

Trillium Awakening article* from the book:

Cohering the Integral We Space: Engaging Collective Emergence, Wisdom and Healing in Groups

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Paperback – October 17, 2016

available on [Amazon](#)

*This article was prepared to convey the Trillium Awakening work to those familiar with current “We Space” practices. It also offers an excellent overview of how our dharma holds and anchors our specific total work.

Trillium Awakening

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Introduction

The Trillium Awakening¹ we-space is the fundamental context for our transformational work, and arises in multiple contexts—teacher-student dyads, sittings, peer-led mutuality groups, in-person retreats, online events, organizational work groups, and informal creative occasions. Each of our we-spaces embody our collective orienting philosophy, which is rooted in deeply held trust in Being—the totality of All and all, the existential reality of any moment, in its nondual nature as consciousness expressing as awareness, silence, and unmoving potential, as well as the radiant and dynamic play of dually alternating forms in the subtle and material worlds. Through this shared orientation, we understand the individuals in our we-space as continuous with Being, progressively and uniquely unfolding in awareness, personal and cultural identity, and embodiment of their full nature, both finite and infinite.

We hold Being as an ultimate Mystery revealing itself in parts and glimpses over time, and consciously honor its wholeness. Our we-spaces are fed by the steady, open spaciousness of presence, freedom, and silence. From that basis, we surface personal accounts, listen to dilemmas, and are moved along undulating waves in contemplating losses, gains, pains, and triumphs. We intuit and come to accept being unable to ever completely know one another, and thus leave room for what is fresh and spontaneously emergent. We practice holding open our minds and hearts, even while internally registering our own biases, reactions, and judgments of character and personality. We continuously acknowledge the sacred *unknowability* of each person including ourselves, and why we are configured precisely as we are.

The Trillium Awakening we-space invites all aspects of a person into the room—from what is known to what is unknown. Within this mystery, our teachers and students access and anchor unshakable confidence in the unlimited nature of self and other. This trust includes a paradoxical core principle of our we-spaces: by descending into the finite—into personal story and conditions—and following themes to their resting point where attention is freed, a person and group are often delivered into the Mystery. The finite opens as rarefied, infinite, and spacious; it appears in and as consciousness, non-separate. In this vast space

¹ The Trillium Awakening work emerged and evolved from the Waking Down in Mutuality® work founded in 1992 by Sanial Bonder. The Trillium Awakening Teachers Circle originally incorporated as the Waking Down Teachers Association in 2005, and in 2015 renamed its work to differentiate from that of Sanial Bonder. The Trillium Awakening Teachers Circle continues to embody and evolve the teachings and we-spaces described herein.

of full welcome, we are organically quickened to release stories to return to their ground, rather than sustaining identification with them. This occurs so reliably that we have come to trust in allowing and tolerating the most limited, frustrating aspects of experience, as counter-intuitive as that may seem.

From this conviction, our we-spaces offer catalytic support we call “greenlighting.” We invite people to speak, feel, and embody their unique personal experience, and notice their growing sense of awareness itself, as they are warmly received in present time. We hold our we-spaces openheartedly, welcoming individual concerns, no matter how “unspiritual” the content might seem. Deep listening, empathic attunement, and careful reflecting facilitate shared relaxation into actual experience, and begin a healing process that allows people to drop into more easeful self-awareness and connection with others.

People sometimes initially distrust greenlighting, as they assume it would reinforce undesirable character traits or regressive coping mechanisms. While such manifestations might appear, unique healing is ultimately catalyzed in the space of tolerant listening, listening, and more listening. Here, people at last experience being fully heard and received—including their conditioning, their suffering, and the ways they reject themselves. As their experience is received in a loving we-space, participants develop the capacity to compassionately observe their patterns, and fundamentally discharge the constricted energy of those forms. They become organically attracted to practices supporting their next levels of growth. In such an atmosphere, transformation is activated from the bottom up, through spontaneous compelling insight and organismic initiative, rather than through top-down directives. This exemplifies another core principle of Trillium Awakening we-spaces—Being prompts and presences what is next ready to surface and become known.

