

Q&A_6 - Aug 8 #1, 2023

Q: Please elaborate on the topic “tonaloga.”

A: Tonaloga is a composite word like psychology or immunology. In ‘psychology,’ ‘psych’ refers to mind and ‘ology’ refers to ‘the study of.’ In tonaloga ‘tonal’ refers to the manifest world and ‘logia’ is the translated ‘study of’ suffix. It is a study of the alignment of the heart, mind, body and spirit in the mundane (manifest) world.

It’s essentially for self-help, like Don Miguel Ruiz’s *The Four Agreements*; not part of the higher consciousness studies per se. It’s an easy way for people to learn a tool. In the case of the four agreements, the tool was the four agreements. In this case, it’s the four elements that need to be aligned in a human. According to my grandmother, the four are **heart**, **mind**, **body** and **soul (spirit)**. Alignment of these four is essential if you want to move forward in life, frankly. But most people spend most of their lives with some kind of interior conflict, their mind saying two different things at once; them wanting to be courageous but being afraid, them wanting to be disciplined but being lazy, them wanting to have meaning and purpose in their life, but they have no information. Or, people have a broken heart, or their heart is not aligned with any part of the world or with anybody else. You can see how there’s a lot of problems. Tonaloga is kind of like psychology for the 21st century.

This way of looking at things has been around since the beginning of psychiatrists’ DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) IV and trying to put people into diagnostic categories – largely now for insurance purposes, a patently ridiculous, and embarrassing practice. The same thing has been said about the DSM 3, that human beings can’t be put into paper bags with labels on them. There’s no human that’s simple enough to do that with. They all have hearts, they all have minds, they all have bodies, and they all have souls or spirits. And those need to be aligned. Sometimes aligning the body can require medication, sometimes it requires exercise, sometimes it requires just not mistreating your body so much, drinking less.

I learned through experience – not expecting tonaloga to take – that the formulation worked the best when I was trying to empty a residential treatment center or an orphanage, or if I was working with probation officers, social workers, or people who don’t have a particularly psychological mindset. This is a quick, easy, and effective way to start helping take the next step in their life. That is a thumb scale view of tonaloga.

I’ll briefly add that all this is in contrast to the Nagual – the world of the yet unseen, the hidden, the creative, the source of everything.

Q: Could you speak more about what attunement of the soul – or spirit – looks like?

A: We ask a person “what matters to you in life?” People need work that’s nourishing. People need work that has meaning. Some of us are lucky, and we choose professions early that are designed for helping people. We’re very fortunate in many ways, but one of them is that we’re not going to get outdated by the machines like most professionals, writers, and, and white-collar workers are.

For others where the choice has not been made, it depends on their specific circumstances. If you’re dealing with a devout Christian or Muslim, it’s easy. But, if you’re dealing with someone who’s an atheist, or someone who’s never been exposed to religion or spirituality or some of our great books like the Bible, Qur’an, or the Bhagavad Gita – and there’s quite a few out there – the question is not so straightforward.

The 'soul' is a way of coining the larger question of "why are you here?" We ask "What gives you meaning? What do you care about? What matters to you? What gives you energy? What nourishes you?" At the same time, we can't neglect the question "how much does it pay?" because you have to have both, realistically? Getting both can be done, but usually what that comes down to is the human touch on something because the machines can do everything else, and they will do everything else.

I'd like to add one other feature of the model of tonal attunement – which is both an ancient model and a modern one since I brought it up in the 90s during which it took like wildfire in the children and family mental health and social services organization I was in.

For purposes of diagramming attunement, we color code the four aspects. **Red is the heart**, **blue is the body**, **yellow is the soul**, and **green is the mind**. This is mainly for social workers, but psychiatrists, psychologists, and lay people can map folks out. You draw out the reciprocal connections or relationships in someone's life, and then you can understand what their interpersonal and inner life is like. This is usually done with a kid or a young adult but can be done with older adults as well. Eventually you can read them like x-rays.

Q: Could you elaborate on "mind-to-mind transmission?"

