

The Disillusionist

By Jasun Horsley, 2012

New Spirituality—Stranger Than Science-Fiction



What Is a Spiritual Teacher?

“Let me give you one piece of advice: be honest. He knows more than you can imagine.”

—Trinity to Thomas, before his first meeting with Morpheus, in *The Matrix*

What is an authentic spiritual teacher? What does an authentic spiritual teacher do? Until now the answers to these questions have typically been vague and subjective. But what if an authentic spiritual teacher was neither spiritual nor a teacher? What if they were a technician trained to perform a specific function, just like a surgeon, a dentist, or a plumber? What place would there be for vagueness or subjectivity then?

In *The Matrix*, Thomas Anderson’s life inside the computer-generated dream world eventually leads him to Morpheus, a fully liberated being. Morpheus intervenes in Thomas’ life and brings it to an end. He

gives Thomas his freedom, but at a cost: his former life and identity. Thomas is transformed into Neo, signifying the end of one existence and the beginning of another.

Is Morpheus a spiritual teacher? Is he a shaman, a guru, a Bodhisattva? Or is he simply a man with specific knowledge and abilities who performs the practical *function* of extracting Thomas' consciousness from the matrix dream world and rescuing his body from the pod farm? Is that enlightenment? Did Morpheus enlighten Neo? Or did he simply remove the obstacles that came between Thomas and reality?

A fairly standard definition of enlightenment is that it is freedom from illusion and entrance into "greater reality." It is waking from the dream world of the ego. In science-fiction, the mechanics of awakening are clear and precise. There is no room for vagueness, mystical concepts or abstract philosophies, and no place for "teachings." Only the facts are needed: the facts of Thomas' enslavement and of the unplugging process by which he accesses reality. There's nothing to debate or discuss, only a living experience to process.

In the spiritual and shamanic market place, concepts rule and nothing is clear or precise. Spirituality is not a science. Blind masses describe unseen elephants and discuss metaphysical beliefs founded on hearsay, hope, and hyperbole. It is a free-for-all of affirmations, wishful thinking, and mythic self-invention in which the only alternative to dogma is collective solipsism: a fuzzy agreement on the subjectivity of truth. Reality is whatever we can persuade ourselves to believe in, especially if we can find others who believe it too. It is a kaleidoscopic carnival of custom-made, interactive self-development programs, a cosmic reality show in which everyone gets to be The One (for fifteen minutes) and the spiritual ego reigns supreme.

The popularity of do-it-yourself spirituality and self-styled shamanism these days is a natural response to a corrupted market place that is overflowing with half-baked recipes, unethical sellers, and junk-laced products. When the professionals are untrustworthy and the amateurs inept, what does that leave besides trusting one's own resources and developing a self-styled, "off-the grid" spirituality? Since self-sufficiency costs money, that means not only growing your own product but selling it too. Everyone becomes a potential teacher, shaman, or guide, "spiritual teachings" proliferate, and the noise of all the falling trees in empty forests drowns out the homing signal of truth.

What are the chances of a Thomas finding a Morpheus amidst the ceaseless cacophony of the (matrix-generated) spiritual marketplace? At best they are negligible. Fortunately, Thomas didn't find Morpheus. Morpheus found Thomas. When the disciple was ready, the master appeared. The fact that Thomas was sincerely seeking was enough to ensure that he was found.

Extraordinarily Ordinary

“You’re here because you know something. What you know, you can’t explain. But you feel it. You’ve felt it your entire life.”

—Morpheus to Thomas, first meeting

What first impressed me about Dave Oshana was how unimpressive he is. Oshana is a spiritual teacher. He claims to be enlightened. He has a website on which he sells his services: live online classes, replay downloads, and one-to-one consultations at a euro a minute. He gives live-in retreats in Finland in winter, spring and summer. There is nothing on the surface to distinguish him from a thousand other spiritual teachers on the enlightenment market. Oshana’s influence on me was gradual and accumulative and it wasn’t until three years after I met him that I coughed up for a consultation and began a more formal relationship with him. It was another year before I really bit the bullet (in December 2011) and signed up for one of his retreats. That was the point of no return.

What took me so long? Call me a hard-sell. I had seen the testimonials at Oshana’s websites from people who had had life-changing experiences around him. Experiences of “no mind,” oneness, transcendental bliss, swirling lights and colors, allegedly occurred within days, hours, even minutes of meeting him. None of that happened for me. A Cockney with a thick accent and bad grammar, Oshana seemed extremely ordinary to me. He made bad jokes and went off on seemingly irrelevant tangents; he repeated himself, made mistakes, sometimes missed the point. He wasn’t a bit like Morpheus. He didn’t sit like a statue and speak in slow, deep monotonous. He didn’t emanate power, authority, and mystery. On the plus side, he didn’t put on airs, unless they were the airs of someone who didn’t put on airs. His presence didn’t generate the slightest awe or reverence, for me at least.

