

## ANSWERING FOR YOUR LIFE "Answerability"

For several years now we've been experimenting with a secular articulation of depth humanness that goes on in me and you in the everyday mundanity of our own existence. When man runs into that livingness in the midst of this world, that's why we have decided to call it the other world in the midst of this world. As we have struggled with how you begin to articulate that as the experience of depth authentic humanness itself, we began to talk about it as four great continents every human being experiences. One we call the land of mystery, the land of mystery; it's life in the everyday mundanity of moment by moment living that is filled with dread and fascination-- awe-fullness-- and wonder and a strange kind of void. And the second continent we talk about is the river of consciousness; that is life's everyday mundanity, which is something like drowning in lucidity. Or like he knew so much that he was surrounded by all this knowing and just flowing with that kind of quality of life. We call it the experience of consciousness and freedom-- consciousness that every human being has. Unbounded lucidity running like a river. And we said that human existence is like a mountain of care; that it's like living in a continent in which everywhere you turn you are engaged, you are inextricably caught in it, you're affecting it, it's affecting you; you're filled with care. And then we said it was like living in a tranquil sea. That depth human living was filled with blissfulness, joy-filledness, happiness and endlessness. It's like being out in an ocean where all you see is that ocean in all directions. Well, I'm going to talk a bit about the river of consciousness. My image for the particular dimension of that consciousness that I want to talk about is this: I belong to no place but this world; and everything that formerly I looked to for certainty and security, that I trusted, has all failed, is all fallen, is all hollow, and in the midst of that, I've experienced the most fantastic openness in my life that it's almost indescribable. I'm filled with a wonder at what can be. Now how does that come about in the everyday mundanity of life? Well for me, it comes something like this...

I was in India, and I was a westerner, then suddenly one day I was suddenly more than a westerner. The news of that day fated my entire existence. And it was a very simple item over the BBC and in the Indian Times: "The U.S. has given arms to Pakistan." And I was suddenly the untouchable in India.

My whole existence was changed by that, and that day I pulled out of my pocket, where I safely kept it all the time, my airplane ticket out of there because I wanted to get on an airplane and I looked at my ticket and its destiny was the U.S.

of A. And then I thought, "No" I want to get on an airplane that'll never land anywhere ever again.

But now, (I don't ask you to believe this, and I don't even care if you believe this or not) now I know exactly how those people felt. Then I decided about this world that all has to change, and furthermore I know that it's no longer my being that's at stake; that what's at stake is being itself.

And that day that happened to me went something like this: First I walked into the post office to mail a letter and asked the postmaster for instructions and he ignored me-- that was the day of the news-- and I screamed at that man in indignation at his decision to be uncaring to me and my need. And that was the beginning.

It seemed that no place on earth was adequate for being the home I wanted-- that I always wanted. In the one place, I was just a naive majority, in the other I was a victimized minority. And there I stood. Six hundred million brown faces around me; whatever colors I turned, brown was not one. And they live in six hundred -thousand villages and they suffered the greatest deprivation and poverty and disease and ignorance that human beings suffer on this earth. And it seemed to me that that was an utterly impossible situation.

Two days later as I set out valiantly to do something about it, I missed my plane in Jabalpur back to Bombay, and I could not buy off the ticket writer to get me a ticket and bounce somebody else so I could get back and do my very important changes for all of mankind. Do you understand the humiliation of that?

He was glad to sell me a ticket for four days later so I got on a train. I didn't have any money. All I had was that ticket and my credit card. Trains don't look at credit cards in India. So I got on with what I had, in third class. What a third class train in India is like is a cattle car in the U.S.A. The only difference is that they have people in it with the cattle. So I got in that third class coach with the rest of the untouchables and their cattle and their filth and their disease and their ignorance. You don't know what was going on inside of me. For the next two days were just a practical agony over my destiny, over my survival in that car with everything that I hated and feared and was out to get rid of on this earth. Every form of covenant that I had in my life began to flow through my being--my covenant with my wife, my ordination, my covenant with my nation, my vocational decision. And you know, they all were relativized, subjugated to that situation. As that train rolled along, I experienced myself as inextricably caught in this world as it is, and utterly inadequate to do one thing about it.

