

PRESENCING AWARENESS

Peter Fenner in interview with Tami Simons of Sounds True

Tami Simon speaks with **Peter Fenner**. Peter has studied as a monk with many prominent Buddhist lamas, and is the founder of the Center for Timeless Wisdom. He's the author of several books, including *Reasoning into Reality* and *The Edge of Certainty*. With Sounds True, he's published a book and audio program called *Radiant Mind*, full of teachings and practices intended to help awaken unconditioned awareness. Peter discusses three dimensions that can be considered when we look at our capacity to rest in unconditioned awareness, and the difference between a causal path and a results-oriented path in spirituality.

Tami Simon: You're listening to "Insights at the Edge." Today my guest is Peter Fenner. Peter has studied as a monk with many prominent Buddhist lamas, and is the founder of the Center for Timeless Wisdom. He's the author of several books, including *Reasoning into Reality* and *The Edge of Certainty*. With Sounds True, he's published a book called *Radiant Mind*, along with an audio program of the same name, full of teachings and practices intended to help awaken unconditioned awareness.

In this episode of "Insights at the Edge," Peter and I discussed three dimensions that can be considered when we look at our capacity to rest in unconditioned awareness: the dimensions of purity, depth, and duration. We also discussed the difference between a causal path and a results-oriented path in spirituality. Peter also leads us through a brief reflection intended to help us identify and rest in unconditioned awareness. Here's my conversation with Peter Fenner.

Peter, you use this phrase in the subtitle of your book and audio series on *Radiant Mind*: "awakening unconditioned awareness." I wanted to start right there with that phrase, "unconditioned awareness." Usually when people talk about awareness, they just say "awareness," but you've added this additional word, "unconditioned awareness." Can you help us understand what you mean by that?

Peter Fenner: I agree with you. That's prickly. It's not necessary, perhaps, to add the qualification "unconditioned," because if we look at awareness itself, it is unconditioned, because it has no structure, it has no form. So there's nothing within it that can be conditioned.

Nonetheless, it's easy for people to relate to awareness as something that can be conditioned. People can think, for example, "I can increase my awareness," "I can decrease my awareness," "I can have a more panoramic awareness." It's really just to point to the fact that, when we really connect with awareness, it is unconditioned. It's not something that can be changed. It can't be enhanced or degraded.

TS: Well, it's really interesting that you mention people using the phrase "increasing awareness." I hear that all the time: "The purpose of meditation is to expand awareness." But really the person must be saying something different.

PF: Sure. I think that what people are saying is that what's expanding are the horizons of their conditioned experience. For example, if people are meditating, they're opening themselves up to this perhaps infinite interior reality composed of thoughts, subtle feelings and sensations, meditative states. So people are expanding what's in the field of awareness, but I don't see that they are expanding awareness itself.

TS: That's a really good point. Now, one of the things you talk about in your book *Radiant Mind*, that I've never heard anybody else introduce is this idea that we can track, in a certain way, how deeply we know, and can rest in unconditioned awareness by using these three different—I guess I might call them "measurements," but you can correct me here if I'm misrepresenting anything. You talk about purity, depth, and duration. Would you say these are three qualities? How would you describe it? That we start relating, being as unconditioned awareness, that we can look at the purity, depth, and duration? Can you talk a bit about that, Peter?

PF: Sure. Firstly, in a way, we can view this from how it is when we're resting within awareness itself, or we can talk about this from how it is from the side of our conditioned existence. So when we're resting within awareness itself, those three dimensions or parameters don't apply, because awareness itself is even beyond notions of purity and impurity. There's nothing that can be pure or impure. There's nothing to prolong or nothing to shorten, so even the notion of duration doesn't apply, because within awareness itself, it's atemporal; we can't measure time. Within awareness itself, there's no deepening; we can't have a more shallow or a deeper resting in this state when we're viewing it from within awareness itself, but when we step back and see how resting in awareness plays out within our

conditioned existence, then I feel that we can usefully make those distinctions, those three parameters.