The process of being unconditionally received facilitates integration in the body-mind and spirit-matter interplay of each participant over time. It thus lays a foundation for further realization and more advanced work. Participation in the Trillium Awakening we-space permeates and heals the perceived split between spirit and matter, and opens the way for truly embodied nondual awakening. The principle of balance comes into play as polar opposites are integrated in an oscillating exchange of insight and activity that refines a person’s whole being, and builds a group’s capacity to hold a holarchy of perspectives. This process is experienced through vast conscious abiding as both form and spirit, “this and That.” As the we-space effectively works its magic, the intelligence and discriminating force of Being is catalyzed, and begins to evolve, enliven, and ennoble the participants and the we-space itself.

Underlying Structures that Support Trillium Awakening We-spaces

The intelligence of Being has also come to operate through our organizational structures. Our we-spaces are clearly and inherently stabilized by policies, principles, and enduring values we hold dear. Our teachers meet regularly to articulate and update their understandings, and reach agreements that ground our interactions in sobriety and integrity—which perhaps more than anything else enables people to drop into the depths of their divinely human nature. Our guiding principles and expectations of those taking part in our we-spaces, and in various levels of leadership, are posted on our public and in-house websites.² Our ethics policy is read aloud by the teaching staff at each retreat and training, and questions and comments are solicited from attendees to ensure clarity and mutual agreement. Additional policies for confidentiality and respectful exchange are regularly presented—particularly when newcomers are present—and we work implicitly to infuse our we-spaces with wisdom and compassion. With this kind of embodied, seasoned clarity about how we interact, we have not found the need in our various group configurations for specific exercises or practices beyond gazing meditation, individual sharing, and deep listening. Alchemical

² *Professional and Ethics Policies of the WDTA*. <http://www.wakingdown.org/professional-and-ethics-policies-of-the-wdta>. Web

transmutation is ignited by the we-space itself, which is profoundly supported by our cultural infrastructure, forged over two decades of engagement, exploration, reflection, and revision. We regularly revisit our orientation as new learnings emerge. Facilitators tend carefully to the quality of our we-spaces to support the most auspicious levels of contact, creativity, and safety. The energetic tone of gatherings might range from expressive to receptive, depending on the living reality of varying configurations of people in time.

To safeguard our we-spaces from the potential excesses of indiscriminate greenlighting, teachers and participants bring various skills to bear, particularly (but not only) when participants request guidance. If conflict arises, dominates the field, and doesn't come to resolution at the time, participants are encouraged to meet with trusted teachers or neutral third parties. Newer teachers refine their discrimination through observing those in whom years of experience have brought mastery, and also through consultation, training, and feedback in supporting students moving through intensities of experience.

While being held with deep awareness and compassion, participants are sensitively invited to touch their underlying experience and bring awareness to their reactions; this is often far more effective than receiving feedback. To support their process, they might choose to explore various resources, therapeutic modalities, and teachers both within and outside Trillium Awakening. Applicants for teacher training undertake intensive training in self-awareness and shadow work, and learn to take responsibility for their impact on others. They are called to closely investigate their behavior, and adequate time is required for such integration to become embodied.

The following example, compiled from many typical experiences, shows how our we-space can assist participants to recognize patterns and make choices to express and honor boundaries. After many months of consultation, a mentee (student) begins to pressure a mentor to be more emotionally engaged, as in a social situation, or to act as a teacher, expressing dharma. The mentor then examines the felt sense of pressure, yet, despite the discomfort, chooses to honor our mentoring parameters by empathizing and reflecting, without interpreting, instructing, or socializing.

Although the mentee might grow more and more dissatisfied that the mentor won't shift, the mentor persists in tolerating the tension, meeting the mentee's experience, and compassionately greenlighting any frustration. The mentee might surface patterns of cajoling or complying, which would empathically be met, and then has the opportunity to find a true voice to state deeper needs and draw an empowering boundary. Such straightforward communication and action support significant growth and integration. After an authentic exchange of this type, both parties arrive at greater clarity with newfound mutual respect. Because the mentor remains in role, the mentee can grow within the we-space that contained and tested both parties.

A significant aspect of our we-space is the practice of engaging one-on-one teacher-student work within groups. In that setting, empowered by our whole-being dharma and the group's resonant field and focus, individual work can be especially potent and enduring. As our work integrates the individual and collective, and the finite and infinite, the entire spectrum of apparent opposites generally comes into play for exploration. Deep collective empathy is catalyzed as individuals work their process. Echoes of the same experience, perhaps reaching back in time or imagined forward into the future, reverberate in the rising field. Compassion, love, and understanding infuse our shared experience, liberating us from exclusively personal and separate identity into tender appreciation for our existence. We might have glimmerings of being called to serve this corner of our universe, and feel empowered to devotedly respond with care and vision. With each individual's process, the group ethos is more clearly enhanced. As feedback is offered, the voice of collective wisdom becomes more refined, evocative, and transformational. The field is activated by each contribution, and intensifies as the evolutionary potential surges for both individual and collective. The we-space enlivens people with uplift and bliss, which often burst forward at break times as refined, delighted awareness of the whole of "I" and "we."