On the other hand, one of the first things that stood about Oshana was that he didn’t shake hands. He was very strict about things that might seem trivial to most people, such as not pointing your feet or fingers in anyone’s direction. Much later, I found out that before coming an intensive, applicants were required to fill out a form and agree not to drink, smoke, or take drugs for several days before attending. People taking certain prescription drugs might be considered ineligible. Unlike most spiritual teachers, his events were often not open to the general public. Oshana screened attendees, especially for the retreats, to make sure that participants were sufficiently prepared to benefit from them. On the other hand, he had an extremely informal teaching style and (besides the no-touch rule) was much more accessible than the average spiritual teacher. He went out for meals with his students. No one I met in his group regarded him as “the living truth,” holy or divine, or as a superior presence (though most of them believed he was enlightened). And although he spoke a lot about his enlightenment, he described it in simple human terms, as something that just “happened” to him. On June 19th 2000, Oshana woke up and realized that he was different. Since he wasn’t sure how, he counted the fingers on his hands to see if he had any extra ones. He looked around the room. Finally he realized that his old self had vanished as if having never existed. “Dave” was gone.

Like most spiritual teachers, Oshana talked a lot about energy. Unlike most spiritual teachers, he talked about a specific kind of energy which he called “the Transmission.” The Transmission was what got him enlightened, and it was what his life was now in service to. The Transmission, according to Oshana, was why he became an enlightenment teacher, even though that was the last thing he ever wanted or expected to be. On “Enlightenment Day” 2012, in Helsinki, Oshana described his enlightenment as a kind of slavery. He said that it was similar to being a parent, and that, on the morning of June 19th 2000, he awoke to find he had seven billion babies to take care of. His life was now devoted to them, and to the task of helping them to wake up and enter into their true nature.

On that same day, Oshana admitted that, in twelve years as an enlightenment teacher, he hadn’t managed to get a single person enlightened to his satisfaction (though there had been claimants to the crown). He laughed until he cried; maybe he laughed in order *not* to cry. Unlike other spiritual teachers, Oshana put a great deal of emphasis on *results*—even when it was to his own detriment to do so.

Splinter in the Mind

“I can guide you, but you must do exactly as I say.”

—Morpheus, to Thomas, first conversation

Oshana and I first met in Hampstead, London, in December 2007. I heard about him by chance, and my curiosity was piqued when I saw something he wrote about *The Matrix* at his website. Since I’d written a book about the film, I took a copy with me and gave it to Oshana. The meeting was enjoyable but I was less than bowled over by him. I went to a second meeting two days later, an intensive with energy work. Soon after, I received an unexpected call from one of Oshana’s assistants saying that Oshana would like to meet me at the Hilton on Edgware Road. It was late in the evening and I rode my bike to the meeting. We sat in a quiet corner of the hotel lobby at a small table and talked for three hours, until after midnight. I did most of the talking. Oshana had read my book and liked it; he did not offer me a red pill, however. I was curious to know what he meant by enlightenment, why he claimed to have it (even if he did), and why he used the word “spiritual” so much. I told him I didn’t think he was enlightened. I had very specific ideas about what enlightenment was. To me it meant the ultimate and final goal of consciousness and human existence, God-consciousness, Oneness with the Universe. Oshana was a brash and bawdy (and oddly unassuming) “wide boy” in his late thirties; he didn’t meet the necessary requirements and I was fairly sure he had not attained the ultimate goal of human evolution. I suggested to him that, like so many other wanna-be’s, he had misunderstood his experience and fallen into “the guru trap” (something I had read about). Oshana listened politely and did not try to dissuade me. He commented on my low energy and we talked a bit about my chronic fatigue.

After that we stayed in touch by email for the next three years, on and off. During that time (2008-2010), I met another spiritual teacher, John de Ruiter, and for the first time ever I took on a guru. De Ruiter was the polar opposite of Oshana: somber, imposing, and profoundly impressive. This was closer to my idea of what a “man of knowledge” ought to be, and I accepted de Ruiter as an Enlightened

Master and assumed the submissive position. Compared to de Ruiter, Oshana was a lightweight. Oshana was too ordinary and approachable for me to see him as a Master. Over time, however, my point of view changed. I began to doubt de Ruiter's authenticity and looked more and more to Oshana for guidance. The more I talked with him (on Skype and emailing back and forth, informally and free of charge), the more apparent it became to me that he was fundamentally different from other people. Since I have an intellectual bias, it was probably the quickness of his thoughts and speech, and the precision and depth of his insights, that finally convinced me of this. He also possessed an unusual looseness and flexibility. During months of informal conversations, I never noticed any tension, rigidity, discomfort or effort in him. He seemed to be constantly at ease, yet totally present. Behind a playful exterior, there was a fierce and unwavering attention, an unbending intent.

