

Didier Weiss in conversation with Alain Eskenazi
Zoom meeting transcript in English

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Alain: Good evening Didier, I'm very pleased that you join us on the third day of "Coming Home project" meetings! Before we get into the heart of the matter today and I let you carry out your "sledgehammer" explorations, I wanted to have your feedback so far.

Didier: Good evening Alain, thank you very much for this opportunity to meet and for your trust. This project is truly amazing, kuddos for settings it up! For example, yesterday's round table discussion about Stephen Jourdain was fascinating. I was grateful for being able to share with everyone, speakers and participants, how much the "Stephen phenomenon" and its meta-poetry - somewhat confusing at first sight - had served as a catalyst, even as a detonator, for this Understanding.

All these intense encounters are precious nuggets. These exchanges between us are not simply a hobby, there is a search for a visceral meaning, and I can't tell you enough how happy I am to be in this great company of friends that are passionate about this search.

Alain: You just mentioned Stephen Jourdain. For him, all that happened in his story of awakening came out of nowhere. no early signs, no tradition, no lineage and no teaching. Is this an indication that awakening can happen to anyone, without any preliminaries, and perhaps long and elaborate research?

Didier: Firstly, awakening does not happen "to" a person! This basic and essential point is often misunderstood or ignored, but we will see this later. Secondly, the understanding/seeing/knowing of our true nature is not directly related to a lesson learnt by rote, or a "learned" knowledge that might be forgotten sooner or later.

Non dual knowledge is a tool for deconstruction, for cleaning up a lifetime of accumulated rubble of concepts, beliefs, unverified assumptions or certainties, etc. Not only it is not useless but it is very useful! But... at some point it becomes cumbersome and is "disposed of" to allow space to a clear true view. The answer to this essential existential question has nothing to do with conceptual knowledge to remember intellectually and which should be stored religiously like precious relics. Quite the opposite! It is in the total absence of all that has been understood intellectually that our true nature is fully lived, not only in the absence of dual knowledge but also in the absence of non dual knowledge. That is to say, the knowledge of what has been accumulated throughout our life, due to our environment, culture, education, which has conditioned us, but also in the absence of non dual knowledge. Otherwise, it would simply be a new conditioning, without any real transformative effect.

I refer here to Ramana Maharshi's "metaphor of the two thorns". Once the second thorn - the non dual tool- has dislodged the first thorn of duality, both thorns are discarded. Then this possibility emerges to be at ease with Life, come what may, to be at peace with this life where wonder is permanent in every now. Then there is no way to know or understand anything. LIFE IS, that's it.

“Me”, the reference point from which everything could be analysed with the help of the mind - this “me” that I thought I was - no longer exists. Or rather, “me” exists for a practical purpose, on a day to day basis, but it is now seen for what it is: a practical tool and only that.

Seen from this new perspective, the word "Truth" sounds hollow and discussing topics related to Truth seem pointless. Silence is all of a sudden much more meaningful...

Now, stories of direct Understanding without going through any process like that of Stephen Jourdain is of course possible. In the end, non-dual knowledge, which can only be temporary knowledge, is not that interesting. It is not a question of getting a doctorate in non-duality, of becoming a Professor Emeritus, it is a question of Awakening to our true nature. So non dual knowledge is useful until it is not!

To answer your specific question regarding Stephen's story of awakening, direct access is possible. There are a few examples in the Western tradition. We could call them "awakening accidents". However, it is not the norm or rather it is just not well documented.

This being said, these accidents can be quite destabilizing and may lead to a period of dysfunction. Nothing makes sense anymore and it is helpful to have someone to talk to, someone that will not label you as "lunatic" or worse. These Awakenings are sometimes temporary, especially when the psychological ground is fragile.

Suzanne Segal in her book "Collision with the Infinite - A life beyond the personal self" - Blue Dove Press 1998, recounted this spontaneous - cataclysmic in her words - Awakening where, without any preparation, just as she was getting on the 37 bus in Paris, she began to realize that Suzanne did not exist as a separate person. Having no reference, this revelation was a source of terror, incomprehensible to both herself and those around her. She spent years consulting specialists who spoke of "depersonalization disorder", a psychiatric dissociative disorder. But she had doubts, she knew it wasn't that.