Trillium Awakening Lineage

Our we-spaces are grounded in conscious embodiment through moment-to-moment awakening and recognition of the utter non-separateness of manifest and unmanifest realms. In traditional parlance, all appearances are understood as the unity of consciousness and form. This principle rests firmly in Indian tantra (not Vedanta), and was exquisitely clarified and elaborated in tenth century Kashmir by the extraordinary sage Abhinavagupta (Dyczkowski, 1987).

Our work received this orientation in modern times through Baba Muktananda,³ who was a living exponent of Kashmir Shaivism and a teacher to Adi Da Samraj,⁴ the guru of Waking Down founder Sanial Bonder, whose transmission helped catalyze our we-spaces. In Kashmir Shaivism, consciousness (Shiva) is not isolated or elevated above form (Shakti). Rather, Shiva and Shakti are perpetually conjoined; as one, they generate and infuse phenomena with radiance. In Kashmir Shaivism, their eternal wedding is a metaphor for our true nature.

Although we don't use specific practices from Kashmir Shaivism, we mention it to indicate that tradition's radical non-separateness, which is foundational to the Trillium Awakening articulation of embodied awakening. This view is inherent in our we-spaces, and challenges paradigms that elevate spirit above matter. Today, our intention to live this "Onliness,"⁵ is progressively embodied over time in the ordinary rituals and gestures of our lives, and the sacred union of our true nature.

Embodied Awakening – The Second Birth

Since the origins of Trillium Awakening, hundreds of people have landed in the embodied awakening we call the Second Birth, which has a uniquely seminal effect on our we-spaces. Although difficult to explain to cognitive satisfaction, the Second Birth is recognizable as pivotal relaxation from the unrelenting search for liberation, healing, satisfaction, happiness, awakening, or enlightenment. This shift influences all the we-spaces in which an individual participates by adding the ineffable ingredient of the potential for liberation, and helps resolve the distresses of the body-mind.

The Second Birth entails descent from identity based in mind into the heart of Being, where consciousness fuses with the body-mind and all conditions. It occurs when a person is sufficiently healed of splits in their perception of spirit "against" matter, and sufficiently relieved of trying to hold everything together in the defended posture of ego-centered life. The individual can then open deeply to the tension and distortion of a set point that maintains acute separation from all it encounters, and might experience a shift downward into the body's field. This is experienced as relief and profound opening, as tightly fixed patterns of mind and conditioning loosen their grip. This signals a major launch into a new understanding and experience of life, and is facilitated by a literal shift in unconscious attention. A new identity begins to take hold, based on the recognition that consciousness appears in simultaneous concert with phenomena—that consciousness IS, in fact, phenomena—in the ongoing unfolding of awareness and experience. The practitioner now begins to embrace divinely human existence. Although this transition might take place in a single moment or over a few years, it is culturally well understood that an ongoing process has begun, and will proceed through time and space as ever more complete recognition of the simultaneity of consciousness and phenomena is

³ *Swami Muktananda*. <http://www.siddhayoga.org/baba-muktananda>

⁴ *An Introduction to Avatar Adi Da*. <http://www.adidam.org>

⁵ "Such Onliness is ... deeply suffused with the intuitive feeling-awareness that Spirit and Matter, Consciousness and Phenomena, Emptiness and Form, are even now and at any and all times and places already as if melted into one another. Such a realized one feelingly knows the essences of these great polar opposites to be intensified into indistinguishability – even while distinctions somehow continue to appear" (Bonder, 2004, p. 80)

established moment to moment. In other words, the Second Birth is a birth, not a traditional completion stage; it initiates a continuing process of integration. Phases of maturation in this shift toward true and radical empowerment have been articulated and will be further clarified over time.

