

The Joy of No

WANTING

An Interview with Linda Clair by Leo Drioli and Enza Vita

It's easy to imagine an enlightened teacher living in some ashram in the Himalayas or even maybe in California or upstate New York, but what about right at our very doorstep in the Adelaide Hills?

For some, it's become a rare and precious opportunity not to be missed... having a realised teacher so readily available to aid in the deepening of their own realisation.

Linda Clair is a fascinating teacher. She offers a non-sectarian approach to sitting, with a difference. Through Q & A's, she has open discussions at the end of each session with the meditators, something not commonly done in meditation circles, bringing out into the open the blocks and barriers to one's own realisation, to be shared for the benefit of all.

For those drawn to investigate just what this teacher has to offer, many have reported a very humble yet obviously realised presence and have begun to sit with her regularly. Enza and I caught up with Linda recently for the following interview, and were met with an open, clear, and refreshingly candid look at just what enlightenment is, and is not. In essence, Linda's teachings are all practice based and are nothing more and nothing less than the exploration of the open vastness that she so obviously embodies.

InnerSelf: You are able to talk about enlightenment from your own direct realisation. Can you tell me what the word "enlightenment" now describes?

Linda Clair: It's a place where I don't exist... "I" don't exist... where there's no separation between me and anything else, because I know nothing exists.

InnerSelf: How does this enlightenment compare to the way you thought about enlightenment before it happened?

Linda Clair: Before I became enlightened I could only see it through the mind so I didn't really know. When I met my first teacher, I knew there was something about him, some depth there, and I could just feel it... and I knew I wasn't in this depth.

InnerSelf: Before enlightenment and after enlightenment... was enlightenment close to what you thought it would be?

Linda Clair: It wasn't at all what I thought it would be.

InnerSelf: Was this place available... was it accessible... was this place familiar when you finally moved into it?

Linda Clair: Yes, it just felt like home... it just felt like I was home wherever I was.

InnerSelf: I find you a fascinating teacher. You talk about enlightenment so openly yet the word is almost a taboo with many other teachers around... they don't like to talk about themselves being enlightened... they don't like even using the word enlightenment. Many say that talking about it, intellectualizing about it can cause delusion. Why are you so open about discussing enlightenment?

Linda Clair: Well, really that's what everyone wants and that's what everyone is fascinated by. So why not just bring it out into the open and talk about it? Now, some people say "*Who* is enlightened?" and all that sort of thing... but really, it's what everyone wants... I know it's what *I* wanted. I didn't really understand what it was, but it's what I wanted. And of course nobody becomes enlightened, but...

InnerSelf: Nobody becomes enlightened?

Linda Clair: No... no... you think that somebody is going to become enlightened, but really to become enlightened you've got to want to become enlightened, and that wanting gets in the way. When you are enlightened you know you are enlightened because you know there's nobody wanting to become enlightened anymore... when there's no one wanting anything.

But leading up to that point you do believe that there's someone there who wants enlightenment. It feels like quite a selfish thing... you become quite self-obsessed but you need to investigate yourself fully and see what's in the way of becoming enlightened. And you find out "I'm in the way".

This "I" is the greatest pain in the world (laughter)... it's an awful thing. It's something that's been created by the mind. I don't know when it starts... probably our parents unwittingly put this ignorance into us and when we're still babies we start to say it's "me" and "you"... and over the years the mind just confirms that and keeps confirming that, and it keeps building on this thing called "I" ... reinforcing it, putting in new rooms and making it stronger and stronger and stronger. And we think it's protecting us from the outside world, but it's not protecting us from anything.

InnerSelf: So enlightenment is a taking apart of the "I" until it disappears... until all that's left is... what?

Linda Clair: Sublime peace... there's nothing left... Nothing at all. (Laughter)

InnerSelf: Nothing of a "me" but there's still... Life...

Linda Clair: You become one with Life, once you lose your attachment to the body. Enlightenment is realising "I am not the body". And the root of all our problems is the belief that "I am the body". It creates such fear because we think this is our body and "if the body dies, I'm gone".

InnerSelf: So what's the most direct approach to enlightenment?

Linda Clair: Becoming so grounded in the body that you're able to see how identified with the body you are... how the mind has created this person you think you are.

InnerSelf: And once we do that we begin to lose our identification and...

Linda Clair: Well...leading up to that we think that we're the body/mind. Once you start becoming grounded in the body you start to see that you're not the mind... you might still feel that there's a body, but you start to see, "No, I'm not the mind." So you see the workings of one thing at a time. And so much "past" is stored in the body. So really, becoming grounded in the body is a way of releasing the past.

