

Original Love Talk

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Now I'm going to just dive in, I think, and just share a little bit about this sort of concept and a certain sense approach to practice that I've called original love. Of course, one of the motivations for that, I don't know if it's provocative, but maybe rather... maybe a little grand title as is really twofold. One of them is, of course, you know, some of you might have, if you've heard about it, you might have thought of this, you know, it's a little bit of a critique of the idea of original sin. That's in there, you know. And I think there's a fairly well-attested generalization that's made, that has been made about... basically Western spirituality and Eastern spirituality, European largely, European-based spirituality and Asian-based spirituality. I think there is a distinction that you can make that holds up more or less that the primary model in the West is that we're messed up and we need to be redeemed.

You know, we've gone astray and we need to be brought back. We're basically, you know, fundamentally awry and an outside force has to intervene and quote unquote redeem us. That's a sort of, that's a fairly well attested sort of foundational model. By contrast, at least when you look by contrast with Asia, where the primary sort of model of spirituality seems to be that, no, actually, we're fundamentally great. We're fundamentally good and right and well. The problem is that dust and debris and confusions of different kinds have accreted over that fundamental rightness.

If you see what I mean, that, that, so it's interesting really to compare those two models. And I think, I think they're thought to largely hold up these two. So in a way, this, this statement or this, you know, declaration, original love is really just pointing more that way. That, that actually, what if. It's not so much that we need some kind of training of whatever form that may be. And, you know, most religions do seem to think we need some kind of training.

Most spiritual traditions are, in fact, some kind of training. But rather than that being a training that sort of prepares us to receive... the beneficent hand of an outside force that will put

us to right. What if the training, in fact, is really more about clearing up the confusions, you know, more than confusions, the poisons, you know, in that language, the three poisons of Buddhism. That confuse us, that send us off away from what is originally right already within us. And that the training, the practice is about coming back to find an original wellness, an inherent wellness, okayness, goodness even.

That is already here and why not call that original love? That's sort of the idea. So again, a second origin of this phrase for me personally was in Zen, there's a lot of talk about original nature. You know in it comes up throughout Mahāyāna Buddhism there's a thing called Buddha nature but it's not a thing but it is a discovery that we can make that there's some level or dimension or register of our very own consciousness that we're not habituated to seeing or feeling or sensing but But it's very much here, always here. And when we drop into it, or however the language might be, when we discover it, when we sense it, when we awaken to it, what we find is that it's universal, it's everywhere, it can't be absent, it's without beginning, it's without end.

Meaning essentially time is not in its nature. It's actually in that nature. Nature, in that awareness, in that whatever it is, there's no time. So it's without beginning, without end. Actually, there's also no space, there's no distance, everything's here. Somehow all things are it.

And yet at the same time, it's not anything, because it's empty, it's śūnyatā. And we can sort of awaken to that original nature. There are Some Zen teachings where the terminology is made a bit more poetic and original nature is called original face. And there are teaching prompts, teaching questions, kōans, little anecdotal snippets that is part of Zen teaching in some traditions known as kōans. One of them is have you seen your original face? Actually the full language of it is have you seen the original face that you've had not just since before you were born but since before even your parents were born you have had an original face have you seen it so that's actually just really poetic language for Hey folks, there's this Buddha nature, this original nature that you have.

Have you discovered it yet? Yeah, kind of thing. So prompted by that, I felt I wanted to use this term original love because anytime, more or less, anytime somebody does glimpse this original nature, it tends to bring up. There may be other things too, but it tends to bring up a sense of extraordinary belonging, that I am not the separate entity stalking this earth in its lonely search for what it wants and to avoid what it doesn't want. I'm not that. I'm not the isolated, separate, constricted, contracted sense of self-control.

I've felt myself to be one way or another for a long time. And I may have done various kinds of practice and that have helped sort of assuage that sense to some degree or to a great degree.

But actually in the moment of awakening to this quote unquote original nature, I discover that that's only ever been a very provisional process. Idea, that sense of self. It's really been no more than a thought or a cluster of thoughts or particular kind of thought, which we could go into in more detail. But I have now seen that it wasn't the totally true thing that it had presented itself as being.

