

KNOWING BY IDENTITY

*What We Are
Is Not Affected by
What We Experience*

Art Ticknor

"I'm not lost for I know where I am.
But however, where I am may be lost."
~ Winnie-the-Pooh



Other books by the author:

Solid Ground of Being: A Personal Story of the Impersonal

Beyond Relativity: Transcending the Split Between Knower and Known

Sense of Self: The Source of All Existential Suffering?

*Always Right Behind You: Parables & Poems of Love & Completion, with Anima
Pundeer*

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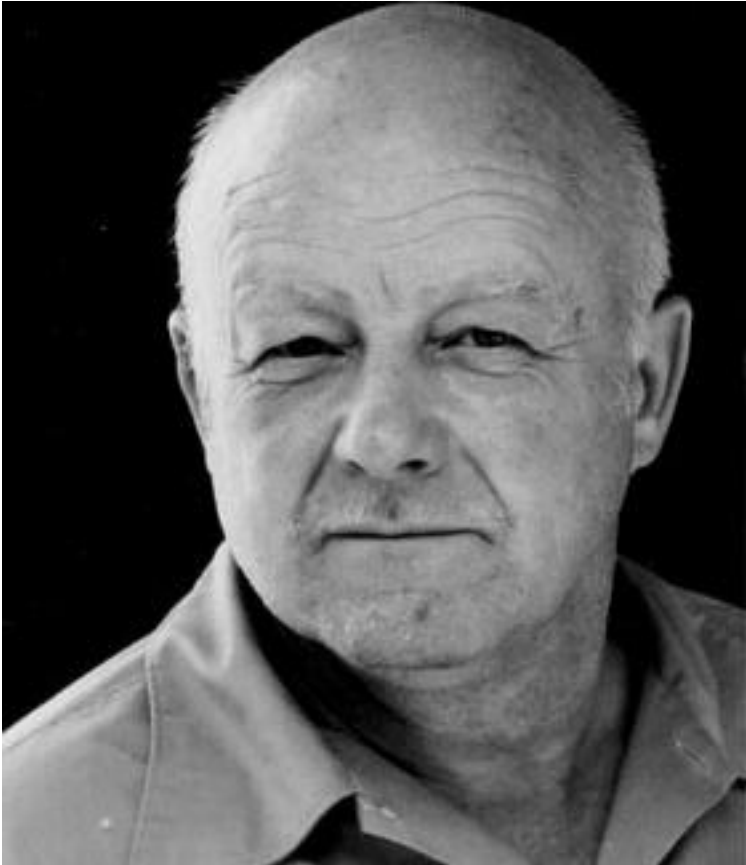
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Dedication



"The Buddha-nature to me is nothing more than the vein of the absolute that's in every human being. But what will it take for it to be conscious, for the person to be conscious of it? What it amounts to basically, I maintain, is that everybody is unconscious; and when a person realizes the Buddha-nature then the small-s self and the large-s Self are both conscious of each other for the first time." ~ *Richard Rose*

Amazon Reviews of Previous Books

Review of Solid Ground of Being: A Personal Story of the Impersonal (2010)

"This book has truly whacked me upside the head. I purchased Solid Ground of Being primarily because I had read some of the author's work over the last few months and I relate well to his style of teaching others. The short passages make it easy to stop and reflect on that particular lesson, or just simply place your book mark in a great spot to return to...."



Beyond Relativity: Transcending the Split Between Knower and Known (2015)

"Beyond Relativity had a beneficial effect on me, the same as when reading other critical philosophers, in that it seemed to raise my mind and heart to a greater capacity to think and feel, especially to the longing and inspiration to head towards that...."



Sense of Self: The Source of All Existential Suffering? (2020)

"If you're an introspective person, a so-called spiritual seeker, or someone interested in your life's 'big questions' I think you will find this book valuable. Art has a unique way of simplifying people's tendency to complicate things,..."



Always Right Behind You: Parables & Poems of Love & Completion (2021), with Anima Pundeer (2021)

"... I felt a mood being created between the two authors about something they claimed to have found, somehow different and yet the same. I continued reading because of an experience, no longer for what could be extracted through understanding, but by the mood created and it was elegantly created and the enchantment caught me by surprise."

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*There's no secondhand knowing of what we are.
The Truth is that which is beyond reach by any except itself.*



Dear Friend

We hear a lot about identity politics and identity theft, but what exactly is identity?

Being a lover of words, I find that the origin of the word traces back to late Latin *identitas*, from Latin *idem*, “same.” And having been a student of mathematics, I recall that identity describes the equality of functions that are defined differently. When we’re referring to *your identity* or *my identity*, they are the same as or equal to what?

Would it offend your sensibility if I said that until self-realization or self-recognition occurs, we know *nothing* about what we are? The path to realization is one of seeing through illusory beliefs about our identity.

I spent the preponderance of my first 33 years focused on my identity in the world.

The highlights of those years were when my girlfriend became pregnant when we were both 18, which provided a missing purpose to my life, and then falling in love with our first-born child and two more children after that.

I went through periods of great dissatisfaction from ages 21 to 33. While feeling that I had all the things that should have made me happy, there was something significantly missing—but despite my best efforts, I couldn’t get a clue as to what it was.

Then I met a man, Richard Rose, who became a teacher and great friend, and who “rang my bell.” That happened when I heard him say that the answer lies within. I had been scanning

the horizon to find what I was searching for, never intuiting that there was an entirely different direction to explore.

I had labeled those periodic torments as “identity crises.” I had no idea why I thought of them that way, but it turned out it was the perfect description for the symptoms.

As I found after a quarter century of struggle, finding our true identity solves the problem of *existence*—a profound term that comes from Latin *ex + sistere*, to stand outside of.

Some Definitions

Define

- find the exact nature, scope, or meaning of.

Ego

- from Latin, “I am”; the sense of self, I-am-ness; consciousness of being conscious.

Exist

- from Latin, *ex + sistere*, “to stand outside of” (outside the center of our being); a very convincing seeming.

Feel

- be aware of (a person or object) through touching or being touched, or
- experience an emotion, or
- have a belief or impression, especially without an identifiable reason.

Mind

- the cosmos of our experience, composed of our I-am-ness and all the other objects that come into our view.

Self

- the subject ("me") that experiences existence; unknown / undefined before self-realization.

Self-definition

- finding our essence, our true identity.

Want

- from Old Norse *vant*, "lacking."

Initial Interrogatives

CREDO (LATIN: I BELIEVE)

What beliefs about yourself have you seen through or have become less convincing?

What beliefs about yourself are still convincing?

It would be "natural" to read those two questions then continue reading to see what comes next. A suggestion: Stop! Make a list of your answers to the two questions, and date it. That will give you material to review in the future, to gauge whether you're making progress. ("Yeah, I'll do it later." I know, me too :-). Procrastination and rationalization are our companions on the path to self-definition.

*

Proposition: We live (exist) in a dimension of uncertainty, of relativity.

A few decades ago I read about a thought-experiment that Albert Einstein described, and it has stuck with me. There are two people (in chairs, if I remember accurately) moving toward each other in space. Einstein's question was: At what speed are they moving? He could calculate the speed each one was moving relative to the other one, but he could find no non-moving point of reference in the cosmos and thus could determine nothing about their absolute speed.

What's your feeling about that proposition: Does it feel true or false?

*

Proposition: We live in a dimension of duality, of insanity, where everything is known/defined in terms of what it's not.

Definition of *dog*: a domesticated carnivorous mammal that typically has a long snout, an acute sense of smell, and a barking, howling, or whining voice. Definition of *carnivorous*: meat-eating; feeding on other animals. Definition of *mammal*: a warm-blooded vertebrate animal of a class that is distinguished by the possession of hair or fur, the secretion of milk by females for the nourishment of the young, and (typically) the birth of live young. Definition of *warm-blooded*: relating to or denoting animals (chiefly mammals and birds) that maintain a constant body temperature, typically above that of the surroundings, by metabolic means; mammals are warm-blooded. Definition of *vertebrate*: an animal of a large group distinguished by the possession of a backbone or spinal column, including mammals,

birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fishes. Definition of *spinal column*: the spine; the backbone. Definition of *spine*: a series of vertebrae extending from the skull to the small of the back, enclosing the spinal cord and providing support for the thorax and abdomen; the backbone. Definition of *vertebrae*: each of the series of small bones forming the backbone, having several projections for articulation and muscle attachment, and a hole through which the spinal cord passes.

In other words, a dog is not a cold-blooded, spineless vegetarian reptile, amphibian, bird, nematode, cnidarian, arthropod, ctenophore, mollusk, annelid, or sponge.

What's your feeling about that: True or false?

*

Proposition: The only permanent solution to existential *angst* (from German, "fear, anxiety") is to find our true identity, what we are at the core of our being.

Does that feel true or false?

*

The Indian sage Ramana Maharshi said that all we need to do, to realize the truth, is to ask ourselves "Who am I?" then sink into the heart.

If you've tried that, what prevents its success?

*

Proposition: There's a flotation device that keeps bringing us back to the surface; it may be our illusory convictions about what we are.

Does that feel true or false?

*

Proposition: The body-mind operates on conviction states based on feeling-beliefs about self and other. We're typically ignorant of what they are since we've adopted them from as far back as infancy or from later traumas. Becoming conscious of them may require becoming like children again—or at least listening to our inner child. When we become conscious of them, then we can look for evidence that questions their validity.

Does that feel true or false?

*

Proposition: To find our true identity, our current beliefs about what we have to lose their hypnotic hold on us. It's not a question of replacing beliefs with better and better beliefs until we get to a true belief but of getting detachment from faulty beliefs until the mind opens and we find ourselves back at our source.

Does that feel true or false?

*

It isn't normal to know what we want. It is a rare and difficult psychological achievement. ~ Abraham Maslow

Does that feel true or false?

Identity Crisis

Identity: Who or what you are. In mathematics, $A \equiv B$.

Crisis: A stage at which the trend of future events is determined; a condition of instability or danger; *a turning point.*

A. What you're searching for, knowingly or not, *is* what you are.

B. What you are *is* what you're looking for.

$A \equiv B$.

$B \equiv A$.

Is-ness $\equiv$ identity.

Identity $\equiv$ oneness.

Living is an identity crisis, although it may be obscured by prides and paranoias.

Dying while living peels away the instability, revealing the Oneness of identity.

A crisis is a potential turning point in one's life. An identity crisis spins around the question of one's identity.

The ultimate identity crisis will not present itself in a predictable or expected way. For example, I went through upsetting periods during the dozen years after my college graduation when I would feel that I had everything that should have made me happy, and yet something was missing. I would "scan the horizon" looking for what that missing something might be ... but I could fast-forward mentally to the attainment

of anything I could think of and realize it wouldn't do the trick. I couldn't identify a potential solution to the painful problem. When I was 33 I heard a man whose words rang a bell inside me (the existence of which surprised me), and the words formed in my mind were: "This man is telling the Truth, which I've never heard before," and his talk produced a temporary state of ecstasy. A day or two later I was trying to figure out what the message was that had produced the great joy, and I recalled it was the words "the answer is within." I had been searching for the answer outside, never intuiting that there was an entirely different direction in which to look.

The **ultimate identity crisis** is not an issue of "am I x, or am I y?" but of "what am I at the core of my being?"

There's a longing inherent in the vibration of the life force coming into the mind, or producing the mind, hinting at the harmony of its (our) source. The message is "come Home." Its language is nostalgia—the vague memory of having come from a place of perfection, to which we long to return.

To answer this longing, no gain or sacrifice will be sufficient, although both may be necessary along the way. To return Home while living, we transcend our identity as a person, as an individual and separate being. This transcendence reveals a Knowing beyond the separation of knower and known.

[Explorations](#)

Earthly things must be known to be loved. Divine things must be loved to be known. ~ Blaise Pascal

=> True or False?

=> A bhakti (devotion to becoming what you love) path?

Chapter 1: *What do we know about what we are?*

Who or what are you?

What do we know about what we are?

Our knowing is a mix of thoughts and feelings derived from the totality of our life-experience.

Those assumptions, conclusions, beliefs or convictions have varying strengths. Some of them we may feel completely certain about. Common examples are that we're a person who was born and is going to die, that we were born into an existing cosmos that will still be here after we die, and that we're one of many, many other individuals who make up a species of animals named *homo sapiens* (Latin for "wise man"). Others, such as beliefs about what we were before birth or what we will be after death, vary among cultural groups.

If we're honest with ourselves, we may admit that there's nothing we're absolutely sure about.

Ideals

We identify with what we love ... physical and mental objects that inflate us, which we don't want to lose. Unfortunately, those identifications are illusions/delusions. As are their opposites. Somehow life has to provide clarity to loosen the certainty that binds us to those convictions.

When that happens, we lose the motivation to try to serve the illusory self. A path to Wholeness:

- Choose the highest ideal that's relevant to you ... what you want to become.
- Intuit that any objective is *not impossible*.
- Live your life to serve that ideal ... and to become it at any cost.

Consider that regardless of the label you give it, it will be embedded in Truth.

*

Synonyms for ideal (n.): Perfection, Epitome, Paragon, *Ne plus ultra*, *Nonpareil*; The Ultimate, The Complete, The Whole, The Real, The Truth, The Unconditioned, The Absolute.

Self

=> self

- "a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action" ~ Oxford Languages
- "an individual's typical character or behavior; the union of elements (such as body, emotions, thoughts, and

sensations) that constitute the individuality and identity of a person” ~ Merriam-Webster

- “In philosophy, the self is the relationship of an individual’s own being, knowledge and values. Self relates the experiences of one’s inner and outer living in presence.” ~ Wikipedia
- “Your self is your sense of who you are, deep down— your identity.” ~ vocabulary.com

=> no self

- “In Buddhism, the term *anattā* or *anātman* is the doctrine of ‘non-self’ – that no unchanging, permanent self or essence can be found in any phenomenon.” ~ Wikipedia

=> Self

- “While a Buddhist, pursuing self-inquiry, discovers no-self, the Hindu discovers an eternal Self.” ~ NeevSelfInquiry¹

*

In logic, the **law of identity** states that each thing is identical with itself. It is the first of the historical three laws of thought, along with the law of noncontradiction, and the law of excluded middle. ~ Wikipedia²

... The **law of non-contradiction (LNC)** (also known as the **law of contradiction, principle of non-contradiction (PNC)**, or the **principle of contradiction**) states that contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense at the same

¹ <https://neevselfinquiry.in/2020/02/01/self-inquiry-and-insight-into-ones-true-nature-in-advaita/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_identity

time.... It is one of the so called three laws of thought, along with its complement, the law of excluded middle, and the law of identity. ~ Wikipedia³

... The **law of excluded middle** or the **principle of excluded middle** states that for every proposition, either this proposition or its negation is true. Another Latin designation for this law is *tertium non datur* or “no third [possibility] is given.” In classical logic, the law is a tautology.

*

What can we testify to from our first-hand experience about what we are, our identity?

- I am that which is conscious, which experiences ... in at least what seem to be two different states of existence: waking and dreaming.
- I cannot testify to a third state of existence ... an apparent gap between the above states: dreamless sleep.
- So I appear to be something that comes and goes ... is turned on and off.
- By the laws/principles of logic, existing as that which experiences, I cannot be that which I experience.
- One if the things I experience is a feeling-sense of self, of being here. When I try to look back at what/where that is, I don't experience anything.
- I therefore know nothing for sure about what I am based on that evidence to date. It's the #1 mystery of my existence, along with where I came from before I became conscious and where I will go when life ends.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_noncontradiction

- I don't even know if it's possible to know for sure what I am ... but I don't know that it's impossible. Therefore it makes sense to make it my overall life-objective.

Something and Its Opposite

What are you?

- Does it make sense to you that we can't be both something and its opposite?
- Are you the seer or what's seen ... that which is conscious, or objects in your consciousness?
- Do you know what you are, or do you have beliefs about what you are (that may not be clearly seen but determine your actions and reactions)?
- Does what you are change as you age? As your mental clarity varies? From what you were before birth? What you will be after death?
- Is the expenditure of life-energy a contest between the temporal and the eternal?

Prove Your Identity

Prove your identity....

- Driver's license
- Credit card
- Debit card
- Passport
- Birth certificate

Prove your car is yours.

- “ your body is yours.
- “ your thoughts/feelings are yours.
- “ your awareness is yours.

Does the proof rely on objects in your consciousness?

- Your family and friends know you?
- Your classmates, workmates, etc., know you?
- Your pets know you?
- Your thoughts & feelings?

What are you?

- A body?
- With a personality?
- Memories (e.g., that you were you yesterday)?
- Something that was born and is going to die?

What were you before birth?

What will you be after death?

What are you at this moment at the core of your being?

[What Do You Want Most?](#)

To make the world a better place?

- What if consciousness, not spacetime and physical objects (i.e., matter), is fundamental?
 - What if consciousness arrives when we awake, spacetime and physical objects are projected through consciousness, and then perceived by consciousness?
 - Placing consciousness closer to Real than the world?

Peace, freedom, and so on?

- If experienced, then what?
 - Temporal (how long will it last) or eternal?
- Will it be fully satisfactory if you can't be absolutely certain it will continue indefinitely?
 - Is absolute certainty possible?
 - "First know thyself."

If you don't know what you want most from life, is there anything more important to discover?

- It may require a series of disillusionments to eliminate what doesn't satisfy your longing.
 - Longing may be the music of the downward current, the life-force that animates us.
- Does it make sense to you to prioritize what you feel has the highest probability for finding complete satisfaction?
 - Does it make sense to you, if you can't decide between two or more options, to pick one rather than agonizing over making the "right" choice?
 - Life is the teacher. Our mental machinery works with the database of our life experience.



Questions & Answers 1

Q: I get the sense that identification with the body is a major obstacle to getting a clearer picture of what I am or at least, what I am not. I also get the sense that much of this identification is sub-conscious, automatic, or under the conscious radar. So, while I can conceptualize about the idea and have had some physical experiences that questioned this belief at a deep level, I feel it is still innate and deeply ingrained in ways that are not in the view, so not easily challenged. What practical methods did you employ to help break the identification with the body?

AT: We need a healthy identification with the body to keep from walking in front of traffic, etc. When we consider our self-definition, if “I am the body” is a strong conscious belief, then we can question that. If we believe “I have a body,” that may be like having a car ... one that we’d protect. If we believe “my existence may be dependent on having a functioning body,” challenges to that may be more abstract; dreaming consciousness may provide some challenge, with dreams where we’re a disembodied consciousness. But I think that’s as far as we’re likely to get without a death experience.

Thanks Art. By death experience, do you mean Realization or an NDE? Or both perhaps.

I think the vast majority of NDEs are lesser realizations, retaining identification with the body. But I remember that Rose felt he’d come across one where the fellow made the whole trip: see [Solow, Victor: I Died at 10:52 A.M.](#)

Thanks for the article Art, it’s a good read. That seems to imply that one way or another, we will all go back to that source. Is that fair to

say that even if we die ignorant, we are likely to realize the Truth of our situation in the process of death?

The question is when a self-conscious critter will become conscious of its source. I don't have the same feeling as Rose did about Victor Solow's realization. In any case, the NDEs may indicate that it's more likely that there's not automatic Self-Realization at the body's death. There may be a continuation of the projection and "unfolding" of individuality.

So effectively reincarnation in some capacity then?

I don't see any evidence for a unit/soul that incarnates or reincarnates. I think what we experience "down here" is via an organism that is born with "dispositions" (as I think most parents will testify to; may be related to inherited DNA) and reactions altered by accumulating experience. Each day may be a new existence where we awaken with a set of memories (which may be stored in a species overmind) in an organism with reactionary patterns in place. I don't remember past lives, but I suspect that something like a species overmind may store life-experience memories.



I'm confused about the difference between identity and ego. It's also confusing that egos are often assumed to be numerous (like pride and fear) where there is only one identity, unless we consider there to be an ego-1 and ego-2. And if there is only one ego or ego-1 and ego-2, would things like pride and fear be considered beliefs rather than egos?

The Ego = I am. (Plural) egos are clothes and ornaments we hang on I-am-ness; personality. When you know your true

identity, it will be Ego. Your mistaken identities are, as Rose term, legion. Beliefs are convictions (barnacles). If you believe you are a superior (or an inferior) human being, that could be referred to as an ego, an identity, a conviction, a belief, etc.



The feeling of wanting to become something else, bigger or smaller, could be proto-self-realization. It's presupposing what I am, as somehow still embodied, but wants to change the definition of what that body is. So the identity is that I'm something that depends on having of a body of some kind, limit of some kind where there's self vs. others. Is there a way to see through the hypnosis there is not-self?

“Becoming” in our experience-world is a relative concept, e.g., becoming richer, becoming more truthful, becoming less gullible, and so on. We may have concepts about what we are, but what we are is not a concept. Becoming Self-Realized is an occurrence of the conscious mind finding the truth of its source, its real identity.

Don't get too carried away with a limited definition of “self.” You know there's “you” ... you just don't have Certainty about what you are.



One of the personality beliefs I've been focusing on recently is that I'm the thinker. Not of all thoughts (not daydreams, songs stuck in my head, other random thoughts), but the thinker of worded streams of thought like this question: What knocked loose the belief in being the thinker for you?

It feels like our streams of consciousness are private picture shows for our entertainment or suffering. And feeling-reactions are stickier than worded-thought-reactions in terms of the detachment of remembering that we're the one watching/experiencing. One set of experiences that challenged my "doing" the choice of words that I wrote was my habit of updating my dream journal first thing each morning. And morning after morning after morning I'd be amazed at the words that popped up to describe key features of the previous night's dreams. Another factor was hearing Rose say that we aren't in control of starting thought or stopping thought. So at times when meditating I'd look for evidence of starting or stopping thought. The only control over thought I saw exercised was watching to see whether the current stream of consciousness seemed relevant to what I was looking for, and if not, then turning the inner head away from it and waiting for a new stream to begin—and it became apparent to me that the activity was a mental process happening on its own.



How does a seeker of Self-Definition question unconscious beliefs?

I don't have a strategy for it, but some thoughts come to mind. Once we have a handy list of our conscious beliefs, we can ask ourselves why we did or didn't do something and scan the list to see if it holds the answer. If not, we can ask ourselves what might be the explanatory belief and then watch/listen for an answer. Another approach would be to go through the items on our list and ask ourselves what beliefs below our conscious level might be supporting them. And a third approach might be to make a list of what "everybody" or large segments of the population believes.



Emotionally, I feel I don't know my home, and what I think is my "home" may be as good as a gingerbread house. And so my beliefs about my home may be untrue in the important sense, and that suggests I'm living a lie, which is against one of my top values. The doer of thoughts may be as much me as a sports team I follow. Could this admission about not knowing my home go far? It connects more emotionally, so I think there is more fuel to work with.

Home is what/where we are at the core of our being. We can't conceive of it, but we can use an ideal to point toward it. Commitment to becoming that ideal may be helpful or even necessary. Pursuing a feeling about what you truly want from life seems more self-honest to me than pursuing an image.



I asked myself why I wanted to entertain myself, and the answer that came up was "to not be here," like there's a fundamental discomfort I'm wanting to escape.

We're temporarily here, and we're permanently not here. Our temporary here-ness needs to find detachment in order to discover its permanent identity.



AT: What occurs when you look at the feeling of being B.?

B: The looking happens as quick glances, of a kind of fundamental identity/being sense. It's like the identity equivalent of when your back is sore and you find a muscle knot in your shoulder blade and press

on it and the feeling radiates out. The glance at the feeling of being B. is like pressing on that knot.

Imagination makes us bigger. Disillusionment makes us smaller. The path to Truth goes through becoming zero.



Rose's "Jacob's Ladder" diagram and many of his writings point at the sense of individuality as being one of the most fundamental illusions. And it makes sense that the sense of individuality is at least suspect because I simply can't answer the "I am an individual what?" question at all. And yet, the possibility of not existing as an individual is simply unfathomable currently. This topic keeps coming up in my mind in the form of questions: "Is it possible I've simply mistaken myself to be an individual? What would it be like if I were not?" etc.

