

CRAIG HAMILTON

Using Meditation To Uncover The Truth of Your Dis-ease

Jason Prall:

Hello, and welcome to Awaken the Healer Within. I'm your host, Jason Prall. Joining me today, I've got Craig Hamilton. He is widely regarded as one of today's most innovative and dynamic spiritual teachers. He's taught his acclaimed Practice of Direct Awakening meditation, which I really want to get into, that process to tens of thousands of people, including many of today's leading luminaries, leaders and change makers. His in-depth online courses bring together core insights and approaches based on decades of on the ground research at the leading edge of spiritual practice and inquiry. So, Craig, thanks for joining me today. Welcome.

Craig Hamilton:

Thank you, Jason. It's great to be here. Hi, everyone. Nice to be spending some time with all of you.

Jason Prall:

So let's get into this Practice of Direct Awakening. I mean, it's a very interesting title. I've spent a little bit of my life in meditation and inquiring some of these bigger concepts, and I love the words you chose to describe your process. So maybe tell me, why is it a direct awakening? Why is it a practice? And awakening to what?

Craig Hamilton:

There's a lot.

Jason Prall:

There's a lot.

Craig Hamilton:

That'll pretty much fill up our time. Great. Well, I feel like maybe I want to ... Since you asked me so many things, let me kind of reverse the order a little bit. I'm going to answer your question in reverse, the last part first.

Jason Prall:

I love that.

Craig Hamilton:

So when we talk about awakening, for this submit, which is about awakening the healer within, and we're looking at awakening as a kind of healing modality, if you will, I think it's good to differentiate between spiritual awakening and maybe all the other ways that we work on changing and growing and healing because, broadly speaking, there are thousands of ways we can help ourselves. We can improve ourselves. We can learn new skills. We can face our inner shadows and inner demons and limiting voices

and limiting beliefs. We can do energy work to release pent up traumas that are in our bodies. Of course, then there's all the physical healing modalities, which are endless. So there are a lot of ways we can work on improving, healing, helping this human organism that we are.

Craig Hamilton:

Then there's this radical idea that's been around for a few thousand years of spiritual awakening or spiritual enlightenment. What it's pointing to is not really just another way that we can work on ourselves, but it's pointing to an essential and shocking discovery that there is a part of us, the truest, deepest part of us that was never wounded or traumatized and that doesn't need to be healed because it's already whole and complete and full and, perhaps most shockingly, contains a natural capacity to both grow and evolve and become so much more. It's unleashed, and it becomes a natural process. Also ... And I have to say this carefully in a healing context. But it also contains a very natural, organic kind of healing function.

Craig Hamilton:

I don't mean that spiritual awakening will heal every physical ailment. I don't mean that at all, although there are certainly countless people who have reported things like that and said, "Once I awoke to who I really am and I awoke to this part of myself that's indestructible and incorruptible and this essential purity and wholeness, that this whole physical issue I was struggling with seemed to have started to resolve." Certainly we hear about miraculous healing. So I want to say all of that's possible. There's no guarantees. It won't really work if we go at spiritual awakening for that purpose, because of what's required to awaken, which we'll get into. But this is a radically different paradigm for healing.

Craig Hamilton:

We're all familiar with the idea that the body ... We always hear it in the alternative healing world, that the body has an incredible intelligence and ability to heal itself. It's a very common idea. Well, what's interesting about awakening is it unleashes an ability for the psyche to heal itself naturally. Many of us have suffered a lot in our lives. We've been traumatized, wounded, scarred deeply by life events. Some of those play into our physical challenges. The whole body-mind of almost all human beings is to some degree damaged and messed up by the life we've lived and the challenges we've faced. The question I would ask is, what if there was a practice and a pathway to unlocking a power and intelligence and love that already fully exists within us, but not only within us. When we discover it, we realize within and without. The distinction between the inner and the outer falls away, but within the cosmos, which is us. Let's maybe say that, that this power is already here. All we really then ... Our work becomes getting out of the way so that it can operate freely and heal what needs to be healed, grow what needs to be grown, discard what needs to be discarded, and we enter into this life of flow that takes us on a journey that we never could have predicted or planned.

Jason Prall:

I love that, and there's a lot of nuance to your answer there. I can tell you were being careful with some of your words because this is territory that is ... It's very difficult to put words to, right? A lot of the words can be misinterpreted to mean something else based on our level of mind and perhaps our level of practice and where our perceptions are. But I love this idea. Maybe we can dive into what this thing that we already are is, if we can put words to it, which, again, is quite difficult. But in a lot of the teachings that I've become familiar with, we can think of it as pure awareness. I'm asking you. Would you categorize it as that? If so, how do we think about awareness versus maybe consciousness? Maybe just help lay the map of what we're even talking about when we talk about our indestructible, already whole,

never destroyed, never created, just is-ness that we are, which is this expansive awareness that is within, without, nowhere, everywhere, before time, inclusive of time-

Craig Hamilton:

Well said, well said.

Jason Prall:

How is that maybe different than what we think about as consciousness? Because that's a very common word that we want to use, particularly in the West, and I think it does have a value in expanding our own consciousness, growing consciousness, the collective consciousness. Is there a difference? Or how do you think about those things?

