

The Eckhart Tolle School of Awakening

Session 1

Eckhart Tolle

SIBYL CHAVIS: Good morning, and welcome to the *Eckhart Tolle School of Awakening*. My name is Sibyl Chavis, and I work with Eckhart Teachings. And we are so glad that you'll all be joining us for these next five months together with Eckhart and Kim. And I wanted to say a very special warm welcome to all of our alumni from the very first program, the very first Eckhart Tolle School of Awakening, and of course, a warm welcome to all of the new participants that are joining us.

An interesting little tidbit of information-- you all have joined us from over 67 different countries. We literally have students from all over the globe. We've hit every continent, and it's so great to have you here.

I wanted to just give you some housekeeping items before we bring Eckhart to our stage. And the first is that I've seen many of you in the chat, and it's great to see you all talking and connecting. But during the main stage events, we're going to have the chat turned off, and that'll be reopened during the break.

If you do have any technical questions or you need anything else, you can just reach out to soa@eckharttolle.com. You can email. There will be folks there answering questions throughout the entire event. And again, that's soa@eckharttolle.com.

Also during the break, we'll be taking questions for both Eckhart and Kim. And so, when you're on the Main Stage tab, you'll see in the Chat section there's a tab that says Slido. And you can put your questions there that will be submitted. And if you can just indicate if your question is for Eckhart and Kim, we'll be able to bring those questions in. And then Eckhart and Kim will be choosing questions that will be answered throughout this weekend.

And with that, it is time to begin. And I'm so, so glad to be able to introduce-- and I hope you all will join me in a warm welcome for Eckhart.

ECKHART TOLLE: Thank you, Sibyl. And welcome, everybody, wherever you are, here in the present moment. It's a retreat, a virtual retreat. What are you retreating from? You're retreating from the world, but more importantly, your mind. Stepping back from the mental noise.

So, we are proceeding slowly because we are not in a hurry to get anywhere right now. And if your mind says, "When is he going to start our meditation?" you know better. You know it started already.

Meditation not as an activity-- no matter how spiritual or esoteric that you are engaged in-- but meditation as the realization of something that's already here, not something that you need to achieve.

So, you're not here on our retreat or the course to become enlightened-- or whatever word you want to use, fully awakened, although it is about awakening. You're not here to become anything, to become anything other than who or what you are already. Not who or what you are as a historical person but who or what you are in the essence of your being.

So, that's a timeless dimension. You can't get there because getting there implies time. You need time to get anywhere. But to discover something that's already here, you don't really need time for that.

So, I wanted to-- in case you don't know already-- to remind you that an important part of this session is the spaces between the words. Easy to overlook because the spaces between the words

are not interesting. The mind looks for something interesting it can analyze or identify with, incorporate. But there's something deeper than interesting. So, paying attention to the little gaps is important.

Why? Because every time you pay attention to the gaps between the words, you're not thinking. You're just aware. Because in the gap, there's nothing to think about. There's no content. There's only space.

So, that's the essence of our session here. And eventually, you realize that is also the essence throughout the course. That's to do with that dimension of consciousness that is already deep within you but is, for most people, habitually overlooked because the mind, the thinking mind, usually absorbs all your attention. And you look for yourself in the realm of thought-- mental image of who you are. And we want to discover a dimension that's deeper than that.

So even now already, if you're able to just be here and to give attention not only to the words but also to the gaps between the words-- and particularly to the gaps between the words-- then you're already in that state of awareness or Presence, which is sometimes called "Stillness." Inner Stillness.

I saw a book on my bookshelf this morning-- a little book called *Stillness Speaks*. Apparently, I wrote it-- it says Eckhart Tolle on here-- a few years ago, but of course in the present moment.

Now, this is a little book of meditative reading. And all you need, ultimately-- you don't need to buy the book. If you don't have it, you can buy it. But all you need is to understand the first two or three sentences, the first little entry. Then, that's it.

And it says, "When you lose touch with inner Stillness, you lose touch with yourself. When you lose touch with yourself, you lose yourself in the world. Your innermost sense of Self, of who you are, is inseparable from Stillness. This is the I Am that is deeper than name and form." That's it.

Your innermost sense of who you are is that Stillness. And "Stillness" is just a word or pointer that we can use to point to it. There are many other pointers we can use. The word is not it. It's a signpost.

Stillness. What is Stillness? Stillness could be, on the one hand, the absence of movement, as in the sense of sitting still. Sit still. I'm sitting still. So, it's the absence of movement. Stillness could also be the absence of noise. It's very still here-- little noise or no noise.

So, it can either be-- Stillness can be defined as the absence of movement or the absence of noise. But it's always defined, it seems, negatively. To define Stillness, you have to point out what it is not.

So it's the absence of movement, not only external movement. External movement is secondary. Primarily, for our purposes, Stillness is the absence of movement in the mind. And the movement in the mind is mental noise, the continuous stream of thinking. So, you can see how it applies to the inner dimension.

It's the cessation of movement in the mind, the cessation of mental noise, the voice in the head. And that is a dimension-- and again, it's important not to want to bring this about in you but to discover that it is already in you. When you pay attention to a silent space, like now --without needing to fill it up with something.

So, your innermost sense of who you are, it says, is inseparable from that Stillness. Your innermost identity, sense of being, of I Am, that is the I Am that is beyond name and form. Those two are often used together in Sanskrit, the ancient teachings of India. *Namarupa*. Name and form, which is the surface-- your surface identity. Who are you, or who am I beyond name and form? My name and my form. Physical form. Psychological form.

The personality is your psychological form that you carry around with you. With all its likes and dislikes and opinions and all kinds of things that make up the personal sense if identity, which is fine. It has its place on the surface of being. It lives there on the surface of being.

