all living" (Watts, 1995, p. 15). James (1902/1991) further elaborated that it is commonly understood in metaphysics "that God's knowledge cannot be discursive but must be intuitive, that is, must be constructed more after the pattern of what in ourselves is called immediate feeling, than after that of proposition and judgment" (p. 311). In other words, the initial experience of no-self, as perceived as coming from God, or as self perceived as Self, is ineffable (not describable in words) without interpretation and judgment by the mind (Hood, 2006; Stace, 1960/1987). Thus, it is apparent that "The language of the mystic is not to be taken as literally descriptive of an experience for which language is ill equipped by its very nature of subject/object distinctions to describe" (Hood, 2006, p. 122), and the reader or

listener may wonder, without the insight of the experiencer, what the experience of no self actually was.

At this point in the discussion it is vital to understand that there is a temptation and an inclination for some people to call themselves enlightened before they actually are. However, there is general agreement that the only enlightenment is mature enlightenment (Adyashanti, 2003; Caplan, 1999; Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989; Goenka, 1991; Kapleau, 1980; Kersschot, 2004; Maharishi, 1967/1992; Roberts, 2005; Welwood, 2000). Mature enlightenment is when there is no flipping in and out of identification with the personal self and when all sense of self rests with the Self. Having experiences of nonduality or of the egoless state is not the end of enlightenment. One needs to be able to live the experience of enlightenment—in the ordinary world of duality. “The point of enlightened duality is to integrate and apply the most profound of our insights, the truest of our feelings and our full attention to the life in front of us, and to live there” (Caplan, 1999, p. 495).

There is also general agreement among psychologists and spiritual teachers that it is not enough to have the experience of no-self or of enlightenment, but that one must manifest the *insight* of the experience, by not clinging to the event (Adyashanti, 2003, 2007; Caplan, 1999, Goenka, 1991; Kapleau, 1980; Kersschot, 2004; Prendergast & Bradford, 2007; Puhakka, 1998; Roberts, 1993). Prendergast and Bradford (2007) explained that there is a difference between awakening to “one’s true nature as the formless ground of being or no-self” (p. 12) and *actualizing or embody[ing]*” (p. 12) the awakening. Roberts (1993) revealed the following: “The secret to allowing an insight to become a permanent way of knowing and seeing is not to touch it, cling to it, dogmatize it, or even think about it” (p. 30). Rather than allowing the mind to establish a frame of reference for the event, Prendergast and Bradford (2007) and Adyashanti

(2006) described the integration process as *embodiment*, which is a gradual process of the body adjusting to the awakening. The body is the container for which the vastness of everything and nothing—the truth of our *being-ness*—is to come through. Illumination illuminating Itself. Oneness reflecting Itself. This affects the person on physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and energetic levels. Because of the experience of oneness, a person’s sense of divided nature can stand out vividly, as being counter to conditioned tendencies. Thus, the process can be painful, confusing, terrifying, and also liberating as self reorients as a reflection of Self (Adyashanti, 2002, 2006; Hunt, 2007; Puhakka, 2007; Roberts, 1993, 2005).

Kersschot (2004) believed that “everyday life is the real guru [teacher]” (p. 79). One wakes up to everyday reality as a story that plays itself out “by a person with memories, preferences and imperfections” (2004, p. 75). In other words, after the experience of no-self as insight, with all its noetic and ineffable qualities, the experience continues day-by-day, moment-by-moment—self as Self embodies Itself as no-self. At this point, one might ask, “What is *this* experience of no-self?” How does this play out in one’s life? After all, this is the dissolution of “every concept of self you have ever held or will ever hold” (Adyashanti, 2002, p. 40).

Transpersonal Psychology in Relation to the Experience and the Living Out of No-self

This dissertation research investigated the experience and the living out of no-self as advanced spiritual development before unity as oneness. This dissertation sought to investigate a realm of no-self attributes—including dissolution of self, loss of meaning, and suffering—in addition to the everyday living out of the event of no-self. The expanded definition of no-self as including dissolution of self, loss of meaning, suffering, and the everyday living out of the event of no-self corresponds with a recent definition of transpersonal psychology. Hartelius et al. (2007) analyzed 35 years of definitions and found three themes, suggesting a contemporary,

global definition of transpersonal psychology as including not only “beyond ego psychology” (p. 142) but also “integrative/holistic psychology” (p. 142) and “transformative psychology” (p. 142). Furthermore, the field of transpersonal psychology acknowledges and studies the whole of human experience—viewing the ego “within the larger fabric of the embodied mind, the community, the social history, the environment, and the transpersonal ultimate” (2007, p. 144) toward personal and also social transformation.

Chapter Summary

This chapter portrayed literature related to no-self in mysticism and as spiritual experience. The focus of this literature review was on historical mystical theory. There exists an abundance of writings regarding the beginning stages of spiritual development (methodology, advice, theory, psychotherapeutic issues) and the ending stages (theory, viewpoints of enlightened individuals). It appeared the later stages of spiritual development is a growing field of investigation both in transpersonal psychology and in spirituality, especially with regard to the topics of nonduality and unity as oneness.

This chapter presented extant literature on no-self as initial experience and as lived experience and described how this study could contribute innovative qualitative research to the field of spiritual development. Chapter 3 describes intuitive inquiry and grounded theory in detail as the methods of investigating the experience of no-self. Chapter 4 explains the process of creating intuitively informed grounded theory as the research method used to investigate the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience. Research results are presented in Chapters 5 and 6, wherein grounded theory data analysis is illustrated through systematic discussion and inclusion of rich, thick participant quotes in order to depict the refinement (Chapter 5) and transformation (Chapter 6) of Cycle 2 lenses toward theory. Chapters 7 and 8

discuss and integrate findings with extant literature, elaborate on the theoretical results portion of the study of the experience of no-self, and suggest areas for future research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

As an expansion of existing literature on the experience of no-self, this research study on no-self as initial and lived experience sought to contribute innovative qualitative research to the field of advanced spiritual development. The research addressed the need to study people voicing their complex, detailed understanding of the topic within the context of their experiences of no-self, rather than from theoretical models. This study was exploratory in nature because there was only a small amount of research on the topic of the experience of no-self to date. In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted to collect data on the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience. Just as semistructured interviews are naturally suited for qualitative research (J. Smith, 1995) and for studies of mysticism (Morrison & Hunt, 1996), the intuitive inquiry research method was chosen as ideal for interpretation of the rich, thick description generated from semistructured interviews (Anderson, 1998, 2004).

As illustrated in the literature review, the experience of no-self is clearly a complex dimension of human experience. Hood (2002) stated that what is missing in the plethora of empirical literature on self is a phenomenological description of reflexive and transcendental self explored empirically. The hermeneutic, intuitive inquiry qualitative research method was chosen to bridge the gap between respect for human experience as objective and what is scientifically measurable (Anderson, 1998). Intuitive inquiry was specifically designed to investigate complex topics requiring in-depth, reflective discernment to conceptualize, explain, and interpret data (Anderson, 1998).

In exploratory research, the intuitive inquiry method has the potential to generate theory (Anderson, 2004). The use of hermeneutical interpretive cycles processed through deep intuitive reflection has the capacity to elucidate human experience closer to actual lived experience than

do rationalistic methods. In designing the dissertation method for studying no-self, I believed that although study results from an intuitive inquiry study would be predominantly descriptive, the possibility existed that theory could emerge from the data. Despite the lack of empirical research on the experience of no-self, there existed a body of literature on no-self written by psychotherapists and enlightened individuals that was not grounded in research. I wished to remain open to the possibility of the data producing new, empirically based theory or of confirming current theories. Therefore, grounded theory was incorporated into the research design to support explaining the phenomenon evidenced in the lived experience of participants and potentially to stimulate further research on no-self. Accordingly, in the following sections, the intuitive inquiry research method is presented as the overarching method that guided the study, and constructivist grounded theory is elucidated as especially suitable to guide data analysis in this study of the experience of no-self.

The Experience of No-Self and the Intuitive Inquiry Method

The intuitive inquiry method involves intuition and compassionate ways of knowing to guide the selection of the research topic, data analysis, and presentation of findings (Anderson, 1998). Intuition is defined as “immediate insight or perception as contrasted with conscious reasoning or reflection” (Vanden Bos, 2007, p. 499). Moreover, the method incorporates a hermeneutic structure of “iterative cycles” (Anderson, 2004, p. 308) to provide structure and precision to the intuitive process.

Hermeneutics involves “a kind of phenomenology of the between” (Bruns, 1992, p. 11) not as translation or new interpretation of data, but in order to “study these things . . . for the light that they shed on its object . . . namely, the question of understanding” (p. 12). As a form of mystical hermeneutics, the researcher literally *goes into* a participant’s experience or literature

readings to reexperience them and to become transformed by them. The hermeneutical cycle of interpretation involves “an ontological movement between the text and our situation as interpreters of it” (Bruns, 1992, p. 4). By including intuition into the method of analyzing data, Anderson (2004) posited intuitive inquiry as a heart-mind process of hermeneutical interpretation. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) stated that hermeneutics refers to the phenomenon of interpretation which can be “understood as *enactment* or *bringing forth* of meaning from a background of understanding” (p. 149). Esbjörn-Hargens (2004) added that “the recursive hermeneutical circle is in a constant state of flux; it is an event of understanding taking place between subject and object, in the context of body, culture, language, and history” (p. 406). Accordingly, Puhakka (2000) described authentic knowing as consisting of a process of the researcher’s awareness spiraling between what is known and unknown as experiential inquiry into authentic knowing. In addition, Hood (2002) validated introspection of internal states and description as “as a powerful methodological tool” (p. 5).

As designed by Anderson (1998, 2004), the intuitive inquiry method requires the researcher to be rigorously aware of inner experiences and to discern self-as-persona from other. This is accomplished through rigorous adherence to full disclosure and attention to the complexity of accurately relating the depth and richness of participants’ experiences—essentially through adherence to truth-telling and copious note taking in the research process. In 2004, Anderson revised the method in order to help researchers make known their own values and assumptions regarding a topic of investigation, while at the same time respecting individual voices of participants. In addition, the changes help the researcher organize huge amounts of data from interviews. The method now incorporates five successive cycles of interpretation in which the researcher (a) clarifies the research topic, (b) develops preliminary lenses through which to

view data, (c) collects data and prepares summary reports, (d) transforms and refines preliminary lenses, and (e) integrates the findings with the literature review.

Cycle 1: Clarifying the Research Topic

In Cycle 1, researchers are encouraged to explore topics which they are enthusiastic about and which are inspired by their own life experiences (Anderson, 2004), as they invite the research process to change their understandings and their lives. Contrary to conventional research where the topic chosen for dissertation is in the area of scholarly interest or specialization, the intuitive inquiry researcher selects a text, image, or experience that compels him or her to further inquiry. Researchers must be willing and able not only to risk exploring the psyche through a deep process of inner reflection, but also to be open to personal transformation.

Personal interest in the topic and evidence of the topic claiming me. It was my heartfelt desire to clarify and elucidate qualities of advanced stages of spiritual growth. I felt that somehow the universe had been propelling me throughout my entire life toward researching, writing, and ultimately publishing on this topic. I knew for almost 2 years that this was part of my purpose here on earth as a human being. No-self was, and still is, my lived, spiritual reality and the experience enlivens and honors my reality. In this section, I describe an event in my spiritual process along with examples from my involvement in the literature review process which illustrate not only how the topic literally grabbed and chased me, but also how it reclaimed me after nonduality informed my awareness that no-self was impossible to research. I wrote the following in my journal in January 2007:

Very early one morning in a timeless instant between sleep and the stirrings of awakening, I saw into darkness, void, perfection of reality: Nothingness and everything; no do-er; nothing to be done, no other, no concepts, no inherent meaning. Simply awareness informing awareness Itself. Realization entered consciousness—there is no meaning, value, or purpose to thoughts, concepts, values, beliefs—no-thing really exists at all. I became aware that absolutely nothing held meaning as I had previously conceived

it. I saw the pieces into which my mind had been shattered. Conditioned conscious reality returned as I heard my dog stirring in her bed. The full weight of my realization hit as I saw right through all the concepts I was learning in my Ph.D. program! Despondency overcame me as the “I” that was left had to figure out how to get out of bed and go on with life. I beseeched Awareness—God—and awaited to be graced with answers. I knew that I had to get up and attend to my pets. I also had classes to attend that day. But why? Nothing is real anyway! There is only nothing. Blessed insight came: The ridiculously meaningless paradox of pursuing a doctorate degree was still the path of least resistance and was somehow still ultimately necessary for me. And the way to get up and do it was to lightly view life as a game.

Experiences of no-self have demanded self-engagement with my topic, as the method posits, as “observation, inward reflection, dialogue, and . . . meditation” (Anderson, 2004, p. 316). Paradoxically, I have lived the distress, disorientation, physiological symptoms, void-nature, love, and awe of embodying no-self. Part of the purpose of this study was to increase my current understanding of dissolution of ego and discernment of signs and symptoms of no-self, with the goal of promoting, versus pathologizing, spiritual growth. Even during the proposal stage of writing the dissertation, I noticed that by engaging with the spiritual, philosophical, and psychological literature related to no-self, I increased self-knowledge and consequently decreased my own symptoms of distress stemming from experiences of no-self.

In June 2007, during the initial stages of research, I was deeply propelled into nonduality and nothingness. Even given my experiential knowledge of no-self, I lost hope of doing dissertation-level research on this subject. How could no-self research no-thing? In the void, I let go of writing my dissertation on the experience of no-self. My topic literally reclaimed me during an ineffable moment between wake and sleep, as expressed through the following:

In the void there is no doer, nothing to be done.
Stillness. Silence. No messages for anyone.
Timeless, endless, Vastness as divine perfection.

And yet conditioned reality appears out of the stillness.
Awakening; as reality awaiting to be constructed.
The path of least resistance appears.
The enormous, life-encompassing task of writing a dissertation.

How can nothing write on a non-concept of no-self?

Letting go into the not-knowing,
I awake into the Knowing and not-knowing.
Being as stillness enlivened.

In later stages of the literature review research, texts claimed me as I experienced spontaneous, sacred weeping when sentences or passages resonated with meaning in my heart-mind. More specifically, after reading several books on writings of the Christian mystics, I ached to understand how the difficult path of the mystic is akin to that of Christ's suffering and how the Passion Story of Christ is the story of enlightenment or Christ consciousness. My readings had kept me up well past midnight. After sleeping several hours, I came to awareness that there was a voice speaking in my head, explaining over and over again, very kindly and patiently, in several different ways, exactly how the Passion Story of Christ is the story of enlightenment. I cannot recall or explain this in words now, but I do know that my heart is at peace with this gnosis. Divine Love is at the heart of all suffering: the burning of egoic self-centeredness in light of compassionate dedication to the oneness of humanity. For me this is a process of letting go, of not-knowing, and of trusting.

Personal varieties of intuition used in dissertation research. As a researcher, I am well-suited to use intuition as a method for my dissertation. Anderson (2004) posited five types of intuition, as those of (a) wounded healer, (b) unconscious and symbolic processes, (c) empathetic identification, (d) sensory modes of intuition, and (e) psychic or parapsychological experiences. My personal varieties of intuition are presented as Appendix A. While it is helpful within the context of this paper to list my intuitive abilities, it is also noted that in 2006 I completed a 4-year apprenticeship in intuitive counseling with a spiritual counselor who had more than 20 years experience. This apprenticeship was vital to my integration of psychic and intuitive

abilities in that it provided networking with other practitioners and addressed theory and application of skills, including the morals and ethics of intuitive practice. In addition, psychological dissolution of ego was supervised and encouraged in order to distill ego from that which is discerned as intuition.

Cycle 2: Developing the Preliminary Lenses

In Cycle 2, the researcher selects a “set of theoretical, research, literary, or historical texts” (Anderson, 2004, p. 318) and engages with them through a “dialective and reflective process” (p. 318) in order to distill a set of preliminary lenses through which to view data. The purpose of this cycle is not to bracket assumptions but to articulate them. This process enables the researcher to analyze these lenses and to invite “their transformation, revision, removal, amplification, and refinement” (p. 318) as the hermeneutical cycle proceeds.

Process of distilling the preliminary lenses for the experience of no-self. The traditional dissertation literature review provided me with the opportunity to engage in psychological, spiritual, and theoretical literature on the experience of no-self as dissolution of ego. In addition, for the purpose of Cycle 2, I chose several additional texts through which to distill preliminary lenses. *The Cloud of Unknowing* was written in the 14th Century by an anonymous English Christian mystic. The book is regarded as a spiritual classic, which beautifully and gently guides the mystic to understand the loss of self involved in unity with God. I chose to read two editions of this text (Anonymous, 1957, 1973) in an effort to entertain full embodiment of the teachings. I also read *The Real Way to Awakening* by Chao Khun Sobhana Dhammasudhi (1969), who is widely recognized for his work in spiritual development. This text is a compilation of talks about awakening from self-delusion. These talks were given at The Buddhapadipa (light of Buddha) Temple in London. I also examined four renowned books on mysticism by the following authors:

psychiatrist Richard Bucke (1901/1966), educator F. C. Happold (1963/1984), philosopher Walter Stace (1960/1987), and psychologist Evelyn Underhill (1911/1974) for Cycle 3 lenses. These writings offered perspectives from authors of different professions and traditions, and included personal accounts of mystical experiences of people during the 20th Century.

My process of working with all of the previously mentioned texts consisted of reading as a contemplative process intent on discovering values and assumptions in viewing no-self, along with taking notes on relevant text references. After each reading session, I sat in contemplation and made note of anything that came to mind and was subsequently attentive to anything that arose from the unconscious.

Writing the preliminary lenses. When the time came to write the lenses, most of them came to me quickly and almost effortlessly, as if they had been sitting in my unconscious waiting to appear on the paper. I believe that I had been incubating them for many weeks as I engaged with the literature, wrote the literature review, and completed a course in intuitive inquiry research method. A few lenses came as the result of reading specific texts, such as *The Cloud of Unknowing*, as insight received during the altered state of consciousness between waking and sleeping. The point of elucidating preliminary lenses was driven home to me as a result of reading comments on the research proposal from my committee members. I realized that I had assumed two ideas within a particular context and needed to make slight writing revisions in order to allow these ideas to emerge from the participant data.

This research was intended to answer the question, “What is it like for someone to have an experience of no-self and to live out the experience?” The following list of values and assumptions of the experience and the living out of no-self as loss of meaning and suffering was written after engaging with literature at the proposal stage of this dissertation.

The Preliminary Lenses for the Study of the Experience of No-self

1. The concept of no-self appears in nondual traditions, in mysticism, and in psychological and spiritual literature. The experience of no-self fits into enlightenment as a process of trans-egoic development beyond the self-centered point of view of the ego and personality toward interconnectedness or Oneness.
2. No-self is a process wherein a person's sense of self dissolves either immediately or over time, and includes experiencing a void, emptiness, dark night, or nothingness.
3. People who are having experiences of no-self as dark night may be in a penultimate stage of spiritual development.
4. The initial experience of no-self can be identified by the following marks: ineffability, paradoxicality, divine nature, peacefulness, objectivity, perception of Void or Oneness, and nonspacial/nontemporal quality.
5. People may also go through a process of embodying no-self. Embodiment is a gradual process of the body adjusting to the awakening or initial no-self experience. This can be experienced on emotional, psychological, physiological, and cognitive levels—all of which may affect the life of the experiencer.
6. In the living out of the experience of no-self, people may experience mild to considerable distress as adjustment to the loss of the sense of a personal self or "I."
7. The experience of no-self may lead to the following positive characteristics: compassion, empathy, and equanimity, and it may result in a deep perception of oneness of all.

8. Having an experience of no-self and living it out does not mean that a person is enlightened. Mature enlightenment is when there is no flipping in and out of a personal sense of self.
9. Whatever the nature of no-self, whether it is darkness, void, purgatory, unknowing, or even thought, it *is* Love, Buddha nature, God, Brahman, Self, Ultimate Reality, Itself, Himself, Herself.
10. There exists latent possibility that theory may emerge out of this study of the experience of no-self.

These Cycle 2 preliminary lenses are used in Cycle 4, when data are interpreted in a process of inviting changes, expansion, or negation of the researcher's understanding of the topic and the development of new lenses, modified lenses (Anderson 2004), or "seed lenses" (Esbjörn - Hargens, 2004, p. 412). This process is described in the section entitled, Cycle 4: Transforming and Refining Lenses.

Cycle 3: Collecting Data and Preparing Summary Reports

Cycle 3 involved collecting original textual data from study participants through interviews (and in some cases through extant texts) and then preparing summary reports of the data (Anderson, 2004). Steps involved in collecting data consisted of identifying the target population and creating the procedures to recruit participants. Elicited texts from individual participant interviews were edited down into summary reports or stories "for greater clarity, precision, grammatical accuracy, and sense of flow" (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004, p. 411) through conventional thematic analysis or as a descriptive summary (Moustakas, 1990). In this dissertation study, data as generated through open-ended interviews with participants were

preassessed (Appendix B; Appendix C, revised version) to be basically stable in no-self as a state of consciousness.

Participants. Study participants consisted of 12 adult (age 18 and up) men and women from a variety of cultural and spiritual backgrounds. I obtained a multispiritual and multicultural population of participants in order to study how the phenomenon of no-self can manifest in adults who are traditional and nontraditional believers, nonbelievers, or believers from multiple traditions. Upon preliminary acceptance into the study, participants received via e-mail the Demographic Survey (Appendix D) to complete and return. This survey assessed spiritual and cultural background in an effort to assure participant diversity. The demographic portion of Palmer's (unpublished manuscript) Spiritual Guidance Inventory was used due to the thorough and sensitive nature of the assessment.

The initial phone consultation (Participant Selection Criteria, Appendixes B and C) and the demographic survey questionnaire supported the intention of ensuring a diverse participant base. I mainly looked for participants who spoke English and who resided in the United States or Canada; however, if a particular spiritual teacher, or his or her devotee, from another country wished to participate in the study, I would have been honored to interview him or her, with an interpreter if necessary. Hence, participants did not necessarily have to be U.S. citizens but had to be fairly accessible to me with regard to my time and expense.

Participant recruitment procedures. Beginning in July 2008, diverse participants were recruited via e-mail correspondence to individuals, exemplars, and spiritual organizations. Exemplars who assisted with recruiting consisted of transpersonal psychotherapists, spiritual teachers, and spiritual directors and guides with considerable experience working with people undergoing consciousness changes as dissolution of ego. Individuals whom I contacted to

participate were sent a basic cover letter with attached documents containing a Participant Recruitment Flyer (Appendix E; Appendix F, revised version) and a Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix G; Appendix H, revised version). The same format was used for two postal mail exemplar contacts. The cover letters consisted of basic research study introductory information and a brief personal bio statement. Each cover letter was customized, based on whether I knew the person and/or whether I received the contact from a spiritual or professional exemplar referral, an acquaintance, or a participant. Sometimes I had permission to use the referring person's name; other times I stated, "A professional colleague thought you might be interested in participating."

Exemplars were provided with the flyer (Appendix E; Appendix F, revised version) for distribution to potential participants. To account for the possibility that exemplars may have wanted to refer my study to other exemplars, I wrote a letter (Appendix G; Appendix H, revised version) for recruiting potential participants. There were two scenarios for use of this document. In the first scenario, a particular exemplar forwarded this letter of introduction to my study with his or her letter of recommendation to another exemplar. Another time, an exemplar provided me with the name and address of a potential participant and suggested that I e-mail him or her.

Auspicious bewilderment. Anderson (2004) stressed the importance of recognition of instances of auspicious bewilderment in intuitive inquiry studies, as they can lead to groundbreaking results. The unexpected showed up early in participant recruitment, when I received an e-mail from a Buddhist scholar stating that the Pali term *anatta* is translated as "not-self" versus "no-self." He also saw an inherent problem with my study due to use of the term "experience of no-self." In response to this scholar's concern, I meticulously reviewed all

Buddhist references contained in the literature review and made minor revisions to the Chapter 3 section on Buddhism.

Further bewilderment showed up during July. I had word from various e-mails that there was some confusion as to just what aspect of spiritual experience I was researching. I went back to the research proposal looking with *new eyes*, knowing that a fuller explanation was in there, and then wrote a new letter. I met with my dissertation chairperson and obtained permission to send out an explanatory letter (Appendix I: Letter to Clarify Participant Selection Criteria) to all people whom I had previously contacted or who had contacted me. I also revised the Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix G; Appendix H, revised version) and the Participant Recruitment Flyer (Appendix E; Appendix F, revised version) to incorporate the following fuller explication:

The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important.

Renewed recruiting efforts. Auspicious bewilderment during early participant recruitment was fortuitous in that the explanatory letter (and later the recruitment letter and flyer revisions) generated a flurry of responses. In late July, an exemplar who leads a no-self discussion group e-mailed the flyer out to group members. Other individuals responded to my direct e-mails. By October 31, I had only interviewed 3 participants and scheduled one additional interview; therefore I launched a new, more proactive recruitment plan. I followed new leads targeting individuals, spiritual organizations, and schools, and revisited leads which had generated no response. Furthermore, I was more proactive in phoning individuals and organizations. As a result of these efforts and over the course of recruiting participants, the flyer was posted in a few centers, and the letter was sent out to members of at least three spiritual and/or consciousness

discussion groups. In total over the course of recruitment, I personally sent out more than 78 direct e-mail contacts, plus made numerous phone and personal networking contacts.

In addition, in December I placed an advertisement (Appendix J) in the *Think About This* e-mail newsletter associated with *EnlightenNext* magazine (formerly known as *What is Enlightenment*). This ad copy was linked to a survey on the SurveyMonkey website, the design of which was based on text and questions taken from participant recruitment and screening criteria (see Advertisement Prescreening Survey, Appendix K). The ad ran two times—the second time due to a slight glitch in the programming link from the first ad copy to the SurveyMonkey survey. While the two ad runs generated 62 responses, I contacted only 2 of these respondents. The others were not contacted either because they described a temporary accessing of no-self or because their spiritual backgrounds were similar to participants already interviewed.

I also followed intuitive leads in finding potential participants. For example, on November 21 I sent an e-mail to a former professor named Matthew (not his real name) as a potential lead to recruit participants. The beginning of the cover letter of this formal contact stated,

Hello Matthew: I am contacting you at this time with regard to my dissertation research on the experience of “no-self” and the living out of the experience. More specifically, I am in touch with you because this morning I awoke within a dream wherein someone was trying to give me your phone number—and the scenario was odd enough to grab my attention with the *knowing* that it was with regard to my study. So, I am wondering if you may know of a potential participant or participants who are living in “no-self” or are beyond that state.

This lead generated several contacts and resulted in obtaining 2 participants. Ultimately, it seemed that snowballing (Mertens, 1998) of my personal contact with people enlisted the next 8 participants needed for my study. This occurred because individuals whom I already knew, had screened, or interviewed endorsed my study, and they suggested individuals to contact. More

specifically, either I contacted the recommended people directly, or they e-mailed my study recruitment documents to spiritual and consciousness groups or directly to individuals. In some cases, I had a strong sense that individuals had received word of my research from two or more sources prior to agreeing to participate.

As a result of all recruitment efforts, I received e-mails from potential participants *and* from people who acknowledged the significance of my dissertation research topic, several of whom wanted to be kept apprised of the final study. My research generated global interest, as I was able to track e-mails as originating from various part of the United States, Europe, Canada, India, and Australia. By January 23 I had 12 participants interviewed. While I did not ask how a person came to know about my study, some people volunteered that information. Of note is the fact that all recruitment efforts—exemplar, individual, and psychotherapist referrals; advertising; intuition; phoning and e-mailing organizations and individuals; and networking—produced some level of contact and interest that generated results.

Participant selection and screening. This research study proposed to explicate the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience as an advanced stage of spiritual consciousness, which is clearly a complex dimension of human experience. Nevertheless, it would have been difficult to assess a person's stage of spiritual development and impossible to guarantee that the person would definitely still be in that stage at the time of the interview due to the fluidity and unpredictability of spirituality. Therefore, participants did not necessarily need to be in a particular advanced stage in order to be accepted into the study. The intent of the initial prescreening was to ensure that that participants had experienced no-self as a drastic unselfing, dark night, loss of meaning, emptiness, or the void and be in the process of living out the experience or have already lived it out. Retrospective experience of no-self, whether the person

was in an advanced phase, such as a penultimate stage, or has slipped into unity as oneness, would exemplify and validate the dissertation research question.

As noted in the previous section, the revised Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix H; Appendix I, revised version) explicated that I was looking for participants who may have had one or more breaks that caused de-identification with self-referent “I” such that personal identification with being and experience was no longer important. Prescreening procedures included screening of potential participants via personal intuition of what a person was saying assessed against knowledge from the study during a telephone conversation in which I asked them to briefly define and describe no-self and to provide their ages and spiritual backgrounds (Appendix C: Revised Participant Selection Criteria). In addition, I screened for each candidate’s ability to describe and articulate no-self as initial experience and the living out of the experience in daily life.

In order to obtain participants who were experiencing the level of drastic unselfing necessary for this study, I needed to discern basic ego loss and the introvertive or unity type of mystical experience from the extrovertive experience of being in no-self as loss of self-referent “I”—without directly asking about these qualities. I had originally thought that listening for any of the following: perception of pure consciousness, dark night, void, emptiness, anhedonia, loss of meaning, nihilistic despair, nothingness, loss of Presence (or of the sacred), or loss of mystical experience, would indicate that the person was a candidate for inclusion in this study. While the quality of perception of pure consciousness was insightful, the screening protocol of asking a person to define no-self and to give brief examples from lived experience was most revealing about whether the person was stable in no-self consciousness. With regard to the other qualities, it was not so much identifying these specific qualities in what the person said, but rather gaining

an overall sense of how personally disruptive his or her spiritual journey was, especially noting the dichotomy between that and the description and definition of no-self.

Additionally, when several participants were asked to describe an experience or experiences of no-self, they said, “I don’t understand the question.” Then I would reformulate my question using their specific spiritual terms related to no-self and their process around no-self. Typically it was a person’s difficulty defining the experience of no self or giving examples from his or her experience, combined with the specific answers and aspects of articulation of no-self, that pointed to the person’s being in a stable state of no-self. On the other hand, a few people seemed to have no hesitancy in answering no-self screening questions. Nevertheless, at some point in the screening, my heart chakra would begin resonating, and an inner knowing would tell me that I just *had* to interview that person, sometimes despite a rational knowing. Noteworthy here is that all participants who were interviewed were included in the dissertation research analysis.

Another level of participant screening included validating my intuitional insight. Two screened participants responded to this study of no-self without exemplar referral, and my intuition led me to believe that they were eligible for the study. Even so, I wanted reassurance of their eligibility; accordingly, I procured consultation from a spiritual exemplar with over 25 years working with individuals in advanced stages of spiritual development. This guidance provided validation of my own intuition during the screening about these two individuals’ level of spiritual development and authenticity during the initial assessment.

During the screening, candidates were also assessed (Appendix B; Appendix C, revised version) to be mentally and physically healthy. All participants rated themselves as being in good or excellent physical health and psychological health, or somewhere right between good and

excellent. I would have excluded any person who would not be able to partake in all aspects of research for health reasons, or who rated himself or herself as being in fair or poor mental health.

Prescreening of participant eligibility for the study took place via e-mail correspondence. Numerous people self-selected out of study because they did not think they were stable in no-self. For example, one person wrote, “I figured you’d be looking for stable no selfers, and I know you’ll find lots of them.” Several people self-selected out because of lack of time, and this drastically cut down on screenings. All individuals who thought they would qualify were screened in a conversation via SimpleTollFree phone service. During that unrecorded conversation, I let the potential participant decide whether he or she was qualified to participate, while at the same time noting my intuition about the person’s state of no-self. As a result of these screening parameters, I only screened five people who ultimately did not participate. Two of the people who self-selected out of the study did so because they were not stable enough in no-self; one due to a lack of ability to articulate the living out of the experience, and one because of time constraints. One person claimed to not be psychologically stable, and I declined to interview one individual whom I thought might be difficult keep on task. Altogether, I did 17 screenings.

Screened participants who qualified for the study. The first actual participant clearly qualified for the study during the screening phone call. Two new screening protocols arose from that conversation. In explaining the interview procedure, I asked, “Would you be able to speak about your experience of no-self and the living out of the experience in terms of phases or stages that occurred during your lifetime?” This question arose out of the individual’s wondering how to speak about no-self and the lived experience of no-self and what the interview questions would be. As a result, I offered that person the opportunity to receive by e-mail a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview. Therefore, these two new aspects the screening

process were added to the initial screening questions (Appendix C: Revised Participant Selection Criteria).

At the end of each screening call, I explained that participants would be partaking in a study and verbally outlined the Participant Informed Consent Form and the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix L), including the confidential nature of the study and participant data. I told them that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice and that participation was entirely voluntary. I explained the procedures regarding the interview telephone conferencing service, the SurveyMonkey version of the Participant Informed Consent Form and the Transcriptionist Agreement (Appendix L), and the Demographic Survey (Appendix D). I did not at any time apply any pressure or encourage participation.

Most participants decided during the screening to join the research study. When the interview appointment was set, I e-mailed each participant the conference call instructions, the SurveyMonkey Web site link to Participant Informed Consent Form, a Microsoft Word document version of the consent form (Appendix L), and the Demographic Survey (Appendix D) as a Microsoft Word document. Eleven participants signed the SurveyMonkey version of the Consent Form; the other individual preferred the Word document version, which he signed and e-mailed back to me. All participants completed and signed the required documents prior to the interview.

Interview protocol. All interviews were recorded and conducted via telephone. I had originally stipulated interview procedures directly related to in-person interviews. However, due to diverse participant geographical location or participant choice, I did not conduct any in-person interviews. Phone interviews were conducted by me in the privacy of my home, and participants

were likewise advised to arrange to be interviewed in a location where they would not be distracted or disturbed.

A pilot test was not conducted because the first 3 interviewed participants were obviously stable in no-self. Additionally, all were able to answer the interview questions in an articulate manner; provided more than enough data for research; and without prompting, were enthusiastic and positive about the interview process.

Phone interviews ranged in length from 50 to 118 minutes and were audio taped and transcribed. I used the SimpleTollFree conferencing service for the interview call due to ease of use, clarity of digital recording service, and no cost to participants. I also chose to use the professional Internet survey service called SurveyMonkey to host the Participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix L). This Web site was selected due to ease of use and privacy policies.

During the telephone interviews, I utilized my prior experience of performing intuitive spiritual counseling via this media. The quality of empathetic identification is a skill I used to facilitate the research interview. Hart (2000) described deep empathy as causing “a more direct knowing of the other” (p. 256) that transcends subject-object and self-as-other in that one retains one’s own sense of self while at the same time being open to and experiencing the world through the other person. This capacity for “empathic inclusion . . . as knowing the other more directly” (p. 257) can happen spontaneously within a person.

I have practiced and am capable of incorporating deep empathy in interview sessions, whether in person or nonlocally via telephone. In early 2002, my heart chakra was blown wide open, resulting in my capacity to embody compassion and unconditional positive regard, with empathetic inclusion happening quite naturally in relation to others. This ability was used as participants gave voice to their initial event of no-self and their lived experiences of ego

dissolution. My heart-mind connection with participants may have helped them not only to trust me but also to trust their own inner wisdom in participating in the research process and giving voice to their truth.

With regard to interview procedures, the proposal version of this text was written for in-person interviews, and similar measures were substituted for telephone interviews. No interview questions were changed. At the beginning of each interview, I acknowledged receipt of the Demographic Survey (Appendix D) and the Participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix L) and answered any questions that the participant had. I reminded him or her that prior participants had found it helpful to give voice to the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience in terms of stages, or phases of spiritual development. I offered the person time to meditate or center, but no one needed to do that. Prior to turning the recording service, I read the following statement:

The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important. I realize that not everyone uses the term “no-self.” Please include the specific terms and definitions you use.

After answering any remaining questions, I told the participant I would turn on the SimpleTollFree recording service and the interview began. Interview questions (Appendix M) guided each participant to elucidate the specifics of the initial experience of no-self, while taking into account the likelihood that the experience was ineffable. The balance of the interview focused on describing aspects of the living out of the experience, such as physiological, cognitive, and emotional components and symptoms; how the participant’s life had changed; and also how his or her sense of self had changed in relation to the world.

Data transcription. I originally intended to personally transcribe participants' interviews; however, interim experience in transcribing 10 participant interviews for another research project led me to decide to use a professional transcriber for dissertation interview data. The transcriber signed the Transcriber Consent Agreement (Appendix L) and did not have access to any information that identified the participant other than what was contained on the audio recording.

After each interview session, I immediately downloaded the digital audio interview file to my computer, coded it with the participant's chosen pseudonym, and sent the file to the transcriptionist via a secure Internet file compacting and transfer service. The transcriptionist then confirmed receipt of the file and informed me of when she would send the transcript back to me. When I received each participant's transcript, I listened to the audio recording to check the text for accuracy, and I amended any inconsistencies. I also edited punctuation to reflect American Psychological Association writing style for inclusion in the dissertation. I kept a copy of the original raw dictation text, as it was punctuated to reflect speaking style, and I referred back to it or the audio recording whenever I wanted to get the original flavor of a passage in analyzing data. Next I sent my edited copy of the interview transcript to the participant and asked him or her to edit it to reflect any changes, additions, deletions, or revisions that were warranted. The reason I did not send the transcriptionist's version of the text was because the punctuation was unclear and also, in some cases, I was able to clarify or correct what the transcriptionist could not decipher from the recording. All participants returned their edited transcripts within a few days to a month.

Writing the participant stories. Anderson (2004) recommended using intuitive inquiry to edit down transcribed material into individual participant stories for the purpose of including them in the dissertation. Additionally, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that data need to be

organized before beginning grounded theory analysis. A complete description of the grounded theory and intuitive inquiry aspects of the process of writing participant stories is contained in Chapter 4.

Member checking as a criterion in research. This dissertation research involved not only the initial screening and the phone interview, but also subsequent “member checks” (Mertens, 1998). Member checking is vital to grounded theory process performed so as to not bring premature closure to theoretical data analysis (Charmaz, 2000) and is an important criterion “in establishing credibility” (Mertens, 1998, p. 182) in qualitative research.

Charmaz (2006) stated that in grounded theory, the researcher “cannot anticipate what [the] core categories will be beforehand” (p. 111). She advised that the researcher should anticipate going back to a participant two to three times when there is a need to “increase conceptual precision” (p. 111) of core categories or of emerging theory. Concurrent with Anderson (2004), Charmaz, and the Participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix L), participants were required to edit their transcripts and their participant stories for accuracy, including making any changes, clarifications, omissions, or additions. Additionally, the Consent Form stipulated that member checks could occur three times. In addition, they were advised that they could be required to answer a few questions, via e-mail or phone, in order to help clarify their experience with regard to data analysis. This phone or e-mail contact could take place a maximum of two times. My intent was to contact participants only if I needed to collect further data in order to explicate concepts that were emerging as vital to the research.

Two levels of member checking utilized in Cycle 3. In the first round of member checking, participants were asked to edit their interview transcripts prior to my writing the participant stories, including making any additions, changes, and/or clarifications to the

document. Participants received copies of their data via e-mail. All participants chose to edit their transcript. One person, upon reading her transcript, e-mailed back to me that she had forgotten during the original interview to speak about “another possibly more deeply embodied, realization of no-self” and asked if she could write about it. I gave her permission to do so, and she e-mailed me her narrative of a significant, pinnacle realization of no-self. I included quotes from her realization, which occurred 6 months prior to the interview, into her participant story.

The second round of member checking occurred later in Cycle 3, when participants were sent via e-mail a draft of their stories, for the purpose of approving and/or editing them. All participants chose to edit their transcripts, and all but 2 chose to edit their participant stories. The 2 who did not make any changes or clarifications to their stories e-mailed a response that they accepted the story as it was written. One of the people who chose to edit her transcript e-mailed me that she wanted to speak to me about her story. During a phone conversation, she felt that her story did not “show [her] state of consciousness” because it did not occur to her to speak about it during the interview. She felt that this should be a personal discussion rather than colored by her writing ability. Of note here is the fact that asking about a participant’s state of consciousness was not part of the Guiding Questions for the Participant Interview (Appendix M). However, most of the participants had made statements indicating level consciousness involvement, and I had noticed that she had not. An additional 7-minute conversation was allotted this participant so that she could give voice to her state of consciousness, without questions on my part. This digitally-recorded conversation was recorded, and aspects of the conversation were included in her participant story.

Later member checks as theoretical sampling in the research of no-self. With regard to possible further levels of member checking, Charmaz (2000) suggested that grounded theory

data analysis should begin, not with the first participant, but later in the data collection in order to allow categories to emerge (Charmaz, 2000). The grounded theory section of this chapter describes the reasons why member checking was *not* done during the data collection interviewing stage as part of early theoretical sampling—doing so would have precluded 3 participants from the study and drawn early closure to categories and themes (Charmaz, 2000). However, by continuing to be auspiciously bewildered (Anderson, 2004) with my process I remained open to delaying data analysis until the end of participant selection and interviewing. This turned out to be essential to this study, as 3 of the last 4 participants were *all within a different category* related to the experience of no-self.

Cycle 4: Transforming and Refining Lenses

The data analysis portion of this research project began in Cycle 4. This cycle involved using the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses to interpret data in a process of inviting changes, modifications, refinement, or even expansion of or negation of the researcher's understanding of the topic (Anderson, 2004). Conventional thematic analysis is typically used to analyze data in intuitive inquiry; however, the method is compatible with other approaches to data analysis (Anderson, 2004). Due to the fact that grounded theory was used in this study to account for the potential emergence of new theory or of confirming existing theory, the grounded theory framework of coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling provided pragmatic steps to analyze data.

Esbjörn-Hargens (2004) stated that in analyzing data, the researcher should remain open to Cycle 2 lenses potentially being transformed into (a) entirely new lenses which encompass unpredicted, fresh understanding; (b) altered lenses which are a modification or improvement of assumptions; and (c) “seed lenses” (p. 412) which may be tracked back to an earlier Cycle 2 lens

or a combination of several of these lenses. Anderson (2004) explained that the most important way of interpreting data is through intuitive breakthroughs as

those illuminating moments when the data begin to shape themselves before the researcher. Patterns seem to reveal themselves with each fresh set of information. . . . This interpretive process may go on for several days or weeks with rest or incubation periods between work sessions. (p. 321)

Often in the process of analyzing data as the researcher goes deeper and deeper into participants' stories, confusion and contradiction can occur as "auspicious bewilderment" (Anderson, 1998, p. 84)—a process of paradoxical challenge of assumptions and generation of new understandings. Here the researcher may turn to her own intuitive incubation, dream work, or spiritual or creative practice (Anderson, 1998, 2004) as a way of letting go of the need to know, in order to allow confusion to be transformed into new insights. In this process, I used the same intuitive abilities described previously and detailed in Appendix A.

Incorporating the grounded theory pragmatic analytical steps into the intuitive inquiry method required that I develop an innovative course of action for scrutinizing data and synthesizing results both as a research process and toward a finished product. This process of creating intuitive grounded theory is fully detailed in Chapter 4, where it is made apparent how intuitive inquiry and grounded theory interrelated as I analyzed data prior to writing the participant stories (Cycle 3) and in the process of transforming and refining the lenses (Cycle 4). Accordingly, Cycle 4 is represented in Chapters 5 and 6, which detail and make apparent the changes as new and unexpected modifications to my understanding of the experience of no-self. By shifting from the intellectual mode of analyzing to the more receptive mode of intuition, I examined data and allowed new understandings and patterns to reveal themselves. I also meticulously recorded and evaluated both the analytical and intuitive aspects of procedures.

Cycle 5: Integration of Findings and Literature Review

Cycle 5 represents the completion of the hermeneutical circle, as the researcher views the entire study anew “as though drawing a larger hermeneutical circle around the hermeneutical circle prescribed by the forward and return arcs of the study” (Anderson, 2004, p. 323) by integrating the findings of the literature. Additionally, the researcher takes a fresh look at all aspects of the study and engages in an honest, critical evaluation and disclosure of what was learned and what still needs to be explored with regard to the topic (Anderson, 2004; Esbjörn-Hargens & Anderson, 2006). The presentation of results of the study, as elucidated through Cycles 4 and 5, are presented in Chapter 5: Transforming the Preliminary Lenses, and in Chapter 6: Refining the Lenses Toward Theory. The discussion of results is presented in Chapters 7 and 8.

Grounded Theory Exploration of the Experience of No-Self

As exploratory qualitative research, this investigation of the experience of no-self through intuitive inquiry had the potential to generate theory due to the fact that the method requires the researcher to maintain “a bigger picture perspective” (Anderson, 2004, p. 335) throughout the study, versus a reductionist perspective. Anderson further elaborated that the method, via the incorporation of hermeneutical interpretive cycles reflected through deep intuitive reflection, has the capacity to elucidate human experience “into new ways of theorizing and envisioning that are closer to lived experience than do the rationalistic styles that dominate much of world culture and scientific discourse” (p. 335). The possibility existed that this study would generate theory, which might help to inform interested people about the topic of no-self as dark night and dissolution of ego. Therefore, grounded theory was incorporated in the research method in order to elucidate this potential.

This section provides an overview of the grounded theory method used to pragmatically guide data analysis in this intuitive inquiry study of no-self. Chapter 4, entitled *Creating Intuitively Informed Grounded Theory*, fully details the grounded theory steps used to analyze data toward theory.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was developed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss (1967), who posited that theories should be *grounded* in field data as interactions in social situations. Mertens (1998) explained,

The defining characteristic of grounded theory is that the theoretical propositions are not stated at the outset of the study. Rather, generalizations (theory) emerge out of the data themselves and not prior to data collection. Thus, the emergent theory is grounded in the current data collection and analysis efforts. (pp. 170-171)

The purpose of the method is to develop a theoretical analysis of the data that fits the data and has relevance to the area of study (Charmaz, 1995). The inductive and interpretive nature of grounded theory, along with the fact that it is not theory driven, allows the researcher the reflexivity of following intuitions that arise from the data rather than data being forced to place into preconceived categories.

The original theory constituted a prescribed and structured method viewed as positivistic (Glaser, 1992). In contrast, Charmaz (2006) posited a constructivist interpretation of grounded theory that both updated the method, while at the same time, kept the basic theoretical guidelines as set forth by Strauss and Corbin (1988). The approach acknowledges the interpretive nature of research, in that we “*construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 11). Charmaz made the following distinction between constructivist and typical grounded theory:

In typical grounded theory practice, you follow the leads in your data, as you see them—and constructivist grounded theory takes you one step further. With it, you try to make

everyone's vantage points and their implications explicit—yours as well as those of your various participants. Not only does a constructivist approach help you to remain clear about the antecedents of your constructed theory, this approach helps other researchers . . . establish the boundaries of the usefulness of your grounded theory and, possibly, to ascertain how and where to modify it. (p. 184)

While the method's pragmatic steps aid in establishing clarity, the approach also conforms to the epistemological stance of both hermeneutics (Bruns, 1992) and intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2004), in that the researcher enters into the phenomenon in order to gain intersubjective understanding based on ontological interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). Consequently, the method is conducive to analysis of rich, thick interview data, and the author recommends that the researcher remain open and flexible at all times to the data and to the discovery of new insights. She suggested that "theoretical playfulness" (Charmaz, p. 71) can inspire and allow testing of potential ideas. Concurrent with intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2004), both intuition and logic are involved in data analysis as the researcher makes sequential comparisons to "establish analytic distinctions" (Charmaz, p. 54).

Pragmatic Groundwork in Data Analysis

Coding and categorizing. Constructivist grounded theory is built on a pragmatic groundwork. The first step involves word-by-word, line-by-line, or segment-by-segment coding, which is a process of attaching labels to data in order to summarize and account for each piece of data and to depict what it is about (Charmaz, 2006). The author recommends using initial coding and focused coding or theoretical coding to distill and sort data and to sharpen and clarify analysis.

In accordance with grounded theory, the researcher must guard against forcing data into preconceived codes and categories by allowing them to emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992). Within this dissertation, the intuitive inquiry Cycle 2 lenses had already identified researcher biases and assumptions, and these lenses were utilized at this point to interpret data

such that I remained open to the preliminary lenses being changed or modified. Next, constructivist grounded theory structured data analysis for the transformation and refinement of Cycle 2 lenses (Anderson, 2004; Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004).

Charmaz (2006) stated that at the coding stage “preconceived theoretic concepts may provide starting points for looking *at* your data but they do not offer automatic codes *for* analyzing these data” (p. 68). In other words, extant concepts need to be integral for understanding the data; and Charmaz recommended several strategies for guarding against imposing assumptions and for ascertaining that the data support the researcher’s assertions. The author cited examples of how to do this, such as asking the following questions: “Can you explicate what is happening in this line or segment of data without these concepts?” (p. 68) and “Have I guarded against rewriting—and therefore recasting—the studied experience into a lifeless language that better fits *our* academic . . . worlds than those of our participants?” (p. 69).

As a result of a process of researcher self-questioning and analysis, codes and categories that elucidated participant description form the foundation for emerging theory based on “meaning, not at truth” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 526). This is another area in which constructivist grounded theory differs from the objectivist approach. Additionally, Charmaz (2006) stated that the process of coding and categorizing is flexible, and it is fitting for the researcher to engage intuition and to play with theory in order to try out ideas or a new set of codes prior to writing about the codes and analyzing their significance.

Memo writing. Memo writing is the second part of constructivist grounded theory and is a crucial step between data collection and writing drafts of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The nonanalytical process of memo writing forms the core of grounded theory and provides an informal record of all ideas and questions relating to analytical problems. Writing memos in data

analysis is in concurrence with the intuitive inquiry required step of keeping scrupulous notes (Anderson, 2004).

Memo writing is a process in which the researcher is free to write and diagram ideas and conjecture about categories quickly and without editing, or in an analytical manner, just as long as the researcher takes the stance that memos are initial, incomplete, and interim (Charmaz, 2006). Memos can be used with initial coding and also later in data analysis to help clarify emerging categories. Memo writing can clarify the rich, thick description in participant data, and then focused coding can be used with codes that appear frequently and with codes that seem most significant, in a decision-making process of analyzing and trying out which codes make sense as categories. Memos can also be used to raise particular codes to conceptual categories based on the researcher's analytic framework by giving them "conceptual definition and analytic treatment in narrative form" (p. 91). This brings codes beyond being descriptive tools into categories that explicate and conceptualize ideas, common themes, patterns, experiences, or processes. "Categories need to be as conceptual as possible—with abstract power, general reach, analytic direction, and precise wording" (p. 91)—and at the same time, they must be consistent with data.

Theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting. Theoretical sampling is a process of data analysis concerned with gathering data to fill out emerging categories. It involves a movement back and forth between codes and data for the purpose of "develop[ing] the properties of your category(ies) until no new properties emerge" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 97). Categories are saturated when there are no more "sparks" (p. 113) of fresh theoretical insights or new attributes of core categories. Sorting the categories organizes them and provides logic for "creating and refining theoretical link[s]" (p. 121) as an analytical framework for writing. This process can also involve

examining initial research questions examining negative cases that emerge in the data as an indication that the researcher needs to refine the emerging theory, versus importing negative cases as a way of advancing theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006).

At the core of grounded theory is the process of simultaneously coding, collecting, and analyzing data throughout the research project, and variations exist in the application of theoretical sampling techniques (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constructivist grounded theory studies phenomena and views both the data and the analysis as being created through interaction with participants within their cultures and contexts (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). The researcher views the meaning of different phenomena or variables and how they play out in participants' lives and then further "seeks to define conditional statements that interpret how [participants] construct their realities" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). Toward this end, Charmaz (1995, 2000, 2006) recommended "conducting theoretical sampling later in the research to ensure that you have already defined relevant issues and allowed significant data to emerge" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 520); otherwise, early theoretical sampling may cause the researcher to prematurely end data analysis. Delaying theoretical sampling establishes potential theories (Charmaz, 2000).

Member checks performed on transcripts and participant stories; early theoretical sampling not performed. As noted in the Intuitive Inquiry section of this chapter, member checking was performed on the participant transcripts and also on their stories. During the participant selection and interview process, I considered starting data analysis and writing the participant stories after I had received the first 3 or 4 participant-edited transcripts; however, I just could not bring myself to do it. These initial interviews turned out to be unique, not surprisingly, as each individual experienced, viewed, and verbalized his or her own spiritual

development differently. I also had an innate sense that there would be further distinctive aspects of no-self coming from the next 8 or 9 participants. I had an influx of interviews from the end of November through January, which further prevented me from beginning formal data analysis. Also during that time, I was contemplating—essentially innovating—how I would combine grounded theory with intuitive inquiry, especially with regard to how the preliminary lenses would fit in with the grounded theory analysis. After the completion of 11 interviews and time spent assimilating participant dialogues, the method clarified between January 20 and 23; therefore, I began formal data analysis during that time.

For these reasons, I did *not* perform grounded theory theoretical sampling during data collection; accordingly, I did not contact participants after the interview to collect further data in order to explicate early concepts and categories that would have emerged from the first few participants' data. In retrospect, if I *had* begun formal grounded theory analysis for the Cycle 3 summary reports at that time, I would have performed theoretical sampling on those 3 to 4 participants and subsequently would have done a member check to confirm emerging categories. Next, I would have revised the interview questions to reflect my emerging data analysis; and from that point on, essentially, I would have narrowed my focus (Charmaz, 2000) and limited potential emerging data from the 8 or 9 remaining participants. By intuitively continuing with the initial open-ended interview questions (Appendix M), I stayed in the not-knowing and was able to remain open to whatever participants wanted to tell me about no-self. This auspicious bewilderment was essential to this research, and I was very grateful that I followed my intuition and delayed data analysis because the 9th through 11th participants who were qualified and agreed to do the study were *all within a different thematic category* of no-self.

The application of theoretical sampling in the study of the experience of no-self. As described in the previous paragraphs, in this study early theoretical sampling with subsequent member checking would have prematurely closed categories and curtailed potential theory formation (Charmaz, 2000). In addition, theoretical sampling as incorporating the procedure of going back to participants to “refine and fill out” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 12) major categories was *not* performed. Participant narratives produced more than enough data which were rich and thick enough for analysis and which generated robust categories; therefore, this aspect of theoretical sampling was not done. Stated alternately, the existing data available for analysis already consisted of 160 pages of participant stories plus additional information contained in the participant transcripts.

There was another reason that early theoretical sampling with subsequent member checking was not performed in this study. In accordance with intuitive inquiry Cycle 3, I decided to begin grounded theory data analysis as I transformed the participant edited transcripts into stories for inclusion in the dissertation (Appendix N). Member checking was performed two times in this study: when participants first edited their transcripts and later when they edited the final stories that I had written. Next, I found that at the beginning of intuitive inquiry Cycle 4 data analysis, two theoretical categories of participants already existed, along with several apparent themes and robust categories which were ripe for analysis—all without going back to participants for further information.

Variations exist in the application of theoretical sampling techniques (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As an alternative application of theoretical sampling, Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that a researcher can use “already collected data” (p. 150) for analysis and still perform theoretical analysis. In this scenario, the researcher would

sample data “for incidents or events pointing toward a concept” (p. 150). Furthermore, performing theoretical sampling on already collected data does not indicate that the “study will lack significance or be superficial” (p. 150). This research would still be considered “a high level analysis” (p. 150), although the authors cautioned that “gaps in the research may occur when analyzing previously collected data because there isn’t the opportunity for further exploration” (p. 150) with participants.

In this study of no-self, theoretical sampling techniques were used to analyze already existing participant data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which were gathered in accordance with intuitive inquiry procedures and as documented in this chapter. Chapter 4 explicates this analytical process and furthermore explains the specific levels of theoretical sampling that were used during the final stages of grounded theory data analysis (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Analyzing and writing research results. The final step in the grounded theory method is that of analyzing and writing research results. Concurrent with the constructivist nature of the approach and with intuitive inquiry (Anderson 2004), grounded theory study results are portrayed in a neutral and objective tone of analytic discourse that links and makes apparent the researcher’s ideas to theoretical conceptions (Charmaz, 2006). The process of theorizing involves the researcher examining participant experience by taking it apart, viewing it in different ways, making comparisons, and following ideas in order to clarify possibilities, connections, and questions. The method takes the standpoint that resulting theories do not represent absolute truths

Rather, they constitute a set of hypotheses and concepts that other researchers can transport to similar research problems and to other substantive fields. . . . Thus the [constructivist] grounded theorist’s hypothesis and concepts offer both explanation and understanding and fulfill the pragmatist criterion of usefulness. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524)

Grounded theories may call us into the experiences and may inspire curiosity and understanding, or they may provide the impetus for future research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter elucidated the research methods used in the proposed dissertation exploration of the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience. The intuitive inquiry research method was presented as the overarching method that guided the dissertation study, and constructivist grounded theory was elucidated as especially suitable to guide data analysis in an intuitive inquiry study. This chapter described intuitive inquiry as an ideal method for exploring and analyzing semistructured interviews of people voicing complex, detailed understanding of their experiences and the living out of no-self. As exploratory research, the intuitive inquiry method had the potential to generate new, empirically based theory or of confirming current theories. Constructivist grounded theory was expounded as laying a pragmatic foundation for coding, categorizing, and analyzing participant data, with the goal of potentially providing a framework for theory and further research.

Outcomes of this dissertation study are presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Chapter 4 explains the process of creating intuitively informed grounded theory as the research method used to investigate the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience. It elucidates data collection, explicates the process of integrating intuitive inquiry with grounded theory, and explains the data analysis procedures. Research results are presented in Chapters 5 and 6, wherein grounded theory data analysis is illustrated through systematic discussion and inclusion of rich, thick participant quotes in order to depict the refinement (Chapter 5) and transformation (Chapter 6) of Cycle 2 lenses toward theory. Discussion, in Chapters 7 and 8, integrates findings with extant literature and elaborates on the theoretical results portion of the study of the

experience of no-self. In preparation for reading Chapter 4, Figure 1 illuminates how the intuitive inquiry cycles were embedded with grounded theory analysis

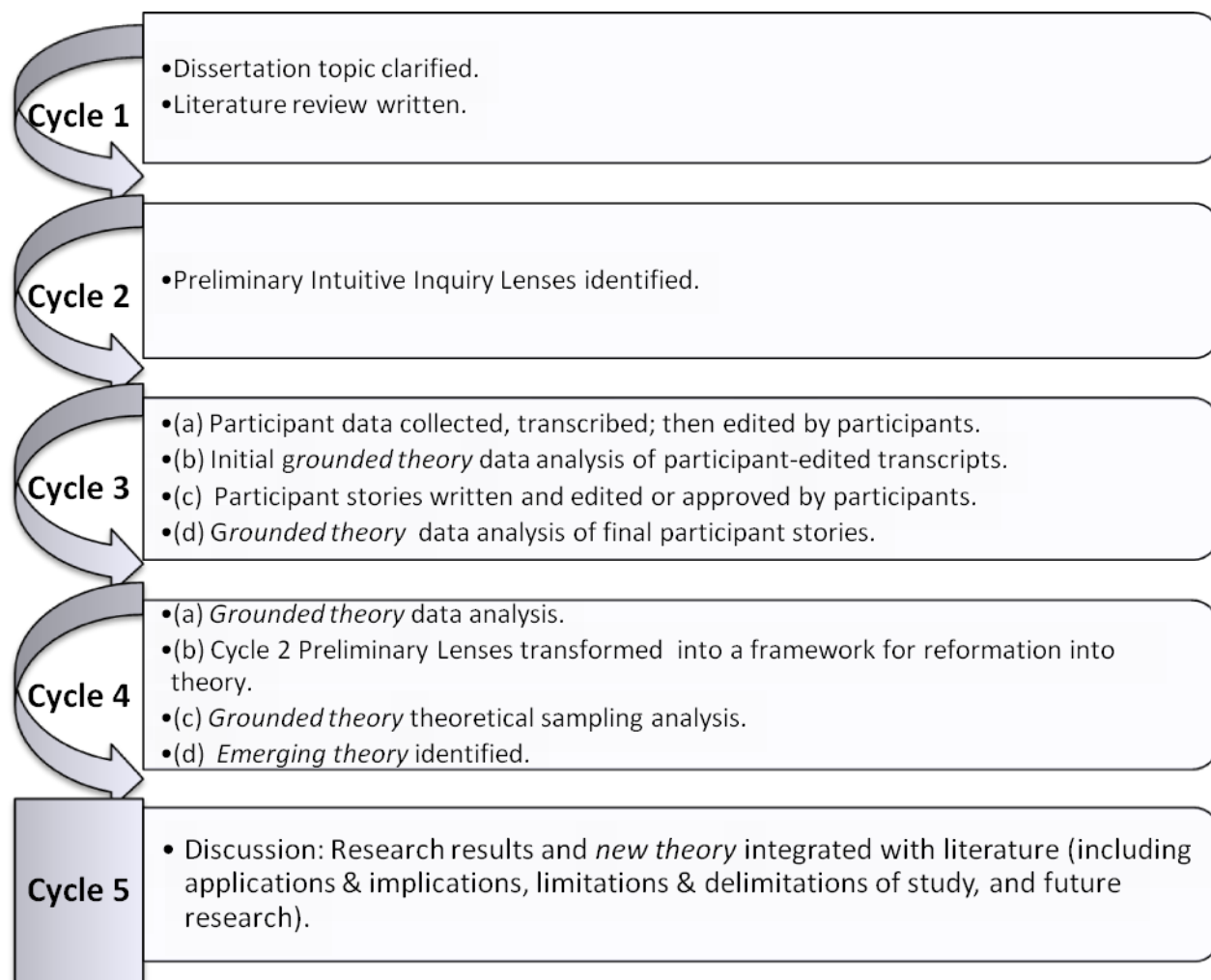


Figure 1. Intuitive inquiry cycles embedded with grounded theory analysis.

Chapter 4: Creating Intuitive Grounded Theory

The process of integrating intuitive inquiry with grounded theory was a creative endeavor. Listening to intuition proved to be integral in guiding the process of not only knowing when to begin data analysis, but also, when and how to use grounded theory tools in relation to writing participant stories. This chapter details both the procedure of constructing intuitively informed grounded theory and the personal analytical and intuitive processes. Making this known fulfills the researcher's requisite "responsibility of demonstrating value and efficacy of intuitive inquiry" (Anderson, 2004, p. 324) as meticulous documentation and conscientious truth-telling.

In this chapter, the intuitive inquiry Cycle 3 grounded theory data analysis is explicated as a course of action of analyzing participant transcripts toward writing the participant stories. Next, Cycle 4 analysis of participant stories is described, followed by theoretical analytical procedures performed during the final stages of grounded theory data analysis toward constructing grounded theory in Chapters 5 and 6. Cycle 5 is also briefly described, with the note that full representation of Cycle 5 procedures are presented in Chapter 8.

This chapter includes an explanation of grounded theory analysis procedures for Cycles 3, 4, and 5 along with the intuitive inquiry process that guided my analysis and writing. Appendixes portray samples of documents used in grounded theory analysis of the experience of no-self. Figure 2 provides an overview of analytical procedures used to investigate no-self. It also illustrates the levels of grounded theory analysis embedded in intuitive inquiry Cycles 3 and 4 toward drafting the results of the study in Chapters 5 and 6.

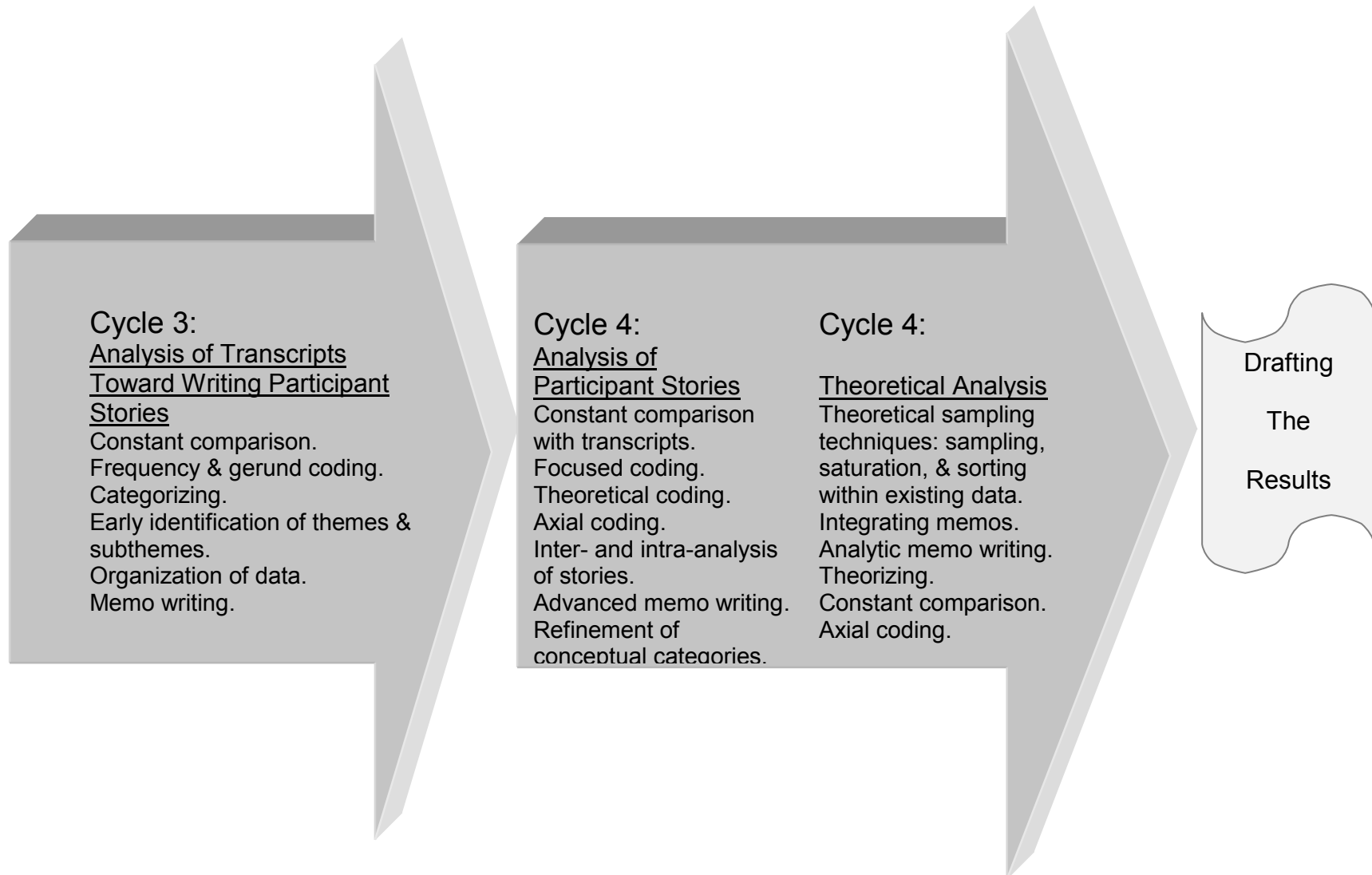


Figure 2: Successive rounds of grounded theory performed in intuitive inquiry Cycles 3 and 4.

Cycle 3: Writing the Participant Stories

Cycle 3 represented the next step in the intuitive inquiry method and involved writing participant stories from the participant-edited transcripts. Participant transcripts varied in length from 11 to 26 single-spaced pages and, in all but one case, consisted of mostly long blocks of participant dialogue, with few questions from me. These summary reports served to organize data prior to analysis (Anderson, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). More precisely, writing the participant stories, with constant comparison with the participant-edited transcripts, not only organized essential concepts, events, and descriptions into a comprehensive, cohesive narration—It also elucidated codes and categories. Furthermore, this analytical process pointed toward identification of themes and subthemes.

Process notes. Beginning in early January 2009, almost *any* question related to my dissertation process was answered through my personal types of intuition (Appendix A). At times I got answers to questions that I did not even realize I had formally asked. For instance on February 7, I awoke to my mind spitting out an initial outline of dissertation Chapters 3 through 5. I immediately jotted down these hits and later more formally recorded ideas. At this time, I also realized how important it was to force myself to take the time away from data analysis to work on dissertation construction.

Grounded Theory Analysis of Participant Transcripts

The initial grounded theory data analysis was performed in order to organize participants' transcripts in my mind, to identify early categories, and to begin to recognize potential themes and subthemes. Documentation of this analysis consisted of (a) numerous memos; (b) individual participant transcripts color-coded with early codes and categories; (c) the key, or list of terms,

for the color-coded transcripts; (d) 12 participant story title analysis documents; (e) the early axial coding document; (f) 12 documents showing levels of grounded theory analysis used in creating participants' story titles; and (g) 12 individual participant memowriting documents.

To illustrate some of the levels of analysis, Appendix O, entitled *Sample Transcript Analysis Documents*, presents the following documentation: the key to color coding individual participant transcripts, a sample selection from one individual's transcript analysis, the early axial coding document, and a document showing grounded theory used in creating one participant's story title.

Analysis toward writing the participant stories. The earliest data analysis began as I verified accuracy of the copy of each participant's transcript received from the transcriptionist. As I listened to the digital recording and edited the transcript, I wrote memos to reflect my analytical, comparative, intuitive, and evaluative thought processes. Next, I identified early codes derived from the interview questions and from the list of attributes that were listed on the Participant Recruitment Letter and the Flyer (Appendixes E through H). These attributes were used for frequency coding the participant transcripts, in that I took these codes, searched for them, and color coded them in each of the 12 participants' transcripts. During this process, the list of terms on the *key* grew as I added specific terms that I discovered on each transcript and backtracked to searching for those terms on each already color-coded participant transcript. This level of color coding visually distinguished key terms, as initial codes and categories, within each transcript (intra-analysis), and served as the first level of interanalysis—in that I began to identify early themes and subthemes. Each individual color-coded transcript was then used along with other transcript-level analysis documents in composing each participant stories. A copy of the key to color coding participant transcripts is presented in Appendix O.

The next step in analyzing participant transcripts, prior to transforming them into stories, was that of coding and categorizing each transcript. This process involved identification of emerging categories, properties of categories, themes, and subthemes. A sample selection from one participant's transcript analysis document is presented in Appendix O.

As the initial analysis began to fracture the participant data into early themes, codes, and categories, I began to be able to not only organize individuals' oral spiritual histories in my mind, but also understand relationships between categories. Axial coding served to record and to lend coherence to the emerging analysis. The initial grounded theory axial coding is presented in Appendix O.

Process notes. At the initial stage of data analysis, I followed intuition with regard to how to code and categorize; then I had to figure out how the intuitions were reflected in grounded theory terminology. In other words, grounding the intuitive process necessitated a meta-analysis of how I was naturally performing grounded theory analysis. Two brief examples illustrate a minute aspect of this process. At the beginning of data analysis, I decided not to use electronic data analysis tools and designed a simple Microsoft Word document in which to analyze participant transcripts and stories. Next, I intuitively started coding one participants' transcript and found that I had to go back and figure out that what aspects of coding I had used—which, it turned out, actually consisted of gerund coding, categorizing, early identification of themes and subthemes, and organization of data. Later in data analysis, in creating the title for the first participant story that I wrote, I discovered that I had intuitively used three strategies—in-vivo coding, frequency coding, and theme identification. Thereafter, I incorporated grounded theory analysis into the writing of all story titles and, additionally, as a way of checking intuited themes. However, sometimes intuition pervaded over analysis as representing the heart of the story.

These initial, experiential processes laid bare the wisdom of Corbin and Strauss' (2008) advice to "walk a fine line between getting into the hearts and minds of participants, while at the same time keeping enough distance to think clearly and analytically" (p. 81). Throughout all dissertation analysis, I continued to follow my intuitive process; furthermore, I stepped back from *knowing* by meticulously performing the grounded theory analysis and recording findings. Accordingly, incorporating grounded theory with intuitive inquiry involved a formal analytical process which had the effect of reducing researcher intuitive bias and grounding intuitions of the heart and mind.

Grounded Theory Procedure Used in Writing the Participant Stories

Analysis toward writing the stories. The next round of grounded theory was performed on each participant-edited transcript toward composing each participant's story; as such, it was intra-analysis. This involved memo writing; constant comparison; gerund coding, line-by-line coding, and focused coding; categorizing; and also theme and subtheme identification. I also began diagramming in an effort to organize upcoming analytical processes. A sample from a section of a narrative coding document used in writing one participant's story is contained in Appendix O. This document serves as an illustration of the style of documentation used at this stage for gerund coding, line-by-line coding, focused coding, and categorizing of each individual participant's transcript (Figure 2 presented earlier in this chapter). Appendix O also contains a sample of levels of grounded theory analysis used in creating one participant's story title.

In composing the stories, I read and reread the text until it became orderly in my mind and I began to see the story. Next, I sequentially cut and pasted chunks of text pertaining to a certain incident, phase, or concept and placed them in a Word document, where I then successively composed each section. The process of writing these sections was an analytical and

intuitive cognitive process—essentially of comparing, contrasting, and comprehending dialogue and of refining thought-memos to the point where they were of dissertation-quality writing.

Participant dialogue that was parenthetical to the actual experience of no-self and the living out of no-self was paraphrased in language that adhered closely to text and was sprinkled with in-vivo codes as direct quotes that kept the story alive with the participant's voice. Large blocks of participant dialogue were inserted to personify and exemplify the participant story. The levels of grounded theory analysis used in writing each story is illustrated in Figure 2 (presented earlier in this chapter).

Sample selection from a participant story. While all the participant stories may be read in Appendix N, a selected quotation from *Dave's Transition Toward No-Self* serves as illustration and potentially as enticement to read other participant stories.

The first transition. For the interview, Dave viewed his spiritual development in terms of three transitions, or shifts in awareness, in relation to no-self. The first transition occurred about two and a half to three years ago right after spending some time in law school on the West Coast. This transition was preceded by extreme spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physiological upheavals. It started when he was on break from law school. He had an

incredible experience of just light everywhere, and there was complete intimacy with the light. So that I was it, and I was connected to it and everything else. I would say perfect unity is what it felt like. And I was thinking, "Oh, this is awesome! I totally made it. This is great. I don't know what happened, but this is wonderful and nothing will ever be wrong again." [with a laugh] And about three days later, it went away. [amused laugh] I was, like, "No! No, no, no!" And so at that point, because I'd had a glimpse of the experience without all these boundaries in the way, all the boundaries that came back were feeling really confining.

This confinement was the impetus that began the period of great upheaval in Dave, where Dave was being forced to look at and let go of every piece of identity and confining idea that he had ever had. As a result, Dave became apathetic toward school work and had an inability to focus; and he also isolated himself from others. Dave explained that internally he had a sense of disconnection, which felt lonely. He explained that he felt that

It's like an ocean or—I'll say an ocean, 'cause it's dynamic. A kind of bigness. And it was dark. And it was a feeling, too. It had a very distinct feeling associated

with it of expansion and freedom, and such. But it was almost as if someone else's expansion and freedom, because I didn't feel connected to it at all.

Cycle 4: Transforming the Initial Intuitive Inquiry Lenses to Theory

According to Anderson (2004), the next cycle in intuitive inquiry method is that of analyzing the participant stories toward transforming and refining the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses into Cycle 4 lenses. In this intuitive inquiry and grounded theory study, participant stories were analyzed toward generating new theory of the experience of no-self. Therefore, instead of refining the preliminary lenses toward new or transformed lenses, the lenses were viewed in Chapter 5 in relation to participant data and transformed in Chapter 6 toward new theory presented in Chapter 7.

The procedure for transformation of the initial lenses into theory involved not only grounded theory categorical analysis of individual participant stories, but it also entailed theoretical analysis. Chapter 3 listed the reasons why member checking was not performed subsequent to the editing of the transcripts and the stories by participants. It also conveyed that this study would involve a variant application of theoretic sampling techniques (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Corbin and Strauss (2008) answered the questions: What if a researcher has already collected all data before doing data analysis? Can theoretical sampling still be performed? The authors said that, although theoretical sampling typically “directs data gathering and analysis” (p. 150), the researcher can analyze “data that have already been collected” (p. 150). In other words, in this study data analysis of the concept of no-self, which was represented by already existing data from the 12 participants, involved theoretical sampling. Corbin and Strauss stated that examination of already collected data can be a “high level of analysis” (p. 150) of both concepts and “incidents pertaining to a concept” (p.

150). This study examined the experience of no-self and incidents relating to the living out of no-self.

To be perfectly clear, in this study I used a variant theoretical sampling technique. Since this was a practical application of theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and not strict use of theoretical sampling, in this study the process is referred to as *theoretical analysis* which included the use of the *theoretical sampling techniques* of sampling, saturation, and sorting.

Cycle 4 grounded theory analysis of participant stories included intra- and interanalysis of participant stories and theoretical sampling performed on already existing participant data. It also entailed evaluation in relation to all transcript analysis documents. Figure 2, presented earlier in this chapter, lists the levels of analysis, including the theoretical analysis used in this dissertation. Documentation of Cycle 4 analysis consisted of the following documentation: (a) numerous memos and diagrams; (b) several axial coding drawings and written documents; (c) the Cycle 4 emerging themes and categories document; (d) the key, or list of terms, for the number and color codes for transformation of the initial intuitive inquiry lenses; (e) 12 participant story intra-analysis documents; (f) the emerging themes and categories document; (g) four intra-analysis documents of FL 1, PL 2 & DL 3 categories; (h) 12 individual participant advanced memowriting documents; and (i) an outline of the levels of Cycle 4 data analysis, which helped me keep track of the analytical procedures.

To illustrate Cycle 4 analysis, Appendix P (Sample Documents: Intra- and Interanalysis of Participant Stories Toward Theory) contains documentation to support grounded theory analysis. This appendix contains the following: the key to the number and color codes for transformation of the initial intuitive inquiry lenses, the key to the Cycle 4 emerging themes and

categories, a sample selection from one participant's story intra-analysis document, and a sample selection from one group's interanalysis document.

Grounded Theory Analysis of Participant Stories

Process notes. I embarked on this grounded theory task by spending an entire day in early March performing an analysis of 1 participant's story. I wondered if I was duplicating previous analysis, and I was confused about how the grounded theory methodology would intersect with transforming the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses. Additionally, I was bewildered regarding how I would portray this in the results chapter. I awoke the next morning with my mind spitting out a simple idea which was integral to organizing and implementing grounded theory methodology with regard to refining preliminary lenses in relation to participant stories. I immediately got up and started working on advanced memo writing, diagramming, and writing sections in Chapters 3 and 4. Out of this work emerged the process I used in theoretical analysis and the *framework* that proved to be integral for analyzing participant stories.

The analytical framework for transforming the preliminary lenses. The theoretical framework involved grouping initial Cycle 2 lenses into 3 themes that had emerged from data analysis: (a) foundational lenses, (b) process lenses, and (c) descriptive lenses. This process of grouping preliminary lenses and categorically labeling them allowed me, once again, to set aside the initial lenses. Consequently, it reduced researcher bias and allowed refinement and development of emerging categories to come out of the data (Charmaz, 2000) rather than from the preliminary lenses. The three themes also proved to be fundamental to theorizing and to writing the dissertation results and in the discussion of results. A copy of the theoretical framework is presented in Appendix P and is entitled, The Number and Color Codes for Transformation of the Initial Intuitive Inquiry Lenses. The reason this document has this title is

because it was first used for intra-analytical coding of individual participant stories, as described in the next section.

The analysis process involved intra- and interanalysis of participant stories. This section explains the levels of intra- and interanalysis of stories. Grounded theory *intra*-analysis of individual participant stories consisted of constant comparison with transcripts, focused and theoretical coding, advanced memo writing, and refinement of conceptual categories and properties of categories. It also entailed comparison to all transcript analysis documents. The analysis of each participant story was performed in a tabular Microsoft Word document. A sample of one participant's story intra-analysis document is presented in Appendix P.

To facilitate *inter*-analysis of participant data, I designed a document entitled, Categories of FL 1, PL2, and DL3, and inserted the three initial theme headings—(a) foundational lenses (b) process lenses and (c) description lenses—into the document. Then I brainstormed categories and subcategories under the three headings, knowing that these categories could be revised as analysis proceeded. These categories arose in my mind due to previous levels of grounded theory analysis and repetitive readings of the participant transcripts and stories. The categories and subcategories were sorted and placed among the FL1, PL2, or DL3 headings. A copy of this document is presented in Appendix P and is entitled, Cycle 4 Emerging Themes and Categories. It is helpful to note that this was a working document—it shows *emerging* themes and categories of FL 1, PL 2, & DL 3 analyzed in the four groups of participants (coded for my own recall as 4.2.a, 4.2.bi, 4.2.bii, 4.2.biii). New themes, categories, and properties of categories came to light out of this analysis, with refinement continuing in Cycle 5 as I wrote the discussion chapter. The final version of this document is reflected in Chapter 7 as theory which is inclusive of all themes and subthemes, and all categories and subcategories and properties thereof.

In the next step toward *interanalysis* of participant stories, participants were placed into one of four groups based on perceived similarities; and the four group documents were given the previously noted group codes of 4.3.a, 4.3.bi, 4.3.bii, and 4.3.biii. From the 12 *intraanalyzed* participant story documents, I copied data, which had been labeled with focused and theoretical codes, and placed it into categories under FL 1, PL 2, and DL3 previously-brainstormed categorical headings. Additionally, advanced memo writing was performed on inter- and intra-participant levels; and conceptual categories, subcategories and categorical properties were refined over the course of the analysis.

A sample selection from one participants' story Categories of FL 1, PL 2, and DL 3 document is contained in Appendix P. Note that the participant's sample of intra-analysis includes dialogue boxes that reveal the first level of advanced memo writing that was performed as part of theoretical sampling and sorting. The next level of advanced memo writing was done in 12 individual participant memo documents—These compare and contrast categories, subcategories, properties; record thoughts, assumptions, and ideas; and most importantly ask analytical questions.

To summarize, Cycle 4 theoretical analysis of already existing participant data first consisted of intra-analysis of individual participant stories, as I learned how individuals' processes developed and changed (Charmaz, 2006). Then interanalysis was performed as theoretical sampling in four group documents each entitled, Categories of FL 1, PL2, and DL3. Sampling was performed until no fresh properties emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006).

The next step in the interanalytical process involved going back and forth between the 12 participant intra-analysis documents and the four Categories of FL 1 (foundation lenses), PL 2 (process lenses), and DL 3 (descriptive lenses) documents and comparing and contrasting all

categorical placements and assumptions. I examined the relationships between and among categories and subcategories, questioning the placement of, and even the labeling of, subthemes, categories, and subcategories. Themes and categories were examined for saturation—at times going back to transcripts if necessary. While advanced memos guided theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting, self-questioning provided intellectual and intuitive insights into all assumptions and conclusions. The most evaluative questions were the simplest: How do I know what I know about this (category, theme, or assumption)? What else do I need to know about this? Are there any negative cases in relation to this? Who else spoke about this; is there more data to support this? What is missing?

In other words, the simplest questions provided the most insight and guidance into intuitive and analytical assumptions—in furtherance of not only integrating advanced memos, but also beyond that toward evaluation of results. Memo writing and self-questioning served as template for elevating categories to concepts and for refining them into theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2006). All Cycle 4 documents, including all memos, evidenced critical sorting and saturation of categories; provided sampling evidence (which elucidated properties of categories); and formed the basis for theorizing.

Process notes. During the process of performing data analysis to transform the Cycle 2 lenses to Cycle 4 theory, I began to wonder how what I was doing in theoretical sampling would be clearly explicated in the dissertation results chapter. I awoke one morning with what seemed like a results chapter outline. However, I was bewildered because it seemed that I would have to write a discussion chapter before I wrote the results chapter because the process I was envisioning would fit into two chapters. The next morning, I awoke with another outline. In writing down this outline, I could clearly see how all the codes and categories—whatever they

were *finally* labeled—would fit into two results chapters. I realized that previous day’s intuition was the second results chapter outline, and the new outline was the first results chapter outline. I now understood the integral role that the foundational lenses, process lenses, and description lenses would play in organizing dissertation results. While I knew that Chapter 5 would be entitled, *Transforming the Preliminary Lenses*, and would contain the overarching framework, and that Chapter 6 would be potentially be entitled, *Refining the Lenses*, I also knew that I had to remain open to change and further bewilderment.

Summary of Cycle 4 grounded theory intra-analysis. In this study, theoretical intra-analysis of already existing participant data included theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting. Theoretical sampling involved identifying relevant data toward developing “emerging theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 100) and furthermore toward expanding and refining categories and properties of categories until no new properties appeared. Sampling of already existing data occurred subsequent the two levels of grounded theory analysis performed on the participant narratives and on the stories, wherein categories, properties of categories, and themes and subthemes were identified. Therefore, congruent with constructivist grounded theory, sampling “developed emerging theoretical categories” (Charmaz 2006, pp. 99-100).

Sorting, diagramming, and integrating advanced memos functioned toward theoretical development (Charmaz, 2006). Axial coding was vital in procedural development of Cycle 4 data analysis as well as in categorical analysis. Because theoretical saturation occurs only when examining the data provides “no new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, p. 113), saturation continued to be of concern through draft writing of results.

Theorizing Continued as Draft Writing of Results

Process notes. Beginning draft writing of results involved further analytic memo writing, diagramming, and axial coding. When I earnestly began writing results, I was baffled by my efforts and found my mind repetitively meta-analyzing during the day and night—essentially revisiting previous insights. I had numerous new insights and wound up performing another round of interanalysis of participant stories and transcripts. I discovered that my consciousness had shifted from the time that I began the first round of interanalysis to the second round, which had taken 4 weeks. I had been involved with a group doing chakra clearing consciousness evolution work and my own spiritual practices and had been aware of the now very familiar physiological signs of spiritual change. However, I had not yet realized that the mind had transformed. I discovered, upon going back into participant stories and transcripts, that I was seeing the dialogues with new heart-mind eyes and gaining new insights. Subsequently, draft writing continued as writing of results.

Writing the results chapters. According to Charmaz (2006), constructivist grounded theory places concepts and ideas at the forefront of analysis as an inquiry process of allowing theory to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). The originally intuited Chapter 5 and 6 outlines were fine-tuned as fresh insights were made while immersing myself in both participant data and during in-process analysis. Remaining open to both intuition and to change was crucial to the process of draft writing. While the framework for the chapters was retained, the intuitive outlines only served as guides, as each chapter was literally created from day to day in a revisionary, analytical, and intuitional process, through the use of all Cycle 3 and Cycle 4 grounded theory documents and memos.

While memo writing and self-questioning served as template for elevating categories to concepts, the tasks of sorting, diagramming, and integrating advanced memos functioned toward theoretical development (Charmaz, 2006). Consequently, grounded theory analysis continued as a constructivist process of draft writing the research results (Charmaz, 2006) in Chapters 5 and 6. Toward achieving final theoretical sorting and theoretical saturation, the same self-questioning process described in the previous section served to evaluate all theorizing assumptions, integrate memos, and scrutinize intuitions and insights. I found diagramming, axial coding, and memo writing to be extremely vital in the process of writing the results chapters. Three file folders filled with handwritten notes and sketches were dedicated solely to this aspect of the study, plus there are several long documents saved on my computer. Writing results in Chapter 6 was difficult, time consuming, and at times mind-boggling. At one point, I developed a three-page axial code in order to clear my mind so that I could proceed with writing. I have included that document as Appendix Q entitled, A Visual Guide to Understanding the Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum. The diagram represents major themes, subthemes, and categories toward theory of no-self; as such, it serves as a guide for reading Chapters 5 through 7.

Theoretical saturation was reached in Cycle 5 when no unique theoretical insights or categorical properties emerged from examining data. To exemplify this, the first of my last two insights concerned a pressing need to insert the categorical section on love and fear into the discussion of results. The second was the need to elevate the categories of letting go, allowing, acceptance, and surrender to themes. I could tell that I had reached theoretical saturation when I made it through three consecutive nights without having to wake up to write memos or to get up and start typing a refinement to the discussion in Chapter 6. I sent the last draft off to my chairperson; after that, no fresh insights came to mind.

Cycle 5: Integration of Findings and Literature Review

Cycle 5, as discussion of results in Chapters 7 and 8, incorporates the completion of the hermeneutical circle (Anderson, 2004; Esbjörn-Hargens & Anderson, 2006) as assessment of the whole dissertation from the literature review through results. The process involved analytically and intuitively viewing the entire study anew and engaging in an honest, critical evaluation and disclosure of what was learned, including suggested areas of future exploration of the experience of no-self (Anderson, 2006). Also in line with constructivist grounded theory, the dissertation literature review acted as a supporting structure, while the fresh “grounded theory *refines, extends, challenges or supersedes* extant concepts (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 168-169). The Cycle 5 procedure is presented in Chapters 7 and 8.

Process notes. My personal lived process of no-self, of course, did not let go of me during the writing of research results. The no-self played out through life choices and events, as they further stimulated loss of core identity structures in body and mind, interspersed with pure unifying experiences. This inner growth and learning was auspicious for identifying ways of interpreting data analysis in discussing results. One brief example is the following: The category of witnessing continued as “bewilderment” (Anderson, 2006). I realized that I had made witnessing too broad a category and that I needed to raise some of its properties to categories. This resulted in a thematic change entitled, *The Experience of No-self as States of Consciousness*.

Writing the results of the study of no-self. As part of my personal intuitive and analytical writing process, insights and realizations regarding results continued to come to me throughout Cycle 5, stimulated my delving deeper into research, and consequently helped create a much fuller analysis of study results. With regard to the constructivist grounded theory method used in

conjunction with intuitive inquiry, the writing of the literature review acts as a supporting structure for writing research results (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, the fresh “grounded theory *refines, extends, challenges or supersedes* extant concepts” (pp. 168-169). In reviewing a great quantity of relevant literature, initially it came to me (through bibliomancy) to focus on the writings of three authors. This was helpful, and in the process of doing so, I discovered (*very* often through additional bibliomancy) additional authors’ viewpoints and tied results back to the literature references and topics, where applicable. Nevertheless, writing the discussion Chapters 7 and 8 was painstakingly difficult at times, and it was much more time consuming than expected. However, fresh intuitive insights always came at night in answer to my most difficult investigative research challenges. As in all other intuitive inquiry cycles, I continued to take copious intuitive and analytical notes as part of Cycle 5.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the process of analyzing the participant stories toward transforming and refining the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses into Cycle 4 lenses. It detailed both the procedure of constructing intuitively informed grounded theory and my personal analytical and intuitive processes as meticulous documentation and conscientious truth-telling (Anderson, 2004).

Within this chapter, the intuitive inquiry Cycle 3 grounded theory data analysis was explained as a course of action of analyzing the participant transcripts toward writing the participant stories. Cycle 4 theoretical analysis of already collected participant data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was analyzed using techniques from theoretical sampling, which was performed during the final stages of grounded theory data analysis (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This analysis explicated core themes, categories, and properties of categories

toward identifying emerging theory. As a continuation of Cycle 4, constructivist grounded theory analysis was distinguished as theorizing, which extended as a self-inquiry process into draft writing of study results. While all Cycle 4 documents provided evidence of theoretical analysis, several examples were presented as Appendixes O, P, and Q. Theoretical saturation was reached in Cycle 5 when no unique theoretical insights or categorical properties emerged from examining data.

Research results are presented in Chapters 5 and 6, including preliminary Cycles 2 lenses grouped thematically as foundational lenses, process lenses, and descriptive lenses. Reformation of the preliminary lenses is illustrated through systematic written discourse and inclusion of rich, thick participant quotes. A framework for transformation of the initial lenses is presented in Chapter 5, toward understanding the rectification of the lenses toward theory in Chapter 6. The discussion of results is contained in Chapters 7 and 8.

Chapter 5: Transforming the Preliminary Lenses

Results of the study of the experience of no-self are contained in Chapters 5 and 6. This chapter begins with an overview of participant demographic information and spiritual background, with discussion of results presented in Chapters 7 and 8. Next, results of grounded theory analysis are portrayed. Themes are disclosed, with an explanation of how they are distributed among and related to three groupings of the preliminary intuitive inquiry lenses: Foundational Lenses, Process Lenses, and Descriptive Lenses. Participant narrative is articulated as evidence of formation of themes related to no-self contextualized as both experiential reality and as unfolding of a spiritual process. This analysis forms a framework for understanding and informing the rectification of preliminary lenses in Chapter 6, where theorizing continues as explication of themes, categories, properties, and dimensions of the experience of no-self.

Within this dissertation, each participant's identity is protected through the use of a pseudonym, which was chosen by the individual when the Participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix L) was signed. Throughout Chapters 5 and 6, interview data are included from both participant-edited transcripts and the edited stories, with quotes providing rich, thick description to explain transformation of preliminary lenses and to also illustrate the depth and breadth of the themes and categories that emerged from intuitive inquiry and grounded theory analysis.

Relevance of Participant Stories to Research Results

Grounded theory and intuitive inquiry research results of this study of no-self were based on both the participant edited transcripts and the participant-edited stories. It is highly recommended that one read the participant stories prior to reading the study results contained in Chapters 5 and 6. Each story is an oral history of a participant's spiritual journey, either from childhood or from early adulthood. Each story provides a unique and deeply personal vision into

an individual's oral history of transformation from self to Self. The stories, whether taken as a whole or individually, not only are significant to understanding research results but also may hold insightful, personal understanding for the reader. All participant stories are contained in Appendix N.

Overview of Participants' Demographic and Spiritual Backgrounds

For this study, I sought and obtained a multispiritual and multicultural population of participants in order to study how the phenomenon of no-self can manifest in adults who are traditional and nontraditional believers, nonbelievers, or believers from multiple traditions. The 12 study participants consisted of 5 men and 7 women between the ages of 24 and 70, with an average age of 55, who resided in the United States or Canada. Demographic and spiritual data originated from participant completion of the assessment presented herein as Appendix D: Demographic Survey. Due to dissertation length constraints, complete presentation of participant demographic data and of their spiritual backgrounds is contained in two appendixes. Participant demographics, ethnicities, and career descriptions are presented in Appendix R. Participant Spiritual and Religious Profiles (Appendix S) presents a clear dissection of spiritual demographics, including participants' unique descriptive viewpoints on current spirituality. A complete discussion of participant demographic and spiritual backgrounds is contained in Chapter 7.

Analysis of Participant Demographic Survey Data

Participants self-reported their ethnic backgrounds, resulting in the use of both racial and ethnic terms; nonetheless, survey results revealed diversity among participants. When completing both the occupational and spiritual background sections of the survey, participants documented multiple careers and numerous past and present religious and spiritual traditions and

practices. Of interest with regard to the latter appendix is the fact that 2 out of 12 participants were raised as nonreligious/secular, 1 participant was raised in multiple traditions, and 9 participants were raised as Jewish or Christian. All participants explored at least one additional spiritual or religious tradition or sect and/or practice as adults, and 5 of these participants explored numerous (defined as more than two) traditions or practices. Another way of looking at the data is that 9 out of 12 participants were raised in and/or explored more than two traditions as *children or adults*, and 10 out of 12 participants have *explored* and/or *currently* practice or participate in *multiple* religious or spiritual traditions, or in spiritual practices. To summarize two key aspects of participant spiritual and religious data, all participants except 1 currently practice or participate in *more than one* spiritual or religious tradition or spiritual practice. In addition, 5 participants explored four or more spiritual or religious traditions as adults. The intention of Appendixes O and P was to establish veridity of participant responses to the demographic survey. While all participants' survey responses showed evidence of exploring spirituality, data from participant interviews presented in this chapter and Chapter 6 further expand on the spiritual process of the experience of no-self.

Framework for Transformation of the Preliminary Lenses

Pursuant to the intuitive inquiry method, Cycle 2 preliminary lenses were developed in order to articulate researcher biases (Anderson, 2004). These lenses were then used in grounded theory analysis as a reflection tool as I remained open to the “transformation, revision, removal, amplification, and refinement” (p. 318) of the lenses. As noted in Chapter 4, when I began theoretical sampling I grouped the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses as a framework for analysis into three themes: foundational lenses, process lenses, and descriptive lenses. At that time, I discovered that the initial lenses seemed to contain elements of true insight and naiveté;

therefore, all lenses appeared to be modified to some degree by constructivist analysis. The following sections break down and group the initial lenses into foundational, experience, and process lenses. In addition, this chapter describes overarching themes that emerged from data analysis through the portrayal of rich, thick participant data.

Foundational Lenses

Preliminary intuitive inquiry lenses as foundational lenses. The following is a quotation of the preliminary lenses that served as foundational lenses (numbered as they originally appeared in Cycle 2, Chapter 3). These lenses were transformed through data analysis into a theorizing summary in Chapter 6.

1. The concept of no-self appears in nondual traditions, in mysticism, and in psychological and spiritual literature. The experience of no-self fits into enlightenment as a process of trans-egoic development beyond the self-centered point of view of the ego and personality toward interconnectedness or Oneness.
2. People who are having experiences of no-self as dark night may be in a penultimate stage of spiritual development.
9. Having an experience of no-self and living it out does not mean that a person is enlightened. Mature enlightenment is when there is no flipping in and out of a personal sense of self.
10. Whatever the nature of no-self, whether it is darkness, void, purgatory, unknowing, or even thought, it *is* Love, Buddha nature, God, Brahman, Self, Ultimate Reality, Itself, Himself, Herself.

Participants defined the experience of no-self. No-self was found to be a term that these 12 participants could relate to across a spectrum of ages, occupations, and backgrounds, and demographic data further explicated diversity among participants. Responses to participant recruiting efforts and the success of that process was evidence of this, and all 12 individuals were able to define no-self, as articulated below through sections of the participant data taken as direct quotes from either the stories or the transcript. The passages below that are from the stories are

essentially quotations from Appendix N, which accounts for the quotations within the block quote text.

Dave. So, here, it's just that it wasn't a self anymore, because there were no edges. There was just no thing. The way I described it at the time was that there wasn't anything at all, but there wasn't nothing. It isn't anything at all, but it isn't nothing. Because even nothing—if you think of nothing, you have an image there—you have empty space, you have—yeah [laughs], I have an image of an empty universe—that's what I think of as nothing, or just blackness or whatever, but it isn't any of that. It's dynamic, it's alive. It's me, so it's—it's almost like an ocean, because it's always moving. And so any idea of self is gone. There is no self any more. There were really three transitions for me, and they're both in some way related to no-self.