Craig Hamilton:

Well, again, so these are just words, and people use them in a lot of different ways, the scientific community that's trying to study consciousness and figure out where it comes from and specifically how the brain creates it, which they can never quite figure out-

Craig Hamilton:

... because it doesn't quite work that way. So I want to tread lightly around what is the difference between consciousness and awareness. I tend to use those two words synonymously. Honestly, I tend to kind of try to use all words a bit poetically, meaning I don't want us to get into ... And I don't mean us, you and me, but I mean all of us on our path. We want to avoid getting into the ... What does that mean? Or how is it different from that and this word? Because, remember, we're actually all ... When we're talking about spiritual awakening, we're always talking about something that your mind actually cannot understand or know, which doesn't mean you can't. When we discover this kind of knowing faculty beyond the mind, since we're talking about knowing things, there is a kind of super cognition or super knowing, super intuition, kind of super intelligence, heightened wisdom faculty that we discover. But it is not mental in the way we normally think about it. It's not just thinking about things. It contains all kinds of modes of direct apprehension or direct perception, direct knowing of reality. So for that reason, we can stay lightly with the words.

Craig Hamilton:

But to what I feel the core of your question is ... So you're asking, what is this sacred essence? What is this what's been called our true nature, our Buddha nature, our essential nature, our true Self, with a capital S? So one way of talking about it ... And it's the way I speak about it. It's one of the practices of direct awakening that I teach. It's all about the discovery of awareness itself or consciousness itself. So to boil that down really simply, all of us go through our lives being conscious, being aware. Anyone who's listening to this, you're watching this event right now, is aware of you. They're aware of me. They're aware of the words we're saying. They're aware of the thoughts that are being sparked by the words we're saying. They're aware of how they feel about what we're saying and whether it's inspiring or challenging or they disagree, and they're reacting.

Craig Hamilton:

So we're aware. We're conscious. We're having an experience. But what very few ... And I mean very, very few human beings ever discover is that which is aware, meaning the awareness, the consciousness that is having the experience of you and me talking and other people and going through our life and all

of our inner feelings and experiences. So when I say spiritual awakening's radical and ultimately kind of stunning when it occurs, it's because suddenly, for a moment, consciousness, which is who you really are, becomes self-aware. We suddenly become aware of the subject of our experience, the one consciousness that's having this encounter with reality.

Craig Hamilton:

When we discover that, we suddenly realize, oh, I'm not who I thought I was at all. Because who do we normally think we are? Ask you, ask anyone. Tell me about you. What are we going to say? We're going to talk about our life experiences up until now. We're going to talk about the values that we hold, the things that are important to us. We're going to talk about our abilities, what we're good at, what we're not good at. We have, in other words, a story about ourselves, a concept about ourselves that's held in the mind. We've all heard about ego, and there's a lot of talk about ego. Well, if you think about ego simply, ego is that self-concept or story that you hold about yourself and that you will defend at all costs.

Craig Hamilton:

Everyone is always - is that my ego? Is that my ego? Here's a very simple way to get to know your ego. Notice when someone says something about you that contradicts your self-image. So you have a self-image of, I'm a nice, caring, spiritual person, and I really want to always do the right thing for the right reason, and someone says, "That was really selfish of you," or, "That wasn't very kind." There's this feeling we get. Everyone has it. It's this reaction, and sometimes we feel it right in our solar plexus. But it's a kind of defense system that activates to defend the story about the self that we have convinced ourselves is true and that we've been projecting and trying to convince everyone else that's who we are. When that gets challenged, that's your ego. It goes, "No!" Everything that flows out of that reaction, if it's unchecked, is kind of what we would call ego response or ego defense or ego reactivity.

Craig Hamilton:

So, anyway, that's a little digression. But the point is that ego, that story of self, that feeling of self that we have, which has served us our whole lives in all kinds of ways to have it, when we awaken spiritually, suddenly we realize, oh, I'm this vast ultimately infinite expanse of consciousness. I can't be located in one place. I'm not this body. I'm not these thoughts. I'm not these feelings. I'm not this story. It's not I'm not those things, meaning those are part of the picture. They're not wrong. Your story about yourself might be quite accurate if you're a fairly objective person. It's not that it's wrong. It's just so limited. It's just such a small piece of an immense being-ness that is who and what we are.

Craig Hamilton:

So I'm going to say that's part of what we mean by your true nature or your awakened, spiritual essence, but that's only one way of looking at it because the ... So that's a very radical thing to discover in itself. But what then becomes almost more ... Well, let's just say what becomes ultimately much more significant is that, when we discover who and what we are and we learn how to stay there and we learn how to start to rest in that, ground in that, not get instantly pulled back into our ego reactions every time something happens that triggers us, and we learn to really stay ... Oh, I'm going to start to live in this essence. I'm going to start to embody who and what I really am and not my stories and reactions and patterns and habits. I'm going to step into this part of me that's not a habit. It's not just a conditioned habit energy that's formed. This is something real and true.

Craig Hamilton:

When that happens, we find that all the beautiful, extraordinary qualities that we all appreciate about human beings at their best, they all are contained within this essence, meaning they all flow naturally from this discovery of this sacred dimension of who and what I am. So what am I talking about, I'm talking about all the virtues, kindness, love, sensitivity, concern for others, courage, strength to face challenges without getting rocked, a kind of healthy fearlessness, not a naïve fearlessness. I'm not going to get stopped by fear. I'm going to listen to fear. Maybe it has something to tell me.

Craig Hamilton:

So there's a wisdom faculty, a discerning faculty that enables us to sense, well, is this the most effective response to this moment, or is something else? Because we're no longer just playing out habitual reactive patterns. We now have free choice. We now have the space within us to see and sense into situations, to tune into other people in a way that we couldn't previously. So all these extraordinary qualities and capacities are the out picturing. They're the natural way of being of our awakened self, of the discovery of our true nature.