Little by little, through my interactions with him, I recalibrated my ideas about enlightenment. I scaled them down to less fantastic, more tangible, human, and attainable dimensions. What Oshana described as having happened to him was similar to what happened to Thomas Anderson: he woke and realized that his life had been a dream. He didn't become Neo overnight, but a fundamental delusion ended. I began to suspect that, like Morpheus, Oshana was operating at another level of being. It was a level which I couldn't understand because I didn't have direct, conscious access to it. This caused a growing awareness in me of an enormous, possibly unbridgeable distance between us. It was the distance between one reality and another, between waking and dreaming. Yet I didn't feel intimidated by Oshana or in awe of him, so much as intensely curious, fascinated, and flattered by his apparent interest in me. And although I felt challenged and even disorientated by Oshana's attention, his particular way of relating was so casual that it kept me at ease. It also prevented me from obsessing on him or the apparent gulf between us.

For the first period of our formal relationship, I experienced doubts about paying Oshana money for his services. Probably it caused a "threat" to my self-esteem and sense of self-determination. The money-exchange reinforced the idea of my inequality to Oshana, and of my being dependent on an enlightenment teacher to attain freedom. Morpheus didn't charge Thomas an unplugging fee! Sometimes a movie is just a movie. Beyond the money issue, there was a subtler concern. I was concerned that the benefits of having an enlightened guide (allowing that Oshana *was* enlightened) might be cancelled out by my almost insurmountable tendency to seek a solution outside of myself. The danger of recognizing a spiritual authority figure is that it can reinforce the habit of looking outside of oneself for truth. Thomas Anderson faced a similar dilemma when he first connected to Morpheus and had to follow seemingly impossible and unexplained instructions. By doing so, he allowed Morpheus to take over his decision-making process and turn him into a kind of puppet. After some initial hesitation, Thomas placed his total trust in Morpheus and was eventually rewarded with freedom. And unbeknownst to Thomas, he had to risk everything to do so.

There is no safe or guaranteed path to the truth. Nor is there any way to avoid the kinds of mind-twisting, potentially paralyzing doubts and fears which Thomas faced once he embarked on his path. In the end, he had to learn to trust, not just Morpheus and Trinity, but in his own internal sense of what

was real and what was unreal. Until that fateful encounter, all Thomas had to follow was a splinter in his mind, a splinter that led him to Morpheus.

What Do You Mean “Enlightened”?

“There’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is, but it’s there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me.”

—Morpheus to Thomas, first meeting

The first question that arises about a spiritual teacher claiming to be enlightened, invariably, is “Is it true?” This is the wrong question. The first question should be: what does this person *mean* by enlightenment? Few people ask this question, however, and the reason they don’t is because they think they already know the answer.

But enlightenment is only a word. It is a word for something beyond most people’s comprehension, and like all incomprehensible words, it is a trigger. It triggers a defensive reaction in people, because everyone would *like* to be enlightened, or at least be able to say that they are. And while the word continues to trigger people it remains undefined—just as if everyone agreed on the meaning. But how can people agree on something which they know nothing about? When I met Oshana, I was quick to tell him what I thought of his alleged “enlightenment.” I never asked him to explain what he meant by it. If I had, I might have learned that whatever I was refuting was something Oshana wasn’t laying a claim to. I wasn’t there to learn, however, since learning means having one’s preconceptions challenged, and it is always best to avoid that if we can! I was there to assert my own beliefs.

So what *does* Oshana mean by “enlightened”? At a recent (2012) intensive in Tallinn, Estonia, Oshana spoke about the period after he first became enlightened. He described being unable or unwilling to go back into his mind due to a feeling of disgust. To me, this comment suggested that Oshana’s mind was still present after enlightenment but that he was no longer restricted or defined by it. Shortly after he made this remark, I had an informal conversation with him and brought the subject up. I asked if there was some basic difference between his idea of enlightenment and that being claimed by other teachers. The way he described his mind, post-enlightenment, made me think of a snake skin that stays in one piece after the snake has shed it: at a glance the dead skin may even resemble a live snake. I wondered if Oshana’s awareness of his mind as a separate “thing” could be contrasted with teachers who possibly took their mind with them into some heightened state of awareness and became a spiritualized ego (which was a bit like an animated snake skin).

