

Hangin' Loose from Diamond Heart Book II: The Freedom to Be

by A.H. Almaas



The process of freeing oneself can be seen from two complementary and interconnected points of view. The first looks at the process as self-realization, which is called self-actualization or essential development. The other point of view sees the process as liberation or freedom. Each perspective you emphasize depends on what you are aware of in yourself. There are two contenders for your attention: essence and personality, your true nature and your acquired identity. From the perspective of essence, self-realization means realizing or developing one's essence. From the perspective of liberation, the process is seen as becoming free from the personality. In our work, these two developments go on simultaneously; they are actually one process. In the past, different systems have emphasized one or the other to the extent that at first glance they may appear contradictory. Sometimes conflicts arise because of the terminology. Those who are on the path to self-realization say, "Just realize yourself, develop your inner potential. What is this enlightenment business? There's no such thing." Those who are seeking liberation or enlightenment say, "What is self-realization? There's no self to be realized. The concept of self is what you need to get rid of."

So far in our work we have not separated the two perspectives. However, we have approached the process of freeing oneself mainly from the perspective of essential development, of becoming more and more your essence. So now we will explore further the perspective of liberation and freedom.

This issue typically arises for people who have a taste of essence, some experience of their true nature, because the taste brings an appetite for complete liberation. Liberation or freedom is not really concerned with any particular essential aspect, quality, or state. It does not matter what essential state exists in the experience of liberation. If you are free from personality, you are free no matter what the state is. In the state of liberation the content of experience becomes unimportant. It is very ordinary. Nothing specific happens, no huge realization or mind-shattering experience. It is the most natural state. It is so ordinary and so natural that when we have it, we don't know we have it. It is so uneventful that almost everyone goes in and out of it frequently. There are no flashing lights or brilliant suns. There is no drama. Liberation is beyond the dichotomy of essence and personality, and because it is so uneventful, it usually escapes us. Its subtlety prevents us from recognizing it, or even from being aware that it is happening. It is not easy to talk about it because it is so ordinary; there is nothing in particular that is present or not present. It is a state you experience every day when you are not self-conscious or concerned with anything in particular.

When your mind is free, not concerned, or worried, or focused on anything in particular, and your heart is not grasping or clinging to anything, then you are free. The most characteristic quality is that there is no fixation on anything; you're not focused on any issue or experience. Whatever is there, is there. So there is a freedom of mind. The mind is not saying, "I want this," or "I want to look at this," or "It has to be this way." The mind is loose. The expression "hang loose" tells us what it means to be liberated.

Being liberated means there is no clinging to anything; there is no worry, no concern, no heaviness. The mind is not fixated, focused or bound to any particular content; you are aware of whatever arises in the mind, without effort, without even trying to be aware. You don't care whether you are sensing your essence, or even whether your essence is there. Whether you are happy or sad, whether a person is there with you or not, none of these things seem important. For the moment you're completely free from all the concerns in your life. This state can never be achieved by striving for it. It will just happen one day, and if you notice it you won't think it's a big deal. You'll go on eating your dinner or whatever you are doing. The moment it becomes a big deal, it's gone. The moment you have the attitude of, "Oh, wonderful! I want to know what's going on-I want to hang on to this," it's gone. Holding on is exactly what is absent in this state, and because of the tendency to grasp this subtle state, it can be very fleeting. It's very simple, the simplest thing there is. Young children are in this state much of the time, a state without concern for anything in particular, daydreaming or playing. But because of our early experiences, our minds become set in a certain direction, so that we fixate on a certain part of reality and reject the rest. This selectivity is the loss of the state. It occurs very early in life, but the fixation doesn't usually become dominant until age five to seven. Until then, the experience of this state comes and goes, but gradually is experienced less and less often. Throughout life it comes and goes, for some people more often than others. It is a state of release, but without a conscious feeling of release; everything is loose. This condition of freedom is not like liberation from some particular oppression; it is the raw state of liberation itself, so liberating that it doesn't matter what your experience is. You don't care what you're experiencing. Your heart is open and your mind doesn't fixate on preconceived ideas or worry about imagined possibilities. You're completely accepting without thinking or

feeling that you're accepting. Essence will be there freely in whatever way your being needs at that moment, but still the presence of essence is not your focus, it's just who you are, what is present in your experience now.

We can talk about this state but we cannot say exactly what it is. You may realize that this is a very familiar state that you've been in many times. It's a very ordinary state; everyone needs to experience it in order to live and enjoy life.

What can we do to prepare ourselves for this experience, and particularly for the perception of the liberated condition? Everything we do here is of course contributing to it, but let's talk more specifically about the primary ingredients needed, what I'll call the factors of enlightenment. What are the primary factors that will prepare you for that perception-that subtle, fleeting perception? Ultimately, all the essential aspects and the knowledge and wisdom that comes from them are needed. Here we'll explore the seven primary ones.