In the same way that a ripple lives on the surface of the ocean, you, as the personality, live on the surface of being for a little while. And then suddenly, the ripple is no more as a ripple. But then, another ripple appears. But the ripple was never separate from the ocean. It just thought it was until it awakened to its essence identity or to its deeper sense of being, or Beingness. And that's the liberation from the illusion that all you are is nama and rupa, name and form. That's the only true liberation.

You become liberated from yourself. [LAUGHS] The burden of yourself. Because it is a burden that you carry around. You are, as a Self, you are so problematic. There's no Self that is not problematic. I'm problematic as just the Self. I'm also problematic. There are problems, all kinds of things.

But the more you realize the essence of who you are, the less important the problematic Self becomes. And also the problems of the problematic Self lessen. They become lighter. Some of it remains because you remain as a person, a personality.

So, you have the two levels: you as a person, and you as consciousness. But they are not ultimately separate. Consciously, the namarupa-- name and form-- are temporary manifestations, forms that the consciousness has taken. Every life-form is a life-form. It's not life. Life is inseparable from consciousness, manifests in different vibrational frequencies. From the mineral, to the plant, to the animal, to the human is consciousness or life manifesting in different vibrational frequencies.

So, mineral comes first. One could call that consciousness that's totally asleep. [LAUGHS] But there is a life there too. Even in the mineral, the stone, there is Inherent in it. There is life. It's an infinitesimal degree of consciousness that *you* have.

But even the physicists, they go deeply into a mineral. When you go deeply into the mineral, you discover that it is not dead. It looks dead when you touch it or look at it. It looks like a dead-- well, the word that's used is "inanimate," which means not animated. Inanimate means it is not animated. So, when you look at a stone or a mineral, you hold it, and it is called inanimate.

But it's not really devoid of-- it is animated. It has life. Physicists find that when they go deeply into the most atomic molecular structure of a stone, they discover it's intensely alive. It's in constant movement. The molecules, the atoms are in constant movement, even in a so-called inanimate object. [CHUCKLES] And that is consciousness alive at its most rudimentary manifestation.

And then gradually, life begins to express itself more fully. That's possibly how it started on the planet. At first, there was the planet. It was just rocks and stones. And then something happened. And the first little green whatever it was when it first started in the ocean, the first life-forms appeared.

Suddenly, life began to appear at a slightly-- considerably higher frequency because the shift from so-called inanimate-- which isn't inanimate-- to animated life-forms. There's a huge transition there from a stone to something that is alive in a different way that's more recognizable to us. And then, you got plant life. And you got animal life. And then, we have an added-- very important added dimension in humans, which is the mind.

And so, this is a higher dimension of frequency, or frequency of consciousness. And then so, you have the mind, and now there is the possibility of realizing that which is beyond the thinking mind. And that, again, is an evolutionary transition to a vibrational frequency that is higher than the frequency of thought.

And that's awareness. And that's why we are here. We are part of-- I'm not saying we are making it happen. It is happening through us. You cannot make it happen, but you can allow it to happen through you. What's happening through you is this, the transition to a state of consciousness that is of a higher vibrational frequency than the state of thinking. You transcend thinking.

It does not mean you cannot think anymore. Your transcending doesn't mean that you put it aside. You don't discard something that you transcend. You go beyond it. You incorporate it. But you are not trapped in it.

So, we are here to transcend thinking, which means thinking is still a very valuable tool. In fact, it becomes more powerful when you are no longer seeking your sense of Self in the movement of

thought, the narrative of your mind that tells you who you are, that tells you how problematic your life is.

You're not seeking yourself anymore on that level. Then, thinking is no longer self-seeking. And then, it becomes a very powerful and wonderful tool that can be used for creation. To create. You can use thought to create.

But who are you that is using thought to create? It's not the mind-created you that is doing that because you have transcended that. It's the consciousness that lies behind the mind that can then use the mind.

And then, you can create whatever it is. You create a different-- you don't create it-- a different vibrational frequency expresses itself through you in whatever form. It could be there just when you interact with another human being. And there's a different dimension there than just the personal interaction, just the functional personal interaction. Then, there's always an added dimension to who you are as a person. Because you continue to be a person until you die as this form. But there's always an added dimension to who you are as a person.

So, when you go into a supermarket, and you pay for what you bought, and you look at the cashier, the cashier looks at you, there is a-- if you are present to that dimension, then you're not the interaction with the-- and I'm giving this as an example. It's the briefest, usually regarded as very insignificant interaction. But there's nothing insignificant. There is no insignificant present moment. Because there is only the present moment. Because if you think there is an insignificant present moment, it's all insignificant.

So, you're interacting with the cashier, the supermarket checkout, at the checkout counter. There's a moment of recognition, although you are engaged in a functional interaction, a moment you look into his or her eyes, and there's a brief recognition of their being. And that is when you discover that-- it's a wonderful realization. That's the beginning of-- it's a glimpse of what is conventionally called-- I'm a little reluctant to use the term-- what is conventionally called "love."

It's a glimpse. Because ultimately, what that means, it's a recognition that the essence of the so-called other human is one with your essence. You recognize this is-- I'm verbalizing something that is not a conceptual realization but an experiential realization. But I'm just verbalizing it now.

It's the recognition of yourself in the other. That is not selfish. [CHUCKLES] It's the opposite of selfish. The recognition of yourself, the essence of yourself, in the other. So, you look through the personality, which can be, in some cases, very intense.

Other people can be very difficult. You might have noticed people can be very difficult and can give you a lot of trouble, in the same way that your mind can give you a lot of trouble. It's the same thing. So yes, the world is full of difficult personalities. But the ability grows in you to pierce beyond the personality and just recognize something, if only very faintly, that is beyond the personality. And that is that their being, their essence. And then, every human interaction becomes something very precious.