In our conversation, Oshana described how, to this day, he was able to go back into his mind, but that it was not full immersion. He described it as similar to a hand covered with water-resistant cream, preventing the water molecules from touching the skin. Although the hand appeared to be submerged, it was not in the water at all. Similarly, when Oshana went into his mind after enlightenment, he was

able to look around at the contents of the mind without being exposed to them or identified with them. This was not through lack of trying, he said. He *wanted* to experience full immersion in his old beliefs and affects to test his enlightenment, and also so as to meet people in the midst of their own experience. He felt it would help him to have a better understanding of what people were going through while they were identified with the contents of their minds, just as he had once been. He had got better at this immersion, he said, but he was still unable to go all the way into the mind. It was like having a bungee cord attached to his back, he said, making sure he never got stranded.

I asked if the mind was the same as “Dave,” the self that vanished when he became enlightened. He said that it was all the “stuff” which he had accumulated while trapped in the illusory identity of Dave. I commented that, for most people, enlightenment equated with perfect, total realization, infallibility, and impeccability. If Oshana’s version refuted this idea, many people didn’t make it past his opening, “inflammatory” claim of being enlightened. So they never realized that Oshana was redefining enlightenment as something more precise, straightforward, and comprehensible. Based on his descriptions, it was not some ultimate attainment but rather the final *end* of something. It was a permanent leaving behind of the confines of the ego-mind.

Residual Self-Image

“Your appearance now is what we call residual self-image. It is the mental projection of your digital self.”
—Morpheus, to Neo

Is any of this true?

It is a partial account of a subjective experience, so the simple answer is no, none of this is true. My experiences with Oshana entail a high level of uncertainty about everything. That is the nature of the process being undergone, if it is. If I was more sure about it, I would have more reason to doubt myself. Oshana’s advice is to question everything, including his advice to question and the one giving the advice. Cognitive dissonance is one inevitable result of spending time with someone who claims to exist inside a different reality tunnel—or outside of all reality tunnels.

I have my doubts about Oshana. But I doubt my doubts as much as everything else. What does that leave? Constant checking, not only of Oshana but of my own tendency to look for flaws and inconsistencies in him or his teachings. The more time I spend with him, the more I notice this tendency in myself. Whenever I find some new failing, I am thrown into doubt. Then it occurs to me that, if not for these failings, I would be that much more in awe of and fascinated by him. His fallibility and ordinariness help to prevent me from obsessing over and creating fantasy-projections around him. For a spiritual teacher to avoid the slavish devotion or blind admiration of his “students,” simply warning them is not enough. The only sure way for such fantasies and projections to be kept in check is if the teacher’s limitations are nakedly apparent, a constant reminder to the student that the “master” is an ordinary person, no matter how extraordinary their perspective.

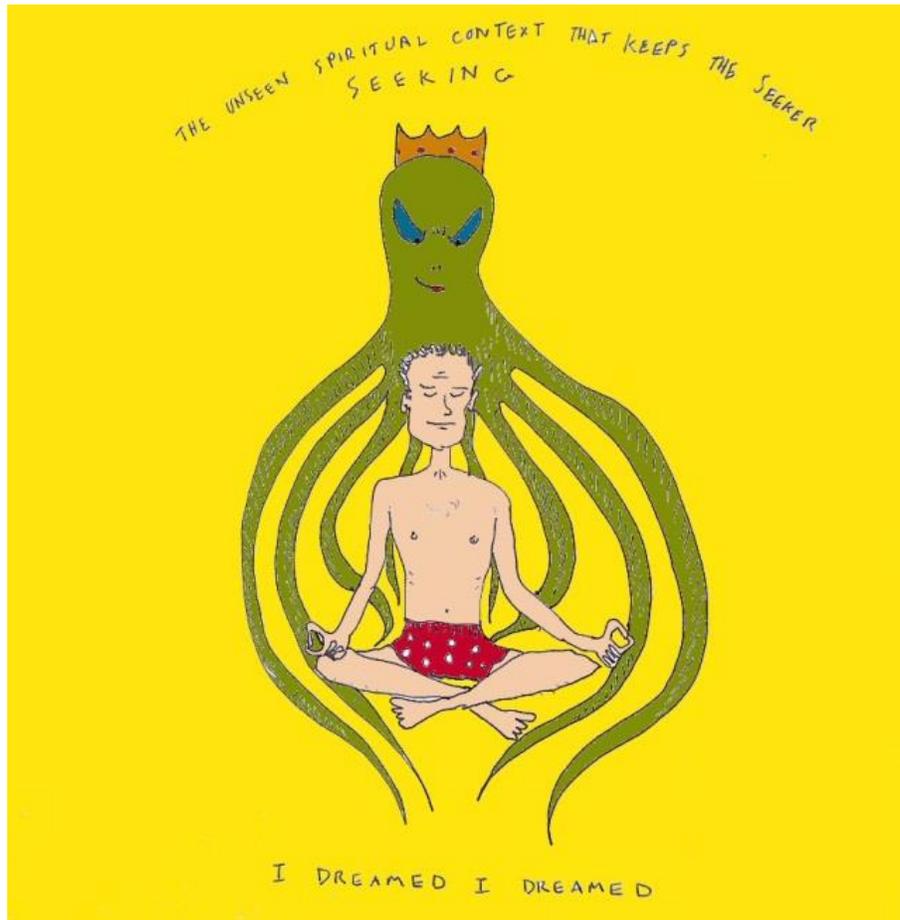
Or perhaps that is just a clever rationalization to keep my fantasy-projections intact? There is no way to ever satisfy the doubting Thomas of the mind. Round and round it goes, where it stops, no one knows.

