



(Adapted from a talk given in Boulder, CO on January 19, 1999)

The important thing to remember is that this is just a story and that nothing I'm going to say now is at all necessary or relevant to knowing who you really are. There are a few exceptions to that, which I'll point out along the way.

About two years ago, I was busy attending naturopathic medical school and, I thought, happily married. Then out of the blue, at least from my perspective, my wife told me she was leaving me for another man. The intensity of the feelings that surfaced was amazing. I was aware of feeling equal and opposite feelings: intense feelings of both grief over the loss and relief from being released from the struggle of making a relationship work. Amidst overwhelming, paralyzing fear was intense excitement over all the new possibilities created by the space that had opened up in my life.

Upon reflection, I realized that this had always been the case, that in every experience in my life I've always had equal and opposite feelings. That's just the nature of feelings-they're always present in opposite pairs. For instance, with naturopathic medical school, I was both enjoying and resisting every minute of it. The problem was that these opposing feelings were so intense in the days and weeks after my wife left me. It felt like I wasn't a big enough container for that much fear and that much excitement, that much sadness and that much relief. I felt like I was being torn apart or stretched, and I couldn't contain all the disparate emotions.

Then, by luck or by grace, I heard about something called The Sedona Method, which is a technique for releasing emotions or, alternatively, for just allowing them to be there with no need to release them. It's based on the idea that there is no need to repress emotions or express them-you just let them be, or just let them go. It was so obviously appropriate for me that I had to check it out. I called up Hale Dwoskin of the Sedona Institute and ordered the tapes that taught the method. I had a week off and just sat down and went through the tapes.

The Sedona Method starts off with letting go of all the uncomfortable emotions. Then what is revealed are the more positive emotions, which it also suggests you let go of. One day I was practicing this technique, and I had a moment when I followed it all the way-I just let go of everything, all the painful emotions and all the peace, happiness, and joy. I just let it all go, and there was an incredible silence that I'd never experienced before. It happened when I was out for a walk, and suddenly I was so present to everything-the trees, the sidewalk, and the sky. I was so moved by this experience of silence that I immediately turned around, went home, called Hale, and asked him if I could come to an advanced training, even though I was just a beginner. He said, "Sure, come on." I signed up thinking I'd get more of this wonderful technique, which I

saw as a profound form of stress relief.

What I didn't know at the time was that The Sedona Method had been developed by a man named Lester Levinson as a tool for awakening to one's true nature as limitless Freedom, and there was a whole community of people who had spent ten, fifteen, or even twenty years using this method in the effort to become awakened, or free. Finally, one of them (other than Lester, who had died a few years earlier) had "made it." Her name was Pamela, and she was co-teaching the advanced Sedona Method course. When I showed up at the course, I saw a room full of forty or so people, all desperate to awaken. I was resistant at first, but I had to admit there was something about Pamela that was undeniably attractive. She had a presence of pure happiness and a real sense of Freedom.

It also happened that Pamela had made arrangements for a spiritual teacher named Neelam to come to town to give satsang. At the time, I didn't even know what "satsang" meant. Every day, we practiced The Sedona Method, and every night we went to satsang with Neelam. This undeniable sense of Freedom that I had felt in Pamela was even more present in Neelam. Even though my mind couldn't grasp it, I couldn't let it go; I couldn't forget about it. I looked around the room at everyone else who had come, and I saw them really suffering over their desire to awaken. It was almost palpable; they wanted it so badly. However, I found myself holding back. I wanted to be like Pamela and Neelam, but I definitely didn't want to be like everybody else. It felt safer just to pretend that I didn't want it.

In one of the classes, Hale presented a chart of wants, and the last want, the most fundamental desire, was the desire for Freedom. He spoke about the desire for Freedom as the desire that burns away all the other desires, which paradoxically, you also must let go of. That night, in my room all alone, I had this great idea-why not take a short cut and just let go of the desire for Freedom? I thought, "I'll start at the end, at the last step. I'll let go of the desire for Freedom, and then I will be Free." But a troubling doubt appeared: "What if I'm fooling myself? This short cut could be like cheating. I'd better ask Hale about it tomorrow."

Then I remembered that Hale rarely answers questions; he just does The Sedona Method until you get the answer from within. So I figured I must already know the answer, and I just got very quiet and asked inside, "Can I use this shortcut to become free?" The answer that came was: "It's not up to you. There's nothing you can do to become free." At that moment I knew this was true beyond a shadow of a doubt-there was absolutely nothing "I" could do about it. It was simply not up to me.

The fact that I couldn't do anything about it was a completely devastating realization because, in that exact same moment, I also realized that I wanted Freedom more than I'd ever wanted anything in my life. And I burst into tears-not just sobbing, but wailing for hours because I realized there was absolutely nothing I could do about this thing that I wanted more than life itself. And yet, after being in the presence of Pamela and Neelam, I just couldn't let it go. I had this sense there was surgery going on in my chest, like it had been ripped open. This is one of those important elements to the story. I could just stop the story here because once I had admitted I wanted this Freedom more than anything else, even though I absolutely knew there was nothing I could do about it, there was no turning back to my old life.

