

Living in the Truth of the Present Moment

*a practical, humorous, and down-to-earth guide
for applying the Principles of Truth in daily life*

Lesson 1

Dear Friend,

Thank you for joining us in our Course of Training. Even if you are an ‘old-timer’ in the study and practice of spirituality and personal development, please be open to what is ‘new’ for you here in these pages. Many active teachers of all traditions and paths participate in this Course to expand and refine their own understanding and their means for communicating principles of Truth.

There is something new for everyone, regardless of how long you have been around or what you have studied before. If there were not some unexpected new experience and understanding, there would be nothing of value offered by the Course. Only when we come upon something *new* are we able to grow and expand beyond present limitations and misunderstandings. Our Course is largely about seeing and understanding something new, and this happens in each moment, and *only* in the present moment.

Everyone has a next step to take. Each of us has something new to understand in order to take our next step. Even our present knowledge can be understood in deeper and more expanded ways, as we discuss in the section of the course entitled “The Evolution of Wisdom.” I caution you from the beginning to beware of the egotistical attitude of *I already know this; I read about/heard about/studied it before, and it’s already quite familiar to me. In fact, I teach it to others myself.*

The great majority of people who feel this way regarding the principles of Truth are, for the most part, applying those principles only sporadically in their own lives. Beware of what feels ‘familiar’, as it is likely to take you into a past perspective and farther from the Truth of the present moment, which, though ancient and eternal, is invariably new.

New ideas are interesting, new knowledge can be fascinating, yet these are mediocre compared to the transformative energy of our actual inner experience. It is an amazing thing to actually *experience* something as new — especially if what is new is pleasant and uplifting. When something new leads to the experience of contentment, there is a profound transformation, an initiation of the highest nature.

In this Course for these modern times, we can begin actually *applying* what we know—*moment by moment*, in each new present moment.

Shortly before beginning the writing of this first lesson, I had a vivid dream about being among a group of people who actually did the work of *remaining aware of Awareness in each present moment*, who didn't just talk about it and discuss their process in an egotistical/intellectual way. For many of us, it's as if the ego comes in and takes control of our 'spiritual work', and then we think we are working on ourselves when we're still indulging in justifying our own position, blaming someone else for our own emotions and reactions, or forever analyzing what's happening in our minds, which basically creates a series of melodramas regarding one's spiritual process.

These people in my dream, however, would catch the impulse or reaction of ego right at the beginning, in the moment, and persistently maintain their own highest state. They didn't allow the impulses and reactions of ego to control them. These people had a great feeling about them, and it was uplifting just being with them. I awoke from that dream with a pleasant vibration throughout my whole body. It was an exquisite sensation. I remember telling my wife Kay about it, saying, "They were actually doing the work, from moment to moment, instead of just talking about it and thinking of it as a good thing to do."

I had the sense of belonging to that community, and when I woke up I missed them. I loved the idea of doing the work in each moment. People often tend to 'work on themselves' only from time to time, and in between they go on automatic and all the usual tendencies and patterns kick in and take over.

Soon after the dream, it was time to begin this Course, and I suddenly experienced a strong sense that the Course would bring together the community in the dream, the people with the great feeling, who are actually doing the work in each present moment instead of just talking about it. What a great adventure for us to share together.

Each of us understands and practices the principles of Truth in our own way, in our own real-life situations. If you are a 'beginner' you will understand the ideas in your way, and if you have been practicing for thirty or forty years, you will understand things in your way. We each have to start from where we are, yet there is no limit to growth.

The lessons are written to be available to all levels of understanding. If we are a beginner, the written words might not all make sense, yet there will be a strong feeling that there is something here, some present, something available that is beyond the ordinary. If we have been studying and practicing for a long time, each lesson meets us at the next step. Nothing in the Course will ever seem elementary. It is as advanced as the one who relates to it. It meets each of us in our own inner space.

Since we find ourselves in these bodies, with this first lesson in our hands, we can do the work of opening up and hearing things in a new way in order to take the next step. Even great teachers have to do this. Even someone in the very last stages of her spiritual journey has to hear, understand, and practice what is new, what is next, in order to complete the journey. It is a great cosmic game, and the meaning of life.

