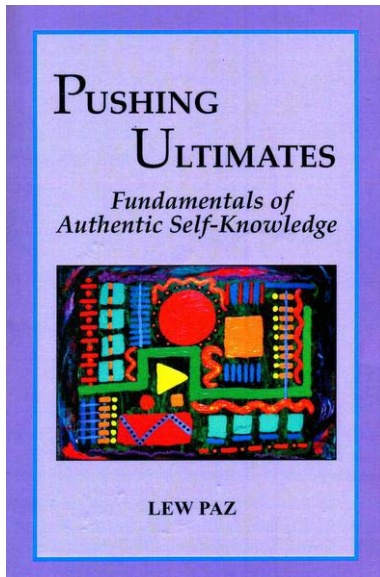


BOOK EXCERPT



*Pushing Ultimates:
Fundamentals of Authentic Self-Knowledge* ↗

Lew Paz

PlumBell Publishing ↗

2006

Paperback: 397 pages

ISBN-10: 0977373398

ISBN-13: 978-0977373390

© PlumBell Publishing

Republished with permission

Chapter 8: Inner Discipline

The very maximum of what one human being can do for another in relation to that wherein each man has to do solely with himself, is to inspire him with concern and unrest.

— Soren Kierkegaard¹

I landed in San Francisco in 1965, having walked away from a fairly affluent lifestyle in Los Angeles, ending a three year marriage. I had been a streetwise guy with a razor styled haircut, a closet filled with tailor made suits, and drawers of expensive cufflinks. I just parked my car by the side of the road one day and stuck out my thumb, heading nowhere in particular. Hitchhiking wasn't new to me. I had my first "on the road" trip (pre-Kerouac) through the Southwest at fourteen years of age, and hitchhiked across the states several times while in the Service. Over the years, I lived in both lower and higher income areas of varied cities, doing the "mean streets" pursuit of money scene, smoking weed and taking a variety of uppers and downers. In '65, the word "hippie" had not yet entered any level of mass media. I had never heard it. With no more income and just the money I had in my wallet when I got to San Francisco, I sought out the cheapest room I could find, which happened to be what others entering the

¹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 346, Princeton University Press 1974.

Bohemian lifestyle of the “hippie” scene were doing. Sometimes six to a dozen would randomly come together sharing a rundown Victorian flat, and this would occasionally, over a period of months, form into an intimate communal scene, with few having any idea at first of what a “commune” even was. Between 1960 and 1967 many people finding their way into this scene had, by experimentation with psychedelic drugs, blown through the acculturated ego sphere of reality and glimpsed a more expansive state of consciousness possible for human beings to attain.

And, as mentioned, such a glimpse usually involved confrontation with evil, as well as dimensions of spiritual heights their childhood religious orientation had completely lacked. None of us gathering in San Francisco had any inkling that we were part of a growing scene that would come to be looked upon as the “Haight-Ashbury” subculture. Such “movements” come about in ways too broad and complex to be captured by the neat little formulas sociologists and cultural historians like to place them in.

The New Age “movement” is just the latest manifestation of the perennial expression of human longing for ultimate spiritual awareness which orthodox religion does not satisfy, entailing a more expansive rippling of ancient Eastern religious concepts, occult lore, theosophical schemata, flowering forth into what was, pre 1970, the flatland of American spirituality. The growing awareness and use of psychedelic substances building up since the late 50’s burgeoned forth over the following decades. The awakening to alternative perceptions of reality and deeper dimensions of spiritual experience brought about an expanding “dropping out” of the sterile nightmare of the American Dream. It also brought about a certain historical relapse into superstitions and occult knowledges that hadn’t been active within the American ambit of cultural awareness for over a century.