Brahma. Brahma defines no-self through the experience in which he lost identification with his persona (the Brahma that was born on his birth date) which was reidentified with his Being which “is eternal” and is “ever-present.”

Ariel. Ariel's experience of no-self is that experience of personal “I” may arise from time to time, but it arises beside the sense of spacious, open consciousness. She viewed this as contrary to what some classical descriptions have described as “field of radical emptiness . . . devoid of concept, devoid of “I,” devoid of anything personal.” Ariel stated that “where I find myself is more in the non-dual, which means that that awareness has returned to join itself or to live through phenomena as well as through emptiness. So that there's a true recognition of the wedding of emptiness and form, you know, or Shiva-Shakti. That's more the experience that I am aware of. That experience more than the classical no-self, where the personal “I” is more distant than the conscious nature.”

AJ. From a very early stage, it was fairly clear to me that the more I tried to look, the less I could find in terms of myself. . . . The process of deepening no-self involved a realization that “ego is not all powerful” and a recognition of the non-solidity of ego. Ego is a process. And everything is a process of changing and moving as part of “I” or “I am.” AJ described being in no-self as “feeling nothing, but totally connected at the same time. You know, being able to function, but just kind of resting in deep peace, deep emptiness.”

Moon. I thought that a more inclusive description of *no-self* would be this: It seems to me that my constant practice is learning to allow. And so, coming to a consciousness of no-self came through practices of allowing Wisdom to wean me from my self, or my small self, or my ego and that kind of consciousness; and Wisdom is instead forming me in a consciousness of service and compassion for the other. . . . Moon [described] images of growing in no-self as facets of stages . . . as a metaphor for her life practice of “letting go of herself.”

Robert. So, for me, no-self or self are two experiences that life can give rise to. But all along it's just life or consciousness—or the mystery or emptiness—whatever you want to call the unnamable thing that's moving as everything. Call it nature; and it moves as an

experience of being separate, and then it moves as an experience of no-separation. It just goes in and out of that obviously. [little laugh] In other words, no-self is everything moving as everything, no matter what it is called—Life, consciousness, mystery, nature, or emptiness or the unnamable.

DBear. DBear reflected on the no-self aspect of his process: “It’s interesting to consider, because it’s like the little self is the ego and the no-self is the loss of the ego after first waking. That’s how I would describe it, because what happens after that is there’s a lack of self; but then the self is found to be within—the bigger Self. For me, I already had had that experience inside, so it was about the loss of the little self, not the gaining of the big Self.

Anam Cara: It feels like there are three aspects. There’s the actuality of no-self—that’s just what is. It’s just how it is, and that’s unchanging. And whatever a human experience is, whether it’s mine or yours, or anyone’s, the fact of no-self is. And then there’s the realization of that no-self, which is sort of like a direct experience of That. And then there’s the human relationship to the experience, which would be like the unfolding of the realization within my life or anyone’s life. I wanted to distinguish these three things because the unchanging actuality of no-self is just the nature of things, and that can’t really be spoken of. So, when you talk about studying the experience of no-self, I have to say, well, I can’t really say anything about it. I can’t. It’s just not possible to say anything about the actuality of no-self. So everything I’m saying is like a vague attempt to just engage with that in some way. And mostly it will probably be about the other two things—the direct experience, and the human relationship to the experience.

Doublespiral. Doublespiral spoke about how for her, metaphorically, no-self is being “the sea of awareness” as that which is vast, silent, full, and also empty awareness which fleetingly gives rise to everything, and then is forgotten. She also defined no-self as a “great, full emptiness” that is “a great silence.”

Leita. Leita’s definition of no-self stems not from an intellectual definition or “a global definition,” but rather from her “personal experience” of no-self, which “is that there is an inner place that is essentially empty, and doesn’t have any identification with an ego structure.” Leita was born with awareness of “an inner place that is essentially empty.” She “did not have a strong identification as solely an ego structure and was aware of [her] self on a higher level outside of the framework of a normal infant or child mind.” This awareness enabled her to access higher mind right from “the first year of life.” In her words, “And it’s there all the time through waking, sleeping and dreaming; and it’s a permanent situation. However, I don’t perceive that it is the only thing that is there, but it is a part of the experience of my own awareness.”

Clara. I didn’t have a specific experience that altered my sense of my self. I guess I always had a notion of “no-self” in some way. It’s a bit hard to describe, because much of this was happening at a time when I didn’t have words for it, when I was still a child. But I can specifically remember just wondering why people thought that things were separate. I don’t know if I’m making sense, but let’s see. . . . I thought everything was all one thing. I couldn’t quite get a sense of myself as being an individual person. Not that I

didn't exist, but it just did not seem to me that I had the same sense of myself in the world as other people seemed to have of themselves.

GY. What I *think* no-self means is: something that takes you beyond the immediate identification that you have. And it moves you deeper into the deeper states or levels of consciousness. . . . So no-self, for me, just means transcendence, really to go beyond, because, you see, you can live in a level and not be identified with it. You can express yourself, but you're detached from it. That, in a way, is no-self, when you have that detachment. . . . A spiritual person or a person who's touched the no-self, they may seem to be in a particular state; but they're not really attached to it. And you can tell by their behavior; they're not obsessed, they're not addicted. They can move very easily and smoothly into the worlds of other people and be very supportive. That's a person that's touched no-self, you can say. They can move very easily and smoothly into the worlds of other people and be very supportive. . . . And my definition of no-self would be that you consciously go to that state of the Ground and live in it.

Quotes regarding participants' definitions of no-self were presented here as illustrations of how participants contextualized the phenomenon of no-self through robust and diverse description, rather than for formation of a composite definition of no-self at this time. The narratives also exemplify the complexity of no-self related to both experience and process. As participant explanations of the phenomenon of no-self are disclosed in Chapters 5 and 6, these foundational, descriptive definitions will anchor the experience of no-self in "sufficient knowledge so one can see differences and distinctions" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131) as theory is constructed.

Process Lenses

Preliminary intuitive inquiry lenses as process lenses. The next grouping of preliminary lenses was related to participants' description of a process related to no-self.

1. The concept of no-self appears in nondual traditions, in mysticism, and in psychological and spiritual literature. The experience of no-self fits into enlightenment as a process of trans-egoic development beyond the self-centered point of view of the ego and personality toward interconnectedness or Oneness.
2. No-self is a process wherein a person's sense of self dissolves either immediately or over time, and includes experiencing a void, emptiness, dark night, or nothingness.

3. People who are having experiences of no-self as dark night may be in a penultimate stage of spiritual development.

8. Having an experience of no-self and living it out does not mean that a person is enlightened. Mature enlightenment is when there is no flipping in and out of a personal sense of self.

Participants described their experiential no-self processes. As specified in intuitive inquiry Cycle 3, during the screening phone call, all participants said that they would be able to speak about their experience of no-self and the living out of the experience in terms of phases, stages, or transitions that occurred during their lifetimes. The following statements reflect participants' descriptions of their experiential no-self processes:

Dave. Dave's experience with Judaism helped to serve as the initial pointer to "the fundamental core of what it meant to come home or be home or let go" in his process of enlightenment." For the interview, Dave viewed his spiritual development in terms of three transitions, or shifts in awareness, in relation to no-self. [After the second transition,] Dave stated that he remained in that unity and there was this realization of being one with God. The third transition, which occurred 8 months later, was that the separate individual self simply went away, and was recognized to never have existed in the first place.

Brahma. For the interview, Brahma described several experiences and realizations on his journey to "Self as eternal Being." As he followed his heart, these experiences changed his agnostic viewpoint, expanded his ego, and evolved his consciousness. The final realization was one of eternal, "fully expanded no-Self ego and total integration with the universe."

Ariel. As an adult [Ariel] participated in various forms of spiritual practice. . . . She had many spiritual experiences along the way and had "many temporary states of no-self" [with one teacher.] [Another] teacher's spiritual practice included much more personal attention of the awakened person and also direct coaching and support . . . [and] "all kinds of things started heating up" in her. . . . Ariel went through a series of personal experiences that "dealt a really big death blow to some of her ego patterns." A few days later while she was meditating, Ariel had other signs of transformation, [including] signs that heart center had awakened in that she had opened up in her heart and that her heart was "not separate from anything else. It was not separate from the deep inner experience of nothingness, emptiness" Ariel realized that she "had crossed over in some sort of way" [and] described her current, personal experience of the I AM.

A.J. At the very early stages of exploring his Asian heritage, AJ stated that he went very deep into Buddhist teachings. He described his spiritual process in terms of inner embodiment of Buddhist and Taoist philosophies as "stages of commitment or stages of

letting go.” These stages played out in his life through the “landmarks” of getting married, having children, giving up his business career to become a Tai Chi and meditation teacher, and getting divorced. Throughout all of this, his application of “the idea of letting go [and] of living in the moment . . . totally transformed [his] life.” This philosophy enabled him “to more and more take each day at a time and concentrate on a moment—give up plans and expectations” This practice is something he’s done “in deeper and deeper levels throughout [his] life.” From age 19 to the present, his inner reality gradually shifted to an inner “sense of no-self.”

Moon. Moon thought of her process in awareness of no-self not in terms of hierarchical or logical development, but rather that “there are facets of stages. There are epiphanies or awakenings! And yet, all of this seems to be embraced in a circle or a container of breath and wisdom. It’s messy. . . . Moon’s facets of stages described as images of letting go reflect how she has transformed in no-self. Doing battle with the messiness can result in “epiphanies or awakenings,” and “all of this seems to be embraced in a circle or a container of breath and wisdom.”

Robert. Robert described his spiritual development as an unfolding of his own understanding and maturing of what was recognized or realized in certain pivotal moments. He sought “to transcend the separate self sense” that was going on “to find that One that [he] intuited.” His seeking led him to a realization that ended seeking, caused him to see the “nature of reality and the nature of the self or no-self,” and ultimately liberated “awake awareness illuminating” all experiences.

DBear. Dbear described his spiritual journey to no-self as three awakenings: the doorway to awakening, in which reality changed when he reached Transcendental Consciousness; a second awakening where he switched to Self in Cosmic Consciousness; and a third awakening which involved the switch to Unity Consciousness. His process continues in Unity as “surrender to life Itself.”

Anam Cara. Anam Cara spoke about six significant moments related to her unfolding process of no-self. Throughout her life there have been five different points that she felt were “relevant to the overall process” of the “core” moment of realizing I AM.

Doublespiral. Since early childhood, Doublespiral has had awareness of no-self, in that “it really was a sense of dipping into something that was always there, just for probably longer and longer periods of time.” Therefore, she does not view her process of permanently being no-self as developmental; rather, she described it metaphorically as a wagon wheel. . . . From a very young age she had a sense of the holiness of everything and an impression that there was just a “veil” separating us from the “full silence.” . . . About three years ago, Doublespiral fell into the sea of awareness, and she has not left the great silence since then.

Leita. Leita was born with awareness of “an inner place that is essentially empty.” She “did not have a strong identification as solely an ego structure and was aware of [her] self on a higher level outside of the framework of a normal infant or child mind.” This awareness enabled her to access higher mind right from “the first year of life.” . . . Since

childhood Leita's spiritual evolution has consisted of transformations of consciousness toward stability of "pure no-self" along with the "capacity for the consciousness to take in larger quantities of" creative, intellectual, and emotional information. The transformations have led to integration and stability in Unity consciousness.

Clara. Because of [Clara's] inner sense of no-self as a child, a lot about life did not make sense to her, especially with regard to religion. . . . Her discernment and her inquiring nature led her to explore religious traditions both as a child and as an adult. Clara has had a notion of no-self since she was a child in the sense that she was able to witness the behaviors and actions of others and as a sense of everything being "all one thing." . . . Clara described a dream that gave her an awareness that has never left her—a sense of "It's all one thing."

GY. GY has noticed a pattern of cycles of noetic events that have remarkably transformed her life. "I've been through three cycles of 20 years, in which similar patterns of noetic events happened. I had the same pattern in the first 20 years of my life, in the second 20 years of my life, and in the third 20 years of my life, and it's actually happening now—now that I'm 68 and into this (fourth) cycle. So I've had three full cycles." . . . GY believes that through the cycles or patterns of noetic events in her life, she has not only touched into the Ground, Self, or no-self, but also that the Self or no-self transformed her consciousness.

It was apparent at the time of interviewing participants and when transcribing the recordings that participants fit into two groups. More specifically, Group A ($N = 3$) participants, Clara, Leita, and Doublespiral, all had awareness of no-self from childhood. Conversely, the storylines of the lived experiences of no-self evidenced the fact that most participants, labeled Group B ($N = 9$), went through a process of developing awareness of no-self. Group B participants consisted of Dave, Brahma, Ariel, A.J., Moon, Robert, DBear, Anam Cara, and GY. The distinctions and similarities between these two groups of participants are presented as results of intuitive inquiry and grounded theory data analysis in Chapter 6.

Descriptive Lenses

All participants were able to articulate and describe their experiences of no-self and the living out of experiences of no-self. The following are the preliminary lenses that related to their explanations of how no-self played out in their lives:

4. The initial experience of no-self can be identified by the following marks: ineffability, paradoxicality, divine nature, peacefulness, objectivity, perception of Void or Oneness, and nonspacial/nontemporal quality.

5. People may also go through a process of embodying no-self. Embodiment is a gradual process of the body adjusting to the awakening or initial no-self experience. This can be experienced on emotional, psychological, physiological, and cognitive levels—all of which may affect the life of the experience.

6. In the living out of the experience of no-self, people may experience mild to considerable distress as adjustment to the loss of the sense of a personal self or “I.”

7. The experience of no-self may lead to the following positive characteristics: compassion, empathy, and equanimity, and may result in a deep perception of oneness of all.

Chapter 6 expounds on participants’ lived experiences of no-self in terms of categories and subcategories that emerged from the data. Nevertheless, it is opportune to note that several participants made a point to speak about ineffability and nonduality of no-self in relation to articulating the phenomenon as experience.

The Paradoxical Nature of Articulating No-self

While all participants provided an in-depth description of the lived experience of no-self as a process, several participants spoke about the ineffability and/or the nonduality of articulating no-self. Paradoxically, describing the sometimes indescribable phenomenon of no-self as experience was accomplished through description. An example of this was taken from Dave’s transcript. This is a quotation in which he describes both the experience of no-self as Awakeness and realizing himself as Awakeness.

Well, okay, it’s like. . . . I’ll say it’s like in my mind’s eye. It’s like an ocean or—I’ll say an ocean, ‘cause it’s dynamic. But just kind of bigness. And it seemed black. It was dark. And it was a feeling, too. It had a very distinct feeling associated with it of expansion and freedom, and whatever. But it was almost like someone else’s expansion and freedom, because I didn’t feel connected to it at all. And it’s interesting, I say it’s in my mind’s eye, but it’s kind of there all the time in the sense that maybe your body’s there all the time and you’re paying more or less attention to it. And maybe if you’re putting your attention on your heart, you kind of get a feeling or an image—or any part of your body. So it was kind of like that, actually. And when I accepted, “Oh, that’s me” the whole

thing just *lit* up. In my mind's eye, and also in my experience. You know, the mind's eye in some ways could be said to be symbolic of the experience, but also the experience itself is connected to the senses. It's not disconnected to the senses. A subtler level. In other words, you'd never mistake something like that for what we would consider concrete reality. But you start to see a relationship, and it starts to become a continuum. [*chuckles*] So that you kind of see concrete reality going deeper and deeper and deeper into that.

What he was trying to explain to me was an integrative moment when he realized what he had been experiencing actually was Awakeness. This example illustrates not only the felt quality, but also the ineffability, a dichotomy of description, and the mind's interpretation of experience of waking up to the nature of reality.

Ineffability and the function of description. A most basic example of in-the-moment ineffability would be that, at one point during the interview, Clara had difficulty describing her sense of self as a child. I asked her if giving an example would be helpful, and by giving an example, she was able to elaborate on her sense of self "as all one thing." Several other participants spent time, prior to the interview, contemplating how to describe their lived experiences of no-self prior the interview. For example,

Moon. I spent time contemplating and asking questions such as, "What is no-self? What are the stages? What has it been like? How am I being formed in this?" I don't feel that it's possible that my ego could have chosen it. I don't think the ego knows how to be for the other. I think it's impossible for the controlling-ego, not for the self-worth ego. And I don't think there's anything it raises its hand for in this kind of stuff. But it's just that "watching life" and "allowing an energy, larger than myself, to call me forth and form me"—without expectations of where it'll go and what will be the product—is what was called up from my depths and tried, in this interview, to language.

During the interview, Moon provided an explicit experiential description of her process of no-self through eight metaphorical, nonhierarchical, transformational stages. For example, her image for life development was that of a cobweb as a metaphor for her life practice of "letting go of herself." With regard to her noetic experiences, she stated, "So, all that kind of stuff is real *real* to me. I can't explain it, but I can describe it." With regard to "living with the largeness of

the gift of Mystery,” later in the interview she stated, “You can’t define Mystery; you describe it.”

Anam Cara incorporated the ineffable nature of no-self into her definition of no-self, as “*that* which is before experience.” In order to be able to talk about no-self for the interview, she realized that “It’s just not possible to say anything about the actuality of no-self.” Therefore, in the interview when she spoke about her “experience of no-self,” it was about the “unfolding or realization” of the “direct experience of That” and about her “human relation to the experience.” As a final point, GY’s statement rounds out this discussion with a functional view of speaking about no-self. “If we talk about our experiences, we are going to use human language, we’re going to interpret whatever experience we had in terms of human language and in terms of our understanding at that time.”

Paradoxically, all of these participants’ descriptions point toward explaining that the function of description is to conceptualize and give voice to the ineffable nature of no-self as personal experience. Moreover, they were able to voice descriptions even though at times both the experience of no-self and the nondual essence of no-self are by nature beyond even being ineffable.

Conditions of Experience Reveal Awareness of No-self

Ariel pointed out that she holds “a renegade idea of no-self” with regard to experience. She stated that in the “traditional Advaitic, Buddhist, Hindu conception of enlightenment or awakening,” there are conditions of “sitting still, deeply relaxing, having a quiet environment,” which makes it feasible “to realize this very, very pristine condition of no-self. That’s how it’s traditionally conceived—that it’s pure, that it’s utterly apart from all conditions.” However, “there really is no way to avoid conditions”; conditions are “always present”; and “we’re never

limited by our conditions.” In a moment, she may think she’s identified with the “local ‘I’” and the next moment that identity lifts, and something else is presenting itself. She’s not limited by her “self sense or [her] self concepts, or about our concepts of other or the world. . . . This conscious awareness of no “I” *is* no self.

For example, for Ariel thoughts and feelings arise, and then a moment later there is another awareness, and

they dissolve. It’s like well, a kind of a traditional way of speaking about it—well, I kind of like Buddhist writings—is that everything is self-liberating. Every thing, every object, every place you can put your attention, it liberates itself the next moment. In other words, there’s no permanence. . . . The only thing that is permanent is awareness or consciousness. The only thing that persists and actually never changes is consciousness—registering this, registering, registering, registering. And that is permanent. And maybe that’s what people mean when they say there is no self. They mean that there’s no permanent self. That’s what I think they mean. But there is an ego-self and there is a body-self and there is a world-self, there are objects. Because if these things weren’t here, there would be no form through which to have any experience. But what people mean by no-self is that none of these things are truly very permanent. And I guess I would say that’s what I’m aware of. You know, I know that. So that’s a sense in which I’m speaking of there’s no “I,” no self.

Ariel said that she has awakened to the truth that even though we experience form through an ego-self, a body-self, a world-self, and objects, that these things are not permanent. She stated that she has confidence that consciousness “will reveal itself to [her] throughout all these experiences” and that conscious awareness of no “I *is* no self.”

Ariel’s statements revealed an essential theme that encompassed all participants’ narrative. All 12 participants reported that they became aware of the phenomenon of no-self. They spoke about their lived experiences of no-self and the conditions related to their conscious unfolding processes of no-self through descriptive narrative. This descriptive data brought to light the fact that participants used the term no-self as a construct to explain a spiritual process concerning their lived, experiential reality. This was true of both Group A ($N = 3$, always aware of no-self) participants and Group B ($N = 9$, a lived process of developing awareness of no-self)

participants. The purpose of all Chapter 5 themes was to inform understanding and comprehension of further grounded theory data analytical results contained in the following chapter.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5, which was the first of two results chapters, portrayed outcomes of the participant demographic and spiritual background surveys. In comparison to the preliminary intuitive inquiry lenses coded as foundational lenses, dense descriptive quotations from participants illustrated the diverse and complex manner in which participants contextualized the phenomenon of no-self. Preliminary lenses coded as process lenses served as illustration of how data evidenced that participants described their experiential no-self as processes. The final grouping of preliminary lenses, coded as descriptive lenses, revealed that participants were able to describe both their experiences of no-self and their lived processes of no-self, and description demonstrated awareness of no-self as a construct. Participant narrative evidenced the paradoxical nature of articulating no-self as experience and the confirmation that description functioned to give voice to the ineffable nature of the phenomenon of no-self. Data regarding conditions of experience revealed both awareness of no-self and the process of no-self unfolding in their lives.

Chapter 5 grounded theory results evidenced the formation of process and descriptive themes regarding participants' interview data regarding the experience of no-self. These themes serve to frame comprehension of results presented in the following chapter. Chapter 6 further illustrates the study finding that, as the experience of no-self unfolded, the 12 participants gave accounts of needing to understand no-self as experience and as process. In addition, the core categories and subcategories of no-self, along with properties and dimensions, are explicated toward defining a theory of no-self. The discussion of results is contained in Chapters 7 and 8.

Chapter 6: Reformation of the Preliminary Lenses Toward Theory

Chapter 5 delineated an overarching thematic framework toward understanding the rectification of the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses toward theory. This chapter evidences grounded theory analysis of each participant's deeply personal experiential process of growing in awareness of no-self as an evolvment of consciousness toward enlightenment. Rich, thick participant description reifies results of successive rounds of grounded theory analysis. Descriptive data originate from both participant stories and the edited transcripts of the interviews.

As evidenced by participant descriptive data, Chapter 5 portrayed no-self as a term participants used to describe conscious awareness of an experiential process occurring in their lives. For this research, the term *process* was used to depict participants' lived experiences of no-self and the conditions related to their conscious unfolding of no-self through descriptive narrative. This term was used rather than *development*, because the latter term tends to imply sequential stages in relation to growth or maturity. Participants tended to use the word *process*, and additionally, this term was chosen because a process may involve active actions or natural occurrences that produce transformation. Interview data showed that the self, no-self, Self process led to transformations of consciousness for the 12 participants.

Within this chapter, the terms *self* and *ego* are discussed in relation to consciousness evolution. The term *self* was defined in Chapter 1 as referring to the whole individual—his or her personal identity, being, and experience. The word *ego* is also a term that refers to the self, specifically to the conscious sense of self. Noteworthy here is the fact that, within this chapter, it became necessary to use the term *personal self* for *self* in order to distinguish *self* from *Self*. The term *personal self* was used by participants to refer to small self versus Self and also to refer to

the personality sense of self. Additionally, utilization of *personal self* also differentiated *self* from *Self* in section headings and assured disambiguation.

This chapter reifies the overarching framework of no-self outlined in Chapter 5 as experience, process, and description. It also evidences the following themes of no-self as continuum of self toward Self.

1. Participants described awareness of no-self since childhood, or they described gaining awareness of no-self as adults:
2. Awareness of personal self, no-self and Self leads to awareness of experiences of no-self, which can be self-transformational:
3. This self transformation can be thought of as a process called the personal self, no-self, Self continuum:
4. Awareness of experiences of personal self dis-identification and/or radical personal self dis-identification leads to awareness of self transformation:
5. The living out of the experience of no-self, including active and passive letting go of ego, leads to a spectrum of distress or no-distress as integration of the experience of no-self.
6. The living out of experience(s) of no-self as the process of emptying self of ego lead to integration as embodiment of realizations.
7. Integration leads to changes in self in relation to the world and changes in consciousness.
8. Further transition(s) and emptying self of ego—on the self, no-self, Self continuum—lead to loss of ego, loss of sense of personal self, integration, and further transformations of consciousness:

9. Concurrent with this, integration and loss of personal sense of self lead to a liberated sense of personal self, while functional ego remained.
10. Life and transformations of consciousness allow the self, no-self, continuum to unfold toward unification.
11. Letting go, allowing, acceptance, and surrender lead to further transformation.
12. Unification is the process of further enlightenment of liberated personal self as evolvment of Unity consciousness.

Appendix Q serves as a pictorial guide to the themes of the no-self as experience and continuing process. Figure 4, presented at the end of this chapter details categories, properties of categories, and qualities of related to no-self.

Experiential Awareness of Self and No-self as Evolution Toward Enlightenment

Two Classifications of Participants: Group A and Group B

As briefly explained in Chapter 5, participants fit into two groups: Group A ($N = 3$) participants were aware of no self since they were young children, and Group B ($N = 9$) participants became aware of no-self as adults. The purpose of this section is to succinctly illustrate the distinction between Group A and Group B participants' spiritual journeys related to no-self, and furthermore, to provide data analysis that shows that participants' spiritual exploration was related to a gradual, spiritual process of no-self unfolding in their lives.

Group A: Always aware of no-self. This category of participants consisted of Clara, Doublespiral, and Leita—all of whom had awareness of no-self as children. Analysis of descriptive data distinguished these 3 from the other 9 participants. To illustrate, Clara stated that she started out in life with no-self. She stated,

I didn't have a specific experience that altered my sense of my self. I guess I always had a notion of "no-self" in some way. It's a bit hard to describe, because much of this was happening at a time when I didn't have words for it, when I was still a child.

By observing or witnessing, she could participate in whatever was happening, retain her "sense of self privately," and "still live in the regular world as well." As her life evolved, there was a process of her trying out different concepts that other people believed in and still retaining her own sense of self. In addition, she recalled,

I can specifically remember just wondering why people thought that things were separate. I don't know if I'm making sense, but let's see. . . . I thought everything was all one thing. I couldn't quite get a sense of myself as being an individual person. Not that I didn't exist, but it just did not seem to me that I had the same sense of myself in the world as other people seemed to have of themselves.

Clara "never sold out" of no-self. She stated that she never sold out of what she called her "me." She just made sure that her "'me' was "safe and okay. She would do whatever she needed to do to function in the larger world but would keep her "real self" safe on the inside.

Similar to Clara's early experience of no-self, Doublespiral stated that no-self has not been a developmental process for her. She has had awareness of no-self since early childhood, in that over the course of her life "it really was a sense of dipping into something that was always there, just for probably longer and longer periods of time." From a very young age she had a sense of the holiness of everything and an impression that there was just a "veil" separating her from the "full silence." The third participant, Leita, stated that she "was *born* in a particular state of awareness, and [she] found that to be true from the time that [she] was an infant." No-self is Leita's experiential awareness of *emptiness* without "identification with an ego structure" that's there through "waking, sleeping and dreaming; and it's a permanent situation." This awareness also includes access to higher mind, which she has had since her first year of life.

Group B: Became aware of no-self in adulthood. As noted in Chapter 5, all participants described a process of no-self. While the 3 Group A participants had awareness of no-self from a

very young age, the 9 participants in Group B became aware of a process of no-self unfolding in their lives as adults. These participants described events related to no-self using, for example, the following distinctive terms: pivotal moments and maturing insights; significant moments, events, and negative teachings; awakenings; transitions or shifts in awareness; signs of transformation; stages of commitment, stages of letting go, and life landmarks; and cycles of noetic events. To exemplify this last distinctive term, Moon described facets of stages of growing in no-self with “epiphanies or awakenings” within cycles related to noetic events.

Spiritual exploration was related to no-self as a process or journey. As pointed out in Chapter 5, demographic survey results evidenced spiritual exploration as part of Participants’ Spiritual and Religious Profiles (Appendix S). Furthermore, data analysis of participant stories revealed that participants’ spiritual exploration was related to a spiritual process of no-self unfolding in their lives. The remaining paragraphs in this section briefly illustrate the distinction between Group A’s ($N = 3$) and Group B’s ($N = 9$) transformative spiritual journeys as a prelude to this chapter evidencing the span of the self, no-self, Self continuum. Additionally, it is evidenced that commitment to spiritual exploration related to the unfolding process of no-self.

With regard to Group A’s spiritual exploration and commitment, Leita sought to understand and to have validated her innate sense of no-self as emptiness as a young child through into adulthood. Two traumatic events in her early 30s led her to not only have her consciousness verified and have a context through which to authenticate her experiential sense of no-self; additionally, the traumatic events also led her to dedicate herself to serving god. While Clara’s spiritual exploration was described in Chapter 5, it is noted here that evidence of spiritual commitment consisted of life-long journaling of her dreams, which were spiritual in nature. The third Group A participant, Doublespiral, sought to normalize her innate sense of no-self.

Although she was exposed to Christian traditions as a child, as a teen she explored different spiritual traditions. For a period of time as an adult, she studied toward earning a Doctor of Ministry degree as a way of resolving her inner conflict through conforming—by becoming either a minister, a priest, or an official Buddhist practitioner. Currently, she considers Buddhism to be her spiritual tradition and also holds agnostic views. Group A participants had differing perspectives and processes related to spiritual exploration and commitment to a spiritual path.

For Group B ($N = 9$) participants, adult spiritual exploration led to awareness of no-self and commitment to a process of spirituality unfolding. For example, AJ was raised in Western culture, and while he was in his early 20s, he set out to rediscover his Asian heritage, initially through reading Buddhist and Taoist literature and then through attending retreats and practicing martial arts, yoga, and meditation. He described his spiritual process in terms of inner embodiment of Buddhist and Taoist philosophies.

Two other examples illustrate the varieties of spiritual exploration and commitment among Group B participants. Robert was not raised in a spiritual or religious tradition; however, he became a spiritual seeker for many years through involvement in meditation and Eastern-based practices in the yoga tradition. He sought “to transcend the separate self sense” that was going on and “to find that One that [he] intuited.” His seeking led him to a realization that ended seeking and caused him to see the “nature of reality and the nature of the self or no-self.” Continuing on his spiritual path, his consciousness was liberated as “awake awareness illuminating” all experiences. Another participant, Moon, was raised in the Roman Catholic Christian religion and was brought up by “a mother and a father who, although religious and active in their church communities . . . weren’t a devotional family.” At the age of 14, she entered a Franciscan convent, and she continues to be involved with that tradition and holds the

title of *Anchoress*, which indicates that she is “anchored in solitude and the ‘now.’” Her occupation consists of ministering spiritual direction, retreat direction, and spiritual teachings. This section showed that for both Group A ($N = 3$) and Group B ($N = 9$), spiritual exploration and commitment facilitated the process of spirituality unfolding as a process of self/no-self toward Self.

The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuing Process

No-self only makes sense in relationship to a personal sense of self. Robert and Ariel articulated explanations of the relationship between self, no-self, and Self which represented themes depicted in participants’ interview data. Robert provided clarity in conceptualizing the relationship between self and no-self:

And so I think that’s a little bit of a way to characterize this whole thing of self or no-self. It’s the mind, the conceptual mind, which is inherently dualistic; and it thinks dualistically generally—that’s how it kind of operates. Well, what is a self? A self only makes sense in relationship to no-self, and conversely no-self only makes sense in relationship to self. Like the mind will go, “Well, either there’s a self or there’s no-self, right?” But at the level of experience, it feels more like there’s a self and there’s no self and both of those are happening simultaneously. There’s absolutely a sense of individuation, *and* there’s a sense—sometimes more pronounced than other times—a sense that the stuff of life, the phenomena, the arisings of life, the manifestations of life. You and me are arisings of the same fundamental nature and substance; and so they’re ultimately not separate. And so that’s happening simultaneously.

The description of his inner experience reflects that the mind has a tendency to dichotomize external experience and that it senses self as individuation. This quote also shows his understanding that as personal self is or becomes Self, a sense of no-self is conceptualized.

Ariel’s description of the self, no-self, Self process is used herein to extend this explanation and pull out additional participant themes. She described several different terms relating to “I,” including (a) her little, personality self; (b) the deeper personality or soul; (c) the transcendent, or unbounded, “I”; and (d) the witness, which is a subtle but very extensive form of the personal self. In addition, Ariel viewed Self, or transcendent “I,” as a continuum:

It's a continuum of the development of the self sense. You know, how it's when you're a child, the self sense is embedded in the body, and then it emerges in the psyche in relationship to mom; and then eventually the "I" sense comes out in relationship to the world and the roles you take. So *that* "I" sense that evolves and changes and develops, that eventually crosses over into . . . the capacity to have a conscience, and then the capacity to witness your behaviors, and then the capacity to stand unassailed in the I AM sense. It's a continuum. Because it's all an inner experience. It's formed by the structures that are given to you on the outside; but it's an inner experience, and it's a continuum. So occasionally when I say, "I," I'm meaning my little personality. Sometimes I'm meaning the deeper personality which is kind of like that which is deeply guiding us through our personal human life. Maybe you could call it the soul. And sometimes I mean the Self—the I AM. It's a continuum.

To recapitulate, Ariel stated that her inner experience or inner sense of personal (conscious and individual) self evolves in relationship to experience of the outer world. Personal self changes and develops—from having a conscience, to having the capacity to witness your behaviors, and then eventually, to having the capacity to further evolve toward Self.

Ariel's and Robert's explanations of self and no-self as a continuum of inner experience *combined* further clarifies the point. A self only makes sense in relationship to no-self; or alternately, an inner awareness of a sense of no-self only makes sense in relationship to a self. No-self is understood in relation to a self as dichotomous experience. Inner awareness of personal self, no-self, and Self is a continuous process in that the personal self/no-self evolves toward Self. A subsequent section in this chapter regarding unification further develops evolution of self/no-self toward Self more fully.

Temporary accessing of no-self which does not cause permanent self-disidentification, but which causes gain in awareness of self in relation to no-self. Temporary accessing of no-self can occur when individuals enter an altered state of consciousness—for example in meditation or contemplation as a transformational state. (Mason et al., 1997; R. White, 1993, 1997; Wilber, 2006). All participants voiced evidence of this nonpermanent sense of no self as *not* causing permanent self-disidentification but as causing gain in awareness of self in relation to no-self.

Moon's example serves as an illustration. One day Moon went into a practice with her heart and mind, where while chanting or intoning someone's name she consciously sent friends in other parts of the world each a blessing. She chuckled aloud because she felt close to not only to them but to the people they were with, and she thought, "What stage of consciousness am I in? I don't know their people." She was surprised 10 days later when she started getting mail from those "very people saying that they had an enormous sense of [her] presence on December 8th." All of the letters from her friends were "dated the 8th, except the one in Japan which was dated the 9th" due to the time difference. Moon's experience also illustrated how, with awareness of self and no-self, she chose to selflessly access no-self for the sake of others, and she was provided with proof of her presence affecting others.

Robert explained that it is the mind that interprets a sense of separate self and that "no-self or self are two experiences that life can give rise to" as consciousness. He cited benefits of temporary spiritual states in that they are pleasurable, people may seek them as temporary accessing of no-self, and they provide liberation from a "fixed view of reality." In other words, people can gain awareness of no-self in relation to self. The following section presents discussion of no-self in relation to transformative change.

Awareness of Personal Self and No-self Related to Transformation

Participants ($N = 12$) evidenced no permanent change in self after temporary accessing of experiences of no-self. In addition, all participants reported temporary no-self experiences that caused change in personal self. This section first discusses witnessing as a state of consciousness which allows one to transcend self. Witnessing consciousness, exceptional human experiences (EHEs), and awareness of no-self as a child related to egoic change, and data are presented to illustrate that temporary accessing of no-self may cause transformation as a permanent change in

personal self or egoic patterns. Finally, data illustrate that life events allowed no-self as a process to unfold and led to permanent self dis-identification as transformation of consciousness.

Witnessing as a state of consciousness which allows one to transcend self. The term *witnessing* is used to describe the state of transcendental or pure consciousness because it is “experienced to be a non-changing level of awareness that serves as peaceful inner observer or ‘silent witness’ to the active changing states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping” (Mason et al., 1997). Witnessing as a state may be experienced by practitioners of Transcendental Meditation (TM), or as witnessing nonduality (Wilber, 1995). Additionally, other types of meditation or contemplation (Wilber, 2006) and exceptional human experiences (R. White, 1993, 1997) may cause changes in self or egoic patterns. Repetitive occurrences of states of consciousness result in progression to the next higher *stage* of consciousness (Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989; R. White, 1993, 1997; Wilber, 2006).

Of the 12 participants, 7 spoke about witnessing. Of these 7 participants, Doublespiral described witnessing as both a stage and as a state, and 2 of them referred to witnessing as a *state* of consciousness versus a stage. GY’s description directly related no-self to witnessing. She said that

The deeper you go into these deeper states of consciousness, the more the physical world just becomes a part of a whole; and the whole gets bigger and bigger and bigger. It’s like a spectrum; and the physical world is just the first, small part of it—it’s like your fingernails, you know. [laughs] It’s a kind of peripheral part of who you are. It’s not that it’s not real. And it’s not that I don’t want to engage in it, because I do. I’m involved in a number of organizations and things that I do myself. I’m involved, but my main preoccupation is the inner reality, the spiritual reality. I think it’s inevitable that you see the physical world as more and more objectified, and you are not primarily identified with it. So if that’s what you mean by witnessing—yeah, exactly, that’s what it is.

GY’s narrative suggests that witnessing may cause less egoic objectification of self in relation to the world and recognition of oneness of self in relation to the physical world.

Ariel clarified the witness as a continuum of inner experience of self. The witness “is a subtle but very extensive form of the personal self.” Witnessing as an inner sense of personal “I” or self “can evolve to the capacity to witness your behaviors” as a continuum of becoming Self. Ariel also tied this in with her own early experience of “consciousness witnessing.”

And in that period of witnessing, there was a sense of transcendent Self; I guess I wouldn’t call it no-self, but there was a sense of transcendent Self and the capacity to receive and hold and stand back from and rest in the conscious nature, kind of like above and apart from “I”—the personal “I” experience. So the “I” was there, and yet there was some distance on it. There was some space into which to feel it. So I didn’t feel completely identified with it; I was more identified with the capacity to witness it or stand aside from it, or be in the transcendent “I.”

Ariel’s description evidences her “early” witnessing as a transcendence of “I” in her continuum of becoming Self. Due to the fact that, theoretically, one must experience witnessing as a state of consciousness before progression to a higher stage of consciousness, it could be inferred that Ariel experienced witnessing as a stage. Nevertheless, I chose to present her dialogue in this section as an illustration of states of witnessing. Other participants ($N = 5$) related their experiences of witnessing to the *stages* of cosmic consciousness or Unity consciousness, and their descriptive data are presented in a subsequent section entitled, *Witnessing as a stage of consciousness*.

Exceptional Human Experience: Temporary accessing of no-self that causes permanent self dis-identification. Temporary accessing of no-self can also cause permanent self dis-identification. This type of no-self experience is commonly called “exceptional human experience (EHE)” (R. White, 1993, p. 88). EHEs are distinguished from other altered states of consciousness in that they cause self-transformation (Palmer & Braud, 2002; R. White, 1997).

This paragraph presents 1 participant’s EHE as an example of allowing one to transcend self or egoic patterns. GY described eight “noetic experiences,” wherein she transcended self, for example,

I went into some kind of transcendental state when I was ten. I don't know how long I was there; but after a while I started to come down, whatever that means. I could see my body standing on that place; and I thought, "I don't want to go back into that body. It's miserable. I don't want to live in that miserable body." [*laughs*] But I had to, of course.

The experience caused her behavior to be "radically changed." She went from being a "hooligan" back to being a "good and a well-behaved student. All of the anger and everything just disappeared [*laughs*]" to the disbelief of her family.

All participants described at least one no-self event that could be classified as an EHE. GY's eight noetic experiences were representative of no-self events other participants spoke about, which were temporary accessing of no-self and which transformed inner sense of self. These transformational events fell into a category of exceptional human experiences because the participants' sense of self transcended what would be considered typical (Palmer & Braud, 2002). A sampling of EHEs reported by participants includes night-long consciousness in sleep; guided meditation; the triple-consciousness state of Samhita; and out of body experience, kundalini, and apparitional experience. Appendix T identifies the types of experiences related to no-self reported by Group A ($N = 3$) and Group B participants ($N = 9$), and a brief sampling of participant narrative of EHEs as temporary accessing of no-self that causes permanent self dis-identification is presented in the following paragraphs.

Clara and GY's examples of passive letting go of ego typify those of other participants. Clara had dream, which could be classified as an exceptional normal human experience (Palmer & Braud, 2002; R. White, 1997), in that it changed her sense of self in relation to the world. In the dream, Clara found herself "in another dimension" and along with her "was a presence that was completely benevolent."

So I'm looking around me in this space and there's nothing. There's no physical anything there, but the sense of it is that . . . it's absolutely amazingly beautiful and calm and everything is just perfect, everything is all one. It's just an amazing feeling and it's just so beautiful, there is nothing to say. There were no beautiful trees or beautiful scenery—just

a sense of beauty. I was simply amazed at this. I didn't speak in this dream, but somehow the presence that was there could understand and feel whatever emotions I was feeling or whatever I was thinking. As I looked around and beneath me I saw this amorphous opalescent stuff just kind of churning and forming different colors. I was asked if I wanted to jump in . . . and the sense that I got was that there was even more to be experienced. And I thought to the being, "You mean, there's more?!" Because I couldn't believe that in addition to all that I had experienced before, there could actually be more to this experience. And the being kind of indicated, "Yes, there is more." But I got this sense that if I were to jump in to this stuff, that I as an individual would disappear. It wasn't as though I would die or anything like that, but I would just simply be a part of everything. I wouldn't be a separate being anymore; I'd be a part of everything. And I thought, "That's how it should be." But at the time I wasn't—I was afraid of doing that, because I thought, "What's going to happen when I wake up?" [*with a laugh*] You know, you have these thoughts in lucid moments in your dreams, "What's going to happen when I wake up?" Immediately after I had this thought I physically woke up. So the dream ended. . . . I was just kind of rushed back into reality. . . . But that experience of everything being one thing was profound. I woke up with the feeling that there really should not be the notion that person A is separate from person B who is separate from an animal. It's all one. It's all one thing.

This dream left her with perception of "no separation between anything"—no good, no bad, no evil, no grace, no anything—"It was just all one thing." She "could see very clearly that everything that was happening was perfect." This perception also relates to how she currently experiences things as "just all one thing," that everything is "perfectly okay," and she tends to "operate from that perspective."

GY's most recent noetic experience occurred while she was in Scotland, when saw an apparitional figure of the spiritual archetype of the Scottish people.

I was out wading in the water. It was a very calm day. It was very, very still; it was very, very quiet. And I felt much more peaceful, although I was still extremely agitated because I didn't know what I was going to do. And this time it wasn't a dream, but I actually *saw* Columba in flesh and blood, not a dream in the sense of two-dimensional like a movie. He said to me, "Don't forget, I was 40 when they kicked me out." And what that meant to me is even if you're 65, you will survive, and you will continue with your work. That's the message I got. The vision enabled me to put the guy in LA totally behind me and to start working to moving out to [another state,] a process which took me another two years.

The vision and "meeting with Columba" was a passive letting go which enabled her to pull herself together and to "move out of something [she] had been involved in for thirty years."

She is now living in another part of the United States, she has an income, and she is going to publish her book. GY summarized how all the noetic experiences were transformational.

So those episodes . . . they gave me so much power, so much conviction about who I am, or was, and the energy to keep going on. Each time I had to face really difficult stuff because leaving the monastic order after 30 years was very, very difficult, especially with very little money, which is the situation I'm in now. So anyhow, I've done it; and that is what helped me to keep going. And I believe that to be able to transcend these situations as I did was because of that revelation of a very deeper level in my being, which took the external form of some kind of archetype Christ, Buddha, Vivekananda, and Columba. You see, you superimpose on to these experiences, at least I do, the preoccupations of one's mind at the time. But the power, the energy, the conviction, the clarity that you get from those experiences—that, to me, is what's important. Not the actual form of the experience.

Awareness of no-self as a natural occurrence from childhood. In addition to witnessing consciousness and EHEs providing awareness of self in relation to no-self, Group A ($N = 3$) participants described being aware of no-self since childhood as a naturally occurring state of consciousness that they noticed was atypical in comparison to other people. Two examples reveal this perceptive ability. Leita was born with awareness of “an inner place that is essentially empty” and was able to access higher mind right from “the first year of life.” While she had precocious intelligence and creative ability since childhood, she also sought to validate her conscious awareness of no-self. She recalled that for many, many years in the middle of the night “feeling like there wasn't anybody there—like there wasn't any *self*—there wasn't anything inside there. It felt empty.” This inner emptiness was uncomfortable and was very difficult for her.

Doublespiral's awareness of self as no-self increased from childhood through adulthood and was described as a “great, full emptiness” that was “a great silence.” For most of her life, she felt conflicted, in that she desired to normalize her innate sense of no-self.

Life events allow no-self as a process to unfold and can lead to permanent self dis-identification as transformation of consciousness. Participants reported that life events

contributed to transformation of consciousness as a continuing process of no-self unfolding in their lives. In other words, life events within the self, no-self, Self continuum allowed the no-self to unfold as a process of transformation of consciousness. All participants ($N = 12$) described life circumstances or events that continued to allow no-self to unfold in their lives. A sampling of Leita's life events that allowed the consciousness evolution process to unfold included the following. An unplanned pregnancy caused her to realize that the "no-self, empty place" that she had felt since childhood was actually both solid and empty. It also led her to meet a counselor who was a lifeline for her in that she finally met someone who could recognize what had always been going on with her. Leita reported,

As soon as I walked in her office, she just had a complete recognition. She just got it—you know, she just totally got me. I was just very, very fortunate. And she said, "There is nothing wrong with you." That was the first thing she said, "There is nothing wrong with you, there's no illness, there's nothing *wrong* with you. You are good; you are fine. You are just having consciousness experiences." . . . And she said, "You know, you can have consciousness experiences, but you're also psychic."

The day that Leita had an abortion, she had "some kind of spiritual thing happen" where she "felt the soul of the child" and made a "commitment internally to God that if [she] let go of the baby that [she] would completely get on the spiritual path."

As Leita sought to understand herself in relation to customary behaviors and abilities, life provided unfolding transformations toward gaining understanding of and comfort with her inner awareness of no-self. Two of her recollections illustrate this progression. For example, when Leita was in her 30s, friends encouraged her to get initiated into Transcendental Meditation, and as part of this connection, she met people with whom, for the first time in her life, she "could actually *really* talk about consciousness experiences." This was a "big mahavakya—a big verification process" of understanding her own state of consciousness. Most recently, Leita integrated into a different level of Unity, wherein she felt unification with objects and people.

The feelings of separation and feeling different since childhood “melted,” and she felt deep, increasing connection to everything.

While Leita’s life experiences reflected other participants’ views of a life process of no-self unfolding, Robert, Ariel, and Anam Cara elaborated that relationships provide the opportunity to keep letting go. As in Chapter 5, the following passages are taken as direct quotes from participant stories (Appendix N) or transcripts.

Anam Cara. We became involved in a relationship. And one of the underlying problems in the relationship was that I had made him now an authority on the subject of Truth or reality, and he accepted the authority. He had so much certainty around his experience, whereas I didn’t have the certainty, intellectually. At the time I didn’t have that kind of internal authority to really stand in my own shoes with it. And so I sort of projected that authority onto him, and—gosh, how should I say?—well, let’s just say he wasn’t perfect. And I eventually, as with [the other spiritual teacher,] I saw gaps in his living of it. Ultimately the relationship didn’t work out for various reasons and it was a very difficult experience for me. Having placed my authority in his hands what I learned from the break-up of all of that was that I had to put the authority back in myself. I had originally sort of put it on [another spiritual teacher.] . . . And then when [the relationship] was gone, it had nowhere left to go. I couldn’t put it back on [that other spiritual teacher,] that felt like going backward. And so it had to come back to myself. And I would say that is a big reason why I’m even talking to you right now. I wouldn’t have enough clarity of standing in my own experience to even talk to you about it.

Ariel. The awakening process caused Ariel to experience some difficult times within the first six years, with regard to a primary relationship and ego patterns. Almost immediately the awakening process kind of like pulled me out of the current relationship. I had been in a relationship for 12 or 13 years with a man. I just—like, I couldn’t go on with him. So I had to leave that relationship. That was like a big jolt. It no longer supported my further understanding of life—my life. So I had to leave that. And then I was in another short term relationship that really provoked all of my early ego deficits, and I had to go through that. It was difficult.

Robert. And then the other thing is that life seems to be such that, particularly I think in relationships, that conditioning gets reactivated by all sorts of life experiences. And so then there’s kind of an ongoing opportunity to keep some process—to continue to keep letting go in a way.

At different times in GY’s life, dreams and other “noetic experiences” facilitated transformation and self dis-identification. GY had been in the convent a little more than 5 or 6 years when she

came to realize that my superior (who was a man) was extremely malevolent, that I was at severe risk. I had no idea what could happen to me; but I am telling you, I was nearly murdered a few times by some of the other nuns, who were influenced by his behavior. It was really bad. I'm not making this up—this is the truth.

Just before things got violent, however, GY had a dream wherein she “was in a house of many stories” and was being chased by a “a very masculine, strong man.” She ran down the flights of stairs from the top floor to the basement.

There were double doors, which I tried to force closed and throw the bolt to keep this being out. But he was very strong and very powerful. And he was forcing the door, forcing the door. And finally I couldn't hold it, and he came into the room. And it was Vivekananda himself, and he was laughing and laughing and laughing [*with a little laugh*]. At that point in my life, I was 45. I was an adult by that time. I realized that in that dream Vivekananda was telling me: “I am not going to let you succumb; I will never let you go; I will pursue you and hold you and keep you going through whatever you have to take on my account.” It empowered me tremendously. It made it possible for me to continue on and face all the crap that I had to. . . . Of course, at that moment in time, I didn't know what it was I was going to have to face; but boy, I sure found out. And if I hadn't had that dream to keep me going—well, I nearly did die [*with a little laugh*] several times, but without the dream or the other noetic experiences I wouldn't be here to tell the tale. And I certainly wouldn't be in my right mind—that was what supported me.

Life events stimulated significant dreams in GY's life, and the dreams were transformational in that they talked “to a deep, deep part of [her] soul” that made it possible for her “to go through all this stuff, and remain above it.” GY recapitulated how events in life allowed no-self as consciousness to transform to the extent that she was supported and taken care of.

I mean, when you live in those states of consciousness, or try to, events have a way of supporting you; and that has definitely been the case in my life. I've been supported every step of the way. Those levels of consciousness support you. People will antagonize you, but there are angels or even human beings who appreciate you. And like this woman who said when they kicked me out in the streets in San Francisco, “You just come and live with me.” I thought I was going to get myself a shopping cart and live under the Golden Gate Bridge or somewhere. But I didn't have to. And now I'm here in Santa Fe. So I have been taken care of; and when I say been taken care of, I do believe if you consistently try to live in those states of consciousness or being, things evolve. Because I cannot believe what's happened in my life—the number of times I've been supported, people have *stepped* forward and made a huge difference in my life, my three gurus. They came because I was kind of sending out signals from whatever level of

consciousness I was in and they came. I believe that because I can't explain it any other way.

Perhaps the most apparent example of life events allowing the process of no-self to unfold toward self dis-identification came from Anam Cara. At a conference given by Douglas Harding, he guided the group "in some experiments of awareness." During one of these exercises, she had a "direct realization" of a "no-self experience." It was an actual glimpse that she "didn't appreciate at the time." A few years later, while attending a graduate course, Anam Cara's "true nature became blatantly clear" in a guided meditation with a teacher. This meditation experienced an "unfolding" of "infinite awareness." It was a realization of no-self as That which *is*. In retrospect, she realized that the Harding experiment was a significant "experience pointing toward no-self."

More to the point, Dave stated that he may not have made it through the shifts in awareness to the next transition and then to unification if he had done it alone.

I don't think I would have ever made it if I was just in a cave by myself without resources. I mean, maybe I would; but whatever I needed, it was there for me. Life provided it.

For most participants, life events allowed no-self as a process to unfold and led to permanent self dis-identification as transformation of conscious awareness. In addition, participant narrative data evidenced events categorized as radical self dis-identification.

Evidence of Witnessing as a Stage of Consciousness

Earlier sections in this chapter described temporary accessing of no-self as a *state* of consciousness which caused self transformation, one of which was witnessing. Temporary accessing of witnessing consciousness has been correlated to the state of transcendental consciousness (Mason et al., 1997), in that witnessing can progress to a permanent *stage* of cosmic consciousness. Of the 12 participants, 7 spoke about witnessing, and 5 the 12

participants' descriptive data portrayed witnessing as a seemingly permanent state of consciousness. One participant's narrative did not present enough information to clearly discern witnessing as a stage. In addition, 1 of the 7 participants, Doublespiral, described witnessing as both a stage and as a state. Her narrative and the other 6 narratives are presented in this section.

All 3 Group A participants spoke about witnessing. Leita mentioned that she had a "*pure* consciousness, witnessing process that was . . . really going on all the time." In addition, her definition of *transcending* related to witnessing. She described transcending consciousness as a

dropping out of the mind completely—it's no mind or a pure witness-silence situation. But awake to the presence. And all the variations thereof, you know. So it depends on the experience.

With regard to witnessing as both a *state* and a *stage* experience, Doublespiral mentioned that since her transition into becoming "the Sea of Awareness," there is no self to witness any more.

The witness fell away. Yeah, there's no witness any more. Because a witness would need to stand back from something in order to perceive it. . . . I think that's one of the noticeable things—is that any sense of witness which *had* been there before, fell away.

At that point in her transformation, Doublespiral stated that she had a permanent sense of Self and experienced a lack of self to witness Self.

Clara described how her ability to witness or observe since childhood has allowed her to discriminate behavioral choice and people's reactions. She found witnessing comfortable and emphasized, "*It was as though I was outside of myself, observing that person doing those things.*" Clara called that no-self because she could discern the observer from the ego. She said that "sense of observing was always there. Always there as a child." She said that she did not encounter any difficulties growing up because she could slip in and out of observing and participating. Additionally, she did not "get caught up in" emotions, behaviors, and situations

like other people did. Therefore, it was not entirely clear whether witnessing was stable as a stage of consciousness during childhood.

Clara's description provided evidence of witnessing as detachment of ego from the situation being observed. Examples from other participants substantiate this, while furthermore illustrating how witnessing can allow one to transcend self or egoic patterns.

Early in DBear's transformation, he began witnessing 24 hours a day. Essentially, "he woke up inside himself" during a 6-month long TM course. After returning to his worldly life, the witnessing "inner self/no-self business faded and became background," in that it was still there, "but it wasn't dominant the way it had been." He said that he had gained awareness of personal self and no-self but hadn't become Self yet.

GY described a more permanent "no-self" as a level of consciousness wherein one can witness life and not be identified or attached with what is going on.

So no-self, for me, just means transcendence, really to go beyond, because, you see, you can live in a level and not be identified with it. You can express yourself, but you're detached from it. That, in a way, is no-self, when you have that detachment.

Dave related witnessing to the state of consciousness termed cosmic consciousness, where one witnesses "the Self without seeing its connection to everything. He acknowledged that some people like witnessing; however, he did not find it comfortable in that "the witnessing was definitely there, but [he] didn't like feeling not connected to everything." So there was a "strong desire to see how this self that [was him] related to everything else," or to continue to evolve to Unity Consciousness. With regard to being in unity, he explained the paradoxical difference between witnessing in Cosmic Consciousness and his current experience in unity.

And even now I almost feel like, you could say the witnessing came back, because there's just no self at all to *[laughs]* . . . But it's in the way that it's completely connected to everything. So, I mean, there's nothing to witness as separate, so, witnessing might be a bad term, but, you know, I always associate witnessing with kind of an impersonalness, and this brought back kind of an impersonalness, because there's no person *[laughs]*

but without any disconnect from everything else, so it was the good kind, you could say, if that makes any sense.

Participant data on witnessing as transcending self toward Self suggest that this stage witnessing causes an impersonal conscious awareness as detachment of ego from the situation being observed.

A Radical Personal Self Dis-Identification

All 3 Group A participants described one event of radical self dis-identification. Most Group B participants recounted radical self dis-identification experiences, and examples from a few of them are presented first.

Group B. All except 2 participants from Group B had experiences that caused a radical dis-identification with personal self or ego. The experiences of Dave, Anam Cara, Robert, DBear, Moon, and AJ are presented as representative of Group B participants' radical loss of self-identity.

Dave. I was at work, and it was the end of the day, and I was having these very kind of bumpy thoughts. And I suddenly felt like I was riding the thought like a horse. In my mind's eye this is what I'm seeing. [laughs] And so I was like, "Huh, that's interesting." So I got off the thought. I got off the horse [laughs] and the thought kept going and the horse kept going on ch-ch, ch-ch, ch-ch, just kind of away from me. And it's like the thought was still going, but it wasn't related to me any more. So, here, it's just that it wasn't a self anymore, because there were no edges. There was just no *thing*. The way I described it at the time was that there wasn't anything at all, but there wasn't nothing. It isn't anything at all, but it isn't nothing. And it was almost like I got off this horse in my mind and then I looked at myself and saw that I wasn't where I had been. I wasn't there. And so any idea of self is gone. There is no self any more. That's kind of what it feels like. And as I was driving home from work, and I noticed for the first time, it felt like everything was as good as everything else. For the first time, it didn't matter what happened . . . because everything was as good as everything else. And so it's like this Oneness moving darkness, but it's a comfortable darkness. It's a deep, loving, safe darkness. It reminds me of being in bed when I was little.

Anam Cara. Anam Cara's sixth significant moment was that of realizing I AM as "another, possibly more deeply embodied realization of no-self." She is the Self, which she has known for a long time. She recognized that she is "seen to be something happening rather than something that has any volition or self in it," like a "sock puppet . . . that moves by some mysterious power," as "all-extending actual presence and

happenings. The I AM presence woke up in her. The person, as the idea or image of a person, has no self, no separate self at all—”like the person has become dislodged from the identity. She “has no self—no separate sense of self at all.” But she does not know if I AM will change or if there will be no-self at all; and she cannot imagine that “there is something beyond I AM.” Meanwhile, she stays “as the I AM,” which “is inherently self-satisfying. “To see the I AM self, and the falling away of [Anam Cara] identification, is to realize that all ‘others’ are this same I AM self. [Anam Cara] is no different from the other people, the other skin puppets.”

Robert. And the pivotal moment came during a retreat that I was on. . . . I heard an instruction in the retreat, and the words came from the person leading the retreat. And it was the words of his teacher, who said to him at one point, “I’m so happy you found the friend that you’ll never see.” And I remember those words—they went off like a time-bomb in my consciousness, is what it felt like. . . . And it was just in that moment that it just felt like it was sort of a shocking- and very-ordinary-at-the-same-time kind of recognition that I was the very thing that I was looking for—that’s all that there was. And that what I called “I” was not separate from what I was looking for, and it was just a sense that there was no separation really anywhere. And it was a sense of what I call Self is none other than, call it what you will—the Source, God or the Ground of Being—that they weren’t two. They’re just one thing. . . . But it was like suddenly this was the, “Oh, this is it.” This is no separation—that there never really was a separate self ever. And the effect of that for the remainder of that retreat was just an amazing sense of coming home. If I had to describe it, it was like, “Oh, I am home, and I’ve always been home, and there’s only always home.” And interestingly, there were lots and lots of tears.

DBear. DBear explained his process of losing the core identity before the switch to Unity: First he lost the ego; then he lost the emotional energy that expressed that core fear; then he lost the fear itself. It came through in him as irrational dread, which the mind tried to attach to, but he didn’t buy into. Later, it dissipated in a puff of what seemed like smoke. Then a day or two later he realized that the identity of DBear wasn’t there anymore. He conceptualized it in terms of losing three tiers of illusion—the ego values related to the illusion of the individual, illusion of universe, and illusion of god’s dream. That’s the construct that collapsed when he lost his identity. [His] teacher said it was sloppy unity—incomplete, with work still to be done.

Moon. One of Moon’s images of growing in no-self was that of going through an 8-year process of menopause as a “mess [she] could not name.” In retrospect, Moon saw that she was “working on was letting go of fear during that time” and that there were stages of this process.

1. I was in an emotionally messy time and sought some insight, so I asked the question, Where am I in life?
2. I became aware of the past abundant blessings of life.
3. I became fearful of the unknown future, a fear of darkness, a fear of scarcity.
4. Enlightenment was given to the future as a mirror of the past: Abundance could be expected. Blessing is always!

5. A deep awareness settled in me. I became trusting that all is well, all is given—that I am not the source nor the sustenance nor the fulfillment of life experiences.
6. The question, ‘How do I partake of the abundance of the future?’ emerged in me.
7. The way to access the movement and flow in all of life is provided by a force larger than myself . . . a love more than ME.

It seems like the wall between scarcity and abundance was crumbled and that I would just be in the flow and never know and just keep watching the flow.

While most participants had more than one experience that caused a radical dis-identification with personal self or ego, for AJ the self/no-self process was different. From age 19 to the present, his inner reality gradually shifted to an inner “sense of no-self.” For AJ, the process of deepening no-self involved a realization that “ego is not all powerful” and a recognition of the nonsolidity of ego. He explained how “the sense of no-self” gradually came to be and how his outer life stages facilitated an inner deepening and manifesting of no-self.

AJ: I think that in my process I got fairly deep at quite a young age. I guess in a way all of this has been like some kind of a plateau; but also, [it has been] some kind of working out the details or working on consistency—working on deepening. So it’s been there for a long time. But these other stages are I guess just manifesting in different ways, just manifesting somehow—moving into different areas of life, different *quadrants* if you like. That’s what those things seem to be about. And at the same time, trying always to deepen. So it carries through all different kinds of experiences and all different areas of life, and to broaden those areas of expression. AJ “embodied” the principles of Yin/Yang, Buddhism, and Taoism through “stages of life” as “stages of letting go.” He explicated this with the following statement: “Yes. You know, each moment is a new moment, so it’s just a matter of trying to respond as best as possible to each moment.” AJ offered this synopsis of the states. . . . I don’t mark them in formal developmental stages. My stages, I guess, are stages of commitment or stages of letting go. . . . Like getting married, having children, giving up being a chartered accountant to be a teacher of Tai Chi and meditation . . . Getting divorced, and then fairly recently, I’ve been making a shift from being a full-time teacher to now running a retreat center and doing more outreach or global work, and, you know, to do work promoting transformation of consciousness, trans-traditionality, etcetera.

After setting out to reconnect to his Asian heritage at age 19, it was a life-changing event that provided the impetus to commit “to pursue study of Buddhism and Taoism as internal and external martial arts.” This event was a near-fatal car accident that occurred while driving in the fjords of Sweden. It was “a wake-up call” for him because he “was inches or milliseconds away

from death” when he was stopped from a drop into the fjords “by a single tree.” After this event, he committed himself to a way of life encompassing studying internal and external martial arts. AJ called his process, “stages of commitment and stages of letting go,” which gradually shifted his awareness to an inner “sense of no-self.” While he did not recount having no-self as a child, his no-self process is similar to Group A’s ($N = 3$) descriptive data in that their inner sense of no-self evolved in adulthood.

Group A. All 3 participants in this group described one event of radical self dis-identification. For example, Leita’s consciousness was transformed over the course of her life—most recently “toward integration into Unity.”

I started having this experience of light coming in from the objects in my perception; and that became very intense actually. And I went to see someone who I felt was in Unity consciousness . . . to talk to her about this experience directly. She told me that if I stayed with the experience and just noticed the light coming into my consciousness like that and not becoming uncomfortable with it, that eventually it would stabilize. She felt that it would precede a different level of integration into Unity. And I started to have that experience happening where the light actually subsided, just like she said; and I didn’t see that happening in my environment visually as much. But I started to feel a feeling of unification with the objects in the perception and with people. And I felt that a lot of the feelings of separation that I had experienced—which were there because I felt different from childhood and different as a result of feeling this no-self experience for such a long time—I felt that that was *melting*; and I felt a deep experience of connectedness to everything which started to increase.

Doublespiral’s awareness of no-self increased from childhood through adulthood, as she dipped into no-self for longer and longer periods of time. She described her experience of having “crossed over” into “the silence” as the “sea of awareness,” which occurred about 3 months after a period of experiencing the “winking in and out” of the physical world:

I just had a feeling before going to sleep one night that something momentous was beginning to happen. I had no idea what it was, and went to sleep. But then I wasn’t asleep. It was like the body was asleep, but the rest of me was awake. And this voice kept chanting and kind of paraphrasing the Bhagavad Gita: “Fire cannot burn it, knife cannot cut it, water cannot wet it.” And it was like a chanting that went on the whole night like that. And my body was asleep, but the rest of me was awake. And I kind of woke up physically the next morning, immediately knowing that everything had shifted. That there

wasn't that veil any more—that thin, thin veil. And I knew that was the only time I'd ever had that experience in that it was permanent. I knew I had crossed over into something. And it wasn't like a woo-hoo or celebratory, it was just like a fact.

Participants described a variety of experiences which led to a radical self-disidentification, which affected conscious awareness of self, no-self, and Self; and in some cases, participants described loss of ego or loss of awareness of self. In Doublespiral's account, she awoke recognizing that the "thin veil" that she had sensed since childhood was gone and that she was permanently in "the great silence."

The Living Out of the Experience of No-self: The Transformative Aspect of No-self

Data analysis showed that, once a participant had an awareness of no-self and had an experience of no-self that radically altered his or her sense of self, the evolution of self continued. Anam Cara explained her viewpoint that a human can have a realization of no-self, "which is sort of like a direct experience of That." She went on to say that after the realization, "There's the human relationship to the experience, which would be like the unfolding of the realization within my life or anyone's life."

Further Transitions Deepen the Experience of No-Self: Loss of the Egoic Aspect of Personal Self

Insights and realizations allow no-self to unfold. After an experience of no-self, all participants described insights and realizations that occurred and that allowed the experience to unfold. Ariel's, Robert's, and Dave's reflective descriptions of their no-self processes exemplify this occurrence. Anam Cara described her process as significant moments of realizing I AM as that which is unchanging and as that which has "no self—no separate self at all."

Robert described pivotal awakenings related to no-self and also what he noticed about these insights into the "nature of self and reality." He said that he seemed "to revisit insights that had been seen before," but it was almost like they were "sinking in [laughs] more deeply." This is paradoxical to the pivotal insight because "once you have kind of a pivotal insight, well, you

don't have to have any more insights [laughs.]" He said that this is because "the pivotal insight of no-separation and that the ground of everything is this profound love and wisdom, it's like you don't need to have another insight about that really." However, he noted,

The whole organism has been so conditioned through culture, society, biology to imagine its own separation, that even if that's seen through; and it's like a mighty blow is dealt to that conditioned belief. . . . It seems to be that most of the time, it has its own momentum, a natural kind of winding down of something. Even if you're no longer spending a lot of time spinning the propeller of believing in a separate self, it has its own momentum; and it takes some time for that to wind down, which is one reason why it rarely seems to be the case that somebody has that kind of insight and then that's the end of the story [laughs] in terms of their own unfolding. . . . And then the other thing is that life seems to be such that, particularly I think in relationships, that conditioning gets reactivated by all sorts of life experiences. And so then there's kind of an ongoing opportunity to keep some process—to continue to keep letting go in a way. You know, that it's almost like—sometimes I have this sense of it's like the body-mind almost just having to surrender or accept in a certain way the reality that's been seen. And it sometimes seems like it puts up a bit of a fight, you know, to keep exerting its [laughs] sense of autonomy. But it feels like a kind of gradual wearing away of a kind of the resistance to what is.

A final report on the unfolding of no-self is provided by Dave, who summarized transitions which allowed a realization to sink in more deeply.

First was kind of connecting to that infiniteness as realizing, "Oh, that's me." And so it's discovering I wasn't myself in the way I thought I was. The second one was this complete shift of perspective. My mind kind of turned upside-down and emptied. . . . It was like this sun whose light was all of creation, and then I was that. So suddenly everything was self. But it wasn't self in an individual way. And at that point, it wasn't really related to no-self, or whatever. It, honestly, started to feel more like there is a small self, a cosmic self, and I guess a no-self that was permeating all of that. . . . And then at the third transition was that that individual went away—just gone [laughs]. That's the no-self in the most direct sense, and that's what's most obvious now, because it seems most real. It's not that anything else went away; it's just not as relevant.

Dave's report and other participant narratives evidenced cognitive awareness of self and no-self and also a process of wearing away or an emptying of self as sense of being an individual, as further substantiation of the personal self, no-self, Self continuum.

The relationship between ego and the no-self unfolding process. All participants discussed ego in relation to no-self unfolding in their lives, and a few examples are presented here. AJ spelled out the relation between ego and no-self as a process:

My teacher talks about “aware ego.” So there is ego. And there always is a sense of “I” and that the ego is operating in the world, but it’s only one manifestation of sense of “I.” It’s necessary, I think, to have that in order to live in the world; but it’s not my primary kind of identification with that sense of “I.” I see ego not as an entity, but as a process. And because, well, to me everything as process is changing, moving, and in that sense there is no solidity; so things are happening, but there isn’t a solid base or entity of underlying anything, apart from spirit—whatever that is. Or apart from the sense of “I” or “I am.”

For AJ, the unfolding of no-self involved understanding that “ego is not all powerful” and that ego is a process, such that he was able to recognize and “let go of [his] destructive patterns.”

Ariel described signs of transformation related to no-self. One sign was that she went through a series of personal events that dealt a “death blow to her ego patterns.” During that time, the “witnessing was so potent that [she] was able to witness some of the deeper ego patterns in [her] personality,” and to allow it to fade. Additionally, Robert spoke about his process of “doing battle” with the ego as “self falls away” and the dawning of “a great clarity and love.”

GY said that in Vedanta, the real world is no-self—not like in the West where the real world is the physical world as objectified reality. Advaitans conceptualize the physical world as a peripheral thing. Conversely, she explained,

I think in the West right now, everyone’s so keen to get beyond the physical world which has such a grip and an irresistible fascination on them that they’re terribly keen to deny it, which is good because you have to at some point. You’ve got to somehow. As I said, I had to leave one paradigm behind and move on to another. Well, you’ve got to first of all smack the ego (specially the physical identity, which is so powerful in the West) down and get rid of it. And in the West, everybody wants no-self and all of that because they want to get rid of the physical world. But as you get further along, you begin to understand that the physical world is not in and of itself something that you deny. You realize that it’s one part of the whole.

In other words, as one matures spiritually there is less objectification of the physical world, and in order to realize oneness, first ego needs to get out of the way.

DBear described the part of his awakening process of loss of ego toward surrendering core identity in terms of “the divine values of chakra energy opening up and blowing off the crust” of personal sense of self. There was what DBear called “ego-shrapnel” that needed to fall away as loss of ego.

There is what I call ego-shrapnel, because even though the ego goes—it’s like the core node falls away in a group of concepts and beliefs and personality thing, then some of the pieces fall away with it naturally because there’s no support—but there’s other things that are still there. There was some ego-shrapnel stuff falling away, bits of drama and story.

To clarify, once ego concepts of the mind were cleared, then emotions were purged by clearing the heart, and then he lost core identity associated with the person, DBear, such that there is no longer a divider between inside and outside. From that point on, all that needed to happen was for him to surrender into Unity. Additional exploration of participant data related emptying self of ego with active and passive letting go, in furtherance of the self, no-self, Self continuum.

Active and passive letting go of ego as emptying self of ego. Data analysis showed that all participants had (from childhood or became aware of as adults) an inner sense of self in relation to no-self. Further data analysis showed that the personal self, no-self, Self evolution was a process of emptying self of ego. In other words, participants actively and passively let go of ego, as *awareness of sense of self*, and this emptying self of ego facilitated evolution of consciousness.

Active letting go of ego. Participants described a process of actively letting go of ego. As a continuation of DBear’s description of letting go of “ego shrapnel,” he narrated how he “woke up” and made the switch to Self. He “let go for a moment” during a satsang conference call session. One of his two teachers

used the word *surrender* for the first time. . . . For me, in the past, I associated it with blind faith and that kind of stuff. But for some reason, at that point I *heard* it differently; and it's like—and of course being visual, I even had a visual quality to it—but it's like I dropped down a tunnel. There was no light or visual sense or that kind of context; it was almost like I was going down a clear tunnel. And I just kind of let go for a moment. Just completely let go for just a moment. And I switched. And what happened in this case was I let go enough to fall into the Self and become it. And so instead of being the person experiencing the Self, the inner Self, I was the inner Self experiencing the person. It was essentially like the witnessing, but it was a deeper value of that. . . . And so for me, I woke up . . . but for a couple of days it was like, "Is this it?" Because it's new and you're not sure. And then I woke up in the morning a couple of days later; and it was just so clear, so obvious.

Moon related her practice of gazing to letting go of ego and self and allowing no-self to fill her. In the Franciscan tradition, nature "is just *the* teacher," and in the first stage is where the instructor teaches

the sisters how to gaze in silence. Then [in the second stage] they can consider—well, you use your mind—but they can consider that which they've gazed upon. And I like to think of that stage as you make the connections between the mystery you gazed into and who was gazed back at you in your own life. You make the connection between spirit and matter. Then in her third stage, they can contemplate that which they had considered. So you see the connections, and you let go, and contemplate the power of the mystery. And then she says the fourth stage: Then you become that which you gazed upon.

These stages of gazing, considering, contemplating, and becoming are metaphorically like

learning to wear glasses or lenses. And you wear them—it's the practice of gazing. I think Buddhists call it benevolent glancing. It's this gazing into everyone and every thing; and you wear these lenses on your heart or your soul, not just on your body's eyes, but with the eyes of the heart and soul and the eyes of the mind. And in gazing into the belovedness and goodness of every creature, I've come to be able to articulate that there is only one breath. And that that breath needs to be breathed by me, now, by loving presence, and hope that the source of that one breath will use that love to create a oneness of our world.

There is this new aspect that has emerged in me about three months ago. It's only recently that I have been able to put language on what is happening. It seems that I've stopped trying to create balance in my life, like balance between the contemplative- and the service-orientated use of time. Instead, I'm watching the flow, because balance still has ego-judgment and comparison in it. But it seems that if I'm just gazing into the flow and considering what's there, it is letting go of some of that selfish ego.

Another participant, AJ, described “stages of commitment and stages of letting go” in relation to no-self. Some of his stages of commitment during his life included getting married, having children, giving up being a chartered accountant to be a teacher of Tai Chi and meditation, and getting divorced. Throughout all of this, his application of “the idea of letting go [and] of living in the moment . . . totally transformed [his] life.” This practice, which he did at deeper and deeper levels throughout his life, enabled him “to more and more take each day at a time and concentrate on a moment,” such that his inner reality gradually shifted to an inner “sense of no-self.”

Passive letting go of ego. For the interview, Leita recounted three extreme examples of “the epitome of no-self.” The third incident, which was an extreme example of passive letting go, occurred just a few months prior to the interview.

I was at the . . . movie theatre, watching George W. there; and I passed out cold—bam. And they had to take me in an ambulance to the emergency room, and I was in one of those states once again. L. was there, and there was this other couple, thank god, also there. And they were all totally cool, you know. This is what happened: My higher cognition, for whatever reason, evaporated. And I was in the hospital on the thing and I was having trouble breathing again—it was one of those deals—and all I experienced was the no-self. There was no higher cognition, there was no ego, it was just this thing—this no-self thing. And I totally relaxed into it. I felt like that’s what I needed to do, and that’s what I did. I just relaxed into that experience; and I let go. I realized that I was holding on very tightly to my higher mind as a source of identity, and that I didn’t need it. And that I could let go of it. And I did. I just let go. With everybody there. And the people at the hospital were so loving. I mean, really, they were just so beautiful, and my friends that were there were so beautiful. And I just felt safe, and I just completely let go. . . . I really didn’t have a choice. It let go. *It* let go. You know what I mean—I didn’t do it; it let go. And I was just sitting there naked in that no-self thing and I was okay with it. . . . And when I came back and I could breathe and function and everything, I felt like I had really cut the tie to having to hold onto the creative higher-mind self as a vehicle for stability. . . . And it felt very okay and real, not surreal for a change, but real. And I thought, “Wow, this is good.” You know what I mean? It felt good. And when I came back, I felt good. . . . And it was really a big transition for me, because that had always been really a strong need.

Insight from Dave sums up the egoic process of emptying self of ego: “So literally, as an ego, everything’s backwards. [*laughs*] You think you get what you want by controlling. But you

actually get what you want by letting go.” Evidence presented by participants suggested that self must be emptied of ego in order for higher consciousness to come in.

Functional ego remains with emptying of ego. Participants talked about whether there is “no self at all” or “no ego” after the emptying of ego. There was one dissenting opinion: Clara stated that she feels she has “no-ego” and has had this sense since early childhood. She does not want “things,” can be friends with everyone, and does not try to impress anyone; for example, she doesn’t need to play the game of dressing a certain way to impress people. Additionally, she chooses to do things based on what feels right because whatever she does, that’s what she’s supposed to do. Clara said that she balances living with her innate spirituality by doing what she feels is right and by remaining open to whatever happens. She related her inner sense of no-self with having “no ego” both as a child and currently.

Other participants offered unsolicited opinions that supported the idea that sense of self expands and that functional ego remains after emptying self of ego. GY and Robert weighed in with similar opinions.

GY. But a spiritual person or a person who’s touched the no-self, they may seem to be in a particular state; but they’re not really attached to it. And you can tell by their behavior; they’re not obsessed, they’re not addicted. They can move very easily and smoothly into the worlds of other people and be very supportive. That’s a person that’s touched no-self, you can say. Because they don’t have an ego defined by their body, emotions, intellect or even intuition. However, I wouldn’t say they don’t have—everybody has an ego. In the Vedanta I subscribe to, the ego expands. When you’re identifying yourself with the material world, you’re identifying yourself in a very narrow way. When you go to the imaginative realm you’re bigger; and when you reach, like, the fourth or the fifth state, you’re the whole universe. You identify empathetically and compassionately with everything. You don’t deny anything; you accept everything. So that’s kind of the philosophy that I subscribe to.

Brahma. Brahman recounted a few stories as illustrations of how his “ego began expanding to embrace and interact with [his] environment as [his] conscious began to evolve.” He started to notice that “events, one right after the other, were totally in line with what my desires were and the fulfillment of those desires.

Anam Cara explained that the change in self may be a “maturation that isn’t psychological.” In her view, “there’s that which is always present” as infinite, ever-present awareness; and

so it’s like the solidity of that hasn’t changed; but then in terms of the relationship to it or the identification of something with something, it’s like the identification becomes bigger and bigger in a way—or less and less. Less and less and bigger and bigger are sort of the same thing, as I say the words. The actual day-to-day experience is like I’m less identified with whatever parts of myself psychologically, or physically; and also the sense of self expands—it just expands. I guess that’s what we could say. And I suspect this is an ongoing, never-ending expansion. . . . Self is always changing, no-self is unchanging.

Doublespiral described how her sense of self has changed with regard to embodying the silence more and in terms of her “egoic construct becoming more transparent” with the silence.

It’s like there’s a functional self in the physical world—a functional ego that’s kind of an aggregate of all sorts of things that moves through and is functional and drives cars and has friends and enjoys a glass of wine. And all of that. But I think my experience the last three years or so is of that functional self becoming progressively more and more transparent. More suffused, in some way that I can’t explain, with that silence. . . . And just allowing—that smaller self has become more and more permeated with that—and that’s just more in allowing. It’s not me doing something. It feels like at a cellular level, actually, just becoming more and more transparent. Another way of looking at it is before all of this, that small self is opaque and seems to be solid. And I think what happens then is it becomes translucent, and then almost transparent. It’s there; but you can see right through it.

Ever since Ariel went through a series of personal experiences that “dealt a really big death blow to some of her ego patterns” and realized the transformations,

She has been able “to be present and aware under all kinds of circumstances;” and this ability “continued to magnify.” This ability to be aware related to “sensing and knowing and intuiting and experiencing *life*!” However, now it was “*not* through as *tight* a framework” as she previously experienced. The distinctive difference was that this was a “very open field through which [she] was aware of life, [her] life; and life, other people’s lives.”

For Ariel, “functional self” became more transparent, more suffused with the silence. Her process is that of allowing the smaller self to become more permeated. In addition, she does not

have a sense of “my” any more. Participant data evidenced that in the personal self, no-self, Self continuum, there is a process of emptying self of ego, while functional ego remains.

Inner Experiential Awareness of No-self: A Range of Distress.

Participants described their inner awareness of having no personal, individual self through the use of intellectual, philosophical, and/or embodied language. Due to the fact that Group A ($N = 3$) participants became aware of no-self as children, the analysis of this group’s distress related awareness of no-self differed from Group B’s ($N = 9$) distress results.

Group A: Degrees of distress related to inner awareness of no-self since childhood. With regard to the lived experience of no-self since childhood, Doublespiral and Clara described disparate views in comparison to Leita’s account. For these 3 participants, the category of distress, or lack thereof, included awareness of being different from other people, and seeking to understand.

Awareness of being different from other people and seeking to understand. Clara related no-self to thinking

everything was all one thing, and I couldn’t quite have a sense of myself as being an individual person. Not that I didn’t exist, but it just did not seem to me that—oh god, it’s so hard to describe! Well, to put it this way, my feeling as a child was that I didn’t have the same sense of myself as I perceived other people or other children around me did.

In addition, as a child, she had difficulty understanding concepts and behaviors of others. She couldn’t quite get a sense of herself as being an individual person and wondered “why people thought that things were separate” when she “thought everything was all one thing.” However, she did not have trouble fitting in and did not experience distress due to her ability to observe or witness. Writing about her prolific dreams kept her “me” safe and okay—kept “her ‘real self safe’ on the inside.” Clara also has found it helpful to meet with a dream group to

discuss dreams, which mostly include cosmic dreams and dreams of being in other dimensions.

A dream in adulthood caused her to have a lasting sense of “it’s all One.”

While Clara always had a sense of herself and everything being all one thing, since childhood Doublespiral had a sense of the holiness of everything, and of a “thin veil [that] separates us from the full silence.” Awareness of no-self increased over time, as she dipped into no-self for longer and longer periods. From a young age, she also had a sense that there was just a “thin black veil that separated her from the sea, great silence, or plenum.” As an adult, a dream experience caused her to “fall into the Sea of Awareness,” such that now she is full-time “the great silence.” Throughout most of Doublespiral’s life, she felt conflicted in that she desired to normalize her innate sense of no-self. Growing up with an inner no-self sense of matter-filled space caused her to feel different. “Being aware that [she was] different in some way,” she did her “best to kind of keep mum about it. . . . Learned to keep my mouth shut!” Additionally, Doublespiral had difficulty fitting in.

It was hard. I’ve been thinking about that this week—just that sense of kind of being at right angles to everyone else. And I know I’ve spent a fair amount of time trying to at least appear normal and fit in. Because I was aware when I’d say things that I thought and perceived and all of that, people would look at me like I was rather strange.

She spent a “fair amount of time” trying to “appear normal” so that she would “fit in.” She made the adult choices of getting married, going to a Presbyterian church, having a daughter, and seeking a Doctor of Ministry degree because she felt conflicted in her desire to “normalize” her innate sense of no-self. Denying her inner sense of self contributed to her exploring different spiritual and religious traditions, developing chronic fatigue, and getting a divorce.

Leita recalled memories of no-self as emptiness and “nothing inside” from the time she was in a toddler in a crib. She sought to validate her inner reality with her parents first, then with teachers. It was “very painful” that she could not find any adults who understood. In addition,

there was still a kind of higher level thinking process going on. And a lack of understanding about why it was that I couldn't really discuss certain situations with my parents very successfully. I was still trying to get my parents to minister to my higher self and to communicate with that part of me appropriately, at least as appropriate as I thought it was. But I wasn't having very much success, because they were still treating me as if I was a child. And that was very confusing to me.

Her distress continued as a teenager, and she explained how she did not fit in with her peers.

And I was still very upset though about this no-self thing, because the other kids were all growing up; and they were doing what kids do. And I never felt very connected to what kids were doing or how they felt about themselves. And I always felt that there was this kind of empty hole in me. You know, I called it the place of no reality. Or "there is no reality," that was the words that I used. . . . But I remember saying to people, you know, there's nobody in here; and I was crying. I was very upset about it and I didn't understand it.

It wasn't until she was in her 30s that she received verification not only of her creative and intellectual abilities, but also of her psychic abilities in relation to her advanced state of spiritual development. Leita's life process of transformations of consciousness in relation to inner sense of no-self led in Unity Consciousness.

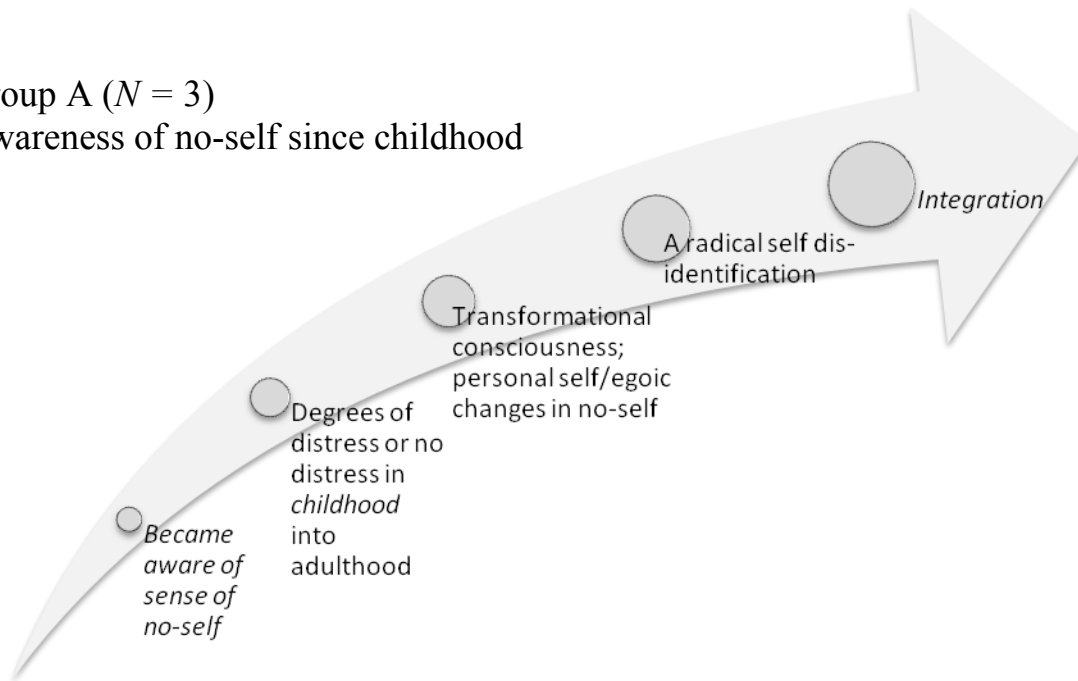
Also related to the subcategory of awareness of being different, all 3 Group A participants mentioned that they have psychic abilities; they also mentioned that they learned early on in life what they could and could not talk to people about and still be considered "normal." For example, Doublespiral had precognitive and psychic abilities, which her matrilineal relatives supported. Therefore, she did not deny or lose her psychic aptitude, and she had that EHE aspect of her reality supported and verified. If she talked about her perceptual experiences, people would look at her "like she was rather strange" and she learned to "keep mum" about things. This example serves to illustrate that this category was related to *awareness of being different from other people*.

Summarizing Group A's descriptions of awareness of being different, Doublespiral's distress was similar to, but did not seem as severe, as Leita's painful recollections of inner emptiness. Both spoke about psychic abilities in childhood—Doublespiral's were supported, and Leita did not fully understand her psychic abilities until adulthood. Clara discussed using discernment about sharing her psychic or intuitive abilities; additionally, she did not relate distress to yearning to fit in and did not experience distress related to inner awareness of no-self. However, she did not understand concepts and behaviors of others, and she still struggles to balance spirituality with concepts like time and money. Doublespiral experienced a sense of "the silence" or oneness since childhood, and both she and Clara had dream experiences that made Doublespiral "the great silence" and made Clara the oneness. Leita described transformation into Unity Consciousness as a process of "pure awareness" becoming "stable and automatic" and also as a comfortableness in Unity.

A comparison of Group A and Group B participants' distress related to no-self. Group B participants described a process of becoming aware of no-self in adulthood. These 9 participants did not experience distress related to no-self until one or more events occurred along the self, no-self, Self continuum. Therefore, Group B distress related to no-self is presented under the *category* of distress, which is included in the subsequent section entitled on integrating no-self. (Group A's category of distress is within both the integration section and the previous section containing descriptions of inner experiential awareness of no-self.) Figure 3 illustrates the differences between Group A and Group B processes in the self, no-self, Self continuum toward unification.

Group A ($N = 3$)

Awareness of no-self since childhood



Group B ($N = 9$)

Process of becoming aware of no-self as adults

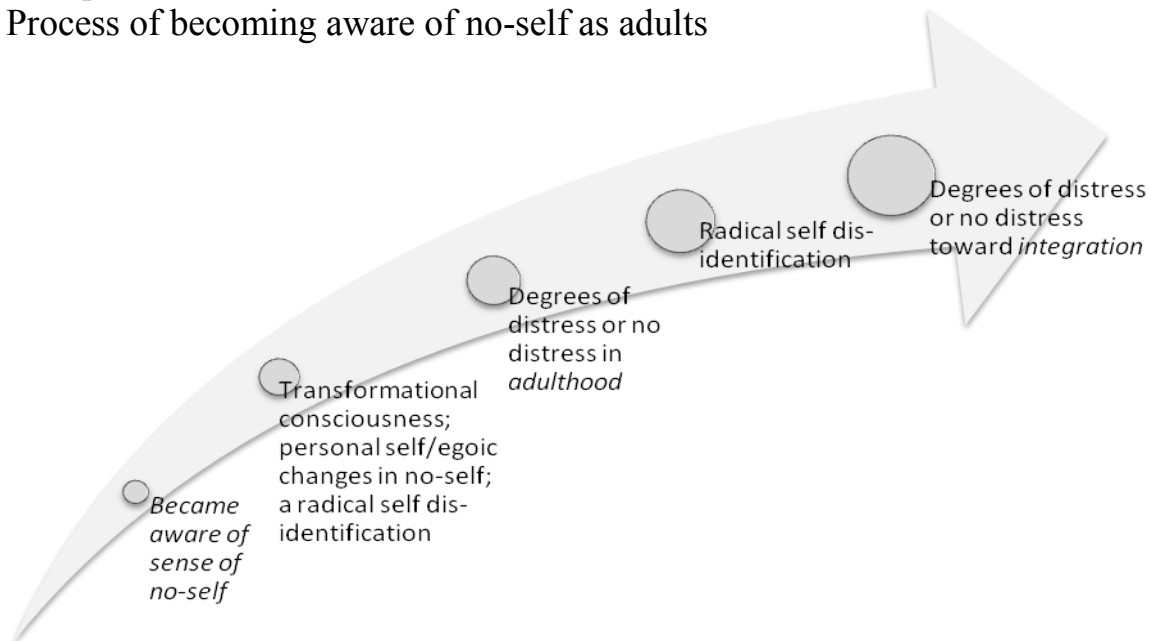


Figure 3: The personal self, no-self, Self continuum: Group A and Group B process differences.

Portrayal of inner awareness of no-self as adults. While Group A participants had inner awareness of no-self as children, Group B ($N = 9$) participants became aware of no-self as adults and described this as loss of personal identity, as loss of ego, as unification with Self, and/or as emptiness. Group B participants portrayed inner awareness of no-self through intellectual, philosophical, and/or embodied descriptions. Descriptions from Brahma and Anam Cara serve to illustrate the emptying of self of ego as seeing through the illusion of a self. Brahma described no-self through the experiences “in which he lost identification with his persona.” The Brahma “that was born on his birth date” was re-identified with his Being which “is eternal” and is “ever-present.” Anam Cara explained that the person, as the idea or image of a person, “has no self, no separate self at all.” It is “like the person has become dislodged from the identity.” In the following quote she speaks about herself by her given name as a characterization or “skin puppet.”

I am the Self—as I have known for a long time—same exact self. And [Anam Cara] is seen to be something happening rather than something that has any volition or self in it. It is understood how [Anam Cara] has no self, because [Anam Cara] is a skin puppet and it moves by some mysterious power—it just moves—while the presence that I am just is.

DBear summed up the process of letting go of ego as awakening toward Unity Consciousness, including “loss of identity of DBear.” He said that “the little self is the ego” and the no-self was “the loss of the ego after first waking.” More specifically, “DBear wasn’t there any more”; in other words, he saw through the three tiers of illusion—“with ego values related to the illusion of the individual, illusion of universe, and illusion of god’s dream. That’s the construct that collapsed when he lost his identity.”

AJ, Ariel, and Dave provided more experiential and personal descriptions. AJ’s portrayal of no-self related meditation to emptiness and to letting go of destructive patterns. He spoke about

how staying in emptiness helps us to “let go of our destructive patterns.” Taoism—Yin and yang and emptiness—always exist.

And it’s the same thing with meditation. Breath—The in-breath and out-breath arise out of space or emptiness and also fall back into space or emptiness. Thoughts rise out of emptiness and fall back; emotions rise out and fall back into emptiness. And so emptiness is always there. And the more we stay in emptiness, the less compulsion we feel from our patterns; and also, the more we actually are able to see into the details of those patterns. And if those are destructive, then hopefully we can let go of our destructive patterns—the patterns that don’t serve us well on that level.

So, in terms of Taoism, there are always those three things. They always exist—both the interplay of Yin and Yang, and the emptiness. And it’s actually built into the practices not only of Tai Chi, but Qigong, etcetera. So, for instance when you stand, you’re actually energetically connected to the earth. You have roots into the earth; your head is connected to the heavens. And so the human being is always seen as channeling the energies of heaven and earth at one time.

For AJ, ego and everything is a process of changing and moving as part of “I” or “I am.”

He described being in no-self as “feeling nothing, but totally connected at the same time. You know, being able to function, but just kind of resting in deep peace, deep emptiness.”

Ariel described a “sense of spaciousness and openness and consciousness [that] is almost always available alongside or *of* the “I.” Sense of “I may arise from time to time, but the self is not just an egoic, body-limited perspective any more.” “The self appears paradoxically wedded to the conscious nature, which is empty or open, or space.” She “mostly always [has] access to this non-duality . . . [or] Love. . . . This conscious awareness of no ‘I’ *is* no self.”

Dave said that “there is no self any more,” and his description encompasses the paradoxical, experiential aspect of this.

And in retrospect, it was because the idea of self is a contained thing for me. It has limits. It has edges, even if they’re really big edges. Even if they’re really cosmic edges. And so suddenly there’s more than one thing. Even if there are things contained within one thing, it’s still more than one thing. So, here, it just it wasn’t a self anymore, ‘cause there were no edges. There was just no *thing*. The way I describe it is in terms of there wasn’t anything, but there wasn’t nothing. It isn’t anything at all, but it isn’t nothing. ‘Cause even nothing—if you think of nothing, you have an image there—you have empty space, you

have—yeah [*laughs*], I have an image of an empty universe—that’s what I think of as nothing, or just blackness or whatever, but it isn’t any of that. It’s dynamic, it’s alive. It’s me, so it’s—you know, it’s almost like an ocean, because it’s always moving. And so any idea of self is gone, so there is no self any more. It’s kind of what it feels like.

Robert offered both a philosophical and personal view of life before and after he lost a separate sense of self.

The project of the self—It takes different forms. And certainly one is to feel better, to make sure that it’s okay, that it’s safe, that it gets certain things, that it gets its needs met. In a way, the self or me is that which is in negotiation with life, trying get something out of life. . . . Only a separate self does that [*laughs*], you know, right? So, there’s just a sense of less and less of that, because that which never really existed anyway—a separate self—is just kind of dying a sort of slow death; and so there’s just less and less negotiating with reality. . . . Incompleteness only exists in relationship to a separate someone who feels incomplete, right? . . . There’s absolutely a sense of individuation, *and* there’s a sense—sometimes more pronounced than other times—a sense that the stuff of life, the phenomena, the arisings of life, the manifestations of life. You and me are arisings of the same fundamental nature and substance; and so they’re ultimately not separate. And so that’s happening simultaneously.

At the level of experience, for Robert, it feels more like there is a self and there is no self, and both of those are happening simultaneously. There’s absolutely a sense of individuation, *and* there is a sense of inseparability. Stated in a different manner, loss of individual, personal self includes a sense of inseparability between self and everything. Loss of inner sense of individuality may also be considered as inseparability of personal self and Self, and, paradoxically, as a sense of emptiness or oneness.

This section portrayed participants’ descriptive data regarding the living out of the experience of no-self as a process of emptying self of ego, and, paradoxically, as transformation of awareness or consciousness. Participant descriptive data were presented regarding what it is like to experience no self or no identity. The following section portrays participants’ descriptive data regarding the living out of the experience no-self as a process of integration, and it includes illustrating Group B’s spectrum of distress in relation to inner awareness of no-self as adults.

The Living Out of the Experience of No-self: The Process of Integration

As explained in the previous section and as illustrated in Figure 3, there was a difference in the processes of the self, no-self continuum between Group A ($N = 3$) and Group B ($N = 9$) participants. Group A participants went through distress or no distress related to inner awareness of no-self in childhood and into adulthood. Group B participants became aware of no-self as adults and experienced varying levels of distress after no-self transformations and after radical self dis-identifications. A range of distress or no distress was characterized as pertaining to a process that participants in both groups tended to describe as *integration*. While portrayal of some participants' experiences of no-self and of radical self dis-identification were presented earlier in this chapter, all participants' stories are contained in Appendix N. Furthermore, a chart entitled, Appendix U: Spiritual Evolvment: What Helped, lists participant descriptions of what helped retain, facilitate, or integrate changes in self toward enlightenment.

