

The Seekers Forum Transcript

# Spiritual Energy: What Wakes Up When You Awaken?

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Hello. Welcome to this month's edition of The Seekers Forum. I'm Mark Matousek. Today we're going to be talking about spiritual energy and what it is that wakes up when you wake up. I hope your summer's off to a great start and that all is well in your world.

Today we're going to be talking about enlightenment, lower case "e", and what it is that wakes up in us as we come to recognize our own true nature. How do we change when awakening happens? How can we know when awakening's authentic or merely wishful thinking, figments of our imagination? Finally, how do we use our enlightened awareness to foster wisdom, balance, and compassion in our lives and bring the same into the lives of others?

Let's begin by considering what it is we're looking for when we embark on a spiritual journey. We're looking for the eternal answers regarding god and mystery and who we are that drives seekers throughout the ages.

What do our lives mean? Is there a god or a higher power? Or, are we products of a random unconscious process that replicates life automatically with no concern for its creations? We hunger to know our true self, whatever that might be, and if we're a lasting and intimate connection to the source. We wonder if spiritual awakening can help us to suffer less, to feel more joy, and to get access to something transcendent within us. These questions are ancient and universal.

Since the first ancestor gazed up at the sky from behind the gift of their cerebral cortex, our predecessors have wondered about who we are, how we came here and where we're going. The cortex had given us the ability to not only notice things, but to have thoughts about them and about ourselves in relation to them.

Now we wanted to know what happens after the body dies, whether we continue on in some form or other, whether we have the ability to communicate and to know at levels beyond what we can imagine. To address these conundrums, our forebears created galaxies of stories to help explain this human condition, mythologies filled with gods and saviors. These super powers could solve our riddles for us, they told us. And so faith was born.

But our genius also became our curse, because as the first animals on this planet endowed with self-consciousness, we're also conscious of our own mortality as well, which has only fueled our reliance on stories that talk about rebirth and the afterlife.

The primary purpose of religion after all is to enable us to make sense of ourselves in this vast space without being paralyzed by fear. With our gods and saviors to chaperone us through this veil of tears, we've gotten through the night, so to speak. These mythologies have provided consolation, and this consolation has required most religions to place the divine outside of ourselves, to operate on a faith-based duality and believe in a god that could save us. In ancient Greek theatre, they called it the Deus ex Machina, the magical hand from the sky that rescues us in the nick of time, except, of course, when it doesn't.

At the same time as faiths of consolation have formed, a whole other rigor of wisdom has played on the other side of the world that didn't put god outside of the individual. These were the non-

dual paths that make no separation between us and the divine. Contrary to the idea that we must be saved, non-duality refuses the notion of salvation altogether, with its implication of two different things, a savior and a saved, as if we were not, in fact, both.

Non-dual practice invites the seeker to turn within to find the divine, to practice rigorously to uncover our inherent awakens and goodness and thus recognize that we are not only not separate from god, but that we are god.

With the coming of non-dual spiritual practices, we not only had the consolation spirituality, but we also had what I like to call the confrontational spirituality, which are paths based on confronting our darkness and our muck in order to recognize our true nature. Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, the Socratic Tradition, and mystic schools of all religions, take as their centerpiece the awakened nature of mind and its boundless potential.

Confrontational spirituality does rely on masters and gurus to mirror to students what they are, too. But hierarchy has no place there. The master comes for one purpose only, to reflect back to us what we already are, to kindle the light that is our very essence. They teach us the cosmic joke of it all, which is that the thing that we're looking for is what is looking. In the world of non-duality, our hunger to know god is itself divine. If we didn't have this spark already inside us, we could neither recognize nor benefit from the fire of the master when it appears.

On the spiritual path, this is the single most inspiring truth you can find, that the candle within you is already lit, that you carry this flicker of god inside you, even when you forget it's there. Knowing this, we're connected, even though we have our clay feet, to that essential self that is god. At the end of the day, our humanity rests on the ability to inhabit both realms at once, the physical and the spiritual.

Strictly speaking, they're not separate, of course. Non-dual means not two. But walking these two paths at the same time does require a major stretch. Remembering the divine spark when we're up to our eyeballs in everyday problems isn't easy, which is why we come together in groups like these to remind one another that it's there.

So, what wakes up when we awaken?

The answer is our essential nature. Spiritual practice opens the wisdom I, the part of us that's already awake. This innate intelligence has always been with you, but you can't sense it or know it's there through the chattering of the thickened mind. It gets lost in the babble of cogitation.

That's the thing about the still, small voice within. It refuses to compete. It will not shout over the din. It waits to be invited, for space to be made, for silence. The voice of god waits for sincerity and intention and surrender, and also for us to be humble enough to receive. So then the god within remains ever present but largely unfelt, which is why we need silence and dropping into ourselves to hear that voice of wisdom.

Do you have enough silence and dropping in, in your life? Ask yourself – can you hear the whisper of wisdom inside you?

Can you feel the presence of god wising up, reverberating inside your body when you come into the present moment? Or do you have trouble listening?

Do you barrel through your life as long as possible until you just can't do it anymore? Does your worrying mind burn you to a frazzle in its attempt to wrestle reality into submission? Does anxiety, will, or just plain terror keep your mind in overdrive?

And how does this addiction to thinking itself affect your awareness of the divine spark?

These are very important questions to keep in mind.

I had an experience last week that moved me very deeply. It was during a workshop I led in Prague. I was working one-on-one with a woman who was in a great deal of pain. She was telling me about her life. At sixty-five years old, she felt like a failure, lost, insecure, and desperate to reconnect with something essential inside her that she had lost touch with many years before.

As she spoke, I watched her intelligent greyish eyes searching mine for a silent response as she related her history and her suffering. Once a successful businesswoman, she felt she was losing the light inside her now that she had retired, her soul, as she called it. This light seemed farther away every day, which left her feeling more and more dim. That's the word she used, dim.

I asked her why she believed she was dim, because to me she didn't seem dim at all. Sad and tired, yes; defeated, yes; overweight and less healthy than she might be, yes. But dim, absolutely not. The light within her was blazing. Her mischievous eyes were alive with the desire to understand, to penetrate her darkness, and to come back fully to the land of the living. Her eyes, showed the soul that was full of light (life) and potential, however depressed she was, at the moment.

I assured her that she didn't look dim to me at all, that behind her sadness, I saw her soul glowing. She asked me if I could see her soul. When I told her that I could, it seemed to be the one thing she feared the most, that her soul was dying. When I said it, she started crying and hugging me and thanking me for setting her free.

But I assured her I had done nothing of the kind, that all I had done was say what I could see. But that was enough. It was enough for her to be seen. We sat there together for a minute or so saying nothing. For a moment she had been able to glimpse herself through my eyes and witness by reflection the light behind her own sadness.

This is what we can do for one another when we take the time to stop, to look, and to listen. We help each other wake up just by seeing one another through the eye of god. That eye of god is ours when we bring ourselves into focus. And when this lovely woman left that afternoon, she looked ten years younger, and I felt a little bit younger, too.

That's what wakes up when we wake up, the awareness in us that is self-transcendent, that sees itself from the outside in and that can walk in different realms at once, between the mess and the

mystery. Why god buries herself in the human being, demanding that we learn to reveal her, is the greatest mystery of all. Zoroaster called this the Farvahar, the play of god, hurling herself into matter, into darkness in order to find her way out again. I don't know about that, but I do know for sure that awakening is possible and that it goes on and on and knowing that, changes everything.

That's what I wanted to say to you today about spiritual energy and what it is that awakens in us when we awaken.