And instead, I'm part of something quite different, you know, and I'm not just sort of part of it. It's really that's deep down what I actually am. And that discovery, you know, known in Zen as kenshō or as in most, most Buddhist traditions as awakening, you know, it's, it's, it really overturns the, in William James's language, it overturns the hegemony of the everyday rational self. It overturns the rule, the reign of the separate sense of self. And when we get a glimpse of that or even more when we really plunge into it or even more when it becomes perhaps more of a stable way of experiencing this world, there is, I think, inevitably... some sort of deeper sense of love because of the deep belonging it brings on. Hence, original love.

Okay, so that's just a word or two on the title of the book and the sort of concept of it behind the title. Now, allow me to just say a little bit about the sort of approach that I'm trying to share in this book. And we've had a program actually called Original Love that's been running for about... for four or five years now, an entirely online, more or less entirely online meditation program. And it's sort of, I think it's sort of morphing a bit now. I noticed some of you have discovered our app the way. Thank you very much for trying it out, if you have done so.

It's informed by sort of similar, understanding of practice that is in this book. When I say this book, I mean this book, original though, that I'm going to be sort of speaking from. So what is this book and what is this approach? What is its particular ways of slicing and dicing the vast field of meditation practice? So... It starts with an early Chinese Buddhist document by a guy called Seng Chou in the 6th century or late 5th century, who said that practice was like a wagon trail with two wheel ruts, as of course, you know, any cart track must have, one for either wheel.

And if you imagine, you know, a... an image of a cart track sort of winding through fields. It has two wheel, wheel ruts, clearly, you know. And he says one of those wheel ruts is the foundations of mindfulness. And the other one, he says, is principle, which is a Taoist and early Chinese Buddhist term for awakening, or as they often called it, realization. So, yeah. What's the difference?

Well, the first track in this view is a gradual, progressive, developmental path of practice. And one way to just come straight at it is by looking at the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, which is this, you

know, the classic Foundations of Mindfulness Sutta, four Foundations of Mindfulness, the body, feelings or sensations, which basically means the valence of experience, whether it's pleasant or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. There's number two. Number three is the mind, which actually we might understand more like sort of emotion states, mood states, affective orientations, you know, and attitudes and so on. And then fourthly, dharmas, which... basically means, it seemed in terms of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, this absolutely classic Theravāda Sutta, it seems to mean some of the primary foundational teachings that categorize experience. And so you can bring those into your practice as lenses, as frameworks for understanding experience.

And all of that is kind of somewhat sequential. It's certainly programmatic and it certainly is understood to develop over time. And it's perfectly reasonable. You know, it is a form of training that takes time and it takes practice. And you know, you can sort of, you can get better at it. You can also go deeper and deeper and deeper into it as you progress through it.

You start analyzing little packets of experience more and more finely, and it gets finer and finer grained. And so your general experience of any moment becomes increasingly kind of acute and fine-grained. And that brings with it, you know, an unpacking, an analysis of breaking down of the great clump called me and my life. Sort of just one lump that's me and my life. You gradually discover, no, it's made of multiple threads like a tapestry. It's made of multiple component parts.

And actually, as you break things down, you tend to open up more and more. The sense of being kind of locked into a way of being and of being the single contracted self that's trying to navigate between pain and pleasure, gain and loss, success and failure, good name, bad name, you know, and so on. That very... contracted lump of me in my life is precisely what is gradually getting unlocked and unraveled and becoming more open through this programmatic path of practice. So that's all great. Why is there another wheel rut? What's wrong with just that as a path?

Well, the reason that there's another wheel rut is this great sort of discovery and insight of of early Buddhism and later Buddhism and of Taoism and of Advaita Vedānta and Yogic Vedic thought and so on. Great discovery that, you know, has been well known in Asia since, you know, probably Indus Valley civilization of 1500 BCE, Mahendra Dharam, you know, where there's, we don't really know. But anyway, it goes way back. The discovery the sudden thing called realization, which is not dependent on any of the stuff in the first wheel rut. It's a flash of discovery that I have never been the separate self I thought I was. It's not a gradual

deconstructing of the self.

