

# **Initial Consciousness-Shifting Stories, Mystical Experiences, Life Purpose Questions, the Challenge of Words, Christian Words, Buddhist Words, Taoist Words, Alfred Korzybski, John Grinder, Ken Wilber, Facing the Unknown, Freedom of Choice in Each and Every Moment, “Power Over,” “Power Under,” “Power Against,” and “Power With”**

This morning, I'd like to talk about the initial consciousness-shifting experiences which started me on this fascinating path of dancing with words and dancing with wisdom. Here's the first story — the mind-opening story.

I was a young mother. I had three preschool sons, ages five, three and one. When my youngest son was born, my oldest son Bill began to wet the bed. I was exhausted, I was busy with three preschoolers, and this was the last thing I needed in my life.

At first, I ignored it. I figured maybe it would go away on its own. It didn't.

I decided it was time to have a talk with Bill and explain to him why a five-year-old is too old to wet the bed. We sat down. Bill listened attentively while I explained to him why he was too old to wet the bed. The next morning the bed was still wet. That didn't work.

I was getting more and more frustrated. Being the “perfect mother,” I thought I had to wash the sheets and wash his pajamas every day. It was just one more task to add to a very busy schedule.

I raised my voice. The next morning, the bed was still wet. I think I even spanked Bill once. Then I realized that I was getting out of control.

Around that time, my mother gave me a book called *Summerhill* by an English schoolmaster, A.S. Neill. Neill ran a boarding school in England.

Neill had a very strange way of dealing with disruptive children in his classroom. When a child would punch another kid or talk loudly while the teacher was trying to teach, Neill didn't make him sit down and write a hundred times, "I will be good." He didn't stand him in a corner until he could come back to the class and be “nice” again. Neill gave the child a penny. More often

than not, the disruptive behavior would stop and the child would begin to be interested in the learning again.

Well, this made absolutely no sense to me. Why would you give a child a penny for bad behavior? But I was also desperate. I was willing to try anything.

The next morning -- although I didn't know what I was doing and just had a model to follow -- the bed was wet. I went to my wallet, pulled out a penny, and gave it to Bill. He looked at me as if to ask, "I wonder what's wrong with her this morning? This is not normal behavior."

But he never wet the bed again! I was amazed.

I couldn't stop thinking about this. It was so easy! It was just so easy, and I wanted to play with it some more.

There was another situation when two of Bill's friends were out in the backyard. I was watching from the window. I could see that they were beginning to get into a fight. They were calling each other names. I figured it was time for me to go out and make an appearance.

In the past, I probably would have pulled them both aside and explained to them why they shouldn't fight. I didn't do that.

Again, I didn't really know what I was doing. I was simply exploring. But I pulled each one aside separately and asked each one the same question, "Do you want to fight?"

They both said the same thing. "No, I don't want to fight, but he's making me do it."

"Well, if you want to fight, go ahead and fight."

They looked at me as if I was crazy. They looked at the ground. They shuffled their feet. They looked at each other out of the corner of their eyes. Two minutes later, they were playing happily together again.

I was watching these things happen, and I didn't understand them at all. But I could see that by changing my own conduct, I was shifting a disruptive, frustrating and potentially conflicting situation into harmony. Fascinating!

There was a third story.

A man came to my door. He was angry and he was angry with me. I don't remember who he was or what he wore, or even what he said or what his problem was. All I remember was the anger, and that he was angry with me.

In the past, I might have gotten defensive. I might have said, "You shouldn't be angry over a little thing like that."

I didn't do any of those things. Instead, I simply said, "I am so sorry. What can I do to make it right?"

And just like that, in an instant, the anger disappeared. When he left, we were friends.

Now, why do thoughts pop into your mind out of nowhere at times when you don't expect them? I don't know the answer to that question, but as the man was walking away, the thought that popped into my mind was words I had been taught as a child in Sunday School. "Resist not evil, but turn the other cheek." I thought, "Oh, my gosh! Suddenly in the context of this situation, I understand what those words mean."

I had never understood them as a child. They made about as much sense to me as giving a kid a penny for bad behavior.

But now, in the context of this experience, by changing my own conduct, I had created a win-win situation.