And it was like everything began to become transparent. I started seeing through; and I had a strangely objective conversation with the guy next to me whom I thought was probably the dregs of the Earth. It began something like this: He said, "Are you American" . . . "Yeah" . . . "I went to Harvard; what are you doing here?" And after I got over the shock of his perfect English as he sat there in rags with a stick, we began to talk. He was an unemployed doctor surviving as best he could. And finally he just said, "What are you going to do about it all? What are you going to do about it all?" He told me what he was doing, and then he put the question to me.

I looked into his eyes and I suddenly glimpsed an inexplicable relationship to something that was other than me and other than him. It was like I belonged to something that he belonged to and everything in that cattle car belonged to, that everything including being belongs to, that being itself is within.

And as I began to interiorly convulse with the kind of consciousness, I sensed, maybe for the first time in my life, authentically what it meant to be a child of creation. A child of creation. A child of more than that: a child of whatever created creation. I'm not talking about something mystical. I'm talking about something very, very mundane. And I became very anxious and painful and found that in that situation I had only one choice and that was either to submit, submission to that, or to jump off that train. And I considered both of those very deeply for a long time. And I decided to submit.

Now don't you ask me why, there is no reason. I just decided to submit. And, my God, that suddenly became a kind of deliverance. I began to see that I am security. That the security that I've always been looking for was already there, I already had it. That my security was that I was in participation in being, that was in me. What more security could I ever have wanted? And that was a glorious moment in my life. It was like a victory had been won.

But then I was still stifled by everything around me. It went something like this: I took myself one great big deep refreshing breath of urine. And it smelled so good. I mean urine just smelled wonderful. I felt a bubbling inside myself. I took another deep breath and walked over to the door-- the open doorway of the train. For 12 hours I stood in that doorway and I watched life, fate, dawn, and day come in village after village, station after station, in face after face, death after death, life after life go by my eyes as I stood there and stared. Every past relationship in my life was slowly, slowly devastated by an emerging new obligation that I saw was being in being. And I sensed oneness with all that was. I'd never known it before in all my life.

But long after that I left India; my visa ran out. And you'd be proud of me, I didn't even try to buy them off. I just left. I didn't want to leave but I left. I went to the Philippines and there in the barrios once more transformed I looked and saw I was one with that. I went to Hong Kong to the refugee centers and I was one with that. In Malaysia in the compons I was one with that; in Africa in the villages, I was one with that; in Athens and Rome and Sheffield, England I was one with that and back to Chicago and I was one with . . . What had happened in my life was something such that no one, no one can ever tell me. That I did not know what depth of suffering is about, that deep interior suffering is quite apart from and other than and never necessarily qualified or dependent upon anything external. Internal suffering-- that is the suffering of the neglect of being. When the oneness with being is being neglected by your life, you at the same time are one with it. It is my own life that is dragged in.

What happened? I've answered for it. I've answered for my life. Answering for your life is simply saying yes to having been born. And every human being has that consciousness, which I'm going to call answerability. It's not something he possesses. It's something he is. I am my answerability for having shown up in being and consciousness of my being in being. I alone am answerable for my answerability. That is to say I am free. I am freedom. It's like the accelerator of my being is stuck at 90 miles an hour. Once that kind of consciousness has happened in my life it is not that I'll speed it up and I'll slow it down. I just decide what wall it'll slam into. It's final. I alone am answerable to that and every human being is answerability. He finally gives his own account for having been born with the consciousness he has. No need to tell him that; it's simply that he says yes to having that consciousness with all its pain. If he says no, he stops living.

That's the river of consciousness. That consciousness is called into being within a man out of the chaos in which his assumptions are shattered, and transparency occurs when he sees through to the depth relatedness of his life with all of life. And then human freedom is possible, authenticity is possible as he articulates the indicative reality of what is no longer the subject of this world's compulsion to seek a refuge or escape. He sees the drivenness of his life, the drivenness of life itself is being and being his own being. I am one with all. There is nothing that I am isolated from. I am answerable for that oneness. I participate in all that's going on and I am answerable for that participation and therefore for what is going on, whether I like it or not.

Whether I live or die, this is the key to authenticity. Childhood's end. Deciding to embrace my knowing, I am my answerability, I am free.

George Walters