A: Years ago, I didn't believe a word of it. I confronted a very smart, trained, American teacher who had studied in China and Japan. I confronted him publicly, with the proper tone of voice, saying,

"Sir, how would you explain mind to mind transmission to a neuroscientist?"

He looked at me and said something along the lines of "I'm not sure that I'd try."

And so, I said, "well, how can it happen? How is it even possible? What's the theory? There's nothing in psychology that says that any of this is possible."

He then said, "what's missing in their analysis is the central core, the most essential element, and that it's transmitted through Love, on Love, as a kind of a frequency."

I thought that was at least nuts-ish. I respected the guy too much to think he was just crazy, but I was skeptical.

Later on, I was at an initiation or ceremony, some large gathering. I was going to see the Dalai Lama. They were initiating us in the Green Tara in preparation for something I don't remember. They made us swear – and I did swear – though I didn't know what it meant at the time. It bothered me to do so because I don't do things like that. But I thought, "this is the Dalai Lama, these guys are Buddhist. I'll just go along with the program. It's just words."

The prayer was the Bodhisattva prayer, and in the next couple of days there was a ceremony. I didn't understand anything, but it was clear that something different from what I knew before was going on, because they had spent a couple of days preparing with gorgeous, incredibly powerful Tibetan rituals and chanting. I don't know how many lamas there were, but there were enough to fill up the place with these gorgeous, Tibetan chants. I mention all this because these are all the contaminating factors to keep in mind.

The Dalai Lama then goes into some state, speaking in Tibetan. His eyes go crossed. And then – and this is I guess my projection – his eyes uncross and he's looking at me directly (I'm just off center in the second row). *Directly*, that's how I feel. Then his eyes cross

again, and he's back into this altered state which has taken him quite a while to get into. I start thinking "this must be mind to mind transmission." I figure I'm going to go home and keep my mind open and be receptive. I do my best, anticipating. Nothing happens. I go "so much for that," and continue with my practice. Within two weeks I woke up (moksha, satori, kensho, small 'e' enlightenment).

Admittedly, I had been preparing, studying, and working hard for some time. There are plenty of other things I could attribute waking up to. Nobody should think that if they want to wake up, all they have to do is go touch the hem of the Dalai Lama's robes or have him bless their scarf or mala. But, to learn from him is something special. And, I didn't learn verbally, Tibetan isn't my language or my culture. Instead, I learned what it was like to be in the presence of a highly evolved human being. That's something anybody can feel. The whole hotel was glowing. I recommend it tremendously to everybody. If you can get the Dalai Lama in a venue of less than, say, 500 people – which can't really be done these days – I highly recommend it. There's something that that man has that can't be denied by anybody, including hardcore atheist scientists. You must experience it first, and then decide.

As for the way all of this works, the mechanism part, that's debatable. The Naqshbandi Sufis have a technique, and the Tibetan Buddhists have their own. Zen in further East has its techniques. Many of these have been developed over literally more than a thousand years, and some of them are still here and they're still working. To ignore those because "we're Americans. We're the ones who know science and the mind. We have top notch psychologists and we studied Freud." It's all so arrogant and it breaks my heart at what is lost.

I'd like to add here something I learned from a man who was wonderful. One of the hardest things in this whole enterprise is finding a good teacher. Back in the day a good teacher required a good translator. It was difficult to set up. Now you can go on YouTube and there's effective people there who teach. Two people I've discovered are Alan Wallace (who I knew before but is online now) and Lama Lena. Alan Wallace is the guy whom I asked, "what is this 'emptiness' thing?" He is an exceedingly rare scholar who is also well woken up and moving along. He's on YouTube teaching up a storm in English.

Then there's this woman, Lama Lena. After just 15 minutes of one of her YouTube videos, I saw she was the real thing, also in English. She's delightful and she's a good teacher in English. People need to know about these folks.

Q: You have mentioned a "new way of looking at Mandala practice." Can you say more?

A: I got this from Lama Lena. She's presenting a prayer from a Rinpoche or other teacher I've never heard of. She's explaining the prayer in Tibetan fashion, laying the prayer out, then giving a commentary, and continuing like that (a beautiful way to teach). As she's continuing this teaching, she pauses to say that they are going to use the word "mandala differently."

