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# The World Spirituality Unique Self Vision of Dharma, Lineage, Students and Teachers

Updated Version



**Center for Integral Wisdom**

Evolving A Global Ethic for a Global Civilization

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CENTER FOR INTEGRAL WISDOM

## Abstract & Introduction

In this article, I want to elaborate on the concept of “Dharma, Lineage, Transmission, and the Student-Teacher Relationship” in the specific way these words are used in my Evolutionary World Spirituality community and specifically by the initiating teacher of the community, Dr. Marc Gafni. Marc has infused the word “Dharma” with a series of meanings which have become self-evident in our community. Because Marc has not yet written about his expansion upon the meaning of “Dharma” for the broader public, I have felt that it is necessary to do so.

The Unique Self teachings that Marc has brought into the conversation are now changing the way that enlightenment is experienced and taught around the world. In my perception, the power, love and clarity of his teaching and transmission of Unique Self enlightenment has been so profound that now, in many enlightenment circles around the world, Unique Self thinking under a host of names is virtually a given. And that although ten years ago, Unique Self Dharma was still unheard of in the enlightenment world. While this (often unconscious) adoption of the core teaching of Gafni’s Unique Self Dharma is an excellent achievement and a necessary and gorgeous step for a cogent meme to become mainstream, I find it—for the many reasons that I will discuss in this article—very important to give honor to Marc Gafni’s original inseminating work and transmission as well as to the lineage(s) that he is part of and whose wisdom he is embodying and evolving.

I, myself, have come a long way from studying cognitive concepts and maps, methods of self-transformation and healing, to studying and embodying a comprehensive dharma. The insights and discoveries I want to share with you in this article have also occurred along with the transition from being a devoted and passionate student of the Dharma to becoming more and more a teacher and lineage-holder of the Dharma myself. Specifically, I have been teaching, sharing and representing the Unique Self Dharma in the German-speaking world, which in turn has deepened my own studies. So, let me share the frameworks that I have encountered and that have worked or not worked for me in relation to the teacher-student-relationship and in relation to the "Dharma." These discernments are I believe critical for what Dr. Marc Gafni calls the "post-postmodern integral reconstruction project" which is so profoundly needed in our post-postmodern world.

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## The Question

In the Abstract & Introduction, I have already tipped my hand about the real issues I want to address. I have raised the words Dharma, Transmission, Lineage, Teacher, and Student. But what do I mean by Dharma? What exactly is a “Dharma?” What distinguishes it from other studies? And why should we care?

And what do I mean when I say “my teacher?” Everyone who knows me knows that I am fiercely independent, autonomous, and wanting very much to share my own creativity in the world. So, having a teacher for me must be aligned with all of that. And clearly, I mean something more than just someone who I took a course with or imparted some information to me.

I love my teacher, receive his transmission, and—when appropriate—challenge him and the Dharma. And that is what delights both him and the Dharma most. So, what is this whole teacher-student-thing and this whole dharma-thing about anyways? And what does it mean to talk of a teacher’s “transmission” and who cares about all of this anyway?

## A New World Spirituality Dharma

So, let me fill in some background. While of course I had heard the word Dharma before in Buddhist circles I am not talking about the Dharma in formal Buddhist terms. Rather I am referring to the way the word is used in my Evolutionary World Spirituality community and specifically by the initiating thought leader and teacher of the community, Dr. Marc Gafni.

Marc has been deploying the word in a strikingly original way over the last several years. When he deploys the term, there is a very precise and inspired energy that animates it, which lifts up and changes the interior nature of every conversation that it enters. Marc has deployed this sense of Dharma and Dharma transmission as a key lodestone in the development of the World Spirituality community and specifically in relation to the Unique Self and Eros/Outrageous Love teachings and lineages, which Marc has placed front and center in the Evolutionary World Spirituality Integral community.

I suggested to write this article to Marc and he, in his characteristic style—not in these words, but in his light and serious way in the same sentence—said in effect, “You have received my transmission on the nature of Dharma, now go and through the prism of your creativity and Unique Self evolve it. Imprint it with your Unique Self even as you remain aligned with the core teaching.”

Much of what I write below is the way I have come to understand Dharma in the post-postmodern context of my community, through Marc's teaching and transmission, and through my own autonomous study and Unique Self investigation of these teachings, Integral teachings, and my own path of study and development.