First of all, you need energy, energy to work on yourself and work through the personality and its patterns. Energy is the sense that you have the capacity, the strength, the courage to do something about it, about yourself, about your life. You have the energy that makes you feel, "Yes, I can do something. I have strength, I have a spirit, I have potency." This energy will give you the fuel to look at yourself and understand things. Many things need to be understood and experienced; tremendous amounts of energy are needed, tremendous amounts of spirit, to be able to work through all the processes, and to deal with all the illusions that cloud the perception. So the factor of energy and strength must be freed and developed.

Another factor is determination. Without determination, the energy will be meaningless. You need steadfast determination and an unwavering will to go on, to continue in the face of discouragement and disappointment. Determination is what pushes you, what makes you persist. It is important to understand the personality issues around will and determination: what the issues are that make you feel castrated, that stop your determination, that block your will, that stop you from feeling, "Yes, I will do it." You need to discover what stops you from saying, "I'm going to do it. Whatever happens-disappointment, pain, fear-I'm going to continue. I might die before I do it, but I'm not going to stop. I'll continue after I die." With this capacity you know you can act in accordance with the importance of what you are doing.

Another factor that comes into the picture is a sense of lightness about the whole thing, a sense of joyousness. It is a specific kind of joyousness, a specific kind of lightness, a specific kind of delight. The delight and the joyfulness are the actual work itself. It is a delight in the truth, delight in seeing and experiencing the truth. It is a little like curiosity--a joyful curiosity about things. If you have only energy and determination, things can get a little heavy, ponderous, and very, very serious. The factor of joyousness is the lightness, the delight that opens things up. You become delighted to be doing whatever you are doing. This lightness has a curiosity to it, the way a child is curious. When a child is curious, he doesn't have a goal in mind. He's not thinking of getting a B.A. or a Ph.D. He's just curious at that moment. He isn't concerned about what will happen next.

The next factor needed to prepare ourselves for the perception of the experience of liberation is that of compassionate kindness. It is a very important, necessary quality. You need kindness for yourself because the process is difficult. Since you're not liberated, it is natural that you'll suffer, so why push yourself in a way that you'll suffer more? Why beat yourself up if you make a mistake? The factor of kindness also brings a quality of trust in yourself, trust in the process, a kind of trust in your mind, in your essence. Kindness also brings an unselfish attitude. If you have kindness, you have kindness for everybody, for everything. You have kindness for anything that suffers. You're doing the work out of kindness because you suffer. You see that you suffer, and out of kindness for yourself you want to do something about it, and that kindness in time extends to others. Other people's suffering hurts you too. You want to liberate yourself and you want other people to be free from their hurt and suffering. This natural course of events brings in a very important attitude that is a factor in allowing this state of liberation. This liberation has no fixation, and if you are focusing only on yourself, that is already a fixation, the biggest fixation. "What's in it for me, what hurts me, what doesn't hurt me, what's good for me?" Activity is focused around the 1, the sense of ego identity.

Compassion is a vehicle that dissolves this fixation or boundary, and frees you from self-centeredness. Kindness makes the pain of going through difficult work tolerable, and brings more trust to your mind, your essence and your heart; it brings more gentleness into your work, and more compassion for others, and works on the dissolution of the self-centered fixation which is one of the main barriers to self-liberation. It is a very necessary factor which needs to be developed while we're working through the personality patterns and issues.

Another factor necessary in this work is peacefulness: the ability to be silent, the capacity to be still, not always in activity and noise. Stillness of the mind. In order to recognize true liberation you must have this capacity for stillness or peacefulness, because liberation is so fleeting. If you are thinking and worrying and planning and carrying on your normal fast-paced activities, you are precluding this experience from your life. As you develop and appreciate the stillness that leads to the absence of agitation, you allow a state of restfulness that leads to intuition to insight, and to the subtle perceptions.

The next factor which is needed is the capacity to be absorbed in something, to be totally absorbed with whatever you're doing, in whatever state happens to be there. You become so one-pointed in your experience that you become completely involved in it, and so involved that you are dissolved in it. This is a certain kind of relationship to experience, a certain capacity, a certain freedom from the personality. The personality usually maintains a kind of separateness from experience. It is afraid of completely dissolving, of becoming one with experience. When you completely experience essence, there isn't an explicit experience; you are so absorbed in it that there is nothing but the essence. When you are working on making a table you are so absorbed in it that you, the tools, and the table are all one thing. There is no mind making a distinction or separation in the experience. You can be absorbed in an action, an emotion, a thought, a sensation, or an essential aspect. The Hindus call this state samadhi, complete absorption. In this state the personality is allowing itself to die, to dissolve, to become totally immersed, totally merged with whatever happens to be the experience.