Certain qualities show up fairly specifically in the Second Birth, and directly attest to a new experience of life. Many such traits appear gradually, and not everyone displays each aspect. That said, the Second Birth empowerment and its subsequent impact on the we-space can manifest as:

- clear recognition of one's conscious nature, which deepens over time and can be regularly accessed as nondual abiding—recognized in our we-space as greater receptivity and flow between a wider range of perspectives;
- growing capacity to be grounded in one's body-mind, with appreciation for patterns as simple conditional structures, and compassion for oneself living the freedom amidst the limits – which is reflected in our we-space as goodwill, humor, and the sense of connecting solidly with others in differences as well as agreements;
- a great heart-opening to love, expanding outward toward the world, and in the we-space as a shared experience of unifying compassion and deeper intuitive discrimination;
- increased integration in self-holding and expression, with curiosity to investigate more deeply and transmute negativity, thus freeing our we-space from being trapped in the distress and stuck energies of participants;
- a deepening impulse to express devotion and actively serve others, while connecting to joy, humor, energetic liveliness, and embodiment;
- more refinement, clarity, and cooperative inspiration for tasks are brought to our we-space;
- a more stabilized, relaxed, and resilient sense of self with boundaries that are permeable or firm as situations merit;
- a pervasive uplift of freedom, while paradoxically honoring responsibility and commitment; greater synergistic exchange and cooperation in the spirit of the we-space;
- the we-space becomes a preferred context for growth and communion.

In our we-spaces, post second birth participants can potentiate integration of the personal and impersonal dimensions, thus raising the field to deeper and fuller expression by embodying these qualities.

Empathic Attunement and Holding

Empathic attunement and holding are foundational to our work and we-spaces. The tendencies to be self-critical and perfectionistic are pervasive in Western culture, and a harsh superego is common in traditional spiritual communities. In Trillium Awakening, participants are received without implicit or explicit expectation to look, think, or feel differently. In this welcoming field where wholeness is embraced, the unrelenting voice of the critic becomes less prominent and can self-liberate; here, practitioners naturally cultivate greater capacity for acceptance and self-love.

Teachers and other community members offer the light of radical acceptance and empathic holding—greenlighting—to each person, inviting them forward in their transcendent and immanent nature. Over time, we begin to hold ourselves as we are being held by others. We come to value our human limitations; we grow in our capacity to self-attune; we receive others with openness and curiosity. Our range of what is acceptable and valued expands greatly.

Through over two decades of experience, we've found that when our rejected, wounded, and frozen parts are empathically met and integrated in the nondual we-space of Trillium Awakening, defenses and contractions can melt. We relax at the core, no longer needing to present a good face or prop ourselves up behind masks and roles. The public personality can soften. Authenticity is invited and encouraged; people experience our we-spaces as a safe setting to be genuine and come out of hiding. Life force energy that was

bound in suppressing unacceptable parts of self is now recovered and liberated. Participants regularly report feeling profoundly seen and heard, often for the first time.

Wounds around empathy might surface; in this field of encouragement to come forward in one's own time and way, it's natural to recall when empathy was absent. It can also take time for someone who has experienced a dearth of empathy to begin to accept, or even tolerate, the empathy available in Trillium Awakening.

Because our teachers and many participants have awakened to non-separateness, they are able to hold and attune from the absolute and relative fields simultaneously. This transmission of whole-being awareness deeply impacts participants, and facilitates the awakening process. Our teachers are comfortable in not knowing, in trusting a practitioner's organic process, and in being guided by the mystery of self, other, and the field. Their comfort and trust support participants to develop their own capacity to inhabit the Mystery, and they notice the need for certainty diminishing. This leads to greater confidence in Being, as well as facilitating dynamic healing and transformation. The entire process involves profoundly discriminating refinement and embodiment of multiple layers of being as the work of the we-space takes hold.

Balancing Sacred Holding and Spiritual Fire

A collective growing edge in our work is skillful use of the inherent tension and dynamic flow between sacred holding and spiritual fire. Practitioners are fully welcomed in the orientation of sacred holding, based on the understanding that all humans have vulnerabilities and have developed adaptive patterns to cope with their sense of separate existence. We recognize that the tender human self needs to be mirrored, nurtured, and honored for having the courage to persist. Teachers are skilled in supporting practitioners to identify and lean into their current needs—such as the wish to escape the tyranny of a negative pattern, or a deep desire for healing, divine abiding, or the recognition of consciousness. Practitioners who are already familiar with their absolute nature might simply long to be seen and known in their humanity.

