"You take your imagining for facts and my facts for imagination..."
- Nisargadatta Maharaj

"Oh, God help me! What a difference there is between hearing and believing these words, and being led in this way to realize how true they are!"
- St. Teresa of Avila

Ultimately, anyone who has ever attempted to write about this, or talk about it, with the idea or intent of communicating some of it, is engaged in a futile, pointless task. There is a basic problem here. And now I don't mean that what is outside human knowledge or experience or categories is inexpressible, which is also true. There is another basic problem, on the other end, the receiving end.

Human beings learn by association. The way the human mind is constructed, the way it is wired, is that it always
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has to have something to relate to. If something new is encountered, the mind will look in its data banks for something similar, however approximately, in order to make a comparison. If it finds something it has encountered before which is somewhat or in some way similar, it will say, okay, this new thing is like this old thing, but different in the following ways. The new thing can then be seen, assimilated, categorized, learned. Education professionals call this 'schematic development.'

But if there can be found nothing in the memory banks that in any way corresponds to any aspect of the new thing, then to the mind it will have no meaning and the new thing will not be learned or assimilated. The mind does not know what to do with it. In fact, scientists who study these things tell us that our eyes, for example, physically see many times more things each day, each moment, than our brains think we see. The nervous system filters out most of what is physically seen, because it is not familiar and therefore judged to be not important.

This is not something we can blame ourselves for, and resolve to correct, and take a seminar to learn to do differently. It's simply the way the organism functions. This filtering mechanism occurs on the level of the autonomic nervous system, before what you think of as your conscious self or your thoughts or your will or your intention even have a crack at it. We have all experienced the phenomenon of learning something new and subsequently seeing it everywhere, whereas before it had never been noticed. It had always been there, everywhere, and surely our physical eyes had 'seen' it, but until the brain recognizes it as something that relates to something it knows, it is not truly seen.
Given this mechanism, it is a wonder that anything is ever learned at all. As it is, learning happens only incrementally, by way of what is familiar, what is already known. And we tend to learn more in the direction in which we were started. Wei Wu Wei puts this well at the beginning of his Ask The Awakened:

"Perhaps the most serious handicap is that we start on the wrong foot. In the end this is likely to be fatal, and, I fear, generally is. We have a basic conditioning, probably in some form of Christian religion, of which very little remains today but its ethical content, or in one of the modern psychologies, that of Freud, Adler, or Jung, or in some scientific discipline, all of which are fundamentally and implacably dualist. Then the urge manifests, and we start reading.

"Every time we happen on a statement or sentiment that fits in with our conditioned notions we adopt it, perhaps with enthusiasm, at the same time ignoring, as though they did not exist, the statements and sentiments which either we did not like or did not understand. And every time we re-read the Masters or the sutras we seize upon further chosen morsels, as our own jigsaw puzzle builds up within us, until we have a personal patchwork that corresponds with nothing on earth that could matter in the least. Not in a thousand million kalpas could such a process produce the essential understanding that the urge is obliging us to seek.

"We are required to do exactly the opposite of all that."

The "opposite of all that" which is required for the Understanding of What Is, is what is known in Zen as 'beginner mind,' a state of open awareness, a state of what Stephen Levine calls "don't know." Spiritual teachers often make use of the image of the innocence of a young child in trying to express the empty openness necessary if one is to
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be able to truly hear the Truth.

But who can approach the teaching like this? One hears the sage's words, and immediately the mind associates the words with what it knows as their familiar definitions, and thinks it knows what has been said. This is why the masters use so many tricks, koans, meaningless phrases, stories that lead nowhere, statements that contradict themselves. Carlos Casteneda called the whole process of teaching by these techniques an attempt by the teacher to 'stop the world' of the student. Gangaji calls on seekers to simply "Stop!" But who can stop in this way? "Ooo, that's good," thinks the seeker, "that really resonates. We should all just 'Stop!'" The idea or the expression that one should 'Stop!' is simply added to the personal patchwork and the crazy jigsaw puzzle that corresponds to nothing keeps being built up. The seeker calls it a lifetime of hard earned knowledge or even wisdom, but the masters and sages unequivocally call it ignorance.

I've seen this in action. When I first went to see Ramesh, he was continually telling the people who came to him that the way to the Understanding lies in realizing that there is nothing you can do. You are not the doer of anything; events only happen through you. This was the basis of his teaching, and he repeated it ad nauseam. I would see people take notes, writing this down. Then the hand would go up. "So, given this, and I understand it perfectly, how do I go about my life? When I leave here, what should I do?"

Ramesh showed infinite patience. I wanted to shake them: haven't you heard anything the man has said? You have just been given the secret of life, the universe, and everything! Stop! Wake up! Let these words explode your brain!

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“The trouble with students these days is that they seize on words and form their understanding on that basis. In a big notebook they copy down the sayings of some worthless old fellow, wrapping it up in three layers, five layers of carrying cloth, not letting anyone else see it, calling it the ‘Dark Meaning’ and guarding it as something precious. What a mistake! Blind fools, what sort of juice do they expect to get out of old dried bones?”

These words were spoken by Ch’an master Lin-chi in the seventh century! What has changed?