After twelve years of unease, it was only when Suzanne met Jean Klein, that she heard of “awakening”. He calmed her fears about her mental state: “Everything was perfectly fine”. He also gave her some helpful suggestions on how to go on with her life. Only then, did her life fall into lasting peace.

So yes, awakening can happen spontaneously, but it doesn't imply there is necessarily peace and bliss. It might be okay when the people around you cooperate, but it can appear frightening for those who have no idea of the process that took place unexpectedly.

Some find themselves taken to psychiatric hospitals for no real reason other than this Discovery, for they have only meet with incomprehension. Especially young adults, who have had a spontaneous - or almost spontaneous - Awakening as a result of a reading or a video on YouTube, feel completely out of place and lost. I have come across a few of them. Somewhere along the line, what they want most and most quickly is to return to their previous life, to completely re-identify with their [persona and join their peers. They lack the needed maturity to deal with this complete reversal of perspective.

Alain: This shows that Awakening is beyond a non-dual teaching or anything else, it is beyond teachings and philosophies... Now, let's come to our topic for today. You wanted to talk about your favourite subject... free will!

Didier: Yes, Alain, I see this "Coming Home" project as a bit like a painter's palette with all its range of colours. Each of us among the speakers will present his/her particular angle, his/her colour to perfect the same fresco. José Le Roy will certainly talk about the "Headless Way" of Douglas Harding, it is very, very likely. Didier's angle was influenced by Douglas Harding's teaching of course, but also by Stephen Jourdain's readings, Don Juan's teachings via Carlos Castaneda, Luis Ansa, Tony Parsons and others like Nisargadatta Maharaj, that is undeniable. But what was, I would say, the most determining factor was first the readings, and then the encounter with Ramesh Balsekar from Bombay in 1995.

Ramesh Balsekar was my guide for a few years and his teachings have been most useful in this Understanding. If there is one tool that is really helpful and practical to use, i.e. within the reach of everyone, it is the exploration of this concept of "free will". He used it at almost every meeting because he knew its importance. So this is indeed today's theme and it is also, you are right Alain, my favourite, because it is infinitely powerful and so revealing and transformative!

Here it goes... The essence of the questioning comes down to this: "Am I the author of my actions?"

At first, the identification with the body, for example, is quite easy to question because I quickly realize that my body is a set of heterogeneous components that keep on changing through time since my birth until now. No cell of my body present on the day of my birth is present today. There is a movement, it changes all the time. But there is also a subtle intuition of an invisible, unchanging Presence that has always been there. So can I really say: *"This body is "me", this is my identity, this is who I am?"*

Then I review everything that is in the "field of consciousness": thoughts, emotions, sensations, perceptions, everything that can be called "objects of consciousness", visible and invisible.

Throughout the day, I see that thoughts go in this direction, in that direction, that sometimes I contradict myself. My moods change, sometimes, several times over the course of the day. I can go from laughter to tears in just a few seconds, the splitting headache that bothered me so much a while ago is gone and I now feel free and light. I observe that all thoughts, emotions, sensations and perceptions are transient, that they change all the time. They can't really represent me, except in the moment. And the moment already it is no more!

This is the time to investigate further.

Throughout my life, I have changed jobs, spouses, working partners, houses, regions, countries, etc. (or not, for that matter!) If something tells me that it is I - and no one else - who has indeed made all these choices of change or non-change, I could ask the question: "What is this mechanism that locks in this belief that "What I really am" is "the one who decides", and that I can even point to it by pointing to a body or a head?"

You can easily see that this is a very active, infinitely powerful mechanism. It has been at work for most of us all our lives, except of course during our early childhood. So it is difficult to detect it even at the beginning.

It is about waging a merciless battle against the fortress of habits, which will resist with all its might, because its survival is at stake... It is about waging the very last battle, by eliminating everything that moves, that is changing and therefore temporary, in order to "See" what does not move, what does not change, what is always here: what was there 10 minutes ago, yesterday, last month, 2 years ago, 20 years ago...

Questions will come: *"Am I the one who independently decides or chooses anything? Or are my decisions or choices dictated by the totality of the context of the moment?"*

If I answer with certainty: *"YES, there is no doubt, I am THE one who independently decides to do this or that, at this moment and not at another, in this way and not in another"*, I need to continue on this path.