It made sense to me that I was an individual consciousness that might be dependent on this body for its existence. Where we come from and where we go is answered when we find / discover / recognize what we are. But that doesn't happen here, in bizarre-land. It takes some new evidence to break the spell of our self-definition's incarceration.

The value of contradictory paradigms that seem to be equally valid is that they show us that we're on shaky ground. The triangulations that loosen our self-definition—e.g., doer vs. not-doer—don't reconcile those beliefs. They help us become detached from identifying with our personality. Then it takes a final disillusionment of our identification with individuality. In my experience and convictions, that final disillusionment takes help from a superior intelligence to show us something we've

never seen, which breaks our consciousness free from the subject/object duality.



Conundrums

Conundrum synonyms: quandary, dilemma, predicament, perplexity, muddle, tangle, jumble, puzzlement, enigma, paradox, complication, koan, vexation, imbroglio.

From the *Isa Upanishad*:

He moves and He moves not.

He is far, and He is near.

He is within all, and He is outside all.

Koan: You move and you move not.

You are far, and you are near.

You are within all, and you are outside all.

*

Focus: the Latin word for domestic hearth. Amazing! And Merriam-Webster defines focus as: a point at which rays (as of light, heat, or sound) meet after being reflected or bent.

Koan: What or where is your focus, your domestic hearth?

*

Jesus, in *John 8:58*, said: "Before Abraham was, I am."

Koan: Before Abraham was, you are.

*

Hypothesis: Love is proportional to propinquity (physical closeness).

Koan: What is the object of your love?

*

Hypothesis: Energy goes where our attention goes; energy follows attention.

Koan: Where does your energy go?

*

Reside: from Latin *residere*, remain.

Koan: Where do you reside?

Chapter 2: *If it's possible to know for sure*

If it's possible to know for sure what we are at the core of our being, including what we were before birth and what we'll be after death, how could we go about knowing that?

We can look for more evidence that supports our current beliefs, or we can try to replace them with beliefs that appeal to us as more refined, perhaps suggested by new authorities we come across and respect. But we'll still run into the problem of absolute certainty.

A less comfortable but maybe more productive way is *via negativa*: defining what we're not.

Eternal Perfection

Consider that what you are is eternal perfection.

Taking that as a hypothesis, and considering what you may feel are your imperfections, what does it tell you about faulty beliefs you may have about your true identity?

Consider that eternal perfection is anterior to time and space.

Taking that as a hypothesis, and considering what you may feel are your limitations in time and space, what does it tell you about faulty beliefs you may have about your true identity?

“Who or what am I?”

The nondualist may say: You don’t exist ... the self doesn’t exist existence Is.

The realist may say: The you that you believe yourself to be, the you of the body-mind, does exist; the word *exist* comes from Latin *ex + sistere*, to stand outside of; that “you” is like the hand at the end of a ray from the sun in the Egyptian *aten* symbol ... it stands outside of its source, the center or essence. Existence seems; being Is.

Abraham, who lived about 2,000 years before Jesus, is considered the first patriarch of the Jewish people. As Jesus reportedly said to the Scribes and Pharisees who were questioning his teaching, “Before Abraham was, I am.”

Before Jesus was, you are. It doesn’t solve the problem of existence to believe whatever we may believe about our

identity. We have to die before we die to find our essential identity.

A Micromanaged Life?

Darin Knight is 34. His wife Keri is 32. They live in Vancouver, Washington with daughters Julia, 5, and Lauren, 2. Darin's plan is to retire in 2029, when he's 55. Household income is currently \$110,000 from Darin's work as a marketing manager. Keri is resuming work, as a part-time teacher, at \$12,000. When Lauren begins school, Keri will become full-time with a salary of about \$50,000. With the stock market decline over the past year, Darin says he's losing sleep at night: watching \$18,000 of his 401(k) disappear has left him uncertain and disillusioned. "I just lost an entire year's worth of savings in equities, and it just keeps going down.... Yeah, it scares me to death."⁴



What kind of reading do you get on Darin's life from that description and the accompanying photo? It leads me to speculate on his life-focus. He looks like a solid guy, a good

⁴From *Money* magazine, October 2008.

provider, somebody who's trying to do all the right things to build a secure future so he can retire at 55—and then do what?

Apparently he doesn't like his work very well since his primary objective is to be able to stop doing it or stop being encumbered by it while having the financial security to do something else. But what is that "something else" that he can't do now? My guess is that he doesn't know. He probably feels hemmed in by his current and projected responsibilities and has some vague desire of returning to a childlike freedom at age 55.

Vagueness is the curse of the mind. It leaves the vast majority of humanity content to live in a cloudy state of misery that they feel they either can't clear up or can only do so at some time in the future. Will Darin be better able to address his lack of clarity in 21 years?

If he has a definite plan that he feels will provide a satisfying life when he can activate it in two decades, he may have to wait to find out if his projection is accurate. Retirement may relieve the daily grind that chews up so much time and energy—and then what? Will the activities he finds to fill that void yield a satisfactory life? Or will he still have a vague sense of something missing or lacking? Will his misery decrease or increase?

The real problem of human vagueness is the lack of self-definition. We struggle to find what will make us happy without getting around to the real problem of not knowing what that "us" is. We wallow through life acting or reacting on the basis of subterranean beliefs about what we are, the most basic of which are held universally and thus not questioned.

We try to compensate for the implications of those beliefs, but it turns out to be impossible.

That make-believe self we live (and die) trying to satisfy is the house⁵ that Gautama Buddha described as the limited self he believed himself to be before he realized the truth. As Gautama and others throughout history have testified, there is a way to the end of human existential misery, and it is to pursue the investigation of what we are to a realization or recognition of the truth.

How? There's no stepwise program that will take you there. The process is one of investigation and retreating from invalid beliefs. Richard Rose's "Threefold Path" ⁶ is the best metasytem, or guidance to approaches, that I've come across. Douglas Harding's "Eight Steps of the Headless Way" (from [*On Having No Head*](#)) and this summary matrix "The 8x8-fold Plebeian Path"⁷ (an appendix of [*The Trial of the Man Who Said He Was God*](#)) are a map representing, as Douglas wrote, "just one of the countless variations on that archetypal Way which leads (in the words of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*) 'from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality.'"

⁵"O builder of the house, Thou art now seen! Thou shalt build no house again. All thy rafters are broken. Thy ridgepole is shattered. My mind has attained the unconditioned [nirvana]." From the *Dhammapada*.

⁶ See Rose's "Threefold Path" at www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/arThreefoldpath.htm

⁷ See Harding's "8x8-fold Plebeian Path" at www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/arHarding8x8.htm

Everything Will Be Okay

Knowing the self is a complex and confusing endeavor involving the hilarious dog-chases-tail pursuit—probably not funny to the dog—of using the mind to study the mind. A difference between man and dog, I presume, is that dogs don't acquire the ability to laugh at themselves.

Where does dream-study come into this quest for knowing the self? What I found were the following values:

- *Solace when feeling alone, comfort when feeling misery.* Before launching into a conscious effort of looking within for answers, I thought I hardly ever dreamed. Then I started experimenting with fasting during solitary retreats, and I became aware of many dreams every night. Some of the dreams were humorous, such as riding a bicycle with a loaf of freshly-baked bread in the basket, starting to take a bite of the loaf, remembering I was fasting and shouldn't do so—and waking with a laugh at my dream-antics. A pattern also developed where a childhood friend, whom I hadn't seen since high school, began visiting me in dreams. Though infrequent, these visits spanned many years, each time leaving me feeling greatly comforted.
- *Material for studying experience with objectivity.* In order to consider our behavior somewhat dispassionately, there has to be some distance from it. This detachment is rather easy when it comes to dream material, and I believe there was a carryover value for me when considering waking-state behavior. We may start with reviewing rough spots that are far enough in the past so

that we don't get caught up in the emotional content again. Progressively we learn to do this with more recent external events and also with internal observations of thoughts and feelings. The great value in all this observation is that by not turning away from the times when our sense of self is shaken, we're able to release our grasp of faulty beliefs about what we are.

- *When life seems to be in a hopeless bind, an endless loop of conflicting and therefore unsatisfiable desires, an avenue for continuing to probe and question.* We don't know how long the search for our true identity may take. And we don't know how long periods of feeling stuck in no-progress may last. During these periods, observation of the seemingly endless repetition of our waking-state patterns may not yield any new clues. Thus having another dimension of consciousness to study may help keep the search alive. For example, I had occasional dreams where I would realize that I wasn't "Art Ticknor" in the dreams. I was looking out of some stranger's eyes. Huh? How could that be, I'd ask myself on waking.
- *Tempering the steel before a blow.* The most memorable dream of my life occurred when I was doing a solitary retreat in a cabin in the woods. The dream began with me standing at a bus stop, waiting for Jesus. He was in the bus that arrived, looking nothing like any representation I'd ever seen of him, but there was no doubt in my mind about who it was. We got off the bus at the next stop, went into a building, and sat on the edge of a stage as in a school auditorium. There had been no conversation to that point. The first word he said was my name, "Arthur," and I observed my surprise at how he knew what it was. Then he finished the sentence with: "everything is going to be okay." When I heard that, I

started weeping. I awoke still weeping. And every time I recalled the dream over the next few days, I began weeping again—having no idea why. Two months later, my father died of a heart attack. His health up to that time was fine, as far as I knew. In retrospect, I felt that the dream had been a way of preparing me for the blow—using the only symbol that would trump the father figure in the mind of my inner child.

- *Preview mode of becoming an observer detached from the observed.* Another standout dream for me was one in which the childhood friend mentioned above and I were in a general store with an 1800s country-western feeling. We were waiting to pay for purchases, watching the friendly interchange between the store owner and a young woman with her infant daughter. Then time stopped—motion stopped—and my awareness was outside my dream-body, looking back at Art, with the scene registering as a nostalgic still life complete with a rectangle of sunlight on the wide-plank floor. Another example of the sense of self being loosened from its attachment to objects.

When watching a video or reading a book, we often become temporarily identified with a particular character. When the movie stops or the book is closed, we eventually awaken from the spell. This is essentially what happens when the spell of individuality is broken and we awaken to our true identity.

[Fasting for Mental Clarity](#)

There's a realm of vast potential payoff in clarity that you may not have considered or tried lately, and that's *fasting*.

Usually we associate the term with not eating, and that is one aspect of fasting that I personally found beyond value. You may have heard me describe how one time when I started a solitary retreat my state of mind in the previous months had been a blah “nothing much is possible.” When I started the retreat that November in a remote cabin on the Richard Rose farm, it was cold, rainy, and muddy; the leaves were off the trees; the cabin had no electricity, no plumbing; the source of heat was a tiny wood stove, and the only firewood was downed branches, which were wet and rotting. I began the retreat with 3 days of water-only fasting. I felt lousy, physically and mentally. On the third morning of the retreat, I walked outside, and wham! Everything, including the leafless trees and the gray skies and the muddy ground were beautiful; and anything was possible! My conviction state had swung 180 degrees. After the retreat I mentioned that to Mr. Rose, my primary teacher, and he told me that’s a value of fasting: it shocks the body and can kick in a different state of mind.

But there are many, many other forms of fasting. From what? Habits (“settled or regular tendencies or practices, esp. ones that are hard to give up”) for example. In addition to food, the other great instinctive drive is sex. We may never get a clue about how much influence the sex drive has in our life unless we experiment with periods of fasting from intentional sex-action. Other habits that are “hard to give up”? If we take a look at our habit patterns, we may see habits that we tell ourselves wouldn’t be hard to give up—but are we kidding ourselves? Alcohol and recreational drug use may be harmless, but what would we find if we took a vacation from them? Nicotine? Supposedly one of life’s most addictive substances. If cold-turkey withdrawal doesn’t work with your psychology,

perhaps a period of tapering usage (e.g., decreasing a bit more each day) might be effective. Coffee? (Now we're getting too close to home. :-)

One of the strongest habits many of us have is using media to fill hours of our waking experience. For a real challenge, try a media fast for a period before the retreat—no books, newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, movies, Internet(!), etc., that aren't necessary for school or work. If that seems too heroic, pick one or two of the highest time-wasters to take a rest from. Phone calls? How much time do you spend in needless conversations? Texting? Ditto. If you put your mind to it, I'm *sure* you can zero in on habits the use your life-time and -energy, which you could experiment with taking a pause from.

Other than addictive habits, there may be indulgences ("giving free rein to"; "freeing from temporal punishment for sin" :-) that would be interesting to abstain from. Retail therapy? Starbucks mochas, lattes and frappes? Fast food treats?

The idea isn't to remove all pleasures from your life but to encourage you to find opportunities to shake things up a bit. If you get any inspirations you'd like to pursue, don't just think (dream) about them: put them into action!

*

I'd encourage you to read the article "Blindsight & Group Efforts"⁸ to get a feeling for my view of productive group retreats and maybe a question or two you haven't considered.

⁸ www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/arBlindsight.htm

Can You Help Me?

Q: What did you find?

- The essence of I-am-ness.
- The builder of consciousness.
- Beingness before time, before formation.
- Identity.

Q: How did you find it?

- I awakened to seeking within after meeting Richard Rose.
- Worked in a singular paradigm that he espoused to find my true identity.
 - “I am the unseen viewer; anything in the view is not the self.”
- Continued working to define myself even when I saw that there was nothing in it for the me I believed myself to be.
 - Later equated it with the stage that Rose labeled as becoming an egoless vector.
- Found an opposite paradigm when I met Douglas Harding.
 - “All things are within me.”
- My mind could flip back and forth between those contradictory paradigms.
 - And calibrated them as being equally valid—a condition that the mind doesn’t like.
- A mood of wanting to become more serious than I’d ever been descended on me.

- Like an angelic annunciation now that I look back at it.
- Did another solitary retreat in a long line of them.
 - Maybe fifteen or twenty over a 25-year period.
 - Intentional tension, discomfort.
 - Relaxed after sundown on the final night, assuming one more non-success.
 - But everything lined up “magically.”
- See “I Am Always Right Behind You” ⁹ on SearchWithin.org

Q: How did it change you?

- Art’s personality is much the same as before.
- But instead of feeling on the edge of an abyss with nothing reliable to hang onto, no solid ground to stand on, his mind found the security that it longed for.
- Art has participated in the grand adventure of Self-Awareness.
- What I am is changeless—the changeless essence behind life and death, the Identity before time, out of which time is born and dies.

Q: Can you help me end my longing?

- Your life is the teacher and guide.
- What you experience of Art is part of your life experience.
- All experience—waking, dreaming, maybe other forms of consciousness—can be mined for self-inquiry.
 - “If there’s a message in this, what might it be?”
- All search for satisfaction is a search for completeness.

⁹ http://www.searchwithin.org/download/realization_art_ticknor.pdf

- Ultimate completeness is our innermost Identity.



Questions & Answers 2

Q: Do you have a sense that Rose's definition of meditation as "productive thinking" was the same as normal, conceptual thinking but with better results, or a different mode or fashion of thinking than what we experience on autopilot?

AT: I think he was saying don't go for peace & quiet, which seems to be the focus of many/most meditation practices. There's more tension when *noticing* what we're seeing, and more clarity. The analytical and feeling processes will be more focused on existential problems rather than distractions.



I read this article of yours today: "Another Way."¹⁰ There's a line, "Could I let the mind find the way, like the amazing true stories..." How did you distinguish between the mind's rationalizations and intuitions?

"Could I let the mind find the way, like the amazing true stories / Of dogs and cats and aborigine girls finding their ways home? / Is there an innate sensor that will find the path if it's my top priority?" "Does the mind have a homing device? / If so, can the mind be trained to pay attention to it?"

We arguably have little to no effect on the mind's operation. Our job is observation. And if the double-slit experiment is relevant at the mind level, conscious observation may affect results. Everything we see/sense occurs in the mind: pictures of trees, thought-reactions to perceptions of trees, feeling-

¹⁰ <https://selfdiscoveryportal.com/arAnotherWay.htm>

reactions to perceptions of trees, and so on. Seeking Truth/Reality may be no more than noticing mind-movement.

What is the instinct/drive of the equipment that drives it or encourages it to receive guidance like the aboriginal girls?

The amazing *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) film based on the experience of three half-Aboriginal girls in Australia tells how they were taken from their homes and moved to another part of the country in order to “socialize” them properly by British standards. They were two sisters and a cousin, and the older sister organizes their escape. After they travel a long way they come across the rabbit-proof fence that spans much of western Australia, and the older sister remembers seeing that same fence near where they lived. So they followed the fence. The cousin was tricked into recapture, but the sisters continued, with the older sister often carrying the younger one on her back. Eventually they came to where the fence ended (because it was in a part of the desert where there weren’t any rabbits). The girls lay down in despair. But then the older sister saw a bird flying in circles above them and then flying away. Her intuition (?) told her to follow the direction in which the bird had flown. Eventually the continuation of the fence came into view, and they followed it home. 1,500 miles!



Conscious observing (noticing what we’re seeing) of mind-movement may affect its operation in a positive way. We don’t know anything for sure about what we perceive.

I had never heard you use that phrase “mind movement” but I wonder in what ways it induces or impedes “spiritual movement”? Can

certain movements or do all movements of one induce/restrict movement in the other?

We talk about and attempt a pivot back to where we come from, toward our source, that which projects. But there is so much talk of the Inner Self, Higher Self, the Over Self—is that in the same direction as in retraversing? If so, did you ever encounter it first hand? Or is talk of Self only alluding to the generalization of Higher Wisdom of the entire creation?

I'd say that what we observe is mind-movement and that spiritual movement occurs when we observe something that weakens our self-beliefs. The Real Self is inward relative to our consciousness; its projections are outward. Using the Aten metaphor that Rose described seeing over the entrance to an Egyptian pyramid: Self is the sun; conscious-us are hands at the end of life-force rays coming from the sun. When I found myself back Home, back at our source, having retraversed that ray of creation, I consciously became my true identity. If we come back into the body-mind after Self-Realization, we will have come along that downward current.



There's got to be a way to triangulate out of this endless loop of near-constant suffering. It's obvious now that thinking my way out of it won't work.

Consider the possibility that what you are isn't affected by what you experience.

Makes sense intellectually, but I seem to only be able to consider it from the level that is affected — i.e., from the level of thought. And from

there, it's hard to go beyond the intellectual conclusion. It feels like this can be listened to from a deeper level, but I can't seem to do so. Is there a way I can try to do this?

What makes sense to me is that after we've tried to analyze our way to understanding something, and that hasn't worked, and intuition hasn't yet resolved the problem, an option is to observe the stream of consciousness, turning our inner head away from irrelevant material, and waiting for the next stream of consciousness to appear. We can also ask whatever may bring experience to us in our waking or dreaming states for the experience we need to see whether what we are is affected by what we experience.



... I was wondering, do you see anything that may be in my way in terms of Awakening? Or something I am not doing / avoiding /doing too much of, or whichever? Just curious if you notice anything that stands out.

I don't recall seeing much interest in discovering / questioning your self-image—i.e., your gut-level beliefs about what you are / what you aren't.

Yes, maybe I got quietly frustrated looking at the wall of empty nothingness inside. Questioning core beliefs with the mind, like am I the body, often seems debatable to me as to the value of that. I guess it's all I have though. Did you have a clear process for documenting your beliefs? What was that? What did you find useful to help challenge a belief like, I am the body, with the mind?

I suspect that looking at the wall of emptiness for more than a microsecond is like Eckhart Tolle's "being in the now" practice. To me, it would be creating and maintaining a thought-picture of nothingness. What I did / found happening was Harding's pointing exercise, which gave me an instantaneous view of possibly looking back at where looking comes from and not seeing anything. (All of Harding's suggestions about the implications of not seeing anything are suggestions that could be helpful in challenging beliefs if they don't become new beliefs.)

I think I kept notes that documented my self-beliefs on occasion, and I reviewed my journal when I did solitary retreats. At some point, the self-beliefs that hadn't been challenged were 1) that I was a separate awareness, and 2) might be dependent on a functioning body-mind. I saw no evidence that questioned the first one until the last evening of my final solitary retreat. And I had determined that the test for the second one was to cut off my head, which I didn't think had a good risk/reward ratio.

The thing is ... we have to notice evidence that presents itself and be open to considering it. I think that's where productive meditation comes into play. For me, that was a) reminding myself of what I was looking for, b) that I would prefer no thought to irrelevant thought, and c) turning my inner head away from irrelevant thought and watching the "mouse hole" that thought comes out of for the next thought stream.

Something else dawned on me that you could look into, and that's the difference between walking meditation and sitting meditation. I walked about an hour on a woodland path along the Ohio River for at least several days per week for maybe 9 years when I lived in Moundsville, WV. I found I did my best

thinking during those walks and speculate it was because there was little visual distraction and the extra oxygen getting to the brain. But to me it wasn't meditation. I also suspect that trying to eliminate thought by "attending to the actual" would be much like Tolle's "being in the now." When I did sitting-meditation, I'd be in a room with little sensory stimulation, and I typically kept my eyes closed, so I was attending to the actual of what was going on in my mind but without trying to stop thought. I suspect that the practice of watching the mind-movement and turning my inner head away from it if it didn't seem relevant to what I was looking for may have built a muscle that was able to keep my focus on awareness when it appeared on the final evening of my final solitary retreat.



Do you believe there's any way to gauge where one is on the path, or is it more of a binary you either are lost or know yourself kind of a thing?

We can see where our beliefs have changed, which is a sign of movement. After 25 years of searching, I felt that I was right back where I started (in a dark room, turning in circles with one foot nailed to the floor). But self-inquiry friends told me they saw lots of differences in me. We can use stages described by Patanjali, Buddha, Rose, et alia to try to gauge where we are on the journey ... but we have to be careful about visualization based on suggestion.

In my experience, there were many years after arriving at what might be the Process Observer level on Rose's [Jacob's Ladder](#) diagram until I became individually conscious of awareness. If we reach the "egoless" stage, which I associate with continuing

to work based on the momentum of an established vector in that direction but without hope of success for ourselves, we may not experience much movement in terms of our view/self-beliefs. I think our commitment has to be for a lifetime, if necessary, with no guarantee of success.



Sometimes in meditation I feel I am “in the zone”, could be visualisation, and then I get interference when I become “self-conscious” of being in the zone. Is a feeling of “being in the zone” a red flag?

If by “in the zone” means you’re watching a process that is computing an enormous amount of information and producing results, which you don’t often witness—e.g., the American-football quarterback watching computations of what to do with the football in his hand and realizing that what occurs is far beyond his ability “to do,” I’d say that would be a view from the process-observer platform. If something then “disturbs” that view, and you “remember yourself” and remember you were just “in the zone,” I’d say that’s the default operation of the mind. Productive meditation would be to lengthen the duration of watching a process without being caught up in it.



Confoundation

Confound: Mix up, bewilder, bemuse.

Foundation: The basis on which a thing stands or is supported.

The world is in you.

The world is infinitely large.

You have no length, no width, no depth.

How do you contain it?

The world is outside you.

You are within.

You have no size, no shape, no texture, no color, no noise, no movement.

How are you going to find yourself, to know yourself?

*

"I'm going to follow a path of surrender, surrendering to What Is at every moment."

Q: How would an AI machine programmed with that objective act, beginning now?

Pause here to consider the question....

Chapter 3: Defining what we're not

Defining what we're not is a path of backing away from untruth, retreating from illusory or delusory beliefs. It's an application of respectful doubt. We can do that by investigating our strongest self-convictions, looking for evidence that challenges them.

We're liable to trade in a belief that's become questionable for its opposite, giving us the comfort of new certainty. But that new belief can be investigated, and new evidence may convince us that the truth lies somewhere in a view over the older belief and its opposite.

Eventually we'll reach a self-belief or a set of self-beliefs that our life-experience hasn't yet provided evidence that challenges them.

What then?

What Part of Speech Are You?

Let me remind you
That the perceived
Cannot perceive.
~ Huang Po

If you ask yourself what you are, or investigate into your true identity, how do you talk to yourself about it?

Here's how four of the people in a self-inquiry retreat began their responses to four five-minute writing exercises:

<i>Responses to "I am..." began with:</i>	<i>Responses to "I am not..." began with:</i>
A: I am tired.... B: I am scared.... C: I am dot dot dot dot D: I am waiting....	A: I am not immune.... B: I am not excited.... C: What am I? D: I am not God....
<i>Responses to "I love..." began with:</i>	<i>Responses to "I hate..." began with:</i>
A: I love the possibility.... B: I love beauty.... C: [no response] D: I love this person....	A: I hate getting distracted.... B: I hate feeling confused.... C: [blank] D: I hate this life....

