

## Tiruvannamalai - India

In the winter of 1997, I met Mario Mantese in Tiruvannamalai at the sacred mountain of Arunachala in South India. A friend of mine had told me he was coming but I did not pay much attention. I did not know the man and was not interested in socializing too much since I had come to this place to meditate and to be silent. But to be polite I decided to drink just one cup of tea with this mutual friend and then take leave. But one cup turned into liters of Indian tea and too much sugar for this poor body. For ten days I had some very intense and revelatory

talks with him. My slight irritation at being disturbed in my silence turned into feelings of fascination and respect for this man and what he had to say. One afternoon I conducted the following interview with him: Mario Mantese was a famous musician in the seventies in Europe and in the US. On the third of November 1977, his life changed drastically. After a gala show in London, he was attacked by an unknown person and was stabbed in the heart with a knife. Mario says jokingly that this must have been his guru because although his physical heart was badly injured, his cosmic heart revealed itself. Twice he had open heart surgery and after the second operation he had a stroke which paralyzed his body totally. For almost eight minutes, his heart stopped beating. He fell into a deep coma which lasted five weeks. During this time he says he left his body and went on a long and incredible journey to the beyond which transformed him completely. He tells of the most astounding experiences of going through different heavens and hells and meeting many celestial beings. When he came out of the coma he was blind, totally paralyzed and mute. The first thing he became aware of was that he was not his body and had never been his body. He says he became aware of who he is, all spiritual doubts having left him. Through grace, inner strength and clarity he managed to recover very slowly and today he can see, walk and talk. Since then, he has written five books and for the past fifteen years has worked as a spiritual teacher. Many people are attracted by his clarity and his teaching about what he calls normality.

Q: You work as a spiritual teacher, what is your teaching?

A: A most difficult question. Removing illusion, concepts, misunderstandings; to give some light in the darkness of this complicated world in which we live.

Q: Which method do you use for that?

A: All method is doomed to fail. Look around and see. Is reality a method? If not, how can a method attain reality? One has to see the limitations of practice and at the same time the limitation of the one who does practice. Both are tied to time and space.

Q: What do you mean by reality?

A: Reality is, of course, never an object nor is it a subject. Reality is realized when all irreality has disappeared. Reality is very simple. Everything else is very complicated.

Q: What would you say the signs of enlightenment are?

A: Ha! I didn't know that signs of enlightenment exist. I wonder who invented those signs, reality or someone else? All the search for enlightenment is a hunt which leads away from simplicity and reality. Because reality is never an object, enlightenment has become a desire, a craving which people think they absolutely should have or fulfill. I myself don't bother about enlightenment. Everything that comes is simplicity and normality.

Q: What do you mean by normality?

A: Normality can only be seen and lived when all the abnormal ways we have superimposed on our lives have vanished.

Q: If there is no method to reach this normality, what to do then?

A: Seeing irreality clearly. Seeing does not imply a method, time or space because seeing is immediate, intuitive transaction. It is like lighting a candle in a dark room. No one knows where the darkness has gone. Light has tremendous impact on darkness.

Q: Is this seeing not an intellectual seeing?

A: No, this seeing sees the irreality of the intellect, the mind and the body appearances. It sees that there is nothing else than superimposition, in fact, empty without substance.

Q: So this seeing somehow has to dawn upon you?

A: No! How can seeing dawn on you? It is your innermost reality.

Q: It is like turning the light on in a dark room?

A: Yes, but there is no becoming, there is no time and space involved. Seeing means also not seeing something because the something is non-real.

Q: What do you mean by the something is non-real?

A: The something which appears to be real is empty like a mirage in a desert. When we see it, we are convinced it is real. But the closer we get, the more we see it is empty. No picture there at all. This is not a theory but absolute reality. In my seminar, these things are very specifically analyzed and clarified.

Q: When you say that things are empty, is this not an intellectual understanding of yours?

A: Definitely not. What I try to explain is that in my daily life, something that I have accepted as real for many years suddenly is seen as a misconception, as non-real. In that moment the irreality has vanished completely. If you ask in what, you have not understood yourself. It has just ended, that is all.

Q: Is this seeing the absolute state?

A: What do you mean by state?

Q: Well, it is a concept I have for the Buddha nature as I imagine it.

A: Like you said, it is your own concept. Don't bother about the absolute and don't bother about a state... and what will be and what will not be. It is again ignorance who asks such questions. Find out who you are and then you can call me if you have found something like absolute or a state.

