



## Presence and awakening on the healing path

Guest: A H Almaas

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### **[00:00:10] Alex Howard**

Welcome to this session, which is an excerpt from our online program *Trauma and Awakening* with Hameed Ali, who writes under the name of A. H. Almaas, and Dr Gabor Mate. In this section, Hameed is exploring the role of presence and awakening on the healing path.

To give you a little bit of Hameed's background, A. Hameed Ali, who writes under the pen name of A. H. Almaas, is the founder of the Diamond Approach to self realization, a contemporary teaching that developed within the context of both ancient spiritual teachings and modern depth psychology theories.

Hameed has authored 18 books about spiritual realization, including the *Diamond Heart* series, *The Pearl Beyond Price*, *The Void*, and *The Alchemy of Freedom*.

He is the founder of the Ridhwan School for Spiritual Development, an inner work school devoted to the realization of true nature. The orientation of the school is directed towards guiding students to realize their true nature, to the fullest realization, and further still to endless enlightenment.

I hope you enjoy this section. If you want to purchase the full program, *Trauma and Awakening*, there are details below this video.

I think before we come into some of the core of today's session, we're going to be exploring presence and true nature, and I think that's a really key part of the foundation of the awakening piece of trauma and awakening. I think it'd be helpful just to say a little bit about when we speak of trauma, what do we actually mean? Because I think Hameed, as you and I have spoken about and we touched on in our interview before this session, one can take quite a narrow definition, but one can also take a broader definition as well.

### **Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

Yes, different researchers have defined trauma in different ways, and especially when the word started being used a few decades ago, it meant something very specific, like somebody is encountering the situation, experience themselves that's so overwhelming that they couldn't handle it and they had to dissociate. They have to forget it, they have to put it away, they have to suppress it and have to run away from it. That's the general thing, it's an overwhelming experience.

**[00:02:42]**

Another definition, it is an experience or difficulty or situation or something, you can't run away from it and you can't find your way through it, so there's no way out for you. Now, many people are using the general definition, which is that a lot of our suffering can be seen as trauma.

And people have suffering of all kinds, armed forces, they have car accidents, they have sexual abuse, they have been mugged, or natural disasters. And general suffering, being abandoned, not being loved. Many people can think of it as trauma. I myself don't think of these things as trauma, but I understand some people use that term that way. So we're exploring the whole spectrum.

### **Alex Howard**

I think it's helpful also to recognize that there are people joining us in this program who are here because they have very specific PTSD type trauma. There are then those that have had perhaps just the more life experiences, let's say, that have been painful and been difficult. And we will at times define specifically when we're speaking to each of those. But also we're taking an approach which is all encompassing so this can be as accessible as it can for as many people as possible. We will get more into this piece in next week's session with Gabor as well.

Hameed, to begin our dive a bit more into this idea of awakening, you and I spoke a little bit about this in the interview that we did. I think it would be helpful to say a little bit about when we talk of awakening, what we mean. And specifically, when we're not awake, where are we? This idea of ego or who we become, which is not our true nature?

### **Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

Well, first of all, the word awakening is becoming commonplace these days. Many people use the word awakening, and that means something. But awakening, the word has been used for some time. Gurdjieff, for instance, the Russian teacher who taught in Europe and USA, used "awakening" in two terms.

First of all, awaken to your present condition. He called it waking up to the terror of the moment. Like if you really know, find out where you really are, where you are at the spectrum of experience of humanity, you'll be terrified. You will see how big in shit you are.

And then the second awakening is awakening to your true nature, to your spiritual nature, which is more what is commonly used these days, which is you are awakened. But people use a different way. Awakening meaning you have experience with awakening. You just have an experience of recognizing there is something to you more than your body and your ordinary thinking mind. There is something more like light or luminosity or presence or pure awareness that we didn't know existed as part of you. You wake up to that.

Many people, many teachers who use the word awakening now, they don't mean just having experience of that, it means that experience has become your mode of experience, that you're awakened in a continuous way. That's the technical word usage, actually. The word awakening that is used by many spiritual teachers these days, is used by many spiritual traditions.

So I'm making a distinction. Waking up to the fact that, yes, there's more. Some people don't have that experience except in drugs, like in LSD, whatever. They have experience, oh, wow. They wake up to

the fact that they didn't know you can experience reality that way. That's awakening. But usually in spiritual tradition, awakening means you are awakened to that condition in a more permanent way.