The way they're going to use it is to mean that a mandala is everything (manifest)¹. In her way of speaking then, a mandala includes the oak tree, the pine trees, the elms, the cacti, the flowers, the sky, the clouds, the roof, the room, the trees, the flowers, the outside, the body, a nose, and so on. And so, this is mandala practice of a different sort. It is a great one because you can do it 24/7, as long as you do it in your sleep too, which you should. That

¹ One of the advantages of having done Ngöndro practice is that when a teacher says one of the words like "mandala", it evokes a conditioned response – good and powerful, not bad like much other conditioning – in the listener. For scholars reading this, getting the etymology of the word "mandala" would be wonderful. Also, Thomas Cleary's books were described as a mandala.

mandala practice, coupled with the mala practice – I wish I had known about that, because that's going to be powerful.

I'm going to add that to the list of intermediate practices. It is simple but you have to know a bit to understand what she's talking about. It is very useful. It also teaches us a wonderful lesson. Some American woman from the northeast finds the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. She takes it seriously and she's an intelligent woman. She absorbs it, starts teaching it, and sure enough, she brings us technologies that we never had before – or at least I never had, and I've never heard anybody speak about. That's what this is about. I've spent a lifetime studying all this stuff and so I have information that could save people a lot of time. There's a lot of dark alleys to walk into and blind fakes to walk behind. You can too easily find on the internet unilluminated fakers – lots of them and some you wouldn't expect.

Q: Could you comment on the 'five clusters' as they are used in the Avatamsaka Sutra – and how they may relate to the mandala practice you just described? Here is what Thomas Cleary has to say about the 'five clusters' in the glossary of his Avatamsaka translation:

“Components of living beings: Matter (physical form), sensations, perceptions, (mental) conformations, consciousness. Traditionally, this analysis is made for contemplation purposes, especially to convey the sense that the psychophysical being is not an irreducible unity, and to provide a framework for meditation on the emptiness of the ideas of self, soul, person, and individual life. They are called “grasping clusters” as long as they are characterized by clinging and attachment.”

A: First, I would like to reiterate to people that you are preparing a recording of the Avatamsaka Sutra in part for people to listen to and watch. This way people can watch or listen to it in addition to reading it.

Now for the passage. Gorgeous. Beautiful text. Let's treat the last three or four sentences independently and discuss the clusters first. I believe this concept is called 'Skahanas' or something like that in Sanskrit. These are usually obstacles for people, and the word 'concepts' should be substituted for 'conformations.'

Physical form is matter. Sensations and perceptions are distinct somewhat, but the difference is detailed and not particularly important here to go deeply into. These are the info you get from senses, memories. Concepts (conformations) are your ideas about things, including memory and judgements. Consciousness (with a small 'c') is the mind (small 'm'), including thought, memory, fantasies about the future, desire, and so on.

Together, these paint the entire picture of mental activity or mentation. We hold onto these things, become attached to them. As hard as it is to believe, you're dreaming your body just like you're dreaming the world, just like you dream anything in a conventional nightly dream. People think the two are different, that when they're asleep there's no consciousness. But, when we go to sleep there is consciousness, you're just not aware of it. The transducer is off because you're sleeping, but neurobiologists know there is still plenty of activity going on. People often ask, “what's your one opinion that everyone else in the world would disagree with you on?” I always say, “consciousness does not arise in the brain.” I made a post on X to this effect and in 12 hours got no response. Usually within that time for an opinion like that I would receive someone, anyone as is the case online, willing to slap someone around intellectually. I received none.

Q: In Carlos Castaneda's books describing his saga with Don Juan, Don Juan describes the "four natural enemies of a man of knowledge." The four are fear, clarity, power, and old age.

