

Pouring Concrete by Bob Harwood Book Notes

Location 1956

The truth had been there all along, but I had unknowingly blinded myself to it. Making a list of what our church should do, I wrote: It should encourage meditation as a daily practice. The Sunday service should be organized around meditation. It should be non-sectarian and open to everyone. It should support the same kinds of charitable activities as other churches.

Location 2063

Indeed, not a single thing exists independently until we imagine that we are observers looking at an external world composed of things. It is our imagining rather than our observing that conjures up the conception of thingness. In the parlance of physicists, it is the act of distinction rather than the act of observation that collapses the wave function. It is imagination that brings forth a world of objects and events that are seemingly separate from what is fundamentally a unified field.

Location 2073

A tree and an observer of a tree are not two separate things except in imagination. To imagine that the observer and the observed are separate entities, we must hide the truth from ourselves and blind ourselves to our true nature. If we want to imagine that there is an original sin, it is the mistake of psychologically blinding ourselves to our essential nature.

Location 2105

The more I meditated, the more the boundaries around me were seen to be artificial. The air ten feet away from my body, the glass of water on the kitchen counter, the cloud overhead, and the stars in the night sky were the real me.

Location 2129

When we look at the world, we look at what we, ourselves, are. The dualistic thinking of western science conceals the fact that the universe is an undivided whole. The cosmos is what we really are.

Location 2157

Later, I would call this practice “ATA-T” (attending the actual minus thought). This is a very powerful exercise that maintains and intensifies the effect of the sitting. It keeps the mind focused on direct sensory perception, and prevents it from wandering off into fantasies during the periods between formal meditation sessions.

Location 2398

My role was to tell people what can be discovered by shifting attention away from thoughts, and the different kinds of activities that can be used in that regard, but which activity they chose to pursue was up to them.

Location 2440

“To live in the present, we must believe deeply that what is most important is the here and the now. We are constantly distracted by things that have happened in the past or that might happen in the future. It is not easy to remain focused on the present. Our mind is hard to master and keeps pulling us away from the moment.” Henri J. M. Nouwen

Location 2529

When Jesus Christ advised his followers to “take no thought of tomorrow,” he gave the best advice that can ever be given to people who are searching for the truth.

Location 2531

As time passed, I discovered that if I ever asked myself what I should be doing in the present moment and didn’t instantly know the answer, then I could meditate upon that question, and my path would once again become clear.

Location 2534

The truth was always present, and by focusing on whatever was happening in the present moment, I could always know what I had to be doing.

Location 2602

The ultimate question is always, “What must we be doing in this moment? What can we see, hear, smell, taste, and feel right now?” Life is a dance that only happens in the present.

Location 2632

December, I wrote a newspaper column about the mind/body problem. In the column, I advised people to contemplate the operation of the body. What I wrote had the effect of stimulating my own practice more than usual, and I began spending a lot of time looking at my hands and arms.

Location 2635

I therefore added something extra to my usual practice. I would sit down and begin my contemplation by saying to myself, “I don’t control what the cells of this body do. I don’t cause blood to flow, or muscles to move, or hair to grow, or any of the complex chemical interactions that occur at the cellular level of the body. How, then, can I get rid of the illusion that I exist as a separate volitional entity?” After thinking these thoughts, I would just stare at my hands and arms and watch the blood vessels pulsing under the skin. While staring, the muscles of my legs would begin rippling and twitching as concentrated attentiveness affected what I assumed to be the electrical energy in the neurons of my muscle tissue. During such practice my skin would grow tingly and very sensitive.

Location 2668

I speculated that the mechanism for achieving the kind of unity I desired must be twofold. First, we must become intimate in our daily life with every activity. If we are washing dishes, pouring concrete, or shopping in a grocery store, then we must become one with those activities. For most of us, running off to the wilderness is an escapist pipedream; the real challenge is here in front of our eyes. We must wake up to this moment fully. Second, samadhi is a state of mind in which we can relax and let go of our ordinary habitual consciousness. Through our formal practice, we can learn how to sink into a non-dual state of mind and make regular contact with the source of our being. It doesn't matter whether we do this through prayer, sufi dancing, or silent meditation as long as we have some way to regularly leave our ordinary dualistic perspective and experience the non-dual ground of our being.