Craig Hamilton:

Why that is, I don't know. How that works, it's mysterious. I mean, there's a lot about the how that can be unpacked. You start to realize, oh, if I'm no longer in fear and I'm no longer trying to control reality, let's say, I've learned that I can trust and let go ... All of us are trying to let go. I've learned that I can let go and trust this deeper wisdom and care to guide my life and direct my actions. When we learn that, of course then we're going to be more in touch with what's in front of us. We're not going to be bringing the baggage of the past. I can just show up here. I can just show up and pay attention. I'll become aware of what's needed, and I'll have the inner resources to bring it.

Craig Hamilton:

So I can relax. I can let go. I can just be myself. I don't even need to worry about, am I okay yet? Because a lot of us are in this journey of I'm not okay. I'm trying to become okay. This doesn't tell you you're okay. It rewrites the program. It's like, well, you being okay isn't the issue. Reality is okay.

Craig Hamilton:

Who and what you are is beyond okay. It's a miracle. Sure, there might be all kinds of things about each of us that still need to improve and grow, but the fundamental story is rewritten.

Jason Prall:

It's like you step out of the matrix, right?

Craig Hamilton:

It is, yeah.

Jason Prall:

There's a lot there. I kind of want to recap a little bit. There's some irony in this whole conversation, right? Because what your main program is, the Practice of Direct Awakening, and so it's a direct experience, and yet here we are trying to talk about it from a mind perspective. So there's an irony in that in and of itself, and yet there's an important aspect to trying to paint the map of what we're talking

about. I think there's a value in that. It's just there's a recognition beyond that this is just the map. It cannot replace the direct experience that is a practice, and yet ironically it's already there for you to witness, to awaken to, to realize, to remember, so to speak.

Jason Prall:

I love this idea. When I first heard about this awareness becoming aware of itself, the mind just really wrestles with that, like, what the heck does that mean? How is that possible? What does that look like, right? Because there's this imagination..

Craig Hamilton:

Yeah, and you can't answer any of those questions with your mind.

Jason Prall:

Right. Through some of the practices that I've been fortunate enough to stumble upon, I got to experience that for the first time. I got to taste it, and I thought, oh, my God, that's what that is. There's a recognition. It doesn't need to be confirmed. You just know because it's ultimately-

Craig Hamilton:

That's right.

Jason Prall:

... your true nature. Yet I'm still not in the position, as you mentioned. There's this stabilization of this being-ness, of resting in that place consistently throughout my day, throughout my life. Also, what I've recognized is that there's a deepening of that as well. So the first time it was this glimpse, this little taste, and then since then it's deepened. I go, oh, it's more of that, however that's possible. It's, again, hard to put words to. Then there's a stabilization of it so that, as things come at me, whereas I was so easily triggered into these patterned behaviors, these conditioned responses that have kept me safe my entire life, so thank God for them, that they don't need to come online as much. There's less charge behind them. Or they happen, and I get triggered, and then I come right back into my ... at least closer to that resting point.

Jason Prall:

So this is what's been really interesting for me. I love you just encapsulated all of this, that there really is this deepening of this practice and a recognition that in ... And when we get to that point and we continue to practice that and continue to rest in that, then it's not like ... We actually stop looking for those same answers that we once were searching for. We recognize that those questions were just such a limited view of really what the truth is, and so our perspective starts to widen, right?

Craig Hamilton:

Yeah.

Jason Prall:

More of the truth comes in, and it really is, to me, like ... Neo in The Matrix is a perfect example of this. It's like once he recognized there were no bullets, that's a totally different level of reality, and he doesn't have to dodge them. So if you-

Craig Hamilton:

Beautiful.

Jason Prall:

... haven't seen The Matrix, I apologize. But..

Craig Hamilton:

Well, The Matrix was written as a kind of contemporary myth about awakening, so it's reasonable to draw upon it. It's something we're all familiar with, at least most of us.

Jason Prall:

So there's probably a lot of people watching this, especially if they're familiar with you and they love your work or they're just drawn in by this idea of meditation as a practice for their life, that this is all resonating, and it makes sense. Undoubtedly, there's some people watching that go, "I don't know what the heck they're talking about. This doesn't make a lot of sense to me because every time I try to sit on my pillow, I can't quiet my mind, and I have this inner critic or inner narrator that just won't shut up." So I think with that in mind, I'm curious how you found yourself on this path as one that you felt you needed to teach this to the world and share what you have experienced and when that started for you. What was it that prompted you on this meditation path or awakening path that you felt you could be a leader?

Craig Hamilton:

So I was raised kind of by ... It might be a little harsh to call them atheist parents, but broadly we were secular Unitarians, and neither of my parents believed in anything beyond, any of this or did we do any of these practices or anything. So I didn't have any religious upbringing in that sense. But in my mid teens, I started to feel this calling and this sense that there was something much bigger, and I started to have spiritual experiences that opened me up to this, oh, my God, there's so much more to this. It's not the world that my parents and teachers are telling me about in school. Reality is cosmic, and it's sacred, and there's an energy flow through this whole thing. There's a purpose to it that I couldn't articulate-

Craig Hamilton:

... but I could sense. There was just this whole deeper reality that started to open up, and that drove me to ... I started meditating when I was about 16 and dabbling in Eastern things and practicing exploring. That carried into my early 20s where I traveled some in the East, traveled in Thailand, visited monasteries, did meditation retreats, traveled in India, did intensive meditation retreats. So I was on the path very intensely pretty early ... A lot of us get on the path a little later in life. We may be in our 40s. Often we start to think, well, there must be more to all this. We start to dig deeper. Some of us earlier.