Now, I must admit. We don't want to be totally unrealistic. I must admit it is sometimes difficult in quite a few humans, where this is not easy at all. And you don't have to try. You begin to practice with humans with whom it's relatively easy. And that often begins with humans with whom you do not share any history. It's sometimes easier. There's no accumulated history in your mind with that other human. So, before you practice this beautiful recognition with your ex-wife or ex-husband, I recommend that you practice it with the supermarket cashier first, just as one example, that brave recognition.

And then later on, when you become more deeply rooted in that which is already here-- so it's a little bit of a paradox. To realize this very deeply, it seems we are speaking it from-- we live in the dimension of time, out here. So when we speak of it, we use the dimension of time to talk about something that is timeless.

So, there is a gradual emergence of this as essence of your being into this dimension of time. So paradoxically, we have to use time to point to this timeless realization. So, that's the practice then with humans is to--

Ultimately, it means you have to find this moment of Stillness when you look at another human, even if it's only three or four seconds. And again, what we call Stillness here is just an alert Presence.

It's not difficult. The more that that space grows in you, the ability to realize this space in you, the more deeply anchored you become in that dimension-- or another way of putting it, the more fully you are you yourself.

So, as we said in this book, that the deepest sense of who you are is inseparable from Stillness, that true-- that who you essentially are originates there. This is the Beingness, the I Am in its pure non-form.

And I suggest, just as experientially right now, asking you whether you can sense that, whether by letting go of any kind of memory of who you are, all the troubles that you have had, and all the troubles that may still be coming, which is all-- you have to think about that in order to have it.

What is left of you when you don't remember your history right now? Do you need to remember your personal history to be really yourself? That's an interesting question. Do you need your personal history to get that deep sense of Beingness, of being alive here and now? Or is it, perhaps, even a hindrance? Is your personal history a hindrance to this deeper realization?

And if you, then, as an experiment, let go of remembering your problems, or your sufferings, or all the great things you have achieved, or the great things you have failed at, whatever it is that makes up your personal sense of identity, let it go for a moment. I mean, it's still there. You can always pick the baggage up again, and you probably will. It's still there. But let the baggage of yourself, the historical Self, go for a moment. And even the future Self. Let go of that for a moment.

So, you don't remember really anything. What is left of you without that? Without past and future? Right now, here and now. Can you get to that? What does it feel like to be yourself without your history? What does it feel like? Can you sense your innermost being without the history? Can you sense an inherent aliveness in you? Not just in the head. It pervades your entire

being, your entire body. That inherent sense of aliveness that is also outside, but you realize it first within.

You are alive. You are. I am. That is the essence of your identity that then gets mixed up with thoughts of past and future. It is that power of consciousness that animates every thought.

So, when you have a thought of who you are, a bundle of thoughts, a mental-- a narrative of this is me, and you call it "my life"-- people call it "my life." And so, you have my life, which is undoubtedly problematic because there's a problematic future, and there's the past, the heaviness of the past. So undoubtedly, your life is problematic.

But what does that mean? What you call your life is a narrative. It's memories, and it's anticipation. Memory and anticipation. Most humans live almost exclusively through memory and anticipation. Almost exclusively. And that's an amazing restriction. The only times when they don't live through memory and anticipation, when very briefly, they take some drug or something. But it lowers their consciousness, and it goes toward unconsciousness.

So, you can free yourself from memory and anticipation by having a few whiskeys or whatever else it is. Just have a few more, and then your memory and anticipation operate less in you. And for a brief transitional period, you may become happy until you become unconscious because you are moving toward unconsciousness.

It's the same state you are in when you're about to go to sleep. You're very, very tired, and you're so tired that you cannot remember your problems anymore. And you can't think about the future or your past anymore. There's just an overwhelming tiredness.

And there's a brief moment, a transitional moment, from wakefulness to sleep. In that transitional moment, you feel the sweet pull of sleep pulling you. It says, "Come here." And if you can catch that before you go to sleep, that brief moment, it feels so beautiful and sweet, that ah, because you're moving toward unconsciousness in sleep. But you're becoming free of yourself. You have temporarily become free of yourself in this transitional moment toward sleep. But this is a lowering of consciousness.

So yes, you can become free of yourself by becoming less conscious. Less conscious and the problematic level of consciousness that is the Self level of conventional Self, by drugging yourself, or brief sexual ecstasies could also do it. [GASPS] So, you become free of yourself. Not for long-- many couples have a sexual encounter, and 10 minutes later, they're fighting again.

So, it's--or even a sensory indulgence can also do it. You have a great-- you have a big-- you go out to restaurant, and you have a great meal. Or maybe not a restaurant, maybe you just-- you're eating, and so, yes, there's a sensory satisfaction, this [GASPS]. And for a moment, you can't even think about your problems because you're enjoying this food so much. It doesn't last long. And if you overindulge, which is often the case, then you feel very bad afterward.

So, becoming-- you can also become free of yourself-- and again, this is dangerous-- by identifying, by replacing your personal sense of Self with a collective sense of Self. This is one way of becoming free.

But it's not the-- it is not-- it ultimately leads you to more unconsciousness and stronger ego than before because you have either-- you have a personal sense of Self, the egoic sense, personal ego. You can also have collective egoic sense of Self.

Now, this can at first look very wonderful because you remove your sense of identity in part, sometimes completely, from your personal being. And instead of deriving a sense of who you are from your personal sense of Self, your personal history and all that, you identify with a collective, which could be like-- a sect or a cult is a typical example of a collective. And your identification with this cult replaces your personal ego. And you may not realize that you have replaced it with an even stronger ego of a collective kind, collective ego.

