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## Spiritual Awakening - Steve Taylor, UK

**Guest:** Steve Taylor

**Date:** September 4, 2012

**Length:** 36:59

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**LILOU:** Hello, Steve.

**STEVE:** Good morning, Lilou.

**LILOU:** How are you doing in Manchester?

**STEVE:** Pretty good, thanks. How are you?

**LILOU:** Pretty good, really, really good actually. I love having those conversations. I think we all need those little reminders and I know people all around the world want those and are looking for those and enjoy very much your work because you've been part of that big list of 100 most influential spiritual leaders so I want to congratulate you on that.

**STEVE:** Thanks very much.

**LILOU:** I look forward reading your latest book 'Out of the Darkness', is that right?

**STEVE:** Actually, I have a new book which is published last June. It's 'Back to Sanity'. 'Out of the Darkness' is the book before 'Back to Sanity'.

**LILOU:** Okay.

**STEVE:** 'Out of the Darkness' is published last year and 'Back to Sanity' is published this year'.

**LILOU:** Excellent. So we're gonna speak about all that because I was really drawn to the title, for now 'Out of the Darkness' but we can go to the latest one, too. From my understanding, you're lecturing at the Leeds University on Psychology and you're interested about psychology in spirituality.

**STEVE:** That's right.

**LILOU:** I would very much love to know what is your view and what is for you spiritual awakening?



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**STEVE:** Well, spiritual awakening is a transformation in the way you see the world, it's a transformation in your relationship to the world and it's an expansion and intensification of consciousness so that you perceive a wider and more intense reality and it's a transcendence of the sacredness, the sense of sacredness which human beings often experience. It's the transcendence of sacredness into connection into great sense of connection in all the people, a great sense of connection with nature, and a great sense of connection with the whole cosmos.

**LILOU:** And for you to experience spiritual awakening, we have to go through suffering, unfortunately. It's part of the process?

**STEVE:** Not necessarily. In my research, I did a lot of research on the triggers or factors which bring people into spiritual awakening, lots of psychologists that did this research. It was partly, and also to my own experiences, too, my own experience of spiritual transformation and spiritual awakening. But I did find that the major factor in spiritual transformation did tend to be intense [??] suffering. That's not to say this, the only factor, it was the most intense, the most prevalent factor. So I interviewed several dozen people, a [??] people who'd undergone spiritual transformation and the vast majority of them, probably about 70% of them all underwent a period of very intense turmoil. So these people have been suffering from severe depression, people who suffered from bereavement. Bereavement was a very big factor. People who just wanted to die and also life events like divorce or losing your job, that kind of thing. But those are the big factors, so these, maybe if 7 years of turmoil or a very short intense turmoil, what was happening there was that the turmoil was somehow breakdown the normal sense of self, the normal sense of ego with all these roles and all these attachments would fall away and suddenly a space inside the person's being, there would become literally empty because the normal self would fall away. It was almost as if a link in higher self would emerge and fill this empty space. But, that's not to say that it's the only factor. I've also encountered people who'd undergone spiritual awakening in a purely accidental way where there's no apparent factors and also people who'd been through many years through intense spiritual practice, intense meditation or following a spiritual tradition like Buddhism. So there's a variety of ways but turmoil and trauma do seem to be the main factors.

**LILOU:** And it was the case for Eckhardt Tolle, you've interviewed him, you've connected with him, he went through depression, severe depression.

**STEVE:** Yeah, I interviewed Eckhardt for my book and yeah, he was some ways one of the clearest cases of that. He was, as he writes in the [??] until the age of 29, he lived in the state of constant depression and anxiety until there was a point where he couldn't take it anymore and he fell asleep one night intending to commit suicide but his ego seems to suddenly collapse, the old ego suddenly dissolved away and he woke in this new world and there was a new self looking at the world. He's a very good example of that.



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**LILOU:** The skeptics, the people that don't believe or don't see this connection or this bigger realm or what you call the spiritual awakening, I hear often that they say, 'oh it's because that person needed something else to hang on to rather than a real state of being.' How do you interact with this type of conversations?

