

(Talk presented by Yaani Drucker at the United Kingdom Sai Baba retreat, April, 2000, followed by excerpts from Al Drucker's talk on the same subject)

*From the unreal, lead me to the real
From darkness, lead me to the light
From death lead me to Immortality.*

What Is Real - What Is Unreal?

I would like to share a story with you that is not real, that never happened, and that had no effect on truth. It did however serve me deeply as a wake-up call, as a classroom for discerning that which is real and eternal from that which is unreal and has no power over me. It revealed to me the truth of who I really am.

Fourteen years ago, I had a most intense experience, first incredibly brutal, and now seen as a true spiritual turning point. Up to that moment I had been Sai Baba's ardent devotee living a simple life as a Montessori teacher, residing by myself, spending 6 months out of every year in India with Baba. Life was beautiful. Then one night everything changed. It was Mahashivaratri in India, the holiest day of the year. I was staying in a Sai Baba center in California. We were scheduled to celebrate with an all-night bhajan the following evening. I was fast asleep in a room adjoining the bhajan hall. It was 3:00 am. It could not have been a more auspicious time or setting.

Suddenly I am jolted into awakening by a threatening voice ordering, "Scream and I'll kill you." I feel a knife at my throat, and see a massive menacing figure looming over me. Still groggy I instinctively scream, and to shut me up he pummels me in the face with his fist. I am drenched in blood. He gags me and ties me up and rips my bedclothes off me. In total terror I cry out to Baba to come and save me. Somehow, in my heart of hearts I fully expect Baba to physically appear and dispel this horrendous nightmare that has suddenly overtaken me. Baba did not come. And yet he did. Even while I was being raped, within me all fear and horror of the situation had left. Quite inexplicably I became very calm and to my astonishment discovered an incredible compassion welling up in my heart.

As he was leaving, I managed a muffled, "God bless you." He hissed back, "God hates me!" and disappeared into the night. I struggled to untie myself and went to get help. The police were called and the man was caught. He had a long criminal history; he had been in and out of jail. And yet, this time something had changed for him. From his jail cell he made a considerable effort to get a message to me. And that message was, "I feel bad about what I did. I'm real sorry I hurt you. Please pray for me." So, even in that horrible scene God was present and even the rapist was affected. To my surprise, I could muster no anger toward the man. I found myself

focusing not on my personal trauma but on the tragedy of the human condition that could lead to such a desperate state.

Although my body was badly beaten and bruised I remember absolutely no pain. Yet, it was not like I wasn't traumatized or bewildered. I remember walking outside in the night and feeling afraid that somebody might be lurking behind a bush. When anyone entered my room I was startled and jittery, feelings that were completely uncharacteristic for me. In my being I felt tainted and my familiar sense of security, knowing that I was always in the protective hands of the divine, had been badly shaken. My confusion centered entirely on Sai Baba. In my mind, Baba, in whom I had put complete trust and whom I regarded as my savior, had not helped me, though I had desperately called out to him. Why hadn't he? I kept praying to Baba, imploring him, "Why did you let this happen to me? Please help me to understand." As I was praying thus, I distinctly heard Sai Baba's voice gently asking, "What happened to you?" "I was raped, brutalized, robbed, and my very life was threatened" came my response, "and I called out to you, but you did not come!" Again Baba asked, ever so tenderly, "What happened to you?"

Suddenly, I understood. Nothing had happened to me. I remembered one of my favorite passages in the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna taught Arjuna, "You are not this perishable body. You cannot be destroyed by weapons, you cannot be incinerated by fire, you cannot be drowned by water, you cannot be blown away by the raging tempest. You are the indestructible, eternal Atma, the one Self." Suddenly this mystical pronouncement of Lord Krishna was no longer a conceptual thought but a direct experience for me. My bewilderment, my fears and feelings of abandonment all dissolved in the light of that incredible realization. Far from failing me and abandoning me, Baba revealed to me the truth of who I am, the immortal Self, and there is nothing in the whole universe that can ever threaten me. I knew myself to be invulnerable, indestructible, eternal. I exploded in joy and exhilaration. What a surprising outcome for such an intense and fearful happening! It turned out to be the quantum leap into the discovery of who I truly am. I am so very grateful. Thank you God!

Over the 14 years that have ensued, many more revelations unfolded from that powerful experience. I have come to understand that not only nothing happened to me, but even more profoundly nothing really happened at all. I started this talk by saying I would like to share a story with you that is not real, that never happened, and that had no affect on truth. What do I mean by that? Did anything happen at all? Was any of it real? The story wasn't real, the rape wasn't real, the brutality wasn't real, the fear wasn't real, but the peace I felt was real, the compassion I felt was real, the presence of God was real, the Atma, my true Self was real.

If none of the horror was real, and yet I felt so deeply affected by it, what was going on? I wanted to find the cause. Only in uncovering the cause of a problem can I hope

for a solution. Some of you may believe that the whole thing was God's will. After all, isn't everything that happens God's will? When I prayed to Baba, "Swami, how could you let this happen to me?" it was clearly my belief that it could only have happened because it was God's will. But this created a real problem for me. In my mind nothing untoward could happen to me because I loved God and He would protect me. I had been a good devotee, I did my sadhana, and felt God's love.

