The Golden Rules of Gazing—In Person and at a Distance

By Mark Taylor

“If you want to know God,
Then turn your face toward your friend,
And don’t look away.”
Rumi

I was raised in the Christian-Judaic tradition. Except for a multi-decade meditation practice and a cursory learning of Hindu and Buddhist teaching, I was unfamiliar with eastern practices. The first time I did a gazing meditation, which was at a leadership conference a couple of years ago, I thought it was weird. I had never done anything like it before. And my tendency is to be skeptical of something that is different. In spite of the minimal explanation provided beforehand, I was feeling a little anxious. Since I’ve been both a huge beneficiary of gazing, and someone who first had no idea what it was about, it’s a special pleasure for me to offer this orientation to it, and to the specific practice called HEARTgazing™.

I didn’t know that gazing meditation is an ancient tradition. It was a practice of the 13th century Sufi teacher, poet, and whirling dervish, Rumi. According to the author Will Johnson, in his book, Gazing at the Beloved – The Radical Practice of Beholding the Divine, much of Rumi’s poetry is inspired by gazing. Johnson provides a great context for gazing.

“Most of our spiritual traditions tell us that, as humans, we are miniature reflections of God and that we have been created in God's image. If this is so, then it would follow that a more direct way to look upon the face of God would be to sit and gaze at an actual person, a real flesh-and-blood human. If he or she will sit and hold your gaze in return, something begins to transpire between the two of you. If you can truly see another and be seen by the other, you begin to see that he or she is an embodiment of the Divine, and you begin to feel that you are as well.”

Gazing in Person

I am not a long time gazer. I have practiced gazing face to face with a spiritual teacher (as of this writing) about 50 times. The most powerful times have been with Saniel Bonder and his partner, Linda Groves-Bonder, whom I met not quite a year ago, in August 2007. An awakened husband and wife teaching team, Saniel and Linda are the founder and a leading senior teacher, respectively, of the transformational work called Waking Down in Mutuality™. More recently, they have created the specific practice, resource-center, and network they’ve named HEARTgazing™.

Saniel and Linda explain what they do in the HEARTgazing™ process as follows:
During the gazing time—ranging from maybe half a minute to a minute, perhaps a little longer—we simply make eye contact with you. We’re not reading your mind or trying to manipulate energies inside you. We’re not trying to impress you at all! We’re just meeting you, heart to heart, soul to soul, through eye contact. Because the seat of consciousness is in the heart, gazing has traditionally been used by awakened adepts in just this kind of way. It tends to help turn up the “pilot light” of consciousness in your heart and thus catalyzes and accelerates your own natural evolutionary growth toward awakened freedom.

For my wife Vera and me, after many years of seeking, we have gone through a tremendous, stable, non-dual awakening into an embodiment of consciousness like nothing we'd ever known or even imagined. For both of us, the practices of "gazing" and receiving transmission from Saniel and Linda by touch and in what physicists might call “quantum non-locality” at a distance—which I’ll say more about below—have made a huge difference.

Johnson provides some historical background on the tradition of gazing.

“In India, darshan often occurs in formal settings between teachers and their students. Teachers may sit at the front of a room, perhaps on a slightly raised dais so that no one's view will be obstructed. They may sit silently, pouring out their gazing, inviting students to meet their eyes and to hold contact with their gaze. This contact allows the Divine to enter their students' awareness.

In the words of Ramana Maharshi, one of the great Indian teachers of the twentieth century and one of the great givers of darshan, "When the eyes of the student meet the gaze of the teacher, words of instruction are no longer necessary."

Again, in the HEARTgazing™ approach to gazing, it’s not necessary to assume this is going to be a big divine event. Also, the teachers of gazing who I’ve been with wouldn’t go so far as to assume no words of instruction are necessary. But there is something special, even sacred about it that came through pretty soon, even for a skeptic like me.

So I began to appreciate the “darshan” quality of it. According to Wikipedia,

“Darshan is a Sanskrit term meaning "sight" (in the sense of an instance of seeing or beholding), vision, apparition, or glimpse. It is most commonly used for "visions of the divine," i.e. of a god or a very holy person or artifact. One could "receive darshana" of the deity in the temple, or from a great saintly person, such as a great guru.