But at first, it might look from an outward observer, it might look as if you had become really a person who is sacrificing himself or herself for the greater good. You're doing everything to help the people in your organization or whatever it is, and you're sacrificing your personal sense of Self for the collective.

Or you can-- some people have done it, political movements too. You can be so identified with a political movement that you sacrifice your whole personal life for the political movement. Or you can do it-- any collective that you identify with, a collective sense of Self, is also a form of ego. But sometimes, it's not recognized as such.

So, people you can identify with political-- where you stand politically. It does not mean you cannot have any political opinion. It's perfectly fine to have a political position toward-- you have a certain opinion about politics and politicians. That's fine.

And the question is, do you derive a significant part of your sense of Self from that? That is where the delusion starts. It is not necessary to free yourself from every opinion, let's say, politics. The question is, is that-- has that taken over your sense of Self to a large extent or almost completely? And always, you know it.

Even racial things. Do you identify? Of course, you are of a certain race. That is part of your form identity. You don't deny your form identity. You recognize your form identity. And you might even feel comfortable with your form identity. And it's fine. I like it. Wonderful. But do you derive the greatest part of your sense of who you are from that kind of form identity? That's the question, and that ultimate-- at first, it feels good because it gives you a stronger sense of who you are. But you can always know that it's ego. Then, when you need the other who is other than you, in order to continue to derive your sense of identity from that.

I've given as the example, when I talked to Tami a few weeks ago-- it's somewhere on the internet. Race, there's nothing wrong with any kind of form identity. You honor your form identity. It has its place. But it's not all that you are. It is a relatively-- it's a temporary sense of who you are. It is a-- there's nothing substantial there, but you honor this level, this dimension. That's fine.

Let's take somebody who is either, let's say, completely identified with their political viewpoint and derive their sense of Self from that. Or take somebody else who is very strong, so strongly identified with their racial makeup that they identify 90 percent of their sense of Self with that. It makes up their identity.

Now, as a thought experiment, which I did with Tami when I talked to her. Imagine that the extraterrestrials come, and they invite you into their flying saucer. And they take you to a planet. Maybe they're experimenting on you. I don't know. They take you to a planet where everybody-- let's say, if you are political-- if, let's say, you are a Republican or Democrat in America-- if you are a Republican with particular very strong viewpoints about people and everything else-- and then they take you to this planet-- maybe it's just a virtual planet. We don't know. They may just want to-- the extraterrestrials may want to find out how you operate.

They take you to a planet where it's full of humans, humans who look like you and have exactly the same political opinion as you with not one ounce of difference. Everybody is a Republican just like you are and has exactly the same opinions as you. What happens to your identity? Or racial? They take you to a planet, and everybody on that planet has exactly the same skin color as you. There's no difference whatsoever. Everybody has-- so your identity that was based on that will immediately dissolve because there is no other.

The egoic identity needs the other to sustain itself. Without the other, it dissolves. So, if everybody is exactly the same as me, then-- or you can use anything. Let's say you have a possession that's important. You have a Rolls-Royce and a private jet. And that makes up an important part of your identity because you feel big and powerful. It's all in your mind, ultimately. And then you go to a planet-- or on this planet, suddenly you have a government that provides every human being with a Rolls-Royce and a private jet. Immediately, your sense of identity based on that would immediately collapse because the other would be gone.

It's all the same. Without the other, you cannot sustain your separate sense of identity. So whether it's political or racial or any religious-- take a person is very strongly identified with their particular religion or their particular branch within a religion. Take them somewhere where everybody is-- there's no different religious affiliations. Immediately your sense of identity that was built around your religious affiliation would dissolve. If everybody is the same, if the other has gone, it cannot give you a sense of Self anymore. Because for the egoic sense of Self you need the other.

But it's more tragic than that. The egoic sense of Self needs to emphasize how other the others are, though, if possible, it tends to make the others even more other. Because the more strongly you can feel how other the others are, the more strongly you feel your ultimately fictitious sense of Self or identity, which is the ego. So, you have an unconscious urge in humans to make the other-- whether it's a person or a group of people-- to emphasize-- I sometimes call it the "otherness of others," to emphasize that they're--

And when you take it a little bit further, the other becomes the enemy. And if you have an enemy, then the ego has really arrived. Then, it can feel its identity very strongly. If it has an enemy or maybe even two or three, even better. Your sense of Self that desperately needs the other grows even stronger.

So, you can see it's an unconscious process. Humans don't know what they are doing. It is an unconscious process associated with the egoic sense of Self in the absence of awareness. It is an unconscious process in the absence of awareness. You do it, but you don't know what you're doing.

They try to do the same with nations. You need to demonize another nation, and then, you feel more strongly, "This is what *we* are. Look at *them*. They're the evil ones." And so, you demonize another nation. And this has been done very often in order to justify-- war is the ultimate "them." The other is the most other when you begin to go to war with them. That's the natural outcome of ego. It ends up there.

But it all comes it comes back to identification with mental structures, whether you adopt them from the collective or they come from your personal life identification. So, there's only-- the source of your sense of Self is the mind. That's the ego.

So, whatever the structures are, whatever the mental formations are that give you your sense of Self, whether they are of a personal nature or of a collective nature, it doesn't matter. The process is always the same.

And this is an important realization. You get to a point-- you realize that there's a great danger that you become taken over by thought forms. And humans don't realize that these thought

forms, in the absence of awareness-- whether the thought forms are of a personal nature mainly, or of a collective nature, or a mixture-- these thought forms live in you-- they live in you as semiautonomous entities, like every thought you let through.

For a moment, let's look at every thought as a little being. Here it comes. It arrives in your mind. Zing. And you absorb, of course, thoughts continuously, through--in the past, through talking to people and interacting with people and encountering situations. You would absorb in at school, education. You absorb thought forms.