Do you head yourself off from the corral of looking with an "I don't know" reaction? Of course you don't know; otherwise, there would be no need for investigation. But if that's a stopping point for you, you've followed a path of the tired, the hopeless, the paranoid, or some other sense that the threat of

looking would overwhelm you. But how could that be the case? What were you afraid you might see, and why would that threat shut down your investigation?

Are you an adjective (“I am tired,” “I am scared,” etc.) or a verbal gerund (“I am waiting”)? Verbs and their relatives describe action or movement; adjectives describe features or attributes.

I am rolling (verb form)

I am round (adjective)

What am I?

A rolling stone :-)

Are you afraid to label the subject of your investigation?

Are you a body?

What is this I-am-ness?

Look around ... everyone you see is going to die.

What if you were what you are:

Before you were born.

Before you became self-conscious.

What if what you are doesn't depend on:

Consciousness.

Life.

All spiritual work is aimed at consciously knowing what you really are:

- The closest clue you have is your I-am-ness sense.
 - What you are “knows” (i.e., experiences) that.

- You are not that sense of self; you are that which experiences it.
- Your focus needs to be turned from what you believe yourself to be:
 - (A person?) (A body-mind?) (A soul?)
 - In order to investigate your I-am-ness.

When what experiences I-am-ness has explored I-am-ness sufficiently:

- You/it will be liberated from the suffering inherent in being some thing.

[What's Your View?](#)

A participant in an email self-inquiry group wrote: *This is getting harder to find the right questions for each person now!*

Let's go back to basics: Why are we doing self-inquiry?

My view: It's the search for solid ground, for certainty.

Your view:

*

Where can we find certainty?

My view: Within. Our identity is the only true certainty, the absolute point of reference.

Richard Rose's view: Nothing can be known for sure until the knower is known.

Your view:

*

How can we find certainty?

My view: By seeing, and admitting to ourselves, that our current views are shaky, that we really know nothing for sure about what we are. When the arch of self-beliefs is loosened, then life can challenge the keystone in the arch. When the arch falls, we find ourselves back Home.

Your view:

*

Richard Rose: Another term for self-inquiry is self-definition.

My view: That's a brilliant descriptor. To define is to "state or describe exactly the nature, scope, or meaning of," to "mark out the boundary or limits of."

Your view:

*

Richard Rose: Definition requires comparison.

My view: That's another ingenious pointer. We back our way through the maze of the mind, the labyrinth of relativity, by having our self-beliefs challenged. For those challenges to occur, we have to encounter contrasting views that are disrupting.

Your view:

*

Where do we find the "right questions" to challenge ourselves or others?

My view: Notice what inspires or irritates us. Inspiration (literally, breathing in) inflates us, encourages us to act, to acquire or accomplish something that will increase our happiness / satisfaction or decrease our unhappiness / dissatisfaction. Irritation encourages us to act in order to eliminate the disturbance. Inspiration and irritation will reveal underlying self-beliefs if we look for them.

Your view:

*

Why do we run out of questions to ask ourselves or others?

My view: Lack of curiosity. Why? Complacency: We think we've seen what's there and that our interpretations of what we've seen are as good as they're going to get. Pride (although as sophisticated seekers we're often identified with the flip side of the coin: depression, gloom, melancholy, misery, pain, sadness, sorrow, trouble, unhappiness, etc.). Exhaustion (from depression, gloom, melancholy, etc.).

Your view:

*

What can we do about it?

My view: Ask ourselves or others what our view / conclusion / belief / conviction/interpretation is of any topic that inspires or irritates us. Then probe for underlying self-beliefs.

Your view:

*

Reminder: Definition requires comparison. If someone else's view agrees with ours, we may get a clue as to compatible self-beliefs. If their view differs from ours, we may get a clue as to incompatible self-beliefs.

Agree? Disagree?

*

Koan: Your best friend is a question that feels relevant to you, that you don't yet have an answer to, and that you feel needs an answer.

Agree? Disagree?

Love the Lord

B. asked M. in a meditation discussion group experiment: *Have you considered using your meditation time to look at the stressors that are coming up in your life and what possible lesson (if any) might be available?*

M. responded: *I have tried this before and I don't really know what I'm supposed to be looking for. I have looked at things coming up in my life and tried to understand them better in order to understand how to work around them or fix them, but all the answers that come up feel like guesses. I don't think I've ever been convinced by some ideas I've had about what something means or why I'm doing it or how to fix it. Each time I've tried to apply the ideas I came up with, nothing really stuck, at least not for a considerable period of time. My mind seems to shift so often it's tough to trust the solutions it keeps spitting out.*

The trick may be to review life experiences and watch the associated thoughts and feelings as if they were occurring in a friend. If the friend (someone you know or some imagined friend) were reviewing those life experiences looking for possible lessons, what might he come up with? Not with the idea of trying to fix but purely with the idea of seeing the truth. Not with the idea of coming up with absolute certainty but just with improved clarity.

Truth is not a servant. Truth is the Lord that we eventually bow down to. The Truth may set us free, but if we try to use the truth,

to bend it to our purposes, we may find ourselves tied in tightening knots. Love the Truth with all your heart.

Meditation: What Is It?

I meditated over a period of 25 years, admittedly with more discipline in earlier years, before reaching the resolution of the yearning for self-definition that prompted my search. And even after self-realization, I didn't feel like I had any perspective on "What is meditation?" Then, a little more than a year later, a perspective drifted into my mind as I was drifting off to sleep one night.

Meditation is watching.

Like watching squirrels at play? Not exactly. Meditation is watching the mind.

Like watching our thoughts and feelings? That's a step in the right direction. But not exactly it, either. Meditation is watching the watching.

How do you do that? By watching the conflict going on in the mind without getting caught up in it. Easier said than done. It requires staying alert to the watching.

And then what? The watching will jump to a more interior view within the mind. Like a new eye opening? Not exactly. The more interior watching has been going on while our attention was on a more exterior watching.

What will I see? You may see processes going on within the mind, processes such as decision-making. Like a factory with machinery operating or a computer with programs running.

And then what? You may become aware of the biggest conflict, the main problem that the mind is trying to resolve: What am I? Where did I come from? What's my connection with the world and particularly with this body-mind? Will its death be my end?

Meditation is not drifting off into a pleasant state. There's no state more pleasant than dreamless sleep, and we go there every night, but it doesn't solve the problem. We return to the waking state without a resolution of the yearning for definition. (Substitute your own word or phrase for "definition": meaning, purpose, truth, reality, nirvana, heaven, oneness, love, etc.)

Meditation is reviewing life's traumas, the blows to our self-esteem, and letting them lead our search for the elusive, seemingly afflicted and needy self. Meditation is learning to monitor and control or sidestep the physical and mental obstacles to meditation. Meditation is watching until the watcher is known.



Questions & Answers 3

Q: I feel like I don't have an obvious direction to look right now. Not that I don't have general philosophical questions, but the heat of psychological stuff and identity crises isn't usually there. That was always an obvious place to look, like the pebble in your shoe analogy. I've heard people like Shawn Nevins talk about continuing to show up, which I feel I'm doing. And I still use afflictions to the sense of self as jumping off points for self-inquiry. I just find myself wishing I had a more obvious direction to focus my problem-solver brain or even to focus my intuition. Anything you recommend besides be-careful-what-you-wish-for asking for more afflictions? Thanks.

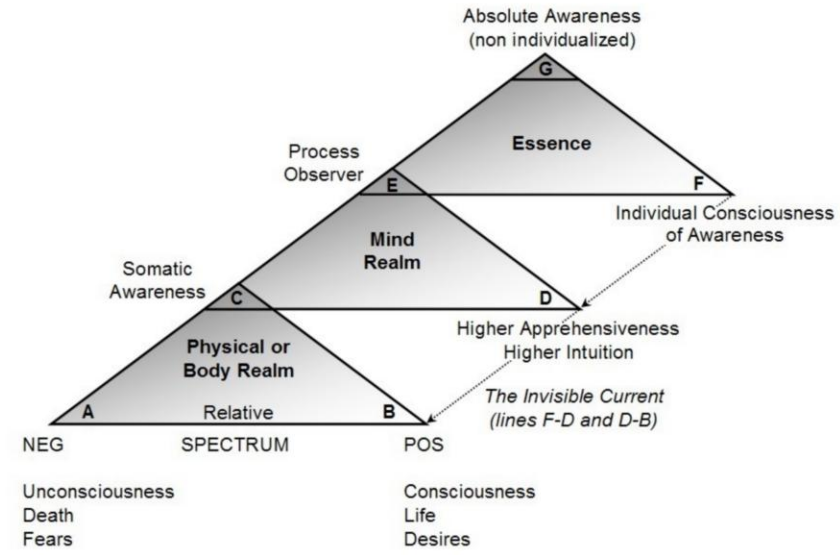
AT: The source of dissatisfaction/misery/feeling incomplete, etc., is faulty beliefs about self.



Can you explain non-duality? Everyone talks about it, understands it, and advocates it, it seems. As a relative creature without very many known non-relative working parts, I don't think I can conceive of anything that is not dualistic in nature. Do you contend it is the "view" from point "C" or "E" [on Richard Rose's Jacob's Ladder diagram below]? Without being at either point, how could I appreciate non-dualism except as a concept?

Non-duality is the opposite of something. What all seekers are looking for, whether it's a conscious goal or not, is what we are that's beyond opposites (happy/unhappy, coming/going, life/death, etc., ad nauseum). It's not conceivable, but it points to "G" on the Richard Rose diagram of Jacob's Ladder. It's off the ladder, before and beyond the ladder of existence.

Jacob's Ladder



Some techniques that seem promising but seem to get me stuck:

- *Retraversing the projected ray: it's a complete mystery. I really want to know my Source. It's the first sentence I read every morning. But I'm making zero progress trying to get to the source of thought.*

- *A couple years ago, I clearly caught thought originating from the organism itself. There seemed to be distinct "points" in the organism (perhaps in its brain) for survival, reminders, and other such functioning.*

- *Other than that, it gets way too abstract. All I see is so much vagueness when I try to ride a ray of thought back to its origin.*

- *Maharshi's "to whom did they arise?" technique was very promising for a while in turning me right inwards. Unfortunately, it doesn't work at all any more (it's discarded at the mental, thought-*

level before looking-in occurs). But from it, I do see clearly now that “I” run “behind” thought and identify with it.

- What’s my relationship to thought? No idea how to tell. The only relationship I seem to have to thought is, “I” mysteriously get identified with it.

How to retrace the ray of creation is a koan, like going within. Climbing Jacob’s Ladder may be getting closer to breaking whatever keeps our focus here. Maharshi’s “to whom did they arise” is a koan. An effective koan keeps us looking. Once we’re familiar with our complaints, we don’t need to keep looking at the complaint details but can turn our inner head away from them while looking for new material. We are that which is experiencing thought, and our mental machinery can learn to focus on thought that is more relevant to our primary goal/purpose.



The [strongest beliefs] I have [about what I am] are: I am an awareness inside a human body-mind who is limited by it, moves around with it, will cease to exist after its death, and is separate from an otherwise dangerous universe. I’m a separate consciousness that is limited by what it experiences—all I know of myself is what I’m conscious of, what I’m not. How can I get data about myself that I’m other than a viewpoint stuck observing a mind if all the data available is observable mind material? The reason my conviction level isn’t 10 [completely certain] on those is I notice logical contradictions and paradoxes that indicate something is off about these beliefs. I have intuitions I’m not entirely what the mind thinks I am. Beyond that, there’s nothing really creating tension for the mind to solve this that it can use as a thread to loosen those “flotation devices” keeping attention from sinking deeper.

You're caught in a riptide of tension. It's all you can do to stay afloat. You can't afford to sink deeper. Why? I'd guess it's because you believe it's up to you to survive in the short term and that you're fighting against overwhelming adversity. Consider the possibility that there may be help more powerful than any adversity and, if you live life in service of becoming an eternal ideal, help will take care of your temporal survival. I think the swing point in living for a better tomorrow vs. living for the *ne plus ultra* of existence is seeing that what you want more than anything else transcends limitation.



When I sit and just look at what's here now, I feel like I'm already behind. Like thoughts and concepts have already shaped what I'm looking at, which makes it hard to answer the question of "what's really going on here" when looking. Is it just a matter of seeing this and watching this as the case until I find myself stepping back (inward) to a broader view? Are there ways to try to see more clearly here-and-now without layers of concepts involved?

What's here "now" is a continuing sensorama—via "outside" or "inside" senses, depending on where we're looking—of images, sounds, etc. A particular percept gets the mind's attention—let's say a visual image or a mental memory—and then it bounces off memories, maybe proceeding in a conceptual path, or a creative path, etc.

Seeing more clearly what's going on as it's happening depends first on becoming conscious of the sensorama as it's happening (versus recalling bits and pieces of it). That occurred for me as if accidentally, and as an amazing surprise.

Then the carving out of time each day to watch what's occurring without getting lost in it—basic mindfulness meditation—with the interval of not getting lost in it expanding, depending on the quantum of energy available. For me, that reached 50 minutes. If I'd set my meditation practice for more than an hour, it might have expanded beyond 50 minutes.

The addition of determining whether what's being witnessed is relevant to what we're looking for and turning the inner head away from what appears to be irrelevant—watching then for what comes into view next—can increase the quality / productivity of the meditation.



How did your attitude/beliefs about your identity change along your path as a seeker?

Various insight-experiences loosened up some of my identity-convictions—for example, seeing the decision-making process in slow motion convinced me that I didn't have any direct influence on decision-making, but I still felt I might have some indirect affect. And seeing that most actions were preceded by decisions loosed up my conviction of being the doer. Coming across the etymology of “person” as coming from the masks Greek actors used to portray various emotions, along with Richard Rose's promotion of the hypothesis that I was never that which I saw/experienced/knew, gave me some distance from identifying with my personality.

I think the main attitude change was a decrease of certainty about the convictions, which were pared down to being a

separate something that was aware and which might be dependent on a functioning body/brain for its continued existence, and of being something that was born and would die.

At one point I had an instantaneous conviction that attaining my main life-objective was hopeless, and that stayed with me for about seven years until it dissipated slowly. It didn't dawn on me that I could question the conviction.



Why God, did you set this up so I desire happiness, yet all I get is unhappiness? Why this separation from my Source?

The apparent separation from our Source is how we know ourselves. Desiring happiness and experiencing unhappiness are the pull and push that motivate Self-Realization. Life is a schoolhouse. And learning requires tension. (I know that's not comforting.)



Struggling with the idea of trying to go beyond experience. Enlightenment or any other improvement is tainted for me because I realized that ultimately what I want is a better experience. An improvement. The promise of absolute self-realization really for me is that I if I achieve it, I won't have problems. Or that if I do, they won't have the same problem feeling somehow.

It might be more productive to focus on solving your #1 problem, whether the solution comes in experience or non-experience (although I don't know how you would know the

problem is solved unless you experience / see / consciously become the solution).



Are thoughts ultimately relevant at all to seeing? Like, do they seem to help point attention? Or are they just noise?

I have the suspicion that there's no wasted experience in our lives ... that all experience, whether it's in the "outside world," perceived by the physical senses, or the "inside world," perceived by the mental senses, provides data that can challenge the certainties of our beliefs about what we are. I also suspect that, as the quantum physicists have apparently found, observation may affect what we see/experience. In conscious observation, we notice what we're seeing.



What does self-inquiry mean to you?

To me it meant carving out an hour of time each morning to remind myself of what I wanted most from life then watching the mind's activity, turning away from activity that didn't seem relevant to what I was looking for. It also meant working together with others on rungs of the spiritual ladder close to mine. It meant trying to conserve energy going to other purposes and directing it to my most important priority.



The Truth is away from the direction of objects.

The Truth is within, but we can't go there directly. We may first have to see that the world and its objects aren't real (the equivalent of Richard Rose's mountaintop experience) and then see that the "me" we-believe-ourselves-to-be isn't real.



If you could have one wish granted this week, what would it be?

To know my Essence and its relation to God.

What do you feel may be holding you here?

Fear of loss (of the world, of life, of family, of connection, of status, of comfort, etc.), and the attention paid to avoiding related losses. The uncomfortable (to say the least) feeling associated with doing/being nothing. A lack of capacity for tension (seeking comfort).

Doing/being something may be the illusion that binds. Your inner self may be reluctant to awaken you from a dream that you don't want to awaken from. Have you seen/admitted that the experience world can't provide what you're looking for?

I do believe that I've seen/admitted that the experience world can't provide what I'm ultimately looking for . . . but it's (apparently) all I have right now, and I still feel/believe myself to be an individual something, and it seems like quite a gamble to give up comforts for the distant chance of something more. Why would the inner self be reluctant to awaken me from a dream that I'm hesitant to awaken from, when ignorance and confusion are the only reasons for my hesitations to awaken? That seems like a cruel joke to me, honestly. If I had a child who was hesitant to go outside and play in the snow because it seemed

scary from his place of ignorance, but I knew as his father that he would find pure joy in that winter wonderland, would I just stand there, shrug my shoulders, and say “well, I guess I won’t bring him outside, doesn’t seem like he wants to.” NO, that would be such a bullshit response from me. I’d pick him up, and carry him outside while he looked around frantically for the first few seconds before realizing he was in a snow-covered paradise. For Gods’ sake, will something pick me up and carry me through that door? I’m pretty sure it’s actually impossible for “me” to “do it myself” anyways, isn’t that part of the paradox? The fact that “I” can’t go through that door? So how do I convince my father that I know I don’t know what’s best, and that I’m doing the best I can with what I have (I think?), and that I’m not sure if I’m supposed to be cherishing life or turning my attention away from it—what is love, anyways? It’s not like I caused this ignorance of mine, why won’t God come grab me in a wheelbarrow? Free me from this prison for drunks? It does seem that whoever brought me here, will have to take me home. Thanks for the provoking question, Art . . . got me going on that one a bit :)

Speaking from the perspective of a person who loves his comforts (:-) how could we possibly “give up” something that we’re enslaved by?



Slavery

Are you a slave of your fears?

*

Are you a slave of your desires?

*

Are you a slave of your feelings?

*

Are you a slave of your intellect?

*

Are you a slave of your intuition?

*

Are you a slave of your prides?

*

Are you a slave of your moods?

*

Are you a slave of your convictions?

Chapter 4: *When we run out of evidence*

When we run out of evidence to challenge our remaining self-beliefs, there's another approach we can work with.

The investigation of doubting our self-beliefs as an aspect of the search for Truth is a heady practice of self-inquiry referred to as Jñāna yoga, questioning our knowing.

There's a companionable practice that's more heart-oriented, which is termed Bhakti yoga: devotion toward a personal ideal.

Time to Try Something Else

The highest a man can feel and think is his highest ideal, and the higher we rise in the scale of existence and the more our knowledge expands, the higher will be our ideal. As long as we cling to our highest ideal we will be happy in spite of the sufferings and vicissitudes of life. The highest ideal confers the highest and most enduring happiness... ~ Franz Hartmann in his *Life of Paracelsus*¹¹

From my journal circa 2000: Reading Radhakrishnan's commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad* this morning, I realized that no refinement of my intellectual understanding of the truth is going to solve the problem. *It's time to try something else*—possibly a “felt” connection with the downward current from the Source.

But I didn't know what else to do. Many years earlier I'd seen clearly what I wanted most from life, which had created my primary commitment. The words that best described it to myself were “to become the Truth regardless of the cost.”

Also many years earlier, when I thanked my teacher Richard Rose for all he'd done for me and said I wished there was a way I could repay him, he said that's not the way it works: pass it on. I took that advice to heart. And when I lost hope in attaining the goal for myself, I continued serving that goal by trying to help others who shared it.

¹¹ <https://selfdefinition.org/magic/paracelsus/hartmann-life-of-paracelsus/09-philosophy-and-theosophy.htm>

I didn't see my path as a bhakti path, but it was based on devotion to my ideal. And there was an unplanned refinement over the years of working for myself then working for others.

Longing

You are what your deep, driving desire is
As your desire is, so is your will
As your will is, so is your deed
As your deed is, so is your destiny.
~ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

How could we be separate from what we really are? (Think about it...) Heartache results from buying into the fictional individuality belief (FIB):

"I am a sentient creature with its personal awareness," you say.

"There are no sentient creatures.

"Awareness is self-aware," the teacher says.

"But I can't see that!" you say.

"That's because you're thinking about it, not looking at it," the teacher says.

You're conscious, and you know that you're conscious. Consciousness is like a light illuminating objects. Becoming conscious of awareness is becoming conscious of what powers that light.

There's a vibrant longing that leads us back to consciousness of awareness. It's reflected in our dissatisfaction, in our desire for unity, completion, wholeness, love, eternity....



Polasek "Man Carving His Own Destiny"

Certain scenes or images or sounds may remind us of its existence. My personal list includes scenes of communal harmony, often associated with churches and music: A brass choir playing "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory" on an Easter Sunday morning in Binghamton, New York when I was eight or ten; antiphonal choirs singing in the front and back lofts of a

Lebanese Orthodox church on a visit to Boston as a high school senior; Bach preludes and fugues vibrating the interior of a college chapel as we walked under the organ loft at the chapel entrance (required attendance for freshmen); a brass band standing under the dome of an old Spanish mission outside San Antonio, Texas, welcoming the local people to Sunday morning mass, and so on.

We try to fulfill the vibrant longing “out there.” But its message is that an internal home is the place of completion, of eternity without conflict. When the excitement and adventure of traveling wears thin, it becomes more and more apparent to the weary traveler that fulfillment doesn’t lie over the next hill or around the next bend. As an old hymn intones: “Come Home, come Home, ye who are weary, come Home.”¹²

Longing.... Yearning....

Longing.... Yearning....
Some say, “How painful!”
Why?
It brings up the awful feeling
that there may be
no hope for me
to realize my deepest
desire.
Do they miss the mood
surrounding the longing?
Is it one of nostalgia?

¹²[Alan Jackson “Softly And Tenderly”](#)

Hope or hopelessness:
a choice,
a personal bias,
emotional, not rational.
Faith: an intuitive horse
of a different color.
Find the umbilical cord
connecting us
to our source,
to the core of being –
Hinting to us that we come
from a place of perfection?
And inviting us to return Home
when we're ready?

[Come Home](#)

The point of self-inquiry is Self-Realization: discovering our true identity, becoming Real.

Self-Realization is the only solution to our longing for X (the unknown; eternal perfection). The life-force that animates us has a vibration, a calling, that invites us: "Come home, come home, ye who are weary come home."

Suffering is an identity problem. It ends when we find ourselves back Home and know-by-identity that what we are is not affected in any way by what we experience.

The purpose of life, of existence, is knowing what we truly are. Self-Knowing is the *ne plus ultra* of life.

Longing Response

Dearly beloved,
Know that I hear you....
My response is the silence behind all movement.
I am the called, the calling ... and the caller.
You and I are not two.

Feelings versus Heart

An excerpt from a talk by Richard Rose, *Definition of Zen*, at Kent State U, circa 1973:

Now this is what they really mean in this Zen literature about no-mind. They mean the point where the head stops. And they talk occasionally about killing the Buddha, or killing the mind. But you can't kill your mind. These were terms that were either lost or had something wrong with the translation, or misinterpreted. The mind is killed for you. You can't set out to kill your own mind. The only thing you can do is set out to find the truth. But in the process of finding the truth, you have to somehow put a stop to this relative hassle that goes back and forth: "It could be this but it also could be the opposite. Or let's look at it from two sides." No, you have to go right down the middle. Look at it directly. Become one with it. You can't reason it out, back and forth.

There was a fellow who participated in one of the email confrontation groups for a few months. He seemed to be working mostly at a concept level, exhibited no emotion, and didn't connect with the other folks. It felt to me like he didn't have his heart in it. By contrast, there are people who exhibit a

lot of emotion, run hot and cold ... what we'd probably label as heart-centered. I think that even those feeling-centered folks may not be heart-centered, though. If a person's feelings react violently (i.e., loudly) when their heart opens, fear may close it before long. My guess is that commitment occurs when the heart—intuition—is open and feelings line up with it rather than override it. I think that both feeling reactions and conceptual thinking are at a lower level of mind functioning.