**[00:07:23] Alex Howard**

It's like the reference point from which we meet our life changes somehow.

**Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

Yes. Our sense of identity moves from the sense of being a body with emotions and thoughts to the spiritual light or presence as what we are. We look from that perspective. We function from that perspective. We act, interact from that point, from that new identity.

**Alex Howard**

So when we are not meeting the world from that place, the place that many of us live much of our lives from, say a bit about that. Meeting the egoic itself that we can come to know ourselves as.

**Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

Yes, that was something you call the world of sleep. In the sense the world of sleep means not awakened, not knowing about this fact. You might hear about it, read it in the Bible or someplace, but you don't know from direct, immediate experience that there is something to reality, dimension reality that is beautiful, wonderful, liberating, happy, inherently good. And it is what we are. People don't know that. So not knowing that, many traditions call it, you're asleep to the world. You're asleep to reality.

Because most people live in what we call the ego world, the world of the self, the ego self. And there's nothing wrong with it. That's normal. Everybody's like that. Everybody has an ego. In fact, they are, they take themselves to be the ego what's called the self, myself. When most people say "me, myself," they mean their bodies and their emotions and their thoughts and their history and their stories and all that. What most people think is who they are, including their roles and their education, who their mother and father are and stuff like that.

That is the definition that people have. And even psychologists, depth psychology takes that to be the self, you see. And in fact, depth psychology has a great deal of research on how that sense of self develops. Which is something that makes me wonder why those depth psychologists explore and show how that sense of self develops from childhood, and then they take it to be their real self. Because they explore how it actually develops through impression.

That our experiences from childhood, we have experiences of different kinds with our parents, our environment, things that happen inside us, it's mostly in our relationship with people, those leave a strong impact on our consciousness. Because we are each medium of consciousness really. When we're born, we are not just the body, we are consciousness. Consciousness is aware they can feel, they can see.

Also consciousness is impressionable, especially as babies. As we know, babies are impressionable. And that's how we learn. The impressionability is needed for learning. However, all the impressions remain like imprints in the consciousness that stay, that last. And some of them, depending on how frequently it was repeated, how intensely it happened, it leaves a deeper, indelible impression that

then structures the consciousness that forms it in some kind of way. So it gives it a certain feel, certain patterns of behavior and feeling and knowing and all that.

### **[00:11:37]**

And with it there's a sense of shape of the body usually, because the body is very impressionable. We are touched, we are held or fall and all that. So the shape of the body, with all the history that it went through, becomes accumulated and integrated by the mind into a sense of an overall sense of being an individual with a self recognition that we call identity. That individual's identity is what people call the self, and that is what spiritual teaching calls the ego.

### **Alex Howard**

And we're going to come to this a little bit more later, but maybe you could say a little bit about the relationship between, I'm not going to use the word trauma here, but the difficult formative experiences that we might have. So, for example, not getting the emotional holding that we need or not feeling seen by a parent in a way that feels important, and how that shapes those impressions in our ego structure. I think just making that relationship between that broad definition of trauma and how the ego shapes is helpful.

### **Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

Yeah, that's an important part of how people are different. Some people tend to be more easy going than others, more relaxed than others. Some people seem to be more normal, ordinary in their relationships, respond appropriately and all that. They seem to manage their life, find work, all of that relatively okay.

Some people have a hell of time. Relationships are difficult, work is difficult, they react inappropriately, they suffer a lot, they're agonized, they have worries, they have fears, they have terrors. All these are included in the spectrum of the ego. Because the ego is not just one level of experience, it has the whole spectrum of how happy, how miserable you are, are all included in the sense of self.

So and the formation of the ego, as I said, all experiences are imprinted through memories or direct imprints, actually in the body and consciousness. And the difficult experiences are intense, and they tend to leave a strong impression in the ego. So they are very important in the formation of the ego self.

In fact, that's why the ego self mostly tends to have suffering of some kind or another. There's no ego self that has no suffering. That was the teaching of the Buddha, that life is suffering. Samsara, which means the ordinary life, the ego is suffering. They can't be an ego life, you can't be not liberated, not awakened, and not suffer. If you take yourself to be the ego, you are suffering at one level or another.