Group A: Integration After Radical Personal Self Dis-identification

Results of data analysis. In a previous section, Group A participants' narratives were presented which substantiated their having experienced distress, difficulties, or no distress related to the experience of no-self from childhood through adulthood. This category was explained as being related to awareness of being different from other people (including having psychic abilities) and seeking to understand. Furthermore, Group A participants experienced a radical self dis-identification, and integration of changes of self occurred after this, with no distress reported.

The need to understand after a radical self dis-identification, and what helped with integration. The 3 Group A participants, Leita, Doublespiral and Clara, each described one or more experiences of radical self-dis-identification. Clara did not experience distress after the dream that left a lasting sense of "it's all one" and did not seek to understand it; however, she said

that she still seeks to “understand the world—it all seems like a gigantic puzzle.” She also did not mention difficulties integrating the dream experience.

Doublespiral and Leita also did not experience distress in relation to their experiences of radical self-dis-identification; however they sought to understand. Doublespiral had a conceptual framework for the permanent shift into no-self prior to her permanent shift into the silence and sought out a friend for “debriefing.”

And so within a couple of days, I just kind of was with it; told my husband about it; and called a dear friend. . . . And I can’t remember that he told me—can’t remember, but he had gone through kind of his own awakening decades before that; and so he was a wonderful person to talk with about. And he’d ask questions, and it just gave me a place to debrief as it was happening, for which I was very, very, very grateful.

Additionally, for probably about 6 months after the shift, Doublespiral had “real difficulty sleeping.” She felt like when she would “lie down at night was when kind of the energetics of it would really start happening.” She had previous understanding and experiences of “kundalini awakenings,” in that she felt that she had been “getting rewired energetically” through a kundalini process over the years. So, she thought her “body was fairly well prepared—my energy-body as well as my physical body” for the permanent shift into the silence.

Similarly, Leita mentioned that having done a lot of chakra work, “the heart chakra and the rest of the chakras” had been “quite well cleaned and groomed, if you will” prior to Unity Consciousness, such that

the consciousness is able to travel through the chakras more fluidly and with greater integration with the light body level. So when the light travels from the light body out, there’s a real deep sense of deep satisfaction and peace.

Regardless of prior knowledge, Leita also sought to understand what was happening to her when she entered Unity Consciousness. She started having “this experience of light coming in from the objects in [her] perception,” which “became very intense actually.” She went to see someone who she felt was in Unity Consciousness “to talk to her about this experience directly.”

This person told Leita that if she “stayed with the experience and just noticed the light coming into [her] consciousness like that and not becoming uncomfortable with it, that eventually it would stabilize.” The experience of light coming in from objects preceded a deeper level of unification.

Group B: Integration After Awareness of No-self Experiences and After a Radical Self

Dis-identification

Group B participants ($N = 7$ out of 9) described a range of distress and individual integration processes after they became aware of no-self, after transformational experiences, *and* after experiences of radical self dis-identification. One category related to distress was *the need to understand and the need for guidance*; participants related this not only with regard to understanding what was going on, but also with regard to gaining assistance and advice regarding the self/no-self process, or just to share what was happening spiritually.

Distress related to the need to understand and the need for guidance. Participants expressed a need to understand what was happening to them and to be able to talk to others about what was going on during the self, no-self, Self continuum, including after transformational experiences and after experiences of radical self dis-identification. For example,

DBear viewed his spiritual path as partly the yogic path of the intellect; and he had a need to understand the significance and meaning of his spiritual development. In the years [after the meditation course,] he did not have access to a community that supported and communicated understanding of the process of becoming enlightened. . . . He continued to meditate and went through emotional clearing; but most significantly, he was “confused” because he was experiencing “self as [his] self, but hadn’t become it yet.”

Ariel did not feel that her experiences were validated and thought that individual attention from her guru was lacking. Therefore, she left that guru and started working with a spiritual teacher whose spiritual practice included much more personal attention of the awakened person and also

direct coaching and support, which she felt “really augmented [her] process very profoundly.” On the other hand, Anam Cara found

working with a particular spiritual teacher for over 9 years was helpful because “he was hands-off” in the “natural unfolding.” This was helpful in creating a “benevolent environment,” where “he didn’t really do much except be there with whatever I was going through.” Similarly, she stated that it was helpful that one of her close friends really understood her experience and didn’t “make it any more or less than it is.” This friend was “an important companion” in helping her to “not feel alone as a human being” because she felt totally understood.

Other Group B examples of distress related to the need to understand were recounted by Brahma, GY, and Dave. After Brahma became involved in Shamanism, his “ego began expanding to embrace and interact with [his] environment as [his] conscious began to evolve.” Then he found himself

in a rather uncomfortable period. I found myself in a period of almost constant bliss or love. Matter of fact, it was love; but it was love with still some levels of attachment. And no matter what I saw, whether it was a tree or a cloud or a person (and it didn’t make any difference what gender) there was just an enormous outpouring of love that I was experiencing; and I don’t even know where it was coming from. It wasn’t a physical attraction, and yet it was still identified with the individual or the subject. So that got very, very powerful. It got to the point where I didn’t really want to have it any more. . . . I was very uncomfortable because it still had attachment to it. I wanted to *be* with the object of whatever I was experiencing.

Experiential love and bliss caused discomfort and “isolation;” and “Brahma searched his mind for a way he could understand, or a place he could find someone who would understand, what he was going through.” This led him to finding the Hindu temple and a priest who, immediately upon seeing him, recognized what he was undergoing. The priest offered Brahma the opportunity to participate in a 75-day ceremony, which ultimately began a series of events that was an answer for his “prayer, because what [he] was seeking was to have love without attachment; and that’s exactly what [he] got from that experience.”

GY went through three cycles of noetic transformations, which she described as experiences “that you tap into the deeper layers of human consciousness to go beyond the level you’re currently at to deeper levels of consciousness.” During each of those cycles, she underwent distressing situations; however, through noetic experiences gurus always became available to her

to provide advice as she sought to understand what was happening to her. During her current, fourth cycle, GY received her vows in a Vedanta convent, and after she was there “a little more than 5 or 6 years,” she

came to realize that my superior (who was a man) was extremely malevolent, that I was at severe risk. I had no idea what could happen to me; but I am telling you, I was nearly murdered a few times by some of the other nuns, who were influenced by his behavior. It was really bad. . . . But the violence was not at the time of the dream. It was later; but I knew I was facing something really bad and difficult.

Now one of the spiritual personalities that, as a Vedantin I was extremely devoted to, was Swami Vivekananda. . . . He was a very powerful being in my life. But this man, my superior, was vehemently antagonistic to Vivekananda; and I had a lot of very painful excruciating exchanges with this man. I felt like I was being psychologically beaten down, you know, and threatened. And I was particularly vulnerable, because my guru had just died. I was still in deep grief over my guru’s death, so I was very vulnerable to all this stuff. And I felt terribly, terribly threatened because, you see, I was completely at the mercy of this man. I had no money—nothing—I was at his mercy.

Just before the situation became “violent,” however, GY had a dream.

This is another dream that gave me the strength to go through what I was going to have to face. These dreams kept me alive. In the dream I was in a house of many stories; I was up in the top floor. . . . I suddenly realized that there was somebody there whom I couldn’t see. He was a very masculine, strong person, but I couldn’t see his face—it was dark. And I got scared. I started to run, and he started to pursue me. And I ran down the stairs and down the stairs and down the stairs [with a little laugh]. And this person was coming after me faster and faster and faster. I got down into the basement, which is the place where I used to talk with my guru, into that room. There were double doors, which I tried to force closed and throw the bolt to keep this being out. But he was very strong and very powerful. And he was forcing the door, forcing the door. And finally I couldn’t hold it, and he came into the room. And it was Vivekananda himself, and he was laughing and laughing and laughing [with a little laugh]. At that point in my life, I was 45. I was an adult by that time. I realized that in that dream Vivekananda was telling me: “I am not going to let you succumb; I will never let you go; I will pursue you and hold you and keep you going through whatever you have to take on my account.” It empowered me tremendously. It made it possible for me to continue on and face all the crap that I had to. Of course, at that moment in time, I didn’t know what it was I was going to have to face; but boy, I sure found out.

So, these dreams occurring at this point were unbelievable. They’re not formless, of course; but they’re talking to a deep, deep part of my soul that made it possible for me to go through all this stuff, and remain above it. See, that’s no-self. You go through the stuff.

Most people go crazy; they become addicted or this or that. But I just kept steady, steady, coming from a much, much deeper part of what I am.

The situation in the convent became intolerable. GY said, “When you’re isolated by the leader, the other people will attack you. . . . [The women] physically assaulted me for several years. . . . At that convent, they . . . literally tried to murder me.” In talking about this experience, she said that the noetic dream experience was an experience of no-self. It spoke to “a deep, deep part of [her] soul that made it possible for [her] to go through all this stuff, and remain above it.” In this case, the dream where she received empowering advice from her deceased guru guided her in the stressful situation. GY said, “Without the dream or the other noetic experiences I wouldn’t be here to tell the tale. And I certainly wouldn’t be in my right mind—that was what supported me.”

Dave explained that having someone to talk to (whether a friend, a spiritual teacher, or a group of people) about his shifts and experiences was helpful. With his first transition when he was in college, he thought what he was going through “was crazy” because he didn’t know anyone having similar experiences. Even though he was exposed to enlightenment teachings while growing up, they “only talked about the nice things that everybody wants” and mentioned that, “Oh yeah, well, you can unstress.” He ended up having to leave the graduate program he was in; after that, he became involved with a group of people who met to discuss enlightenment. The discussions in the group of awakened people he met with caused him to understand his enlightenment process and facilitated a shift in awareness. Furthermore, with regard to the need to understand, Dave said that he and a close friend would discuss existential questions to really try to examine and understand their issues. The level of understanding of what they sought after a transition was analogous to reunderstanding something that you already knew and understood as reality.

Additional perspective regarding the need for guidance and the need to understand was provided by Brahma. With regard to his experience of becoming Self as Eternal Being, he went through a challenging 10-year period of adjusting to relative existence, and reflected,

You know, but it wasn't easy. I had no guidance, and I really feel that somehow we need to be able to provide some guidance, because we don't have a culture that's prepared at all for this kind of awakening or whatever you want to call it. You know at first, I didn't think it was anything more than just a profound experience; but I realized that I've never changed my perception of who I am since that time. It was almost like I [*little laugh*—if you can imagine going through, like, an hourglass and coming out the other side, and realizing, “Oh, I've never been what I just thought I was for all those 55 years.” [*laughs*] It's quite strange. Yeah.

The Mind-Body Aspect of Integrating No-self

The majority of Group A ($N = 3$) and Group B ($N = 9$) participants described levels of distress and no distress related to the living out of no-self. All participant narratives demonstrated the need to understand and the need for guidance during the personal self, no-self, Self continuum, whether beginning in childhood or in adulthood. The participants' need to understand what was happening to their awareness of self in relation to the world pointed toward a process that the mind goes through in comprehending and accepting changes in personal self related to no-self and Self. Dave clearly articulated both this mind aspect and also the body aspect of integration. He found that there were two phases integral to transition or growth of awareness.

The first phase is

the expansion part, when a new experience dawns and Awareness expands; and then the integration, where the experience is being integrated physically so that it becomes normal, no matter how flashy it was originally.

Furthermore, Dave explained, this is not on the intellectual level, but it is a process of accepting, recognizing, and understanding on the deepest level of knowing—it is an experience that the mind *and* body have to catch up to after the shift in awareness.

Dave provided examples of his process of releasing or letting go of emotional and physical boundaries—which was “intensely painful” at times.

And so I found that I had all these emotional beliefs in the way. Emotional as in I would get highly reactive about them, because I felt threatened. I felt like I was an individual who could be threatened in different ways. . . . And my whole life was kind of based around that, actually, out of being emotionally safe.

He said that emotional beliefs were “released bit by bit, often painful, because [he] was clinging to these ideas so much, because [he] felt like [he] would be annihilated if they left.” This was threatening because he was still feeling very much like he was an individual. The process of releasing was accompanied with intense fear, sadness, anger, or pain.

It’s kind of like if someone took someone you loved very dearly and started torturing them. It’s not like you’re actually in physical pain, but you might as well be because you’re going through it so badly. It was that kind of thing. And then there were certain amounts of physical pain, too.

As part of the challenging 10-year period of adjusting to relative existence, Brahma explained the body-mind process of letting go of residual belief systems:

No judgment. Anger, if it ever arises, it seems to simultaneously come up with, “This is yourself, and what you’re seeing are residual belief systems that are interfering with your clarity. Find what they are and just let them dissolve; and then just love the experience.”

He had to learn to live with a “whole new set of priorities,” a “new set of awareness” before he could gain “purposefulness,” “infinite compassion,” and “patience.”

DBear explained his process related to the body-mind habit. He explained both the change he has noticed in himself regarding a relationship and, additionally, how a relationship can cause habits to come to consciousness and then he can clear them.

There isn’t the *needs* associated with the relationship—the need for acceptance, the need for recognition, the need for, you know, all that stuff associated with a relationship. For me, relationship is about a vehicle to flow love to. It just changed that dynamic completely. There’s still some garbage flowing around there. I’m not Mr. Clear, Mr. Clean [*laughs*] yet. The mind is a habit machine, right? So there’s all this stuff there, and it’s not till something comes up to make the habit conscious that you see it and then can clear it. It’s interesting—in some ways my life has been an exercise in that.

This body-mind process continues, in that DBear said he is still encountering opportunities that help him clear the habit of the mind machine.

In Ariel's awakening process, she experienced some difficult times within the first 6 years, with regard to a primary relationship and ego patterns as part of integration. She explained her process of how ego deficits and patterns were exposed, purified, and integrated in terms of ongoing healing.

I would say that in the first six years of my awakening life that many of my ego limitations—my ego patterns—were exposed and purified and integrated. Things like abandonment feelings, insecurities. And really, I notice they're not all gone. I mean, they still arise in me; but also, I know they're not essential or permanent. But those places in my ego development where I didn't get what I needed at the time I needed it—those things all popped up for my examination, and they are healing. They are purifying, they are integrating, they no longer are the big stumbling blocks that they once were. But they can be triggered, you know. But nothing like they used to be. I would say I used to be kind of a depressed person. And inhibited. And a pleaser. And now I've gotten more of a hold on myself. Now I feel like it's just okay to be turned inward if I want to. It's just okay to say no; it's okay to immerse myself in whatever little narrow interest I have at the moment. There's just a way in which I have seen the other side of my self-criticism, and it doesn't carry the weight that it used to. So that's psychologically how I've been affected.

Anam Cara explained both a psychological aspect of spiritual maturation and also her psychological maturation. She stated that “coming into” herself psychologically was “very significant in the process of unfolding as a human being with relation to the experience of no-self.” As a Ph.D. student studying psychology, her “process with psychological exploration” had been all about something being “wrong with” herself, and how to “fix” herself. However, with a significant no-self realization, that “whole thing got pulled out from under” her, such that, “there [was] no self to fix, and there's nothing wrong—that kind of thing.” Also, there were other “ups and downs in terms of [her] relationship to the experience.” In her words,

I think the biggest up-and-down kind of thing was that my mind took over, intellectualizing what was seen to not be true. Ultimately, the experience was one of denying emotion. That would be a way to sum it up. So there was a period of years, let's say, maybe 10 years, of going into a denial of emotion and then coming back out of it. And I would say, actually, that the difficulty of it wasn't because of the realization. Well, I

guess the denial was related to that; but, had there been whatever level of emotional maturity in the first place, then the denial wouldn't have been the default setting on my mind, if that makes sense.

She elaborated on her level of emotional immaturity and how that related to denial.

It wasn't [denial of] the emotion of the no-self experience. It was denying the human emotions that I would have just in life, because it was seen so clearly in the moment of realization: "Oh, this is just experience—there's the unfolding of life and then there's what I actually am."—There was sort of a separation between the two. In the realization it was all one, there was no inner conflict or outer conflict about anything. But when the mind came in, it took ownership of the realization and then applied that to emotion—"Oh, there *is no* emotion. That doesn't exist." And yet the human experience was one where there were emotions and there was whatever level of maturity or immaturity. Denying it without actually seeing through it was ultimately painful.

I guess maybe the main ways as a human being I have tended to function are emotionally and intellectually. And so it was sort of a combination of both of those things that had to settle into something. So, as the intellect settles down and sees and knows its rightful place in the movement of things, then also the emotion isn't being denied intellectually. And so then it has room to just be what it is.

So [the realization experience] just basically highlighted where the unconsciousness was, and it wasn't pleasant. It wasn't easy to have that be denied. And then actually when it started letting go of the denial, then even though the emotions were painful, it felt very releasing and healing. So that's sort of the main up and down thing—just intellectualizing it. . . . And so at this point, it feels like there's, in terms of my human experience, just a natural unfolding of it—If emotional issues come up, it's more like they just are what they are and there's not the inner conflict about it. And there's not so much the intellectual denying of emotion. It's just allowed; there's a harmonious allowing of my human experience.

In other words, the mind had to "settle down" and know "its rightful place in the movement of things" in order for emotion to not be denied intellectually. When this let go, there was "just a natural unfolding" or an "allowing" of human experience.

Additionally, Anam Cara explained that the change in self may be a "maturation that isn't psychological." In her awareness process she described "that which is always present" as infinite, ever-present awareness, and "actual day-to-day experience is like [she is] less identified with psychological or physical parts of herself." She said that sense of self expands and suspected that "this is an ongoing, never-ending expansion. . . . Self is always changing, no-self is unchanging."

Additionally, she stated that in her unfolding process, she felt like her body relaxed over time as “things” settled in.

Robert provided further insight on the mind-body process in his discussion of integrating no-self toward liberation. He had a pivotal insight of no-separation, such that the ground of everything was “this profound love and wisdom.” Additionally, Robert found that there needed to be “a lived, moment-to-moment recognition of the insight.” He said, “Every moment and every experience is equally divine, and liberation lies in *“living from this insight.”* The “deep seated conditioned habit of the body-mind” needs to just be “allowed to be.” He elaborated that the conditioned habit of the body-mind is that “when threatened, it will naturally close down.” That closing down is “awakeness itself as life or awareness—it is awake awareness versus a falling asleep.”

It’s really about seeing that something remains awake in the midst of whatever is arising—that awakeness remains awake through every experience, and it’s moving as every experience, and so there’s no problem. There’s never a problem. The problem comes in a way with the kind of second order thinking about some conditioning that’s arising. The conditioning just arises; and if it’s just not resisted, then it just arises and almost can’t sustain itself in a way. But then when the mind comes in and starts creating a whole story about what a problem this is and now I’ve gotta find an antidote to it—you know, whatever the antidote might be, spiritual or otherwise—then we’re back on the treadmill of a separate self who thinks that there’s a problem with some aspect of reality it has to solve. And usually the problem is with myself—like, this shouldn’t be happening, you know, it’s kind of the ultimate ego trip. Well, if I was really enlightened [*laughs*], there would be no fear [*laughing*] arising, you know, and that’s one of ego’s favorite tricks.

To restate this, Robert thinks that it is the conditioned mind that finds a problem with experiences by contracting from experiences rather than by recognizing that every experience *is* the arising of awake awareness. Therefore, it is the trick of the ego or the “the project of the self . . . to feel better.” For example, Robert said that with regard to fear and anger, “the less and less and less resistance there is to it, the more *awake* remains in the center of” the emotion. Feeling

better is “not dominating the field of consciousness” even if fear and anger are present because “there’s something else that is still there—that’s still awake—*that*’s still present in the midst of it, and that clarity doesn’t go anywhere.”

The Process of Embodying a Realization Is Vital to Integration

Prendergast and Bradford (2007) provided a definition of the term embody related to no-self as a process of spiritual transformation.

It is one thing to thoroughly wake up to one’s true nature as the formless ground of being or no-self; it is another to *actualize* or *embody* this awareness in one’s daily life in the body and in relationship to transpose these changes to collective, societal structures. Each body-mind holds different degrees and kinds of conditioning, both individually and collectively. . . . The deeper the awakening, however, the less we are identified with this conditioning. (pp. 12-13)

Participant data evidenced experiences of no-self as self dis-identification and as radical self dis-identification, which were further integrated as no-self unfolded through the living out of no-self in relation to the world and through additional realizations and insights. These transformations were portrayed as needing to be integrated through the living out of no-self, including explanations of the body-mind aspect of integration. While 8 out of 12 participants used the term *integration* in relation to the living out of no-self, evidence from Anam Cara, AJ, Doublespiral, and Dave directly corroborated embodying as an aspect integral to the integration process of living out of no-self.

Dave’s spiritual transitions gave rise to new understandings of reality, the heart of which lies in his experience of being the creator of his individual reality as an embodiment of his concept of home. Doublespiral went through transformation after crossing over into the silence. She described how her sense of self changed with regard to embodying the silence more and in terms of her “egoic construct becoming more transparent” with the silence.

It's like there's a functional self in the physical world. . . . But I think my experience the last three years or so is of that functional self becoming progressively more and more transparent. More suffused, in some way that I can't explain, with that silence.

AJ defined the living out of his early, deep realization of no-self through “life landmarks” which filled in the details as filling in “more pieces of the puzzle” so that he *now* embodies and lives Buddhist and Taoist principles and philosophies. He not only sees how “body, energy, mind, spirit” are “generally and intuitively” connected, but he also sees the “specific dynamics” of them. They are “not just a theory or belief system,” but rather they are “a reality” to him, and his innate connection with body, energy, mind, spirit “is quite specific and practical.” In the living out of his early realization, his embodiment consisted of living moment-to-moment through life stages of commitment and stages of letting go.

Anam Cara clarified the importance of personal self continuing as embodiment of realizations. She had an important, experiential insight that played out in her life through a “negative teaching” through her relationship with a spiritual teacher whom she worked with for a while. She thought that the teacher was someone who had an “important direct experience” of “enlightenment—and yet there was a way that she wasn't embodying it.”

And the word that I sort of have around it is *Half-Way Up the Mountain*. And again, in retrospect, looking back on it, I saw, “Wow, that was a great teaching for me.” I saw directly by witnessing her experience that it's possible to be enlightened, and to not be fully enlightened, or to not embody it. It was plain as day right in front of my face—This is how it works in the actual human unfolding of this. It's not like there's enlightenment and then you're done and you're perfect. And though the fundamental understanding is beyond simple, the unfolding or the living of it is something of an entirely different order. So that was another [of] what I'm calling “negative teaching” that was really important and valuable for me. And just for the record, I've heard only wonderful things about [that teacher] lately. And that, too is a teaching—transformation continues to unfold.

This and other teachings affected the ultimate unfolding of her “realizing the truth of I AM,” as “another, possibly more deeply embodied realization of no-self.”

To recapitulate based on participant data, embodying a realization, insight, or transformation is a process of the body changing to adapt to an experience of self dis-identification or radical self-disidentification—in order that it can be fully realized and actualized in living out daily life. Emptying self of ego continues to unfold beyond having the realization through a mind-body transformational process of embodiment.

This section portrayed participant data regarding integration of no-self and embodying insights and realizations as an integral part of the personal self, no-self, Self continuum and elucidated the mind-body aspects of changes in personal self. The next section presents categories and properties of change intertwined with changes in self in relation to the world. This aspect of inner and outer self/no-self transformation continues as a process of unification in furtherance of evolution of personal self.

Unification: Further Emptying and Transformation of Personal Self

The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum: Transformation as Unification

Earlier in this chapter, grounded theory data analysis was presented which showed that participants' commitment to spirituality evolved as a process of spiritual transformation. In addition, life events, insights, realizations, and letting go within the self, no-self, Self continuum allowed no-self to unfold as a process of transformation of consciousness. During this progression of self dis-identification and radical self dis-identification, life experiences and practices also helped integrate and embody no-self. With regard to their evolved conscious awareness, participants described how they had changed in relation to the world. While Appendix U lists what was helpful in facilitating or integrating no-self transformational experiences, the following participant data elucidated categories and properties of the integrating process. The process of

integrating changes in self was found to be related to loss, while at the same time related to acceptance and surrender in furtherance of unification.

Changes in Personal Self in Relation to the World

Participants described varying degrees of change in self in relation to the world. For example, Moon described how coming to consciousness of no-self has changed her, especially with regard the subcategories of mind-body changes, equanimity, and compassionate awareness:

I'm less combative with people. I have more room inside of me for allowing them to have their stuff. I don't have to fix them. Certainly with all the physical stuff I've been through, I've learned some patience and wonderment. I had healers around the country who were sending me energy for my healing, and sometimes I could watch my abdomen heal with their energy. It certainly has taught me to love my body, and how powerful it is and let it be. Feed it what it needs, not more . . . and so it's a way of life between food and me now. Relationally there's more peace and more affirming of other people's goodness, rather than teaching them what they should do to change. I'm a deeper listener. I'm surprised by invitations that come to me to share my story with others. You know, you were a surprise. I've been asked to do the opening prayer at the City Council meeting tonight. You know, how did that happen?

There is this new aspect that has emerged in me about three months ago. It's only recently that I have been able to put language on what is happening. It seems that I've stopped trying to create balance in my life, like balance between the contemplative- and the service-orientated use of time. Instead, I'm watching the flow, because balance still has ego-judgment and comparison in it. But it seems that if I'm just gazing into the flow and considering what's there, it is letting go of some of that selfish ego. And, you know, I had just put language on it, I think, when you e-mailed me about this work of your studies. It was, like, "My!? This flow is something! The revelation is clear!" I think it's an exchange of flow. It's between all of us; it's between creation and the human species. It's between people who are doing the conscious work of trying not to say "mine" and "my way." I do believe that way of claiming "me and mine" is what bodies of religious and spiritual communities refer to as original sin. I don't think creation flowed forth from such self-centeredness. But somewhere along in the human development somebody claimed "mine" and thus began warfare and violence and everything else. So this journey of trying to be one small mustard seed that will do the work of allowing the "mine" or the selfishness to disappear and the no-self to arise is, you know, in religious terms you could say it's salvation work: Helping to redeem human consciousness. And I do believe that if enough folks are participating in this—nobody has to know about it—but when enough of us so breathe, there will be a critical mass of energy, and it will change human consciousness.

I'm more trusting that life is benevolent. I feel larger—like more of the universe lives inside of me than outside. And I also feel more responsible for practicing no-self or

integrity or spiritual consciousness—with intention for the sake of other, for the universe, for friends and enemies.

I guess I am surprised more by reactions inside of me that seem to be beyond me, or they're certainly free of the worst angels inside of me. I think the biggest thoughts when I am able to see the goodness and affirm other people, or when I find a way to affirm other people and not use language of diminishment or fear or violent language. I feel changed when I recognize that there is no need to put another down. Certainly all of this spills over into ecology. So I feel more responsibility toward the world and I also feel larger. I don't think I'm the creator of the largeness; and yet the largeness is such a *gift*, so I better say 'thank you' and live responsibly in the gift.

Loss Related to Changes in Personal Self in Relation to the World

While Moon did not use the term *loss* in relation to changes in self in relation to the world, the majority of participants did. Even so, these individuals paradoxically described loss in conjunction with equanimous qualities. For example, Doublespiral said that she lost sense of “my” and “lost sense of direction.” In other words, there is “no small self to do the planning.” She also lost her need to normalize with regard to spirituality, such that now she

considers herself to be a spiritual mystic in the sense that the nature of all things and beings are the appearance of one being or god. She said it's like she gets “to create a life that fits” for herself as “a quirky, sensual mystic.” She referred to a line from Gerard Manley Hopkins—that “the presence of god” or “the spirit will shake out in this world like shining from shook foil.”

Leita lost “holding onto creative higher mind as a vehicle for stability of consciousness.” Furthermore, while integrating Unity Consciousness, “the feelings of separation from feeling different since childhood—these feelings melted,” and Leita “felt deep, increasing connection to everything.”

DBear and Anam Cara provided descriptions that illustrated loss of meaning. DBear experienced challenging times during his spiritual journey, including loss of work ethic. When the identity of DBear was not there anymore, he saw through the three tiers of illusion: the “ego values related to the illusion of the individual,” the “illusion of universe,” and the “illusion of god's dream.” He said that was one construct that collapsed when he lost his identity, such that

less and less of what he knew meant anything. DBear lost “the do-er” and explained, “I am not the do-er—It’s basically God and one of the constructs that God’s created that’s doing the doing of itself.”

Anam Cara illustrated loss of meaning that can occur with loss of self and how that played out in the living out of her daily life. Her fifth realization, when her true nature became clear, “happened right in the middle” of writing her dissertation, such that:

It “became blatantly obvious that there was no putting words around [her] chosen topic;” and that it was “a total farce to even pretend to make some intellectual study out of it.” In fact, “seeing beyond experience in general, just pulled the rug out from under [her] dissertation process,” such that it was “sort of the antithesis of” the topic. And so for her “that was sort of weird.” . . . Nevertheless, she continued with her dissertation because it “felt like it was the right thing to do; but the actuality of working on it was strangely futile and slightly dissatisfying because it just felt like a farce.” In the end, she viewed writing the dissertation as a good process; but at the time, “it was just sort of confusing to have to do life, when life [didn’t] make sense anymore.”

Anam Cara said that another thing that changed was that she was not interested in the same things she had been interested in before, “like fixing [her]self or seeking experiences.” Accordingly, “the common interest of friends changed, and the people [she] spent time with reflected that.”

Loss Related to Positive Changes in Self in Relation to the World

Loss is wedded to positive changes in self in relation to the world. While Moon did not relate loss to changes in self, the 11 other participants described changes in personal self in relation to the world as a result of transformation of consciousness. In the living out of no-self, these 11 participants’ descriptions paradoxically spoke about loss of self in relation to the world *along with* positive change in self in relationship with people and the world.

Brahma described a variety of loss and illustrated the extent to which loss of self in relation to the world occurred for him. The following quotation is a description of not only how he changed, but also the extent to which his life changed.

And I can say that it cost everything. It cost me my job, my career, my marriage of 25 years. My wife just couldn't understand how I could suddenly instantly change and have a different value system. I could no longer become part of any codependent relationship. I wasn't condemning. I just have infinite compassion, but I didn't want to support it with my energy any more. That's kind of clear. What else did I give up? I virtually gave up everything. Yeah, I [with a little laugh] kind of used to laugh and say, "Well, now that I'm everything, I have nothing." [laughs] And yet, I don't feel any loss at all. I have a very, very full and happy and blissful continence in life.

Brahma's experience of change may seem extreme, and yet it alludes to loss as positive change in self in relation to the world. Further examination of Brahma's narrative elucidates a spectrum of positive changes reflected as a shift in consciousness awareness, including mind-body changes, equanimity, and compassionate awareness. Brahma's "ego began expanding to embrace and interact" with his environment as his conscious began to evolve.

I took a look at my life and I said, "Well, what could I do? If I'm being supported this way, what large thing could I do that would seem almost impossible for anybody to achieve?" And I wasn't anybody special, so I intended to create a non-for-profit for people that were terminally ill. And within three years I had that, and I was having camps and weekends and hundreds of people were coming to it, and I could see that somehow whatever I desired was unfolding. And it was a very special and wonderful time in my life. And even though I had to deal with challenges and all kinds of things that were normal to regular people, I had an inner knowing that supported me through those periods, because I really felt that somehow I had made a deeper connection with whatever organized that energy in nature. It was like Nature was supporting my desire.

Additionally, Brahma described how he changed after becoming "Self as infinite field as unexpressed and expressed—One Being connected in total silence." At one point,

You know . . . the days after that were quite challenging. I no longer felt identified with my work ethic. I realized the transparency of our culture and the shallowness of how we live and die and suffer—and it's all because we don't understand our own nature, we don't understand who we are; and so I stopped working.

I'm not afraid of death; I'm not afraid of anything that can happen, because I know that everything relative is an experience of myself. And that I totally am absolutely a hundred percent knowing that there's no such thing as death. So for me, there's no fear at all. And suffering—It doesn't mean I don't have pain; but I don't suffer, because I don't think there's anything wrong. [laughs] That sounds maybe hard to understand, too; but for instance, I had an operation recently, and I realized that that's what my body had to go through, and I didn't suffer through it. I experienced it and said, "Okay, well, we're going to have this experience, and, you know, for whatever reason it's important; and maybe I

don't know it right now, but you know, I'm just going to go through it the best way I can and enjoy it." And that was my attitude. And that's my attitude through everything now. I didn't have that before. Yeah. Sure. And I'm not afraid to try anything. I mean, no matter what business venture there is, I'm very happy to get involved with it. I went from being a database administrator at Xerox at the time that I had that very clear understanding of myself, and then within only just a couple of years, I had written ten books, or authored ten published items, and was a public speaker. Prior to that, I could never ever talk, even in front of 2 or 3 people. I was a very private and—I don't know—I guess reclusive individual. And now I can speak in front of 2 to 15 or 20 thousand people and totally enjoy it. Because I know I'm sitting inside of myself. And I also worked myself up to a business mentor where I was charging 400 dollars an hour to take any person's problem and come up with creative solutions for it in ten, one-week sessions of 400 dollars each. And I'm not trying to brag about it. I'm just saying that I could have never, ever, ever done that prior to that understanding. So, it just changed everything about me. It's very strange. [*little laugh*]

No judgment. Anger, if it ever arises, it seems to simultaneously come up with, "This is yourself, and what you're seeing are residual belief systems that are interfering with your clarity. Find what they are and just let them dissolve; and then just love the experience." . . . There's no mistake any more in anything that happens to me. There's only purposefulness, and it's purposeful for maybe a reason that I don't understand intellectually, but I'm willing to wait and find out what the purpose is. So I have a lot of patience, a lot of compassion—infinite, if I could say that. I'm still learning how to become more aligned with that unbounded aspect. And it was almost as though I had to relearn how to live with a whole new set of priorities, a whole new set of awareness. I read every book that I loved prior to that experience and saw it in a completely different light. If I go to the movies, I can't get entrained into a movie any more. If I fall asleep and there's a nightmare, I know it's happening within myself. There's no place where I lose that unbounded connection. It's even in deep sleep. It's just there all the time. [*little laugh*] So, it's rather interesting, actually—yeah.

Participant data suggest that, in the personal self, no-self, Self continuum, there was an emptying self of ego, and there was a process of integration. Changes in self occurred and functional ego remained. As part of this process toward unification, participants described loss of egoic needs or loss of self in relation to the world, which loss related to mind-body changes, equanimity, creativity, mental perception, psychic/intuitive abilities, and compassionate awareness. Narratives from other participants substantiated these categories of change.

Body-mind changes, equanimity. Data from DBear, Doublespiral, and Robert are presented here as examples of body-mind changes and equanimity. With the loss of egoic needs

associated with the relationship, DBear found that relationship was just “a vehicle to flow love to.” Additionally, life events provided opportunities to clear “the mind [as] a habit machine,” in that mind habits would come to consciousness; then he would clear them. Additionally, he stated that this is a continuing process.

Doublespiral said that she takes neuroses less personally, such that the “egoic construct [became] more transparent with the silence” while functional ego remains. She lost the sense of “my,” in that there is “less sense of self for mind stories to stick to, and she takes her own neuroses and emotions less personally.” They are “like relationship to external weather”; there are no good or bad emotions, and she “doesn’t get caught up small stuff.” There is no small self left to do the planning and no small self left to step out of during ecstatic states. She views the universe as “*lila* in the Hindu sense of just the universe—all of this being play, kind of divine play.” Now she trusts the next step and next step and the next: “like breadcrumbs in the forest.”

Changes in unification: Psychic/intuitive abilities, mental perception, creativity, and compassionate awareness as service. Leita, Doublespiral, and Clara all described having psychic abilities from a young age. Dave described how he has always been an empath, in that he “feels other people’s emotions as clearly as he can feel his own.” While he found this troubling in the past, he is now more accepting of his ability to perceive other.

Ariel noticed that she had psychic abilities postawakening.

I’m a psychotherapist, right, so when I would meet with people, it was as if I suddenly knew them inside out. Just like a lot of veils have dropped away, and I could just directly sense where they were stuck, where their identity had congealed. So it was kind of fun. All of a sudden I felt psychic, you know? That has continued. . . . This passage kind of endowed the capacity to penetrate through many layers of mind, I guess you would say, in myself and others. And that has remained really delicious. Like, my level of sensitivity to energy and, oh, phenomena—yeah, I guess phenomena—has really increased dramatically. And along with this has come an increase in bliss and joy and love and curiosity and delight and humor. You know, it’s just augmented all those things. But I also

have to add that it has intensified the so-called “negative” experiences such as isolation, grief, anger, pain.

Participants also described changes in mental perception and creativity in relation to changes in self in unification. For example, Ariel described how her intelligence “went up many degrees” posttransformation; in addition, her capacity to speak, teach, and affect people speeded up. Leita explained that her consciousness has transformed toward stability of “pure no-self” along with the “capacity for the consciousness to take in larger quantities” of “creative, intellectual, and emotional information.”

As adults, participants have been involved in creative careers or other transformational endeavors. For example, AJ, Doublespiral, and Ariel are spiritual teachers. Anam Cara and Leita are transformational musicians. Robert and Moon write poetry as expression of self, no-self, and Self. Leita, Brahma, Clara, and GY have written or are in the process of writing books with transformational themes. Anam Cara and GY are involved in creative fields—GY as a videographer and Anam Cara as a creative director. In addition, Leita, Doublespiral, AJ, and Dave are involved in spiritual counseling or healing professions, and Brahma was successful in creating a nonprofit organization.

Participants portrayed compassionate awareness in relation helping others. Two participant narratives illustrate the selfless service aspect of the living out of unification. Brahma described how loss and meaningless have transformed into “purposefulness.” However, the sense of purpose he has now is not the same as before. He now sees that everything “doesn’t have to have a relative purpose to it,” and he has “again started to enjoy just *being* in the relative, rather than purposefully *doing* something in the relative” to the extent that

Whatever I need is provided in some unexplainable way. It still happens like that. And, you know, I feel that my purpose for being relative [now] is just to help anybody who is really seeking their own nature to discover that for themselves. And if there’s anything that I can do to support that in any way, that’s my purpose for being relative.

Another example of compassion and helping others came from AJ. Most recently, in contrast to his introverted personality, he has been manifesting his passion, which is “to help bring about more compassion, more sense of unity or oneness within our society because [he thinks] we are very privileged to live on this planet.” He is now more proactive in public life by working on projects that “support anything at any level that will help move us towards that.” He stated that he is just using his gifts to the best of his ability and doing whatever he can do—which he thinks “has a lot to do with sense of self or no-self or who we are.”

Categories of change: Fear and love. Fear and love were two categories found to be related to the integration and embodiment aspect of emptying self of ego. Examples regarding fear include the following: Robert had insights about fear as one of ego’s favorite tricks. Moon described letting go of fear. Dave described fear associated with the integrative and embodiment process of letting go of emotional concepts and beliefs. AJ faced his fears in the living out of his early, deep realization of Buddhist, Taoist, and Yin-Yang principles. DBear lost the emotional energy that expressed a core fear, and then lost the fear itself, as part of losing his identity. Brahma lost all fear, and Clara said that she doesn’t have a sense of fear, but rather, a sense of knowing that everything is perfect the way it is.

Also associated with integration and embodiment was the category of love. DBear, Doublespiral, and Ariel equated love with the emptiness or void. Ariel described this characteristic as the self appearing “paradoxically wedded to the conscious nature, which is empty or open, or space” or “love,” to the extent that she almost always has access to this nonduality. Moon considered herself as an instrument of love in that she allows love to flow through her. Anam Cara had a realization of unconditional love. Robert experienced a dawning of great clarity and love as part of his process of “doing battle” with the ego as self fell away. DBear explained

relationship as a “vehicle to flow love to.” Love was a theme woven through Brahma’s narrative; in fact, he spent a period of time being in the constant state of love and bliss. He described a process of letting go of attachment to love, such that now he *lives* in “the constant state of love and bliss.” After awakening, Ariel experienced “an increase in bliss and joy and love and curiosity and delight and humor.”

Related to the category of love was the embodied process participants gave voice to regarding the heart chakra. Dave described sensing and feeling through his heart. As he followed his heart, his transformational experiences changed his agnostic viewpoint, expanded his ego and evolved his consciousness. Brahma also spoke about following his heart through his process. Ariel’s heart center awakened in that her heart opened up and was “not separate from anything else.” AJ’s initial integration and embodiment process involved letting go of control, and “allowing himself to be vulnerable—to be fair, to lose.” He put himself in situations in which that might happen, and that had the effect of “opening up the heart.” Moon’s gazing practice involved “gazing into everyone and every thing . . . with the eyes of the heart and soul and the eyes of the mind.” DBear made an active effort to culture more of the heart aspect of spiritual development, which was essential in letting go of emotional baggage, and also clearing and opening his heart.

Doublespiral experienced physiological heart symptoms during the integration process after becoming full time “the great silence.” She had kundalini experiences “all the way up to the heart” and had intensely physical and spiritual heart “palpitations for weeks.” She did not allow her mind to be distracted by them, and they passed after a while. She felt that what “really helped” was that she had gone through kundalini awakenings “ten or twelve, fifteen times over the course of the years,” so that her “body was fairly well prepared” for the awakening—her energy-body as well as her physical body.

Corresponding with Doublespiral's account, Leita recounted that part of what helped in her integration of Unity consciousness was

having done a lot of chakra work—the heart chakra and the rest of the chakras have been quite well cleaned and groomed, if you will; and so the consciousness is able to travel through the chakras more fluidly and with greater integration with the light body level. So when the light travels from the light body out, there's a real deep sense of deep satisfaction and peace. And I was just commenting last night that even when there's something very difficult or challenging or *painful* to process emotionally, that the stability of the consciousness is such that it will experience the pain, but it will not be overshadowed by the pain anywhere as much as it would have been under certain circumstances—that the stability of the light body is very strong; and it will override feelings of discomfort or fear. So I'm noticing that in session for other people and in personal interactions situations which I would have experienced as more challenging because I felt that the personal self was not as readily available, now seem easier and more integrated.

Participant data elucidated integrating and embodying transformational no-self experiences as involving heart chakra clearing work on both emotional and energetic or spiritual levels. Heart chakra cleansing and clearing work spontaneously occurred; also, participants actively practiced clearing the heart or had awareness of internal changes, such that there was less egoic attachment to situations and relationships. Love and fear were two core emotions that were related to emptying self of ego.

Allowing or Surrendering Leads to Further Transformation

Most participants ($N = 11$ out of 12) related allowing or surrendering to loss of self and served to further empty personal self of ego. In addition, allowing or surrendering tied in with commitment, as emptying self of ego. For example, Moon, GY, and AJ committed themselves to a way of life that included a dedication to a particular spiritual tradition. More specifically, AJ spoke about no-self in relation to his life stages of commitment and stages of letting go. Moon described her constant practice of learning to allow. No-self came through practices of “allowing Wisdom to wean her from her personal self” and that “kind of consciousness.” She stated that Wisdom was instead forming her “in a consciousness of service and compassion for the other.”

Leita “completely, totally” surrendered her life to serving god after two tragic life events. Robert spoke about liberation from a sense of separate self, which he described as “just kind of dying a sort of slow death; and so there’s just less and less negotiating with reality.” In other words, he let go of control and allows experience to unfold.

When DBear was describing his transition into “Cosmic Consciousness,” he said that he had “integrated the silence . . . full-time”; furthermore,

The way I describe it is essentially that there’s fullness and there’s resistance, and that’s it. Everything is either fullness or resistance; and all of the suffering, all of the issues we have in our lives, are around resistance. And all this emotional baggage we’re carrying is basically stuff that we’ve been unwilling to fully experience. So we’re resisting it—we’re holding it back. And simply by allowing the experience, there would be a brief wave of emotion wash over me and then it would be done. So, all this baggage I’d been carrying around for years, emotional trash and stuff . . . Basically, I just allowed experiences, then let it go. And I just lightened the whole load during that period—I did a lot of that.

DBear lightened the load of suffering through allowing and letting go of emotional baggage. This served to facilitate unification, as reflected in what he had to say about Unity Consciousness:

“When love overtakes bliss as the dominant tone, surrender is a simple thing. All life is a surrender to Itself.”

Acceptance was a theme throughout Clara’s life. Early on in life, she accepted her inner experience of no-self as observing, and thus she retained her sense of self and did not experience distress related to no-self. Regarding her current sense of no-self, she expressed an accepting attitude toward life, in that she lets “life play itself out as this is how it’s supposed to be.”

Why Would Anyone Want to Commit to a Path of Enlightenment?

Discussion of distress, loss, and surrender related to the living out of the experience of no self may lead one to wonder why anyone would want to commit to a path of spiritual enlightenment. While participant data supports this category, narrative from Dave, Robert, and Brahma are presented below as affirmative aspects of unification. Dave described the essence of

being no-self as everything when he explained his inner sense of there being “no *separate* person.”

It’s not that what I am doesn’t include the individual, I mean, what *isn’t* me? Everything arises within the Awareness that I am. But it’s not like me the individual is suddenly, Pff! big. It’s more like me the individual is suddenly realized that I’m not so necessary for anything that I wanted— survival [*laughs*], peace—you know. . . . I’m actually having the experience of life as this other thing, without losing all the things I’ve got as an individual. It’s not like I *personally* am everything; it’s like I just am everything. There *is* no personal [*laughs*].

Robert presented his view that when “self gives up the battle with reality, there is a dawning of great clarity and great love” along with “a settledness and nonresistance.” For him, liberation was “the freedom of recognizing the separation of no-self—that there’s *not* something that has independent existence from life that can be harmed,” and that every moment and every experience is equally divine. Liberated freedom lies in “living from this insight.”

Brahma described his insight, which occurred when he realized how his “infinite nature becomes relatively expressed.” He never lost that awareness:

From that point on, I have always been unbounded in my understanding of my own nature. And it’s as though the relative [Brahma] that was born on my birthday was just a vehicle to carry that consciousness until it discovered its real, true value or its real true Self. And *now* I live—I can love everything. I don’t feel attached to anything. I know it to be myself. And that’s the great liberation that came—is that I can love every single thing now as deeply as I love myself. And yet that self isn’t [Brahma]; it’s the self expressed as the entire universe. So I lost the being that I used to be. It no longer exists for me at all.

As further evidence of the personal self, no-self, self continuum, data analysis presented in this section illustrates participant-reported changes and further emptying of self as a process of unification and liberated awareness of self as Self. The next section continues with this affirmative theme related to enlightened awareness of functional self.

Unification: Evolvment of Functional Self Toward Further Enlightenment

Experiential Descriptions of Unity or Oneness

The experience of light coming in from objects may occur in unification. Leita, Dave, DBear, and Brahma ($N = 3$ out of 12) described having transformational experiences related to perception of light, and these experiences related to their processes of unification. These participants' narratives illustrate this quality.

About 8 or 9 years ago, Leita went through a transition, wherein there was a period where

I started having this experience of light coming in from the objects in my perception; and that became very intense actually. And I went to see someone who I felt was in Unity consciousness . . . to talk to her about this experience directly. She told me that if I stayed with the experience and just noticed the light coming into my consciousness like that and not becoming uncomfortable with it, that eventually it would stabilize.

For Leita, this experience preceded a different level of integration into Unity. As part of Dave's first no-self transition, he had an

incredible experience of just light everywhere, and there was complete intimacy with the light. So that I *was* it, and I was connected to it and everything else. I would say perfect unity is what it felt like. And I was thinking, "Oh, this is awesome! I totally made it. This is great. I don't know what happened, but this is wonderful and nothing will ever be wrong again." [*with a laugh*] And about three days later, it went away. [*amused laugh*] I was, like, "No! No, no, no!" And so at that point, because I'd had a glimpse of the experience without all these boundaries in the way, all the boundaries that came back were feeling really confining.

DBear described a "golden color" of shining light as part of a huge opening related to seeing through "the fundamental principles of God." He was at a workshop doing a dyad practice

with [a] young woman, and the question she was asking me was something like, "What is love?" And it was just an amazing experience. This huge opening. And so through that period I did a lot of heart opening. . . . You know, I remember going out and sitting on the lawn at lunch time after the dyad on the retreat and everything was gold. You know, just with the eyes. Yeah, golden color. Just shining with light. I just feel this huge love and all this kind of thing. It was quite remarkable. At the time it was a very distinct experience, partly because of contrast. That's one of the interesting things I find about it. At a certain point you get used to this stuff, and then it becomes normal and ordinary. [*laughs*] And what was huge and incredible becomes ordinary. It's very funny. But anyways at the time, it was this big contrast and huge heart and all that kind of stuff. And I ended up having

actually this experience in the fall, where I wasn't in a relationship, but this love just wanted to flow.

During a long, transformational meditation that occurred over 2 decades ago, Brahma had an experience of explosions of light.

And then I had a series of very interesting experiences that happened one on top of the other. I started to vibrate intensely, and it felt like every cell in my body was going to explode. . . . And the thought sort of arose that, "Okay, the part of your brain that has to do with sensory feelings is dying, because it's not breathing, you're not breathing, and therefore all the cells are sort of firing as they die." That was the interpretation. That was what my logic went through. And then that passed by and it quieted down, and then I had a noise that all I could say that if you could put a speaker inside of a Saturn rocket, it felt like my entire being, my whole essence turned to sound. And I thought, "Okay, so here's the hearing part of your brain, the interpreting part, and that is dying; and so this is what happens when you lose your life." And that's what I thought I was doing—I thought I was dying. And then that passed, and then I had explosions of light brighter than anything you can see with the eyeball. It was like pure white sun. And then that passed, and then I thought I'd be dead. And there was just pure absolute silence—silence that has never had movement in it. . . . I was the center; I am the center of that silence.

Descriptions of conscious awareness in unity. Participant narratives contained profound description of conscious awareness in unity or oneness. Descriptive data from Doublespiral, Moon, Brahma, Anam Cara, and Ariel are presented as illustrations of the enlightened aspect of experiential awareness in unity consciousness. Doublespiral portrayed her awareness of living and being "the sea of awareness" of no-self, which is the blooming of "that full void that contains everything," and she added,

I think it's about kind of the absence of qualities. I'm not usually into kind of systems or descriptions, but the best description of it I've ever read is the three kayas in Buddhism—the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. And of the other two emanating; but that first one being really like that full void that contains everything, but is nothing. And then the next kind of world or state is of becoming, you know. And that's where you find all the qualities like love and joy; and all of that is in that kind of moving from that out into the physical world. And then the final being the physical world, but it's all just an efflorescence of the Dharmakaya. So I think that's the closest description of what my experience of all that is. That so much of what we describe as ultimate is really, for me, like the first efflorescence of that void—you know, all of those states of joy, love, peace—All of those are the first moving out from that original void. . . . Any of those kind of states—that those aren't the final thing, those are expressions of kind of a deeper place,

which holds those and contains those, but is so much more than those. It's not like there is a feeling state connected with that void. It's just pure being.

Brahma described life after becoming Self as Eternal Being.

And *now* I live—I can love everything. I don't feel attached to anything. I know it to be myself. And that's the great liberation that came—is that I can love every single thing now as deeply as I love myself. And yet that self isn't [Brahma]; it's the self expressed as the entire universe. So I lost the being that I used to be. It no longer exists for me at all.

Moon spoke about how Wisdom is forming her “in a consciousness of service and compassion for the other.” When she gazes into the flow, she understands the nature and the revelation of the flow:

I think it's an exchange of flow. It's between all of us; it's between creation and the human species. It's between people who are doing the conscious work of trying not to say “mine” and “my way.” I do believe that way of claiming “me and mine” is what bodies of religious and spiritual communities refer to as original sin. I don't think creation flowed forth from such self-centeredness. But somewhere along in the human development somebody claimed “mine” and thus began warfare and violence and everything else. So this journey of trying to be one small mustard seed that will do the work of allowing the “mine” or the selfishness to disappear and the no-self to arise is, you know, in religious terms you could say it's salvation work: Helping to redeem human consciousness. And I do believe that if enough folks are participating in this—nobody has to know about it—but when enough of us so breathe, there will be a critical mass of energy, and it will change human consciousness.

Ariel described her inner awareness of “no separate sense of self at all.” Her view of the concept of ego is that it does not relate to the words “I” and “me,” but rather that the words “I” and “me” “point back to the fundamental principle of Being.”

When I say “person,” I don't mean the essential beingness of person. I mean only the image of person, the idea of person, the moving parts. So the image of [Anam Cara] has no self—no separate self at all. There is no such thing as a separate self at all. There is only one self that lends itself to anything that has a sense of self.

In other words, the words “I” or “me” and the concept of “person” are now understood as a fundamental principle of inseparable Beingness.

Ariel described her experience of “no-self” as contrary to the stereotypical conceptualization of “spiritual.”

I would add that the experience of “no-self” is for me not at all what many conceptualize as “spiritual” [as] pure, placid, serene, positive, etc. [My experience] is definitely colorful, forceful, opinionated, fierce, lively, contentious, all the elements in the spectrum of human and biological/cosmic life. And another thing I’ve been thinking about lately—I’ve understood now that *my* life is a highly creative life—that with the capacity to observe very deeply and to allow the living out of whatever’s in me, that as things open, they’re lived out and they dissolve. Then the next moment presents an open field in which a lot of creative energy and ideas and actions arise. So, there’s a sense of not being stuck, of being really a source—A source arises in my particular human form that wasn’t available to me before that I wasn’t in touch with in the same way. A creative source that’s . . . oh, it’s wonderfully pleasurable.

Ariel reported that she has awakened to the truth that even though we experience form through an ego-self, a body-self, a world-self, and objects, that these things are not permanent. This conscious awareness of no “I” is no self. She is awakened “to the truth of that condition.”

This section presented participant descriptive narrative evidencing sense of self continues to function as the living out of no self progresses through descriptive narrative. Concurrent with this progression, integration and loss of personal sense of self lead to a liberated sense of personal self, while functional ego remains.

Unification: Evolution of Self Continues

Participant data evidenced that the process of self, no-self, Self evolvment continues ($N = 12$). Narrative from AJ, Anam Cara, Clara, GY, Robert, Moon, Dave, Ariel, and Leita is presented to corroborate this category. Each person’s perspective on the evolution of self, no-self, toward Self is as unique as their descriptive portrayals of their unfolding processes of no-self.

AJ described ego as “a process, and everything is a process of changing and moving as part of ‘I’ or ‘I am.’” His description of being in no-self was that of “feeling nothing, but totally connected at the same time.” He is able “to function,” while “resting in deep peace, deep emptiness.” Anam Cara does not know if I AM will change or if there will be no-self at all, and she cannot imagine that “there is something beyond I AM.” Meanwhile, she stays at the door of I AM, which “is inherently self-satisfying.”

Clara had a profound dream that left her with a lasting sense of “everything being one thing. Her inquiry, “Is that all there is?” is an “ongoing” part of her evolution. For her, the sense of *being one* is

that same sense that everything is all connected. And even more than connected, it’s all one; it’s all one thing, we’re the same chemical soup—it’s all the same. You know, there really is no difference. I think once we’re able to see that, then we’ll behave much more kindly towards everyone and everything around us—to the earth, to everything.

In the living of her daily life, the sense of *being one* for Clara is “getting to be more moment-to-moment.”

It’s just always kind of there in the background. I might not be consciously thinking or be consciously aware of it, but it’s there in the background somewhere. It takes away that sense of competitiveness and that sense of I have to win. It just takes that all away—where you know that it’s as though we’re all-in-this-together kind of feeling. So, it’s not as though I have to win at the cost of somebody else, because we truly are all in this together.

GY sees herself as being in “a third level of consciousness, so there’s still a part of [her] being that cannot yet totally become identified with the Atman. . . . or the no-self.” She described this as the “state of Prajna,” in that she sees the “Atman, but there’s a veil that prevents [her] from going into it and becoming absolutely identified with it . . . becoming the no-self in its absolute sense.”

Robert described “a mysterious process” of the “the unfolding” of “different aspects” of “recognizing the separation of no-self,” and said that awake awareness continues to unfold as “the last gasps of an ego or me.” The “deep seated conditioned habit of the body-mind” needs to just be “allowed to be.”

Moon used metaphor to portray how Wisdom is transforming her consciousness.

Now, I’m a practitioner. I don’t claim to have accomplished this. I think that’s what life is for—to practice this letting go of yourself and saying, “What’s the stuff of your life that makes you say that?” And it’s not hierarchical, it’s not logical. It’s very messy, and yet it seems to be an image—this cobweb image, a metaphor for the practice of letting go or allowing a force greater than yourself to form you larger in consciousness.

Dave said that he is in “an *extremely* good place right now, no-self all over” but his “place of total fulfillment of [his] heart’s desire is even farther than this.” He wants to “bring that in physically in the most extreme possible way.” In other words, he continues to evolve as the “edge always keeps going out,” even though he has “gotten way beyond where [he] ever thought was possible.” He still has a “feeling of wanting more” even though the concept of dissatisfaction doesn’t make sense any more.

Ariel has awakened to the truth that even though we experience form through an ego-self, a body-self, a world-self, and objects, that these things are not permanent. This conscious awareness of no “I” *is* no self. She is awakened “to the truth of that condition.” Furthermore, she stated,

And I’m not a finished product, you know. I’m not sitting around—no one would say that I’m a Ramana Maharshi or anything like that. I don’t think I would be instantly recognized as an enlightened being. But, you know, I actually am enlightened to this aspect of the world. But I’m not a finished product. I haven’t realized everything in every way. And I haven’t encountered everything in every way, so there’s a lot of learning and encountering that will happen; but I guess I’ve arrived at the place where I have confidence that the consciousness that I am, that everything is, will reveal itself to me throughout all these experiences.

Leita said that unity consciousness has integrated to the point where her

present experience is that the consciousness itself is penetrating *into* people, events, objects, and situations; and that the light value from *inside* my consciousness is, rather than it being perceived from outside, that the light value from *inside* my awareness is penetrating *into* the environment more acutely. There is a process going on of that penetration becoming more and more strong. My association with that is that it seems like the actual *influence* of that pure awareness is becoming more stable and more strong in the environment; and so there’s a feeling of having to do less to influence—that the influence is becoming very stable and automatic.

She explained that she has felt more and more “a sense of a comfortableness,” as there being less separation between herself and the environment; furthermore, she feels like she is “still in process with the integration of the Unity experience.” Descriptive data from Leita and other participants

evidenced their conscious awareness that evolution of personal self or functional self continues to integrate and to evolve as a process of unification.

The Need for and Value of Research on the Topic of No-self

Participants were appreciative of the chance to share their spiritual biographies in relation to no-self, and they expressed this sentiment to me either during or after the recorded interview.

For example, Moon expressed her gratitude:

Doing this reflection, Laurel, has been a gift to me, you know, so I really thank you. I don't think I would have sat down and gathered all of this. And it's been humbling, too, to have words, to have poetry arise from it, or imaging come forth. I say, "Oh, wow! Why would I ever cling?"

Also in line with being appreciative of participating, individuals found the experience useful or gained something from it.

DBear: So we had this long conversation—it was very useful for me. That's the first time I'd had my experiences verified since the seventies. This is not a big deal after a certain point. You kind of get to a place where you're able to verify yourself for the most part, but just having that outside thing is nice. And just to be able to talk with someone who knows what you're talking about. As you can see by your efforts to find research subjects, there are people out there, certainly, but not everybody is in it the same way. They don't talk about it the same way, necessarily. I have some friends I can talk to about it, but it's really rarefied. So it was really nice to be able to talk to somebody about it who'd been there.

Moon: Throughout all of this reflecting time, even when the metaphors started coming, an inner voice was whispering to me, "This is how it is, this growing." It's messy and sometimes confusing to others. And not everybody has the ears to hear it. I also have to watch myself about how and when I share it, because I can be sharing it to wow people. And I don't need to wow them. They've got their stuff, they're doing it their way. But to be able to have a net and see all these connections has really been a gift for me—this kind of reflecting. And so I'm very grateful that somehow you found me.

In addition, during the course of the interview participants spontaneously expressed their thoughts regarding the need for research on the topic of the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience.

Brahma: It wasn't easy. I had no guidance; and I really feel that somehow we need to be able to provide some guidance, because we don't have a culture that's prepared at all for

this kind of awakening or whatever you want to call it. You know at first, I didn't think it was anything more than just a profound experience.

Robert: I just think it's, you know, it's fantastic that you're looking into this and studying it, and I'll really be curious to see what's revealed through your inquiry into this.

GY: But the kind of work you're doing is very important, and this is why I'm supporting it. Transpersonal psychologists are bringing a whole different dimension into the West, which we *desperately* need. We need to understand that these states of consciousness are *normal*. Everybody can have them. And there is a technology available to develop them; one of my number one favorites is Abraham Maslow. I just love those last two books that he wrote. I can't remember the names of them. You know, he talks—it's almost like the Vedantic Bhagavad Gita. He talks about what beings can be in their fullness. This is the norm. It is not the exception in my world. The West has got a long way to go before it understands all this stuff, but there is an increasing tolerance of it. People are interested in transformational yoga. You know, it's going to come. It's going to come in the West.

GY and Brahma expressed their viewpoints on the value of helping people understand self and no-self in relation to how supportive and freeing spiritual evolution can be.

GY: The kind of work you're doing is very important, and this is why I'm supporting it. Transpersonal psychologists are bringing a whole different dimension into the West, which we *desperately* need. We need to understand that these states of consciousness are *normal*. Everybody can have them. . . . Everybody has to know that they have within them these hugely powerful and extremely freeing states of being. And it's a question of getting on with the job and transforming yourself. . . . And you read it in the lives of people like Saint Paul. He was in prison and one night the door just opened, and he walked out. I mean, when you live in those states of consciousness, or try to, events have a way of supporting you; and that has definitely been the case in my life. I've been supported every step of the way.

Brahma: I really would love to see more awakening in the world. And I would love to see some of the suffering dissipate. And I think the only way we can do that is to bring the knowledge of the self into awareness, whether it's through business or through science, or whatever.

Chapter Summary

In lieu of a written summary of this chapter, Figure 4 offers a pictorial view of the personal self, no-self, Self continuum as experience, process, and unification. A formal summarization of theoretical understanding is presented at the end of Chapter 7.

As advancement of the foundation laid in Chapter 5, this chapter revealed specific facets of results of grounded theory and intuitive inquiry data analysis as theoretical understanding of the experience of no-self. Research results were premised on no-self events lived through and described by 12 participants from diverse spiritual and traditional backgrounds. Rich, thick participant data served as evidence of the self, no-self, Self continuum as evolvment and integration as a process of unification. Chapters 7 and 8 integrate findings with extant literature, elaborate on the theoretical results portion of the study of the experience of no-self, and suggest areas for future research.

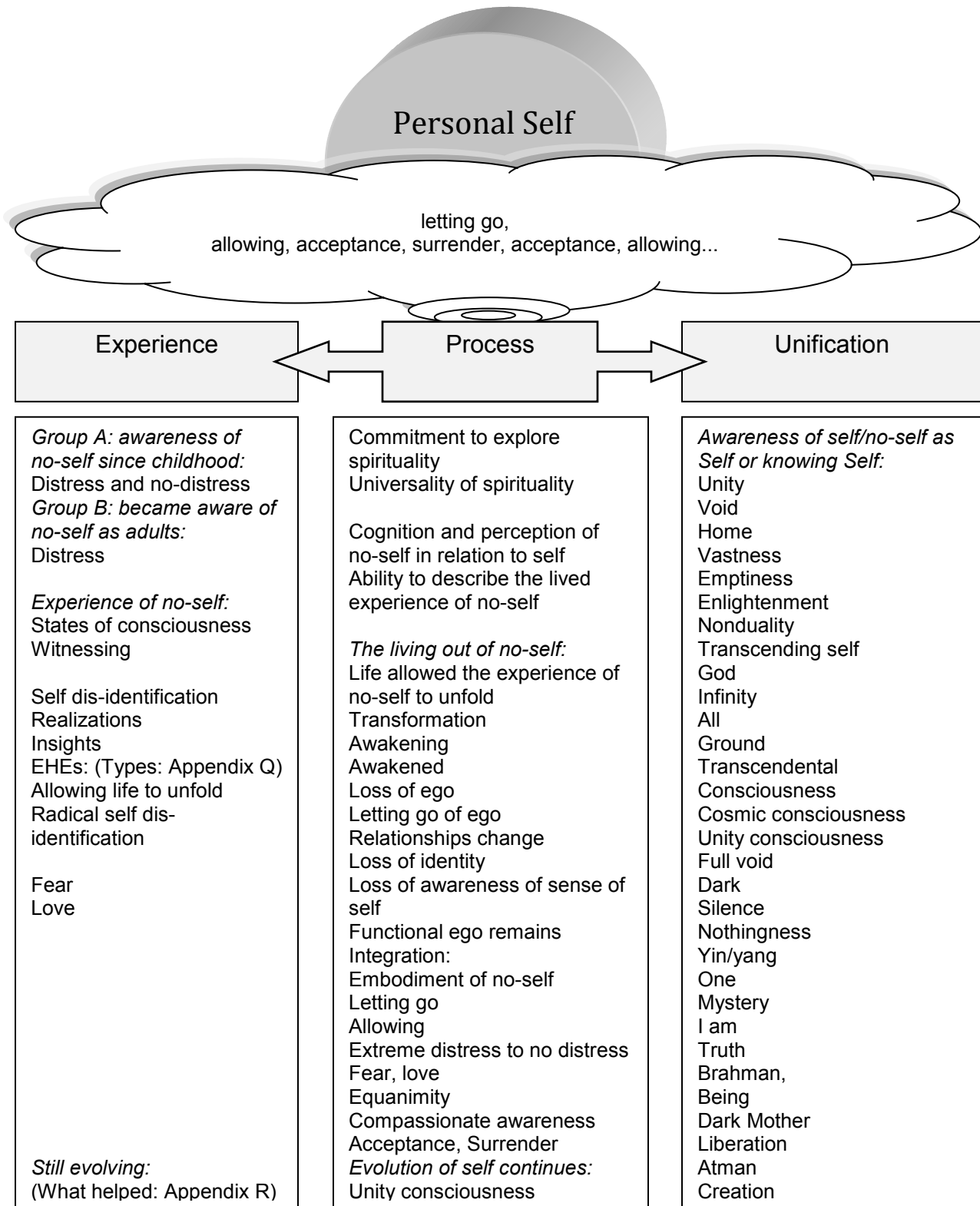


Figure 4: The personal self, no-self, Self continuum as transformative and integrative embodiment of Self—A process of evolution of Self toward higher stages of consciousness.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand, describe, and discover the experience of no-self as dissolution of egoic or illusory self in 12 men and women. Research provided insight into the question, “What is it like for someone to have an experience of no-self as loss of meaning and as suffering and to live out the experience?” While the concept of no-self appeared in nondual traditions and in mysticism, this exploratory research sought to address the literary gap in spiritual, theological, and psychological literature, which primarily delved into beginning and advanced stages of spiritual development. In-depth participant interviews were obtained in order to portray individuals’ lived experiences of no-self and the living out of the experiences as dissolution of self or identity, which occurs in advanced spiritual development toward unity as oneness.

Data gathered from semistructured interviews and investigated through the intuitive inquiry and grounded theory methods elucidated the phenomenon of no-self. Participants were asked to describe an event or events of no-self, including how everyday life and their sense of self had changed in relation to the world. The intuitive inquiry research method was used as the framework that guided the dissertation study, and constructivist grounded theory laid a pragmatic foundation for analyzing participant data and developing theory. Both intuitive inquiry and grounded theory methods potentiated generating new, empirically based theory, of confirming current theories, and/or of generating a basis for theory and further research.

Outcomes of this dissertation study are presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. Due to the fact that there was no known protocol for combining the two research methods, Chapter 4 explained the process of creating intuitively informed grounded theory as the approach used to investigate the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience. It elucidated data collection,

explicated the process of integrating intuitive inquiry with grounded theory, and explained the data analysis procedures. Research results were presented in Chapters 5 and 6, wherein grounded theory data analysis was illustrated through systematic discussion and inclusion of rich, thick participant quotes in order to depict the refinement (Chapter 5) and transformation (Chapter 6) of Cycle 2 lenses toward theory.

Overview of Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate findings from data analysis with extant literature and to elaborate on the theoretical results portion of the study of the experience of no-self. There exists a large body of literature and many topics of investigation that could relate to the themes regarding the experience of no-self. Including a fully complete literary research study of all themes, categories, and qualities would add an extensive amount of complexity to the discussion of the nondual, paradoxical subject of no-self. The objective of the discussion of results in this chapter is to present a comprehensive dialogue that is both well grounded in scholarly literature and that stays within the confines of institutional constraints regarding dissertation length. The intention of this exploratory research was to investigate no-self as an advanced stage of spiritual development. While data analysis produced numerous areas of potential research, I chose to mainly focus on the perception of self, no-self, and Self as a continuing experiential process in relation to integration and unification. In discussing results, I mainly concentrated on literature related to philosophical and psychological theory, on stages and states of consciousness, and on research on the topics of spiritual transformation.

This chapter is laid out in the following manner. First, discussion of participant demographic and spiritual backgrounds is presented along with discourse regarding participant universality of spirituality and commitment to spiritual exploration. Next is a section that contains

discussion of research results from Chapters 5 and 6 presented in three parts related to experience, process, and unification of no-self. Following the discussion of results, the intuitive inquiry Cycle 5 is presented as a review of the whole study; this is followed by assessment of the validity, reliability, limitations, and delimitations of the study. The chapter ends with discussion of the experience of no-self research in relation to the field of transpersonal psychology and implications for future research.

Participants' Demographic and Spiritual Backgrounds

For this study, I sought and obtained a multispiritual and multicultural population of participants in order to discover how the phenomenon of no-self can manifest in adults who are traditional and nontraditional believers, nonbelievers, or believers from multiple traditions. Demographic and spiritual background data originated from participant completion of the Demographic Survey (Appendix D). The 12 study participants consisted of 5 men and 7 women between the ages of 24 and 70, with an average age of 55. They resided in 5 of the 9 census divisional regions of the United States and in 2 Canadian Provinces.

Participants self-reported their ethnic backgrounds, resulting in the use of both racial and ethnic terms; nevertheless, survey results showed diversity among participants. Appendix R portrayed participant demographic data and specified educational and occupational variety among participants. Appendix S detailed the various assortments of participants' religious, spiritual, and/or nontraditional backgrounds. The Chapter 5 section entitled, *Overview of Participants' Demographic and Spiritual Backgrounds*, presented an analysis of results of participants' spiritual backgrounds, including tradition(s) and/or no-tradition participants were raised in, explored, or currently practiced.

Analysis of participants' spiritual and religious background data produced results that are relevant to the current discussion of spiritual diversity. During childhood, 2 out of 12 participants were raised as nonreligious/secular, 1 participant was raised in multiple traditions, and 9 participants were raised as Jewish or Christian. In addition, 9 out of 12 participants were raised in and/or explored more than 2 traditions as *children or adults*; and 10 out of 12 participants have *explored* and/or *currently* practice or participate in *multiple* religious or spiritual traditions or in spiritual practices. Also of interest is the background of GY and Moon, who described how their experiential processes of no-self involved time spent living in a convent, and who both listed current spiritual traditions outside of their vowed religious tradition.

*Universality of Spiritual Exploration and Commitment to Spiritual Exploration as a Process
Related to No-self*

In filling out the survey, most participants found it necessary to write in an explanation of either the traditions or spiritualities explored as an adult, and/or to write in an explanation of their current spirituality. For example, Clara was raised in (and she also chose to explore in childhood) several different Christian religious sects: Presbyterian, Baptist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic. As an adult seeking answers to existential questions, she explored 15 different religions and spiritual practices. With regard to her current spirituality, she stated that she “has studied and is comfortable with religions and spiritual traditions of many cultures, but doesn’t follow any one of them.” Two other participants illustrate the other aspects of the spectrum of spiritual exploration. Ariel was raised as nonreligious/secular, explored the way of Adi Da Samraj as an adult, and currently participates in The Waking Down Community. Another participant, AJ, was raised Christian; as an adult, he made a commitment to explore, practice, and embody Buddhist and Taoist principles.

Appendix S details the full spectrum of participant spiritual exploration and furthermore provides a glimpse into the eclectic nature or universality of many of the participants' current spiritualities. For example, Brahma explored several religions and spiritual practices as an adult, and in describing current spiritual/religious affiliation, wrote that he “knows Self as Eternal Being.” As a contrasting example, Leita was raised in the Jewish denomination. She listed the following current spiritual/religious traditions and practices: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Transcendental Meditation, insight meditation, Christ Consciousness meditation, Heart-centered meditation, and Shaktipat meditation.

As a summarization of two key aspects of participant spiritual and religious data, participants were raised in diverse spiritual and religious traditions or no traditions; additionally, 11 out of 12 participants currently practice or participate in *more than one* spiritual or religious tradition or practice. While I intended to recruit participants from diverse spiritual backgrounds, it was remarkable not only that there was diversity with regard to tradition or spirituality raised in, but also the extent to which most participants explored different traditions, including the 2 vowed religious participants. Diverse spiritual exploration was a common behavior pattern to almost every participant in this study of no-self.

Evidence of participant demographic and spiritual/religious diversity combined with participant stories (Appendix N) and data analysis (Chapters 5 and 6) lend credence to the view that spiritual development and enlightenment can happen to anyone—the traditional and nontraditional believer, or nonbeliever (Adyashanti, 2002; Canda & Furman, 1999; James, 1902/1991; E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; King, 1984; Lancaster, 2004; Louchakova, 2004; Noss & Noss, 1994; H. Smith, 1959; Stace, 1960/1987; Wilber, 1995). Due to the fact that a diverse sampling of 12 participants responded to my dissertation recruiting efforts, it is plausible that

no-self is developing (or has developed) into a term that is related to and goes beyond traditional religious and spiritual traditions. The lived experience of no-self may represent a phenomenon occurring among a population of people in the United States and Canada.

A Brief Discussion of Perennialism and Contextualism Related to Participant Experience of No-self

Contained in Chapter 2 was the holistic definition of spirituality used for this study; additionally, mysticism was defined as “the art of union with Reality” (Underhill, 1914/1986, p. 23). Huxley’s (1945/1970) writings have provided groundwork for contemporary definitions of mysticism and for the definition of perennial philosophy. He defined this school of thought as

The metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being—the thing is immemorial and Universal. Rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditional lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world. (p. vii)

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to present a full overview of perennialism and the controversies regarding this philosophy. However, Ferrer (2000a) performed an analysis of the history of perennial theory and all its varieties, trends, and contemporary debates, including the underlying difficulties of all varieties of perennialism. The core of Ferrer’s work discussed the conflict between perennialism versus contextualism toward “a vision of human spirituality that integrates their valid insights while eschewing their shortcomings” (p. 8). The objective was to unpack the “complementary epistemological assumptions that constrain perennialism and contextualism” (p. 8). His goal was to foster integration of perennialist and contextualist viewpoints in order to stimulate creative research efforts among transpersonal theorists.

Perennialism is concerned with “the search for a universal, permanent, and all-encompassing philosophy” (Ferrer, 2000a, p. 8) that integrates all traditions as “a *single* Truth that

underlies the apparent plurality of world views” (p. 8). Perennial truths are accessible by mystics of any tradition as reflections of a singular Truth. Ferrer stated that the logic of perennialism consists of the following: (a) There is a single referent for all mysticisms, (b) this referent corresponds to the ultimate nature of reality or the Divine, and (c) mystics can directly access this single ultimate reality (p. 15). This view of perennialism, Ferrer critiques, “stems from an a priori commitment” (p. 7) to “nondual monistic metaphysics” (p. 7). It is an objectivist viewpoint, and it is “prone to dogmatism and intolerance” (p. 7). The drawback of all perennialist theory is that it is conceptualized through the well-known “Myth of the Given” (p. 22) as two interconnected viewpoints:

(a) the world has pregiven features independent of any cognitive activity (ontological thesis) and (b) human knowledge finds its justification by matching its claims with this pregiven world (epistemological thesis). (p. 22)

Ferrer (2000a) also examined the opposing theoretical standpoint of contextualism. The contextualists’ argument takes the following five general formats:

1. There are texts and chronological reports that detail the context of mystical experiences. These documents show that the mystic’s experiences are a result of and are formed from specific spiritual doctrines and practices.
2. Contextualists take a reconstructive view of the spiritual path as process, the goal of which is to recondition the mystic’s “cognitive structures and conceptual schemes” (p. 15) toward apprehending self in accordance with the specific doctrinal belief.
3. They maintain that there is mutual relationship between experience and interpretation. All experience is interpreted, and interpretation is through the lens of epistemological experience.

4. They dispute the existence of “pure consciousness experiences” (p. 15) and assert that even if pure emptiness states of consciousness exist, they may not be cognition of an ultimate divine reality.
5. Some contextualists think that perennialist thought is “ideological, authoritarian, patriarchal” (p. 15) and that it marginalizes groups of people.

Ferrer (2000a) pointed out that contextualism views spiritual knowledge as stemming from “cultural factors, doctrinal commitments, and soteriological expectations” (p. 23). On the one hand, contextualists maintain that spiritual knowledge cultivated through spiritual doctrines and practices is “obviously accurate” (Ferrer 2000a, p. 23) and take credit for having emphasized the “radical plurality of spiritual claims” (p. 23). On the other, they reject “the ontological and metaphysical import of human participation in spiritual realities” (p. 23).

Contextualism is critiqued in that it assumes what Popper (1994) calls “The Myth of the Framework” (p. 48). With regard to the current discussion, Ferrer (2000a) stated that the myth would suggest that “metaphysical realities may exist, but we can access only our situated phenomenal awarenesses of them” (p. 23); therefore, one cannot have direct knowledge of spiritual reality, while perennialists would hold that such situated awareness *is* our spiritual reality.

Toward resolution of the perennialist and contextualist debate, Ferrer (2000a) advocated that both sides give up their dualistic mythical frameworks in order to “move beyond objectivism and subjectivism toward the recognition of the concurrently interpretive and immediate nature of human knowledge” (p. 23). He pointed out that

as we move from the more gross to the more subtle, the gap between being and knowing, between the ontological and the epistemological, is increasingly abridged. Accordingly, it becomes less and less adequate to anchor the soundness of knowledge claims on any kind

of intrinsic features and more and more necessary to discern validity standards of a different kind. (p. 23)

Ferrer recognized that hermeneutic and spiritual knowing involves a more creative element than knowing involved in “empirical domains” (p. 23). Ferrer acknowledged the “creative element of human cognition” (p. 23) of the spiritual realities that happens in the move from gross to subtle realities in bridging the gap between knower and Known.

Toward resolution of the perennialist and contextualist debate, Ferrer (2000b) oriented people on a spiritual path to view transpersonal or spiritual phenomena as “transpersonal participatory events” (p. 23), which elicit transpersonal experiences. The participatory approach does not discredit the legitimacy of the inner experiential aspect of spiritual phenomena; rather it “reconceives this intrasubjective dimension in terms of the participation of an individual consciousness in transpersonal or spiritual event” (p. 237). He emphasized that the participatory versus experiential viewpoint is not about objectifying transpersonal experiences. Rather, it is about restoring our participatory, direct relationship with reality and engaging in “participatory knowing” (p. 227), which Ferrer stated is

A multidimensional access to reality that includes not only the intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and empathic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings. (p. 227)

Furthermore, viewing transpersonal phenomena as participatory in nature is in recognition of “*communion and co-creative participation*” (p. 227). It also refers to the inherent nature of human existence as participation in a spiritual reality disclosing itself, wherein “knowing occurs by virtue of being” (p. 228).

Discussion of 4 participants’ experiences of no-self in relation to perennialism and contextualism. All participants reported and intimately described experience of no-self—at some point in their lives, they conceptualized aspects of their experiential reality as no-self. While it is

beyond the scope of this paper to deliberate all participants' experiences of no-self in relation to perennialist and contextualist philosophy, the following paragraphs present 4 participants' narratives as illustrations of the philosophical issues raised by Ferrer (2000a). This discussion of experiences of 4 participants (2 from Group A, awareness of no-self since childhood; 2 from Group B, became aware of no-self as adults) provides a basic frame of reference for understanding objective and subjective experiential and conceptual no-self.

DBear (Group B) was raised in the Christian Roman Catholic tradition, has lived in the United States, and currently resides in British Columbia, Canada. As an adult, he has explored Hinduism, Transcendental Meditation, and additionally Spiritualist, Unitarian Universalist, and Wicca/Pagan/Druid traditions. He described himself as being "more spiritual than religious." DBear stated that his philosophical underpinnings are "Vedic, predating modern Hinduism and Buddhism," although mostly as conceptualization versus practice. Basically, he follows his own path, and his "outlook has less and less to do with belief and more about experience." For example, he doesn't believe in God; rather, he experiences "God directly, both in form and as formless." DBear contextualized his spiritual journey as encompassing three awakenings: the "doorway" to awakening, in which reality changed when he reached Transcendental Consciousness; a second awakening where he switched to Self in Cosmic Consciousness; and a third awakening which involved the "switch" to Unity Consciousness. His process continues in Unity as "surrender to life itself."

A core part of DBear's experiential no-self journey was loss of ego. Additionally, he said that in order for unity to take place there needed to be a loss of the identity associated "with the person" [DBear], which he described as the "collapse" of "the three levels of illusion and the three ego values of that—the illusion of individual, illusion of universe, and illusion of God's

dream.” DBear’s contextualization of his inner reality appears to be language through both experiential and doctrinal description, which might stimulate the deconditioning (perennialist) versus reconstructive (contextualist) debate. A contextualist would possibly say that his exposure to Christian and Transcendental Meditation teachings and practices caused a cognitive reconstructive process such that he interpreted his phenomenological reality through doctrinal knowledge. A perennialist may well validate DBear’s view of transcendental or pure consciousness and his unity process, while a contextualist might challenge the existence of these realities.

The second participant discussed in relation to the perennialist/contextualist debate is Robert (Group B), who was not raised in a spiritual or religious tradition; however, he became a spiritual “seeker” and was involved for years in meditation and Eastern-based practices. Additionally, he reported that he currently studies with Adyashanti. His spiritual path led him toward seeking “to transcend the separate self sense” that was going on and “to find that One that [he] intuited.” He had a realization that ended seeking, caused him to see the “nature of reality and the nature of the self or no-self,” and ultimately liberated “awake awareness illuminating” all experiences. Robert viewed no-self as being everything conceptualized by the mind as duality. Another pivotal moment in his life caused him to realize that what he called “I” was not separate from what he was looking for and that “there was no separation really anywhere.” He further explained that what he called “Self” was “none other than, call it what you will—the Source, God or the Ground of Being—that they weren’t two. They’re just one thing.” This realization caused him to recognize “that all of life is liberated freedom.” His discussion revealed the paradoxicality of self and no-self, and he used nondual terminology to verbalize his lived reality of no-self. His spiritual journey included the process of letting go of ego, such that he was then experiencing “the

last gasps of an ego or me.” In addition, Robert described his current lived reality of Self as a “lived recognition of awake Awareness.”

A contextualist might assert that Robert’s spiritual seeking led him to spiritual teachings and practices which reconditioned any doctrinal and soteriological cognitive structures that may have developed through living in the culture of the United States, and furthermore the teaching and practices shaped his subsequent mystical experiences. In other words, nondual teachings reconstructed his cognitive structures, and he interpreted his experience through the framework of nondual terminology. On the other hand, a perennialist would perhaps say that spiritual seeking and practice mediated cognitive schema and might validate the truth of Robert’s realization of oneness.

The third participant in this discussion, Clara, reported that she was raised in and explored several different Christian religious sects: Presbyterian, Baptist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic. She reported that she became aware of no-self as a child. Because of her inner sense of no-self when she was young, a lot about life did not make sense to her, especially with regard to religion. Her discernment and her inquiring nature led her to explore religious traditions both as a child and as an adult. She said,

You can see from my religious upbringing that I had a lot of different influences, but yet, a lot about life, especially religious life did not make sense to me. And the adults around me seemed unable to explain things in a way that satisfied my sense of value or how the world should be. One of the things that I found interesting—as with many children, you question what you’re being taught about the Bible. Why did this happen? Why did God say or do that?

I think the questions I had fueled my quest for exploring the many different traditions that I’ve studied. I never really believed with that degree of intensity that I see in some people that, “this is the way it is.” I was always very open to learning; and I think that from those early days of questioning and just realizing, “This doesn’t really fully make sense, and there has to be more to it than this.” That led to that constant exploration of many traditions and ways of knowing or understanding the world; and I keep searching, because I think there is just so much that we haven’t quite grasped yet. And the more I seek, the

more interesting it becomes. It sometimes seems like a gigantic puzzle, and I'm constantly trying to see where all the parts fit in.

Clara stated that she equated her inner sense of no-self to the ability to be “outside of [herself], observing [witnessing] that person doing those things,” which also gave her the capacity to “choose how to behave or how to react to anything.” She didn't “get caught up in” emotions, behaviors, and situations like other people did. Clara recounted that “the sense of observing . . . never went away as a child”.

I never sold out . . . and I think in one of my writings, I called it my “me.” I just made sure that “my me” was okay—that it was safe and okay—I'd pretend to do whatever I needed to do to function in the larger world but keep my “real self” safe on the inside.

As an adult, Clara explored the following religious and spiritual traditions: Episcopalian, Church of God, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Christian Scientist, Religious Science, Unity, Fundamentalist, Pentecostal, Buddhist, Native American Ceremonies, yoga, Judaism, Gnostic Gospels, and Sufism. She did not report distress in relation to living from her “sense of no-self or no ego” as an adult or as a child. A dream left her with perception of everything being “just all one thing” and that everything is “perfectly okay.” Her transcript reflects her lived philosophy,

We think that things are separate, but it's not. And even the earth itself as we know is a part of a much larger [*little laugh*] universe—multiverse really. My ultimate thing is that we just don't know. Nobody knows for sure what it all means. And in that vein, I like to be open to learning and experiencing more, because no one person or no one creed or belief knows everything or knows what it's all about. I guess one of the ways to say that is that I prefer to live in the inquiry, because we just don't know. I'm fully engaged in the inquiry, because I think that there is so much that we don't know. And the more we learn, and I guess the more accepting we can be, the more we know, the more we learn. And I think that's one of the reasons why I never really believed in, or cottoned onto a particular belief system in terms of religion, because I think that once we do that, we kind of cut ourselves off from any other experience or knowledge. So, I'm very open about any kind of religious experience, or any kind of a tradition.

Clara said that she had the witnessing awareness since she was a young child; however, it was not apparent when she began calling her innate “real self” *no-self*. Clara lived in Western society, was raised in Western religious traditions, and apparently viewed childhood inner

awareness of no-self retrospectively contextualized through the lens of no-self. Except for describing her confusion as a child regarding Biblical teachings, her perception of oneness, and the use of the term “God” in relation to debates with fundamentalist young adults, her transcript lacked spiritual or religious language. Rather, she described day-to-day aspects of her experiential reality of no-self as oneness, but not with a pure perennialist slant. With regard to the perennialism debate, she described ongoing ontological and epistemological questions and reported not believing in any particular religious system. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not Clara’s spiritual exploration deconstructed (perennialist view) or reconstructed (contextualist view) any conceptual schemes given her childhood perception of no-self as witnessing awareness. However, cultural interpretive influence cannot be discounted.

The final participant discussed in this section, Leita, was raised with maternal Orthodox Jewish influences and the Conservative Jewish denomination. Leita was born with awareness of “an inner place that is essentially empty.” She “did not have a strong identification as solely an ego structure and was aware of [her] self on a higher level outside of the framework of a normal infant or child mind.” This awareness enabled her to access higher mind right from “the first year of life.” Throughout her childhood she sought to validate her inner reality, first with her parents, and later on with friends and teachers. For Leita, no-self was inner experience of “emptiness all the time.” She found it “very painful” that she could not find any adults who would appreciate what she experienced. From early childhood until young adulthood, she struggled to find anyone who could validate her inner reality. She explained,

And so what started to happen is that I think the psychological part of the ego structure which would normally be developing, I think it was developing; but it never took a front seat in quite the same way as it might for most people. It was always a back seat. And so throughout my elementary school years, therefore, I remember very vividly waking up in the middle of the night, and this happened for many, many years, and looking in the mirror and not feeling like there wasn’t anybody there—like there wasn’t any *self*—there wasn’t

anything inside there. It felt empty. And I wasn't comfortable with that at all. It was a very difficult experience, and I didn't really have anybody to talk to or discuss these kinds of things with whatsoever.

Leita reported perception of no-self as inner emptiness since infancy, with an adult-like “thinking processes of the higher mind . . . available right away within the first year of life.” It would appear that cultural and doctrinal influence (contextualist perspective) did not reach her until when, as a young adult, Leita found contextualization for and meaning in her inner experience of no-self through Buddhist teachings and Maharishi's understanding of self, no-self, and cosmic consciousness. Adult spiritual exploration of Eastern traditions along with practicing several types of meditation (Appendix R) may have influenced retrospective interpretation of childhood experience. She conceptualized her current spiritual process as integration in unity consciousness, which may indicate deconstruction (perennialist perspective) of socially learned cognitive structures in that she reported recent advancement from cosmic consciousness to unity consciousness. Her understanding and conceptualization of her experiential no-self process is also interpreted through knowledge gained through spiritual teachings (conceptualist perspective).

Conclusion of perennial/contextual discussion in relation to participants in this study. In this study, data analysis showed a participant trend toward universality of spiritual exploration and commitment to spiritual exploration as a process related to no-self. No-self was found to be a term that the 12 participants could relate to across a spectrum of ages, occupations, and backgrounds; demographic data further explicated spiritual diversity among participants. The research method used in this dissertation blended the intuitive inquiry way of knowing with the pragmatic, analytical grounded theory way of discovering theory of no-self as experiential reality—as acknowledgment of my innate intuitive and analytical ways of being and knowing. This method was used to examine the lived spiritual realities of 12 participants who spoke about their knowledge and intimate inner awareness of self in relation to no-self and Self. This

interreligious and nondenominational study of the experience of no-self evidenced a trend among participants toward universality of spiritual exploration and commitment to spiritual exploration as a process related to no-self. Participants committed to spiritual exploration, and their inner knowing occurred by virtue of being self in relation to spiritual teachings, knowledge, and practices. One of the goals of this research was increase understanding of advanced spiritual states. Perhaps further interfaith and nondenominational research may point toward a definition of universality that neither perennialists nor contextualists have considered.

In the previous section, both perennialist and contextualist philosophical viewpoints were shown to be plausibly evident in each of 4 participants' narratives. In other words, neither pure perennialism nor pure contextualism could be ascertained as evidencing any of the 4 participants' lived descriptions of no-self as Self. Two of the participants, discussed in the previous section, evidenced awareness of no-self since childhood—prior to verbal and conceptual knowledge or understanding of no-self. For example, Leita, who experienced no-self since infancy, did not find meaning or understanding of her inner reality of no-self as emptiness until she was an adult—in fact, doctrinal knowledge relieved distress she experienced since childhood. This study included a total of 3 out of 12 participants who became aware of no-self in childhood. Perhaps study of children's spiritual experience could help uncover qualities of innate spirituality and bridge the gap between the perennialist and contextualist debate.

Participants described their experiential no-self processes by giving voice to living and being self, no-self, and Self. These descriptions also pointed toward explaining that the function of description was to conceptualize and give voice to the ineffable nature of no-self as personal experience. In addition, participant data revealed that conditions of experience reveal awareness of no-self, such that the experience of no-self was found to be part of continuing process of self

toward Self. Both viewpoints of reconditioning and deconditioning could have had effects on participants' retrospective descriptions no-self as experience and process. For example, DBear's contextualization of his inner reality appeared to be languaged through both experiential and doctrinal description, which would stimulate the deconditioning (perennialist) versus reconstructive (contextualist) debate. More importantly, an event of no-self or a realization occurred, and interpretation occurred regardless of conditioning, deconditioning, or reconstruction of cognitive structures. Participants reported spiritual advancement; furthermore, they described awareness and participation a process of letting go of ego and an integrative process of embodying no-self realizations and insights—both of these processes required introspective interpretation.

Regardless of the disputed existence of pure consciousness, participants sought understanding (conceptualization) of what was happening to them as perception events interpreted as a process, experience, event, realization, or insight. Understanding helped decrease distress following self dis-identification.

Reported experience of no-self was most likely, in my opinion, a blend of pure experience and profound insights and realizations—a blend of contextualization and inner embodied realization. This subjectivity and objectivity is inherent in humans when giving voice to lived phenomenological reality. The subsequent sections in this chapter further discuss the participative, lived spiritual realities of 12 participants who intimately know Self by virtue of being and experiencing events of no-self.

The Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum as Experiential and Integral Awareness of a Process of Unification

This section contains five main subdivisions—*Experiential Awareness of No-self: A Continuing Process of Self, No-Self, and Self*; *The Living Out of No-self: States and Stages of Consciousness*; *The Living Out of No-self: Integration Toward Enlightenment*; *The Essential Process of No-self: Letting go, Allowing, Acceptance, and Surrender*; and *The Living Out of No-self: Unification*—related to the continuum of no-self experience, process, and unification.

Interwoven in these sections is discussion of the theorizing results in Chapter 6—illustrated by participant narrative. Figure 6 at the end of the last chapter presents a visual representation of themes, categories, and qualities related to the lived experience of no-self.

Experiential Awareness of No-self: A Continuing Process of Personal Self, No-self, and Self

As detailed in Chapter 6, it was apparent at the time of interviewing participants and when transcribing the recordings that participants fit into two groups. Group A ($N = 3$) participants, Clara, Leita, and Doublespiral, all described having awareness of no-self since childhood. Conversely, the storylines of the lived experiences of no-self evidenced the fact that most participants, labeled Group B ($N = 9$), went through a process of developing awareness of no-self. Group B participants consisted of Dave, Brahma, Ariel, A.J., Moon, Robert, DBear, Anam Cara, and GY.

With regard to Chapter 5 findings, no-self was found to be associated with experience, process, and description in the following manner: Awareness of personal self, no-self, and Self was related to awareness of experiences of no-self, and participants viewed these experiences as self-transformational. Participant narrative evidenced the paradoxical nature of articulating no-self

as experience and the confirmation that description functioned to give voice to the ineffable nature of the phenomenon of no-self.

In this section, I present research studies and theories that point toward explaining how participants were able to describe experiences that occurred as nondual, preconscious awareness of self in relation to no-self and Self. The goal of this section is to offer a foundation for understanding the entire dissertation discussion of research results. The objective is to account for the participants' rich, thick descriptions of experiences of no-self which function as validation of nondual, ineffable *knowing* of states and stages of consciousness toward enlightenment. This information forms the basis for understanding the value of participant narratives as evidence of awareness of experience as a continuing process toward unification throughout this discussion chapter.

Verbalizing nondual awareness as ineffable, paradoxical experiential knowing. Chapter 6 presented data showing that participants discussed experiential awareness of self, no-self, and Self as a process contextualized through robust and diverse description. Participants either spontaneously and directly addressed the ineffability and nonduality of no-self in relation to articulating the phenomenon as experience and/or wove paradox and metaphor into their narratives.

Toward understanding verbalizing nondual awareness in a dualistic world, Wilber (1977/1993) stated that "if reality is inexpressible, it is nevertheless experienceable" (p. 66). He further explained that experience of the real world is obscure due to conceptualizations regarding the experience as a divide between the observer and the observed. The next query to be resolved with regard to verbalizing conceptualizations is dualistic versus nondual knowing and also dualistic-symbolic language versus true knowing as Reality.

Wilber (1977/1993) revealed that “the dualistic mode of knowing confines one’s identity to the *knower*” (p. 42). With the shift to the nondual “mode of knowing . . . the knower is felt to be one with all that is known, so that one’s identity similarly shifts from the isolated individual to the whole” (p. 42). With this shift, the conceptualization of experiences of the real world is of Reality, or “‘Reality as a level of Consciousness’ or simply, ‘Reality as Mind-only’” (p. 67).

Awareness of self and no-self verbalized as dichotomous experience. In this discussion, I note the inevitable paradox of dualistic language in explaining the Known or Reality as conscious knowing. With regard to participant descriptive data, a working example would be the inherent dualism is participants’ use of the term *unfolding* in relation their nondual experiences, and also my use of the same term in describing their unfolding processes or journeys. Hawkins (1995/1998) pointed out the limited view of unfoldment in relation to linguistic conceptualization of Reality or Self:

Even the phenomenon of “unfoldment” itself reflects a limited point of view. There is no enfolded and unfolded universe; there is only becoming awareness. Our perception of events happening in time is analogous to a traveler watching the landscape unfold before him. But so say that the landscape unfolds before the traveler is merely a figure of speech: nothing is actually unfolding; nothing is actually becoming manifest. There is only the progression of awareness. (p. 193)

This description sheds light on the use of the term *unfolding* in relation to conceptualizing and giving voice to awareness as Reality or Self. It also elucidates the necessity of the use of the term *experience* in relation to awareness of events happening in participants’ lives perceived as self and no-self in relation to Self. In other words, the *experience of no-self* includes embodied awareness awaring Awareness (or Reality/Self). What follows is that this dissertation study is, in part, an analysis of 12 participants’ nondual life events—which events may have come into awareness prior to linguistic conceptualizations. This Awareness, Self, or Reality is perceived and voiced through the specific descriptors of *self*, *no-self*, and *Self*, while at the same time,

description functions to explain the ineffable and paradoxical experience. This is a perennialist standpoint regarding knowledge of the nature of awareness of existence. The contextualist standpoint would view the spiritual path as a process in which the goal of spiritual doctrine is to recondition awareness toward interpreting experience through what is known; therefore, participants gave voice to spiritual experience through already-existing contextualizations. Perhaps both viewpoints are true to some extent in that Awareness gives rise to what is known (previous exposure to conceptualization) and unknown (prior to linguistic conceptualization).

Of note here with regard to dichotomous description is data from Robert and Ariel. Their data represented themes depicted in participant narratives related to discussing self, no-self, and Self as a spiritual process unfolding in their lives. Dialogue from Robert clarified the relationship of self to no-self. He offered his viewpoint that his inner experience was that the mind has a tendency to dichotomize external experience, and it senses self as individuation. In order to understand how personal self is or becomes Self, a sense of no-self is conceptualized.