Looking back, I probably borrowed commitment from Richard Rose because his teachings opened my heart (to Truth-Love). Two of the convictions underlying my commitment to become the Truth were the conviction that self-definition—knowing the knower—was the goal to shoot for and the conviction that celibacy was beneficial for me. Like you, S., I couldn't gauge a definite result of celibacy, but I felt or believed it to be valuable.

There's a huge difference between fortifying our self-image by building a wall of rationalizations to explain our behavior versus taking a direct look at our motivations. The seeker who's commitment-shy or has rationalized away either the possibility, or the value, of commitment may be listening more to the feeling level of his mind than to the heart or intuition level. And from my experience, I feel that even the least effective seeker who's open to the inner guru's help can ride their coattails into Nirvana.

[Longing for Home](#)

Adam: I feel the pain of separation
Which no closeness to those I love
Removes.

I long for the soul-satisfying
Completeness of what feels like
A half-remembered distant home
Where I came from.
But I feel I was pushed out
Of that remote paradise
Into this valley of suffering,
Lost, wandering, not knowing
How to find my way home.

Father

Ah, my son, I know what you're feeling –
The loneliness, fear and frustration –
Because your feelings are my feelings,
Your thoughts my thoughts,
Your heartbeat my heartbeat,
Your breath my breath.
Your longing for Home is your
Reaching out to Me,
And although you don't know it
My reaching out to you.
We are not remote and distant.
When we touch,
When consciousness touches Awareness,
You will not see or feel me
But see that you and I are One.
Do you feel that I
Have abandoned you
To struggle on your own?
Your longing for the hand of the Father
Is in fact the Father's extended hand
Inviting our conscious reunion.
Out of Me comes the mind,

Forming the dimension of self
And other.
Your conscious feeling
Of the longing
Is like a prayer
Of recognition.

Feed Before You Eat

What distinguishes man from the so-called lower animals? As Temple Grandin tells us in *Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior*, one of the major differences is that “animals aren’t ambivalent.” She points out that neuroscience is showing us that animals and humans have the same core emotions, but animals don’t have the mixed emotions that normal adults have. In that respect, animals are more like children and autistic people. The child and the autistic person are *innocents* whose feelings are direct and open. The difference may be explained neurologically by the development of the frontal lobes. They don’t have the mental equipment to support love-hate relationships or to entertain the resulting psychodrama that normal adults engage in. (Suggestion to ignore :-) don’t read any further until you’ve identified and considered an example of the psychodrama that you indulge in.)

Jesus exhorted his followers: “Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Richard Rose tried to make it clearer by saying: “To enter the Kingdom, you have to become as an autistic little child.” To know the self,

we have to somehow become *innocents* again. How can that be done?

We aren't going to rewire the prefrontal lobes, to "dumb" them down to pre-adult simplicity. So we have to somehow transcend the turmoil of mixed emotions. All this requires is a shift in our observation platform. From being caught up in the swirl of conflicting emotions, we find ourselves watching the struggle from an anterior position. There's no formula for making this shift, but the general approach is one of 1) noticing what we're observing, 2) providing room for our curiosity to work at trying to understand what we observe, and 3) overcoming our disbelief in the possibility of attaining a radically different perspective. This approach is synonymous with productive meditation.

Education in self-knowledge generally comes in the form of shocks that jar us out of self-complacency. But these shocks impel hypnotic psychodrama. So we need an alternation of being focused on the inner drama with putting our attention on something else. In other words, if we spend too much time "in our heads," we need to disrupt that spell with some focus on the outer world. One of the best ways to do this is to ask ourselves what we can do for someone else. Not to win points toward some do-gooder prize, not to pump ourselves up as more benevolent than the next-door neighbor, but just to stop taking our personal psychodrama as being so important. (It's not.)

When you reach the pinnacle of self-knowledge, you may find yourself aligned with the view expressed by Nisargadatta: "My stand is clear: produce to distribute, feed before you eat, give before you take, think of others before you think of yourself."



Questions & Answers 4

Q: What's your intuition about whether facing fear in the dimension of existence help you find your source?

AT: We may need to risk all to consciously become All. But we need to use intuition and common sense to determine which risks to take. For example, I think that facing the fear of going onto a high, steep roof helped challenge faulty beliefs I had about myself, but I didn't think that detaching my brain from its blood supply to see if I'd still be here was a reasonable risk. I can't be certain about what helped me find my source since causation is questionable, but what I see in retrospect is that the path may have been a loosening of who/what I believed I was as a person—e.g., the thinker, the decision-maker, the meditator, symmetrical with other persons; a loosening of the seeking-paradigm I was using—i.e., whether objects in my consciousness were inside me or outside me; and the disruption of my belief in individuality when I became conscious of awareness.



A thought that's come up a few times recently is something like: why do I even need enlightenment? Isn't it just something 'I' want? And what's actually wrong with right now that it will fix? For me it's not clear what's even wrong, so why does it matter if it happens or not?

Could it be that we're inexorably drawn to perfection? (And could it be that our life-experience is what leads us to perfection? And could it be that it takes maybe 10,000 lifetimes?) Admittedly rhetorical questions, but I'm curious what your feeling is about the first one.

And if you had the option at this moment to be guaranteed another lifetime, would you choose it?



Is “the evidence” that you become conscious of something you weren’t before (like Awareness), or is the evidence that you realize thoughts were convincing you that you weren’t seeing IT but you actually were looking at it all along? Said another way, is enlightenment an addition (become conscious of) or subtraction (lose the believe in)?

It was definitely something I’d never seen before. Enlightenment is beyond addition or subtraction, which are the path: life provides added experience that challenges and subtracts our certainty about our self-beliefs. I’d say that becoming conscious of our real identity provides a new kind of knowing for the conscious mind. It shows the conscious mind that nothing in duality can be known for sure, and it shows the conscious mind that nothing it experiences can affect what we are.

Using the snake/rope analogy ... when you aren’t seeing the rope clearly and you think it’s a snake, you are in fact looking at rope the whole time and, once realizing it’s not a snake, can see that it was in fact rope you were looking at the whole time ... there’s no additional rope to see you weren’t already looking right at ... is Realization similar?

Self-Realization is beyond the split between view and viewer. If we’re talking about the trigger for transcending limitation, for me it was the unimagined change from seeing nothing when

I looked back at where I look out from to seeing something. So I guess the analogy would be no rope to rope.

I don't know for sure if that's necessary for everyone. I equate it to what Richard Rose labeled as point F on his Jacob's Ladder diagram, which he named as "individual consciousness of awareness." I do feel that some experience has to remove anything that the mind-self can hold onto.



What is the source of a nostalgic certainty feeling? Does the mind have a tiny view of truth? Is there a way to use nostalgia or longing or Bhakti to retreat from untruth? With faith, I could say it may be truer than the mind's obvious nonsense, but it could still be wrong. Alan Jackson's song ["Softly and Tenderly"] is probably suggesting a Jesus path, and I have a feeling of a different path, but how can I safely trust a feeling?

That's why I suggested substituting Buddha for Jesus in the "Softly and Tenderly" lyrics. Feelings are facts/data. Interpretations of feelings are questionable. As in a courtroom, we can act on feelings of conviction without the illusion of certainty. Nostalgia in the most abstract sense is telling us to come home, back to the eternal perfection we come from. We're identified with what we love. We come from Love into love becoming Love. The bhakti component of the path home is finding our mind's ideal, elevating it to the sacred, and becoming it.

The mind's ideal could be like "the light" as Peace Pilgrim talks about it. Where I feel "the light" is vague. I love the idea of Connection to

all. What connects to what? How am I not feeling I'm connected if everything is connected? Aloneness seems like a fact of being a self.

The mind's ideal could be security through wealth, unconditional approval, "the light," connection to all, etc. Those, in my view, are lesser ideals that wouldn't satisfy the life-force's longing. Connected-to-all could mean different things to different folks. Some physicists have apparently seen that Indra's Net (an infinite number of jewels with an infinite number of facets that reflect every other jewel) is a good metaphor for how subatomic particles can know instantly what another subatomic particle knows. We don't consciously experience at a quantum level (at least I don't). Not feeling connected, feeling alone/separate, are beliefs about ourselves until our life experience loosens them. Feeling deep rapport with another person challenged my belief in where my boundary was, and definitely challenged the belief in separation ... but at a mental level, not the body level. When I found my real identity, it destroyed my belief in true separation. But back in duality, separation is paradoxical.

Even with rapport, I imagine it just says at best there are other centers of consciousness and the contents of experience can be experienced simultaneously, but somehow this center congeals back to its own little world like a magnet pulling back all the iron filings. Maybe on some unconscious level there is rapport with everyone past and future, like the collective unconscious.

So I don't want to just become mentally convinced I'm not alone in more ways. I'm still alone ultimately as far as I know. Even if there are guardian angels, I am separate.

There's a feeling I don't want to be me. So it would be a relief to know it/I am not true. How can I go from here to find my mind's ideal, then elevate it to sacred, and become it? I want to become something truer. From the ground level that could be burning the lies from my life.

With my first deep experience of rapport, there was only one mind looking at itself, like with facing mirrors producing an infinite regression (I know that they know that I know that they know ... that we're experiencing the same thoughts and feelings). One center of consciousness. As if two minds had merged into one. It loosened my belief in my boundary being my "private" mind.

Our belief about being separate/alone is merely a strong belief that makes sense until experience challenges it and we find otherwise. What we find is what we truly are, and that what we are isn't affected by what we experience. Back in this dimension, this body-mind is separate from the table, the car, the lover, etc., but we now know that separate "me" is not our true identity.

I think it's just a question of looking in the mind for what we want most from life. Let's say the intuition goes to work on the project if it's important to us, and if we carve time out of our busyness to remind the mind of our priority and watch to see what it produces. Retreating from the certainty of beliefs about what we are is helpful and may be necessary. You could start with the admission that you don't know what you are essentially, and therefore any of your strong beliefs about yourself could be untrue.



... Is he describing what you consider bhakti?

I never considered myself a bhakti seeker, but in retrospect I could argue that my whole path was a bhakti path (in an intellectual sort of way :-). As I see it now, a bhakti path results from seeing clearly what we're here for and seeing there's nothing more important to us, which generates true commitment and raises that objective to a sacred ideal for becoming. It's the process of knowing what we are: Love becoming love becoming Love.

Thank you for that, though don't know I understand it all. I hear you saying bhakti is giving in to what is true, and then one's commitment, intentions become more than just commitments, intentions, they get elevated.... So for me, what would you say is the best antidote for pride?

Sounds like you're saying that somehow my smaller love needs to embrace a much greater love to become transformed to that greater level.

I only saw two commitments in my life (although there were responsibilities I took seriously): the commitment that occurred when I saw clearly what I wanted most from life and the commitment that occurred when I thanked RR for all he had done for me, said I wished there was some way I could repay him for it, and he replied: "That's not the way it works; pass it on."

I think our prides are only a problem if they block our retreat from untruth. We may get a better sense of that if we look at our fears (the flip side of the coin in a way) one at a time. The "final" pride may be individuality, and I feel that it takes help for the experience to appear that contests that belief.

I'd say that our existence has two forces at work to bring us back to what we are: the push of dissatisfaction / suffering, and the pull of Love.



This week I saw that the desire to “be in alignment with what is” is partially about wanting to return to the state I was in after my mini-satori last year, where I felt like everything was unfolding perfectly and I didn’t need to do anything.

I know, it’s wonderful, isn’t it. But pining for lost beauty is painful. The thing is, you’ve had the experience, and it’s available for your intuition to process. It doesn’t need to be repeated. (Unless it is repeated, then, like a recurring dream, that the intuition may be ignoring it for some reason.) Cherish the experience. (Bhakti?)



I have been engaging with your ‘Three questions’ article, which you recommended. I wonder how necessary it is to abandon the notion of control when working with ‘Am I the thinker?’ and ‘Am I the decision maker?’ Do I have to accept I have no influence over my thoughts / decisions whatsoever to ‘pass’? Or is mere acceptance that I have no full control over them sufficient?

My bias is for investigating beliefs such as control ... actually looking for evidence supporting and contradicting the beliefs. Acceptance should be like an ideal scientific approach ... temporary conclusions subject to more evidence. Most of us go about it in a sloppy way, dropping a belief for its opposite. In

addition to analysis, it requires refined feeling to get more honest with ourself about the certainty of our beliefs.



I believe I'm not seeing clearly what 'being' is, so I'm not complacent as a believer in neo-advaita.

After examining the sense of self I don't believe there's an individual self that is able to do or not do. But I don't 'see' what's the source of the energy that moves things.

The concept of "I" seems to be a concept that somehow tries to point to what's 'within', to the source of awareness and movement, but it's just a concept, a phenomenon; it's as Harding's pointing finger, it doesn't imply a certainty about what's at the Source. How can we move in the direction Harding's finger points at?

I'll continue trying different things, observing results, praying, etc.

I believe that staying in the 'not knowing' / 'just being' is very probably helpful, and various mystics point at that. Right now I'm prioritizing that practice because I have no clue about what else can help. This may be an error, but I'm not sure yet that it's an error, and I have no better plan.

The primary data the seeker has is the "I am here" sense that we get when we suddenly "self-remember" after we've been hypnotized with the view ... like the analogy of being caught up in a movie then remembering that we're sitting in the seat, not in that movie.

I feel there's no direct way to go within, to return consciously to the core of our being. Progress is reflected in our self-beliefs being recognized and weakened. Life has to provide experience that challenges our faulty certainties about what we are. Based on my experience (and I think Richard Rose's experience as reflected in point F on his Jacob's Ladder diagram), I think the final evidence is becoming conscious of awareness ... and that occurs when we look back at what/where we're looking out from and actually see something for the first time.

Trying to stay in the unknowing: your beliefs haven't yet been challenged sufficiently. I think the timing is determined by a higher intelligence. When we get to the point where we intuit that what we're seeking isn't going to save our little-s self ... when it no longer makes sense to work for our self ... we may need to keep the vector going by focusing on helping others.



[Bhakti](#)

The highest a man can feel and think is his highest ideal, and the higher we rise in the scale of existence and the more our knowledge expands, the higher will be our ideal. As long as we cling to our highest ideal we will be happy in spite of the sufferings and *vicissitudes* of life. The highest ideal confers the highest and most enduring happiness.... ~ Franz Hartmann¹³

*

Earthly things must be known to be loved. Divine things must be loved to be known. ~ Blaise Pascal¹⁴

*

[Going Hone, Close Your Eyes](#)

Lyrics to the Largo from Dvorak's *New World Symphony*

I.

If you feel lost
and torn apart
from the source of love,
look for it, it's not hard,
you fit it like a glove.

II.

Where is home?
Where is home?
Neither here nor far,

IV.

If you feel lost
and torn apart
from the source of love,
look for it, it's not hard,
you fit it like a glove

V.

You're the path,
yes, you're the path --
whatever does this mean?

¹³[*The Life and the Doctrines of Paracelsus*](#)

¹⁴[*The Big Book of Blaise Pascal Quotes*](#)

not in front,
not behind,
not on a distant star.

Where am I?
Not here nor there
but somewhere in-between.

III.

Close your eyes,
close your eyes,
listen to this well:
you and I are not two,
that is where you dwell.

VI.

Close your eyes,
close your eyes,
listen to this well:
you and I are not two,
that is where you dwell....
that is where you dwell....
yes, that is where you dwell.

*

It might be interesting to compare your heart's lyrics to those of the dolly in the window in "Shake Me, I Rattle" as sung by Christy Lane:¹⁵

Shake me I rattle
Squeeze me I cry
Please take me home
And love me...

¹⁵["Shake Me, I Rattle"](#)

Chapter 5: *What do you want most from your life?*

What do you want most from your life?

What do you long for or yearn to become?

Once we see/intuit with clarity what we want most, it's a recognition of the umbilical cord connecting us to our source. The downward current from the source is the life-force animating our body-mind. And the longing/yearning is to find our way back to the source.

Common denominators of what we want are absolute certainty, unconditional love, eternal perfection. To be Fully Satisfying, it has to be Unconditioned and Eternal, before time and space. Capital-l Love, capital-r Reality, capital-t Truth.

Our intuition improves during our retreat from untruth, where we see and admit that our certainties are questionable, that we don't know anything for sure ... which includes not knowing for sure that any ultimate attainment or becoming is impossible.

When we see that what we want most is to become That, an ultimate commitment to that goal is born.

The Innermost Longing

There's an innermost longing that tries to get our attention and never lets us rest for long until it has been satisfied. Bernadette Roberts had a clear feeling about it at the remarkable age of ten:

I went on to discover that in its deepest sense, the will is not primarily the faculty of desire for anything known, but rather, the desire for something unknown, an innate desire for something that lies beyond ourselves, a longing for something we know is missing in us. This longing is always uplifting, never focused on anything in the world we know of, and no matter how intense this longing, it is never a downer or sad, never focused on what is low or ugly. It's a need to have something, know something, possess something in order to fulfill ourselves, to be complete or whole. We may think at times it is a longing for beauty, truth, goodness and much more, but nothing short of God will ever satisfy. ~
Contemplative: Autobiography of the Early Years.

Many of us become aware of a deep longing, and we arrive at various interpretations of what will satisfy it. Some of us pursue personal love, seeking the perfect mate as our savior. Others pursue wealth or knowledge or fame. The biologist Robert DeRopp, in a remarkable book titled [The Master Game](#), laid out a hierarchy of life-aims and the corresponding strategies, or life-games, used to try to attain them:

<u>Game</u>	<u>Life Aim</u>
Master Game	awakening
Religion Game	salvation

Science Game	knowledge
Art Game	beauty
Householder Game	raise family
No game	no aim
Hog in Trough	wealth
Cock on Dunghill	fame
Moloch Game	glory or victory

Few of us start out playing the Master Game but come to it only after disillusionment with lesser games. Bernadette Roberts latched onto it at a very early age, although it was probably mixed with the religion game. She entered the Discalced Carmelites at a young age and, around twenty-five, had what the Catholic contemplatives call the unitive experience. As far as she knew, that was the end of the line, so she left the monastery and entered what she referred to as the marketplace, later marrying and raising a family. Then, in her fifties, she had a profound awakening which she described as the experience of no-self. After that, she dedicated her life to letting the Catholic contemplative community know that the end-point of the spiritual search is beyond the unitive experience.

Reading her books gives me the feeling that she indeed reached the realization that satisfies our innermost longing. The fact that she was seemingly stuck in the Catholic paradigm, seeing it as the best path and feeling she can only help others on that path, reminds me of the life of Francis Thompson. Thompson was the Englishman (1859–1907) who wrote one of the most glorious poems in the English language, [*The Hound of Heaven*](#). It was abstractly autobiographical, depicting the deep misery of his life, his search for God or Truth, and its satisfactory attainment. The background, not clearly spelled out in the poem, is that he

was a young man who failed at everything he put his hand to, becoming a laudanum addict in his twenties. He was rescued temporarily by a publisher and his wife, and there followed a four-year period of withdrawal during which he presumably had the awakening that led to writing *The Hound of Heaven*. Eventually, though, he relapsed into the laudanum addiction and died before fifty.

There's a Zen saying that before enlightenment, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers; with enlightenment, mountains are no longer mountains and rivers are no longer rivers; and after enlightenment, mountains are again mountains and rivers are again rivers. You'd expect that the enlightenment which brings satisfaction of our innermost desire would remove all personal limitations and lead to a happy-ever-after life. After all, it's associated in the popular view with uninterrupted personal bliss. But that's not really it, at all. It's much more; inconceivably so.

When we peel off the outer layers of personal desire and get down to the innermost one, its satisfaction coincides with the death of identifying with the personality-concept. We find that what we thought we were, an individual something, is the faulty product of a finite mind, and what we really are is in no way affected by individual circumstances such as joy and sorrow—or life and death.

[Is Discipline a Dirty Word?](#)

I often hear people say that pursuing a goal is *the* problem—just *let go*, just *be in the now*, and so on. In the spiritual arena, it's often the young, or the not-so-young sophisticates, who adopt

that posture. It's a cool attitude; cool both in hippie terms and in terms of trying to avoid confrontation with an adversity they feel would devastate them.

"The problem" is not pursuing a goal (i.e., effort, struggle, fighting) or not not-pursuing a goal (i.e., non-effort, non-struggle, non-fighting). Those are merely opposite reactions to the problem. The problem is the sense of individuality, of separateness, of ultimate vulnerability that we carry around in us—a heavy load. We feel a hole in the center of our existence, a void we try to fill with love, or wealth, or accomplishment, or any of a hundred other attainments. The values that we pursue indicate how we compensate for the feeling that we're not the center of the universe by structuring a universe in our mind that *is* centered on us. Hubert Benoit summarized these compensations into three categories: ego acting on or being acted on by the outside world; ego perceiving or being perceived by the outside world; and ego as creator either in the outside world or within the self.¹⁶

[Hypnotized by the View](#)

Why are we dissatisfied with our lives? Because we're hypnotized by the view. We're like kids watching TV or playing video games who don't want to be interrupted when a parent tries to get their attention.

¹⁶ Hubert Benoit, [*The Supreme Doctrine: Psychological Studies in Zen Thought*](#). There's a table at www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/BZrecap.htm showing how our values map into 3 pairs of compensation categories.

As we mature, our attachment to the external view alternates with attachment to the inner one. We luxuriate in our autobiography, replaying countless times the inner audio/video that reinforces the starring role we play in our universe. Generally we focus on negatives such as what we don't have or personal interactions that made us unhappy. The *Old Testament* character Jeremiah captured the essence of our complaint that the world is antagonistic to our happiness in his lamentation: "I am the man that hath seen affliction.... [The Lord] hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me he is turned...."

Those in conscious pursuit of truth or complete satisfaction are often diverted by opposing desires and may find themselves at a point of no movement. These stopping points can be traced to attachments. For example, our progress may have been stopped by a conclusion, verbalized to ourselves or not, that the search is too unsettling or too demanding. The corresponding attachment might be to security, comfort or pleasure.

To get a feeling for what our attachments are, we can ask ourselves: "What wouldn't I be willing to give up or lose in order to find permanent satisfaction? Common responses include sex, comfortable circumstances, career, popularity and personal love. There's nothing inherently wrong with any of those desires, but attachment to them indicates an unconscious slavery or hypnosis.

We may find that we have layers of attachments, like defensive fortifications. What is it that we're trying to protect? A sense of self, which we intuitively know to be vulnerable. It's vulnerable because false—and the truth is what releases us from dissatisfaction and incompleteness.

Knowing What We Really Want

“I don’t know why I find it so hard to know what I want.”

Progress along the spiritual path or Truth path yields less, not more, certainty about whether what we experience is real. It’s a path of disillusionment, where beliefs about ourselves (and others, the flip side of the coin) come into question. Often we bounce to the negation of the previous belief, but eventually we find that the validity of any belief or its opposite depends on the paradigm or conviction state through which we’re looking—like the image of the Necker cube, which flips back and forth from inside to outside as we stare at it.

Einstein had a thought experiment that grabbed my attention when I came across it: Two people are moving toward each other in space; how fast are they moving? He saw that he could measure how fast each one was moving relative to the other one, but there was no absolute point of reference in the universe to determine either person’s absolute speed.

What the mind is looking for is that absolute point of reference. We label it differently—unconditional love, immortality, real security, etc. But I think the labels are all pointing back at the common *feeling* that something’s lacking or missing. The mood of nostalgia points at that feeling: a vague sense that we came from a place of perfection, and we want to go Home.

Knowing what we want begins with feeling the feeling of deep want. The mind tries to find it, but it’s like a dog chasing its tail. Finding it doesn’t fit into any category of knowing that we’re

familiar with. It involves *becoming* it, by finding/recognizing our true identity. How that final discontinuity occurs is unexplainable in my opinion, but it happens.

