

From The Translucent Revolution
By Arjuna Ardagh
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Millions of people have now had an awakening glimpse into their real nature. The experience may not be stable, but it can never be overlooked again. It is not the access that challenges us now, but the actualization of it in our daily lives. David Deida, the prolific writer and teacher, calls such a glimpse a “poking through.” To Deida, these moments are fleeting, almost inconsequential in and of themselves. “I think it’s far more important what people do, given the ‘poke through.’ How, given a glimpse, they dedicate their occupation, their attention. Otherwise, that glimpse is fleeting and useless.”

Without this essential, pivotal awakening there can be no real depth to life. We live preoccupied with hallucinations. After suffering the endless “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” it’s a relief to know a dimension of reality where nothing is happening, where we know ourselves to be essential peace, where we are connected with everything, a state where love rules supreme. If our disposition and destiny are reclusive, then a glimpse is often enough. We can retire to the sanctity of our hermitage and enjoy the view. If, on the other hand, our calling is to participate fully in the swirling dramas of daily life, our task is more daunting.

The Impact of Awakening

The moment of awakening may be the end of seeking, but it is the beginning of a sane life. Saniel Bonder emphasizes “waking down” more than “waking up” and stresses that our realization has its real relevance in how we live: “You really need to have realized the absolute immutable unimaginable awesome magnificence — just to be able to make your way through the day. Once awakening is not viewed as a fetishism of escape, then its value in life becomes more and more evident.”

An amazing number of people in ordinary contexts have been blasted open in this way. Good, we can stop the torture of feeling “he’s got it and I haven’t.” We can stop giving our divinity away to someone else. But it is still only a glimpse and has changed five minutes later, or even within a nanosecond. Now begins the much more difficult work of living and embodying our own realization. A radical awakening can affect our day-to-day life in several ways. We may experience just one of these responses, or several together.

Business as Usual

For some, the poking through into deeper reality quickly disappears, crushed underfoot by the incessant march of daily life. Kids, carpool, shopping, bills, fixing the hole in the roof: Who’s got time for the timeless? Within days, the glimpse is erased from the hard drive.

The Lord Spoke to Me!

Others integrate radical awakening into a personal belief system or theology. Sandy was singing in the choir at church one Sunday, when suddenly everything changed. She could still hear the voices, she could see the other mouths moving, yet all became silent, as though a television had been switched off that she had not even noticed was on. “The sounds were made of silence,” she told me. “I could feel the perfection of it all, as though a hand was stroking me and telling me it is all perfect. There was such sweet, sweet peace.” This feeling of benevolence, coupled with the fact that it had happened in church, led Sandy to believe that she had received a message from Jesus. She interpreted her experience as something “out there” instead of what is already here. In this way, simple reality, outside of mind, can be interpreted as a message from God, a prophet, a past-life memory, or even a visit to some higher sphere or heaven.

Many years later, when Sandy met others who had had similar awakenings from the mind, her need to mold her experience to her belief system softened.

The Reentry High

A radical awakening is often accompanied by strong emotional or physical symptoms. We may experience overwhelming feelings of bliss, rushes of energy up the spine, or waves of fresh understanding and insight. When these physiological, emotional, and mental states disappear again, we may feel that we have “lost” the awakening.

Take a fish out of the water and put it on a rock, then put the fish back into the water. I’m sure that fish will experience ecstasy beyond belief and will probably have a deep and religious experience of oneness with the cosmic wetness. But come back the next day, and things will be normal again. It was the reentry into the water that promoted those happy fishy feelings, not the water itself.

In a moment of radical awakening, we simply know reality, nothing more. But we can get attached to the emotions, body sensations, or insights that accompany the awakening. When they pass, as they inevitably will, we chase after them and once again seek for something we believe is missing. Renewed seeking for another high of reentry then follows our awakening.

Total Supreme Enlightenment

Some claim that the moment of radical awakening causes *all* old symptoms of personal identity to dissolve completely. There’s no more desire, no more fear, no more getting pissed off when someone nabs your parking place. No more of Iago’s whisper. Gone. Poof! The divine light, and nothing else, shines through every orifice of the body. Most of the people who make such claims are men. After all, it’s the hypermasculine curse to want to be totally finished and complete with the inconveniences of incarnation. So many men long to swoop down someday onto an aircraft carrier, and proudly announce, “Mission accomplished.”

“The clearer you get,” says Isaac Shapiro, “the more you believe your own bullshit.” When we see teachers surrounded only by adoring students, when these teachers no longer have a peer group to offer honest and supportive feedback, not about their enlightenment, but about their humanity, we are often watching an accident waiting to happen. The more grandiose the claims made about ultimate enlightenment, the more sordid the scandals we often hear about later, from disgruntled devotees and former spouses. Let’s leave the jury out on such absolute transformations.

Initiation into Endless Evolution

The fifth impact of radical awakening is the most interesting. What has been seen and known in the snap of the finger leaves a strong enough mark that it can never be overlooked again. Have you ever come across those images that jump off the page if you look at them cross-eyed? At first glance, you see a bunch of squiggly lines and nothing else. Then, if you step back a little and look beyond the lines to an imaginary point a few feet beyond the flat surface, a dragon or a ballerina magically appears as a hologram. After you’ve seen the 3-D image just once, you can easily find it again when you look for it.

In the same way, when the awakening is strong enough, it leaves an imprint on the body and psyche. You are left with a deep knowing of the perfection of things, even when they are going wrong. You realize that everything is interconnected, even when you are caught in conflict, that who you are is actually much bigger than the person you have taken yourself to be. The game is up on Iago.