In my mind, God's love for me had manifested in many ways, in Sai Baba materializing a ring for me and presenting me his robe for the Center's altar, and in many deep inner spiritual revelations, dreams and visions which I experienced as tokens of God's love. Then how could God let this horrible thing happen? Of course, this assumes that God did let this happen. If He did wouldn't that make Him cruel? What kind of a God would permit such horrors to happen? Certainly God does not wish us to suffer. God is pure love. He loves us so incredibly. There is simply no way that God could have wished this for me.

The other obvious alternative is that there was a rapist out there over whom I had no control and who the divinity could not prevent, who caused this to happen. Certainly this is how the world would see it. Isn't personal security a major issue for us? So much effort goes into protecting ourselves from hostile forces outside of ourselves. But is that really how it is? How could I possibly return to normalcy, if this were so? Then at every turn, I could expect another incident. There could be no peace if this were true. Could the divinity be that impotent? I simply can't accept that a rapist randomly breaking in and assaulting me could be the full story, particularly on Shivaratri night in a Sai Center.

Well then, if God is not the cause and if the rapist is not the cause, then the only other possibility is that I am the cause; that I did this to myself. That's a tough one. Not only did this nightmare happen to me, but now I am owning that it was my own doing. I arranged the whole thing. Wow! It was I who arranged this horrible thing? But that's impossible. Why would I do something so utterly insane? Why would I do something so hurtful, so humiliating, so devastating? What purpose could it possibly serve? If I'm the author and the director of this movie, and let me tell you that I have known myself all my life to be so positive in every way, a real Pollyanna, then something must have gone badly wrong. But was this script really so unreasonable?

Think about it. If I'm desperately attempting at all cost to maintain my individuality and autonomy, which is what we all have been doing for countless lives, then doesn't this story dramatically keep the belief intact that I am a body separate from other bodies who can hurt me, that I am vulnerable and subject to dying at any moment, and that even God himself and all the protection of his temple could not save me? What I am admitting to myself is that I would even be willing to hurt myself so drastically, to the point of death, to hold on to my belief in separation and make the unreal real for me. And so this whole drama was put there by me to verify my own

self-identity. This is the insidiousness of the ego thought system, with which I have allied. But once I recognize that I am the cause, I can see that I am also the solution. If I did this to myself, then I can also undo this. How?

Is it by seeing that I was paying off some karma? Some well-intentioned friends told me that now I had removed a big chunk of negative karma. It provided a possible explanation but no solution, and it certainly didn't make me feel good, because it left open the question of how much more negative karma I might have to undergo, whose effects I might experience at any time. I wanted a solution that would guarantee the end of all suffering, and that solution hinged on my discovering why I would do such a thing to myself. Karma does place the responsibility on me. It considers whatever happens in a situation to be an effect of a previous cause for which I am responsible through my past actions. Karma will attempt to heal a specific incident, specific actions of one body doing something to another, but it does not address the one purpose for all my actions. And so the law of karma cannot free me. It does not address the real underlying purpose of the body, which is to maintain my separation.

Karma is based on the ego thought system which sees another body outside of me that can hurt me or that I can hurt, which then leads to future retribution, in line with the idea of 'as you sow so shall you reap'. But once I realize through direct experience that there is nothing outside of my mind, and that the world and the body that's within it are all part of a dream I am dreaming which is not real, then the law of karma has no power over me. I now know with certainty that I am not bound by karma, and nor are you. Karma binds only as long as I retain the purpose of separation and body-consciousness, within which it applies. But I am not a body. I am as God created me, whole and perfect. My mind joined with God is all-powerful. In the past I misused my mind to make a meaningless world of illusion. I imposed an idea of time and space on the seamless eternity which is the omnipresent now. But, I cannot be bound by the past. I can choose to totally let it go. Baba teaches, "Past is past. Forget the past. There is no past. All there is is the everpresent now."

To be free of karma the idea of separation has to be rooted out in its entirety, and that will happen only when I realize that all of it without exception is playing out only in my mind. It is my dream of death, the nightmare I made up to prove to myself that I can be a little being separate from others, with friends and enemies and a wide world out there that define me and affect me night and day, and that whatever in this short lifetime I manage to accomplish in this world, I inevitably end in death. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. My mind is all-powerful and it is my dream.

Whatever story I make up and whatever world I fabricate, I place it all there to reflect my wishes, my purpose and my thoughts. There is no rapist outside of my mind. If I accept suffering as a way of paying off a karmic debt, I have stated a purpose for suffering. As long as I have that purpose there will be the suffering. But this need not be. Fortunately I was ready to see another purpose.

Everything that happens to me is because I want the purpose that it serves. Think about it, what is your purpose right now? Undoubtedly your first thought will be that you are here in a spiritual retreat, diving into the experience of Sai Baba's presence and imbibing his teachings. But go deeper. Are you a body sitting there listening to me? Is there someone else sitting next to you? Or is there just you and is everything you experience only happening in your own mind and orchestrated by you? Could you even conceive that the person sitting next to you is an image you made up to keep your reality of separate existence alive? Or can you see that you as a body and they as bodies are all within your mind, not separate from you? And I am just a part of you speaking to you within your mind? Even if you cannot immediately accept all this, do you see that you can always have only two possible purposes? It is either to abide in the One Self, the truth of who you really are, or it is to maintain a separate self-identity. One is of God, the other is of the ego. One is real, the other is unreal.