We will explore many aspects of life in the lessons ahead. What is essential is the understanding that new knowledge is to be applied NOW, in the present moment; otherwise we will quickly lose it. We are not saving up knowledge for future use. Knowledge can only be applied now, in the present moment. Only in the present moment can our inner power generate outer power. The word *power* as it is used in the lessons refers to the beneficent energy of transformation.

There is no limit to what is available right now. Right now we can open up to everything. The only limitations are those we have either accepted from others, from society, or that we have created for ourselves and impose on ourselves. We go to the ocean with a cup.

The highest Consciousness exists in all its glory right now. We are limited only by our capacity to see and experience the Truth of our own Being.

When we consider our life, most of us think in terms of some ‘beginning’, somewhere in the past—either our ‘birth’ or our first memories—and then our ‘life’ stretches through everything we’ve experienced and done, everyone we’ve known, all the things that have happened to us, all the way up to the previous moment. Then, somehow, for most of us, our experience of our own life conveniently skips over the present moment and begins to project into a theoretical future—plans, ambitions, worries, fears—all that we hope to attain, and all that we hope to avoid.

In this way, we totally miss out on the experience of the present moment. The problem with this is that the present moment is the only time that our life actually *exists*. The ‘past’ and the ‘future’ exist in the mind only, as ideas or concepts of what was and what might be. The past is no longer real, and the future is only a mental projection, a point of reference arising from the ego’s need to continue beyond the present moment. We live presuming a future is just ahead of us. After all, since the past apparently did happen, there must be a future too, right?

If we observe very clearly, it is intuitively obvious that right now, in this moment, life *is* as it actually is. This is *it*. Nothing could be more obvious than this. It is so obvious that it seems a bit absurd even to say it.

That which exists without change or variance is the inner Awareness, or Consciousness. It is that within us that is aware or conscious of anything. It is the Knower of all that is known and the Seer of all that is seen. It understands

all that is understood. It is indestructible and indivisible. This Awareness pervades and permeates the entire universe simultaneously, and it exists within us as our own Self, our own inner Awareness of Being, which is unconditioned and unmodified.

When we are aware of this Awareness, and our focus is on Awareness itself, Consciousness itself, we experience a gentle contentment unlike anything else. It is in this contentment that we experience the Truth.

Our highest Truth exists in the state of supreme contentment. A person who can focus on the Truth of the present moment lives in a state of inner bliss regardless of external karmic circumstances.

We can experience bliss when we are quiet and content, yet we can also experience bliss when we are sad or grief stricken. Bliss is an eternal aspect of our own nature. If we are not too addicted to our anger or our depression (which we will explore more later), we can even experience bliss during those times. Bliss has no opposite; does not exist in time; does not come or go. Only our experience of it fluctuates. The inner nature of the Self is always the same. It is eternally changeless.

Bliss exists right now. It is our truest inner feeling. All that might be lacking is our awareness of it.

In ordinary life, we are oblivious to our inner bliss; we ignore our own inner Consciousness altogether. We are unaware of Awareness. Instead, our attention is primarily focused on the outer world as perceived by the physical senses and described by the mind. Ordinarily, we are primarily involved in egotistical melodramas most of the time. Since they are so prevalent, we will come to understand exactly what an egotistical melodrama is.

For the most part, we experience the world as we describe it to ourselves, or as we accept the descriptions of others, particularly in early life, when the mind is easily molded, which over time crystallizes as aspects of the subconscious mind. This becomes our conditioning, and our early conditioning very powerfully influences how we see and react to things the rest of our life. What we're calling 'the work of the present moment' is summoning the necessary awareness to break free from prior conditioning, to see beyond that which has kept us blinded and bound, and to experience the ultimate freedom. There is no spiritual growth without this.

We might be angry at our partner and doing our best to convince him that he is wrong and that we are right about whatever the current issue might be. We then go through the day having mental dialogues, explaining our position, presenting our case like a good lawyer working on our behalf. We try to figure out how to score the next point in our self-created game of one-upmanship. All this stuff is going on in mind, in personal consciousness, oblivious to the awe and wonder of the present moment.