It is our intention in the World Spirituality community to model humbly and audaciously a framework of what a post-postmodern Integral Unique Self Dharma might look like. As Marc has pointed out again and again, the development of a post-postmodern vision of Integral Dharma is an evolutionary imperative of our time.

## The Teacher-Student-Relationship in the Unique Self Dharma

So, first let me say a word about the teacher-student-relationship within the context of the Evolutionary Unique Self World Spirituality Lineage. The Unique Self Dharma discerns between several models of teacher-student-relationship.

Basically, there are three kinds of teacher-student-relationships:

1. There is the classical, mythical “Guru” or teacher who has full authority over students by virtue of having a higher degree of “no-self” or “true self” enlightenment. This is what we call the “Guru model.”
2. There is the teacher who is basically a friend of the student, a fellow traveler along the way, where there is no hierarchy at all. This is what we call the “teacher as friend model.”
3. Both of these, in the World Spirituality-Unique Self perspective are true but partial. In the Unique Self teacher-student-relationship, the teacher must have a genuine transmission of wisdom and enlightened consciousness to share with the student. But this does not give the teacher any ultimate authority over the student. For the student is an irreducible Unique Self with gifts, perspectives and insights that—when fully realized—are not available to the teacher. The teacher’s mandate is to help evoke or even provoke the Unique Self of the student. But once that emerges, it is the Unique Self, which is the seat of authority and not the teacher. So, paradoxically, there is both a submission to the teacher and an audacious affirmation of autonomy and independent creativity of the student. This is what we call the “Unique Self Teacher Student model.”

Zak Stein has written more about this subject in his article “On Spiritual Teachers and Teachings,” published in the March 2011 issue of the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, which was edited by Marc and where he published two key academic articles on Unique Self. [Here is a short excerpt from Zak’s article.](#)

### Three Stations of Love

Model three, the Unique Self Teacher Student model, is further clarified through the prism of one of the core models that Marc teaches which he calls [the three stations of love](#). Without entering into the thick of this model suffice it to say that station one is called submission, station two separation, and station three sweetness:

1. Submission is the first level of the teacher-student-relationship. It starts with the moment when—as Ken Wilber once said in response to a question of how to know that I have found my teacher: “You fall in love with him.”
2. Station two is separation—not leaving the relationship but gaining some more objective clarity in relation to your teacher, their strengths, human shortcomings, complexity, and depth.
3. Finally station three is when you fall in love with your teacher again but this time from a much higher place in your consciousness. You are bound to your teacher but both you and your teacher are bound to the Dharma. And your teacher is bound to you. Your teacher is delighted in your creativity; the relationship is fraught with love and egoless; you begin evolving new pieces of the Dharma in yourself. Your teacher and the lineage itself begin to empower you to emerge

as a teacher even as you deepen your role as student. You develop a dual relationship with your teacher as both source of transmission and also friend and partnering visionary.

While these stations naturally take many years to be fully passed through, they can also emerge in shorter cycles. In my own experience, I sometimes see myself going through the stations a couple of times within minutes or hours, while there are other cycles that take months or years.

Now, let me turn again to the meaning of Dharma in our community.

## The Six Core Strands of the New World Spirituality Dharma

In my discernment, there are six core strands that Marc has originally woven together in what he, citing earlier sources, calls new wine in old flasks.<sup>1</sup>

**First**, he uses Dharma in the way that his native tradition of Kabbalah uses the word Torah. In his words, Torah is an "ongoing living expression of the sacred aliveness of reality organized in explanatory teachings and embodiments that reflect the truest nature we can ascertain about the interior laws of psychological, spiritual, emotional, erotic, ethical, and existential reality." In other words, Dharma is a deep revelation and ascertainment of the inner truth and principles of reality. And that is actually remarkably close to the definition of Dharma in the Indian religions where it means the Law that "upholds, supports or maintains the regulatory order of the universe."

**Second**, Marc deploys the Perennial Philosophy as a modern example of an attempt to articulate Dharma. The Perennial Philosophy—as articulated by the likes of Frithjof Schuon and his circle and popularized by the likes of Aldous Huxley and later Huston Smith—is a collection and integration of the best truths of classical religion. It distinguishes between the surface structures and depth structures of every religion and looks for the shared depth structures of all the great traditions.

