



When Certainty Replaces Curiosity

How Metaphor Can Misdirect

“I would rather have questions that can’t be answered than answers that can’t be questioned.”

—Richard Feynman

1. The Omission

I didn’t notice at first. While rereading my essay *Once Upon an Awakening*—a piece exploring the metaphors that shape our experience of spiritual realization—I suddenly saw what wasn’t there. For all its exploration of *transparency*, *dissolution*, and *transcendence*, one of the most enduring metaphors in the spiritual lexicon was entirely absent: *liberation from bondage*.

Liberation. The idea of awakening as the discovery of inner freedom—but freedom from what? From a narrow, constricting worldview. From identification with thoughts that box in and flatten the multidimensional nature of being. This metaphor of liberation—so central to countless traditions: *Vedanta’s moksha*, *Buddhism’s nirvana*, *the Exodus of the Israelites in the Judeo-Christian imagination*—had simply vanished from my vocabulary.

Looking back over the past year of writing, especially the poems, the same pattern emerged. Other metaphors were used freely and often: *homecoming*, *melting*, *unfolding*, *disappearance into light*. But not *liberation*. Not even subtly.

This wasn’t a conscious decision. I hadn’t rejected the metaphor on principle. I had simply—completely—forgotten it. And once I saw the omission, I began to question why.

There was something about the quality of the forgetting that felt deliberate, even if the deliberation itself had been erased. It had the flavour of denial, or perhaps dissociative repression—a forgetting that served to protect, to distance, to survive.

Why had I left it out? What had made that metaphor so unpalatable, so unusable, that it never even knocked on the door of my awareness?

The answer, I suspect, lies in my past—and in the way metaphors, when weaponized, can wound.





2. The Legacy of a Loaded Metaphor

When I first met Andrew Cohen, the idea of *freedom*—of *liberation*—was deeply enticing. It seemed to hold the promise of something only faintly glimpsed, a light behind the veil of ordinary life. In those early days within the community, there was a real buzz about it. Liberation wasn't just a goal; it was an atmosphere, a current running through us. It carried a charge, an urgency, a shared sense that we were part of something meaningful and new.

We believed we were spiritual warriors, taking on the noble task of confronting the ego. The metaphor of liberation inspired us. It gave shape to the inner work, to the fire of transformation. It was an ideal we willingly rallied around—not out of fear, but out of trust. What underlay it all was a profound confidence in Andrew's vision. We believed in what he saw, even when we couldn't yet see it ourselves. So, when doubts arose or resistance stirred, we learned to interpret them not as inner guidance, but as signs of egoic attachment. The metaphor had become the lens through which all experience was filtered.

That was the slippery slope. Once you begin to label your own conscience as “the traitor within,” it becomes almost impossible to climb back out. Like a pitcher plant, the metaphor was sweet at the rim, irresistible at the edge—but once inside, it became harder and harder to find a way out. Eventually, the only valid truth was the one seen through Andrew's eyes. And as he grew increasingly frustrated with our collective failure to “transcend the ego once and for all,” the warmth and camaraderie of the early community began to darken. The metaphor of liberation, which had once inspired devotion, began to demand allegiance.

3. Returning to the Root: What Liberation Really Means

Looking back, I can see how far the metaphor of liberation had drifted from its original spirit.

In the Eastern traditions that first gave rise to this image, *moksha*—liberation—is not a conquest. It is not achieved through violence, willpower, or force. Rather, it is a quiet, clear seeing: the recognition that the self we thought we were—the limited, striving, anxious ego—was never ultimately real. The prison we believed ourselves to be trapped in was never locked. The cell door was always ajar. All that was ever required was to *turn around*.

Liberation, in that sense, is not a break-out—it's a waking up. It's the dissolution of a false identification, not the slaying of a real enemy.

But in Andrew's philosophy, ego was cast as a monster—a looming, active force that had to be confronted and defeated. Liberation became a spiritual war. The ego wasn't seen as a mistaken identity, but as an obstruction, a toxin, a dangerous force that stood between us and purity. The primary weapon we wielded in this battle was *intention*—used not as a gentle orientation of the heart, but as a goad. We pushed ourselves and each other relentlessly, trying to break through what we believed to be our inner enemy.