Q: So what you are saying is that enlightenment doesn't exist because it is a concept of the seeker?

A: I never said that enlightenment doesn't exist. I just said don't bother about enlightenment. Find out who you are and everything will be okay. I wonder if enlightenment exists. For whom does it exist and where? And who will acclaim, I am enlightened? Let us be normal, that is good enough.

Q: Is it not a paradox that you act like a teacher which implies duality, one who knows and one who doesn't, and in that way conceptualize reality?

A: One has to be aware that the moment you open your mouth you create irreality and, at a certain point, disillusion. As I said before, Mario Mantese as a teacher is absolutely not important, only what is said is important. Final truth can never be put into words.

Q: Many people are involved in all kinds of spiritual practices. Does that not help anything?

A: Of course spiritual practice is very good because it helps the person to look from outside to inside. So this helps in the beginning. But some people keep the beginning for 20-25 years. Have they not seen after all these years that the practitioner and the practice are both unreal? Practice is important but one who cleanses to a certain point should definitely go deeper. Of course doing implies achievement. This is why it becomes very attractive. This is why my seminars are very unattractive. Nothing to do. Nothing to achieve. Only for one to see his own clarity in the deepest way. Horrible, eh?

Q: To arrive at this seeing is purification then necessary?

A: Arriving is wrong. To see, you can never arrive because you are already this eternal. To be aware of this is a tremendous purification. This is what I call meditation.

Q: What about samadhi experiences? Many masters from different traditions seem to have passed through these states before their final enlightenment.

A: I have no knowledge about samadhi. I wonder if it is something you can drink or eat? But I have been told that people who are absorbed for hours and hours in a deep state of consciousness is what they call samadhi. I wonder if the man who meditates and the one who has the samadhi experience are two different entities or are they one and the same? Instead of meditating for hours, I would ask myself who is the one who wants to meditate? Why does he want to meditate? And what is the goal and the achievement behind all that? To put questions like that is meditation for me. It means to search in the deepest depths of one's own being and dismiss all activity and non-activity in that sense. But as I said, I am just a simple uncomplicated being who does not know much about these techniques and things and I have absolutely no interest in those things.

Q: Many teachers also seem to have gone through a final death experience before self-realization, like yourself?

A: I do not know about many teachers. All I can say is from my own experience. Yes, I have gone through a tremendous death experience and in the end, the final conclusion was that nobody ever died and nobody has ever been born. The life and death as such were pure concepts and mis-conceptions of my own. Existence has no course. People lived in and through their own mental concepts. This is the big illusion.

Q: So death does not exist, only for the body?

A: Also the body is only a concept. It is not a question of only. The body itself is an appearance and a concept.

Q: Seen in this light, does the free will of man exist at all?

A: I never said anything was in the light!

Q: Does the free will exist?

A: For those who like it, they can have it.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Just what I am saying. Everyone can have three wills, why only one?

Q: If you haven't understood that you are beyond mental concepts, what happens at the time of death for such a one? Will he experience reincarnation for example?

A: Of course reincarnation is part of the concept of the one who does not see clearly. So at this level inevitable reincarnation exists. But you have to be very clear that that which incarnates is nothing but ignorance and life after death is exactly the same thing. A person who dies is caught in those concepts which are not of a physical nature in that sense. He will live in the beyond in those concepts, of which he is the owner. It's like a mirror, one could say. One must understand very clearly that on this level everything which one lives now is always here and now. Everything that one is, through his experiences and memories, is the trigger of his destiny. The whole sum of these implied concepts has a certain key of vibration and this will decide exactly what one will find in the beyond.

Q: Did your own death experience give you this insight?

A: My experience was tremendously strong and appeared to me like a thousand years. I can say I went through hells and heavens and met many celestial beings. After a year, when my blindness ended, a friend of mine gave me the Bardo Thodol (The Tibetan Book of the Dead) and I was absolutely surprised to find everything written down the way I had experienced it. It was only much later that I realized the irreality of the (untrue) sphere of the here and the beyond. I saw that they were nothing else than experiences in my own consciousness.

Q: Do you still have visions?

A: Of course, I see you. You are nothing but a vision.

Q: Daily life?

A: What do you mean by daily life?

Q: Well, being normal in the world again, as you put it, how does that unfold for you?

A: Well, I must tell you frankly, I have not the slightest idea about daily life and the world because both have ceased to exist for me. All that I know is that I exist. That is all. Maybe that is normality? Who knows?