The seventh and last factor of liberation is awakening, the capacity to be awake in your experience. We talked about the capacity to be absorbed in your experience; there is also the capacity to actually be awake, to be aware. You are so aware that you feel as if you have just awakened. There's a feeling of light all around you. The quality of awakens is an antidote to sleepiness and to dullness of perception in doing the work. It is needed to understand the issues of your personality, and helps in dealing with attachments. You're awake to what's happening, not asleep to it; you're conscious. You are awake with clarity and light; things become clear and crisp. You see things as they are, what's there exactly, not what your unconscious sees. It's clear and light, like an open clear sky, the absence of fog. It's not as if the sky is clear and you are looking at it-you are the clarity. The mind is functioning with complete openness and clarity.

The combination of all these factors brings about objectivity. The seven factors-the energy, the determination, the joyfulness, the kindness, the absorption, the peacefulness, and the awakens come together in perfect proportion, and exist as one phenomenon, whose quality is objectivity. Objectivity is exactly what is needed to deal with the personality, its basic patterns and its basic tendencies toward grasping and attachment. With objectivity you are not influenced by your superego or your unconscious; what you see is what is there. You are not determined by your past experience, by concepts, or by opinions. Your strength is objective, your will is objective, your joy is objective, your kindness is objective, your peace is objective, your capacity to be absorbed, to be dissolved is objective. Objectivity takes the seven factors to another dimension, another level. The seven factors are called the lataif, the seven elements of subtle consciousness. The energy is the red latifa, the determination is the white latifa, the joy is the yellow latifa, the kindness or compassion is the green latifa, peacefulness is the black latifa, the absorption is the blue latifa, the awakens that can free us from desires is what we call the clear latifa. The lataif are a very subtle kind of presence; some people say it's like air, a subtle air that produces those qualities in you.

The consciousness now is objective because it balances the seven factors, and is exactly what is needed to be free from the attachment and grasping that are the most basic characteristics of the personality. The objective consciousness, what we call the diamond consciousness, allows freedom from these aspects of the personality. The diamond consciousness is a panoramic consciousness, in contrast to the fixated focus of the personality.

If you could look at your difficulties and conflicts objectively, you would see they are nothing but resistance against that objectivity, against seeing things as they really are. You are attached to your attachments and you don't want to see things as they are.

You are attached more than anything else to your personality itself, to the way your personality functions, to your likes and dislikes, and patterns. You've lived with your personality for a long time and it's familiar to you. Even if you don't like parts of it, it's still familiar and dependable. So why leave it? You don't want to be free from it.

To be objective means you must see what role your personality plays. It is this objective consciousness that can perceive the state of liberation, because it doesn't have any of the clinging attitudes or obscurations that block the perception. These factors are called factors of enlightenment not only because they will lead you to objectivity and liberation, but also because they are present in the state of liberation itself. You are joyful, you are kind, you are energetic, you are determined, you're clear, you're awake, you're completely absorbed

in your experience, you're peaceful. All these qualities are present together in the objective level, as the diamond consciousness, or the objective consciousness. When this diamond consciousness finally perceives the state of liberation, it just melts, becomes softer, delicate, liquid, relaxed, and flowing. There is no structure, no fixation, no holding this way or that way, no preference one way or another. It's not as if you're objective or not objective, or you're kind or not kind, it's none of those. They're all there in a sort of melted, free-flowing loose way. They're so loose, they're so free that you don't think of yourself as kind, you don't think of yourself as happy. The moment you say, "Oh, I'm happy now," it's gone. You are it and that's it. You're not concerned about it, you go about your business, have breakfast, read the paper, go to work, have a fight. It doesn't matter. There is total freedom. You have learned how to hang loose. You are liberated and you are awake. The quality of the clear light is important because you are awake and you know that you know. That's the moment of recognition. A child may be in a liberated state but doesn't recognize it, loses it and doesn't even know he lost it. But when you're an adult you recognize it, you're awake. That's why the Buddhists emphasize the clear light, the awakening, because it is an ingredient that is needed. You need the clear light to be awake in this state, and to recognize it. You're absorbed in it. You're not trying feverishly to hold onto it.

The seven factors ultimately make the eighth factor, which is all the seven in one, making an octagon. I talked about these qualities because they are the main aspects of essence constituting the lataif, and as you continue, you'll find that each of the lataif goes on to deeper levels. Each one is like a whole universe of its own. These are the seven primary factors needed for liberation, and are factors of the liberated state. They will help you finally to hang loose. So I think our talk today explains the relationship between the personality and essence, and how essence contributes to the freedom from the personality which in turn would be the liberation to enjoy essence.

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