**STEVE:** People do sometimes say that it's a self-delusion, particularly people who have been suffering from turmoil and trauma, they say that the trauma was so great that they had to create this delusory reality to escape it. But I think there are some very good reasons why that's not the case probably it's because if you're escaping from reality and you're escaping into narcissism, into self-delusion, you go away from reality. What all of these people are actually going deeper into reality in every way the relationship with reality expands, they perceive more intense reality, they have more authentic relationships with other people, they look more altruistically, they help other people. In some cases, we often have this idea that spiritual awakening means withdrawing from the world. It means going to live in pains or going to monastery or live in the forest of India, and so forth. A lot of the people actually go through spiritual awakening become more engaged with the world. If you have a strong sense of mission, a strong altruistic drive to relieve other people's suffering to improve people's predicaments. So in every way, these people became more involved in the world, they became more engaged with reality. So it's very difficult to say that it would be a self-delusion. In every way, they become better functioning human beings, they've gone into a higher state. If they were escaping, they would surely go the other way. That's a good reason why it's an authentic real state.

**LILOU:** Yeah. Did you find out, because I'm so interested about those stories, obviously I travel the world and interview people that have done that shift and I'm always interested in that tipping point beyond the suffering and all the outside, what makes a person all of a sudden be connected to everything and have a whole new perspective? What did you see as the mechanism or something or the switch or have you found out?

**STEVE:** I'll give you a couple of examples, I'll give you a couple of stories of the people in the book. There was a lady I interviewed who lives here in England called Glen. Her daughter died, her daughter died at the age of 20 which she had this small baby. It was all very sudden and very mysterious that she died. As a consequence, she was obviously devastated by this, but as a consequence, everything else in her life fell away too. She lost her job. She had financial problems, everything collapsed in the space of 1 or 2 years, everything collapsed. And she was devastated and depressed for a long time. Suddenly without warning one day about 2 years after her daughter's death, she was driving a car and suddenly felt something was happening inside her, she was undergoing some kind of shift. Suddenly she describes it as if the gate was suddenly opening, almost as if flood gates were opening and suddenly knowledge was flooding through. She had to pull over at a car park, [??] and she knew that something incredibly important was happening so she just decided to sit back and let it happen. Suddenly she was flooded



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with this amazing knowledge. She thought she had visions about the future, she could sense what other people were thinking. She had lots of revelations about the meaning of life. It took a while for it to settle down, it was kind of overwhelming, but it took a while to settle down. But once it settled down after a few days, she felt that she was a new person, she felt this amazing sense of appreciation for living in the world, she felt an amazing sense of connection to the whole reality. She felt suddenly removed from any anxiety or depression. She felt she suddenly transcended them. So although she still loved her daughter, she felt it in some way, she no longer grieved for her, she sort of transcended the grief. And that remained constant, it's been a few years, she's still in that same state, she's in the same state of amazing connection and appreciation. Another case was a counselor I used to work with at my college called Kevin and he had been quite a severe alcoholic and like many alcoholics, within a few years slowly his life began to crumble away. His wife left him, he lost his business because people no longer trusted him. And slowly he lost all his savings. He'd been quite a successful businessman being an architect in his own company but slowly he lost everything. In the end, there was only 200 pounds left in his bank account, he's living in a tiny, scruffy flat here in Manchester. He decided to drink the rest of his money away and he even thought about committing suicide because he had nothing left. But he decided he couldn't commit suicide because he'd been brought up as a spiritualist who believes in life after death. So he knew that suicide wasn't a solution. So he decided to go along to some AA meetings and after one or two weeks, he decided to, in AA they call that the process of letting go or handing over your problem, so he decided to go through this process where he decided this problem is too big for me to deal with so I'm going to hand over to some higher power. So he did that mentally, he handed over his problem. And suddenly a bit like Glen, he was flooded with this sense of wellbeing, as if something has suddenly given away. And he suddenly felt amazingly grateful and amazingly serene inside and as if the whole other world is suddenly little with meaning. He describes, he says he felt like he was on honeymoon, everything was just incredibly alive. And again that remained with him, it's been 15 years now and he's still in that same state of appreciation and wonder that a miracle, that being alive. The important thing here is that all of these people, they came through so much loss and so much turmoil but all of the attachments that we have, all of the ego attachments which we have flowed away. For example, our attachment to the future falls away, our attachment to hopes and ambitions falls away. Our attachment to wealth falls away because our wealth is taken away, our roles are taken away in society, our relationships are broken down. So, literally everything breaks down but because the ego is made up of all these attachments, these attachments are the building blocks of the ego, so when the building blocks are taken away, the whole ego just collapses a bit like an earthquake where a building collapses in an earthquake. So suddenly these people are completely empty which gives them a terrible sense of loss, a terrible sense of desolation. But because there's so empty inside, there's a space for a latent higher self to emerge and that seems to be what happens that this latent higher self emerges into space and becomes that normal sense of entity.