In the sense "to see with reverence and devotion," the term translates to epiphany, and could refer either to a vision of the divine or to being in the presence of a highly revered person. In this sense it may assume a meaning closer to audience. "By doing darshan properly a devotee develops affection for God, and God develops affection for that devotee."
The Golden Rules of Gazing—In Person and at a Distance

The whole concept of guru is foreign to me, and I am distrustful of teachers who portray themselves as gurus in the “bow down to me” sense. Saniel and Linda do not. I have never felt any pressure from them to be a “devotee” or drink any Kool-Aid, liquid or otherwise. (Let’s face it, these are the fears about cults and cult leaders that we all understandably have.)

In fact, my distrust was completely ok with Saniel and Linda and the other teachers associated with them who I’ve gazed with. They all encouraged me to do my “due diligence.” Being a businessman, and well known even professionally to be a realistic, skeptical, bottom-line questioning kind of guy, I take that kind of recommendation seriously. I was pretty impressed, over time, to get that these teachers really meant for others and me to “kick their tires” to our hearts’ content. Which is exactly what I did.

So I fairly quickly became comfortable with the gazing practice with them. In my HEARTgazing™ sessions with Saniel and Linda, we gazed, or looked at each other in the eyes for a few minutes. Then they would touch my feet, heart and the top of my head. Saniel would also play a flute and I got to choose which one of about seven he had with him that I wanted to hear. Or, instead of the flute, Linda would do vocal toning, which is a kind of singing without words. So, in traditional terms, we received their transmission by glance or gaze, by touch, and also by sound or music.

The entire experience felt sacred, the way I feel during a great meditation. I did not know this, but in Indian culture, the touching of the feet is a show of respect and it is often an integral part of darshan, only in that practice it is usually the other way around—the student touches the feet of the teacher. I felt that Saniel’s and Linda’s touching was a recognition of the Divine in me, and was moved by the humbleness of their gesture.

The “Golden Rules of Gazing”

If you choose to gaze, the following are my suggestions, and what I have heard from teachers. We could call these “the Golden Rules of Gazing,” though they’re not so much rules as suggestions and, like so much “golden rule” living, just commonsense ways of being in our own integrity and respecting and honoring one another.

- Gazing is looking into each others’ eyes. It is not a staring contest and blinking is ok. It is not an attempt to dominate or possess the other person. It is a meeting of two people. It is not hypnosis.
- At times, it may feel uncomfortable. We are not used to this type of intimacy. If it becomes too much for you, it is ok to shut your eyes. In fact, Saniel and Linda and the other gazing teachers make the point that the best way to receive this transmission is to be true to yourself and your own comfort zones.
- There is no purpose, or, there’s nothing to do; you can’t do it wrong. If some kind of epiphany, union, or bliss arises, great, but if not, no problem—in fact, equally great. The simple fact of the meeting, being to being, is all it takes for the transmission to have its positive effect in your life, then and afterward. This is what I’ve found to be true for me.
• During gazing, I try to be present and just observe my thoughts and triggers, as I do during meditation. I have had all kinds of things come up, like:
  o Am I doing this right?
  o How long does this go on? (Usually a couple of minutes)
  o Does she like me?
  o He looks angry; he is not smiling.
  o Maybe I am doing it wrong.
  o I don’t feel anything.
  o Am I feeling something?
  o This is weird.
  o This is boring.
  o I feel tense.
  o I feel sad.
  o He looks sad.
  o Is this my sadness or hers?
  o She looks afraid.
  o I feel afraid.
  o Is this mine?
  o This is sweet.
  o I feel peace.
  o I feel nurtured.
  o I feel love.
  o I feel connected.
  o I feel relaxed.
  o Is it over?

The teachers have assured me that all of these kinds of thoughts and feelings, and others, are just fine. And, it is ok if nothing occurs. Thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, even the sense of being distracted, are all just fine.

• Sometimes, I have felt tears come down my face. Other times, I have laughed.
• I have also felt deeply moved and connected. I have experienced a oneness and love.
• I have noticed the awkwardness diminishes over time.