Sacred holding fosters a field where individuals and the group can feel safe to explore new territory. The personality is supported to relax and integrate past experience, including wounds and disappointment in the awakening journey. Trillium Awakening offers a generously receptive, gentle field in which practitioners come to trust that the teacher and group will hold space and safeguard their process. Beneath much of the drive for self-improvement lie buried needs for affirmation and recognition; when practitioners feel adequately seen and held, they begin to fall out of seeking. For many in our contemporary culture of fragmentation and competition, this sense of being safely received while coming into fuller self-knowing is the first order of need.

One who has not yet personally experienced our honoring approach might wonder whether too much emoting and storytelling are encouraged. However, our experience has proven the nearly magical empowerment of this approach, which yields surprisingly rapid, identifiable results by laying a stable foundation in consciousness for discrimination and integration. Teachers are trained to discern when a student might need simple holding more than conceptual instruction or challenge. We adopt a pace that supports practitioners as they encounter their walled-off places, and gradually face them without arousing debilitating fear, which could activate defenses and prompt splitting. We believe survival strategies are inevitable, and actually attest to human intelligence and responsiveness to life's challenges. Ultimately, we see our patterns as continuous with our conscious nature. They most quickly show themselves and are disarmed in an atmosphere of trust, where teachers kindly and patiently hold and reflect. Under such conditions, students build their capacity to hold more tension, discomfort, conflict, and difference, thus empowering growth and transformation.

At the opposite end of the spectrum lies spiritual fire, where participants might find themselves orienting toward greater discriminative awareness and new forms of expression; here, they often benefit from increased direction and guidance from teachers, who might discuss the dharma, suggest individualized disciplines, challenge perspectives, comment on their process, illuminate needs for further development, help ignite visions for change and achievement, and generally inspire movement forward. This stance in the we-space helps loosen the grip of conditioning. Slowly or rapidly, the resulting heat and insecurity of dissolution begin to unravel old ways of being, and bring permeability and the excitement of discovery. Thought and habit patterns are penetrated through discernment and clarity. Guidance is important through the encounter with self, and teachers can help students navigate this transformation.

One of the significant gifts of our work is the availability of personal support and guidance from a teacher, either one-to-one or in small groups (often four to twelve people). This low student-teacher ratio is a hallmark distinguishing our we-spaces from paths with single teachers facilitating large groups.

Spiritual fire is present throughout Trillium Awakening, and is implicit within the quieter stance of sacred holding. As teachers relate from their non-separate, consciously embodied state, the fire of their wholeness flows freely into the field and quickens those poised to receive it. In this dynamic tension between holding for safety and activating for transformation, emergent aspects of personality and soul nature can be discovered, celebrated, and integrated. By remaining attuned to the field, a teacher calibrates to the needs of individuals and the we-space, steering between the stability of sacred holding and the dynamism of spiritual fire. This spectrum is also a natural polarity within any person, and contributes to aliveness altogether.

When engaging spiritual fire, practitioners might explore shadow work, inquiry, or feedback. Teachers might reflect the need for boundaries and self-responsibility, or the possibility of relying more on internal grounding than external support. Practitioners begin to release the need for others to greenlight their vulnerabilities, and begin to address them through innate wisdom. In working the fire for change, practitioners lean into conditions with discrimination, and explore patterns ripe for transformation. Openness and honesty are encouraged with regard to their experience of teachers' communications. If something feels off the mark or triggering, the work happens right there.

Practitioners drawn to spiritual fire are likely to be relatively stable and ready for change, and more equipped to integrate shadow in self and relationship. They are skilled at holding their process and listening for its energy to open and resolve. As they are also more confidently rooted in conscious recognition of non-separateness, they might show a greater intensity of expression. Having established competency to stand in their wholeness, they can engage a wider range of energies. They can be very direct while intensely feeling and expressive, yet also honor their own and each others' boundaries; this can be very enlivening.

A full spectrum of healing, guidance, and teaching is represented in the continuum of sacred holding to spiritual fire. The field created by our teachers, mentors, and newly arrived and long-established practitioners contributes to the mysterious alchemy of our we-spaces, which are replete with evolutionary potential for individuals and the collective. To participate in this culture, which is naturally always in flux, is energizing; it requires attunement to the growing edge, and following its most resilient trajectory.