At the same time you have the humility, the honesty, and humor to cop to the habits of this human monkey. You recognize that it is still predisposed toward craving ice cream, wanting more of this and less of that. It has addictions to particular pleasures, and it also has its favorite miseries. The awakening initiates a gradual metamorphosis, which is both evolutionary and endless. A spontaneous generosity of spirit, an impulse to serve, and a willingness to transform living into art gradually replace the normal relationship to life marked by fear and acquisition. You develop an amused, playful attitude to the only raw materials available: the strange habits of the bundle of thoughts you call “me.”

This dual state of being both limitless and limited, of being both out of time and within it, reveals an evolutionary impulse, inherent in life itself — the impulse for the realization to continuously marinate the personal and to become ever more embodied.

We will call this endless process of evolution and transformation “translucence.”

Becoming Translucent

Webster's dictionary defines *translucent* as "letting light pass through, but not transparent." A transparent object, like a clean sheet of glass, is almost invisible. You see everything through a transparent object as if it were not there at all. An opaque object, on the other hand, blocks light completely. A translucent object allows light to pass through, but diffusely, while maintaining its form and texture. Objects on the other side cannot be clearly distinguished. A crystal is translucent. So is a sculpture of frosted glass: if the sun were to shine on it from behind, you would see the light passing through the sculpture, and it would appear to be glowing from the inside.

Translucent people also appear to glow from the inside. They have access to their deepest nature as peaceful, limitless, free, unchanging, and at the same time they remain fully involved in the events of their personal lives. Thoughts, fears, and desires still come and go; life is still characterized by temporary trials, misfortunes, and stress. But the personal story is no longer opaque: it is now capable of reflecting something deeper, more luminous and abiding, that can shine through it.

Contemporary transluents defy many of the spiritual concepts we have inherited from religious traditions. The thousands of people I have spoken to in researching this book are not recluses. They play vigorously in their relationships with others, their work, their creativity, and their political and environmental causes, but they play to play more than to win. Transluents display an above-average generosity of spirit. Giving to other people and to the environment replaces Iago's habits, based in lack, desire, and need. Above all, transluents have a humorous and often irreverent relationship to their personal life, beliefs, and identity.

Transluents do not fit established pigeonholes. They generally don't follow one particular teacher, teaching, or group, although many have in their past. They are not "spiritual" in any way that can be obviously recognized through lifestyle choices. As a group they display as wide a variety of occupations, appearance, and educational and cultural backgrounds as humanity itself. They generally don't identify themselves as "enlightened" or as having attained anything, and they are also not trying to *become* enlightened. They are not overly materialistic or spiritually cynical. Transluents are not uniformly vegetarians, political liberals, religious zealots, new age hippies, or self-improvement junkies. And they don't all wear Birkenstocks.

The word *translucent* refers to the degree of embodiment of a realization, not to what has been realized. Hence it is a relative term, like *interesting*, *inspiring*, *boring*, or *idiotic*. These words are relative because not everyone agrees on their meaning. You might find opera inspiring, whereas someone else might be put to sleep by it. Relative terms also have no finite end. You can be "quite boring," "rather boring," "really boring," even "extremely boring," but however boring you may be, you can always outdo yourself the next day. There is no such thing as "ultimately boring." Relative terms shift, from day to day or hour to hour. You might be really boring on Monday, but more interesting on Tuesday.

Absolute words, to the contrary, are black and white, like an on-off switch. *French*, *married*, and *dead* are examples. "He's quite French" sounds a little strange, doesn't it? So does "I am married on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays but single the other days." And what about, "The doctor says she's dead, but Frank doesn't agree. I feel I need to get to know her better before making a judgment." *Enlightenment* has generally been used as an absolute word. Even though people don't agree on what it means or to whom it applies, those who talk about enlightenment claim it is a defined condition, and one is either enlightened or not. (Usually a man is telling you *he* is and *you* are not, so you'd better do what he tells you.)

Translucence is subtler; it is relative. One can always become more translucent, one may waver in the degree of translucence, and the people I feel to be most translucent may differ from your top ten.

Some Transluents, Up Close and Personal

Over the last thirteen years, I have talked to thousands of people in researching this book. I'd like to introduce you to a few of them. Bill works both as a drywall installer and as an artist. He plays in a rock band, drinks beer, and plays softball with the guys. He has had several relationships over the last few years, some of which ended a bit "stickily." He freely admits to being abrasive and insensitive from time to time and to occasionally having a wildly inappropriate sense of humor.

Cynthia lives with her husband and teenage son. She is a retired nurse. She shops at Costco, attends the local Unity church, and loves her garden. She suffers from arthritis, which gets worse in the fall and winter. Her son thinks of her as “conservative.” She laughs and put up no argument. She was raised a Catholic and sees many of her personality traits as reflecting those roots.

Tom is the senior risk evaluator for one of the largest insurance underwriters in the country. He owns real estate, and invests, conservatively, on Wall Street. His wife and close friends calls him a reserved and retiring man.

Ewa raises her two sons, by two different fathers, in Stockholm. She works as a massage therapist and has a hard time making ends meet. She loves to kayak, swim, and play the flute. She is an environmental activist and participates in running the local Waldorf School.

All these people have had radical awakenings, powerful enough that their lives have changed as a result. They have all read, and can relate to, the descriptions of awakening in the previous chapter. Although they are as different from each other as people can be, they all display the qualities of emerging transluents we explore in this book. Below we will explore some of these common characteristics.

Trans•lu•cent n. 1. an individual who has undergone a spiritual awakening deeply enough that it has permanently transformed their relationship to themselves and to reality, while allowing them to remain involved in ordinary life in a process, which is evolutionary and endless. 2. an individual with a glowing appearance, as though light were passing through. ***adj.*** an individual or object that exhibits translucence.

Trans•lu•cence n. 1. the quality or state of being translucent

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For more excerpts, or to order the book, please visit:

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