There is nothing that will not be undone instantly when I see no further purpose for it. I am all-powerful because I am not separate or different from God. Can we imagine God being victimized? No. Well, then neither can I be victimized, unless I want to be, because He created me just like Himself. I am not a helpless victim of circumstances beyond my control.

I once had a dream which came to me at a time when I had been struggling with the question of free will. In this dream, Arjuna and I were chatting like brother and sister. "You know Yaani," he said, "I saw the whole Mahabharata war from start to finish before it ever began." Upon hearing that, I threw up my hands and exclaimed in dismay, "Oh Arjuna, does that mean that I have nothing to say about what happens to me in my life, that I have no free-will!?" "No, Yaani, it is not like that. When your consciousness changes, your destiny changes." In other words, it is my dream and I can change it from a dream of death into a happy dream of eternal life. All I have to do is change my mind from body-consciousness to God-consciousness, from untruth to truth. Every thought I think is either real or unreal. My real thoughts are thoughts I think with God. All the other thoughts are unreal, yet they will have their consequences. There are no neutral thoughts. That is why Baba constantly reminds us to watch our thoughts.

Today I can say with total conviction that I am certain of who I am, and who I am not. I can speak to you freely about my rape experience, because I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that in reality it never happened. It has no charge, no juice, no power over me. But first I had to look at it and take full personal responsibility for all of it, without guilt or self-condemnation or judgment, holding Spirit's hand and asking to be shown. When I am willing to fully expose to myself my willingness to hurt myself in order to keep my belief in separation alive, and see that I no longer want that, the truth reveals itself and shows me that none of what I think has happened was real. In truth, there could never be anything but God and God's love.

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not advocating denial of your negative experiences. Denial gives energy to the darkest fears by attempting to hide them and put them out of the consciousness. Exposing our fears or negative qualities undoes them and reveals them as the nothing that they have always been.

I am deeply grateful for the classroom that this episode has become for me. What have I learned? That I am the indestructible Atma. That what is real cannot be threatened, and what is not real does not exist. That only God's will is real. And whatever I experience will be what I choose. As long as my underlying purpose is to maintain my separate identity it will not be real and I will not be real. All suffering is self-inflicted, and is over when I no longer see any value in it. Once I see no value in my separation thoughts they will simply fade away. Then my will is one with God's will and I experience only the constant extension of love and joy. That is awakening from the dream of death.

The experience I recounted turned out to be a great gift and blessing to me, for it impelled me to change my mind. But this was an extreme example, certainly not one you or anyone has to undergo. You can change your mind right now. Use my experience, or any other extreme example such as Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to motivate you to change your consciousness and see that separation, and this world of duality and death that you made to maintain your separation consciousness, is no longer what you want. You don't need to use pain to wake up. It can certainly serve as one of the ways. But why not wake up laughing? Whatever you do, WAKE UP! The time is now! Don't put it off. Choose now to die to your old way of thinking in separation and body-consciousness and be reborn in God-consciousness. Turn your life and will over to God, and ask for help. There is no way you can manage it by yourself.

Baba says the spiritual path is easy. It requires no effort at all. Making what is unreal and nonexistent real requires tremendous effort. On the underlying basis of the unchanging eternal peace and serenity of God's love, I can choose to manufacture an incident of such magnitude and intensity as this one just recounted, in order to keep an insane belief system intact and make it real for me. But how much easier it is to simply allow what is real to be real, and to abide in perfect peace, love and light, and be who you naturally are and always have been, one with God! You don't have to do anything to make the truth real. Just let yourself be who you truly are. You cannot fail. You are perfect and whole as God created you. Be happy!

Yaani

Al's talk, relating to Yaani's story:

Yaani's story is an incredible example of how a dream of awakening can come to replace a dream of death. This subject is so important, and so key to the mind transformation necessary to awaken, that I will focus my talk today on many of the same ideas that Yaani presented earlier, repeating them in different ways, with the hope of evoking a deeper experience of the truth in you. Let me begin by recapping the story. It is of an apparently innocent girl, the victim of a dreadful assault. She's a devotee of Sai Baba in India where she spends six months per year. In the other six months in America, she is a much loved teacher of little kids, who lives a very simple life and is very active in service projects helping many others throughout her area. This is the Dr. Jekyll persona, the good being, the benefactress, the modest, shy one that everyone likes and that is visible on the outside. It is the attractive ego front.

But behind this face of innocence, in the human condition, there's also a dark Mr. Hyde persona; this we will do everything to deny and keep hidden. It is what we swear we will never look at. It is the predatory side of the ego which defends its self-identity at all cost, ready to do anything to keep its separation and independence from God alive, even to the point of brutalizing and nearly killing the body. And so in this story, it makes up an incident, a dream, in which a criminal form breaks in during the middle of the night when our girl is innocently asleep. It holds a knife at her throat, screams at her, threatens to kill her, ties her up, beats her, rapes her and robs her. Not a pretty picture.

Now if for a moment you think we are speaking of her story and not of yours, you haven't gotten the message of this powerful teaching. This is your experience, your dream, and it is playing out in your own mind. The story and the characters may appear to be different but the purpose is the same and the capacity for savagery is the same. You have chosen to shelter the ego, because it serves your wish of maintaining your autonomy as a little separate being in a great big world independent of God. That ego you have allied yourself with is a serial killer, a rapist, a cannibal, a heartless terrorizer. And dressed in its Sunday-best, it lodges in you and dreams your dream of death. You're walking around with a war zone playing out in your mind. Every hurt, every bit of suffering in the world is of your making. You are responsible for all of it.