As a child, I had always thought of those words as putting myself in a very subservient position. Why in the world, if somebody hit me on one side of my face, would I turn my other cheek and say, "Hit me again"? It made no sense. But in the context of freedom of choice (and my choices certainly were free) and changing my own conduct, suddenly, all by myself, I had created or co-created this harmonious ending to the story. I couldn't stop thinking about it.

I was reared Unitarian, so I had no built-in vocabulary with which to understand this experience. I just knew it was amazing! It was as if all the pieces of the "human truth puzzle" had suddenly, instantaneously, fallen into place.

I was so excited about the sudden clarity I had that I wanted to go out and start talking to everyone I met and communicate this unifying, holistic experience to everyone. I was met with nothing but blank stares and blank faces. I was talking, but I wasn't communicating. That caused me to pull back and start looking at the words I was using and also looking for a vocabulary with which I could communicate what had happened to me, to communicate this experience that I wanted to share with everyone.

I began reading voraciously in religious literature, psychological literature and philosophical literature. What I discovered was that the words of all those religions, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism — any religion that is out there — are maps of this unifying experience. They all are words. They're fingers pointing at the moon. None of them is actually the experience.

If you think about the difference between words and the underlying experience, you look at a menu and it tells you what is available to eat, but looking at the menu and selecting a particular item on the menu is not the same as actually eating the meal.

I began to realize the truth of what Alfred Korzybski had said. "The map is not the territory." The words are not the experience, and my words were only maps of my experience. But I was still looking for a way. I was looking for a vocabulary with which I could somehow communicate this experience.

The question that simply popped into my mind was "How can I use analytic, divisive words to communicate a unifying, holistic experience?" Because that's what words do. They analyze, separate, divide, and categorize.

I struggled with that question for years. It was like a Zen koan that I was trying to solve, and I could not find the perfect words to use. There were a lot of words that were maps of the experience or were fingers pointing toward the experience, but none of those words could actually bring people into that experience.

As I was searching for vocabulary, one of the books I read was William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. I didn't even have a name to stick on what had happened to me, although I could see that different religions might use different words. Some of those words would be "salvation," "awakening," "samadhi," "nirvana," and lots, lots more like that.

But as I read William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, when I read the chapter on Mysticism, I thought, "Oh, that pretty much describes what my experience was because my experience contained the four qualities or aspects of a mystical experience."

It was ineffable, which, as I was discovering, means you can't accurately talk about it.

It has a noetic quality. Somehow you just know that you know. For me, it was just a sudden clarity.

It is passive. You can't set having this experience as a goal. It's a gift at a very unexpected time.

And it's also transient. That means it happens, you're stunned by it, you're amazed by it, and you want to explore more and go deeper. But necessity pulls you back into preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning, sleeping.

Let me talk a little bit about some of the parallels or interesting things that I discovered in other religions about this whole issue of words; what words do when we choose to try to communicate this unifying, holistic experience.

I struggled with this for 10 or 15 years, and I just couldn't find the perfect words. I tried stories. I tried questions. I tried didactic teaching. I tried poetry. And nothing fully worked. All were maps of the experience, but none of them could fully communicate the experience.

I got so frustrated with words that I began drawing diagrams to try to show rather than tell what had happened and give an overview of what this experience is about. It is a reconnection. And it is, in some senses, a getting out of your head, but it's also using your mind in creative and co-creative ways to bring about the kind of results that you want; to change our world into the kind of world in which you would like to live.

After about 10 or 15 years of struggling with trying to find the right words with which to communicate this experience (again, why do these thoughts come into your mind?), I changed one word in that original question, "How can I use analytic, divisive words to communicate a unifying, holistic expression?" I changed the word "communicate" to "facilitate." So the question then became "How can I use analytic, divisive words to *facilitate* a unifying, holistic experience?" Now, that was do-able, and I was stepping into my full creative and co-creative power and my lifetime work and play of dancing with words and dancing with wisdom.

Getting back to the point I was making before about some of the interesting parallels I found in different religions — in Christianity, for example, and Judaism, the Genesis story of eating of the tree of knowledge and being cast out of the Garden of Eden. There's a sense in which, when we eat of the tree of knowledge (which means we start using words to separate, divide and categorize), it puts us into a mental, conceptual way of being, as opposed to a very natural, spontaneous way of being in connection with the earth and everyone around us. That makes sense to me not as a literal story but as a myth or a metaphor for where we still are. We are still stuck in believing that we have hold of the tree of knowledge with all our maps of our experiences, all our conceptualizations. Yes, they're useful, but they're not necessarily true.