Transmission

Our we-space is a rich field conveying the Trillium Awakening transmission, which can be felt as a subtle influence or sensed as a distinct current penetrating body and mind. Recognizing and cultivating transmission plays a large part in activating the Second Birth embodied awakening. Transmission occurs in a multiplicity of contexts among teachers, mentors, practitioners, and peers, and is understood as embodied Being communicated effortlessly and non-verbally through gazing meditation, verbally through various media and meetings, or by simply being together.

Our we-space is constellated by individuals with diverse histories, needs, views, and life conditions, as well as the subtle forces of awareness and Being. Each person within the collective can be seen as a unique individual field contributing to the whole. Multiple perspectives are articulated, and typically activate other realizations and discernments when received.

Transformation in our work is fundamentally organic, arising in Being, and is influenced by the collective field. Practitioners are encouraged to trust, be with, and work with what they encounter in their lives and the we-space. When they speak their truth in the moment, the field becomes more conscious, holds more potential, and informs those listening as they register the experience just shared. Greater nuance becomes available, and can prompt deeper self-reflection.

Deep relaxation and receptivity are catalyzed through the transmission of our work. Participants begin to experience coherence, which is felt as enormous support and a sense of shared well-being. As people relax into the we-space, all domains of Being are welcome to emerge, be held, and seen. The field offers shape and grounding to the potential for personal and collective integration. Like an unseen mover, it is alive and alchemical—a fertile container of healing, growth, and evolution.

Our teachers are ordinary people whose lives include the usual challenges; they profess their limitations and willingness to be impacted by adversity. And yet, as the transmission of our work becomes palpable, students gradually recognize their teachers' subtle freedom, enjoyment, and humor amidst their human struggles. This ease in Being epitomizes our transmission—we participate in the full range of experience, living deeply and meaningfully while expressing our unique gifts and talents in service to others. Gradually, expectations about spiritual practice shift as life simultaneously expresses the immanent and transcendent.

An example follows of how the transmission and potency of our we-space served to augment awareness for a woman in her mid-thirties and facilitate further embodiment, which led to her Second Birth realization. She was attending a week-long retreat after participating in our work for a year, and was familiar with the teaching.

She gazed with another woman who had been in her Second Birth for a number of years, and was close to her own age and situation. In that exchange, this practitioner found herself meeting the vastness of the other woman's conscious nature, and identifying as that vast consciousness. She later recalled that as she attuned to this felt sense, her body relaxed, her awareness expanded, and she felt herself settle. She also experienced a familiar deep human loneliness in the conditional flow, which the other woman had gracefully and vulnerably revealed. As they gazed, the practitioner simply held this loneliness with compassion and receptive neutrality, rather than becoming emotionally identified and disturbed by it. Abiding steadily in awareness, she felt capable of holding her fear of losing her intimate partner and being alone.

The practitioner next gazed with a man who was also experiencing fear and angst about losing his partner. Now, she opened and freely entered into his plight with the same compassion with which she had met herself. She was surprised to find herself capable of meeting the man's experience without collapsing into a broken sense of self. The gazing exercise came to an end, and the retreat continued. A few hours later, other participants remarked how changed the woman appeared, and how peaceful, radiant, and present she seemed, although she had earlier been absorbed in difficult material. Later still, she realized that her sense of self had fundamentally expanded to include her infinite nature. This shift in identity was later recognized as the beginning of her passage into the Second Birth and the ongoing deep spiritual transformation it makes possible.

In our we-spaces, we've discovered that the more people open to receive their experience as it is, the more steadily their perspectives begin to shift. This process is profoundly supported through consistent welcome into the awakened, compassionate, relational field, which is the very essence of our transmission.

The Core Wound of Embodied Life

A key component of our dharma that informs and empowers our transmission is our understanding of the Core Wound, which signifies the basic condition at the heart of embodiment: we appear, abide awhile, and pass away through a profoundly mysterious process. We exist at the interface of bounded-ness and openness; this tension yields inherent uncertainty, discomfort, and vulnerability. Every phenomenon exhibits perpetual movement between endlessly arising polarities—light/dark, love/hate, pain/pleasure, beginning/ending, and creation/destruction, to name just a few. To live fully, we are called to consciously participate in the endless changing flow that is our very nature.

We honor the Core Wound as the very portal to embodied awakening, with its realization of fundamental wellness and the radical non-separateness of consciousness and phenomena. Neither practice, achievement of rarefied states, nor transcending human dilemmas are necessary to enter this portal, which is a realm of letting go, surrendering, becoming present to our deep human needs and vulnerability, and apprehending how they coexist with the infinite unbounded dimension of our being.