Though it is possible to trace New Age root connections to the counter-culture hippie scene of the ‘60s and ‘70s, it is now such a wide ranging phenomenon that it shouldn’t even be considered a movement in the way the beatnik and hippie scenes could be. You can’t look at a person and identify him/her as a “New Ager” as you could identify beatniks and early hippies as separate from main stream citizenry. The New Age is an umbrella label covering a wide variety of activities concerning aspects of physical health, and mental and spiritual development. And, despite the shortcomings of the contemporary New Age movement, there is no denying that something is going on involving the expanding transformation of human consciousness. Over the past thirty years, more people than in any previous era have become aware of their potential to overcome social programming and psychological weaknesses in order to bring about genuine spiritual growth. Those setting off on the quest for authentic self-knowledge are going to partake here and there of certain New Age activities. Thus they should definitely be concerned with the ability to separate falsehood and delusion from the truthful and genuine. This demands close observance of any organized system of mental or spiritual growth they may become involved with, perceiving any subterfuge or derangement behind skillfully constructed masks of spiritual expertise. For amid the nourishing garden of New Age offerings are shadowed areas where lurk parasites and predators that can hinder and even blight the potential for growth.

From a certain perspective, the New Age movement seems to have contributed as many obstacles to spiritual awareness as doorways. One of Donovan's songs from the sixties, "Young Girl Blues," has the phrase "*working your way through the phonies.*" "Phoniness" is concern for image rather than substance. On the journey for authenticity, maneuvering through the legions of well intentioned but shallow guides and teachers of every stripe — gurus, masters, swamis, herbalists, channelers — acute discernment is a necessary skill one must develop. Treacherous indeed is the ego's craving for excessive self-esteem, cultivating ways and means for the personality to preen an image of awakening rather than seek the actual challenge of inner exploration. This entire capitalist Society, dependent upon the interplay of consumer and marketing industry, has produced the most profoundly manipulative advertising empire the world has ever known — and the main "game" is to create self-imagery dependent on external validation. Marketing experts, skilled at catering to every vanity and whim of the ego-persona, inundate the media with commercials that ignite a worshipful attitude for external display, such as fashionable name-brand attire to enhance the image of success, coolness, or hip sophistication. The New Age movement has its own place in this marketing empire. Designer gurus and yoga teachers give their devotees in-crowd prestige on the New Age circuit. The expanding number of people who are skilled at cultivating external images of spiritual depth and intellectual substance is epidemic as the new millennium dawns.

For the seeker to find a way through such ego entrancing obstacles without succumbing to cynicism, calls for a refined and flexible skepticism of everything offered as a way of "spiritual" lifestyle. A finely honed skepticism sharpened by consistent consideration of every field of significant knowledge, is absolutely necessary in this endeavor. Cautionary inquiry is able to separate truth from cunningly disguised falsehood, the authentic from cultivated mimicry, insightful simplicity from banality, and genuine spiritual phenomena from the merely psychic and hallucinatory. Such discernment also calls for insight into the misuse of words, language, concepts. For instance, everyone knows how the concept of love suffers from tenacious reductionism in our consumer society, how it percolates throughout the entire social network in infinite banal ways, capitalized upon for material profit, degraded as a tool for commercial manipulation in order to enhance material products, from automobiles to cereals to deodorants. If the word love is so easily reduced to such an insipid level, what about such words as soul, enlightenment, and of course, God. Authors of books concerning everything from Christian fundamentalism to theosophical concepts to the paranormal, use a kind of linguistic mimicry of the phrases of genuine wisdom to validate absurdities. Such falsification gives the wrong impression of authentic spiritual teachings.

James Hillman, whose works dive deeply into Jungian archetypes, sees most New Age therapeutic methods as failing to deal with the true complexities of the soul.² We can see this lack of substantial psychological awareness in many New Age writers and

2 *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy — And the World's Getting Worse*, James Hillman and Michael Ventura, Harper Collins 1992.

lecturers. Though such spokespeople may specialize in Hindu and Buddhist terminology relating to levels of consciousness, few speak with any background knowledge of centuries of Western art, literature, poetry, science, philosophy, and how these have contributed to highlighting the further heights and depths of the human situation today. Many become popular because they speak and write with a reductionist style that brings the complex and disturbing down into canned formulas of what spiritual growth is supposedly all about. Dozens of such New Age authors could bring their works together into one large volume entitled “*How To Become Aware of the Depths of Your Being Without Disturbing the Routine of Your Comfortable Lifestyle.*”