Sometimes, someone will listen carefully to expressions of the Understanding, that there is no doer of anything, that there are no individuals, that all there is is Consciousness, and that you are That; and they will say, “This all sounds a little theoretical, how do I integrate this into my daily life?” That’s usually a good conversation stopper, because the answer is, you don’t. Actually, it’s one of those questions like, “Are you awakened?” which from the point of view of the seeker is sincere and begs for a decent answer but from the perspective of the Understanding makes no sense, because the premise is back-asswards. It’s a little like the tourist who stood next to me as we took in our first view of Cliff Palace, the ancient Anasazi ruins at Mesa Verde, a complete adobe village thousands of years old built into a cliffside in the Colorado desert.

“Humph,” he pronounced, “looks like a movie set.”

“But you see,” I couldn’t help but reply, “actually, it’s the movie set, if it’s a good one, that may look a little like this.”

You come across this all the time. Sitting on the porch on a summer evening listening to the insects, someone will say, “That cricket sounds just like a cell phone.” Sure, it’s all
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dream, all illusion, but even within the dream the cricket is just itself: it was there before there were cell phones, and it is the cell phone that came later and was programmed to (poorly) imitate the chirp of a cricket. This is a perspective, a mind-set, which obfuscates clear understanding. As a first step, at least get clear on what it is that is real, and what it is that is the illusion, the construct, the derivative.

Asking how you integrate the Understanding into your daily life is like asking how you incorporate total freedom into captivity. You don’t. Maybe it’s the other way around, what remains of your ‘life’ might be incorporated into the freedom of the Truth. But in fact there isn’t anything there to incorporate. As Jed McKenna puts it,

“You’re talking about reconciling the dreamstate with reality, like it has to add up. Everyone seems to get hooked on that, but you can’t do it. Truth and non-truth are irreconcilable. Truth is, non-truth isn’t... We can’t insist on a truth that makes sense in light of what we know because we don’t know anything.”

Adyashanti has simply said,

“There is no such thing as integrating truth into an illusion.”

If you insist on trying to fit the teaching into your growing patchwork jigsaw puzzle, your lifetime of learning and knowledge, you will reduce it to just one more meaningless bit of ignorance. Please don’t. Don’t try to integrate this. Don’t take notes and go back and re-read them and compare them to something you read somewhere else. This doesn’t work like that. The only way this works is if you stop taking notes and start taking this personally, as it were. Take it very intimately. Let it stop you.
Don’t fit it into a lifetime of hunting and gathering for nuggets. Don’t try to compare and sort to see how it fits in with other stuff you’ve learned, other things that you have heard from other people. Especially if you are a seeker and have been at this awhile, your head is probably full of other people’s ideas, half-assimilated into your patchwork, of what Truth or awakening or understanding is. Don’t ask, how does this fit in to what I already have accumulated? It doesn’t. That isn’t what this is about. If you are going to ask questions, ask instead the hard questions, the questions that take you out of anything you have ever known, the questions that could end your life. That’s what this is about.

Most of the folk I come across who are ‘into’ Advaita are intelligent people. They are quick studies, and after they have read a few books and been to a few satsangs they figure out what words and ideas are acceptable Advaita concepts. Ask them a question and they don’t answer right away; you can almost see the wheels turning in there, weighing and rejecting one answer after another as inappropriate or likely to get them branded as one who doesn’t know. They’ve been to enough teachers that they’ve learned to try to find that ‘right’ answer that won’t get them shot down. And it’s hardly their fault: there are a lot of teachers out there whose sole functioning seems to be shooting down anyone whose answers are not phrased correctly.

What good does this do anyone? Is it necessary to point out that this isn’t about ‘right’ answers? Speak your truth. There is nothing acceptable, there is nothing appropriate. There is only what is. Talking in circles, painfully and awkwardly trying to avoid using personal pronouns, when it is clear that your simple everyday experience is that you
live your life as an individual, is pointless. Obviously so. This isn’t an area where you can ‘fake it until you make it.’

One person says, “I’m glad you came.” And the other answers, “Who? Who is glad?” And I think, the Advaita thought police never sleep. An old Ch’an master would give you a whap upside the head with his stick. What are you saying, ‘who is glad?’ She is glad, you dope, and she’s being honest enough to tell you so.

Descriptive, not prescriptive. When there is no sense of a separate self, words referring to such a mythological thing will be superfluous, will naturally be used much less; not because they are avoided, but because they do not express what is, and are used simply because that is the way language is structured, and it is often the most convenient way to speak and be understood. There will not be searching for words or actions or responses which are imagined to be most appropriate, but rather there will be the simple spontaneous expression of what is here.

Speak your truth. That’s what this is about. How can it be about saying the right thing, fitting in, using acceptable language? Stop. Go back. Self inquiry is about going deep within to see what is your truth. Never mind what you have heard or what anyone else has said. This is not about learning the right thing from some teacher. A true teacher will deflect any such attempts back to you: what is your truth? Inquire within, find out for yourself. Who are you? Who is the Self from which all these things arise? No one can show you this. No amount of trying to guess right will reveal this. Discover it yourself by being relentlessly and ruthlessly honest, authentic, true.