Location 2696

Each of us follows a unique path, but if we can drop our conceptual mode of mind, and open ourselves to the universe, we can discover the infinite field of being that is always dancing via the bodies that we seemingly inhabit. Below the level of conscious perception, the practice of non-conceptual awareness changes the way our mind interacts with reality. Sooner or later, as ideas drop away, we see the truth of who we are. Through the simple activity of shifting attention away from thoughts to what is, we gradually leave thoughts behind and discover our true identity in the simplest things we do, whether shopping for groceries, making love, or brushing our teeth. Through meditative activities, the dancing of the Absolute can become obvious. With any luck at all, we learn to quit thinking about the dance and begin to move with the music. The

Location 2703

The purpose of meditation is to help us see what is always here and now. It is to bring us back to washing the dishes, putting on our clothes, or pouring concrete with a new kind of understanding. It is to help us appreciate the wonder of existence and help us see ourselves in everyone we meet. It is to wake us up to the truth of what we are.

Location 2938

A good friend suggested that I read a book, *Collision With The Infinite*, written by Suzanne Segal, a forty-two year old California woman. I ordered a copy and when it arrived, started reading it and could not put it down.

Location 2959

Ms. Segal writes, All ideas about accomplishing spiritual awakening are based on the assumption that there is a someone, a you, who can perform the practices and accomplish the goal. But this someone doesn't exist. Take, for example, the popular spiritual notion that we need to "get out of the way so the infinite can just flow through us." It is predicated on a nonexistent someone who can figure out how to surrender. We need to see that both spiritual and psychological practices,

every single one of them, are based on taking ideas about who we are to be the truth of who we are. The idea that we are the doer behind our actions does not make us the doer, no matter how often we get hoodwinked into taking this idea to be the truth. Then there is the notion that we must stop the mind in order to be free. But who will stop the mind? Like everything else, the mind is just what it is. A mind that generates thoughts is not a problem; it is simply doing what minds do.[p 149]

Location 2994

I continued to read *Collision With The Infinite* over and over during the following two weeks. After I finished the book for the seventh time, it became clear that if there is no personal self, then there is no future for a personal self.

Location 3002

If there is no self, then there's no need for patience because there's no separate someone who could attempt to be patient. I thought that my long search was finally over, but later I would realize that one small obstacle to true freedom still remained—the continuing sense of a “me.”

Location 3085

Actions. I no longer felt that I had free will in any usual sense. The concept of free will is based upon the assumption that there is an independent entity, a “me,” that can choose to act in certain ways, and my experiences had convinced me that no such entity exists. The idea of choice, from my perspective, was an illusion.

Location 3179

When making these hiking trips, I always made a concerted effort to listen to the sounds around me, and to look non-conceptually at everything in my visual field. As time went by, the one who practiced this form of direct sensory perception began disappearing into the field of perception.

Location 3243

I began doing the same meditative activity that I had pursued for several years. I kept shifting attention away from thoughts to direct sensory perception. I looked at the highway, the other vehicles on the road, the clouds in the sky, the fields, the trees, the interstate overpasses, etc. without naming or commenting upon what was observed.

Location 3246

Each time that I became aware of a thought, I shifted attention back to what could be seen or heard.

Location 3436

The real searcher had been the infinite field of all being manifesting as a particular human being!
The cosmic joke was the fact that the seeker and the object of the search were one and the same.

Location 3439

All there is is THIS/Self/Source/God/the Infinite, and everyone and everything is always one with THAT.

Location 3534

Later, I reflected about how, as adults, we usually want to feel as if we are in control. We want to think that life is predictable. What a mistake this is. If we fully appreciated our situation, then we would never want to know what will happen next. Not knowing what will happen next is what makes the mystery of life so entertaining.

Location 3537

It is only by seeing through our attachments, desires, and need for security that the play of the Infinite can be fully appreciated.

Location 3569

Indeed, when the mind functions freely and without attachment to self-referential ideas, there is no hindrance. There is no need to control mind talk or anything else. There is no longer a separate entity who needs to do anything. Without the idea of separate doership the idea of improving oneself is seen to be a joke because there's no one who needs to be improved. The idea of acquiring anything for oneself is also seen to be an illusion because there is absolutely nothing lacking.