I have so far refrained from attempting to describe the ways in which Oshana has impacted me, because it is largely subjective and does not easily translate without sounding like lip service to the guru. Oshana is not the sort of “flying nagual” which Castaneda depicted so romantically in his accounts. He’s not an imposing mystic or charismatic sorcerer in the style of Rasputin, Gurdjieff, or Crowley. What is most extraordinary about my experiences with Oshana is how little they fit the mold of what meetings with remarkable men are *supposed* to be like. John De Ruiter has talked about not trying to make the shallow deep, allowing the shallow to be shallow and letting the deep do its work unimpeded. Despite his words, my experience of de Ruiter was very different. Being with him always felt like a momentously profound experience. With Oshana, it is often only afterwards that I notice what has been happening. There is little surface evidence, because Oshana isn’t “doing” anything. My impression is that “Dave” is taking care of the surface (the personal interaction) in such a way that movement is able to happen in “the deep” and the Transmission can do its work with a minimum of interference. It’s not only that Oshana doesn’t take credit for what happens around him; most spiritual teachers preach humility. It’s more like his “persona” doesn’t get involved at all. Yet he is aware of what is going on in a way that I am not, and to an extent which I can only guess at.

Whatever Oshana’s limitations, I haven’t seen anything that could be called unethical, neglectful, or dishonest behavior. Recognizing his fallibility has not led me to doubt his integrity. If anything, it is reassuring that he doesn’t try to be “on” all the time, or to keep up an appearance of depth and grace, the way de Ruiter does. I have seen many ordinary kinds of behavior that suggest that Oshana is, after all, just an ordinary guy. But I have also seen extraordinary feats of stamina, intelligence, delicacy, imagination, perspicacity and daring, and a level of commitment that borders on the superhuman. It is as if his personality has been kept intact after enlightenment, but that a larger, encompassing awareness now contains it. Like a loving and always-attentive parent, it allows the old Dave to continue doing his thing just as long as he’s not causing any mischief. Maybe “Oshana” (the willing slave to Transmission) wears the old “Dave” personality, like a diving suit to enter into the depths of the dream realm? And maybe the suit has a set of automated functions that allow it to function smoothly within that realm, and to pass smoothly among the dreamers. But the “bungee cord” is attached to his back, and the oxygen tube extends all the way to the surface providing a continuous feed of Transmission energy, making sure he never gets lost inside residual self-image. When the Transmission is needed, it takes over the controls and marvels happen.

This viewpoint might challenge popular ideas about enlightenment. It also scrambles and disperses any idealized projections that might otherwise form around an “enlightened being”—a being who does not even exist outside of those projections (any more than Morpheus’s matrix self exists). In my case, it has left me to negotiate with my doubts and try to reach a treaty with them. How relevant are all my projections and preconceptions really? Does it matter what Oshana is capable of as “an enlightened being”? Isn’t the real question how honest he is, how trustworthy, and how effectively he can guide me?

In the end, the question of “enlightenment” is a red herring that, if pursued, will lead the seeker far from the path that leads to it. The reason is simple: enlightenment *doesn't mean a thing* until we have experienced it for ourselves. So to focus on the *idea* of it, without direct experience of the reality, means, invariably, to become lost in fantasy and projection.



Is There a Way Out?

“You have been down there, Neo. You know that road. You know exactly where it ends. And I know that’s not where you want to be.”

—Trinity, to Thomas

In the end, for me as much as for Thomas, it came down to one basic question: Was there a way out? And if I found someone who claimed to have found a way out, and could back it up with evidence (and even results), was I willing to make the leap? There was no other way to test it. If Thomas hadn’t taken the red pill, he would never have known the truth. It would have remained a strange and vivid dream, gradually fading into non-existence.