The paradox, which I've only come to see more clearly in the years since, is this: the ego isn't real in the way we believed it was. It is a powerful illusion—yes. Hypnotic, persistent, convincing. But it has no substance of its own. And when you fight a mirage, something strange happens: you give it energy. It becomes more vivid, more solid, more resistant. By treating it as an enemy, we made it real. By declaring war, we gave it ground.

We weren't transcending the ego—we were feeding it.



And so the metaphor of liberation, once pointing toward freedom and insight, became the justification for a false battle. The warzone wasn't just internal—it permeated our relationships. We couldn't fully trust ourselves or each other. The noble warrior spirit that had animated our early days began to turn in on ourselves. Suspicion took root. The intoxicating sense of shared purpose gave way to something darker.

What had started as a vision of freedom slowly became a state of surveillance. A Stasi-like mentality crept in, where any lingering humanity was viewed with concern, and any questioning of the process was seen as a sign of egoic infiltration. We became wary of one another, and wary of ourselves.

The metaphor had hardened. And in doing so, it had begun to harm.

4. When Metaphor Becomes Dogma

Metaphors are useful tools of perception—they're meant to open things up. They don't explain so much as evoke. A good metaphor doesn't pin truth down; it *points toward* something subtle, something otherwise difficult to name. It's provisional. Poetic. Held lightly.

The trouble is, metaphor operates almost invisibly. Its power to frame and colour our perception is so subtle that we often don't recognise its presence as a shaper of experience. It feels like reality itself.

So when a metaphor becomes a doctrine, it loses its flexibility. We no longer see *through* it—we see *only* it.

That's what happened with the metaphor of liberation in my former community. It stopped functioning as a lens and became a law. Not just a way of describing awakening, but the yardstick we measured everything by. You were either "on the side of liberation," or you were lost in ego. The metaphor began to operate as a totalizing worldview—one that made doubt dangerous and nuance suspect.

And this is the deeper danger: when metaphor is mistaken for truth itself, it becomes a weapon. It demands capitulation. It overrides inner experience and tramples conscience. It divides the world into the saved and the fallen, the awakened and the deluded.

We often think of spiritual harm as arising from rigid ideology or entrenched belief systems—but it can just as easily come from metaphor, when it's handled without care. For all our resilience as human beings, there is a fragility to the psyche when it is continually battered by a version of truth that doesn't meet its inner reality.

In the end, the metaphor of liberation had twisted so far from its roots that it became its opposite. What we had once envisioned as a doorway into freedom became a dungeon that we couldn't see our way out of. The very ideal we chased with such devotion—liberation—had hardened into the walls of our own spiritual prison. And for me, the only way out wasn't through some final act of transcendence. It came, quite simply, by running away. Leaving was my liberation. Finally free to find out for myself – and isn't that the essence of freedom?

5. Free to Breathe

Before the metaphor of liberation became distorted, it held a profound and innocent appeal.

I wasn't seeking freedom from anything specific—the word *freedom, liberation*, needed no association to carry its allure. For me, it wasn't about escape from the world or rejection of the messy human condition. It was a longing



for space. A bigger window on the world. Spaciousness. The pull to realise an inherent potential still lying dormant. The freedom to breathe, to rise above the noise and distraction, to move lightly in a world that so often felt heavy.

A book that influenced me profoundly in my youth was Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. It wasn't a story about flying—it was an allegory for what I most longed for: a life of clarity, elevation, wonder. A way of being unbound by convention or fear. A way of soaring.

That early sense of freedom wasn't rooted in opposition—it was rooted in expansion. In rising into something greater, subtler, more whole. It was about moving beyond confinement, not as rejection, but as return—to something original and vast. A purity of presence. A view from the mountain that lets you see the whole terrain.

But somewhere along the way, the metaphor began to harden. What had been a call to rise became a command to escape. The gentle spaciousness I had felt in those early years was replaced by an urgent demand to transcend. To break through. To confront. No longer just to see clearly—but to sever ties with anything “less than.” With doubt. With emotion. With complexity. An absolute that obliterated the personal rather than embracing and integrating it.