All those who set out to pursue the quest for self-knowledge should consider H.L. Mencken’s perception that there is no idea so stupid you can’t find people to believe in it.³ If the seeker does not wish to number among the spiritually naive, he/she must be willing to approach inner exploration, the mystical, the paranormal, the metaphysical, as if gathering fruit from an orchard inundated with land mines. We must be very attentive, for, as Theodore Roszak warned us in his insightful book, *Unfinished Animal*,

It is spiritual intelligence that is demanded of us; the power to tell the greater from the lesser reality, the sacred paradigm from its copies and secular counterfeits. Spiritual intelligence — without it, the consciousness circuit will surely become a lethal swamp of paranormal entertainments, facile therapeutic tricks, authoritarian guru trips, and demonic subversions.⁴

Since the mid 1970’s when Roszak wrote this warning, common gullibility and lack of spiritual intelligence when dealing with psychic phenomena and occult systems has become rampant. Rather than stumble naively through the labyrinth of New Age belief systems, it is worthwhile to read through dozens of issues of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine, which reveal much of the fraud and deceit that goes on with esoteric messengers, channelers, astrologers, etc., who roam the avenues of the New Age spiritual movement. But one must be aware that such skepticism is very prone to a narrow materialistic orientation, which has its own failings. Somewhere between the Charybdis of zealous skepticism and the Scylla of New Age credulity lies the firm higher ground of cohesive awareness.

There are many positive elements within the New Age ambit, which have injected a fresh vitality into a half century and more of religious narrow-mindedness, soulless materialism, and spiritual blandness. And there are teachers and gurus of integrity and capability who can be very beneficial to those with certain spiritual and psychological needs. Yet, like mining for gold, as one approaches the genuine mother lode, there is always more eye-catching fools gold scattered about than real nuggets. David Tacey points out,

The New Age man wants the Goal (unity with the divine) without the way (the discipline, ethics, and self-effacement that make such unity possible). He wants blissful union without the suffering of the cross, spiritual rebirth without having to first endure spiri-

³ H.L. Mencken, as quoted in *Redneck Nation*, by Michael Graham, Warner Books 2003.

⁴ Theodore Roszak, *Unfinished Animal*, Harper and Row 1975.

tual death. He is 'hooked' on the sacred, addicted to spiritual techniques and practices, and his credo is: 'Follow your bliss' (Joseph Campbell). A Jungian response would be to doubt the authenticity of this so-called 'spirituality' if it is merely designed to provide instant gratification for the ego....

[There is a] notorious problem of rampant egotism, emotionality, splits, and competitiveness that plague New Age groups, cults, sects, ashrams, clubs, societies and communes. Although all these groups (ostensibly) work toward transcendence of ego in favor of soul, they are often destroyed by a secret, dark and malignant egotism, which eats away at the high ideals and eventually causes the whole edifice to collapse, often with devastating consequences to society and to all concerned... The drives of the ego, especially the power drive and its push for identity and esteem, cannot be got rid of by intellectual attitude which espouses focus on 'higher' things. Although the conscious emphasis is on 'openness' to the divine, merging with a higher will, and mystical 'negative capability,' the power drive of the ego makes itself felt in the fixity and dogmatism with which these 'expansive' goals are pursued. The devotees declare that they are 'nothing' before the divine, or worthless before the charismatic teacher, but in the background there is fierce jockeying for privilege and special places, for power and influence within the group.⁵