Because we are so easily caught up in the realm of mind and ego, we become oblivious to the present greatness of our own inner Being.

If we can eliminate all thoughts that require a memory of the past or a projection of the future, and everything that we can describe in words, the pure Awareness that remains is the Truth of the present moment.

Can you develop the ability to remain present, to be aware of the Truth of the present moment? *Your developed capacity to do this will enhance your experience of life more than any single thing you could ever do.*

During forty years of working with people, individually and in groups, I have listened as they described the details of their personal lives—usually in regard to problems or difficulties—and I have often pointed out that nothing they were talking about actually *exists* in the present moment, that they were only relating memories and projecting them to continue into the future.

We unknowingly seal our own fate by projecting the past into the future. We haven't yet realized that each present moment offers a clean slate.

If we are to entertain memories, why not remember the good things, the memories that leave us with a pleasant feeling? If we remember the best things, our present state actually expands to accommodate them. When we remember the worst things, our present state contracts. I think of the line from the Leonard Cohen song, *I remember you dancing, so naked and so free; if I have to remember, that's a fine memory.*

Life would be so much nicer if we would stick to the memories that feel good to us, and let go of the rest. We create our world, and our future karma, through how we direct our attention right now. We can enhance and upgrade the quality of our life simply by describing things more pleasantly, more cheerfully, more lightheartedly.

How we describe things, and the feelings we generate relating to those descriptions, creates our perception and experience of life and the world around us. This is an essential principle to include in our basic foundation of understanding. If we don't understand this one, everything else will be out-of-whack.

We remember what others did or said, hours or days or months or years ago, and work ourselves into a fit of anger, all because of that negative memory. In truth, there is nothing to be angry at *now*—never really is actually. We get angry, irritated, agitated, and depressed over stuff we make up in our mind, or memories we pull out of the past just because we want to indulge in some old-fashioned, self-absorbed negativity. Yet, in the present moment, everything is absolutely fine. We don't see what is real because we are blinded by the contents of our mind.

What is actually going on in this moment? What is the *Truth* of the present moment? If we wish to know what is real, and to develop the capacity to distinguish between the real and the unreal—an ability that relatively few

people have developed—we must learn to look beyond anything that is not actually here and now. If a situation or issue is related to the past or future, we can, *for now*, refuse to consider it—*especially* if it brings up negative emotions. We can always go back to the memory ‘later’ if truly necessary.

We can begin by practicing this as a game, as an experiment to see what happens. We don’t have to ‘believe’ in anything. In fact, it’s much easier to see what is true if we can momentarily ‘forget’ all belief altogether. We will come to see that we are actually limited by our own beliefs. The Truth is real whether we believe it or not, so it is not a matter of belief.

What is true is what is *new right now*. The present moment is always new; it never existed before now. It is never old. Only memory is old.

If it is not new, if it does not exist right now, in this present moment, then it is not ultimately true. It might have been true there and then, relatively speaking, but it is not true here and now. If we think it is still true, it’s because we are living in a mental melodrama that is no more ‘real life’ than the last movie we saw or the dream we floated in last night.

Mysteriously, we live our lives as though what was true there and then is also true here and now; we bring our past into our experience of the present moment whether we actually desire to experience it again or not—most often we don’t, and even wish it never happened in the first place. Yet, unknowingly, we continually recreate our own past. In this way we are slaves to the past.

We like to think we are free and independent and that we are thinking for ourselves, but past ways of thinking and seeing control and influence us to a degree that few can fathom.

The average person might be horrified to know the degree to which he is stuck in the past and future and unable to experience the Truth of the present. It takes a true and sincere willingness and openness to begin to perceive the Truth of the existing moment, because past and future are given up in the process. It takes a keen intention and persistence to overcome past conditioning that is so strong it rules our perception and experience. Conditioning of mind and ego are the origin of all our automatic tendencies, including our reactions to things that we later regret and apologize for.

The underlying theme of our Course of Training is that the ultimate Truth of life exists *only* in the present moment.

The work that lies ‘ahead’, in order to actually *perceive* and *experience* the Truth of the present, includes breaking free from all our erroneous ideas of the ways we *think* things are, as well as all the ways things *appear* to be. Due to past conditioning—the ways we were taught to see the world when we were very young—our minds are full of untrue ideas, notions, and concepts.