Ariel described several different terms relating to “I,” including (a) her little, personality self; (b) the deeper personality or soul; (c) the transcendent, or unbounded “I”; and (d) the witness, which is a subtle but very extensive form of the personal self. Additionally, Ariel viewed Self, or transcendent “I,” as a continuum. Furthermore, she said that her inner experience or inner sense of personal (conscious and individual) self evolves in relationship to experience of the outer world. Personal self changes and develops—from having a conscience, to having the capacity to witness your behaviors, and then eventually, to having the capacity to further evolve toward Self.

Ariel’s and Robert’s explanations of self and no-self as a continuum of inner experience *combined* further clarify the point. A self only makes sense in relationship to no-self; alternately, an inner awareness of *a sense of no-self* only makes sense in relationship to a self. No-self is

understood in relation to a self as dichotomous experience. Inner *awareness* of personal self, no-self, and Self is a continuous process in that the personal self/no-self evolves toward Self. In Chapters 5 and 6, I called this process the personal self, no-self, Self continuum.

Research on knowing and verbalizing self and Self as a continuum. Additional verification of self, no-self, Self as a continuum comes from Travis, Arenander, and DuBois (2004) in the form of consciousness research which “distinguished an individual’s sense-of-self along an Object-referral Continuum of self-awareness” (p. 401). This study consisted of a series of two experiments, as an extension of brainwave pattern function research and in support of research on transcendental or pure consciousness contextualized as a state. The researchers compared qualitative interviews and quantitative measurements of object-referral modes of awareness with existing brainwave pattern functioning research. The hypothesis was,

Can one’s experience of sense-of-self be de-embedded from *all* mental processing? If so, then awareness would experience awareness, without the usual mental content and processing associated with daily experience. (p. 403)

Travis et al.’s research results suggested that

The development of self awareness can be understood along this continuum as the progressive de-embedding of the knower or Self from the objects and processes of knowing—thoughts, feelings, and actions. As one de-embeds from cognitive and behavioral process or moves toward the Self-referral end of this continuum an integrated set of mind/body measures appear . . . which findings may characterize the process of self de-embedding from thinking, feeling, and behavior. (p. 415)

To reiterate, the knower (who knows self as Self) de-embeds from thoughts, feelings, and actions. He or she progresses from self-referral-as-object-relations mode to the “self-referral” (p. 416) end of the continuum. In this self-referral mode, self is independent (or not identified) with thoughts or actions.

Furthermore, this progression includes “an integrated set of body/mind measures” (Travis et al., 2004, p. 416). Test subjects in the integrated, de-embedded mode of awareness had

integration scale scores which showed (a) higher levels of moral reasoning, (b) higher happiness, (c) greater emotional stability, (d) orientation toward inner awareness, and (e) less anxiety. The authors suggested that “these expressions of brain and sense-of-self represent a normal extension of human development” (p. 415), wherein conscious awareness is de-embedded from but coexists with waking, sleeping, or dreaming as the state of cosmic consciousness (Alexander et al., 1994; Travis & Pearson, 2000) also referred to as “pure consciousness” (Travis et al., p. 407). A diverse pool of subjects was chosen for the study, except with regard to the following characteristics. A limitation of Travis et al.’s study may be that research subjects consisted of two groups of TM practitioners (long-term and short-term) and a non-TM group. All subjects resided in the TM community area of Fairfield, Iowa. While the authors acknowledged Bucke’s (1901/1966) research that enlightenment as cosmic consciousness is found among many religious traditions, future research could demonstrate the interreligious (or no denomination) nature of cosmic consciousness, pure consciousness, or pure memory process.

Data analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 substantiated the continuing process of emptying self of ego, transformation of self, and evolution of personal self toward Self. Discussion presented in this chapter continues to lend credence to conceptualizing a personal self, no-self, Self continuum.

Discussion of ineffability and paradoxicality as description of nondual knowing of Self.

With regard to the ineffability and paradoxicality related to the self/no-self/Self dissertation topic, participants’ descriptions pointed toward explaining that the function of description is to conceptualize and give voice to the ineffable nature of no-self as personal experience. This coincides with the viewpoints of Hood (2006), James (1902/1991), and Stace (1960/1987) that perception of the Self is ineffable without interpretation and judgment by the mind. Participants

directly and indirectly spoke about the ineffable and paradoxical nature of speaking about no-self. More specifically, GY gave her opinion that talking about experiences involves human language and current understandings used to interpret experiences. Anam Cara incorporated the ineffable nature of no-self into her definition of no-self, as “*that* which is before experience.” In the interview when she spoke about her “experience of no-self,” it was about the “unfolding or realization” of the “direct experience of That” and about her “human relation to the experience.”

While Hawkins’ (2006) calibrated levels of consciousness were presented in Chapter 2, his 1998 text lends clarity to this discussion by explaining the paradox of knowing as dualism and knowing as nondual existence:

Paradoxes dissolve in the greater paradigm which includes both opposites, wherein oppositions as such are only the loci of the observer. This transcendence of opposition occurs spontaneously at consciousness levels of 600 and above. The notion that there is a “knower” and a “known” is in itself dualistic, in that it implies a separation between subject and object (which, again, can only be inferred by adoption of a point of observation.) The Maker of all things in heaven and on earth, of all things visible and invisible, stands beyond both, includes both, and is one with both. Existence is, therefore, merely a statement that awareness is aware of its awareness and of its expression as consciousness. (1998, pp. 193-194)

Wilber (1977/1993) concurred with the idea of transcendence of opposition in nondual awareness and noted the psychological distinction that “*different modes of knowing correspond to different levels of consciousness*, as distinct and easily recognized bands of the spectrum of consciousness” (p. 40).

This suggests to me that individuals who are observing Reality or Self, or who are at higher bands or levels of consciousness, are aware of awareness awaring; and in that awaring, paradoxes are unapparent because there is no separation between knower and known. What follows is that participants’ descriptions of what they have experienced and *know* at higher levels of consciousness are predictably portrayed through dualistic language and sometimes ironic dualism. In addition, paradox and metaphor function as illustration of the ineffability of nondual

awareness. Wilber (1977/1993) posited two types of symbolic verbal articulation that can point to Reality or Self.

The first way, the analogical, describes Reality in terms of *what it is like*. It uses positive and finite qualities that are so overpowering that they can effectively hint at or point to the Absolute. . . . The second way, the negative, describes reality in a thoroughly negative way. . . . In Vedanta, this is expressed by the phrase “neti, neti,” the absolute is “not this, not that,” not any particular thing or idea but the “underlying reality.” . . . Brahman in essence is without any describable qualities, for every quality ascribed to Brahma necessarily excludes its opposite quality. . . . In Mahayana Buddhism, especially *sunyata*, “void,” and this does not mean a blank and featureless nothing, but the realization that one cannot make a direct statement about the absolute without involving oneself in that vicious circle of having to make statements about statements about statement [*sic*] about . . . what Reality is Void because it is void of conceptual elaboration. (pp. 44-45)

Wilber (1977/1993) concluded this discussion by saying that Reality, insights, and experiences are beyond words—that words can only point toward nondual knowing as Reality. Just as I am forced to use my own inherently dual nature in writing this dissertation, participants used dualistic and symbolic language to give voice to self, no-self, and Self. They verbalized temporary accessing of no-self as a state of consciousness and/or no-self a stable stage of consciousness. Further discussion in this chapter elucidates and defines this finding.

Chapter 3 outlined the study requirement that participants needed to have experienced no-self and be in the process of living out no-self, rather than be assessed as being in a stage prior to unity as oneness or having slipped into unity as oneness. Even without this judgment, participant data in Chapters 5 and 6 exemplified the dissertation research question into the experience of no-self in higher stages of spiritual development. To cite just a few participant examples related to the nondual level of awareness, Self or Reality was described as

“Awake awareness illuminating” experience. (Robert)

Infinite awareness. (DBear)

No-self as That which *is*—as “unchanging actuality” of the “nature of things” that “can’t really be spoken of.” (Anam Cara)

The Light or the Self, the Atman—that Ground, that inner Ground of being that is in every single human being. (GY)

Where “awareness has returned to join itself or to live through phenomena as well as through emptiness.” (Ariel)

These representations of participant descriptive definitions of no-self along with those contained in Chapter 5 seem to be of the same mind as the definition of enlightenment presented in Chapter 2: Enlightenment is a shift in awareness to where we are not separate—an awakening from the illusion of having a fixed, personal identity to realization of the interconnectedness of all (oneness, Reality, God, Unity; Adyashanti, 2002; Balsekar, 2002; Blackstone, 2007; Lumiere & Lumiere-Wins, 2003; Prendergast & Bradford, 2007; Walsh & Vaughan, 1980; Welwood, 2000; Wilber, 1995). It is also known as direct experience of “ever-present Nondual awareness” (Wilber, 2006, p. 74).

Awareness of higher levels of consciousness toward enlightenment. Both Hawkins (1998) and Wilber (1977/1993) concurred that the great sages in history have pointed toward moving beyond duality to nondual awareness. I believe that participant descriptive data contained in this dissertation also lend credence to the opinion that that enlightenment is possible (Bucke, 1901/1966; Deikman, 2000; McCloskey, 2004; Stace, 1960/1987; Washburn, 2000; J. White, 1995; Wilber, 2006).

Experiential Awareness of No-self: Stages and States of Consciousness

The following is an outline of discussion related to participants’ experiential awareness of no-self: States and stages of consciousness are discussed in relation to participant transformation. Participants described awareness of experiences of personal self dis-identification and/or radical personal self dis-identification. Participants’ narratives evidenced experiences related to witnessing, exceptional human experiences, and awareness of sense of no-self since childhood.

These events are discussed in relation to self transformation as *states* of consciousness toward higher *stages* of consciousness.

Discussion of experiential awareness of no-self as temporary stages and permanent states of higher consciousness. A practical discussion of awareness of no-self necessitates understanding of stages and states of consciousness. Everyone is aware of the states of consciousness of waking, sleeping, and deep sleep (Tart, 1975; Wilber, 2006). Wilber (2006) differentiated between states of consciousness, which are temporary, and stages of consciousness, which are permanent as milestones of growth and development. One can experience higher *states* of consciousness (such as peak or altered states) at any time as awareness of experiences in the body and/or as consciousness (Wilber, 2006). One cannot be in a higher *stage* of consciousness without having allowed previous stages to successively unfold and develop over time (Wilber, 2006). However, with the growth and practice of having glimpses of stages of consciousness (as temporary states of consciousness), one's stages of consciousness can more rapidly and more readily unfold (Wilber, 2006).

While *stages* of consciousness cannot be skipped, Wilber (2006) explained that the more one is exposed, for example, to meditation or contemplation as genuine higher *states*,

the *faster* one can disidentify with a lower stage so that the next higher stage can emerge, until you can remain at higher levels of awareness on an ongoing basis, whereupon a passing state has become a permanent trait. (p. 11)

Frequently dipping into states of consciousness allows one to *disidentify* with the current stage. These glimpses of stages of consciousness may be accessed through peak, shamanic, mystical, altered, contemplative, meditative, or altered states. All of these glimpses into pure awareness can facilitate a progression to the next higher stage of consciousness as a permanent attribute (Wilber, 2006).

As described in Chapter 6, an exceptional human experience (EHE) is where one's sense of self transcends what is considered typical (Palmer & Braud, 2002). EHEs are distinguished from other altered states of consciousness in that they cause self-transformation (Palmer & Braud, 2002; R. White, 1997). Participants' transformational no-self events fell into the category of EHEs because the participants' sense of self transcended what would be considered typical (Palmer & Braud, 2002). R. White's (1993) research showed EHEs allow "isolated ego-selves to become conscious of the All-Self by dissociating from the ego-self when the EHE occurs" (1993, p. 89).

In a quantitative and qualitative study of EHEs, Palmer and Braud (2002) validated existing EHE research and found that disclosure of EHEs caused "change and transformation" (p. 52) related to "surpassing one's self and getting more in touch with Self, others, nature" (p. 52). The authors noted that EHEs as states of consciousness "may serve as gateways to transcendent behaviors, freeing one, and allowing for the realization of more of one's true potential as a human being" (p. 52).

States of consciousness are experienced through the mind and the body as a "felt energetic component" (Wilber, 2006, p. 16) and as an "embodied feeling" (p. 16). The body concretely provides temporary accessing of higher states in relation to one's *gross*, or physical sensorimotor body and one's *subtle* body of "light, energy, emotional feelings, and fluid and flowing images" (p. 16), which is what one experiences during dream states. Furthermore, Wilber stated,

as you pass from the *dream state* with its subtle body into the deep-sleep or *formless* state, even thoughts and images drop away, and there is only a vast emptiness, a formless expanse beyond any individual "I" or ego or self. (p. 17)

Experience of this egoless state, which may seem like "a blank or nothingness" (Wilber, 2006, p. 17), is that of being "plunged into a vast formless realm, a great Emptiness or Ground of Being, an expanse of consciousness that seems almost infinite" (p. 17). This is the state—beyond

self, ego, or individual “I”— that mystical and wisdom traditions refer to as nothingness, emptiness, oneness (Hawkins, 2006; E. F. Kelly and Grosso, 2007; Lancaster, 2004; McCloskey, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Stace, 1960/1987; R. White, 1993; Wilber, 2006).

Pure or cosmic consciousness as a higher stage of consciousness. Within the context of Maharishi’s (1967) model of stages and states of consciousness, the *states* of waking, sleeping, and dreaming may coexist with cosmic consciousness (Alexander, Heaton, & Chandler, 1994; Travis & Pearson, 2000) or pure consciousness (Travis et al., 2004). Higher *stages* of consciousness may be gained with repeated exposure to temporary states of consciousness (Alexander et al., 1994; Travis & Pearson, 2000; Wilber, 2006). An example of a model of higher consciousness is Maharishi’s (1967/1992) four states and three stages of consciousness (outlined in Chapter 2). His model is discussed relative to this study due to the fact that there is research associated with it and because participants spoke about unity as conscious awareness or they directly mentioned unity consciousness. Maharishi’s (1967/1992) fourth *state*, transcendental or pure consciousness, may be experienced intermittently by stilling the mind, as through his techniques of Transcendental Meditation and the TM Sidhis (or spiritual teachings; A. Campbell, 1974; Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989; Maharishi, 1967/1992).

Research by Travis and Pearson (2000) found that while meditating in the TM state, during pure consciousness experiences “both the fundamental framework and the content of waking experiences were reported to be absent” (p. 82). This research suggested that pure consciousness is a state of “*self-awareness* (the subjects are awake during this state; and they can describe the nature of the experience afterwards) *without waking processing and contents*” (p. 82). Pure consciousness was shown to have physiologically distinct markers from waking, sleeping, and dreaming states and to be experientially distinct from ordinary states (Travis &

Pearson). However, as a *state* of consciousness it needs to be integrated with ordinary consciousness (Travis & Pearson) as a “continuous nonchanging level of awareness along with the changing experiences” (Alexander et al., 1994, p. 46) in order to be gained as the *stage* of cosmic consciousness (Alexander et al., 1994; Travis & Pearson, 2000). The resulting fifth stage of cosmic consciousness is the first stage of enlightenment, along with the sixth stage of God consciousness and the final stage of unity consciousness (Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989).

Lancaster’s theory of pure memory process. Woven into Chapter 2 was the recurrent theme of nothingness, void, and emptiness in mystical experience in relation to the experience of no-self. This nothingness as dissolution of self, Lancaster (2004) stated, is “the perceived quality of the divine as nothingness” (p. 78). This nothingness also seems to be a fundamental part of “a mystical advance of some kind of de-conditioning from the normal associations that establish the parameters of consciousness” (p. 78). Researchers, such as Dillbeck and Alexander (1989), Forman (1990), Shear and Jevning (1999), and Travis and Pearson (2000), have ascertained the existence of pure consciousness through research. However, it is acknowledged that the concept of pure consciousness may fall under the perennialist Myth of the Given as universal single Truth (Ferrer, 2000a). Contextualists argue that pure consciousness experiences as a state of nothing, “may not be cognitive of any ultimate or divine reality” (Ferrer, p. 15).

Lancaster (2004) stated that nothingness may not be devoid of content (as pure emptiness) because there could be “significant content-related activity on a preconscious level” (p. 99). Toward understanding how consciousness operates, Lancaster envisioned a “pure memory process” (p. 98). He stated,

This pure memory process was not posited as operating without content. I see it as an incessant dynamic, by means of which the relationships between active cognitive structures are determined and stored. The pure memory process underpins the generation

of more personally-oriented associations that determine the individual's response in any given situation. (p. 98)

He perceived this pure memory process as a continuing "*preconscious memory activity*" (Lancaster, 2004, p. 98) as a theory to resolve the question of how consciousness operates. He explained that consciousness is generally identified with experience; however, perhaps what are thought to be preconscious processes "are not intrinsically pre-conscious, in the sense of being prior to experience" (p. 100). Stated alternately, what is called pure consciousness may be experience of preconscious processing. In states such as pure consciousness or in mystical experiences there may be a different process at work that gives rise to experience. Lancaster explained this aspect of his theory:

Looking in this way at the relationships between preconscious activity, experience and mundane consciousness, four possible scenarios emerge. . . . The first scenario depicts the normal 'everyday' situation, in which experience is restricted to the conscious end-stage. The content of preconscious activity is not experienced. ["I" fully experience conscious experience.] The following three alternatives . . . entail some degree of attenuation of the end-stage. The second scenario is simply one in which there is no experience, as in coma or non-dreaming sleep. [No sense of "I." No conscious experience.]

The third scenario depicts a situation in which the experience attaching to the end-stage is still present, but in the absence of the content normally generated by the end-stage. This scenario is distinguished from the fourth in that the person is not experiencing any content-related activity of earlier processing stages. This third scenario gives rise to contentless experience: the person is awake and conscious, but their experience does not extend to whatever activity may be occurring preconsciously. [No "I" to experiencing conscious experience.] Under the fourth possibility, the person experiences the earlier processing stages in some measure. The figure depicts a reduced sense of "I" in this fourth case, in accordance with reports of this kind of mystical experience. In effect, the situation illustrated according to this fourth scenario is one in which the individual becomes conscious of normally preconscious activity. [Diminished "I" experiencing preconscious experience.] (p. 100)

This pure memory process relates to perception and thought in relation to experience. We tend to "recognize the end-stage of a perceptual process as being identified with the arrival of the formed image in consciousness" (Lancaster, 2004, p. 103). However, the end-stage "may entail a

forging of a link between the image and ‘I’ (or, in brain processing terms, between the neural representation of the object and the representation of self)” (p. 103).

In addition to Lancaster’s (2004) theory of pure memory process, he posited a theory of how “I” is constructed. In this premise, he proposed that representations of “I” are stored in memory as “I-tags” (Lancaster, 1993, p. 518) and that conscious connections are made through a consciousness system, such as Gazzaniga’s (1988) left brain *interpreter*. Lancaster’s (1993) theory supported the mystical standpoint that “‘I’ exists only as a conditioned frame of reference for other mind events” (p. 520). He explained that the interpreter provides self-commentary to “unify a person’s experience” (p. 520) and elaborated that I-tags enunciate how in no-self experience, “the sense of ‘I’ is devoid of real substance or continuity” (p. 522).

With regard to participant data, I interpreted Lancaster’s (2004) model of pure memory process in the following manner. In his third scenario, if a participant reported a pure consciousness experience as a state, there would have been no content as in dreamless sleep—or, stated alternately, there would be disappearance of the self-referent “I.” Upon coming back to a normal state of awareness, the mind as process interpreted the contentlessness, substance-less void as a sense of “I” with awareness of having had an experience. Participants in this study, to be perfectly clear, described their pure memory events in terms of self, no-self, and Self.

In Lancaster’s (2004) fourth scenario, if a participant reported having a mystical, transformational or transcendent experience regardless of whether it was meditative or an EHE, he or she would have had some aspect of waking or sleep consciousness as a state. In this state, he or she would have a diminished sense of “I” experiencing the experience and then would have become conscious of what would normally have been preconscious activity.

My interpretation of Lancaster's model (2004) and theory (1993) accounts for features of participants' reporting of experiences of no-self. In my scenario, the participant is in some aspect of waking or sleep state, and he or she has a pure memory event. Then he or she enters into aspects of an altered state, perhaps a hypnagogic- or hypnopompic-like sleep state or a meditative state; at the same time, the left brain interpreter would begin to make conscious connections and the I-tags would be stored in memory. This could be followed by successive cycles of pure memory events followed by a waking, sleep, or meditative state—all potentially with memory of content.

These changes in states of consciousness in relation to pure consciousness events would account for several participant-reported aspects of the pure, no-self/Self experience—the mind interpretation of the awareness of pure consciousness as qualities of fullness, emptiness, and void; the insight into the preconscious experience; and the memory of the event. It would also account for the ability to describe the event, *and* also for the discussion related to the ineffable, paradoxical nature of the events, including realizations and sensations. Two examples of participant experiences of no-self that are related to this scenario are Brahma's "becoming Self as Eternal Being" and Doublespiral's "crossing over" into the "silence as the sea of awareness" narratives, which are contained in their participant stories (Appendix N). Another example, which is raw descriptive data taken from the transcript, pertains to Dave's recalled perception of "Awakeness." It is a portrayal of his experiential consciousness and the process of *realizing* himself as Self when the Awakeness "lit up."

Well, okay, it's like. . . . I'll say it's like in my mind's eye. It's like an ocean or—I'll say an ocean, 'cause it's dynamic. But just kind of bigness. And it seemed black. It was dark. And it was a feeling, too. It had a very distinct feeling associated with it of expansion and freedom, and whatever. But it was almost like someone else's expansion and freedom, because I didn't feel connected to it at all. And it's interesting, I say it's in my mind's eye, but it's kind of there all the time in the sense that maybe your body's there all the time and

you're paying more or less attention to it. And maybe if you're putting your attention on your heart, you kind of get a feeling or an image—or any part of your body. So it was kind of like that, actually. And when I accepted, “Oh, that's me” the whole thing just *lit* up. In my mind's eye, and also in my experience. You know, the mind's eye in some ways could be said to be symbolic of the experience, but also the experience itself is connected to the senses. It's not disconnected to the senses. A subtler level. In other words, you'd never mistake something like that for what we would consider concrete reality. But you start to see a relationship, and it starts to become a continuum. [*chuckles*] So that you kind of see concrete reality going deeper and deeper and deeper into that.

This example illustrates not only the felt and the ineffable qualities, but also a dichotomy of description, and the mind's interpretation of experience of waking up to the nature of reality.

Participant-reported events which caused or did not cause permanent self dis-identification. Participants related no-self to witnessing consciousness, EHEs, and awareness of no-self since childhood. EHEs, meditation, and other temporary states of consciousness can contribute to dis-identification from a stage by dissociating from the ego toward progression to the next higher stage of consciousness. In addition, participant data showed that EHEs, meditation, awareness of no-self since childhood, and life events can also contribute to dissolving ego toward evolution of consciousness.

The term *witnessing* is used to describe transcendental or pure consciousness because it is “experienced to be a non-changing level of awareness that serves as peaceful inner observer or quiet witness to the active changing states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping” (Mason et al., 1997). Alexander et al. (1994) explained that in transcendental consciousness states during TM, awareness can

effortlessly settle in a “vertical” direction until the subtlest mental activity separating the subject from the object is transcended; and knower, known, and process of knowing become unified in one silent wholeness of awareness . . . as absolute Self. (p. 44)

Transcendental consciousness during TM allows temporary accessing of Self and to transcend self-awareness toward knowing Self. Descriptions from Wilber (1995) and Hunt (2007)

shed a further light on the self, no-self, Self aspect of witnessing. Wilber (1995) illustrated nonduality as

pure Presence, the simple feeling of being: empty awareness as the opening or clearing in which all worlds arise ceaselessly. I-I is the box the universe comes in. Abiding as I-I, the world arises as before, but now there is no one to witness it. I-I is not “in here” looking “out there”: There is no in here, no out there, only this. It is the radical end of all . . . centricism. (pp. 309-310)

Hunt (2007) described the dark night aspect of dissolution of ego which occurs prior to enlightenment. The dark nights are

a deepening of mystical witnessing [which] reveals a nonsubstantiality *within* previous enhancements of presence—only to be transformed into more subtle levels of unitive mysticism with a more complete letting go of the boundaries of self. (p. 220)

Participants gave voice to witnessing as a temporary accessing of no-self which helped cause transformation as a permanent change in personal self or egoic patterns. Clara provided a clear description of her sense of no-self since childhood: “*It was as though I was outside of myself, observing that person doing those things,*” and she called that no-self because she could discern the observer from the ego. Two other brief examples from Chapter 6 are presented here. In her transformation, Doublespiral stated that she had a permanent sense of Self and experienced a lack of self to witness Self. GY’s narrative suggested that witnessing may cause less egoic objectification of self in relation to the world and recognition of oneness of self in relation to the physical world. Ariel clarified the witness as a continuum of inner experience of self. Dave related witnessing to the state of consciousness termed Cosmic Consciousness, where one witnesses “the Self without seeing its connection to everything.”

Exceptional Human Experience: Temporary accessing of no-self that causes permanent self dis-identification. Temporary accessing of no-self can also cause permanent self dis-identification. This type of no-self experience can be understood as “exceptional human experience (EHE)” (R. White, 1993, p. 88) because one’s sense of self transcends what is

considered typical (Palmer & Braud, 2002). EHEs are distinguished from other altered states of consciousness in that they cause self-transformation (Palmer & Braud, 2002; R. White, 1997).

Discussion of development of sense of no-self in Group A and Group B participants in relation to psychosynthesis. As fully described in Chapter 6, Group A ($N = 3$) reported becoming aware of no-self since childhood as a naturally occurring state of consciousness that they noticed was atypical in comparison to other people. Group B ($N = 9$) participants described becoming aware of no-self in adulthood. This section first presents a brief synopsis of the psychosynthesis model of spiritual development. Then I discuss my own thoughts regarding Group A and Group B participants' continuing process of personal self and no-self toward Self.

Roberto Assagioli (1965) conceptualized psychosynthesis as a psychoanalytical orientation of understanding Self-realization as holistic relationship between personal self and Self. Firman and Gila (2002) stated that psychosynthesis involves healing the personality split by gaining awareness of "authentic personality" (p. 176), which involves "the development of increasingly conscious communication with Self in our daily lives" (p. 176). This Self-realization is eternal reliance of "I" on Self, essentially an "ontological union of 'I' and Self. . . . So complete is this union that it may be called 'nondual,' a unity transcending any sense of duality, isolation, or separation" (Firman & Gila, 1997, p. 45).

Dis-identification of self as Self is caused by primal wounding, which occurs when a significant person in a child or adult's life does not validate his or her lived perception of reality (Firman & Gila, 2002). These "empathic failures" (p. 122) "annihilate" (p. 121) personal self and cause one to "plunge into non-being" (p. 121). This split from whom we truly are causes us to form what Assagioli (1965) called subpersonalities, which cause disharmony or conflict in our interactions in everyday life. These dysfunctions may be recognized by addictions, compulsions,

attachments—”in short, virtually any pattern of human thought and behavior [that] can become obsessive” (Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 125). One of these thought patterns that fixates is “‘split object relations’ from the higher and lower sectors of the unconscious” (p. 201). The authors stated that the process of healing or synthesis begins when one takes a look at himself or herself and then starts to recognize and to bring authentic unifying centers into his or her life.

Authentic unifying centers are people, places, and things that empathically mirror and value whom we truly are (Firman & Gila, 2002). An authentic unifying center can hold and support a person to examine not only middle unconsciousness (ordinary reality), but also lower unconscious (that which is repressed from consciousness) and higher unconscious (loss of consciousness of authentic self) memories and experiences. In addition, authentic unifying centers assist moving into primal wounding and moving from disassociation to disidentifying—toward recognizing and empathically bridging the split in subpersonalities. According to Firman and Gila, a unifying center recognizes and reinforces the individual to move into the primal wounding by recognizing and empathically mirroring self as Self. In this process, one moves from disassociation to dis-identifying toward highest human potential as “transcendent-immanent within” (p. 109).

Participants’ data suggested that data on witnessing, EHEs, and awareness of no-self since childhood facilitated dis-identification toward realizing Self. With self awareness of no-self and Self, experiences of no-self brought maladaptive ego patterns to the forefront so that these dysfunctions let go or died off as a process of integration toward unification. In addition, experiences of no-self were found to be related to the transformation of self toward Self, as an experiential process of involving change or loss of sense of personal self, and more radically as permanent or temporary disappearance of awareness of sense of self. What this suggests to me is

that in relation to psychosynthesis, experiences of no-self could be conceptualized as functioning as authentic unifying centers. Firman and Gila (2002) stated that in the “universality of Self” there can be a “staggering variety of unifying centers” (p. 175) which assist one to see through the illusory absence of self toward perception of the unbroken connection to Self.

The psychosynthesis orientation as it relates to the self/no-self process. With regard to Group A participants Clara, Doublespiral, and Leita, I would like to postulate three scenarios that could account for early perception of no-self. They may have had a preconscious, preverbal experience of perception of nothingness or more than one event that caused them to have inner awareness of Self. In this scenario, later instances of primal wounding would account for development of self awareness of no-self and formation of ego. Another scenario is that perhaps Group A participants were born with awareness of Self and began to perceive no-self because of what Firman and Gila (2002) call “primal wounding” (p. 122). Clara did not experience distress in relation to awareness of no-self because of being comfortable with witnessing. Doublespiral described a moderate level of distress in relation and sought to normalize herself in relation to other people during much of her adult life. Leita described feeling alienation and fear in relation to her inner awareness of no-self throughout all of her life until a few months prior to her interview for this study. Perhaps distress in relation to perception of inner awareness since childhood was due to empathic failures in relation to needing to talk with adult caregivers about experiences of no-self. Leita described specific examples of this need for understanding in her participant story. Similarly, Group B participants ($N = 9$) experienced distress in relation to no awareness of no-self as adults.

EHEs, meditation, and witnessing in relation to the Psychosynthesis orientation and to Lancaster’s model and theory. With regard to Lancaster’s model (2004) and theory (1993), I

already have theorized development of participants' awareness of no-self through empathic failures, in addition to just suggesting that pure consciousness or an event of pure memory may act as an authentic unifying center that facilitates self as Self. Group A and Group B participants described experiences of no-self related to EHEs, meditation, and witnessing.

These no-self experiences act as temporary accessing of pure memory process. What naturally follows here is that EHEs, meditation, and witnessing provide peeks into pure memory as *state*, and these three experiences also act as authentic unifying centers. Additionally, with regard to Lancaster's (2004) third scenario of pure memory process, I offer that exposure of personal self to no-self as a temporary state of consciousness, whether as a single event or as multiple occurrences, may not only produce temporary accessing of no-self. Exposure of personal self to experience with no "I" also produces conscious awareness as contentless perception of the pure memory process. This *no "I"* awareness may also explain participant-reported events that caused radical self dis-identification.

Two participant examples, from Chapter 6, serve to illustrate reported narrative of radical self dis-identification related to loss of identification or sense of self. Dave's example of having "bumpy thoughts" like he was "riding the thought like a horse" caused realization that there "wasn't a self anymore—that there was just no *thing*—there is no self any more." Another participant, Robert, had a realization that occurred when a retreat leader said, "I'm so happy you found the friend that you'll never see."

And I remember those words—they went off like a time-bomb in my consciousness, is what it felt like. . . . And it was just in that moment that it just felt like it was sort of a shocking- and very-ordinary-at-the-same-time kind of recognition that I was the very thing that I was looking for—that's all that there was. And that what I called "I" was not separate from what I was looking for, and it was just a sense that there was no separation really anywhere.

These events, and experiences other participants reported, dramatically transformed sense of self in relation to the world.

Life events allowed no-self as a process to unfold and can lead to permanent self dis-identification as transformation of consciousness. After an experience of no-self, participants described insights and realizations that occurred and that allowed the experience to unfold. They reported that life events contributed to transformation of consciousness as a continuing process of no-self unfolding in their lives. In other words, life events within the self, no-self, Self continuum allowed the no-self to unfold as a process of transformation of consciousness. However it is noted that not all of these events were related to perception of pure consciousness or pure memory. For example, Anam Cara, Ariel, and Robert reported that relationships caused their ego deficits to become apparent, which provided the opportunity to let go of ego. For example, Doublespiral stated, “Almost immediately the awakening process kind of like pulled me out of the current relationship.” Life events caused both GY and Doublespiral to have dream experiences that transformed their awareness in relation to self, no-self, and Self.

The Living Out of No-self: Integration Toward Enlightenment

Data presented in Chapter 6 showed that the living out of experience(s) of no-self, as the process of emptying self of ego, leads to integration. Additionally, the process of embodying a realization is vital to integration. Integration leads to changes in self in relation to the world and changes in consciousness. Further transition(s) and emptying self of ego—on the self, no-self, Self continuum—lead to loss of ego, loss of sense of personal self, integration, and further transformations of consciousness. In other words, active and passive letting go of ego leads to transformation of consciousness as a process of emptying self of ego. Concurrent with this,

integration and loss of personal sense of self leads to a liberated sense of personal self, while functional ego remains.

As an expansion of Chapter 6 portrayal of integration of experiences of no-self, Appendix U explicates participant-reported experiences that supported retention of inner sense of no-self and/or that facilitated further enlightenment for Group A ($N = 3$). This appendix also lists experiences that preceded, facilitated, or helped integrate changes in consciousness toward enlightenment for Group B ($N = 9$).

Integration of pure memory process or pure consciousness. Analysis of participant data showed that no-self as a state of consciousness needs to be integrated with ordinary consciousness. Additionally, participants provided evidence that they are in a continuing process of enlightenment. This evidence is in concurrence with a “continuous nonchanging level of awareness along with the changing experiences” (Alexander et al., 1994, p. 46) in order to be gained as the *stage* of cosmic consciousness (Alexander et al., 1994; Travis & Pearson, 2000). It is also in line with Travis and Pearson’s (2000) view that states need to be integrated as stages of consciousness.

R. White (1997) stated that the occurrence of an EHE initiates “working on oneself in which one can view one’s own shortcomings and limitations and how to change them” (p. 93) and can also transform limitations and failures into positive characteristics. EHEs can cause transcendence of “our attachment to pain and pleasure” (p. 96), in that “pain must be faced with full conscious awareness because it contains the seeds of important learning and growth” (p. 96). The author elaborates that EHEs are initiators of a process that can

open a person to the existence of a spiritual reality, create a path that one can follow through it, and not only equip experiencers to naturally follow the precepts of the spiritual psychologies but make it possible to apply these inner forms of knowing and being freshly

in each new age. EHEs are the experiential learning and knowing components of the spiritual life. (p. 100)

Palmer and Braud (2002) found that it was helpful for participants in their study to talk about EHEs. This is in line with data analysis that showed that participants needed to understand themselves in relation to others, and that they felt the need to talk to someone about what was happening to them.

Embodying the lived reality of no-self. Kersschot (2004) considered that the real teaching aspect of the insight, awakening, or realization lies in the living out of the experience. According to Ferrer (2000b) transpersonal phenomena occur as events that happen “spontaneously when the right circumstances come together” (p. 225). These events can be lived as realizations or “transpersonal knowings” (Ferrer, 2000b, p. 233) as openings of the “mind, body, and the heart” (p. 233). Washburn (2000) explained the process of embodying as being unexpected and often “frightening and difficult to decipher” (p. 205). The awakening, as transpersonal cognition, is charged with “enlivening energy” (Washburn, 2000, p. 204). Furthermore,

initial awakening is unstable because the ego is unprepared for the plenipotent energy and other resurgent non-egoic potentials. *Transpersonal cognition becomes progressively more stable . . . [as] the ego gradually adjusts and is integrated with non-egoic life.* (p. 205)

As a summary of what these authors stated, the living out of a transpersonal event is a necessary aspect of knowing and embodying the body, mind, and heart aspects of awakenings. The transpersonal event can be surprising; also, the embodying aspect of the event can be unexpectedly frightening because one may not be prepared for the effect of the vital life force energy that comes along with the cognitive event. The event, which is interpreted egoically, gradually gets integrated and embodied as the ego as the mind gradually adjusts to the event in day-to-day life.

A survey of literature revealed that there is agreement among psychologists and spiritual teachers that it is not enough to have the experience of no-self or of enlightenment, but that one must manifest the *insight* of the experience, by not clinging to the experience (Adyashanti, 2003, 2007; Caplan, 1999; Ferrer, 2000b; Goenka, 1991; Kapleau, 1980; Kersschot, 2004; Prendergast & Bradford, 2007; Puhakka, 1998; Roberts, 1993). Prendergast and Bradford (2007) explained that there is a difference between awakening to “one’s true nature as the formless ground of being or no-self” (p. 12) and “*actualizing or embody[ing]*” (p. 12) the awakening. Roberts (1993) revealed the following: “The secret to allowing an insight to become a permanent way of knowing and seeing is not to touch it, cling to it, dogmatize it, or even think about it” (p. 30).

Rather than allowing the mind to establish a frame of reference for the event, Prendergast and Bradford (2007) and Adyashanti (2006) described the integration process as *embodiment*, which is a gradual process of the body adjusting to the awakening. While I agree with these authors’ definition of embodiment, it was obvious that the participants in this study *did* have a frame of reference for their lived experience of no-self and, equally as apparent, that memory and conceptualization of the events did not have a detrimental effect on either integration or the unfolding of their spiritual development. While there were aspects of self that participants had to let go of, it does not seem likely that they let go of those aspects were due to conceptualizing the experience of no-self. However, it would seem that some level of conceptualization naturally occurred such that there was awareness of the realization or preconscious event. Additionally, there was awareness of changes in self in relation to the world *and* there was awareness of integration and embodiment of the event as *letting go of ego*.

What this suggests to me is that the perception of pure of consciousness as void, emptiness, fullness, oneness, can cause a person’s sense of duality to stand out, including

conditioned tendencies. The physical body is a container for *embodiment* of the awakening, insight, or realization; and this process affects the individual on physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and energetic levels. Accordingly, an individual can perceive the embodiment process as potentially being painful, confusing, terrifying, and also liberating as self reorients as a reflection of Self (Adyashanti, 2002, 2006; Hunt, 2007; Puhakka, 2007; Roberts, 1993, 2005; Washburn, 2000).

Bodian (2008) explained that in awakening to the truth of reality, one can find that “old identities and . . . accumulated beliefs about themselves and others no longer hold any meaning” (p. 164). Relationships may change, future projects or dreams may seem pointless, and unresolved emotional attachments may need to be faced and allowed to let go (Bodian, 2008). Additionally, one finds that after awakening to the reality of no-self, there is no turning back because of the shift in identity (Bodian, 2008).

Discussion of the participatory aspect of the lived experience of no-self. The embodiment aspect of spiritual integration brings to mind the perspective of Ferrer (2000b), who has oriented people on a spiritual path to view transpersonal or spiritual phenomena as “transpersonal participatory events” (p. 223). He emphasized that the participatory versus experiential viewpoint is not about objectifying transpersonal experiences, but rather it is about acknowledging the intrasubjective and transformative nature of spiritual experiences. These events occur when “the right circumstances come together” (p. 225). Transpersonal events engage acts of “*participatory knowing*” (p. 225). Ferrer stated that this knowing offers

a multidimensional access to reality that includes not only the intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and empathic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings. (p. 227)

Furthermore, viewing transpersonal phenomena as participatory in nature, is in recognition of “‘communion’ and ‘cocreative’ participation” (p. 227) with nature itself.

As a result of all aspects of data analysis, including embodying participant stories into my heart-mind, I presumed that spiritual commitment, as a theme evidenced in participant data, was not solely about seeking spiritual experiences. Rather it was about desire to go deeper into the psycho-spiritual work on themselves as integration and embodiment of the realization. In addition, it was the living out the no-self events *and* integration or embodiment of the realizations that facilitated spiritual development toward higher states of consciousness. In other words, life allowed the experience of no-self to unfold as participants integrated the transformational events into their daily living, as evidenced by analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Outline of participants’ distress related to no-self events. Awakening “can be profoundly disturbing and unsettling as it naturally moves to embody itself through your words and actions” (Bodian, 2008, p. 162). Participants in this study experienced a range of distress in living out the experience of no self—from no distress to a more extreme level of distress that persisted throughout much of life. Earlier in this chapter, distress was discussed in relation to psychosynthesis as it relates the self/no-self process. Group A participants ($N = 3$) reported a range of distress, from none to a more extreme levels, as a result of perception of no-self in childhood. Group B participants ($N = 9$) who reported becoming aware of no-self in adulthood did not experience distress related to no-self until one or more events occurred along the self, no-self, Self continuum. Group A participants did not report distress after an experience of no-self, including radical events of self dis-identification. Group B participants experienced distress in the form of the need to talk to someone and the need to understand what was

happening, after an experience of no-self or a radical experience of no-self. Group A's and Group B's levels of distress are explicated in Chapter 6.

Toward full embodiment of self as Self—Life continues to allow the experience of no-self to unfold. Bodian (2008) provided a clear explanation of full embodiment of awakening as Self. He pointed out that when one is living “the awakened reality of no-self and no separation” (p. 188) as embodiment, he or she is living “without conflict or resistance, in harmony with the flow of what is” (p. 188). Participant data evidenced that integration, embodiment, and evolution of consciousness continues as life allows no-self to unfold toward Self.

Bodian (2008) explained that embodiment of spiritual awakening is about letting

the fire of truth . . . burn bright enough that you desire complete freedom more than the power, comfort or recognition that the “awakened position” can confer. As a result you're willing to face the reactive patterns, the contracted knots of suffering and control, acknowledge that the truth has not yet fully embodied itself in your life, and be open to allowing the love and awareness of your essential nature to enter. (p. 189)

Deepening embodiment requires allowing life to live itself as “freedom and authenticity” (Bodian, 2008, p. 188).

Participants gave voice to this theme, and their descriptive data in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 evidences their personal and spiritual development along the personal self, no-self, Self continuum. In addition, they spoke about their spiritual journeys abiding as evolution of consciousness. As a sampling of this, Clara had a profound dream that left her with a lasting sense of “everything being one thing.” Her inquiry, “Is that all there is?” is an “ongoing” part of her evolution. Anam Cara does not know if I AM will change or if there will be no-self at all; and she cannot imagine that “there is something beyond I AM.” Meanwhile, she stays at the door of I AM, which “is inherently self-satisfying.” Moon used metaphor to portray her practice of letting go or just *allowing* a force greater than herself; alternately, she described Wisdom as continuing to transform her consciousness.

Concurrent with transformation, extensive participant data presented in Chapter 6 showed that integration and loss of personal sense of self led to a liberated sense of personal self, while functional ego remained. Dave's narrative here serves as an illustration of the loss of egoic sense of self.

It's like there's a functional self in the physical world. . . . But I think my experience the last three years or so is of that functional self becoming progressively more and more transparent. More suffused, in some way that I can't explain, with that silence.

Wilber (1995) explained that "only with the emergence of a strong and differentiated ego . . . [or] a mature ego, does egocentricism die down" (p. 229). This emergence begins in the formal operational developmental stage, when the ego finally becomes stable as a "self clearly differentiated from the external world and from its various roles (personae)" (p. 229). This stage is still an egoic realm and is still "shot through with egocentric adherences: the world exists centered on humans" (p. 230).

In relation to a process that Piaget (1950) originally called "decentering," Wilber (1995) explained the beginning of this stage as being when one can "stand aside from the egocentricism of the early mind and instead take the role of other" (p. 230). Additional decentering occurs as "one can take the perspective not just of others in one's group, but of others in other groups: *worldcentric* or non-ethnocentric" (Wilber, p. 230)—and as the individual is capable of holding deeper perspectives and is less egocentric toward being transegoic. Transcendence of ego begins at

higher developments into more spiritual realms [which] are then referred to as being transegoic, with the clear understanding that the ego is being negated but also preserved (as a functional self in conventional reality). The self in these higher states I will refer to as the Self. (Wilber, p. 229)

Wilber further explained that the transpersonal domains of ego development

converge on an intuition of the very Divine as one's very Self, common in and to all peoples (in fact, all sentient beings), a Self that is the great omega point of this entire

series of decreasing egocentricism, of decentering from the small self in order to find the big Self—a Self common in and to all beings and thus escaping the egocentricism (and ethnocentricism of each. The completely decenterted self is the all-embracing Self. . . . The Self that is no-self.” (pp. 230-231)

Here, in the depths of Self, is “a self clearly differentiated from the external world and from its various roles” (p. 229).

Participant data suggested that, in the personal self, no-self, Self continuum, there was an emptying self of ego, and there was a process of integration; and participants experienced a range of distress, from distress to no distress, to events of self dis-identification. Changes in self occurred and functional ego remained. As part of this process toward unification, participants described loss of egoic needs or loss of self in relation to the world, which loss correlated to mind-body changes, equanimity, creativity, mental perception, psychic/intuitive abilities, and compassionate awareness. Narratives from participants substantiated these categories of change.

The Inherent Process of No-self: Letting Go, Allowing, Acceptance, and Surrender

In this section, participant data are presented, which show the following. After one or more experiences of no-self that caused self dis-identification, insights and/or realizations occurred in the unfolding process. Participant data correlated emptying self of ego with active and passive letting go, in furtherance of the self, no-self, Self continuum. In other words, they actively and passively let go of ego, as *awareness of sense of self*, such that the emptying self of ego allowed higher consciousness to come in, while functional ego remained. Participants described their inner awareness of having no personal, individual self through the use of intellectual, philosophical, and/or embodied language. Group A and B participants described degrees of distress or no distress having inner awareness of no-self. In addition to distress related to integration of experiences of no-self, participant narrative also showed that allowing or surrendering was related with loss of self and served to further empty personal self of ego.

Letting go, allowing, acceptance, and surrender as a theme. In writing Chapter 2, I performed a literary analysis leading to a brief definition of no-self as “dissolution of ego” as this seemed to capture the quality of the process of self-evolution of ego. From analysis of participant data, dissolution of ego appears to be integral to the active and passive letting go, allowing, and surrendering to the egoic quality of control.

As a researcher, I made the decision to elevate the qualities of letting go, allowing, surrender, and acceptance to themes that run inherently through the self, no-self, Self continuum. This decision was based not only on the literature review and grounded theory analysis, but also on my own intuition and on my own experiences in living out no-self prior to my decision to write this dissertation, during the process—right up to making the decision to write this section.

Letting go, allowing, acceptance, and surrender related to loss of egocentricism. Descriptors such as emptiness, void, obscurity, darkness, nothingness, silence appear throughout mystical literature (E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007) and are “common across all spiritual traditions” (Lancaster, 2004, p. 107). As noted in the previous section, these experiences alter one’s perception of reality by transforming or dissolving self (Hunt, 2007; Lancaster, 2004; Stace, 1960/1987) with resulting perception of unity as oneness (Hunt, 2007; E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987; Underhill, 1911/1974). Furthermore, they occur in advanced stages of mystical and spiritual development (Hunt, 2007; Stace, 1960/1987; Underhill, 1911/1974).

Hunt (2007) called the advanced stage of “accelerated ‘unselfing’, or loss of egocentricism” (p. 226) the “penultimate stage of mystical experience, prior to its classic completing in states of all encompassing felt unity” (p. 213). In this penultimate stage, Hunt (2007) agreed with other writers (e.g., E. F. Kelly & Grosso, 2007; Roberts, 1993; Stace, 1960/1987; Underhill, 1911/1974) that the mystic may encounter a form of suffering and loss of

meaning, such that he or she may experience “a felt dissolution of the ordinary social-personal sense of self” (p. 213). Participants in this study experienced levels of distress and no distress in relation to letting go of ego; they also gave voice to the need to talk to someone and the need to understand what was happening to them. Hunt (2007) related no-self to experiential felt deletion and sense of emptiness and posited that the reason for the emptiness is due to

A process of felt deletion [which] can be understood as a kind of inevitable semantic satiation, with progressively more subtle levels of realization initially experienced more as the loss of previous more definite understandings rather than as a “something.” . . . Specific felt meanings must disappear under any sustained gaze, which alone may also allow their later reemergence in renewed forms. . . . They only give way, if they do, when the individual . . . sees and surrenders unconscious boundaries of self and world that have stood in the way of the more positive subtleties of nondual unity. (p. 214)

In other words, as unconscious layers of limited self dissolve, an individual can experience levels of Being that he or she was previously unaware of. As an embodied process, specific felt meanings must give way or let go as the individual surrenders the duality of self to nondual unity. With the acceptance of this loss of self or egocentricism (Hunt, 2007), compassion, empathy, and equanimity emerge (Hunt, 2007; Lancaster, 2004).

I believe that letting go, allowing, acceptance, and surrender are such important spiritual qualities that I would recommend that anyone interested in advancing spiritual development could go back through this dissertation and read any passages related to the self and egoic process of these four qualities. May the following short narratives from DBear, Moon, and Dave serve as enticement to do so. DBear described the part of his awakening process of loss of ego toward surrendering core identity in terms of “the divine values of chakra energy opening up and blowing off the crust” of personal sense of self. There was what DBear called “ego-shrapnel” that needed to fall away as loss of ego.

There is what I call ego-shrapnel, because even though the ego goes—it’s like the core node falls away in a group of concepts and beliefs and personality thing, then some of the

pieces fall away with it naturally because there's no support—but there's other things that are still there. There was some ego-shrapnel stuff falling away, bits of drama and story.

To clarify what DBear said, once ego concepts of the mind were cleared, then emotions were purged by clearing the heart. Then he lost core identity associated with the person, DBear, such that there is no divider between inside and outside. From that point on, all that needed to happen was for him to surrender into Unity.

Moon described her constant practice of learning to allow. No-self came through practices of “allowing Wisdom to wean her from her personal self” and that “kind of consciousness.” She stated that Wisdom was instead forming her “in a consciousness of service and compassion for the other.”

The final example came from Dave, who found that there were two phases integral to transition or growth of awareness:

the expansion part, when a new experience dawns and Awareness expands; and then the integration, where the experience is being integrated physically so that it becomes normal, no matter how flashy it was originally.

Dave said integration does not occur on the intellectual level, but it is a process of accepting, recognizing, and understanding on the deepest level of knowing—It's an experience that the mind *and* body have to catch up to after the shift in awareness.

So for me, the process of growth, of integration particularly, became more and more automatic—a lot less having to figure out what to do. It got more and more obvious, until it was just completely automatic, even though I didn't feel uninvolved. But there was just no control anymore because there was no reason to. Before it felt like I was in control, so I had to “figure out which way to go” [*laughs*]. And so for me, there's always been a lot of need for integration, because, I grew up with a lot of these experiences, they were already there; but I didn't want to accept it, or I didn't know what it was, or whatever. And not having that integrated was just as good as not having it, on a lot of levels. I think this is true for everyone to some extent. You look back and realize that it's always been there, it's just been ignored. I suppose that's why people use the word “ignorance” to describe living life feeling like a limited separate person.

Letting go, allowing, acceptance, and surrender were qualities related to loss of ego in the living out of events of no-self. Examples from DBear, Moon, and Dave illustrate the inherent process of integrating no-self shifts in awareness as being integral to embodiment of self as Self. As a brief summary of the personal self, no-self, Self continuum, there were four aspects of integration toward embodiment of self toward Self:

1. The living out of experience(s) of no-self, as the transformative process of emptying self of egoic identification, included integration and embodying insights and realizations. The integration process led to changes in self in relation to the world and changes in consciousness, and functional ego remained.
2. Participants also described further no-self insights and realizations that occurred. These further transition(s) caused emptying self of ego, which led to loss of egoic identification and/or loss of inner sense of “I” or personal self.
3. Integration of these further transformations of consciousness was inherent in the living out of the no-self events as emptying self of ego or as loss of identity with self.
4. As a continuum, integration and loss of personal sense of self led to a liberated sense of personal self, while at the same time, functional ego remained. As self continues to evolve toward Self, unification is the process of further enlightenment of liberated personal self as transformation toward Self or Unity consciousness.

The Personal Self, No-self, Continuum Toward Unification

Participant descriptive data presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, along with participant stories (Appendix N,) provided evidence of a process that was interpreted as a personal self, no-self, Self continuum. As self continues to evolve toward Self, unification is the process of

further enlightenment of liberated personal self as transformation in Unity consciousness. As a continuance of evidence presented in this dissertation, this section provides a frame of reference for self transformation as a *stage* of consciousness and as a mind process. In furtherance of discussion of states of consciousness, Maharishi's (1967) model of higher stages is presented, as just one example of the numerous conceptualizations of spiritual development. Following this is a discussion of the continuing process of emptying self of ego toward enlightenment.

Maharishi's (1967) three highest levels of spiritual development are explained as illustration of the unification process. The fifth state, cosmic consciousness, is the first of the permanent *stages* of enlightenment. This stage narrows the separation between self and Self (A. Campbell, 1974; Dillbeck & Alexander 1989). The conclusion of this state is stable establishment of an individual's field of awareness in the cosmic or universal "field of pure intelligence or pure consciousness, as the 'Self'" (Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989, p. 314). In the resulting sixth state, called God consciousness (Maharishi, 1967), there is no separation between self and Self, and the individual perceives the world through God consciousness or Self as pure consciousness (A. Campbell, 1974; Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989). The seventh state, unity consciousness (Maharishi, 1967), is the final *stage* of development of consciousness, wherein "one is said to fully realize one's own nature and also all of physical existence as expressions of an underlying unified field, the field of pure consciousness" (Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989, p. 318). Maharishi's model was discussed in Chapter 2 due to the fact that there is research associated with it, and it is discussed in this chapter because participants spoke about unity as conscious awareness or they directly mentioned unity consciousness.

Evolution of self continues as unification. Participant data presented in their individual stories and in Chapters 5 and 6 portray their oral histories of spiritual development and opinions that evolution of self toward Self continues. Bodian (2008) has the same outlook and counseled that awakening is a never ending process. He elucidated the manner in which the evolution of self continues.

Embodiment is not about becoming a better person or living up to the expectations of yourself or others; the mind is just thrilled at the prospect of turning embodiment into another self-improvement project. Rather it's about freedom and authenticity, about letting the radiant emptiness that you are live your life, not the conditioned mind with its preconceived ideas and agendas. When you're embodying the truth, you're living without conflict or resistance, in harmony with the flow of what is. (p. 188)

Letting go into the flow of life allows alignment with a more harmonious daily life. However, Bodain (2008) also cautioned that after awakening, the tendency of the conditioned mind is to force one to face psychological issues. He stated,

Whatever the metaphor you choose, psychological or neurological, the message is still the same: despite powerful awakening experiences, you may still have profound internal splits that perpetuate division and conflict at a psychological level and lead to actions that are out of harmony or integrity with the nondual reality to which you've awakened. Until every split has fully healed and you experience no separation between outside and inside, self and other—and one part of yourself and another—your realization hasn't completely embodied. (p. 200)

Bodian (2008) presented a detailed description of the human tendency to use spirituality as a bypass or avoidance of facing interrelational problems. It is the tendency of ego, with all its neuroses and defensive nature, to assume enlightenment before it is fully embodied (Adyashanti, 2003; Bodian, 2008; Caplan, 1999; Roberts, 2005; Welwood, 2000). The end of spiritual bypass (Welwood, 2000) is full embodiment of insights and realizations on the levels of mind, body, and heart (Bodian, 2008; Caplan, 1999; Ferrer, 2003; Welwood, 2000).

There is general agreement that the only enlightenment is mature enlightenment (Adyashanti, 2003; Caplan, 1999; Dillbeck & Alexander, 1989; Goenka, 1991; Kapleau, 1980;

Kersschot, 2004; Maharishi, 1967/1992; Roberts, 2005; Welwood, 2000). Wilber (2006) suggested that *full* Self-Realization or Enlightenment necessitates realization of *all stages and states* which “have evolved so far and that are in existence at any given time” (p. 95). This requires

transcending all states and stages (they become objects of my infinite subject, or me’s of the I-I or Witness), and including all states and stages (the entire Kosmos becomes “mine” in nondual awareness), so that all subjects and all objects arise in the great play of the supreme Self that is the I-I of this and every moment. (p. 130)

Enlightenment entails oneness being one with all subjects/objects and all forms/expressions of Spirit as realization of Self.

Ending thoughts as lingering questions. Participant conceptualizations of the experience of unification were as individual as their own manifest Beingness. As represented in Chapter 5, they defined no-self as experience, as perception of awareness as Awareness, and as Awareness Itself. They described it as a journey, process, or unfolding of everything and nothing—and as dis-identification, letting go, and loss of this dichotomy also. As a living continuum, no-self transcends self and objective reality as awareness, purpose, and meaning toward becoming the highest expression of human potential.

This research study closes with lingering questions that arise in juxtaposition to the essence of nondual Self and scientific observation. Neuberg, D’Aquill, and Rause (2001) presented a neurobiological view of personal self awareness of Self, and they noted that their research on how self conceptualizes Itself is theoretical but probable:

The self is not the same as the mind. The mind exists before the self and, in one way or another, it supplies the essential memories, emotions, and other component parts from which the self is assembled. If these components could somehow be undone, the self would come unraveled. We believe this is exactly what happens when the orientation association area [of the brain], as well as other areas that might help to provide a sense of the self, becomes deafferented—deprived of new sensory input. These areas are also cut off from the memories, emotions, and patterns of behavior that the mind recognizes as the self. Deafferentation does not deprive the mind of awareness, it simply frees that

awareness of the usual subjective sense of self, and from all sense of the spatial world in which that self could be. The result of such a lack of input, almost certainly, would be a state of pure awareness, an awareness stripped of ego, focused on nothing, oblivious to the passage of time and physical sensation. This awareness would be neurobiologically incapable of differentiating between subject and object, between the limited persona self and the external, material world. It would perceive and interpret reality as a formless unified whole, with no limits, no substance, no beginning, and no end. Add the assembled constructs of the conscious mind—the emotions, memories, thoughts, and unformed intuitions by which we know our selves—would come undone, and dissolve into this pure awareness, which would be our deepest, truest self, the universal self the mystics describe. (pp. 150-151).

It appears to me that Neuberg et al.'s (2001) idea is that the conscious mind interprets pure awareness and supplies the memories, thoughts, emotions, and unformed intuitions which assemble self. The mind, in the state of pure consciousness, is devoid of ego but is aware of pure awareness. In this state of consciousness, the mind is neurobiologically incapable of differentiating or interpreting because any mental constructs were dissolved in pure awareness. The mind, in this state, is only aware of formless, limitless, endless whole. In line with the dissertation research results on the experience of no-self, the authors seem to be of the opinion that the function of the mind is to dichotomize external experience such that it senses self as individuation, which also accounts for conceptualization of self in relation to no-self as Self. Neuberg's et al.'s (2001) theory accounts for participant interpretation of pure awareness as unity, oneness, wholeness, nothingness, emptiness, void. It also points to a functional self that remains after dis-identification from self or with disappearance of identity. However, it leaves unanswered questions lingering in my mind. What is the cause of perception of pure consciousness or pure awareness? What propels the ego and the body toward integration and embodying? What causes feelings of empowerment and tendency to pursue spiritual development after perception of the universal self, and why do some people have the opposite reactions of fear and pathology? Is it all the mind and egoic interpretation—or is it something more? We may have theories about any of these questions, but are they Truth? Perhaps the world's greatest mystery is indeed Mystery.

Chapter Summary: The Theory of No-self as a Continuum Toward Self

Pictorial Guide Serves to Outline the No-self Continuum

This section presents results of this intuitive inquiry and grounded theory investigation of experiential no-self as a continuing process toward Self in the form of theory. Appendix Q serves as a pictorial guide to the theory of no-self presented in the following paragraphs. Figure 4 (at the end of Chapter 6) portrays categories, subcategories, and qualities of the no-self process. Chapter 8 details completion the hermeneutic circle of inquiry into the experience of no-self and explicates areas for future research.

Theory of No-self as Continuum Toward Self

All participants gave voice to experiences of no-self. Group A ($N = 3$) participants all described having awareness of no-self since childhood. Conversely, the storylines of the lived experiences of no-self evidenced the fact that most participants, labeled Group B ($N = 9$), went through a process of developing awareness of no-self. Experiential awareness of no-self was viewed as a unification process of evolving consciousness toward enlightenment. This process was called the personal self, no-self, Self continuum.

Participants described awareness of experiences no-self in relation to personal self and Self. Their narratives evidenced the paradoxical nature of articulating no-self as experience and the confirmation that description functioned to give voice to the ineffable nature of the phenomenon of no-self. Group A and Group B participants recounted experiences of no-self related to witnessing and exceptional human experiences. Group A participants described awareness of sense of no-self since childhood. All participants also described awareness of experiences of personal self dis-identification and/or radical personal self dis-identification. These events were viewed in relation to self transformation as *states* of consciousness toward higher

stages of consciousness. In addition, participants reported that life events contributed to transformation of consciousness as a continuing process of no-self unfolding in their lives.

After one or more experiences of no-self that caused self dis-identification or radical self dis-identification, insights and realizations occurred in the unfolding self/no-self process as a wearing away or an emptying of self as sense of being an individual or of identity with self. Participant data correlated emptying self of ego with active and passive letting go, in furtherance of the self, no-self, Self continuum. They actively and passively let go of ego, such that the emptying self of ego allowed higher consciousness to come in, with functional ego remaining. Participants described their inner awareness of having no sense of personal, individual self through the use of intellectual, philosophical, and/or embodied language. Group A and B participants described degrees of distress or no distress in relation to having inner awareness of no-self.

Participant data suggested that, in the personal self, no-self, Self continuum, there was an emptying self of ego, and there was a process of integration. Changes in self occurred and functional ego remained. As part of this process toward unification, participants described loss of egoic needs or loss of self in relation to the world, which loss related to mind-body changes, equanimity, creativity, mental perception, psychic/intuitive abilities, and compassionate awareness.

The process of embodying a realization was vital to integration. Integration leads to changes in self in relation to the world and changes in consciousness. Further transition(s) and emptying self of ego—on the self, no-self, Self continuum—lead to loss of ego, loss of sense of personal self, integration, and further transformations of consciousness. In other words, active and passive letting go of ego leads to transformation of consciousness as a process of emptying self of

ego. Concurrent with this, integration and loss of personal sense of self leads to a liberated sense of personal self, while functional ego remains. Furthermore, the qualities of allowing, acceptance, and surrender were related to loss of self and served to further empty personal self of ego, and this was inherent in the process of integration of experiences of no-self. In conclusion, the emptying of self allowed higher consciousness to come in, and there was still a functional ego. Participant narrative pointed toward a process of unification as a process of further enlightenment of liberated personal self toward Self or Unity consciousness.

Chapter 8: Completion of the Hermeneutic Circle of Inquiry Into the Experience of No-self

Cycle 5 incorporates Chapter 8 as the completion of the hermeneutical circle (Anderson, 2004; Esbjörn-Hargens & Anderson, 2006) and as assessment of the whole dissertation from the literature review through results. The discussion of the completion of this study of the lived experience of no-self is concluded through the following sections presented in this chapter:

(a) Integration of Findings and Literature Review, (b) Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research, (c) Limitations and Delimitations, and (d) Implications for Future Research.

The process of completion of the intuitive inquiry hermeneutical circle involved analytically and intuitively viewing the entire study anew and extended into engaging in an honest, critical evaluation and disclosure of what was learned through the process of studying the lived experience of no-self. Recording of the dissertation process related to intuitive inquiry Cycles 1 through 3 is contained in Chapter 3; and Cycle 4 is presented in Chapter 4: Creating Intuitive Grounded Theory. Cycle 5 encompasses Chapters 5 and 6 as presentation of results and furthermore includes Chapters 7 and 8 as discussion of research results and suggestions for future no-self research.

Integration of Findings and Literature Review

The purpose of this intuitive inquiry and grounded theory study was to understand, describe, and discover the experience of no-self as dissolution of egoic or illusory self in 12 men and women. No-self was defined as a process wherein a person's sense of self is dissolved either immediately or over time. This study sought to address the gap between extant literature on beginning and advanced spiritual development and the scarcity of studies of individuals' lived experiences of no-self as dissolution of ego. Research provided insight into the experience of

no-self as loss of sense of personal self and as distress in advanced stages of spiritual development and addressed the question, “What is it like for someone to have an experience or experiences of no-self and to live out the experience?” The following quotation from the Revised Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix H) specifies the extent to which participants were informed about the research topic.

The term “no-self” does not necessarily mean that you transcended the self or that you changed your self-identity. The experience of “no-self” may be associated with perception of pure consciousness; or the void, the sacred, or God. The living out of the experience may be associated with loss of meaning; or with ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, or peacefulness. Also, it may or may not be associated with loss of context of the sacred or divine, or with loss of previously felt Presence, or with loss of spiritual experience. The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important.

The experience of “no-self” may be associated with perception of pure consciousness; or with the void, the sacred, or God. The living out of the experience may be associated with loss of meaning, or with ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, or peacefulness. Also, it may or may not be associated with loss of context of the sacred or divine, or with loss of previously-felt Presence, or with loss of spiritual experience. In my research, I seek to clarify what people are actually experiencing with what is in the literature, and I remain neutral to what participant data will actually show. The proposed research will provide insights into the level of ego dissolution that occurs in advanced stages of mystical experience before unity as oneness.

Documents presented as Appendixes L and M describe participant protocol related to informed consent to participate in my research study on no-self and the guiding questions for participant interview. As fully described in Chapter 3, I adhered to dissertation protocol at all times and did not persuade participant participation or ask leading questions in the interviews.

Rich, thick participant narrative evidenced the deeply personal experiential process of growing in awareness of no-self as an evolvment of consciousness toward enlightenment. In the living out of no-self, most participants paradoxically spoke about loss of self in relation to the world *along with* positive change in self in relationship with people and the world. As part of this

process, participants described loss of egoic needs or loss of personal sense of self, which loss correlated to mind-body changes, equanimity, creativity, mental perception, psychic/intuitive abilities, and compassionate awareness. Allowing or surrendering correlated with loss of self and served to further evolve functional self toward enlightenment. Moreover, participant data evidenced a self, no-self, Self continuum, through their reports that conscious awareness continues to evolve and integrate as a process of unification.

In a comparison of the Revised Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix H) with the Chapter 2 literature review, along with results presented in Chapters 5 and 6, one point stands out. It seems to me that the literature portrayed the experience of no-self in a more negative light than the themes and qualities found among participants' oral histories of no-self. Qualities *not* found among participants include the following terms: loss of meaning, peacefulness, loss of context of the sacred or divine, loss of previously felt Presence, and loss of spiritual experience.

Participant description *was* related to the following terms: change of identity, perception of pure consciousness, void, God, transcending the self, ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, loss of egocentricism, diminishing of superficial self (although it is noted that participants used slightly different terms to describe these qualities). It is also noted that, while participant data showed evidence of the quality of *de-identification with self-referent "I,"* the quality of *personal identification with being and experience as no longer important* was not validated in this study. In fact, experience was strongly correlated to description of awareness of no-self as a process and with paradoxicality and ineffability. In other words, participants described levels of distress and no distress in relation to dis-identification with self as loss of ego; however, there was no evidence of loss of previously felt Presence, spiritual experience, or loss of context of the sacred or Divine.

A point worth discussing is the fact that the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2 portrayed a more negative view of no-self than participants described experiencing. While the cause is not entirely apparent, there are a few potential explanations for this phenomenon. This research was a purely qualitative study of *experience*. Participants were informed that my intention was not to pathologize the experience of no-self or the participants themselves, and this may have had an effect on the population of participants who joined the study. In addition, perhaps the small sample size ($N = 12$) would account for not finding experiences of no-self on the level of Bernadette Roberts, Suzanne Segal, Saint John of the Cross, or Mother Teresa. However, it is noted that 2 participants in this study did have more difficult spiritual histories in relation to their experiences of no-self compared to the other 10 participants. Another reason is that participants may have felt uncomfortable or have been reluctant to describe negative experiences in relation to spirituality. Alternately, there could be a forgetting process involved in relation to previously viewed negative experiences as one advances in stages of consciousness. Perhaps with dissolution of ego there is a fogging over of traumatic life events. Future research is needed to uncover these possibilities.

The terms emptiness and nothingness were discussed paradoxically in relation to fullness and wholeness; however, while Leita, AJ, Ariel, Robert, and Doublespiral directly mentioned emptiness and/or void, no participants mentioned dark night. In contrast, in the literature review Hunt (2007), May (2004), Roberts (1993, 2005), St. John of the Cross (2002), and Underhill (1911/1974) described dark night as a dark stage in spiritual development. Ullman and Reichenberg-Ullman (2001) stated that dark night is the death of all desires and senses and an emptying of intellect and form of God.

Roberts (2005) stated that experience of no-self “shatters the ego like a hole made in the center of ourselves. . . . [And] there is no ego anymore to experience the divine” (p. 20). Roberts (1993, 2005), a former Carmelite nun, categorized her dark night experience as *no-self*, a term which she discovered in Buddhist literature. She explained that, with the unexpected breakthrough of no-self into the void of the unconscious, there came the sense of nothingness and emptiness, wherein it seems that the divine was “absent or lost” (p. 21). Her writing described how she was left to live out no-self as dark night and as loss of Presence (as felt sense of the divine) in everyday life prior to unity as oneness.

Hunt (2007), E. F. Kelly and Grosso (2007), Roberts (1993), Stace (1960/1987), and Underhill (1911/1974) concurred with Roberts (1993, 2005) that the mystic may encounter a form of suffering and loss of meaning, such that he or she may experience a felt dissolution of the ordinary sense of self and numinous experience. This emptiness is felt as a painful diminishment of spiritual presence or God/Being/Isness, which is remembered and compared to prior experiences at more expansive, positive, or illuminating stages of spiritual development. Hunt (2007) called this advanced stage of “accelerated ‘unselfing,’ or loss of egocentricism” (p. 226) the “penultimate stage of mystical experience, prior to its classic completing in states of all encompassing felt unity” (p. 213).

The nondual literature in Chapter 2 emphasized conceptualization of no-self as the process of awakening from the illusion of being a personal, separate self as a shift in consciousness from the individual toward interconnectedness, in that the person’s consciousness itself is transcended by no-self experiences (Adyashanti, 2002; Blackstone, 2007; Braud, 1998; Carter, 1990; Epstein, 1993; Puhakka, 1998; Walsh, 1994; Washburn, 1988; J. White, 1995; Wilber 1986). Prendergast and Bradford (2007) explained that there is a difference between awakening to “one’s true nature

as the formless ground of being or no-self” (p. 12) and “*actualizing or embody[ing]*” (p. 12) the awakening. Roberts (1993) revealed the following, “The secret to allowing an insight to become a permanent way of knowing and seeing is not to touch it, cling to it, dogmatize it, or even think about it” (p. 30). Rather than allowing the mind to establish a frame of reference for the event, Prendergast and Bradford (2007) and Adyashanti (2006) described the integration process as *embodiment*, which is a gradual process of the body adjusting to the awakening. The body is the container for which the vastness of everything and nothing—the truth of our *being-ness*—is to come through. Illumination illuminating Itself. Oneness reflecting Itself. This affects the person on physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and energetic levels. Because of the experience of oneness, a person’s sense of divided nature can stand out vividly, as being counter to conditioned tendencies. Thus, the process can be painful, confusing, terrifying, and also liberating as self reorients as a reflection of Self

Adyashanti (2002, 2006), Bodian (2008), Hunt (2007), Prendergast and Bradford (2007), Puhakka (2007), and Roberts (1993, 2005) emphasized that rather than allowing the mind to dualistically cling to the awakening event, the secret to allowing realizations and insights to become a permanent way of perceiving lies in the integration process of embodiment. Allowing this process to unfold enables the body to adjust on physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and energetic levels—It is this embodiment process that can be painful, confusing, terrifying, and also liberating as self reorients as a reflection of Self.

This review of literature indicates to me that the misery of dark night, as described in Christian literature, is not solely a Western traditional experience stemming from a dualistic view of loss of felt sense of the divine. In this study of no-self, participant data evidenced no-self as a process wherein experience of no-self reveals the One, Self, God, I AM and dissolves self as

egoic attachment. All participants had some exposure to Eastern traditions. Participants spoke about integration and the process of embodying no-self; yet the term dark night was not mentioned, and the participant data evidenced levels of distress and no distress in relation to experiential no-self.

Several questions come to mind regarding the research findings. Why was the term dark night not used by participants? Perhaps dark night is not a term that is discussed often or well understood among spiritual communities—Western or Eastern. What was the effect of nondual teachings in buffering dualistic thinking on the lived experience of no-self among participants who were raised in Western, dualistic traditions? Why did participant data not evidence more extreme levels of pain, confusion, or anguish described by Christian-oriented and nondual literature in embodying no-self? Was this due to a forgetting process in unification or a tendency to not want to portray advanced spiritual development in a dark or more negative light? Do some participants in this study have yet to go through a penultimate dark night stage? Does every person go through an intense level of suffering in the unification stage? Is the level of suffering inversely related to the level of ego dissolution, or is interpretation of suffering individualistic? What is the experience of contemporary dark night of the soul? Future research on no-self could address these questions and additionally investigate Hunt's (2007) view of emptying self of ego as a penultimate stage of spiritual growth.

Dissertation length restrictions prevented me from discussing participant results in relation to Maharishi's (1967), Underhill's (1974/1911), and Hawkins' (2006) levels of consciousness, and in relation to Stace's (1960/1987) extrovertive and introvertive states using the Hood Mysticism Scale (Hood et al., 1993; Hood et al., 2001; Hood & Williamson, 2000.) Future research would confirm and extend themes and qualities of no-self, and mixed methods studies

may offer new theories into the experience of no-self and the living out of the experience—and address perennialist and contextualist related questions regarding the results of this study. A discussion of implications of future research is presented in the last section of this chapter.

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

This study of the experience of no-self as initial experience and as lived experience constituted exploratory qualitative research. Reliability in qualitative research is demonstrated when another study can produce the same results; thus, reliability is not immediately established in exploratory research. However, Kirk and Miller (1986) suggested that “reliability depends essentially on explicitly described observational procedures” (p. 42). The description of pragmatic steps taken in this intuitive inquiry and grounded theory study, as presented in Chapters 3 and 4, would substantiate future demonstration of reliability. In addition, copious note taking at all stages of writing the dissertation and analyzing results further evidences the procedure.

Validity in qualitative studies depends on the extent to which the research is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Creswell (2007) viewed validity as a process of “validation” (p. 206) as an “attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 206-207) reflected through the writing of the researcher. Validation is, therefore, procedural such that establishing trust of participants; learning their culture and checking for biases; attaining rich, thick description; and including quotes in the report adds to accuracy in the study (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, Creswell suggested strategies such as using peer review (which is inherent in the dissertation process), member or participant checking, and negative case analysis until all instances fit a hypothesis, and triangulation to substantiate premises and perceptions. The following paragraphs outline determination of validity in intuitive inquiry and grounded theory, respectively.

Intuitive Inquiry

Credibility, transferability, and dependability. Credibility relates to the internal validity of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Anderson (2004) stated that findings from an intuitive inquiry study are credible if they help readers question their current understandings of their own experiences and lives. In other words, the reader resonates and gains in-depth, intimate familiarity with the topic of study, which is grounded in data and logical analysis. Transferability and dependability relate, respectively, to the study's external validity and its reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The hermeneutical structure of five iterative cycles pragmatically guides the research process. In addition, the method posits copious note-taking and truth-telling by the researcher throughout research procedures. The semistructured interviews generated rich, thick description of 12 participants' experience and living out of no-self. Anderson (2004) further addressed these critical areas by stating that study findings have efficacy validity to the extent that (a) the researcher is transformed by conducting the research project, and (b) the reader of the final document resonates with the readings and is transformed by reading it or recognizes the potential for change.

It is my feeling that some people who decide to read the participant stories will be captivated by the spiritual histories of the participants and by their recollection of the living out of no-self and their continuum of self toward Self. Perhaps some readers will be further drawn in to reading about the results related to dis-identification from self and the discussion of results. I can only hope that some aspect of these 12 participants' transformation will spark insight into or pursuit of spiritual development.

Process notes. With regard to my own no-self adventures, the topic grabbed hold of my *self* several years before I even knew what no-self was, and pursued me throughout the

dissertation process, even along my drive from coast to coast of the United States. I embodied the participant stories during interviews, transcript editing, data analysis, writing of results, and discussion of results. The 12 participants are in my heart, and I am truly grateful for their gifts of presence in my life. Any anxiety that still resided in my body after the January 2007 experience (described in Chapter 3) dissipated completely during the time period of interviewing participants. I had many, many insights and realizations into understanding self as no-self and toward de-embedding ego. As evidence of self transformation, part of my continuing no-self process was interwoven into Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Appendix A.

Confirmability and authenticity. Confirmability relates to the objectivity of the study, and authenticity relates to making known all values beliefs and perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). With regard to confirmability, it is noted that this dissertation research was an interreligious and nondenominational study of the experience of no-self. Sahadat (1985) posited that the underlying premise of an “interreligious study of mysticism” (p. 311) is the willingness of the researcher to go beyond his or her own spirituality and to enter into the other person’s tradition, and he suggested “openmindedness, empathy, and neutrality” (p. 311) as basic tenets for objectivity. These qualities were inherent in both the literature review and in intuitive inquiry as a method. Participant data were checked for transcription accuracy, and additionally confirmed, in that participants had the opportunity make changes or additions to both their transcripts and their participant stories. Values and beliefs were further made known in that Cycle 2 preliminary lenses articulated my perspectives and biases as researcher. The intuitive inquiry method also required me to write the dissertation in a manner that is articulate and authentic, and in a manner that leaves the reader knowing me on a personal level (Anderson, 2004). Ontological authenticity is present in intuitive inquiry if the study generates findings that provide for new visions of the future and potentiality

(Anderson, 2004). This dissertation research may progress the field of transpersonal psychology, and related areas, by increasing understanding of the lived experience of no-self as a continuum of dis-identification from personal self as a continuum toward Self. It is my hope that this research will help people identify qualities and themes related to experiential awareness of no-self, with the goal of promoting, versus pathologizing spiritual growth. In addition, this research potentiates numerous opportunities for future research, as outlined in the last section of this chapter.

Grounded Theory

Charmaz (2006) posited that grounded theory studies need to be credible, useful, and original. The four iterative steps (coding; categorizing; memo writing; and theoretical analysis, including theoretical sampling techniques) in grounded theory comprise a pragmatic basis for qualitative research. Categories should have resonance or significance, in that they (a) depict the fullness of the experience being studied, (b) reveal “both luminal and unstable taken-for granted meanings” (p. 132), (c) are linked to larger groups or bodies of knowledge, (d) make sense to participants and others who share in the experience, and (e) offer deeper insight into the experience. Theoretical sampling in constructivist grounded theory includes examining negative cases that emerge out of the data (Charmaz). Grounded theory is compatible with other research methods (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1988), and adding grounded theory to this intuitive inquiry investigation of the experience of no-self essentially triangulated, or served to cross-check, intuitive inquiry information, conclusions, and procedures in order to validate research findings and elucidate relevance to existing or innovative theory. The research process and procedure was explicitly recorded and presented in Chapter 4, entitled *Creating Intuitively Informed Grounded Theory*, and this chapter serves as evidence of grounded theory credibility. Future research is needed to show validity and reliability of the no-self dissertation results.

Limitations and Delimitations

The experience of no-self was studied from the perspective of spiritual literature, spiritual traditions, and psychological literature and theory to the extent limited within the dissertation proposal. Due to the nature of exploratory, interview-based research, participant sample size was limited to 12 adult men and women. Diversity among participants was limited to the extent of participants available at the time of recruit. Nevertheless, as described in Chapters 3 and 7, participants had diverse spiritual backgrounds and were from diverse locations across the United States. Research findings may be generalizable and of interest to spiritual, psychological, or psychiatric practitioners, as well as to anyone living out the experience of no-self or who knows or cares for such a person.

The intuitive inquiry research method was chosen for this qualitative research due to the fact that I cannot turn off my intuition; therefore, the method allowed me to be open and honest about the inclusion of my intuition and any auspicious bewilderment (as confusion and presage of new understandings) that resulted from the research process, data analysis, and encounters with paradox. In addition to truth telling, I rigorously documented all intuitive impressions immediately after they occurred. I also maintained a process-oriented, inclusive perspective in interpreting participant data, in a manner that was intersubjective. However, I realize that academic clarity and authenticity combined with adherence to pragmatic research methods does not guarantee that this research will be meaningful to all readers.

This research is also limited by the lens through which I viewed the world at the time of researching, analyzing, and writing the dissertation; it is also limited by the literature incorporated in the literature review and presentation of findings. Nevertheless, incorporating intuition into research can open up “the unfolding into new ways of theorizing and envisioning that are closer

to lived experiences than do rationalistic research methods” (Anderson, 2004, p. 335). It is my hope that this research will achieve harmonic resonance with a wide population of individuals. Any theory that emerges from data collection and analysis has the potential to provide a new vision for the future that may actualize people toward individual, spiritual, or professional goals and toward societal and global service. Perhaps this dissertation on the experience of no-self as dissolution of ego will elucidate and, in some manner, help to promote, versus pathologize, spiritual development in advanced stages.

*Grounded Theory Embedded Into Intuitive Inquiry: A New Approach to Research
Intuitive Knowing Qualified by Pragmatic Analysis*

This study investigated the lived experience of no-self as integrated, embodied mystical experience through an innovative research method combining intuitive inquiry with grounded theory. Grounded theory is known for its pragmatic steps used to analyze, interpret, and construct theory from data (Charmaz, 2006). Intuitive inquiry is a method that incorporates five iterative cycles of inquiry which structure and organize the research process, while at the same time acknowledges and makes known the researcher’s inherent intuitive process throughout all phases of the research study (Anderson, 2004). In 2004, Anderson wrote, “A promising aspect of intuitive inquiry is its capacity to synthesize prior theory and research on a topic and render theoretical integration is Cycles 4 and 5” (p. 335). In this study, grounded theory was used as the systematic approach for analyzing participant data, while at the same time, intuitions were rigorously documented and tested by formal analysis.

With regard to the subjective nature of intuition, Esbjörn-Hargens (2004) stated, “It is actually by acknowledging our embeddedness in the knower-known complex that more objectivity becomes available” (p. 420). Inherent in the intuitive inquiry research method is the researcher

engaging in or embodying the lived realities of the participants (or alternately, the texts they are researching; Anderson, 2004; Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004). During this study I embodied participant narratives during interviews, while editing the transcripts, and during data analysis and writing—in other words, I participated in knowing them “by virtue of being” (Ferrer, 2000b, p. 228). This level of knowing is deep empathy which brings one closer to transcending subject-object perception toward “loosening self-object boundaries” (Hart, 2000, pp. 256-257).

Ferrer (2000b) explained that as we move away from “the more gross to the more subtle, the gap between being and knowing narrows” (p. 23). With this bridge between the ontological and the epistemological, it is not as necessary “to anchor the soundness of knowledge claims on any kind of intrinsic features and more necessary to discern validity standards of a different kind” (p. 23). However, in this research on the lived experience of no-self, I sought to qualify intuitive knowing through systematic analysis.

Theoretical Analysis Used in This Study

As detailed in Chapter 3, grounded theory data analysis consisted of cycles of coding, categorizing, and theorizing embedded in the intuitive inquiry Cycles 3, 4, and 5. This chapter also clarified that in this study, a variant theoretical sampling technique was used (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As an alternative application of theoretical sampling proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008), I used the already collected participant data for theoretical analysis and for sampling for no-self as both a concept and as incidents related to the living out of no-self. Theoretical analysis consisted of use of theoretical sampling techniques to analyze participant narrative data. Chapter 4 explicated this analytical process and furthermore explained the specific levels of theoretical

sampling that were used during the final stages of grounded theory data analysis (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) clarified that theoretical sampling on already collected data does not indicate that the “study will lack significance or be superficial” (p. 150) and explained that such research would still be “a high level analysis” (p. 150). However, they cautioned that “gaps in the research may occur when analyzing previously collected data because there isn’t the opportunity for further exploration” (p. 150) with participants. Chapter 4 detailed the reasons why this study involved member checking at the transcript and participant story writing cycles of intuitive inquiry and why member checking was not performed during theoretical sampling. Already existing participant data were rich, thick, and ripe for analysis; furthermore, I had already identified numerous dense categories and themes directly related to the lived experience of no-self as part of the rounds of grounded theory analysis performed on participant transcripts and stories. This investigation of the experience of no-self was exploratory, and future research can address any gaps or supplement categories and themes of no-self identified through this study.

Future Research Studies—Combining Intuitive Inquiry With Grounded Theory

The method of intuitive inquiry embedded with grounded theory is suitable for research topics that require in-depth reflection on the nature of existence and Self-realization. However, it may not be for every researcher—it does involve following the protocol of two systematic qualitative research approaches. In the interest of promoting more rigorous qualitative research, I would invite researchers to consider combining intuitive inquiry with grounded theory if they are willing to enter deeply into the topic being studied and if they would like to potentiate generating theory from their research. While Anderson (2004) and Charmaz (2006) acknowledged the inherent value of combining qualitative methods, future research may substantiate intuitive

inquiry embedded with pragmatic grounded theory analysis as a valid research method for investigating humanistic and transpersonal research topics.

Implications for Future Research

Implications for Transpersonal Psychology

This dissertation research investigated the experience and the living out of no-self as transformation in advanced stages of spiritual development toward enlightenment. Results of the study of no-self showed that in the personal self, no-self, Self continuum, there was an emptying self of ego, and there was a process of integration. Changes in self occurred and functional ego remained. As part of this process toward unification, participants described loss of egoic needs or loss of self in relation to the world, which loss correlated to mind-body changes, equanimity, creativity, mental perception, psychic/intuitive abilities, and compassionate awareness. Narratives from other participants substantiated these categories of change.

Dissertation results correspond with the most recent definition of transpersonal psychology. Hartelius et al. (2007) analyzed 35 years of definitions and found three themes, suggesting a contemporary, global definition of transpersonal psychology as including not only “beyond ego psychology” (p. 142), but also, “integrative/holistic psychology” (p. 142) and “transformative psychology” (p. 142). Furthermore, the field of transpersonal psychology acknowledges and studies the whole of human experience—viewing the ego “within the larger fabric of the embodied mind, the community, the social history, the environment, and the transpersonal ultimate” (p. 144) toward personal and also social transformation. This dissertation study is related not only to the field of transpersonal psychology in terms of the latest definition, but also results of this study contribute to what Hartelius et al. (2007) suggested are ways of understanding stages and states of human development “beyond ego” (p. 142) in furtherance of

“here and now homecomings toward a deeper self that is always present—and often goes unnoticed” (p. 142).

Analysis of participant data showed evidence of the lived experience of self, no-self, Self as a transformative continuum of advanced states and stages of evolvement of consciousness. The research provided insight into the two areas which are on target with Hartelius et al.’s (2007) definition of transpersonal psychology. Results point toward participants transcending or going beyond current level of ego, as self dis-identification and letting go of ego, and additionally evidence the transformational process of postdevelopment toward embodiment of integrative change in self in relation to the world. What is apparent to me is that no-self events, as discussed within the parameters of participant experience, provide an egoless, observational insight into situations, people, and relationships—if they are realized and integrated. This embodiment of no-self allows self to know Self as liberation toward potentially realizing one’s true human potential.

Hawkins (1995/1998) described the self-transcendent level of conscious awareness as being beyond consciousness, such that individuals who have reached this

state of awareness report that it cannot be described and can have no meaning for anyone without the experience of that context. Nonetheless, this is the true state of Reality, universally and externally; we merely fail to recognize it. Such a recognition is the essence of enlightenment and the final resolution of the evolution of consciousness to the point of self-transcendence. (p. 194)

This suggests to me that the nature of enlightenment is essential to self-transcendence and evolution of consciousness. In order for people to self-transcend their egoic boundaries and for evolution of consciousness to occur, there is the need for a body of literature regarding the lived experiential reality of progressing through higher stages of consciousness. With this knowledge they may be able to recognize and appreciate temporary accessing of no-self or Reality as a state—or even as a stable stage of higher consciousness. There exists the possibility that this

dissertation may increase understanding of the experience of no-self and what it is like to live out the experience of no-self, whether a person has perceived aspects of no-self in childhood or in adulthood. However, what stands out clearly to me is the exploratory nature of this research into personal self, no-self, and Self. I envision this study as the tip of the iceberg of research into the topic of self-transformation in enlightenment.

Implications for Future Research Toward Deeper Understanding of Evolution of Consciousness

The participant stories, taken individually or as a body of work, give credence to the value of the personal self, no-self, Self transformational continuum. The implications of working with children and adults in recognizing signs and symptoms of self in relation to no-self and Self may pertain to professionals in the helping professions, including psychiatry, social work, spiritual direction, spiritual guidance, and the transpersonal and integral psychology fields.

Working with people who are in advanced stages of spiritual development may necessitate insight into new levels of emotional intelligence and increased understanding of stages of moral development. The following questions come to mind with regard to this is topic: Do higher stages of consciousness necessarily correlate to higher levels of ego and moral development? What qualitatively and quantitatively accounts for discrepancies between being in a high stage of consciousness and low levels of ego or moral development? Do high levels of distress reported by participants in relation to the experience of no-self relate to low ego development? Research into personal self, no-self, and Self as experiential awareness may elucidate or refine qualities of stages of emotional intelligence and moral development.

Currently there are more than 100 identified types of EHEs (R. White, 2000). EHEs are transformational (Palmer & Braud, 2002; R. White, 1993, 1997). Additional qualitative and quantitative research on no-self experiences could provide evidence of a new classification of

EHEs related to no-self and no-self events. In addition, neuropsychological and qualitative research into EHEs may prove that they occur at the witnessing or the transcendental state of consciousness or at a newly-defined higher state of consciousness. This research could validate occurrences of numerous types of “nonordinary” (Palmer & Braud, 2002, p. 30) human experiences as providing glimpses into the *stage* of cosmic consciousness—thus increasing validity, recognition, and appreciation of EHEs as transforming consciousness. I feel that this understanding would also greatly contribute to public recognition and appreciation of personal, transformational experiences that are out of the ordinary compared to day-to-day experience.

Lancaster (2004) and Gooren (2007) have discussed the problem of young adult bias and gender bias in assessment tools related to the study of religious conversion. I encountered this dilemma when I investigated the literature on mysticism and religious conversion. The fact that assessments were normed on adolescent populations affected my decision to not perform a mixed methods study of no-self. This issue was also the reason I chose not to include quantitative literature studies on topics related to discussion of the dissertation results, including mysticism and religious conversion research. While this decision may have limited the scope of interpretation of results, it maintained validity of the discussion of results, given that the average participant age was 55. My main point here is that research into no-self as an expansion of EHE research (and consciousness research in general) could necessitate new spiritual developmental assessment tools or revisions of current assessments. Research into and inclusion of no-self events and witnessing as a state into EHE categorizations could increase understanding of EHEs, generate greater awareness EHEs, and therefore potentially generate a larger, more diversified pool of research subjects.

Participants related no-self to witnessing consciousness, EHEs and awareness of no-self since childhood. Literary references were cited in this chapter showing that EHEs, meditation, and other temporary states of consciousness can contribute to dis-identification from a stage by dissociating from the ego toward progression to the next higher stage of consciousness. Participant data also showed that EHEs, meditation, awareness of no-self since childhood, and life events can also contribute to dissolving ego toward evolution of consciousness. The term *witnessing* is used to describe transcendental or pure consciousness because it is “experienced to be a non-changing level of awareness that serves as peaceful inner observer or witness to the active changing states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping” (Mason et al., 1997). Temporary accessing of Self as witnessing pure consciousness allows one to transcend self-awareness toward knowing Self (Alexander et al., 1994).

Research on meditating in the TM state, showed that during pure consciousness experiences “both the fundamental framework and the content of waking experiences were reported to be absent” (Travis & Pearson, 2000, p. 82) and that subjects in the pure consciousness state were able describe the nature of the experience afterwards. Participants in this study of no self were able to describe no-self in relation to witnessing consciousness, exceptional human experiences, and perception of pure self as a child. Travis et al. (2004) have developed a method of studying “Object-referral Continuum of self-awareness” (p. 401) and suggested that their model may be used by other researchers. The Travis et al. study showed that sense-of-self can be de-embedded from mental processing—the knower who knows self as Self de-embeds from self-referral-as-object relations mode toward the Self end of the continuum. In the self-referral mode, self is not identified with thoughts, feelings, or actions. In addition, perhaps a study of no-self as pure consciousness using Travis et al.’s method could be performed with participants from

diverse spiritual backgrounds in relation to witnessing consciousness, EHEs, and/or perception of no-self during childhood. This may show universality between the TM state and other types of perception of pure awareness or uncover new states of transformational experiences that could progressively facilitate reaching the next *stage* of consciousness.

This study produced results regarding the human sense of individuation among participants. Results were discussed in relation to Lancaster's theory of pure memory process (2004) and his theory of how "I" is constructed (1993). Additional qualitative research related to self, no-self, and Self combined with quantitative neuropsychological research could provide inroads into Lancaster's (2004) theory of pure memory process and/or his (1993) model of a left brain interpreter and the function of I-tags.

The purpose this study was to elucidate the experience of no-self at advanced stages of consciousness toward enlightenment and to discern qualities of the living out of the experience. Clearly, the personal self, no-self, Self continuum is a complex area of spiritual development and the scope of the research in dissertation format only permitted me to begin to explore no-self as self dis-integration of ego. It is a topic that I feel needs to be understood by spiritual practitioners, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists, and even by people beginning on the spiritual path and their loved ones. I also recognize that individuals may need guidance along the spiritual path in relation to experiencing the no-self aspect of enlightenment. In this study, I sought to promote spiritual growth versus pathologize spiritual growth (whether by the individual in the form of self-pathologizing or by others). It is my hope that future research continues in this vein for the sake of furthering the advancement of holistic, transpersonal development. Descriptive narrative presented in Chapter 6 showed that participants appreciated being able to give voice to their oral histories of no-self and were grateful for my doing this research into the lived experience of

no-self. I hope that this dissertation may contribute to recognition and understanding of the personal self and no-self as a transformative, liberating process, not to be feared, but to be embraced with courage and loving conviction.

In relation to further research on the lived experience of no-self, I feel there is a need for a meeting of minds among researchers who study higher states of consciousness, including those who investigate specific aspects of consciousness, such as those who study Maharishi's (1967/1992) levels of consciousness. Such cooperative effort could produce revolutionary results into personal self, no-self, and Self as perceptual phenomena and as a development of higher states and stages toward enlightenment. This type of interspiritual, internationally-cooperative research could greatly contribute to advancement of human consciousness.

References

- Adyashanti. (2002). *The impact of awakening*. Los Gatos, CA: Open Gate Sangha.
- Adyashanti. (2003). Adyashanti. In L. Lumiere & J. Lumiere-Wins (Eds.), *The awakening West: Conversations with today's new Western spiritual leaders* (pp. 189-207). Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press.
- Adyashanti. (2006). *True meditation: Discover the freedom of pure consciousness*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Adyashanti. (2007). Love returning for itself. In J. Prendergast, P. Fenner, & S. Krystal (Eds.), *The sacred mirror: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 1, pp. 57-87). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Alexander, C. (1988). A conceptual and phenomenological analysis of pure consciousness during sleep. *Lucidity Letters*, 7, 39-45.
- Alexander, C., Davies, J., & Dixon, C. (1990). Growth of higher stages of consciousness: Maharishi's Vedic psychology of human development. In C. Alexander & E. Langer (Eds.), *Higher stages of human development: Perspectives on adult growth* (pp. 286-341). New York: Oxford Press.
- Alexander, C., Heaton, D., & Chandler, H. (1994). Advanced human development in the Vedic psychology of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi: Theory and research. In M. Miller & S. Cook-Greuter (Eds.), *Transcendence and mature thought in adulthood: The further reaches of adult development* (pp. 39-70). Lantham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Almaas, A. (1994). *The pearl beyond price: Integration of personality into being: An object relations approach*. Berkeley, CA: Diamond Books. (Original work published 1988)
- Anderson, R. (1998). Intuitive inquiry: A transpersonal approach. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.), *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (pp. 69-94). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Anderson, R. (2004). Intuitive inquiry: An epistemology of the heart for scientific inquiry. *Humanistic Psychologist*, 3, 307-341.
- Anonymous. (1957). *The cloud of unknowing* (I. Progoff, Trans.). New York: Dell.
- Anonymous. (1973). *The cloud of unknowing and book of privy counseling: An enduring classic of Christian mystical experience* (W. Johnston, Ed.). New York: Doubleday.
- Assagioli, R. (1965). *Psychosynthesis*. New York: Viking.
- Balsekar, R. (1989). *The final truth: A guide to ultimate understanding*. Redondo Beach, CA: Advaita Press.