Nowadays, this has become intensified by the virtual-- mainstream media itself is one way, where you absorb ready-made opinions already, without realizing it. You watch the news. And the news, these are thought forms that go into your mind. You don't realize that every news item is already a manipulation because somebody there chooses what they're going to report, how they're going to report it, what they're going to completely ignore, not to give any attention to. What is it that they-- what they amplify. This is important. And then another event is not even talked about.

But you don't realize. You're continuously manipulated by those people. But they are not to blame because they themselves are possessed by thought. So, it's not a conspiracy theory as such because that would imply that they know what they're doing.

But Jesus's words on the cross, I'll always remember. I often think about them. "Forgive them for they know not what they do." That means they are unconscious. They are not unconscious in the conventional sense. Unconscious in a spiritual sense. Meaning they are completely identified with the thoughts in [their] head. The thoughts have taken possession of them. They are kind of almost like parasites that live in you. When they get lodged in your mind, you have a parasite that lives in you.

It can be of a personal nature. You've all known people perhaps who have one predominant thought. That can sometimes happen. It's a virus infection of thought. Thought can be looked at as potentially a viral infection. One thought can come into your mind and then proliferate and

create other associated thoughts, and it completely takes over your mind. And then, you have one obsessive world view that people may have, and they interpret everything through that.

They immediately have an answer for everything they see. It's, "Oh, that's what it is." It's always the one they look through, that lens of an obsessive thought that they have. It can develop into something that is easily recognized as a mental illness. But it really is a dysfunction that's already there long before it can be recognized as a mental illness, and it's normal.

Then, when it becomes a mental illness, you can have something like paranoid schizophrenia. Paranoid schizophrenia, for example, is just an extension of something. It's an amplification of something that was already there before in your mind. To be fearful of people, to be critical of people, to always look out for hidden motives in other people. These are all thought forms that already tell you other people are not to be trusted. They're dangerous. Look out. They want something from you. They're after you. So, that's already at the beginning of paranoia.

And then, it becomes even more accentuated. And then, you have a viral infection in your mind. And you then believe that they're everywhere. "It's the CIA. They are listening in to everything I say. There must be 100 people who work exclusively to spy on me." And you look everywhere. I'm not saying these things do not happen. They do probably do spy on people, but not on you. They're not that interested probably. But-- [LAUGHS] You can see how to be infected by thought as a virus is more dangerous than a physical virus because it's not as easily recognized. So that would become a--

It was Carl Jung, the psychologist, who said the greatest danger that humans face is not-- does not come from any outside source. The greatest dangers that humans face is collective psychosis. Psychosis is when you've been infected by certain thoughts that completely distort reality. And a collective psychosis is when large numbers of people become infected by certain thoughts that completely distort their view of reality. They misinterpret what they perceive completely. They misinterpret to such an extent that it becomes harmful to themselves and to others.

And that is a collective psychosis. Collective psychosis-- many examples in history-- witch burnings, when people suddenly-- this idea was in their mind that many, many women are

witches. You could just be a midwife. And often, of course, in the past, children, babies died soon after they were born. And it just takes one woman whose baby died and said, "Oh, the midwife. She touched my baby, and then two hours later, he was dead." And immediately, the craziness of the human mind-- thousands of humans have become infected by this. "She's a witch!" They would burn thousands and more of women. Total insanity. They didn't realize they had been infected by a mental virus.

You can have entire huge political movements-- such as the Nazi movement, the Communist movement under Mao in China, under Stalin in Russia-- when millions became infected with a certain worldview. And they create an enormous amount of suffering, enormous amount of people killed through infections, viral infections, by thought forms, by thoughts. And so, you have to be very careful.

The thing is, you do not know. Once you've been infected by a thought, it's not easy to recognize it because thought takes possession of your mind. And once a thought has taken possession of your mind, you can't-- you need awareness to recognize it. So again, you are continuously threatened by mental viruses, which is more threatening than the physical virus. And so, you have to be--

How do you become immune to being infected by a mental virus? Well, this is what this is all about. You need to go beyond identification with thought and recognize a dimension of consciousness in you that is beyond thought. And from there, you can see the thoughts that you're thinking instead of being in the grip of the thoughts that you're thinking.

Then, you develop an immunity to being infected by a mental virus. Mental virus always becomes part of your ego. Immediately, every mental virus becomes-- is incorporated into your egoic sense of Self.

And watch out for needing to emphasize the otherness of others. Watch out for that inner need when you feel it because that will give you an indication that you are in the grip of an egoic thought form or egoic thought forms. Because, as pointed out a little while ago, the other needs to be as other as possible for the ego to become stronger, not only to survive but also to become

stronger. So, when you discover an inner need to have enemies, to emphasize-- and people do that-- not you, of course, because you are all awakening human beings. Well, you may have occasional relapses. Yes, that's probably the case.

You can do it on social media. I interact very little, almost not at all, with social media, but I know from what people are telling me that what goes on there is attacking other people on social media. Some people. That becomes a very important part of their life. They derive egoic food from attacking others on their Twitter, Facebook, all the other platforms that they use. And again, they don't realize that they are motivated by ego.

When you attack another, you're not questioning somebody's opinion. That's fine. But you are attacking the holder of that opinion. So, you can question someone's opinion-- why not-- and show that "In my view, you are wrong because of this, this, this, and this." Fine. Whether it has any purpose, I don't know. Perhaps it does. Perhaps it doesn't. Just to do that, to engage with somebody who, perhaps they're not interested in being shown that they're wrong, but not many egos like to be wrong. That would be ego death. To be wrong is the death of the ego. To be right is the triumph of the ego. The ego needs to be right. It's not interested in the truth. It's interested in being right.