Craig Hamilton:

But I was drawn in very early, and I was kind of plagued by or my inquiry was being propelled by a kind of core question, which was ... because I minored in religious studies in the university and was really studying religion as well. There seemed to be this narrative around awakening. Really, the most common narrative around it was that it takes an incredibly long time. Some of the traditions say it takes lifetimes. You have to be a monk for many lifetimes to really awaken to who and what you are. If not lifetimes, at

least you have to give up the world and go and give yourself to this fully because it's such a deep and profound transformation that it's very hard to do when you're living a life engaged in worldly activities of family and work.

Craig Hamilton:

So there was this core story in most of the traditions most of the time, and I say that because, within every tradition, there's all kinds of parallel stories. So there was that, and yet at the same time there was always this statement that what we're awakening to already exists, that it's who and what we already are, and that it's never far away. It's the one breathing this air. It's the one hearing these words. It's the one living this life. That's who you are. It's always here. It's not far away, and yet it's going to take eons to awaken to.

Craig Hamilton:

So I always felt this does not quite ... It doesn't really seem like it has to be this way. I get that it can take a long time. It can take a lot of effort. There's a lot to unwind. There's a lot to get out of the way to make space for this primordial essence to reveal itself. But, still, something about the traditional stories didn't fully work for me, even though there were very direct teachings in some of the traditions too, which I resonated with more.

Craig Hamilton:

But I sort of set out on this quest to really unlock, how could this happen in a much more direct way? I had the good fortune to participate in some really powerful, what I call evolutionary laboratories where people were coming together wholeheartedly dedicated to spiritual practice and inquiry and really giving our lives to this to explore this together, not just as a solo quest, but to compare notes. That's the laboratory metaphor, to observe our experience with practice, compare notes. I had an opportunity to work with some profound teachers in the process.

Craig Hamilton:

So through all of that and through my own practice as well, gradually this picture started to emerge, which was, there is actually a very direct way to do meditation practice that is not ... So let me step back to that just for a moment, because you were kind of touching on the ... At the beginning of this question, you were saying, well, there's this kind of irony that we're talking about something that's already here, and yet you're saying you can practice it, and yet we're thinking about it. So that's right at the heart of the whole idea of direct awakening that I ultimately came to.

Craig Hamilton:

The essence of it is this. Most of us think about meditation or have learned meditation or dabbled in meditation. It's usually some form of either trying to concentrate our attention on something other than our thoughts ... We're concentrating on our breathing. We're repeating a mantra over and over, or we're looking at a flame or an image, and we're trying to concentrate and distract ourselves from the narrative of our thoughts. It can work, and it can be powerful. We've done that, or we've done practices that are more about trying to become hyper vigilantly aware, hyper aware of every little thing that's happening in every second. How does your toe feel right now? What is the feeling of the hair on your skin, your clothing against your ... everything that's happening, super intensely mindfully aware of everything. A lot of us have tried those practices.

Craig Hamilton:

A lot of those, if you look at them, you're not practicing awakening. There's nothing about the practice that's inherently about this deeper nature, this Buddha nature that we've been talking about. They're all practices designed to prepare you to maybe experience that. The idea is, well, if you can draw your attention away from your mind, maybe you'll become aware of something deeper than your mind. If you can become very aware of everything that's happening, that'll enable you to unhook yourself from thoughts and unhook yourself from feelings so you can, again, start to discover something deeper. So they're what I would call indirect practices. They're a practice of doing this in order so that this other thing might happen at some point.

Craig Hamilton:

The Practice of Direct Awakening is a practice of, every time we sit down to meditate, we're actually practicing aligning with or stepping directly into the natural way of being that is our true nature. Maybe that wasn't a very clear way of saying it, so let me try to clarify. So let's just say this broadly. All human beings are the same, broadly. Of course, we're all unique and different in certain ways. But, broadly, what a human organism is, is the same thing. All egos are the same. We all function basically the same way. We're all unique too. But I'm talking about the universal part now.

Craig Hamilton:

So that means, when we're in ego consciousness or our conventional unawakened consciousness, the way we relate to life is basically the same, and it's predictable. We want to feel good. We don't want to feel bad. So much of our behavior is driven by things that we think are going to make us feel good now or in the future, and avoiding things that make us feel bad now or in the future. There's these very primitive drives running the show, and it's very predictable. Then how any of us is going to relate to thoughts that arise, feelings that arise, sensations that arise, very predictable.

Craig Hamilton:

Well, guess what. Awakened consciousness is also the same for you and me. It's also one thing, and when any of us awakens beyond the mind, beyond the ego, we are stepping into a dimension of reality and consciousness that's the same for all of us. In fact, it's even more the same for all of us than the ego consciousness because it's not really differentiated or individuated. So awakened consciousness also shows up in very predictable ways. When any of us is awake, we tend to be very nonreactive to what's happening. We tend to be grounded in something that's deeper than the reactivity. We have let go, so we have a natural ease and flow. When something challenges us, we lean into it, not away from it. We are not identified with our mind. We don't need to know, so we're, in a sense, interested all the time. We're not fundamentally like, well, let me tell you what I know about this. I'm more interested in what I don't know about it. Let me find that. So there's this open, innocent curiosity, and many other things about awakened consciousness that are predictable, observable ... I don't want to say behaviors, but they're orientations or attitudes or qualities in consciousness that are natural and organic when we're awake.