Location 3581

No conclusions, however, should be drawn from any of these changes other than the fact that significant realizations can affect a human being in different ways. Tomorrow will be different than today. What we are changes every moment. The opportunity we have is to watch all of these phenomena without letting them blind us to the truth, or using them to build a conceptual model of how life ought to look.

Location 3621

The process of becoming psychologically unified with life is the process of once again learning to see and interact with the world like a little child. It is seeing the world detached from all ideas. It is once again being filled with wonder, enjoying the play of life, and living life without second-guessing it.

Location 3627

For forty years I was proud to be a thinker, but for whatever time this body has left, it will spend its time looking, listening, smelling, tasting, feeling, and being what is. It will be here now and experience what is always here and now.

Location 3655

The pathos of things involves the recognition of what we are. It is the recognition that although we are infinite, we manifest “just like this.” Bodies come and go, but the One who manifests through human bodies and looks out of the eyes of every body remains the same.

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Location 3664:

When we see the world as it is, it is like being in church all the time. Even the most mundane objects are holy and infused with poignance and beauty. When nothing is categorized, compared, or analyzed, sacredness flows through the world, and each person we meet brings us the gift of presence.

Location 3701:

Formal meditation, such as sitting and focusing on a mantra or pure awareness without content, and informal meditation, such as ATA-T, help us exchange the habit of incessant thought for direct perception and a direct interaction with what is actual. As this occurs, the truth that is always before our eyes becomes more likely to be seen.

Location 3709:

At the same time, I would not want to claim that my laissez-faire approach to meditation is better than some other approach. I simply feel that when we act out of a sense of duty we separate ourselves from the truth of who we are. Rather than using the intellect to direct the body it makes more sense to let the body direct the body. If the intellect is silent and still, the body always knows what to do.

Location 3715:

One value of a contemplative practice is that it reduces the amount of reflection in our life. This allows us to respond to whatever is happening directly and spontaneously. We become people of action. As this process continues, more and more often we act from the core of who we are rather than our ideas about who we are.

Location 3724:

It is only by letting go of our thoughts that we can become free to act without a sense of burden. If we can let go of our thoughts, then we will feel like a leaf in the wind being blown first one way and then another without knowing where it will land next.

Location 3896:

First, what people call “Self-realization” requires the recognition of what theologians call “the ground of being.” It requires the realization that what we are is THAT in which all states of mind occur. This realization informs the mind concerning the true nature of reality and puts the mind to rest. Everything we experience, whether seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting, hearing, thinking, dreaming, samadhi-ing, etc., occurs in THAT, and THAT is what we are.

Location 3900:

Second, in one instant, with or without spiritual practice, it’s possible to realize the truth. However, while meditation or contemplation is not an absolute necessity for awakening to occur, most of us cannot be internally silent long enough to discern the illusory nature of thoughts or to become free from the influence of thoughts.

Location 3907:

Third, the practice of non-conceptual awareness is both an end in itself as well as a path to deeper insight. We take time to smell the roses because direct experience is what life is all about. Abstract thought, alone, is not sufficient for attaining lasting happiness or peace. We also take time to smell the roses because the activity of directly experiencing the world makes us more likely to discover that the rose and the rose-smeller are one.

Location 3910:

Fourth, no religion, spiritual path, or philosophy contains the truth. The truth is beyond all ideas, whether the ideas are Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, etc. The truth shines forth in every moment, but it has no name or form, even though it is given innumerable names and imagined in innumerable forms. Each of us must find our own way to the discovery of the Infinite. Some of us will do it through traditional religions and some of us will do it in highly individual and non-institutional ways.

Location 3914:

Fifth, even if we discover who we are, the path of insight does not stop. There is no end to the depth of potential realization. No matter how deeply we see into the nature of our being, there is infinitely more to see.

Location 3923:

Seventh, there is nothing one can specifically do that will guarantee awakening from the dream of being a separate entity. This is because there is no separate entity capable of action. The “me” who imagines that it is seeking enlightenment is fictional.