When you stand in the total guilt of having done all that in your mind, the devastation is so enormous you will do anything to free yourself from it. You just don't want anymore suffering. In the past what you've done in an attempt to get rid of the guilt is to project it out. And so you peopled your world with images that contained your guilt. They became the bad guys, the guilty ones, the victimizers, while you could play the role of the good guy, the innocent one, the victim. But alas, it never worked. It couldn't work. The guilt remained, although now well hidden, even from yourself. When you finally realize that you cannot solve your problem by yourself, that you've never been able to solve it, and you cry out to God for help, and

you're mind is open and willing for a real alternative, then you are shown a possibility that really works. The answer you receive initiates a complete and fundamental change of mind.

You are shown how to make that change and find a new purpose in your mind that is in alignment with God's will. When you do, you discover that nothing you thought before was real, is real. None of it was ever real. Even the feeling of guilt was not real. It was a falsely made-up idea to keep yourself bound. You have always been pure innocence itself. You are not from here. In truth, you are not even here. You are not a body. The body is a cover you have put over yourself to hide your truth. It is you who have chosen to keep yourself a dream character under assault by a world of your own making. But there is no world and there is no you as you have constituted yourself. Both the Dr. Jekyll and the Mr. Hyde characters are the outer dress and undergarments you have chosen to wear on a stage you made up, in a three-act play you have written, that you are enacting, are watching and identifying with. But, none of it is real. Take it all away and what is left is real. That is you; the true you. You alone are real.

Sai Baba tells a story that illustrates this. There was a good king in ancient times, King Janaka, who was a sincere seeker of truth. He was free of attachment to all the riches and power he commanded. He was a worthy candidate for self-knowledge. One particular day, he was occupied with his ministers through most of the day and evening. He didn't get back to his private quarters until quite late. A meal had been set out for him but he didn't touch it. He relaxed on a sofa, while the queen massaged his feet. Soon King Janaka fell asleep. The queen asked the various attendants present to leave the room and made sure that the king, who was extremely tired, would not be disturbed in his sleep. She put a cover over him and banked the light low, quietly remaining by his side. Shortly afterwards, King Janaka quite suddenly opened his eyes, sat up, looked around incredulously at his surroundings, and in a most peculiar way began to ask, "Is this real or is that real. Is this the truth or is that the truth?"

The queen became a little frightened by his bewildered look and strange question; she tried to find out what exactly he was asking, but he would not explain or answer any of her queries. He just went on saying, "Is this the truth or is that the truth?" She called for the ministers, counsellors, and other important officials. They all assembled and began questioning the king. "Maharaja, what is your doubt? What exactly are you asking?" But the Maharaja would not respond to them. Finally the ministers brought the great Sage Vashishta to the court. Vashishta asked the king, "What are you asking? What is your doubt? May I clarify it for you?" The king was replying to all the questions with the same query, "Is that the truth or is this the truth? Is this reality or is that reality?"

Sage Vashishta being omniscient closed his eyes and meditated for a while to find out the cause of the king's strange behavior. Vashishta realized that King Janaka had suddenly awakened from a vivid dream in which he had lost his kingdom and was

fleeing for his life. He found himself in a forest, wandering alone, bleeding, weary, despondent and forsaken. He had been staggering through that forest for days without food. He was feeling terribly hungry and kept shouting, "O, I am so hungry, I am so hungry." It happened that there were some robbers in that forest. These robbers were just sitting down in a glade nearby to have their meal, eating from plates made of leaves. Seeing him and taking pity on him, the robbers made themselves known and invited him to join them, offering him a portion of their meal.

Just at that moment, a tiger came upon them and they all ran for their lives. The tiger devoured all the food. Again Janaka found himself staggering through the forest crying out, "O, I am so hungry. I am so very hungry." When he woke up he discovered he was in a palace, on a royal sofa by the side of the queen, with a silver tray filled with luxurious food and dainties sitting on the table nearby, and he began asking whether he was the starving, forsaken wretch begging food from robbers in a fearful forest, or whether he was a king living in a sumptuous palace surrounded by all possible luxuries. "Is this true or is that true?"

Sage Vashishta immediately recognized the king's confusion and said, "King Janaka, neither of these two roles is true. You alone are true. You, yourself, are the truth. Life during the daytime is a day-dream; during the night it is a night-dream. They are both illusions. They constantly change from one thing to another; so they cannot be real and they can have no effect on you. Only you who remain constant in all these states, free of all change and illusion are real. You are the one Self, the Atma. That alone is ever real and unchanging."

That was the realization Yaani was given in her experience. What appeared to have happened to the body did not touch her. Once she realized who she truly was, that she was not a body, she recognized that nothing in this world could affect her in any way. This is a monumental lesson, of incalculable worth. But that revelation in itself is not the permanent end of dreaming. The experience of oneness must deepen and strengthen until no trace of body-consciousness and separation remains. The express train to such a full awakening is the inner inquiry into the cause of what appears to be happening to you. A sincere asking will lead to the discovery that you yourself are the cause and not the effect.