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**LILOU:** Could it also be linked to something happening with the heart?

**STEVE:** In what way?

**LILOU:** In like, in opening of the heart, the heart being shut down before and that would open up to something else like the ego collapse but the heart also feels like it opens up to something bigger to receive and to connect.

**STEVE:** Yeah, I think that's a good way of describing it. You could very well describe it in that way. It's almost as if many people, these people we're talking about, their identity is so focused on the ego that when it closes off, everything else in their being, so when the ego collapses, suddenly there's this space for all other aspects to come through. Yeah, you could describe that the heart suddenly opens, identity suddenly goes down from the ego down to the heart.

**LILOU:** How do you feel a lot of people talk of 2012, how do you feel about that? Do you feel a shift in England or wherever you travel or have you ever been interested by all those prophecies finding out 2012, do you see something happening?

**STEVE:** I do see something happening, not just in England but all around the world, but I'm a bit skeptical about relating it in particular to 2012. I think in general there's a gradual shift in consciousness. I think more and more people are having spiritual experiences, temporary spiritual experiences but also more and more people are undergoing permanent spiritual awakening too. That was one of the things I found when I was writing 'Out of the Darkness'. I found it so easy to collect examples of this in people because they are everywhere around me and people, one of my students at the university had this experience, one of my colleagues, a couple of people in my wider circle of acquaintances. I became aware that so many people are undergoing a shift. One of the interesting things that a lot of them didn't actually understand it because they don't know background in spirituality and didn't know anything about meditation or healing or spiritual traditions like Buddhism, they knew nothing about it. So when it happened, when they underwent the shift, they were sometimes a little bit confused, they knew they felt a sense of wellbeing, they knew something fantastic had happened to them and at the same time a little bit confused. People around, maybe they try to explain it and people say, 'you've suddenly gone a bit crazy.'

**LILOU:** Especially the beginning where you try to explain.

**STEVE:** Yeah. They would say, 'maybe you should see a psychiatrist'. But slowly, they gravitated towards all the spiritual people, they gravitated towards spiritual books and spiritual groups. So eventually they did begin to understand it. I'm kind of doubtful that 2012 in itself is a very significant milestone in





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human history but I think that in general of the last few decades and in the future may emerge something special or significant is happening to human consciousness.

**LILOU:** How is your – can you tell us a little bit more about your latest book and why you decided to add that piece in your work? Because it is not a small task to work on a book and put it out and then promote and go out in the world. You've invested your time as an author, as a researcher, [??] into the new topic or area. Could you tell us more why?

**STEVE:** You mean my latest book, 'Back to Sanity'?

**LILOU:** Yes.

**STEVE:** Yeah this is a book called 'Back to Sanity: Healing the Madness of the Human Mind'. It really began, when I was younger, when I was a teenager in my early 20's, I often had a feeling that something quite not right about human beings. When I looked around me and the way the people are living, even my own family, it's partly because in those days, when I was a teenager, it was before computers, before the internet, everybody around me used to watch TV all the time. The TV was always on in my house. When I walked in the street and I'd look into people's living rooms and everybody will be watching TV in the evening. I think, what's going on? Why do people spend their whole evenings, why do people waste their whole evenings staring at this picture box in the corner of their rooms? It seems to be it was based on the human need to escape from your own self. If human beings were happy just to, if they were happy with themselves, they would be able to just sit in the room without turning the TV on, without turning the computer on. They would just be happy just to be. So it seemed to me that human beings are not really happy just to be. I always thought there was restlessness inside people, too. Most people in general, they're in a state of dissatisfaction, they're striving to gain something, they're striving to achieve more in the future, they're striving to acquire more wealth and possessions or to acquire more status and more power, more fame. And then when I was younger, I looked back at human history, I started to read about history and archaeology. If you look back at history, it's just an endless battle on the warfare and conflict for the last 3000 years, endless brutality and cruelty. So that gives you, but also suggest that there's something wrong with human beings. So in 'Back to Sanity', I proposed the idea that human beings or most human beings suffer from a psychological disorder which I call humania, that's human madness. So this psychological disorder creates the sense of restlessness which makes us strive, which makes us determine to strive the things in the future and makes it very difficult for us to live in the moment and to live inside ourselves and it's also responsible for all of the conflicts in human history, all the warfare, all of the oppression and even the environmental destruction which we're living through at the moment, they're all linked into humania. But I've always been interested in indigenous people, too. If you compare, for example, when the Europeans went to America and Australia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, they wrote reports about how the native peoples lived. It seems to be



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that they didn't suffer from this restlessness and this discontent, they did have a sense of connection to nature, they respect it, the natural world. They lived in harmony with the natural world. In some ways, we seem to have lost that. So 'Back to Sanity' I try to explain why we lost that sense of connection, why we suffer from the psychological disorder, but most importantly, I suggest what we can do to overcome this disorder and how we can learn to live in harmony with ourselves and with the world.