Craig Hamilton:

So the Practice of Direct Awakening takes, really, each of these natural qualities, natural characteristics, natural attitudes of awakened consciousness, and reverse engineers them and says, let's practice those. So we sit down to practice. We're not just trying to get undistracted by our mind. We're bringing our attention to something that already exists that naturally flows, so if awakened consciousness doesn't

hold on, we're going to practice not holding on. So we're going to sit still, and no matter what happens in our experience, we're not going to hold on to anything. We're going to always let go of everything.

Craig Hamilton:

If awakened consciousness is innocent and doesn't need certainty, we're going to practice not grasping onto our thoughts and not needing to know anything and not having any idea about anything and not participating in the mind's endless attempt to interpret and make meaning. We say, "I'm going to make no meaning for the next half hour of practice." They're hard practices to some degree at first because they're literally doing the opposite of what we're doing our entire lives, and it says, "Okay, now do the opposite. Sit down for a half an hour and do the opposite of what you're doing all the rest of the time."

Craig Hamilton:

How do I do that? Well, guess what. There's only one part of you that can actually do these practices. Can you guess which part? The awakened part. Your true nature can do all these practices because that's how it relates to life. So the practices challenge you to step into your true nature right now, and they have instantaneous effect and result if you do them completely and wholeheartedly in the moment. The moment you're not doing it, it has no result. The moment you give up the practice and decide to just go and plan what you're going to have for dinner, you're not doing it, and it's not having the result. But the moment you're doing the practice wholeheartedly, you're having the encounter, the experience of awakening, and it's happening.

Craig Hamilton:

So that's what I mean by direct. They're all or nothing, but they're all or nothing in each moment. It's like, oh, even if you spent half your practice distracted, if you spent half your practice not distracted, really practicing, you just had 15 minutes ... Let's say half an hour is your meditation period. You just had 15 minutes of real awakening practice that's now going to ... And this is what everyone who does this work starts to report is they say, "Wow, I felt like my meditation was so-so. I was kind of distracted. But I really did apply myself to it. Then all day I found that my consciousness was very open and spacious, and people said things to me, and they didn't trigger me in the way they normally would. I found I was really much more present and attentive in meetings with people. What is that? All I did was meditate for half an hour, and most of the time I felt distracted." But you're practicing awakening, and then the awakening ripples out on its own.

Craig Hamilton:

I guess, to come back to the very beginning of your question where you were kind of saying, "Well, what's the value of meditation?" Almost, the real value of meditation is that we can do this wholeheartedly, completely, without distraction for a period of time every day. If we're practicing being awake like that, we don't then need to try to hold on to it all day long. We're unleashing something that's actually very interested in living your life. Your true nature is very interested in taking over the wheel and living your life. It wants to. So if you start to let go of the steering wheel and learn how to let this natural flow come through, it will start to permeate everything.

Jason Prall:

I love that, and there's this aspect that I realized at one point about things like meditation. You can do meditation. Sometimes there's an efforting that goes in, and not that that's bad, sometimes that's a good place to start is to do these things. The evolution is to then be these things, to let go of the doing,

let go of the efforting. Then they start naturally cultivating. I love what you said. You just start to recognize that you're showing up differently in the world. One of the ways that's shown up for me is that it gets reflected back to me. Other people and scenarios become mirrors.

Craig Hamilton:

Yes.

Jason Prall:

I don't even feel like I've changed. I feel like the same-

Craig Hamilton:

Often, yeah.

Jason Prall:

but still very much heart centered, but I feel like the same person, and then it gets reflected back to me. That's where I go, oh, wow, maybe things really are changing. At least, that was a thought.

Craig Hamilton:

That's a very common experience. I love the way you said it. All of us go through that on the path. In some ways you're the last person to know you've changed. You said it very well, because we still feel the same. But, see, we're practicing unlocking something that isn't feeling based, and it's not ... See, here's the thing. That inner self of, I feel this, and I'm insecure-

Jason Prall:

The inner critic.

Craig Hamilton:

... I'm insecure, I have self doubt, too arrogant, I'm too this, whatever, that whole inner world, that's not actually changing. That's just your starting to discover something else that's starting to show up on its own. As you said earlier, which I really appreciated, that's going to start to just ... I don't remember how you said it, but you were making the point that that then starts to organically show up in all kinds of ways in your life. It's not really something you're controlling, and it's not ... Oh, I know. You were basically saying that you get less hooked by things. It's not that that stuff goes away. You're now identified with something else that's not that, and so all the patterns might still arise, but they're not capturing your attention in the same way.

Jason Prall:

It's almost like there's a distance. It's like they happen, and there's another aspect of myself that can witness it without the judgment and the ... It's almost just a curiosity. Oh, look at that thing. It's showing up again. Huh. Isn't that interesting?

Craig Hamilton:

That's great.

Jason Prall:

There's some distancing that starts to happen, and the charge just becomes a little less potent. Again, I think one of the things that you're ... This is just coming alive for me right now as you speak to this stuff. This is what's cool too that I want to mention, is that it's like this is our true nature, and it's already here. The programs like yours and the teachers like you, there's a real benefit to you pointing to some of these aspects because it's like, if you point to these, then my mind may not be able to conceptualize what the heck you're talking about, but my awareness can find it. My awareness-

Craig Hamilton:

Beautiful.

Jason Prall:

... even though it may not recognize or interpret it correctly, this to be becomes the value of, again, programs like yours and teachers like you, is I want to see where this teacher can point my awareness, to a new area that I might not have recognized before. Then all of a sudden it gets illuminated, and something within me starts to get cultivated. It starts to grow. It starts to react or become in any way. I think that's what's so cool about this work, is that it isn't a matter of needing someone, per se. Rather, there is still a value in someone else pointing to experiences.