For example, purity is just the way that sometimes, when people are resting in awareness, they still create that it's some type of subtle experience. It's what I call "experientializing the state." People can say, "Wow, this is really blissful!" or "This is a really . . ." They can feel the palpability of the field, so they overlay onto the nothing of awareness some subtle fabric. That's what I mean by introducing an impurity into the experience.

Then, with depth, to me that's really important to acknowledge, because by depth, I mean the extent to which we can integrate the present thing of unconditioned awareness into our life. Because, at least in my experience, what happens is that I'm resting in awareness, and then something comes along that's outside of my preferences, and then I'm triggered into a reaction of attraction and aversion, so then I lose the resting, because I become identified with what's happening in my experience. I feel that this can be deepened. I think that this makes the difference, for example, between me and the great masters. Great masters are able to just include anything and everything within the field of awareness, without their being triggered into aversive or attractive reactions.

TS: So to see if I understand what you're saying: you're describing that, as a person, we visit or we touch or we rest for periods of time in unconditioned awareness. Would you say that?

PF: Exactly! Exactly, but also I'm noting that when we are resting in awareness, while the awareness is unconditioned, our capacity to rest in awareness is conditioned. It's conditioned by the ambient circumstances in the moment. For example, we have to be relatively free of physical pain. We have to be in, for most people, an environment that's relatively settled. And our mind needs to be reasonably settled. If we're in a really intense situation, it can be difficult to presence awareness.

TS: OK, I'm with you. And I think that, in terms of these three dimensions—depth, duration, and purity—I think duration seems pretty obvious to people: how long am I resting in unconditioned awareness before I start thinking about something or, as you say, pay attention to the pain in my back, or something like that. So duration

seems obvious. Depth and purity, I'm not as clear on.

PF: OK, so firstly, I'll talk a little bit about purity. By purity, I'm really meaning that, when we're resting in awareness in a pure way, there's a clear recognition that this, as awareness, is not a thing. It's no thing. It's not a phenomenon. It has no structure to it. It has no directionality. We can't talk about it—we can't qualify it in any way, because there's nothing to qualify, nothing to put any labels on.

What can happen is that, when people are resting in awareness, there can be a tendency to make the no thing into something. Why? Because often, really nice experiences come along in the slipstream of the presencing of awareness, things like clarity, bliss, feelings of intimacy and deep connection, and so then people can feel, "Ah! Those things, those secondary phenomena, are qualities of awareness itself!"

TS: OK, that's helpful. So in a very pure state of unconditioned awareness, would there be no qualities?

PF: Not of awareness, but it can be accompanied by exquisite types of feelings. It could be accompanied by anything, because nothing is excluded by awareness itself. It contains everything, but awareness itself doesn't have those qualities. If it does, then it's something that can be experienced. It's not awareness; it's the contents of awareness.

TS: OK. I think that's helpful. Now let's circle around to depth one more time.

PF: OK. So, by depth, I mean that I feel that, for many of us, when we're presencing awareness, it's dependent upon having conducive conditions, the presence of conducive conditions. That's, for example, why people come together in a workshop situation—they're taking a break from life—or coming together in a retreat. The intention is to create the conditions that support resting in awareness.

When you look at it, it only needs a small change to those conditions to flip us out. You can imagine that we're in a workshop, and then someone gives us a message; or we're in a retreat, and someone says, "Hey, there's a telephone call for you," and wow! There can be a lot of panic even before we know what's going on, and we're no longer resting in awareness. That's in contrast to someone who has really integrated the resting in a very deep way, so they can be resting in awareness in circumstances, in environments, that we might regard as hostile and threatening.

TS: And I'm curious how you came to identify these three dimensions. Are they in certain texts, and you're bringing them forward in a contemporary idiom, or did you discover this yourself?

PF: Well, it just seems obvious that it's the case. It's just through working in this area, being involved with the cultivation of awareness, working with myself, working with other people. It just seems clear that there are those three parameters to distinguish. And when people do it, I feel that they can have a more realistic appreciation for how the presencing of awareness is resting in their lives, and how it's evolving.