These false beliefs actually limit us and prevent us from seeing the Truth. Such false beliefs are known as ‘limited knowledge’, and are considered the

primary obstacle to enlightenment (consistent experience of Truth) and the origin of all our troubles and conflicts. We have to break free from all our 'limited knowledge' that is inaccurate and untrue, and which holds us back.

We don't recognize our limited knowledge for what it is, and we live as though all our beliefs are true.

We think we know, yet our 'knowledge' limits our experience and therefore what we can do and be.

In the Course, we capitalize *Truth* when referring to the ultimate Truth, the most expanded Truth, *absolute* and *eternal* Truth. There are many relative truths, existing on all the various realms of existence, but none of them *in particular* is the ultimate Truth. For example, we can think *my back hurts*, or *I feel depressed*, or *I wish I had some strawberries*, and they can all be relatively true at a particular time. The ultimate Truth—the Truth of Being—includes all relative truths and all perspectives simultaneously, yet extends beyond them into that realm of oneness, beyond all time and space, that realm of light and love and wonder that exists within each of us right now, free from all words or descriptions.

As we progress through the process of the lessons, we will come to understand that which is being discussed from ever-deeper and more expanded perspectives. If we have an open mind, the same words will make more sense each time we read them—especially if we can read something familiar without thinking we 'already know it'. This simple misunderstanding prevents many from accessing new knowledge, as thinking *I already know this* shuts off our access to higher levels of understanding that same knowledge. As we understand the principles of Truth in new ways each time they are encountered and contemplated, our wisdom evolves. In this way we have the evolution of wisdom.

When we explore the same ideas from several different angles, the principles gradually sink into our own consciousness to such a degree that we actually *see* and *experience* the Truth—now. The experience of the realm of light and love and wonder exists only now. The perception and experience of the Truth requires much more than a mere intellectual understanding or agreement. So let's begin to open up to ourselves and explore further.

Please read the lesson slowly. Each sentence presents an entire contemplation. Let the meaning sink in before moving to the next one. There is no hurry. If you read too fast you miss the point.

If we objectively observe our thoughts throughout the day, we might be surprised to see how high a percentage of them are related to either the past or the future. In a sense, we are *bound* to the past and the future—without realizing it or even choosing to be—through our mental absorption in them. Most of our mental activity centers around what happened in the past and what might happen in the future. Because all of society lives this way, we learn from a very early age that what is important in life is whatever is going on in our

mind, in words and descriptions, rather than what is actually taking place in the present moment. This is very similar to a state of hypnosis.

Ordinarily we tend to live in this hypnotic state, believing in all our wrong ideas as though they are true. Since we believe in them, we see them reflected back to us everywhere we look. If we believe something, we experience it as a reality in our own life, whether there is any truth to it or not. On the other hand, if we have no awareness of something, it will not be experienced as a reality in our own life, even though it might exist as a reality for another. Because of our limited perspective, we are oblivious to that which is intuitively obvious.

Being bound to the past and future is a major obstacle to the experience of true freedom. We might think of ourselves as free, but if our thoughts are manipulating us to the degree that imaginary situations and circumstances seem more important than the reality of what is actually present right now, then obviously we are not nearly as free as we presume.

One aspect of spiritual liberation is freedom from the past and the future. Not that they are ignored, denied, or forgotten; we just don't lose ourselves by keeping our attention on them. Another aspect of liberation is freedom from the tyranny of false beliefs. These two go hand in hand.

The present moment is the only reality there is.

Nothing exists except what is here right now. If we could indelibly impress this into our mind and consciousness right now, we could resonate with the Truth forever. The past is a memory. The future is a concept. If we can operate in our life with these distinctions, our life will become simpler and easier than we ever imagined.

We have already been taught to function in this world. We've already been trained to do our work. Innate abilities have been awakened and we possess amazing skills. We don't have to *try* to hold it all together nearly as hard as we think we do. Trying to control everything so that everything will work out right only causes much unnecessary tension and stress, and serves no practical purpose. We need to let it go and enter into the natural flow of all that effortlessly happens.