But there are degrees of suffering. There is suffering like you were abandoned at some point or you didn't get loved enough, or maybe you had siblings and you have rivalry and you don't feel self esteem the same way. For some people, that's part of what forms your sense of self. For some people, they were actually beaten. Some people encounter difficult illnesses at childhood. Some people lost their father and mother when they are 1 year old or a year and a half. These are the formative years of the ego. The ego developed in the first few years of life. It's by 7, all formed, usually by 3, it's basically formed and then adds more later on.

**[00:15:54]**

So the difficult experiences will leave a really deep impression and usually the real difficult, painful one, they become unconscious, we're not aware of them. They become repressed. Most experiences of course, early on we don't remember because we don't have memories from early life, from the first year or so, but some experiences, even if they happen 2nd, 3rd year, if they're really painful, they are repressed. I mean usual psychology talks about repression. Much therapy deals with uncovering the repressed.

So everybody has repressed memories but trauma is, depending on the degree of trauma, if there is a general trauma where you were abandoned or you are not loved or you lost a parent and you have a deep wounding and deep suffering, that has been in your makeup. It's in the makeup which appears in the way you feel about yourself and the way you feel about people, the way you feel safe in the world, the way you interact with people. This all comes through that way without you knowing what's making you that way.

Now if you were beaten or you are sexually molested or you encountered intense difficulty in childhood that leaves an even bigger... That is not only repressed, it is dissociated and that part, that's the deep drama that has a bigger impact than all the others and makes personality or the sense of self have more obvious distortion that other people notice because you become inappropriate in the way you behave. You become so dysfunctional in a way that is obvious to you and to others and you tend to suffer, you worry, you feel a lot of guilt, a lot of shame, that's not explained.

### **Alex Howard**

And I think that's one of the pieces that's really important here, that there is a brilliance and a complexity in the way that we develop our responses. And in those impressions within the ego structure, there's often also defenses that come as part of that. So maybe we're going to open this up a little bit more later in the session, but maybe you can say a bit about how the way we respond is a way of trying to defend against the impact that's happened to us.

### **Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

That's a good point, Alex, because really the development of the ego, first of all as a whole, is for the service of survival. All human beings develop an ego. You wonder why? Because some spiritual teachings say it's a mistake, it's an error. Well, it isn't a mistake. That's part of the way human beings develop. One stage of development is to develop a sense of ego self because we need to survive as physical beings. You cannot survive as a physical being without developing the sense of self with its usual discrimination and usual learning about what happened to the body, what is dangerous, what is scary, what is helpful.

So the whole thing is survival. And part of that survival mechanism appears as defenses that keep those difficult situations hidden. Because if you're aware of the pain, we can't function, we can't live. Even regular pain of just being not loved, wounding, not loved or wounded and not being understood, to live with it constantly is difficult. So we tend not to feel it directly. A person who's feeling not loved, they're always looking for somebody to love them, for instance. A person who doesn't feel valued, they're always looking for someone to see them, appreciate them instead of feeling the wounding hurt of not being valued, not being worthless.

So these are defenses, and defenses help us live our life to some level so we can survive basically. Some level of functionality, not functionality, survival.

**[00:20:51] Alex Howard**

And maybe we could also, again, this is a thing we will come back to later in the program, but maybe just say a little bit around shame. That often as one sees the impact of some of these patterns and behaviors that develop, or indeed, sometimes as one starts to put the spotlight on and starts to look at these patterns, there can be a lot of self judgment and shame that can come in. And I think just speaking to that briefly might be helpful for some people.

**Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

So when we see those, when we have a sense of inadequacy in us or something happened that we take, there's something wrong with us, for many of us, we have shame around it. Shame is a social thing. It's a relation to other people being in society in a group. Ashamed of yourself because children tend to blame themselves for what happens. Even when they get abused or beaten, they think it's their fault.

So there's shame, also there's guilt, both guilt and shame. Guilt is different from shame. Shame is more of a social thing. It's a painful feeling that is feeling bad about yourself. Guilt is more of a self blame. That I'm responsible and you tend to attack yourself and call yourself names and you're stupid, you're bad, you're this and that.

And with all time judgment, and we call a super ego judgment or the top dog. And everybody has a super ego. Everybody judges themselves as part of the ego self. There is self judgment and all of that. But some are harsher than others, and some are so harsh that it makes a person not be able to function in society, not able to have a regular relationship because of how we make ourself ashamed or guilty or bad or deficient or a failure.