As Tacey indicates, within the faction of society supposedly involved with activities related to the spiritual quest, various leaders and teachers, who claim to have conquered their lower desires, capitulate to all too common sexual urges, games of manipulation, and even lying to their followers to cover up their duplicity. Such failings of integrity are no less negative than those of a Jimmy Swaggart or Jim Baker, but few devotees recognize this. I have heard some devotees use Jungian concepts to excuse their gurus' sexual gambits and power games, saying they were just manifesting their shadow. That's nonsense. Anyone who claims guruship or the title of master should have full control of lower mind desires, not from puritanistic repression, but by conscious disciplined restraint. Others use a more Buddhist excuse, claiming their master's shortcomings as displays of "crazy wisdom." Though there are jester/trickster methods of teaching, when it drags into any of the above mentioned negativities, or worse, it is pure folly. A revealing case in point is Amy Wallace's exposé about her years as one of Castaneda's harem of neurotic women, all self-deceived to believe they were elite extraordinary beings when in reality they had succumbed to common negative traits of the human personality.⁶ Where such things are concerned, we have to develop an attentive intuitive perception which allows us to see beyond the skillfully created image cloaked in all the garb that creates the illusion of spiritual wisdom.

We are dealing here with a very significant aspect of the seeker's journey, the ability to judge the quality of a person in the position of teacher or guru he/she may relate intimately to in pursuit of enhancing spiritual development. This is not just a matter of simple common sense, like how to pick your lawyer or mechanic. It's a situation that requires a keen sense of discrimination. Consider the weak criticism and apologetic semantic acrobatics of certain American roshis, in their attempt to justify the rabid

⁵ David Tacey, *Jung and the New Age*, Brunner-Routledge 2001.

⁶ Amy Wallace, *Sorcerer's Apprentice: My Life With Carlos Castaneda*, Frog Ltd, 2003.

anti-Semitism of Zen master Yasutani. Their efforts only reveal just how much the process of dharma transmission has been diluted over the past two hundred years. Roshi Bernie Glassman's feeble defense in *Tricycle* magazine '99, was truly pathetic.⁷ Such incidents reveal a delusion built up about Zen — that Christianity is subject to its Elmer Gantry's, but Zen roshis are all purity. Scandals during the 1990's revealed how limited such an idealistic assumption can be. In the effort to adapt Eastern religions to Western culture, Glassman, like many New Age "masters," is ready to reduce even the ideal of an enlightened sage to fit Yasutani's spew of hatred and ignorance. In the same issue of *Tricycle*, instead of demanding a roshi's commitment to purity of mind as qualifying for enlightenment, Roshi Aitken desperately excused Yasutani's anti-Semitism, claiming Yasutani was vulnerable to the times and the current political atmosphere. But the truly enlightened mind should not be drawn down by time and place, or current politics. The genuinely awakened spiritual master may perhaps have an impulse to get drunk now and then, or have a momentary sexual attraction for another person, or occasionally get overly angry at injustice, but will *never* capitulate to serious negative traits of the mass common mind, such as racial prejudice, greed, lust, ethnic pride, or mentally limited impulses such as patriotism and nationalism. And though the awakened one may on occasion be carefully and knowingly involved in political activities such as civil rights and anti-war demonstrations out of an acute sense of compassion, he/she is never a believer in any political system. Politics, to an awakened one, is like stirred dust in a strong wind — an exceedingly ephemeral distraction from more meaningful and significant ways and means humans have available to create a worthwhile social structure.

Writing of the qualities of a genuine master, Robert Nozick says,

First, they exemplify what they hold important; their values infuse their lives.... In their presence we are reminded of our own neglected heights, embarrassed to be less than our best selves.... The spiritual teachers are exemplars of the full force of their values.... They adhere completely and totally to what is important to them. They will not compromise these values or deviate from them.⁸

Bernie Glassman, who has been involved in many positive social works, claims that Buddha would have considered him to be enlightened — a claim that is undoubtedly bolstered within his mutual admiration network. But Bernie old boy, you'd better not even begin to speculate what Buddha would have thought about your spiritual state. Obviously a claim such as that is imbued with a definite element of egoic self promotion, thus tainted with more than a little vanity, which is enough to void the claim.