Ultimate Concerns

... When a person realizes the Buddha nature then the small-s self and the large-s Self are both conscious of each other for the first time. ~ Richard Rose: "Relative and Absolute" part 2 of a talk given at Ohio State University in 1978¹⁷

Do you want to realize your Buddha nature, the true nature of reality and Being, per Dōgen Zenji?

If so, why? If not, why not?

Does an acorn strive to become an oak tree? If so, why? If not, why not?

Consciously or unconsciously, there seems to be an urge to be(come) all that we can be(come).

Would you prefer a life of fantasy and illusion?

Do you want to understand what life is all about?

Is life only known in contrast to death?

Is it possible to transcend life and death while alive?

¹⁷ See the [March 2020 TAT Forum](#).

If knowing what you are also entails knowing where you came from before birth and where you'll go after death, is that important to you?

If near-death experiences are indicative, not everyone "goes to the same place" when they die.

Jesus reportedly said to Simon Peter, "Where I am going, you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow later."

Becoming Your Own Authority

I heard a similar message from two good friends recently. One is an older fellow who has been at this business of self-inquiry for a couple decades, who wrote:

I wish ... I could pinpoint the reason I departed from a course of action.... I continue to see it as a major reaction to going along with programs and philosophies that inspired me, but should not have infiltrated my thinking to the extent they did. I blame myself, not the sources of inspiration. That doesn't mean I won't or can't ask for help from others, which I know I need, but I want to intuit better a course that arises from personal history and experience. To find your own voice, as they say.

The other is a younger fellow who has been trying to answer the big questions for six or seven years. Referring to a situation he and another mutual friend find themselves in, he wrote:

Both of us had picked up a message ... that felt stifling because we weren't our own authorities and felt we *had* to be a certain way.

Any genuine teacher in the field of self-realization will tell the student that he has to do the truth-facing for himself, has to look for himself and see the truth for himself. The sentiment of becoming our own authority is a valid and worthy one. And yet I have the feeling that both of these friends are employing that sentiment as a wall to hide behind.

Personality is a mask we wear. Belief in individuality is identification with a mask. A self-professed *individual* is a belief-state—a paradigm or model that is trying to validate itself as reality while masking reality.

Life threatens that mask, and death may ultimately triumph over it. The truth-seeker is looking for an answer while living, but the personality is constructed to avoid unmasking. Whenever an affliction to the personality occurs, we tend to quickly focus away from the truth by reactions such as rationalization, distraction and procrastination. Facing the truth is looking back at what we're looking out from, and when we do that, we "see" silence and non-movement. To the personality, silence and non-movement represent death. Thus the belief in personality or individuality cannot be reconciled with the truth of what we see when we look inward toward what we really are.

In order to face the final contradiction of what we see we are versus what we believe ourselves to be, there are outer layers of self-belief that need to be peeled away. That challenging of beliefs can be painful, so we hide from it as much as possible.

All men should strive to learn
before they die,
what they are running from,
and to, and why. ~ *James Thurber*

Questions we can ask ourselves:

1. What am I running from, and to, and why?
2. Have I honestly admitted to myself what I want most from life? Or am I trying to juggle multiple number-one priorities?
3. Am I avoiding situations that remind me of my lack of determining what's most important to me or of my lack of action toward its accomplishment?

The role of the friend or teacher is to help the truth-seeker find out what they really want since the truth seeker often encounters an inner resistance to answering the question for themselves. That resistance takes the form of fears. For example, we might fear missing out on other pleasures, or we might fear that we won't have the courage to face possible challenges. Many fears remain unarticulated, as if expressing them even to ourselves would be like opening a door that may let out a monster. Our basic psychological fears, such as fear of rejection or failure, go back to the fear of annihilation. Seeking the truth about our self is in large part facing these psychological fears.

Becoming our own authority does not imply *thinking* for ourself—which is wishful thinking, since all thoughts and feelings are reactions—but *looking* for ourself. Looking for oneself implies a certain objective detachment from our thoughts and feelings rather than being caught up in them.

Becoming our own authority thus challenges the validity of our conclusions and beliefs, undermining the ground upon which our individuality stands.



Questions & Answers 5

Q: *Looking at your path, you seemed to be very determined in a philosophical way, is that even possible though? How does one get determined in a philosophical, more energy-conserving way? Like B's question for an upcoming meeting, "what does it mean to wait like the archer with the drawn bow"?*

AT: Philosophy, according to Oxford Languages, is: "the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence...." My search/commitment was to become the Truth. I assumed (in agreement with my teacher, Richard Rose) that it wasn't going to be found directly but could be found by "backing into it." Somewhere along the road I saw that I was trying to understand my way to Truth and that it wasn't going to work.

Energy conservation hit me out of the blue (could have been from an intuitional calculation or unseen help) when I was in my first solitary retreat and reading Rose's *Energy Transmutation, Between-ness and Transmission*. A lightbulb appeared in my mind, and the words that formed were along the line of: "My only hope for mental clarity is with an extended period of celibacy." Celibacy descended on me as a gift and continued without any struggle for nearly five years.

Determination comes from seeing clearly what we truly want from life ... what we're here for ... and taking an honest look to see if something else is as or more important to us. It's the question of what master our life is going to serve.



You said: "The source of dissatisfaction / misery / feeling incomplete, etc., is faulty beliefs about the self. Being more conscious of what's happening ('outside' and 'inside,' which are both either outside or inside relative to the inside-outside viewer-view paradigm) provides data that challenges the strengths of the beliefs.... The path to surrender is one of disillusionment, and the disillusionments are in the mind domain."

I could also say: "The source of dissatisfaction / misery / feeling incomplete" and illusions lies in 'desires,' which are of course connected to beliefs about self. Buddhism talks about 'attachment to desires' as suffering's source. I mean to get disillusionment and notice the new data and let it change you, the 'more illusory' data from desires has to step away. But I feel I really can't control my desires much, just notice and sometimes don't take actions on them."

So, are the desires something that have to be lived/expressed, then when I have enough of it, it will be possible to get clearer, or can they just be noticed and run in parallel with opening to new/more relevant data (more likely)? Is there true/relevant data in desires too (as maybe creative life-force energy), or are they all just seeming (but without desires we probably just wouldn't want to live)?

Desires are implants in the mind. We don't choose them. When a decision is made among the cast of desires and fears, their noise is weighted by our beliefs about what we are.

Attachment to desires isn't the problem preventing seeing/becoming the Truth / Self-Realization. It's the strength of the beliefs we have about what we are that keep us trapped.

I think that our current view of what we really-really want from life has to be pursued wholeheartedly until 1) it's attained, and we find that it doesn't solve the problem (i.e., existential angst), or 2) it's attained and solves the problem.

We wouldn't survive (exist) without functional fears and desires. The problem is being identified with what we're experiencing rather than realizing what we truly are.



I have a very clear and felt connection to my heart's deepest desire of Absolute love and belonging. How do I use that in practical terms to take me home?

The desire for absolute love and belonging is what we could say is pulling you. Going Home is discovering what you *are*. Let's say that Home in a generic sense is Completeness, Full Satisfaction, Nothing Missing, Total Certainty, Eternal Perfection. The *bhakti* component of the journey home may be becoming more complete, satisfied, etc., while the *jnana* component may be becoming less incomplete, dissatisfied, etc. I think/feel the best strategy for both components is what some graffiti artist carved on the Delphi temple wall: First Know Thyself. That's an intuitive calculation based on data like Richard Rose's statement that nothing can be known *for sure* until the knower is known. The good news (gospel) is that knowing what we are solves all the existential problems.



I had two instances recently where a question arose that I wanted to ask you in the [email confrontation group report]. Something decided

not to write them down, and now they are gone. I don't know why I thought that was a good idea (not to write them down). What does following your heart mean to you in the context of a spiritual search?

For me it was seeing clearly what I wanted most from life, and the automatic morphing of that into the ideal I loved and committed to become.

I know you've tried to find that conceptually but haven't arrived at conviction. Don't know if you've tried asking your dream-maker or your intuition for help and then watched/listened for possible response.



One reason for doubt is that I do not feel the level of spiritual commitment that I often hear and read about from other people.

To me, real commitment occurs when we see clearly what we really want from life ... and pursue it as our #1 priority with no guarantee of attainment.

Obstacles I can identify internally are:

- *Doubt (Am I able to wake up at all? Is enlightenment even true? I want to believe it is, but I do not really know the answer.)*

There's no way for you to know for sure. It's a question of whether your intuition computes that there's nothing more worthwhile to dedicate one's life to, regardless. If you don't know for sure that it's impossible, then it may be possible. Maybe the focus isn't some imaginary enlightenment but knowing for sure what you are. Your identity.

- *Fear of failure (If enlightenment escapes me, will I not regret on my deathbed that I wasted time chasing it?)*

Again, this is something for your intuition to compute. Whatever you see as your highest ideal, dedicating your life to it could not produce a regret.

- *Attachment to and desire for security, including financial one (Does full commitment to the spiritual path mean I will lose these?)*

Could be. But it could be regardless of what you commit your life to.

- *Very strong attachment to my family (Will those I love be harmed and suffer as a result of my choices?)*

Could be. But it could be regardless of what you commit your life to.

Yes, I know, there is no 'I' that can 'achieve'. And yet...

Of course there's "I" ... you just don't know yet what you-it Is.



Life is very busy but in a mostly enjoyable way with work, family, girlfriend, travel, friends, TAT logistics . . . etc. It feels nice, though I recognize it's all vulnerable to loss and ultimately impermanent, to lean into these aspects of life. I remember many years ago learning how the Hindu traditions talk about the importance of living one's phases of life. I don't recall each phase, but it was basically childhood,

then study, then householder, then essentially spiritual retiree :) Though spiritual questions and longings remain, they feel more in the background recently, like they're maybe waiting for another time. How do you interpret all this? Would you tend to believe it's the mind looking for distraction from oblivion, or some similar hound of heaven situation ... or ... do you think it's "God's Will" so to speak, that people find Truth when they're meant to and everything unfolds exactly as it should, phases of life or lack thereof included?

I interpret it as an interlude of satisfaction with life that's occurring to someone who hasn't seen clearly what he really wants most from life, or what he wants most from life hasn't become a commitment. I don't know whether what we experience is a product of random accident, predetermined plan, some combination of the two, or a film of what has already occurred being seen in reverse. I feel that everyone does the best they can to satisfy their longing for perfection.



On a zoom call the other day, B. mentioned that he's known of very few Enlightened people that have busy minds. I may fit this category and I'm attempting to be clear on this matter. Your input would be invaluable.

Enlightenment has many definitions for many people. For me, it means the conscious mind discovering its true/real identity.

I think that Franklin Merrell-Wolff nailed it when he said or wrote that such discovery is a form of knowing that the conscious mind had not been familiar with. Unlike perceptual and conceptual knowing, it's a knowing-by-identity.

Perceptual and conceptual knowing are relative—knowing by contrast. Knowing by identity is absolute knowing/being. The conscious mind becomes a mirror of the absolute.

My conviction is that knowing our true identity is the ONLY knowing that's FOR SURE. Every other "known" is speculative.

No one other than you can know FOR SURE what you know of what you are at the core of your being. You are the only authority on that most fundamental of all knowing.



Been absorbed in more psychodrama around work since getting back. Do they think I'm valuable or valueless? Are they an idiot or am I being embarrassingly defensive? Should I complete something as a kind of slam dunk in their face, or would that be playing into their self-centeredness or am I projecting the whole thing? When I try to meditate, I think about that situation.

That stuff will take care of itself if you live your life for a higher purpose.

That feels true. A higher purpose implies a higher being than this experience suggests. If this experience is all there is of me, the purpose of any higher purpose is still getting by. That is, there is no real higher purpose unless there's a kind of spiritual being that's real. So this does go back to self-knowledge. A higher purpose starts if and only if there's something eternal about me. No less.

Listen for it / feel for it vs. look for it / think for it.



My biggest question in this moment is: Why am I (and most other human beings) living a life without realising that I am not (they are not) a separate awareness?

Based on my life-experience, I'd say that you (and they) don't yet know the truth about what you are because you haven't yet had experience that loosens up all your beliefs about what you are. I feel it's our not-yet-sufficiently-challenged certainties that keep our consciousness hypnotized by the dualistic dimension.

In your case, I'd also point out that you apparently are looking for Truth to support a belief you have about what it Is, which may be a deterrent.



What tools, practices, approaches, etc., have you found to be most helpful in sustaining motivation and effort on the spiritual path?

Gratitude. Saying goodbye to Richard Rose when moving to CA in 1980 after having been connected with him since 1978, I told him I wished there was some way to repay him for everything he'd done for me. His response: That's not the way it works; pass it on.

Thank you for this, that's a very inspiring response.



I often hear seekers talk about stopping their thoughts or experiencing no thought. The only time I've experienced anything close to that is when extreme fear, surprise or profound confusion shock me into a

kind of brain freeze for a second or two, and it's not something I intentionally do. Similarly, I hear about those who experience great stillness and silence during meditation which I don't experience either.

Are these all just beliefs or am I missing something?

They're all in the category of descriptions of waking-state experience. I don't know directly what another person has experienced which produced those descriptions. I haven't experienced anything that I would describe as the stopping of thought or no-thought other than when I became conscious of awareness, that "stopped my head," and I found myself back Home. I assume it's possible to experience a temporal interruption of thought. Also, I haven't experienced anything that I would describe as great stillness or silence during meditation. I assume it's possible to experience. My conclusion is that neither type of experience is necessary. Their value might be in loosening a hypnosis.



I'm most strongly identified with thinking and thought, and still am. However, I've seen it very many times, very clearly, that I am not thought, which occurs of its own accord and control. However, (via thought and feeling), I still have a high degree of consternation about death. So I do believe I'm something that'll die. I.e., this body-mind. I feel like this loose-floating ghost in this strange dimension. I can viscerally see I'm not the body nor the mind, but surely I've got to "be" (I do exist, after all), so where/what/how am I?

Existence is temporal, a temporal hypnosis; being is eternal. Consciousness comes and goes. The conscious self struggles in the dark and in the light to return to its source. It's arguably

how the Self knows itself. It's arguably very impersonal. My feeling is that living life with the primary goal of serving the Truth at least improves the chance of Realization (consciously "becoming real").



Identity Questions

What is the inner eye by which you see?

Considerations:

- ◆ *All seeing is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Every thing you see is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Unfolding of experience is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Time is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Distance is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Space is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Separation is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Existence is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Life is in the mind.*
- ◆ *Birth and death are in the mind.*

Where are you (with respect to the mind)?

Hypotheses:

You are *never within the mind.*

You are *behind the mind.*

You are *before the mind.*

You are *after the mind.*

You are *the source of the mind.*

What are you doing?

Feasibility:

- ✓ You are *only watching / witnessing / experiencing.*

Why can the inner eye apparently see everything except itself?

What settles the soul / puts the mind at ease / makes you complete?

Possibilities:

*Essence-realization / Observing the Observer / Transcending the
Split Between Knower & Known / Discovering our True Identity*

*

Acrostic

The most persistent of seekers
Always in a hurry
But never changing their pace
Searching for obstruction
To verify their own existence?

*

Self-Inquiry: What Is It?

Looking to see what you, the aware subject of your life
experience, truly are.

Self-realization: What is it?

Consciously finding your real identity. It's possible! The end of
the search.

Search for what?

Reality. Truth. Self. Completion.

Why is it the end?

It relieves existential angst. It answers all the unsettling
questions. How is that possible? We see that the questions of

relative existence were not relevant to absolute Is-ness. What we are has no vulnerabilities.

Self-inquiry: How do you do it?

Chapter 6: *Raja (royal) yoga (union)*

Raja (royal) yoga (union) is the combination of the bhakti practice—devotion to serving the ideal of becoming That—along with the jnana practice of self-inquiry into That.

*

Delphi Oracle—Three Maxims

1. Know Thyself
2. Nothing to Excess
3. Certainty Brings Insanity

Inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi according to the Greek writer Pausanias. The maxims are attributed to a high priestess circa 8 to 4 BC.

*

What do you believe yourself to be? The question isn't what you feel you may be identified with at any particular time but what, in a moment of introspection / more clarity / self-remembering, you feel "in your bones" you are. Life will challenge that faulty belief.

Crossing Over the Bridge

There's a riddle about a 180-pound man who has three packages, each weighing 10 pounds: How does he get across a bridge that has a load-carrying capacity of 200 pounds in one trip with all his packages? (Have you stopped to consider it?)

The answer is that he juggles them. One of the packages will always be in the air. And the riddle is used as a metaphor, with the bridge representing his life and the packages containing his burdens. Everyone is crossing the bridge with more weight than they can bear.

The problem arises because we're attached to our burdens. We don't feel we can survive without them, or we'd jettison them over the side of the bridge.

The burdens are our faulty self-definitions, the unfounded beliefs we have about what we are. This starts off with the belief that we're a person with thoughts and feelings and a body. When we realize that we're never that which is observed or observable (objects), we eventually realize that we've backed ourselves into the corner of being an observer (subject) trying to observe itself—while anything that can be observed is not the self.

What's the solution? Getting to the other side—death—loaded down with our self-beliefs may not solve the problem. Jumping off the bridge—suicide—may not solve the problem. We need to “sacrifice” the self-beliefs by realizing the falseness of our certainty until we get down to the core belief: possibly the conviction of individuality. Getting rid of the final false belief would be like jumping off the bridge while remaining on it.

There's a passage in the *Old Testament* (Proverbs 8:17) that points to the way: "I love those who love me. Those who seek me diligently will find me." Something larger than what we think we are helps accomplishing the final step, casting off the final burden. When that occurs, we realize our true identity. And we find that our identity is beyond the little person struggling across the bridge.

Even if we think we've had a "glimpse" of what we really are, we're still stuck with the belief that we're observing it and are thus convinced it can't really be us. We have to "go there," back to our source, beyond subject-object duality.

Discovering Your Identity¹⁸

Life is all about finding our identity. We generally approach it like trying to find the right clothes to put on: Become a ninja, a famous actress, a Watson or Crick, a Bill Gates, a Picasso, a Mother Teresa.

Life is also about *disappointment*. Rumpole, the British icon of novel and TV, being rebuffed as a young barrister after a dinner date, provides an example: "I don't know what you think about being young. To me, it's a time for growing used to disappointment." You find your identity by *disillusionment*, a falling away of faulty beliefs. Leonard Whiting, who starred as Romeo in Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* at age 17 and whose career went downhill from there, stated candidly that his life was one

¹⁸ From a presentation made to a student-organized Perennial Philosophy course at Carnegie Mellon University in 2006.

of disappointment after having “started at the top.” A friend, who saw the pretense involved in believing he was, or should be, in control, joked that it was a huge relief after seeing through the illusion of having to make sure the sun came up each morning.

Two bald assertions: 1) The cause of your misery is not knowing what you really are; and 2) it’s possible to know what you really are.

Perennial Philosophy is all about identity — where to look for it & how to go about it. We talk about finding our identity as if it’s lost. It’s closer than our breath, closer than our thoughts and feelings. We find it by *becoming*, by recognition resulting in a *change of being*.

You may find that the angst cranks up after you finish school. You may have more free time—for anxiety and depression. You may keep your tank overheated (keep yourself busy and distracted)—trying to keep ahead of the *hound of heaven*. I went through about a dozen years after I got out of school where I experienced periodic *identity crises*. When I was 33 I met a man, Richard Rose, who “rang my bell.” I’d been scanning the horizon looking for a missing purpose or meaning for all those years. His message was that *the answers are within*.

I had found the direction I’d been looking for. I followed his advice and pursued the quest for self-definition to a successful conclusion. I “became one with” (knowledge by identity) what we are, essentially. This I feel is what Buddha pointed to as *nirvana* and what Jesus referred to as the *kingdom of heaven*. It’s all that it’s advertised to be ... vastly less and vastly more.

The Persian mystic Rumi wrote:¹⁹

The master said there is one thing in this world which must never be forgotten. If you were to forget everything else, there would be no cause for worry, while if you remembered, performed and attended to everything else but forgot that one thing, you would in fact have done nothing whatsoever. It is as if a king had sent you to a country and you perform a hundred tasks, but if you have not performed the task you were sent for, it is as if you have performed nothing at all. So man has come into the world for a particular task, and that is his purpose. If he doesn't perform it, he will have done nothing.

The *purpose* of life is to discover your real identity. The *meaning* of life will be answered when you find your identity.

Nick [the class organizer] had a question recently: “*How does a man forget God?*” The answer is that he does so through faulty self-definition.

Perennial Philosophy is a philosophy of *action*—a way of living your life. You're now acting out a program, a play, which you didn't write. You're *sleepwalking* through life. Perennial Philosophy is *a war against sleep*—for those who are dissatisfied with being asleep.

How do we do it? Perennial Philosophy is a philosophy of *doubt*. Al-Ghazali, a Sufi master who lived about 900 years ago, wrote: “Doubt transports you to the truth. Who does not doubt fails to inquire. Who does not inquire fails to gain insight. Without insight, you remain blind and perplexed.”

¹⁹From Rumi's “Table Talk,” translated by Coleman Barks.

What is a man [an old-fashioned synonym for human]? If you're male, you would probably come up with a list of "positive" character qualities. If you're female, you might construct an entertaining list of "negative" qualities. My definition may be somewhat different: "a man" falls into one of two categories: *complete* or *incomplete*.

The *incomplete* man tries to make themselves invulnerable by building a wall of security (which becomes their prison). They try to run away from the fear of nonexistence. They try to prolong their misery rather than get to the core of it. They try to become complete by expanding their membrane of individual selfhood to include friends, fans, mates, offspring.

The *complete* man is invulnerable. They have transcended misery. They want to help the incomplete man.

The incomplete person is trying to find his or her identity. Angst arises from not knowing the meaning or purpose of your life (or having the conviction that it's meaningless). As far as you know, despite possible wishful thinking, you will cease to exist before, at, or soon after physical death. You're on death row and have little if any certainty about when the guillotine is going to fall & erase that identity. Who or what is living and facing dying?

[How Is It Possible?](#)

How is it possible that you know you're conscious?

Did you ever stop to consider that?

Now is the perfect opportunity to do so....



What rationalization will you give yourself to keep moving instead? What excuse will an outer part of yourself use to fool a more inner part? That need to keep moving is based on fear, on lesser desires, and on false pride.

To know that you're conscious, "something" must be staring at itself. What is it that can stare directly at itself?

Did you keep reading, keep moving, keep running from the "hound of heaven" when you read the previous paragraph?

Knowing that you're consciousness isn't like pulling one of your eyes out of its socket so that it can stare at the other eye. In that case, each eye would still be seeing the other eye, not itself. But that analogy is basically what we say is going on when we try to explain self-consciousness to ourselves, isn't it. You may tell yourself: I'm what's aware—aware of objects outside myself and aware of thoughts and feelings inside myself; but I'm also aware that I'm what's aware. There's me #1 that's conscious of the world, that looks out and sees objects outside and inside myself. And then there's me #2 that looks back and is aware of me #1.

Are there really two of you, both apparently performing the same function—“me” here in the foreground, aware that in the background is the “me” that’s aware?

Intuitively we know that isn’t the case. But to become whole or complete we have to know what we are at the core of our being. And that knowing involves climbing to the top of the triangle whose baseline is formed by the above opposition.

The Buddha raised one flower
Sharing a silent sign;
Maha-Kasyapa smiled,
Keeping an open mind.
Truly eye to eye, free and kind,
Outside any scriptures, beyond the lies;
Fresh flowers in a sunny sky.
~ from Dōgen’s “Hokke-ten-Hokke”

The story of Buddha’s transmission to Kasyapa is really the story of how one looks back, sees oneself looking out—and “becomes” That which one is before birth.

[Is What You See Real?](#)

In the January 2006 issue of the Dana Foundation’s newsletter “Brain in the News,” there was an article about Esref Armagan, a 52-year-old Turkish man who has been blind since birth. Armagan “has never seen a coffee cup, a toothbrush, an elephant, or a tree-lined street, but he can draw them each, from any perspective, with or without shadows depending on the time of day.... Though [he] has never had an art lesson, the streets he paints stretch into the distance as converging parallel lines.” Harvard researchers, the article reported,

found to their amazement when doing brain scans: “Esref’s visual cortex lit up during the drawing tasks as if he were actually seeing.”

