



## *The First Awakening*

One morning, I returned from my morning walk, which that day seemed especially invigorating, and took a shower. I felt unusually relaxed; the warm water was incredibly inviting. Feeling the water's delightful touch on my back, I looked within, into the inner emptiness of Consciousness, trying to see if I could find whom it was who experienced the water's touch. I had done this observation thousands of times before, in thousands of different circumstances, seeking the 'I' who was the experiencer and never finding it, yet clinging still to the notion I was an I, a person.

This time, like all the others, there was nothing there, only a vast inner emptiness that contained everything: the kinesthetic sensations of moving arms, back and neck muscles, the touch of the water, the sound of it's spray, and a few thoughts, but mostly there was a silent emptiness that felt inviting and full. I saw no one, no thing, no I, there at all for the ten thousandth time, but this time, God knows why, it was different. The reality of 'no-one' sank in! There was no person, no one experiencing the water's touch. There was no one home, so to speak. There was just the touch of water, the feeling of my feet against the bottom of the shower. My hands were touching my back and neck, putting on soap, but there was no one experiencing any of this. There was just experience happening in awareness.

Briefly, I felt intense fear. The fear was, "Who is watching the store?" I felt, or better, there was a feeling of insecurity, because no one was there to protect and control. All that there was, was experiencing, happening in Consciousness.

All the air left my lungs, almost as if it had been knocked out of me, and I relaxed. Years of tension drained out of me. I did not breathe for what seemed like minutes. There was no need to breathe. There was no me, no I to pump up anymore, so my body just relaxed and deflated.

My mind (actually, 'the' mind since there was no I) became utterly still. No thoughts, no special attention to any one thing, just the grand, silent, all-pervading emptiness, illuminated by the inner light of Consciousness, and which contained all experience. My mind was gone.

I felt too weak to stand up, so I dried myself off and laid down on a couch to explore the inner-ness from the viewpoint of the discovery that I had no I, no me, no personal self. With the utter mental silence, 'my' Consciousness expanded to fill up the emptiness which was everywhere, rather than remain affixed to the mental chatter that normally exists in the service of the I.

This is what I discovered: The I was not there. There was no central kernel that gave illusory life to me as a person. There never was an I. There had never even been an idea that there was an I, the doer and experiencer; even that was gone. What I had thought to be I, was really I-Am, the sense of presence, of being-ness. But that I-Amness, the presence, the Consciousness contained no point of I, and it never had. 'I' had only been a belief, an idea held tenaciously, that created an apparent experience of I as a person.

When the idea of I died, the whole realm of conceptualization changed and became clear. All other ideas depended on the belief in a separate I, set apart from the rest of the experienced world, and when this duality was exposed as fantasy, so were all other concepts that depended on the I-Other duality.

Looking within, the I-Am-ness, the presence I had called Consciousness, seemed to have a center or source near the heart (of my apparent body); it appeared that Consciousness arose and flowed from this center. *Yet that heart center was only a happening in Consciousness and had nothing to do with the belief in an I as the doer and experiencer.* The I-Am, the sense of presence that pervades all inner and outer emptiness and experience has no I as a central core. It really is an Am-ness, not an I-Am-ness. Without an I, there is no not-I within Consciousness. *There is only Consciousness, only One.* The One contains all experience. All experiences are only modifications of that one Consciousness.

I turned my attention to thoughts, and saw that thoughts just float through Am-ness, as if from outside the body. There is no mind as such, just thoughts

passing through Am-ness, beingness. Without an I, the illusory personal center, there is no one to take possession of a thought or desire and to act on it or make it real. The Am-ness has no inclination to participate in the thoughts, and is free of their tyranny. The Am-ness is free to take delivery of a thought *briefly*, and make it real, such as an idea that I need to do some chore, which may be transformed into action, or it can let the thought or desire pass through, unaccepted.

Thoughts, forms, and imaginations are infinitely changing and moving. They have no permanent existence. They are just modifications within the overflowing process of I-Am. The only reality was Am-ness, which contained all experience, and which was being witnessed. So, I then asked myself, "Who witnesses all this?" The answer came as an inner voice: "No one at all!" I realized there is only witnessing, but with no witness! Just like there was no I to take possession of a desire or thought, there is no witness to take possession of any experience. The idea of the witness, and the apparent experience of the witness, arises from the apparent duality the I-idea creates. When this fundamental duality disappears, so do all the others, including the imagined duality of the witness and the witnessed, the observer and the observed.