A: To clear up terms, Don Juan's 'man of knowledge' is like Taoism's 'Real Man.' First, it's important to mention that some people will never respond to the Tibetans or Buddhists, but will fall all over themselves for Curanderismo and the Nagual or Shamanism, a big fad in the U. S. Second, an important point on books is that there's some books pay you \$100,000 to read them, and others will cost you \$20 and some time, if we were to put things in monetary terms. Along this vein, popularity and effectiveness (not just of books) are almost completely inversely related, with few exceptions (*The Four Agreements*). Going crazy for a popular guru and switching with every new fad (back in the day with Scott Peck as a teacher and then Deepak Chopra 10 years later) is a huge mistake. You could inadvertently follow a wrong guru for ten years, and even one year is too much. More often than not the guru isn't leading anywhere and may just be working out some neurotic problem that he has. The people that are attracted to this are the most gullible, who get taken advantage of.

Fear has to be overcome. Sooner or later, you're going to face some sort of challenge or abyss. You're going to have to stand up on your own two feet and fight or jump or fly for yourself. This work does take courage. It's fascinating that this is something that the Tibetan Buddhists never mentioned, but it could be because of their culture. To them it may not be scary to jump into a space they've never been and encounter less superficial matters deeper in consciousness. Fear (or courage) actually could be a paramita, but it would make a big mess. It could be a secret paramita for people that are further along in the way.

Clarity. Don Juan describes this as an enemy but it works both ways. You need clarity or you can't read a book; you can't understand what someone is saying. Your mind glazes over things and you give up. Once you've overcome fear, then you will have much more clarity. If you wake up, you gain much more clarity, though you will obviously be limited by your human – animal – brain.

Power. Power is like clarity, also useful but the pitfalls are obvious. Look at Bush, or Biden. The examples are endless.

Death (old age) will come before you're ready for it. There are things that should be done in this life – in your life and my life – that hopefully you've done, because you don't want to live a life, especially the last parts of it, in misery and regret. I will tell you now it is the things we didn't do more so than the mistakes we made that we regret. There's a hard limit on this process. Americans have a hard time with this. They say "I'll just do it when I'm 50 or 60 or 65." No, you can't do this work after a certain age and the Sufis are much more willing to say it out loud than others. You're not going to make any progress after a certain point. For those who delay like this, the most any of us can do is hold their hand, pat them on the back, tell them not to be too afraid of death and to remember their Bible studies. It's regrettable that these people don't have peace at the end of their life. So, if you want peace at the end of your life, you're getting warned now. You're going to have to do some preparation for it, and it doesn't matter what age you are. It's not too early to start if you're hearing this. I speak from the experience of an old man. I can tell you that people aren't joking with the things they say of old age, sickness, and death. If you're prepared, the most any of us can do is hold your hand, pat you on the back, and tell you not to be too afraid of death.

It is helpful to know that the most devastating things can happen to you, but if you're rooted in the Way, it won't disturb you. For example, you may have the disturbance of having to pack up your home and run away from an enemy, or kill a few soldiers on the way out, or whatever will be served on you in your life. In the final analysis, however, none of this is of

concern because you're not really of this world. Jesus put it the same way when describing his relationship with the world.

Q: Can you explain further how clarity can be an enemy of a man of knowledge?

A: Clarity can easily be the enemy of a man. Take Carlos Castaneda – the man Don Juan is speaking to. Carlos is perfectly clear. He “knows” his role is to perform anthropology work, to take notes and learn about plants. But then he realizes that his role might be something else, to learn about consciousness and use it for his PhD thesis or whatever he’s working on. He changes aims frequently, always certain and clear about things, always wrong. If a thinking man is certain in an unwarranted way, it can ruin him – especially if he is a serious man.

One last comment on the Sufi tradition in juxtaposition to the Toltec one described before: for Muslims, I don’t know why they wouldn’t go all the way. You need to be a Muslim to be a real Sufi. More than that, you need to be an exceptional Muslim. More than a few Muslims have made it the whole way on this journey and Muslims have everything they need right there within their religion, something I can't say for Christianity at this moment. That is, unless you're part of one of their special enterprises, in which they unfortunately put you away so that others don’t get too many ideas.

Q: You mentioned doing an awareness practice 24/7, even during sleep. Are you referring to lucid dreaming?