That is, whenever you find yourself in body-consciousness, experiencing the serial adventures of a body eking out a life in a caringless world, you need to remind yourself that whatever you experience, whatever you perceive as outside of yourself, you are only doing this to yourself. You are responsible for all of it. There is only your mind and all of this dream is playing out only in your mind. The particular form it has taken perfectly corresponds to your wish to be separate and create yourself as a person in a body and in a world without God. All the suffering that you experience and perceive follows from this wish to be your own creator, separate from God. But now, finally, you say enough is enough. You don't want to do this anymore.

You want to change your mind and your purpose. You want to return to your home in God.

To do this you need to expose the two antagonists, the Dr. Jekyll who is the face of innocence and the Mr. Hyde who is the assailant. These are the two characters you made up, only the former of which you consciously acknowledge. But they are both there in your hallucinatory self, making war in your mind and keeping you miserable. Let us look at this Mr. Hyde character, who is so well hidden from view. You do not own him and claim him as an integral part of who you think you are in your conscious awareness of yourself. And so he remains invisible to you. Yet he is very easily visible in the characters you have projected out and perceive as outside yourself.

In Yaani's story, what is the unmistakable goodie for Mr Hyde? And remember, we're not speaking here of the assailant, the rapist, but we're referring to Yaani, as she has constituted herself, and inferentially, to the ego lurking inside you. In acting out this drama there cannot be the merest shadow of doubt in the separated mind as to who was the victim and who was the attacker, who was the innocent and who was the guilty one. Nor can there be any question that these two seemingly totally separate entities had no relationship at all to each other, except through the insane act of bestial violence perpetrated by one against the other. This is the way the world looks at this incident. And the more violent the details, the more convincing will be the belief in a dualistic world of threat, attack and fear.

Nevertheless, this particular story has some unusual details. It was a holy night at a most holy time, it was a temple, the guru's robe, which he had given her, was on the chair in the bhajan hall in the next room, the ring he had materialized for her protection was on her finger, and a fervent call to the divine to rescue her had gone out. The memory of her true reality had filtered into her dream and impelled her to call out to the divine for help.

That call will always be answered. It must be answered, but the help that comes may not look anything at all as expected by the dream character. Our focus is always very small. We call out for help to relieve some threat to the body. The answer will be a major shift in the mind. We won't have any idea what the help looks like. The response will invariably be much bigger and far-reaching than we thought. Often times it will call for a dislodgment which may be experienced as intense pain or an emotional devastation that does not resemble an answer for help at all, at least in the way that we imagine.

When invited and called onto the scene, Spirit will use the very situation that the ego made up, the stratagems ego has concocted to keep itself alive and autonomous, to turn that very scene into an opportunity to expose the ego and teach the powerful lesson that the real being cannot be threatened or hurt. That despite the seeming

violence, nothing happened. And so in this story, far from succeeding in its designs, the ego failed miserably in convincing our girl to preserve her separate self-identity; instead, she recognized herself to be the Atma, the One Self, beyond world, beyond time and space, one with God. To get to that point she had to turn to God, acknowledge that she can't solve her problems herself, for that very self she thought she was, was made by her to keep the problem unsolvable. Once she turns to God in total dependence, the dream takes a radical turn towards awakening.

Sai Baba said that Krishna waited 70 years for the moment on the eve of the great war, when Arjuna fell to his knees in despondency and turned to Krishna, who was his brother-in-law and dearest buddy at the time, but who Arjuna now recognized as the divinity. Arjuna cried out, "Lord, Help me! I'm confused. I don't know what to do." That's when the Bhagavad Gita came. In my own case, Spirit waited until I was in a hopeless situation in a plane that I was flying, that was coming apart in an incredible storm and running out of fuel, when I cried out, "God help me! I don't want to die!" The call was answered immediately and I was saved physically and spiritually. I was brought to India and the door was opened to everything in the whole universe. With Yaani, Spirit waited until she was threatened with death before revealing the truth to her. Spirit waits for the call. It is ever eager to come but It will not circumvent your free will; so It waits for the invitation. It is the mother of mothers. It will come running to take you in Its arms as soon as you call out to It.

Then why do these stories always have such a dramatic extremis character to them? Why do I have to be near death before I call out and Spirit responds? Why does Spirit wait for Yaani to be threatened with death and be horribly abused before It responds, and in a way totally different then asked for. She wanted God to save her body. She was shown that she was not her body, that instead she was invincible, invulnerable, she could not be threatened. She was the love of God in its entirety; there was no force anywhere in the universe that could oppose her mind or threaten her. So if that great realization is available to us any time, how come we don't call out right now but wait for that extreme situation? The reason will surprise you.

At the surface of consciousness we fear death, but below in the subconscious where the ego has taken up residence, we are attracted to death. We welcome death because it puts the lie to any idea of eternal life, of oneness with everything and everyone. Death proves we're separate. It supports our self-image and our separation from God. Similarly, at the conscious level we want to be loved and so when we hear of a god-man, the divine in human form, we rush there yearning to experience his love. But, hopefully, not too much love. For at the subconscious level our terror is not of death but of God's love, for we know it will annihilate us, it will dissolve our separate self and snuff out our individuality. So, our attraction to Sai Baba quickly turns to seeking an interview which would serve as self-verification, and would hopefully get him to solve our individual problems and reinforce our specialness.