**Third**, Marc points out that the Perennial Philosophy taken by itself is regressive. It is a series of truths that are all pre-modern. They do not take into account the best knowing of modernity and postmodernity. Therefore, Marc's third principle is the "*Embracing of evolution as the core fact of the cosmos and the integral principle.*" It has been radically affirmed by Ken Wilber that this evolution takes place, or tetra arises, in all four quadrants—individual, collective, interior, and exterior. So, what we call Dharma is in some sense, as Marc likes to say, "*the Perennial Philosophy in an evolutionary context.*"

**Fourth**, the source of Dharma is not in doctrine or dogma. Dharma is the deepest insight that is born from the eye of the spirit and the eye of the heart. Following Habermas, Integral theory, and the medieval Kabbalists who originally informed him, Gafni here speaks of different domains of knowing: Empirical, rational, and interior all of which have their own methods of perception and their own validity claims. There is the eye of the senses (empirical knowing including much of science), the eye of the mind (including for example mathematics, logic and more) and the eye of the spirit and the heart (including all forms of interior meaning, including love, values, and many dimensions of wisdom).

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<sup>1</sup> I reviewed these core elements of Marc's deployment of the term Dharma during the course of writing this article and he confirmed and clarified the content and language of each of them.

Dharma is the deepest knowing of the core principles of the interior face of the cosmos—a knowing which is supported by implications from the eye of the mind and the eye of the senses. This knowing which emerges directly from the eye of the spirit always requires validations by the “community of the adequate”—meaning of those who have engaged the practices long enough to actually get results that then can be (and have been) compared in cross-cultural, double-blind studies (over many centuries).

Dharma is both a first person realization—that is it is known in first person—as well as supported by a collection of first person testimonies which together create a third person witness of its truths.

**The fifth dimension** that Gafni brings to Dharma is the requirement that Dharma be embodied by an awake teacher whose Unique Self, heart, body, and mind are to some significant extent transparent to wisdom. The teacher must be committed to the evolution of love and to transmitting the Dharma through their integrity, clarity and love. The teacher is not perfect but rather human like the rest of us and as Gafni says, “an imperfect vessel for the light.”

**The sixth domain** which the Dharma expresses has already been pointed to by second generation Integral Theorist Zak Stein in his review of three of Gafni’s books: the two volumes of *Radical Kabbalah* and *Your Unique Self*. He wrote:

“It appears that the rumors of God’s death have been greatly exaggerated! There may be no better way to understand the Divine in the coming decades than what is expressed in this book, where ancient traditions are cast in a new light and brought into a new Century. You will be compelled to respect the unparalleled rigor and depth of scholarship while at the same time swooning from the beauty of the ideas. A work like this comes along once in a generation.”

Stein in this review elaborates on why Gafni’s work is unique and “unparalleled” in its particular gift. In his view, Marc’s work is important in part because it both articulates a new worldview which is fresh and clear and interfaces powerfully in the modern, postmodern and post-postmodern context, even as he is so deeply and reverentially receiving, embodying and transmitting a lineage. Zak points both to the breadth and depth of Marc’s scholarship merging with the beauty and power of fresh ideas.

From his review:

“Gafni’s scholarship serves as a model, not only in articulating a new framework of spiritual thought which I will discuss below, but in creating a new genre of book that offers a distinct intellectual strategy for developing and delivering ideas. At the heart of this approach is a dimension of engagement with the traditions that has already been noticed by integral theorist Sean Esbjörn-Hargens (2012), who deployed Jeffery Kripal’s terms in describing Gafni’s work as a form of ‘mystical hermeneutics and ecstatic scholarship.’ This is a key observation, as Gafni is not only a significant third person scholar of his native tradition of Kabbalah, he is also an advanced first and second person adept within the tradition, possessed of realization received from the lineage.

“In the Introduction to *Radical Kabbalah* Gafni tips his hand and reveals some of his complex agenda. He calls the book an esoteric transmission, which hides appropriately under the fig leaf

of the academic structure and rigor of the work. This is the only section of the two volumes where Gafni drops the academic veneer:

‘I am in love with these teachings, awed by their subtlety and profundity, moved by their commitment and depth and enchanted by their possibility. In the book before you however, I have remained faithful to the academy in deploying the tools of scholarship, in seeking to uncover Rabbi Lainer’s [the lineage master whose works are the focus of *Radical Kabbalah*] teaching exclusively, without entangling it, explicitly or subtly with my own. None the less the initiated reader must remember that this is an esoteric work, one which in understated tones, intends to lay down a revolutionary, evolutionary set of spiritual principles which will be recognized as such by those with a pure heart and a clarified self. (Gafni, 2012, p. li)’”