TS: Well, this is a really cool phrase that you've been using: "the presencing of awareness." I like that. What do you mean by it?

PF: Just being. We can be doing it now. Presencing is not an action. Even the word "resting" does not capture what this is. It's just discovering, finding ourselves in this place where there's nowhere further to go, there's no more work to be done. That's how I would see it. It's like the work is over. Because this, as awareness, has no structure, we're in a place where there's nowhere further that we can evolve. So for me, this is the pinnacle of human evolution.

TS: So you're presencing awareness as we're having this conversation?

PF: Yes. We're having this conversation, and at the same time, there's an awareness of the no thing, of the nothing, that is here at the same time that we're here, but not as a physical location.

TS: And how would somebody listening be able to investigate if they were presencing awareness in their listening?

PF: Well, by seeing that there's nothing to investigate, that they can't investigate this, because it's not a phenomenon. So it's really appreciating that, at the same time that there's a flux of conditioned experience, in a way it's tuning into the no thing, the emptiness, the ground of being, the nature of awareness itself, rather than what's happening within the field of awareness. When I say "tuning in," again you have to listen to that carefully, because it's not tuning in to something.

TS: Now, the title for the book and audio series with Sounds True, and also the title

that you offer trainings under, is *Radiant Mind*. Can you help us understand what you mean by that?

PF: Yes. So at the moment, I have distinguished unconditioned awareness and whatever is arising within the field of awareness, which consists of sensory phenomena, feelings, and thoughts. And so radiant mind is when unconditioned awareness is infusing, when it's arising, at the same time as everything is arising within the field of awareness. So this is radiant mind when we appreciate the indivisibility of the conditioned and the unconditioned, that they're not two separate things, that unconditioned awareness cannot be separate from what's arising, because it's not that type of thing. It's not the type of thing that can be the same as the contents of awareness, or separate. So when we rest into that realization, we have the radiance of awareness, or awareness that's radiating as manifest phenomena.

TS: Hmm. You mentioned the difference between ourselves, perhaps, and great masters in relationship to these three dimensions—purity, depth, and duration—would be that a great master would be able to rest in unconditioned awareness for long periods of time (that's duration), at great depth, not being disturbed by the note that they got while they were at the retreat, telling them that XYZ happened back at their house (that's depth), and then not putting on overlays (that's purity). I'm curious, in your own experience, and your own life over the past couple decades, have you tracked some increasing capacity for purity, depth, and duration? And how you've tracked that, how you've measured that, if you will.

PF: Yes, sure. I think for myself, and also for many people in the West, people who are familiar with nondual teachings, I think that purity is fairly easy to get. I think that people can rest in awareness without what I called "experientializing it," without making it into an experience. The duration is something that, yes, if you look at it not necessarily from one year to the next, if I look at things like in five-year blocks of time, then I can certainly notice a difference from twenty years ago, thirty years ago, and ten years, five years, and so on, that there is an increasing capacity to rest in awareness, just little bit by little bit. Depth is something that, yes, I can notice, that I can rest here, be here, in a situation where previously I would have been triggered. Like in a workshop situation, for example, and someone's attacking, or trying to have a bit of a fight or something like that, or just disagreeing—that can all be accommodated within the field of awareness.

But then there are real limitations to my capacity to rest as awareness. I'm just recalling last year, for example, I flew into Santa Cruz from Europe, and there was a delay in my flight. So I arrived at about 1 a.m., expecting to find a key where I thought it was going to be located, for the bed and breakfast where I was staying at. I couldn't find it! And so I freaked out! I thought, "Wow! Oh my God! I've just finished this flight, I'm really exhausted, and a storm is blowing in, and it's starting to rain! What am I going to do? I've got to find a bed for the night!" I was really in quite a panicked situation, and then I think, "Wow! But what about these masters, these great masters, let's say in Tibet, for whom that would be totally uneventful, would be a non-event?" Like having to spend the night out somewhere wouldn't produce any disturbance at all. Or again, these great masters can not have food for two or three days, it's just not coming to them, and again, it's uneventful. It doesn't produce any disturbance in their presencing of awareness. That to me is a vast difference, and that's what I mean by deepening.