**LILOU:** And also, I know that more and more people, some people blame the conspiracy theory and there are people that want to lead the world and when you look at history or nowadays, the big media, you see negative stories but there are really wonderful things happening, too, around the world but it's just that it wasn't talked about at that time and still not enough and people like me, ordinary people have to come out and do the work. Do you believe in some of those, that it is also maybe a group of individuals or we just trap ourselves, how do you see, do you see that it could also be related to some external factors that little by little we've been living this way and we just have to for survival?

**STEVE:** Interestingly, if we look back really far in human history, we go back 6000 years ago, the traditional idea is that human beings were living in caves, they were eating each [??] with sticks, there's a grunting language, they couldn't speak properly and also that they lived really terrible and really hard nasty lives. There's a famous quote from an English hospital, Thomas Hobbes that life has always been nasty, brutish and short. But in actual fact, if you look into the research, into archaeology, you'll find that early human beings actually live very harmonious lives and very, in some ways, easy lives, too, because they were all hunter gatherers, hunter gatherers, which means they would come in a particular site for 23 or 4 months or 6 months and then they hunt the next one, usually live in the forest and food was everywhere, they didn't have to work very hard to get food, food was everywhere around them. So, anthropologists believe that early human beings probably spent 3 or 4 hours a day gathering food and the rest of the time was leisure time, you know, they have endless time to talk and to sing and to engage in spiritual practices. It seems to be that they felt a very strong connection to nature, they felt they were aware of spirits all around them, almost all indigenous people in the world have a term for spirit force. They have a word which means soul force or spirit force, the soul which lives inside the world. So they seem to have been constantly aware of this force, so they had a sense of sacredness. All of nature was sacred and they work hard in this sacred web of nature. It's really only later that when human beings started farming and when cities developed, that's when things started to go downhill. That's when life became really hard. That's when lifespan decreased, also that's when tiny groups of people began to dominate the rest of the society. In hunter gatherer groups, they are very egalitarian, everybody shares decisions, there was no leaders, or if there are leaders, they're very kind of quite an [??] and very democratic and very egalitarian. But suddenly, when people thought farming and towns and cities developed, a small number privileged people begin to take control, they begin to oppress 90 or 95% of the population. They have all the power, they control wealth and resources and they live lives of luxury



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while the rest of the population lives a life of squalor or deprivation. And that's always been the case. We call it history of the last 50,000 years. It's always been a case of aristocrats and the nobles dominating and oppressing 90% of the population. In some ways I'm quite optimistic because that's began to change in the last 100, 200 years especially in Europe. Things have become more equal again. The old feudal system is broken down and there's a lot more equality around. So in some ways, I'm quite optimistic.

**LILOU:** That's good. Do you think there is different kind of leadership that is needed in the world or some changes that could happen or some [??] as we say in French that you start to realize you've been waiting for something but we are the one that we've been waiting for kind of thing?

**STEVE:** I think one of the problems in our societies is that people who become leaders, usually the people who should not be leaders, the people who should be prevented from being leaders because it's usually the people have the strongest drive for power, the strongest desire to control other people, these people have the strongest ambition and usually those people don't have very much empathy and responsibility to other people. They tend to be quite narcissistic and quite self-centered. But it's a sad fact that these people usually run the positions of prominence, not just politicians, but all over our society, the managers in corporations, they even have teachers at schools, people in local governments. There's always the people with the least empathy and responsibility and conscience that've taken these positions of power. So I think we should follow practices to Native Americans and also hunter gatherer peoples, they don't let people decide to become leaders, they choose leaders, they vote, they decide which person should become leader even if they don't want to. So the collective group decides who is the wisest person in the group and they elect them as leaders. Often people don't wanna be leaders, 'I'm quite happy being on the sidelines, living the life of leisure.' And they say, 'no, you're wise, you've got to be the leader.' So leaders do not choose themselves, they are chosen by other people. I think that would be much better.