[Read more of his review here.](#)

### Some Core Teachings of the World Spirituality Dharma

Core to the Dharma Lineage of World Spirituality as developed by Marc are a series of living key Knowings around the following central topics:

- The Universe: A Love Story
- The Democratization of Enlightenment
- Conscious Eros
- Unique Self
- Outrageous Love
- Evolutionary Relationships
- Evolutionary Intimacy
- Unique Gender
- Unique Self Symphony
- The Second Person of God
- Falling in Love with the Divine
- Evolutionary Prayer
- The Personal Beyond the Impersonal
- The Evolution of Tears
- Dual Citizenship as an Enactment of the Conveyor Belt
- and more.

All of these are Dharma in the sense that they are in alignment with the six core principles articulated above.

### The Emerging Lineage of Unique Self & Integral World Spirituality

Most traditions have lineages that in some ways or another go back to their founders. So, Buddhists tend to trace their lineage back to Buddha, Sufis to Muhammad, Christians to Jesus, and Jews to Abraham. At the same time, lineage is connected both to a Dharma as well as to its respective community of practice.



While deeply rooted in many of these old lineages, the World Spirituality, Unique Self, and Eros teachings have all signs of a newly emerging lineage as well: a comprehensive Dharma, its own consistent practices for Unique Self-Realization, as well as the communities (or Sanghas) that engage the practices and have the potential of creating and evolving this new lineage together.

By engaging the practices and by opening to the Transmission of the Dharma through the Unique Self Teacher, the students participate in the foundation of this new lineage. And while former mythical lineages had a tendency to preserve the same way of thinking in their dogmas and doctrines with aberrations leading to the foundation of new lineages, this newly emerging World Spirituality Lineage has its own evolution already built in, as it is held self-evident that the Dharma will be evolved over time by all its practitioners.

And while there still might be different views held by different practitioners that might lead to separation, it is actually part of the practices to engage in what Marc calls “Dharma combat” where the two masters or advanced students fight not for their own egoic sense of being right but in order to find the highest accessible truth and wisdom for this moment in time. Marc also invites any student to challenge him on any issue and delights if they can best him in Dharma combat because in his words, “I learn most from my students who are my teachers.” And as you can imagine that is not easy to do, which is why he is the teacher. And yet the Dharma is democratic. Anyone can enter the holy fray, challenge it, and seek to evolve the Dharma. And nothing—really nothing—makes the teacher happier.

### So, how exactly does this work?

We can only challenge the Dharma by entering it fully, first! We need to live in the Dharma, enter it fully with body, mind, soul, and spirit; we need to do the practices regularly for some time, embody the principles in our lives and see the results. We need to thereby become members of the “*community of the adequate*.” Only then can we really participate in the evolution of the Dharma and the evolution of love.

Or, in terms of the three stations of love, we cannot skip any of these stations. We need to allow ourselves to fall in love with the Dharma, merge with it, and even submit to it, so that the Dharma can start to work us. We need to fall out of love and separate and analyze the Dharma from a little more distance. And we need to do the work to find a mature relationship to it. And although this is a process that can and will take years, it can and will also happen in ten minutes, and again in the next...

Also, our post-postmodern Dharma is not a theoretical concept. We cannot engage this Dharma just cognitively. Yet, we cannot bypass the mind, either. In our practices for Waking Up, Growing Up, Cleaning Up, Opening Up, and Showing Up, we need to engage each of the eyes—the eye of the body, the eye of the mind, and the eye of the spirit and the heart in their respective appropriate ways—to tell us something about the nature of reality, to create a real map that helps us to live a well-lived life, and to create practices that help us transform to the next level of our own development, where the next level of the Dharma can be revealed to us or—to say it more accurately—can be enacted through us.

In coming together as communities of practice—both virtually or online as well as in real life—we participate in the foundation of the new lineage of World Spirituality and Unique Self. Dr. Marc Gafni,

who is the founder of this new lineage—working in partnership alongside with Ken Wilber, who is the founder of the Integral lineage, Sally Kempton, who is a great meditation teacher and transmitter of post-postmodern Kashmir Shaivism, Mariana Caplan, a psychologist and expert on spiritual scandal and controversy, as well as other thought leaders in our activist think tank, The Center for Integral Wisdom—draws on many lineages himself, bringing them together and evolving them into a comprehensive new Dharma.