So, if you're strongly identified with a certain thought, [it] becomes part of your ego structure, anybody who shows to you that you are actually wrong, you would create-- you, as the ego, you would create some kind of a lie. Or you would attack the integrity of the other person because you cannot prove that they are wrong. You attack them as a human being. All kinds of craziness happens out there.

All these platforms amplify a dysfunction that was already there for thousands of years in the human mind. But through technology, we can now amplify the ego in humans. But the technology itself, of course, is neutral.

Here, we're using the technology for the opposite purpose. We're using the technology here to become more conscious, to awaken. But to a large extent-- I don't know the percentage-- this

medium, the technology that we now have, is used for the purpose of strengthening the human ego.

So, there's a lot of craziness there that you need to be aware of so that you do not become part of it. Do not become part of that craziness. When you interact, if you feel the need, interact consciously. Don't make enemies. Don't recognize that others are enemies.

Just-- again, be aware, that there is a danger of being infected by mental viruses, especially as you interact with these platforms and watch the news and so on and so on. Be aware. Be conscious. Have that space in you from where you can be the observer of the thoughts that arise in the field of consciousness.

Alertness is the greatest immunity. That alert Presence. That's what it is. So, we are-- remember, I often point it out. You may know it. You can become free of the egoic Self by falling below thought or rising above thought.

We don't want to fall below thought. Humans try to do that because they don't know that they are longing to be free of themselves. The Self. That the Buddha pointed out as the greatest illusion is the illusion of Self. And it's the egoic Self. People do all kinds of things to become free. As I pointed out, drug taking, all kinds of things to become free of their Self. But you are moving below thought, which-- the identification with thought is where the egoic Self lives.

We don't want to fall below thought. We are rising above thought, so to speak. We transcend thought. And then, thought can be a wonderful instrument to be used. But you are no longer used by it. You are no longer used by thought. You are able to use thought.

But who are you? You are not the entity. That is created by thought, which is the narrative that you call "my life." That is not who you are. The narrative that you call "my life" is your form identity. That's fine. But who are you when you use thought? You are the consciousness that gives rise to thought.

Then, you become really intelligent. It's not until then that you become truly intelligent. When you-- there is an awareness beyond the mind that can use the mind to create. That's intelligence.

Without awareness, even if you have a very high IQ, that is a very limited form of intelligence to have--

There are many forms of intelligence. A high IQ does not free you from the insanity of the egoic mind. You can have two PhDs and, as a human being, be very unconscious in the way you live, the way you interact, the thoughts you think. Your whole sense of identity can be very unconscious. Ultimately, that means unintelligent. So, true intelligence comes with the arising of that awareness that is transcendent to thought.

There was a philosopher in ancient Greece-- not very well known-- a wonderful philosopher. He was called Epictetus. And he said-- lived 2,000 years ago. He said, "Drama ensues when fools meet the challenges of life." Fools means unconscious people. When fools meet the challenges of life, then drama happens.

And now, so "fool" means somebody who is unconscious. It does not mean, in this sense, somebody who is not educated. Education has nothing to do with that. You can have relatively little education and be conscious. Or you can be highly educated and be unconscious. So, there's no correlation. So, a fool is an unconscious person. An unconscious person is a person who is identified completely with the conditioned thinking mind. Now, when an unconscious person meets a challenge, then the challenge usually amplifies their unconsciousness. It makes them even more unconscious.

So, that's how, sometimes, people who develop a mental illness, the trigger for it is often a difficult event in their lives. And that triggers a dysfunction that was already latently there in their mind, becomes a fully grown mental illness.

So, I personally knew somebody who was always very suspicious of other people and critical of other people, and so on. So, there was already this dysfunction. It's a normal egoic thing for many, many people. And then, something happened in this person's life that was very challenging. Breakdown of marriage and other difficulties suddenly all happening all at once. And suddenly, this dysfunction developed into acute paranoia and obvious mental illness.

So, it's when you're being challenged. Then, if you are completely identified with the mind, there's no awareness. Then, the way in which you respond to the challenge will be dysfunctional. It will amplify the problem. There will be a lack of wisdom. This is perhaps the key word. Intelligence and wisdom are very different things. Intelligence sees one problem and tries to fix this one problem. This is what we do, and then we get rid of the problem.

Can be very acutely-- intelligence cannot see the totality of a situation. It fix-- it addresses one thing. And often, it is reactive when it's the ego is involved. It reacts. So, it gives it more energy.

For example, a very simple example-- you have a brief interaction with somebody driving in traffic. Somebody cuts you off, or somebody shouts at you while you're driving. It's not uncommon. So then, if you react, you shout something back. What initially was just one unconscious person shouting something, you shout something back because you feel you need to defend your-- you don't know that-- but you need to defend your egoic sense of Self because any insult is a diminishment of your egoic sense of Self.

It feels like an injury to the ego. When somebody does not respect you or insults you, it's an injury to the ego. And the ego goes into almost immediate repair mode. And this immediate repair mode, in this particular case, would be that you shout something back.

And this shouting something back, it's all unconscious. It's the ego attempting to repair its sense of diminishment. Any disrespect or insult to the ego is a diminishment. Nothing has been diminished to who you truly are. It's just a fictitious sense of Self has been diminished, but you don't know that. And then, you shout something back. And this can easily then evolve into a huge drama, including physical violence, which is not uncommon.

Because this is-- I'm explaining what the Greek philosopher said-- "When a fool meets a challenging situation, drama ensues." Because the fool, meaning the unconscious person, amplifies whatever is happening there through his or her reaction. The reaction amplifies the problem. That's happened continuously in daily life on a both on a personal level and on a collective level. So, you create a solution which is a reactive--

Often, it comes-- another motivator for this kind of reactivity can also be fear. Fear is also of course associated with ego. So, when anything that brings about fear in you, and then the fear-- now, it's the ego that feels fear. As the fear arises, which is an emotional contraction, the fear rises into your mind. And the fear then controls your thinking.