A few weeks later I was at a satsang retreat with Neelam, and at one point she moved into the center of my heart. I suddenly knew that whatever it took, I was going to be with Neelam. She was a master at completely bypassing my mind. I would formulate these nice, neat questions, and she would lovingly pop them like a balloon. There's no way I could get around her, through her, or past her with my mind.

So, I gave my share in our house to my wife and quit medical school. These are the irrelevant parts, by the way. You don't need to have a spouse leave you. You don't have to give away your house, drop out of school, quit your job-whatever. But I did all that to follow Neelam through Europe and on to India. I had never had a strong desire to go to India with all its poverty, disease, and other challenges. And I had even less desire to go, now that I was going. Going to India had nothing to do with wanting to go to India; that was just where Neelam was going to be.

The next relevant point in this story came during a satsang in England, on the way to India. I can't remember exactly what Neelam said, but in that same way that I'd known there was nothing I could do to get Freedom, I also knew that there was nothing that I had to fix about myself first to become Free. There was truly nothing I had to change or improve. Trying to fix myself, make myself perfect, had been a lifelong task and a huge burden because it was so obvious that it was hopeless. I had participated in endless workshops, trainings, and self-improvement techniques-even The Sedona Method. They were all attempts to become better. Finally, from what Neelam said, I got it that none of that was necessary. So not only was there nothing I could do to become Free, but fortunately I now recognized that neither was there anything I had to do to become Free.

From that point, I just got happier and happier. Even awakening and Freedom no longer mattered. I was perfectly happy the way things were. For example, I used to run the sound equipment for Neelam, and one day, fifteen minutes into satsang the whole system stopped

working. I was pushing buttons and turning knobs, and it just wouldn't work. Meanwhile, I was just getting happier and happier-"It's wonderful, the system's not working!" It's just that it really didn't matter anymore-even this whole notion of awakening or Freedom. I was ready to spend the rest of my life going to satsang with Neelam, running the sound equipment. This was the letting go of even the desire for Freedom that Hale had spoken about.

Eventually, we went on to India and ended up in Rishikesh at an ashram called Phool Chatti in the jungle on the banks of the Ganges. There we spent our days in satsang with Neelam and our nights singing devotional songs.

Whenever I wasn't in satsang, I sat by the river, especially late at night after everyone had gone to sleep. I would sit about ten feet from the edge of the Ganges along this stretch of ten-foot tall rapids. The river was an incredible roaring presence of rushing white water.

One night as I was sitting there under the full moon, I recognized that the rock I was leaning on was me-"Oh yeah, this is me; this rock is inside of me." Once I realized that about that rock, I saw the same was true of all the rocks in the huge field of boulders along the river's edge. Then since the rocks were so obviously "me," the river was obviously "me" too, not just this stretch of the river, but the entire Ganges from one end of India to the other. Very quickly, I saw that not just the river, but the whole continent was "me." It struck me as obvious that it was all inside "me"-and then it was the whole world, and the whole solar system, the entire galaxy and universe. This kept going until the mind couldn't keep up. There was no longer any possibility of my mind containing all of this endless space, and yet it was all "me" in the same way that one of my limbs was "me."

Then there was a wonderful moment when "me" included not only infinity in terms of space, but "popped" to also include all time. It was obviously who I had always been, and it included all the past and all the future. Then I laughed and laughed and rolled around in the gravel because it was suddenly so silly that I had imagined myself to have suffered. I had always been so free that I was even free to have this illusion of not being free. That's how complete the Freedom is. So I just laughed and laughed.

I sometimes call this experience a non-awakening because what I realized in that moment is that all there is and ever has been is Awakeness. There's no need for awakening in Awakeness itself. All of life is just the play of this that has always been fully awake.

I would like to emphasize again that the specifics of this experience aren't important. This Awakeness/Consciousness doesn't even make a snowflake the same way twice, so it is reasonable to assume that it wouldn't have an awakening experience the same way twice. What is important is the transformation of perspective that the experience allows. The shift in perspective to knowing that you are already free doesn't depend on having any particular experience.

Since that time, there has been a simple desire to share the perspective of Freedom. I began doing this in informal conversations with friends and then through giving satsang after being invited to.

About Nirmala:

After experiencing a profound spiritual awakening in India, [Advaita spiritual teacher](#), Nirmala has been writing

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in the U.S. and internationally since 1998. Nirmala offers a unique vision and a gentle, compassionate approach, which adds to the rich tradition of inquiry into our true nature. He is the author of several other

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Gifts with No Giver
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