In all of this, it is important to see that World Spirituality is not a new religion in any sense, shape or form. In the language of the old traditions, “God Forbid.” Each tradition is seen and valued as having its own Unique Self with its own unique contribution that adds an important voice to the symphony of World Spirituality. One can actually remain part of one’s native or chosen tradition and practice it besides being part of this emergent World Spirituality. Or one can engage this World Spirituality Dharma as a lineage of its own. Ken and Marc have also called the World Spirituality lineage “*a trans-lineage path*” because it draws upon the wisdom of all the independent traditional, modern, and postmodern lineages that exist.

So, after all these definitions and thoughts, why did I, as an autonomous human being decide to become part of this lineage?

## Teacher-Student-Relationship Reloaded: My Personal Story

Although I was a student of spiritual teachings for more than 20 years, I was always repelled by the mythical Guru systems, where I would have had to give up my autonomy, in order to obey to the authority of the guru who will or will not abuse it. With all my longing for connection and union, I just couldn’t do it. Again and again, I decided to stick to the postmodern student-teacher-relationship (the second model adduced above), where the teacher is mainly a friend who can maybe teach me some cognitive concepts or can lovingly point me to some issues in my psyche that I otherwise would not be able to see. And although I have learned a lot this way, my heart always knew that there was something missing.

Even if I didn’t know the framework of Unique Self, I had enough intuition of it that my own path and practices helped me to realize my Unique Self even without a comprehensive Dharma of it, helping me move beyond True Self experiences. My True Self experiences were beautiful peak experiences, but were not ends in and of themselves. I resolutely understood that no Guru or Master could ever replace my own Unique Self. With my growing skills of discernment, I perceived people who submitted to a Guru as though their Guru had actually replaced their own soul, higher self, or what I now call Unique Self. And definitely, that was not what I wanted.

So, I stayed in my autonomy. And even the communities I became part of could never fulfill my deepest yearning for true connection. And there weren’t so many teachers around who were:

1. Real lineage holders in one or more traditions
2. Not only transmitting but also evolving their lineages
3. Able to transmit enlightened states of consciousness and love
4. Respectful for the autonomy of the Unique Self of their students AND

## 5. Coming from a truly integral perspective and framework

In meeting Marc Gafni, I have found all of this and I immediately and intuitively decided to become his student. Until now, this intuition has been confirmed by reality over and over again. In the midst of many challenges we are facing together in our collaboration for the Center for Integral Wisdom, my trust in him as a teacher and leader is deepening almost every day of working with him.

### The Three Stations for Me

So, let me give you a first person account on how I experience being a student of the Dharma, a part of this emerging Unique Self and Eros lineage, and finally a teacher and lineage-holder myself.

I have been through some smaller and larger cycles of the three stations of love with my teacher Marc and the Dharma and I can say that my relationship to him and to it continues to deepen. There are times where the subtle energy transmission is so strong that my whole body vibrates for days—even when there is a whole ocean between us. And it seems like Marc always knows the exact proportion of masculine push and feminine holding that I need in order to grow.

Now, does that mean he is perfect? Of course not! Like every other human being he has a unique blend of wonderful unique gifts and also weaknesses. As Marc often says "we are all imperfect vessels for the light." That he embodies his Unique Self most of the times, which gives him an incredible energy to do whatever he is doing (and I have not seen many people work as hard as him), does not mean that he can do everything. He is constantly inviting us to partner with him in this emergent movement of World Spirituality and Integral Wisdom and to do better than him. Yet, when he is in the teacher function and in his transmission, there is a great clarity, wisdom, and love coming through him and from him.

I also have challenged him and the Dharma in several situations. And I was often surprised how Marc has welcomed my view and empowered me to take a leadership role wherever appropriate.

We move through these larger cycles between the Stations of Love, and after moving through Station 2—Separation—and coming to the other side of it in Station 3—Sweetness—our relationship emerges with greater maturity, clarity, and love. At the same time as these cycles are happening, I am becoming able to hold more and more the paradox of autonomy in communion, surrender and personal power.