- Balsekar, R. (1993). *Consciousness speaks: Conversations with Ramesh S. Balsekar* (W. Liquorman, Ed.). Redondo Beach, CA: Advaita Press.
- Balsekar, R. (2002). All is destined according to God's will. In B. Thompson (Ed.), *The odyssey of enlightenment: Rare interviews with enlightened teachers of our time* (pp. 150-168). Mount Shasta, CA: Wisdom Editions.
- Banquet, J., & Sailhan, M. (1974). Quantified EEG spectral analysis of sleep and transcendental meditation. *Electroencephalography Clinical Neurophysiology*, 42, 445-453.
- Berkow, D. (2003). A psychology of no-thingness: Seeing through the projected self. In J. Prendergast, P. Fenner, & S. Krystal (Eds.), *The sacred mirror: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 1, pp. 185-208). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Bhikkhu, T. (1997). What do Buddhists mean when they talk about emptiness? *Tricycle*, 6(3), 52-53.
- Blackstone, J. (2006). Intersubjectivity and nonduality in the psychotherapeutic relationship. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 38(1), 25-40.
- Blackstone, J. (2007). Intersubjectivity and nonduality in the psychotherapeutic relationship. In J. Prendergast & K. Bradford (Eds.), *Listening from the heart of silence: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 77-97). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Bodian, S. (2008). *Wake up now: A guide to the journey of spiritual awakening*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Braud, W. (1998). Integral inquiry: Complementary ways of knowing, being, and expression. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.), *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (pp. 35-68). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brown, D. (1986). The stages of meditation in cross-cultural perspective. In K. Wilber, J. Engler, & D. Brown (Eds.), *Transformations of consciousness* (pp. 219-283). Boston: Shambhala.
- Brown, D., & Engler, J. (1986a). The stages of mindfulness meditation: A validation study; Part I: Study and results. In K. Wilber, J. Engler, & D. Brown (Eds.), *Transformations of consciousness* (pp. 161-191). Boston: Shambhala.
- Brown, D., & Engler, J. (1986b). The stages of mindfulness meditation: A validation study; Part II: Discussion. In K. Wilber, J. Engler, & D. Brown (Eds.), *Transformations of consciousness* (pp. 193-217). Boston: Shambhala.
- Bruns, G. (1992). *Hermeneutics ancient & modern*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- Bucke, R. (1966). *Cosmic consciousness: A study in the evolution of the human mind*. New York: E. P. Dutton. (Original work published 1901)

- Campbell, A. (1974). *Seven states of consciousness: A vision of possibilities suggested by the teaching of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Campbell, J. (1999). Self or no-self: Is there a middle way? *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 53(1), 7-18.
- Canda, E. (1990). Religious content in social work education: A comparative approach. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 25(1), 36-45.
- Canda, E., & Furman, L. (1999). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The heart of helping*. New York: Free Press.
- Caplan, M. (1999). *Halfway up the mountain: The error of premature claims to enlightenment*. Prescott, AZ: Hohm.
- Caplan, M. (2007). Walking the talk: The principles and practices of embodied spirituality. In J. Prendergast & K. Bradford (Eds.), *Listening from the heart of silence: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 181-196). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Carter, R. (1990). Introduction. In R. Carter (Ed.), *God, the self and nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western* (pp. ix-xxxix). New York: Paragon House.
- Chao Khun Sobhana Dhammasudhi. (1969). *The real way to awakening*. London: The Buddhapadipa Temple.
- Charmaz, K. (1995). Grounded theory. In J. Smith, R. Harre, & L. Van Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking methods in psychology* (pp. 27-49). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research design* (2nd ed., pp. 509-535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chirban, J. (1986). Developmental stages in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. In K. Wilber, J. Engler, & D. Brown (Eds.), *Transformations of consciousness: Conventional and contemplative perspectives on development* (pp. 285-314). Boston: New Science Library.
- Cook-Greuter, S. (1990). Maps for living: Ego development theory from symbiosis to conscious universal embeddedness. In M. Commons, C. Armon, L. Kohlberg, F. Richards, T. Grotzer, & J. Sinnott (Eds.), *Adult development, models and methods in the study of adolescent and adult thought* (Vol. 2, pp. 79-104). New York: Praeger.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research 3e: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cousins, E. (1990). The self and not-self in Christian mysticism: Augustine and Eckhart. In R. Carter (Ed.), *God, the self and nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western* (pp. 59-71). New York: Paragon House.

- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dalai Lama. (1997). *Sleeping, dreaming, and dying: An exploration of consciousness with the Dalai Lama* (F. Varela, Ed.). Somerville, MA: Wisdom.
- Deikman, A. (2000). Service as a way of knowing. In T. Hart, P. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 303-318). Albany: State University of New York.
- Dillbeck, M., & Alexander, C. (1989). Higher states of consciousness: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Vedic psychology of human development. *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 10(4), 307-334.
- Ellwood, R. (1980). *Mysticism and religion*. Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice-Hall.
- Engler, J. (1984). Therapeutic aims in psychotherapy and meditation: Developmental stages in the representation of self. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 16(1), 25-61.
- Engler, J. (1993). Becoming somebody and nobody: Psychoanalysis. In R. Walsh & F. Vaughan (Eds.), *Paths beyond the ego* (pp. 118-120). New York: Tharcher.
- Epstein, M. (1988). Forms of emptiness: Psychodynamic, meditative, and clinical perspectives. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 21(1), 61-71.
- Epstein, M. (1993). Varieties of egolessness. In R. Walsh & F. Vaughan (Eds.), *Paths beyond the ego* (pp. 121-123). New York: Tharcher.
- Epstein, M. (2006). The structure of no structure: Winnicott's concept of unintegration and the Buddhist notion of no-self. In D. M. Black (Ed.), *Psychoanalysis and religion in the 21st century: Competitors or collaborators* (pp. 223-233). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Esbjörn-Hargens, V. (2004). The union of flesh and spirit in women mystics. *Humanistic Psychologist*, 32(4), 401-425.
- Esbjörn-Hargens, V., & Anderson, R. (2006). Intuitive inquiry: An exploration of embodiment among contemporary female mystics. In C. Fischer (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods for psychologists: Introduction through empirical studies* (pp. 301-330). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Fenner, P. (2007). Listening and speaking from no-mind. In J. Prendergast & K. Bradford (Eds.), *Listening from the heart of silence: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 121-150). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Ferrer, J. (2000a). The perennial philosophy revisited. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 32(1), 7-30.

- Ferrer, J. (2000b). Transpersonal knowledge: A participatory approach to transpersonal phenomena. In T. Hart, P. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 213-252). Albany: State University of New York.
- Ferrer, J. (2003). Integral transformative practice: A participatory approach. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 35(1), 21-42.
- Firman, J., & Gila, A. (1997). *The primal wound*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Firman, J., & Gila, A. (2002). *Psychosynthesis: A psychology of the spirit*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Forman, K. (1990). *The problem of pure consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Francis, K. (2001). *Soul friend: A shamanistic model of spiritual direction with adults abused as children*. Kettering, OH: Inner Resources.
- Frysh, L. (2007). *The experience of self: An exploration of the understanding gained as a result of growing up in the household of a spiritual teacher*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 3238286)
- Gazzaniga, M. (1988). Brain modularity: Towards a philosophy of conscious experience. In A. Marcel & E. Bisiach (Eds.), *Consciousness in contemporary society* (pp. 218-238). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gelderloos, P., Hermans, H., Ahistrom, H., & Jacoby, R. (1990). Transcendence and psychological health: Studies with long-term participants of the transcendental meditation and TM-Sidhi program. *Journal of Psychology*, 124, 177-197.
- Glaser, B. (1992). *Emergence v. forcing: Basics of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociological Press.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goenka, S. (1991). Master of meditation. In S. Bodian (Ed.), *Timeless visions, healing voices: Conversations with men and women of the spirit* (pp. 167-174). Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.
- Goldstein, J. (1997). If there is no self, who is born, who dies, who meditates? *Tricycle*, 6(3), 52-53.
- Gooren, H. (2007). Reassessing conventional approaches to conversion: Toward new synthesis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46(3), 337-353.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Hanna, F. (2000). Dissolving the center: Streamlining the mind and dismantling the self. In T. Hart, P. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 113-146). Albany: State University of New York.
- Happold, F. C. (1984). *Mysticism: A study and an anthology*. Baltimore: Penguin. (Original work published 1963)
- Harding, D. (1986). *On having no head: Zen and the rediscovery of the obvious*. Boston: Arkana. (Original work published 1961)
- Hart, T. (2000). Deep knowing. In T. Hart, P. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 253-270). Albany: State University of New York.
- Hartelius, G., Caplan, M., & Rardin, M. (2007). Transpersonal psychology: Defining the past, divining the future. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 35(2), 135-160.
- Haskar, V. (1991). *Indivisible selves and moral practice*. Edinburgh, Scotland: University Press.
- Hawkins, D. (1998). *Power versus force: An anatomy of consciousness*. Sedona, AZ: Veritas. (Original work published 1995)
- Hawkins, D. (2006). *Transcending the levels of consciousness: The stairway to enlightenment*. Sedona, AZ: Veritas.
- Hebert, R., & Lehman, D. (1977). Theta bursts: An EEG pattern in normal subjects practicing the transcendental meditation technique. *Electroencephalography Clinical Neurophysiology*, 42, 397-405.
- Hegel, G. (1977). *Hegel: The essential writings* (F. Weiss, Ed.). New York: Harper Perennial.
- Hixon, L. (1984). Ten seasons of enlightenment: Zen ox-herding. In J. White (Ed.), *What is enlightenment* (pp. 130-138). Los Angeles: J. P. Tharcher.
- Hood, R. (1975). The construction and preliminary validation of a measure of reported mystical experience. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 14, 29-41.
- Hood, R. (1989). Mysticism, the unity thesis, and the paranormal. In G. Zollschan, J. Schumaker, & G. Walsh (Eds.), *Exploring the paranormal* (pp. 117-130). Bridport, England: Prism.
- Hood, R. (1994). Self and self-loss in mystical experience. In T. Brinthaup & R. Lipka (Eds.), *The changing self: Philosophies, techniques, and experiences* (pp. 279-305). Albany: State University of New York.
- Hood, R. (1997). The empirical study of mysticism. In B. Spilka & D. McIntosh (Eds.), *The psychology of religion* (pp. 222-232). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Hood, R. (2002). The mystical self: Lost and found. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 12(1), 1-14.
- Hood, R. (2006). The common core thesis in the study of mysticism. In P. MacNamara (Ed.), *Where God and science meet: How brain and evolutionary studies alter our understanding of religion* (Vol. 3, pp. 119-138). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Hood, R., Ghorbani, N., Watson, P., Ghramaleki, A., Bing, M., Davidson, H., et al. (2001). Dimensions of the mysticism scale: Confirming the three-factor structure in the United States and Iran. *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40(4), 691-705.
- Hood, R., Morrison, R., & Watson, P. (1993). Further factor analysis of Hood's mysticism scale. *Psychological Reports*, 73, 1176-1178.
- Hood, R., & Williamson, W. (2000). An empirical test of the unity thesis: The structure of mystical descriptors in various faith samples. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 19(3), 232-244.
- Hopfe, L. (1994). *Religions of the world* (6th ed.). New York: Macmillan College.
- Hopkins, J. (1995). *Emptiness yoga*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion. (Original work published 1987)
- Hunt, H. (2007). "Dark nights of the soul": Phenomenology and neurocognition of spiritual suffering in mysticism and psychosis. *Review of General Psychology*, 11(3), 209-234.
- Hussurl, E. (1960). *Cartesian meditations* (D. Cairns, Trans.). The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff. (Original work published 1931)
- Huxley, A. (1970). *The perennial philosophy*. New York: Harper and Row. (Original work published 1945)
- James, W. (1900). *Human immortality: Two supposed objections to the doctrine*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- James, W. (1967). A pluralistic universe. In W. James (Ed.), *Essays in radical empiricism and a pluralistic universe*. New York: E. P. Dutton. (Original work published 1909)
- James, W. (1991). *The varieties of religious experience*. Ligouri, MO: Triumph Books. (Original work published 1902)
- Jung, C. (1978). *Man and his symbols* (M. von Franz, J. Henderson, J. Jacobi, & A. Jaffe, Eds.). New York: Dell. (Original work published 1964)
- Kahn, D., & Hobson, A. (2005). Theory of mind in dreaming: Awareness of feelings and thoughts of others in dreams. *Dreaming*, 15(1), 48-57.
- Kalff, M. (1983). The negation of ego in Tibetan Buddhism and Jungian psychology. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 15(2), 103-123.

- Kapleau, Roshi P. (1980). *Zen: Dawn in the West*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Katz, S. (1978). *Mysticism and philosophical analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kelly, E. F. (2007). Toward a psychology for the 21st century. In E. F. Kelly, E. W. Kelly, A. Crabtree, A. Gauld, M. Grosso, & B. Greyson (Eds.), *Irreducible mind: Toward a psychology for the 21st century* (pp. 577-643). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kelly, E. F., & Grosso, M. (2007). Mystical experience. In E. F. Kelly, E. W. Kelly, A. Crabtree, A. Gauld, M. Grosso, & B. Greyson (Eds.), *Irreducible mind: Toward a psychology for the 21st century* (pp. 495-575). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kelly, E. F., Kelly, E. W., Crabtree, A., Gauld, A., Grosso, M., & Greyson, B. (Eds.). (2007). *Irreducible mind: Toward a psychology for the 21st century*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kelly, E. W. (2007). F. W. H. Myers and the empirical study of the mind-body problem. In E. F. Kelly, E. W. Kelly, A. Crabtree, A. Gauld, M. Grosso, & B. Greyson (Eds.), *Irreducible mind: Toward a psychology for the 21st century* (pp. 47-115). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kersschot, J. (2004). *This is it: The nature of oneness*. London: Watkins.
- King, S. (1984). The Buddha nature: True self as action. *Religious Studies*, 20(2), 255-267.
- Kirk, J., & Miller, M. (1986). *Reliability and validity in qualitative research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Koltko, M. (1989). The humanized no-self: A response to Shneider's critique of transpersonal psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 29(4), 482-492.
- Koplonitz, H. (1984). A projection beyond Piaget's formal-operations stage: A general system stage and a unitary stage. In M. Commons, F. Richards, & C. Armon (Eds.), *Beyond formal operations: Late adolescent and adult cognitive development* (pp. 137-169). Los Angeles: Tharcher.
- Lajoie, D., & Shapiro, S. (1992). Definitions of transpersonal psychology: The first twenty-three years. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 24(1), 79-98.
- Lancaster, B. L. (1993). Self or no-self? Converging perspectives from neuropsychology and mysticism. *Zygon*, 28(4), 507-526.
- Lancaster, B. L. (2004). *Approaches to consciousness: The marriage of science and mysticism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Louchakova, O. (2004). Awakening to spiritual consciousness in times of religious violence: Reflections on culture and transpersonal psychology. In J. Drew & D. Lorrimer (Eds.), *Ways through the wall: Approaches to citizenship in an interconnected world* (pp. 34-46). Gloucestershire, England: First Stone.
- Louchakova, O. (2007). The prayer of the heart, ego-transcendence and adult development. *Existential Analysis*, 18(2), 261-287.
- Loy, D. (1998). *Nonduality: A study in comparative philosophy*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.
- Loy, D. (2001). Avoiding the void: The lack of self in psychotherapy and Buddhism. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 26(1), 151-179.
- Loy, D. (2007). Experiencing the universe as yourself: The nonduality of self and society. In J. Prendergast & K. Bradford (Eds.), *Listening from the heart of silence: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 171-180). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Lumiere, L., & Lumiere-Wins, J. (2003). The time is now. In L. Lumiere & J. Lumiere-Wins (Eds.), *The awakening West: Conversations with today's new Western spiritual leaders* (pp. 13-17). Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1967). *Bhagavad Gita: A new translation and commentary: Chapters 1-6*. Los Angeles: International SRM.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (Speaker). (1992). *The seven states of consciousness: A historic lecture by his Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi founder of the transcendental meditation and TM-Sidhi program* [Audio cassette]. Fairfield, IA: Maharishi International University. (Original work published 1967)
- Mason, L., Alexander, C., Travis, R., Marsh, G., Orme-Johnson, D., Gackenbach, J., et al. (1997). Electrophysiological correlates of higher states of consciousness during sleep in long-term practitioners of the transcendental meditation program. *Sleep*, 20(2), 102-110.
- May, G. (2004). *The dark night of the soul: A psychiatrist explores the connection between darkness and spiritual growth*. San Francisco: Harper.
- McCloskey, M. (2004). You are the pure silence. In J. Kerschot (Ed.), *This is it: Dialogues on the nature of oneness* (pp. 197-207). London: Watkins.
- Menton, S. (2005). What is Indian psychology: Transcendence in and while thinking. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 37(2), 83-98.
- Mertens, D. (1998). *Research methods in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Michalon, M. (2001). "Selflessness" in the service of the ego: Contributions, limitations and dangers of Buddhist psychology for Western psychotherapy. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 55(2), 202-218.

- Miller, M. (1994). World views, ego development, and epistemological changes from the conventional to the postformal: A longitudinal perspective. In M. Miller & S. Cook-Greuter (Eds.), *Transcendence and mature thought in adulthood: The further reaches of adult development* (pp. 147-180). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Morrison, A., & Hunt, H. (1996). "Reals," "roles," and demand features: A critical look at interview v. questionnaire measures of subjective states. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 37(2), 112-119.
- Mother Teresa. (2007). *Mother Teresa: Come be my light: The private writings of the "Saint of Calcutta"* (B. Kolodiejchuk, Ed.). New York: Doubleday.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Naranda Thera. (Trans.). (1993). The Dhammanpada: Pali text and translation with stories in brief and notes. Taipei, Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation. (Original work published 1963)
- Neuberg, A., D'Aquill, E., & Rause, V. (2001). *Why God won't go away: Brain science and the biology of belief*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Neumann, E. (1968). Mystical man. In J. Campbell & R. Manheim (Trans.), *The mystic vision: Papers from the eranos yearbooks* (pp. 375-415). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1948)
- Noss, D., & Noss, J. (1994). *Religions of the world* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Otto, R. (1960). *Mysticism East and West*. New York: Collier Books. (Original work published 1932)
- Palmer, G. (2007). *Listening to spirit: A spiritual guidance inventory*. Unpublished manuscript. Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA.
- Palmer, G., & Braud, W. (2002). Exceptional human experiences, disclosure, and a more inclusive view of physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 34(1), 29-61.
- Piaget, J. (1950). *The psychology of intelligence*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Popper, K. (1997). The myth of the framework. In M. Nottumo (Ed.), *The myth of the framework: In defense of science and rationality* (pp. 33-64). New York: Routledge.
- Premasiri, P. (1990). The ultimate goal of Buddhism and the doctrine of no-self. In R. Carter (Ed.), *God, the self and nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western* (pp. 171-183). New York: Paragon House.

- Prendergast, J. (2003a). Introduction. In J. Prendergast, P. Fenner, & S. Krystal (Eds.), *The sacred Mirror: Nondual wisdom and psychotherapy* (pp. 1-22). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Prendergast, J. (2003b). The sacred mirror: Being together. In J. Prendergast, P. Fenner, & S. Krystal (Eds.), *The sacred mirror: Nondual wisdom and psychotherapy* (pp. 89-115). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Prendergast, J., & Bradford, K. (2007). Toward an embodied nonduality: Introductory remarks. In J. Prendergast & K. Bradford (Eds.), *Listening from the heart of silence: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 1-34). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Puhakka, K. (1998). Dissolving the self: Rinzai Zen training at an American monastery. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 30(2), 135-160.
- Puhakka, K. (2000). An invitation to authentic knowing. In T. Hart, P. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 11-53). Albany: State University of New York.
- Puhakka, K. (2007). Nonduality: A spontaneous movement “to” and “fro.” In J. Prendergast & K. Bradford (Eds.), *Listening from the heart of silence: Nondual wisdom & psychotherapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 151-170). St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Ram-Prasad, C. (2000). Knowledge and action II: Attaining liberation in Bhatta Mimamsa and Advaita Vedanta. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 28, 25-41.
- Roberts, B. (1991). *The path to no-self: Life at the center*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Roberts, B. (1993). *The experience of no-self: A contemplative journey*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Roberts, B. (2005). *What is self?: A study of the spiritual journey in terms of consciousness*. Boulder, CO: Sentient.
- Rock, A. (2005). Why does the universe exist?: An Advaita Vedantic perspective. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 24, 69-76.
- Rothberg, D. (1994). Spiritual inquiry. *Revision*, 17(2), 2-12.
- Sahadat, J. (1985). The interreligious study of mysticism and a sense of universality. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 22(2), 292-311.
- Sarte, J. (1957). *Being and nothingness*. New York: Citadel.
- Scharfstein, B. (1973). *Mystical experience*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Segal, S. (1996). *Collision with the infinite: A life beyond the personal self*. San Diego, CA: Blue Dove Press.

- Segal, S. (2003). Conversation with Suzanne Segal. In L. Lumiere & J. Lumiere-Wins (Eds.), *The awakening West: Conversations with today's new Western spiritual leaders* (pp. 269-284). Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press.
- Shear, J., & Jevning, R. (1999). Pure consciousness: Scientific exploration of meditation techniques. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6(2-3), 189-209.
- Sleeth, D. (2007). The self system: Toward a new understanding of the whole person (Part 2). *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 35(1), 27-43.
- Smith, H. (1959). *The religions of man*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Smith, J. (1995). Semi-structured interviewing and qualitative analysis. In J. Smith, R. Harre, & L. Van Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking methods in psychology* (pp. 9-26). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sri Laksmidhara Kavi. (trans. 1990). *Advaita Makaranda: Translation & commentary* (A. Berliner, Trans.). Mumbai, India: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
- Sri Laksmidhara Kavi. (trans. 2004). *Advaita Makaranda: A composition of Sri Laksmidhara Kavi* (Swami Teojomayananda, Trans.). Bombay, India: Mouj Printing Bureau.
- St. John of the Cross. (trans. 1908). *The dark night of the soul* (D. Lewis, Trans.). London, England: England.
- St. John of the Cross. (trans. 2004). *Dark night of the soul: St. John of the Cross* (M. Starr, Trans.). New York: Riverhead.
- Stace, W. (1987). *Mysticism and philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1960)
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1988). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tart, C. T. (1975). *States of consciousness*. New York: Dutton.
- Travis, F. (1994). The junction point: A field model of waking, sleeping, and dreaming, relating dream witnessing, the waking/sleeping transition, and transcendental meditation in terms of a common psychophysiological state. *Dreaming*, 4, 91-104.
- Travis, F., Arenander, A., & DuBois, D. (2004). Psychological and physiological characteristics of a proposed object-referral/self-referral continuum of self awareness. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 13, 401-420.
- Travis, F., & Pearson, C. (2000). Pure consciousness: Distinct phenomenological and physiological correlates of "consciousness itself." *International Journal of Neuroscience*, 100(1), 77-89.

- Ullman, R., & Reichenberg-Ullman, J. (2001). *Mystics, masters, saints, and sages: Stories of enlightenment*. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press.
- Underhill, E. (1974). *Mysticism: A study in the nature and development of man's spiritual consciousness*. New York: New American Library. (Original work published 1911)
- Underhill, E. (1986). *Practical mysticism*. Alpharetta, GA: First Ariel Press. (Original work published 1914)
- Vanden Bos, G. (Ed.). (2007). *APA dictionary of psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Varela, F., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Walsh, R. (1994). The cultivation of wisdom: An interview with Roger Walsh by Kaisa Puhakka. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 22(3), 275-298.
- Walsh, R., & Vaughan, F. (1980). Beyond the ego: Toward transpersonal models of the person and psychotherapy. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 20(1), 5-28.
- Walsh, R., & Vaughan, F. (1993). On transpersonal definitions. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 25(2), 199-207.
- Washburn, M. (1988). *The ego and the dynamic ground: A transpersonal theory of human development*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Washburn, M. (2000). Transpersonal cognition in developmental perspective. In T. Hart, P. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 185-212). Albany: State University of New York.
- Watts, A. (1995). This is it. In J. White (Ed.), *What is enlightenment?: Exploring the goal of the spiritual path* (pp. 14-26). New York: Pentagon House.
- Welwood, J. (2000). Reflection and presence: The dialectic of awakening. In T. Hart, P. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 85-112). Albany: State University of New York.
- White, J. (1995). Introduction. In J. White (Ed.), *What is enlightenment?: Exploring the goal of the spiritual path* (pp. xi-xxi). New York: Pentagon House.
- White, R. (1993). Exceptional human experiences and the experiential paradigm. In C. Tart (Ed.), *Body mind spirit: Exploring the parapsychology of spirit* (pp. 83-100). Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads.
- White, R. (1997). Dissociation, narrative, and exceptional human experiences. In S. Krippner & S. Powers (Eds.), *Broken images, broken selves: Dissociative narratives in clinical practice* (pp. 89-123). Bristol, PA: Brunner/Mazel.

- White, R. (2000, June). *List of potential EE/EHEs*. Retrieved October 24, 2009, from the EHE Network, Inc. Web site: <http://www.ehe.org/display/ehe-pagedc08.html?ID=3>
- Wilber, K. (1986). The spectrum of development. In K. Wilber, J. Engler, & D. Brown (Eds.), *Transformations of consciousness: Conventional and contemplative perspectives on development* (pp. 65-105). Boston: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (1993). *The spectrum of consciousness*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books. (Original work published 1977)
- Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, ecology, spirituality: The spirit of evolution*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wulff, D. (2000). Mystical experience. In E. Cardena, S. Lynn, & S. Krippner (Eds.), *Varieties of anomalous experience: Examining the scientific evidence* (pp. 397-440). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Zum Brunn, E. (1990). Steps towards ecumenism in Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. In R. Carter (Ed.), *God, the self and nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western* (pp. 73-87). New York: Paragon House.

Appendix A: Personal Types of Intuition

1. *Wounded Healer*. I am a wounded healer (Francis, 2001). As a child I experienced mild traumas and abuse resulting in soul loss, and then as an adult, further trauma and emotional abuse resulting in further soul loss and holes in the soul. As a result of life experiences, I gave away pieces and parts of my self and soul until I became a shadow of my true self. In healing from an extremely shocking experience, I began to discover my true self when God reached out and touched me through a healing dream, proving Presence in my life. Needless to say, I answered the call and began to listen. Among the guidance I received was to call back the dis-spirited pieces and parts of my soul in what I now know was truly a shamanic process achieved within the altered states of consciousness between dreaming and waking. I performed kataphatic direction and prayer to release myself from pain so that I could re-enter my life more as my true self. As a wounded healer, I am also an *aman cara* (soul friend), in that my wounded self opened me to my current spiritual and life path and to all my interactions and relationships with others.
2. *As unconscious and symbolic processes*. I have a high level of consciousness during sleep, which is termed witnessing sleep and described as “the distinct, continuous experience of a state of inner awareness known as ‘transcendental consciousness’ during deep sleep” (Mason et al., 1997). Consciousness in sleep not only provides me with a high level of awareness of and recall of dreams, but it also provides me with insight, healing, and intuition. For me, self-judgment and self-consciousness slip away during dream states; therefore, I am able to gain deep insight into self, and self-as-Self. My insights are *not* fulfillment of unconscious wishes, but are definitely acute insights into my life questions and situations, my inner world, and my spirituality. My “inner psychologist” awakens; and thus, dream states constitute a process over time of letting go of ego and of self-realization.

While research by Kahn and Hobson (2005) showed that dreaming may provide social intelligence, in my experience it is the *residual feelings* upon arousing from the dream state that are the very powerful clues as to dream interpretation. It is in the first moments of the hypnopompic state that I feel the overall emotional quality of the dream and receive a flash of intuition as to the meaning of the dream, including how it has healed me psychologically and/or physically. At other times witnessing sleep can last the almost the whole night, with resulting insight, intuition, and/or spiritual experiences. Nighttime is also a powerful time for dream or insight incubation.

Another form of unconscious processing that I find particularly helpful is a type of spiritual inquiry I call “not-knowing and knowing.” Merton (as cited in Rothberg, 1994) wrote that “the greatest obstacle to contemplation is rigidity and prejudice” (p. 11) and that knowing in advance prevents one from knowing true knowing. My spiritual inquiry process is one of holding a question or a “not-knowing” in my mind—contemplating it, wondering about it, or meditating upon it—and letting it go. Then the answer comes as clear insight in one or more of the following ways: upon initial stirrings of consciousness after sleep; in witnessing consciousness; and as a flash of knowing in waking consciousness when not thinking about the issue, whether involved in a task, sitting with

no thought, or amidst other unrelated thoughts. As Welwood (2000) posited, this can be thought of as a process of stepping back from conscious and unconscious identification which leads to accessing the wisdom of non-dual awareness. In other words, I disengage my ego or will from the question and engage in participatory consciousness (Ferrar, 2000b) as spiritual process by letting go into the not-knowing in order to access transpersonal knowing (Ferrar, 2000b; Hanna, 2000; Washburn, 2000) as I pursue wisdom to apply to my dissertation.

3. *As empathetic identification.* Hart (2000) stated deep empathy causes “a more direct knowing of the other” (p. 256) that transcends subject-object and self-as-other in that one retains one’s own sense of self while at the same time being open to and experiencing the world through the other person. This capacity for “empathic inclusion . . . as knowing the other more directly” (p. 257) can happen spontaneously within a person.

In early 2002, my heart chakra was blown wide open, resulting in my capacity to embody compassion and unconditional positive regard. It also resulted in empathetic inclusion happening quite naturally in relation to others. This ability was used as participants gave voice to their initial event of no-self and their lived experiences of ego dissolution. My heart-mind connection with participants helped them to not only trust me, but also to trust their own inner wisdom in participating in the research process and giving voice to their truth. In addition, I find that empathetic identification shows up in reading literature on no-self, guiding and shaping my interpretation of text.

4. *As sensory modes of intuition and as psychic or parapsychological experiences.* Also as a result of my heart opening, I became a kinesthetic and proprioceptive intuitive, with clairsentient, clairaudient, and precognitive abilities.

Appendix B: Initial Participant Selection Criteria

Psycho-Spiritual Background Information for Potential Participants

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Address:
4. Were you involved in any religious or spiritual tradition(s) as a child? If so, which one(s)?
5. Are you currently involved in any formal spiritual or religious tradition(s)? If so, which one(s)?
6. Do you currently engage in any regular spiritual, religious, or awareness practice, however you may define it? If so, please describe it briefly.
7. Are you currently practicing with a spiritual or religious teacher or guru?
8. Please briefly describe your history of spiritual or awareness practice, however you may define it.
9. How would you rate your physical health? Poor Fair Good Excellent
If poor, please describe.
May also ask: "Would any of this prevent you from participating in this study?"
10. How would you rate yourself psychologically? Poor Fair Good Excellent
If not good or excellent, may ask a clarifying question, such as: "Do you rate yourself as psychologically stable and healthy?" or "Is your therapy successful?"

Information Regarding the Experience and Living Out of No-self

1. How would you define no-self?
2. Can you give me a brief example from your experience?
3. How has or have your experience(s) of no-self affected your living out your daily life? Or your living in daily life?

(In order to discern no-self with loss of meaning and suffering, I will be listening for any of the following qualities: perception of pure consciousness, dark night, void, emptiness, anhedonia, loss of meaning, nihilistic despair, nothingness, loss of Presence or of the sacred, loss of mystical experience—without directly asking about these qualities).

Appendix C: Revised Participant Selection Criteria

Psycho-Spiritual Background Information for Potential Participants

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Address:
4. Were you involved in any religious or spiritual tradition(s) as a child? If so, which one(s)?
5. Are you currently involved in any formal spiritual or religious tradition(s)? If so, which one(s)?
6. Do you currently engage in any regular spiritual, religious, or awareness practice, however you may define it? If so, please describe it briefly.
7. Are you currently practicing with a spiritual or religious teacher or guru?
8. Please briefly describe your history of spiritual or awareness practice, however you may define it.
9. How would you rate your physical health? Poor Fair Good Excellent
If poor, please describe.
May also ask: "Would any of this prevent you from participating in this study?"
10. How would you rate yourself psychologically? Poor Fair Good Excellent
If not good or excellent, may ask a clarifying question, such as: "Do you rate yourself as psychologically stable and healthy?" or "Is your therapy successful?"

Information Regarding the Experience and Living Out of No-self

1. How would you define no-self?
2. Can you give me a brief example from your experience?
3. How has or have your experience(s) of no-self affected your living out your daily life? Or your living in daily life?

(In order to discern no-self with loss of meaning and suffering, I will be listening for any of the following qualities: perception of pure consciousness, dark night, void, emptiness, anhedonia, loss of meaning, nihilistic despair, nothingness, loss of Presence or of the sacred, loss of mystical experience—without directly asking about these qualities).

Participation in the Study

If person clearly qualifies for the study:

1. Do you think you would like to participate this research study on the experience of no-self?

If he or she agrees to participate:

1. Would you be able to speak about your experience of no-self and the living out of the experience in terms of phases or stages that occurred during your lifetime?
2. Would it be helpful for you to receive a copy of the interview questions so that you may consider how you would like to speak about your experience of no-self?

(Review Participant Informed Consent Form and study protocols. Ascertain that person still wants to participate. Set date for interview appointment).

Appendix D: Demographic Survey

1. Date of birth (month/day/year): _____/_____/_____
2. Gender: _____
3. Current residence (city, state): _____
4. Current relationship status:
- ☐ Single (never married) ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Separated
- ☐ Significant Other/Partner ☐ Widowed ☐ Vowed religious
- 5A. Educational History (check highest level):
- ☐ No formal education
- ☐ Elementary School (K-8)
- ☐ High School or GED
- | <u>Vocational</u> | <u>College</u> | <u>Graduate</u> | <u>Post Doctorate</u> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> some | <input type="checkbox"/> some | <input type="checkbox"/> some | <input type="checkbox"/> some |
| <input type="checkbox"/> completed | <input type="checkbox"/> completed | <input type="checkbox"/> completed | <input type="checkbox"/> completed |
- 5B. List all degrees earned: _____
-
- 5C. Are you currently enrolled in an educational or vocational program?
- ☐ Yes (please list): _____
- ☐ No
6. Indicate any professional, religious, and/or spiritual competencies. Check all that apply and list the name(s) in the spaces provided:
- ☐ Certificates: _____
- ☐ Certifications: _____
- ☐ Licenses: _____
- ☐ Titles: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

7. List all current occupations: _____

8. If you are willing, please list ethnicity(ies) (for example, Japanese, Japanese American, Alaskan Native, Sicilian) _____

9A. List any religious tradition(s) or spiritual practice(s) that you were raised with. Check *all* that apply; please explain in **Question 9B** if you checked more than one box.

☐ Baha'i

☐ Native American Religion

☐ Buddhism

☐ New Thought

☐ Christianity

☐ Nonreligious/Secular

☐ Deity (Deist)

☐ Scientology

☐ Eckankar

☐ Sikhism

☐ Hinduism

☐ Spiritualist

☐ Humanist

☐ Taoism

☐ Islam

☐ Unitarian Universalist

☐ Judaism

☐ Wiccan/Pagan/ Druid

☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

If none of the above apply, check below if appropriate:

☐ Agnostic

☐ Atheist

9B. Please explain if you checked more than one box in **Question 9A** (for example, raised by parents from different religious traditions): _____

9C. Specify what denomination/sect/subgroup you were raised in, if any: _____

10A. What is/are your **current** religious tradition(s) or spiritual practice(s)?

Check *all* that apply.

☐ Baha'i

☐ Native American Religion

☐ Buddhism

☐ New Thought

☐ Christianity

☐ Nonreligious/Secular

☐ Deity (Deist)

☐ Scientology

☐ Eckankar

☐ Sikhism

☐ Hinduism

☐ Spiritualist

☐ Humanist

☐ Taoism

☐ Islam

☐ Unitarian Universalist

☐ Judaism

☐ Wiccan/Pagan/ Druid

☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

☐ Other: _____

If none of the above traditions or practices apply, check below if appropriate:

☐ Agnostic

☐ Atheist

10B. Please specify what denomination/sect/subgroup you currently belong to or associate with, if any;

Or provide further explanation if none of the above choices were appropriate

Appendix E: Initial Participant Recruitment Flyer

You are invited to participate in the research of:

The Experience of No-self

Have you had an experience or experiences of “no-self” that affected the daily living out of your life?

Would you be willing to discuss your experience and how it affected your life and your spirituality?

Would you be willing to participate in interview research, which will potentially help others who have had similar experiences?

Have you (or someone you know) ever had an experience of “no-self”? I am very interested in knowing about your experience or experiences and how they affected your everyday life.

The term “no-self” does not necessarily mean that you transcended the self or that you changed your self-identity. The experience of “no-self” may be associated with perception of pure consciousness; or the void, the sacred, or God. The living out of the experience may be associated with loss of meaning, or with ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, or peacefulness. Also, it may or may not be associated with loss of context of the sacred or divine, or with loss of previously felt Presence, or with loss of spiritual experience.

By participating in this study, you may contribute to the fields of transpersonal and spiritual psychology by increasing current understanding of no-self, and discernment of signs and symptoms of no-self, with the goal of promoting versus pathologizing spiritual growth. You may benefit from participating in this study by gaining spiritual and psychological insights or personal development; and you may increase your own understanding or acceptance of your spiritual process.

If you would like to contribute to clarifying a deeper understanding of the self, or would like further information, please contact:

Laurel McCormick, M.S.W., M.A.
 Doctoral student in dissertation phase in a Ph.D. program
 at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology
 xxxxxxxx@xxx.com
 [e-mail address will be procured prior to sending out flyers]

Appendix F: Revised Participant Recruitment Flyer

You are invited to participate in the research of:

The Experience of “No-self”

Have you had an experience or experiences of “no-self” that affected the daily living out of your life?

Would you be willing to share your experience and how it affected your life and your spirituality?

Would you be willing to participate in interview research, which will potentially help others who have had similar experiences?

Have you (or someone you know) ever had an experience of “no-self”? I am interested in knowing about your experience or experiences and how they affected your everyday life. In certain traditions or practices, the term “no-self” may or may not seem appropriate. This discernment of terms is pertinent to my study, and participants may address this in the interview.

The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur in advanced stages of spiritual development as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important.

The term “no-self” does not necessarily mean that you transcended the self or that you changed your self-identity. The experience of “no-self” may be associated with perception of pure consciousness; or the void, the sacred, or God. The living out of the experience may be associated with loss of meaning; or with ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, or peacefulness. Also, it may or may not be associated with loss of context of the sacred or divine, or with loss of previously felt Presence, or with loss of spiritual experience.

By participating in this study, you may contribute to the fields of transpersonal and spiritual psychology by increasing current understanding of no-self, and discernment of signs and symptoms of no-self, with the goal of promoting versus pathologizing spiritual growth. You may benefit from participating in this study by gaining spiritual and psychological insights or personal development; and you may increase your own understanding or acceptance of your spiritual process.

If you would like to contribute to clarifying a deeper would like further information, please contact: understanding of the self, or

Laurel McCormick, M.S.W., M.A.
 Doctoral student in dissertation phase in a Ph.D. program
 at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology
 xxxx@xx.com

Appendix G: Initial Participant Recruitment Letter

P. O. Box XX [added at time of recruiting]
 XXXXX, CA 94040
 Date

Exemplar's name

Address

City, State

Re: Dissertation research on the experience of “no-self” and the living out of the experience in advanced stages of spiritual development

Dear

For the last 3 years I have been working toward a Ph.D. in Transpersonal Psychology, and am I now working on my dissertation. This research will examine the experience of “no-self” and the living out of the experience in 12 adult men and women. The term “no-self” does not necessarily mean that a person has transcended the self, or that he or she changed self-identity. The experience of “no-self” may be associated with perception of pure consciousness; or with the void, the sacred, or God. The living out of the experience may be associated with loss of meaning, or with ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, or peacefulness. Also, it may or may not be associated with loss of context of the sacred or divine, or with loss of previously-felt Presence, or with loss of spiritual experience. The proposed research will provide insights into the level of ego dissolution that occurs in advanced stages of mystical experience before unity as oneness.

It is my heartfelt desire to clarify and elucidate qualities of this stage of spiritual growth. I feel that somehow the universe has been propelling me throughout my entire life toward this moment of currently researching and writing my dissertation, and ultimately writing and publishing on this topic. I have known for almost 2 years that this is part of my purpose here on earth as a human being. The experience of no-self is currently my lived, spiritual reality; and it enlivens and honors my own experience. The topic of no-self has literally grabbed and chased me—and it reclaimed me after nonduality attempted to inform my awareness that no-self was impossible to research.

Study participants will consist of 12 adult (age 18 and up) men and women from a variety of cultural and spiritual backgrounds. Participants do not necessarily have to be in a stage of spiritual development prior to unity as oneness in order to be accepted into the study; but rather participants need to have experienced and be in the process of living out of no-self, or need to be in a stage of unity as oneness. Retrospective experience of no-self, whether the person is in a stage prior to unity as oneness or has slipped into unity as oneness, will exemplify and validate the dissertation research question.

I am interested in obtaining a multi-spiritual and multicultural population of participants in order to study how the phenomenon of no-self can manifest in adults who are traditional and non-traditional believers, non-believers, or believers from multiple traditions or from no tradition. I am mainly looking for participants who speak English and who reside in the United States; however, if a particular spiritual teacher, or his or her devotee, should be traveling through the U.S. and wishes to participate in the study, I would be honored to interview him or her, with an interpreter if necessary. Alternately, I will interview participants via telephone. Participants will be required to take part in a 1 to 2 ½ hour initial interview process in which open-ended questions will elicit detail of an event of no-self and the living out of the experience, including how their sense of self has changed in relation to the world. Following the initial interview, participants will be required, via e-mail or postal mail, to review the initial interview transcript, and to approve or make changes to a summary of the interview. Participants will also be required to answer a few questions, via e-mail, phone or in person (if available), in order to help clarify their experience with regard to data analysis.

The proposed dissertation research may progress the fields of transpersonal and spiritual psychology by contributing to interreligious, mysticism, and non-dual literature; and by further increasing current understanding and signs and symptoms of no-self and the living out of the experience, with the goal of promoting versus pathologizing spiritual growth.

[If exemplar referral letter attachments: Attached you will find letter(s) of recommendation for my study from (list names), who have given (his/her/their) stamp of approval for my dissertation research.] It is my hope that you can help me to locate people who would like to participate in clarifying the deepest understanding of the self.

Enclosed are copies of a flyer which describes my dissertation research on no-self and which you may post in your (ashram, synagogue, church, center) or give to potential participants. If you are interested in participating in my research or wish to refer someone to my study, I can be contacted via e-mail xxxxxx@xxx.com or phone xxx-xxx-xxxx. [inserted prior to recruiting]

Please call me or e-mail if you have any questions. Thank you very much for your consideration!

With heart,

Laurel A. McCormick
M.S.W., M.A.
Doctoral student in Ph.D. program at the
Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Enclosures: [if any]
Flyers
Letter(s) of recommendation

Appendix H: Revised Participant Recruitment Letter

P. O. Box xxx [added at time of recruiting]

XXXXXXXX, CA xxxxx

Date

Re: Dissertation research on the experience of “no-self” and the living out of the experience in advanced stages of spiritual development

For the last 3 years I have been working toward a Ph.D. in Transpersonal Psychology, and am I now working on my dissertation. Through in-depth interviews, this research will examine the experience of “no-self” and the living out of the experience in 12 adult men and women. In certain traditions or practices, the term “no-self” may or may not seem appropriate; and it is not my intention to exclude any spiritual tradition or non-tradition in participant recruitment. This discernment of terms is pertinent to my study, and participants may address this in the interview.

The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important.

The experience of “no-self” may be associated with perception of pure consciousness; or with the void, the sacred, or God. The living out of the experience may be associated with loss of meaning, or with ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, or peacefulness. Also, it may or may not be associated with loss of context of the sacred or divine, or with loss of previously-felt Presence, or with loss of spiritual experience. In my research, I seek to clarify what people are actually experiencing with what is in the literature, and I remain neutral to what participant data will actually show. The proposed research will provide insights into the level of ego dissolution that occurs in advanced stages of mystical experience before unity as oneness.

It is my heartfelt desire to clarify and elucidate qualities of this stage of spiritual growth. I feel that somehow the universe has been propelling me throughout my entire life toward this moment of currently researching and writing my dissertation, and ultimately writing and publishing on this topic. I have known for almost 2 years that this is part of my purpose here on earth as a human being. The experience of no-self is currently my lived, spiritual reality; and it enlivens and honors my own experience. The topic of no-self has literally grabbed and chased me—and it reclaimed me after nonduality attempted to inform my awareness that no-self was impossible to research.

The study will consist of 12 adult (age 18 and up) men and women from a variety of cultural and spiritual backgrounds. Participants do not necessarily have to be in a stage of spiritual development prior to unity as oneness in order to be accepted into the study; but rather

participants need to have experienced and be in the process of living out “no-self,” or need to be in a stage of unity as oneness. Retrospective experience of no-self, whether the person is in a stage prior to unity as oneness or has slipped into unity as oneness, will exemplify and validate the dissertation research question.

I am interested in obtaining a multi-spiritual and multicultural population of participants in order to study how the phenomenon of no-self can manifest in adults who are traditional and non-traditional believers, non-believers, or believers from multiple traditions or from no tradition. I am mainly looking for participants who speak English and who reside in the United States; however, if a particular spiritual teacher, or his or her devotee, should be traveling through the U.S. and wishes to participate in the study, I would be honored to interview him or her, with an interpreter if necessary. Alternately, I will interview participants via telephone. Participants will be required to take part in a 1 to 2 ½ hour initial interview process in which open-ended questions will elicit detail of an event of no-self and the living out of the experience, including how their sense of self has changed in relation to the world. Following the initial interview, participants will be required, via e-mail or postal mail, to review the initial interview transcript, and to approve or make changes to a summary of the interview. Participants will also be required to answer a few questions, via e-mail, phone, or in person (if available), in order to help clarify their experience with regard to data analysis.

The proposed dissertation research may progress the fields of transpersonal and spiritual psychology by contributing to interreligious, mysticism, and non-dual literature; and by further increasing current understanding and signs and symptoms of no-self and the living out of the experience, with the goal of promoting versus pathologizing spiritual growth.

It is my hope that you can help me to locate people who would like to participate in clarifying the deepest understanding of the self.

Enclosed are copies of a flyer which describes my dissertation research on no-self and which you may copy and post in your center or give to potential participants. If you are interested in participating in my research or wish to refer someone to my study, I can be contacted via e-mail xxxxxxxxt@xxx.com or phone xxx-xxx-xxxx [inserted prior to recruiting].

Please call me or e-mail if you have any questions. Thank you very much for your consideration!

With heart,

Laurel A. McCormick
M.S.W., M.A.
Doctoral student in Ph.D. program at the
Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Attachment: Participant Recruitment Flyer

Appendix I: Letter to Clarify Participant Selection Criteria

Dear

Subject: Clarifying participant selection criteria re: McCormick Dissertation on “no-self”

It has come to my attention that my participant recruitment letter and flyer may not be meeting the needs of describing just what aspect of spiritual experience I am researching. It seems that there may be a gap between terminology and description that appears in the scholarly literature and the language used in spiritual communities, which may be more directly experiential. I view this discrepancy as a positive sign for my research, and my study method embraces transformation or even negation of researcher presuppositions.

The wording of the flyer and recruitment letter was based on my research and input from my dissertation committee. It was not my intention to exclude any spiritual tradition or non-tradition in participant recruitment.

In certain traditions or practices, the term “no-self” may or may not seem appropriate. This is pertinent to my study, and participants may address this aspect in the interview. It is tricky putting words around the topic without providing too much information and thus leading participants to discuss my understandings. My intention is to remain open (unknowing) to whatever participant interview data reveals.

The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important. The list of qualities (such as loss of context of the divine; or perception of pure consciousness, God, or void) outlined in the Participant Recruitment Letter and Flyer are attributes from literary references that a person may or may not experience as a result of this. In my research, I seek to clarify what people are actually experiencing with what is in the literature, and I remain neutral to what participant data will actually show.

I hope that this further explanation sheds light on any confusion that terminology in the letter and flyer may have caused. Please pass this information on to potential participants and groups. If you have any further questions or comments, require further information, or would like to participate in my research study, please call or e-mail.

Thank you very much,
Laurel

Laurel A. McCormick, M.S.W., M.A.
Candidate in Ph.D. program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology
xxxxx@xxx.com
xxx-xxx-xxxx [inserted when e-mail sent]

Appendix J: Advertisement for Participants

**The
Experience of
“No-Self”**

**Have you had an
experience or
experiences of
“no-self” that
affected the daily
living out of your
life?**

**Would you be
willing to partici-
pate in interview
research, which
will potentially
help others who
have had similar
experiences?**

***Click link below for
More information**

**[www.surveymonkey.com/
experiencenoself](http://www.surveymonkey.com/experiencenoself)**

**Laurel McCormick
B.S. Ed., M.S.W., M.A.**

**Candidate in Ph.D.
Program at the
Institute of
Transpersonal
Psychology.**

Appendix K: Advertisement Prescreening Survey

The Experience of “No-self” and the Living Out of the Experience

[Exit this survey](#)

1. The Experience of “No-self” and the Living Out of the Experience

Welcome!

The purpose of this site is to provide information so that you may decide if you would like to participate in my dissertation research. It also serves as pre-screening to see if you qualify to take part in this in-depth interview study of the experience of “no-self” and the living out of the experience.

Please note: No information given in this survey will be used in my dissertation research unless you are accepted into the study and provide formal consent.

If you choose to continue with this pre-screening, first I will present details of my study; and then you will be asked to answer seven questions about yourself in order that you may be considered for participating in this research toward a deeper understanding of the self.

Laurel McCormick
B.S. Ed., M.S.W., M.A.
Ph.D. student in dissertation phase at the
Institute of Transpersonal Psychology
California, U.S.A.

[Next](#)

2. Description of Experience of “No-self” Dissertation Research

Hello,

My name is Laurel McCormick, and I am a Ph.D. student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in California. For the last 3 years I have been working toward a Ph.D. in Transpersonal Psychology, and am I now working

on my dissertation. Through in-depth interviews, this research will examine the experience of “no-self” and the living out of the experience in 12 adult men and women. In certain traditions or practices, the term “no-self” may or may not seem appropriate; and it is not my intention to exclude any spiritual tradition or non-tradition in participant recruitment. This discernment of terms is pertinent to my study, and participants may address this in the interview.

The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important--such that the individual is stable in “no-self.”

The experience of “no-self” may be associated with perception of pure consciousness; or with the void, the sacred, or God. The living out of the experience may be associated with loss of meaning, or with ineffability, emptiness, paradoxicality, or peacefulness. Also, it may or may not be associated with loss of context of the sacred or divine, or with loss of previously-felt Presence, or with loss of spiritual experience. In my research, I seek to clarify what people are actually experiencing with what is in the literature, and I remain neutral to what participant data will actually show. The proposed research will provide insights into the level of ego dissolution that occurs in advanced stages of mystical experience before unity as oneness.

It is my heartfelt desire to clarify and elucidate qualities of this stage of spiritual growth. I feel that somehow the universe has been propelling me throughout my entire life toward this moment of currently researching and writing my dissertation, and ultimately writing and publishing on this topic. I have known for almost 2 years that this is part of my purpose here on earth as a human being. The experience of no-self enlivens and honors my own experience. The topic has literally grabbed and chased me, and it reclaimed me after nonduality attempted to inform my awareness that no-self was impossible to research.

The study will consist of 12 adult (age 18 and up) men and women from a variety of cultural and spiritual backgrounds. Participants do not necessarily have to be in a stage of spiritual development prior to unity as oneness in order to be accepted into the study; but rather participants need to have experienced and be in the process of living out “no-self,” or need to be in a stage of unity as oneness. Retrospective experience of no-self, whether the person is in a stage prior to unity as oneness or has slipped into unity as

oneness, will exemplify and validate the dissertation research question.

I am interested in obtaining a multi-spiritual and multicultural population of participants in order to study how the phenomenon of no-self can manifest in adults who are traditional and non-traditional believers, non-believers, or believers from multiple traditions or from no tradition. I am mainly looking for participants who speak English; however, I will hire an interpreter if necessary. Interviews will take place in person or via telephone.

Participants will be required to take part in a 1 to 2 hour initial interview process in which open-ended questions will elicit detail of an event of no-self and the living out of the experience, including how their sense of self has changed in relation to the world. Following the initial interview, participants will be required, via e-mail or postal mail, to review the initial interview transcript, and to approve or make changes to a summary of the interview. Participants will also be required to answer a few questions, via e-mail, phone, or in person (if available), in order to help clarify their experience with regard to data analysis.

The proposed dissertation research may progress the fields of transpersonal and spiritual psychology by contributing to interreligious, mysticism, and non-dual literature; and by further increasing current understanding and signs and symptoms of no-self and the living out of the experience, with the goal of promoting versus pathologizing spiritual growth.

It is my hope that you will be able to assist me in clarifying the deepest understanding of the self by contributing description of your lived experiences of no-self. If you are interested, I invite you to continue to the next page and answer a few simple demographic and descriptive questions.

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

3.

1. Please type in your name and where you live.

Please type in
your name
and where you
live. Name:

City/Town:

State:

Country:

2. What is your age?

- ☐ What is your age? 18-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60-69
- ☐ 70-79
- ☐ 80-89
- ☐ 90+

3. What is the best way for me to contact you? Please include e-mail address or phone number, with best days and times.

4. Were you raised in any religious or spiritual tradition(s) as a child? If so, please type in your answer below.

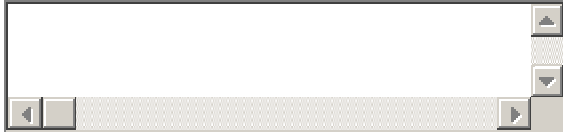
If you were not raised in a particular tradition, please state this; or choose raised as agnostic or atheist.

5. What is or are your current religious tradition(s) or spiritual practice(s)?

Please list below.

6. How would you define no-self?

7. Please briefly describe an example of no-self from your experience.



[Prev](#) [Next](#)

4.

Thank you very much for completing the pre-screening survey for my dissertation research on the experience of no-self. I will review your demographic information and your descriptions of no-self, and may contact you in the near future if you meet the study requirements.

With Appreciation,
Laurel McCormick

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Appendix L: Participant Informed Consent Form

To the Participant in This Research:

You are invited to participate in an interreligious study of “no-self” as an advanced phase of spiritual development. The research will explore the experience or experiences of no-self and the living out of the events(s), including descriptive narrative of any and all experiences of adjusting to the event and how it affected your life. The goal of this research is to receive honest and in-depth description of how no-self has or has not altered your experience and perception in the world. Potential benefits of participating in this study may include gaining spiritual and psychological insights or personal development; and may increase your own understanding or acceptance of your spiritual process.

In-person interviews will be recorded and take place in a neutral location, where the researcher and participant will not be disturbed or distracted. Local interviews may occur at a spiritual or religious facility or a business office, in the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology’s spiritual guidance office or the William James Center for Consciousness Studies, in a private library meeting room, or at a similar private location with the permission of facility directors or owners. Interviews that will not take place in person will be recorded and conducted via telephone. In-person interviews outside of the local South Peninsula Bay Area will take place in a neutral location, such as in a spiritual or religious facility, a university or public library meeting room that is considered private, or a business office, with the site preselected by the participant and researcher. Phone interviews will be conducted and recorded by me in the privacy of my home or office, and participants will likewise be advised to arrange to be interviewed in a location where they will not be distracted or disturbed.

Initial in-person or phone interviews will last approximately 1 to 2 ½ hours and will be recorded. I plan on personally transcribing the interviews. However, if I elect to use a transcriber for interview data, the transcriber will be required to sign a Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement (a copy of which is attached); and he or she will not have access to your personal information other than that which is contained in the interview. You will be asked to review both the transcript and a summary story for accuracy, including any changes, clarifications, omissions, or additions you wish to make. Audio files will be stored on CD and kept in a locked, metal file box in my office; and only I will have access to the files. You will be required to participate not only in the initial interview, but also will subsequently be required to answer a few questions, via e-mail or phone, in order to help clarify your experience with regard to data analysis. These questions will be with regard to specific aspects your experience of no-self and the living out of the experience that cannot be anticipated prior to analyzing the initial interview data. My intent is to contact you only if I need to collect further data in order to explicate concepts that are emerging as vital to the research. The phone or e-mail contact will take place a maximum of two times, and each contact will require approximately one half-hour of your time. Phone interviews will be recorded; and copies of e-mails and audio files will be stored on CD, with your confidentiality maintained as described above.

For the protection of your privacy, all information received from you will be kept confidential as to its source; and your identity will be protected by a pseudonym. I will assure and maintain confidentiality of interview data by storing it in a locked file cabinet, and will store backup CD storage files in a locked, fireproof file box. Your personal identity will be protected by a pseudonym, which you may choose. While some of the interview text may be included for its rich, thick description in the final manuscript, your personal identity will be kept confidential in all written materials and in any presentations of the final dissertation. In the reporting of information in published material, any and all identifying information will be altered to ensure your anonymity.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. If for any reason you experience psychological distress, such as uncomfortable or unpleasant memories or emotions arising from talking about your experience, I will have available a list of counselors with whom you can consult if necessary.

If at any time you have any concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss them with you and inform you of options for resolving your concerns. If you do have any questions or concerns, you may call me collect at xxx-xxx-xxxx [obtained prior to recruitment]; Genie Palmer, Ph. D., my Dissertation Chairperson at 650-493-4430; or Kartik Patel, Ph. D., Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology at 650-493-4430. **The participant may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice.**

You may request a written summary of group research findings by providing your e-mail address below the signatures.

Thank you very much for your participation.

I attest that I have read and understood this form. The researcher has explained the study to me and has answered my questions. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage participation. My signature indicates my willingness to be a participant in this research.

Participant Name—Please Print

Participant Signature

Date

Please write in chosen pseudonym here:

Pseudonym

Date

Laurel A. McCormick, Researcher
P.O. Box xxxx, Mountain View, CA 94040

Date

xxxx@xxx.com; (650) xxx-xxxx

[phone number, postal box, and e-mail address will be obtained prior to recruitment]

Please include your e-mail address, or a postal address, if you want a written summary of group research findings:

Please write in your preferred method of contact for research questions subsequent to the initial interview; these questions will help clarify your experience with regard to data analysis:

Telephone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Transcriber Consent Agreement

As a transcriptionist, I agree to maintain strict confidentiality with regard to all participant information and content contained within the audiotapes that I transcribe. I agree to keep the tapes and transcripts in a locked filing cabinet or safe when they are not in use by me. I will also help to aid the researcher in protecting the identity of all participants to ensure anonymity.

Transcriptionist's signature

Date

Laurel A. McCormick, Researcher
P.O. Box xxxx, Mountain View, CA 94040
xxxx@xxx.com; (650) xxx-xxxx

Date

[phone number, postal box, and e-mail address will be obtained prior to recruitment]

Appendix M: Guiding Questions for Participant Interview

During the telephone interviews, I utilized my prior experience of performing intuitive spiritual counseling via this media. The quality of empathetic identification was the innate skill used as participants gave voice to their lived experiences of no-self. Additionally, my heart-mind connection facilitated participants to not only trust me, but also to trust their own inner wisdom in participating in the research process and giving voice to their truth. I used empathic and intuitive listening skills as they narrated their lived experience. I honored what they had to say by suspending prior knowledge and by letting go of egoic thoughts in order to create a trusting, mutual connection. In this way, my purpose was to respect their truth toward a fuller understand their reality.

At the beginning of each interview, I acknowledged receipt of the Demographic Survey and Consent Form, and answered any questions that the participant had. I offered the person time to meditate or center, but no one needed to do that.

Prior to turning the recording service, I read the following statement: The aspects of the experience of “no-self” that I am researching seem to occur as a breakthrough of consciousness such that there is a loss of egocentricism or a diminishing of superficial self. This seems to occur as one or more breaks that cause de-identification with self-referent “I” in that personal identification with being and experience is no longer important. I realize that not everyone uses the term “no-self.” Please include the specific terms and definitions you use.

Then I told the participant that I would turn on the SimpleTollFree recording service, and the interview began.

Initial Open-Ended Questions

1. Describe as completely as you can, your experience of no-self. Please include where, when, and how you realized it, including your feelings and thoughts.
 - (a) What was the best part of the experience?
 - (b) What was the hardest or most difficult part of the experience?
2. What preceded the experience of no-self?
 - (a) Did you have any sense that this was coming?
3. How has/have your experience(s) of no-self affected your living out your daily life? Or your living in daily life? (physiological, cognitive, emotional aspects—descriptive and symptoms)
 - (a) What (and/or who) was helpful to you in living out the experience?
 - (b) What was not helpful to you in living out the experience?
 - (c) Was witnessing involved in the living out process?
 - (d) Are there any parts of self or self-identification that seemed to have changed?
 - (e) Is there any part of self that seems to still be in the process of changing?
 - (f) Have there been any aspects of this in your own body?

4. Has your sense of self changed in relation to the world?
5. How has it changed? with regard to:
 - (a) who you are,
 - (b) why you are here
 - (c) what life is all about, and
 - (d) whether this has given you a sense of direction in your life?

Post-Interview Procedure

End recording.

Do you have any questions or have any issues come up for you?

I would like to remind you that I will be sending you a copy of your individual participant story, along with a copy the transcript of this interview, so that you will be able to make any additions, changes, and/or clarifications. I may also contact you via e-mail or phone in order to help clarify your experience with data that is emerging from the research.

Thank you very much for your participation in my research

Appendix N: Participant Stories

Dave's Process of Returning Home to Unification

Dave is a 24-year old male who lives in the West North Central part of the Midwestern Region of the United States. He has a B.A. in Business, is working on a graduate degree; and he works as an accounting professional, computer technician, and as a spiritual healer and counselor.

Dave was raised in the Jewish Conservative Reform tradition, as he attended synagogue with his parents on high holy days. He considers himself to be 100 percent Jewish genealogically speaking, which has resulting in him always feeling very connected to the people. His parents were involved in the Transcendental Meditation movement, so he grew up meditating but he disliked it. He stated that meditation may have ended up being helpful, however, as “any spiritual technique’s going to help you to some extent. . . . It’s certainly not going to hurt usually, unless you make it part of your limited identity or take it to an unhealthy extreme.” Dave stated that, because he was not particularly attracted to TM and the TM Program, he never ended up egoically identifying with meditation or with TM.

Dave’s experience with Judaism helped to serve as the initial pointer to “the fundamental core of what it meant to come home or be home or let go” in his process of enlightenment. He noticed that whenever he went to the synagogue

I would have these incredible experiences of god—just totally clear, totally bright, totally overwhelming—to the point where you could say that it was really *nice* on some level; but it was also so overwhelming that it was very uncomfortable at the same time. And so I kind of simultaneously looked forward to it and didn’t want it at the same time. [*chuckles*] And so when I had my Bar Mitzvah when I was 13, the experience was so powerful and awesome, but so uncomfortable that it was hard to even remain standing while leading the service. I was not a happy camper! [*laughs*] And I think the experience was so overwhelmingly powerful because I was just spontaneously so connected to that tradition.

However, on his spiritual journey Dave’s connection to Judaism was not the main tradition or source for spiritual practice. In the demographic survey, he wrote the following:

I just follow my own experience. I don’t feel the need for an outside concept of what will bring spiritual growth and connection. All of those traditions and religions are great, but I just go with what works for me personally.

Correspondingly, he viewed his strong Jewish bond was “a pointer to where home was for [his] personality. . . . because it was like returning home—the whole process” such that when he had a spiritual realization, there was “just a natural tendency to allow that to automatically be created.”

Dave's Three Transitions to No-self

The First Transition

For the interview, Dave viewed his spiritual development in terms of three transitions, or shifts in awareness, in relation to no-self. The first transition occurred about two and a half to three years ago right after spending some time in law school on the West Coast. This transition was preceded by extreme spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physiological upheavals. It started when he was on break from law school. He had an

incredible experience of just light everywhere, and there was complete intimacy with the light. So that I *was* it, and I was connected to it and everything else. I would say perfect unity is what it felt like. And I was thinking, “Oh, this is awesome! I totally made it. This is great. I don’t know what happened, but this is wonderful and nothing will ever be wrong again.” [*with a laugh*] And about three days later, it went away. [*amused laugh*] I was, like, “No! No, no, no!” And so at that point, because I’d had a glimpse of the experience without all these boundaries in the way, all the boundaries that came back were feeling really confining.

This confinement was the impetus that began the period of great upheaval in Dave, where Dave was being forced to look at and let go of every piece of identity and confining idea that he had ever had. As a result, Dave became apathetic toward school work and had an inability to focus, and he also isolated himself from others. Dave explained that internally he had a sense of disconnection, which felt lonely. He explained that he felt that

It’s like an ocean or—I’ll say an ocean, ‘cause it’s dynamic. A kind of bigness. And it was dark. And it was a feeling, too. It had a very distinct feeling associated with it of expansion and freedom, and such. But it was almost like someone else’s expansion and freedom, because I didn’t feel connected to it at all.

Dave’s schoolwork began to slip so much that he realized he had to take a year off from grad school to figure out what was going on. He was fortunate to meet a group of awake people who met to discuss “their direct experience,” which helped him cross over into this first transition.

So when I first met the group, I was going through this whole massive expansion. It was cool, but it was lonely, because it felt disconnected from me. They essentially said, “No, no, it’s not this expansiveness that’s always *around* you, that *is* you.” And as soon as I realized that, it was like the whole thing just lit up. . . . Just lit up. And it was so natural and kind of normal that I didn’t quite know whether it was really what I thought it was or whether it was permanent or whether it was just another temporary high experience. And I felt kind of the same; so I thought, “Well, I’m not sure that it really was the shift I thought it was. I’m not sure it really happened.” About 2 weeks later, there was just this very clear experience of, you could say, of big Self or just this vast emptiness that isn’t empty. And it was alive in me, and it was me, and it just felt really good. And I didn’t feel limited by my body or anything else. It was like there was always this core place, that no matter how bad things got, it was always okay. It just couldn’t be touched. And . . . about 2 weeks later

that was always going on. And I realized, “Oh, well, this is it—THIS is what resonated with Awakening for me.”

Dave stated that one thing he’s noticed consistently throughout his spiritual growth is that when

a shift in awareness happens . . . then a little bit later it gets integrated to where that same shift in awareness is really clear. But there seems to be that gap between new Awakening and clarity. Perhaps for the physiology to catch up.

The Second Transition

Dave’s second spiritual transition occurred 6 months after the first. He recounted how he was feeling prior to the transition.

At that time I was feeling some sense of unification with things, and I was really unhappy about not having the unification experience that I could very subtly *feel*. I felt so close . . . that I thought, “How can it be so close but still not clear? This is ridiculous. I should just be able to have it!” [*laughs*].

When this “huge shift,” finally happened, he was actually talking to a friend while the event was occurring. He described the following about the unification:

I didn’t know that’s what it was at the time, ‘cause it didn’t correspond to my ideas of what it was supposed to be, at all, other than that I could look through the description and be, like, “Yeah, that’s true, just not the way I thought it was.” It wasn’t light like someone put a flashlight in the world, because it was almost like seeing it with my heart. But it was there for sure. I would discount it usually as being “real,” unless I saw it with my gross physical eyes. Well, I was seeing it with in my physical eyes, but it wasn’t the way I traditionally thought of as physical.

Dave stated that he remained in that unity and there was this realization of being one with God. He describes it has having both an individual body and a Cosmic body that was all of Creation simultaneously. Paradoxically, he is still able to function as an individual while “being one with god.” Dave stated

The analogy to describe Creation as your body . . . was the greatest description for me [of a Cosmic Body], because it really was what it felt like, what it still feels like. And it’s just a great description. Because that’s the reality in the larger sense, in a more direct sense, even though what I feel like now is even beyond that.

Dave found it interesting that this transition was similar to his first glimpse of experience that set everything in motion, noting that possibly

the tendency to doubt actually makes it take longer to get clear. [*chuckle*] Which, I guess, if you think about it, makes sense because if I’m looking at a pillow on my bed and I have decided that I cannot accept the pillow is there, it’s very difficult for me to describe the details of the pillow, if I don’t want to look at it.

The Third Transition

The third transition, which occurred 8 months later, was that the separate individual self simply went away, and was recognized to never have existed in the first place. At the end of a day at work

I was having these very kind of bumpy thoughts. And I suddenly felt like I was riding the thought like a horse. In my mind's eye this is what I'm seeing. I thought "Huh, that's interesting." So I just got off the thought. I got off the horse and the thought kept going and the horse kept going on ch-ch, ch-ch, ch-ch, just "galloped" away from me. The thought was still going, but it wasn't related to me any more. And suddenly, this whole—what had previously been about this big-self, small-self, me-god kind of *thing*—just wasn't there. Because the individual suddenly wasn't there any more.

Dave said it was almost like he got off the horse in his mind, and then looked at himself and saw that he wasn't there. Looking at it retrospectively, he recognized that Self wasn't there because it is an idea that is a "contained thing." Dave said, "A person, a self, even a cosmic self, has edges. This has no edges."

So, here, it's just that it wasn't a self anymore, because there were no edges. There was just no *thing*. The way I described it at the time was that there wasn't anything at all, but there wasn't nothing. It isn't anything at all, but it isn't nothing. Because even nothing—if you think of nothing, you have an image there—you have empty space, you have—yeah [*laughs*], I have an image of an empty universe—that's what I think of as nothing, or just blackness or whatever, but it isn't any of that. It's dynamic, it's alive. It's me, so it's—it's almost like an ocean, because it's always moving. And so any idea of self is gone. There is no self any more. That's kind of what it feels like. And as I was driving home from work, and I noticed for the first time, it felt like everything was as good as everything else. For the first time, it didn't matter what happened . . . because everything was as good as everything else. And so it's like this Oneness moving darkness, but it's a comfortable darkness. It's a deep, loving, safe darkness. It reminds me of being in bed when I was little.

Since that point, everything is always, really, fundamentally okay no matter how bad it is. No matter how afraid or whatever, it cannot be not okay any more. There's nothing I can do to make it not okay, even if I tried. [*laughs*] And on some level there's still a personality, an individual, you could say. It's kind of like if there is a relative existence, *if* you say these fluctuations are relative, and that's a big if; but *if* you want to say that, then there's an individual of sorts. It's just that the individual isn't more me than anything else.

So, from the perspective that there is an individual, it's like finding out that I'm in the place to fulfill all these individuals' desires, you know? And it's not that I'm disconnected to the individual, I'm completely connected to the individual. In fact I'm completely connected to everything. And I'm allowing myself, while being, everything that I just said—source of everything, god, all of this—I'm the individual as well and so there is the experience of all this in amazement, in fun, in joy-ness. It's like I said, as the

Consciousness itself, “Well, okay, I’ll let myself pretend to be individuated for a little while.” And that is not only what was previously considered as “me”, but also as all of temporal existence. There’s no *separate* person.

It’s not that what I am doesn’t include the individual, I mean, what *isn’t* me? Everything arises within the Awareness that I am. But it’s not like me the individual is suddenly, Pff! big. It’s more like me the individual is suddenly realized that I’m not so necessary for anything that I wanted— survival [*laughs*], peace—you know. . . . I’m actually having the experience of life as this other thing, without losing all the things I’ve got as an individual. It’s not like I *personally* am everything; it’s like I just am everything. There *is* no personal [*laughs*].

Even though Dave stated that he is in a place where there can be no more suffering, he does not believe that his spiritual growth is done. He stated,

I want to take [enlightenment] as far as I can. That is what my sincere desire as an individual is. There’s always more. Forever. No matter how wonderful or perfect or expanded it gets, there’s always more, because the Isness is Infinite.

Integrating Shifts in Awareness

Dave found that there were two phases integral to transition or growth of awareness:

the expansion part, when a new experience dawns and Awareness expands; and then the integration, where the experience is being integrated physically so that it becomes normal, no matter how flashy it was originally.

This is not on the intellectual level, but it is a process of accepting, recognizing, and understanding on the deepest level of knowing—It’s an experience that the mind *and* body have to catch up to after the shift in awareness.

So for me, the process of growth, of integration particularly, became more and more automatic—a lot less having to figure out what to do. It got more and more obvious, until it was just completely automatic, even though I didn’t feel uninvolved. But there was just no control anymore because there was no reason to. Before it felt like I was in control, so I had to “figure out which way to go” [*laughs*]. And so for me, there’s always been a lot of need for integration, because, I grew up with a lot of these experiences, they were already there; but I didn’t want to accept it, or I didn’t know what it was, or whatever. And not having that integrated was just as good as not having it, on a lot of levels. I think this is true for everyone to some extent. You look back and realize that it’s always been there, it’s just been ignored. I suppose that’s why people use the word “ignorance” to describe living life feeling like a limited separate person.

Dave recounted that he went through physiological and emotional changes during the 2- to 3-year period following his first transition; and he stated that he may not have made it through the shifts in awareness to the next transition and then to unification if he had done it alone.

I don't think I would have ever made it if I was just in a cave by myself without resources. I mean, maybe I would; but whatever I needed, it was there for me. Life provided it.

With regard to the emotional and physiological changes that he went through, Dave stated

It's almost as if the mind *and* body are catching up. [laughs] A lot of what's in the way are what I call emotional beliefs. It's a function of the mind—a way of thinking, a way of function in limitation, but it's also physiologically based. So that when the stuff starts to go, a lot of times I noticed my body went through very distinct, sometimes even extreme changes.

He described the emotional and physiological changes in himself as a process of releasing or of letting go of emotional and physical boundaries—which was intensely painful at times—in the following manner:

It's like there are these overlays we put on—just raw experience—almost like a picture. It's as if life is an ink and paper drawing. We kind of have to figure out what the drawing's of. And it kind of looks like something and all, so that's how we distinguish it. But it feels like those overlays get so ingrained that we forget, first of all, that it's a picture at all [chuckles]. And we forget that it's just ink and paper. The boundaries are, you could say, arbitrary, even though it really does look like something. And so I found that I had all these emotional beliefs in the way. Emotional as in I would get highly reactive about them, because I felt threatened. I felt like I was an individual who could be threatened in different ways. . . . And my whole life was kind of based around that, actually, out of being emotionally safe.

[This] was released bit by bit, often painful, because I was clinging to these ideas so much, because it felt like *I* would be annihilated if *they* left. And even though each step of awakening it got a lot clearer that I wouldn't be annihilated, there was still that process going on, still those feelings. But the part leading up to the actual awakening was definitely the worst, because I was letting go of most stuff I had up to that time, but I was still feeling very much like I was an individual. And that was the most threatening time. And I've gone through stuff that's way more extreme since then, but I had so much more resources to deal with it because there was so much less feeling like I was bounded by these concepts I'm letting go of. They didn't feel like concepts at the time. [laughs] So that was what was going on, and it'd be accompanied by intense fear or intense sadness or intense anger or intense pain—a lot of just pain for me. A lot of pain.

Dave offers an illustration of what it was like to go through what he describes as releasing physiological/emotional pain:

It's kind of like if someone took someone you loved very dearly and started torturing them. It's not like you're actually in physical pain, but you might as well be because you're going through it so badly. It was that kind of thing. And then there were certain amounts of physical pain, too. . . . And to the extent that it was there, it was never hard to deal with compared to the emotional pain. I just put my attention on it and it would

subside, or it would become manageable or safe. For some reason I was never worried about physical pain when it happened. I had these fears of being mutilated and that sort of thing. And that took quite some time to kind of come out; but a lot of that, even, was emotionally based. But it feels like it's all kind of emotionally based. 'Cause even with physical pain, it's what the physical pain *means* that bothers people, not so much the sensation itself.

Relational Changes

Over time, Dave has become more and more comfortable with himself in relation to other people and with how he has always viewed reality. He described how he has always been an empath, or someone who physically feels the emotions of others.

I've always been really, really empathic, which means I can feel other people's emotions as clearly as I can feel my own. And that's taken, actually, a lot to realize which are mine and which are [other peoples' emotions]. I've noticed that . . . a lot of people have it—I found out it wasn't just me. For empathic people getting to the point where they can really use their ability effectively without it getting in the way—it's not usually developing it—it's actually understanding it and protecting yourself. You know, when I was young, I'd get huge ranges of emotions from other people and not know that they were other peoples'; and that created kind of interesting outlook growing up. [*laughs*] I had to be protective of who I hung out with; and I had to make sure they were okay, because I was taking responsibility for their emotions, 'cause I was feeling their emotions. So that started to regulate through this whole time. Even way before the awakening that was being worked out.

Additionally, Dave has always been able to perceive other dimensions of reality. He described his process of acceptance of this “natural” aspect of himself and his development of a “relationship and interaction” with those realms.

In terms of communicating with other beings and other planes of existence—I was always very aware of that, for some reason; but I was so skeptical of my experience because these other planes are not supposed to even exist, let alone be experienced, you know? Even though my family was very open-minded and they accepted that, I was too (what I thought was) pragmatic in my opinion at the time to be able to accept those kinds of things. Even though when they got really obvious I would deal with it, but I didn't quite know if I believed it. So it was almost like it was the doubt, and the not being completely objective about my experience that started to fade more and more. So that then, it was like, “Well, I could *say* these things aren't real; but, for something not real, they're pretty obvious. [*laughs*] And they're part of my experience if I want to be honest, and they behaved in ways I could never predict, so it's not my fantasy.” . . . I never had too much interest in it except when it's necessary or to such an extent that I naturally have a relationship with it.

So there was definitely a lot of clarity of that, but it didn't feel like something emerging; it feels like trying-to-pretend-it-wasn't-there ideas and concepts and just my own not wanting to acknowledge what was really already going on—was all going away. . . .

And when you accept something's there, you can examine it—you can't examine it if it's "not supposed to be there" [laughs]. So there was a lot more clarity and relationship and interaction with that as I started to accept it more and more. And in terms of ability to think and process information and such, the main thing was a lot of time I would get emotionally blocked, because if I had a test I would worry about it, or if there was something I was really supposed to get, I would be trying too hard or whatever. And there was just this distance. Just like it didn't matter so much anymore. I couldn't worry about it in the same way, progressively more and more and more. And so I just kind of stopped being in my way. And that happened in life in general. So that everything became more and more fluid. And now it's becoming super-fluid.

What was Helpful in the Integration Process Toward Unification

Letting go of ego. Dave's desire drove him toward enlightenment; and the process of letting go of control and of letting go of ego facilitated his spiritual growth, as he recalled:

There's a passage from The Course in Miracles, which said it really well: Basically it says, "If you think you're a small person, you're looking at it from your point of view out. But if you know you're not, you're looking at it from the top down." So literally, as an ego, everything's backwards. [laughs] You think you get what you want by controlling. But you actually get what you want by letting go. And so forth. I mean, the list goes on because it's literally the exact opposite in almost every case. And that's why the illusions are perfect. [laughs] That's why maya [illusion] works so well, you know? It's perfectly self-regulating.

Books, spiritual teachers, a close friend, and a meeting group. In addition to letting go, Dave cited spiritual books, spiritual teachers, a meeting group, and a close friend as particularly helpful in integrating the transitions and in finding self-direction. After the second transition, Dave found the *Bramha Sutras* "helpful in understanding unification with everything." Additionally, a couple of spiritual books were "great pointers" toward "the paradox of the Self." "It's like both books completely got it; but they put it in, you could see, almost opposite ways."

He and a close friend would discuss existential questions to really try to examine and understand their issues. The level of understanding of what they sought after a transition was analogous to re-understanding something that you already knew and understood as reality. Dave cited the example of knowing the earth is round, and having someone tell you that it is actually flat.

If they said, "Oh, no, we were wrong, it actually is flat." you'd be, like, "No, it isn't." Because you really understand so fully that you know. You know, because of the various proofs, like, you can walk around the earth and not fall off. [laughs] And it's even more than that, because there's a connection to it. But it's the same level of certainty, you could say. It's the same kind of change in understanding that actually changes the [awakening] experience, because it's accepting what's really been going on, instead of what you had decided was going on and didn't want to accept. So it's more true, in whatever way we decide anything is more true.

Auspiciously, Dave became involved with a group of people who met to discuss enlightenment. Dave reflected one way that the discussions were insightful for him.

[Some of] the other people were extremely awake; and it was awesome, because you'd get all these different perspectives. It was so obvious that . . . it wasn't about the personality, 'cause there was all these different personalities—fully integrated, and even maybe with their own issues. But it wasn't about personality. And that took a lot of time, actually, for me to kind of accept that it didn't mean an end to all issues. Although there was obviously a tendency in that direction—the more evolved [one] got, the more the person would relax and be happy and have his desires fulfilled. And I was sure that to have this complete no-self experience, there'd have to be perfection. But then it did just happen that there was perfection without that; and I was, like, "Oh, apparently I don't have to let go of all of my issues. [laughs] All right."

In summary, having someone to talk to (whether a friend, a spiritual teacher, or a group of people) about his shifts and experiences was helpful. With his first transition when he was in college, he thought what he was going through "was crazy" because he didn't know anyone having similar experiences. Even though he was exposed to enlightenment teachings while growing up, "they only talked about the nice things that everybody wants" and mentioned that "Oh yeah, well, you can unstress."

Transitions Toward Enlightenment Create New Understandings of Reality

For Dave the spiritual transitions gave rise to new understandings of reality, the heart of which lies in his experience of being the creator of his individual reality as an embodiment of his concept of home. He described this in the following passage:

So whatever experience is the epitome of home for people, is usually what they will create for themselves in Enlightenment. Because ultimately it's understanding that you're the source. And if you're the source of it all, then you're everything; and there is nothing else. Then you're everything that it generates; and it's cliché, but like a hologram. And so you're not separate from the creator. In fact in the level that you really are that, and that's primary now, you *are* the creator. In fact, we've always—we all *are* the creator of the world. It's that we literally create our reality as we have decided it is. As an individual. [laughs] To the extent that we are individuals, we create our reality as—I mean, it's quite literal. [laughs] There's no reality, and not just our reality—there's *no reality*, period. [laughs] And we're individuals really, so each reality is the whole thing and perfectly co-exists with everything else. You could say, "Oh, is it this? Yes." And whatever you point to it's going to be that. [laughs] It's like asking which part of your dream is more you? There's the character you're identifying with, but the whole dream is equally in your mind. So, as individuals, we have specific ideas at our fundamental core of what it means to come home or be home or return or let go or whatever—whatever it is we really want. And so, when you realize what's really going on, or what has been really going on [laughs] there's just a natural tendency to allow that to automatically be created.

The Transition Toward Enlightenment Continues

Dave was motivated to transition toward enlightenment, and he made rapid, often painful, progress over a span of 2 to 3 years. With regard to his determination and fast rate of growth and integration, he stated:

So speed of growth doesn't mean anything one way or the other; it isn't an egotistical thing. It's just you move as you have to move. Even if you don't want to. Although I very much always did, even when I actually got to the core of a huge issue I would be like, "Aaah! I changed my mind!" [laughs] At that point it was coming out anyway, and there wasn't anything I could do about it. Which is good, 'cause I'm fully convinced that [with] these huge issues, people would never let go of them unless they had to. They hurt so much when they come up. But it just hurts too much not to, and that forces you to let it out. . . . You know, I happened to have [had] a particularly painful process, I think, because I was just determined to do it all at once. [laughs] And I could say that I wanted it to be different, but I wouldn't have had it any other way; and I actually grudgingly knew that at the time. You know, I even had a choice to slow down. I felt like it was because of my desire that life was helping me. But I didn't want to slow down for some reason. I wanted to go faster, even if that meant faster than was comfortable.

Even though, at the time of the interview, Dave felt that he was in "an extremely good place" with "no-self all over," he reflected that the transition toward enlightenment continues. This aspiration is led not by dissatisfaction, but by desire and a feeling that there is more. And with that, his process of releasing of emotional and physical "stuff" is still going on:

Because there's always desire for more and deeper experience and greater richness and greater everything. So there's always clarity taking place. And, you know, clarity is relative, right? [laughs] So there's always something being released in order to have more. And I've noticed that people have this essential heart desire about what the most fulfilling thing would be. What that is for each person is unique to them, so it's different for different people. . . . Some people get this basic awakening experience and, like, "Okay, I'm good." Where when I got that, I was, like, "This isn't even close to fulfilling that desire!" [laughs] And it's not that we necessarily even get to choose what that point is. It's just whatever is right for the individual—maybe what they chose ahead of time, is what it feels like to me. So, I'm in an *extremely* good place right now, no-self all over but my place of total fulfillment of my heart's desire is even farther than this. I want to bring that in physically in the most extreme possible way. . . . [Although] I'm not even entirely sure what that means. . . . But I'm kind of just following the feeling. Which is what I was doing the whole time, I suppose . . . and then I guess the edge always keeps going out, 'cause I've gotten way beyond where I ever thought was possible. And there's still, you know, [laughs] this feeling of wanting more. But the idea of dissatisfaction kind of doesn't make sense any more. So, it's completely different. Even though you could say the content doesn't change, the relationship to it changes completely.

Brahma's Journey to Self as Eternal Being

Brahma is a 60-year old male who lives in the West North Central part of the Midwestern region of the United States. His educational background includes receiving B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees. He has had several careers as: an engineer at a major United States technological corporation, an author of ten books, founder of a non-profit organization, a business mentor, and a conflict mediator. Most recently, he pursued a Ph. D. in Business Management as accreditation for future research into "our highest nature."

Brahma was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition. As a child, he had a strong desire to help his severely-ill mother recover. For that reason, he got "quite involved with Catholic spirituality by going to church before school and by praying very, very hard." Brahma felt that he would get answers from the only known source he knew of that could help him attain the wellness of his mother. He "really felt that somehow . . . there was a divine essence or a being that would answer [his] prayers and that [he] would eventually be able to somehow get her that assistance." In that journey, he eventually lost hope and faith because he was never able to make a deep connection through the Catholic tradition. As a result, he "sort of turned against all spirituality" for a number of years as a young adult. During this time, he viewed spirituality "somewhat agnostically" as "something that mankind contrived in order to make itself feel superior or special or whatever."

For the interview, Brahma described several experiences and realizations on his journey to "Self as eternal Being." As he followed his heart, these experiences changed his agnostic viewpoint, expanded his ego, and evolved his consciousness. The final realization was one of eternal, "fully expanded no-Self ego and total integration with the universe." Currently Brahma lives "a passionately spiritual life respecting every faith as an expression of [his] Self while practicing none."

Brahma's Journey

While in his 20s, Brahma went through a somewhat agnostic period, where he didn't "have any interest in any major religion at all." Then he started to "encounter unexplained events" that he "couldn't necessarily define in social terms." For example, he went through

an extended period where I would just close my eyes to go to sleep, and I would hear enormous choirs of music or, what I would later learn [to] be, the seraphim or the cherubim. I would read about the voices of sounds like thousands of voices singing in harmony and beautiful, beautiful music. And it was an exquisite experience; it was filled with bliss. And it didn't take away from my normal function, so it was never diagnosed as anything wrong; but it only lasted for a short period of time, maybe 2 or 3 months in my early twenties. But nonetheless it sort of opened my attention to maybe that there was a deeper reality that I had sort of passed up, and wanted to investigate longer.

Another unexplainable experience happened while he was in the military. During this time, he was in a situation where he had to travel on a bus packed with 70 civilians for 8 hours a day for over a month. "The atmosphere was so obnoxious. . . . and about 40 percent of [the passengers] would lose their cookies and throw up in the bus." While traveling on the bus,

I would close my eyes and just allow my mind to wander without identifying with my thoughts. And I would later learn that that was kind of a meditation technique. And after about the second or third day, I could actually ride for 8 hours at a time, being awake, but not necessarily being in the bus, and not identified with my sense. So I didn't have a sense of smell or any of the discomfort that went along with the trip, and yet I didn't feel like I was asleep. I was sort of awake inside and just ignoring my senses. And I did this for several weeks at a time. We traveled for over a month, so I spent maybe 5 to 7 hours a day in what I would later in my life learn would be probably a deep type of meditation. And it was during those times of my life where I had some of those profound, what they term spiritual experiences of sound and light and so forth.

As a result of the unexplainable experiences, when he came out of the military he "wasn't quite as much an agnostic any more." He "sort of" believed that "there was a higher being." Since he didn't particularly identify with any spiritual path, he decided that he would follow whatever his heart felt associated with or interested in.

When he was completing his undergraduate studies in psychology and biology, life circumstances led him to learn the technique of Transcendental Meditation. After about a month or two of practicing TM, he "did some research in the lab, and realized that in meditation [he] was getting profound physiological rest." His own research convinced him "that there was something to it that was deeper than sleep." As a result of realizing the physiological benefit of meditation, he became more interested in meditating. While initial practice was sporadic, Brahma noted that he now considers himself to be a "lifetime meditator."

Shamanic and Native American Awareness

In his late 30s, Brahma had the opportunity to participate in the "harmonic convergence" ceremonies" which he understood as

a window in the Mayan Calendar that if you held your intention to a specific goal over this three-day period, then somehow you would align with . . . whatever energies they spoke about . . . and that would evolve in your lifetime. So my intent at the time was to be able to integrate a spiritual life and a regular Western cultural life together.

Also during this time, Brahma became interested in Shamanism. He started to have the ability to see auras, which he viewed not as a "spiritual gift," but "just part of the human capability; and maybe we just don't use it in our culture." He became involved with Native American spirituality; and contrary to Western traditions, had some of the classic shamanic experiences such as talking to plants and trees. He eventually began to see that "somehow there was some type of a connection being made;" and integration of that connection "became deeper and deeper over time, with [his] environment." For example, while drumming in his backyard, he had an "encounter with the possum" which progressed to a Native American experience wherein

I was sort of praying and hoping and sending healing energy to this young girl. And I heard some crackling behind me; and I turned around, and I was filled with terror. I'm not usually afraid . . . but there seemed to be something menacing about to occur to me that I couldn't identify. . . . And then when I turned around there was sort of this column of mist

. . . that sort of precipitated to the ground or fell to the ground within half a second as I watched it. And standing where the mist column was, was a possum. The possum, I was sure, had rabies, 'cause I was beating a drum *really* loud; and it wasn't fazed by that. I was sitting on the ground, and it came over and it stood in front of me, and it lowered its head onto my left foot. . . . I was almost terrified out of my mind, thinking that any minute it would bite me. Then I simply spoke to it; and I said, "You know, I'm terrified that something special is happening—we're making a connection. I read about this in some of the books . . . but I feel that I'm not prepared. I don't have enough . . . strength." And I asked the animal to please, whatever it was, whatever kind of a messenger, whatever was happening, would it just please leave me in peace. So it lifted its head; and then it shook its body like a dog shakes after you give it a bath. And I nearly passed out. I mean, I was really at the point of total terror; and then it just turned very slowly and walked away from me and headed straight out from me. And I kinda sat there; and I thought, 'I wonder what that's all about?' I looked for some symbology in it; and I kind of felt that maybe the nature of the possum was telling me that I was sort of pretending that my spirituality wasn't alive, or that I wasn't living fully alive in my life. And I kinda got that message that I needed to integrate more of my beliefs and more of what I was experiencing with my waking every day world.

As a result of the possum experience, Brahman "started to see that there were very deep connections being made." Immediately and synchronistically after that event, he was invited by a Medicine Man to a Native American weekend; and that chain of events further convinced him to follow his own heart. Brahman recounted these stories as illustration of how his "ego began expanding to embrace and interact with [his] environment as [his] conscious began to evolve." He started to notice that

events, one right after the other, were totally in line with what my desires were and the fulfillment of those desires. And that proceeded for some time, and I have many, many episodes of quite interesting phenomenon occurring during that time. And that was a real fun time. That felt very up and lively and special, and it seemed like I could almost play with having a desire for anything, and in fact, I did do that.

His desire led him to create a non-profit organization.

I took a look at my life and I said, "Well, what could I do? If I'm being supported this way, what large thing could I do that would seem almost impossible for anybody to achieve?" And I wasn't anybody special, so I intended to create a non-for-profit [*sic*] for people that were terminally ill. And within three years I had that, and I was having camps and weekends and hundreds of people were coming to it, and I could see that somehow whatever I desired was unfolding. And it was a very special and wonderful time in my life. And even though I had to deal with challenges and all kinds of things that were normal to regular people, I had an inner knowing that supported me through those periods, because I really felt that somehow I had made a deeper connection with whatever organized that energy in nature. It was like Nature was supporting my desire.

Being in the Constant State of Love and Bliss

Brahman described how he experienced life as Nature supporting his desire for “quite some time;” and then

it sort of got richer and more blissful and more rich, and then I found myself in a rather uncomfortable period. I found myself in a period of almost constant bliss or love. Matter of fact, it was love; but it was love with still some levels of attachment. And no matter what I saw, whether it was a tree or a cloud or a person (and it didn't make any difference what gender) there was just an enormous outpouring of love that I was experiencing; and I don't even know where it was coming from. It wasn't a physical attraction, and yet it was still identified with the individual or the subject. So that got very, very powerful. It got to the point where I didn't really want to have it any more. . . . I was very uncomfortable because it still had attachment to it. I wanted to *be* with the object of whatever I was experiencing. It still had a level of, I don't know, there was a level of ownership that I wanted to impose upon it that wasn't comfortable. I was married, and I had children. And I didn't want that as part of my reality; and it seemed to be getting stronger and more overwhelming. It wasn't something I was comfortable with at all. . . . I can't really give any specific examples other than to say almost everybody I met—anybody I had any kind of relationship with, business or social or anything like that—or even just I could sit and look at a tree. Or I could look at a cloud and be overwhelmed with bliss and love, but I wanted a relationship with it. And it was an ephemeral thing, and I wasn't in a position to—I didn't feel free. I was committed to the relationship with one person and one family; and I didn't feel like in our culture that . . . there was any room for it. It seemed like almost being broken. [*laughs*] I don't know how else to explain it. It was just very uncomfortable, yeah.

As a result of his discomfort, Brahma started to isolate more and more.

And then it got to the point where I really wanted to have somebody that could advise me about it. And I couldn't even imagine who to turn to. I had, you know, experiences prior to that with Catholicism and ministers and so forth; but I wanted somebody who had had the experience to be able to help me through it, not somebody who has maybe learned about it in a book.

Brahma searched his mind for a way or a place he could find someone who would understand what he was going through. He had read that the Hindu deity Shiva “was supposed to have attained immortality.” Although he didn't “understand how that could be possible on the relative level,” one night he went to a Hindu temple and laid in front of an altar and said:

“Look, if there's such a thing as an eternal being and if you can understand and if I'm making a connection, I really feel like I need to be healed, because I feel broken in the relative world. I have all of this love, but I'm still attached to it; and I don't feel that that's a right balance for me.” And it was an interesting thing that night—The priest came in and he said, “How did you find this temple?” And I told him that I had heard about it; and he said, “Well, we've prepared for over three years for a ceremony that we're starting tonight; and since you've come to this temple tonight, we feel that you should be part of it;

and would you mind coming for the next 75 days every day and sitting here?” I explained to him, I said, “I’m really broken and I don’t need this, and I can hardly deal with my self . . . What would you want me to do?” And he said, “Just radiate love.” . . . So I felt very connected in some way; and I thought, “Wow, if they needed a love generator, well they had the right person.”

So Brahman went to the temple in the evenings after work, and meditated and prayed for 75 days; “and during the course of those days, many, many things happened.” He didn’t know what they were preparing for in the temple; but toward the end of the 75 days, he found out

that they were installing a Shri Chakra, and then [he] realized that it would be installed in the people that were part of the ceremony. And then they explained to me at the end of that whole period that Shiva had given this ceremony to their religion to detach people from the attachment to the relative world. And I felt that it was an answer for my prayer, because what I was seeking was to have love without attachment; and that’s exactly what I got from that experience. And it was an irony for me.

Once the Shri Chakra was installed, he went through what he called a “very profound” three-year period of adjustment to “love without attachment.”

I went through an extremely, extremely flat period. I went through a period where anything I looked at had, like, the power of zero. Everything. And it started to happen in every part of my life—whether it was my children or my wife or my relationship or my job, or anything that I did or any interest that I had. And that got really, [*with a laugh*] really, really, really, really difficult to deal with. I thought that I was in trouble with the love; and now I had an enormous amount of individual bliss, but there was nothing to share it with at all. There was nothing that I looked at or experienced that I had the desire for, or wanted to be part of, or wanted to be associated with. And even though I was happy—So it was very conflicting, because I wasn’t depressed, and yet everything was completely flat. And that lasted for me fortunately—well, probably I’m gonna say about three years, I think. And it got more and more and more intense over a three-year period.

Becoming Self as Eternal Being

Then one night in October 1994, Brahma was meditating; and it “just dawned on [him] that [he] hadn’t been breathing.” He could not remember how long it was since he had taken his last breath. Since he was “not attached to anything of the world,” he did not put his attention on it, and continued to meditate.

And then I had a series of very interesting experiences that happened one on top of the other. I started to vibrate intensely, and it felt like every cell in my body was going to explode. . . . And the thought sort of arose that, “Okay, the part of your brain that has to do with sensory feelings is dying, because it’s not breathing, you’re not breathing, and therefore all the cells are sort of firing as they die.” That was the interpretation. That was what my logic went through. And then that passed by and it quieted down, and then I had a noise that all I could say that if you could put a speaker inside of a Saturn rocket, it felt

like my entire being, my whole essence turned to sound. And I thought, “Okay, so here’s the hearing part of your brain, the interpreting part, and that is dying; and so this is what happens when you lose your life.” And that’s what I thought I was doing—I thought I was dying. And then that passed, and then I had explosions of light brighter than anything you can see with the eyeball. It was like pure white sun. And then that passed, and then I thought I’d be dead. And there was just pure absolute silence—silence that has never had movement in it. . . . I was the center; I am the center of that silence.

As soon as Brahma understood that he *is* the center of pure, absolute silence, he had an experience of what he would later discover is known as “Samhita—It’s three states of awareness at the same time, simultaneously.” He explained Samhita in the following manner:

Right now I’m speaking with you and you’re thinking about it, but you can still think in the past and think in the future. But [Samhita] is only in the present. And as I realized I was silent, I also knew that that was eternal, and that that’s what my nature is, and that I am always that, and whatever wasn’t that never was. And then I realized that everything that is *Is* what that silence *Is*. And that I was, I *AM* all of everything that *Is*. And it was such a beautiful—and I wish I could speak in three voices at the same time, because to try to explain the Samhita, a triple experience of consciousness, can’t be done with a single voice. You know, you have to *Be-It* in order to experience *It*. And I can only do a very, very poor job of trying to describe it.

Then every single thought that he had ever had a question about—“Each one rose up simultaneously with its answer.” He experienced “how nothing was ever gained or ever lost. But it was/*Is* infinite—It *Is* [his] infinite Self experiencing that aspect of eternal reality as all parts of *It*.”

And it’s so beautiful, because when you see that everything that you ever thought was right and wrong was no more than an experience of infinite relativity as an aspect of your Being, then I called it the Mahahaha. It was a great bliss to be released of every point of suffering question in an instant. But that instant lasts for forever. There is no timeline to it, because once you’re outside of time, there’s only now; and now is eternal. And so, to say I was there for a period of time can’t be comprehended clearly, because I *Am* all that *Is* forever; and I knew in that state of experience my entire relative nature, and my entire unmanifest nature, and my entire—the silence that binds them together was my, *Is* my Being.

Coming back to the “relative aspect of himself,” he recalled the entire experience as a memory that “simultaneously exists in every waking moment.”