TS: That's helpful. That's clarifying. Now we've been using this phrase, talking about "resting in awareness," but of course, awareness is available in the midst of all of our doing, all of our activity. I'm curious what it's like to be presencing awareness in the midst of responsibilities where there's a lot of initiation that's required, a lot of strategy, let's say scheming, etc., etc. What's it like on the go, versus resting?

PF: Well, I think it is easier to presence awareness when there is a relative amount of resting, and then when we're, let's say, in a work situation where there's a lot of demand being put on us, what we'd call "a pressurized situation," then it's more difficult to rest. I'm not—I guess, in my life, I'm satisfied with how things are evolving. I've no expectation to be resting in awareness for big chunks of my life. Probably for most of it, I'm not expecting to be resting in awareness when I'm in—it depends on the work. If it's the work of facilitating a workshop, then yes, because everything supports resting in awareness, even though it can be punctuated by dynamic relationships, dynamic exchanges. But for example, if I'm going shopping, I just do that! I don't think about resting in awareness when I'm doing a lot of things in my life.

TS: So if we were to work with a percentage, then— I mean, I know it's kind of weird, but at the end of any given year (you know me, Peter. I like these audit-type statements!) at the end of any given year, how much time would you say you were in unconditioned awareness, and how much time were you not, consciously?

PF: In other words, resting with a recognition of resting in awareness? It's really difficult. Someone asked me that a couple of years ago, and I said, "Five percent." And then I've had an opportunity to think about it since, and I thought, "Wow! I think I'm really overestimating!" I really don't know what it is. It's less than that, but the point is that I'm absolutely satisfied with the amount of resting that happens. I can't ask for more, because I have as much of it as is possible within my mind stream, and so I feel privileged and blessed to have the level of access that I do.

TS: What I noticed this exchange is bringing up in me is this fantasy I have that it's possible to live 100 percent of the time that way, and that that's some kind of goal that I've been secretly holding.

PF: Hmm. I don't have that. I'm completely satisfied to make gradual progress from now up until my death. I'm sure that will happen, just because the components are part of my life now, particularly practicing and teaching this. The components are in place to support that gradual, incremental growth.

TS: You mention this idea in the book, *Radiant Mind*, about the "homing instinct." What I took from that is, once we've really tasted unconditioned awareness, there's some kind of homing instinct in us that will keep pulling us into it again and again. Is that what you mean?

PF: It's a little bit like that, yes, that there's a recognition that develops within us, so that when the circumstances support resting in awareness, we automatically move in that direction, and it becomes easier and easier to make the journey from being in a reactive state—meaning liking or not liking whatever is going on—through to being in equanimous, unconditioned awareness. So it becomes easier to make that journey. It's not a conscious thing that we need to follow. It's like our mind and body learn how to make that journey, then when the conditions are there, we find ourselves just resting in awareness.

TS: I'm wondering at this point in our conversation, if you'd be willing, as a gift to our listeners, to lead us in a brief pointing out, if you will, of unconditioned awareness, so that people who are listening could, right now, take a few moments and be with us in that space.

PF: Mmm. Yeah, that's a beautiful invitation. That's a lovely invitation. So when you say, "Inviting us to present awareness," it's inviting us to be here in a completely

uncomplicated and uncontrived way, in which we're not trying to get anywhere, because there's nowhere to get to. We're allowing whatever's arising to arise and dissipate exactly as it does, and not having to give any attention to that. Then we can look inside and ask, "Who is here? Who is resting?" and we can find that; we can't find who is resting. We can't find a soul; we can't find a center.

Also, we're not resting in any thing. We're just tuning into effortlessness in a way that nothing at all can obstruct this. There are no obstructions. Nothing can get in the way of being here—being here, in the sense of being nowhere, being nowhere in particular. And then we can just connect and appreciate that this, as awareness, has nothing to do with us. We can appreciate this, in a sense we can join, we can enter this space, but the space really is transpersonal. It's the same for you and me and all of our listeners. And it's trans-historical. This has nothing to do with me being in San Francisco, you being in Boulder, and our listeners being wherever they are. This is beyond time, beyond culture.