And finally, I was able to start teaching the Dharma myself, starting to contribute to it my own views and experiences. This is when I find myself in utter sweetness. My Unique Self blossoms into and delights in it. And I continue to let the Dharma work me and the lineage has taken me inside. I can feel it, I am proud of it, and I bow to it in humility, while at the same time I audaciously dare to give my own unique contribution to it.

Here, my utmost autonomy comes together with my sense of being connected to something bigger than me, which is the nature of every Unique Self. I am part of the All while I am also whole (not separate or lacking) by myself. Letting myself be held by the lineage, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the teacher, who in these moments represents the Goddess or Divine Mother, finally releases that old sense of loneliness in me, the sense that I have to "do it all by myself," which can of course never be enough. At the same time, my unique contribution to the All, together with my sense of personal power to actually change

something in the world, can finally take root as I have given up that notion of having to do it all by myself; and I surrender again and again to being part of this.

Now, again, does this mean that I have become perfect all of a sudden? Of course not! I still have my challenges that I work with almost every single day—learning and growing and sometimes reaching the end of my rope. Yet, when I am in the teacher function, I can often feel a great clarity, love, and wisdom pouring through me. And the more I can embody my own Evolutionary Unique Self in my life, the more I get access to that inexhaustible source of energy within me or the cosmos that we can all plug into through our unique “plugs” offered by our Unique Selves—to borrow another image from Marc.

## The Idea of Lineage in a Wider Context

Here, I want to add something to the notion of lineage that comes from my own background.

Earlier in my life, I had been doing some (family) Constellations work that goes back to the work of Bert Hellinger et al. In it, working with representatives for a constellation of the family of origin often results in a constellation at the end where all the (representatives for the) ancestors of the client are standing behind him or her, giving him strength and blessings for his own path of life that is in front of her. Having been in such constellations myself (as client, representative, and leader) I know that this is a very powerful experience. There is a palpable feeling of strength and empowerment coming from behind, that actually strengthens the sense of the own Self, the alignment to and embodiment of one's own Unique Self.

When I teach the lineage Dharma of Unique Self and Eros that I study with Marc Gafni, I have a very similar experience as I had during these constellations: I can feel Marc and his whole lineage behind me transmitting the Dharma to me while I am transmitting it myself. Giving and Receiving become truly one, as is a part of Marc's teaching on Eros. I can only give as much as I receive, while at the same time, my own Unique Self is totally present and grounded, giving my expression a special flavor, adding my own experiences to it, translating the teaching not only into a different language (German) but also into a different culture, sometimes even reaching some people who have been formerly closed to this Dharma... And I totally love it!

If we are really conscious, we realize that all of us stand in the lineages of countless thinkers, mystics, and powerful people. All the people that have been before us, on whose experiences and realizations we build upon, are actually part of our lineage.

As 12th century theologian and author John of Salisbury put it:

"We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours."

So, why then is what I describe not a normal experience for all of us?

In Constellations work, for most us, there are some rituals that have to be taken and really embodied first. The most important one is that we acknowledge to our parents and grandparents that we are small.

We bow to them and say: “You are big. I am small. You give. I take.” And the taking here is not a passive receiving, nor is it a taking without receiving. We open to receive but we also need to actively take hold of whatever is given.

Mostly what hinders this experience is that we make ourselves too big. We think we are big already. We think we may actually need to save our parents and ancestors. Or we think they did it all wrong. And we actually forget that we are the dwarfs sitting on their shoulders.

In not giving credit to all those on whose knowledge and realizations we draw upon, we do the same thing. We make ourselves big. We act as if all those realizations are just coming from ourselves and nobody can or needs to transmit to us. Yet, little do we know... Without the realizations of all the generations before us, we would have to start over again as hunters and gatherers—reinventing not only the wheel but also the fire and language and basically everything that we take for granted in our lives.

Giving credit to those who came before us, acknowledging all the lineages we are part of, realizing that we are small beyond measure as long as we don’t open ourselves to these lineages, that is exactly what opens up all the strength, all the support, all the blessings from our ancestors and predecessors, from all the direct and indirect teachers in our lives. And that paradoxically doesn’t weaken our access to our own spirit or Unique Self, but it strengthens it greatly. And of course, we potentially have something small or great that we will contribute to it. And the lineage is waiting for us. Not giving credit is actually not only arrogant, but it is also the dumbest thing we can do.