I lost all fear. I lost all concept of suffering, I realized that nothing is ever gained or lost, that there is no such thing as death, that death only exists in the awareness of people who don’t know their nature. And it’s a sort of a horrible, horrible lie that’s perpetuated on people. Hm. And . . . when you have that unbounded awareness in your field of comprehension, everything associated with any desire is fully and simultaneously cognized. So if you have a thought about anything, the whole holistic gestalt that’s

associated in any remote way with that one experience is fully revealed simultaneously to your awareness. And it's so beautiful. . . . And simultaneously, I could see how all life evolved from the desire of Being to know Itself. I saw the entire evolution of all life in every place in the universe, and then how it became more complex and how it became aquatic, and how all the evolution of all the different types of aquatic beings actually became a fish, and then I *was* the molecules of water around the surface of every scale on every fish and every ocean and every planet, simultaneously. It was my physiology. And so it wasn't as though I knew something else. I just remembered aspects of my own being. It was like my being was spread across all time and all space as the relative and unmanifest aspects of it, and all I had to do was to remember myself in any combination of experiences that I wanted to. So that went on forever.

Then Brahma thought, "How did I get here; what was my path?" He remembered that he'd had several teachers, the most recent of which was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation. He felt that practicing that meditation had taken him on a path that led to the "unbounded state of infinite awareness of himself." He was overwhelmed with desire to thank him, but "couldn't fathom anything" that would be sufficient. Then,

one thought rose up very clearly; and it said, "Give him your awareness in the form of a book." And then something very amazing happened, Laurel. I felt as though I were [*little laugh*] a universe filled with shaving cream, and I started to churn. . . . I felt like I was a resonant field of all potential atoms in times in space, and then they started to churn, and they took a position that allowed the universe to become stabilized again. And I heard again an enormous, enormous rushing of a horrific roar, like an engine, but more powerful than you could hear with ears, and a churning of my body. And then I realized that what was happening was that my physical body—somehow the universe had coalesced again into physical form. My whole infinite became relative time and space again, and my body was now gasping for air, and I was back individualized from unboundedness.

Brahma summed up this last part of the whole experience by saying, "And so I was fully awake through the whole journey and saw how my infinite nature becomes relatively expressed." He wrote ten books after that, and stated that he has

never lost that awareness. From that point on, I have always been unbounded in my understanding of my own nature. And it's as though the relative [Brahma] that was born on my birthday was just a vehicle to carry that consciousness until it discovered its real, true value or its real true Self. And *now* I live—I can love everything. I don't feel attached to anything. I know it to be myself. And that's the great liberation that came—is that I can love every single thing now as deeply as I love myself. And yet that self isn't [Brahma]; it's the self expressed as the entire universe. So I lost the being that I used to be. It no longer exists for me at all.

The Challenging Ten-Year Period of Adjusting to Relative Existence

Brahma explained what the entire last experience has left him with:

No judgment. Anger, if it ever arises, it seems to simultaneously come up with, “This is yourself, and what you’re seeing are residual belief systems that are interfering with your clarity. Find what they are and just let them dissolve; and then just love the experience.” . . . There’s no mistake any more in anything that happens to me. There’s only purposefulness, and it’s purposeful for maybe a reason that I don’t understand intellectually, but I’m willing to wait and find out what the purpose is. So I have a lot of patience, a lot of compassion—infinite, if I could say that. I’m still learning how to become more aligned with that unbounded aspect. And it was almost as though I had to relearn how to live with a whole new set of priorities, a whole new set of awareness. I read every book that I loved prior to that experience and saw it in a completely different light. If I go to the movies, I can’t get entrained into a movie any more. If I fall asleep and there’s a nightmare, I know it’s happening within myself. There’s no place where I lose that unbounded connection. It’s even in deep sleep. It’s just there all the time. [*little laugh*] So, it’s rather interesting, actually—yeah.

Brahma stated that “the days after that were quite challenging,” and that he actually went through a period of adjustment for about ten years.

You know, but it wasn’t easy. I had no guidance, and I really feel that somehow we need to be able to provide some guidance, because we don’t have a culture that’s prepared at all for this kind of awakening or whatever you want to call it. You know at first, I didn’t think it was anything more than just a profound experience, but I realized that I’ve never changed my perception of who I am since that time. It was almost like I [*little laugh*—if you can imagine going through, like, an hourglass and coming out the other side, and realizing, “Oh, I’ve never been what I just thought I was for all those 55 years.” [*laughs*] It’s quite strange. Yeah.

You know . . . the days after that were quite challenging. I no longer felt identified with my work ethic. I realized the transparency of our culture and the shallowness of how we live and die and suffer—and it’s all because we don’t understand our own nature, we don’t understand who we are; and so I stopped working.

And I can say that it cost everything. It cost me my job, my career, my marriage of 25 years. My wife just couldn’t understand how I could suddenly instantly change and have a different value system. I could no longer become part of any codependent relationship. I wasn’t condemning. I just have infinite compassion, but I didn’t want to support it with my energy any more. That’s kind of clear. What else did I give up? I virtually gave up everything. Yeah, I [*with a little laugh*] kind of used to laugh and say, “Well, now that I’m everything, I have nothing.” [*laughs*] And yet, I don’t feel any loss at all. I have a very, very full and happy and blissful continence in life. I’m not afraid of death; I’m not afraid of anything that can happen, because I know that everything relative is an experience of myself. And that I totally am absolutely a hundred percent knowing that there’s no such thing as death. So for me, there’s no fear at all. And suffering—It doesn’t mean I don’t have pain; but I don’t suffer, because I don’t think there’s anything wrong. [*laughs*] That sounds maybe hard to understand, too. But for instance, I experienced [an operation recently] and said, “Okay, well, we’re going to have this experience, and, you know, for

whatever reason it's important; and maybe I don't know it right now, but you know, I'm just going to go through it the best way I can and enjoy it." And that was my attitude. And that's my attitude through everything now. I didn't have that before.

So there's a lot of adjustment afterwards. . . . At first there was no meaning at all, it was like, well, if I'm everything, why, what's the purpose of doing anything at all? It was hard to get motivated again to do anything. . . . I needed to, I seemed to need to have a purposefulness; and that took a long time to develop. What I lived as was just kind and loving and supporting wherever I was. But I didn't feel like I had the same kind of purposeful drive as I had prior to that experience at all.

Brahma's Definition of No-Self

Brahma defines no-self through the experience in which he lost identification with his persona (the Brahma that was born on his birth date) which was re-identified with his Being which "is eternal" and is "ever-present."

And that was a very distinct experience for me. And in that experience, everything that I know, which occurred to the life form that was born on my birthday, I realize was no more or less than sort of a dream that I had been attached to for my entire physical existence, and that my real essence was an immortal Being that had no beginning and it had no personality—it is All personalities, it is All things. But it wasn't confined to the little self that I had grown up knowing myself to be from the time I was born. So I lost all identification with my individuality, I guess, is the best way I can describe it.

In other words, he knows his Self as eternal Being which is simultaneously apparent as the relative universe and unnoticeable as infinite potential.

Relative Existence Now

It took Brahma from 1994 to about 2004 "to become interested in a relative life again," not that he's terribly concerned about life right now. He explained that it was almost as if he was *driven* to write ten books, like he "had to get this enormous, enormous amount of information out in whatever way" he could.

And nothing else interested me in the world at all. And no relationships, no career, no anything. I mean, I became virtually a hermit, almost, for ten years. And I ran a business. I ran a mediation business. . . . I didn't connect in any way like I used to connect prior to the understanding of my Self. I literally did the business, but I wasn't *of* the business, I guess is [*laughing*] the only way I can describe it. And that's kind of like what I do now: I do the task, but I'm not identified with the task.

And it took a long time for me to try to just accept and live like that, 'cause I still had the memory of what it was like to be attached, and that was never happening any more. And it took me quite a while to understand that that wasn't gonna happen any more. [*laughs*] Yeah—yeah, it took quite a few years.

Relative existence for Brahma now is anything that he can experience through his senses *and* which is expressed as infinite potential through relative time and space.

The relative for me is any tangible expression in time and space. And so any *thing* that we can experience with our senses is what I term the relative. And the infinite potential is anything that *creates* the relative, that hasn't taken physical form or any kind of form that can be detected with sensory perception. So I believe that there's this infinite field that exists as my Self, both in the unexpressed and the fully-expressed relative universe and that they balance each other, that the whole thing is one Being connected in total silence; and that the core of either side of it is silence. And churning within myself, and I have a very, very clear and vivid understanding of how that happens, I become expressed as time—relative time and space and also absolutely infinity at the same time. And that's very lively in everything. I don't have to try to remember it. It's there inside of me as a permanent—as much as you know who you are, I know that I'm Being. [*laughs*] And that never goes away any longer.

Brahma explained that the sense of “purposefulness” he has now is not the same as before. He now sees that everything “doesn't have to have a relative purpose to it,” and he has “again started to enjoy just *being* in the relative, rather than purposefully *doing* something in the relative.” The effect of this is that,

Whatever I need is provided in some unexplainable way. It still happens like that. And, you know, I feel that my purpose for being relative [now] is just to help anybody who is really seeking their own nature to discover that for themselves. And if there's anything that I can do to support that in any way, that's my purpose for being relative.

I really would love to see more awakening in the world. And I would love to see some of the suffering dissipate. And I think the only way we can do that is to bring the knowledge of the self into awareness, whether it's through business or through science, or whatever.

Ariel's Signs of Awakening to the I AM

Ariel Samson is a 70-year old female who lives in the West North Central Midwestern region of the United States. She is a licensed marriage and family therapist, and works as a psychotherapist and a spiritual counselor.

Ariel's Definition of No-self

During Ariel's narrative, she described several different terms relating to "I," including (a) her little, personality self, (b) the deeper personality or soul, (c) the transcendent, or unbounded,"I", and (d) the witness, which is a subtle but very extensive form of the personal self. She viewed the I AM, Self, or transcendent "I" as a continuum, and explained

I see it all as a continuum. It's a continuum of the development of the self sense. You know, how it's when you're a child, the self sense is embedded in the body, and then it emerges in the psyche in relationship to mom; and then eventually the "I" sense comes out in relationship to the world and the roles you take. So *that* "I" sense that evolves and changes and develops, that eventually crosses over into . . . the capacity to have a conscience, and then the capacity to witness your behaviors, and then the capacity to stand unassailed in the I AM sense. It's a continuum. Because it's all an inner experience. It's formed by the structures that are given to you on the outside; but it's an inner experience, and it's a continuum. So occasionally when I say, "I," I'm meaning my little personality. Sometimes I'm meaning the deeper personality which is kind of like that which is deeply guiding us through our personal human life. Maybe you could call it the soul. And sometimes I mean the Self—the I AM. It's a continuum.

She described her current, personal experience of the I AM as, for example:

When I'm teaching and when I'm talking, like, I just feel the IAM appear and be speaking from a very all-knowing, profound, non-separate place. It just appears. It's not my little voice speaking. Sometimes it's my little personal self giving my opinion, you know. So, in my own self I can kind of discriminate those developmental levels of it appearing.

Signs of Awakening to No-self as I AM

While Ariel was not raised in any religious or secular tradition, as an adult she spent 10 years as a devotee of Adi Da Samraj. From 1986 to 1996 she lived part-time with his community and participated in various forms of spiritual practice, including: steady meditation, puja rituals, chanting, service, diet and lifestyle, and retreats. She had many spiritual experiences along the way and had "many temporary states of no-self." She explained,

They were very often energetic states of non-separation, like the feeling of merging into the entire environment, and blissful feelings in the body, and feelings of losing the boundaries of the body and the loss of sense of separate self. In that practice, I had many of those experiences while in a group setting, and then I also had those experiences in meditation.

However, Ariel did not feel that her experiences were validated, and she thought that individual attention from her guru was lacking. So she left that teacher and went to study with one of Adi Da's former students, Sanial Bonder. She stated that this teacher's spiritual practice included much more personal attention of the awakened person and also direct coaching and support, which she felt "really augmented [her] process very profoundly." During the early part of 1996, "with this more individually supportive teacher, [she] really experienced very completely, a period of witnessing—consciousness witnessing," which continued to deepen.

And in that period of witnessing, there was a sense of transcendent Self; I guess I wouldn't call it no-self, but there was a sense of transcendent Self and the capacity to receive and hold and stand back from and rest in the conscious nature, kind of like above and apart from "I"—the personal "I" experience. So the "I" was there, and yet there was some distance on it. There was some space into which to feel it. So I didn't feel completely identified with it; I was more identified with the capacity to witness it or stand aside from it, or be in the transcendent "I."

Then after about 9 months of being with this new teacher, "all kinds of things started heating up" in her.

The witnessing was so potent that I was able to witness some of the deeper ego patterns in my personality. I was able to just actually enter into those and experience them directly, not just feel their presence; and I was able to actually *be* my fractured mind, my paranoia, my sorrow, my brokenness. I was actually able to allow that kind of limitation of the ego self. I was able to allow myself to experience it directly, by the support of also the confidence in my capacity to witness it. So there was something about the duality that was beginning to fade. It was beginning to be experienced in a paradoxical way—the "I"—the limited "I" and the transcendent Self.

Immediate Signs of Transformation

In October 1996, Ariel went through a series of personal experiences that "dealt a really big death blow to some of her ego patterns.

Well, death blow—I mean, they revealed them and I could see past them; and especially one event. I was so affected and so disarranged in my ego self that I was up the entire night experiencing an upwelling of deep and different feelings and liberations from this ego self. And what arose was the feeling of very profound love for myself, for the people in my life, for the universe, for whatever's holding the universe together, and just an understanding of the kind of freedom that was available, and the kind of—what else? Just the kind of cracking open that was positive in its liberating force. . . . I was so ragged that finally I felt—the only thing I can call it is a profound descent of blessing from above that poured in through my crown chakra and traveled down my entire body. And it was like a pacifying and soothing and illuminating force that brought me to a state of equanimity and rest. And I finally fell asleep for about an hour [*little laugh*] or 2 hours. And then when I got up in the morning, I felt completely refreshed and restored. . . . But I didn't know that I had undergone such a profound transformation 'till a few days later. But when I did awaken, one of the things I just happened to notice was that in the midst of this

equanimity, I had noticed I was walking down the hallway of the house, and that I just happened to notice that I was present beyond the walls. I was present in the yard, I was present, you know, in a very expanded space. And I don't know if it was "I." I didn't cognize that *I'm* present like this. But I just noticed awareness was registering in a vast space that hadn't happened to me in my life outside of an ashram experience, you know, or a gathering with the guru or something like that. I just never noticed that it had happened in my ordinary life. So that was one of the signs.

A few days later while she was meditating, Ariel had other signs of transformation from "her inner self" that "were framed in [her] cognitive view of the world." Additionally, she had signs that heart center had awakened in that she had opened up in her heart and that her heart was "not separate from anything else. It was not separate from the deep inner experience of nothingness, emptiness" Ariel realized that she "had crossed over in some sort of way."

Ariel's Description of Awakening Related to No-self

Ever since Ariel realized the transformations, she has been able "to be present and aware under all kinds of circumstances;" and this ability "continued to magnify." This ability to be aware related to "sensing and knowing and intuiting and experiencing *life*;" However, now it was "*not* through as *tight* a framework" as she previously experienced. The distinctive difference was that this was a "very open field through which [she] was aware of life, [her] life; and life, other people's lives." She explained,

It's like, yes, I continued to arise; and from time to time—and I still do identify with my own personal "I," but it doesn't demand or command or hold me captive at all in the same way that it used to. It's like this sense of spaciousness and openness and consciousness is almost always available alongside or *of* the "I." And to me it just seems like the "I" is the same as the space; it's open and it's *opening* and it's not limiting me. . . . It's not fundamentally limiting me to any condition, [such] that I recognize the conditions come and go and the "I" comes and goes, but it's like it's not my primary identity. This "I" that's associated with the body-mind doesn't seem to be my primary identity. It alone doesn't seem to be my primary identity. So, in that sense, I guess you might say it's an experience of no "I" or of no self. But, you know, the self is just not a tight little ego, body-limited perspective any more. The self appears paradoxically wedded to the conscious nature, which is empty or open, or space; or well you know, there are a lot of words for it. Love. So in that sense, I feel like I mostly always have access to this non-duality.

In other words, Ariel's description of her experience of no-self is that experience of personal "I" may arise from time to time, but it arises beside the sense of spacious, open consciousness. She viewed this as contrary to what some classical descriptions have described as "field of radical emptiness . . . devoid of concept, devoid of "I," devoid of anything personal." Ariel stated

But where I find myself is more in the non-dual, which means that that awareness has returned to join itself or to live through phenomena as well as through emptiness. So that there's a true recognition of the wedding of emptiness and form, you know, or Shiva-

Shakti. That's more the experience that I am aware of. That experience more than the classical no-self, where the personal "I" is more distant than the conscious nature.

Ariel expressed her belief that spirituality has evolved such that awakening is no longer just an inner experience among those who can isolate themselves in monasteries or ashrams. Rather, "being involved in the world and infused in" activity of our Western civilization experience needs to be included in realization of awakening. She explicated her viewpoint that inner awakening without involvement in the phenomenal world is

like stepping back so far . . . and resting in either the Self or no-self so profoundly, that one loses all inclination to be involved in the unfolding of the phenomenal world. And you can recognize and live non-duality without living in *that* extreme an expression of it. And, in fact, it's much more akin to the Western psyche to come back into the world. You know, it's more like the expression of God as immanent in the world—included in the world . . . rather than standing separate from it. It's like it's not fitting any more. It's not comprehensive enough for our times. It only includes the internal experience of realization, whereas, I guess I would say spirituality has evolved in the sense now that it recognizes the external evolution—the external elements of our experience need to be included as much as the internal phenomenology. So, this internal realization is really only partial. It's not the fullness of our full manifestation of being.

In other words, for Ariel, "*emptiness is fullness is emptiness*," in the sense that "it is paradoxically present and obvious in the fullness of unending arising phenomena."

This is the next evolutionary expression of Being. . . . Because Being exists in all the human systems, as well as in the internal system only—in community, in family, in nations, in world order.

Living in No-self as Being

Ariel pointed out that her view is "a renegade idea of no-self" that is not the "traditional Advaitic, Buddhist, Hindu conception of enlightenment or awakening." Her understanding is that experience is not possible without conditions.

And yet . . . there is a sense as I lead my life, that the conditions are permeable—the "I" is permeable with consciousness, so that there's identification with the "I" and there's non-identification with the personal "I" and it's not material, in a way. It doesn't matter, because everything has permeated and *is* consciousness. And there really is no way to avoid conditions, because even the people who realize non-duality in the inner planes say at the subtle levels there are conditions which make that possible. They're conditions of sitting still, deeply relaxing, having a quiet environment. You know, those conditions make it possible to realize this very, very pristine condition of no-self. That's how it's traditionally conceived—that it's pure, that it's utterly apart from all conditions. But to me, I think that's an illusion. There's no experience apart from conditions. There is an ongoing capacity you recognize that conditions aren't limiting, but conditions are always present. So, I guess I would say that's my realization of no-self. Conditions aren't limiting.

Ariel cited a personal example of how conditions aren't limiting:

In any moment I can tell you that my interactions with other people, listening to the political news, listening to the [*with a laugh*] economic news, in any moment I can think, "Oh, my god, this condition is permanent, you know, now I'm doomed, blah, blah, blah." But all I have to do is wait a moment; and that thought, that limiting thought, evaporates. It's like, you know, in this moment I may think and see and feel that way, I might have identified with the local "I" and the next moment that identity lifts, and something else is presenting itself. So we're never limited for very long by any conditions. That's what I've come to see. We're not limited by our self sense or our self concepts, or about our concepts of other or the world. We are really not limited like we tend to think we are.

In other words, thoughts and feelings arise; and then a moment later there's another awareness and

they dissolve. It's like well, a kind of a traditional way of speaking about it—well, I kind of like Buddhist writings—is that everything is self-liberating. Every thing, every object, every place you can put your attention, it liberates itself the next moment. In other words, there's no permanence. There's really no permanence. The only thing that is permanent is awareness or consciousness. The only thing that persists and actually never changes is consciousness—registering this, registering, registering, registering. And that is permanent. And maybe that's what people mean when they say there is no self. They mean that there's no permanent self. That's what I think they mean. But there is an ego-self and there is a body-self and there is a world-self, there are objects. Because if these things weren't here, there would be no form through which to have any experience. But what people mean by no-self is that none of these things are truly very permanent. And I guess I would say that's what I'm aware of. You know, I know that. So that's a sense in which I'm speaking of there's no "I," no self.

Ariel has awakened to the truth that even though we experience form through an ego-self, a body-self, a world-self, and objects, that these things are not permanent. This conscious awareness of no "I" is no self. She is awakened "to the truth of that condition."

And that doesn't mean that I'm free of structures. The deeper structures of my ego are unfolding, you know, and the deeper structures of my soul-nature—probably, you can call it that, I don't know, you know, some radical teachers will say there's no such thing as a soul, there's no [*with a little laugh*] such thing as an ego—but there are structures that arise. I don't know whatever you want to call them. And I'm not a finished product, you know. I'm not sitting around—no one would say that I'm a Ramana Maharshi or anything like that. I don't think I would be instantly recognized as an enlightened being. But, you know, I actually am enlightened to this aspect of the world. But I'm not a finished product. I haven't realized everything in every way. And I haven't encountered everything in every way, so there's a lot of learning and encountering that will happen; but I guess I've arrived at the place where I have confidence that the consciousness that I am, that everything is, will reveal itself to me throughout all these experiences.

Ariel's Description of "Living in Awakening"

Difficult Aspects of Psychological Growth

The awakening process caused Ariel to experience some difficult times within the first 6 years, with regard to a primary relationship and ego patterns.

Almost immediately the awakening process kind of like pulled me out of the current relationship. I had been in a relationship for 12 or 13 years with a man. I just—like, I couldn't go on with him. So I had to leave that relationship. That was like a big jolt. It no longer supported my further understanding of life—my life. So I had to leave that. And then I was in another short term relationship that really provoked all of my early ego deficits, and I had to go through that. It was difficult.

I would say that in the first 6 years of my awakening life that many of my ego limitations—my ego patterns—were exposed and purified and integrated. Things like abandonment feelings, insecurities. And really, I notice they're not all gone. I mean, they still arise in me; but also, I know they're not essential or permanent. But those places in my ego development where I didn't get what I needed at the time I needed it—those things all popped up for my examination, and they are healing. They are purifying, they are integrating, they no longer are the big stumbling blocks that they once were. But they can be triggered, you know. But nothing like they used to be. I would say I used to be kind of a depressed person. And inhibited. And a pleaser. And now I've gotten more of a hold on myself. Now I feel like it's just okay to be turned inward if I want to. It's just okay to say no; it's okay to immerse myself in whatever little narrow interest I have at the moment. There's just a way in which I have seen the other side of my self-criticism, and it doesn't carry the weight that it used to. So that's psychologically how I've been affected.

Personal and Physiological Changes Related to Awakening

Ariel described the paradoxical nature of awakening, in that in one respect she had changed “profoundly;” and

in another respect, I'm still the same character [*makes sound wah*]; I still have some of the same desires; and I still, from the outside it looks like I lead an ordinary life. So in some respects I haven't changed, but in many respects I have changed.

Immediately after awakening, Ariel experienced

the new influx of powerful energies in my body, like there was kind of a rejuvenation of sexuality and vitality and more endurance, more stamina—way more for many years. I mean, I could really like kind of out-walk, out-hike, out-endure people that were younger than I am. [*with a laugh*] That's not true any more, but I'll be 70 in a month. So, that's not as true of me now. I am actually feeling like the growth energy, the vitality of my body, is a little bit less. . . . The kundalini energy, or the subtle energy in my body is very powerful still. So that changed a lot. That was augmented a lot.

Another one of the first things she noticed was

I'm a psychotherapist, right, so when I would meet with people, it was as if I suddenly knew them inside out. Just like a lot of veils have dropped away, and I could just directly sense where they were stuck, where their identity had congealed. So it was kind of fun. All of a sudden I felt psychic, you know? That has continued. . . . This passage kind of endowed the capacity to penetrate through many layers of mind, I guess you would say, in myself and others. And that has remained really delicious. Like, my level of sensitivity to energy and, oh, phenomena—yeah, I guess phenomena—has really increased dramatically. And along with this has come an increase in bliss and joy and love and curiosity and delight and humor. You know, it's just augmented all those things. But I also have to add that it has intensified the so-called “negative” experiences such as isolation, grief, anger, pain.

Initially, Ariel did not change her psychotherapy career; but over time she “phased out of working with really difficult patients,” such as those with personality disorders, because [she] no longer felt drawn to working with that population. She did, however, add a whole new career as a teacher. Additionally, Ariel noticed that her intelligence seemed to go up.

Then, regarding intelligence. That's another thing. Whoa! I feel like my intelligence went up many degrees. [*laughs*] Like it was easy to grasp things quickly. . . . The mental perceptions have greatly speeded up. And capacity to speak and teach and affect people has greatly speeded up. Because it feels like there's something in me that is “authority.” Some authority is in me, as me. I used to be very . . . equivocal, you know. I could never really land in anything and never make a statement about anything. And now sometimes I feel like I'm on the other side. I'm making too many [*with a laugh*] authoritative statements. Like, “This is how it is.” But, you know, I also have the awareness that even as I make that statement, the other side of the coin is also true and . . . approach the consideration, too. But like any more . . . I don't hesitate as much to be what I am in the moment—just letting it fall. And knowing that this is not permanent either, but it might be valuable in this moment to just be myself. So, the ability to just *be* myself, express myself, accept myself, and live my individuality is very different from what it used to be. Very, very different.

Ariel described her experience of “no-self” as contrary to the stereotypical conceptualization of “spiritual.”

I would add that the experience of “no-self” is for me not at all what many conceptualize as “spiritual” [as] pure, placid, serene, positive, etc. [My experience] is definitely colorful, forceful, opinionated, fierce, lively, contentious, all the elements in the spectrum of human and biological/cosmic life. And another thing I've been thinking about lately—I've understood now that *my* life is a highly creative life—that with the capacity to observe very deeply and to allow the living out of whatever's in me, that as things open, they're lived out and they dissolve. Then the next moment presents an open field in which a lot of creative energy and ideas and actions arise. So, there's a sense of not being stuck, of being really a source—A source arises in my particular human form that wasn't available to me

before that I wasn't in touch with in the same way. A creative source that's . . . oh, it's wonderfully pleasurable.

Currently Ariel is semi-retired and focuses on spiritual counseling and teaching. She is interested in "helping people discriminate the levels of consciousness and the deeply held, unrecognized levels of attitude towards spiritual life."

AJ's Life Process of Embodying Buddhist and Taoist Principles as No-self

AJ is a 60-year old male who lives in the province of Ontario, Canada. He has a B.S degree and also holds certifications as a Chartered Accountant; a Medical Qigong therapist; a Zen Shiatsu therapist; and as a teacher of Vipassana meditation, Taijiquan, and Qigong. His current vocations include being a Qigong healer, an author, a Tai Chi and internal martial arts instructor, a manager and owner of a retreat centre, and a teacher and workshop leader.

For the interview, AJ stated that he was born in Guyana; and although he is of Chinese heritage, he was raised in Western culture when Guyana was a British colony. During the decade from 1968 to 1978 he set out to rediscover his Asian heritage, initially through reading Buddhist and Taoist literature, and then through attending retreats and practicing martial arts, yoga, and meditation.

At the very early stages of exploring his Asian heritage, AJ stated that he went very deep into Buddhist teachings. He described his spiritual process in terms of inner embodiment of Buddhist and Taoist philosophies as “stages of commitment or stages of letting go.” These stages played out in his life through the “landmarks” of getting married, having children, giving up his business career to become a Tai Chi and meditation teacher, and getting divorced. Throughout all of this, his application of “the idea of letting go [and] of living in the moment . . . totally transformed [his] life.” This philosophy enabled him “to more and more take each day at a time and concentrate on a moment—give up plans and expectations” This practice is something he’s done “in deeper and deeper levels throughout [his] life.” From age 19 to the present, his inner reality gradually shifted to an inner “sense of no-self.”

AJ's Definition of No-self

AJ defined no-self in Buddhist and Taoist philosophical terms.

A lot of Chinese philosophy is very much influenced by Yin/Yang philosophy, and Yin/Yang philosophy is . . . maybe three thousand years or more old. But it was reflected in the Tai Chi diagram . . . which is called the Tai Chi Tu. But that was developed in about the 11th century A.D., so that diagram itself is not as old as the philosophy itself. If you think of the Tai Chi diagram, there is a circle; and then there's the Yin and the Yang, that's called Taiji—that's the interaction of the Yin and the Yang. But prior to *Tai Chi* is *Wu Chi*; and Wu Chi is just an empty circle. So out of nothingness comes activity and manifestation. But activity and the manifestation doesn't displace the emptiness; it's still taking place in the emptiness. So the emptiness is always there. And the emptiness is not just a vacuum; it's a different dimension [and it's always available].

So, when you do the Tai Chi form, for instance, you start out by standing still. That's called a Wu Chi posture. But within the Wu Chi posture, Yin Yang still exists. For instance, there's front and back, there's heaven and earth, there's breathing in, breathing out, there's left and right, active and passive, you know, heavy and light, etcetera. So those are there even when you're just standing there. And when you start to move, then those things become more obvious. But they were there before, and they become more active. So Tai Chi is, in a way, dynamic balance. Tai Chi is acknowledging, as the Buddha does,

that everything is impermanent, everything is changing. But at the same time, underneath the change there is a stillness; there is an emptiness at the same time. And so those two things can go together.

And it's the same thing with meditation. Breath—The in-breath and out-breath arise out of space or emptiness and also fall back into space or emptiness. Thoughts rise out of emptiness and fall back; emotions rise out and fall back into emptiness. And so emptiness is always there. And the more we stay in emptiness, the less compulsion we feel from our patterns; and also, the more we actually are able to see into the details of those patterns. And if those are destructive, then hopefully we can let go of our destructive patterns—the patterns that don't serve us well on that level.

So, in terms of Taoism, there are always those three things. They always exist—both the interplay of Yin and Yang, and the emptiness. And it's actually built into the practices not only of Tai Chi, but Qigong, etcetera. So, for instance when you stand, you're actually energetically connected to the earth. You have roots into the earth; your head is connected to the heavens. And so the human being is always seen as channeling the energies of heaven and earth at one time.

For AJ, the process of deepening no-self involved a realization that “ego is not all powerful” and a recognition of the non-solidity of ego.

My teacher talks about “aware ego.” So there is ego. And there always is a sense of “I” and that the ego is operating in the world, but it's only one manifestation of sense of “I.” It's necessary, I think, to have that in order to live in the world; but it's not my primary kind of identification with that sense of “I.” I see ego not as an entity, but as a process. And because, well, to me everything as process is changing, moving, and in that sense there is no solidity; so things are happening, but there isn't a solid base or entity of underlying anything, apart from spirit—whatever that is. Or apart from the sense of “I” or “I am.”

In other words, ego is a process. And everything is a process of changing and moving as part of “I” or “I am.” AJ described being in no-self as “feeling nothing, but totally connected at the same time. You know, being able to function, but just kind of resting in deep peace, deep emptiness.” He explained how “the sense of no-self” gradually came to be and how his outer life stages facilitated an inner deepening and manifesting of no-self.

I think that in my process I got fairly deep at quite a young age. I guess in a way all of this has been like some kind of a plateau; but also, [it has been] some kind of working out the details or working on consistency—working on deepening. So it's been there for a long time. But these other stages are I guess just manifesting in different ways, just manifesting somehow—moving into different areas of life, different *quadrants* if you like. That's what those things seem to be about. And at the same time, trying always to deepen. So it carries through all different kinds of experiences and all different areas of life, and to broaden those areas of expression.

AJ's Stages of Commitment and Stages of Letting Go

AJ “embodied” the principles of Yin/Yang, Buddhism, and Taoism through “stages of life” as “stages of letting go.” He explicated this with the following statement: “Yes. You know, each moment is a new moment, so it’s just a matter of trying to respond as best as possible to each moment.” AJ offered this synopsis of the states.

It actually has just been like different stages—I mean, I don’t mark them in formal developmental stages. My stages, I guess, are stages of commitment or stages of letting go.... Like getting married, having children, giving up being a chartered accountant to be a teacher of Tai Chi and meditation . . . Getting divorced, and then fairly recently, I’ve been making a shift from being a full-time teacher to now running a retreat center and doing more outreach or global work, and, you know, to do work promoting transformation of consciousness, trans-traditionality, etcetera.

The First Stage of Commitment and Letting Go

When AJ was 19 years old and beginning to reconnect with his Eastern heritage, he started reading about yoga and started learning martial arts and karate, which he categorized as “*external martial arts*.” In the next year, 1969, while he was driving to a summer job in Stockholm, he had a very serious car accident in the fjords in Norway. This accident served as a “wake-up call,” which he credits as causing him to commit to pursue study of Buddhism, Taoism as internal and external martial arts. He said,

It was really a kind of a wake-up call for me, because I nearly went over the side of a fjord. I was stopped by a single tree that was on the way down. And [*little laugh*] so I was kind of literally you know, inches or milliseconds away from death, because it was quite a drop into the fjords.

I just felt completely stupid and [*little laugh*] and vulnerable and pretty shaken up. And I had to wait; so it was almost like a kind of retreat because here I was speeding away to go to Stockholm, have a great time. And all of a sudden I was stuck in the countryside in Norway, knowing no one and having to kind of beg lifts trying to get by. And so before I could get a plane out and arrange for my car to be fixed, I had several days of nothing to do but sitting in a room of a local inn. And I started to do whatever yoga exercises I could remember from the book I had bought. But I also started to do something which actually became my practice later, which is something quite akin to Vipassana or insight meditation—just really reviewing my life and asking questions, like, “What is the purpose of life? Who am I?” etcetera.

And then some time later—I think maybe it was in the next year or so—I was at the London School of Economics at that time, which was a political hotbed and people were talking about Buddhism and Zen, etcetera. I thought I would buy a book on Buddhism to find out what it was about so I could fuel my anti-religious argument. And when I read the book, it actually was really an eye-opener. For the first time I could see how the mental ego—why it was not all-powerful, and why the thinking mind was not all-powerful, and how that connected with the sense of “I.” And it was a very enlightening experience; I

suddenly *understood*. And I'm not sure what actually happened then; but certainly from that point onwards there was a commitment to realize this stuff or experience this stuff as much as I could, which is what happened. I started reading, looking for teachers; and then when I found teachers, going on intensive retreats; I found teachers in internal martial arts like Tai Chi . . . and I pursued those.

So from that point onwards, it actually has just been like different stages. . . . Those are my landmarks; but as I said, from a very early stage, it was fairly clear to me that the more I tried to look, the less I could find in terms of myself. . . . I gave up any form of belief system. I didn't operate on belief—more “to be in the moment,” experience, be conscious. For me, it's been gradual. I guess I could point to certain inner experiences; or I could point to certain life experiences which were significant or painful. But as I kind of go back in my mind's eye . . . when I look at how I was thinking then, I know more now—but more or less, the main outlines—understandings were there.

The reality and the living out of the first stage. AJ's first stage was an “enlightenment” experience of seeing through the solidity of ego. It was a landmark that “opened up a whole new world” to him with regard to how he could *be* in living his “new life.”

Well, prior to this experience, I was always in charge—I was always in control of myself or my life—or I thought I was, anyway. But I always wanted to be the one in control. And so, when I read Buddhism, it kind of opened up a whole new world, because I could see that my understanding was kind of a closed circuit. And so part of living my new life was actually trying to be in the moment. And I'm letting go of control, which is also opening up the heart or allowing yourself to be vulnerable—to be fair, to lose—putting yourself in situations in which that might happen, does happen.

AJ explained his first internal application of the Buddhist philosophies of letting go of control and of living in the moment, and how that “totally changed” his life.

I started applying what I was learning. I guess one of the first steps was when I was training to be a chartered accountant. I hated it. It was very tedious, and like everyone else, I counted the minutes, counted the seconds. But after a while, after a few weeks or a few months, it occurred to me to apply the idea of letting go, of living in the moment, etcetera. And that I did; and that totally transformed my life. I've lived like that ever since, and it totally transformed my working experience. I was no longer disgruntled. I was able to more and more take each day at a time and concentrate on a moment, give up plans and expectations. And that's something I've done kind of more and more, or in deeper and deeper levels throughout my life.

AJ further explained his realizations in letting go and living in the moment

Yeah, letting go, rather than living by jumping between the past and future; and I see the future as just a projection of the past. So rather than thinking of what was, or what might be, or what I wanted, or what I believed—giving all of that up and just more focusing on *what is*—what is happening in the body; what's happening in the mind energetically,

contact or interaction with the world, and what constitutes *right action*. So you know, “What is the correct response to what is happening moment by moment?” rather than having a grand plan or a dream that you’re moving towards. So I gave that up. I’m not having any plans. I loved what I was doing, and wanted to do more and more in terms of spirituality, in terms of the martial arts and energetic arts. But in the early days, I couldn’t see it as practical; or I couldn’t see how—I wasn’t ‘qualified’ to be a teacher. It was something that attracted me, but I didn’t really have a plan to be a teacher because I was just going day by day, doing what had to be done, paying my bills, taking care of mundane stuff; and, in the meanwhile, continuing my training and my practice.

The Second Stage

In the next stage of commitment and letting go, AJ experienced true love.

I guess the second thing I can think of in terms of opening up and vulnerability was at about the same time, I met the woman who would be my wife, eventually together for 23 years. That was the first time—I had my first true experience of love. Because for the first time, I wasn’t in control, didn’t want anything, wasn’t in a controlling role, and allowed myself to be in a more open role.

For about the next ten years, AJ was able to intensively pursue Buddhist and Taoist practice, until the birth of his first child caused a deepening of letting go.

And so in the beginning, like for the first ten years or so, I was really devoting myself quite intensively to all of this stuff. In fact, the first time I stopped all of that was when I had my first child. And I couldn’t do all of that stuff. But then I embarked on a different kind of training, which has been just letting go [*little laugh*]. Letting go not only of the negative stuff, but even letting go of stuff that I thought was positive, because I simply didn’t have the time and energy to do all of the stuff that I was doing. So I had to learn to do my practice in a different way—in a way in which I was more immersed in the world.

The Third Stage

The next stage in AJ’s life occurred after his move to Canada in 1982, when he was invited by his teacher to train as a Vipassana teacher. He decided to become a teacher despite having no savings and the birth of his second child.

One of the reasons I did it was because if I had to divide my life between spiritual practice, looking after the family, and doing a 9 to 5 job, I couldn’t see how I would have enough time to do everything. So I guess I took the option of trying to make my 9 to 5 job my hobby—put them together [*laughs*]. And so that’s what I did. But being an accountant myself, it was not really a logical thing to do. I mean, I didn’t even have enough money to make it worthwhile even doing a budget. [*little laugh*]

AJ found that he was not making much money as a teacher either; so he started a fish business with a partner. The business failed, the partner absconded with the money; and all of this left AJ

feeling “disheartened.” So, like the Buddha, he decided to “sit down in meditation until [he] could come to some clarity.

And as I sat, I wasn’t looking for the Buddha to come and give me guidance. It could be anyone. It could be Mohammed or Jesus [*with a laugh*]. I just wanted some kind of guidance or to be in touch with something. And eventually, I was in touch with something. It wasn’t something external; but it was just a clear realization within myself that I had certain expectations, I had certain fears about being a teacher or about how that would come about. They were not great fears, they were kind of subtle ones; but they were there nevertheless. I thought that if I wanted to continue being a teacher and to continue being true to myself, that I would just have to trust and also give a hundred percent of myself to what I was doing. Which I did.

AJ also gave an example of application of letting go in relation to his marital commitment. A few times during their 23-year marriage there were relational disturbances. In reaction to a particularly intolerable occurrence, he described his application of “letting go.”

I was walking out the door, but all of a sudden I had a flash and the image in my mind was of our relationship as a baby, as something living, something vulnerable. By walking out of the door, I would be killing the baby. So I didn’t. And as it turned out, she was the mother of my three children; and so we were together for 23 years, and that ended in ‘93.

The Fourth Stage

AJ’s “next milestone” occurred in 1993. At that point, he had been teaching for almost ten years. During that time, he “never made a ton of money;” but he did establish a martial arts school which became well-known.” He had “a bunch of senior students who were very loyal and very supportive and very sincere. And so it was like a big spiritual family.” Eventually, the marital discord led to his wife’s shocking announcement that “she just basically wanted to leave or didn’t want anything to do with” him. This was shocking

more to the kids. It was a shock, I mean, I knew that there was stuff going on, but I didn’t think it was nearly that bad; and certainly the kids had no inkling, because we never had quarreled. And so, again, that was a kind of a period of letting go—well, at first—not letting go. I first tried my best to see what we could do to fix it or talk or communicate, but when it became clear to me after about 2 or 3 months that her feeling [was that] she didn’t love me, she didn’t want to be with me. Then I just did my best to let go and not sink into recrimination or anger or blame. And I think that it was very healthy. I don’t know if the kids are totally untouched, but I think it really minimized the damage.

AJ described how his application of Buddhist principles facilitated familial harmony and affected his children. He began teaching them to meditate and to “feel energy,” without expectation or the authority of “belief.” Meditation “transformed” his kids, they began to meditate as a family, and this allowed them to “talk about emotions and deeper things” and let go of conflicts. His kids eventually embodied Buddhist and Taoist practices, which validated the philosophies as “universal forces and universal dynamics.”

And in a way, last year things came full circle. [The kids] are now all in their 20s and all of a sudden, they requested a formal meditation retreat. We don't spend much time together; but rather than just hanging out, they all wanted to have a formal retreat. And that's what we did for a couple of times last year; and it was amazing because it was like a validation. Because with them, I've never wanted to make them believe as I did. Because I don't "believe," *[with a laugh]* and I don't believe in "belief." So I never tried to put anything onto them, but just give them opportunities or asked them questions or gave them possibilities. So I think that was part of my path—which was interacting with my students, interacting with my children, and seeing that these things were not just my pet beliefs or whatever, but they are universal forces and universal dynamics. So to be able to see them in my children from a very, very young age, even before they were born. . . . That kind of stuff is interesting; and they've always been aware of energy, the existence of energy. They could feel it, and sometimes they could see it. (Of course they went through teenage years where they were more preoccupied with friends and partying, etcetera). So it has been a gift for me to see them through all those stages. And also I have always wanted to be ordinary. I wanted for things to unfold in a kind of a natural, spontaneous fashion. As a teacher, I've never emphasized being a teacher or the authority of tradition, etcetera, even though I respect it and I practice according to it.

Also subsequent to his divorce, AJ "actually again moved into the world," came out of his "shell in a different way," and faced his fear when he began competing in Chinese Tai Chi Chuan competitions. Through personally competing and taking his students to competitions, he found a Qigong teacher who encouraged him to not only "do the martial Qigong, but medical Qigong as well."

So I became a Qigong healer, and I studied Chinese medicine. I still do that. . . . That's just one of the things that I do, but I don't put myself out primarily as healer. But I do heal, especially if people are in serious situations. I also do long distance healing. So, I guess, that is another landmark.

AJ defined his life landmarks as "filling in the details, fitting in more pieces of the puzzle;" so that he *now* embodies and lives Buddhist and Taoist principles and philosophies. He not only sees how "body, energy, mind, spirit" are "generally and intuitively" connected, but he also sees the "specific dynamics" of them. They are "not just a theory or belief system," but rather they are "a reality" to him, and his innate connection with body, energy, mind, spirit "is quite specific and practical."

AJ's Lived Reality

AJ said that he is "living the Yin/Yang—embodying it on many different levels, and levels that are surprising." They are "just so physical and strategic;" but also, "they just are as they are." He went very deep into Buddhism and Taoism at a young age. He embodied no-self as he went through the stages of his life by responding to "as best as possible to each moment" as a "new moment." He stated this embodiment of no-self has been a process of understanding more clearly "specific things that he would read in books" and over the years their becoming "much more a constant reality." He used "the image of filling in the blanks" as to describe how life stages and

landmarks facilitated embodiment of “specific faculties or abilities,” which he further explicated as

energy and feeling energy, cultivating energy, projecting energy, understanding how energy can be a specific manifestation of the mind. So even if you’re meditating and know nothing about energy, how your specific meditations can be causing stuff to happen within you; and how that is affecting the body and the organs, etcetera. Probably—that’s not totally it, but more or less a lot of that is. So, kind of filling in, I think, an important blank, because a lot of traditions don’t talk about that in any detail.

Understanding, feeling, and experimenting with energy led him to not only integrate Qigong with Tai Chi, but also to make the surprising discovery that he is a healer and to study Chinese medicine. What were formerly “just possibilities or theories” which he basically agreed with, “are actually reality for” him now. This ability, he added, is “not a big deal, it’s just part of being human;” and it includes the ability to heal long distance.

Other than learning to become a healer and learning to do his practice in a way that “was more immersed in the world,” AJ stated that he hasn’t changed much. He has always been “a very stable and balanced person;” and he has remained strong and healthy at age 60. Most recently, in contrast to his introverted personality, he has been manifesting his passion, which is “to help bring about more compassion, more sense of unity or oneness within our society because [he thinks] we are very privileged to live on this planet.” He has become more proactive in public life by working on projects that “support anything at any level that will help move us towards that.” He stated that he is just using his gifts to the best of his ability and doing whatever he can do—which he thinks “has a lot to do with sense of self or no-self or who we are.”

Moon's Images of Growing in Awareness of No-self

Moon is a 60-year old female who resides in the East North Central Midwestern region of the United States. Her education included earning a B.A., M.A., and D.Min. degrees. She holds the title of *Sister*, which names the way in which she is “related to all creatures of the universe.” She prefers to be called by her given name.

Moon was raised in the Roman Catholic Christian religion. She was brought up by “a mother and a father who, although religious and active in their church communities . . . weren’t a devotional family.” She grew up with the value that she should always pay attention to the other and to ask herself, “What could be another reason?” if she felt inclined to “badmouth” somebody. “And then if there was another reason, there could be more reasons; and so you don’t know. Just love the other.”

At the “ripe age of 14,” Moon entered a Franciscan convent; and she has the letters O.S.F. after her name which indicates Order of Saint Francis. Moon’s occupational title is *Anchoress*, which indicates that she is “anchored in solitude and the ‘now’ from which [she] ministers with services of spiritual direction, retreat direction, spiritual teachings, writing, poeting, and watercolor painting.”

Moon’s poetry, writing, and painting are part of her practice of letting go of ego or self—It’s where she does “battle” with the “messiness” of life. Her account of her ministering “comes from the concept of no-self,” which for her means

letting go of myself so that energy for the other might flow through me. This is my Artist Statement: I paint for the same reason that I live, relate, and serve. It is to engage the purpose, passion, and pleasure of the spirit of beauty within and around me—All divine donation. This beauty, by its nature, seeks to give itself away for the sake of the other. I choose the media of watercolor in order to be at one with the water planet, Earth. Many of my paintings incorporate a quilt-like design that connects me with those folks of the ages who have made beauty and warmth the stuff of their lives through quilting or other forms of connecting. I hope that my art is a blessing for the gazer and that it reflects back some of the beauty of their own soul.

Moon elaborated on her life practice of letting go and related it to both her upbringing and the Franciscan teachings.

And the whole concept of Franciscan spirituality is to be for the other. Even the prayer that is ascribed to [Saint Francis of Assisi]—we don’t believe he wrote it—”Make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred, let me bring love; where there is discord, unity. . . .” You’re not asking there to *be* the peace or the unity or the love; you’re asking just to be the instrument. And in order to be the instrument for such a universal ultimate love to flow through you, you’ve got to let go of yourself. So those were very early practices that I was invited into.

And then there is my interpretation of incarnation as the practice of no-self by the divine. In the Christian scriptures Jesus empties himself of God to come and be one among us. So, all of that fit together for me. And when I describe myself in interreligious gatherings, I always say I'm a Christian in the lineage of Francis and Clare of Assisi. I do not identify with much of the very Roman ways.

Facets of Stages of Growing in No-self

In preparation for the interview, Moon thought of her process in awareness of no-self not in terms of hierarchical or logical development, but rather that

there are facets of stages. There are epiphanies or awakenings! And yet, all of this seems to be embraced in a circle or a container of breath and wisdom. It's messy.

Also in preparation for the interview, she spent time contemplating and asking questions such as,

What is no-self? What are the stages? What has it been like? How am I being formed in this?" I don't feel that it's possible that my ego could have chosen it. I don't think the ego knows how to *be* for the other. I think it's impossible for the controlling-ego, not for the self-worth ego. And I don't think there's anything it raises its hand for in this kind of stuff. But it's just that "watching life" and "allowing an energy, larger than myself, to call me forth and form me"—without expectations of where it'll go and what will be the product—is what was called up from my depths and tried, in this interview, to language.

As she contemplated no-self, eight images emerged as metaphors or practices of no-self. She thought to herself, if not for having to do the interview,

I don't think I would have sat down and gathered all of this. And it's been humbling, too, to have words, to have poetry arise from it, or imaging come forth. I say, "Oh, wow! Why would I ever cling?" Throughout all of this reflecting time, even when the metaphors started coming, an inner voice was whispering to me, "This is how it is, this growing."

Moon's Images of Growing in No-self as Facets of Stages

The first image. For Moon, all of life development includes "human life, relational life, and spiritual life—It's all one." Her image for life development is a cobweb, which is a metaphor for her life practice of "letting go of herself." She explained,

Now, a cobweb is not a spider's web; a spider's web is made out the spider's body. But the cobweb is made out of those particles that if I would squint my eyes in a sunbeam I would see all that dust flying around. And given the right environment, this dust connects with one another and forms strings. The strings gather other stuff and they become an energy that is constantly changing form and rearranging and evolving into another shape. It's real messy, but it's made out of the stuff of life. And that's what the whole spiritual life, the whole no-self, is all about. It's this cobwebbing.

And I've studied science a bit, and I've seen pictures of outer space, and it looks like that cobwebbing. If you go down deep enough into your own molecular structures of your body, it's the same kind of cobwebbing. The womb is that kind of cobwebbing, and it's constantly changing, constantly changing.

The other way that this image has helped me to grow in awareness of no-self is that the only way that I'm going to know how another is behaving towards me or coming at me or relating with me is to ask, "What's the stuff of your life that makes you say that?" And when you do that you hear the story. Now, they might be in a part of the cobweb that I've never experienced before, so how can I judge? But I have my stuff. And I think we have to ask that question of every creature. That's what studies are about in science and philosophy. It's trying to find [out] what is the stuff that makes somebody come to this. And in gathering those stories, the web becomes complete. And the practice of allowing wisdom to wean me from self into compassion for the other, or no-self, is constantly trying to remember to ask the question of another.

Now, I'm a practitioner. I don't claim to have accomplished this. I think that's what life is for—to practice this letting go of yourself and saying, "What's the stuff of your life that makes you say that?" And it's not hierarchical, it's not logical. It's very messy, and yet it seems to be an image—this cobweb image, a metaphor for the practice of letting go or allowing a force greater than yourself to form you larger in consciousness.

The second image. This practice comes from the teachings of Clare of Assisi.

Another practice that just popped into my mind. It comes from Clare of Assisi. So it's back in the 13th Century—14th Century. In a letter she writes to Agnes of Prague, who was a well-off woman in Prague who felt called to form a foundation of sisters that we now call Poor Clares. They were called the Ladies of Clare back then. She writes a letter to Agnes and says, "Teach the sisters how to pray." And this one has stages. She says, "Teach them to gaze." Now we're back in the Medieval time, where it was frescoes and icons that were the teachers. They didn't have books. And nature for Franciscans is just *the* teacher—the teacher. So teach the sisters how to gaze in silence. Then they can consider—well, you use your mind—but they can consider that which they've gazed upon. And I like to think of that stage as you make the connections between the mystery you gazed into and who was gazed back at you in your own life. You make the connection between spirit and matter. Then in her third stage, they can contemplate that which they had considered. So you see the connections, and you let go, and contemplate the power of the mystery. And then she says the fourth stage: Then you become that which you gazed upon. So when I found that in life, that was—and it was maybe only 30 years ago—it was very affirming to me, because the stages are comforting. You know, they don't happen always in that order, but it's comforting to see somebody who I honored as a model in my own life saying these stages of gazing, considering, contemplating, becoming. And that's certainly within Christian spirituality!

Often when I try to share this practice of no-self, the listener will say to me, “Oh, you sound so Eastern.” And then I’ll quote Clare of Assisi and say, “She wasn’t Eastern.” Yet, Jesus Christ was born in the Middle *East*. Why are we so afraid of the East?

The third image. A metaphor that Moon spoke about is that of learning to wear lenses on your heart and on your soul, which reflects gazing as one of her practices.

Another metaphor that I thought of was that growing in non-self is learning to wear glasses or lenses. And you wear them—it’s the practice of gazing. I think Buddhists call it benevolent glancing. It’s this gazing into everyone and every thing; and you wear these lenses on your heart or your soul, not just on your body’s eyes, but with the eyes of the heart and soul and the eyes of the mind. And in gazing into the belovedness and goodness of every creature, I’ve come to be able to articulate that there is only one breath. And that that breath needs to be breathed by me, now, by loving presence, and hope that the source of that one breath will use that love to create a oneness of our world.

The fourth image. Moon recounted growing in no-self between 1985 and 1993, in the 8-year process of menopause.

In the beginning. . . . I would sit regularly and I’d ask myself, “where *am I* in life?” It seemed like I was losing language for telling time, because I couldn’t tell time by my body any more. And there were all the other chemical affects of menopause, all the emotions and the moods that connected all that into a mess I could not name. It seemed like I lost imaging and everything.

And so I remember sitting and asking myself in a period of meditation, “Where am I in life? Where am I?” And an image did come. And it was of me standing at a precipice, and everything in back of me where I was standing was all lit up. I knew what had happened in life; but everything before me was dark, and it seemed to me it was deep. And it was scary. And I was in that for—you know, I don’t know when it moved; but I was in that for some period of time, and then another period of time I asked myself that question, “Where am I in life?” And the same image popped up. But now, what was in front of me was lit also. I think what I had been working on was letting go of fear during that time. And doing breath practices really, kind of like in Pema Chodron’s style of breathing out the fear. So it was gone from me—It lit up what was in front of me. And it was this abundant valley of beauty! And then it became a question, like, “Well, how do I enter that? I’m afraid of falling.” So there was still fear there. Yeah—you know, but how do I abandon myself to get there?

And then at another time, the image occurred again, and this huge bird came and took me under her wing and carried me down there. But that bird was always available. You know, it was like it could carry me up also. It just moved me around, and it gave me a sense of all is mine, but not by my power.

In retrospect, Moon saw that there were stages of this process.

8. I was in an emotionally messy time and sought some insight, so I asked the question, 'Where am I in life?'
9. I became aware of the past abundant blessings of life.
10. I became fearful of the unknown future, a fear of darkness, a fear of scarcity.
11. Enlightenment was given to the future as a mirror of the past: Abundance could be expected. Blessing is always!
12. A deep awareness settled in me. I became trusting that all is well, all is given—that I am not the source nor the sustenance nor the fulfillment of life experiences.
13. The question, 'How do I partake of the abundance of the future?' emerged in me.
14. The way to access the movement and flow in all of life is provided by a force larger than myself . . . a love more than ME.

It seems like the wall between scarcity and abundance was crumbled and that I would just be in the flow and never know and just keep watching the flow. However, there's certainly another journey in learning to trust the abundance.

The fifth image. At another time in her life, Moon "made the 19th Annotation of the Saint Ignatius Spiritual Exercises." She described the history behind these exercises, and explained her process and practice. These spiritual exercises are

exercises that Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote down. He was a military man before his conversion. And so when he wrote down spiritual paths, he wrote them in a military style manual: First the director should do this and then this and then this and then this. And it walks you through the Paschal Mystery or the life of Jesus Christ—life, death and dying and rising, all via a course of meditations. In the 19th paragraph of instructions, he writes that there will be people who can't go away for 30 days (it's called the 30-day retreat) and so the director needs to adapt these processes to the lifestyle of the person desiring to make them. Thus this retreat, this form of doing the 30-day retreat is called the 19th annotation, because it's in the 19th paragraph of the manual on how to give the retreat.

I did this with a director, a woman, whom I met with like every ten days for maybe 6 months. We gradually walked through the process of these meditations. And then I went away for 2 weeks of being enclosed—I was in a convent—to finish making this retreat. And at the end of it, I felt spiritual freedom. And I said to her, "Ann, being faithful to this process just has created such freedom in me. Give me a set of exercises to do beyond this so I can stay in this freedom." You hear all the 'I' in this? And I remember we were eating soup for lunch; and she said to me, "Just watch life." I said, "Okay, I'll watch life, and I know it's ridiculous for me to ask for an exercise for the rest of my life. I am the first one who will get bored by it. And so, you know, what I'm asking is what shall I do until retreat time next year?" I make an annual retreat. And she said, "Oh, just watch your life, and it'll show itself." And I thought, "Yeah, mm hm."

So I asked her again for what should I do until next month when I would come to see her for spiritual direction. And she told me just watch life. And I thought, "Why is it that this woman who was so intuitive throughout this whole process doesn't get me today? But I'll find it, and I'll surprise her next month." It was somewhere in the month that my eyes

were opened, and I saw that watching the flow of life brings you everything you need in life. And there is nothing else to watch. This is the life you've been created to live, and you need to integrate *everything*.

The sixth image. A metaphor of growing in no-self and of integrating “everything that happens in life” is the Century plant—

It looks like a Yucca when it starts growing. A cactus, but it grows this stem. It takes a hundred years for it to develop and grow this tall stem and to bloom. Once the bloom is done, it shrivels and dies; and then the whole stem shrivels and dies; then the whole plant dies and so does the root. So it's spends its entire *being* to bloom. It can't cut out year 69 and say, “I don't like the way the winds blew me that time and they caused this and something hit me, and I'm going to cut that out of my life.” It has to integrate everything that happens to it in order to bloom.

I came to that image in a meeting of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, a gathering of a lot of different kinds of people. I had asked Wisdom to show me a part of her face that I couldn't see from my own culture and my own limits—my own experiences. “So, show me the stuff of their lives and show me your face through it.” And that's what came to me—the people I met there, whether they were Bush People or Afrikaners or whites or blacks, no matter what religion they were, or if they were vendors in the squares selling their wares—they were all happy because they were integrating everything in life, and they didn't hold resentment. And this watching and flowing in life is kind of like that. You just watch and integrate everything that happens in life. All the stuff of living and loving is grist for the mill!

The seventh image. A metaphor for the process of coming to an awareness of no self for Moon occurred while whale watching off the San Diego coast. The story encapsulated another of her practices.

I was once whale watching off the San Diego coast. I went out to whale-watch in boat. And it was about the 5th or 6th time that I'd gone out, so I really didn't need the tour of the San Diego harbor. I went to a part of the boat where I could be alone. I had recently been in Spain. I had had a tour of Spain and then went to a meeting in Barcelona. I came back from that trip just absolutely intrigued with the images of the black madonnas that I'd seen in many places in Spain. I did some reading about this and recognized that the black ones were those images of the goddesses that were then, so to speak, baptized and turned into images of The Madonna. The “black” ones are the images of she who receives all, whereas the “white” ones are she who shines the light out for all. I was playing with these ideas when I did my own watercolor painting of this “she who receives all.” [The painting] is a black circle of holding energy that spirals out of the sea. She told me her name was *Madre de Cosa*—the Mother of All.

So that's where I was within myself when I was out whale-watching, and I kind of said to the universe, “Okay, you know how intrigued I was with all of these dark ones, so on this trip show me the face of your deep, dark one. I know you're called Pacifica and it means

peace, but you just caused the Tsunami over in Indonesia and the surrounding areas; and so you're integrating it all too. So I don't know what *peace* means to you, but show me your face from the midst of it all." And we went out whale-watching for 5 hours. . . . We saw animals that we didn't usually see there; but no whale. But all of a sudden we saw a spout; and the captain eased the boat toward that area. And sure enough this whale surfaced again. It had barnacles all over its body. And then a third time it surfaced, and when it dove down and we could see that its tail was growing grey around the edges or white or whatever. The captain says, "This is an old whale—I don't know what she's doing here; she certainly isn't going to spawn. This is an *ancient* whale. I've never seen anything in 14 years of whale-watching like this." And I knew it was the dark one of the depths showing me her face.

I came home, sat in silence; and I asked, "Now what happened today? What were the stages of what happened today for me?" And I thought: First *I asked* to be enlarged—enlarged in my sight, enlarged by the appearance of the depth of the Pacifica. And then I gazed and waited without expectation or design. And that opened up the space to allow for the emergence. And then I said, "Thank you." So this story has the stages of asking, waiting to allow for the epiphany to happen in its way, and then saying thank you, because if I say anything else I may be grasping.

The eighth image. The familiar psychological image of life, in American culture, for Moon is that of "peeling the onion."

You know that you've got gold in your core, but you better peel off these layers and then you throw the layers away. I prefer the integrating image better, and just watching life is kind of an integrative image for me.

An Example of the "Messiness" of Growing in No-self

Moon's poetry and painting are part of her spiritual practice of letting go of ego or self, and painting epitomizes how she does battle with the "messiness" of letting go.

So even my painting is part of my spiritual practice. It's where I often do battle in the messiness. It's like you have to dig for coal before you find diamonds. It just seems to be the human condition. But keep the coal for it can burn a light in the darkness and keep you warm when fear freezes playfulness. [The messiness] comes in multiple shapes and forms and you never know. I mean, you can be taking a shower, you can be deep in contemplation, and it shows its head. So, you know, life is warfare. But how to do it non-violently, you know? I like that [Native American] balsa wood image—of touching the nose of the dragon and it melts. It's a non-violent transforming practice.

The messiness of letting go of ego or self involves doing battle with what Moon called "demons," which are "mind bothers" or monkey-mind. When I asked her for an example of the messiness, she said:

I just lived through one. I was asked, along with two others of our sisters, to produce a portrait of the foundress of our community. We have one picture of her in the whole

congregation. She was excommunicated from the church and community, and tried to defend herself in Rome, and died a pauper. So she wasn't even considered a foundress until some writings were found in archives in Rome. . . . I was asked to produce this painting. . . . I asked somebody else who is a very fine illustrator and is a portrait painter and works in oils if she would do this for us. She knows the heart of this our foundress. And I believe art comes from the heart. She was a bit reluctant, but finally said that she'd like to have a crack at it. And then I didn't know how it happened, but all of a sudden I was walking out of that meeting being commissioned to also do a portrait in watercolor, and another woman was to do one in acrylic—so that the people in our circle could see what the different medias look like. So here I was commissioned to do this painting. All the inner demons started showing up and shouting in chorus: "You're not an illustrator. You paint impressions of nature; and you don't do portraits, and you don't even know how to mix the colors to get flesh color, etc." Then the comparisons and the competition chants, that I name mess, all showed up.

Now did a picture come out of this? Yes, it did. I used a mixture media to enhance it. I am not the best of instruments for beauty to use when I'm dealing with that many demons. It's not what I think of as "fine art." But anyway, something did come out over a 6-week period. And it's not bad. And I know it's not going to be *the* image that we end up using. It's just a sample to show people, and so—okay. Once I got through all that messiness I breathed relief. Then a surprising energy emerged. I had this urge inside of me to paint another picture of her—another portrait, but to do it as a symbolic impression. The demons were gone and the muses were dancing: It was done in 6 hours.

And so, you know what can happen when you're dealing with all of these mind-bothers, what I call these demons. It is a mess. No sense of order or harmony. I call these demons "critters." They're all the "shoulds" and "musts" and "ought tos" and "what ifs" that exist in my mind. They're legion. But once I moved through enough of them and created something and said, "Okay, it is good enough." and let go, then the muses could start playing. And the muses are like the soul graces. They're not the critters of the mind that are always using comparison and competition and put-down and scarcity and fear models.

Moon's facets of stages described as images of letting go reflect how she has transformed in no-self. Doing battle with the messiness can result in "epiphanies or awakenings," and "all of this seems to be embraced in a circle or a container of breath and wisdom."

Continuing to Come to Consciousness of No-self

Moon described how coming to consciousness of no-self has changed her:

I'm less combative with people. I have more room inside of me for allowing them to have their stuff. I don't have to fix them. Certainly with all the physical stuff I've been through, I've learned some patience and wonderment. I had healers around the country who were sending me energy for my healing, and sometimes I could watch my abdomen heal with their energy. It certainly has taught me to love my body, and how powerful it is and let it be. Feed it what it needs, not more . . . and so it's a way of life between food and me now. Relationally there's more peace and more affirming of other people's goodness, rather

than teaching them what they should do to change. I'm a deeper listener. I'm surprised by invitations that come to me to share my story with others. You know, you were a surprise. I've been asked to do the opening prayer at the City Council meeting tonight. You know, how did that happen?

I'm more trusting that life is benevolent. I feel larger—like more of the universe lives inside of me than outside. And I also feel more responsible for practicing no-self or integrity or spiritual consciousness—with intention for the sake of other, for the universe, for friends and enemies.

I guess I am surprised more by reactions inside of me that seem to be beyond me, or they're certainly free of the worst angels inside of me. I think the biggest thoughts when I am able to see the goodness and affirm other people, or when I find a way to affirm other people and not use language of diminishment or fear or violent language. I feel changed when I recognize that there is no need to put another down. Certainly all of this spills over into ecology. So I feel more responsibility toward the world and I also feel larger. I don't think I'm the creator of the largeness; and yet the largeness is such a *gift*, so I better say 'thank you' and live responsibly in the gift.

Moon provided an example that described both her surprise of and her responsibility toward living with the largeness of the gift of Mystery. One day all her plans were cancelled, and she found herself with time on her hands.

I sat down and thought, "Oh my god, I've got the whole day to myself." . . . I went into a practice that I sometimes do, a practice in my heart and my mind; and sometimes I do it out loud. While chanting or intoning someone's name I consciously send them blessing. This day I became very aware of friends in other parts of the world—somebody who was in Japan at that time, somebody else on the Amazon in Brazil, a couple of people there, a couple of people in Zimbabwe, other people in Rome. And I remembered it because at the same time I felt close to not only them, but to the people they were with. I kind of chuckled out loud while thinking, "What stage of consciousness am I in? I don't know their people." But I did feel it. When I ended this practice I went on with my plans for the day. Then in ten days I started getting mail from these very people saying that they had an enormous sense of my presence on December 8th. They knew that they should be doing their Christmas mail and getting it out, so this was going to be their first letter. And every letter was dated the 8th, except the one in Japan which was dated the 9th [due to the time difference]. So that was one of those mystery gifts. I was surprised, you know? I was surprised during the time of prayer, and I was surprised ten days later of how consciousness can travel. And, you know, all the studies done about people praying for another, and other people healing physically. So, all that kind of stuff is real *real* to me. I can't explain it, but I can describe it.

Her example is illustrative of the ineffability of Mystery: "You can't define Mystery; you describe it. So it's like I can be in many places at one and the same time in this consciousness." She further described her awareness of consciousness as both talking to me and, at the same time, being awareness of witnessing the presence of nature.

I'm not aware of witnessing consciousness. But I think the gazing is—'cause when I'm gazing, like, right now I'm sitting looking out my front window, and one of the things I've noticed is that the leaves are down in the trees and you can see up better. Up and through them, you know? And I just gaze and I don't know what my mind is doing, but I'm witnessing to the fact that these creatures are here. And that I wouldn't see the immensity of the sky through them if they didn't exist. And so in that sense, I guess I'm witnessing to their presence.

Moon described recent changes and how they relate to gazing and letting go of “selfish ego” as the work of “helping to redeem human consciousness.”

There is this new aspect that has emerged in me about three months ago. It's only recently that I have been able to put language on what is happening. It seems that I've stopped trying to create balance in my life, like balance between the contemplative- and the service-orientated use of time. Instead, I'm watching the flow, because balance still has ego-judgment and comparison in it. But it seems that if I'm just gazing into the flow and considering what's there, it is letting go of some of that selfish ego. And, you know, I had just put language on it, I think, when you e-mailed me about this work of your studies. It was, like, “My!? This flow is something! The revelation is clear!” I think it's an exchange of flow. It's between all of us; it's between creation and the human species. It's between people who are doing the conscious work of trying not to say “mine” and “my way.” I do believe that way of claiming “me and mine” is what bodies of religious and spiritual communities refer to as original sin. I don't think creation flowed forth from such self-centeredness. But somewhere along in the human development somebody claimed “mine” and thus began warfare and violence and everything else. So this journey of trying to be one small mustard seed that will do the work of allowing the “mine” or the selfishness to disappear and the no-self to arise is, you know, in religious terms you could say it's salvation work: Helping to redeem human consciousness. And I do believe that if enough folks are participating in this—nobody has to know about it—but when enough of us so breathe, there will be a critical mass of energy, and it will change human consciousness.

Defining No-self

Moon provided this insightful summary of her no-self process:

Okay, as I was re-pondering this in preparation for this interview, I thought that a more inclusive description of *no-self* would be this: It seems to me that my constant practice is learning to allow. And so, coming to a consciousness of no-self came through practices of allowing Wisdom to wean me from my self, or my small self, or my ego and that kind of consciousness; and Wisdom is instead forming me in a consciousness of service and compassion for the other.

Robert's Lived Recognition of Awake Awareness

Robert is a 50-year old male who lives in the Pacific Western region of the United States. He holds B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees. His occupations include being a writer, musician, and scientist.

Robert was not raised in a spiritual or religious tradition; however, he became a spiritual “seeker” for many years. He was very involved for years in meditation and Eastern-based practices in the yoga tradition. He sought “to transcend the separate self sense” that was going on “to find that One that [he] intuited.” His seeking led him to a realization that ended seeking, caused him to see the “nature of reality and the nature of the self or no-self,” and ultimately liberated “awake awareness illuminating” all experiences.

No-self is Everything Conceptualized by the Mind as Duality

Robert provided a multifaceted explanation of the relationship of self, no-self, and Self in explaining his definition of no-self. He described the temporary accessing of no-self as a state, and also clarified how no-self only makes sense in relationship to a self. Nonetheless, his definition of no-self is that it is everything.

No-self is Everything

Robert revealed the paradoxicality of self and no-self.

I mean, one way to define no-self is that it's everything. [*with a laugh*] That's what no-self is. Because all there is *is* everything. And a part of that everything can be the emergence of a sense of self. So, for me, no-self or self are two experiences that life can give rise to. But all along it's just life or consciousness—or the mystery or emptiness—whatever you want to call the unnamable thing that's moving as everything. Call it nature; and it moves as an experience of being separate, and then it moves as an experience of no-separation. It just goes in and out of that obviously. [*little laugh*] That's kind of what it does—everything is just the productions of that. And so if you use the old classic ocean-wave metaphor, it's like, well, the ocean of life gives rise to seemingly separate waves of existence—of manifestation. And a wave called [Robert] is talking to the wave called Laurel right now. And clearly at one level of experience there's a sense of my life is my life and it isn't your life. I'm not doing your dissertation on this, you are. [*little laugh*] So there's that level of reality . . . and it's somewhat silly to deny that, for that's one level at which reality is experienced. Sometimes I use the example of—let's talk about physical concrete objects—you know, I'm leaning on a table right now; and at one level of reality this is a hard thing and if I hit my head on it, it will hurt. But at another level of reality, it isn't a thing at all—it's quantum potential. It hasn't even come into existence at a level of even what physicists would start to try and describe. I mean, it would seem like those would be contradictory: Well, is it something that's hard or is it empty space? [*little laugh*] Well, it's both.

In other words, no-self is everything moving as everything, no matter what it is called—Life, consciousness, mystery, nature, or emptiness or the unnamable.

No-self Only Makes Sense in Relationship to a Self

Robert further revealed that understanding no-self requires clarification.

And so I think that's a little bit of a way to characterize this whole thing of self or no-self. It's the mind, the conceptual mind, which is inherently dualistic; and it thinks dualistically generally—that's how it kind of operates. Well, what is a self? A self only makes sense in relationship to no-self, and conversely no-self only makes sense in relationship to self. Like the mind will go, "Well, either there's a self or there's no-self, right?" But at the level of experience, it feels more like there's a self and there's no self and both of those are happening simultaneously. There's absolutely a sense of individuation, *and* there's a sense—sometimes more pronounced than other times—a sense that the stuff of life, the phenomena, the arisings of life, the manifestations of life. You and me are arisings of the same fundamental nature and substance; and so they're ultimately not separate. And so that's happening simultaneously.

Temporary Accessing of No-self as a State

It is the mind that conceptualizes a sense of duality as self and no-self. In addition, one can access no-self as a temporary state in unity or Samhadi experiences. Robert described these temporary states and how people can get caught up in pursuing those states.

People can get into all sorts of Samadhi states of mystical union and disappearance of self/other distinction, where it just all collapses and there's nothing but what is, and no sense of separation anywhere. Subject-object just collapses. But that's probably a non-functional state, actually. . . . I think it's also that people will have experiences of no self, or self falling away; and then that's a state. And as a state, all states go away; and then the state could come back [as] the sense of there being an individual self. And I think what often happens is people—there's a certain pleasurable, [*with a little laugh*] often highly pleasurable, sense of self falling away—and so people often want to get back to that state. The state of being merged.

And if you even look at the level of biology, well, brain science is starting to demonstrate this in some interesting ways that it seems like the body-mind basically produces a sense of self; and that that's credibly functional that it does that. Even the sense that "I did this." The sense of volition also seems to be produced by the brain after the fact [*little laugh*] of something happening. But that has functional utility in . . . that you could say self is just a mental representation: "Oh, well I did that, right? I'm doing this dissertation." You're representing some experience mentally there, but that's adaptive and has evolved over time. And that's why it's present. But of course when you see that it's one thing to think that you're a self, it's another thing to recognize, "Oh, that's just a representation of the mind." But that of course changes [*laughs*], changes a lot. But it isn't necessarily that the mind's going to stop representing that. It may. I don't know. Maybe in some people that happens, and [the mind] can't even create any sense that there's an individual there. I don't know—that's not my experience.

Concluding remarks on no-self. Robert reiterated his previous point that “no-self or self are two experiences that life can give rise to” as consciousness, and elucidated his liberation from a “fixed view of reality.”

And for me, it’s much more about the liberation, if you will, as the freedom from taking any fixed mental position. The freedom from wanting to sort of set up camp in any fixed view of reality, self or no-self, recognizing the fluidity of life, that it can absolutely move, as I said, as self or no-self.

Robert’s Pivotal Moments in Realizing Awake Awareness

The following sections encapsulate two of Robert’s pivotal awakening experiences as illustration of his process of “doing battle” with the ego as “self falls away,” and the dawning of “a great clarity and love.”

The First Pivotal Moment

Robert described his spiritual development as an unfolding of his own understanding and maturing of what was recognized or realized in certain pivotal moments. He reflected back to a time 6 or 7 years ago when he had a significant realization of seeing through “the nature of reality of the self or no-self.”

I guess if you want to look back in time in my own process, something being realized that feels significant in the sense of seeing through, let’s call it the assumption of separation. . . . We carry around with us this assumption of being a separate someone, a separate individual apart from life, apart from the whole. Most human activity can be understood as an effort to get back to a sense of wholeness, a sense of reconnecting to what we came out of—connecting to source—and it’s almost like an intuition. And I didn’t really realize this until this sort of pivotal experience, I would say, that I think a lot of the seeking was reinforcing the sense of separation, rather than freeing me from that [laughs]. And ‘cause really you sort of put firmly in place the sense of being a someone who is seeking to be free of a someone. . . . I think most people don’t realize this until they realize it that it . . . can often just perpetuate that sense of a separate seeker looking for something. And so that was certainly the case for me

And the pivotal moment came during a retreat that I was on. . . . I heard an instruction in the retreat, and the words came from the person leading the retreat. And it was the words of his teacher, who said to him at one point, “I’m so happy you found the friend that you’ll never see. And I remember those words—they went off like a time-bomb in my consciousness, is what it felt like. And I instantly kind of realized, “Oh, well, I can never see what it is I am—the friend that I’m looking for, if you want to put it in those terms—because I *am* that friend.” And it was just in that moment that it just felt like it was sort of a shocking- and very-ordinary-at-the-same-time kind of recognition that I was the very thing that I was looking for—that’s all that there was. And that what I called “I” was not separate from what I was looking for, and it was just a sense that there was no separation really anywhere. And it was a sense of what I call Self is none other than, call it what you will—the Source, God or the Ground of Being—that they weren’t two. They’re just one

thing. So kind of the ludicrousness of searching sort of also came to the [*with a laugh*] forefront. What could you possibly be looking for when this is the only thing that there is? And almost funny actually, that life or the universe or God plays this game with Itself—looking for Itself, when all along that’s all there is.

And that was the sense; and it was like I had been seeking and seeking. And part of my life as a musician and writing music and poetry for years and years and years [*was*] about this reality of non-separation, because I think I probably had glimpses of it in smaller ways. But it was like suddenly this was the, “Oh, this is it.” This is no separation—that there never really was a separate self ever. And the effect of that for the remainder of that retreat was just an amazing sense of coming home. If I had to describe it, it was like, “Oh, I am home, and I’ve always been home, and there’s only always home.” And interestingly, there were lots and lots of tears; and it was a mixture of tears of, like anyone being kind of rejoicing and coming home. Tears of joy—They were just flowing spontaneously, but they were mixed with a kind of sweet sadness of, “Wow, how did I ever miss this?” I looked everywhere for it, and I never knew that it was the very thing that was looking itself. That that was what was being looked for; and that, of course, is always there: the looking, the seeing. That’s never absent. And so that was probably about 6 or 7 years ago, and that was very much a sense of something very fundamental was being seen in that moment about the nature of reality and the nature of the self or no-self.

The body-mind process after the first pivotal moment. Robert described a mind-body process that he went through after seeing through “the nature of reality of the self or no-self,” which was a struggle of “fighting” the “return of the sense of lack” or incompleteness. He viewed the distress of “self-grasping” as conditioning of the body-mind.

I’ve seen it in myself to a lesser and lesser and lesser extent as time has gone by, a kind of struggle that once a separate self has been seen through, when and if it re-arises, that can create a lot of confusion. And also a sense, if there’s a lot of spiritual conditioning, that says (whether you’re Buddhist or whatever) that, “Although there is no self and now the reality of no-self has been seen, and wait, wait—why has this come back now? I’ve gotta get back.” You know . . . get back to that realization . . . that’s grasping right there—suffering.

And so it’s this curious thing about, as one of my teachers like to say, “It’s only a self that tries to be free of itself.” [*laughs*] What else is trying to do that but a self that thinks it’s separate? I think it’s somewhat analogous to seeking in that it’s like seeking falls away; and there’s this recognition that the seeker’s the sought—that there’s always only been reality. And so seeking stops, say, in a moment, of recognizing that. But seeking may return. Probably will, and most often does. And then this interesting process starts for people along the lines of, “Oh, sh—I want to get back to the no-seeking, because it feels better?” [*laughs*] And so then what do we do? We take up the ultimate search, which is to be done with seeking forever. Well, that’s just an excruciating search [*laughs*]. And that’s just more seeking, right?

It's kind of like we're caught in a sense that the seeker can't really ever get out of itself, 'cause that's what it is—it's seeking. And even if the seeking gets turned around to say I want to be done with seeking, it's just more seeking. But the ego that wants to be done with ego, the self that wants no-self. I mean—meanwhile, there's just life moving however it moves. And seemingly not having a problem with any of it—self, no-self, opening, closing. And then there's this kind of, I think, ease that can begin to be realized even in the midst of disturbance—the recognition of an ease that's there even in dis-ease, a kind of rest that's there even when there's unrest. Otherwise, we're just chasing after states. Including self/no-self. Does that make sense?

In other words, after the first pivotal moment, he saw through the separate self; however, that was not the end of grasping. He clarified that point and described his own body-mind process of struggling to be “free of grasping” as a state of consciousness, which was a movement toward “deeper recognition” that life and experience “has never been a personal thing ever.”

Yeah, [the first pivotal moment] was the sense that grasping just ended. Now, you know, I wouldn't say that it ended forever [*laughs*]. But in that particular moment it stopped and something was seen and recognized. . . . Here's one way maybe to describe it as it relates to grasping or *self*-grasping. One way to think about what the self sense is, the separate self sense, it's like something grasping after itself. The whole organism has been so conditioned through culture, society, biology to imagine its own separation, that even if that's seen through; and it's like a mighty blow is dealt to that conditioned belief. . . . It seems to be that most of the time, it has its own momentum, a natural kind of winding down of something. Even if you're no longer spending a lot of time spinning the propeller of believing in a separate self, it has its own momentum; and it takes some time for that to wind down, which is one reason why it rarely seems to be the case that somebody has that kind of insight and then that's the end of the story [*laughs*] in terms of their own unfolding.

And then the other thing is that life seems to be such that, particularly I think in relationships, that conditioning gets reactivated by all sorts of life experiences. And so then there's kind of an ongoing opportunity to keep some process—to continue to keep letting go in a way. You know, that it's almost like—sometimes I have this sense of it's like the body-mind almost just having to surrender or accept in a certain way the reality that's been seen. And it sometimes seems like it puts up a bit of a fight, you know, to keep exerting its [*laughs*] sense of autonomy. But it feels like a kind of gradual wearing away of a kind of the resistance to what is. It often seems like the resistance, the kind of efforting to make what is something other than it is, *is* what gives rise to the sense of being separate. It's almost like it produces a sense of separation—that resistance to what is. And so it just kind of feels like that's a deep seated conditioned habit of the body-mind.

One of my teachers likes to say that “Enlightenment is the end of our argument with what is.” But that argument, you know, it has a lot of staying power [*laughs*] So [*with a laugh*] at least in my life it has; but it's almost like something is getting increasingly more exhausted in its efforts to kind of struggle with experience. And so that feels like the further kind of dissolution of separation, even though the separation has never existed,

really. You know what I mean? It's somewhat of a mysterious process how this all happens [*little laugh*]. I don't fully understand it. But it feels like, especially if you step back and from the perspective of no-separation, the non-dual nature of reality, it's like all life *is* is liberated, freedom. *And you know, normally from the perspective of the separate self who's seeking liberation, the seeking to discover wholeness or oneness or freedom—it seems like, Oh, I'm an individual trying to free myself from myself, trying to be free of grasping. But from the perspective of that self that never really was, it seems like the movement is just a deeper and deeper and deeper recognition that this has never been a personal thing ever.* It's always just been a movement of something impersonal—something beyond the personal, but inclusive of the personal, and having given rise to the sense of the personal. But it's kind of not something over which we have some kind of personal control over making happen or not happen. And that feels like . . . the kind of wearing away of the personal will, that sense that “I can do this.”

In other words, there was a realization of life and experiences as being beyond personal—that all of life is liberated freedom. Robert went on to portray what this recognition was like for him.

So I don't know if that makes sense, but that's the feeling of . . . oh, actually there can be this kind of profound relaxation because there's not anything that can ever be harmed. And I think that's one of the keys that's part of the freedom of recognizing the separation of no-self—that there's *not* something that has independent existence from life that can be harmed. You can't harm the wave, 'cause the wave's made of the ocean, to use that metaphor. And there's not anything outside of it to harm it anyway, at the most fundamental kind of level of reality. Not necessarily at the level of, well, you could take a gun and you could shoot me and the organism might die [*laughs*]. So I don't want to deny that level of experience. But at another level, well, that's not actually what's happening.

He provided some examples of how this has played out in his life—not as “discreet phases or stages,” but rather as “the unfolding” of “different aspects” of “recognizing the separation of no-self.”

Yeah, I don't necessarily see it as discreet phases or stages so much, plus my memory is a little fuzzy in a lot of ways. Also, it's funny, because, you know, the story could in some ways only be told about a separate someone who had a bunch of experiences [*laughs*]. And this is a tricky [*little laugh*] aspect of this. But there's different aspects of this. One is that the self is ultimately just a conceptual representation—it's an idea of an “I”—of who I am, all the ideas that I have about who I am. And part of the movement and the development into the unfolding has just been increasingly harder and harder and harder to believe the ideas in the mind, including that one. But it could be lots of ideas about how things should be or how other people should be or how the world should be. . . . But also the idea of being someone. That it's just harder and harder, somehow to believe any idea really.

And in terms of how it plays itself out, I think that the direction it seems to move in is just more and more, like I was saying earlier about resistance, more and more ease. Just more and more ease in the midst of whatever is arising. And less and less the project of the me.

The project of the self—It takes different forms. And certainly one is to feel better, to make sure that it's okay, that it's safe, that it gets certain things, that it gets its needs met. In a way, the self or me is that which is in negotiation with life, trying get something out of life. . . . Only a separate self does that [*laughs*], you know, right? So, there's just a sense of less and less of that, because that which never really existed anyway—a separate self—is just kind of dying a sort of slow death; and so there's just less and less negotiating with reality. More and more ease; more and more a sense that the moment is always enough—that there's nothing ever missing. And in a sense, the sense of incompleteness, the sense that “this is not quite enough,” the sense of lack that arises and then gives rise to seeking, grasping, looking, desiring, wanting—that's so tied in and inseparable in a way from a sense of being a separate someone. Incompleteness only exists in relationship to a separate someone who feels incomplete, right? And so that, again, is another key kind of feature of what starts to fall away, and for me kind of increasingly falls away.

And then there's always the opportunities to, you know, if some kind of grasping returns in some way and suddenly there's a sense of being incomplete again, if that happens . . . then there's this beautiful opportunity to look again, to re-recognize what's already been recognized—that there's never been anything missing. And that the all-inclusive nature of awareness, let's say the ground of awareness, that it's illuminating all experiences; and [it] is completely fine with both the sense of incompleteness and the sense of completeness.

The Second Pivotal Moment

Robert let go of wanting “that sense of completeness all the time” and recognized the ground of awareness as including both incompleteness and completeness. He went on to explain the “all-inclusive nature” of awareness: “This moves as every experience; this is the ground of every experience. And so it's also the ground of incompleteness and the ground of lack.” Furthermore, he stated that this is the “shift that's happening now in [his] experience.” In terms of this second pivotal moment, he described it as a “shift,” such that now:

In my life there appears to be less and less struggle with even the sense of lack and incompleteness and seeking if it returns. And then, of course, the Tibetans have this great term, they say that phenomena self-liberate when there's no opposition to them. So the sense of whatever it is that might arise, like some afflictive state of mind, it just simply self-liberates like everything else. Phenomena just arise and they pass away; and there's no problem with them—until some part of us turns it into a problem that has to be modulated, managed, controlled, manipulated, [*with a little laugh*] transcended, you know, spiritually healed; the list is endless. But again, that's all *the project of a me*. But when it's seen that at the center of any experience—there is no me—there's nothing except awake awareness illuminating that experience. Well, then it's like the awake awareness is not in opposition to what's arising. It's the space that is allowing everything to appear and disappear. And so then there's less and less effort to control experience, and experience just unfolds however it unfolds.

Robert's view of reality now. In giving up the “battle” with reality, Robert has experienced a “great clarity and love.”

And interestingly, in that non-resistance to what is, that comes about when—well, it just comes about, I think, the more there's a kind of giving up, in a sense, of the fight [*little laugh*] against reality, a self pitted against reality. And what begins to dawn is this great clarity and this great love when that battle starts to diminish, when that fight with reality relaxes. It's like there's a settledness; and in that settledness and non-resistance there's just great clarity, not because I tried to get clear, not because a self tried to become compassionate. But no, it's just that the nature of reality is this great clarity and love. And it's just obviously there in a way, when there's not an effort to try to modify experience. I would describe that as a kind of developmental unfolding in my own understanding and maturing of what was recognized in certain pivotal kind of moments.

Robert elucidated his developmental unfolding and the maturation of realizations gained in pivotal moments as a process of relaxing into the reality of “awake awareness,” which continues to unfold.

Further Maturing of Insights as “the Last Gasps of an Ego or Me”

Robert explained that subsequent to the two pivotal experiences described earlier, he's had “evocative” moments which were “just sort of insights that [arose] spontaneously in any moment.”

And what I've noticed around insights about the nature of self and reality is that I seem to revisit insights that have been seen before; but it's almost like they're like sinking in [*laughs*] more deeply, 'cause you know in a certain way it's almost like once you have kind of a pivotal insight, well, you don't have to have any more insights. [*laughs*] I mean, you can get more knowledge about various aspects of life and reality, but the pivotal insight of no-separation and that the ground of everything is this profound love and wisdom, it's like you don't need to have another insight about that really.

Robert stated that the key question then becomes, “Are we actually *living* from that insight, not as a memory, but as a lived, moment-to-moment recognition?”

And a moment-by-moment question, we could say, “Is it awake now? [*laughs*] And recognized as awake now?” That's always just a question of the moment. Because that's the funny thing about experiences and insights, no matter how profoundly impactful they may have been at the time, where are they all now? [*little laugh*] They're gone. They're totally gone—vanished, as if they never happened. And it's an interesting thing. So we can speak about pivotal moments and experiences that, sure, to some extent shape present moment experience. But in a sense the moment keeps self-liberating from what was, and what's here is fresh and new and never been here before. . . . The real maturing, I think, comes about when we start to recognize in a . . . grounded kind of simple, practical way, the equalness of all experience—that those incredible moments of insight, as beautiful as they are and evocative as they can be and transformational—are no different than this moment of you and I sitting here. One's not above the other in any way, because both experiences are manifestations of the same single reality; and so they're equally, if you wanted to put it in spiritual terms, they're equally divine. They're equally sacred, they're equally empty but full of life and consciousness and awareness. And so, of course, the

recognition of that is profoundly liberating, because the grasping naturally falls away, right? Because, well, what could you ever grasp for? [*little laugh*] Right? Because this is already the whole thing. And it can't get any more whole than this [*laughs*].

In other words, every moment and every experience is equally divine, and liberation lies in “*living* from this insight.” The “deep seated conditioned habit of the body-mind” needs to just be “allowed to be.” Robert gave an example,

And you could say, even like at a level of kind of say something like the elicitation of fear, like a clam will—if it feels threatened, right, it will close down. So, if something in the organism, something in the body-mind feels threatened, well, there can be this natural tendency to just close in a way, to try and protect itself. And one could say, “Well, if the realization was all the way through the organism, the closing down would never happen, because there would just be this knowing.” But, you know, I don't know if that—maybe that's true, but I think what I've observed in other people and myself is more like what happens is, if that closing down and contraction happens after there's been some kind of big opening, then, again, what people do is they want to get back to not being contracted and being open again. And it creates this got it/lost it, got it/lost it experience. I think there's a lot of people right now having that experience who are, you know, inquiring into some of these things. But what happens if contraction just is contraction? Closing is just closing. Somehow, when there's this recognition of what it is that's closing, then . . . it's like in a way the closing doesn't cause a kind of falling asleep because it's seen that, well, what closing is awakesness itself as life or awareness—and so it's not ever really falling asleep. It's just moving in a different way. I know that could sound like a kind of justification to indulge in various habits of mind, but I don't mean it that way. It's really about seeing that something remains awake in the midst of whatever is arising—that awakesness remains awake through every experience, and it's moving as every experience, and so there's no problem. There's never a problem. The problem comes in a way with the kind of second order thinking about some conditioning that's arising. The conditioning just arises; and if it's just not resisted, then it just arises and almost can't sustain itself in a way. But then when the mind comes in and starts creating a whole story about what a problem this is and now I've gotta find an antidote to it—you know, whatever the antidote might be, spiritual or otherwise—then we're back on the treadmill of a separate self who thinks that there's a problem with some aspect of reality it has to solve. And usually the problem is with myself—like, this shouldn't be happening, you know, it's kind of the ultimate ego trip. Well, if I was really enlightened [*laughs*], there would be no fear [*laughing*] arising, you know, and that's one of ego's favorite tricks.

In other words, it is the conditioned mind that finds a problem with experiences by contracting from experiences rather than by recognizing that every experience *is* the arising of awake awareness. Therefore, it is the trick of the ego or the “the project of the self . . . to feel better.” For example, Robert said that with regard to fear and anger, “the less and less and less resistance there is to it, the more *awake* remains in the center of” the emotion. Feeling better is “not dominating the field of consciousness” even if fear and anger are present because “there's something else that is still there—that's still awake—that's still present in the midst of it; and that clarity doesn't go anywhere.”

It's like an image I sometimes use to describe the non-dual nature of reality of a hand that whether its open or closed, simply remains what it is, a hand. That sounds like a nice philosophy; but as a lived recognition, it changes the whole thing. It changes the whole experience of closing down and contracting; and then in a way it's seen that the effort to get back to being open is just more contracting. But just the relaxation into whatever is, open or closed, is—well, then there is, as I said earlier, the great dawning of clarity and love in the midst of everything.

What has been dawning in Robert lately are the “last gasps of an ego or a me” and a realization that there is no need for any antidote for any experience—that well-being *is* the ground of being.

The habit is to make problems out of experiences. That's the conditioned tendency. Certain experiences are experienced as or interpreted as wrong or unpleasant or distasteful or aversive; and so we try to remedy those. The ego or the me tries to remedy those. But it's interesting, what's been dawning more and more of late is that the ultimate medicine is to realize that no antidote is ever necessary. That's the ultimate medicine. And we don't ever have to try to get ourselves into a different state. You can't really even do it anyway. *[laughs]* I mean, certainly not any state that will remain. *[laughs]* Good luck! But we try. We try, and it's like the last gasps of an ego or a me that keeps trying: “Oh, god, can I just do something to ensure my well-being, right?” That's what it wants; it wants to just ensure its well-being. But there can be a deepening recognition that there is always only well-being. Always—even in the midst of times of great challenge, and seeming disturbance in the organism. The nature of the ground and root of the whole thing is this great well-being

How Realization of Awake Awareness has Changed Robert

Robert has not predominantly experienced physiological changes, “other than there being more ease in the body;” however, with regard to cognitive changes, “there is the sense of greater clarity.” He also experiences “more equanimity, less being disturbed by disturbing emotions if they arise. Challenging emotional states still arise, but they are less and less seen as problems requiring solutions.”

With regard to relationships, one of the biggest changes is the “falling away more and more and more” of judgment—more belief that people should be not be “other than they are.” Robert sees this as playing itself out in “allowing people to be what they are, not expecting that they're going to be other than they are.” He has a “deep appreciation for what they actually are;” and an “ability to see what they actually are, even if it's not being recognized by them.”

Since age 19, Robert's spiritual path has been expressed through his musical writing and song writing as “an expression of whatever understanding is there” at the time. He stated that it seems that is how he's “wired to try to express what's happening.” He has also authored a couple of books, which are another way of “trying to express the inexpressible.”

Recently, Robert recognized “a definite shift,” in that

there's less kind of focus and emphasis on having a particular meaning, purpose, direction for my life. Yeah, that's been kind of surprising. I was talking to a friend the other day about. . . the importance of meaning and purpose and hopefulness; and it was like, I was sitting there going, "Wow, that completely doesn't describe my experience." And yet it certainly did at a point. And that feels like something that's kind of fallen away, like there's not a sense that this moment needs to mean something or have a purpose. And yet, the natural way all of this seems to move in me is kind of sharing the good news of [*little laugh*] that you don't actually have to keep controlling and managing your experience. You can allow it to be as it is. And that's the good news; that's the little secret that we just don't know. [*little laugh*] That this moment isn't actually a problem, it is simply life. . . . So there's a natural kind of desire to share this with others. But it's not . . . my purpose in life, or the direction I want to move is this way. It's like, "Oh, okay, that's just . . . a natural expression of a kind of sharing of what's been seen and understood and continues to unfold." But yeah, the kind of looking for, "What's the meaning of my life? isn't really there anymore. Life itself is its own meaning. It doesn't need anything additionally from me [*laughs*]"—some kind of, "Oh, this is what it means." Which could only be some kind of lame interpretation of my mind—as if *I* could possibly know. [*little laugh*]

DBear's Awakening to Unity: Surrendering to Life Itself

DBear is a 54-year old male who resides in British Columbia, Canada. He has an educational background in various technological and media fields and in business management. He currently works as a technology consultant. DBear was raised in the Christian tradition and attended Sunday school at a United Church while growing up.

During DBear's journey to no-self, he explored Hindu and Advaita Vedanta traditions, Transcendental Meditation, and also experiential practices. He described himself as being "more spiritual than religious." He currently "attends a New Thought oriented church for heart and social purposes." DBear's philosophical underpinnings are "Vedic, predating modern Hinduism and Buddhism," although mostly as conceptualization versus practice. Basically, he follows his own path; and his "outlook has less and less to do with belief and more about experience." For example, he doesn't believe in God; but rather, he experiences "God directly, both in form and as formless."

The Awakenings

DBear described three awakenings in his journey to no-self: the doorway to awakening, in which reality changed when he reached Transcendental Consciousness; a second awakening where he switched to Self in Cosmic Consciousness; and a third awakening which involved the switch to Unity Consciousness. His process continues in Unity as "surrender to life itself."

Doorway to Awakening: Reality Changes in Transcendental Consciousness

DBear's awakening began at age 18, when he was on a 6-month long Transcendental Meditation course. Three months into the course, and after doing some emotional clearing, he began *witnessing* 24 hours a day—Essentially, "he woke up inside himself."

In the '70s, I was on a long meditation course. . . . And I went through three months where I did a lot of clearing. I was also learning to teach meditation. We were studying this one part, and I can remember pacing the floor while we were trying to memorize this stuff because I was purging all this anxiety. But about three months in, I moved past all that and into a place of clarity, and began what I describe as witnessing or being a separate observer. Essentially you kind of wake up inside and observe your life taking place in front of you, the separation between activity and the world and you. You are this inner observer. And the distinctive part about that is that when it's quite clear and you're well rested, it's 24/7; so you're awake through your dreams and deep sleep as well. I found, for myself, initially with dreams, that I would step in and change them around and mess with them, 'till I realized that was not the point of the dreams and just let them happen. And then deep sleep was very curious, because the body turns into a kind of a lump. It won't move and stuff. . . . For me, it was just like a night of meditation, you know, just being in the silence there.

He clarified that witnessing sleep is not no-self, but rather a "soul-awakening."