If I thus find that it is "my" decision, independent of the context, I push the investigation a little further: "If I am the chief decision-maker, where is this control centre that dictates my conduct? I start looking... Automatically, the focus will be "here" and not "there", but where exactly? In the room where I am? Inside my body? Inside my head? In the lower or upper part of my head? Chances are, I'm going to locate it right here in my forehead, behind my eyes.

Try right away to explore! Now I become serious and ask myself: *"Is there really a little controller in my head between my two eyes who could decide to say this word, then that word, then another, and another, etc., or who could think this thought or that thought, or could start waving his hands like this or like that? Or is it not rather that words, thoughts, gestures arise spontaneously?"*

The implications of this investigation are huge... *"Does this little controller supposedly located in my head really exist?"*

Is this not a form of definition of a separate life, in other words THE very mechanism of separation that makes me often feel small, disconnected, incomplete, disturbed, in the midst of a vast and threatening world against which I must defend myself to survive?

It may seem that I am the controller of my body. However I am obviously not the controller of someone else's body! The result is a form of asymmetry, a kind of limitation to something localized in a fixed point. For the "others" than me, logically it seems the same, so there will always be a form of asymmetry between them and me.

On one side, right here in my body or my head, there is "me". And on the other side, down there, there is what I could call "not-me", that is to say an external world including all that is "other than me".

This is the mechanism of separation revealed! This mechanism will go round and round for a lifetime, as long as it has not been explored and identified... And demystified once and for all.

I really urge you to make this exploration that will lead you to this first discovery, without which there is no possibility of solving the existential enigma.

Can we agree that my next words and actions do not come from a controller located somewhere in my head? That there are mere movements, impersonal movements that have nothing to do with "me"? That it is in fact, pure physics, like the flow of a torrent that descends a mountain following the greatest slope...

To be honest, when this moment of seeing/understanding comes, it can sometimes be a difficult time for "me". It requires - at first - a form of courage to consent to this utter powerlessness. It is painful, very painful all of a sudden, to realize that: "All my life, I was the toy of an illusion. I thought I was in control of my life, but I was not! I had the impression that I had a say, that I was independent, that I was in charge, that it was me calling the shots... And now I discover that in fact my so called choices and decisions are completely dependent on circumstances in the moment."

And it gets better or worse, depending on how the interpretation goes: *"I can no longer glorify nor criticize myself... When everything works out the way I want it to be, it is perfect and it is a combination of circumstances, it is nothing personal. When everything goes wrong, therefore not at all as I intended, it is also the complex result of the moment, and it is nothing personal."*

This discovery is both incredibly liberating and incredibly scary. How this moment of clarity is going to be lived depends also on the context; our state of mind and our psychological profile in the moment of discovery.

This is where it is essential not to draw any final, definitive conclusions. It is necessary to let things settle. It can be helpful to redo a few times if necessary the exploration to be sure to come to the same conclusion: "I am not the doer of my actions" so that the evidence settles quietly. Otherwise, you might fall into depression... Emptiness can get to you and you risk going through an empty passage worthy of the "dark night of the soul" of Saint John of the Cross: *"What? Am I only a puppet? I feel indeed "disconnected" but not in the way I thought. Am I a kind of ghost which goes through life without my word to say on anything, i.e. without "me". It can also be horrifying: Does this really imply that "I" have never done anything throughout my life"?!"*

Alain: It may sound like a life sentence and can be unsettling...

Didier: Right so, it does sound like a life sentence and can be pretty scary for the "me" that I think I am. But trust me, it is the opposite of a life sentence, it is the Liberation from the grip of the illusory "me". What a relief it is not to have to be a "me"... and seeing that Life goes on.

To be quite frank, I went through this and got confused for a while... I was becoming impatient after a few years of search, and was way too quick to jump to a conclusion in error. So here you are..., it is all about keeping your courage and determination for the second part of the exploration of free will. Because there is a sequel, as in Netflix!

First of all, let us put this idea of being a puppet back into the drawer - even if it means taking it out again later, the overall perspective will have changed by then. And let's resume the exploration with joy in our heart.

It is time to investigate further. Is any action, - any event that happens in this life as simple and ordinary as buying bread at the nearby bakery - the end result of a personal impulse that was "my" very own decision?: *"It is I who decided to walk to the nearby bakery at such time on that day of the week Sunday, to buy bread."* Or is it possible to envisage that this action is merely the end result of an infinite number of factors and interactions coming from the entire universe at that very moment in the moment?"