Allowing for the possibility that a “spiritual teacher” belongs to different level of being that we can only guess at, and that they possess the authority of that higher perspective, is a massive step for most people. The ego finds a hundred reasons not to submit to spiritual authority. Any excuse it can find to return to the lonely road of sovereignty, it will take it. The trouble for me was that, like Thomas, I had been down that road before.

So I took the only other road open to me: I submitted. I allowed Dave Oshana, in service to the Transmission, or the Transmission with Oshana as the facilitator, to go deep into the matrix program of my life and put together the missing pieces. I opened my psyche to energetic probes that extended back through time and space, into the deepest, darkest recesses of childhood, and brought to the surface the lost narrative that I had been seeking, ever since that first experience of fragmentation and forgetting. And as I opened to it, the energy of the Transmission became tangible to me, experiential. I became aware of it, dimly, as it worked away silently to repair countless “breaks” in my nervous system, lost synapses and dropped connections in my energy body. It *may* be doing all these things, or I *may* be wishfully imagining it all.

If Morpheus gave group therapy to prepare potential unpluggees for reality and smooth their passage from one realm to the next, it might look something like an Oshana retreat. (One difference: unlike Morpheus, Oshana is something of a natural comedian, so there are a lot more laughs than on the Nebuchadnezzar.) Thomas Anderson was only briefly prepared for his unplugging, and most of his training happened once he was in the real world. The Oshana experience is different. Like Morpheus, Oshana is a disillusionist, and like Morpheus his job isn’t to get anyone enlightened but to break apart—to eradicate—the false identity that comes between a person and the truth. This isn’t something that can be taught; it can only be witnessed and experienced. This is not a movie (it just sounds like one), and outside of science-fiction metaphors, unplugging doesn’t happen in a single moment. It happens via a series of preparatory stages or “initiations.” After five days of my first Oshana retreat (the winter of 2011, with Oshana and about sixteen other participants), I was, like Thomas Anderson, picking up a signal from elsewhere and beginning to glimpse a new existence outside “the pod.”

But there is no nuts-and-bolts measure of the spiritual-energetic experience, at least that the mind can use. Oshana is not a miracle worker. The fact that his efficacy seems to depend to some degree on the receptivity of the participant might suggest a placebo effect at work, at least to the skeptical mind. On the other hand, my own skepticism and resistance does not seem to have cancelled out Oshana’s effectiveness. This is all a work in progress, and no final conclusion can be reached until it has been completed. At which time, either I will be awakened, or I won’t.

So far the results of my relationship with Oshana remain intangible, undefined. Certainly, he and/or the Transmission has enriched my sense of possibility and expanded my perception of reality. He has helped me to see through, and potentially to shed, false beliefs and mistaken ideas about myself and the world. I can’t say that it’s made me happier or more free. I can only say that it’s allowed me to be more aware of my limitations, my weaknesses and failings, and, because of that, my potential to overcome them. I

can't yet gauge the value of what Oshana has done. My body may know the answer, but my mind knows only doubt, because doubt is what the mind does best. In the absence of knowing, all that is left is belief. But believing the Transmission is real is useless to me: it is just an opinion. I have to know. And the only way to know is to proceed *as if* it were real. That means to believe without believing, which means to trust. I choose to trust in Oshana, to trust in myself, and above all, to trust in life.

I choose to trust that this is the right path, the one that will lead to the truth; and that, if it doesn't kill me, the truth will set me free.

Spiritual Assassin

"We're going to kill him, do you understand that?"

—Cypher to Trinity, about Thomas

Lately one of Oshana's students decided to take time away from him because they wanted to be more independent. Although I acknowledged that this might be an appropriate action for them (Oshana does not discourage people from leaving his group), I realized that for me it would be missing the point. The possibility of becoming independent of Oshana within the context of an ongoing relationship with him struck me as a much trickier but more rewarding maneuver. In *The Matrix*, there is a similar development between Thomas Anderson and Morpheus. At the beginning, Thomas is totally dependent on Morpheus and even needs to be physically *reconstituted*. But gradually, he is able to stand on his own two feet and he becomes Morpheus' equal, and more. That development only happens after he has been unplugged, but if the movie had been more realistic, it might have shown that Thomas had to go through a *lot* of preparation before unplugging could even happen.

A look at Oshana's website, and even a listen to a random selection of his online class replays, might not suggest that he is much different from any other spiritual teacher or self-professed "enlightened being" on the market. His actual methods and goals have until now been quite well-concealed. This seems to be changing. Lately, Oshana has talked a little less about enlightenment and a lot more about the obstacle to it: the ego. He has described the ego, in graphic and visceral terms, as an octopus whose head is situated in or around the human brain, and whose limbs extend into every cell of the body. This octopus is like an alien parasite taking over a host body: it has almost total control over our thoughts, actions, and perceptions.