At the time, I thought that was no-self, because I experienced myself as being the inner silence, but after I came back home at the end of the course, over a period of 6 or 8 months, the distinct witness gradually faded. That sense of inner self was there, but it was much more in the background. This was somewhat confusing, because my understanding at the time was that this was one of the aspects of first awakening—the beginning of first awakening. I didn't clearly understand at that point that first awakening, or what's called Cosmic Consciousness or various things, is a *distinctive shift*. . . . And the key thing there was that I was experiencing it, but I hadn't become it. I've heard this described since then as what's called jiva or soul-awakening. . . . And so basically you become awake to the Self inside, but haven't become it yet. You may have shifted to jiva awareness, an aspect of Self, but not all Self. And so in that context, the ego or the little-self remains.

While in the meditation course, DBear had many experiences of himself “as being the inner silence,” which he defined as “Transcendental Consciousness.” He described one memorable experience he had after he had “been witnessing full time for about ten days.” While he was doing yoga on the floor, everything visually went white.

Yeah, everything vanished. . . This whole process didn't take very long, but gradually the world came back over a few seconds, and for a moment I could see through the walls and floor to the grounds outside. And then, it was like I came back again. I was like, “Well, that was interesting.” But it's only looking back that I realized that it was this point of change. When I sat to meditate after that, I had what I describe as my first cognition, where essentially you get this complete experience. I don't know how to explain this. When you look at an object with your eyes, you see the side that you're on. You know, you can see the side of the box or the front of the box or whatever angle you're at. And you have to move to see the other side, or whatever. With a cognitory [*sic*] type experience, the way I describe it, you see it completely. And you can come back to the experience and play it different ways, so it's not like if you experience an apple, you see the outside of the apple; but if you cognize it, you know all of the sides of the apple, you know the core, the skin and the layers of it and the whole thing. Even its history, life.

It was an experience of the structure of the universe. This was verified at the end of the course, and I was told there would be much more. That was an understatement. Basically, it continued from there, going deeper over several years. Creation's a lot bigger place than I expected.

Life after the meditation course. At the end of the 6-month meditation course, he went back to his worldly life. “The inner self/no-self business faded and became background,” in that it was still there; “but it wasn't dominant the way it had been.” The course changed him in the following manner:

It changed my view of the world quite a bit. I could see the dynamics of karma taking place in the world—action and reaction. The time-lag was very short for a while there. And so, you know, just to have a judgmental thought; and I would get the consequences of that immediately. The mechanics of that was very clear.

The inner changes took meaning away from some things in my life in certain ways. Things that had been important to me became less important. Not greatly, but to some extent. I already carried a temperament that has a strong philosophical outlook. Even in vocational testing, they've said my work has to have significance and meaning for me and stuff like that. . . . I think that's been true for a good part of my life, but it became a lot more true then. And in different ways.

Furthermore, DBear viewed his spiritual path as partly the yogic path of the intellect; and he had a need to understand the significance and meaning of his spiritual development. In the following years, he did not have access to a community that supported and communicated understanding of the process of becoming enlightened. As he moved on with his life over the years, he got married, worked, and raised kids. During the years after the meditation the course, he continued to meditate and went through emotional clearing; but most significantly, he was "confused" because he was experiencing "self as [his] self, but hadn't become it yet."

In retrospect, DBear viewed the experience of the flash of "white light" as a "doorway" that "opened." His awakening continued over the years as he reached higher and higher levels development.

Second Awakening: The Switch to Self, Ego Loss, and Cosmic Consciousness

After the meditation course and as he continued to meditate through the years, DBear's mundane life continued, "but the spiritual aspect became background for a good part of that time." Then about three and a half years ago, his life "just kind of fell apart," and he "began to look at the spiritual side of things again and culture more of the heart" aspect of spiritual development. He saw that he had been "too much in his head" as he had "been working in a high stress workaholic kind of job, running the technology of a dot com company that was 24/7." So, he reconnected to old meditation friends, sought spiritual teachers, participated in local satsangs. He also "made an active effort to culture the heart" through a practice that evolved out of "cultivating" an "attitude of gratitude," which was essential to the process because it allowed him to forgive past relational issues, let go of "emotional baggage," and open his heart.

One of the funny things for me was seeing the movie, *The Secret*. In there, there's a suggestion to culture gratitude, where you carry a little rock around in your pocket, and every time you pull it out at the end of the day and put it in your pocket in the morning, and reach for your keys, you find this rock. You think of something different to be grateful for. I decided to try that; and it was surprisingly powerful just culturing that *attitude of gratitude* as they say. . . . Rather than judging things as much, it was about being grateful for things that were happening, and choosing what I have my attention on. And what it did for me was every so often I would reach this point of emotional clarity or openness, and the opportunity was there to forgive. There was the obvious stuff at first—you know, old relationships and that kind of thing. And as I peeled the onion back through a few of these sessions, I found that [with] virtually every relationship I had, there had been some holding associated with it; and I was able to just let that go. And I found that all I needed to do was just simply experience it, and the junk fell away.

The way I describe it is essentially that there's fullness and there's resistance, and that's it. Everything is either fullness or resistance; and all of the suffering, all of the issues we have in our lives, are around resistance. And all this emotional baggage we're carrying is basically stuff that we've been unwilling to fully experience. So we're resisting it—we're holding it back. And simply by allowing the experience, there would be a brief wave of emotion wash over me and then it would be done. So, all this baggage I'd been carrying around for years, emotional trash and stuff . . . Basically, I just allowed experiences, then let it go. And I just lightened the whole load during that period—I did a lot of that.

He also began participating in conference call satsangs led by two spiritual teachers who helped him walk through blockages in his awakening process. They also verified the spiritual experiences he'd had since the meditation course, which was valuable to him because "it was really nice to be able to talk to somebody about it who'd been there."

Although he went through the emotional clearing and had his experiences verified, he was still confused because ever since the meditation course and that awakening, he had "become awake to the Self inside." However, he still sought clarity

because what I was experiencing was being the Self, being the big "S" Self, the unbounded, unlimited Self. But at the same time the small self was obviously there, too, which was confusing to me because I thought it was an either/or thing. But, again, it was a value of experience. I was experiencing the Self as my self, but hadn't become it yet. I hadn't made the switch.

The Switch to Self in Cosmic Consciousness. In July 2007, DBear "woke up" and made the switch to Self. During a satsang conference call session, one of his two teachers

used the word *surrender* for the first time. . . For me, in the past, I associated it with blind faith and that kind of stuff. But for some reason, at that point I *heard* it differently; and it's like—and of course being visual, I even had a visual quality to it—but it's like I dropped down a tunnel. There was no light or visual sense or that kind of context; it was almost like I was going down a clear tunnel. And I just kind of let go for a moment. Just completely let go for just a moment. And I switched. And what happened in this case was I let go enough to fall into the Self and become it. And so instead of being the person experiencing the Self, the inner Self, I was the inner Self experiencing the person. It was essentially like the witnessing, but it was a deeper value of that. . . And so for me, I woke up . . . but for a couple of days it was like, "Is this it?" Because it's new and you're not sure. And then I woke up in the morning a couple of days later; and it was just so clear, so obvious.

DBear described this as "Cosmic Consciousness," in that he had "integrated the silence . . . full-time;" and he said that other people noticed that he was "enlightened." Then a few months later, he went to a 2-day retreat with Gangaji. During one of Gangaji's dyad practices

with [a] young woman, and the question she was asking me was something like, "What is love?" And it was just an amazing experience. This huge opening. And so through that

period I did a lot of heart opening. . . . You know, I remember going out and sitting on the lawn at lunch time after the dyad on the retreat and everything was gold. You know, just with the eyes. Yeah, golden color. Just shining with light. I just feel this huge love and all this kind of thing. It was quite remarkable. At the time it was a very distinct experience, partly because of contrast. That's one of the interesting things I find about it. At a certain point you get used to this stuff, and then it becomes normal and ordinary. [laughs] And what was huge and incredible becomes ordinary. It's very funny. But anyways at the time, it was this big contrast and huge heart and all that kind of stuff. And I ended up having actually this experience in the fall, where I wasn't in a relationship, but this love just wanted to flow.

DBear described this experience of love as “seeing [one of] the fundamental principles of God.” He was uncertain about this inner experience of God for a long time. He stated that there “was this desire to flow love, devotion, to an object, but [he was] not quite prepared to do that with God. He was holding back, uncertain about desire to flow love; and eventually he “ended up in a relationship with a friend.” It was a friendship relationship, and “she became this vehicle for [him] flowing love to” for a period of time.

Loss of ego toward surrendering core identity. DBear explained this time in his life in terms of “the divine values of chakra energy opening up and blowing off the crust” of identity. From his perspective, the “ego, heart, and identity” are “three layers of one construct expressed through the person. One clears the ego concepts of the mind, then emotions are “purged by clearing the heart,” and finally one loses the core identity. In Cosmic Consciousness as one clears the concepts of mind, there is what DBear called “ego-shrapnel” that needs to fall as loss of ego.

There is what I call ego-shrapnel, because even though the ego goes—it's like the core node falls away in a group of concepts and beliefs and personality thing, then some of the pieces fall away with it naturally because there's no support—but there's other things that are still there. There was some ego-shrapnel stuff falling away, bits of drama and story.

In terms of no-self, he said that in order for unity to take place there needed to be “the loss of the no-self in terms of no-identity” In other words, there needed to be a loss of the identity “association with the person, [DBear].” The process of losing identity was something that for him, took place a little before unity. He stated that when the identity fell away, the divider between “inside” and “outside” was gone. Then there was less “of that identity stuff” so that all that was needed to do was “just surrender.”

Third Awakening: The Switch to Unity Consciousness

Losing the core identity: The self work. DBear described what occurred for him prior to Unity as a process of first losing the ego, then losing the emotional energy that expresses the core fear, and then losing the fear itself. “This is the process involved in losing identity.”

Essentially there's the mind construct, the ego of being separate; [and] there is this emotional resistance that is the energy that drives that. And then the core identity which is fear underneath that. Identity drives the emotional energy which drives the ego. So you lose the ego, but then you gotta lose the emotional energy that expresses that core fear,

and then you lose the fear itself. The identity is subconscious until this point, and then it becomes conscious. You become aware of this gripping fear.

He said that for him, this process was “mercifully short;” and he expounded,

I was working at my computer, typing something or other; and this really strong, irrational dread came up. Keeping in mind I’m in a place where those kind of emotions haven’t really been experienced for a while—I mean, I get angry here and there or whatever, but it’s like this surface thing that blows off very quickly. And it doesn’t come up very often; and there’s some reason for it, whereas this was irrational dread. And it started to try and attach itself, because mind doesn’t like to have emotions for no reason. And so the mind starts trying to attach the emotion to something, and I could see that dynamic. It was like, “Okay, no.” . . . I went out in the evening for dinner. And I remember walking down the street and just having it pass; and there was this puff of dust or smoke or whatever it was But it was really interesting because it almost had a characteristic of smoke. [*with a laugh*]. It was quite interesting.

And then a short while later . . . a day or two . . . I was walking down the street in the evening; and it dawned on me that [DBear] wasn’t there any more. The person, the identity of [DBear]. And this is different from the ego. In that sense there’s kind of a three-tier thing. . . . I jokingly called it the three amigos—”am-egos.” The three levels of illusion and the three ego values of that—the illusion of individual, illusion of universe, and illusion of God’s dream. It’s like this whole construct, it collapsed; and I didn’t have a name for myself any more. It was very odd. I referred to myself as an *increment* for a bit. It reminded me of how in some traditions they give you a new name—partly to release your old identity, but probably because you do lose your identity. I guess.

After the loss of identity, he went on a weekend retreat;

and on the second night, I guess it was, when I went to bed, I was lying there in bed and it dawned on me that everything was gone. It’s hard to describe exactly, because my eyes are open and I’m seeing sort of vaguely shapes in the dark, so I could still perceive—my eyes are perceiving something. But all of that transcendent knowledge that Genpo talks about, all of the layers of creation, God, the world, existence, everything—gone. Very curious. And once again, a surprise.

On this retreat, he was able to discuss with the teacher what had “happened up to that point with the loss of the identity.” They had a “great conversation about unity;” and the teacher confirmed had “made the switch to unity.”

After the third awakening. The “unity switch” occurred in late November 2007, and the process is still underway. One of his spiritual teachers called this unity switch, “sloppy unity” because “it’s there, but it’s definitely not complete.” DBear has experienced a lot of changes since the unity awakening. In his words: “It’s affected my life dramatically, because there’s a whole lot of stuff that just doesn’t matter any more. Partly the need to know. . . the end of illusion.”

Another change is that he has lost motivation or desire to do things. It was the role of the do-er and “who it is that’s doing” that changed.

And I realize I’ve been in this place where I am not the do-er—It’s basically God and one of the constructs that God’s created that’s doing the doing of itself. And it’s happening within me, but it’s like I’m waiting for—I’ve lost my own former motivations to do things, to act, the sense of desire to get things done—the need to do and all that. So there’s this sense of, well, when God has a need, he’ll let me know kind of thing; and the impulse will be there. But it’s interesting, because I’m supposed to be a technology consultant; but it holds no interest. And consulting means marketing myself, and I simply don’t. Stuff comes up here and there; I see myself in this middle place, that I haven’t quite finished the process.

So it’s been funny. In an outward kind of way, from a practical standpoint, my life, I wouldn’t say is on hold; but it’s not doing anything. But I don’t care. *[laughs]* It doesn’t have any meaning for me to make a bunch of money so I can buy things that don’t matter. There’s no need to do stuff, to avoid being, or to avoid feeling, you know? But it surprises me, because I have this impression that, well, I have this gift. Isn’t there some reason why I *[laughs]* I have this gift? Or you know, ‘Why me?’ This has been a big question for me.

In the last year, he’s “in a place where less and less of what” he knows means anything, which has led him to “surrender into not knowing.”

One of the big ones for me more recently was the need to know—a real dominant thing in my life for a long time, for many lives actually. And that went away. That completely changed a lot of things for me. It’s hard to describe exactly, but it was a core part of my identity. There’s lots more to do.

There was this sense of waking up from the illusion, and for a while there, there was a sense of the world being God’s dream. I was no longer in the dream; but there was a separation there, which was not unity. And then the dream goes away, and the world turns out to be not separate—It’s part of the silence just moving within itself.

With this whole thing, my brain kind of goes, “What the heck was with all the transcendent knowledge? What was the point of all these layers of creation and, you know, what was the point of all that knowledge? *[laughs]* It was just—it was God! *[laughs]* It’s meaningless.” It’s just this complete simplicity. I’m still digesting and integrating that, and so it’s probably been—the unity switch was in late November of last year, so it’s been just over a year. I’ve been in post-switch, whatever; and there’s still this process underway.

In other words, less and less of what he knows means anything, which requires a complete surrender into not knowing; and he needs to complete the process before knowing what he’s going to be doing.

Additionally, “relationship is very different” for DBear now.

There isn't the *needs* associated with the relationship—the need for acceptance, the need for recognition, the need for, you know, all that stuff associated with a relationship. For me, relationship is about a vehicle to flow love to. It just changed that dynamic completely. There's still some garbage flowing around there. I'm not Mr. Clear, Mr. Clean [laughs] yet. The mind is a habit machine, right? So there's all this stuff there, and it's not till something comes up to make the habit conscious that you see it and then can clear it. It's interesting—in some ways my life has been an exercise in that.

DBear is still encountering opportunities that help him clear the habit of the mind machine. For example, in the beginning of 2008 he moved to another city.

I got a big job offer. . . . I went over there, met someone; this whole thing happened, just bang, bang, bang, bang. And it all seems to be, “Okay, this is what I'm supposed to be doing.” Like God organizing things. It just seemed to all be set up. And then about 2 months into it, it started to go weird. The job—the actual owner at this job. . . . he hated everything I did. [laughs] It was very strange. I'd never had that kind of reaction from anybody; and I was standing there with this guy shouting at me, but I was not attached—I wasn't caught up by it. But it was a very strange experience. Soon it was clear that *none* of it was working properly. The relationship was very interesting, because it became clear that. . . . we didn't have a shared reality. Friends of mine joke that I lived twenty years of my life in those 6 months. And in some ways it's like that. There's this rush through a series of experiences. And, I mean, I have a strong sense of where this is going—where this ends up. But the part in the middle—how do I get there from here, that's the journey. That's not known.

In retrospect of awakening so far, DBear reflected on the no-self aspect of his process:

It's interesting to consider, because it's like the little self is the ego and the no-self is the loss of the ego after first waking. That's how I would describe it, because what happens after that is there's a lack of self; but then the self is found to be within—the bigger Self. For me, I already had had that experience inside, so it was about the loss of the little self, not the gaining of the big Self. But some people have to lose the little self and then gain the big Self. So there's a period of no-self. It depends on how you want to talk about it, you know. And how you want to describe what self is and what no-self is. . . . Some teachers emphasize the silence as emptiness. Whereas I've only experienced it like that a little bit. Mostly for me, it's what I would describe as fullness. What [one of his teachers] describes as lively silence. Like I said earlier, it is fullness and resistance—there is nothing else. And so I've never had a sense of—well, not any time recently anyways—a sense of it being emptiness.

DBear has been fulfilling his desire to express his experience and knowledge about spiritual awakening through writing a book and conversing with others on the Internet. For example, what was helpful to him in awakening was:

1. Meditation (TM): It was key for him.
2. Yoga: Taking care of himself.
3. Understanding the stages of awakening; and finding teachers to help with this.
4. Finding a community where he could share his experiences.
5. Doing the emotional clearing. For him clearing came about through the habit of gratitude.
6. Forgetting—letting go of all the concepts and ideas about waking.
7. His philosophy of love: Small love is emotional love. Big Love is the fundamental of what is; it's what causes existence to be.
8. Opening the heart.
9. Letting go: Allowing versus doing. Moving out of resistance and into fullness. Not doing, just allowing.

With regard to the 9th helpful thing, DBear said,

Basically, we just have to let go of all of it. This only needs to be for a moment. From what I understand, the fullness of it happens when you're able to just allow all the time. And I would say that's probably going to take me a while [*laughs*]. So there's some sense in my life of being okay with it as it is. Not really caring about it being a certain way, but at the same time with a sense of, I know it's perfect, but [it] is the perfect it's gonna be? [*laughs*]

DBear explained that the spiritual awakening process continues. "I'm not quite a full-time surrendering person yet. [*laughs*] Eventually what it becomes is a full-time surrender, and I'm not there yet. [*laughs*] However, in a subsequent e-mail, he wrote: "By the way—I *get* full time surrender now. When love overtakes bliss as the dominant tone, surrender becomes a simple thing. All life is a surrender to Itself."

Anam Cara's Significant Moments in Realizing I AM

Anam Cara is a 41 year-old female who lives in the Western Pacific Region of the United States. She holds B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees; and works as a creative and musical director, musician, artist, poet, graphic designer, and creative expression facilitator. Anam Cara was raised in the Christian Roman Catholic tradition and explored Hindu, Advaita Vedanta, Christianity, Taoism, and Buddhism spiritualities as an adult. Nonetheless, she stated that she does not identify as belonging to any tradition.

Conceptualizing and Giving Voice to the Process of No-self

Anam Cara stated that the interview provided a rare opportunity to describe her history of experiences related to her “specific process of unfolding” spiritual development. In the past when she has talked about it with her family or with people in the general community, it was mostly “taken to mean something different than what [she was] saying.” Therefore, in order to be able to talk about no-self for the interview,

I need to have some kind of internal model to put words around. Words are concepts; and in order to use words, it's like I have to make some kind of construct to talk about. I realized what kind of construct was naturally forming for the sake of communication: It feels like there are three aspects. There's the actuality of no-self—that's just what is. It's just how it is, and that's unchanging. And whatever a human experience is, whether it's mine or yours, or anyone's, the fact of no-self *is*. And then there's the realization of that no-self, which is sort of like a direct experience of That. And then there's the human relationship to the experience, which would be like the unfolding of the realization within my life or anyone's life. I wanted to distinguish these 3 things because the unchanging actuality of no-self is just the nature of things, and that can't really be spoken of. So, when you talk about studying the experience of no-self, I have to say, well, I can't really say anything about it. I can't. It's just not possible to say anything about the actuality of no-self. So everything I'm saying is like a vague attempt to just engage with that in some way. And mostly it will probably be about the other two things—the direct experience, and the human relationship to the experience.

In other words, no-self is That which *is*, as “unchanging actuality” of the “nature of things” that “can't really be spoken of.” Therefore, in the interview when she spoke about her “experience of no-self,” it was about the “unfolding or realization” of the “direct experience of That” and about her “human relation to the experience.” She stated that “coming into” herself psychologically was “very significant in the process of unfolding as a human being with relation to the experience of no-self.” Fundamental to her relationship with no-self was her psychological maturation. For the interview, Anam Cara described significant moments of realizing I AM as that which is unchanging and as that which has “no self—no separate self at all.

The Unfolding of Significant Moments of Realizing I AM

Anam Cara spoke about six significant moments related to her unfolding process of no-self. Throughout her life there have been five different points that she felt were “relevant to the overall process” of the “core” moment of realizing I AM.

Inviting Jesus into Her Heart

The first event occurred somewhere around when Anam Cara was 4 to 8 years old when she was with a woman who had the role of grandmother in her life.

And she was a fundamentalist Christian. I was brought up Catholic, and so I had some understanding of the concept of Jesus. Going to church didn't turn me on at all, but I had a sense that Jesus was a good thing. I somehow knew in my heart that Jesus was a good thing. Anyway, she asked me one day, "Have you invited Jesus into your heart?" And I said, "No, I haven't." And she said, "Would you like to?" And because I had the sense that it was a good thing, I said, "Sure, but I don't know how." And she said, "Oh, it's easy; just repeat after me." And then she said, "Dear Jesus—" And I said, "Dear Jesus." "I invite you into my heart—" "I invite you into my heart." "Amen—" "Amen." And that was it. . . . I remember thinking it was so simple. And at the time it didn't seem like any big revelation or anything; it was just a natural moment. But the thing was that years and years later, maybe 25 years later, I realized that I had *always* remembered that moment. You know how there are certain moments in life that you just always remember, even if they don't seem particularly outstanding or noteworthy? That was one of those moments. . . . And as things unfolded in awareness, I realized, "Wow, that was actually a significant moment in terms of planting a seed." In retrospect, there was some very significant sense that that moment had directed my being in the right direction toward truth. So that was the first one.

Realizing Unconditional Love

The second significant moment for Aman Cara occurred in a religion class in high school when

the teacher brought up the question, "What is love?" And he talked about unconditional and conditional love. He described conditional love as when you have a boyfriend and you love them one day and then you have an argument and you don't love them anymore. And unconditional love is like the love a mother has for her child. No matter what the child would ever do, even horrible things, she would still love that child. And as he was talking it was so obvious to me that conditional love wasn't love at all. It had nothing to do with love. It was labeled "love," but if it's conditional it's not really love. So it really made me ponder on my own time, "What is love?" And so during one of the breaks, probably a lunch break, I was sitting outside; and I was asking myself and imagining, "Okay, so what is unconditional love, really?" And I imagined that I was in the future, and my future son who's now an adult, is in prison. And I'm in the prison cell with him and he's murdered five people or whatever; and because he's my son, I love him no matter what. In my life I had somehow the modeling of unconditional love, I suppose, with my parents. Not that it was perfect, but there was some sense of knowing what that would be like to love my son even though he did these horrible things. And then I sort of looked around at the kids walking around the campus or whatever; and I thought, "Well, why don't I love that guy? What if he was my son? Then I would love him." Or, "What if she was my daughter, I would love her." And it dawned on me that, "Just because that guy's not my son, why should I hold that against him?" There was something that just opened up and realized that

the real and true potential of a human life was to love everybody. It wasn't that specific people are or aren't lovable and that determines whether or not I should love them, it was that there was something going on *on my end* that was or wasn't open to loving them. So I saw that love isn't limited by the appearance of things; it's more about how I am seeing or approaching it. . . . So that was a significant moment where the direction of my life was oriented. Love became consciously what my life is about. Not that I was some totally loving, open person after that. . . . But it was like that guiding principle, that deep knowing of possibility, was always there in the background, without question or doubt.

Realizing Beauty: The Third Significant Moment

Then when I was in my mid-twenties or early, mid-twenties, I experimented a little bit with LSD. The first time I took it there was a realization about beauty. I had been sitting outside under a tree; and I saw, "Oh my god, this tree is so beautiful!" And I recognized that the tree is always that beautiful; it's not just beautiful because I'm tripping out on it. It was seen that the beauty was real and that it was always there. It's just that normally I don't see it. Again, in retrospect, I came to see that that experience was very significant. It was perhaps the first time that I saw that which doesn't come and go. Beauty was what I might call a facet of reality, and I saw that it is always present no matter what. That was, I think, a very significant sort of seeing.

The Headless Experiment Pointing Toward No-self

The fourth significant moment occurred at a conference where Douglas Harding was doing a presentation.

His presentation was called, *The Headless Life*; and he guided us in some experiments of awareness. I went along with his instruction and directly experienced what he was pointing out. It was, like, "Oh wow, this is *great*." I was really was touched by what he was pointing out, in a direct way. There was the direct experience of what he was talking about, but . . . I didn't get how fundamentally important and relevant it was. And during one of the breaks in the conference I remember one of the people that seemed to be more involved with him said, "Oh, did you get it?" I said, "Yes." And he said something about how he was interested in walking around with that "headless" awareness all the time. And I remember thinking, "Why would you want—what's the big deal?" It was like I didn't comprehend why that would be so important to do. I didn't understand the significance. I would say that "headless experiment" was certainly one way of pointing to a no-self experience. . . . My experience of it was . . . energizing; it felt really positive like this is a good and right thing that was happening. . . . But I wasn't looking for truth, I didn't understand why I would care, and I didn't look for or see a connection between love and "the headless life."

Realization of the True Nature of Infinite Awareness

Anam Cara stated that the headless experiment "was an actual glimpse that [she] didn't appreciate at the time" as being an "experience pointing toward no-self," and she didn't see that "this

experience was pointing to Truth.” However, two additional events pointed her toward truth prior to the 5th event, which prepared her to recognize truth.

Events prior to the fifth realization. Two things occurred as “precursors leading up to the [fifth] realization.”

The first was that I had read a book that was sort of a new-agey channeled kind of book; but in there was a thing about, “Well, if truth is what you really want, why are you praying for parking places?” You know, if you want truth, pray for truth. Don’t waste your energy on other things. And so, that was a total pointer—like, “Oh, right.” Something in me knew this is the most important thing, and I don’t want to dissipate my energy. Why would I bother? If I don’t know truth, and truth is the most important thing, then why would I ask for other things? At the time, I had actually been praying for parking spaces, I had been going through that sort of thing. Not that it’s wrong to do that; but for me at that time, was my new-agey phase of trying to manage life in that way or whatever. And my internal response was, “Yes, I’m not going to pray for parking spaces. Next time I’m wanting a parking spot, I’m going to pray for truth instead.” And I remember after that, many times of driving into the parking lot, having a desire for a parking spot, and praying for truth instead. And so that little pointer, really directed my mind and my being in one direction. . . . Then around this time when I read that book, it became clear that there’s only one thing that’s worth wishing for and that’s truth. Or, eventually I had the word “enlightenment” around it rather than “truth.” So I prayed for enlightenment; or I wished for enlightenment because there was no other wish that could hold a candle to that. It was like I no longer had un-clarity about what was important to me. So that was significant.

Then shortly after that, maybe a matter of months, Anam Cara read Gangaji’s book, *You are That*. In the book,

She talked about where true happiness comes from: If you want to be happy, and you look for happiness in things that come and go, you’re going to have happiness that comes and goes. If you want lasting happiness, then the only place that lasting happiness can come from is from that which doesn’t come and go—that which is always here in your experience. And so in reading that, it sort of directed me more toward honing in on what it was that I was really looking for. “Oh, it’s That which is always here—that which is always my experience.” And she was calling it your *self*—who you are is what is always there in your experience. Who you are is what doesn’t come and go—It is the source of lasting happiness.

This realization provided Anam Cara with that background for “knowing that truth was what [she] wanted,” and realizing that what she was looking for “doesn’t come and go” and “is always in [her] experience.” She said that this, along with the headless experiment pointed the way to no-self, allowed the “awareness” to come “to the fore,” and enabled her to *recognize* the 5th event.

The fifth realization. The fifth significant moment occurred in 1995, when Anam Cara was 28 years old. In an Advaita Vedanta satsang and while being led in a guided meditation by a teacher,

“her true nature became blatantly clear.” In this meditation, the teacher guided her to first “be aware of what was immediately present; then she was guided to be aware of the entire building, block, city, country—

And so she sort of guided us basically to be aware of the infinite universe. And then she asked an important question: “Does this awareness end anywhere?” And it was obvious, “No, it doesn’t end anywhere.” And then she had us try to destroy the awareness in any way we could think of. I don’t remember what she said; but I remember thinking, “Okay, I have an imaginary sword and I’m going to destroy it.” But that didn’t even touch it. I tried whatever internal thing I could think of, but there was no getting rid of the infinite awareness. And somewhere in there it just became obvious: “Oh, *this* is what is always present.” This is always sort of the backdrop of any experience that I might have in life. So it was transcending—the best word I can find—any experience and also at the base of any experience that might be had in life. And it was totally obvious, and it was obvious that this is what I am. This is sort of the true nature of consciousness that is what I am. It’s strange talking about it, because in describing it, it becomes objectified and the objectification of it is itself false. So it’s a little strange to put it into words.

In describing the “un-describable,” Anam Cara said that, “The word ‘experience’ doesn’t quite fit, because part of the realization was that it is *that* which is before experience.” However, there was “an enjoyable part of the experience. . . . It was so obvious. It was like, “Oooh! This is what—who I am!” She had been exposed to the “self-inquiry idea in the preceding months, so the truth of the realization was a “How could I have missed it?” kind of thing, which “was enjoyable” as an experience “on sort of a human level.” In retrospect, Anam Cara said there was nothing hard about the immediate experience—“It was very natural and flow-y and fine.” Afterward, “maybe within the first week or two,” it seemed sort of “lonely” not to be able to share it.

How the experience affected the living out of her daily life. This “thing” that happened to Anam Cara occurred right in the middle of writing her dissertation. It “became blatantly obvious that there was no putting words around [her] chosen topic;” and that it was “a total farce to even pretend to make some intellectual study out of it.” In fact, “seeing beyond experience in general, just pulled the rug out from under [her] dissertation process,” such that it was “sort of the antithesis” of the topic. So for her “that was sort of weird.” As a Ph.D. student studying psychology, her “process with psychological exploration had all been about how there’s something wrong with” herself, and how to “fix” herself. Having to fix herself—that “whole thing got pulled out from under” her, such that, “There [was] no self to fix, and there’s nothing wrong.” She said that on a practical level, that was “a confusing part of the unfolding.” Nevertheless, she continued with her dissertation because it “felt like it was the right thing to do; but the actuality of working on it was strangely futile and slightly dissatisfying because it just felt like a farce.” In the end, she viewed writing the dissertation as a good process; but at the time, “it was just sort of confusing to have to do life, when life [didn’t] make sense anymore.”

Another thing that changed was that Anam Cara wasn’t interested in the same things that she had been before, “like fixing [her]self or seeking experiences.” Accordingly, “the common interest of friends changed, and the people [she] spent time with reflected that.”

Later on in time, there were other “ups and downs in terms of [her] relationship to the experience.” In her words,

I think the biggest up-and-down kind of thing was that my mind took over, intellectualizing what was seen to not be true. Ultimately, the experience was one of denying emotion. That would be a way to sum it up. So there was a period of years, let’s say, maybe 10 years, of going into a denial of emotion and then coming back out of it. And I would say, actually, that the difficulty of it wasn’t because of the realization. Well, I guess the denial was related to that; but, had there been whatever level of emotional maturity in the first place, then the denial wouldn’t have been the default setting on my mind, if that makes sense.

She elaborated on her level of emotional immaturity and how that related to denial.

It wasn’t [denial of] the emotion of the no-self experience. It was denying the human emotions that I would have just in life, because it was seen so clearly in the moment of realization: “Oh, this is just experience—there’s the unfolding of life and then there’s what I actually am.”—There was sort of a separation between the two. In the realization it was all one, there was no inner conflict or outer conflict about anything. But when the mind came in, it took ownership of the realization and then applied that to emotion—“Oh, there *is no* emotion. That doesn’t exist.” And yet the human experience was one where there were emotions and there was whatever level of maturity or immaturity. Denying it without actually seeing through it was ultimately painful.

I guess maybe the main ways as a human being I have tended to function are emotionally and intellectually. And so it was sort of a combination of both of those things that had to settle into something. So, as the intellect settles down and sees and knows its rightful place in the movement of things, then also the emotion isn’t being denied intellectually. And so then it has room to just be what it is.

So [the realization experience] just basically highlighted where the unconsciousness was, and it wasn’t pleasant. It wasn’t easy to have that be denied. And then actually when it started letting go of the denial, then even though the emotions were painful, it felt very releasing and healing. So that’s sort of the main up and down thing—just intellectualizing it. . . . And so at this point, it feels like there’s, in terms of my human experience, just a natural unfolding of it—If emotional issues come up, it’s more like they just are what they are and there’s not the inner conflict about it. And there’s not so much the intellectual denying of emotion. It’s just allowed; there’s a harmonious allowing of my human experience.

In other words, during the guided meditation with her teacher, Anam Cara had an “unfolding” of “infinite awareness.” It was a realization of no-self as That which *is*—as “unchanging actuality” of the “nature of things” that “can’t really be spoken of,” and this realization “highlighted” the unconsciousness. For a period of time, she denied emotions as “just experience” without letting painful emotions naturally unfold” until she had emotionally matured enough to harmoniously allow her human experience.

Three negative teachings. Anam Cara also spoke about three negative teachings that contributed to her process of unfolding. She defined the term *negative teaching* as

It's a teaching—it's different than just a random person offering me a difficult experience. It is sort of like these teachers, despite their outward teachings, despite their conscious or unconscious intentions as teachers, offered me great teachings that were totally relevant in the unfolding of truth.

One relationship and two teachers provided “interesting” experiences as moments in her unfolding no-self process. Anam Cara worked with prominent spiritual teacher in India via videotape. She had an idea of what his “teaching was like and how that worked;” and in satsang, “he would read [students’ letters] and then take them through a process of inquiry; and then they would become enlightened!” She was aware that she still needed guidance in completing the fundamental realization of the truth of infinite awareness, so she decided to go and visit the teacher in India. The teacher did a process where he would read an individual’s personal letter and then call that person up in front of all the students to give his answer. When Anam Cara wrote her letter she thought, “Oh, great, he’ll read it and then we’ll do inquiry and everything will be great.”

At the satsang, basically he had been reading a story. He didn’t give a talk or anything, he was just reading out of a book with a thick, heavy accent. And the way he read was really hard for me to follow, so while I was listening to the story, I stopped paying attention to the story because my mind was just struggling, struggling to understand what he was saying. And I was aware, “I’m not here to understand the story. I know that this is about presence. It’s not about the concepts or intellectual ideas.” And so instead of struggling so hard to listen to the content, I was just sitting there, sort of meditating, sitting quietly in his presence. So after the reading he reads my letter. He calls me up to speak with him. The question in my letter was, “Who am I?” And he said, “So, did you get your answer?” And I didn’t really know what he meant by that. And he repeated, “So, did you get your answer I read this beautiful story. Did you get your answer?” And I was, like, “Oh god, he is quizzing me on the story [*with a laugh*] and I don’t even know what the story was.” And so I said, “I don’t know.” And he didn’t hear me, and the lady who was attending to him said louder, “I don’t know. . . .” And he said, “Well, then fuck off!” And he points to the door; and the first thing I thought was, “Oh, he’s telling my ego to fuck off or whatever.” And I was totally caught off guard. That was totally out of left field because all I thought of him was like this happy . . . guru guy, right? And then he said, “You’re wasting our time! I’m reading this beautiful story, and you’re just—where’s your mind?” And I forget what he said specifically, but it was just this total blast. Not what I expected. And he kept going on about it, and I eventually realized, “Oh, my god, he’s actually kicking me out.” It wasn’t like an ego metaphor to fuck off, it was “I have to get up and leave.” And so I got up and I was walking towards the door, and I asked the person who was sitting behind where my seat was what I should do; and they said, “Just sit down.” So I just sat down.

During the aftermath of that experience, the “community was really great about supporting” her through it.

And there was every possible interpretation of the experience—from what’s going on, this guy is out of his mind, to the enlightened master giving me the teaching that is ultimately going to liberate me kind of thing. It took me like ten years to get over that. It had a lasting effect. But in retrospect, I see it as what I’m calling a “negative teaching,” in that it wasn’t a direct teaching in any way. It wasn’t like he gave me any realization . . . but it was one of those things that I had to come to terms with as a human being. I had to come to terms with it. And what’s coming up right now is that the coming to terms is what allowed me to be more available as a human being to live the experience of what we’re calling no-self. Also, the main immediate teaching was to pull the rug out from under a sense of spiritual ambition or superiority. Before I went to India I had an underlying ambition, “Oh, I will go to India, see [this teacher], become enlightened, and then come back and be the enlightened one at [graduate school].” It nauseates me now to recall that feeling. But that’s where my mind was; and what a gift to have that demolished, as painful as it was at the time.

Anam Cara had a similar experience with another spiritual teacher, with whom she had been working with for a while. She had this sort of student-teacher guru thing going on with this teacher. . . . There was an occurrence where she felt disrespected and dis-acknowledged with regard to her teaching, and it had to do with her relationship to being a teacher. In retrospect, Anam Cara thought that the teacher was someone who had an “important direct experience” of “enlightenment—and yet there was a way that she wasn’t embodying it.”

The word that I sort of have around it is *Half-Way Up the Mountain*. And again, in retrospect, looking back on it, I saw, “Wow, that was a great teaching for me.” I saw directly by witnessing her experience that it’s possible to be enlightened, and to not be fully enlightened, or to not embody it. It was plain as day right in front of my face—This is how it works in the actual human unfolding of this. It’s not like there’s enlightenment and then you’re done and you’re perfect. And though the fundamental understanding is beyond simple, the unfolding or the living of it is something of an entirely different order. So that was another [of] what I’m calling “negative teaching” that was really important and valuable for me. And just for the record, I’ve heard only wonderful things about [that teacher] lately. And that, too is a teaching—transformation continues to unfold.

The final negative teaching occurred when she became involved with a man who is “an Advaita type non-dual teacher” who could “beautifully articulate his understanding of no-self such that people benefitted from his understanding.”

We became involved in a relationship. And one of the underlying problems in the relationship was that I had made him now [*sic*] an authority on the subject of Truth or reality, and he accepted the authority. He had so much certainty around his experience, whereas I didn’t have the certainty, intellectually. At the time I didn’t have that kind of internal authority to really stand in my own shoes with it. And so I sort of projected that authority onto him, and—gosh, how should I say?—well, let’s just say he wasn’t perfect. I eventually, as with [the other spiritual teacher,] I saw gaps in his living of it. Ultimately the relationship didn’t work out for various reasons and it was a very difficult experience for me. Having placed my authority in his hands what I learned from the break-up of all of

that was that I had to put the authority back in myself. I had originally sort of put it on [another spiritual teacher;] . . . and then when [the relationship] was gone, it had nowhere left to go. I couldn't put it back on [that other spiritual teacher,] that felt like going backward. And so it had to come back to myself. I would say *that* is a big reason why I'm even talking to you right now. I wouldn't have enough clarity of standing in my own experience to even talk to you about it.

Anam Cara concluded that those were three negative teachings that offered experiences that affected the ultimate unfolding of the realizing the truth of I AM.

The Sixth Significant Moment: The IAM Realization

When Anam Cara received and read the copy of her interview transcript, she realized that she had forgotten, during the interview, to speak about her most recent realization of "I AM." Therefore, in an e-mail, she told me about the sixth significant moment, which occurred about 6 months or so previously. This was "another, possibly more deeply embodied realization of no-self." Preceding this experience, Anam Cara met a young teacher who was visiting from overseas; and through that meeting, she came to be internally motivated to direct her "attention one-pointedly to the 'I AM.'" Nisargadatta's quote came to her mind: "I AM is the door. Stay at it until it opens." As the most efficient way of describing her realization, Anam Cara passed on the following writing from her journal:

It is understood: [Anam Cara] is the body character, "skin puppet," thing that moves around and does stuff. [Anam Cara] cannot be enlightened and it doesn't matter. That is so beside the point. I am the Self—as I have known for a long time—same exact self. And [Anam Cara] is seen to be something happening rather than something that has any volition or self in it. It is understood how [Anam Cara] has no self, because [Anam Cara] is a skin puppet and it moves by some mysterious power—it just moves—while the presence that I am just is. So there is the all-extending actual presence and the happenings within that.

So the "I AM" is the door and the destiny. . . . I mean, to stay at the I AM until it opens is not to go into some different world. The door-opening part isn't about a change of state or experience, it is about the appearance of [Anam Cara] being dislodged from the I AM presence so that it is not bound as containing the identity that I AM. This is where the presence wakes up, not the person. But the presence has been awake since 1995. Now, it is like the person has become dislodged from the identity.

When I say "person," I don't mean the essential beingness of person. I mean only the image of person, the idea of person, the moving parts. So the image of [Anam Cara] has no self—no separate self at all. There is no such thing as a separate self at all. There is only one self that lends itself to anything that has a sense of self.

So staying at the I AM door is so completely and totally relevant. Even now. Even after [Anam Cara] is seen as a character. Because the next moment—who knows? I can't say disappearance doesn't happen again. I can say that I AM doesn't change and that to be

HERE—to remain as I AM—is never not true. It just may be that the appearance of a person gets lodged again to the I AM. And even so, I AM remains unchanged.

Is this the end? I don't know. Certainly [Anam Cara] is seen to have no self—except for the self that gives itself to everything equally. And the thing about no-self . . . at all? . . . I don't know. Maybe there is something beyond I AM. If so, I can't imagine it—i.e. it is not imaginable. And in any case, the directive is still to remain as I AM. Maybe the door is only partly opened with the dislodging of the [Anam Cara] person, but staying as the I AM is inherently self-satisfying.

To see the I AM self, and the falling away of [Anam Cara] identification, is to realize that all “others” are this same I AM self. [Anam Cara] is no different from the other people, the other skin puppets.

Anam Cara stated that she did not perceive this to be a “waking out” or “transcendent awakening.” Rather her “direct experience of it” was the opposite: “In seeing the [Anam Cara] character in this way, it felt totally inclusive and totally present within the physical human beingness. More so than ever.”

For a while, the concept of *ego* was puzzling her; she didn't know what people meant by it. In her experience, “any sense of self *is* the I AM principle; and without the I-amness, there is no entity to speak of. So what could ego be?” She supposed that it was “the I-amness with a costume on.” What didn't make sense was why people would use the words “I” and “me” to point to the *ego*. For her, the words “I” and “me” point back to the fundamental principle of Being.” This bewilderment was laid to rest when she came across a quote from Ramana Maharshi: “The ego is I-thought. The true I is Self.” She realized that,

The actuality of I AM is the truth of existence, the thought of I AM is just a thought. The thought (ego) is not the actuality. The thought is an object, the actuality is the subject.

How Realization of I AM has Changed Her

Anam Cara found that expressing herself creatively through artistic media and writing was helpful to her “in just sort of expressing and integrating and exploring the unfolding.” Additionally, working with a particular spiritual teacher for over 9 years was helpful because “he was hands-off” in the “natural unfolding.” This was helpful in creating a “benevolent environment, where “he didn't really do much except be there with whatever I was going through.” Similarly, she stated that it was helpful that one of her close friends really understood her experience and didn't “make it any more or less than it is.” This friend was “an important companion” in helping her to “not feel alone as a human being” because she felt totally understood.

Changes in Self and Self-Identification

Anam Cara explained that the change in self may be a “maturation that isn't psychological.” Like she said previously, “there's that which is always present” as infinite, ever-present awareness, and

so it's like the solidity of that hasn't changed; but then in terms of the relationship to it or the identification of something with something, it's like the identification becomes bigger and bigger in a way—or less and less. Less and less and bigger and bigger are sort of the same thing, as I say the words. The actual day-to-day experience is like I'm less identified with whatever parts of myself psychologically, or physically; and also the sense of self expands—it just expands. I guess that's what we could say. And I suspect this is an ongoing, never-ending expansion. . . . Self is always changing, no-self is unchanging.

Additionally, she stated that in her unfolding process, she felt like her body relaxed over time as “things” settled in.

For Anam Cara there is no longer reason to be a spiritual seeker, in that she said, “I'm not going anywhere, and I'm not looking for any place to go.” So, it's like I'm not looking—there's not seeking.” Moreover, any sense of direction she had in her life “was prior to the realization and it led to the realization.” She explained,

So actually, then, that brings me back to the wishing well thing. When my intention became clear, I would always only wish for Enlightenment; but then after that fundamental sense of self fell away or was realized, I couldn't pray for Enlightenment any more. And so [*laughing*] now I have trouble at the wishing well again. [*laughs*] I don't know what to wish for. So, in a way I've lost my direction. And it's sort of the same as it was before my intention became clear; but the more identity or holding on drops away, then direction just happens. It's not like there has to be a guiding principle, except just what this moment *is* sort of defines what it wants to be in the moment. And so in that way there's that perpetual direction. But it's not any direction that I can grasp or claim or do anything with. I can't use it in any way.

Doublespiral: Always Being the Sea of Awareness

Doublespiral is a 54-year old female who lives in the Pacific Western region of the United States. She holds B.A., B.M., M.M., and M.S. degrees; has a license in Marriage and Family Therapy; and has partially completed a D.Min. degree. She works as a psychotherapist, life coach, spiritual director, author, teacher, and workshop facilitator.

Doublespiral was raised in the Christian Presbyterian tradition, and was exposed to the New Thought tradition through her grandmother who lived with the family. As a teenager, she began exploring Buddhism and various meditation techniques. For a while she studied toward receiving a Doctor of Ministry degree because, throughout much of her life, she felt conflicted in her desire to “normalize” her innate sense of no-self through becoming either a minister, a priest, or an official Buddhist practitioner. Currently, she considers Buddhism to be her spiritual tradition and also holds agnostic views.

Defining No-self as the Sea of Awareness

In defining no-self, Doublespiral spoke about how for her, metaphorically, no-self is *being* “the sea of awareness.” She said: “There’s something about that that really speaks to me about just being that sea of awareness.” She also defined no-self as a “great, full emptiness” that is “a great silence.”

I like both of those, actually, because there is a sense of both of those that there is nothing that is *not* that. And that both of them convey for me that sense of a full emptiness out of which everything else arises, and the physical world being a constant just kind of evanescence of all of that.

In other words, her definition describes no-self as that which is vast, silent, full and also empty awareness which fleetingly gives rise to everything, and then is forgotten.

Always Dipping into No-self

Since early childhood, Doublespiral has had awareness of no-self, in that “it really was a sense of dipping into something that was always there, just for probably longer and longer periods of time.” Therefore, she does not view her process of permanently being no-self as developmental; but rather, she described it metaphorically.

Rather than it being development per se, it was more like a wagon wheel or something and being at the center all the time. And different paths [were] all the spokes leading to the center. And really kind of my development as it is, has been really kind of being in the center and then playing with a spoke that would just land me back in the center, and then playing with another spoke.

From a very young age she had a sense of the holiness of everything and an impression that there was just a “veil” separating us from the “full silence,” as she illustrated through the following memories.

So the burning bush piece was in Sunday school, quite young, hearing the story of Moses and the burning bush; and kind of being surprised that they made such a big deal out of it, because my experience was that everything was on fire all the time. Everything was holy ground—everything. . . . That piece about the crayons—you know, some time in elementary school learning how to do something with crayons where you take colored crayons, and you completely cover a piece of paper with them. And then I think it was painting over it, but that wouldn't make sense—or black crayons—one or the other, and then you take a little tool or your fingernail and you scratch off the black; and there's all this wonderful color underneath and you could draw that way. And, again, my sense of that there was a very thin veil, like that black, between us and this sea, this great silence, this plenum, whatever you want to call it.

Growing up with this inner sense of matter-filled space caused her to feel “different.”

So, growing up with that, and being aware that I was different in some way, and doing my best to kind of keep mum about it. . . . Learned to keep my mouth shut! [*laughs a little*] I had the same experience this week talking to somebody, and it's just like they disappeared. I mean, not they disappeared, but like, “Oh, okay, I need to be aware of how I speak about things.”

Additionally, Doublespiral had difficulty fitting in.

It was hard. I've been thinking about that this week—just that sense of kind of being at right angles to everyone else. And I know I've spent a fair amount of time trying to at least appear normal and fit in. Because I was aware when I'd say things that I thought and perceived and all of that, people would look at me like I was rather strange.

I grew up in a family that was a funny family. My grandmother lived with us and regularly saw other beings. And called me Isabelle, because that was my name in a past life, when I was a French Huguenot; and kept getting me confused with her. And we'd do the Ouija board; and two of my aunts came in—my mother's sisters—I come from a long matrilineal line of, I guess, *seers* for lack of a better word. Did the Ouija board, and actually discovered bones under our house that the Ouija board accurately dated—told us they were under there when we were digging up for a new foundation. That sort of thing—stuff that was corroborate-able, if that's a word. So [I] grew up in that family. My mother would have dreams about friends who were pregnant; and then, as we got older . . . she'd have dreams about the sex of the baby and what the baby was going to be like. And it was always correct. So within my family, there wasn't any sense of being strange, but I was aware that the outside world didn't work that way.

Like her female relatives, Doublespiral also had pre-cognitive and psychic abilities. She had these capabilities from an early age; and she exemplified this as

knowing when, after one ring, whether the person was home. I could tell by the quality of the ring. And having dreams for other people, knowing what other people were thinking

and feeling, and having intuitive flashes of things that were going to happen—all of that sort of thing.

As a result of all of this, Doublespiral grew up being aware that she “was different in some way;” and she did her best to “keep mum about” her psychic abilities and her inner sense of the “great sea of awareness.” She frequently slipped into the “great silence,” sometimes during meditation when she was deliberately “inviting it; and sometimes it would just show up.” She continued to experience it “particularly out in nature, and during meditations.”

I started meditating as a teenager, first after reading *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* in high school and being blown away by it. And just sitting down and starting to sit with no instruction, ‘cause there was nobody doing that that I knew of. And then when the TM movement came to New Orleans, getting instruction in that, I think, when I was about 18; and basically meditating since then in different traditions.

Doublespiral stated that for her, “the process, at least psychologically, since then has been one of kind of shedding piece by piece that yearning to fit in and be normal.” This also affected her vocational choices and her spiritual quest.

As far as vocational choices, I started off as a musician, partly just ‘cause I was so good at it; and had the feeling all the way through undergraduate and starting graduate school that that wasn’t what I was supposed to be doing. I knew there was something else. I was just scared to leave music because I was good at it and making a living at it. And my body finally rebelled with tendonitis. So I had to get out of music, which started a 2-year, 3-year quest to figure out what it was I really wanted. And ended up going back to grad school in marriage and family therapy, within an institution that was a pastoral counseling place. So there was the big acknowledgement of spiritual there as well.

From young adulthood to about age 40, Doublespiral struggled with trying to put her spirituality within the context of a tradition, which was her way of trying to fit in—to normalize.

I’ve been thinking a lot more about this piece the last couple weeks. Almost rather than a developmental piece, the facts were, starting with the Buddhist stuff as a teenager and kind of moving in—Buddhism and Christianity have been the two kind of strongest threads there. Mystical Christianity. And kept [*little laugh*] have you ever seen a car trying to drive with the brakes on? They go forward then jerk back, forward, jerk—just like a lot of my spiritual journey on the outside has looked like that. I’d start to go toward responding to a vocation for the priesthood, and then pull back, not at the last minute—pretty early on. But it really is like an instinctive kind of withdrawing. And started D.Min. I’ve had quite a few instances of that. And 2 weeks ago, really started thinking about it. It’s like, realizing it was such a pattern in my life. And wondering whether it was a pattern of backing off from a deeper commitment, you know, going much deeper, or whether it was some part of me instinctively saying “no” when I was trying to do something that didn’t fit. And just the last 3 or 4 days have really come to a deeper awareness that it’s the second piece. I mean, commitment scares me. So it’s not that’s not every [*sic*] there; but I commit when the time is right. And I think it’s just more I realize that I was framing all of

that as a call to the priesthood. Because when I was growing up, I wasn't a Catholic. So I think if I'd been a Catholic, I would have interpreted it as a call to the convent. But I wasn't. I had plenty of Catholic friends, but Presbyterians didn't go to convent. So the next best thing was becoming a minister or something. And so I kept putting all of this within a context of a call to be within an institution, whether it was as a minister or a priest, or later an official Buddhist practitioner. I *wanted* that *so* badly. And I realized part of that was: (a) wanting to fit in—you know, if I could just find a place that I could fit in, somehow that would normalize me; (b) I think there was a narcissistic desire to have a community recognize me officially as a spiritual teacher and leader. I had the yearning for that. . . . A priest is basically a functionary. I mean, a priest does some spiritual things; but basically—and I don't mean this as a put-down in any way—they're a CEO of an organization. And that's not what I am, you know? I've never worked for an organization, except for one time in my life when there were only a few of us. I've always been self-employed. And my spiritual path has always been synchronistic.

In a summary of her adult life, Doublespiral reflected how her sense of feeling different affected her decisions during the course of her life.

I think there was a time in early adulthood where I did my best to not be that way. I think it was kind of a developmental thing of really wanting to appear normal, and all of that stuff. Where I went to Presbyterian church, and got married to kind of a normal guy, and just really wanted to appear normal. And it was one of the unhappier times of my life. And toward the end of that marriage, just realized I couldn't do that anymore. It was killing me. I got ill. Actually did get ill from all of that—Got chronic fatigue and realized I needed to step out of that box or the next time it was going to be something much worse. So left all that behind to my great grief and joy. And actually I started during the last 4 or 5 years of the marriage. . . . There was something about the birth of my daughter that kind of split me wide open again; and I just wasn't going to go back to a semi-shutdown place. So it started during the end of the marriage.

Falling Into the Sea of Awareness

The Winking In and Out of the Physical World

About three years ago, Doublespiral fell into the sea of awareness, and she has not left the great silence since that time. Prior to that, however, she had an extended experience of the “non-substantiality of the physical world.”

I think the only thing kind. . . . leading up to it was, I think maybe 2 or 3 months before that I had had an extended experience of—it's really hard to explain perceptually. But, you know, I'd read before of that sense of molecules and atoms winking in and out of existence. They just do it so fast we can't see that there really is a constant recreation, destruction of matter going on. And for about I think maybe 2 weeks or something, something happened perceptually, where I could see, like, everything was very slowed down. And I could see, like, frames of film—Instead of seeing the movie, I could also see in between the frames. . . . That was that 2-week period. It was just really funny. It was like a movie; but I could see the spaces between the frames; and it was very, very fast. And it

was like my perception was very slowed down or something or speeded up—something—who knows? So, it wasn't like action was slowed down out there; but my perception of that winking in and out was there. . . . And I wish, you know, it would have been nice to write about it, because it's such an odd perceptual thing. But it really was a sense of the physical world of matter continuing *constantly* to be recreated from that silence, that void, or whatever—of the non-substantiality of the physical world.

Crossing Over Into Permanent Silence

Doublespiral described the experience of “crossing over” into the silence as the sea of awareness and her process afterwards. About three months after “that winking in and out” of the physical world, the following occurred:

I just had a feeling before going to sleep one night that something momentous was beginning to happen. I had no idea what it was, and went to sleep. But then I wasn't asleep. It was like the body was asleep, but the rest of me was awake. And this voice kept chanting and kind of paraphrasing the Bhagavad Gita: “Fire cannot burn it, knife cannot cut it, water cannot wet it.” And it was like a chanting that went on the whole night like that. And my body was asleep, but the rest of me was awake. And I kind of woke up physically the next morning, immediately knowing that everything had shifted. That there wasn't that veil any more—that thin, thin veil. And I knew that was the only time I'd ever had that experience in that it was permanent. I knew I had crossed over into something. And it wasn't like a woo-hoo or celebratory, it was just like a fact.

And so within a couple of days, I just kind of was with it; told my husband about it. And called a dear friend—And I can't remember that he told me. . . . But he had gone through kind of his own awakening decades before that; and so he was a wonderful person to talk with about. And he'd ask questions, and it just gave me a place to debrief as it was happening, for which I was very, very, very grateful. And then ran into that book. . . . Gurumayi writing about her own experience. And somehow that book fell into my lap within a couple of weeks. And I was reading that, and that really helped as well.

Doublespiral recalled that all her life she would slip in and out of this state, sometimes during meditation, but other times having it “just show up.” However, this time she knew it was permanent: “There was something about this time; and it wasn't with a lot of fanfare or anything, but I just knew that I was there for good.”

Her Process After the Permanent Shift

Doublespiral went on to say that she read plenty of other books over the next few years. She described this period of time “more as a state than a stage” of gaining a “conceptual framework” for the permanent shift into no-self.

She had some intense physiological sensations after the shift, which she described in terms of kundalini energy.

For probably about six months afterwards, I had real difficulty sleeping. It felt like when I'd lie down at night was when . . . the energetics of it would really start happening. [Kundalini] only in the sense that they are about the body. They were all intensely physical. From the first one with the root chakra, where I really didn't sleep for, I think, a couple of weeks. It quite took me by surprise. All the way up to the heart—one where I was having palpitations for weeks. They were intensely physical, as well as kind of spiritual energetic. . . . It felt like ever since that first kundalini experience, which was before my daughter was born, so it was probably about 23 years ago, my body had been getting periodically upped with the rewiring. And I'd had a meditation teacher early on that I was very grateful for in my 20s, where I was kind of getting both kriyas, but also, you know siddhas. Just intuitive flashes and precognitive stuff and all that. And he said, "Those can be distractions. Don't follow them. If they show up, fine; but don't get seduced by them." Basically. And he wasn't saying it in a judgmental way. I think that's some of the best advice I ever got. . . . And I also was listening to some tapes by Adyashanti. And he mentioned that in his own experience and other people's experience, so I knew that would kind of pass after a while. And I think it really helped that I'd gone through all of those kundalini awakenings. And also just this periodic sense . . . that I was getting rewired energetically. That probably happened ten or twelve, fifteen times over the course of the years, where I could just feel it happening. So, I think my body was fairly well prepared—my energy-body as well as my physical body.

Changes since crossing over into the silence. Doublespiral described how her sense of self has changed with regard to embodying the silence more and in terms of her "egoic construct becoming more transparent" with the silence.

It's like there's a functional self in the physical world—a functional ego that's kind of an aggregate of all sorts of things that moves through and is functional and drives cars and has friends and enjoys a glass of wine. And all of that. But I think my experience the last three years or so is of that functional self becoming progressively more and more transparent. More suffused, in some way that I can't explain, with that silence. . . . And just allowing—that smaller self has become more and more permeated with that—and that's just more in allowing. It's not me doing something. It feels like at a cellular level, actually, just becoming more and more transparent. Another way of looking at it is before all of this, that small self is opaque and seems to be solid. And I think what happens then is it becomes translucent, and then almost transparent. It's there; but you can see right through it.

She also said that she had no sense of "my" any more. She described her changes in self through events that transpired while on vacation recently. While vacationing in a tropical climate, Doublespiral witnessed a motorcycle accident that happened to a loved one. She recounted that her reaction was one of being in huge spaciousness, such that there wasn't a self to start telling stories to herself—there was no self for stories to stick to.

Yeah, that I didn't take it personally. That I could see the mind starting to tell a story about it: "Oh, this happened during the vacation—aah." You know. And it would kind of come up, and I didn't have to tell it to go away. There just wasn't enough energy to

sustain it. So it would kind of start to come up, and then it would just fall [*with a laugh*] away. It was actually kind of funny. It's like there just wasn't anything there that could sustain the stories. So they weren't there. It was funny to see them come up, and just realizing how much the self as we commonly experience it is in many ways just a reflex of old energetic patterns. So, that we take to be solid; but they're just simply energetic patterns.

Later on during the vacation she had another realization about her new sense of self with no solid small self.

I was on the beach, looking out and thinking, god, you know, this would normally push me . . . into an ecstatic state, where I'd kind of feel one with everything and kind of high and all that. And I realized I hadn't had any for quite a while, and realized that there was no place to go to—that part of what feels so ecstatic about ecstatic states is this incredible freedom of being free of that small self for a while. Like being let out of prison, you get to play. And once . . . those doors were opened permanently, you step out, there's no constriction in that way, so there's no rush of escaping from that constriction. *Extasis*, meaning stepping out, standing out; and once there's not that notion of a solid small self, there's nothing to step out from. And that sense of how much I would long for those when I was not in them and kind of look for them, or go out to nature. And that funny sense standing on that beach that this is so beautiful, and I'm enjoying myself so much; but it's not any different than being home. You know, I don't have to go somewhere to get that any more.

She has noticed a change in relationships.

I take my own, hmmm, kind of neuroses less personally. You know, it's just like the rising and falling of stuff. I think my relationships, all that, now is more like same as the relationship to external weather—it's all weather. Some of it appears to be outside, some of it appears to be inside, but it's just phenomena. So I don't get as caught up in it any more. You know, it's like my husband and I are talking about [*with a little laugh*] something; and he points out that I'm being a little bossy or something. And there's kind of this amusement, "Oh yeah. I am. Oh, look at that." I mean, a lot of times it can feel funny, rather than—or not funny, amusing or something, rather than something serious and deep. And I think little just stuff doesn't bother me as much. You know, I have days. But for the most part, small stuff is just small stuff.

Doublespiral reflected on emotional changes.

Same emotions are still there. I think I get frustrated and angry and fearful less easily, but they're still there. Again, it just feels like weather. I mean, it's what psyches do is feel stuff. And actually I kind of experimented for about a week with joining a group that was based on . . . this law of attraction stuff and this material called the Abraham Hicks material that has this emphasis all the time on feeling good. . . . "Bad" emotions are a sign to pivot and find something to feel good about. And I dropped out, 'cause it's like why?

There's nothing to be afraid of with "bad emotions." You know, why put out all that energy to try to make something happen?

And it was interesting, because when I was talking to the leader of the group about dropping out, he couldn't understand where I was coming from. . . . He asked a very interesting question. . . . He said, "Do you believe the universe is random?" And I said, "No, you know, I really love chaos theory." And so [he asked,] "Do you believe it's ordered then?" And I thought that was a really interesting—I said, "No, I don't believe it's either of those things—that it's much more flexible and playful than that. And to put it in the dichotomy of it's either ordered or it's disordered—anyway that feels like it has something to do with this, too. Just stepping out of trying to name and codify either way something that's so much larger than our own brain's ability to codify.

She went on to describe the universe in terms of

that whole notion of play. And of *lila* in the Hindu sense of just the universe—all of this being play, kind of divine play, rather than law or de-de-de-de-de, all that stuff. It's just play, in the best sense of that word.

And furthermore, Doublespiral has lost a sense of direction in her life.

I think I've lost [*with a laugh*] a sense of direction. I think so much of that sense of direction had to do with that small self kind of planning. And so a lot of that's dropped away; and I do some planning, but not way into the future. I mean, not more than really a couple months out now—couple, three months out. Kind of no more 1-year plans or 5-years plans or any of that. Because it just feels like an emergence now; and following that emergence, that there's much greater intelligence at work than my small self. So just following that. And it feels like something is emerging now, and I don't know what it is. It has something to do with elderhood and spirituality. But formerly I would have tried to write about it and figure it out and de-de-de. And it's just like it's gonna emerge; and I just need to keep listening to it and paying attention to it—just kind of deep listening to what wants to emerge and then following that.

She now trusts the next step and the next step and the next—"like breadcrumbs in the forest."

Retrospectively, Doublespiral views herself as always having been a spiritual mystic.

And my spiritual path has always been synchronistic, and just realized a couple nights ago that really it's about a calling to be a mystic rather than a priest. It's a very different calling. And mystics who stay within organizations tend to [*little laugh*] cause trouble for the organizations. Mystics tend to be more edge-dwellers than central players in an organization. And so a much deeper coming to terms with: "*Of course* I've gone in and out. And of course there's been something that [has] reflexively drawn me back when I've tried to get too institutionalized. It just doesn't work for me." So it's been, really in the last week, a much deeper coming to terms with that, and a dropping away of judgment of what I was interpreting as starting and stopping things [*with a laugh*]. And played around with. I realize also that if I were to give myself kind of a name-badge, it wouldn't just be

mystic, it would be a sensual mystic. That's why that Tantric path appeals to me so much—Tantric Buddhism, Vajrayana—is that sense of this is it. You know, or panentheism, however that appears in different spiritual traditions—that it's not about someplace else, it's about this.

In other words, she considers herself to be a spiritual mystic in the sense that the nature of all things and beings are the appearance of one being or god. She said it's like she gets "to create a life that fits" for herself as "a quirky, sensual mystic." She referred to a line from Gerard Manley Hopkins—that "the presence of god" or "the spirit will shake out in this world like shining from shook foil."

Living and Being the Sea of Awareness

Living and being the sea of awareness of no-self is the blooming of "that full void that contains everything," as described by Doublespiral.

I think it's about kind of the absence of qualities. I'm not usually into kind of systems or descriptions, but the best description of it I've ever read is the three kayas in Buddhism—the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. And of the other two emanating; but that first one being really like that full void that contains everything, but is nothing. And then the next kind of world or state is of becoming, you know. And that's where you find all the qualities like love and joy; and all of that is in that kind of moving from that out into the physical world. And then the final being the physical world, but it's all just an efflorescence of the Dharmakaya. So I think that's the closest description of what my experience of all that is. That so much of what we describe as ultimate is really, for me, like the first efflorescence of that void—you know, all of those states of joy, love, peace—All of those are the first moving out from that original void. . . . Any of those kind of states—that those aren't the final thing, those are expressions of kind of a deeper place, which holds those and contains those, but is so much more than those. It's not like there is a feeling state connected with that void. It's just pure being.

Leita: Awareness of Higher Mind From Childhood to Present

Leita is a 56-year old female who lives in the West North Central Midwestern region of the United States. She has a B.A. degree, and a ministerial license; and works as a spiritual counselor, transformational musician, author, and president of a publishing company. Leita was raised with maternal Orthodox Jewish influences and Conservative Jewish denomination. Her current spiritual traditions and practices include: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Transcendental Meditation, Insight Meditation, Christ Consciousness Meditation, Heart-Centered Meditation, and Shaktipat Meditation.

Since childhood Leita's spiritual evolution has consisted of transformations of consciousness toward stability of "pure no-self" along the "capacity for the consciousness to take in larger quantities of" creative, intellectual, and emotional information. The transformations have led to integration and stability in Unity consciousness.

Defining No-self Through Awareness and Cognition

Leita's definition of no-self stems not from an intellectual definition or "a global definition," but rather from her "personal experience" of no-self:

You when you asked me what do I think or what is my experience of no-self—My experience is that there is an inner place that is essentially empty, and doesn't have any identification with an ego structure. And it's there all the time through waking, sleeping and dreaming; and it's a permanent situation. However, I don't perceive that it is the only thing that is there, but it is a part of the experience of my own awareness.

In my case, I think that I was *born* in a particular state of awareness, and I found that to be true from the time that I was an infant. And I had parts of me that were very much in an adult situation even in infancy, so that the thinking processes of the higher mind were available right away within the first year of life.

In other words, Leita was born with awareness of "an inner place that is essentially empty. She "did not have a strong identification as solely an ego structure and was aware of [her] self on a higher level outside of the framework of a normal infant or child mind." This awareness enabled her to access higher mind right from "the first year of life." Throughout her childhood she sought to validate her inner reality, first with her parents, and later on with friends and teachers. She found it "very painful" that she could not find any adults who would appreciate what she experienced.

Leita's Earliest Memories of No-self

Leita recounted memories as a toddler that exemplified her precocious awareness.

So, an example of that is that when I was living . . . in a little two-room apartment with my parents, and I could not have been more than 2 because I was still in a crib; and I very vividly recall being in my crib and pushing it up towards the window and looking through the window in my little crib and thinking about the Holocaust and this couple that had

survived the holocaust who lived in my housing area—actually it was not really a couple that I recall, but the woman and her son. And the son had cerebral palsy, and he was probably about 12 or 13 years old when I was a toddler. And I used to go out and play with them; and when I think back at the level of thinking process that I had about this and wondering what it had been like in Germany for them and so forth, it's obvious that there was something going on in my awareness that normally isn't happening in a 1- or 2-year old baby. And at the same time that that was going on, I remember having my mom come to pick me up and realizing that she just was treating me like a baby—that I was a baby, but I had kind of a disconnect with that, because I wasn't a baby to myself. On the other hand, I do remember emotional material of being a little child and having experiences of being afraid or just being a baby—playing and laughing and so forth—simultaneously with that higher mind available at the beginning.

And so that is how things started for me. And by the time I was 3 or 4, when we moved to Long Island from New York City, I started having a lot of visionary experience, seeing very strong, really holographic images in my living quarters, in my bedroom; and was going through a lot of opening in that way. And I still had the higher mind available to me—there was still a kind of higher level thinking process going on. And a lack of understanding about why it was that I couldn't really discuss certain situations with my parents very successfully. I was still trying to get my parents to minister to my higher self and to communicate with that part of me appropriately, at least as appropriate as I thought it was. But I wasn't having very much success, because they were still treating me as if I was a child. And that was very confusing to me.

essentially, I think for me . . . there was a major transition around 3 or 4 years old, when I realized that my father and mother were not going to really get it. And that I was really going to have to be on my own, and I was going to have to validate my own reality.

Retrospectively, Leita viewed her ego development as atypical and further described her inner sense of no-self.

What started to happen is that I think the psychological part of the ego structure which would normally be developing, I think it was developing; but it never took a front seat in quite the same way as it might for most people. It was always a back seat. And so throughout my elementary school years, therefore, I remember very vividly waking up in the middle of the night, and this happened for many, many years, and looking in the mirror and not feeling like there wasn't anybody there—like there wasn't any *self*—there wasn't anything inside there. It felt empty. And I wasn't comfortable with that at all. It was a very difficult experience, and I didn't really have anybody to talk to or discuss these kinds of things with whatsoever.

Growing Up With an Inner Sense of No-self

Precocious Intelligence and Creativity

The grade school years. Leita's growing up was a process of events happening where people would experience her as somehow more adult or different or not a child, especially around the creative process. During her grade school education, her visionary experiences changed.

Starting at around maybe 7, 8, 9 years old, that visionary experience took the form of actually seeing computer screens, which you know, at that time I thought it was television screens, appearing in my bedroom which I shared with my little sister. And I would just stay up at night reading off these screens and studying information, and essentially that was how I was communicating with a higher power. And that went on for quite a number of years, and a lot of technical information started to come about consciousness and many different things. And so it was a very real and tangible experience for me. And I also used to see, again, holographically—like, they would appear, literally as holograms in my room, to the point where you could walk right through them and walk right back through them—*beings*, different beings would come and visit me.

I had a whole secret life, essentially, spiritually going on—and became more and more secret, because I by nature wanted to communicate all of this, but I couldn't really with my parents, so I kind of gave up on it at a certain point. I think one of the pinnacle moments of giving up on it came when I had a baby-sitter that was there. And again, I couldn't have been very old, because I started baby-sitting when I was eleven for other people. . . . I made the mistake of trying to tell this babysitter . . . some of the experiences that I was having, and she got really freaked out and she locked me in my bedroom. And it was very traumatic, because I felt like this was kind of a last-ditch effort, you know, to someone that was a little younger than my parents to get help—to get some feedback or some reinforcement or some understanding. I remember crying myself to sleep and thinking that I was never really going to be able to have that. And that was a big turning point for me.

So I had that going on; and then I had a lot of questioning and trying to understand the sexuality issue, because I started to have the awareness that maybe I was gay or bi-sexual. And I was trying to understand that—all of that material and feelings. So I had quite a bit going on for a little kid, you know, and it was challenging.

The First Mentor. In Leita's fourth grade year, she had a teacher whose name was Mr. B. who seemed to understand her to some extent.

He really was a major turning-point person for me, because I don't know if he could completely understand what was going on with me, but he seemed to have a pretty good idea. And I think that that was a major help to me. It kind of was a lifeline that year. I started writing and I started some research projects, and I got a lot of positive feedback from him. Basically what he would say to me is that he told me that I would probably have to wait until I went to college before I would really have people understand what was

going on with me. I think he seemed to have an intuitive understanding of that. But when that year ended, things kind of dropped away again.

I had the combination of things going on where I had a creative opening, where I was very precocious in certain areas and was writing things and perceiving things that were pretty far beyond what you were supposed to be doing at that age. And that was challenging because people were always thinking I was plagiarizing things. I always was getting accused of that, [*with a little laugh*] you know? On the other hand, I had this thing going on—the no-self thing—where there was this emptiness all the time, which I wasn't sure myself whether it was depression or—you know, I was trying to understand it. Trying to understand it.

While Leita was challenged to find people to validate her reality, and even she had difficulty understanding herself, she managed to find ways of meeting her own need to understand—through researching and writing on socio-political consciousness.

Then in sixth grade, I spent the entire year working on my little sixth grade dissertation on Japan, which actually was a hundred-page typed report that I made. I spent the entire year basically researching Japan. And during that period I feel like I entered into a spiritual process with the history and the consciousness of Buddhism and kind of found refuge in that. So I retreated into that world for a whole year. At the end of the year, my mother typed up this dissertation for me, which I really took very, very seriously. And when I think about it, again, I was like eleven or twelve years old—I don't know how unusual that is, but you know, it was a very serious undertaking for me. I remember I ordered all these reports from the Atomic Energy Commission and tried to understand what had happened at Hiroshima. I seemed to have a whole need to work out what happened during World War II to the Japanese.

These kind of political/social kinds of consciousness things were going on. And at the same time I became really interested in the way that they described how Buddhism was and this whole notion that there was something inside that kind of preceded thought and wasn't thought and wasn't the mind. I remember being really fascinated with the different aspects of that, and reading about it, and reading about Shinto and nature religion; and just going through this whole spiritual process with that dissertation at the end of the year. So I think during that year there was a lot of ripening for me; and again it was an awakening somehow, doing that project—it was an important process for me.

A friend who understood. For a brief period of time, Leita had a girlfriend who lived next door; and she could talk to her about all of her experiences.

I was basically—I shared my soul with her. I told her all about all these things that were happening. And it's just like *now*, really—there's always something happening. You know, at one point there was this whole language that was coming to me, and I wrote down this entire complex symbolic language, and was sharing that with her. We would have these discussions about mathematics and consciousness. I mean, when I think about it, and I was a 12 and 13 years old, I can hardly believe it myself to tell you the truth, you

know [*with a laugh*]. But this is really what was going on. And so, god kind of was very merciful with me in creating M. next door, because she was the only person in my entire childhood I could talk to. But then at 14, we moved [to another state.] I remember I was in the car, and . . . it was a devastating emotional experience. It was like when I lost Mr. B. in 4th grade. You know, I felt like, “Oh, my god, there’s not going to be anybody that understands me now for years. I’m never going to make a friend like this—it’s impossible.” And I was pretty right, ‘cause she really was an irreplaceable person.

Junior High School

Another big turning point occurred for Leita in 7th grade.

I must have been about 13 or 14. . . . lot of this as you hear revolves around writing, ‘cause I was always writing, you know? I read *The Catcher in the Rye* in 8th grade. It was suggested to me by my dad, who really thought I should read this book. . . . I wrote this stream of consciousness book report basically about awakening and about the nature of consciousness and what happened to J.D. Salinger’s character in *The Catcher in the Rye*. The kids freaked, the teacher freaked—everybody freaked. That was a very difficult period for me because that’s when they really thought that I had plagiarized that writing. They didn’t believe I wrote it, essentially. And for me it was an extremely self-revealing experience of really my true nature coming out and allowing people to view it in public. It was very traumatic that no one thought I had actually written it. I had to verify, you know, with my parents. It was a whole thing, and one of the little girls called her mother—I couldn’t believe this—and said that she couldn’t believe that I had really written it; and I was cheating. It became like a whole controversial thing.

Also, I must have been in 8th grade, I had an experience like this with math, where I wasn’t a very good math student and I had to take geometry. I had this opening and I was able to cognize all the answers for the test. You know, I just wrote them all down without figuring any of them out, you know? And so I aced my exam when I had been getting Cs and Ds on all the rest of them. So, obviously, again, they thought I had plagiarized the material, they thought I had cheated, and actually I hadn’t. I mean, that just wasn’t the case. I just basically realized that I could *cognize*. It was a real deep realization for me. And I was surprised that I aced it myself. You know, I didn’t even know that I had—you see what I mean? Until I finished; and I thought I did better than I normally did, but I didn’t expect to do as well as I did.

Leita had a lot of these events happening around her creative and intellectual processes. She said that each time an event would happen “where people would experience [her] as somehow more adult or different or not a child or not like everyone else,” on the one hand she felt “appreciated;” but on the other hand, she “felt more alienated, and [she] didn’t understand what was going on.”

Like, I knew that there was something going on inside of me that was growing inside, but I didn’t understand what it was and I had no context for it at all. A lot of this went on around the creative process. So in addition to the writing, I was also studying music very seriously; and I was playing classical music.

Leita's Recollection of Transcending

When she was young, Leita had a number of experiences where she was transcending consciousness, where she “would go into some altered state; and then that would trigger a transcending.” She delineated transcending:

If you're asking what transcending is, basically it's the experience of dropping out of the mind completely—it's no-mind. No mind. And either going into a completely non-cognitional state where there's nothing, to going out of the mind and just going into a pure witness-silence situation. But awake to the presence, and the variations thereof. So it depends on the experience.

A number of these transcending experiences occurred while playing the piano; for example, in junior high school:

I was in these little competitions with a group of young women, where we would get sent out to play *out*. And on one of these occasions, I had a very bad case of stage fright, and it was my first experience of completely blacking out. I didn't *pass out*, but there was nothing there—there was absolutely nothing there. . . . my entire consciousness just went blank. I realize now that I probably transcended, you know, but I didn't know, of course, what that was or anything. Because I didn't fall asleep, I really even wasn't that nervous, it's just that everything just *went out*. I was sitting in front of the instrument, and . . . I had of course memorized all this music, because you had to memorize it—we weren't allowed to read it. I actually just walked right off the stage. And my piano teacher *completely* freaked out. You know, started cursing at me; and he was very violent. And that was also another one of those moments when I thought, “Boy, there's something really wrong with me, but there's something going *on* with me.” It was like a paradoxical [*with a laugh*] thing, you know?

Another time she was playing in a concert,

and there were, like a couple hundred people there. I was doing my piano thing, and I transcended while I was playing *onstage*. I came back, and my fingers were still moving, and I never missed a note. And when you listen back to the tape, which I have, you'd never know that this had happened. [*laughs*] It was one of the most incredible things that's ever happened to me. You know, to have that happen onstage in the auditorium there. It was a mind-blower.

High School

In high school, Leita continued to study of music and immersed herself in creative arts, which seemed to help. However, the “no-self thing” continued as a sense of “no-reality” and emptiness. Around 11th grade, she took a biology course.

That was a big breakthrough consciousness experience for me, too. Because when I started to study biology . . . took advanced placement biology . . . was studying anatomy and physiology, I started having these experiences of my own physiology when I was

studying. It was another awakening process for me. And for me, I would get into this total immersion study thing, which seemed to be my thing. So I just totally immersed myself in that AP course in biology just 150 percent—just like I was doing with the music. And I started to feel like there was something happening in me that had to do with an opening into knowledge or recognition. I was still very upset though about this no-self thing, because the other kids were all growing up; and they were doing what kids do. I never felt very connected to what kids were doing or how they felt about themselves. I always felt that there was this kind of empty hole in me. You know, I called it the place of no reality. Or “there is no reality,” that was the words that I used, which is kind of funny now ‘cause of the [books] I’ve written. But I remember saying to people, “There’s nobody in here.” I was crying. I was very upset about it and I didn’t understand it.

I got myself immersed in the creative arts, and that’s really what helped me. I was in the choir in the temple, and I was the only young person in it [*little laugh*]. I was sixteen, and everybody else was an adult. I used to take all the hymns very seriously, these Jewish hymns. I would feel a lot of, now I realize, *Shakti* from singing them, so they were making my heart feel better. It was very healing for me. So the music—the classical music and the singing of the hymns—that was all comforting. But then I became the head of my temple youth group at one point. I guess I was in high school, maybe 11th grade, and I remember having this *intense* crying jag on the phone with the temple youth group leader, saying, “I just don’t feel like everybody else, I don’t feel like a child. All they want to do is make out, and I want to [*with a laugh*] talk about god!” I remember he was laughing on the phone, you know, he must have thought this was terribly funny. But it wasn’t funny to me. I mean, for me, it was like I kept thinking that there was going to be some event or something that was going to happen that was going to allow this whole thing that had happened my whole life to make sense to me.

Leita kept waiting for something to happen; and she always remembered Mr. B. saying, “Wait ‘til college. It won’t happen ‘till college.”

Young Adult to Adulthood

The College Years

Mr. B.’s premonition proved to be correct in that Leita finally met teachers who “just totally got her” while she was in college.

I was really fortunate to have some stunningly great, *stunningly great*. . . . creative writing teachers. That’s why I didn’t major in music; I majored in creative writing because I had these incredible teachers. . . . But I was pretty much given free reign my junior and senior year, and it was kind of like going to graduate school. They just let me loose, and I got to write and research. I was in these little seminar classes with like six or seven people, which now looking back on it, is a very remarkable college experience. . . . It was super formative, and the people I encountered, the teachers, they just totally got me. They understood the whole creative thing, the stream of consciousness thing. I don’t know if they understood the *pure* consciousness, witnessing process that was going on with me, which was really going on all the time. I don’t know if they understood that piece, but they

were open. They were willing. They must have seen something in me because they really turned me loose, and they didn't have to do that. I remember going to see this teacher; and he just said, "Go home and write. Just go home and write. You don't have to come to class." . . . He must have seen something.

During college, Leita was publically rejected by her female love interest, who accused her of "being disgusting." She ended up being in a relationship with a man named D. who "understood almost immediately that there was something unusual going on with [her] consciousness." He was another "lifeline," as someone she could really talk to. At this time her "kundalini really opened up," and she started having "kriyas."

Adult-Level Transitions in Consciousness

During young adulthood, Leita continued to meet mentors who were able to validate her experience. These people were lifelines in her unfolding process of devoting herself to spirituality and committing to helping others, and also to the development of her life work.

After graduating from college, Leita moved back to New York. An unplanned pregnancy led to meeting a counselor named G., who turned out to be a lifeline.

I had to decide about whether I was going to keep the baby. And that's when I went to counseling. So I was in New York City and I was in counseling. And to the grace of god, I bumped into this counselor in New York City. I was living at [street name]; and I met this woman named G., who was, again, just a lifeline for me. And as soon as I walked in her office, she just had a complete recognition. She just got it—you know, she just totally got me. I was just very, very fortunate. And she said, "There is nothing wrong with you." That was the first thing she said, "There is nothing wrong with you, there's no illness, there's nothing *wrong* with you. You are good; you are fine. You are just having consciousness experiences." You know, because I was describing all these things that were happening to me. And they were endless; I mean, there's a long, long list, you know. And she said, "You know, you can have consciousness experiences, but you're also psychic." And she tried to explain to me the difference—that you could be on a spiritual path, but not everybody was psychic like I was, you know? And she just went through this long explanation with me for many sessions about this. And, again, was a total lifeline for me. And in that process, I did decide to have an abortion. And the day that I had the abortion, I had some kind of spiritual thing happen, where I felt the soul of the child ; and I made a commitment internally to god that if I let go of the baby that I would completely get on the spiritual path.

And at that point Leita had been working in the publishing industry. After the "huge pivotal moment" of committing to god, she left D., packed up and moved to another state in order to "explore things spiritually." She found a therapist who turned out to be a Gurdjieff devotee and became involved in a Buddhist community. She "started sitting meditation" and

I was now 24 or something; and I immediately started searching for spiritual teacher people. I knew that that's what I needed to do; and I tried to look for them. So I found a therapist who was a Gurdjieff devotee. Of course, you know, I didn't know that she was,

but it turned out that's what she was "started having intense kundalini experiences, to the point where [she] was having a hard time holding a job and working. So I was just working part-time.

This is the period where the no-self thing became acute. It was around that time, about 25 or 26 or so, where it was the most acute. That's when I remember. I was out on the river in Cambridge where a friend of mine who was another Buddhist practitioner. I said, "I don't know if I can take this. I feel so unreal—I don't feel like anything's real, I don't feel like I'm real." You know, I felt like I didn't have any inner reality; I felt like the self pretty much was evaporating before my eyes, whatever was left of it. And, you know, it was a weird thing, because on the one hand I was scared to death, and on the other hand I was happy about it. [*little laugh*] I mean, you know, that's really the truth.

During that period, Leita experienced "creative openings that would happen with these consciousness-transition experiences," to the point where she "woke up in the middle of the night having kriyas." Of course at that time, she didn't know what they were, but she "was having every classic kundalini thing—[her] body was twitching, it was itching," and she thought she had "bugs crawling over" her. Then a "voice started appearing" in "the form of an Irish kind of dialect" to the point where she was able to listen and write a play. Leita got a grant and turned it into a "true radio play" for a radio station in a major city. This was "a big transitional experience" for her because as a theatre production, people were "reading lines that had come right out of [her] subconscious somewhere from this whole other level of communication." Also during this time, she met a "couple of people that [she] could really talk to about the consciousness thing"—which was "unique" for her.

A traumatic experience in 1980 caused a major no-self transition and a creative opening for Leita. One night, she was on a street walking home singing to herself, when a man jumped her and raped her. She went through a "kind of near-death experience" in that scenario.

That was a major transition—that night. Because when I was lying there, all this terrible stuff was going on to my body; but I had a clear, direct experience that I was not my body. I had a clear, direct experience that this thing that had been there since early childhood that I'm describing to you—this no-self, empty place—that it was actually a solid thing even though it was empty. That's the best way I can describe it. I realized that it was both solid *and* empty. And I realized that it was real, because if all this was going on to my body, and I was still there, then this is what I really was. I was that.

In other words, she realized that she was both something spiritual or nonsolid and something real and solid, simultaneously. This "was a recognition" that enabled her to save her life, because she "basically psychically figured out how to kind of trigger this guy and get him to stop hurting [her] so he wouldn't kill [her.] And so he "bolted" because she "said something to him about his sister or something; and he just flipped and left." She was laying in an alley "in a completely altered state, not just in shock because of the rape; but [she] was in shock or [she] was in some other state of recognition about the self or the no-self." A taxicab came and took her to where she had been going. When the people opened the door,

it was like I was transparent. It was like they could just see right through me— there was nobody home, in a way. So I was in this combination of post-traumatic stress and recognition [*with a laugh*]. All at the same time. [*laughs*] And during that experience, it was another moment where it was like the abortion, where I told god, “Look, if you get me out of this alive, I promise you I will dedicate my life to serving.” I really followed through on that. After that incident, I have never had a quote “straight job” again since—that was 1980. I completely, totally surrendered. I just started working with people, and that’s really what happened and that’s how it’s been ever since.

It took her about three years to integrate that experience because she was “walking around for 2 years on the streets there in empty-land. . . . There was just kind of a *nobody-home* feeling.” She went to therapy, which helped her to understand how much of her feelings were from shock “and how much of it was consciousness.” She realized that, “what was happening was more about consciousness than it was about hurt,” and she “surrendered and accepted it.”

This incident was also a creative opening in that Leita’s singing unfolded to “become a more pure vocal sound” and eventually led to doing “chakra singing.” She described how her singing related to “witnessing the self or no-self process.”

One of the things that happened when I was doing that singing in the beginning is that. . . it was so obvious to me that there was this sort of empty feel—now, this is all before doing TM, so I didn’t understand the transcending process yet, okay? . . . But I would notice that before or during the time that I was doing the singing, I would now realize I would transcend. And then when I would transcend, I would get into this space where I was just completely ensconced in that empty place. It wasn’t full; it was empty. You know, which is what we’re talking about—this no-self thing. And then I could sit inside that, or be a witness to that, or recognize that; and out of that would come this language, this singing. . . . I felt much more grounded when I was doing the singing and doing it when there was someone else there. Because I think that all along, from the very beginning, from being a little child, I was terribly afraid to be alone with that feeling of nothing in there. It just was frightening. So, that’s why all these pivotal experiences usually took place with another person there—someone to be a grounding emotional influence.

Development of Leita’s Life Work

From age 30 to the present time, events in Leita’s life continued to unfold toward development of her vocations as a spiritual counselor, transformational musician, author, and president of a publishing company.

Counseling and healing work. In the 1980s, another big opening was that Leita “started having healing abilities happening—of “actually having energy coming out of [her] hands. This ability enabled her to use her healing energy to help people. Also, Leita recounted how she came to be doing intuitional counseling. For about three years, she had darshan with a woman named E., who was a very spiritually advanced person. E. basically performed a series of spiritual initiations with her, which enabled Leita to be “able to make a living doing consultations for people.” One day E. walked in to her apartment, had Leita do an intuitive consultation for her, told her that she was

“doing very well,” and vanished from her life. Leita said, “And after that some of her people started seeing me, and the rest is history. And that’s how I started doing this work and how I started getting paid for it.”

The intuition counseling Leita now does for people involves intuition, clairaudience, and visual perception to enter their awareness, see their situation, and give them counseling. Her role is that of “compassionate insight-witness” who looks at their energy field and provides feedback. Leita also “started receiving” information about the heart, started doing heart-meditation with people, and teaching weekly classes. She bought a piano and taught herself “to do improv music to be a source of meditation for the class.” She combines vocal sound with intuition counseling, chakra singing, and energy work in individual and group sessions.

Time and consciousness work. In 1985, while Leita continued to have an “internally blended, soul-level *knowing* about Buddhist teachings,” her friends encouraged her to get initiated into Transcendental Meditation because they thought that it would help her integrate more. So, she started TM and 2 months later took the siddhis. During that course she met people whom, for the first time in her life, she “could actually *really* talk about consciousness experiences.” She was very fortunate, because everyone in her siddhis course seemed to “get it.” For example, when Leita walked into the TM center, sat down with D., started telling D. about her experiences, D. was able to map it all out for her on the blackboard and explain “the self, the no-self cosmic consciousness, this and that.” She explained “what Maharishi’s understanding of these things were, what [Leita] was experiencing, what context it was in.” In Leita’s words, “It was unbelievable. It was *un*-believable—she was so open to me. She somehow got it that it was really authentic.” For Leita, D. was a “big mahavakya—a big verification process” of understanding her own state of consciousness.

Also during this time, Leita stated to have an “opening of being able to time-travel” or of what is perhaps better described as “experiencing consciousness-time experiences.” All her life she had “this whole experiential process going on that had to do with consciousness and creativity.” Only now it was developing to the point of being able to have interdimensional consciousness of time-travel and to gain scientific and metaphysical understanding of how that is possible. This ultimately led to her write and publish two books on the nature of time, space, and consciousness.

The Epitome of Extreme No-Self: Three Transcending Consciousness Shifts

Leita has had three extreme events of transcending consciousness, as a dropping out of the mind completely—into no mind. The first incident occurred 14 years ago when she returned home from a trip to France and became “really sick” from “poisoning.” When she was in the hospital, “it was just a theory that [she] had salmonella, because they couldn’t explain what was happening.” She was collapsing, couldn’t function, and was going through a kind of consciousness “transitioning thing.”

The second and third events were much more extreme in that they caused both a loss of consciousness and physical symptoms with no medically discernible cause; *and* they completely incapacitated her for several weeks. Retrospectively, she viewed these incidents as a process of letting go of “holding onto the creative higher-mind self as a vehicle for stability.” With the salmonella poisoning event, she “was too scared to let go that much.”

Leita described the second extreme transcending consciousness shifts as *the epitome of no-self*.

Then I had this *break*. I was working with a client, and it was a very innocent thing. I was in my room that I worked in. It was a loft space. And I don't know how this happened; but I was working with him, I went to pick up a glass of water, I felt this tear in my right side, and I went into some kind of altered state. And basically for six weeks I was in a completely altered state. I went to the hospital; they didn't really think that there was anything seriously the matter. They thought I tore a ligament. But I was in excruciating pain, and I basically was not functional for six weeks. I mean, my friends were nursing me around the clock. I couldn't even pee by myself. For 6 weeks. And in the middle of that, I remember my friend D . . . walked in the house, and I remember saying to him, "There's nothing here. There's no one here. There's *no one* here." And, you know, I really scared him [*laughs*]. And that was the epitome of the no-self thing—was right then at that kitchen table with those people. Because it was like everything had finally completely emptied out and really my inner experience was there was nobody there.

It took about 6 or 7 weeks for me to re-integrate, get my body functioning, get out of pain. L. was nursing me; I was on oxygen. I mean, it was such a drama. It seems ridiculous now, but there was no place to put me. They weren't going to take me at the hospital. I wasn't really psychotic, you know what I mean? So no, there was not really any psychological thing they could do with me. My friends, to the grace of god, all realized that it was a consciousness thing, you see what I mean? So they basically just treated it that way. They were cooking for me. My friend G. is a nurse. I was having trouble breathing, and she brought me an oxygen tank. I was so fortunate that all these people just totally cradled me for 6 weeks. Then one day I just woke up, and I was pretty much back to functioning again. But I was never the same. It was like somebody took like a white-hot branding thing and just stuck it right in me, and it obliterated something. And it *never* came back. It never came back. I kept waiting for it to come back, but it never came back.

The third incident occurred just a few months ago.

I was at the . . . movie theatre, watching George W. there; and I passed out cold—bam. They had to take me in an ambulance to the emergency room, and I was in one of those states once again. L. was there, and there was this other couple, thank god, also there. And they were all totally cool. This is what happened: My higher cognition, for whatever reason, evaporated. I was in the hospital on the thing and I was having trouble breathing again—it was one of those deals—and all I experienced was the no-self. There was no higher cognition, there was no ego, it was just this thing—this no-self thing. And I totally relaxed into it. I felt like that's what I needed to do, and that's what I did. I just relaxed into that experience; and I let go. I realized that I was holding on very tightly to my higher mind as a source of identity, and that I didn't need it. And that I could let go of it. And I did. I just let go. With everybody there.

The people at the hospital were so loving. Really, they were just so beautiful, and my friends that were there were so beautiful. I just felt safe, and I just completely let go. . . . I

really didn't have a choice. It let go. *It* let go. You know what I mean—I didn't do it; it let go. And I was just sitting there naked in that no-self thing and I was okay with it. . . . And when I came back and I could breathe and function and everything, I felt like I had really cut the tie to having to hold onto the creative higher-mind self as a vehicle for stability. . . . It felt very okay and real, not surreal for a change, but real. I thought, "Wow, this is good." You know what I mean? It felt good. And when I came back, I felt good. . . . It was really a big transition for me, because that had always been really a strong need.

Leita said that when she was in the hospital during these events, "They did a CT scan and a bunch of other things with me; and of course whenever I go through these things, they never find anything wrong with me. They never do." Subsequent to the interview, Leita said that she followed the hospital discharge recommendation that she make an appointment with a neurologist. On February 7, 2009, she wrote via e-mail to me, "Saw the neurologist. He was unable to find anything wrong with me."

People and Community as Lifelines

Lifeline people. "Lifelines" for Leita were people whom were able to meet her desperate need to "to get it or validate it or at least be comfortable" with the nature of her consciousness and/or whom could contribute to her understanding of what was going on with her. From age 30 to the present, she has been in two primary relationships, with a woman and then with a man. L. has been a major lifeline for Leita, as "someone who really recognized and totally understood that there was something unusual going on" with her. Additionally, T. was one person who came forward and has been a lifeline "because he has had so much knowledge and experience with the kundalini for so many years."

Community. In addition, Leita developed a long-standing relationship with a community of people where she lives. She described how people in her life have *literally* been a lifeline.

I've been so well-embraced by the people in this community. I mean, just so beautifully embraced by them that I can't really describe that. They really took me in. I feel like my time here has been very blessed; very, very blessed—extraordinarily so. . . . I don't know that I would have made it without this community. I think they were integral to everything with me. . . . I have to say, it's the strangest thing with me because on the one hand I always was very precocious and mature beyond my years. On the other hand, I feel like there's a small child in there that never grew up and is basically sort of developmentally sitting in that mode of child-ness. In other words, is dependent on other people because I'm not really able to totally function on my own, because of the depth of the altered-ness of my consciousness all the time. I need people to help me in certain ways. I'm not independent the way I should be, or the way I think I should be. My friends have always recognized this; and I've been very fortunate in that they see me as a very precious person. And the people in this community view me that way. I have not felt like an *odd* person here. I felt like a *valued* person, and sometimes even honestly a *revered* person.

Spiritual mentors. Over the years Leita has worked with many spiritual teachers, gurus, and saints, including: Deepak Chopra, Dhyani Ywahoo, Subrahmanya Swami, Ma Jaya Bhagavati, Shankaracharya, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Karunamayi, ShreeMa, Ammaji, Mother Meera,

Gamapathi Sadhidananda Swamiji. Many shifts in consciousness happened as a result of working with all these spiritual people. In addition, receiving Shaktipat (or spiritual energy of kundalini) seemed to help stabilize the consciousness process; and now the Scalar Wave technology seems to stabilize, integrate that for her.

Reflections No-self and Consciousness

Subsequent to the interview, Leita realized that she had neglected to talk about her current state of consciousness. She wanted to add this to her Participant Story, preferred not to do this through editing her own story, and requested to orally edit her story. Therefore, Leita's quotations in this section originated from a recorded telephone conversation wherein she described her state of consciousness regarding "toward integration into Unity."

Since childhood Leita's spiritual evolution has consisted of transformations of consciousness toward stability of "pure no-self" along the "capacity for the consciousness to take in larger quantities of information. She explained "the evolution from a pure no-self experience to the capacity to assimilate emotional and event information in the present" as follows:

I think that the evolution of that experience has probably, honestly, been going on since childhood. But with the different transformations that we discussed in our previous conversation, we are seeing that as the transformation takes place, there's more capacity for the consciousness to take in larger quantities of information—whether it is creative or intellectual or emotional—at a much faster pace. And to have the stability of the no-self experience be maintained during the transfer of information to the consciousness. As that happens in more dense layers, that consciousness is able to experience the no-self experience as being stable, more strong, and less shocking or uncomfortable. It just has become a very easy and safe experience emotionally for me.