As a brief aside, I'll mention John Grinder who was one of the cofounders of neuro-linguistic programming. He has a very well-developed theory of something he calls "First Access." That simply means that there are sounds that our ears can't hear. Dogs can hear them, but we can't. There are light waves that we can't see. Our "knowledge" is already limited by our neurology. There is certain sensory data that our bodies just can't receive and process.

And then on top of this First Access, we impose words. We take this flow of sensory data that's coming into us all the time, what our neurology can actually receive, and we chop it up, we separate it, and we categorize it with words. So we're putting this linguistic structure on top of the flow of experience.

Another Christian story that has always fascinated me is the story of the Tower of Babel, where people were going to build a tower, a temple to reach God, and God basically destroyed it and dispersed the people, because you cannot intentionally do that, or you cannot intentionally build a structure to reach God. Yes, you can facilitate a connection with something we can call "God."

There's also the Book of Revelation in the Christian religion which talks over and over again about "To he who overcometh shall I give. . ." It's really talking about overcoming the rigidity of our concepts, the rigidity of our doctrines, the rigidity of our words. It says, "Shall I give." It is a gift when we become willing to release our rigid concepts and become open to receiving.

When we were talking before, I was talking about particular aspects of Christianity that I could so well relate to after having had this experience. But there were parts of other religions, too, that really resonated with me and made sense, again within the context of the actual experience.

For example, the Buddhist Eightfold Path talks about "right speech" and "right intention." I was discovering, as I explored this whole issue of the words I was choosing to use, that, in a sense, there is "right speech," there is "correct speech," there is speech that brings people together instead of separating them; there is speech that creates peace and harmony rather than warfare. So, there is a sense in which there is "right speech," and to find the "right speech," it's really important to get clear on your intentions.

Intention is something you have to start working on for yourself. What are your intentions? What is it you want to create? Do you want to create a good, loving, warm, mutually supportive relationship? Do you want to help co-create heaven on earth, peace on this planet? Or do you want to rip other people apart?

What are your intentions? There are some intentions, I think you will discover, that work well in terms of harmony and some that don't work at all.

Hinduism talks about "piercing the veil of illusion." I like to elaborate on that and express it as "piercing the veil of word illusions."

Taoism. "The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao." How interesting! Look at all the years I spent trying to find the right words to communicate this unifying, holistic experience, and I couldn't do it, and that is exactly why. The tao that can be spoken is not the Tao.

As I started playing with these words, I was very aware of being in a space of freedom and choice in each and every moment, but in another sense, facing the unknown — not knowing for sure what the response would be when I spoke certain words. A couple of things I became aware of as I played with my choices of words were, first of all, that I might have a very positive intention. I might want to create a bonding or a friendship with another person. My intention might have been, using Buddhist terminology, a "right intention," but the effect wasn't always what I expected. There were some people who really became upset with my words, and either I could feel this wall going up between us, as if they felt they had to protect themselves from my words, or they would suddenly strike viciously out at me with their own words. I had to look at that over a long period of time and just think about what was happening here beneath the surface of the words. This was really strange.

I started looking at the human power dynamics. I don't know how many of you are familiar with Ken Wilber's four-quadrant diagram. For those of you who are not familiar with it, Wilber divides the way we're looking at the world into four quadrants. There's an upper left quadrant, upper right, lower left, lower right. So if you just visualize a box with a cross at the center, you've got four squares within the larger square.

The upper left quadrant is the individual subjective quadrant. That's where a lot of the initial work has to be done. That's where I was doing my work as I went through these initial consciousness-shifting experiences. I was looking at myself. I was changing my own conduct. I was changing my own speech. I also started looking at my own thoughts, looking at my own emotions, and looking at what was going on in my body. That's all upper left quadrant work.

Upper right quadrant is individual objective as opposed to individual subjective. That would mean you're looking out there. For example, you're looking at a physical brain, you're looking at a physical body, and you're looking at a physical tree.

The lower left quadrant is collective subjective or plural subjective. The left side of this diagram is subjective; the right side is objective. The lower right quadrant is collective objective. That's systems theory, things like that.