Not that we become passive. On the contrary, progress through the school of life requires that we are dynamic in our approach. It requires a delicate balance. This is understood more deeply as we progress through the lessons.

Life is a continuous flow. It is not a struggle unless we make it so. We could just as easily relax and see that life goes on in *spite* of us, not *because* of us. Just as our heart beats without our help, just as we breathe whether we remember to or not, our life happens, regardless of what we consciously do or don't do. Yet, paradoxically, perhaps, we have to approach it dynamically.

Try this exercise: Quit. Just quit everything. Go and lie on your bed and say to yourself, *I quit! I'm never doing anything ever again. I'll just lie here until time runs out.* Within a very short while something inside you will think, *Hmmm, I wonder what's in the fridge?* And suddenly you'll be hopping down the hallway and life will be going on again, all on its own.

As is said in the *Yoga Vasistha*: ***The world is as you see it.*** We see and experience conditions and situations as we believe them to be, and as we describe them to ourselves.

The first thing we need to understand is that only the present moment exists. In this moment, the ideas of the past and future are only mind-stuff. The essential practice is: *Come back to the present, come back to the heart, come back to your love.* Only in the present moment can we experience the higher emotions such as love, compassion, equanimity, and cheerfulness.

The second thing we need to understand is that, in this present moment, and from this moment on, we create our personal life as we go along. The source of creation for our personal life is the Mind. Every thought the mind thinks is a creation of a particular reality for us, if only for the time the thought is in motion. Truly, a thought is Mind-in-motion, and the Mind is nothing but creative.

If the world is as we see it, then if something bothers us or limits us, obviously we need to see things differently.

Strangely, for the most part we are unable to do this although the idea has been presented to us and we agree with it—it is easy to have knowledge without ever once applying it in practical ways in real life. So we can agree that we need to see things differently without knowing how to actually do that. One aspect of our lessons is to help develop and activate the capacity to see things differently. Once we see things differently, we experience things differently as well. This brings about an elevation or expansion of our experience of life.

Please continue to read and reread this lesson for a period of two weeks. During that time, please focus on two practices:

The first practice is to keep remembering to bring the awareness back to the present moment. Consistently return to this until it begins to feel natural to you. Once you get the hang of it, you'll never want to go back to the old way.

Please do not fall for the tendency to think *I know I can already do this; therefore, there is no need to even make the effort.* It is amazing how many people take this approach. Somehow, since we think we could easily do it if we tried, we don't make the effort to do it. It is similar to the thought *Oh I could exercise and eat healthily if I wanted to, and I will one day, but for now I am enjoying things as they come.*

My Teacher used to tell this story of a Sunday School teacher asking the kids how many wanted to go to heaven. Everyone raised their hands except little Johnny. The teacher asked him why he did not want to go to heaven. "Oh,

I do want to," he said. "I just thought you were making up a load right now." We want to experience the highest and the best, but just not yet.

So don't wait until later to focus on the present moment. Right now is the only time in Existence. There will never come another point of Existence, because the whole thing is right now. All that will happen is the show, the play, the drama, the karmic movie. If we focus on the present moment, we are centered in the Truth.

The second practice for this lesson is to see how many conditions and situations you can describe positively and pleasantly instead of negatively and unpleasantly. When you are aware of an unpleasant feeling arising, see if you can describe what is going on in a pleasant way, and allow for a more pleasant feeling to take its place. You cannot simply 'get rid of' a negative feeling. You must FIRST create a positive feeling to take its place. Feeling follows thought.

If you find yourself describing something negatively, such as a painful memory from the past, see if you can describe the same thing positively instead. If you describe the incident positively, the nature of your experience will change as well. Experiment with describing all things in a positive way. If you can't think something good, then don't think at all. Think pleasant thoughts only. This paves the way for positive experiences. Try this and see for yourself what happens.

Please see the file "Introduction and Enrollment Details" for more information about the Course of Training. Lesson 2 will be sent to you as soon as we hear from you that you would like to continue. Each lesson is meant to be read and reread as many times as possible until time for the next lesson. The reasons for this will soon be clear.

With love,
D. R. Butler