A: I'm trying to signal the power of intent. If you're going to take on that practice – or any practice – and you're serious about waking up quickly, then you have to have the right intent. If what matters to you is dharma and you are intent on it during the day, then you will dream of dharma. This is because your brain is actively working on it, trying to solve problems. I’m no expert on the mandala practice I mentioned, but I can tell it’s going to be useful. There are other practices, “stopping and seeing” for example.

But, for the 24/7 matter, the idea is that when you get up in the morning, your first concern is “I have to try this.” You're saturated, your brain's saturated, and then your dreams get saturated. Thus, lucid dreaming becomes much easier. When your intent is strong, pure, and crystal clear in your own mind, then you can learn and learn to See.

Q: What would you recommend Lucid Dreaming for? If somebody is interested in lucid dreaming, what resources would you recommend?

A: For me, there's only one rationale for lucid dreaming as a praxis and that is to find out the Truth. Everyone should explore the Truth for themselves, and no one else can do your dreams for you. People do lucid dreaming for spills, chills, and excitement. People do it to boost their ego. People do it to stretch themselves. People do it because it's cool. These are all fine preoccupations but they’re just that, preoccupations. The search for Truth isn’t.

There was a man named Boltzmann who believed that perhaps there isn’t a real world; perhaps we are a brain in a vat in emptiness and this world is all dreamt up. He said

this 130 years ago. Today the question remains: to what extent could this world right now be a dream? As far as I'm concerned it is a dream – it's at least more like a dream than anything else. You can't grasp it and if you try, you're going to just suffer.

I see a world just like this when I lucid dream. I dream and maybe I see a stick. It looks, feels, and acts just like a stick in “real life.” I take the stick and hit a bell, now I hear a sound in my lucid dream. Everything I dream up has solidity, color, I can hear sound, and so on just like in this world. It would be wonderful I think if a lot of anesthesiologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, neurologists, and scientists in general, grew up and did this basic work on consciousness. We're a laughingstock to have gone on this long and not have even consulted other cultures who have been exploring this for millennia compared to our 150 years. It is arrogant not to do even basic research like this. You should do it not for entertainment but for education and proof.

I have no problem stating, in my direct experience, that this world is certainly a dream, and has the same characteristics as a lucid dream. There's nothing that lasts. There's nothing I can grab on to. There's no foundation or fundamental I can rely on. I'm a scientist, for God's sake, give me something. The best they can do is light and a few numbers. I admire these scientists to the end of the earth. But we're going beyond the end of the earth. We have to be more creative and rigorous.

Along this vein, scholars for dollars are bad for two reasons. One is they're not doing Science. Two is they're taking the resources away from people who are. They get credit for work that is many times stolen. The credit itself isn't the important issue. What is an issue is that none of this work has been done by anybody that I know of. Even LaBerge from Stanford, with all the time he put into lucid dreaming, wasn't interested in this stuff – at least not 20 years ago.

The Tibetans have dream yoga. I'm sure something similar is done by the Sufis, although I don't know the details. My strong recommendation – especially if you don't want to meditate or don't want to do all this other stuff – is to at least do this. Check it out for yourself and find out: can your brain create a world? Can your brain create other people and things out of nothing? My answer is yes, but that's my answer. In this science, there's only one lab. That lab is your own mind, your own heart, and your own spirit. We can discuss techniques for lucid dreaming another time (perhaps in a space on X).

Q: When teaching or coaching, how do you perform a diagnostic after someone has read a book to understand where they are and how to help them develop further?

A: A lot of things are made unnecessarily complicated. A lot of teachers and gurus in the past obfuscated this knowledge, and we can't have that anymore. We don't have time. It's too important.

Most people write books because they want to be famous, gain money, or because they want to be able to put it in their CV. That's all fine, but not part of this work. Certain books are written for a different reason. These books, in the right hands, can be immensely useful. For example, let's say you give a book to a child – maybe *The Four Agreements* to a 12–15-year-old – and they're loving it. They're responding well, so you give some Native American stuff to them next – maybe some of Castaneda's work. Let's say the kid doesn't like it, says “I'm not into that.” Then, the next book you give them might be sci-fi or something up their alley. You consider how that book worked out for them, how they responded to it. Some books are accepted by almost everyone, some are not. If you

recommend a book and they have nothing but negative things to say, then you know not to go down that path.