At first, Oshana seemed to be speaking metaphorically, but over time, I began to suspect that he was speaking *energetically*. The ego he was describing was at least somewhat physical. As Thomas cries after the bug is removed from his stomach: "That thing is *real*?" The ego described by Oshana is a kind of alien *implant* in the human body, similar not just to science-fiction stories but also to sorcery tradition (the "foreign installation" described in Castaneda's last work *The Active Side of Infinity*). Whatever its exact nature, and wherever it came from, the octopus-ego has hijacked our life force and is now in almost total control of our lives. Like an invasion of body snatchers, the egos have infested the planet.

The enlightenment process is the process of exposing, isolating, and *extracting* the octopus from our nervous systems, in order that the life force can return to the body and resume a natural and healthy relationship with it. The ego has dethroned the soul, and enlightenment is only possible when the slimy usurper has been outed and slain, and the soul can re-animate the body again.

A spiritual teacher is not a philosopher, a truth-embodier, or a holy man. He is not a prophet, healer, or sage. He is a hitman. He is an energetic surgeon whose job is to remove the ego and bring about the total and cataclysmic end of the false self and the illusory life it has been living. An assassin.

Morpheus did not tell Thomas that the red pill would end his life. He didn't tell him that he was not his friend but his worst enemy and nightmare. Naturally he didn't. He wanted Thomas to cooperate and so he gave him a selective briefing. But the truth was he had a job to do and he would see it through to the end, even if it killed Thomas. Why? Because, from Morpheus' point of view, which was the point of view of reality, Thomas was already worse off than dead.

What finally caused Thomas to wake up in the pod was never revealed (the red pill was only a tracking device so they could find his body in time). In the end, it's a mystery. He woke because circumstances combined to create an opportunity for awakening, and because he had been sufficiently prepared (just enough, but not too much) to seize the opportunity. It happened, and Morpheus and the crew weren't there to create the circumstances so much as to know how to recognize them, to use and direct them towards the desired outcome. I am fairly sure that is how it is with Oshana. Surrender happens when the balance is just right between the momentum or "thrust" of the soul or life force, and the exhaustion of the octopus-ego. That is when the spiritual assassin steps in and hits the target. There is a "pop," and everything is suddenly over.



Ego Extractions Unlimited

“There are fields, endless fields, where human beings are no longer born. We are grown. . . . Standing there, facing the pure horrifying precision, I came to realize the obviousness of the truth. What is the Matrix? Control.”

—Morpheus to Neo

According to Oshana, the ego is a semi-autonomous entity-construct at least partially made up of interlocking patterns of thought and emotional memory. The “octopus”—whatever its primary origin—has insinuated itself into the human nervous system like a foreign “driver” generating its own reality program. Through this program, it is able to hijack our senses, both inner and outer. Our conscious life force or soul is isolated and kept from accessing greater reality, both outside and inside of us. It then becomes fuel for the octopus, both a food source and a means to replicate itself. We have been turned into batteries and livestock. This is spiritual fact, and it is the only suitable context for any kind of spiritual development or training. We are engaged in a spiritual war and what is at stake is our own life force.

In his teachings, Oshana brings the focus always back to the senses. He counsels continuous observation of what is going on at a perceptual level, both in the outer environment and in our physical, mental and emotional responses. He encourages a ceaseless questioning of every thought, every belief and assumption, always referring us back to what the senses are telling us is actually there. He prescribes total commitment to transformation, hyper-vigilance, and continuous questioning of our thoughts. He does not preach any doctrine or a philosophy. He is opposed to conceptual or abstract thinking, belief, and any kind of dogma. From what I have observed on three Oshana retreats, his methods are primarily improvisatory, spontaneous, unplanned and unpremeditated. Oshana claims this is because he follows the Transmission at all times and it is the Transmission that decides what will happen, not him. This means that he has no more of a clue what he is doing than the rest of us, *until it happens*. His role is as a coach and a guide, more than a teacher. The actual journey of discovery must be undertaken by the student, and it must be undertaken alone.

For the purposes of clarity, Oshana’s work can be separated into five departments: Transmission, Teachings, Energy Work, Lifestyle, and Service. His goal however is single: to get people enlightened. He freely (and somewhat wryly) admits that, in twelve years (so far as he knows), he has not had a single success. Oshana has no choice but to continue with his work, however, because the Transmission has directed him to do so. According to Oshana, serving the Transmission is the only purpose that he has, in this life or any other.