InnerSelf: And when the past is all released... what happens?

Linda Clair: You then let go of the body, and you start to realise that you're not the body... bit by bit... it happens gradually, it's not a sudden thing. The final realisation is when everything turns around for good... and there's no more searching ... there's nothing.

InnerSelf: Many spiritual seekers have this goal of enlightenment. What qualities within set apart the one who has attained from the ones who haven't yet?

Linda Clair: Patience... perseverance. Some people are just ready - they're mature. Others aren't quite ready.

InnerSelf: How much does enlightenment depend on what we do or don't do, and how much does it depend on Grace or a Higher Power?

Linda Clair: A lot is talked about this... about effort vs. not doing anything. In my experience, I worked really hard at it... and that's not a cool thing to say in a lot of circles, but I practised and practised and practised and practised. I know some people practise and practise and practise and it doesn't happen. Why? I don't know. I think a lot of it had to do with my first teacher; I just gave myself completely to him... I trusted him completely. And I think it was that combination of the practice and devotion. It was devotion to him in the human form but really it wasn't him - it was devotion to something other than me. And that's what I sensed in him when I first met him... the devotion, the love did have a lot to do with it. And the more I opened up to him, the more he gave me... and it was limitless, he just gave and gave and gave.

InnerSelf: I guess there must be this incredible willingness to disappear and really go all the way, and maybe those who don't get there don't really want that.

Linda Clair: Yes, I think a lot of people say they want enlightenment but its just words... I mean wanting enlightenment is a huge thing that you can't really understand until... I can understand now why people don't want it, because it means the end of "I" and most people are so attached to this "I".

For me, I can say I just got so sick of this "I" - I couldn't stand it anymore. But this pain of the "I" became stronger and stronger and stronger... And when I couldn't stand it for another minute, that's when it really happened.

InnerSelf: Some teachers say our attention should not be on that moment of enlightenment when everything shifts, but on the journey. What is your perspective on this?

Linda Clair: Well it's all *this* moment really. The journey is this moment... this moment... this moment. And the final realisation is the combination of all those moments. You can get into this thing of, "Oh it's this moment, this is when it happened", and it becomes quite a romantic thing. People talk about what happened when they finally became enlightened and other people focus on just that and don't talk so much about what led up to that. So some people tend to just want it to happen straight away rather than putting in the work that is completely necessary. Anyone who is truly enlightened has consciously suffered greatly.

InnerSelf: What do you mean by "conscious suffering"?

Linda Clair: To be willing to be completely open to the pain that has been created by the "I", by my self, and keep seeing it and seeing it and seeing it. It's an incredibly deep thing to break the attachment to this pain again and again. And there are so many attachments.

InnerSelf: You address that in the title of your new book, "What do you want?" wanting being the cause of all this pain - but it's also what can ultimately set us free, as you were saying earlier. Is that the reason you chose it as the title of your book?

Linda Clair: Yes. Enlightenment is not wanting anything. Most of our suffering is associated with wanting things to be different to how they are - not accepting things as they are. But at the same time, there's this incredible wanting to be free of this wanting. And in me it just became deeper and deeper. I didn't realise what I really wanted until I met my first teacher. And then I just sensed something, and knew that this was what I wanted and I didn't even know what it was... (Laughter) But I wanted it... (Laughter) It's an amazing thing. I just sensed this thing in him. There was incredibly deep communication between us, and really what I wanted was no separation... I didn't want to be separate from anyone.

You have to be willing to go through what you need to go through to be free of the wanting. It's completely necessary. But it can get in the way when you're actually sitting and wanting this instant result. It's like you have to be aware of the big picture all the time, what you ultimately really do want, but at the same time letting go of that wanting every moment when you are sitting... not wanting to feel good all the time... not wanting a result from sitting.

We spend most of our lives taking... giving sometimes and then expecting something back... and it's a really deep habit. In meditation it doesn't always work that way. You have to give, give, give, without expecting anything back.

InnerSelf: So the place you're now in is the ever-present moment, the Now, as popularised by Eckhart Tolle's book. So many are trying to get into this "Now", yet fail so often. What keeps us out of it? Or are we always already in it?

Linda Clair: Well, you are in it always, but you believe that you are not in it because you still believe that you are the body. And when you still believe that "I am the body", you can't be in the present moment, you can't be Now.

InnerSelf: I think that most people have tasted the peace of being here... sometimes stumbling into it, sometimes through hard work. For myself, I've seen that when I am present, it feels like it's always available, yet I fall out of it... how?