Let's review all the nitty-gritty details: "my" cultural habit to eat bread versus rice or chapatis, "my" hunger for bread, the proximity of that particular bakery nearby "my" home, the opening times on a Sunday, "my" ability to walk to the bakery and enough money in my pocket, and probably many more factors took me there and not somewhere else at that time.

You are puzzled? Stunned a bit perhaps? We can agree that this is not the way we see things happening normally, we seem so sure that we run the show, right? Really, is that so? Let's try to measure the implications of this new possibility. Upon examining a decision/action of mine from every angle, can I really fail again and again to notice that, had it not been for the total collaboration of the entire universe across space and time - we could go back to the time of the dinosaurs, and of course prior to Dinosaurs - an event such as me walking to the nearby bakery today would never have taken place!

Can we acknowledge that the plot is unrolling itself by itself, but not on “my” terms? If we are honest with ourselves, we see that as a matter of fact, a divine conspiracy – lets call it this way for lack of a better word - allows events to manifest themselves!

What is amazing is that everything is always a divine plot. It has nothing to do with “me”. It is not because “I” am special, or because anyone else for that matter is special. Strawberry ice cream melting in my mouth is a divine plot: a bird singing its song, sore muscles after a run, dishes piled up in the sink, the lost sunglasses forgotten on the counter, hanging laundry gently flapping in the wind, the colour of my couch, the ringing of the phone, the fear of snakes when night falls, greenhouse gases, global warming, mosquito bites, a stranger's smile, a toothache, the theft of my wallet, a misunderstanding, the flight of butterflies, COVID, an accident, taking out the garbage on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, clouds passing... Truly everything is a divine conspiracy.

Do you see what I'm getting at? Anything that happens is a miracle in the moment! There is nothing which is not the result of all the elements combined at one moment. It is a divine plot, a set of circumstances that lead to this action or that action.

And now, this is key. When this is understood, not with the mind only but truly known/seen, you can live an ordinary life in peace, without finding anything particularly disturbing in it, since it is a divine plot and not the work of a person – yourself or someone else - that you might consider from your angle “good” or “bad”. All that happens happens by itself and it is not personal. There lies the chance to be relieved from emotional and psychological suffering! There can and will certainly be physical, emotional and psychological pain, but no longer the emotional and psychological suffering that seems to always go along with the pain. Suffering is optional. There can be joy, sadness, laughter, tears, but no one to blame or to congratulate. And this of course does not prevent any specific further decision/action to modify or improve the course of life from your point of view, to re direct it in a new direction. This is also part of this same plot!

As an illustration of this perhaps new discovery of the “divine conspiracy”, I suggest that you watch an extract from a film called "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" by the American director David Fincher with Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, released in 2009.

This film is an adaptation of a short story by Scott Fitzgerald. In a succession of scenes in real time, we see a perfect demonstration that things happened as they happened and not as they could/should/ought to have happened... For a particular action, there are incredible ramifications and its ramifications are always infinite. This excerpt is incredibly telling, it is very visual. Here follows the dialogue that goes with the extract:.

“Sometimes we go right into a collision and we don't realize it. Whether it is by accident or by design, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it...”

A lady in Paris was going shopping. But she had forgotten her coat and came back to get it. When she got her coat, the phone rang. She stopped to answer it and talked for a few minutes. While the lady was on the phone, Daisy was rehearsing for a performance at the Paris Opera. And while she was rehearsing, the lady who had hung up was out taking a cab. A cab driver who had dropped off a client had stopped for a cup of coffee. And all the while, Daisy was rehearsing. And this cab driver who had dropped off his customer and stopped to drink his cup of coffee, picked up the lady who was going to do her shopping and had missed the previous cab. The cab had to stop because a man was crossing the street. He had gone.

He had left for work five minutes later than usual because he had forgotten to set his alarm clock. While this man was crossing the street late for work, Daisy had finished her rehearsal and was taking a shower. And while Daisy was showering, the cab was waiting in front of a store for the lady to pick up a package that hadn't been wrapped yet because the girl, who was supposed to wrap it, had broken up with her boyfriend the night before and forgot. When the package was wrapped, the lady who had gotten back into the cab was blocked by a delivery van. Meanwhile, Daisy was getting dressed. The delivery van drove away and the cab was able to start while Daisy, the last one dressed, waited for one of her friends who had just broken one of her shoelaces. While the cab was stopped waiting at the light, Daisy and her friend walked out the back of the opera house.