What of Deepak Chopra, a man whose fame, status, and fortune is so well established he has no need for elaboration of his abilities. Yet, in *Esquire* magazine, October 1995,⁹ he

⁷ Bernie Glassman, *Tricycle Magazine*, Fall 1999, "Yasutani Roshi: The Hardest Koan" Brain Victoria, with responses from Robert Aitken, Bernie Glassman, Bodhin Kjolhede, Lawrence Shainberg.

⁸ Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*, Touchstone 1989.

⁹ Deepak Chopra, *Esquire Magazine*, "Deepak Chopra has (sniff) a cold" by Chip Brown, October 1995.

claimed to have the ability to levitate. The interviewer saw a photograph with Deepak and Michael Jackson in the lotus position. Michael was on the floor, but Deepak was supposedly a foot in the air! Deepak said it was real, and that his wife Rita could do it also. If his idea of levitation consists of that absurdity of hopping around on one's butt — the so-called “yogic flying” of practitioners of Transcendental Meditation — and the photo was of one of his higher “hops,” well, the entire claim is ridiculous. But if he truly rose from the lotus position into the air, sort of gently floating upward, then it is the greatest breakthrough in the centuries-old debate between materialism and mysticism that has ever occurred. So why has Deepak not given a televised demonstration with an audience of expert illusionists and qualified scientists to scrutinize? Did he really do it? I do not believe so. Why would he distort the truth? He has no need to bolster his fame by tricks of illusion. I think Deepak was the victim of self-delusion, which religious and spiritual “experiencers” are very prone to.

I could go on about others — Werner Erhard of EST, or designer-guru Sri Krishna Pattabhi Jois, whom some have called a racist Brahmin. We all know about Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, whose devotees, snared by cultish elitism, went bonkers against the local ... community. The internet will clue you in on all the negative activities of Sai Baba, or Adi Da, or Amrit Desai. Unfortunately, there are very few “gurus” you can name who don't have skeletons in and out of their closets. Yet all of the above people do have significant insights to offer. It is the same with philosophers and scientists. I have found many deeply meaningful insights in the brilliant work of Heidegger, yet he succumbed to Nazism and praised Hitler as a Germanic savior.

Like the roshis who strive to protect Haku'un Yasutani's reputation, William Patrick Patterson does the same in his writings about the late Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche,¹⁰ said to have once been the supreme abbot of a Tibetan monastery, whose devotees rationalized his excessive drinking, chain smoking and womanizing, as his way of understanding Western decadence, and his taste for exquisite suits and luxuries as his “disguise,” so he could be a spiritual spy among the social elite. This is absurd. I have gained many insights from the writings of Rinpoche, but I have gained as much from others who don't claim titles of spiritual tradition while simultaneously succumbing to negative habits an ordinary morally weak person is prone to. Patterson also mentions Miguel Serrano's writings about having found his true self, which apparently did not prevent him from becoming a zealous Nazi. In his last internet interviews, Serrano was involved in esoteric Hitlerism, which is most likely still quite active in South American political-corporate circles.

Image, position, outward trappings, guarantee nothing. The riots between Buddhist monks in Korea in 1988, as well as pedophile priests in the West, verify that a so-called spiritually disciplined lifestyle can all too often be a veneer, a masking of ordinary psychological hang-ups. There have been a dozen or more autobiographies written over the past decade by people who became obedient disciples of one or another guru

¹⁰ William Patrick Patterson, *Eating the I: a Direct Account of the Fourth Way — The Way of Transformation in Ordinary Life*, Arete Communications 1992.

or monk representing teachings from Buddhism or Hinduism, and for five to ten years, or even more, merged with fellow worshippers in a seclusive and seemingly ideal way of spiritual life, only to later discover the “clay feet” of the person they had seen as godlike. They realized that though they had matured to some extent during those years and had developed an amazing vocabulary concerning enlightenment, gurus, yoga, etc., they were still not any more spiritually aware than those who had never bowed before a guru. Those who attempt to be truly free, free even from the enchaining “freedoms” of the immoralist and the nihilist, free from all mundane desires and ambitions, must maneuver through the labyrinth of charlatans and illusions that can impede the way of the sincere novice seeker. To continue the journey without becoming ensnared by skilled deceivers and psychic predators, one must be alert to powers and forces opposing spiritual awakening, becoming skillfully discerning, balancing flexible skepticism with cautious openness, constantly and eclectically taking from various “masters” what is of real value and leaving all else behind.