We can also see that we can't lose this. As the texts say, this is beyond loss and gain. This isn't something that we can have. We can't own this, because it's like space. We can't put our hands on it. And we can't lose this. It's impossible to lose this, because it's not a thing.

And so, in a sense, we're resting. We can't say what we're resting in, and we don't need to. Here, there's nothing that we need, certainly nothing that we need to do, and nothing to know.

TS: Well, Peter, I have to say, your approach really takes the pressure off.

PF: Great!

TS: Now you call this resting in unconditional awareness a kind of ultimate medicine. How is it healing?

PF: It is in a way, in two ways, I feel. One way that it's healing is that, when we're here in this space, nothing's wrong. We don't need to be healed. So no matter what our condition is, we're totally at home and completely comfortable with our condition, so even if we have some, let's say illness or disease, when we're resting in awareness, we are complete for as long as we're here. We go beyond the need to be healed. Nothing needs to be healed. So that's one way in which this is the ultimate

medicine. That's the way that it's normally spoken about in Buddhism, for example, as the ultimate medicine, that "Emptiness is the ultimate healer."

Another way that I feel that it's healing is that, when we're resting here, I feel that it is producing, without any intentional effort, that it's producing healing at a spiritual, psychological, and physiological level. Because when we tune into this, we can feel that there's no conflict, that it is a state of harmony and integration. There's no struggle whatsoever against anything. So I think just resting here, without any intention, does produce a psychological healing, and that it can translate also into enhancing our physical well-being.

TS: Now you mentioned that, when you're leading a Radiant Mind training, or perhaps just at times when you're on your own, that you're intentionally presencing unconditioned awareness. Now, you didn't use the word "intentionally." I added that word, but that's part of what you're doing in those situations. And this is happening, as you're confessing (but you don't really find it a confession!) less than five percent of the time over the course of a year. My question is, when you're in those situations, are you making some kind of shift—like "OK, now I'm teaching a workshop"? Is there something that you slightly turn in some way? And what is that shift or that slight turn?

PF: No, there's not a turn. There's not a shift happening. I just know that, for example, when a workshop or a retreat is happening, I know that it's going to come together in a way in which there will be a mutual presencing of awareness. I just know that this will happen. And I know that when I'm on the phone with people—I do a lot of conference calls with my students in different countries—I know that the presencing will happen. I know that, if I set down to do some writing about awareness, working on books like *Radiant Mind*, I know that presencing will happen; I know that it will happen. In this call, as it is, I know that if I sit down to just be quiet in myself and say, "OK, yes, awareness," it will be here, again because I've made the journey many times from being involved in what's happening in life, involved in my thoughts, feelings, other people, and I know that it's really easy to make the journey back here.

TS: But what you're saying is you're not actually saying, "OK! Time for the journey!" There's no "OK! Time for the journey"?

PF: No. No, it's just a flow. It's a flow in life from doing the things that need to be done in order to be doing the nothing. So it's like living life, doing what I need to do so that I can open up, or so there can be more and more opening to nondual awareness, unconditioned awareness. There's no effort. There's no trying at all involved in doing this. It's just something that comes to punctuate our life with more frequency and ease.

TS: OK. Let's talk a moment a little bit about your own biographical history. You were a monk for nine years. I'm curious why you decided to become a monk, and then why you decided to no longer be a monk.

PF: I decided to become—the impulse to become a monk was really to take care of myself. So in my later teens to early twenties, I was living a pretty reckless and yes, confused life, then I connected with Advaita and Theravada Buddhism, and then Tibetan Buddhism. And I thought, “Wow! I really do need to, in a way, get a handle on my life.” Also I wanted to do it seriously. I thought, “If I'm going to devote my life to a spiritual path, I want to do it as effectively as I can.” At that time, I thought, “Wow. Well, being a monk, that's the way to do it seriously. That's the way to fast track. That's the way to make the most progress in a given amount of time, is to take on the discipline of being a monk.” In part because I thought this way, I could accrue more positive karma more quickly, and also create better conditions for meditating, better conditions for gaining inner serenity.