**Alex Howard**

Let's turn our attention a little bit to presence. We're going to come back to some of these themes as the program develops, but we started off by talking about what awakening is and what true nature is. Perhaps we could speak a little bit to what it means to be present, to be showing up and here in the world, which is not caught up in all of these ego dynamics and structures we've been talking about.

**Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

That's quite a jump, of trauma, to shame, to presence.

**Alex Howard**

We're not holding back here, Hameed. We go for it.

**Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

I usually take people slowly, step by step, but I know some teachers do exactly that, I'm always like, what're they doing?

**Alex Howard**

If you want to take a slower path, I'm happy to follow your lead as well.

**[00:24:05] Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

Well, anyway, that's good. We do need to bring that up because we talk about the world of ego and we want to say that's not the only way human beings can be, basically. And it is part of all spiritual teaching to know oneself differently from all of that. The ego or the sense of self is to know ourselves as a being of light, as a being of goodness, compassion, and love.

But the goodness, the compassion, love, and the light is not just a thought, it's not just a vision, it is something you feel in your conscious. And the conscious becomes filled with some kind of a texture, some kind of fullness, some kind of a luminosity that has a body. The luminosity is a light that has a sense of body, that has a sense of heft, that has a sense of being. Just like with our meditation, the liquid gold. Liquid gold is an example of presence.

But presence is the fullness of our being, the fullness of our spirit. And its truth and its realness and its authenticity. Because the presence, when we think about it, which is our spiritual nature, how it is different from the ego is that it is not the product of the past. It's not the impressions of the past and their constellations and their integration, their memories and the imprints and all of that, it's not any of those things. It is being what you are, independent of the past. Being a human being that has actualized the depth of being a human being, which is the deeper aspect of our consciousness, which is our spiritual nature.

The outer expression of our consciousness are the thoughts and the feelings and the sensations and body sense and all that. The deeper sense is a sense of goodness and a comfortable, blissful feeling that has a sense of texture, viscosity, density, a sense of heft. But here I am, and you feel it. It's uniform. It's not a different part of this reaction. It's uniform, like liquid gold, there's a uniform. But here you're full of presence, and you are that presence. So that's a different kind of experience than experiencing the self.

And it is the self. It is the true self. But you recognize that when people usually, my students experience, they said, oh, that's me. But it's not them that their parents know, not them that their friends know, not them that they have known. It's a discovery. That's me. And it's very clear it's you because it is closest to you than anything else you have experienced before. It is your innate inherent true beingness. Your very substance of your consciousness.

And that feels like a magical kind of elixir, a kind of reality and truth, a fantasy to it. But the important thing about why we call it presence, some people talk about awareness, some people talk about consciousness, some people talk about light. All that is true. These are ways that consciousness, the nature of consciousness appears. But the most palpable way of this nature of consciousness is when we recognize it as presence.

So presence doesn't mean just I am present in the sense I'm aware of the situation. No, you as the spirit is present and you're aware of yourself as what you are here being now. So being in the now doesn't mean just being aware of what is happening now, it means the fullness of the spirit. Spirit itself is here because the spirit itself is beyond time. It is the now. It is what makes the now feel like now instead of feeling just like the present moment.

**Alex Howard**

And maybe you can speak a little bit to some of the other aspects or qualities of that. And I think particularly this idea that this is not a cognitive or an intellectual event. It's an experiential event.

**[00:29:22] Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

It is a very immediate, experiential, subjective event that hopefully many of the psychologists will learn about. Because I don't think psychology is complete without it you see, because you cannot completely explain consciousness the way our psychology has explained it, because it doesn't make sense. They're trying to explain it in neuroscience, the phenomenon of the brain and this and that, and maybe it's emergent, all these theories. But spiritual people know it directly. And they've known it for thousands of years.

And many thousands of people have known it and lived it and be it. There's a truth to many of us. And it's not just one way of experiencing it. People talk about being consciousness and vastness, the ocean of consciousness, for instance. Some people talk about being an ocean of love. You're just pure love that's sweet and full and soft and gentle. But it doesn't have to be infinite, boundness. It can be just within the body, for instance. Or could be just located.

And it can be love, any kind of love. It can be sweet, fluffy. It can be sweet like a golden liquid honey kind of filling the heart. That's the kind of love that when people feel it, they feel they're close to each other, they want to connect. They say they want to merge. And that's why I call it the merging assets. Because when you feel it, you feel like your boundaries tend to dissolve into the boundaries of the other. You're connected with them. After a while, you don't feel you are two, but at the same time you interact as two, which is a wonderful thing to have.