Some people experience the Core Wound as subtle or more pronounced tension, and others register it as an underlying sense of incompleteness, separation, or existential anxiety. When unexamined, the Core Wound can drive much of our conditioned behavior. When examined, it can be an impossible, frightening koan the mind cannot hold, which the body yearns to resolve. Participants are at times invited to drop into the feeling recognition of this core paradox at the root of their being. They are invited to feel the fullness of being human, embodied, limited and conditioned, while at the same time abiding as unconditioned awareness—spacious, unlimited, and vast. Our we-spaces offer support in opening to and tolerating this core existential tension. We do not try to understand these paradoxes; we simply drop into them and feel them. Surrendering into the paradox of the absolute and relative can immediately catalyze the Second Birth awakening, although it often occurs more gradually.

To know ourselves, we must finally BE ourselves—and what we find in that process is an encounter with the radical creativity at the heart of all existence, which is inescapably present in each moment. We affirm that we evolve by embracing our utter nakedness to this dimension of our existence. This first requires encountering our suffering and limits, and descending through these layers to the felt experience of core separation. Over time, we build capacity to face into that sense of limitation. Our empathic we-space, as well as growing access to one's conscious nature, provide the deep support needed to descend, until we unexpectedly discover the Core Wound beginning to turn, dissipate, and dissolve into open boundaries and expansive freedom. At that point, the Core Wound has been integrated right through its darkest interior, and we are released from exclusive identification with our conditioned state and the separate, solid "I."

After the Second Birth, the unfathomable spectrum of opposites is perceived as both/and, rather than one or the other, thus yielding an integrated view we call the Core Paradox or Core Mystery. From this perspective, we notice our doing to be more and more sourced in Being. We find ourselves speaking and acting from the quiet source of the unknown emerging through us. When this process has matured and become recognizable, we might say, "I have entered a new life. In my first birth and life, I was such and such a person; in this Second Birth and life, I now know myself as fundamentally different, although the conditions and patterns of my life might remain the same. Most assuredly, I'm operating from new ground." There has been a shift into the heart of Being, where opposites reconverge, where tender feeling is found, and where reverence is felt for creatures enduring the journey. Love is understood and consciously lived, and those not yet awake to this mystery are held in compassion. In our we-spaces, people at all stages of exploration and realization are exposed to this transmission and have the opportunity to attune to it, resonate with it, and allow it to infuse them with awareness and warmth.

Mutuality

One of Trillium Awakening's significant distinguishing evolutionary features is Mutuality, which can be considered essential in democratizing awakening. The disposition underlying Mutuality is honoring the experience and tender heart of the other, as if placing it on a sacred altar. Human nature is inherently vulnerable, and our personal perspective and experience, however conditioned they may be, have enabled us to survive thus far, and are worthy of respect. To be honored so deeply at the core of our vulnerability is profoundly reorienting, particularly for those of us who have encountered pressure and critical feedback from well-intentioned though misattuned families, workplaces, or spiritual communities and teachers.

The practice of Mutuality is a distinct form of exchange in the self-other field. It begins with speaking and acting in integrity with our felt reality on all levels at which we are aware. While doing so, we participate with others who are doing the same, recognizing that their experience is different from our own, and remaining present with the tensions such differences can create. At times, a person might experience pain in response to our words and actions, even if we intended no harm. When this happens, we listen, honor their reality, and take responsibility for our part. Mutuality requires mature development; practitioners need to be able to take perspectives on self and other, own their part in breakdowns, and sincerely apologize when warranted. When the person apologizing is a teacher, it can be incredibly healing for students who have not experienced leaders admitting their own imperfection, insensitivity, and missteps.

At times, Mutuality requires us to bring feedback to another, sharing our honest experience of their impact. Although giving and receiving feedback might initially feel challenging, it can also be quickening for both parties. When receiving feedback, we might at times feel it's unjustified, yet in our work we have a cultural understanding that we first practice deep listening before sensing next steps.

Mutuality can require profoundly leaning into situations and tolerating many tensions, sometimes over long periods. Despite its connotations, Mutuality is not inherently mild, kind, or nice. It doesn't always lead to resolution, reunion, or shared understanding and vision. It can eventually involve the deconstruction of existing forms, and emergence of new structures that express further integration and possibility. It's an evolutionary force that invites our surrender, and builds our capacity to endure and engage with it.