In my experience, Oshana seems to function at the level appropriate to the company he is with. I have witnessed a fairly wide spectrum of behavior from him, ranging from disorganized and enervated to breathtaking in intensity and power. In my own one-to-one interactions, I have noticed that he tends to meet me wherever I am in my own awareness, like a mirror of unlimited potential (I have yet to glimpse the limits). When Oshana stares at me and tells me that I do not exist, *I know exactly what he means*.

The words stir in me a growing sense of an unseen existence and an unseen self concealed just behind the surface of my ordinary awareness. That existence is pushing gently but insistently on the plastic wrap of my mind, trying to break through into air.

My ordinary self, that residual self-image, is something which Oshana seems to acknowledge strategically, out of politeness. His attention is really focused elsewhere, and my own awareness strains to follow it, inward, to the emptiness at my core. It is a bit like being directed to focus on a sleeping body, trapped in a machine pod, an existence that as yet I have no real idea exists. The idea of another reality, of another self, belongs to the conceptual realms of science-fiction, spirituality, and shamanism. It belongs with the mind-generated images of movies, meditation, and magic mushrooms. It is not an idea that ordinary ego awareness can hold onto for more than a moment *except* as a concept. Ordinary awareness is already fully occupied by belief in the reality of the ego self, and the ego cannot imagine a reality in which it is not. If you doubt it, just try it.

Oshana bypasses the ego and addresses the body and the life force directly. He keeps the octopus distracted, whether with irreverent chatter or profound wit and wisdom, it's all the same. Syntax is the essence of the ego's system of control. Oshana doesn't use words to trick or deceive. He says exactly what he is doing, or trying to do. But the ego is so sure of its own reality that it fools itself. When Oshana tells it that it does not exist, the ego puffs itself up and says, "Are you talkin' to me?"

Then it looks around and smiles. "I'm the only one here."

The Infinite

"As you can see, we've had our eye on you for some time now."

—Agent Smith, to Thomas

So when will the axe finally fall and the octopus be slain? Is Oshana capable of the task or is he only making promises that can never be fulfilled? Can he lead me to freedom, as Morpheus led Thomas? Or is it all just a ruse?

Like Thomas, I am lost in a dream world. Unlike in the movie, recognizing the fact of my non-existence doesn't coincide with breaking out of the dream. I am like a lucid dreamer who has no control over the creations of his own unconscious. Instead, I am fully aware of being trapped without being able to use that awareness to awaken. And so the dream turns slowly to nightmare. Am I getting close to waking? There is no way of knowing. There is no point of reference outside the dream. There is Oshana and the Transmission, but that depends largely on trust, and faith. Even if I could know that he was operating outside the dream state, that still wouldn't guarantee that he can get me *out*. Even Oshana doesn't know for sure. Even Morpheus didn't.

Morpheus told Thomas they rarely unplugged people after a certain age. “The mind has trouble letting go.” They made an exception in Thomas’ case because Morpheus believed he was the One. Maybe it is too late for me. Maybe I am too firmly entrenched in shamanic dreams of self-empowerment and my ego has become too spiritualized, the octopus too slippery and refined, to submit to the surgical process. Maybe. All I know with any certainty is that I am lost in a dream and that I *cannot awaken under my own power*. I am helpless to affect my own transformation or bring about liberation. And because of this, I am dependent on something—*someone*—that is too far beyond my understanding to even think about, much less write about. I have reached the limits of my capacities as a writer, as an intellect, and as an individual. Am I done yet? Am I finally defeated by my own pen, self-slain, the death of a thousand cuts? This would be the best possible outcome for me: complete and undeniable defeat. Then all that’s left is to invite the birds—*that’s you*—to come and pick my bones clean.

For Oshana, enlightenment meant “the end of questing.” After he became enlightened, he was no longer searching for anything. He had arrived. That is all he claims to know. He doesn’t know if what happened to him was enlightenment but he chose to use the word because it was a good enough fit. He never received a diploma, crown, or official stamp. He simply entered into the presence of something, and his life vanished into the vastness, forever.

What is driven home by the presence of Oshana, for me, is that a temporal life is not only meaningless but *unreal* unless it is shaped and informed by, and in service to, the eternal. That might sound like a religious doctrine, but is it? Or is it just mathematics? Even the longest and deepest existence is reduced to insignificance by the touch of eternity. Any day now, all of us are due to be divided by infinity. Then only what is infinite within us will remain. Doesn’t that imply that only what is infinite within us ever really existed?

Oshana speaks to the infinite in me. And somehow, in some manner I am only just beginning to grok, the infinite in me responds.