You may think you see with your eyes. Buddha (c. 500 BC) knew differently: “The eyes seeing forms is equivalent to blindness; the ears hearing sounds is equivalent to deafness.” Foyan, a Ch’an master who lived about 600 years after Buddha, told his students: “You are always in the light, and yet do not know it, even with your eyes open.” Why? What were they talking about? The view, we could say, from inside the cosmic egg.

What is spiritual action, and what’s the relation of action to realization, to awakening? Beliefs are what keep us trapped, asleep and dreaming in the cosmic egg. The first step to realization—primary spiritual action—involves getting some perspective or detachment from those beliefs. Frank Lloyd Wright was one of my heroes as a young man. One of the buildings he designed was the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The main part of the museum is an open space, like a cylinder whose wall spirals outward as it goes up. There’s an ascending ramp from the main floor that spirals up along the wall, with paintings hung on the wall to your right as you ascend the ramp.

- Suppose you went to the Guggenheim as a child with your parents or on a school outing and, upon entry, a conveyor belt carried everyone shoulder-to-shoulder along that outer wall up the spiral—with your nose no more than an inch or two from the paintings. You wouldn’t get much of a perspective, would you? Getting perspective requires that you stand back from what

you're observing. Some ways to encourage this are ways to clear some space in your life:

- Do a media fast—eliminate Internet surfing, TV, video games, magazines, newspapers, books, movies, music, etc. other than that strictly required for school or work, for a defined period (one week, for example).
- Spend a scheduled period of time alone each day without the typical distractions. Use it for introspection—gain clarity as to your life-objective and roadblocks.
- Do a solitary retreat once or twice a year, where you devote a weekend, a week, a month to getting a break from the daily routine and finding renewed inspiration for what's supremely important to you.
- Eliminate habits that cloud the mind.
- Introspect the mind—watch with detachment. Implement self-inquiry: Why am I doing what I'm doing? What is my innermost desire? Who is living and facing death? etc.
- Clear up the subject-object confusion. "You are never that which is seen."
- Allow your mind to recognize/remember its connection to something bigger than itself—find the mental umbilical cord that connects you to your source.

Finding the umbilical cord and following it Home is on the "feeling side" of the mind. Music keys into the longing for many people, and a piece of music that is able to ring the longing bell for many people is the Largo from Dvorak's 9th (New World) Symphony. Neil Armstrong, the first man to step on the moon, was so moved by it that he took it along on that mission, Apollo 11.

Seeing & Becoming

If someone hasn't found or recognized the absolute point of reference, which is also our source and core identity, what conclusion can they draw? Three possibilities occur to me:

1. Maybe there isn't an absolute point of reference or identity.
2. Maybe there is, but it's not possible to find.
3. Maybe there is and it's possible to find, but there's something in the way.

Possibilities 1 and 2 can't be determined. If either of them is true, we're condemned to wander in vagueness for a lifetime, or maybe for eternity. On the other hand, how could we be sure of their impossibility? Possibility 3 can be investigated, but would it be a worthwhile endeavor? Two reasons to do so come to mind:

- A curiosity to explore for academic purposes or because we're bored.
- A possibly lifelong project, if necessary, to fully satisfy our longing for X.

I use the capital-x symbol to represent the unknown, absolute condition that we hunger and thirst for, and for which we may or may not have found a label. Some of the common labels that I see as pointing at the same longing are Certainty, Unconditional Love, Full Satisfaction, Permanence, Truth, Reality, and True Identity.

What would a project to find one's X entail?

1. The Truth would have to be *within*. The search for X always begins with the outside world. Eventually it may move to the middle world of thoughts, feelings, and mental processes.
2. We would somehow have to *go there*. When we do, it becomes the true *here*, where we've always been, unwittingly to us now.
3. And find it as our true identity—which we've always been and always will be. To *see* the absolute, we would have to *be* it.

It sounds like a horrendously abstract project, but I think there's a simple starting point for each and every day. If we see or hear or think or feel something about ourselves that contradicts our current belief or view:

- We can dismiss or reject it as wrong or inferior. (It might well be.)
- We can adopt it as right or superior. (It's highly unlikely :-).
- Or we can admit that we don't "see" it (if that's the case) but accept the possibility that there may be some truth in it ... and take a fresh look into our beliefs and views.
- Doubt may be our greatest friend in the search for Truth.



Questions & Answers 6

Q: *I love this article [transcript of a talk titled "[Jacob's Ladder](#)"] by Richard Rose. I wish there was more expansion on the last line [in [part 2](#) of the 5-part transcription]:*

Now this is an old saying, "going inside." And there are many methods of going inside. So you can take your pick; whatever appeals to your intuition. It may be concentrating on a nerve center, it may be self-hypnosis; there are different things you can try, for their effect. You can try all of them in fact, if you wish to. But I think that there is a very direct way, and that is by watching your actions.

Do you have any more information or examples that may have followed this (about watching your actions)? I can infer what is being said and it strongly resonates, but just wondering if anything came to mind.

AT: The process of going within occurs seemingly by accident when we're watching our mental movement as it occurs. In one of my early meetings with the Pyramid Zen discussion group inspired by Rose at Ohio State U., the meeting moderator asked me what I was thinking about on the way to the meeting. My response was something along the line of not thinking about anything, just noticing the buds starting to come out on trees along the sidewalk.

As I left the meeting that evening, I was stopped in my tracks: "I'm watching thoughts as they happen! I didn't know that was even possible!!" I had found (or been moved to) a new observation platform. The contrast showed me the difference between being caught up in what I was experiencing and watching it from a somewhat detached position.

Our actions seem to occur outside or inside depending on whether we're watching the reports of physical senses or mental senses. Much of the time, what gets the mind's attention is data from the physical senses. Rose's suggestions for meditation included 1) a daily practice of an hour at the same time of day, 2) reminding yourself of the reason for meditation (your ultimate life-objective ... your highest ideal ... what you want to serve and become), 3) declaring that you'd prefer no thoughts to irrelevant thoughts, then 4) watching the current thought stream (worded thoughts, images, sounds, etc.) and turning the inner head away from the thought stream if it seems irrelevant ... not substituting a mantra or anything but just watching the "mouse hole" that thoughts come out from until the next stream appears.



I'd say that the bhakti component of our path results from seeing that what we want most from life (desire most; love most) towers over other desires and fears, and we need to become it.

I like how if what we love most is eternal, then any other fear/desire will not overshadow it because fear only can threaten something non-eternal. So if we become that, would we lose love for that (love still needs two?) Also do you think a person needs to be strongly prepared physically/energetically/psychologically to retain/handle the memory of being/becoming the absolute (because probably everyone has it happening to them but something blocks from remembering/connecting it to their real identity)?

I'm using love as a metaphorical synonym for identity. When we love a child, or a car, etc., that association becomes an

important part of our identity. And losing it, or something bad happening to it, etc., hurts.

If we fall in love with an absolute abstraction—seeing clearly that it's the ideal that we want to pursue more than anything, and intuiting that to attain it, we have to become it—then we won't want any temporal pursuit to interfere.

The ultimate pursuit of love is to become what we love, to lose our sense of separation and its consequent vulnerability.



If my inner Self is waiting to wake me up until I'm completely ready to wake up, but the reason I'm not completely ready to wake up (without hesitation, without attachments to this world, willing to sacrifice it all, etc.) is because I don't know what it's like to be awake and if sacrifice would even get me there . . . how is that a workable problem that I can solve?

I'd say your inner Self is projecting a spacetime movie, which has movement we interpret as sequential cause-and-effect with maybe some randomness mixed in. Or more precisely, we—as some formless form of awareness—witness what seems to be personal physical-mental machinery interpreting and reacting to the movement while trying to compensate for and improve its imagined identity.

This physical-mental machinery is working with a set of identity-convictions that apparently have developed from its movie experience. New or remembered experience may challenge those convictions, and the machinery can learn to ignore (i.e., disregard intentionally) what seems irrelevant to

and pay attention to what seems relevant to a problem it's working on. The machinery can also redistribute energy from what seems irrelevant or detrimental to a problem it's working on to what seems relevant and beneficial.



I am now looking to purpose by pursuing Knowledge. I want to Know, but I cannot say I want to become Knowledge. Even 'becoming more knowledgeable' does not ring fully true for me, given the alleged all-or-nothing nature of the pursuit.

You want to Know what?

Is it possible to know reality for sure, without relying on arbitrary postulates?

What are the purpose and the meaning of life?

Is there a Reason of Reasons? If yes, what it is? Is there an end to asking 'why?'?

If, as some allege, a Solid Ground of Being exists, what is it?

Do you have a feeling for what may need to be found before any of those questions could be answered satisfactorily?



If I'm seeing that it's impossible to know anything for sure through the mind-relative knowledge, but rather through being-identity, and in another place you said love is identity, does it follow that knowing something for sure is possible through love?

Yes, when you become what you love beyond time and space.



OK, so keep looking for what is looking, but work for other people, what else gives one a higher chance of experiencing what you call awareness?

Regarding probability, I don't know whether it's a random occurrence, preordained, or somewhere between. My feeling is that it can't be gamed, that it requires help from a higher intelligence, and that the timing has to be right. I also suspect that not working for oneself is a progression from working for ourselves, working for others, and eventually working for something greater.



Did you ever have any fear of getting lost too far down the road due to trusting someone who might turn out to be nuts or deluded?

No ... it didn't make any difference to me. I had adopted many of Rose's biases about how to live a life that was focused on understanding that life, and that was what I wanted more than anything else. So even if it wasn't possible or wasn't going to happen, there was nothing I would regret about making it my #1 priority. It seemed pretty obvious to me that I was already lost (definition: unable to find one's way; not knowing one's whereabouts) and my life was all about trying to find my way.



What was the way you determined, as a seeker, whether something conflicted with your #1 priority?

During meditation, it seemed simple to notice if what I was watching seemed relevant to self-inquiry. For example, if the content was what I was going to have for breakfast, what I needed to do right after meditation, what I was going to wear, etc., I would instantly turn away from it. If it wasn't immediately obvious, I would keep watching it. Like what I read since then that UK schools were teaching kids on mindfulness: if the bus pulling into the bus stop doesn't appear to be going where you want to go, then don't get on it; if it does and you've gotten on it but it turns out not relevant, then get off it.

At other times, when my default focus was on living my life but not turning away from all content that wasn't relevant to my quest, I would just try to be alert to reactions that might threaten my quest. For example, sleeping in vs. getting up to meditate, or chasing affection when it might threaten my commitment to celibacy.

Seems to me that the starting point in living a life that isn't a cork on the ocean is getting a clear view of what we want from life.



The small "s" self is still so apparent, more than ever in a way, maybe because the noticing has become so fine tuned. Not sure what to do other than to keep looking for it, try to notice when it arises and not judge harshly. Ideas?

We go within by backing into Truth, and we back into Truth by going within. The only strategy I can recommend is reminding ourselves of what we want most from life, then watching

what's going on in the mind and turning the inner head away from any activity that doesn't seem relevant. We eventually need to see something that disrupts our conscious attachment to duality.



You: (when someone seems dead-serious and open) my reaction is to touch my inner core and see what comes to me. So is there something inner/more core vs outer for you (as some Advaita people might say-there is no inner/outer for me now). So is this connection to depth/inner core only happening when something special spontaneous triggers it, or is it always 'available in the background' on demand whenever attention turns to it?

Conscious-me and conscious-you are projections out from the Core. There's no way to know that for sure unless we've consciously returned to the Core—the enlightenment of Self-Realization. Before that, “inner” is the unseen viewer and “outer” is anything in the view. Saying there's no inner/outer now indicates some imaginary Absolute that speaks ... like the religious statement “God told me to tell you....”

I feel that I can touch back to an absolute point of reference (but not go there) whenever wanted. I don't feel the need to do that for myself.



Was there ever a point for you where Rose himself or his teaching was an obstacle for you, or did both feel like things you could trust all along your path?

I had complete trust in Richard Rose and his teaching. I didn't think he was right in all things relative (like the mechanics of how the bond market worked :-), but I chalked that up to duality's lack of perfection. I obviously didn't take his advice to doubt everything seriously enough or I would have questioned my seven-year "hopeless" conviction more dynamically.

I didn't have any way to be certain that he wasn't either nuts or deluded, but I'd seen that what he was talking about was what I wanted most in life & I admitted that knowing something for sure (i.e., absolutely) wasn't impossible.



Hi Art, how do you know for sure that you really know what you are? How do you know for sure that what you are is not born and does not die? How do you know that that knowledge is not just a trick of the mind?

And how can we know there is one awareness? If a chimpanzee bothers a bunch of ants in an ant hill with a stick and a human being bothers the same ants with a stick, to the ants it's the same higher force. I don't think their limited cognition can comprehend the difference between two vastly higher powers, it's just "oh here comes the stick again". Using that example, how can we know there is just oneness of higher power? What if each of us has a different higher being meddling with us, creating our thoughts, controlling our actions? How can we be sure it's one Awareness or God or whatever to call it? As far as I can see it, you and Nisargadatta could be 100% correct but how can I say that it isn't also possible that we're all different characters in a video game controlled by different unrelated superior beings from a different dimension? How could we ever know?

If I turn on a lightbulb at my house in Malawi and you turn one on at your house in Florida, it's both the force we call electricity, but is it the same electricity? You can tell me I'm losing the thread of productive inquiry here. Maybe it doesn't matter what the higher power is that I'm surrendering to since I don't seem to control anything anyway.

Hi B. It's a form of knowing that my mind wasn't familiar with. Merrell-Wolff nailed it with the term knowing-by-identity. Self-Realization is a phenomenon of consciously becoming absolute beingness, where you know with absolute certainty what you are. You find your Real identity. It's obviously The Only Reality, that it's before time, space, manifestation, change, etc. I don't know how I know that. I can't prove it to you or to myself. My first thought when consciousness returned to the bodymind was: "I can see know why Mr. Rose thought he might have gone crazy." The mind can't compute it and can either consider it nutty or can bow to a larger Truth.

Self-Knowing includes knowing that it's the only X (Absolute, Truth, Reality) that knows itself, and it's the source of all manifestation ... including the consciousness that has returned from its projected territory (and then returned to its projected territory). You become the All-That-Is. By comparison, you know that anything that exists (i.e., stands "outside" the Core of Being), no matter how big or small, how impressive or insignificant, is a projection that starts and ends.

Richard Rose's advice to Lee W. was: "Do all things for the sake of a higher power, and it will correctly guide your every step." What we can surrender to, on the other hand, is the admission that relative truth is iffy, which surrender weakens the bond of faulty certainty.



[May 2010](#)

We'd made a rest stop for my sister Fern at a gas station and convenience store in Dulce, New Mexico, which happens to be the town with the tribal HQ for the Jicarilla Apache Nation. I was standing outside the car waiting for my sister when an Apache man probably about my age walked out of the store with a cup of coffee in his hand, and when he spotted me he came over and started a conversation.

Before long an older Apache man joined us, and the conversation turned to talk about the changes in their lives from the time they were children, the crops their grandparents had raised compared to the shorter growing seasons since then, and a prediction by the older gentleman that before long we'd be growing many of our food crops in greenhouses. I think we would all have been content to continue for hours, but my sister and I were on our way to meet Alexander in Taos.

That instantaneous meeting of the minds was a highlight of my trip, as was a similar occurrence during my previous trip West, when son Chris and I stopped at a roadside kiosk in Monument Valley, near the border of Utah and Arizona. A young Navajo man who was selling wares produced by his family started telling me his life story almost as soon as Chris and I got out of the car, and he continued talking, largely ignoring other tourists who were actually buying things, for a long time until

Chris reminded me that we wanted to get to the Grand Canyon while there was still daylight. The young Navajo then clasped my shoulder and said goodbye as if we were close friends who probably wouldn't see each other again.

*

Solitary Retreats

Group retreats are popular with peace-of-mind seekers, and I think they can be valuable. For me, though, during my quarter century of seeking, I found solitary retreats to be high points of my life.

My teacher Richard Rose recommended doing solitary retreats, which he called isolations, once or twice a year. Several of his early students had moved to his farm in the northern panhandle of West Virginia, built cabins there, developed local businesses that allowed them flexible schedules, and spent the month of January in solitary retreat.

I was married with kids, living in Columbus, Ohio when I met Richard Rose five years after his founding of the TAT Foundation. My first solitary retreats were week-long stays on his farm that fall and the following spring. I didn't want to be bothered with food, so I fasted—a great experiment for observational clarity. And during the first retreat, my first mini-satori experience occurred: a light bulb flashed on in my imagination (I thought that only happened in cartoons!) and I saw with great conviction that my only chance for mental clarity depended on an extended period of celibacy. I couldn't wait to get home at the end of the week and share the good news with my wife!

In subsequent years I did solitary retreats ranging from weekends in retreat centers and off-season resort-area motels to month-long stays on the Rose farm, always starting with at least three days of water-only fasting. On one of the month-long fasts my normal, somewhat optimistic state of mind had switched to pessimistic in preceding months. The cabin I was staying in had no electricity or plumbing, I had no tools to cut firewood for the tiny wood stove, and the downed twigs and small branches nearby were soddened from rain. It was November, I was cold and depressed, everything was muddy, and the hardwood forest was ugly with no leaves on the trees other than oaks, which had colorless, dead leaves hanging from them.

When I stepped outside the cabin on the 3rd morning of my initial fast, the mud was beautiful, the deciduous trees were beautiful, and I felt that anything was possible! My conviction state had changed 180 degrees! When I mentioned that to Mr. Rose after the retreat, he told me that was the value of fasting: it could shock the body-mind into a new conviction state. Once that happens, you have strong evidence of how the mind is always operating on a set of convictions, and those convictions are only relatively true at best.

During my three days of fasting I was low on physical and mental energy. It would be like a decompression period for me, and I'd sleep a lot. I don't remember for sure, but I suspect I did little or no meditation. (I had a regular one-hour morning meditation discipline, which I did twice a day during solitary retreats.) I would only bring one or two books—ones I'd already read more than once, for priming the pump before meditating—so that they didn't offer entertaining distraction.

And I would get super bored. I don't know if what followed always happened, but it occurred frequently enough so that I recognized the pattern: important material that I sort of felt but never saw during my normal daily life would start coming up to the surface of consciousness, and I'd feel like champagne bubbles of happiness were coursing through my bloodstream.

Maybe group retreats appeal more to the extrovert aspects of our personalities and solitary retreats to the introvert aspects. Several friends have told me over the years that they panicked when they tried a solitary retreat and cut it short. It was always a relief for me, although an uncomfortable one. But the discomfort must have been a helpful ingredient; one time I did a solitary retreat in a friend's cabin, which had most of the normal comforts, and it was the only long retreat I ever did that felt like a dud.

I also had the conviction that, for me, I would have to be by myself with no other folks around in order for awakening to occur. I don't know if that was true, but I was on a solitary retreat when it finally did occur.

Oh, another thing: during each solitary retreat I would read through my journal for the period since my last retreat, and it was always "enlightening." As my friend Shawn Nevins once wrote, if you're a seeker and you're not keeping a journal, you're a fool. :-)

Chapter 7: It's all about identity

It's all about identity.

We long for Certainty / Truth.

And we can't know anything for sure unless/until we know the knower.

*

Livin' ain't easy before we discover our true identity. It's a long (sometimes short) interesting (sometimes boring) ride in dreamland. To me, it's the story of Love becoming love becoming Love. I'd title it "All About Identity." The purpose of life? Knowing ourself ... our Real Self, our True Identity.

Is Psychological Change Necessary?

It most definitely was in my case. I was 33 when I met Richard Rose and had my first exposure to the possibility of finding a total answer to the questions of life and death. I was married, had a wife and kids I adored, a good job, house, cars—but I knew something was missing in terms of life-purpose and meaning. For over a decade I'd been scanning the horizon for the solution, but no matter what I considered, I could see it wouldn't provide lasting satisfaction. Then I heard Rose's message that all answers are within.

That's when the work began. How does one go within? I wasn't naturally introspective, not contemplative by nature. If I'd been "ready," my psychological condition or state of being would have been ripe for the two-punch knockout that leads to total realization. The first punch causes us to look back at what/where we're looking out from and see/hear nothing there. If we're guided by a teacher who has only gotten that far, then we may conclude that such knowing is the final answer. This condition spawns the "just realize that there's no self; you're enlightened, and there's nothing to be done" adherents.

The second punch, the KO, depends upon being able to accept the implications of what else we've seen. There's a progression of self-images or self-identifications that have to be seen as questionable before we get to the final self-image—the self as a separate observer—that has to be transcended. This progressive loosening of the self-convictions that we're identified with is the psychological change that's necessary before we're ready to see the final evidence needed to challenge individuality.

Gautama Buddha laid out an eightfold plan for this progression, beginning with externals and moving up to internal changes. Richard Rose outlined a metasytem, a threefold path that distills the essence of Buddha's advice to take refuge only in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and which Rose saw as equivalent to the way, the life and the truth of Jesus.

In order to become detached from our faulty self-identities, we can either wait passively and hope that life provides the proper traumas, or we can take a proactive approach of making our life an answer-seeking arrow. This may start with physical and lifestyle changes, which Rose referred to as "setting the house in order." During my first solitary retreat, a light bulb went on in my head, and with it came the conviction that my only chance for finding mental clarity lay in an extended period of sexual abstinence. We generally have no idea how enslaved we are to the sex drive until we attempt to gain control over it. And any enslavement indicates an attachment that's part of a self-image.

Becoming an answer-seeking arrow makes sense to the person who intuits that the answer is beyond conceptual knowing and involves a change of being. This is something that the psyche, the mind, arguably cannot reach. We become the answer. There's an obvious paradox here, since the testimony throughout the ages is that we become what we have always been—which is another indication that the answer lies beyond conceptual understanding, beyond the dualistic mind.

[Knowing What We Are](#)

My idea about confrontational questioning is that it should be aimed at questioning beliefs and not at suggesting better beliefs. The best position for an inquirer is the intermediate spot of unknowing.

Replacing a belief with its opposite is my main argument with most of the no-self folks—like *Liberation Unleashed*,²⁰ for example. It could result in a trigger to a deeper realization, but the timing has to be right. Otherwise, the other blocks in the arch of faulty beliefs don't let the keystone drop out. I think something similar happens with cosmic consciousness or unitive experiences, which give temporary relief but don't ultimately answer the underlying human longing.

Knowing what we're not is still in the mind realm. Knowing what we are is the mind's conscious connection with the source of all.

[Mirror Therapy](#)

Walt Whitman traveled to Virginia during the Civil War to look for his brother, who had been wounded at Fredericksburg. He wrote to his mother about the “heap of feet, arms, legs &c.” he saw under a tree in front of a hospital tent. He then spent three years attending to wounded soldiers, which led to the “Drum Taps” section of his evolving and growing masterwork, *Leaves of Grass*.²¹

²⁰ <https://www.liberationunleashed.com/>

²¹ [Leaves of Grass](#) by Walt Whitman

A common phenomenon of soldiers with amputated limbs was feeling those missing limbs, and frequently the feelings were painful. Silas Weir Mitchell, a Philadelphia doctor who became a friend and correspondent of Whitman's, kept a medical notebook documenting the "sensory ghosts" of the amputees from the battle of Gettysburg, thinking he was the first person to do so. However, as Jonah Lehrer points out in *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*,²² a dozen years earlier Herman Melville gave Captain Ahab a sensory ghost of the leg eaten by his nemesis, Moby-Dick. Ahab tells the carpenter who's fashioning an ivory replacement leg, "here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the soul," and says that he felt tingling life there just as before.

Mitchell felt that the amputees' sensory ghosts supported Whitman's poetry, which stated that matter and spirit were not separate but intertwined. He wrote an anonymous short story, "The Case of George Dedlow" (published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and available now as a free e-book) giving a first-person fictional account of waking up in a hospital tent with all his limbs missing.

I saw a segment on a TV news program recently showing a treatment for phantom limb pain that's simple and surprisingly effective. Navy doctor Jack Tsao prescribed it for artillery sergeant Nicholas Paupore, who was wounded in Iraq.