Linda Clair: It's the belief that "I am the body", that "I exist". "I" lives on the past and the mind will keep feeding this belief by continually bringing up the past.

InnerSelf: So there's an "I" that's trying to get into the moment...

Linda Clair: ...The *belief* that there's an "I". There is no "I".

InnerSelf: Everybody's reading these self-help books on getting into the moment to live a peaceful, happy life, but it's the "I" that we believe ourselves to be - this entity of the "me" trying to do this. What you're saying is that it's not about the "I" moving into the moment, but getting rid of the "I"...

Linda Clair: It's about being free of the "I" - not believing that the "I" is real anymore. "I" can't be in the present moment. (Laughter)

InnerSelf: Because the "I" is past?

Linda Clair: The “I” is made up of memories of the past.

InnerSelf: Even when we are projecting into the future?

Linda Clair: There is no future. We use the past to try and create a future that gives us some sense of security... using the past to forecast or plan the future, because what we’re really scared of is the unknown, and death is the ultimate unknown.

InnerSelf: To be enlightened is a form of death, I suppose.

Linda Clair: Yes, because when you’re truly in the moment you don’t know anything. You’re not trying to use the past to create some sort of security. And that’s why there’s this great fear... you think you’re secure by using the past to create a future, but there’s no security in the world, in existence... anything could happen at any time. The only real security is accepting that you don’t know anything... you’ve got no idea what’s going to happen next.

InnerSelf: Why is that security?

Linda Clair: Because if you’ve got nothing, you’ve got nothing to lose... (Laughter)

InnerSelf: With becoming enlightened... the death of the “I”, what happens to the past?

Linda Clair: You realise the past never existed.

InnerSelf: Yet, you as Linda have an historical past when you were younger, found a partner, had children... How do you view that from your position of enlightenment?

Linda Clair: I’m aware that in the relative sense this body is born and dies, but in the absolute sense I was never born, I’ll never die. In the relative sense of course, I’ve got children, a partner, and have done certain things in my life, but now it’s like in a way it doesn’t matter.

InnerSelf: So is that the life story of the “I” but not of who you really are?

Linda Clair: It depends how you look at it. It’s only the story of the “I” when you make it the story of the “I” - when you think that it’s real. But what you realise eventually is that the only thing that’s real is Now. There’s only Now, there’s nothing else. Nothing else is real. But at the same time I do things in the world - I function quite well, but there’s always this deep awareness that it doesn’t really matter... it’s not real, it’s not reality.

So it’s like you are in both worlds at the same time, and sometimes I retreat more into the Absolute, particularly when I don’t have to relate to people, and there’s just this spaciousness... there’s no separation. Not that I feel a separation now, but it becomes even deeper. Talking with you, there’s still that lack of separation, but when there’s no “me” to communicate personally or interact with anyone, I tend to sink more into that, and just feel this incredible vastness.

InnerSelf: So is the Absolute, God?

Linda Clair: Some people would call it God... or Love. Different people have different names for it. I suppose I prefer to call it Life because the word God has so many personal interpretations. You just realise there’s no difference between anything; it’s like you become space.

InnerSelf: So when you recede into the Absolute, is there awareness there of something?

Linda Clair: I don’t know if I’d call it an awareness of something, it’s more nothing than something... more nothing. (Laughter) I don’t know if it’s even awareness - I don’t know what it is. And in that space where there is no separation, there’s this incredible love. You realise that it’s all just one. What an amazing thing. There is no separation; there is no you or I. I become everything, which is nothing. Everything is contained in nothing. It’s an incredible thing and it just becomes deeper and deeper and deeper. But I think that as long as one is in the body, there is some element of, as Nisagardatta calls it, individuality... it’s probably a better word than ego. But in my experience it becomes less and less and less until you are just merging more and more into the Absolute...

InnerSelf: You come from a Buddhist tradition, practising Zen and Vipassana style meditation, yet, now you teach a non-sectarian approach to meditation... Why is that?

Linda Clair: Well I’ve got the greatest respect for my Buddhist teachers, but I think in the end I felt a bit constrained by the whole thing. I lived in a monastery for a short time and my first teacher had very strong Buddhist leanings. My Japanese teachers were very strict Zen Buddhists. But in the end, I just felt a bit constrained by it. I mean I’m not Japanese and I didn’t want to have to learn all the sutras that

you have to learn in Zen Buddhism. Even though I've got the greatest respect for it I just didn't feel that. I felt to teach, but to teach as a Zen Buddhist I would have needed to really get deeply into all the rituals and things. Even though at the time I was going through my training, I could see the reason for them, I just didn't feel drawn to that. And I felt there was a real need for teachers who weren't into a traditional religion. A lot of people who come here are really interested in becoming more conscious, but don't want any of the rituals and traditions. Even though what we do is really basic Zen Buddhist meditation - it's like Zen Buddhism without the rituals.