What if only one thing had happened differently? What if that shoelace hadn't broken? Or if that delivery van had started earlier? Or if that package had been wrapped and ready because the girl hadn't broken up with her boyfriend? Or if that man had set his alarm and gotten up five minutes earlier? Or if that cab driver hadn't stopped for a cup of coffee? Or if that lady had thought of her coat and got into the first cab? Daisy and her friend would have crossed the street and the cab would have passed.

But life being what it is, a series of intertwined existences and incidents that no one can control, that cab did not pass. And that driver was momentarily distracted. And that cab hit Daisy and her leg was crushed."

Let it settle a bit. It might take you a moment to grasp its full meaning and implications. The way Life - Life with a capital L - unfolds is extremely well illustrated in this excerpt. Of course, this is only a very partial illustration of everything that goes at any time. But you can immediately see for yourself that for each element of the story to appear, there must be infinite ramifications, which themselves have elements that have infinite ramifications, and so on. Fascinating, isn't it?

Now let's come back to the topic of free will. Given what we have just said, can I really go on saying that my decisions are taken by an autonomous control centre placed in the higher part of my head outside of any context? Or am I ready to admit that all the decision made by "me" are in fact a sort of a fiction? Can I see that "I" never make any decision after all? Can I see that decisions are made according to so many different factors.

I am aware that this is a big step to take, but do consider it. You see, the belief that I am a separate entity with free will creates and recreates again and again, and even reinforces this person I believe that I am with a control centre located in my head between my two eyes. Am I ready to question this belief? Does my separate entity really exist in its own right? Or is it a simple belief that I have adhered to out of habit?

It is all about deconstructing this person and especially about stopping recreating it again and again and thus believing it to be true. It is a mirage, like the hot tar of a road in the desert makes us believe that it is covered with water from a distance. The water seems so real, doesn't... But when you go along the road and get closer to the puddle of water, the more you realize that there is no water and that there never has been water. It was purely an optical phenomenon.

Now from theory to practice... I suggest, as Ramesh Balsekar would suggest to his visitors, to review at the end of the day the many events that marked your day from the moment you woke up (a meeting with a client or a friend, a car breakdown, a dentist appointment, a phone call to your mother, going for a swim or a run, watching a movie, etc. Note them down mentally or better in writing, and then systematically check whether each decision or choice you made today (tea versus coffee, swimming versus jogging, red sweater versus yellow top) was entirely yours.

I mean... "entirely yours", not 50% or 99% as this would partly contribute to prove the existence of your control centre, thus reinforcing the reality of your person. Or... check whether each decision or choice you made today was not rather the result of a highly complex combination of circumstances.

This exploration needs perhaps to be made many times, evening after evening to come to realize that the totality of all your decisions and actions have resulted entirely from the torrent of Life as it presented itself at the moment you had to make a decision or take an action. Our decisions and actions are like the water molecules of a torrent that flows down the mountain, across the plain and into the sea. The interactions of these water molecules are infinite but the stream always follows the steepest slope until it reaches the ocean.

Let me give you a very concrete example. My parents called me "Didier" at birth. One day, out of sheer curiosity, I asked my parents: *"Why did you choose the name Didier? Did you choose it?"* Their answer was: *"We liked the sound of it. Yes, of course, we chose it by ourselves. What a question!"* They were convinced that they had made this choice independently of any influence or fashion effect. I had them look at the chart of male babies named Didier by year so they could see that the peak of this name was in 1962, the year of my birth! Another example, my sister's name is Sylvie, she happened to be born in 1964 which is a record year for female babies born called Sylvie that year! So much for my parents' free will in choosing names for their children...

As a general rule, I believe that I exist as an independent person: *"I am the one who creates my life as I see fit (even if at times I feel overwhelmed)."* This belief is what defines me. As long as everything is going great or ok, I am ok, I don't question myself. But when life isn't going the way I want it to, doubt creeps in, and I sometimes feel helpless.