TS: Mm-hmm. It sounds very goal driven, compared to your current outlook.

PF: Yes, for sure. I mean, at that time—so we're going back close to forty years—the idea of nirvana was unbelievably attractive! That, absolutely, was what I wanted! I was suffering a lot, and I thought, “Wow! Samsara is a total mess, and I am deeply in it, and I want to get out of it as fast as I can and realize nirvana or realize enlightenment.” I was also motivated to contribute to other people, but it was absolutely goal driven. I felt trapped, and I wanted to escape, to protect myself from samsara and to discover a state of real peace and clarity that protected me from suffering.

TS: And then, after nine years?

PF: Well, it's not exactly nine years, but I think I became a little bit obsessive in the monastic discipline. I think it's just that things evolved for me over time, and I saw

that that type of goal orientation produces its own suffering, because it effectively confirms to us that realization can't be happening in this moment; it can't be happening now, if I'm focused on a future goal. So then it's like there's a reorientation in saying, "Aha! OK, so how can I be complete? How can I be fulfilled in this moment?"

In the traditions, this is sometimes spoken about as the difference between causal paths and result paths. The causal path is when we're doing something now, like meditating, following a particular discipline, in order to produce a result in a future, like achieve nirvana at some time in this life, at death, or in a future life, whenever. This is in contrast to working at the result level, in which, in a way, we bring the result into the here and now, not permanently, but as we've been talking about, you know, for five minutes, and thirty minutes, with some regularity.

TS: So it was this switch to being more drawn to a results-oriented path that had you leave monastic life?

PF: Not exactly, but it's a progressive appreciation of that results-orientation, and a progressive appreciation of the fact that it is possible to rest in what is qualitatively the experience of nirvana for five minutes, for an hour at a time. Not permanently, but it's possible, through elegant and skillful work, to open up that space, to enjoy that possibility.

So then when that realization, when that capacity comes into the picture, for me at least, it made the discipline of being a monk less relevant, because it wasn't needed. What's needed is to let go of all ambition, to let go of all striving. That's the only way to be here. The only way to be here is to not need to be anywhere else! If I need to be somewhere else, by definition, I'm incomplete. I'm creating lack and inadequacy.

TS: It seems that you've now—correct me if I'm wrong—moved to a results-oriented approach. Do you not see a value in alternating between a results-oriented approach and then also focusing on a causal approach in an alternating kind of way, seeing the value of both?

PF: Sure, I do, and I approach it that way myself. As much as possible, we rest here. For me, the causal approach, I think now has more subtlety to it, I hope. The causal approach now, for me, is more understanding how to live my life so more resting in awareness can happen, so more resting at the result level can happen. It's not doing

what I need to do in order to, at some point, break through to a permanent experience of liberation or nirvana. I don't see it quite as dualistically as that. It's more: How do I live my life so I'm complete in the moment, so I'm not producing residues? How do I live my life so I'm not so driven by my desires and preferences? And in this way, I can create a foundational platform that supports the more resting in awareness, being at the result.

TS: Mm-hmm. Interesting, this idea that we can live in such a way that we don't create residue, or what you call in the book, *Radiant Mind*, complete experience. Can you talk more about that? How do we live in such a way that we don't create residue?

PF: I feel, by tuning in to what we're doing as we're doing it, and in a way just listening to ourselves more carefully, and learning to live life so that we're not creating events, so that things are not eventful. What I'm looking for is to act and function in a way that I'm not creating things that I have to work through, things that I have to remedy, things that I have to process in the future.

For example, in this call that we're having now, what I'm looking for, myself, is that it's being complete moment by moment, saying what I feel is worth saying, not saying what's not necessary. And then at the end of this call with you, not having to think about this at all, and then just being able to move on with whatever is happening in the rest of my day. It's what I call being ongoingly complete: learning how to live so that we're not creating regrets, or also not creating things that we're going to celebrate, that we'll bring up from the past and try and make our life more buoyant by remembering fantastic experiences.

