Most human behavior is nothing other than the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure. Whenever we experience an event, whether it's a visit to the dentist or going on a joyride at the carnival, our consciousness registers that experience internally on a spectrum with great pain at one end and extreme pleasure at the other. Once completed, the memory of that experience is tagged to either pain or pleasure, and it continues to exist in our body-mind.

Memory is useful because it gives us a sense of continuity. But memory is also imprisoning because it conditions us in predictable ways. The great yogi Lord Shiva said, "I use memories, but I do not allow memories to use me." We have to use memories; otherwise we wouldn't find our way home. When we use memories, we are creators. But when our memories use us, we become victims.

Are you ready to step out of the prison of memory and conditioned responses into the experience of freedom? If so, then observe your addictive behaviors without judgment. Addiction is the number-one disease of civilization, and it's directly and indirectly related to all other diseases. Besides physical addictions, such as the addiction to food, tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, there are psychological addictions, such as the addiction to work, to sex, to television, to shopping, to appearing young, to suffering, to anxiety, to melodrama, to perfection.

Why are we addicted to all these things? We are addicted because we are not living from our source; we have lost our connection to our soul. The use of food, alcohol, or drugs is essentially a material response to a need that is not really physical at its foundation. Drunkenness, for example, is really a forgetting of personal memory so we can experience the joy of the nonpersonal, the universal. What we are looking for is pure joy rather than mere sensation, or even oblivion of sensation. Self-destructive behavior is unrecognized spiritual craving. All addictions are really a search for the exultation of spirit, and this search has to do with the expansion of consciousness, the intoxication of love, which is pure consciousness.

Over and over, people have tried to overcome their addictions through psychological and behavioral methods or through medication. None of these offers a permanent cure. The only cure for addiction is spiritual. We hunger for the ecstatic experience, which is a need as basic as the need for food, water, or shelter. Ecstasy, or ek-tasis, literally means stepping out. True ecstasy is stepping out of the bondage of the time-bound, space-bound world of materialism. We long to step out of the limitations of the body. We long to be free of fear and limitation. We hunger for the oblivion of our ego so that we can experience our infinite Being.

When the ego or the image of the self overshadows the unbounded Self, we feel cut off or disconnected from infinite consciousness, our source. This is the beginning of fear, the onset of suffering, and all of the problems of humanity, from our minor insecurities to our major catastrophes, such as war.

Start today to transcend your addictive behaviors by observing them without judgment. Wake every day with a prayer: "Thank you, God, for making me just as I am," and then observe yourself. Be a witness to your thoughts, your

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moods, your reactions, your behaviors. They represent your memories of the past, and by witnessing them in the present, you liberate yourself of the past. By observing your addictive behaviors, you observe your conditioning. And when you observe your conditioning, you are free of it, because you are not your conditioning; you are the observer of your conditioning.

Observe the silence between your thoughts, your actions, your reactions, and you will feel the presence of spirit in the stillness of those spaces. In the mere observation of yourself, you begin the process of healing and transformation. And if you keep practicing ever-present awareness of your own self, then insight, intuition, and imagination will begin to blossom.

People have asked me, “If the universe is so elegantly organized and we are born with all this human potential and creativity, then why are we so ignorant?” Well, if we were already enlightened, there would be nothing to do. It’s a process. If you occasionally succumb to your addictive behavior, understand that this, too, is part of the process. You may keep falling, but you can always get up and continue on your journey.

No matter how hysterical your environment appears to be, remain alert and sober in your ever-present witnessing awareness. Resolve not to get drawn into the melodrama around you. Remind yourself, I am neither superior nor inferior to anyone who exists. Saint or sinner, the spirit that resides within me is the divine spirit. It has taken on a certain role in this lifetime; it has taken on other roles in other lifetimes. I honor the divine spirit in myself and in all beings as holy and sacred no matter what role it is playing.

None of us are the roles we play. Recognizing this truth, it is easier to forgive all perceived transgressions. We don’t feel compelled to label, evaluate, analyze, or judge ourselves or others. When we have no need to label or judge, it’s easier to relinquish the desire to control and manipulate others.

In this very moment, you are surrounded by a field of pure consciousness. Pure consciousness illuminates and animates your mind and body, and it is powerful, nourishing, invincible, unbounded, and free. By knowing your true nature, it is possible to go beyond suffering. When you go beyond suffering, you help others to go beyond suffering. As you continue on your journey of healing, you help others to heal. And you can start to heal by observing your addictive behaviors without judgment. Once you find your true self, once you become whole, the only intoxication you have is the intoxication of pure consciousness, pure Being.