

## **“I’ve failed to achieve anything”**

*Session facilitated by Elizabeth Lavine*

**Andrew:** Since our last session, I've been letting my mind rule the roost.

**EJ:** Any insight about what compels you to let it?

**Andrew:** It seems like anxiety gets out of control.

**EJ:** It *seems* like that. What is anxiety but a stream of thoughts, some energies and images, all telling you who you are and why you should be afraid? Are you interested in investing your attention into them—giving them the power that they're begging you to give them?

**Andrew:** No, I'm not interested in that. But I'm taking this course that requires me to estimate how many days I have left to live, and to write my eulogy. I'm supposed to list what regrets I have. And all of this is fact-based, because I don't have that many days left.

**EJ:** Well, the person who has a number of days left, and regrets that belong to a presumed separate self are not fact-based. It's a theory until and unless you have direct experience that it's true.

**Andrew:** Unfortunately, I have to live this life

**EJ:** What you? Where is the you that has a number of days and has to live a life? Don't use non-dual theory to answer, but check your direct experience—where is it? What you is living a life right now? What you was born, is going through time and going to die in a certain number of days?

**Andrew:** Hmm. But it's just true.

**EJ:** It's a true theory.

**Andrew:** But those are facts.

**EJ:** What you're saying, is that belief—assembled from thoughts, memories, perceptions, sensations—is just a fact because your thinking says so; because everyone else says so. This is not inquiry.

**Andrew:** But there's a character who has to live this life.

**EJ:** If there is, let's find it. Wouldn't you agree if there is really such a character, it can be easily identified, found, made to stand out?

**Andrew:** Yes. So are you saying those questions for my assignment are not useful?

**EJ:** I'm not saying that. They're questions. It's an assignment. Those are useful concepts: "I" was born, I'm such and such an age, and I'm going to have a death experience, and a eulogy is required for the funeral. Those are useful concept for functioning; for writing a eulogy and planning a funeral. The problem is when you believe the concepts are real and that they define an actual self, you experience anxiety. Is anxiety a useful experience to you?

**Andrew:** No.

**EJ:** So are those questions useful, when you take the concepts they involve to be true and real?

**Andrew:** No. So I tried yesterday to inquire, and to welcome the sinking energy, and to let it be. But the clarity wasn't there. I didn't feel like I connected with the spaciousness.

**EJ:** So what? Inquiry is like taking swimming lessons. One day you go to your lesson and you find the buoyancy relatively easily, and the next day it's hard. The fear and rigidity seems to dominate and you don't find the buoyancy. So what? On that day you wear some swim wings, and the next day you try again. You keep getting in the water until buoyancy is your natural experience in the water, just like fear and paralysis used to be your natural experience in the water. It's the same here: right now your unnatural—but familiar—experience around the concept of "I was born and I have to live a life," is fear; your unnatural but familiar experience with the concept of death is fear. But the opportunity is to keep diving into the inquiries until your natural experience around those concepts is buoyancy; fearlessness.

**Andrew:** That makes sense.

**EJ:** So let's inquire. What's the trigger, what self is claiming an identity in the situation of the eulogy assignment?

**Andrew:** I'm going to leave without achieving anything. I'm a failure

**EJ:** Okay. Look directly at that series of words. "I'm going to leave without achieving anything; I'm a failure." Take time. Do you see that series of words?

**Andrew:** Yes.

**EJ:** Is it clear to you that that is a set of words? It's not even a thought—it's a series of shapes called letters forming what we call words—which you are observing and experiencing. Is that clear?

**Andrew:** Yes.

**EJ:** Is that set of words you, a failed self?

**Andrew:** Yes, it seems like it.

**EJ:** Is there a feeling in your body?

**Andrew:** No. It just seems like those words are me. That's what I am.

**EJ:** So let's check. In order for that series of words to be an actual self, there are certain criteria. For example, what you call "yourself" is whatever it is that's aware and experiencing right now, correct? "I am present. I am aware. I am experiencing sounds and sensations, and perceptions." Correct?

**Andrew:** Right.

**EJ:** Something is aware of sounds, images, sensations, memories—what is that something? Is it something or someone else, other than you?

**Andrew:** No. It's me. I am experiencing those words, and my total experience right now.

**EJ:** But a minute ago, you said the series of words, "I'm going to leave without achieving anything, I'm a failure" is you, a failed self. So using our criteria for you, yourself—check. Is that set of words aware of your thoughts?

**Andrew:** No.

**EJ:** Is it aware of your feelings?

**Andrew:** No.

**EJ:** Is it contemplating these questions?

**Andrew:** No.

**EJ:** Therefore, is it you, a self?

**Andrew:** No.

**EJ:** Okay, now let's check something else. Take that set of words again, "I'm going to leave without achieving anything." Now let the words try to agitate you, the awareness which is aware of the words. You're aware of yourself right now as awareness, right?

**Andrew:** Right.

**EJ:** So go ahead and let that thought—in whatever form, you can even hear it as a series of sounds. Let the words or sounds agitate you—you, whatever it is that's aware. [pause] What happens?

**Andrew:** It can't.

**EJ:** Now that's immensely powerful. So let's take another thought—such as, "I have only a certain number of days left." Be the one who is receiving and experiencing those words; invite those words to agitate you—you, whatever is aware.

**Andrew:** It's not going to happen. [laughter]

**EJ:** So try the opposite. Take the words, "I've achieved more than anyone who ever lived" and be knowingly your self, the aware presence. See if those words make you bigger, happier, fuller.

**Andrew:** Can't do it. [laughter]:

**EJ:** You're laughing now, even though you didn't achieve anything.

**Andrew:** [laughter] that's right. I feel like I could laugh all day long. This inquiry really does work, but then it flares up again... the old stuff. [laughter]

**EJ:** So you haven't achieved anything—that's the old set of words that you used to believe was you—and here you are, laughing.

**Andrew:** [laughter] It's hilarious!

**EJ:** But you should be upset, because you really didn't achieve anything.

**Andrew:** [laughter] Stop it. [laughter] I really don't care.

**EJ:** So where's the failed self?

**Andrew:** I can't find it. What a ridiculous concept.

**EJ:** Is this a good place to rest for now?

**Andrew:** Yes, thank you.

**EJ:** You're welcome.