In other words, when you become fearful, the emotion of fear rises up into your mind, and it thinks through you. It's not you doing the thinking. The fear in you is doing the thinking. And so, fearful thinking very often and very quickly turns into irrational thinking.

In other words, you can no longer think rationally. But you don't know it because if you are identified with your mind, you do not know that you can no longer think rationally. You think that everything that you think is actually absolutely correct. So, when fear rises into your mind, the fear does the thinking. Fear and thinking have become intertwined, aligned.

And so, then you think fearful thought, and you're trying to solve a problem through your fearful thinking. [CHUCKLES] And whatever solution you come up with through your fearful thinking, it will amplify the problem. Sooner or later-- sometimes not immediately-- sometimes it looks at first, "OK, I've eliminated this problem." But you don't know that you have created two or three bigger problems which then manifest a little bit later.

So, you see how important it is to have that awareness of your mind. Because without the awareness, you are at the mercy of all kinds of influences that come at you. And these things infect your mind.

And the danger is, if a large group of people become infected by a particular mental virus, then an enormous amount of suffering happens because they create suffering for themselves and others. And their decision-making is just completely dysfunctional. Whatever action they take is motivated by fear-- in other words, complete lack of wisdom.

Wisdom. It's not intelligence that our world needs. It's wisdom. And wisdom is inseparable from awareness. It arises through that-- the ability for a moment to be still and alert.

Let's say you are faced with a problem. Here's the situation. Maybe you can see it right there, or you can focus your attention on whatever it is, whatever the problem is. Are you able to face it, to look at it? Either literally look at it or metaphorically hold the problem in your mind and see it? There it is.

Are you able then to become alert and still and thereby get in touch with that true intelligence in you? Because that is where it arises, and that's where wisdom comes in. Wisdom arises always out of that inner Stillness or Presence, or awareness-- whatever you want to call it. That's where wisdom arises.

And then, you will be able to have a solution that does not amplify the problem. Or you may find, in some cases, that there's nothing you can do, or anything that you would do would only-- it would be counterproductive.

In some cases, you may simply allow this so-called problem to be there because you may have realized, right now nothing can be done. And then, you surrender, and you say, "That's what is."

And internally, you can also transcend problems. Internally, you can be in a difficult situation. And you look at it. "Is there anything I can do?" And perhaps there isn't. Perhaps you're in prison. Well, you could try to escape. But let's say you can't escape. "Is there anything I can do in this situation?" And you look at it, and then you might see "No." There's still the possibility for you to find freedom, which is always ultimately inner, by accepting this moment as it is. Only this moment. Otherwise, it gets difficult. You can't accept tomorrow because it's not even here.

You might have heard-- I can't remember who said it. Maybe I said it, or somebody else. It doesn't matter. It's all consciousness. There are two days per year when nothing can be done. Two days per year when you shouldn't do anything. Those days, you can't do anything. It's yesterday and tomorrow. Yesterday and tomorrow nothing can be done.

So, what you accept is never the-- let's say there's nothing you can do. You look at it, and you see right now maybe tomorrow something can be done. Right now, nothing can be done. And tomorrow, when tomorrow comes, it's a now.

So, in certain cases-- and I gave the example of being in prison-- you recognize there's nothing that can be done right now. So, what do I do? When nothing can be done, you actually don't do anything. You simply, internally, accept this moment, which sounds like doing, but it isn't. You accept this moment as it is.

Just this moment, not the next 15 years that you're going to be in prison, because who knows. They might shorten your sentence. We don't know. So, you don't accept that you're going to be in prison-- it's just an example. You don't accept that you're going to be in prison for the next 15 years. Don't go there. It's difficult to accept.

But you can accept this moment, just this moment as it is. This moment, we're sitting here breathing, looking around, feeling the energy in your body, feeling the consciousness that you are beyond thought. The aware Presence. The inner Stillness, Right now this, moment. Even if you were in the most desirable place, on a beach in Hawaii, all you could do is feel the Stillness within you right now.

And the more you go there, the more you realize you have found the transcendent dimension where your inner state is no longer dependent upon, or determined by, external conditions. You can transcend.

It does not diminish your ability to take action when action is possible. It does not diminish your ability to take intelligent action. It's the only way you can take intelligent action. But when action is not possible, you can still transcend the situation by going deep within, becoming still-- or rather, discovering the Stillness that's always already there, that alert aliveness, the I Am.

And it suddenly becomes almost secondary, whether you are sitting in a prison cell or on a beach in Hawaii. In fact, it is not uncommon, for people to sit on a beach in Hawaii and think about their problems and be unhappy.

Now, of course, if you had a choice, if somebody asked, "Would you rather be in a prison cell or on a beach in Hawaii?" you would probably say "A beach in Hawaii," or wherever else you think of as a desirable location. Of course, you probably would say that. Desert, some paradise island somewhere or whatever, or some beautiful meadow in the Swiss mountains, or whatever you can

think of, where you-- or desirable circumstances-- your big house rather than a trailer. But ultimately, you can be as internally aligned and as deeply peaceful and alive in a trailer as in a big mansion.

So ultimately, it doesn't matter. You may still have a preference, but ultimately, the external circumstances are secondary. Yes, perhaps you would like to live another 20, 30 years, 40, whatever. Your preference might be that. But if you had to depart in a few months or next year, and if that were inevitable, you would become-- you could-- there's a possibility that the situation would force you into the present moment.

Because if you leave the present moment in a situation that is very conventionally regarded as very difficult and undesirable, if you leave that present moment-- whether it's a prison or there's an illness, and let's say you might die or will die-- if you leave the present moment, you suffer.