It's not a gradual deconstructing of how I perceive and experience the world. It's a sudden, radical seeing through of the whole way I've constructed self and world. Okay, now, you know, this is the great thing about this is that it's real and it happens and it's true. And it does actually reveal something very profoundly important about the nature of our experience and of what we call this human life. And it happens to people. There's sort of no doubt about it. People do sometimes get struck by it. Revelations, epiphanies, awakenings. I mean, the language is a little tricky, but basically, and sometimes the interpretations put on these can range wildly. You know, sometimes they're given theistic overlays. But I mean, fundamentally, I don't think they need anything like that. They're simply insights into the nature of the sense of self and its relationship to the world.

Now, Buddhism seems to have known about this all along. You know, there are stories in Theravāda of people who come to the Buddha. They hear just a snippet of his teaching and boom, they get it. And they see, quote unquote, the deathless. They see that which does not die. And maybe that means, in a more secular understanding, they discover this original nature of that doesn't do time. They suddenly discover that there's actually, let's say, a level of consciousness, of awareness, where the construction of a sense of time is not going on, nor is the construction of a sense of self, nor is the construction of a world that is not self. Those aren't going on on this level of awareness. There be some, you know, in some Advaita, modern Advaita people call it pure consciousness. A sort of consciousness that is actually, you know, you sort of drop beneath all the presuppositions, the, all the presuppositions about the way things are. All the conditioned views are not there. It's a consciousness that's actually... Pure, meaning free of them, you know, of the ordinary suppositions we make about life.

Okay, I'll just pause for a moment, just to sort of let this sink in a bit and see what floats up for all of us. Yeah, so just a little recap. This cart track metaphor is suggesting that on the one hand, there's the practice of gradually... deepening, clarifying, coming to understand and also to experience, you know, this, basically this very moment in fresh ways based on our dismantling, our analysis, our breaking apart, our deconstructing of our habituated ways of understanding. The bedrock of which is really about self and other or self and world as being cast-ironly separate from one another. All that's being gradually deconstructed. And along the way, we're having great insights. We're also dismantling habits of mind. You know, we're becoming, essentially, you know, we're deconstructing suffering in a fairly... reliable and sort of predict a predictable way even if we follow the instructions and the path of training. So

that's tremendous. And again, it would beg the question, what's this other wheel rut? Why have another one? What's wrong with that? Well, there's nothing wrong with that at all. It's great. It just so happens that sometimes people suddenly get the whole picture or they get that the picture that they've had has been just a trick of light and one tweak in the angle of light and bam they see it's it's a transparency i thought it was absolutely opaque and solid and it's a transparency you know or however we would phrase they suddenly just see this profoundly liberative insight that you know that and you know that there's this original nature everything has you know and well what is that well some say but vedic and vaita folks it's pure consciousness it's the original or sometimes called the fourth consciousness yeah i don't know if you know this term the turiya there's a great one of the great panishads is the Chandogya, I think it is, where it lays it out very clearly. There are four consciousnesses. There's waking consciousness, dreaming consciousness, sleeping consciousness. So it's trying to cover the whole terrain of human experience, waking consciousness, everything that happens when we're awake, all of that is within waking consciousness. Yeah, but sometimes we're sleeping and we dream. Well, that's dream consciousness. Fine, that's a second consciousness. What about when we're, you know, we're not dead, but we're in deep sleep? There's another one. There's sleep consciousness. So there's three consciousnesses. They're trying to cover the totality of experience. But what about this fourth one? The fourth one is what all three are made of. And the goal of yogic training in this view is to discover the fourth one. Because then you see what everything, what the entirety of your experience has actually been all along. It's been this hidden, not really hidden, but unnoticed fourth consciousness, the Turiya, which just means fourth, the fourth consciousness. Everything's made of the fourth consciousness. And that fourth consciousness itself has the capacity to be everything, but it itself is without characteristic. Or we might just say empty in more Buddhist terminology, shūnya. Or we might say pure. That's the word they like. So, so, so, so, let's see. So that's why there's a second wheel rut on this cart track. Because actually, in a certain sense, from the perspective of the second wheel rut, Everything you're doing on that first one is maybe it's helpful, but in a certain way, it's kind of a waste of time. Because every little last part of the first wheel rut is actually already the second wheel rut. And you just have to realize that. Okay, so is this kind of, is this making some conceptual sense so far? but yeah okay i'm getting some thoughts out there yeah okay okay okay so i mean maybe for some of you yes and for some of you lurking with your cameras off you think what the hell's this guy talking about i don't know anyway um i'll keep going but we but we so so okay henry just pause a moment let's just let's just have a little pause i gotta just uh check where i've got to and what's still to come yeah okay