**LILOU:** Do you, a lot of people are talking about a new economy and new paradigm, do you have advice or insights on that?

**STEVE:** The last 300 years, I think has been a major change in human beings occurring. If you look back at human history, which I did in my book before, I looked back at the last few thousand years of history and all of the nightmarish oppression and conflict. If you go back 300 years, suddenly there is a flaring of human consciousness. Suddenly people began to empathize with one another. They began to relate to animals and to nature and that's why in the 18<sup>th</sup> century suddenly there was a movement against slavery. Suddenly women's rights became important and animal rights. Suddenly people began to reconnect with nature which led to the romantic movement in poetry and arts and music. Suddenly there was a transcendence of sacredness and I think that's continuing now, it's intensifying. I think





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people collectively transcending ego sacredness. They're beginning to connect with others, they're connecting more and more to nature, they're connecting more and more to the spiritual aspects of the cosmos. To me, it's an evolutionary movement. I think it's an evolutionary shift. If you look back at evolution, you can see as progressive and slow intensification of consciousness in different life forms and that's continuing inside human beings. Our own consciousness collectively is intensifying and expanding. I think that's happening very, very quickly for the moment.

**LILOU:** Because some people talk about a turning point, the same way human beings experience spiritual awakening. Maybe our whole planet has experienced that after certain number of people are possibly awakened or how do you see this turning point on the more global big scale? Since you've started on a personal level also.

**STEVE:** If you look back at evolution, higher forms of life seem to be latent to low forms of life. Everything seems to be latent. So insects or low forms of life such as insects, the higher stages of life was somehow dormant and waiting to emerge. I think it's interesting when I talked to one of the people in 'Out of the Darkness', it was as if, there's a latent higher self waiting to emerge inside him. I think this higher self is possibly latent inside everybody. I think it's the next evolutionary step to the human race, the next evolutionary step for all of us, it's a more expansive awareness where we can sense what we transcend sacredness and sense the spiritual essence to all human beings and where we transcend anxiety and feelings of insecurity or fear. I really do think that this is latent inside human beings and that's slowly progressing collectively towards this state. When it does happen, it will be, we'll live in a transformed world. The world will be more harmonious and more peaceful place.

**LILOU:** Because some people are already living in that state, right? There is some people that are enlightened and living that more or less. I guess there's different degrees of it. But a lot of us, and I know a lot of people watching this videos, feel connected and they're about to or most of the time they are already, they're feeling this spiritual awakening, so it's beautiful. But there is, as you're saying, there is possibly a different stage where all of us then would really live in this world, not just, some other authors talk a new earth, but the old earth and the new would collaborate, not collaborating but 2 different occurrence and way of living in fear or in love. So, some people say it's already there, some people see it's 2 different planets or 2 different worlds. Simultaneously living together but no longer kind of being able to speak the same language, unfortunately.

**STEVE:** Well, I think we're still in the minority. People or experts that call it spiritual awakening, even if it's only temporary, even if it comes and goes, we're still a minority. We're still out there in the world and the world is still dominated by materialism and selfishness and grief. I think slowly, spiritual awakening is spreading to the whole entity, the whole human race. In some ways, I don't think it's gonna transform the world in a radical way, I think the shift will be quite gentle. I think when you



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experience spiritual awakening, in some ways, it can be quite ordinary, almost, the world is still the world, we still live in the same world. It's just like a different world. It's a world of connection. It's a world of beauty and we feel a sense of appreciation and serenity inside ourselves but we still live in the same world, we still interact with the people. The difference is that we no longer feel competition and rivalry and fear towards other people. We feel warmth and empathy towards other people. We no longer strive for our own, to achieve for our own desires. We no longer strive to accumulate possessions and status. The main striving of our life becomes to alleviate all the people's suffering, to help other people, to share with other people. So there's a substitution of individualistic pursuits or individualistic desires with collective, desire for collective wellbeing.

**LILOU:** Well, thank you so much, Steve, for this juicy conversation as I like to call them because they bring us the juice of life, you know, the essence and we can taste it, feel it, and somewhat live it more and more each day or get reminders. Thank you for this conversation. I hope we can meet in Manchester since I'll be going there on my way to Glasgow to the I Can Do It Conference. Thank you very, very much.

**STEVE:** Thank you, Lilou.

**LILOU:** It was fun.

**STEVE:** Me too. I enjoyed it. That's all.

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