And then there may come the greatest discovery, the hidden secret is no longer a secret: this independence of mine is a dream, this free will is a delusion and I have been living asleep all my life. In fact, if I take a closer look, it is not just a dream, it is a real nightmare! Then comes the crucial question - metaphorically speaking of course... And this is the second part of the exploration that needs to be done independently, really independently.

If what I thought was "me" all my life, that is, a person defined by the very fact of having free will, by the fact of being able to make my choices, by the fact of making my decisions independently (that's the key word: "independently") has in fact no independent personal influence on my destiny... And if every event, at every moment, is the result of an infinite context of elements in Presence, then what does it mean?

This is where it gets even more interesting. I will be led to ask myself if my person, which was defined by the very fact that I have independent control over my personal life, but also over life in general, really exists?

The conclusion is obvious: there is neither a powerless puppet nor a ghost. There never was, because in reality, the controller, the person who was at the centre, who was the one who thought he had the power to make his decisions "in his soul and conscience" and to make his choices independently throughout his life, and who suddenly believes that he has lost this power, does not exist! Not only does she not exist, she never existed. It was just a dream. Pure imagination...

Let's recap... That person I thought was "me" who thought she was making her own decisions and choices, doesn't exist, and she never existed!

This particular definition of "my separate existence", independent, all of a sudden disappears in its entirety. This impression of free will disappears, but also the person who allegedly has or doesn't have - free will disappears because he/she never really existed.

In fact, it is the end of a dream, it is the end of a dream of being a person. But of course the character remains and the story continues, as if nothing had happened.

o you see clearly the difference between the two: character and person? One is apparently real, the character; the other is purely fictitious, the person with free will.

The person who was dreaming cannot disappear because he never existed except in a dream... So in the end, nothing happens! In concrete terms, what does this mean? It means that decisions and choices to come will continue to appear, as before. It's not that all of a sudden, in this discovery, I become a bedridden person who won't do anything anymore, with the idea that if "I" don't decide anything, nothing will happen. This would mean that I would still believe in a person who could not do anything. But this is what must be seen, this person does not exist!

Life is no longer a puzzle: things are done, decisions are made, actions follow. **The unit, the character, the action figure, the hero, – whichever way you want to call it - is indeed fully there but not the imaginary person. That one is gone!**

It is simple. When I wake up in the morning, it is impossible not to get out of bed (at least at some point!) I will eventually get up to put the coffee on and start my day. Everything will continue... The difference - and it's a huge difference - is that there is no longer the belief of someone with a control centre. There is no need for it, life unfolds according to the script of the moment, from moment to moment, with the elements present in the moment. There is no longer comments on how Life unfolds or judgment as to how Life should or should not unfold. Just as the torrent flows down the mountain on the steepest slope in the moment...

There is no need for a controller for life to unfold, and in this absence of the dream of this controller, in this absence of something that is unreal and generating suffering (the snake "becomes again" the rope it has always been), this life appears in an infinitely more harmonious way.

This is an unchanging peace that is the result of a total absence of battle in every moment. There is no longer any comparison between what should happen, what should not happen, what should have happened or what should not have happened. All this disappears instantly.

There is only "What is" and "What is" is just a particular view of the totality of the universe, of the totality of manifestation. That's all that can be said. There is no added person to it, in fact the very idea of being a person in its own right becomes ludicrous.

I address this central topic frequently in my meetings with seekers, but it is not necessarily well received or understood immediately. There is often resistance, for it calls into question and further invalidates what is most familiar and dear to us: "me"!

Ramesh Balsekar spoke in every Satsang about this alleged sense of free will. I heard it myself so often that I would simply tune off. I was then lulled by his words, it appeared to me at that time that he was being repetitious, repeating the same concepts day after day. It did not really make sense: "What are you talking about? Of course, I have free-will, at least in some degree!" But one day I realized that the understanding that the notion of free will – lack of free-will, for that matter, for there was no "me" in the very first place - was in fact crucial. This certainty to be a separate self, this belief in a separate existence with a control centre somewhere located behind my eyes was like ballast needing to be released to find freedom. You can hear this message 10 times, 100 times, and still not realize its full importance and meaning. In my experience, these repetitions were useful. In fact, they were indispensable in order to be able to jump over all the barriers of resistance that I call Maya.