Only when death is staring us directly in the eye and we're facing physical annihilation, which we see as total dissolution of our self, will we take a chance on dissolution at God's Hands, and call out to Him. But, why wait? Eventually, you yourself will create a scenario in which you have no choice but to appeal to God. You'll make a rapist and install him in the Sai Center, or you'll create some other 'life'-threatening incident for yourself. It may be a great story, but it's stupid. To the ego the story may be foolproof but only because by embracing the ego you have become a fool and will not recognize the insidious plot that you yourself have concocted. The story is foolproof, but it is not God proof. It won't work because you are not a fool; you are one with God. And God is pure love and will not let you get lost in a nightmare.

You yourself, the true divine part of yourself, will save you. What's required is the admission that you made the problem, or more correctly that you are the problem, and you are the solution. But you have become so ensnared with the problem you have no idea how to get out of the web. Sai Baba says being is lost in becoming, life is wasted in dreaming. That's our condition. His prescription for finding ourselves is 'Forget the world, Remember God, Never fear death.' He says, 'Dust if you think, dust you are. God if you think, God you are. All power is in your mind. As you will so you are. Think only God and you will realize God.' You are whole, you are eternal, you are love itself. Even if you don't experience it, that is what you are.

Don't define yourself by your experience and put your trust in that. The real test is are you supremely happy? Is the delicious joy of ananda your consistent experience? Happiness, joy, unbounded delight is your very nature. If that's not what is happening to you and what you are perceiving all around you, then recognize that something is very fundamentally wrong. You've done something in your own mind to turn off your own nature. But that's ridiculous. It's impossible. How can you not be yourself? You have all power in your mind. You can make time and space and whole universes, and fool yourself that you are a mere speck within them. But you do not have the power to undo what God created. There is a God, and He created you like Himself, and you have willfully chosen to forget the perfect wholeness that you are. Recognize you have been mistaken about yourself, you have been misperceiving everything; you don't have any idea what's going on. Call for help and ask to be shown. The divinity that is your core, will always answer and show you the door out and back to your home with God, which you never left.

If you're in the middle of a devastating life situation, great! Don't waste your devastation. It's an incredibly opportunity. For heaven's sake, and I mean that literally, don't pity yourself. Transform that devastation; take full responsibility for all of it and bring all those dark thoughts to the light. But, as Yaani said, suffering is not required; you can make the choice right now to awaken in total joy. Recognize that it is only your own meaningless thoughts that have made a joyless and

meaningless world for you. Let them go and choose for God instead. Baba says that the easiest way through life is to say 'thanks' in full gratitude for everything that has been, and to say 'yes' in total acceptance to everything that is to come. Then, with the past and future thus fully taken care of, you are free to be totally in the now, creatively present in the freshness of every moment. It only takes a little willingness to allow a little switch to be thrown in the mind that moves you from fear to love, from attack and grievance to joy and freedom.

Sai Baba tells many stories that illustrate this shift of consciousness. Here is one of them. Imagine the divinity as a child, the divine child, alone and whole, totally self-absorbed. Being a child full of joy and playfulness he entertains himself by imagining that he is entering a room made up of mirrors. Now, everywhere he looks he sees a reflection of himself. In his divine imagination he puts a mustache and beard on one of his reflections, a dress and female features on another of his mirror images, he slightly warps some of the mirrors in his mind to present a thin image, another a thick image, another a short image, another a tall image, another a youthful image, another an older image. And so, in his divine imagination, he has created more himself to love and play with.

Of course all these images are merely reflections of himself. There is only one 'I' and all he sees is but himself. Yet, to make the play more enjoyable he pretends that all these images are separate beings and that they relate to each other and to him in infinite ways of expressing their joy, their love and deep communion with each other. It is an ongoing heavenly party and the divine child plays every role and enjoys every detail of this celestial play. O, he likes this game very much! It is a thoroughly wonderful game of pretend.

The divine child can be compared to the ocean. On the surface of the ocean there will be found so many different forms each with their own name and characteristics. There are waves, swells, currents, spray, fog, clouds, snow, ice, steam, vapor, hail, sleet, hurricanes, typhoons, waterspouts. In short, there are an infinite variety of forms, but they are all just made of the one substance, water. All are manifestations of the same ocean, in which water is the one reality. And so it is in this world, the basis of all names and forms, the one reality is the one divine light, the one divine child.

Returning to our story, all games eventually come to an end. When the divine child is done with this one, he turns around and walks out of his imagined room of mirrors. All his reflections which had instantly appeared, now instantly vanish, and the divine child is again absorbed in his native state of undifferentiated consciousness, what Sai Baba calls *CIA*, Constant Integrated Awareness.

Contrast the play of the divine child who always knows himself and who is always in undiminishable joy, with the actions of a dog who happens into the room of

mirrors. Everywhere the dog looks he sees other dogs facing him. He becomes agitated and ready to defend or attack; he bares his teeth and snarls at the band of dogs surrounding him. Now he finds that his adversaries are also getting excited and signaling threatening gestures. He becomes afraid, adrenaline rushes into his blood stream and he prepares to fight for his life. He barks and growls and menacingly faces one after the other of his attackers to keep them at bay.