Craig Hamilton:

No, it's profound. You're speaking to what in some of the higher Buddhist traditions are called pointing out instructions, pointing out. It's, oh, let me point out to you the aspects of your consciousness, the things that are already going on that you are not aware of. Just in pointing them out, you can become aware of them. It also really speaks to one of the values of having a teacher who's more awakened than you. Let's just put it on a continuum. Working with someone who can point out things to you that you're not likely to stumble upon any time soon. Let's put it that way. All of it can be discovered in one moment, totally out of nowhere by anyone, so that's fundamentally true. And if someone has walked that journey and is aware of dimensions of being in consciousness that you're not and can show you those, you now have access to something that you didn't. Your practice jumps to another level because now you're practicing in the knowledge of something, as opposed to practicing to try to find that knowledge, and now your practice gets exponentially more powerful and accelerated.

Jason Prall:

There's something that you said earlier that I really love, which is that I think there's this inner guidance system or driver that all of us have to become better. I want to be of greater service. I want to share more love. I want to be more compassionate. These are things that we're trying to achieve to some degree. What I think is fascinating is that ... What you mentioned is that, as we start to awaken to the real truth of who we are, these aspects just start to emerge. They just start to shine. So I just want to point to that again because I think it's really important for many of us, even a reminder for myself that it doesn't do a ton of good to try to be more compassionate, even though there's an element of doing and efforting. Rather, it's the inner work. You said a lot of the shadow work. There's inner cultivations, that this work will naturally bring this out of me because it's already there, and it's who I am. It's the ultimate being of compassion, the ultimate being of love and patience and all the virtues, right?

Craig Hamilton:

Yeah.

Jason Prall:

So I think that's such a cool recognition that you are already these things. You can't become any more of them. You can become more aware of them in yourself, and they will naturally arise within you.

Craig Hamilton:

Beautiful. I mean, let's just pause on that for a moment. Isn't that an extraordinary truth about being human?

Jason Prall:

As you said let's just pause on that and I was feeling into it, there's this ... Even in my system still, there's this, ah. It's like the pressure's off. I don't have to try to become something I'm not, so to speak.

Craig Hamilton:

I want to say ... We always have to say that, I mean, it's good for us all to be trying to be better people in whatever way we can. Imagine the world that we would live in if everyone was just trying to be more compassionate. So that's all really good. It's all good. Everybody keep trying to do everything you can to be a better person-

Jason Prall:

Thank you for saying that.

Craig Hamilton:

... because we need all that work. But what we're talking about here is the ultimate truth of things, which is that, for those things to be fully unlocked ... I think the real truth is you'll never get to the profound awakened compassion that's possible or the profound awakened wisdom or the profound inner strength and courage and ... All of these qualities have a kind of ... They have an ultimate level, meaning an unconditional, where they've now become fully embodied. It doesn't mean they're all showing up all the time. They're all showing up the moment they're needed, and so you can trust that that reservoir is full. It will flow through into the moment with whatever response is needed for that moment, without you needing to control it, anticipate it, premeditate, plan, prepare. That can be left aside. I don't mean that larger scale planning in your life gets left aside. We all still need to take responsibility for the bigger decisions in our lives. But even those are now informed by something else, in many ways by a deeper awareness of what's really important, because we haven't really spoken about that piece.

Craig Hamilton:

But, ultimately, spiritual awakening is most significant in that it reveals to us what really matters, what really matters ultimately in life, which then shows up in each moment as, well, what's really important now? I could respond in all kinds of ways to this moment, but what's really the important way? What's the way that's going to have the most impact? What's the way that's serving the highest value for the greater good? That becomes an intuitive ... We have an intuitive sense of what matters. That, in many ways, ultimately, is what really puts us at rest is we start ... because even if we realize, well, I have nothing to fear and I'm okay and all this, we human beings fundamentally want to be doing the right thing. We want to be aligned with the right things. We want to be on the right side of history. We want

to be on the right side of life. We want to be aligned with the imperative of the cosmos, the attempt to grow and evolve and awaken that's driving this whole event of life.

Craig Hamilton:

So starting to know and feel that we are and that we are being informed ... I hesitate to say guided because it sounds like there's some other consciousness that's telling us what to do. It's from within, which I guess brings us back to the title of this. You're awakening the guidance system, the knowing faculty within that now you can start to trust and take your hands off the wheel and experience this mysterious flow that carries you through life. You're ever in awe at what each new brings your way and what's coming out of you. You're in awe at what's coming out of you because it doesn't feel like you in the same old way.

Jason Prall:

I love that, I love that, because what you're speaking to, what I'm hearing and picking up on is that there's this both-ness. We are our human selves, the lower case S, conditioned self, and there's a greater aspect of who we are. We don't have to deny either. We can accept both at the same time. There's a permissioning that can happen in that flow as we awaken to the whole truth of what we are.

Jason Prall:

You're hitting on a point that I really would love to dive deeper on, and you've touched on it a little bit already, but this idea of embodiment, because I've been in enough spiritual communities and groups and around enough people that there is a very, very strong tendency or pattern that I notice in a lot of the communities of this sort of bypass, which is "it's all good. Everything's all good, right?"

Craig Hamilton:

If only it were all good.

Jason Prall:

It's like, yeah, that is true. That's not a falsity, and there's more to the story that we can become aware of, which is, again, what I want to dive deeper on with you here is this, what does matter? Why do we need to be concerned about our humanness as we're awakening and this idea of an embodied awakening and embodied spiritual practice, versus just bypassing and saying, oh, well, I can just go meditate in a cave, and everything's all good, and you humans just do whatever you want over there?