*However, if there is no witness, then there are no objects to be witnessed. If the I is unreal, everything observed by the I is unreal. You can't have only one half of a duality. If half is unreal, so is its opposite, or else the duality was only apparent. The objects, the body, the mind, the world, are all unreal, only mindstuff, dreams in Consciousness. With no I, and no observed world, there are only happenings within Consciousness, and Consciousness is all that there is— Oneness.*

*A few moments later came the feeling that even this Consciousness, the sense of presence, of Am-ness is unreal, a kind of visual-auditory-tactile illusion added onto pure silence, pure emptiness. About this time, all the forms, sounds, sights and feelings began to flow together, and I could see their temporary and evanescent nature. There was no I, no world, no body; there was only presence, and even that, I am not. Even the I-Amness, Consciousness, was only mindstuff — a construct. I am that I-Am only as long as I live in the illusion of Consciousness. Imagination, ideas, and all phenomenal experience were all just mind. The mind does not create the world, the mind is the world; mind is everything. With that I began laughing. What my teacher had said was true, it is all a joke, a tale told by an idiot, implying nothing. Anything said here too is only a conceptualization, mindstuff, therefore a mistake!*

The whole experience lasted a few hours, and I eventually returned to a place where a chair was a chair and potato salad was a food. I was different though. I could not find an 'I' or even the belief there was an I. That core was gone, although a functional pseudo-core was later to return.

### **Aftermath and Totally Unfounded Speculation of the Collective Unconsciousness**

Over the days following the shower experience, other understandings of what the experience of no-I meant became clear. First, all understanding, whatever can be said in words is untrue or misleading. Everything is mindstuff – everything! Anything said, is said in illusion about illusion. Anything said is a mistake. Mind cannot grasp anything other than itself. It cannot go beyond itself. Conceptions, phenomenality, and what we call dreams, are all made of the same illusory substance.

Second, there was no one to take delivery of 'my' life. It was just being lived. There was no one to take possession of any thought or responsibility. There was no decision maker who willed an intended end. Intentionality, the idea we can conceive of and then create an outcome, was a fraud.

Life is just lived by the illusion of existence some call 'Maya', others 'Consciousness', others call it 'God' or the 'Totality of Phenomenality'. The *apparent individual mind* just creates a story for some unknown reason; it creates a pseudo existence on an apparent reality.

We don't even have an individual mind, the I-idea just makes it appear that we have. The I idea entertains those thoughts that yield the appearance of a consideration process, of a decider and of decision to pursue some path.

If those thoughts had not come, the apparent body-mind would have taken on some other bundle of thought-forms and given itself a different existence. On the personal level, that meant the world I lived in was purely conceptual, and I could have led an entirely different conceptual life had that different thought complex taken possession of my I-thought.

That is, all pseudo realities are appearances in Consciousness only, there was no human to take possession of that identity in a solid space-time continuum. There were just complexes of thoughts and mental patterns – waking dreams made of the same substances as what we call dreams. Life has no solidity at

all; solidity, perseverance, continuity are concepts that allow us to take the world for real and sets the stage for all apparent worldly activity.

That is, if I were meant to relocate to New York, that thought would come into my mind, otherwise some other thought would take hold, such as to become a computer consultant in Santa Fe. When the I shuts down and the ego disappears, the happenings in Consciousness will do what they do, the psychosomatic apparatus walks through its paces, watched as we would watch an interesting but not too involving movie.

I also understood why the older I was the less interested I had become about anything. As the ego shriveled through constant inner observation, there was progressively less willingness by 'me', to take hold of any random thoughts or desires that passed through, and if it did, there was little energy behind manifesting them.

As Robert said, "The sage's thoughts and desires are dead thoughts, they have no strength and they pass quickly, only barely touching the apparent person." As one who watched him in action, I could attest to that. Someone might mention the idea of founding an ashram or writing a book, or moving to another city, and he would show momentary interest; but a day or a week later, the idea, and the will backing that idea, were gone. Around Robert, there was nothing to hold onto; nothing stuck.

When the first person 'I' disappears, the idea of Him, a second person, a personal God disappears too. There is no God, no power, no plan running things. God is an idea in Consciousness. Things just happen in Consciousness without me or God doing it. Consciousness and events appear out of nothing and disappear into nothing. If you want to call 'nothingness' or 'Consciousness' God, feel free, but what is achieved by giving the illusion another name? *There is only One, and that One is not real.*

All this became temporarily quite depressing. It was as if I were waiting for the winning lotto numbers to be announced, knowing that I would win this time, and then to wake up to discover the lottery and the certainty of winning were only a dream. The notion that a better life was just around the corner, and that I could influence its outcome was just fantasy. There is no decision maker, no doer, not even an experiencer. My career trajectory had just vanished!