Transformation into Unity consciousness. At the same time, about 8 or 9 years ago she went through a transition, wherein there was a period where:

I started having this experience of light coming in from the objects in my perception; and that became very intense actually. I went to see someone who I felt was in Unity consciousness . . . to talk to her about this experience directly. She told me that if I stayed with the experience and just noticed the light coming into my consciousness like that and not becoming uncomfortable with it, that eventually it would stabilize. She felt that it would precede a different level of integration into Unity. I started to have that experience happening where the light actually subsided, just like she said; and I didn't see that happening in my environment visually as much. But I started to feel a feeling of unification with the objects in the perception and with people. I felt that a lot of the feelings of separation that I had experienced—which were there because I felt different from childhood and different as a result of feeling this no-self experience for such a long time—I felt that that was *melting*; and I felt a deep experience of connectedness to everything which started to increase.

Present consciousness experience and what helped with integration. Unity consciousness has integrated to the point where her

present experience is that the consciousness itself is penetrating *into* people, events, objects, and situations; and that the light value from *inside* my consciousness is, rather than it being perceived from outside, that the light value from *inside* my awareness is penetrating *into* the environment more acutely. There is a process going on of that penetration becoming more and more strong. My association with that is that it seems like the actual *influence* of that pure awareness is becoming more stable and more strong in the environment; and so there's a feeling of having to do less to influence—that the influence is becoming very stable and automatic. I'm experiencing that there's more and more, therefore, of a sense of a comfortableness, of there being less separation between me and the environment; and I feel like we're still in process with the integration of the Unity experience.

I think that part of this is having done a lot of chakra work—the heart chakra and the rest of the chakras have been quite well cleaned and groomed, if you will. So the consciousness is able to travel through the chakras more fluidly and with greater integration with the light body level. When the light travels from the light body out, there's a real deep sense of deep satisfaction and peace. I was just commenting last night that even when there's something very difficult or challenging or *painful* to process emotionally, that the stability of the consciousness is such that it will experience the pain, but it will not be overshadowed by the pain anywhere as much as it would have been under certain circumstances—that the stability of the light body is very strong; and it will override feelings of discomfort or fear. I'm noticing that in session for other people and in personal interactions situations which I would have experienced as more challenging because I felt that the personal self was not as readily available, now seem easier and more integrated.

As Unity consciousness continues to integrate, Leita carries on with her work in sessions as a spiritual counselor, and as a transformational musician, author, and president of a publishing company. She is in the process of completing a trilogy of books on time, space and matter. The first book has been published, the second is in the editing process, the third book is being written.

Clara's Encapsulation of No-self: It's All One Thing

Clara is a 55 year-old female who lives in the Middle Atlantic Northeastern region of the United States. She has a B.A. in Psychology; and works as a writer, an entrepreneur, and in retail sales.

Religious Background

Clara was raised in and explored several different Christian religious sects: Presbyterian, Baptist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic. Because of her inner sense of no-self as a child, a lot about life did not make sense to her, especially with regard to religion.

You can see from my religious upbringing that I had a lot of different influences, but yet, a lot about life, especially religious life did not make sense to me. The adults around me seemed unable to explain things in a way that satisfied my sense of value or how the world should be. One of the things that I found interesting—as with many children, you question what you're being taught about the Bible. Why did this happen? Why did God say or do that? And why—if God knows everything and he knows what you think before you actually think it or knows what you're going to do before you actually do it, why does God “test” people? If God knew that Abraham was a good servant to him, then he must have known that Abraham would indeed sacrifice his Isaac if he asked him to. Why would God want a “sacrifice” of a human being in the first place? Those types of questions were constants I had about religion and why things were the way they were. The adults around couldn't give me an answer that made sense to me. “You have to believe, because that's what the Bible says.” was their response to most of these questions; and more often than not, the condescending notion that I was a child and couldn't understand these things yet. Well, that was never good enough for me.

Her discernment and her inquiring nature led her to explore religious traditions both as a child and as an adult.

I think the questions I had fueled my quest for exploring the many different traditions that I've studied. I never really believed with that degree of intensity that I see people in some people that, “this is the way it is.” I was always very open to learning; and I think that from those early days of questioning and just realizing, “This doesn't really fully make sense, and there has to be more to it than this.” That led to that constant exploration of many traditions and ways of knowing or understanding the world; and I keep searching, because I think there is just so much that we haven't quite grasped yet; and the more I seek, the more interesting it becomes. It sometimes seems like a gigantic puzzle, and I'm constantly trying to see where all the parts fit in.

As an adult she explored many spiritual traditions, including: Episcopalian, Church of God, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Christian Scientist, Religious Science, Unity, Fundamentalist, Pentecostal, Buddhist, Native American ceremonies, yoga, Judaism, Gnostic gospels, and Sufism. With this spiritual background, currently she is comfortable with religions and spiritual traditions of many cultures, but doesn't follow any one of them.

Clara: Never Sold Out of No-self

Clara has had a notion of no-self since she was a child in the sense that she was able to witness the behaviors and actions of others and as a sense of everything being “all one thing.”

I didn’t have a specific experience that altered my sense of my self. I guess I always had a notion of “no-self” in some way. It’s a bit hard to describe, because much of this was happening at a time when I didn’t have words for it, when I was still a child. But I can specifically remember just wondering why people thought that things were separate. I don’t know if I’m making sense, but let’s see . . . I thought everything was all one thing. I couldn’t quite get a sense of myself as being an individual person. Not that I didn’t exist, but it just did not seem to me that I had the same sense of myself in the world as other people seemed to have of themselves.

For instance, when I would hear people say things like, “Be yourself.” My question was, “How do they know what ‘yourself’ is?” I couldn’t quite get that— “Be yourself.” I would think, well, “How do they know?” That was one of the things that I couldn’t quite understand. And from other similar experiences, I realized that I didn’t quite react or see things the way others around me apparently seemed to see things.

In order to fit in, Clara spent a lot of time observing rather than participating in activities, and she discriminated behavioral choice and reactions through witnessing.

I don’t know if this is whether it’s because I was inherently a writer, but it just seemed that I spent a lot more time observing than participating. I would much rather sit and watch other people do whatever they were doing, even other children do whatever they were doing, than to be a part of whatever game was being played. Even when I was playing the game, I was aware of being separate from it. I would organize games; and I would say, “Gee, this is really interesting—I can actually be here, and I can in a sense orchestrate things. I can actually tell how somebody’s going to react to certain things, because I can just orchestrate it.” It was just interesting—it would be even more so when adults would do what I thought they would, just based on what I did or said or how I behaved. I kind of knew, well, if you are a child, then adults expect you to behave in this way. I thought,—and sometimes I would just go ahead and do it just to see if people would behave [how] I anticipated they would; and when they did, I would think, “Wow, that *did* get the reaction I thought it would.” *But it was as though I was outside of myself, observing that person doing those things.* It was a choice—it was really a conscious choice at all times to behave in certain ways. It’s as though I had the sense that one could choose how to behave or how to react to anything.

I call that no-self, because. I could see the difference between being the observer and being fully immersed in an experience that was so intense that the observer went away and left just the ego I guess.

Clara equated observing with witnessing, and furthermore said,

That sense of observing was always there. Always there as a child. And maybe it's difficult to be in the moment, if you will, because it was just, "Gee, I'm observing this; and I don't know if anyone else felt that way or saw things that way." It was my sense that people didn't. But that was always a constant with me.

Even though she stated she did not quite "fit in," Clara did not encounter any difficulties growing up because she could slip in and out of observing and participating. Additionally, she didn't "get caught up in" emotions, behaviors, and situations like other people did.

I didn't have any difficulties, because I think I could slip into either space, as I needed to. I was perfectly okay with just going back and forth; and knowing what I needed to do. Just to, as most children do, you know what you need to do to survive, so you do that. So I didn't have any particular difficulties in being able to relate to people or things; but I just knew that I just preferred to be the observer, if you will. That was just a regular part of what I experienced—that I would be not so fully engaged in playing or doing whatever the other kids were doing. I was certainly able to enjoy things; but I was able to also have that sense of observing and anticipating and being aware. I kind of like that, because I like observing. It's something that I think was, and is very helpful. You don't get caught up in what people would get extremely upset about. I don't get upset about certain things that people get upset about. Like family situations. It's not as though there's no emotion involved; but it's simply a matter of, okay, these things happen, people behave in this way and how best can we take care of this situation, as opposed to being all caught up in emotions and getting crazed by it. So that, I think, is where the benefit of having that kind of sense comes from, because you don't get as caught up in what's not really important in the long run really.

Clara started out in life with no-self; and as her life evolved, there was a process of her trying out different concepts that other people believed in and still retaining her own sense of self.

I've never felt the need to really conform to other people's beliefs, so what I've done and the way I was able to survive and to do whatever I needed to do was just to take myself apart from it. I could participate in whatever was happening at the time, but I also had my own sense of the world and my place in it. I could retain my sense of self privately and still live in the regular world as well. I was happy doing that. I never felt deprived or felt, "Oh, my god, I wish I could more easily enjoy X, Y, and Z." Or you know, enjoy things the way other people did. I still liked where I came from. So I kept that.

Clara couldn't point to any particular thing that helped her maintain her aspect of no-self throughout her life—except perhaps writing about her dreams.

I don't have anything that I can point to. I really don't. I've maintained a dream journal for many years, because I think a lot of information comes to me in my dreams. I have been recording my dreams since I was a teenager, so I have a lot of stuff. Maybe that was it. Maybe I was able to keep it going that way—I don't know. But I can't point to any one thing that has made me able to do this. I just felt that whatever it is that I had, I needed to keep it protected. So I never really sold out. [*both laugh*] I never sold out.

To further explicate how she “never sold out” of no-self, she said,

I never sold out . . . And I think in one of my writings, I called it my “me.” I just made sure that “my me” was okay—that it was safe and okay—I’d pretend to do whatever I needed to do to function in the larger world but keep my “real self” safe on the inside. One of the things that I remember was a song that was popular at the time. . . . “Is That All There Is?” . . . That truly echoed how I felt about things as a child: “Is That All There Is?” I mean, is *that it*? Then, “If that’s all there is, then what’s the point!” [*laughs*]. You know, it just didn’t seem to make sense. Even the thought of, okay, you get born, and you grow up, you get married, you have children, then you get a job and then you die—and then those children grow up, get married, have children—I said, “What’s the point of all of that?” There didn’t seem to be a point to it. And I thought, “Is that all there is?” There *has* to be more to life and the world than that. And I still feel that there has to be more to it than that, but I don’t know what that is. That’s what I think keeps evolving.

Dreams as a Whole Other Aspect of Life

Clara’s inquiry, “Is that all there is?” is “ongoing” as part of her evolution. Her prolific dream life is another aspect that has helped her maintain no-self. She has recorded her dreams since she was a teenager, and currently participates in a dream group devoted to “dream exploration.” Clara portrayed her dream life.

That’s a whole other [*laughs*] aspect of life for me. And it’s prolific. I mean, I have a lot of dreams, and I record most of them. . . . They’re not like I dream that I am walking down the street and I meet, you know, the latest movie-heartthrob; it’s not like that. It’s dreams of the order of, “Okay, I’m in another dimension and here’s what happened.” It’s those kinds of dreams. I meet all these beings and I experience these things. But it’s just really more profound than just dealing with everyday stuff. I very rarely dream about mundane things. Very, very rarely. At one point I would have what I call my “cosmic dreams, where I’m dreaming about the sun and the stars. And with those dreams, I just thought it was a confirmation that there was more to life than just what we think—or just what appears to be on the surface. Yeah, but the dreams—that’s like a whole other conversation. [*laughs*]. As I said, I’m looking at my notebooks now—there are probably about ten of them, like regular spiral notebooks. So there are a lot in there.

The dreams relate to her sense of no-self in that,

I guess it just kind of reinforces my original sense that there’s more to life than what appears on the surface, and my dreams have confirmed that there’s something much, much vaster than, I think, we can lay claim to understanding. And it’s just huge. It’s just really so much more than what we think. And that’s just my sense of it.

A Dream That Gave a Lasting Sense of “It’s All One”

As illustration of the vastness and oneness of everything, Clara described a dream that gave her an awareness that has never left her—a sense of “It’s all one thing.”

It was a dream where I found myself in another dimension. And along with me was a presence, I would call it, because there was no physical being or anything, but there was definitely a presence that was completely benevolent. The best way to give an analogy to it would be, let me see. . . . it would be like a parent with a child experiencing something for the very first time, but that parent knowing what the child is feeling. So I'm looking around me in this space and there's nothing. There's no physical anything there, but the sense of it is that . . . it's absolutely amazingly beautiful and calm and everything is just perfect, everything is all one. It's just an amazing feeling and it's just so beautiful, there is nothing to say. There were no beautiful trees or beautiful scenery—just a sense of beauty. I was simply amazed at this. I didn't speak in this dream, but somehow the presence that was there could understand and feel whatever emotions I was feeling or whatever I was thinking. As I looked around and beneath me I saw this amorphous opalescent stuff just kind of churning and forming different colors. I was asked if I wanted to jump in . . . and the sense that I got was that there was even more to be experienced. And I thought to the being, "You mean, there's more?!" Because I couldn't believe that in addition to all that I had experienced before, there could actually be more to this experience. And the being kind of indicated, "Yes, there is more." But I got this sense that if I were to jump in to this stuff, that I as an individual would disappear. It wasn't as though I would die or anything like that, but I would just simply be a part of everything. I wouldn't be a separate being anymore; I'd be a part of everything. And I thought, "That's how it should be." But at the time I wasn't—I was afraid of doing that, because I thought, "What's going to happen when I wake up?" [*with a laugh*] You know, you have these thoughts in lucid moments in your dreams, "What's going to happen when I wake up?" Immediately after I had this thought I physically woke up. So the dream ended. . . I was just kind of rushed back into reality. . . . But that experience of everything being one thing was profound. I woke up with the feeling that there really should not be the notion that person A is separate from person B who is separate from an animal. It's all one. It's all one thing.

That's the sense that I had then, and it has never completely left me. I live each day with the sense that "it's all one thing." I think one of the actual, the tangible results of that kind of thinking is that it takes away being judgmental. Because if it's all one thing, then how can you judge that other thing when it's you're part of that too—you're that thing, too. So I can listen to people and they can say what they say and I can understand and say, "Okay, that's what this person is experiencing." As opposed to, "Oh my god, how could she say that!" It's no longer like that. Or even when you see something horrible happens in the news and you read, "Oh my god, this is a horrible crime, how could they do that?" And it's like, "Oh my gosh . . . we're all a participant in this, how can we make this end? As opposed to what a horrible person this is—he should be that or he should be sent to jail forever. It's like, here is something happening to somebody who is a part of the whole creation; why is this happening? How can we make that not happen again? It's just very different in how you then perceive everything after such an experience.

This dream left her with perception of "no separation between anything"—no good, no bad, no evil, no grace, no anything—"It was just all one thing." She "could see very clearly that everything that was happening was perfect." This perception also relates to how she currently

experiences things as “just all one thing,” that everything is “perfectly okay;” and she tends to “operate from that perspective.”

The Dilemma of Balancing Perspectives

Clara holds an aspect of reality, that of cosmic reality and insight into different dimensions, which most people do not recognize or understand. In addition, ordinary concepts such as money don't make sense to her. Her dilemma is to balance spirituality with

just being a successful person—in terms of having what I need to live and to, as I say, to live and to do good in the world. That's really what I struggle to do constantly—to balance spirituality, with needing to make money, because of course everyone needs to have money to live. It would be a lot better if we had another system, besides having to earn money just to pay rent and to do all these things we need to do. But at the same time, this is what's needed. You know, our whole world is built on this principle, so one has to find a way to live within that framework. So that becomes a challenge. Oh, things kind of work out sometimes without operating within this framework. I've tried some of the accepted ways—getting a job, but working in that way just never seems genuine to me. . . So, I guess that's my struggle with trying to live from that sense of no-self or no ego. How do I make this work so that I can still take care of myself and others and still maintain that sense of who I am or that sense of connection with the world? . . . So that's the dilemma. . . . How do I include the spiritual dimension and still make a living? My current concern is “How am I going to manage?” But rather than having that sense of panic or fear, it's like, . . . “This is perfect; this is exactly where it should be.” And it's as though, “Okay, now what's the next thing to experience out of this?” is my approach to that. I think that makes for—I don't know whether that's no-self or whether that's denial—[with a laugh] But I just feel as though, “Okay, this is where we are, this is what we're going to be doing, and it's perfectly okay.” So that's just the feeling that I have about things. There are horrible things happening in the world, it really is awful; and yes, we want to have that end. But it's as though there is something that's evolving, and maybe this is a part of the evolving process that the world needs to do.

No-self in Daily Living

Intuitive or psychic events just seem to happen for Clara, and they seem “to be happening more.” Clara has an attitude toward life of whatever happens, there's a reason; and ultimately it's for her own benefit. She sees the connections between events, follows intuition, and lets the universe “play itself out.”

It began last year, where I said, I'm not going to really fight anything. If something keeps happening—and again, you wonder, am I being passive, or am I just letting the universe or whatever it is play itself out? In many instances it's as though there is that thread of connection that this is how it's supposed to be. One recent incident illustrates this. I was running late for work, it was one of those days where you forget something and you go back and you miss the train. It was a snowy day—oh, it was just awful. I ended up at a bus stop where I would normally not be and I found \$20! [laughs]. It was interesting. I thought, “Could that be a 20 dollar bill? The day before a man had asked me for money.

At the time I had \$2 in my wallet, but I gave him one. As I walked away, I thought, “I just gave that guy my next to last dollar.” And here it was, I found \$20. Had I not been delayed, had I not missed the train, had I not gone back for my cell phone, I would not have found that \$20, and I needed it. So I just say, “You know what? It’s okay.”

Because ultimately, I know that whatever happens it’s for my own benefit—it’s for good. It’s not for something bad. It’s for good. And that really does help. Certainly it keeps me calm, and it just keeps me open to whatever experiences might be coming up next. It takes away worry and fear, which I think are two of the most damning emotions one can have; and I don’t have any of those, or I do all I can to keep them at bay.

In addition, she finds it difficult to know who will listen to her perspectives because “to some people it’s kind of off-the-wall, but to [her] it’s very normal. It’s very real.” Not that she would be offended or hurt; but rather, as she explained, it leads to reflective inquiry:

Because somebody could say something intended to be hurtful or disparaging in some way; and I think, “Okay. Why did they say that?” As opposed to, “Oh my god, my feelings are hurt, how could they possibly say that about me.” It’s more like, “That’s interesting. I wonder why they feel that way?”

Clara feels that she has “no ego” and that she has had a sense of this since she was young.

I really feel that way, so again, if people criticize or make a comment, it’s as though I’m not invested in any “things.”—I don’t have to get certain things that seem to be important to some people. Like, people will say, “Oh, I have to have this particular brand of—whatever—it could be a car, or I have to live in a particular neighborhood. Or, I have to have jewelry, I have to have.” I don’t need to have any of that. I guess that that’s from no ego, because I don’t need to have anything that would be seen as a status symbol so that I can impress other people with what I have. I don’t see the need to do that. I can choose to be friends with everyone. I don’t seek out people because I think they’re helpful to me in some way. And in my work, I don’t do things because I’m trying to impress the boss. It just doesn’t occur to me to think in that way. So I also would call that no ego, because I’m not thinking in those terms.

The world is so tied in to image and appearance. It gets you—if you’re in a certain profession, let’s say, if you dress a certain way, then that means that you get more respect. I guess, if I needed to play that game, I could too. . . . But I don’t need to—I don’t feel as though I have to have this thing to make me look more impressive to other people. It’s just not like that. But it’s an interesting phenomenon though.

In thinking back on how no ego played out in her life and the choices she has made, she stated,

It’s a matter of not—of just choosing things based on what I feel is the right thing for me, as opposed to, “Well, if I choose to do this activity, or if I choose to go to this place, then that would put me in a better stead for more goodies or more promotions or more whatever it is.” So I never really thought of things in that way. I’ve always just had the

notion that whatever choice I make, it's going to work out the best for me. One of my more recent mantras is "everything works in my favor." So whatever I do, that's what I'm supposed to be doing—that's what I'm supposed to do. I never really think, okay, if I do this, then that would mean that I will then, again, find favor in somebody else's eyes, and then that would be good for me, because then that would bring me more reward. I don't think of things in that way.

Clara's Encapsulation of No-self

While Clara balances living with her sense of no-self or no ego with her innate spirituality by doing what she feels is right and by remaining open to whatever happens. She also maintains a global perspective of no-self as spiritual evolvment that includes everything and every person as "all one."

I was watching the History Channel—they had a whole series on religion and various aspects of how the world developed. And I got to thinking about how the world has evolved. Even if you look back at just even modern recent history, where . . . you have the Internet, you can just take a little device from your pocket and turn it on and you can be anywhere in the world. That would have been inconceivable just 20 years ago. So, it seems as though we're evolving. Something is evolving. . . . I just feel it. Maybe our spiritual evolvment hasn't happened to the same degree that our technology has. What I feel in my feeling of no-self is that there is a spiritual evolvment that probably is happening or needs to happen, when or how I don't know. But it just seems as though if people had more of the sense of everything being all one, and that that includes everything, the animals, the trees—it's all one—then maybe *that's* a spiritual evolvment that needs to happen. That's just, I guess, how I would encapsulate that whole sense of no-self—is that it's all one.

In the living of her daily life, the sense of *being one* for Clara is "getting to be more moment-to-moment."

It's just always kind of there in the background. I might not be consciously thinking or be consciously aware of it, but it's there in the background somewhere. It takes away that sense of competitiveness and that sense of I have to win. It just takes that all away—where you know that it's as though we're all-in-this-together kind of feeling. So, it's not as though I have to win at the cost of somebody else, because we truly are all in this together.

For her, the sense of *being one* is

that same sense that everything is all connected. And even more than connected, it's all one; it's all one thing, we're the same chemical soup—it's all the same. You know, there really is no difference. I think once we're able to see that, then we'll behave much more kindly towards everyone and everything around us—to the earth, to everything.

GY's Noetic Experiences Toward Becoming the Ground

GY is a 68-year old female who lives in the Pacific Mountain region of the United States. She was educated in Europe and holds an M.B.Ch.B., which is the degree of British Doctor of Medicine. GY is a Licentiate of the American Academy of Pathology; and is also a swami of the Ramakrishna Order of India, with the title of Pravrajika. GY works as a writer, videographer, and lecturer.

GY was raised by her mother who was atheist, her grandmother who was Christian in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, her father who was agnostic, and the Quakers. With regard to her current spiritual perspective, GY calls herself an “independent operator,” and follows what she has worked out for herself after thirty years of formal religious life in Vedanta convents, along with childhood training and experience. She also finds meaning in transpersonal psychology.

Noetic Events as Experiences of No-self

GY has noticed a pattern of cycles of noetic events that have remarkably transformed her life.

I've been through three cycles of 20 years, in which similar patterns of noetic events happened. I had the same pattern in the first 20 years of my life, in the second 20 years of my life, and in the third 20 years of my life, and it's actually happening now—now that I'm 68 and into this (fourth) cycle. So I've had three full cycles.

In defining *noetic*, she said that the word is

derived from the Greek word, *nous*, meaning “spirit,” which is the deepest level of consciousness we can currently conceive of. I would just define it as tapping into the deeper layers of human consciousness; or, in a very generic sense, going beyond the level you're at now to a deeper level. That's a noetic transition or transformation.

Defining No-self

GY views no-self through both Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism philosophies, and defines the term as a Ground, which is actually beyond any level of consciousness we can describe, but which moves you into deeper levels of consciousness.

The term no-self is not something that I use, because it's Buddhist terminology; and it's tied into a philosophy that I don't really subscribe to. What I *think* no-self means is: something that takes you *beyond* the immediate identification that you have. And it moves you deeper into the deeper states or levels of consciousness. . . . In Vedanta, there's basically (well, it depends which branch of Vedanta you look at, but I am talking about contemporary Vedanta combined with Kashmir Shaivism) five levels of consciousness that are identifiable in human beings. Most people don't get beyond the first or second level. The first level is what they call the waking state, when you're involved with the physical world. The second state is the dream state, which is actually a consciousness empowered by emotion which is creative and imaginative. When you're in the world of the physical world, like this math and science world, everything excludes everything

else—everything’s separate and in conflict. When you move into the creative or the second level, called the dream state, there isn’t the same degree of separation. There’s far more degrees of freedom; and there’s a creative freedom that you don’t have in the physical world. And in the third state, they call it the deep sleep state, related to *buddhi* or the discriminative intellect, your mind becomes very detached from everything that’s going on; and you can perceive things in a very detached way; and you can see more deeply into what underlies all of these different states. And when you get to the fourth state [or *turiya*,] you move beyond the preceding states; and you can see the whole pattern unfolding before you, because you are so detached from what is going on. And then in the fifth state, you are so identified with the Ground that no matter what state you’re in, you’re what you are, with no modification. In that state you can go to the first, second, third, or fourth states, but you’re not identified with any of them. That’s a very, very advanced state of consciousness that only avatars and a few people like that have. They can live in all states of consciousness at will and at random, but they don’t get identified with it. And then beyond that is the Ground—the Ground of being, which is what it is.

So no-self, for me, just means transcendence, really to go beyond, because, you see, you can live in a level and not be identified with it. You can express yourself, but you’re detached from it. That, in a way, is no-self, when you have that detachment. I mean, the avatars can become angry and upset, but it doesn’t affect them. It’s just something on the surface. Most people are totally within the clutches of their emotions and preoccupations. They’re totally dominated by what they call nowadays their “histories” or their “stories.” But a spiritual person or a person who’s touched the no-self, they may seem to be in a particular state; but they’re not really attached to it. And you can tell by their behavior; they’re not obsessed, they’re not addicted. They can move very easily and smoothly into the worlds of other people and be very supportive. That’s a person that’s touched no-self, you can say. Because they don’t have an ego defined by their body, emotions, intellect or even intuition. However, I wouldn’t say they don’t have—everybody has an ego. In the Vedanta I subscribe to, the ego expands. When you’re identifying yourself with the material world, you’re identifying yourself in a very narrow way. When you go to the imaginative realm you’re bigger; and when you reach, like, the fourth or the fifth state, you’re the whole universe. You identify empathetically and compassionately with everything. You don’t deny anything; you accept everything. So that’s kind of the philosophy that I subscribe to. No-self is kind of like Theravada Buddhism or something like that, which is okay. I mean, it’s a path, but it’s not the one I follow.

And my definition of no-self would be that you consciously go to that state of the Ground and live in it. But of course, the thing of it is, it’s extremely hard for us put such an experience into words. If we talk about our experiences, we are going to use human language, we’re going to interpret whatever experience we had in terms of human language and in terms of our understanding at that time. And that’s why these different experiences I can tell you about had different forms. I believe I touched the Ground in some way, but the state of my mind and consciousness at that time made a difference in how I saw what I experienced.

Noetic Events as Transcending Toward Being the Ground

GY believes that through the cycles or patterns of noetic events in her life, she has not only touched into the Ground, Self, or no-self, but also that the Self or no-self transformed her consciousness.

I firmly believe that they were all experiences of the Ground with a capital G or no-self, the words I use to describe it. Because, you see, the old traditional Vedantic practices and Buddhist practices tried to take you off to a state where you completely transcend the mind. And I believe that that's what happens, but when you try to talk about it, you immediately start introducing philosophy, theology, and your own preoccupations—that's what I feel. Even the term "no-self" is defining something in terms of a philosophy. The no-self is a philosophical term, actually, because you're defining a self that is *not or absent*. What is this self that you're saying no to? I believe it's the physical body or any of the previous or lower states of consciousness. But Vedanta emphasizes the spiritual Ground, and that's the Self with a capital "S." So I was saying that Buddhist philosophy and Vedantic philosophy are somewhat different. The Buddhists emphasize the negative approach, and Vedanta emphasizes the positive approach.

GY stated that her consciousness is transformed such that that her mind experiences "the third level of consciousness, so there's still a part of [her] being that cannot yet totally become identified with the Atman . . . or the no-self." She described how the noetic cycles or patterns transformed her from birth to the present.

So, anyhow, I had these patterns. And the first time it happened, between the ages of zero and 20, it happened pretty much — events happened *to* me, like I was essentially a physical being and events happened to me. The second twenty years, it was more of an emotional thing: The same pattern within an emotional level of consciousness. And the third 20 years it was more what I would call intellectual. My mind was more aware—it was clear about what was happening. I was anticipating things, I knew it was happening, I could analyze it and I could handle it. And what I'm going through now is much more intuitive. I'm kind of pro-actively interacting with this pattern of stuff. I know it's going to happen: I wait for it; I prepare my mind. I'm like playing with the pattern now.

She sees herself as being in the "state of Prajna" in that she sees the "Atman, but there's a veil that prevents [her] from going into it and becoming absolutely identified with it . . . becoming the no-self in its absolute sense."

GY's Cycles of Noetic Events

Within all four 20-year cycles, a terrible disaster happened to GY; and she ended up moving to a different physical location. Also within each cycle, she had a very powerful dream or a big event that helped get her through these terrible things and toward looking at the next paradigm; and she also met a guru or a person who deeply understood her on a spiritual level.

Well, let me quickly tell you what happens. In that twenty year cycle there's four 5-year quarters. The first 5years, I'm in a certain paradigm with a certain person who is very

central in my life—like my mother, when I was a baby; my father from 20-25; my monastic superior when I was 40 to 45; and from 60 to 65, a man in Los Angeles with whom I was working to develop a new movement. And at the end of about 5 years, something goes terribly wrong. . . . In all four cases a terrible disaster happened to me. I don't know why these things happen at the same time in each cycle, but they do. And about a year before that [terrible] event happened, I [had] a very, very powerful dream—really powerful dream—and that dream, I believe, is what helped me to get through these terrible things that happened to me. And right after the disaster, I move to a completely different place. I don't know why it happens this way, but I go to somewhere (physically) quite different and I meet my guru. I meet a person who deeply understands me spiritually. . . . So that's sort of the beginning of the second part. And [also] in the second part, I'm going through a huge struggle to cope with the collapse of the paradigm in the first part. And the guru is holding me spiritually and helping me to keep my head above water as I struggle to survive. And then at the end of that 5 years . . . I have a big event, like an out-of-the-body experience; and that event is a confirmation of what the guru was telling me. And it not only takes me beyond the first paradigm, but also gets me looking towards the next paradigm that I'm going to move into. In the third group of 5 years in this 20-year cycle, I have to go through a huge amount of struggle, finally turning my back on the first paradigm and moving forward. And I come to a very big decision when I'm about in the 15th year of the 20 years. It's a very counter-intuitive decision. So I get to this big, big decision; and it's sometimes a very dramatic experience that I go through to make that decision. And then in the fourth group of 5 years, I have to face terrible, terrible opposition. I go through really desperate opposition to what I'm trying to do. And by that time the guru has died: I'm alone; I have to face it alone. And I just stick to my guns and somehow a door opens and I walk through into the new paradigm.

GY contextualized the noetic experiences that she has had “as being part and parcel of” her radical “evolutionary process.”

Now these noetic experiences, which I'll tell you about, are definitely part and parcel of the whole process I'm outlining here. These experiences are not things that just come out of the blue. They come *into* these situations—all these events that I had to go through. And by definition being noetic, they tap me into a very deep level of who I am, and they give me the capacity to continue on, work the stuff out, come up with a decision, and implement it. All of this is just to put you into the picture of how these experiences come in a pattern that are definitely part and parcel of my whole evolutionary progress. Because I've done many things: I've been an artist, I've been a scientist, I've been a nun, and now I'm a writer [*laughs*.] . . . So that's just to give you the context of these experiences that I've had. I've had a lot more experiences besides that, but these are the ones which have made radical changes in my life.

The First Cycle

GY was born during the Second World War. Her father was away in the war, and she lived exclusively with her mother. She lived in a very desperate situation because Scotland was badly bombed. She recalled the following about her mother:

My mother was a wonderful, wonderful woman. She was an atheist, she was a communist, and she was trained in the Froebel German kindergarten system. She really knew how to relate to kids, and she was my best friend. I was just really, really close to my mother, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, to the extent a child has an intellect. . . . But it was becoming apparent to me that she was very depressed, and it was getting worse and worse and worse. *I was 4*. And a child of that age—I just knew that there was nothing going well, that things were bad. And of course I’d no idea what it was.

Her mother committed suicide; but before that,

And, as I said, about a year before she committed suicide, I had a very, very big dream. And the dream was that I was walking in a dark forest all alone. I saw this huge tree, *huge*, you know, about ten feet wide trunk in the dark. When I got close to it, I could see there was a small door near the bottom of the tree. I opened the door, and light started pouring out of the door. I stood on my tiptoes to look in and see what it was; and Jesus Christ was there. And not just pictures, but Christ—alive—a real *person*! There was so much light, and he looked at me with so much *love*. It was so all-encompassing, that I just transcended myself at the age of 4. This thing was huge. The interesting part is my mother was an atheist. I had not been exposed really much to Christ. I was not brought up as a Christian. But the only thing I could think of when I thought about it later was, occasionally she sent me down the hill to a little sort of impromptu Sunday school on Sunday. I think my mother sent me there just to have some peace and quiet [*laughs*]. But somehow or another, I had seen some picture of Jesus. Anyhow this came into my life. It was so living; it was so real; it was so powerful, that it *energized* me.

And when my mother about a year later committed suicide, I took it very calmly. I never mentioned her name ever again. Because I’m psychic, I saw her die. I mean, I could see her at a distance; and I could see what was happening. And because of this tremendously powerful experience I’d had of this tremendously powerful spiritual love, I do believe that’s what saved me, because most children to whom things like that happen, you know, become very mentally disturbed. I wasn’t disturbed, I just took it and moved on. And so that was a huge thing.

GY’s grandmother came into her life as her first guru. Her grandmother

was basically a peasant. You know, she was a very simple being in a sense, but she was highly spiritual. And she had what we call in Scotland, “the second sight,” meaning she was extremely psychic. . . . So I grew up with that, you see. [*laughs*] When you grow up with that stuff, you can’t be the same as most other people, you know what I mean? And she was always right. She wasn’t a kooky person at all. She was a very, very normal woman. She was a very loving woman. She was a deeply spiritual woman. And she was revered by the Gaelic-speaking people as the next best thing to a saint. She was a very amazing woman. . . . My mother, as I said, was an atheist and a communist; and my grandmother was this [*laughs*] unbelievably gifted psychic woman and spiritual woman. And she had a huge effect on me. It was she, really, who saved me after my mother’s death. I went to live with her, and she had a big influence on me.

Between the ages of 5 and 10, GY was “very angry after her mother’s death.” She was “unconsciously angry” with her mother and “was angry with [her] father for the way he was treating” her very badly. She was a good student and was very well-behaved; but around the age of 10, she “turned into a little *demon*.” Her family was worried because she “was running around with a bunch of little thugs in the street,” and [she] was “turning into a little hooligan.”

However, her grandmother’s guru influence was very deep. GY said:

She was holding me. She was a woman of few words; but, you know, words are not that important. It’s what the person is. To cut a long story short, when I was ten things were so bad, my father was endlessly up at the school talking with the headmistress, “What are we going to do about [GY]?” and this whole bit. The whole family were wringing their hands. They didn’t know what was going to happen. And it is true that I could have become an alcoholic or violent or anything. I was so disturbed by all of this, you know, my mother’s death. And one of the reasons my mother killed herself was my father’s behavior. He was really dishing it out to me, too. I was having a very hard time.

She went to visit her cousins in the north part of Scotland; and one day she and her cousin went for a walk in the hills.

It’s a very enchanted part of the world. . . . It was the fall, it was exquisitely beautiful. And as a Celtic person, I have deep, deep connections with nature. This kind of stuff really affects me very deeply. Anyhow, we got up into the hills; and we came into this clearing. My cousin was a bit of a jokester. He disappeared and left me. And I was standing there knowing that he was fooling around and he’d show up. It was going to rain with very dark clouds. I was surrounded by these beautiful silver birch trees. It was so beautiful. It was very quiet and still. And then suddenly, as I was standing there like in an enchanted world, some wind came. . . . And this silver birch, the whole thing began to ripple; and because I’m very into nature, I just completely went out of my body. I ceased to exist. I went into some kind of transcendental state when I was ten. I don’t know how long I was there; but after a while I started to come down, whatever that means. I could see my body standing on that place; and I thought, “I don’t want to go back into that body. It’s miserable. I don’t want to live in that miserable body.” [*laughs*] But I had to, of course.

And at the age of 10 I couldn’t analyze it, but what happened was my behavior radically changed. I went back to being a good and a well-behaved student. All of the anger and everything just disappeared [*laughs*]. The family couldn’t believe it. And I never told a soul. I never told anybody any of this stuff at all. I said nothing. I just experienced it. I felt at that time that—well, when you’re ten you can’t put stuff into words—I had tapped into a conviction of my own inner, divine nature. I just knew there was something to me much more powerful than all of this junk going on in the outside. And, as I said, my anger, my rebellion, my running around with those little thugs, it all came to an end. I just brought it to an end myself. I realized looking back on it that at that point in time, that was when I could have become violent or I could have become an alcoholic. I could have done something really desperate. My life could have gone that way easily because of all the

stuff I'd been through—my mother's suicide, my father's appalling behavior—you know what I mean?

With regard to the transcending experience,

I visualized it afterwards as what I called the Dark Mother. I felt it was a deep, deep, feminine supportive mothering. Of course, naturally, I'd lost my mother. I felt it that way as the divine feminine. Of course, I didn't use words. You intuitively experience this deeply supporting power—this silent, dark power that's constantly supporting you. So that was a pretty big thing. That was a very big part of my life, which helped me to stand my ground and give up a very promising career as an artist and become a medical doctor, despite the vehement opposition of my father.

The Second Noetic Event

With regard to the second event, ages 20 to 40, GY spoke described her father, the events that transpired, and how she rose above her situation and became a medical doctor.

My father was very psychologically disturbed. He was an alcoholic, and he had very bad PTSD. He was very badly wounded in the Second World War. But the thing that totally unhinged his mind really was he was a medical officer in one of the British regiments; and he was sent into Auschwitz or Belsen (I can't remember which of the two) to liberate it. And it was so appalling what he saw there, he was never the same again. He was a university professor. He wrote a very famous book. He was very brilliant intellectually, but psychologically he was a big mess. And he really smashed me around badly psychologically, but I am glad to say not physically or sexually. . . . And he refused to pay for my education. He was always trying to get rid of me; he wanted to put me up for adoption. He treated me very badly. But I moved ahead. I did all I was going to do. The rest of the family supported me, and I went ahead without him. But I did try, when I was around 24 or 25, I did try to reconnect with my father; and it turned into a terrible disaster. It was so awful; it was one of the most appalling things that ever happened. But just before that, again, I knew deeply and intuitively—I had a deep knowledge that this thing with my father was going to kill me, nearly kill me. It was terrible what happened.

I did have another dream before that next turning point in my life. And this time, again I, I was walking in the dark (to my mind this is archetypal). I was walking in the dark; and I suddenly saw very far ahead of me a light. And of course I started walking towards it. As I got closer to it, I became aware that on both sides of me there were millions and millions of people standing looking at the light. And, of course, I had no idea what it was. The thing that surprised me was that nobody was obstructing me; I was able to keep moving forward. So I kept moving forward and forward and forward. As I got closer, I realized how many people there were. They were all gazing at this light with the most incredible devotion. This was obviously something big; but I didn't know what it was.

So anyhow, when I got there, it was a young man sitting on a kind of throne, meditating, very serene, and in total silence. I looked around and there were millions of people standing there. I just looked at him, but had no idea who it was or anything of that sort.

Suddenly he opened his eyes and looked at me; and, again, it was the same thing—it was so powerful. It was very serene, it was very calm; and it was very, very—it evoked in me the feeling of my own calmness and blessedness and all the rest of it. I woke up feeling blissfully happy. All the depression—and of course when I was younger I had inclinations towards suicide myself, because of, you know, what had happened to me—all of that was gone. I had no idea who it was; but I heard from within myself that [I] was Buddha [*with a laugh.*] . . . But I may have read about Buddha because I had read Radhakrishnan's Gita, and he may have mentioned Buddha in passing. But, you know, Buddha was not a preoccupation that I had. This was some kind of deep archetypal being that manifested to me without my conscious participation. I mean, this came from a deep, deep layer of my being.

GY wanted to go to medical school and become a doctor. Her father did not support her in that decision, but she “stuck to [her] guns” and became a medical doctor.

But, you see, it's always happened to me that I get support. When I wanted to become a medical doctor; and my father said, “You're an emotional incompetent like your mother, you're incapable. I will not support you financially.” My family stepped forward; and the British government, because I was a good student, I got a grant. I got given money, and I did it.

The Third Noetic Experience

GY graduated from medical and went on to work at Harvard University. By this time,

I had met my second guru, who was an Indian swami in New York. He was a very, very powerful person who completely wiped all of that anger and bitterness—just completely took away my father out of my—you know, he took me beyond it. I left it behind. He was a very powerful, spiritual being. But I had gone off to Harvard because of my medical career and so on and so forth. And I was having a lot of conflicts. I have worked in a number of big academic institutions. I don't know what they're like now, but then they were horrible. People were so at each other's throats—the competition, it was horrible. . . . The work was very fascinating. But this kind of savagery and competition, first-level stuff that I really couldn't be dealing with; and I began to have great doubts. I was told at Harvard, “You will be a full professor in ten years.” I was in the fast track at Harvard; but I wasn't happy. I didn't want to live that way. I was having a lot of conflict and particularly because I had made that decision to become a doctor instead of an artist, and my father had totally opposed it. [Harvard] wanted to keep me; they offered me millions of dollars to stay there. I couldn't believe it—6 million dollars. They wanted to put me in a project and keep me at Harvard. But I knew in my soul that it wasn't what was going to help me spiritually. And at that time, having had two gurus and very powerful—I knew that's what I wanted. I didn't want to go and become famous at Harvard. I wanted to go deeper into my inner consciousness.

So it was a big crisis; and I had another of these experiences that pulled me through and out on the other side. This time I had a desperately bad migraine headache. The vomiting was terrible. I was sick as a dog. I thought I was going to die. I was in terrible condition. I

was lying there; and I had, it wasn't a dream, it was a vision. I saw myself in a huge river that was moving terribly quickly. It was deep, dark and moving really fast; and I was being smashed on the rocks. And I thought, "My god, I'm going to die in this thing." So I somehow got myself to the edge, and I was holding onto a rock. And I was being slammed again and again and again on the bank of the river, and I realized this is worse than being in the river itself. But I was in a terrible quandary. And a voice—and I knew who this was—this was a woman called Sarada Devi. She was Ramakrishna's spiritual consort, and I was very devoted to her. She was a real human being; she died in 1920. I heard her telling me, "Let go and flow in the river." I said, "I'm trying to let go, but I can't." She said, "You will be much better flowing in the river." And again, it brought a degree of insight, conviction, and silence in my soul. And afterwards, when I look back on it, what she was telling me was, "Go into the spiritual current, give up holding onto all of this Harvard stuff." I let it go. I went out and became a nun.

So that was a big experience too. Because to give up a full professorship at Harvard—which I was told I would get within ten years; I was only in my thirties at that point—was quite a lot to let go. But I let it go. And it was that experience that made it possible. I felt, again, that this Mother power was—these are not intellectual things, you don't sit there and think this, you feel it, you experience it—she was carrying me forward to a totally different life as a nun.

The Third Noetic Event

GY went on to receive her first vows in a Vedanta convent in the Western Pacific region of the United States. At this time she was given the name *Prajna*, which is a Buddhist term. She explained how this term relates to the Ground or the no-self.

Vedanta, of course, is the precursor of Buddhism. They're closely related; they have the same terminology, but slightly different meanings. In Vedanta, *Prajna* is the third level of consciousness, where you actually see the Atman—you see that spiritual Ground. But you can't become one with it. . . . There's a thin veil that separates [you.] . . . I remember I quoted the Vedantic text, "He who sees Brahman, becomes Brahman." When you see the Ground or the no-self you *become* that; there is no separation from it at all—That is the fourth state in Vedanta. In the third state, you can see it, but you can't actually become it. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, this name really spiritually energized me.

GY had been in the convent a little more than 5 or 6 years, when she

came to realize that my superior (who was a man) was extremely malevolent, that I was at severe risk. I had no idea what could happen to me; but I am telling you, I was nearly murdered a few times by some of the other nuns, who were influenced by his behavior. It was really bad. I'm not making this up—this is the truth. I'm writing it in my book. But the violence was not at the time of the dream. It was later; but I knew I was facing something really bad and difficult.

Now one of the spiritual personalities that, as a Vedantin I was extremely devoted to, was Swami Vivekananda. . . . He was a great spiritual being who came to America and

actually started this whole interest in Asian thought. . . . I was very closely related to Vivekananda spiritually. I had written about him, and now I'm making videos and things about him. Anyhow, he was a very powerful being in my life. But this man, my superior, was vehemently antagonistic to Vivekananda; and I had a lot of very painful excruciating exchanges with this man. I felt like I was being psychologically beaten down, you know, and threatened. And I was particularly vulnerable, because my guru had just died. I was still in deep grief over my guru's death, so I was very vulnerable to all this stuff. And I felt terribly, terribly threatened because, you see, I was completely at the mercy of this man. I had no money—nothing—I was at his mercy.

Just before things got violent, however, GY had a dream.

This is another dream that gave me the strength to go through what I was going to have to face. These dreams kept me alive. In the dream I was in a house of many stories; I was up in the top floor. It was actually the Vedanta Society in New York, but it was in a dream form. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, I suddenly realized that there was somebody there whom I couldn't see. He was a very masculine, strong person, but I couldn't see his face—it was dark. And I got scared. I started to run, and he started to pursue me. And I ran down the stairs and down the stairs and down the stairs [*with a little laugh*]. And this person was coming after me faster and faster and faster. I got down into the basement, which is the place where I used to talk with my guru, into that room. There were double doors, which I tried to force closed and throw the bolt to keep this being out. But he was very strong and very powerful. And he was forcing the door, forcing the door. And finally I couldn't hold it, and he came into the room. And it was Vivekananda himself, and he was laughing and laughing and laughing [*with a little laugh*].

At that point in my life, I was 45. I was an adult by that time. I realized that in that dream Vivekananda was telling me: "I am not going to let you succumb; I will never let you go; I will pursue you and hold you and keep you going through whatever you have to take on my account." It empowered me tremendously. It made it possible for me to continue on and face all the crap that I had to. Of course, at that moment in time, I didn't know what it was I was going to have to face; but boy, I sure found out.

So, these dreams occurring at this point were unbelievable. They're not formless, of course; but they're talking to a deep, deep part of my soul that made it possible for me to go through all this stuff, and remain above it. See, that's no-self. You go through the stuff. Most people go crazy; they become addicted or this or that. But I just kept steady, steady, coming from a much, much deeper part of what I am.

The situation at the convent became terrible. In GY's words,

The women did attack me—when you're isolated by the leader, the other people will attack you. . . . They actually attacked me, they physically assaulted me for several years. . . . At that convent, they tried to kill me—literally tried to murder me. I really had to go through a whole lot of stuff. And if I hadn't had that dream to keep me going—well, I nearly did die [*with a little laugh*] several times, but without the dream or the other

noetic experiences I wouldn't be here to tell the tale. And I certainly wouldn't be in my right mind—that was what supported me.

In addition, GY's third guru helped her cope with the terrible opposition she faced from her superior and the nuns.

My third guru was a swami in Boston whom I knew very well. I called him up: and I told him, "you know something, I'm going to get killed here; this is a terrible place." He said, "I will help you." And he gave me a lot of instructions about how to cope with it, how to remain above it, and particularly he told me, "Write—do your writing." He said, "You have the ability to write, you have the ability to understand." And that's what I did. That focus on the buddhi or the intellect, that's what kept me going, and that is the faculty that is involved in the state of prajna. It's between the eyes—the third eye. I don't know about Buddhism, but in Vedanta it's the point between the eyebrows. Your consciousness is there.

One evening, at around age 50, GY was up at Lake Tahoe on vacation.

I was meditating, overlooking the lake. It was very dusky. I think it was September. As I was meditating, I just felt everything disappearing. And I felt that I was going into—it's impossible to put these things into words really. I was going into—I call it the Light or the Self, the Atman—that Ground, that inner Ground of being that is in every single human being. You can call it a level of consciousness, whatever you want to call it, a deep level of consciousness. But I didn't become identified with it, and I realized that there was still some part of my mind that was preventing me from becoming one with that reality. And afterwards I thought, "You know something? That's Prajna." That's the state of Prajna where you see the Ground or the Atman; or if you want to call it the no-self, you see it, but you don't become one with it. I felt frustrated, but I also felt very blessed that I had had that experience—that this state of consciousness had become a reality to me.

That year, 1991, I was under heavy, heavy attack—verbal and physical attack. And it became much worse. In 1996, an attempt was made on my life. I believe that it was that experience at Tahoe that helped me to keep my mental balance and go through all of this stuff and come out on the other side. In fact, I know it was. I couldn't have done that without that experience. I also began to realize that I was to move on from being just a simple nun to becoming a writer, which I did, with some degree of success, even within the order itself.

The Current, Fourth Cycle of Noetic Events

And then in the cycle I am going through now I had a similar thing. This fellow in Los Angeles, he and I were actually spiritual soul-mates. He's a great fan of Vivekananda. We worked together on the texts of Vivekananda with view to starting out on our own; and then he pulled the plug on me and let me go down the drain. However, I knew he cared for me a lot and also needed me to help him in his work, so I decided to give him 2 years to think through what he had done and perhaps to change his attitude. After about eighteen

months there was not a flicker from him, and I began to realize that the monastic organization had nothing in it that was going to support me, including this guy.

I was then pretty upset, because I was 65, and with no marketable skills—I was in a mess. At the same time I was still not really able to make up my mind to take initiatives in this very difficult situation.

On a trip to the holy Isle of Iona off the coast of Scotland, GY had another noetic experience.

About a quarter of a million people go on pilgrimage there every year. It's a very powerful, spiritual place. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, the spiritual personality that is the inspiration of the island is a man called Columba. He lived in the 6th century. He's like the spiritual archetype of the Scottish people. His history was that he was an Irish prince, and he was a monk. He was the head of a monastery, he was very influential, and he was heir to the Irish throne. But he got kicked out of Ireland because he was very revolutionary, and they sent him off to Scotland when he was 40. And age 40 back in the 6th Century was old.

I was out wading in the water. It was a very calm day. It was very, very still; it was very, very quiet. And I felt much more peaceful, although I was still extremely agitated because I didn't know what I was going to do. And this time it wasn't a dream, but I actually *saw* Columba in flesh and blood, not a dream in the sense of two-dimensional like a movie. He said to me, "Don't forget, I was 40 when they kicked me out." And what that meant to me is even if you're 65, you will survive, and you will continue with your work. That's the message I got. The vision enabled me to put the guy in LA totally behind me and to start working to moving out to [another state,] a process which took me another 2 years.

GY stated that the vision and "meeting with Columba" enabled her to pull herself together and to "move out of something [she] had been involved in for thirty years." She is now living in another part of the United States, she has an income, and she is going to publish her book. GY summarized how the noetic experiences were empowering.

So those episodes—I don't know if it qualifies for what you think of as no-self, but they gave me so much power, so much conviction about who I am, or was, and the energy to keep going on. Each time I had to face really difficult stuff because leaving the monastic order after 30 years was very, very difficult, especially with very little money, which is the situation I'm in now. So anyhow, I've done it; and that is what helped me to keep going. And I believe that to be able to transcend these situations as I did was because of that revelation of a very deeper level in my being, which took the external form of some kind of archetype Christ, Buddha, Vivekananda, and Columba. You see, you superimpose on to these experiences, at least I do, the preoccupations of one's mind at the time. But the power, the energy, the conviction, the clarity that you get from those experiences—that, to me, is what's important. Not the actual form of the experience.

Elucidation of Transformations of Consciousness

GY reiterated her transformations of consciousness within context of the five states of consciousness in Vedanta philosophy.

As a child, in the first 20-year cycle, my identification was with basically the material world more or less. I didn't see things as very interconnected; I saw things as individual events. . . . I would identify myself at that time primarily with the physical world and my body—survival. But it was spiritualized.

In the second cycle between 20 and 40, predominantly I was an emotional being. I identified myself with emotion, I mean [*with a laugh*] everything *was* emotion. As you gathered, I'm a rather intense person. My emotions were, like I was living in a permanent tsunami. And I just had to work it all through. . . . And the reason why it was a struggle is because I identified with my emotions as a young adult.

And then the third cycle, I believe I was under *so much* threat, verbal and physical abuse all the time that there was no time for the luxury of emotion. . . . When you have to survive, you've got to rely on what the Vedantins call buddhi—the discriminating intellect that can distinguish between the real and the unreal. . . . You go to sort of an inner point in your being like prajna; and from that central point, you can see all this stuff going on round about you; and you're not identified with it either as a physical being or as an emotional being. You are seeing it from the standpoint of intellect. The Western scholastics used the term intellect to mean this kind of mind that *is poised in itself and not identifying with what was going on*. So I was that kind of person between the ages of 40 and 60.

And now I believe I'm moving into a much more intuitive state of being. I'm just kind of flowing along, and discovering that, you know, [*little laugh*] things work out. I understand that I'm going through a process; and I thought to myself, "I'm waiting for my fourth guru to show up and no sign." And I thought to myself, "Who am I to say I'm going to have a guru?" I'm going along with this system; I'm floating in it and it's carrying me forward. And I'm using my energy to make these videos and write these books and whatever, in the hopes that they will be meaningful to other people. I don't feel that I have so many personal conflicts anymore because I believe I'm in a much more expanded level of consciousness than I was before. The mere fact I can talk about all of it, to some extent is an indication that I have kind of left it behind and I'm looking back at it. You know, it isn't my battle any more—it's all over.

How GY's Inner and Outer Sense of Self Has Changed

With regard to how GY's sense of self has changed, she reflected on the cause of her "psychosomatic conditions" such as "cyclical vomiting and migraines ." She illustrated how the psychosomatic conditions were caused by a "disharmony between her inner and outer realities," and noted that "noetic life" has changed her in that there has been "an amelioration" of conditions."

That's what I think. My father used to make a fool of me and tell me I was neurotic and blah, blah, blah, blah, because I wasn't "normal." I never told them I was going through this stuff, but people *feel* that you're not on their wavelength. And because the West has been very intolerant of this kind of thing (of course it's tolerant in other dimensions) but in terms of the noetic life, the world I grew up in was very, very intolerant of it. And I took a lot. I mean, my father, he told me, "You're an emotional incompetent; you're incompetent, incapable of doing anything worthwhile with your life." And then I went on to Harvard and was in the fast track to a professorship; that showed him a thing or two. But the reason why I could do that was because I was working from that inner energy. And I'm sure that's why I had those psychosomatic—because it's very painful, you know, when the person that's supposed to be your nearest and dearest is reviling you and putting obstacles in your way. Like when I went to the convent, the superior telling me, "You don't know anything." He told me the same stuff. He said, "You're just talking rubbish. You don't know anything; you're a Western person. By definition you're incapable of having spiritual experience." That kind of intolerant stuff. And the women in the convent resented me intensely because I was living in that domain [prajna]. I never said a word.

My father was *really* ugly to me; and my family did not understand where I was coming from. I never said a word; I kept it all to myself. But they *knew* I was different. And I think that's why people like me have so much psychosomatic difficulty. You can't work it out any other way, you see, so it goes into your body. That's my theory. . . . Because of the noetic experiences, the psychosomatic conditions that I was suffering from got a lot better. [The noetic events] helped me to get over that and leave it behind me and move on in a much, much more meaningful way. Got my act together, made that powerful decision, and I moved on. And I bloody well did what I was going to. I became a medical doctor and to hell with my father. I became a nun, to hell with my family. I've become a writer, to hell with the Ramakrishna order. I was very empowered by all of this stuff. I wasn't made weaker, I was made much stronger, and my physical health improved. In that sense, it had an impact on my physical being.

But, you see, my superior could never beat me down. Never. He beat them all down, but he never beat me down because I had that inner conviction from the experiences I'd been through. And while I was there in the convent, I would go [on retreats;] and in those woods, I *knew who I was*. That man could not tell me I was worthless. Or he could tell me; but I'd pay no attention, and that made him angrier and angrier and angrier. And finally he threw me out. That's why it happened. It happened from many standpoints, but from a spiritual standpoint, that's why they savaged me. I see it as clear as day. The West is very, very intolerant.

No-self as De-Identifying With Ego and Transcending Consciousness

GY illustrated aspects of no-self as involving both acceptance of the real world and a natural witnessing of the world, rather than objectification of or egoic identification with the physical world.

That very first experience I described to you is an illustration: That afternoon in the woods when I just went off somewhere and I came back and I saw my physical body; and I thought, “My god, I don’t want to go into that—that’s a miserable thing to be in.” That’s witnessing. Because I knew I wasn’t the body. That’s what that meant. I don’t want to go there. It was a very crude way of witnessing. At the age of ten I had that experience. But, as I said, this kind of attitude becomes more and more a natural part of your existence. And in the West when you talk about the real world, that means the physical world. In Vedanta, when you talk about real world, it means no-self because that’s their definition of real. The physical world is a very peripheral thing in their concept.

I think in the West right now, everyone’s so keen to get beyond the physical world which has such a grip and an irresistible fascination on them that they’re terribly keen to deny it, which is good because you have to at some point. You’ve got to somehow. As I said, I had to leave one paradigm behind and move on to another. Well, you’ve got to first of all smack the ego (specially the physical identity, which is so powerful in the West) down and get rid of it. And in the West, everybody wants no-self and all of that because they want to get rid of the physical world. But as you get further along, you begin to understand that the physical world is not in and of itself something that you deny. You realize that it’s one part of the whole.

In other words, “the Vedantic attitude is to help make yourself understand the need and necessity and value of the physical world” However, in the West “because we’re so identified with the physical world, [we] have to work towards the no-self.” But the ultimate thing” is that “the world and no-self are two different aspects of the same thing. So when you see things that way, you can be in *any* domain, and it doesn’t affect you.” A person is able to be “poised,” while interacting with the world “in a very effective way—it doesn’t bother you.” Additionally, as you go into deeper levels of consciousness, “the so-called real world becomes more and more objectified and you’re not identified with it.” Your perspective changes in the following manner:

I think the deeper you go into these deeper states of consciousness, the more the physical world just becomes a part of a whole; and the whole gets bigger and bigger and bigger. It’s like a spectrum; and the physical world is just the first, small part of it—it’s like your fingernails, you know. *[laughs]* It’s a kind of peripheral part of who you are. It’s not that it’s not real. And it’s not that I don’t want to engage in it, because I do. I’m involved in a number of organizations and things that I do myself. I’m involved, but my main preoccupation is the inner reality, the spiritual reality. I think it’s inevitable that you see the physical world as more and more objectified, and you are not primarily identified with it. So if that’s what you mean by witnessing—yeah, exactly, that’s what it is.

In addition, GY expressed her viewpoint on the importance of helping people to understand how supporting and freeing spiritual evolution can be.

The kind of work you’re doing is very important, and this is why I’m supporting it. Transpersonal psychologists are bringing a whole different dimension into the West, which we *desperately* need. We need to understand that these states of consciousness are *normal*. Everybody can have them. . . . Everybody has to know that they have within them

these hugely powerful and extremely freeing states of being. And it's a question of getting on with the job and transforming yourself. . . . And you read it in the lives of people like Saint Paul. He was in prison and one night the door just opened, and he walked out. I mean, when you live in those states of consciousness, or try to, events have a way of supporting you; and that has definitely been the case in my life. I've been supported every step of the way.

Appendix O: Sample Transcript Analysis Documents

Key to Color Coding Individual Participant Transcripts Prior to Composing Stories

This document shows the all the key terms used in the search for initial grounded theory codes. Each resulting color coded participant transcript was then used, along with using other levels of grounded theory analysis, in writing participant stories.

Key to Initial Codes:

YELLOW HIGHLIGHTING:

Self, self, no-self, no self, and self variations; identity, identify, identification, personality, persona, identity, identification, personal self, little personal self, ego, and ego variations

AQUA HIGHLIGHTING:

Empty, emptiness, void, dark, pain, let go, letting go, diminish, de-identification, release, releasing, hard, difficult, uncomfortable, diminishing, nothing, nothingness, devoid, suffer, isolate, grief, anger, loss, loses, fractured, broken, death blow, death, fear, kill, murder

VIOLET HIGHLIGHTING:

Transition, phase, stage, state, realization, realize, break, breakthrough, shifts (in awareness), insight, paradox, event, signs, sign-posts, significant moment

RED HIGHLIGHTING:

Experience

BLUE HIGHLIGHTING:

Integrate, embody, embodiment. Accept, Acceptance, surrender

RED LETTERING:

Home, god, Presence, unity, unification, universe, consciousness, cosmic, cosmic body, sacred, divine, light, Brahman, awake, awakening, Awakening, awakened, infinite, infiniteness, infinity, awareness, one, Oneness, All, Being, nonduality, transcend, source, I am, Goddess, Mystery, Truth, Ground, Atman, Dark Goddess, noetic

PURPLE LETTERING:

Witness, Witnessing

BLUE LETTERING:

Feeling, feel, felt, emotion, emotionally, mind, mind's eye, body, physiological, physical, nobody home

Sample of Levels of Coding Involved in Analyzing a Section of One Participant's Transcript

<p>3.1</p> <p>DESCRIBED WHAT SHE FEELS IN HER FEELING OF NO-SELF related to "it's all one thing"</p> <p>KEY QUOTE→ "encapsulate that whole sense of no-self—is that it's all one"</p> <p>HER DREAM RELATED TO NO-SELF & IT'S ALL ONE</p> <p>Another dimension</p> <p>A presence</p> <p>Benevolent</p> <p>Parental</p> <p>Nothing</p> <p>Just perfect; all one</p> <p>The presence could understand</p>	<p>Something is evolving. There is some—whatever intelligence there is, it's all evolving, and where it's going to, I don't know, but there certainly is an evolving that's happening, and I just feel it, so maybe our spiritual evolution hasn't happened to the same degree that our technology has. So, what I feel in my feeling of no-self is that there is a spiritual evolution that probably is happening or needs to happen, and when or how I don't know, but it just seems as though if people had more of the sense of everything is all one, where it's no individual ego or person, but that it's all one thing, and that includes everything, it includes the animals, the trees—it's all one—then maybe that's a spiritual evolution that needs to happen. Yeah, that's just, I guess, how I would encapsulate that whole sense of no-self—is that it's all one.</p> <p>I have a couple of questions coming up, and I guess I'll say two of the questions and you can decide which one and in what order you want to address them. I'd like you to talk more about "it's all one" and how that fits in no-self, but also, you mentioned that dream, and anything that we discussed in the screening I haven't recorded, so I would really appreciate it if you would repeat the dream and anything else that comes up that we discussed in the screening.</p> <p>Okay, well, in that dream it was a dream where I found myself in another dimension. And along with me was a presence, I would call it, because there was no physical being or anything, but there was definitely a presence that was completely benevolent. And the best way to give an analogy to it would be, let me see...it would be like a parent with a child experiencing something for the very first time, but that parent knowing what the child is feeling. So that I'm there and kind of looking around me in this space and there's nothing—there's no physical anything there, but the sense of it is that it's very, very—it's absolutely amazingly beautiful and calm and everything is just perfect, and everything is all one, and it's just an amazing feeling and it's just so beautiful, there was nothing to say, There were beautiful trees or beautiful scenery—just the whole sense of that was just beauty. And I was just simply amazed at this. It was, like, Oh, my god, this is just so amazing!</p> <p>And again, I wasn't talking, but somehow the presence that was there could understand and feel whatever emotions I was feeling or whatever I was thinking. And but when I looked down, it was as</p>
--	--

<p>Amorphous opalescent stuff</p> <p>SHE GOT THE SENSE THAT IF SHE JUMPED IN, SHE AS AN INDIVIDUAL WOULD DISAPPEAR</p> <p>AND BE A PART OF EVERYTHING. No separation. That's how it should be Afraid What would happen when she woke up?</p> <p>Rushed back into reality. Maybe more,,,,,</p> <p>It really is all one thing. No separation.</p> <p>STAYED WITH HER. LIVES EACH DAY THIS WAY</p> <p>Takes away judgement because it's all one thing</p> <p>No longer wonders all these questions</p>	<p>though there was this amorphous opalescent stuff just kind of turning around and forming different colors and stuff. That's just the only word for it. And then I was asked if I wanted to jump in. And I thought—and the sense that I got was that there was even more to be experienced. And I thought to the being “You mean, there's more?! “Because I couldn't believe that in addition to all that I had experienced before, that oh, there's actually more to this experience. And the being kind of indicated, Yes, there is more. And I got this sense that if I were to jump in to this stuff, that I, as an individual, would disappear. It wasn't as though I would die or anything like that, but I would just simply be a part of everything. I wouldn't be a separate being any more; I'd be a part of everything. And I thought, That's how it should be, but at the time I wasn't—I was kind of afraid of doing that, because I thought, what's going to happen when I wake up? [<i>with a laugh</i>] You know, you have these strange things in your dreams kind of thing, What's going to happen when I wake up? And then immediately I physically woke up. So it just kind of ended—it kind of terminated, I was just kind of rushed back into reality. Maybe there's more to the dream, but that's probably all I feel safe in saying right now. But so that experience of, Oh, my god, it's—! And that's where I have this sense it really is all one thing. There really should not be a sense that person A is separate from person B who is separate from an animal. It's all one. It's all one thing.</p> <p>And so that's the sense that I had then has never completely left me, so I kind of live each day with that “it's all one thing.” And I think one of the actual, the tangible results of that is that I have—it kind of takes away being judgmental, because if it's all one thing, then how can you judge that other thing, when it's you're part of that too—you're that thing, too. So it kind of takes away that sense of being judgmental. So I can listen to people and they can say what they say and I can understand and say, Okay, that's what this person is experiencing, as opposed to, Oh my god, how could she say that! It's no longer like that. Or even when you see something horrible happens in the news and you read, Oh my god, this is a horrible crime, how could they do that? And it's like, Oh my gosh, you know, this is the part—we're all a participant in this, how can we make this end?</p>
---	--

Sample of Earliest Axial Coding

Early Axial Coding:

A Process of Spiritual Development

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Group 2 | Development of self/ego
Changes in consciousness
Self/egoic changes in no-self
Difficult adjustment phases
Degrees of difficulties
Toward unification |
| Group 1 | Retained no-ego
Fitting into society
Changes in consciousness
Toward unification |

Sample of Levels of Grounded Theory Analysis Used in Creating One Participant's Story Title

Frequency Coding, In-Vivo Coding, and Early Theme Identification
Toward Participant Story Title:

Journey=3

Eternal Being=1, plus see below

Infinite=9

Self=6 (big S), but most used in discussion of persona/no-self

Being=4

In-vivo coding used AND frequency coding AND early theme identification

everything that you ever thought was right and wrong was no more than an experience of infinite relativity as an aspect of your Being

was silly to ask that infinite being

unbounded state of infinite awareness of myself.

infinite being became relative time and space again

and saw how my infinite nature becomes relatively expressed.

It was my infinite Self experiencing that aspect of eternal reality as all parts of It.

I believe that there's this infinite field that exists as myself, both in the unexpressed and the fully-expressed relative universe and that they balance each other, that the whole thing is one ...Being connected in total silence; and that the core of either side of it is silence.

no more than an experience of infinite relativity as an aspect of your Being

And the infinite potential is anything that *creates* the relative

my life path and took me to this unbounded state of infinite awareness of myself

From demographic survey:

I know my Self as eternal being, simultaneously manifest as the relative universe and unmanifested as infinite potential.

RESULTING TITLE: Brahma's Journey to Self as Eternal Being

Appendix P: Sample Documents: Intra- and Interanalysis of Participant Stories Toward Theory

The Number and Color Codes for Transformation of the Initial Intuitive Inquiry Lenses

KEY:

PL2.

2. **Process Lenses:** No-self as Spiritual Maturation

1. The concept of no-self appears in nondual traditions, in mysticism, and in psychological and spiritual literature. The experience of no-self fits into enlightenment as a process of trans-egoic development beyond the self-centered point of view of the ego and personality toward interconnectedness or Oneness.
2. No-self is a process wherein a person's sense of self dissolves either immediately or over time, and includes experiencing a void, emptiness, dark night, or nothingness.
3. People who are having experiences of no-self as dark night may be in a penultimate stage of spiritual development.
8. Having an experience of no-self and living it out does not mean that a person is enlightened. Mature enlightenment is when there is no flipping in and out of a personal sense of self.

DL 3.

3. **Descriptive Lenses:** The Living Out of the Experience of No-self

4. The initial experience of no-self can be identified by the following marks: ineffability, paradoxicality, divine nature, peacefulness, objectivity, perception of Void or Oneness, and nonspacial/nontemporal quality.
5. People may also go through a process of embodying no-self. Embodiment is a gradual process of the body adjusting to the awakening or initial no-self experience. This can be experienced on emotional, psychological, physiological, and cognitive levels—all of which may affect the life of the experienter.
6. In the living out of the experience of no self, people may experience mild to considerable distress as adjustment to the loss of the sense of a personal self or "I."
7. The experience of no-self may lead to the following positive characteristics: compassion, empathy, and equanimity, and it may result in a deep perception of oneness of all.

FL 1.

1. **Foundational Lens:** No-self is Self

9. Whatever the nature of no-self, whether it is darkness, void, purgatory, unknowing, or even thought, it *is* Love, Buddha nature, God, Brahman, Self, Ultimate Reality, Itself, Himself, Herself.

4. The initial experience of no-self can be identified by the following marks: ineffability, paradoxicality, divine nature, peacefulness, objectivity, perception of Void or Oneness, and non-spacial/non-temporal quality.

THEN LOOK FOR subcategories and qualities of categories and subcategories—in the difference between what comes out of the above analysis and the guiding questions.

Theoretical Lens--Lens #10: There exists latent possibility that theory may emerge out of this study of the experience of no-self.

Sample Selection From One Participant's Story Intra-Analysis Document

<p>Group 4.2.b.ii_R</p> <p>PL2 Seeking to find the One he intuited:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Temporary accessing of no-self/transcending self/sp. seeking PL2 2. No-self as a separate sense self DL3 3. No-self as everything FL1 <p>FL1 → PL2 → DL 3 → FL →</p> <p>PL 2 Paradox</p> <p>FL1 No-self-everything, life, consciousness, mystery, emptiness</p> <p>Illustrating via example</p> <p>Another example—reality vs.</p>	<p>Robert was not raised in a spiritual or religious tradition; however, he became a spiritual “seeker” for many years. He was very involved for years in meditation and Eastern-based practices in the yoga tradition. He sought “to transcend the separate self sense” that was going on “to find that One that [he] intuited.” His seeking led him to a realization that ended seeking, caused him to see the “nature of reality and the nature of the self or no-self,” and ultimately liberated “awake awareness illuminating” all experiences.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><u>Further notes to discuss/compare in advanced memowriting:</u> He was a <u>spiritual seeker</u> for many years/Meditation & Eastern based practices. He sought to <u>transcend that separate sense of self</u> to find the <u>One</u> he intuited.</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No-self is Everything Conceptualized by the Mind as Duality</i></p> <p>Robert provided a multifaceted explanation of the relationship of self, no-self, and Self in explaining his definition of no-self. He described the temporary accessing of no-self as a state, and also clarified how no-self only makes sense in relationship to a self. Nonetheless, his definition of no-self is that it is everything.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No-self is Everything</i></p> <p>Robert revealed the paradoxicality of self and no-self.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I mean, one way to define no-self is that it's everything. [<i>with a laugh</i>] That's what no-self is. Because all there is <i>is</i> everything. And a part of that everything can be the emergence of a sense of self. So, for me, no-self or self are two experiences that life can give rise to. But all along it's just life or consciousness—or the mystery or emptiness—whatever you want to call the unnamable thing that's moving as everything. Call it nature; and it moves as an experience of being separate, and then it moves as an experience of no-separation. It just goes in and out of that obviously. [<i>little laugh</i>] That's kind of what it does—everything is just the productions of that. And so if you use the old classic ocean-wave metaphor, it's like, well, the ocean of life gives rise to seemingly separate waves of existence—of manifestation. And a wave called [Robert] is talking to the wave called Laurel right now. And clearly at one level of experience there's a sense of my life is my life and it isn't your life. I'm not doing your dissertation on this, you are. [<i>little laugh</i>] So there's that level of reality . . . and it's somewhat silly to deny that, for that's one level at which reality is experienced. Sometimes I use the example of—let's talk about physical concrete objects—you know, I'm leaning on a table right now; and at one level of reality this is a hard thing and if I</p>
---	--

quantum potential & the nondual paradox	<p>hit my head on it, it will hurt. But at another level of reality, it isn't a thing at all—it's quantum potential. It hasn't even come into existence at a level of even what physicists would start to try and describe. I mean, it would seem like those would be contradictory: Well, is it something that's hard or is it empty space? <i>[little laugh]</i> Well, it's both.</p>
FL1 No-self as Self,	<p>In other words, no-self is everything moving as everything, no matter what it is called—Life, consciousness, mystery, nature, or emptiness or the unnamable.</p> <p>Further notes to discuss/compare in advanced memowriting: No-self is everything moving as everything, no matter what it is called—Life, consciousness, mystery, nature, or emptiness or the unnamable. Nondual view, paradoxical—everything/nothing.</p>
<p>PL2 More paradox of nonduality Clarifying</p> <p>PL2/FL1 Cognizing: The mind's interpretation of Self and self through no-self KEY QUOTE→</p> <p>PL2 paradox of sense of no-self DL3</p>	<p><i>No-self Only Makes Sense in Relationship to a Self</i></p> <p>Robert further revealed that understanding no-self requires clarification.</p> <p>And so I think that's a little bit of a way to characterize this whole thing of self or no-self. It's the mind, the conceptual mind, which is inherently dualistic; and it thinks dualistically generally—that's how it kind of operates. Well, what is a self? A self only makes sense in relationship to no-self, and conversely no-self only makes sense in relationship to self. Like the mind will go, "Well, either there's a self or there's no-self, right?" But at the level of experience, it feels more like there's a self and there's no self and both of those are happening simultaneously. There's absolutely a sense of individuation, <i>and</i> there's a sense—sometimes more pronounced than other times—a sense that the stuff of life, the phenomena, the arisings of life, the manifestations of life. You and me are arisings of the same fundamental nature and substance; and so they're ultimately not separate. And so that's happening simultaneously.</p> <p>Further notes to discuss/compare in advanced memowriting: What it feels like: At the level of experience, there's a self and there's no self simultaneously. There's absolutely a sense of individuation, <i>and</i> there's a sense of inseparability. Duality of nondualism. See later: 1. Seeking→temporary SOC as self merged with Self or oneness→mind interprets pleasure→seeking; 2. Wondering if mind's interpretation of sense of individuality disappears in some people. He does not have this experience—Later he describes that he's going through as a last gasps of ego process/doing battle with the ego; and 3. for him no-self as Self is liberation from a "fixed view of reality" as being either Self or no-self</p>

Cycle 4 Emerging Themes and Categories

This document shows the emerging themes and categories of FL 1, PL 2 & DL 3 analyzed in the 4 groups of participants (numbered 4.2.a, 4.2.bi, 4.2.bii, 4.2.biii). Note that this was a working document: New themes, categories, and properties of categories emerged out of this analysis, with refinement continuing in Cycle 5 as I wrote the discussion chapter. The final version of this document is reflected in Chapter 7.

YELLOW HIGHLIGHTING: FL1.

1. Foundational Lens: No-self is Self

Oneness-

Void-

Evolving-

GREEN HIGHLIGHTING: PL2.

2. Process Lenses: No-self as Spiritual Maturation

The spiritual seeker – (understanding self as a child- Group A)

Radical Self Dis-identification –

Process –

Acceptance/Surrender process leads to Liberation—see below DL 3

Subject/Object –

Stability of no-self-

Wisdom-

insight-

Intuition/ psychic abilities-

Intelligence-

Liberation-

Love –

Unity consciousness-

Joy-

Compassion/Empathy/kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity, service

DL3.

Descriptive Lenses: The Lived Experience of No-self

The need to talk-

The need to understand-

Experience-

Relationships-

People in general- (also see The Need to Talk/Understand)

Primary relationships-

Spiritual teachers-

The need to understand-

Nothingness

Meaninglessness –

INTEGRATION – (Integration is the most frequently used term among participants)

Embodying
 Distress-
 Meaninglessness??-
 Loss Involved in Realization (vs letting go, which implies a will??)
 non-attachment –
 Letting go – (implies a will??)
 Acceptance/Surrender-
 Acceptance
 Surrender
 dissolution-
 Cognitive & Body (Physiological, Psychological, Cognitive)
 Memory –
 Ineffability –
 Body-mind habit related to Emotion –*ties in with loss of meaning?*
 Witnessing-
 Insight –
 Transcending-
 “An Average Person”?
 What helped—See Chart
 Need for this research – separate document with all quotes

Sample Selection From One Group's Interanalysis Document

Group 4.3.biii

PL2.

2. Process Lenses: No-self as Spiritual Maturation

The spiritual seeker – (understanding self as a child)

Radical Self Dis-identification – AJ (Throughout all of this, his application of “the idea of letting go [and] of living in the moment. . . . totally transformed [his] life.” This philosophy enabled him “to more and more take each day at a time and concentrate on a moment—give up plans and expectations.” This practice is something he’s done “in deeper and deeper levels throughout [his] life.” From age 19 to the present, his inner reality gradually shifted to an inner “sense of no-self.” // AJ said that he is “living the Yin/Yang—embodying it on many different levels, and levels that are surprising.” They are “just so physical and strategic,” but also, “they just are as they are.”)

Moon (. I think that’s what life is for—to practice this letting go of yourself and saying, “What’s the stuff of your life that makes you say that?” And it’s not hierarchical, it’s not logical. It’s very messy, and yet it seems to be an image—this cobweb image, a metaphor for the practice of letting go or allowing a force greater than yourself to form you larger in consciousness.” // GY (GY contextualized the noetic experiences that that she has had “as being part and parcel of “her radical “evolutionary process.” “Now these noetic experiences, which I’ll tell you about, are definitely part and parcel of the whole process I’m outlining here. These experiences are not things that just come out of the blue. They come *into* these situations—all these events that I had to go through. And by definition being noetic, they tap me into a very deep level of who I am, and they give me the capacity to continue on, work the stuff out, come up with a decision, and implement it. All of this is just to put you into the picture of how these experiences come in a pattern that are definitely part and parcel of my whole evolutionary progress. Because I’ve done many things: I’ve been an artist, I’ve been a scientist, I’ve been a nun, and now I’m a writer. [laughs] . . . So that’s just to give you the context of these experiences that I’ve had. I’ve had a lot more experiences besides that, but these are the ones which have made radical changes in my life.” // **Radical self-transformation:** GY stated that the vision and “meeting with Columba” enabled her to pull herself together and to “move out of something [she] had been involved in for thirty years.” She is now living in another part of the United States, she has an income, and she is going to publish her book. GY summarized how the noetic experiences were empowering.)

Process – AJ (“stages of commitment or stages of letting go.” These stages played out in his life through the “landmarks” of getting married, having children, giving up his business career to become a Tai Chi and meditation teacher, and getting divorced. // **Defined life landmarks** as “filling in the details, fitting in more pieces of the puzzle;” so that he *now* embodies and lives Buddhist and Taoist principles and philosophies. // **Letting go of ego:** The stages are his landmarks. From a very early stage, “it was fairly clear to me that the more I tried to look, the less I could find in terms of myself.” // Stage 1 was an “enlightenment” experience of seeing through the solidity of ego. It was a

landmark that “opened up a whole new world” to him with regard to how he could *be* in living his “new life.” Letting go of control/Opening the heart or allowing yourself to be vulnerable. // 2nd stage of letting go, first exper of true love “I wasn’t in control, didn’t want anything, wasn’t in a controlling role, and allowed myself to be in a more open role.” Let go of control. // In the 3rd stage of letting go, he had a series of events happen related to money, which left him feeling “disheartened.” So he meditated for clarity. He let go of expectations and fears about being a teacher.)

AJ (said that he is “living the Yin/Yang—embodying it on many different levels, and levels that are surprising.” They are “just so physical and strategic,” but also, “they just are as they are.” //

Moon (1st Image: Cobweb as metaphor for her life practice of “letting go of herself” and for the messiness of life. // Letting go of self into understanding “another.” And the practice of allowing wisdom to wean me from self into compassion for the other, or no-self, is constantly trying to remember to ask the question of another. “Now, I’m a practitioner. I don’t claim to have accomplished this. I think that’s what life is for—to practice this letting go of yourself and saying, “What’s the stuff of your life that makes you say that?” And it’s not hierarchical, it’s not logical. It’s very messy, and yet it seems to be an image—this cobweb image, a metaphor for the practice of letting go or allowing a force greater than yourself to form you larger in consciousness.” // 2nd Image:

Witnessing: Gazing—Agnes of Prague, teach the sisters how to gaze into nature. // 3rd image: Witnessing: Gazing--Wearing lenses on your heart and on your soul. // 4th image: She went through a period of menopause as a “mess I could not name” She asked, “Where am I in life? Where am I?” Relates to **Letting go of fear**. // 6th & 7th relate to integrating by watching life// 7th image of coming into awareness of no-self: the stages of asking, waiting to allow for the epiphany to happen in its way, and then saying thank you, because if I say anything else I may be grasping.)

GY (Cycles of Noetic Events: IN ALL 4 CYCLES, #1 A TERRIBLE DISASTER HAPPENS TO HER and #2 SHE HAS A VERY POWERFUL DREAM or other noetic experience WHICH HELPS HER GET THROUGH THESE TERRIBLE THINGS. #1 Disaster #2. Moves, Meets guru. Struggling/coping cope with collapse of #1. At end of #2: Big event, out of body exper or dream as confirmation, & gets her looking toward next paradigm. #3. Has to face huge opposition/ huge struggle: Has to make counter-intuitive decision. #4. Faces terrible opposition: Door opens & walks through into a new paradigm. // 1st Noetic Event: Mother died. 2nd Noetic Event: Abused by father; rose above situation & became a medical doctor & gave that up. 3rd: became a nun; left that to become a writer, videographer. Now in this 4th cycle. // GY contextualized the noetic experiences that that she has had “as being part and parcel of “her radical “evolutionary process.” “Now these noetic experiences, which I’ll tell you about, are definitely part and parcel of the whole process I’m outlining here. These experiences are not things that just come out of the blue. They come *into* these situations—all these events that I had to go through. And by definition being noetic, they tap me into a very deep level of who I am, and they give me the capacity to continue on, work the stuff out, come up with a decision, and implement it. All of this is just to put you into the picture of how these experiences come in a pattern that are definitely part and parcel of my whole evolutionary progress.”)

Appendix Q: A Visual Guide to Understanding the Personal Self, No-self, Self Continuum

Participants described awareness of no-self since childhood, or they described gaining awareness of no-self as adults:



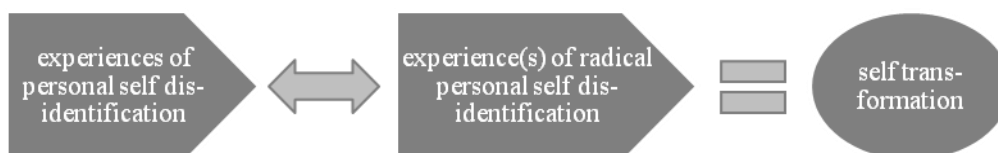
Awareness of personal self, no-self and Self leads to awareness of experiences of no-self, which can be self-transformational:



This self transformation can be thought of as a process called the personal self, no-self, Self continuum:



Awareness of experiences of personal self dis-identification and/or radical personal self dis-identification leads to awareness of self transformation:



The living out of the experience of no-self, including active and passive letting go of ego, leads to a spectrum of distress or no-distress as integration of the experience of no-self.



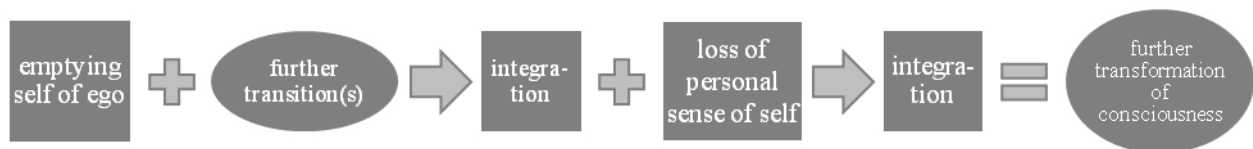
The living out of experience(s) of no-self, as the process of emptying self of ego, leads to integration.



Integration leads to changes in self in relation to the world and changes in consciousness.



Further transition(s) and emptying self of ego—on the self, no-self, Self continuum—leads to loss of ego, loss of sense of personal self, integration, and further transformations of consciousness:



In other words, active and passive letting go of ego leads to transformation of consciousness in a process of emptying self of ego.



Concurrent with this, integration and loss of personal sense of self leads to a liberated sense of personal self, while functional ego remains.



Life and transformations of consciousness allow the self, no-self, continuum to unfold toward unification.



Unification is the process of further enlightenment of liberated personal self as evolvement of Unity consciousness.



Appendix R: Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Geographic location and country	Current relationship status	Degrees earned	Highest level of education	certificates, licenses, titles	Current occupations	Ethnicities
Dave	M	24	West North Central Midwestern United States	Significant other/partner	B.A.	Partial Graduate	n/a	Accounting professional, Computer technician, Spiritual healer	White
Bramha	M	60	West North Central Midwestern United States	Divorced	B.S. M.S.	Partial Doctorate	Conflict mediation	Business mentor, Conflict mediator	American
Ariel	F	70	West North Central Midwestern United States	Significant other/partner	M.S.	Graduate	Marriage & family therapy	Psychotherapist, Spiritual teacher	Caucasian
AJ	M	59	Ontario Canada	Significant other/partner	B.S.	Undergraduate	Chartered accountant; Medical Qigong therapy; Zen Shiatsu therapy; Teacher of Vipassana meditation, Taijiquan, and Qigong	Qigong healer, author, Tai Chi instructor, Manager/Owner of retreat centre, Teacher/workshop leader	Chinese
Moon	F	67	East North Central Midwestern United States	Vowed Religious	B.A. M.A. D.Min.	Doctorate	O.S.F., Sister	Anchoress, Poet, Artist	Scottish Polish American

Name	Gender	Age	Geographic location and country	Current relationship status	Degrees earned	Highest level of education	certificates, licenses, titles	Current occupations	Ethnicities
Robert	M	49	Pacific Western United States	Married	B.A. M.A. Ph.D.	Post Doctorate	n/a	Writer, Musician, Scientist	White
DBear	M	54	British Columbia Canada	Divorced	n/a	Vocational, Some under-graduate	Various technology certificates	Technology consultant	Canadian Scottish New Zealand
Aman Cara	F	41	Pacific Western United States	Single	B.A. M.A. Ph.D.	Doctorate	Creative expression	Creative & musical director, Musician, Artist, Poet, Graphic designer, Creative expression facilitator	Caucasian, Slavic
Doublespiral	F	54	Pacific Western United States	Married	B.A. B.M. M.M. M.S.	Partial D. Min.	Marriage & Family Therapy	Psychotherapist, Life coach, Spiritual director, Author, teacher, Workshop facilitator	None
Leita	F	56	West North Central Midwestern United States	Single	B.A.	Undergraduate	Ministerial	Spiritual Counselor, Transformational musician, Author, President of a publishing company	Jewish

Name	Gender	Age	Geographic location and country	Current relationship status	Degrees earned	Highest level of education	certificates, licenses, titles	Current occupations	Ethnicities
Clara	F	55	Middle Atlantic Northeastern United States	Single	B.A.	Undergraduate		Writer, Entrepreneur, Sales	Black
GY	F	68	Pacific Mountain United States	Vowed Religious	M.B.Ch.B. (British Doctor of Medicine)	Doctorate	Pravrajika (a Swami of the Ramakrishna Order of India); Licentiate of the American Academy of Pathology	Writer, Videographer, Lecturer	Celtic

Appendix S: Participant Spiritual and Religious Profiles

Name	Religious/spiritual tradition and sect/subgroup raised in	Religious/spiritual tradition(s) explored	Current religious/spiritual tradition or spiritual practice
Dave	Jewish: Conservative Reform	Some exposure to Transcendental Meditation	Follows own experience for spiritual growth and connection.
Bramha	Christian: Roman Catholic	Native American, Shamanism, Hinduism, Transcendental Meditation, Spiritualist, Unitarian Universalist, and Wicca/Pagan/Druid	Knows his Self as eternal being.
Ariel Samson	Nonreligious/secular	The way of Adi Da Samraj Waking Down in Mutuality	Waking Down in Mutuality Community.
AJ	Christian: Anglican	Buddhism, Taoism	No formal ties to any religious organization.
Moon	Christian: Roman Catholic	Christianity in the lineage of Francis and Clare of Assisi	Christian in the lineage of Francis and Clare of Assisi; Buddhist, Druid.
Robert	Nonreligious/secular	Eastern-based practices	Nonduality. Studies with Adyashanti.
DBear	Christian: United Church	Hinduism, Advaita Vedanta, Transcendental Meditation, New Thought, Experiential	Spirituality is experiential with Vedic philosophical underpinnings.
Aman Cara	Christian: Roman Catholic	Hinduism, Advaita Vedanta, Christian, Taoism, Buddhism	Does not identify as belonging to any tradition.
Doublespiral	Christian: Presbyterian, New Thought	Buddhism	Buddhist, Atheist.

Name	Religious/spiritual tradition and sect/subgroup raised in	Religious/spiritual tradition(s) explored	Current religious/spiritual tradition or spiritual practice
Leita	Jewish: Orthodox & Reformed	Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Transcendental Meditation	Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Transcendental Meditation, Insight Meditation, Christ Consciousness Meditation, Heart-Centered Meditation, Shaktipat Meditation
Clara	Christian: Presbyterian, Baptist, Moravian, Roman Catholic	Episcopalian, Church of God, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Christian Scientist, Religious Science, Unity, Fundamentalist, Pentecostal, Buddhist, Native American Ceremonies, yoga, Judaism, Gnostic Gospels, Sufism	Has studied and is comfortable with religions and spiritual traditions of many cultures, but doesn't follow any one of them.
GY	Christian: Scottish Presbyterian; Nonreligious/Secular: Atheist, Agnostic; Quaker ¹	Vedanta, Transpersonal Psychology	Calls herself an "independent operator," and follows what she has worked out for herself after thirty years of formal religious life in Vedanta convents, along with childhood training and experience.

¹ GY was raised by her mother (atheist), grandmother (Christian), father (agnostic), and by the Quakers.

Appendix T: Types of Experiences Related to No-self Reported by Participants

Group A: Always Aware of No-self (N = 3)	Experiences That Supported Retention of Inner Sense of No-self and/or That Facilitated Further Enlightenment
Clara	Witnessing/observing and dream journaling helped keep her inner sense of self safe. Life-long awareness of dreams. Meditation. A dream.
Doublespiral	Matrilineal relatives supported psychic abilities, meditation, night-long consciousness in sleep.
Leita	Always inner awareness of no-self perceived as empty/fullness. Life events, spiritual practices, chakra work, spiritual teachers facilitated consciousness shifts. Experiential awareness of interdimensionality of reality, time, & space. Transcending consciousness, meditation. Support of individuals and community.

Group B: Process of Becoming Aware of No-self (N = 9)	Experiences That Preceded, Facilitated, or Helped Integrate Changes in Consciousness Toward Enlightenment
Robert	Realizations: 2 pivotal moments as realization of no-self, and maturing insights as maturation of no-self/ego.
Anam Cara	6 significant moments as realizations of no-self plus 2 events that pointed her being toward no-self. 3 negative teachings. Inviting Jesus into her heart, 1 psychedelic experience, guided meditation, working with 1 particular spiritual teacher. Awareness of psychological maturation.
DBear	3 awakenings: witnessing consciousness 24/7, letting go into becoming Self and Unity. Inner awareness of emotional releasing. Yoga, meditation.
Ariel	Temporary states of no-self: merging with the environment; losing boundaries of body; loss of sense of separate self. Working with a 1 specific spiritual teacher. Witnessing consciousness as transcending self. A series of personal experiences that “dealt a really big death blow” to some of her ego patterns. Heart center awakened and opened.
Brahma	Exceptional human experiences: transcendental music, a triple-consciousness state of Samhita, a non-temporal experience. Transcendental Meditation. Altering consciousness by drumming.
Dave	Judiasm growing up pointed toward “the fundamental core of what it meant to come home or be home or let go” in his process of enlightenment. Integration: 2 phases integral to transition or growth of awareness. Letting go of control, letting go of ego, people to talk about enlightenment.

Group B: Process of Becoming Aware of No-self (N = 9)	Experiences That Preceded, Facilitated, or Helped Integrate Changes in Consciousness Toward Enlightenment
AJ	Buddhist and Taoist literature, attending retreats and practicing martial arts, yoga, and meditation. Embodying the principles of Yin/Yang, Buddhism, and Taoism through stages of life as stages of letting go. Internal application of letting go of control and living in the moment totally transformed his life.
GY	Cycles of noetic events transformed her life. Acceptance of her inner noetic life: it empowered her to make radical, life-changing decisions. Getting rid of ego. Dreams, visions, and spiritual mentors.
Moon	Allowing wisdom to wean her from self into compassion for the other or no-self. Gazing as wearing lenses on her heart and on her soul. Letting go of fear, trusting a “force larger than herself and a love more than ME. Making the 19 th Annotation of the Saint Ignatius Spiritual Exercises; learning to watch the flow of life. Integrating everything that happens in life. Coming into awareness of no-self through the stages of asking, waiting to allow for the epiphany to happen in its way, and then saying thank you.

Appendix U: Spiritual Evolverment—What Helped

Group A: Always No-self	What Supported Retention of Inner Sense of No-self or Facilitated Further Enlightenment and Integration
Clara	Self-acceptance and an inquiring mind helped her to always retain her innate sense of no-self; witnessing and observing; intuition; dreams: dream journaling and a dream discussion group.
Doublespiral	Relatives who validated her psychic abilities; dreams; awareness of kundalini process; TM and various traditions of meditation; a night-long dream experience. Gaining a conceptual framework for what had happened to her regarding the last permanent shift: books, talking to a friend; trust, acceptance, allowing.
Leita	In childhood: immersing herself in the creative arts, and intense study of particular subjects, i.e., Japan, biology, music, Buddhism. People and community as lifelines: people who could understand and/or validate her perception of reality; a community that supported her understanding of reality; working with numerous spiritual teachers, saints, and masters. Gaining conceptual understanding of her perception no-self; a lot of chakra cleaning and clearing work; transcending as witnessing pure silence; scalar wave technology; receiving Shaktipat.
Group B: Process of Becoming Aware of No-self	What Preceded, Facilitated, or Helped Integrate Changes in Consciousness Toward Enlightenment
Robert	Spiritual teachers; witnessing as awareness awaring. Integration of realizations and insights as a process of allowing the conditioned habits of the body-mind to surrender, or accept, versus resisting what is.
Anam Cara	Inviting Jesus into her heart as a child; working with teachers who pointed her being toward unconditional love, the unchanging reality of beauty, no-self, Truth, and ever-present self; meditation; 3 negative spiritual teacher experiences recognized as great teachings; expressing herself creatively through artistic media and writing; books; working with a one particular awakened spiritual teacher, described as “hands off,” for almost a decade; friends to talk to.
DBear	Transcendental Meditation, witnessing the inner observer; taking care of himself; understanding the stages of awakening and finding teachers to help with this; finding a community where he could share his experiences; doing the emotional clearing through the habit of gratitude; letting go of all the concepts and ideas about waking; opening the heart; letting go—allowing versus doing.

Group B: Process of Realizing No-self	Experiences That Preceded, Facilitated, or Helped Integrate Changes in Consciousness Toward Enlightenment
Ariel	Personal attention, direct coaching, and support of one particular awakened spiritual teacher; meditation; consciousness witnessing;
Brahma	Transcendental Meditation. Shamanism and involvement in Native American ceremonies which integrated a deep connection with the environment; participation in the harmonic convergence ceremonies; participating in a Shri Chakra installation ceremony; praying to have love without attachment; letting go of residual belief systems; accepting the loss of identification with the do-er.
Dave	Letting go of control. Letting go of ego. Books; spiritual teachers. A close friend and a meeting group were particularly helpful in integrating the transitions and in finding self-direction. Awareness of Judaism as a pointer toward both being home and toward letting go of all identification with self in his process. Following his heart's desire as a feeling that there's more enlightenment to come.
AJ	Two practices he has practiced at deeper and deeper levels over the course of his adult life—that of letting go and living in the moment, and of taking each day at a time and concentrating on a moment—totally transformed his life and inner reality. Reading Buddhist and Taoist literature, attending retreats, and practicing martial arts, yoga, and meditation.
Moon	She has come into awareness of no-self by letting go of controlling-ego, watching life, integrating everything that happens in life, and by allowing Wisdom to call her forth and to form her—without expectations of where it'll go and what will be the product. Recognition of the stages of gazing, considering, contemplating, becoming. Recognition of stages of inquiry: asking, waiting to allow for the epiphany to happen in its way, and then saying thank you. Psychic abilities. Breathing out the fear. Trusting a force larger than herself and a love more than her.
GY	Noetic experiences enabled her to transcend drastic situations because of revelation of a very deeper level of consciousness in her being. Noetic experiences took the external form of some kind of archetype: Christ, Buddha, Vivekananda, and Columba. Dreams, visions, meditation, 4 gurus, Vedanta philosophy, transpersonal psychology.