Craig Hamilton:

So what is the truth to, it's all good? How about that? The truth to that has to be that there's an essential goodness. There's an essential, a deeper wholeness, a deeper goodness that is the essence of who and what we are that we can discover. But that doesn't mean everything happening in this world is an expression of that. Almost nothing that's happening in this world's an expression of that. So our great project as spiritual practitioners, as meditators, as people on a path of growth and/or healing or however we see our path, our great project is really to embody the deeper truths, the deeper love, the deeper care that is revealed to us in our spiritual practices, that we discover to be our own essence.

Craig Hamilton:

Just discovering that's your essence is a great first step, but where it becomes meaningful is when you're living that, when you're walking through the world showing everyone that it's good, that it's essentially

good, and that there's something essential that we can trust and that we can give ourselves to, that we can start to even surrender to a greater power, a greater intelligence, a greater love that is our own nature and that wants to come out and enlighten and elevate the world. It really does. We're the one in the way, and now we're going to dedicate ourselves to our path really wholeheartedly so that we can become, ideally, an ... I don't want to say perfect, but a continuous expression of that, a kind of unbroken expression of that purity, of that higher potential, of all that goodness and love and sensitivity and beauty that is our own essence.

Jason Prall:

I love that, and I want to add my own perspective on this because I grew up kind of similar to you, I think, not really religious. There was no direction I was pushed. My own inquiry of religion, particularly the Judeo-Christian, Western ideas of religion, I just couldn't buy into. I denied it wholeheartedly. You could say I was an atheist sort of, but it was more like agnostic. I can't lean on that. Let me lean on my intellect and science and the rational mind, and that's what really drove me. It wasn't until I started exploring some of these practices, and they included ayahuasca with some indigenous shamans. It included these type of meditation, Buddhist vipassana meditation, all kinds of different practices that I actually started to have my own experiences that led me back to these Judeo-Christian ideals, the Ten Commandments and these virtues, and even to some degree this idea of a savior.

Jason Prall:

I say this lightly, but what I mean is that my perspective now is that, when I die, when I leave this body, I will be saved. I will go back to divine origins, the great mystery that everything will be okay. There is a sort of savior aspect to that process. Again, I think where a lot of us get a little confused is in the interpretation of, perhaps, some of these ancient wisdoms that are carried through these religious ideas that have been a little distorted, a little bit convoluted, and the reinterpreted. There's a lot of messiness I feel in a lot of religions.

Craig Hamilton:

Sure. If you go right to the original essence of probably any wisdom tradition, any spiritual tradition, you're going to find this gem that we started with at the very beginning, which is this radical realization that God is great, that there is something much bigger than me that is extraordinary and beautiful and sacred, and that I'm here to serve and line up with and ultimately embody and express.

Jason Prall:

Totally.

Craig Hamilton:

That's right there at the beginning, and, sure, we can see all the deviations.

Jason Prall:

I love it too because, for me, what I've started to appreciate more and more is that perhaps those truths have been a little distorted along the way or a little bit misinterpreted through the evolution of societies. Look, I mean, wars and overthrows, and, I mean, things have just been a mess over the last 2,000 years.

Craig Hamilton:

And still are.

Jason Prall:

And still are. Yet why can't these ideas that are as old as time ... Why can't they evolve? Why can't they so till hold those essences of truth and gain new perspectives as we evolve and move through the solar system and the galaxy and we get into the new age of Aquarius? Why can't these energies shift and ideas shift and change and modify and grow? So, to me, it kind of goes back to what you said at the beginning, which is that you have this idea of holding these things loosely. Let's not get obsessed with the map or the territory or the names of things and what they mean. Let's hold them all loosely and let them guide our direct experience.

Jason Prall:

So, I guess, I just wanted to share that from my perspective because I'm finding now in my life more interest in the variety of religions and wisdom traditions. I think they're so cool. I find something here, and I'm like, oh, that matches with, A, my experience, and, B, it matches with this other thing from this other religion. There's got to be something to that. How cool is that? So I'm finding more appreciation for the religions, even though there's still a lot of things I don't necessarily fully buy into. But, anyway, I just wanted to share that. I'm just having so much fun exploring deeper aspects of the religious texts and some of these ideas that are starting to really align with my experience.

Craig Hamilton:

This is very common for people who get into any path of awakening, and I'm always intrigued by, in particular, people who grew up inside a religion that they then rejected because they couldn't buy into the hierarchy or the mythology or the dogma or whatever, and they left it. Then they come full circle, and they get into meditation, and they start to awaken to their true nature. Then they'll say to me, "Wow, I'm really developing a newfound appreciation for Christianity, and I'm starting to read the Bible again." I'm like, "Beautiful, makes sense." The way it was being delivered and taught, you couldn't buy into, but that doesn't mean you needed to reject the essence. Maybe now that you found the essence, all of it starts to make sense and speak to you.

Jason Prall:

As we wrap up here, that's something that Ken Wilber talks about, which is this idea of waking up and growing up. As we grow up, in other words our human self starts to grow up and mature, these awakening experiences that we have, they change. In other words, we're seeing this awakening from a new perspective, a new depth. That kind of reminded me of what you said there is that, coming back around to the same ideas, but there the individuals is now in a new place. They can see it from a new perspective and perhaps appreciate the qualities or the essence or the aspects of it that were already there that they weren't able to recognize before for a variety of reasons. So where can people find more of your work? I'm curious beyond maybe just the Practice of Direct Awakening, are there things that you teach and that you offer along those same lines?

