

TALKS
WITH
TEMERLEN

An exploration into the deeper meaning of
consciousness, meditation, and prayer

PETER INGLE

TALKS WITH TEMERLEN

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All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount.
Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me.

Walt Whitman

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Awareness is Everything

IT WAS TIME to start the interview. Sitting in my chair in the recording studio, I felt unusually nervous. My guest would be a professor named Temerlen P. Gillis who had lectured at the local college a week before on the subject of awareness. There was something unusual about his manner that had drawn me in, so after his talk I asked if he might join my weekly show sometime for an interview, to which he agreed.

The focal point of our interview was going to be the nature of awareness which he had touched on during his lecture and which I had found intriguing due to his simple way of explaining a subject that many people presume to understand, but which he cast in a whole new light.

As I sat reviewing my questions, the door opened and in walked a slender, graying man in his late 60s with a gentle face and calm manner. Mr. Gillis looked at me knowingly, walked to my chair, and shook my hand. He then took a seat, got comfortable in front of the microphone, lifted the glass of water in front of him, and took a sip. I asked if he was ready to begin and he nodded with a smile.

I read my introduction about him as a professor of philosophy who had for many years studied religion and eastern spirituality. I then looked at him and asked if he could describe for our listeners the nature of human awareness and why he felt it was so important.

With his hands folded quietly in front of him and with no sign of hesitation, he began by explaining that simple awareness—the capacity in humans to be aware—is the most remarkable yet most overlooked fact about our existence. “Awareness is everything,” he said, “but because it’s *behind* everything else about our existence we don’t notice it.”

“And yet,” I responded, “you and I are aware that we’re here doing this interview, and everyone listening is aware that they’re hearing it. Isn’t this what you mean?”

“Yes and no,” Mr. Gillis said. “It’s true that, as we’re talking, we’re aware and your listeners are aware. In this sense, we’re all naturally aware. At the same time—and this is the key—awareness is not aware of being aware; it’s not consciously aware.”

The he added: "And just my saying this caused your awareness to jump up a notch."

"As a matter of fact," I replied. "I did feel something."

"Can you describe it," he asked. "What did you feel?"

After a pause, I said, "Well, for one thing, it became more obvious—if that's the word—that we're sitting here."

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "You became more vivid. I saw you and heard you more vividly."

"True," replied said Mr. Gillis. "Everything you just said happens when awareness becomes more aware. But there's something else. Did you catch it?"

At his question, I felt myself go on guard, as though I had to solve a riddle. "Well," I said, "I suppose I became more vivid, too; more aware of being in the studio with you. Is that what you mean?"

“Almost,” he said. “Very close. In fact, what’s so interesting about your description is that it’s very close, but only close. Most people who are asked the same thing also come very close.

“Think of it like this,” he continued. “A moment ago, *what* you were aware of became more vivid. You suddenly became more aware of me and more aware of you. At the same time—and this is what gets missed—awareness became aware of *itself*. This coming home of awareness, this being aware of being aware, is the hallmark of spiritual life. Everything else is just talk.

“You have to realize,” Mr. Gillis said slowly, “how odd it is that awareness is always here and always aware, yet seldom is it aware of being aware. I say odd because the more you notice this, the more you realize that everything else about our existence stems from awareness, depends on awareness, and pales in significance to awareness. But we don’t give this any attention or talk about it. We take awareness completely for granted.”

He then paused. His gaze lowered as he seemed to journey deep into thought. He seemed unhurried, as though waiting for thoughts to reveal themselves rather than chasing after some-

thing scripted to say. He clearly wasn't concerned about the delay in our broadcast, as I was.

Just as I was about to speak, he continued:

“Of course, what we're talking about—the nature of awareness—is beyond the mind's ability to grasp it. The mind is more limited than we like to believe. That's why it's good to talk about awareness. Talking about awareness pushes the mind up against its own limits, and sometimes beyond.

“You see,” he continued, “the mind can only *think* about awareness. It can only conceptualize it. The mind cannot be aware. Take right now, for example. As our minds use words to construct a mental notion of something called awareness, we're aware this is going on. There's thinking and there's awareness of thinking—two phenomena. One mentally tangible. The other intangible and elusive to the mind.”

“It seems obvious when you point it out,” I said. “But most of the time I don't notice this distinction. Frankly, I've never even thought about it.”

“Precisely,” he replied, “and it’s interesting how you just said it: that you don’t ‘notice’ it. In other words, awareness goes unnoticed most of the time. Isn’t that strange? And to whom does it go unnoticed? To itself.

“Look carefully,” he went on, “and you’ll see that you can be aware of your hands, you can be aware that you’re talking or walking, you can be aware that you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. But none of these activities or senses can be aware of themselves. Only awareness can be aware of them. For example, your hand is not aware of itself. Your eyes are not aware of seeing. Something else is aware of them. And only that can be aware of *itself*.”

After a pause, Mr. Gillis continued: “This capacity to be aware of being aware seems so simple, doesn’t it—so ridiculously simple—yet this is the essence of enlightenment.