Lower left would be community dynamics, an area which, after I worked through the upper left quadrant (the individual subjective), I started playing in that lower left quadrant. Again, it was how do I communicate? How can I facilitate? What words can I use? My intention was to bring harmony into situations.

Most of my own work in connection with these initial experiences has been on the left side of that diagram, the subjective side, which has meant I really had to start paying attention, first of all, in the upper left quadrant, to what was going on within me, my thoughts, my emotions, illnesses in my body perhaps or discomforts, and just start paying attention to those things and asking myself the right questions. The "right questions" change in each and every moment.

But right here, right now, what do I feel? What do I think? What do I need? And what are my choices? Those were four questions that came to me many, many, many years ago, but I've used them over and over. I find them very helpful anytime I get into a difficult, challenging situation.

I'd also, in this upper left quadrant, like to talk a little bit about two huge emotional challenges I have had to overcome in this process of getting to know myself. "Know Thyself." Those are words from the Temple of Delphi. I believe Socrates also used them. This is Ken Wilber's upper left quadrant.

The first emotion I struggled with was fear — or much more than fear — terror. There were many situations that I was involved in, mostly with men, but occasionally, too, with a woman,

where I was just being verbally trashed and abused, and people were attempting to manipulate my conduct to suit their agendas. I was afraid. And I was more than afraid. I was terrified. I have a longer story about this, but I'm not going to tell it here.

As I began looking at this terror, it was just as if I was -- this is a cliché -- between a rock and a hard place. I did not know what to do next. It felt as if my hands were tied, my feet were tied. I was scared to death, and I did not know what to do or which way to turn as these people outside me were trying to force me into their way of doing things and their way of thinking.

A little context, reared Unitarian, I had always considered myself an agnostic. But I was so terrified in one particular situation that I was down on my knees on my living room floor, begging, tears streaming down my face, just begging, "God help me. I do not know what to do." As I spoke those words, this amazing calm descended on me, and it felt as if somehow, together, we would work ourselves through this situation, and we did.

Now, one more aspect about terror, if you start watching your own mind when you're aware of being afraid, you start watching your thoughts, I think what you'll notice when you're feeling terror or fear is that your mind is focused in one of two places. It's either focused in the future. What if this happens? What if that happens? Or it's focused on what other people may think, say or do.

As soon as you notice where your mind is focused, — and you can call this mind mastery — you have a choice. You can leave your mind right where it is, focused on the future and on what other people may think, say or do, or you can make a conscious choice to bring your mind back to the present moment. And then you simply ask yourself, "What can I do right here, right now to move my life forward?" By making that shift in consciousness (a focused shift through choice), you are stepping into your own power and putting the control of your life back into your own hands.

Again, this is Ken Wilber's upper left quadrant. This is both upper and lower left quadrants. As I began looking at the strange dynamics that were happening where my intentions were pure, but people were just trashing me and abusing me and ramming me for expressing an opinion that was different from theirs, I started looking at the whole human power dynamic, flow, and interaction. There's a sense in which power is a dance.

As I was putting my words out into the world, I was getting trashed and abused by other people for what I was saying, or sometimes what I was doing or not doing. When you're in that kind of position, you're in a "power under" position. We could talk about "power under," "power against," and "power with." We are in so much of that "power over/power under" dynamic right now in the United States and also the "power against" dynamic. We need to be shifting into a "power with" dynamic.

Getting back to rage, I think there's a process that goes on here. When somebody is abusing you and you're in that power under position, your first thoughts are, "Oh, what did I do wrong?"



What should I have done differently? I've offended this person. There must be something wrong with me." You go through the whole guilt process and the pain process because it's very painful to be abused by another person.

And then you shift into a rage position. "This was not my fault. That person should not have abused me." And then you're in a power against position.

But rage is not a fun place to be emotionally. Just stay there for a little while and see how you feel about yourself. It's not good. So, you can shift yourself into a "power with" position by connecting with some "Power greater than yourself," whether you call it God, Allah, universal energy, cosmic energy — whatever makes sense to you, but connecting with it. And it's experiential. You connect with that, and then you are not fighting against injustice, which is a power against dynamic. You are standing in authenticity, strength and courage, for justice. Totally different energy, totally different words, totally different dynamic. That is where you want to be, because that's where your strength ultimately is.