But you can experience it as power. As a sense of power and capacity. Or you could experience a fiery strength like your body is full of molten lava that makes you feel bursting with life. Or you could experience it as compassion, as delicate, empathic, soft tenderness that pervades the whole atmosphere. The inner and the outer. Which makes you feel the pain of others and respond to it with empathy, with kind of sadness and care, wanting to help.

And so there are many kinds I call the qualities of spirit or essential aspects. And there are many of those we can get into. And each one of them actually deals with a specific part of the ego structure. Because the ego structure, part of the way it's developed is by losing contact with our essential nature, with our spiritual nature. And so it's not just we are structured by the story of what happened to us. A large part of what happened to us is that we lose contact with our spiritual nature and we lose contact with different parts of our spiritual nature.

And each part as it is lost, it leaves a gap that we call a hole that is covered over by some kind of story. We remember the object relation relationship, but we don't remember what was lost, like the feeling of confidence, the solidity of will and confidence. We got lost because we got castrated in the way we were dealt with. Our will was broken, and we don't feel the absence of will, which is the emptiness of it. We don't feel the will. We just feel trying to control, becoming a controlling person, being hot headed or stubborn, for instance. That becomes part of our personality.

So a large part of what forms the ego self is how it got disconnected from its spiritual nature, because how we were related to make us get disconnected from different aspects of spiritual nature in different ways. Each one of them has its own story, its own situations, which we can work through them one by one.

Many teachings work us through the spiritual nature as a whole, just the disconnection, which is true, we get totally disconnected, but that's a much more difficult thing to really do because most people don't have the capacity to do that. There's so much pain and suffering in their life and their history, to



let go of the whole thing is too challenging. So it's easier to access certain parts of our spiritual nature by dealing with certain aspects of our sense of self.

**[00:34:49] Alex Howard**

And that's also why separating the different fields that tends to happen is problematic. In a sense, there is an innate brilliance and wisdom in how these structures develop in response or an attempt to try and resolve these inner holes or deficiency. And perhaps you could also speak to there is, in a sense, a brilliance, a wisdom within our true nature that can also be part of the guide to come back home. I think sometimes people can think this has to be a very cognitive event of understanding all of this, but actually, as one opens to their nature, there is a guidance system.

**Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

Yeah, we could talk about that, definitely, if you want to talk about now, which is that our spiritual nature is inherently pure illumination and it's nature to reveal itself and to illuminate. And if we become in touch with that or we are influenced by that, there is a sense of guidance, there's a sense of direction of how we go about investigating and exploring our experience.

Because we could work on our ego and ourselves, our difficulties, our suffering or trauma, and work with them in a way to resolve them, but we could also work on them in a way that would lead us to the spiritual qualities that get disconnected in the process.

And that requires some guidance. And the guidance can come from a teacher or can come from within oneself if you have enough awareness, enough discernment. Because the spirit has its own guidance, however most people are so busy in their mind and their emotions, it's difficult for them to discern that subtle guidance.

**Alex Howard**

I think sometimes as we start to talk about the qualities of presence and opening to ourselves in that way, people's response can be, "I don't know how to do that. I don't understand". And what you're saying is that actually one's job is to become more present and connected and to learn how to follow some of the thread and some of the wisdom from there.

**Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas)**

See, the way I work with people, I have worked and have developed my teaching and trained people to work is that, where you work with yourself is you work with the material you have at the moment, whatever you experience it at the moment. It doesn't matter what it is, whether it's painful or pleasurable. Whether it's neutral or anger or fear or happiness or emptiness or meaninglessness, whatever it is, you take it as it is.

Many teachings say no, you don't want to deal with that. You want to go around it, you want to transcend it, go to the vastness. And you can do that, however that's more difficult and also leaves this part of the content of the ego not worked out, not metabolized. It stays there. It's not true that if we experience our pure awareness, it will get rid by itself of our structure or personality. It does not. I have seen it for every teacher who claims it and appears in the relationship and interaction and the development of their heart and development of their descendants and all of that.

**[00:38:52] Alex Howard**

I really hope you enjoy that section from *Trauma and Awakening*. *Trauma and Awakening* is a 12 hour online program with Hameed Ali (A.H. Almaas) and Dr Gabor Mate. It's a huge, powerful and impactful program. You can find out more about the program in the link below this video.

Thanks for watching.