Participants in a trial administered by Tsao²³ used the mirror therapy technique—simply moving the leg, watching the movement in the mirror and imagining that the missing leg is

²²[*Proust Was a Neuroscientist*](#) by Jonah Lehrer

²³[Jack Tsao mirror therapy clinical trial](#)

making the movements—15 minutes a day, five days a week for four weeks. Pain levels came down the first week and continued down. Every person experienced relief, with pain completely disappearing for some. Paupore and some others were able to get off painkillers entirely. “It tricks your brain into thinking your leg is still there, so it’s not misfiring,” Paupore said. “I don’t know how it works, but it works.”

Pain is a signal that something’s wrong. Seeing their missing legs in the mirror convinced the subconscious mental equipment that they were whole again and relieved the pain associated with the phantom limb.

Consider now, if you would, the existential pain that people suffer. I recall reading somewhere years ago that social outcasts were sometimes banished outside the protection of a city’s walls and survived on the city’s garbage dump—and I thought, “That’s it!” We court the approval of others to fix some perceived lack—some missing limb—and fear the hell²⁴ of social ostracizing.

Even worse is the fear of annihilation. We believe we’re separate creatures, and we know the creature’s existence is threatened every moment. What will death bring? We don’t know, so we latch onto beliefs and repeat those beliefs as a mantra whenever the subject of death passes through our awareness: We will continue on forever in the Happy Hunting Ground, in Paradise, in Heaven ... or our molecules will gracefully disperse back into the cosmic soup ... or we will slip

²⁴ The Old Testament term “hell” is a translation of the Hebrew word Gehennam, which Wikipedia says derives from “Ge Hinnom,” meaning “Valley of Hinnom”—the location of the burning garbage dump outside Jerusalem.

placidly into the comforting oblivion of dreamless sleep. But those beliefs don't really eliminate the underlying fear; they merely provide distraction, like sticking our fingers in our ears and singing or talking loudly when we don't want to hear something someone is saying to us.

Can we apply mirror therapy to the existential pain?

We believe ourselves to be individual human beings, irrevocably separate from whatever created us and from other human beings. No matter how close we get with another person, we never approach absolute knowing. And we feel even more not-one with whatever created us.

Our self-beliefs—for example, that we are a separate entity that is somehow dependent on a body that was born and is going to die; is or has an individual awareness; is limited, changing, vulnerable, uncertain—cause psychological turmoil and suffering. Like the amputee's phantom limb pain, it is phantom-self pain. Panic attacks (fear of dying or going insane, which reflect the fear of losing the phantom self) and depression (based on the conviction that something that's necessary to our happiness is not possible to attain) are extreme examples.

Have you ever stopped to wonder how it is that we know we're conscious? Our self-consciousness indicates a mirroring effect that's already taking place in the mind. It's as if there's one part of us looking outward and another part of us that's looking backward, aware of the part that's looking outward. But what does that backward-looking part of us see? Nothing ... no entity, no Wizard of Oz making things happen ... an empty, boundless, changeless, aware non-space.

We have a feeling of what we are. Sure, that's our bike, our car, our toes, and so on, but we feel we're essentially something deeper than those things. We feel that we're what's aware ... aware of external things but also of inner things such as thoughts and feelings ... and also, somehow, mysteriously self-aware.

We believe mightily that we're a separate, isolated entity attempting to know an unknown self ... as if we needed to look into a reflection of our eyes and, in that mirror image, see a reflection back into our "real eye." The hang-up is that we can't conceive of direct seeing without an intermediary. We can't conceive of seeing without a separate seer doing the seeing. We can't conceive of our self as not being a separate seer. How do we get beyond this phantom-seer pain?

Looking for the self, we need to notice what we're looking at (i.e., what we're aware of) and continue looking at it until we see, intuitively, what its relationship is to us. To do this systematically, we begin with more exterior objects—like bikes, cars and toes—and move inward to thoughts, feelings, and beyond. Doing occasional credo exercises to identify our current beliefs about what we are, or what we become identified with, provides us with ongoing material for investigation. All the while, we compare what we're looking at to the feeling of what we really are: that which is aware, which we sense (intuit) from the mirroring aspect of awareness itself.

Letting go of faulty self-beliefs may cause some jolts, but if we persist, we will get down to a final faulty self-belief ... and a final jolt will leave us with a recognition of direct seeing and absolute knowing.

Moods & States of Mind

A note to three friends:

I was thinking about you earlier today and thinking about how projections of the future are based on underlying convictions about ourselves and about the world. We don't see those convictions, however, without a comparison ... sometimes from observing others and sometimes with our direct experience.

The mind predicts the general future with an algorithm like "the future is going to be like the past because in the past the future was like the past," with biases such as weighting recent experience more heavily, etc., and of course it factors in worries about threats and opportunities.

Have you experienced or imagined what it's like to awaken not just with a different mood than you went to sleep with but with a set of convictions about yourself or the world that's diametrically opposed to the state of mind that you went to sleep with?

That happened to me once, when I was doing a solitary retreat in a rural cabin. When I had arrived there, it was cold, rainy and muddy, and the deciduous trees were ugly. There was no electricity or plumbing in the cabin, a tiny wood stove but no dry kindling or wood to burn. It was not a cheery picture for me. And I was fasting (water only) for the first three days. On the third or fourth morning when I first went outside, the mud was beautiful, the bare trees were beautiful, and I felt that anything was possible ... about the opposite of what I could see

my conviction state had been for several months now that I had a contrasting view. When I told my teacher and friend Richard Rose about that later, he said that's a benefit of fasting ... it can shock the bodymind into a new conviction state.

Anyway, I was trying to get a feeling about your conviction state. T: Is it anything along the line of the world won't give you what you want or you're not worthy of what you want? M: If I apply the right energy in the right direction, I may be able to figure out this mess and find what I'm looking for? C: The world is too demanding of me, or I'm not up to the demands of the world?

Veering off on a slight tangent, I was thinking how asking ourselves why we're doing what we're doing specifically (as opposed to in general) would probably be considered too basic for people who think of themselves as advanced seekers, but it could be a good way to direct our study to observation of the mind at work, which can't help but bring up comparisons to our convictions and a lessening of certainties. The more advanced we become as seekers, the fewer certainties remain to bind us.



Questions & Answers 7

AT: If you could have one question answered with absolute certainty, what would you want that question to be?

Q: *What is the purpose of my life?*

AT: Do you feel it may be related to what you hunger for, what you long for?



How would you describe the method for “knowing” what is never an object of consciousness? Is it something you “see,” “feel,” something else entirely? How does one’s consciousness / attention approach such a non-thing?

In my experience, it came from looking back at what/where I look out from maybe hundreds of times without having seen anything, then an impressive series of events over a 3-day period during a solitary retreat, which led to actually seeing something “back there.” It became evident to me that I was witnessing pure awareness, that the new view contradicted the keystone in the arch of my self-beliefs, and that they couldn’t both be true. The result was the keystone dropping, with a quiet conclusion (ha, Art Ticknor never was), followed by an instantaneous discontinuity, then finding myself back at my source, which conscious-me recognized as my true identity. That type of knowing is something my conscious-self had never experienced previously.



In hindsight, were there ways that you unnecessarily got in your own way on your path, ways that you could have circumvented?

The most obvious one to me is that I bought into a conviction that came out of the blue after Mr. Rose hadn't responded to a letter I'd sent him after a solitary retreat and resent maybe a month later when I hadn't heard from him. The conviction was that he had given up on me, and therefore my case was hopeless.

I luxuriated in the depression of hopelessness for half a dozen years. A friend asked me once why I hadn't asked Rose about it, but I'd boxed myself into a corner with the thinking that the answer could ruin the trauma if it was intended to shake me up. It never occurred to me that I could question the conviction!



I interviewed P. on my podcast recently.... When I asked him "what do you know for sure" he said "Absolutely nothing ... once you're sure about something you get locked in, but if you stay open and keep investigating (etc.) then that lotus will just keep opening up".

Are you certain that your certainty hasn't kept you locked in? Or do you think that P. hasn't come to the same place you have?

I'd say that's the view of someone who hasn't found his real identity, which is the sole source of absolute certainty. There's no proof of it, but look at the beliefs of someone who's sure it's not possible. What supports their belief in the impossibility?



From reading Rose's "Lecture on Moods" he mentions that moods could be the doorway back through the mind. What is your perspective toward moods? Can they be a gateway or just that which obstructs?

I feel it's good for the mind-machinery to be conscious of the current mood since it affects reactions. The nostalgic mood is a reflection of the invitation of the life-force to come back to the source. I think Rose referred to it as the language of the soul.



What do you think I'm missing?

Whatever it takes to break your conscious tether to this projection. For me, it was becoming conscious of awareness. Since it was apparently the case for Richard Rose also, I suspect it might be a necessary experience.

I'm convinced that some superior intelligence set up that experience for me and that it was way beyond the capability of Art's intelligence to do it. I suspect that kind of help comes after we're no longer working for our own edification but for a higher purpose.



Did you find the "I AM" meditation useful in your search? Is it all about intensity/desire? You talked before about not being able to see anything until the conditions are right; are those conditions to do with when the mental noise plateaus out and leaves a more silent space? Or does it take work to create the silent place? Also I'm starting to not see the "I AM" as Michael Langford has put it. He says the meditation is "my present awareness" watching "my present awareness."

However, trying to define what I am seeing, it seems to me to be my present awareness/consciousness watching “mind.” It is like my mind is there, projecting/manifesting mind, that is emanating from the unmanifested source of mind. Maybe that is the problem, that I believe that I am the “mind”.

I found Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta dialogues inspiring to read, but I don't recall specific effects they may have had. The only meditation I really worked with was the one Richard Rose described in *Psychology of the Observer*.

I never felt that my hair was on fire. I think the pull was having seen clearly what I wanted more than anything else in life. That “seeing” produced the true commitment of my life, to become the Truth at any cost, and something kept it operating until it succeeded.

What I referred to as not appearing in consciousness for the first 99.9% of my seeking was awareness, and my retrospective conclusion—since it was evident to me that some superior intelligence produced the necessary conditions—was that it may not appear until the conditions are right.

I never experienced silence, so I'd say that, whatever someone means by that, it's not universally necessary. Perhaps it's what Rose said about no-thought, which I never experienced (until my head stopped), and I'd also say isn't universally necessary. My advice for seekers: DON'T TRY TO REPLICATE CONDITIONS OTHERS SAY ARE NECESSARY.

Our pre-enlightenment experience is consciousness of objects that are not us but that we are lost in / identified with most of the time. What finally broke the spell for me (and I assume for

Richard Rose based on his Jacob's Ladder diagram) was becoming conscious of awareness. Enlightenment or Self-Realization occurs when our consciousness finds itself back at our source, absolute Awareness. Post-enlightenment, when consciousness returns along the ray of creation to the body-mind, we again experience consciousness of objects that are not us, but—knowing our true identity—we're no longer lost in them.



I live with this idea that there will be this happy home life with kids and a big house but that I just have to get Enlightened first.

It may be as simple as being honest with ourselves about what our *current* priority is, especially if there's a conflict between a temporal objective and an eternal objective. If we're honest about our current priority, it puts any other priorities in perspective. There's nothing else that has to be done first *currently*.



What is "going within"? Is it increasing quietness and emptiness of the mind? Does it require some tension to not be imaginary going within? If I wanted to go within right now, would it just be turning attention on the me-sense/I am-ness/self-remembering, or is there a step beyond that? I suppose I can try to peer into the blackness of "what's looking?" and continue to not get any conscious information but maybe the mind's attachments to lies are slowly being burned out.

But there is some uncertainty whether this "going within" is what Rose meant or just another dead end. It does seem like the farthest I've

gone when considering a paradox, so has some value, but it could also be over complication. Probably am overcomplicating going within somehow.

I suspect there is something on the other side of putting attention on knowing I am but not seeing who's conscious, but it's not a strong voice. Maybe there is a pull to disappear into perceived vibration and hope it really is more than auto-suggestion hypnosis to hide from life.

That question was almost exactly my koan for 25 years. I figured that when I became conscious of watching my thoughts as they were happening, that was maybe a step within. Same when I witnessed the decision-making process in slow motion. Again, when I saw the mind go into a turbo-drive process, which I later assumed was what Rose meant by intuition. But all those occurrences seemed accidental. And I still had the question of *how* to continue, *how* to go within.

Be careful of being sold on silence, quietness, peace, emptiness, blackness, etc. Sure they sound good as a break from all the mental madness, but the real break is detachment from the being caught up in the mental movement and, especially, in the underlying self-beliefs. That's the fertile field to plow.

So that's about "relative" going-within. That's "the way." But we still feel ourselves (but can't find ourselves) out here. If you want to go within right now, ask a higher power for the experience(s) that will trigger transcending this dimension, transcending the knower-known split.

If that doesn't happen, ask your inner self "Why?" In the meantime, what this mental equipment can do is to continue working at a retreat from faulty beliefs. Within is capital-t Truth;

absolute being. We have to back into it. You're not going to "get there" by transmission until One Mind is ready. Live your life as a pursuit of Truth.



If I am committed to honesty and self-inquiry, then why does it seem to be a mostly impenetrable wall between consciousness and both my dream world and the subconscious? Are they both what stands between me the self, and an Inner Self? Is the secretive life of dreams and the subconscious both based on the possibility that the conscious part of me can't handle the truth about itself? Could it be simply that the 'me' could never face the truth of its existence, if it was truly experienced or seen? Was it the conscious me or the subconscious that created a veil, some mechanism to keep 'me' from making conscious what is the subconscious? Does my avoidance or denial reside in the conscious part of me, or the subconscious? I have added a daily prayer to my routine that the veil become at least transparent -but could I even bear that?

Some folks experience a blending of the waking state and dreaming state (lucid dreaming). I haven't; my conclusion: it wasn't necessary. "Subconscious" could include mental activity that we haven't yet viewed, don't view normally, or is in the view but we haven't noticed it. I don't see that any of those possibilities prevent Self-Realization. If faulty self-belief certainties prevent Self-Realization, why do we hang onto them? I'd say it's because our life-experience hasn't yet successfully challenged them. Our self-beliefs may make it easier or more difficult for the mental machinery to ignore contradictory evidence.

When I reread your paragraph above, it suggests to me that you may be hovering over the inquiry from an abstract distance rather than digging into self-beliefs one at a time.



You said: I think the pull was having seen clearly what I wanted more than anything else in life. That “seeing” produced the true commitment of my life, to become the Truth at any cost, and something kept it operating until it occurred.

So, after having seen clearly what you wanted most in life at one point, you kept having the same want all the time/years afterwards? I would find that very difficult especially with something like “become the truth”, because it’s not very defined and once it goes into mind level and I lose the feeling level, I lose the sureness that this is what I want the most, there has to always be at least some strong feeling. Or did you say to yourself (like in moment of clarity)- “I see—this is what I want most now, and I will follow it to the end even/resolution even if I would lose any strong feeling/pull about it”?

I was fortunate in that my longing was close to the surface. I would generally contact it (remember to feel it) just before meditating, and it reminded me of why I was meditating. The words “become the Truth at any cost” were the conceptual partner of the longing. My dissatisfaction was also close to the surface.



Solitary Retreats II

A friend wrote on a Monday that he was planning to go camping the next day, for three or four days, to focus on the question of what was really important to him. On Tuesday he wrote: *"I couldn't handle it. I'm going to try and give all this up."*

What you witnessed is valuable, M. The mind-self panicked because it felt threatened. That happened to me the first time I swam in the Pacific and got caught in a rip tide, which I'd never even heard of. The mind panicked, and the body started stroking and kicking as hard as it could to avoid being dragged out to sea. You've probably read somewhere where I've described that, and the life-review that followed, losing body consciousness, etc. I'm sure you couldn't have gotten me back in the ocean for some period after that.

Now think about a little kid who panics in a swimming pool when he's being taught how to swim. He isn't likely to want to get back in the water. But as his parent, you know it's important for him to learn how to swim. So after some time has passed, you talk to him about it, tell him how important knowing how to swim is, and encourage him to give it another try.

It wasn't the real-you that panicked, and it's not the real-you that concludes it's just too much to handle or can't every carry out a commitment, etc. The real-you is witnessing the mind's operation and its interaction with the body. The mind's operation is based on a cast of fears and desires (which it didn't choose but is somehow "blessed" with) that are in an ongoing contest to spend or protect the body's energy. Their noise, or debate, is monitored by a program that takes it all into consideration as data and reacts with decisions for the body to

act or not act on. The more the mind is conscious of its own operation, the better it functions. It collects data—the memory database—that get factored into future decisions. Intentionally becoming conscious of its own operation is what introspective meditation is all about. Meditation is one of the mental processes that the inner-you witnesses.

A person's mentality generally accomplishes things better either by cold-turkey changes or by gradual changes. Once the mentality sees which works better for it, then it can apply that data in its decisions. It was always difficult for me to do anything in moderation, so cold turkey was the way my mind instructed the body to quit smoking, conserve sex-energy, etc. I suspect your mentality might function better with gradualism?

Panic is a reaction to extreme fear. And unless we want to be slaves to psychological fears, we need to face them. Some fears, as Shawn Nevins pointed out in one of his essays, aren't very relevant to what we want to accomplish in life—an example he gives is a fear of black cats—and so we don't need to pay attention to them. But if a fear interferes with something that's important to us, we need to find a way to circumvent it ... and that typically means we have to face it or confront it. The mind doesn't become fearless; it learns to act in the face of fear. It's a learning process, and your mind is capable of learning.

When you first wrote, you said that seeking meaning in your life, seeking to understand what is really going on, is your goal. And you mentioned your fear of being alone, which keeps you socializing in a way you find unproductive. I don't know if that was the fear that kicked in when you started off to spend a few days alone in the woods, but naming a fear isn't really important. You set off for a solitary time in the woods, and one

or more of the cast of desires and fears got really loud, causing the panicked reaction that you witnessed. If it was primarily a physical fear, such as fear of getting mauled by a bear, then being alone in the woods was the source of the panic—and you don't need to be alone in the woods in order to find your life's meaning. But you do need to be able to spend time alone and away from distraction. So a solitary retreat could be done in a quiet hotel room, or a solitary retreat facility somewhere. It could start off with a day trip and then build from there as you feel the longer time would be helpful.

I think you're missing a good source of help by not working with others who may have had similar experiences and found ways around them or ways to face them.

*

[Doing Zen](#)

Had an interesting meeting Monday night. With the universities on break, I didn't know whether we'd have much of a turnout (which is always fine with me, since it allows more time to spend with the few regulars). Started the meeting off different than usual ... had the three folks who were there do a silent breath-counting exercise for 5 minutes. While we were doing that a few more people came in, and then when I started giving a 5-minute spiel (which I seldom do), a few more people came, so we ended up with 10 of us—including 2 new people and 2 who haven't been around in a while. The spiel I gave followed this line:

- Zen (the term) comes from a Sanskrit word meaning concentration or focus.

- If you were watching yourself count breaths silently, you were “doing” Zen.
- The ultimate purpose of Zen is self-realization, or knowing your true, present identity with full awareness.
- That’s also the goal of this self-inquiry group. Intentional self-inquiry incorporates “Zen.”
- To know your present identity, you need to be in the present.
- “Doing” Zen or self-inquiry = learning to be in the present.
- The poster for the meeting had the heading: Who in the Brain Is Looking?
- Scientists try to study it from the outside. Zenists/self-inquirers look for it from the inside.

One of the new people, a 25-year-old Qatari who graduated from Carnegie Mellon’s Qatar campus and is over here for a year’s work, came to the coffee shop with us afterward. There were 7 of us from the meeting plus two more people who came to the coffee shop who hadn’t made it to the meeting. By 10 o’clock or so, many of the folks left, with V. (in his final year of his PhD program at CMU), Ben (who graduates from CMU next week), and M.—the new guy, who’s ethnically Indian but whose parents grew up in Pakistan—remaining. What followed was a lengthy interchange with M., who’s a practicing Shia Muslim but intensely interested in self-realization, who finally reached the point where he got a glimpse of the void (so to speak), which has happened a few times before and scares the you-know-what out of him. V. told me it was like seeing a whole year of his changes in that hour or so with M.

*

Giving Up the Ghost

What do you think keeps the ego in charge for most people?

Being identified with it keeps it thinking/feeling it's in charge or at least should be in charge. The identification loosens as life challenges the certainty of being the thinker/doer/decider.

Did you have any emotional reactions to "increasing uncertainty"?

I was probably certain of my uncertainty. :-) And I still had the unchallenged conviction of being a separate something. The mind-self only needs one faulty conviction to hold onto in order to keep from falling into the abyss of Peace when the situation would otherwise let it give up the ghost.

Chapter 8: *Suppose I awoke a week from today and....*

Suppose I awoke a week from today and found conscious-me in a moth's body. And with memories of having awakened on previous days in the moth body, observing moth-life over that period, I had concluded that I was a separate thing, a moth-person or moth-being. But then the question occurred to me: **"Am I a moth?"**

- I see my wings, my abdomen, etc. Like many other creatures who take ourselves as moths.
- Although some creatures like me consider themselves butterflies. Not sure why.
- I feel that I'm something inside this body, aware of what's going on outside and also of some things that are going on inside my body.
- I've seen that other moths were once worm-like fetuses in a cocoon, so I figure I was once like that—not a moth—but I don't remember it.
- I feel like I'm something that started at some preconscious time.
- I've seen other moths die, and I feel like my moth-consciousness will end at some future time.
- Maybe my consciousness will continue after my moth-self dies, but I don't have any memories of being

conscious before my moth-self. So if I began, I think I'll also end.

- Other moths have told me their views on life after death, but I want to know the truth for myself.
- From what I've seen and heard, I probably have 1 or 2 weeks to live. Our purpose seems to be to mate and keep the species alive.
- I've observed that after moths mate, females lay eggs, and inchworm caterpillars develop from the eggs.
- The inchworms eat and eat and eat, shedding their skin several times as they outgrow it. Then they stop eating, and they molt into a shiny cocoon or they hang upside down from a twig or leaf and spin a silky cocoon.
- Inside the cocoon, the caterpillar breaks down and reorganizes into a moth, usually within 2 weeks.
- So I ask myself: What am I?
- I seem now to be a moth and, before that, to have been an inchworm that developed from an egg then metamorphized through a pupa stage.
- If I was an inchworm and then a moth, what was my deeper identity underlying those two forms? And what was my identity that preceded and/or follows?

Am I a moth, or am I experiencing life as a moth?

*

Am I an ice cream cone, or am I a person eating an ice cream cone?

*

Am I a human being, or am I experiencing life as a human being?

Your Strategy

A question for your consideration: What's the best way to read an essay or listen to a talk? (I'm really asking, so I'll put a pause here for you to consider the question....)

If you just kept reading, it indicates you're looking for answers outside yourself, from external authority. If you're looking for solid footing, on the other hand, you'll eventually need to turn to an internal source and become your own authority to answer the parent of all philosophical questions.

But to get back to the "best way" question, in the past I read and listened critically, sorting what I read or heard into things I agreed with, things I disagreed with, and occasionally something to look further into. These days I tend to pay attention not so much to the words as to what's behind the words. When you read or listen, you're following a strategy—consciously or not—that may be active or passive. You're at a point of non-action when you're consciously viewing that mental activity or relative inactivity.

You're reading this today because you're pursuing a strategy to get what you want out of life. You may also be reading it because there's something you need to "hear." If that's the case, I don't know what it is, and you don't know what it is, so we'll have to rely on accident ... or on intelligence greater than human knowing. Would it bother you if you knew you were dependent on such an intelligence to find what you're looking for in life?

There was an old woman in Birmingham, Alabama who knew about that intelligence. William Samuel²⁵ told about her in a weekend retreat he held in Georgia in 1993, which was filmed by PBS. Samuel (1924-96) was a soldier who became a metaphysician and then a self-realized man. He was commissioned a lieutenant at age 18 and fought for about three years leading a troop of Chinese soldiers in their resistance against Japanese invaders. His interpreter turned out to be a Taoist master, whom Bill spent some time with after the war. He then returned to Birmingham and became a well-known Christian Science practitioner and metaphysician. Then in the late 1950s or early 1960s he awakened to a realization of his essential being.