There was a feeling of loss of my ordinary world and ordinary relationships, including the feeling that I was a doer. I did not exist; there was only

Consciousness, which was everything, but it did not exist either. For days I would sit staring at the world with a sense of wonder that neither I nor it existed.

Over the next few days and weeks strange things happened. My body felt hot all the time, 'energy' currents coursing throughout it, and strange new muscle tension patterns replaced old ones. I felt my body was trying to reject something, as if it were trying to fight off a disease. Robert laughed when I told him, and he half joked, saying "It's trying to reject you!" The sense of unreality of both I and the world persisted and deepened, along with the depression.

One day I called Robert in despair and said, "I'm depressed! I am not real; nothing is real!" Robert responded forcefully, and loudly, "Of course you are real, you are talking to me on the phone aren't you?" The sense of unreality persisted, but I felt perplexed by his answer that I was real, since he almost always said everything was unreal.

A few days later when looking at that feeling of unreality, I suddenly realized that feeling was itself taking place within that unreality; it too was merely a happening in Consciousness and no more real than that which I had formerly considered real. The thought I and the world were unreal, itself was just a concept of no more power or import than any other.

I understood Ramana's response to a devotee who asked whether the world was real or unreal. He said, "*The world is as real as you are.*" The world appeared unreal once the I disappeared; before the I disappeared, both seemed real. *The world, I, real, and unreal were all just concepts, and the world of appearance were just forms in Consciousness with no I to observe them.*

Forms come, forms go, they are observed, but there is no observer. The apparent depression lifted instantly. It was just another phenomenon in Consciousness, not a state belonging to me as a person.

## Illusion's Realm

Over the following months the experience widened and deepened. Sometimes the world appeared real, sometimes unreal, sometimes both; but, I understood that these appearances of real or unreal were just judgments added onto the basic illusion of phenomenality and of Consciousness itself. When there is only One, all judgments or knowledge about qualities or parts of the One, such as

'the world was unreal,' or 'that is a car,' are themselves illusory because they are divisive, and there is only One. The sentence, and the knowledge, "That is a car," and the car itself as an object separate from the One, are both illusion. Knowledge is illusion; objects are illusion; distinguishable qualities of the One are illusion.

Days and weeks would pass where I felt I was living in a hologram. I felt as if I could see through objects in the world and my own body because my focus was on the emptiness which permeated all things, inside and out. Everything was 'hollow,' insubstantial images and sensations projected onto an underlying empty space of still silence. Sometimes too, I would see an object out of the corner of my eye, an automobile for example, and it would only be half there, like a movie set where only the front existed. Days passed into nights and then into days again with barely the feeling of the passage of time, and each afternoon, from 1:00 to 3:00 PM I would experience an involuntary withdrawal of Consciousness — a 'trance,' that limited full participation in the so-called reality on any consistent basis.

The whole process was great fun — sometimes, seeing the world as empty and insubstantial images changing rapidly through time, without the personal involvement that had formerly made the world seem so real. When I told Robert about the phenomena of half disappearing objects bereft of substantiality, I jokingly asked whether this was part of the awakening process, or an entering into insanity. With wry humor he replied, "*They go hand in hand.*"

A week later, I asked again whether seeing the world as an empty and hollow dream was a temporary state, or something one leaves behind as a passing phase. "*It's always like this,*" he said, waving his hand around the room to include everything. Then he said, "*In the end, fundamentally nothing has ever existed, nothing has ever happened.*"

It became more difficult to motivate myself to do anything, for when the dreamed character understands he is part of a dream, how can he take it seriously and make any effort to control outcomes of the dream? Things that had severely bothered me before had lost any ability to perturb me. I lived day to day just watching the changing manifestation, the all-permeating emptiness that made a mockery of the world and my own existence as a separate human being. Sometimes the humorous aspects of Jnana gave way to a feeling of not wanting to participate in the joke any longer. Everything is absolutely false the way it is perceived; why persist in playing the game? Sometimes it felt better to just refuse all involvement in the illusion.

A central phrase from the [Buddhist Heart Sutra](#) became very clear about this time: *Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form; feelings, thought, sensations and even Consciousness are also like this.*

With the knowledge that my personal self and the world were illusion, personal qualities, such as ambition, ego, and intentionality, became empty. There is no free will because there is no willer, no willing and nothing to be willed. The world itself was only insubstantial images, ever changing--there were no things that existed, No-Things at all. With no things comes the recognition that No-Thing has ever happened, nor ever will happen. There was no World War II, no Vietnam, no Richard Nixon.