This all depends on the would-be learner. For example, let's say we're recommending a book to someone. We recommend a Christian or Sufi text mentioning ceremonial wine maybe 6 times throughout. They happen to be an alcoholic craving a drink. They read and you ask them how they liked it, and they say, "you know, that book – all it did was remind me of booze; that book is just a book about booze." Well, you know how that person is primed and where you went wrong.

Our goal is to try to help people, not to promote books. We're trying to get people the information they need, and it's hard. But it was harder in the 20th century than it is now with the new tech. Luckily now the problem is in presentation and choosing the right content, rather than having content (or finding it) to begin with. This all requires expertise which can be cultivated. It's important I get this information out to people before I die, because if I don't, the people who need it could waste years and years – literally.

One more thing on reading: some folks don't want to read in the beginning. You can honor that. If they can get far enough along to where they can start Mala practice, Mantra practice, and Mandala practice – those three – that would probably work. There's a lot of ways to move along. Some other ways require some fairly smart and very dedicated (to the right thing, mind you) folks.

Many people don't have an attention span. You ask them if they ever had one and these days it's all too common for them to say "no, I never developed one. It's always been a problem. I've got ADHD, so I can't read any books. And I don't read anything more than two paragraphs, because I'm not just a normie like you. I'm autistic." These people demand that you change the teaching to suit them. Of course, we fit the teaching to the learner, but with many people the problem isn't one of fit, but one of them not having energy or real discipline or any real motivation. It's a real tragedy.

Q: *Please explain the difference between small 'e' enlightenment and big 'E' Enlightenment, as well as the "getting rid of all concepts in a flash" described in the below excerpt you posted to X:*

"This Mind is no mind of conceptual thought, and it is completely detached from form. So Buddhas and sentient beings do not differ at all. If you can only rid yourselves of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything. But if you students of the Way do not rid yourselves of conceptual thought in a flash, even though you strive for aeon after aeon, you will never accomplish it. Enmeshed in the meritorious practices of the Three Vehicles, you will be unable to attain Enlightenment. Nevertheless, the realization of the One Mind may come after a shorter or longer period. There are those who, upon hearing this teaching, rid themselves of conceptual thought in a flash. There are others who do this after following through the Ten Beliefs, the Ten Stages, the Ten Activities and the Ten Bestowals of Merit. Yet others accomplish it after passing through the 10 stages of a Bodhisattva's progress."

A: Small 'e' enlightenment is waking up, kensho, moksha, satori, true self-realization. Big 'E' Enlightenment looks completely like an act of God. We're talking about those like Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, and others – the vast majority of which don't make themselves known.

So, when you're at the grocery store or anywhere, you could be standing next to a saint there. You'll never know because they're not in it for your approval.

As for the quote, it is remarkably clear. The confusing word here is “everything.” When you reach the other side, “everything” really means “everything.” When you reach the other side the world appears here, but you are not of it. You are, at the very least in terms of words and concepts, of the cosmos. When you enter that state, it's sudden and your life has changed forever. It could also occur along the 10 stages, or it could occur even if you haven't heard of the 10 stages. This author is a Zen Buddhist and he's talking to a particular audience of serious people. They showed up for Zen, which was arduous back in the 17th century. But it was more popular and more accepted. Beyond what I've said, it's impossible to describe the other side except to say that everything's there, nothing's missing; but also nothing is there, especially thoughts and concepts.

If you start indulging in thoughts or concepts in that state, it's going to collapse. This is because you're blocking it; you're blocking the sun, the light of consciousness, with thoughts and concepts, even if this doesn't make sense. As for the gradual part you mention – the 10 Stages – any Buddhist of Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, or the Middle East would be familiar with the Ten Stages as stages of human development. We come up with shallow, puny theories of human development that are skin deep at best. I'm not trying to fault anybody, people have given it a lot of effort, philosophers for example. But there's nothing more to be said about the other side and Reality until you're talking about the other side *from* the other side.