So now, why have I bothered to write this book? Well, there are a couple of risks in all of this, a couple of pitfalls. I'm sure there's many, but I'm talking about sort of major ones. The first one is like this. You could spend a lot of time trying to kind of get down some perfect practice on the first wheel, right? and not actually recognize that there is a much larger vista, a much larger view that's here all along.

So you could spend perhaps much longer than you really need to, trying to perfect your practice on the first wheel run. I'm going to come back to this. I want to just lay out the two primary pitfalls. There's a way we might be... kind of training ourselves actually to not see the vast vista of the second wheel rut. Because our practice is so fine-grained and we're trying to perfect it and get really good at it, it actually, there might be a law of diminishing returns, kind of thing if you see what I mean. With too much... perfection attempts to perfect practice on the first wheel road.

There's a, maybe I can say this in another way. Some of you will know Locke Kelly and his teaching. He's got a great book, Effortless Mindfulness. And in it, he's got this great little section at the back. Of kind of common pitfalls in practice, three or four pages or something, little two or three liners. And he talks about this in one of them.

There's a lot of people who are worried about spiritual bypassing. That was a terminology created by John Welwood in the 80s, for people who were just throwing themselves into practice, hoping it would solve marriage problems, hoping it would solve career problems and hoping that somehow if they just did more sitting, other areas of life would automatically be helped by it. And in fact, it turned out in a way they were really just avoiding other areas of life that they were having problems in. So the term spiritual bypass was coined by John Welwood. Yeah, to mean, you know, it's not that different from, say, workaholism, you know, or when getting just so into some... past time. Maybe it's running or something.

And it could be something that is in itself a good thing. It's just that when we're doing it to a great extent and somehow ignoring other sides of life that we hope might magically be helped by this other thing we're doing, then it's this other spiritual practice we're doing, then it's spiritual bypassing. Okay, is that sort of clear roughly? But Lot Kelly says, yeah, right. But there's also what he calls underpassing, which is where we get so into, he talked about therapeutic underpassing. We can get so into our therapeutic approach to things that we're actually not opening up to the spiritual side.

He also talks about conceptual overpassing, where we're getting so good at understanding things that we're not actually able to drop down into the experience of them. You know, there was a classic thing in the, I think, in the 50s and 60s, and I'm sure it's probably still going on,

where people were getting really into Zen. People loved Zen, but they kind of loved its ideas. And there were people who were really into Zen, but didn't actually practice it. Didn't actually experience what it was trying to convey. So that would be conceptual overpassing.

So these are all sort of hazards. And the hazard of wheel track, wheel rut one is of a kind of underpassing. I would call it a sort of mindfulness underpassing. We're playing whack-a-mole a lot, trying to just catch every time we're off track with our mindfulness. You know, and we're actually, you know, it's, I mean, it's, of course, it's all good, but there's a risk of a kind of underpassing. Okay. Hazard of the second wheel rut is like this.

There are traditions, some forms of Zen, definitely the form of Zen that I've maximally trained in or primarily trained in, and Advaita and Neo Advaita. Would, I think, also fall into this category, where there isn't a whole lot of emphasis on fine-grained mindfulness, fine-tuning our capacity to sort of deconstruct present moment experience. Instead, there's a lot of emphasis on the big awakening. Don't bother with that stuff. Just discover who you really are. You know, discover your true nature. Don't bother with that. You're wasting your time on messing around with mindfulness, you know, stress reduction. No, who needs that if you awaken? You know, that you can understand that kind of thinking, you know, right?