The practice of Mutuality is a journey of discovery that's typically more complex and fraught with hope and fear than the experience of individual awakening. We often say that awakening is easy; the real workout going forward is in Mutuality. Moreover, people at various levels of development come together in Mutuality, and mature at differing paces as they practice. The more integrated the personal self, the greater the potential to be skillful in Mutuality. Being accelerates our understanding and development through life experience, which is at times quite painful as well as gratifying!

Evolution Through Meeting Challenge

The inherent tension and oscillation between sacred holding and spiritual fire have characterized our we-spaces from their inception. Saniei Bonder's initial dharma articulation in 1992, a fiery declaration in support of matter, the body, emotions, and ordinary people, was greatly influential in shaping our we-spaces. In it he called for a restoration of the feminine principle that required holding the space open, and restraining the dominance of traditional top-down and formulaic teachings. Trillium Awakening embodies this orientation for spiritual awakening by honoring the existential equality of its participants, as well as the functional hierarchy of those holding teaching and organizational roles. This has led to more transparent and permeable governance to distribute power and authority, and recognition of the community of practitioners as itself carrying the transmission of awakening.

Over the years, several hundred have awakened to non-separate conscious embodiment in our we-spaces, contributing to a sense of family and solidarity—a nurturing safe haven. Our organizational structures train and support a growing body of teachers (over 40 as of this writing), and develop guidelines that clarify the ethical use of power. In 2011, our teachers circle implemented Holacracy,⁶ a progressive, purpose-driven form of governance that differentiates role and soul. A community network of practitioners is crystallizing, and finding its organized voice.

To further ground the democratization of awakening within the Trillium Awakening work, we continue to update the policies and procedures that govern our we-space and sustain its integrity. In alignment with this work's original impulse to evolve beyond its guru-centric lineage, the teachers circle has found it increasingly crucial to enforce our member agreements impartially, without exception.

Recently, this obligation severely tested our community to outgrow its inertia of disregarding breaches in conduct. In 2014, after frustrating and futile attempts to address problems mutually, the teachers formally called Saniel to be accountable for violations of our Teachers Circle Ethics Policy governing teachers' expression of anger and use of power. The tensions fueling this situation catalyzed intensive soul-searching and cultural assessment, including speaking perspectives from many points in a full spectrum of responses. It was a trying time for all. In the end, the efforts to bridge our differences in approach and organizational structures proved irreconcilable, leading to a separation of entities. Saniel relinquished membership in the teacher's circle, and established exclusive ownership of his trademarks. The teachers chose to rebrand and establish their own independent organization. After two rough years, the resulting groups are in a process of grounding in their own realities, having been freed from the need to encompass such an expanse of differences between them.

From the current vantage point, we teachers and leaders of Trillium Awakening see our work evolving its capacity to hold human limitation while releasing identification with obsolete patterning, and catalyzing more integrated levels of development individually and within our we-spaces. This evolutionary ordeal continues to call us toward both richer personal investigation and impersonal transcendence in service to our purpose.

Our Contribution to Collective Evolution

As we make our way through the challenges of rebuilding, we hope that our process of ongoing healing might be helpful for other groups as they face into common difficulties of maturing and evolving. Among our contributions to collective evolution are the many individuals who have experienced profound healing, awakening, and integration in our we-spaces, where vulnerable, authentic, heart-awakened, energized beings find their calling in all manner of cultural expressions. In their capacity to hold paradox and the Core Mystery of embodied life, our practitioners provide robust containment for a full range of immanent and transcendent experience.

Our community is revealing itself as a vital launching pad from which teachers and practitioners evolve new perspectives on their accumulated repertoires of practices, interests, and skills. This expansion, coupled with our foundational teachings, brings the possibility of awakening to growing numbers of people. Articulations of our core values now appear in various fields of creative expression, shamanic and somatic therapies, traditional and mystical spirituality, consciousness studies, and fresh interpretations of typological maps. The groundwork of conscious embodiment established through the Trillium Awakening sensibility,

⁶ Holacracy is a social technology or system of organizational governance in which authority and decision-making are distributed throughout a holarchy of self-organizing teams rather than being vested in a management hierarchy. See Robertson, 2015.

and the participation of thousands over the past twenty years, have provided rich, permeable soil for deep waters to seep upward, infusing all with the living spirit of transformation and enterprise, through a great diversity of individual expression and collective engagement.

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