Location 3925:

All that can be said is that certain activities seem to be correlated with awakening. Those activities involve shifting attention away from thoughts to direct sensory perception and attentiveness that leads to psychological unity with whatever is being done. If one focuses attention intensely upon washing dishes, for example, one is less likely to spend time reflecting self-referentially and more likely to psychologically lose oneself in the activity itself.

Location 3928:

Eighth, the one who wrote these words and the one who is reading these words are not separate; they are aspects of an unbounded and unified field of being that cannot be grasped by the intellect. Any attempt to grasp it, understand it, conceive it, or imagine it is a movement in the wrong direction. To see the truth, we must see through our ideas. The idea that we exist separately is the very thing that makes us overlook what is looking. Who we are is the unbounded field of being in which everything appears.

Location 3933:

Ninth, and lastly, although the title of this book seems to imply that there exists a path to realization, this is only a figure of speech, an idea/image pointing toward something that cannot be imagined. In truth, there is no path and no separate entity who might choose to follow a path.

Location 3959:

From the author’s perspective, the path to freedom, peace, equanimity, and understanding is a path that involves seeing through cognitive illusions, becoming detached from ideation, and realizing that one’s true identity is THIS—the infinite and incomprehensible field of all being.

Location 3965:

The question that this quotation prompts is, “What must one do to ‘go beyond the mind’?” Fortunately, there are many ways of following this advice. Nisargadatta, himself, recommended among other things, refusing all thoughts except the thought “I am.” Any activity that shifts attention away from “mind chatter” (the internal dialogue) will probably be effective. The author experimented with many different forms of meditation, but eventually put his primary focus on what he calls “attending the actual minus thoughts” (ATA-T)—the shifting of attention away from thoughts to direct sensory perception. Other people have shifted attention away from thoughts by staying aware of awareness, mindfulness, contemplating existential questions, watching the body, staying silently alert without a focus, yoga, tai chi, etc. Any activity that cuts off reflective thought and keeps the focus of attention upon what’s happening in the present

moment rather than thoughts about what's happening will almost certainly lead to existential realizations.

Location 3979:

Addendum 1 Attending the Actual Minus Thoughts (ATA-T) The primary meditative activity that I pursued was shifting attention, again and again, to direct sensory perception—to what could be seen, heard, felt, smelled, or tasted. I had become uninterested in the activity of thinking because thinking had never helped me find answers to existential questions.

Location 3985:

As I began attempting to look at the world in silence, thoughts were incessant, but I kept shifting attention, again and again, back to what the eyes could see rather than the thoughts that kept appearing in the mind.

Location 3989:

As a result of pursuing this activity, mind talk gradually slowed down to such a degree that there could be awareness of mental silence without the mind commenting on the mental silence.

Location 3993:

Learning to look at the world in silence involves breaking the habit of incessantly thinking reflective thoughts and acquiring a new habit of remaining alert but internally silent.

Location 3998:

Addendum 2 How to find answers to existential questions

Location 4004:

The general approach can be described as follows: State explicitly whatever you want to know, and think about the issue. Shift attention away from thoughts using whatever meditative activity you prefer. Periodically bring up the issue that you want to understand for conscious review, and again shift attention away from thoughts until the answer suddenly appears.

Location 4009:

Here is a simple meditative activity that can be used to shift attention away from thoughts: While sitting with eyes closed, shift attention away from thoughts to a specific ambient sound—perhaps the humming of a refrigerator or the sound of wind or birdsong. If thoughts arise, shift attention back to whatever is being listened to as soon as you recognize that attention has reverted to thoughts. Periodically bring up and review the question that needs resolution, and then shift attention back to whatever sound is being listened to. Many people find shifting attention away from thoughts to sounds easier than other meditative activities because there are not as many

mental associations with auditory perceptions, and it is relatively easy to hold one's attention on a specific sound.

Location 4017:

Addendum 3 Other Questions and Answers

Location 4025:

Everyone is always doing exactly what one must be doing because that's the way reality unfolds.

If there is ever any doubt about this, one can ask, "What must I be doing this exact moment?"

The answer will almost always be crystal clear. If it's not clear, then one can contemplate the issue using the approach described in addendum 2, and it will usually become clear very quickly.