These were only memories (images) circulating in 'my' mind, or images from TV sets. There was no proof that any of these had existed in any other form than an image in mind. History never happened! Somebody might show me a history book about all this, but that was no proof because that book was part of my present waking dream, and *nothing within the dream can prove the reality or existence of another part of that dream. Even though physics postulates the existence of time, this is still just an idea within the One Mind, which is dreamstuff. Science, like the history book, is part of the dream, creating a structure for the images. Nor did the rest of the world, out-of-sight exist: Not France, not Russian, not Cleveland. These were all ideas supported by seeing them on television, or from memories of a prior visit, which are parts of the dream too — like the history book.*

The past does not exist except as memory, which is a present happening in Consciousness. The future does not exist; it is only mental speculation in the now, about what might happen in an imaginary future. Finally, and most importantly, the apparently real present does not exist either, because 'reality' is only sensations, perceptions, objects, created by mind, suspended in a mental emptiness, and in the end, neither forms nor emptiness exists. Here-and-now has the same mindstuff existence as all other happenings in mind and Consciousness. Avalokiteshvara, in the Heart Sutra says further:

*Thus, Sariputra, all things having the nature of emptiness have no beginning and no ending. In emptiness there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no discrimination, no Consciousness itself. There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no skin, no mind. There is no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no mental processes, no objects, no knowledge, no ignorance. There is no ending*



*of objects, no ending of knowledge, no ending of ignorance. There is no enlightenment, nor path to enlightenment: no pain, no cause of pain, no ending of pain. There is no decay and no death. There is no knowledge of enlightenment, no obtaining of enlightenment, and no not obtaining of enlightenment.*

*Why is there no obtaining enlightenment? Because enlightenment is in the realm of no 'thingness,' and in No-Thingness there is no personality to obtain enlightenment. As long as a man pursues enlightenment, he is still abiding in the realm of Consciousness. If he is to realize enlightenment, he must pass beyond Consciousness, beyond discrimination and knowledge, beyond the reach of change or fear. The perfect understanding of this, and the patient acceptance of it, is the highest wisdom, the essential heart of wisdom. All Buddhas of the past, present and future having attained the highest Samadhi, awake to find themselves realizing the heart of wisdom.*

Life is the doings of an apparent body-mind living in a dream, aware that life is a dream, but with neither the will to change it, because the personality is dead (or seriously dying), nor the power to change the dream. Dream characters have no autonomous will to change the contents and script of the dreamer's sleeping dreams, and just so, we cannot change the script of our waking dream. Each of us as apparent humans, have a part to perform, but no substantial means to direct dream outcomes. *Any control we appear to have in directing our lives is only apparent, part of the dream script.* We are supposed to believe we are directing the dream outcome, otherwise how could involvement in the illusory dream be sustained?

Robert often would respond to queries of people wanting to make changes in their lives by practicing Sadhana, meditation, positive thinking, or releasing, when he saw he couldn't talk them out of these ideas, by saying, *"By all means make the effort to change; the appearance of effort goes hand in hand with the appearance of change. As long as you believe you are a human, effort is necessary."*

With the coming of knowledge, my searching mind came to rest. I had tasted absolute truth for the first time, and no relative truth of the world could touch it. History, economics, and physics were all just complicated knowledge about the waking dream, and that kind of knowing was irrelevant, a joke — part of a world viewed as a bad art movie. Absolute knowledge, Jnana, Prajna Paramita, cannot be sought or learned. It comes to you, is always with you, and is you!

However, even the taste of absolute truth passes until one tastes nothing, metaphorically.

With the end of searching, I began to experience moments of peace beyond description, a peace so deep, so profound, that nothing mattered, nothing! All knowledge, all power, all worldly pleasures and even the experience of 'divine bliss' faded in comparison. Peace dissolved everything. Nothing penetrated it. Nothing remained to be done.

The sense of beingness, Sat, persisted even though I saw it as illusion. It felt like an energy, yet was as substantial as matter. It permeated me; it was me, my sense of my-ness. All the while emptiness pervaded everything, all objects, my body, and me as the beingness energy itself.

Underlying beingness was Nothing, experienced through a filter of being. Still, Nothing perceived from beingness, was still beingness. What lay on the other side of this perceived emptiness and Consciousness, of the perceived illusion? I saw everything as the One, and that One and everything in it was illusion; but the illusion persisted. Was there an end to this illusion?

Next: [The Second Awakening](#)

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