InnerSelf: Is a teacher necessary for attaining enlightenment, or can it be done without the aid of a teacher?

Linda Clair: I don't know. Maybe occasionally, but almost everyone who is enlightened has had a teacher. For me it was completely necessary, to see that it was possible in this body to be in that state. Dead teachers are of some use you can read their books and feel it energetically, but really there's nothing that compares to having an enlightened teacher right in front of you. It's like a continual proof and a continual challenge to the mind. It strengthens you, but also challenges the mind, so it can stir you up. I feel that a teacher is completely necessary... I'm sure I wouldn't have kept going without a teacher.

InnerSelf: So what is it that draws you to teach now?

Linda Clair: Why do I teach? It's too good to keep all this to myself. (Laughter) What else am I to do? I could go and sit in a little house in the bush somewhere and have quite an easy life. It's not that I went through my training thinking, "I really want to be a teacher; it would be great to be a teacher". I didn't have anything like that. But once I was really free, free from my mind, it was like the only thing missing was that everyone didn't feel like this. It felt like it would almost be selfish to just go and sit in this state without showing people how to get there... how to get *here*.

InnerSelf: How do your friends and family see you these days? The same old Linda or...

Linda Clair: (Laughter) I think so. I spoke to my brother the other day on the phone and said I had a book, and he just started laughing... he just wouldn't stop laughing! I said, "What are you laughing about?" and he said, "I don't know". He just kept laughing. (Laughter) And I kept saying, "What are you laughing about?" and he would just start laughing again. I don't know what was in it, whether he just thought "My sister!" or whether it was some sort of nervous reaction... He just couldn't understand it at all.

InnerSelf: I find it amazing that your awakened presence is so obvious yet others don't see it...

Linda Clair: Well, they're still living through the past and they're attached to that Linda. That's what they see, and they don't want her to change. That's their security: Linda is Linda. They don't really want to talk about it. They know what I do. My daughter talks about it, she's read the book. I haven't spoken much with my son about it... but he's quite open to it. But you mention it to some people and they just change the subject... (Laughter)

Some friends I just don't see anymore. (Laughter) Some people, it's just too much for them. And others are incredibly attracted to it and can't believe their luck that someone they know has become enlightened.

It's interesting watching the different reactions. Some people think, "How could *she* be enlightened? She's someone I know". It's threatening to them because they think that "Maybe it's possible for me". And other people have the opposite experience - they recognise that "Yes, she is enlightened, she's here, and maybe it's possible for me". So there's the two sides.

InnerSelf: So how has your life changed since enlightenment?

Linda Clair: It used to be full of unconscious suffering and now it's full of joy. I can see that so many people have got so much invested in this "I". And for some, it's just too hard to let go of. People who are ready come, and I'll do anything to help them. It's not that I want to change people - they have to want that fundamental change... and *everything* changes.

InnerSelf: Where to from here for you?

Linda Clair: There's nowhere to go, I'm already here (Laughter)

InnerSelf: Do you have any plans or visions for the future, or do you not do that?

Linda Clair: No, I think I originally did... I felt it would be good to have a certain number of people coming - being with me - but now that's gone. Whatever happens happens, and Dave (Linda's partner) and I will put our energy into it. But if it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen. I don't know what will happen... I don't know if there'll be more people coming or if the numbers will dwindle... I don't really care anymore.

InnerSelf: It's certainly happening now...

Linda Clair: Yes, it feels like it's happening. And there are a lot of people here who are really committed... I've never seen it before... the number of people who are really committed - and some very deep things are happening.

I can see that people are changing being around me, but it's going both ways... it's really affecting me as well. I can see that I'm going more and more deeply into it, because with the teaching thing you just have to let go of it for it to work. You can't be attached to being a teacher; you have to continually let go of that. If there's any trace of thinking of yourself or seeing yourself as a teacher, you have to let it go.

Linda Clair has meditated intensively for around 10 years, first in the Vipassana and then in the Zen tradition, with two Japanese Zen Masters. She is now a non-sectarian teacher based in Adelaide.

"My search ended during a meditation retreat. Everything changed. All fear disappeared. I was left with nothing and nothing to lose. The depth of peace and satisfaction overwhelmed me, and it continues to deepen every day. Life is immediate. There is no desire for anything more or different. This is enough." -

Linda Clair