But there is no relief, the standoff continues and the threat is unabated until he finally wears himself out, becomes weak and gives up. He becomes defenseless. Amazingly, the band of dogs around him relax as well and cease their attacking gestures. Of course, the whole scene of threat and attack and the anguish that resulted from it, was all concocted in the dog's mind. A shift in perception would have been so very easy to make and would have so completely changed what he sees and experiences, but it is a seemingly impossible task for dog-consciousness to manage.

Through the law of *karma*, the dog realizes that he himself is responsible for all his actions. It dawns in his consciousness that everything he seems to do to someone outside of himself, that every hurt he inflicts, he himself will suffer from; and that whatever he appears to be doing to someone else he is really doing to himself. Eventually he realizes that all these projections perceived to be others outside of him are really just himself. When the dog learns to look lovingly on his reflections, 100 dog reflections look lovingly back at him. Every kind act he takes is magnified and returned a hundred-fold. It has been said that when you take one small step towards the divinity, the divinity takes 100 steps towards you. Align yourself with truth and all the awakened and realized beings of the ages will come to bless you and shower their grace.

And so, this whole story is our story. It is the story of our daily progression through the house of mirrors of our dreams. In time, the dog changes his perceptions; he reverses his spelling and instead of a d-o-g, he becomes the g-o-d that he has always been. This change in perception need not take eons. It can happen in an instant. Right now we can leave our dog-consciousness behind and return to God-consciousness. Nothing need be done. We only need to stop giving our false perceptions continued validity by perpetuating the belief that they are true. To let go of our belief in the reality of illusion is the only spiritual practice that is required of us. Truly, we need do nothing; we merely need to be willing to stop reinforcing life-times of mistaken seeing and conditioning by continuing to see the false as true and thereby making the error real.

You are the divine child, playing with all these seemingly different reflected images of yourself. And now you are in process of turning inward and leaving the house of mirrors behind. Just a few more moments and your awareness will again be bathed in the infinite joy of self-absorption. You simply do not realize it yet.

Sai Baba illustrates the letting go of false beliefs, by calling attention to a handkerchief he holds in his hand. As he clutches the handkerchief, he says, "Holding on is what is difficult." As he lets go of the handkerchief and it falls to the floor, he says with a twinkle in his eye, "Letting go is so easy." In other words, when we give up all efforts to hold on to and give meaning and value to the illusion, the truth reveals itself naturally, of its own accord. It is all so simple.

Sometimes the shift in consciousness comes quite unexpectedly for it is available every moment of our day. All that is required is a willingness to commit our lives to it totally and relinquish all efforts to hold on to even the least part of the illusion by considering any of it to have real value. To attempt to purify or sanctify the illusion with sacred forms and rituals and incantations, in other words, to attempt to bring truth into the illusion, as some spiritual paths advocate, will not get us there. Even our attempts to spiritualize our lives within the dream and hope thereby to awaken to truth, will also not do it. All these efforts will not get us there because *we are already there*. In the end all our efforts directed towards achieving awakening turn out to be futile, because we don't believe we are already there. It is like looking for our eyeglasses, when they are sitting on our nose and we are using them to look for the eyeglasses we think we lost. We won't find them that way.

What *does* get us there, is our recognition that we are already there.... that we have kept the illusion alive through force of habit and through non-inquiry, and this has covered the realization of our truth. We have constantly reinforced the illusion by all our daily actions and thoughts, by our judgments and perceptions as separate individual beings. We need but to stop feeding the illusion with our belief in its existence. When we no longer see differences and specialness, then all we see wherever we turn is ourself, the one Self. In Christian terms, all we see is the face of Christ, everywhere. Then love abounds, and illusion, shorn of all our beliefs in it, wastes away and vanishes. Being no longer obscured, the truth which was always there unaffected, but which illusion appeared to have covered, now stands revealed. That is all.

I want to tell you one more story that I always liked. It comes from the great Indian classic, the Mahabharata. It illustrates a very important quality, the healing grace of compassion. It is of a benevolent uncle who turns up in a village and finds his nephews and nieces and their friends playing in a thatched hut with toys and make-do twig-and-rag dolls. "Why play with these?" he asks. "Outside is the Kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree. Stand under it and wish. It will give you everything you want."

The children don't believe him. They are smart enough to know that the world isn't like that, so they just smile knowingly. But, as soon as the uncle leaves, they rush out to the tree and start wishing. They want sweets and soon they get sweets... and the stomach aches that follow. They want toys and soon they get all the toys they wished for... and the squabbles and boredom that follows. This is very disturbing to them.

Something seems to be wrong. Why is there always this unpleasant extra that tags along with whatever they wish for? The pattern is always the same: first there is pleasure and gratification, then there is pain and misery; and then they run back to the tree to wish for something new, in order to get some distraction and relief from the unpleasantness.

What they haven't realized is that the wish-fulfilling tree is the vast, enormously responsive, but totally unsentimental world. It gives you exactly what you want, and with it its built-in opposite. It is not steady; it is constantly changing. The tragedy of the world is not that you don't get what you want, it is that you do get exactly what you ask for, along with its built-in opposite. Wish it, think it, ask for it and you have it... and then you've had it!