So that would be, what would that be? I don't know what would we call that sort of awakening overpass? I don't know quite what to call that. But I mean, there's... These things are tricky because there's something to that view. It's not entirely wrong. I mean, if somebody does have a profound awakening experience, you know, it is pretty mind-blowing. You do see your life in a whole new way. And sometimes it seems to be sort of enough. I mean, I'm thinking of, say, Ramana Maharshi, you know, the famous... 20th century sage in India, I forget, I think he was born in the late 19th century. He had this sort of massive awakening as a 16 year old. And undoubtedly it happened. And he kind of crawled into the cellar under a temple for six months because he didn't know what to do next. And you can read about the story. I might mangle it a bit. And then luckily he met with some... Rishi, some spiritual master, who kind of understood what had happened to him and gradually helped him sort of come out, come out of it and be able to live from it, sort of integrate a way of living from it, which took maybe a few years. And he truly had suddenly had the veil pulled aside and rent asunder and seen the veil. A deeper reality of things where he was not separate and could never be separate. And, you know, whatever the subtleties of terminology might be, according to different traditions in Buddhist, certainly Mahāyāna Buddhist terminology, it would be about śūnyatā, awakening to the truth of śūnyatā, awakening to the reality of Buddha nature, of one emptiness, comprising all things, one emptiness full of all things, including us. And

sort of, it's not just sort of, that's how it is and we're seeing it. No, that's how it is and we are it. You know, that's the profundity of awakening. And it's incredible. You know, it is remarkable. It is remarkable in its radicalness of its overturning of our prior way of seeing and understanding everything, basically. It's remarkable in that.

So we don't want to diminish that or not acknowledge that. Yet, if that's the only thing we're after in practice, there's a big problem. Firstly, we're trying to get something which is anti-thetical really to the true nature of practice, which is that it's always showing up for what is. But this isn't doing that. It's seeking something that isn't apparently present. And they'll say, well, no, it is present now. It's just that you're not seeing it. But that's still saying you need to be in a different state than the one you're in somehow. And that's not actually the heart of practice. The heart of practice is always showing up for the way things are. I mean, that's always the bedrock of practice. You always have to start. We have to start there. And things can develop as they do from there. But it's never like we're skipping over the way things are to get to. No, you can't do that. That's sort of the heart of what practice is, is showing up, beginning, being present for the way things are.

So... That's one hazard. Another hazard of it is the idea that if you have seen this thing, you're done. Well, that's a grievously hazardous position to be in for a practitioner. I'm now done. Man, that's a risky place to be. Very risky place to be. And some people are kind of forced into it by the ideology of the tradition that they're in. And so you get these situations where, you know, a teacher feels they have to be infallible. And if they slip, they have to hide it. And that's a terrible place for any human being to be put in. I'm now basically perfect and infallible because I've been through this massive experience that the tradition endorses as the one thing you really have to do. Man, I've done it. Or at least I've been told I've done it. And now I'm cooked. Now I'm done. And... What a risky, precarious, horrid little pinnacle to be placed on. Oh my God, who would want that? You know, and it's very hazardous. It leads to all kinds of problems in Zen and other kinds of spiritual centers where there's a prevailing ideology like that. Does that make sense? Yeah. Okay.

So hence we are. The royal we I present in this book and in teaching you gotta have an awareness of both wheel ruts I think that's the healthy way you gotta it's good to know about both it's good to be open to the second yes and it's most important to practice the first um so look we're going to have a break now so i've gone over a little bit on the timetable um We'll reconvene. I think we should have 15 minutes because this is rather a long block otherwise. And we'll reconvene in 15 minutes and just sort of carry on from there. So, you know, have a nice little break, a walk, a cup of tea, whatever you'd like. Thank you so much, everybody.