A significant element here is the problem of psychological transference. This syndrome, known to all psychiatrists, occurs when a patient projects his/her longing for a godlike guide onto the analyst. In the New Age milieu, a person only needs to be qualified to teach a class in yoga to receive such projections, since so many people naively equate the teaching of yoga as somehow qualifying a person for the status of guru. Many yoga teachers encourage this for various egoic reasons. Far too many who have claimed to be and are seen as gurus thrive on projection. As with the analyst-analysand relationship, if this projection isn't revealed by the guru to the devotee when the moment is ripe, authentic growth is stunted. The patient/neophyte must eventually be empowered to stand alone and cultivate inwardly the qualities he/she projects outward.

To ignore the failings of those espousing spiritual truths is a serious oversight. When dealing with subject matter in which a decision can dramatically affect your entire life and the well-being of your soul, the integral value of a person's spiritual worth must be thoroughly evaluated. The seeker must consider such things as whether spiritual teachers or guides live up to their own teachings, how much they actually know concerning their subject matter, how much experience is behind it, and whether or not they are still in their own way seeking. If they are defending and bolstering a scheme of delusions woven together with certain essential truths, this must be uncovered. The quest demands cultivating the skill to know the difference between delusive preachings and authentic wisdoms, and most of all to realize that a permanent intermediary between your own soul and the holy source of existence is not needed. Perseveringly develop your intelligence, your intuition, your spiritual disciplines, and your own inner intermediary shall reveal itself, becoming clearer and more dependable as your comprehension expands. There is no getting around it, the quest for truth is definitely a multi-leveled social, psychic, spiritual obstacle course we must be very attentive to. Though the quest is imbued with numinous relationship to an enigmatic cosmic design, it should not be considered an aspect of some great theosophical cosmic plan of “earth as spiritual basic-training camp.” Truly, as one awakens and faces existence head-on, the human condition can be seen as a very dark and troubling predicament. There are

great writers and philosophers who even saw it as completely hopeless and tragic. Miguel de Unamuno's book, *Tragic Sense of Life*,¹¹ presents a vision we should not flee from, but face and integrate into our own comprehension of life. The disturbing insights of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Artaud, Joseph Conrad, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Beckett, and the dark visions of other artists and poets, must be fully taken into consideration, for there is much about life that justifies their disquieting revelations. Even the writings of our great sages can be very disturbing when it comes to describing our actual existential-spiritual predicament. This is necessary, for too many New Age books present nothing more than facile ineffectual messages of hope. But the philosophy of Samkya yoga proclaims that this kind of hope only prolongs common entanglements, and thus should be vanquished. Genuine faith in the light of the moment is sufficient. Enough moments of light fill a day – enough days, a lifetime. The challenge is to face both the horrid murk of the external world and the deeper shadows within ourselves, and deal with it by orienting ourselves to the light, both external and internal, wherever it manifests itself. This cannot be done by turning one's back on the evil that exists and adopting the trite "there's a divine reason for every horror" formula, which reflects the New Age tendency to dismiss the suffering and misfortune of humanity as part of some great karmic apple-pie-in-the-sky plan for us all. Does it seem the demands of the quest for self-knowledge are more than you are able to take on? You would be surprised what you are truly capable of. Just begin by taking on what you can, and you will find your capabilities expanding as you develop. If you make it too easy for yourself, your inner potential will never reach the tension that ignites the alchemical fire. You have to stretch, sacrifice, act.

¹¹ Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, tr. J.E. Crawford Fritch, Dover Publications 1954.