The children grow up but they are still trapped and clamoring under the wish-fulfilling tree. Instead of sweets and toys they now crave for money, power, fame and family, and they get what they ask for, and the same bitter after-taste of disillusionment and disappointment. The tree just keeps on granting all favors, but always with frustrations attached. Still, they go on wishing and experiencing alternate bouts of pleasure and agony. They feel trapped because they have forgotten how to free themselves from the tree. They do not realize that all that is required is the simple willingness to just walk away. It is like a monkey who has stuck his hand in a jar filled with peanuts and now cannot get his hand back out because it is filled with peanuts and his hand has become bigger than the opening. He feels trapped although he need only let go of the peanuts to free himself.

And so, these foolish ones grow old and increasingly miserable and end up stretched out under the tree, awaiting their end. The cynics among them lament that the world has gone sour because they've allowed themselves to get trapped under this damned tree. "Next time", they think to themselves, "we'll live our lives and get what we want far away from any tree like this." But, they are fools. They have learned nothing. Their desire and sense of lack will put them back under the tree.

The clever ones among them lament that they have just been making the wrong wishes. "Next time we'll surely pick the right wishes and not get ourselves into such a bad fix", they think. But, they are still greater fools. They have also learned nothing. But there are even greater fools among them who say to themselves, "There isn't going to be any next time. I'm tired of this stupid game and this stupid world. I'm just going to die and get myself out of here." The obliging tree quickly grants their desire. They die and soon thereafter they get the built-in opposite of their death-wish. They are reborn, and under the same tree, for, in this world, there really is no other place to be.

This story would be the ultimate tragedy if it weren't for one more boy, a cripple who also made his way out to the tree after the uncle left, hobbling slowly on his crutches.

But he was quickly pushed aside by his eager friends. So he crawled back to the hut and gazed at the marvelous tree from his window, waiting for his friends to finish and make room for him to stand under the tree and make his lame-boy wishes. What he saw from the window shocked him.

Here was a tragic scene being enacted in front of him. He saw his companions grabbing for sweets and toys of all sorts without letup, from the time they were young until they were old, and getting stomach aches and boredom and anguish without ever realizing the cause of their suffering. Finally, he saw them lying old and decrepit under the tree, dissipated and suffering and wishing death and getting it and being reborn into the same cycle all over again. The spectacle of this cosmic tragi-comedy so baffled him and impressed him, that he just kept looking wonder-struck. A gush of compassion welled in his heart for the victims of this endless karmic play, and in that overwhelming feeling of empathy and loving-kindness, he completely forgot to wish his own wish, although he had been waiting for so long and wanting it so much.

Overwhelmed as he was with compassion, he forgot everything else, and in that moment of spontaneous caring and concern he stood outside the influence of the world's ambivalence. With his unplanned act of non-attachment, he had separated the wish-fulfilling tree from its roots, growing in desire. He had committed the spontaneous good deed, the gratuitous act of concerned compassion, and since such an unplanned act is free of all desire for personal reward, he became free of the influence of the wish-fulfilling tree. Marveling at the complex and dreadful fabric of the universe he forgot to wish.

He had not done the planned good act which makes you suffer the punishment of returning to get your reward of good *karma*, nor had he done the planned bad act, which makes you suffer the punishment of hell. Nor had he done the absurd act, wanting to cop out of the system from within the system. It is absurd because it is impossible. He had simply forgotten his unreal self... he didn't remember to forget, he merely forgot, having become completely indifferent to his own wants. He stood in the healing shadow of his compassion, and through that gracious act he became transformed. He was freed from the pale of the tree. He became the serene man, the dharmic man, the right candidate for enlightenment, untouched by the varieties of pleasure and pain the world so copiously provides.

In compassion, which is the passion of divine love, lies the true meaning of life. Arjuna showed such compassion for a brief moment and the whole Mahabharata pivoted on that one moment. After a lifetime of preparation to defend righteousness, now on the eve of the battle Arjuna threw down his bow and resolved not to fight, because in his mind's eye he saw all the suffering that would ensue. That was the moment the Lord chose to teach him the singular truth that there was only his mind, that he was the Atma, the one Self, and not the body. He was not born and he could

not die, nor could his cousins and his beloved teacher and grandfather on the other side, die. In Yaani's case also, her compassion welled up within her at the most improbable moment, and she totally forgot her own fear and self-concern.

The message is clear... there is nothing in this world of any value whatsoever. Everything we wish for in the world will eventually change from being de-lightful to being repulsive and abhorrent. When we recognize that through our wishes we are responsible for all the disappointment, suffering and death we perceive, our compassion for the human condition wells up within us. We be-come inspired to express our function as savior and liberate the world that we made. This happens when we transform our mind. It is our love that fuels this change. When we see the heart-wrenching tragi-comedy of puppet-dolls we made, caught on the whirling merry-go-around, and our heart melts with compassion and we forget ourself and all our own desires and problems... at that critical instant the veil of illusion drops off and unexpectedly and un-planned, we traverse the dark passage of samsara and emerge into our certain-ty, blazing in the light of self-knowledge. Then there is only light. There is no more world. There never was any world, but only light. That is the awakening.

Postscript The ideas presented here can be found in the Sai Baba Gita and the Workbook and Text of the Course in Miracles. I would greatly encourage any of you who are seriously interested in healing your mind and transforming it from separation consciousness to the direct experience of singular creative reality, to immerse yourself in these, particularly the Course in Miracles, which Baba has called his highest teaching for the West. Doing the daily lessons will immeasurably quicken your transformation .