My best advice is to experience it yourself. I found that a few minutes of closing my eyes afterward in silent meditation worked well for me to integrate the experience.

I think Johnson summarizes the deeper mysteries of gazing well.

“Just as archers fix their gaze upon a distant target before loosing the strings of their bows and sending their arrows flying, so do lovers of God fix their gaze on the face of God, each releasing the soul so it too can fly toward its target where it celebrates its homecoming. All spiritual paths teach us that if we want to find God, then we need to turn directly toward God, come face-to-face with the energies of the Divine, and then surrender to whatever begins to occur as a result of the impact that such an encounter creates in our lives.”
The special gift of HEARTgazing™ with Saniel and Linda and gazing with other teachers in the Waking Down in Mutuality™ work is that you don’t have to try to make this kind of sacred “archery” and “love of God” happen—it starts to feel like that’s what is happening anyway, without you even thinking about it.

Gazing at a Distance

One of the incredible opportunities that technology brings us is being able to receive very powerful transmission by gazing from a distance. The same attitude and orientations that I’ve shared above, including the “Golden Rules of Gazing,” essentially apply—except that most often, when gazing at a distance, you’ll be looking at another person’s photograph and, unless you’re doing a two-way video-cam connection, they won’t be seeing and gazing with you at the same time.

Turns out, that doesn’t matter very much! I have been gazing with Saniel and Linda’s photo on my iPod while listening to them on an MP3 that I downloaded. Again, I was skeptical at first, but many people have been gazing with photos of awakened teacher-transmitters since the advent of photographic technology. Before that, they’d created statues and paintings. But now it does get a lot juicier and more direct, more immediate. Here are a couple of comments from some of my friends who’ve benefited tremendously from HEARTgazing™ with Saniel and Linda at a distance. There are many other such accounts in the Waking Down in Mutuality community, related to different teachers and also with mentors, peers, and friends.

“Every morning, I love having my coffee and doing heart-gazing with Saniel and Linda. It amazes me how utterly transformative this ancient spiritual practice has been for me. With it I experience the effects of deep meditation pretty much in a matter of minutes and without exerting any special effort whatsoever.

“As a person who was a committed Zen meditator for several years and has studied with some of the greatest modern spiritual teachers, I recommend to you this so simply effective and reachable spiritual tool. Along with the guidance of wise, effective, and seasoned teachers who value simple, respectful methods and practices for people—and I haven't found better such teachers than Saniel Bonder and Linda Groves-Bonder—take advantage of this gift of HEARTgazing and let it help your heart awaken to its full, confident power.” ~ Alejandro Maya, Vallejo, CA—USA

“Saniel and Linda's Heart-transmission really does come across, even at a distance. I started having short phone consultations with Saniel last September, alongside taking their Great Relief Hero's Journey audio programme. I found the audio programme to be a great backup to the phone sessions as I could listen to it anytime I felt I needed a boost of transmission. I also read and reread some of Saniel's writings and used Saniel and Linda's photos for gazing. As a longtime and very frustrated spiritual seeker I had my doubts. But the strength of the transmission surprised me. By December, to my amazement, I had...
stabilized in awakened consciousness. Linda confirmed my realization a month or so later. To this day I still have not yet physically met either of them or anyone else involved in their work. The help they're offering through HEARTgazing™ really works, and I definitely recommend it.” ~ Alison Foss, Faringdon, UK

**Mutual Gazing**

One final and really wonderful thing about gazing in this practice: the teachers relate to us as divine, or divinely human, equals—and so they also encourage “Mutual Gazing” between and among everyone who enjoys practicing it. This is what I want us to practice in our mutuality group meetings. It can get really interesting as more and more of us join the Facebook HEARTgazing™ network, post our pictures, even streaming videos. And Mutual Gazing is always a wonderful part of what Saniel and Linda invite participants to do when they meet with people for HEARTgazing™ sessions in person—which I heartily recommend you attend if you get a chance.