## The Responsibility and Dignity of the Student in the Unique Self Lineage

As a teacher, it is my responsibility to clarify both myself as well as my expression of the Dharma again and again, to remain true to the Dharma as it is revealed to me over time, to resist the temptation to change it in order to make it more popular or easily accessible, and to transmit it in ways the students can receive it. It is also my responsibility to open and hold sacred spaces for the students where they can access their own True Self, their own Unique Selves, and where they feel held in the Divine Feminine. It is my responsibility to create the right amount of tension and discomfort for them, sometimes pushing them beyond their recent limitations, while simultaneously holding them in my personal “outrageous” love. And I must say that Marc Gafni has been a real role model for me in all of this; and I have been learning so much by witnessing his example.

Yet, I also need to say that there is a lot of responsibility with the student. The student needs to open him- or herself up to the teachings again and again. “Lean in, don’t lean back!” I first heard this sentence said by my Dharma sister (board member of our Center and spiritual teacher in her own right) Chahat Corten during the first Summer Festival of Love at Venwoude in 2012, and it spoke to me deeply.

We have a natural tendency to contract and close ourselves. We are used to listening to a teaching only with our conditioned minds, thinking of our own thoughts and responses to what is being said, instead of really and actively listening first. We listen for what we already know and put it into little boxes in our minds, instead of being really interested in what is said, opening to something that we don’t know, that surprises us, something that sets our minds and hearts on fire and causes us to literally think outside of the box.

To be open like that and to listen with full presence to a Dharma is a practice in and of itself. Like in a meditation practice, we need to go back to it again and again, whenever we catch our minds wandering, our bodies fall asleep, or our hearts close. There will be moments of great clarity, beauty, and awe, when we discover something new. And there will be moments of resistance, when the Dharma asks us—as it will inevitably do—to grow beyond our current limitations.

If there wouldn't be resistance, we would already be enlightened. And I am not speaking of enlightenment as a final state or stage here, but as the process of enlightening that is never-ending. There is always more to discover, more to embrace, more perspectives to be taken, and more service to be done. There is no limit to the evolution of All-That-Is, of reality itself, the manifest Godhead, or what we often call the Goddess. We are part of—while simultaneously embodying—this process of perfecting that is according to Marc “more perfect than being perfect.” And as Marc Gafni often reminds us, each moment we are not opening, we are closing, and the moment will remain closed to us.

It is important to understand that Unique Self is not an object out there that I can reach. It is not a concept. It is a Realization. And it is paradoxically the very Ground of Being that we have always been, always and already from before our birth, while at the same time it is always in the future. While uniqueness is a feature of the universe in all its expressions all the way down to elementary particles, we not only grow to become conscious of our uniqueness as well as our connectedness more and more, but we also grow increasingly distinct from and connected to each other.

In my own life as well as in working with hundreds of people (friends and colleagues as well as participants in the workshops and groups that I have led and clients with whom I have worked one on one), I have seen it over and over again that real transformation takes place when all aspects of ourselves say a big resounding YES to this process—even if we don't know exactly what will be the result of it, as is always the case with genuine transformation where we enter uncharted waters.

By “aspects of ourselves,” I mean body, mind, soul, and spirit as well as all our sub-personalities or sub-selves (in whatever language you want to put it). Even our inner skeptic (whose job it is to be skeptical, but not cynical) needs to voluntarily step aside for a while to let us experiment with the new. This is of course only possible by “listening” and giving voice to all those inner voices in the first place, albeit only in our minds.

And in my experience, the same is true for the Dharma. In order for it to be truly transformative and to lead to sustainable change (in our everyday lives and in the world!), all aspects of ourselves need to be able to experience, test, and even challenge the Dharma. Only when the answer to it is a resounding YES, can the Dharma do its transformative work. Real transformation happens when every part of us can say YES to the transformation, the leap into the Unknown...

Our job as students—and the second we stop being students (of all the lineages we belong to as well as of our own Unique Self) we should definitely stop being teachers—is to remain present, awake, and aflame, to open up again and again and again, and to let the Dharma work us. It is our job to test the Dharma, to put it into practice in our lives, and to come back with new experiences and questions. That is, as far as I understand, also the way the Dharma evolves through us.

And the Dharma wants everything from us. It consumes us whole and leaves only our Unique Selves, hearts and minds blown wide open. In acts of outrageous love, we evolve the Dharma and the source-code of love itself until no gift remains ungiven. And the Dharma turns her head and smiles...