TS: What I notice is that, in order to be complete in all of my interactions with people, I would probably have to slow down a bit. Often a lot of the "residue" that's created is because I'm rushing, so something's vague or not clear or something like that.

PF: Sure. Yeah, I would agree with that, that to tune in to the effects that we're producing in the here and now as a consequence of what we're doing, yes, it does require some settlement just to appreciate, just to get a sense. Part of what we're talking about here is the way that we all have experiences in which we say something, and it's like we have an intimation that we don't need to say something.

This can often happen in intimate relationships. We want to have the last say, the last word, or we want to be right, and we just say something, but we have an intuition that it's not necessary to do it, but we do it nonetheless. And then it produces some fallout. We regret it. Like it can escalate into something, or we just go on with our day and say, "Wow! That was just mean-spirited of me! Why did I say that?" So it's just tuning in to ourselves, tuning in to the way that happens, so that we're less likely to do that.

TS: There's one phrase in the book that I really love, when you talk about this idea of "broadening the river of life." I'm wondering if you could explain what you mean by that, and how we do that.

PF: Yes. Well, "broadening the river of life" relates directly to this notion of deepening the presencing of awareness, because "broadening the river of life" means, wow! It's like I'm just broadening my capacity to be present to happiness, really pleasurable experiences, and really painful and unpleasant experiences without rejection. It's like I'm just opening. You can imagine just opening our chest, just opening right out and saying, "Wow!" So I will just allow anything and everything to enter me and flow through me without freaking out, without tying myself up in a knot, without trying to protect my identity, who I feel I am.

TS: Peter, you mentioned the story of when you arrived to a home at one in the morning after a plane being delayed in bad weather, and thought, "Where am I going to sleep tonight?" and how you lost your cool. I'm curious, just as we close our program: How do you work with situations where you feel you've "lost it"? What do you do?

PF: I do what I think most people do: I suffer. It's as simple as that. I think one of the important things to appreciate, at this point on our path, is that we will suffer in the future, just to really take that on board and to acknowledge that, for as long as I have preferences, I'll suffer, because very often the circumstances won't accord with my preferences. Things won't be like what I'd like them to be like. That's the inevitability of suffering.

I can say right now, with 100 percent confidence, that I will be suffering in the future. I have up to this point. I'm not expecting some radical change to happen in this instant that would change things forever. To me, that's a great way to enter the

future: to acknowledge that we will suffer in the future as a function of how we're conditioned—we have preferences, things we like and don't like—and yet, in this moment, that does not devalue or compromise the quality of this experience right now. Not at all. We can still be resting right now in awareness, beyond suffering, knowing and really being honest about our situation, not thinking, "Ah! I expect to be here forever, and I'll be disappointed if I'm not," but acknowledging, "Yes, we can return to here again and again, and in between we'll be living our life: enjoying things and also complaining and struggling."

TS: You know, it does seem though, Peter, that many spiritual practitioners are looking for that time in their life beyond which they will never suffer again. They'll have some kind of great waking-up experience, shift in their being, and there will be no more suffering. You're describing something quite different.

PF: Yes. I just feel that what I'm describing feels more realistic to me. What you're describing may happen for one in—wow! I think maybe one in less than a hundred thousand people! I can't really put a figure on it, but that's really enough to say, "Wow! I'm never really expecting that for myself!"

TS: And so in that, there's a kind of relaxation, that you're not needing some kind of crossing like that to occur.

PF: Yes. Not looking for it, and I don't need it. I don't expect it, so then I'm free from that expectation, free from that need for that to happen. And so that allows me to be free in this moment, because I'm not looking for that.

TS: Very good. I've been speaking with Peter Fenner, who is the author of a book and audio learning series on *Radiant Mind: Awakening Unconditioned Awareness*. Peter also offers Radiant Mind trainings for therapists and other people who are immersed in nondual teachings and teach nondual teachings. Peter, thank you so much for being with us on "Insights at the Edge."

PF: A great pleasure. Thank you very much, Tami.

TS: Many voices, one journey: SoundsTrue.com.