Over there, things are different. There's only one thing and knowledge is not a problem. Power is not a problem. Understanding is not a problem. Keep going. That's what I have to say. Whatever urgency or fervor or passion you hear in my voice, I would love to give it to everybody that I love and care about, as well the ones I don't care for and my enemies. Animals already have it, or at least their version of it. They don't get into trouble with the mind and concepts, so they're much more able to accord with the Way. We get tangled up in theories and laws and words and more that, on the other side, makes no sense, except in a strange wistful, melancholy way. Some of the theorizing and philosophies make a small amount of sense but honestly, who would want to read that stuff?

Q: Books can be psychoactive and provide transmission. Do you lose some of this element when you read a PDF as opposed to a physical copy?

A: It's subtle, and I can't be sure. You have to find this out for yourself. For now, I will say that it does not feel the same to read on an iPad as it does to take out a physical copy of a good book written by an enlightened master. I may be conditioned toward books, but in my experience the answer is yes, especially for some specific books. And, great authors of a certain ilk, I'm thinking of the Sufis, take great care in how their books are presented. They care immensely for things like the table of contents, whether and how chapters are presented, what order topics are presented, what images are being used and how, and other things many of us cannot appreciate.

Don't make the mistake – because I did – of thinking these guys get sloppy with their work or their words. They do not. In my entire perhaps 20 years of study, I've never seen them misplace as much as a word. So, I think the layout of the book is important, and more so for some books than others. Also, some books really should be listened to, like the Avatamsaka Sutra. The beauty of the melody, cadence, and effect of the words is astonishing and has an effect, literally broadening the mind like a flower in bloom.

All this to say that the answer to your question depends on the book, and the person. But, for serious students there are some books for which you should really get the original, physical copy of. There are maybe 10 of these. Also, they're going out of print, and it will be a real tragedy for humanity if they're lost. We've got something like 5% of the Library of Alexandria? It would be nice to have 6% or more. Treasures like this are stolen, there are book burnings, libraries fall. Publishing houses discontinue things, and we lose knowledge. It has happened countless times. I don't say that physical copies are necessary to many people because for most people it won't matter. But for serious students, it can and it does for some books.

Q: Can you speak on the balance of compassion and emptiness? Over the past few months with this work, I have become much more attuned to the wildlife around me – plants and insects, animals and so on in addition to my increased understanding of other people. I'm still new to this orientation in the world.

A: Welcome to the family. It's a nice world out there, incredibly alive. It's all real. I really love dogs, and sometimes feel rude giving a dog more attention than its owner. Sometimes I even feel dread when I see a dog and then look up the leash to the owner, because you can tell how an owner's doing from how the dog is doing – which is not very well now and again. Dogs are very extraordinary creatures, and I don't know if we would have survived without them. We certainly would not have evolved without them.

Going deeper, you can see from the other side that the dog is you and that the person is you; the tree over there is you and everything around is as well. You see the preciousness, the sacredness, and the unspeakable beauty of this dream – how this is a dream to end all dreams. You'd have to invent an entirely new cosmos to get more interesting than what we have here. And who knows? Maybe you will. I don't know, but all the boundaries you saw before go away. Everyone is you. Everyone is your brother, your sister.

More specifically, on balancing and emptiness compassion. These are words and their meanings are lost in translation to English. On that point of translation, I'd like to say a word here about Coleman Barks. He has made millions of dollars off the backs of Sufis, in particular, Rumi, may peace be upon him. He has butchered Rumi's poetry, putting Rumi's name on it. His translation has nothing to do with Rumi and nothing to do with Islam. It has everything to do with Coleman Barks. And honestly, I like Coleman Barks. But this is a crime. At least two generations are going to grow up thinking that Rumi is at the level of Coleman Barks. In reality, Rumi makes Coleman Barks look like a sea slug out in the ocean. You don't compare those two things. To do what Barks has done willfully, openly, and to just lie – it needs to be called out at some point. He's filthy rich now. More power to him. But people need to know that his stuff has nothing to do with Islam, with Sufism, or with Truth. Not to mention it's poor poetry unless you're inclined to hysterics. Sure, for those so inclined it can be fun. The indulgence shouldn't take more than six months, a year for really bad hysterics.