So, certain circumstances can be used that are usually regarded as very undesirable. But those certain circumstances, you could allow them to force you, so to speak, into the present moment. Why do they force you? Well, they don't actually force you. You allow them to push you into the present moment because you realize if you are not present in this difficult situation, you suffer.

If you think about-- let's go back to the example of a prison cell. If you think about yourself in prison and you realize, "I've made one wrong choice after another. My life is just completely effed up. I'm completely-- I've--just one bad thing. How dreadful." Or you might think, "What these people have done to me, what society has done to me," whatever it may be. Or maybe you're innocent, and it's even worse what you're thinking about. You're in it, but terrible, if you start thinking about it. Or you think about how many years you have to stay-- going to stay here. Suffer, you suffer. You suffer.

So, you allow the situation to force you-- is you discover that there is a transcendent dimension in you. And this transcendent dimension can only be discovered in the present moment. And you would stop thinking about past and future. Yes, fragments are there, of course. They come in and out of your awareness. They float in out of your awareness. Fragments of thoughts about your past life and possible future. They come in. They float in and out.

But more fundamentally, there is an aware Presence. And you indulge in relatively little thinking about past and future. You just completely-- so basically, [MAKE SWISHING SOUND] there's just this-- the narrow-- Jesus called-- this is how I interpret the saying. "The narrow path that leads to life." The narrow path that leads to life. Past falls away. The future falls away, except for practical purposes. And you walk in the narrow path of the present moment.

And when you hear-- some people are interested in Zen. The Zen form of Buddhism. If you hear stories about Zen masters and so on, the entire Zen can be explained in one sentence. And people spend 20 years in a monastery and still don't understand it because they're trying to understand something that has nothing to do with conceptual understanding. Zen is walking the narrow path that is this moment.

And when you live, when you are this present, you immediately are the master. You become a Zen master, or whatever else you want to call it. Anybody who is completely present becomes a master. The master doesn't know-- any spiritual master doesn't really know more than you in terms of knowledge. Almost every relatively educated person nowadays knows more than probably the Buddha did in terms of knowledge about science and all kinds of things. Or Jesus. Jesus probably was not highly educated at all. And there are many other examples of spiritual teachers who had relatively little education. It's not knowledge. It's Presence. How present you are. That's all.

So, you can either be a master now, or you can work toward becoming a master. And that doesn't work. [LAUGHS] If you work toward becoming a master and you continue on the road of becoming, and when you're on the road of becoming, you continually miss the road, you miss the realization of being.

So, becoming is fine. You need becoming for all kinds of things. Don't completely neglect it. You need to do and become. When you learn something new, you need time to absorb knowledge to practice with whatever it is. Any subject that you take on, take up, any experience-- you want to experience more of this or more of that-- all kinds of things. Becoming is fine.

On the level of the person, there's a lot still that you can do and become. There's no need to say, I'm not-- But it's about recognizing the levels. On the level of the person, becoming still has a certain importance. Unless you're 95 years old, there's probably not much point in becoming anything. "Now I want to become--" No. The older you get, the more you would probably be interested in the being dimension.

But so, becoming is fine and necessary, but being is the realization that you, on that level, you are already complete. It seems like a paradox. As a person, there's still a lot you can do and learn and experience, undoubtedly. But as who you are beyond the person, there's nothing that can or need be added to who you are. And these seem to be almost contradictory things. You need to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory dimensions in your life.

That's the art of-- this is what we're about here. This is what we're engaged in here. To recognize these seemingly contradictory levels of-- on the one hand, becoming is called for, is necessary. But on the other hand, on the other dimension-- essentially, on the depth dimension-- nothing needs to be added to who you are. You're already complete. Both are true on their own level.

And here we are to reconcile the two. So, we can live in both dimensions. And that is the art of living. When you have learned that, to live in both dimensions, then not only does your life become free of unnecessary suffering-- which is most suffering-- your life becomes free of unnecessary suffering, and you create a different world because what you experience as the world is dependent on your state of consciousness. There is a oneness between your consciousness and the world.

So, here we are. This is why we're here, and nothing could be more important in your life than this. All everything else is relatively important, but only this is absolutely important. Your career, your relationships, yes, they're relatively important. But this is absolutely important.

But this dimension does not exist separately from the becoming dimension. They kind of become-- they have to come together. So, you don't have one hour in your daily life when you "be," and the rest of your time can get lost in "becoming" again. You bring the two together so

that you have the ability to become and to develop. But you know the essence of who you are is already complete. It's just an amazing thing.

So throughout our so-called course, we're going to address this. And with this, I will leave you for a little while. And in an hour and a half, I believe Kim will be doing an inner-body meditation with you, unless something else arises. And then, I will see you again later. This afternoon. Tonight. In the morning. Wherever you are. So, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

SIBYL CHAVIS: Thank you, Eckhart. Thank you. And as Eckhart said, we're going to take a break for about an hour and 27 minutes. Kim will be with us then. And during that time, we have set up break rooms, community rooms, for those of you who want to participate in that. And you can go to the Main Stage, and you'll see on the side of your screen opportunities to click on the button that says Community. And the thing to be aware of is that it's only the first 20 people who will be seen on screen, and their audio will be heard. You'll be asked if you're interested in participating in that way. Otherwise, you can just sit and participate in the chat in one of the community rooms. So, we will be back in an hour and 25 minutes.

And another thing as well. If you do want to ask a question to either Eckhart or Kim, again, you can do that in the section when you see the Slido on the chat section to put that there. And lastly, if you have any issues, or technical assistance is needed, or any questions, please reach out to us at soa@eckharttolle.com.

© Eckhart Tolle, Kim Eng ℗ Eckhart Teachings Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this transcript may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from Eckhart Teachings Inc.