“Imagine,” he continued, “what such awareness would be like on the scale of our galaxy or universe, or beyond—an infinite awareness encompassing everything else.”

“You mean God,” I said.

“I mean awareness,” Mr. Gillis said softly. “Larger and larger and larger awareness that is more and more and more conscious of being aware of being aware.”

“But what else can that be but God?” I said.

“Ultimately,” he replied, “you acknowledge that what we call God is awareness and that awareness is God.”

“Wouldn’t awareness be the presence of God?” I asked. “In the sense that God is beyond awareness, bigger than awareness?”

“It’s an interesting question,” said Mr. Gillis. “And it’s interesting that it’s not asked more often or examined more carefully.”

“You mean we take God for granted,” I said.

“I would say,” he replied, “that we make too many assumptions about what God is, just as we make too many assumptions about who and what we are.”

After a pause, he went on: “You have to realize that the concept of God has different meaning for different people. This in itself is interesting.

Why are they so different? How can there be differences where something as big as God is concerned?

“At the same time,” he added, “God is usually considered to be physically out of reach. Just from this point of view it’s worth asking: where is God, what form does God actually take, and what precisely is his relationship to us? These sound like reasonable questions, but they challenge assumptions that we take for granted. But why should we settle for assumptions on such an important issue?”

I then asked, “What about God as awareness? Can’t we ask the same questions?”

“We can,” said Mr. Gillis, “and we should. But we have to understand that it’s the mind which poses such questions. The mind asks about God from the mind’s frame of reference, which is all it knows, then it shapes answers within that frame. The mind is remarkable, but when you step out of it, you see that the mind is a box you can put a lot of stuff into, but it can’t get outside of itself. The mind is very much its own trap.

“Nevertheless,” Mr. Gillis said, “the mind can

visualize things beyond itself—like the solar system, the galaxy, and the universe. It can then conclude that everything is connected; that the universe is an enormous body; that even though all the parts seem disconnected, they're really one because together they form one large whole.”

I then asked: “So what and where is God in all this?”

He didn't respond right away. He just looked at me thoughtfully. After a few moments, he said, “You might say that God is ultimate awareness and that each human being contains a potential of awareness, and that in their purest form they are the same.”

“And what about prayer?” I said.

“Prayer,” he responded right away, “is a link between the two: between potential awareness and full, conscious awareness. What's important to understand, though, is that prayer doesn't belong to awareness. Awareness is already aware. It has no need of prayer, which is a mental exercise. Prayer exists as a vehicle for the mind to open itself—yield itself—to awareness. In religious terms, this is man surrendering to

the will of God. In reality, it means the mind surrendering to awareness so that awareness will recognize itself, realize itself, return to itself.

“In its highest form,” Mr. Gillis continued, “prayer is an appeal by the mind to awareness in the sincere hope that awareness will actualize itself as conscious awareness by becoming aware of being aware.”

“So, we’re really praying to ourselves, not to God.” I said.

“Yes and no,” he said. “We as physical beings are petitioning metaphysical awareness to be consciously aware. You might say that we’re pleading to God to save us by saving himself. This is the only true salvation. There is no external salvation. And when you take the concept of God out of the equation, it’s strictly about awareness. Behind the universe, encompassing the universe, and filling the universe is pure awareness. You can still call it God and pray to it, but as soon as pure awareness recognizes itself, all that falls away.” ■

Who is Temerlen Gillis?

Well, you can imagine the feedback the station got from this broadcast:

Who is this Temerlen Gillis?

Since when does this guy have the authority to dismiss religion wholesale and claim we are God?

Awareness, smareness. This is your usual spirituality speak and new-age gobbledy gook.

For other listeners, it was a revelation:

Completely blown away. I was forced to take a hard look at all this. Wow.

Needless to say, praying didn't feel the same after listening to Mr. Gillis. It felt better and meant more.

I applaud his daring honesty. He just shot what feels like an arrow of truth into the heart of my belief system. I hope that's a good thing.

I stayed in touch with Mr. Gillis, at first by phone. He didn't want to do another live broadcast, but he said he would be interested in

some private recording sessions. Of course, I agreed. He felt to me like a fresh spring of knowledge and I wanted to bottle some of it.

As it turned out, what Mr. Gillis really wanted was to explore the idea of prayer, specifically The Lord's Prayer. He said he wanted to peel away the literal meaning and examine its metaphysical purpose.

What follows is a record of our talks on this subject over a period of several months.

Something to keep in mind while reading these "snapshots" is that Mr. Gillis was never in a hurry. He never insisted on his point of view. He never tried to convince me of anything. On the contrary, he always spoke carefully, often pausing as he went, never pressing to reach a conclusion. His demeanor left the impression of someone paddling a canoe down a tranquil stream with ease and precision. His thoughts were like deep, slow strokes that propelled us along. Occasionally he would make two or three incisive strokes and let us glide downstream. Never did he seem lost and never did he say where we were going, which always came as a wonderful, sometimes startling, surprise.