Craig Hamilton:

Yeah. I mean, I would say, if you just go to my website, it's all on there. It's CraigHamiltonGlobal.com, and you can also just Google Craig Hamilton, and it's the first thing that will come up. You can read about all my different program offerings. I've got lots of videos and articles on there that go into various aspects of what we just spoke about with a lot more depth, and so it's lots of free resources. If someone

wants to learn more about the meditation part of this, I would say download the meditation audio that's on there, Meditation 2.0, that goes into more depth about the Practice of Direct Awakening.

Craig Hamilton:

There's another meditation that ... sorry, another seminar you can tune into that's called The Key to Evolving Beyond Ego, which we didn't speak so much about that here, but that's the whole other half of my teaching work, which is really about the growing up part of what you said. It's about, how do we evolve? How do we live a spiritual life day-to-day? What are the kinds of practices we can bring out into our life and transform who we are, our relationships, our career path, our contribution? So those are kind of the two pillars of my work, and there's all kinds of stuff around that. So I encourage you to check it out.

Jason Prall:

I think I just got enamored with this topic that's so fun to discuss and chat about, and even feel into as you're transmitting some of these ideas. But I do want to ask you one final question here because there's undoubtedly people listening that are saying, "You know, look, I've got IBS. I've got thyroid issues. I can lose this weight. I've got depression," and I know you've worked with people directly in this same vein, and a lot of the people that find your work are probably in that same world. What would you offer to somebody that is just dealing with physical ailment? What's the benefit of doing this type of work? It may not be this sort of direct solution, so to speak. But what are you noticing in the people that you work with.

Craig Hamilton:

Sure, yeah. Well, there are a few different pieces to that. So one is, if you're ill and suffering, meditation and spiritual awakening can change your relationship to your suffering dramatically. Why that's important is that suffering doesn't just have one level to it. There's the actual physical pain, and then there's often all the psycho-emotional ways we're relating to our illness and our pain that are adding a lot of suffering on top of what is the core suffering of the ailment itself. So like I said at the beginning, there's no promise that spiritual practice or transformation will actually cure your physical ailment, although there are certainly many stories of that happening. But that's not the core promise, and it's certainly not something you should expect. But it can definitely change your relationship to it, which changes your experience of it, which ultimately can liberate you in the face of it, bring you more into either radical acceptance of it, if it's an incurable situation seemingly, can bring you into a radical acceptance in the face of it that then empowers you to go on with all the good things about your life, even with the limitations that you're suffering from. So I've seen that happen for a lot of people, and that's powerful and profound.

Craig Hamilton:

Also, you mentioned things though that aren't necessarily purely physical ailments, things like depression, and I will say ... And, again, we have to always be very careful. We're not prescribing this as an alternative to any medication. But I have had a number of people with really chronic depression who, after doing some of this work, came to me and said, "I can't believe what happened. It went away. I'm not depressed anymore," including one woman with bipolar depression that she had had for two decades really intensely, said, "I have found a part of myself that's not affected by that, and I'm able to live from that." Some of the patterns are still there in me, for sure, but I now feel free from it.

Craig Hamilton:

So I'm not saying that will happen for anyone. That's not the point of it. You shouldn't take up a spiritual path in the hope that it will fix you. It's a different thing. But I've seen enough stories of people dealing with ... It's sort of like dealing with anything in our lives that's difficult. It's giving us access to a strength, to a serenity, to a wisdom, a discernment that might help you navigate your illness. If it's a complex diagnosis that requires a lot of sifting through, you're going to start to see, well, which part of me is just wishful and hopeful and tempted to buy into someone who tells me they're going to cure me overnight? Where's that? Oh, that's just my wishfulness. This does not feel like a legitimate practitioner. It's going to help you steer away from things that might be not good paths. It's going to help you sense things that are more wholesome and are going to be good for you. So I think many, many layers to how our whole life, but including our relationship to our health can get transformed by spiritual practice.

Jason Prall:

I love that. You named so many things there, and that one at the end is a really, really powerful one, this internal guidance system, which I think is so important because it's not this, "Let me let the universe take care of it," even though that's kind of a thing to some degree. But there's this, "I am here. I have a decision. I can discern. I can determine what's best for me, the truth of what I need." So I think that's so powerful, and for me that's always something I'm trying to cultivate more and more is this ability to discern these fine levels of reality such that it's just operating naturally and there's no more efforting involved.

Jason Prall:

I mean, for me, that's just a big one for me, because I've tried so hard most of my life. There's so much efforting. I know this a lot in myself because it's deep in my system, but as well as people I know, is we can get to this point of just, "I'm exhausted. I'm tired. I'm tired of fighting and trying." I think a lot of people can resonate with this idea. So anything that's going to get me to this point of less efforting, less trying, and just relaxing into life, I mean, there's just so much salvation in that itself.

Craig Hamilton:

Absolutely.

Jason Prall:

That's beautiful. Craig, like I said, we could probably chat for hours on a number of topics. I love your work. I love what you do. I love your perspectives. I love your transmission as you speak, so thank you so much for joining us today. Everybody, go check out Craig's work, Practice of Direct Awakening. I will say that, from my perspective, there's no downside to dabbling in this and exploring it.

Craig Hamilton:

Yeah, I agree. Well, hey, really lovely to be with you, and great to be part of this gathering. So I wish you all the best with it and lots of learning and growing in the process for everyone. So thanks for spending time with me.

Jason Prall:

Beautiful. Thanks, Craig.

Craig Hamilton:

Take care.

Jason Prall:

Take care, everybody.