Alarm bells should have been ringing. In fact, at times they were—but I'd already drunk the Kool-Aid. I ignored my better instincts, labelling myself deluded, limited, and weak.

Because when freedom is misunderstood as a severing from all things human in pursuit of some idealised absolute, it becomes a kind of spiritual violence. The longing that began as wonder turns into a war against the self. What once opened us to the mystery of being becomes a tool for overriding its messiness.

We forget that the sky and the earth belong to the same world.

6. Integration as an Alternative Metaphor

So, I ran away.

I re-entered the world and saw immediately how much I had been cut off from something vital to our humanity—real connection. Friends I had abandoned on my spiritual quest welcomed me back and reflected, gently but clearly, how robotic I had become while in the “cult.”

I embraced the world again—and yes, perhaps I lost myself temporarily in all its lushness and temptations. But maybe I needed that immersion. Maybe I needed to explore what it meant to be fully human, with a courage I hadn't known before. Sometimes going through the fire can also have its benefits.

Gradually, the pull toward deeper authenticity and integrity returned. First through meditation, then contemplation, and eventually through a fuller engagement with the longing I had always known.

But I no longer saw that longing in terms of *freedom*. I was discovering myself in all my complexity—and yet, paradoxically, that complexity was now framed by a deeper simplicity. As I began to explore, in my writing, how to live in the world as a fully human being while remaining aware of the limitless horizons of my true nature, other metaphors naturally emerged.



Not replacements, exactly—but natural expressions of the territory I was now inhabiting. *Homecoming. Unfolding. Transparency. Melting. Presence.* These became the quiet architecture of my inner life—not because I chose them, but because they matched the shape of my experience.

And maybe that's why "liberation" disappeared. Not as a conscious act of rejection, but as a kind of evolution. I had outgrown it—not the longing behind it, but the form it had taken.

The metaphors that came to me in its place didn't ask me to rise above myself or sever what felt human and tender. They asked me to listen. To soften. To stay. They didn't divide reality into higher and lower, true and false, self and ego. They invited me to hold the whole of it. To recognise that what we most want to escape is often the doorway to intimacy.

These metaphors honour the mystery of being without needing to conquer it. They don't promise a final breakthrough or a pristine state beyond the personal. They speak to a different kind of freedom—one that includes fragility, contradiction, and depth. One that lets me be here, as I am, with no expectations imposed on the horizon.

Perhaps forgetting the metaphor of liberation was a kind of healing. A recognition that a word which had once meant soaring had come to mean pressure, surveillance, perfectionism. The forgetting made space for something truer to arrive.

Integration isn't a concept for me now. It's a way of being. It's the freedom not to escape, but to stay—and to discover that the more I'm willing to meet what's here, the more the ground itself becomes spacious.

7. Reclaiming Language, Gently

So, coming back to the reason I felt this essay was an important exploration—just why did I forget the metaphor of liberation so completely?

To me, liberation was always about spaciousness. So when that perspective was tarnished, the only way to rediscover that spaciousness was to walk away from it—and find other ways to express the inner longing.

I don't feel the need to reclaim the metaphor. But maybe now is the time to re-examine it—and perhaps even redefine it.

Because maybe liberation isn't from the human condition, but freedom from the compulsion to escape it. Freedom to be right here, as I am, without feeling that this is somehow wrong, not enough, unworthy—the very reasons we postpone our return home. To be liberated *into* the moment, rather than *out* of it.

Metaphors live in the body, not just the mind. And when they've been misused, they leave a residue—like a bad smell. It takes time for language to become trustworthy again. For certain words to feel safe. To transmit real meaning.

If liberation still has a place in my life, it's no longer as a goal. It speaks of coming home. Of living in presence where once there was striving.



Will it reappear in my writing, now that I've explored the hidden world I closed the door on so many years ago? Only time will tell. But I can certainly feel my breath being that little bit deeper and freer—and in the end, that was always what it was about.

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