In Mutual Gazing, the same “Golden Rules” apply as in gazing with awakened teachers; meeting being to being, heart to heart. Intending only blessing and simple respect. Being ok with whatever we may or may not feel. Honoring each other’s privacy, not intruding on psychic space or intending any manipulation of energies and so on. Whoever we are, when we practice these Golden Rules while gazing with one another, something mysterious and beautiful often takes place:

“Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.”
Kahlil Gibran
About Mark Taylor
Mark Taylor is a businessman, entrepreneur, author, and speaker currently living in New York City. He has been featured as a shipping industry expert on ABC News and in the New York Times and is the author of Computerized Shipping Systems: Increasing Profit & Productivity Through Technology. Taylor has been named a Distinguished Logistics Professional (DLP) by the American Society of Transportation & Logistics in recognition of the contributions he has made to the field of logistics during his 30-year career. He can be reached at mtaylortec@aol.com.

Mark and his wife, architect Vera Angelico, have created the Waking Down in Mutuality NYC Meetup group, which is hosting a HEARTgazing™ event with Saniel and Linda on July 28, 2008 in New York City. You can find out more at http://spirituality.meetup.com/369/calendar/8146596/

About Saniel Bonder and Linda Groves-Bonder
Intent on democratizing Eastern-style awakeness and integrating it with everyday Western or “real-world” life across the globe, acclaimed teachers Saniel Bonder and his partner, Linda Groves-Bonder, are among the foremost pioneers of evolutionary, embodied, and mutual enlightenment working today. Saniel is the founder and Linda a leading senior teacher of the international Waking Down in Mutuality™ transformational process and network, which now has its own autonomous organizations and directors. They and their colleagues in that network have helped many hundreds of people rapidly achieve stable spiritual awakenings of a kind that few historically ever could. Saniel and Linda are also founding members of Ken Wilber's Integral Institute, charter members of the Integral Spiritual Center, and members of American Zen master Genpo Roshi's Big Mind Advisory Board.

Saniel, a Harvard graduate who was awarded an Honorary National Scholarship there for leadership potential—one of only 50 in a class of 1200—has authored nine books, including:

- Great Relief: Nine Sacred Secrets Your Body Wants You to Know
- Healing the Spirit/Matter Split: An Invitation to Awaken and Fulfill Your Divinely Human Destiny
- Waking Down: Beyond Hypermasculine Dharmas
- The Conscious Principle
- a flute CD, The Nectar
- and a novel, While Jesus Weeps

He also has several books and/or extended audio programs in progress, including:

- The Tantra of Trust™: Skilled and Superlative Intimate Sexual Partnership for 21st Century Woman and Man
The Golden Rules of Gazing—In Person and at a Distance

- **What Does It Really Mean to Take an Honest Swing? Introducing the “Seven FundaMentals” of Honest Swing Golf™**
- **Wealth Without* Guilt™: How to Find Emotional Silver Linings in Miseries That Can Come with Being Rich—and Then Turn Them into Spiritual Gold**

Linda is a graduate of Ball State University with degrees in Art Education, Music, and Theater. A former professional jazz singer and songwriter who has toured with a legendary band, she continues her singing through toning and also has a CD, *I'm Here*. Linda is the revealer of key HEARTgazing™ and Waking Down in Mutuality™ practices, including Six-Step Recognition Yoga™ and Active Conscious Dreaming™. She is also one of three senior adepts entrusted by the international Waking Down Teachers Association with the profoundly sensitive, sacred task of conducting confirmation interviews to help people clarify their spiritual awakenings. And, as a lover of Nature, she feels her Heart-transmission never goes out more powerfully to humankind and all living creatures than when she is feeding the wild birds or tending her beloved plants and garden at home.

Saniel and Linda offer their own conscious and energetic Heart-transmission and teaching as part of a total path for serious seekers of spiritual and personal evolution. An introductory offering to the general public, HEARTgazing™ is a "simple, powerful, non-sectarian way to strengthen your bodily connection to the Divine no matter what's happening in your life." This gentle yet profound technology is designed for use by anyone anywhere who hungers to deepen and grow in spiritual faith and all-around personal integrity, wellness, effectiveness, and joy. You can take a free 4-session online multi-media course that introduces HEARTgazing™, Transmission of the HEART, at [http://heartgazing.com/friends/](http://heartgazing.com/friends/).