In the 1993 retreat Bill told how twelve days earlier he'd had a massive stroke, which left him unable to speak or move. The quantum physicist David Bohm was to have been there, also, but likewise had suffered from a critical medical problem at about the same time. You could see that Bill was having some difficulty with his speech at the beginning of the weekend, but his astounding recovery continued and his speech improved noticeably by the end of the filming.

Bill told about having had heart surgery some years before, followed later by an angioplasty. Everything seemed okay, then the angioplasty collapsed ... followed by a collapse of each of the earlier bypasses. His doctors apparently didn't give him any hope of surviving. He said he was lying in bed, should have already been dead, when an old woman who came in to take care of him leaned down and whispered in his ear: "Do you

²⁵See selfdiscoveryportal.com/WmSamuel.htm for more on his life and teaching.

know what love is?” He said he was totally honest perhaps for the first time in his life and replied, “No. But I’d like to.” She responded: “It doesn’t matter. God loves you, and I loves you.” He said he began healing at that instant.

I suspect she’d had a rough life, a life that had been tough on her pride. I also suspect that Bill’s “total honesty”—total openness to her—reflected the inverse of pride. The intelligence that healed him was what the old woman felt as love. And it was transmitted when he was in the receptive state of total openness. The only impediment to its transmission at every moment—at this very moment—is pride.

Hunger

When you’re hungry, you follow an action plan to satisfy that want. You’re reading this because you have a hunger or thirst you haven’t been able to satisfy. It may not be defined, but it’s something you feel—an unfulfilled longing that’s deeper than words. Feeling that longing, that deep want, is the starting point—always come back to that. Whatever put that want there does the work of satisfying it *if you allow it*.

Everyone has a strategy they’re pursuing to get what they want out of life. It may be conscious or largely unconscious. Becoming conscious of your strategy is a step in the direction of waking up. Observing it may have an impact. Part of becoming conscious of the strategy is refining your understanding of the goal it’s aimed at. Cooperating with that goal is equivalent to getting out of its way.

Regarding that goal, what is it that you really want? Answering the question requires becoming aware of the goal that your

ingrained strategy is pursuing. In a workshop last September, I heard several people say basically this: “I don’t know what I want. I guess what I really want is to find out what I want.” A want is a feeling—a feeling that something’s missing, or lacking. You have to feel it ... and it’s unpleasant. *Knowing* what you want is an interpretation of the feeling. It comes by using the tools at hand (intuition and reason), and it provides a tentative answer to the question: “What will satisfy the want?”

I heard an Internet interview recently of a British entrepreneur, Jim Mellon, who had written a book²⁶ on financial planning with his business partner. His primary suggestion was to take a couple days, go away from the family and other commitments, and sit down and really think about what you’re going to do when you’re 65 and retired. He was referring mainly to financial planning, but his approach is a good one.

If you “know” what you want out of life, you’re half way there. If you “don’t know,” when are you going to get serious?

[Getting Serious](#)

Getting serious is the equivalent of getting honest with oneself. Are you serious about finding the truth of your existence? I’m not talking about running around like your hair’s on fire but of getting down to business. Gautama apparently got serious when he sat down under the Bo tree; Jesus, when he spent 40 days in the desert; Paul Wood, when he put his head down on his desk and prayed for God to kill him. Unless you spent time around Richard Rose you probably haven’t heard the story of

²⁶[Top 10 Investments for the Next 10 Years](#), by Jim Mellon and Al Chalabi

Paul Wood. Richard said he was one of a handful of people he'd met whom he felt certain were self-realized. Paul had grown up a fundamentalist Christian and found himself participating in the bombing of either Hiroshima or Nagasaki. When he saw the devastation that he was part of, all he could think of was what he'd learned from the *Bible* about how God was concerned with the fall of every sparrow. But where was God when the bombs exploded?

Paul became unable to function and was sent home to Texas. He couldn't hold down a job there, and his wife and kids left him. He said all he could do to try to figure things out was to say the Lord's Prayer, taking it apart phrase-by-phrase and word-by-word. He eventually found work as a used car salesman, but one day he was having a difficult time with a couple who were prospective customers, and he said he put his head down on his desk and prayed for death. He awoke a week or so later in a hospital, knowing the answer to his questions.

You can't force yourself to get serious. You basically have to run out of other options. As Winston Churchill quipped or complained about Americans, presumably because it took them so long to get into World War II, "They can always be counted on to do the right thing—after they have exhausted all other possibilities." (His mother was an American, by the way.)

Surveys cited by Daniel Gilbert in *Stumbling on Happiness*²⁷ show that: most students see themselves as more intelligent than the average student; 90% of motorists consider themselves safer-than-average drivers; and 94% of college prosfs consider themselves better-than-average teachers. "If you're like most

²⁷<https://amzn.to/3kTAMIO>

people, then like most people, you don't know you're like most people," as Gilbert writes in his typically clever fashion. Are you more serious than the average seeker? Is your strategy going to keep you in the game until real seriousness grabs you?

[The Strategy for Knowing the Self](#)

The strategy for self-definition requires *becoming your own authority*. How is that done? By doing it on your own? By not being influenced by others? I've known people who have followed those strategies, and I agree that they are effective—for isolating yourself from possibly useful influences. They are really two sides of the same coin, the former ("no help") motivated by pride and the latter ("no influence") by fear.

It's far better to immerse yourself with people who are striving for what you're striving for, including those who may have preceded you down the path. But carve out alone time for yourself—daily, and occasionally for longer periods.

Do you become your own authority by thinking for yourself? I used to feel that it was the solution, but when I saw that all thinking is a reaction process, I realized that thinking for myself was literally impossible. What is possible, though, is to *look* for yourself with an unbiased eye not affected by thinking or feeling.

Whatever set of fears and desires is making the most noise determines your action or inaction—until there's sufficient detachment from identifying with the view (i.e., those fears and desires). To look objectively means not flinching from the contradictions you'll see about what you believe yourself to be.

I feel that our primary desire is for *eternal survival in a state of grand equanimity*. Permanent healing brings us to that state when we realize that “God loves us.” The purest form of love is the identity of exact sameness. “God loves us” is equivalent to “God R us” —or “God is All, and all is God.” Thus the search for permanent healing or satisfaction is the quest for knowing the self, for self-definition.

[Going Within](#)

The self is located, intuitively, within. Finding the self could therefore be described as going within. When you recognize that your hunger won’t be satisfied by even the highest external games (for example, the metagames of art, science and religion in DeRopp’s *Master Game*²⁸), then the only possibility for satisfaction lies within ... the game of discovering what you truly are.

Going within expands the view. But since the view is not the viewer, going within expands the view of what you’re not. This is what Richard Rose termed retreating from untruth about what you are. It’s a journey of *disillusionment*.

Like the zoom on a camera, when the lens is fully zoomed out you get a close-up view. Retracting the lens expands the view. Eventually you back up to a blank wall or abyss ... the boundary of the individual mind. And then *a reversal of focus* leads to a quantum jump or leap.

Speaking of focus, I hear friends, who are attempting to know what they are but feel they aren’t making sufficient progress,

²⁸<https://amzn.to/3qnaCJz>

say they need to focus more on self-definition. How is it done? Here's what Steve Jobs, then Apple CEO, had to say about focus in a 3/17/08 *Fortune* magazine interview:

People think that focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the 100 other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully.... Life is brief, and then you die, you know?

[How Can You Gauge if You're Making Progress?](#)

Are you moving ... or are you just keeping busy? The journey is a chipping away at identification with what's not your essence, a backing away from faulty beliefs about what you are. An acid test: Have you seen anything new about yourself that dispels a previous belief/delusion?

What do you believe yourself to be? Until you consciously become the awareness that knows itself, you're stuck in the land of belief—and that's the source of your unsatisfied hunger. Fortunately, though, we're designed to look for the solid ground of certainty.

Are you challenging your beliefs about what you are? You first have to become conscious of your current self-definition then look for rigorous evidence of its validity—not what you read or someone tells you but first-person evidence that comes by looking for yourself. Admitting that you don't know what you are may be a sign of progress, but don't let it be a comfortable resting spot or insurmountable hurdle.

Why isn't everyone devoting every spare moment to *conscious* pursuit of what they want out of life? I hear friends say things like: "I don't know how ... I'm lazy ... I lack courage ... I haven't found Grace," and so on. Those are all beliefs about what you are! All you have to do is look at your complaints and excuses to find beliefs.

Other signposts of progress include mini-satoris, natural koans, and mental processes seen in slow motion. As an example of a satori experience, after a one-week intensive early in my years of searching I was back at work and found myself holding off something until the other workers had gone home for the day. Then I felt myself going "up" (although I was still conscious of being seated at my desk) and getting a view that my mind found these words to describe: "Something IS!" I realized with amazement that for something to be, an original something had to arise out of nothing—a logical impossibility. I felt myself seemingly going up a second time, and my mind found the following words to describe the second view: "Everything is just the way it is." This realization was actually an appreciation for the conciliation of opposites, seeing that "true" and "false" have equal validity from a view that transcends them.

A natural koan found me one time when I was doing a solitary retreat. It came in the form of a question that came out of nowhere and latched onto my mind. "What is the source of my awareness?" was the first thought I awoke with, the last thought I went to sleep with, and was rather constantly on my mind for a couple days. It was wonderful. And then late one afternoon as I sat resting on a tree stump in the woods, an answer came in the form of a quiet vision: I saw that I was attached to something bigger than myself at the end of a long string. A few years later I heard Richard Rose say that every

seeker has to find his umbilical cord, the mental umbilical cord connecting us to our source, and I knew then what I had seen.

An earlier time when I was on a solitary retreat it had rained for several days, and I was cold (having no heat source) and hungry (from fasting). When the rain ceased, I went for a walk and spotted a boulder on the edge of a stream with the sun shining on it. My first thought was how nice it would be to warm myself there. But then I saw a “no trespassing” sign posted on a nearby tree. And my reaction was fear that an unfriendly property owner might shoot me for trespassing. I found myself stopped in my tracks on the dirt road, watching the argument in my mind in slow motion. It was like a tug of war among various fears and desires, with the opposing contestants trying to win their side of the argument. The “team” that finally made the most noise won the argument—a very primitive operation, indeed.

Another sign of progress is becoming less personal in your interests. We generally begin searching for happiness (emotional) or meaning (intellectual); later stages of the search gravitate toward truth or reality. What takes place is a refinement of your understanding of your deepest desire. What you believe yourself to be is shrinking; more view coincides with less self.

[If Your Strategy Doesn't Seem to Be Working](#)

At the heart of the struggle for self-realization is an opposition of wants: one is to be relieved of your burden, while the other is to maintain the feeling of being the final arbiter. The feeling that you are in control, or should be, is a basic symptom of the illusion of individuality.

It's no mistake that the first step in the AA 12-step program is admitting that your life is out of (your) control. Have you reached that point of honesty yet?

If your strategy doesn't seem to be working, it may help to look at it ("Sometimes you can observe a lot by watching," as the famous yogi of baseball, Yogi Berra, was credited with saying).

- The mind is an *addiction machine*. Bernadette Roberts²⁹ at 17 was so good at disciplines that she realized the next step in discipline was giving up disciplines. (Don't overrate yourself on this!) Does your strategy condone habits negative to your clarity?
- The mind's a *forgetting machine*. Gurdjieff³⁰ urged his students to wage a war against (mental) sleep, devising alarm clocks to awaken themselves from daydreaming. Does your strategy compensate for forgetting?
- The mind's a *distraction machine*. "If you throw enough mud at the ceiling, some of it will stick," as Richard Rose would tell his listeners. Does your strategy divert energy from non-critical pursuits every day?
- The mind's a *fickle machine*. Does your strategy accommodate varying moods and convictions?

The spiritual path is contra-addiction, contra-forgetting, contra-distraction, contra-fickleness.

For years I dreamed of being an architect. I read biographies of architects, studied their designs, luxuriated in their successes of

²⁹[*Contemplative: Autobiography of the Early Years*](#), by Bernadette Roberts

³⁰[*G.I. Gurdjieff: The War Against Sleep*](#), by Colin Wilson

creating beauty. But I never followed a strategy or action plan for becoming an architect. Are you merely dreaming about self-realization?

[More Stumbling](#)

The author of *Stumbling on Happiness* cites a study in which 96% of the cancer patients claimed to be in better health than the average cancer patient! Does your strategy enable you to avoid the facts of your life?

Gilbert also notes in his witty style the many studies indicating: “The self considers itself to be a very special person.” Is your strategy enhancing this conviction?

He tells us that 9 of 10 people say they’d regret a foolish action more than a foolish inaction—but studies show that people of all ages and walks of life regret inactions more than actions. Does your strategy allow fear of making the wrong decision to lead to inaction?

Not making a serious commitment to yourself to pursue your deepest desire wholeheartedly is a way (a path, a strategy) to try to avoid something you may fear. But will you regret it??

[The 600-Pound Man](#)

I saw a news story in January about a 600-pound man from West Virginia who had tried and tried to lose weight unsuccessfully. He told the interviewer that he’d gotten to the point, despite the support of his attractive wife, of not wanting to live any more. Then he found himself admitting he was helpless and praying to God for help. That was 11 months

earlier. By January he'd lost 300 pounds and was still losing weight!

He's an example of someone with a hunger he literally couldn't satisfy. And a strategy that apparently wasn't working despite trying everything he could think of. But he witnessed a sea change in his thinking and results when he got out of the way. How? First, he found his life untenable. Second, he tried everything he could think of, but all failed. Third, he admitted he didn't have will power—but he then found it within, by turning over control to something bigger than his personality.

Life Is One Day (Catch the Wave)

Your life is one day --
less than "one day at a time" --
just today, really.

It may seem to repeat
endlessly (you may hope)
with large or small variations
such as in the movie *Groundhog Day*.

But those repetitions are merely memories
or anticipations,
not "solid" like today.

Make the most of it.
Because your life is just one day.
Or is it?

Where is "earlier today"?

Is it still here, still solid --
or has it been consigned to memory?

And where is “later today”?
Is it solid --
or imaginary?

Life is just this moment, isn’t it.
Try to make the most of it.

And where is this moment,
this ungraspable “now”?
Is it solid?

Or has it already disappeared?
How long will you be able
to surf the moment?

[Rabbit-Proof Fence](#)

One of those synchronicities like Jung used to write about: I was talking with some friends on Monday night, and they referred to a movie titled *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.³¹ I’d read about that fence in Jared Diamond’s *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*.³² It had been constructed across the entire length of Western Australia in an attempt to control the destructive rabbit population. My friends said that wasn’t what the movie was about, but the conversation jumped to something else, and nothing more was said about it. On Tuesday I decided to watch

³¹ [Rabbit-Proof Fence](#) starring Kenneth Branagh

³² [Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed](#) by Jared Diamond;
also see [Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence](#) by Doris Pilkington

the second of two DVDs I'd rented the previous week—and it turned out to be *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, which I'd picked up from reading the jacket blurb and then forgotten about, the title not ringing a bell when I heard it mentioned.

It turned out that the movie was based on the real-life adventure of three girls (two sisters and a cousin) from Jigalong in the northern part of Western Australia. They were daughters of two aboriginal mothers and three Caucasian fathers. The movie depicted what took place during 1931 when the girls were forcibly separated from their homes and taken to a camp near Perth, about 1,200 miles south. This was part of a program of the English bureaucracy to integrate half-caste children into western society.

The three children ran away from the settlement and headed north, hunted by an aboriginal tracker as well as the police. When someone along the way told them about the rabbit-proof fence being close by, the oldest girl knew that if they followed it, they would find their way home.

After many weeks of walking, the girls heard from another person they encountered how their story was in all the papers and that one of their mothers was waiting for them at a nearby railroad station. The oldest sister intuited that the fellow was lying to them and tried to get the other girls back on their trek along the fence, but the cousin rebelled and headed for the train station. The two girls turned back for her when she didn't follow them, but before they could be reunited, they saw her picked up by a policeman at the train station. By then the youngest girl was about done in and had to be carried most of the time by the oldest girl. And their hearts dropped when they saw the fence end at a death-valley stretch of desert. But the

older girl saw a “sign”—a bird circling over them then taking off in a direction—found faith, and told her sister that the fence would reappear. So they trudged on across the pathless wasteland.

It struck me when I received an e-mail from a friend today, Wednesday, asking: “Is there any way to know if what you’re doing is actually helping you in the search, if there is no path....” that this movie contained a good metaphor for the situation faced by the spiritual seeker. When we begin the adventure of knowing ourselves, we may start off by moving away from a way of living that we find untenable. This often involves rejection of previously-held beliefs and adjustment of habits that impede clear-headedness. Then we come across a teacher or teaching that offers specific recommendations of what to do—we find our fence to follow. We may be like the middle girl and veer off the path at some point. But if we persist long enough, we’ll come to the trackless desert. To keep going toward truth (i.e., away from illusion), there’s no longer a program or fence to follow. It now depends on intuition. And if we’ve learned to pay attention to intuition, to the “voice of silence” coming into the mind from its unknown source, its messages may register on our consciousness as *signs*. After the two girls had collapsed in the wasteland, an eagle circled overhead, which the oldest sister recognized as a sign and followed the direction it flew off in.

There *is* a path that leads back to the source, the Unconditional. But, as with the aboriginal girls in the story, beyond a certain point it can only be followed by intuition and by persistent effort.

You Are That Which Sees

You are *that* which sees,
Never that which is seen.
You are *that* which experiences,
Never that which is experienced.
You are *that* which knows,
Never that which is known.

The cosmos of mind
Is a realm of relativity,
A dimension of duality,
Ruled by the law
Of the excluded middle,
Where *x* and *not-x* are never identical,
Never one and the same.

What is your true identity?
Here you are defined only by what you are not:
You are *not* that which is seen,
Not that which is experienced,
Not that which is known.

Your identity is *unseen*,
Unexperienced, unknown.
As far as you know, you are that which
Was born, suffers and will die ... until
You transcend the split between knower and known.



Questions & Answers 8

Q: *Did you ever avoid facing fears? When and why?*

AT: Maybe. I wasn't 100% open about volunteering my thoughts and feelings with everyone I interacted with. That probably had some connection to fears of rejection. I felt I was honest about what was relevant and in answering questions. I don't know why my search took nearly 26 years. In the early part I'd seen clearly what I wanted most from life and had done a serious scan to determine if there were any fears or other desires that I felt were as or more important, and there weren't. I don't recall ever fearing something I wanted to do or not do regarding my search that I didn't face.

Did you experience any fears that you felt you couldn't explain to yourself, like psychological fears, regardless of whether you felt you needed to face them or not?

Probably, but nothing occurs to me now. I think I had a pattern that probably went back to early years of suppressing feelings. I only saw the comparison when I returned from self-realization and could afford to feel feelings and to let them go as deep as they wanted to go. The depth that fear threatened was annihilation via being cast outside the city gates.



Just re: 'I don't know why my search took nearly 26 years.' That implies that you think it should take much less time than that. Am I reading that right?

My feeling is that there's a full water tower that has to be swallowed & that each of us is on a spectrum of sippers to gulpers. Or that the story was prewritten. Or that the assistance of an individual self helper (ISH) is available and/or needed, but it can only help when asked. :-)

What do you mean by 'individual self helper'?

Richard Rose recommended a book titled *Minds in Many Pieces*³³ written by California psychiatrist Ralph Allison in 1980 about his practice with multiple-personality patients. He was hypnotizing them and then talking to the various personalities that would communicate. As I recall, in at least two of the cases there was an intelligence that described itself as an individual self-helper (which I think Allison referred to as an ISH) and which said it could only help if asked.

If there are ISH intelligences, it may make sense to ask within for help. I never heard Rose mention it, but in recent years I came across a talk transcript where he said he felt everyone has a guardian angel. I'd be curious to know if he thought the ISH and guardian angle might be the same. I haven't had any personal sightings of either, but I am largely certain that some inner intelligence was lining things up for me in my final solitary retreat.



Do you find me to be drifting at sea without direction, or overall moving from a going-within vector?

³³ [*Minds in Many Pieces*](#)

What I question is whether you've given adequate consideration to the possible value of celibacy.

*Yeah, that's a fair point. Considering how linked to connection/romantic relationships sexual intimacy is for me, and how strong my desire for these relationships/connection has always been . . . I imagine I'd have to have a pretty strong conviction that celibacy was what would make the difference before making that sacrifice. It's like saying "quit your job because it *might* help" :) Celibacy does seem to be a common denominator in many who have "attained" Realization, but there are others who have attained without celibacy. Nevertheless, in my own experience (which equates to two separate occasions of being celibate for 30-45 days), celibacy does increase energy, ability to sit in meditation longer, etc., and may have been a factor in a notable "glimpse" I had a few years ago. Without the aforementioned conviction, I'm not sure how realistic it is for me to consider full celibacy (which functionally equals no romantic relationships) . . . but I'm at the very least curious to experiment with "reducing the sex act" as Rose talked about, without it needing to be all or nothing. Perhaps this could help?*

Are you certain about who has attained Realization? And are you certain about whether celibacy played a role?

As I remember it, one of Richard Rose's definitions of celibacy was "decreasing intentional sex action." I think that definition took into consideration that some guys do better getting to zero cold-turkey and some stepwise; also not giving up if there are bobbles. And it was aimed at youngish guys shooting for Self-Realization with the intention of celibacy until age 40. (That's not really long-term for you :-). The age factor had to do with Rose's concern about prostate problems for the no-longer elastic seeker. In my case, it became obvious to me rather early

(I didn't start until age 33 or 34) that mental celibacy was the key: if I allowed any sexual reverie, I would have groin pain. I figured it was causing a build-up of prostate fluid. I had no problem through age 59 (when my search for Self ended) and later.

Anyway, you don't seem to be getting a strong intuitional reading on celibacy for your own mental clarity, so maybe further consideration would be to look into resistance to the idea. It doesn't sound like it's based on fear, so I'm assuming desire may be the focus. Is it like the experiment with the kids where they can either eat the donut on their plate when the teacher leaves the room or they can get two donuts if they wait until (if) the teacher returns?

It was clear to me that what I wanted was eternal X (let's say Love, or Truth). There was ongoing desire for temporal love (including sex, of course) during my decades of search. I think my commitment to an eternal ideal/solution may have protected me from seeing / taking advantage of temporal opportunities that came my way.

You may be at a fork in the road. My vote would be for that which may be helpful or necessary for your eternal X, but I think the decision depends on what your intuition and common sense tell you.



I have always been skeptical when someone mentions the word love. Ever since I was a child I've been suspicious when people used that word outside of church. I don't think I was denied love when I was young, but that word was never used in my family. I can't think of

another word that I am equally suspicious of even when I use it. I can't get a grip on this strange reaction.

The “masculine part” of us may feel X and express it as “I love you,” and the “feminine part” may feel Y and express it as “you love me.” We may associate the love-word with various feelings. It's a word that begs for definition in any context where it's used.



What was the most valuable tool / practice for you in honing your intuition? And was it a question of listening to and acting on intuition more, and so it got stronger?

I don't see that I ever honed in on improving my intuition. I did some half-hearted work with trying to read cards (e.g., guess whether the next card turned over will be black or red), but it never appealed to me. If I had thought of using the card-reading to test for whether my intuition was working, I think I would have gotten into it. I eventually saw evidence from my reviewing of childhood years that intuition had been working then. But as an adult I didn't see any evidence of it until I witnessed the mind going into a turbo-drive process during a solitary retreat and later witnessed that operation in slow-motion, when I labeled it as the intuition process and distinguished it from 6th-sense / psychic input. I think intuition can be put to work for mundane purposes but can focus on self-inquiry if we carve time out of our schedules to work toward Self-Realization.



In becoming conscious of awareness, is there still some "I"-subject, "doing" the experiencing? It seems to me, the closer I get to awareness, the "I", the subject, becomes "weaker"; it just becomes like a being without subject, so that makes it harder for me to see "my real identity" as identity starts to dissolve. That also makes it harder to keep alertness, as there is nothing concrete to hold onto. So are these "all merging into one" "unity" experiences possibly detrimental in seeing clearly who I am, becoming the complete truth?

You're possibly imagining something about awareness. When I became "individually conscious of awareness," it was like my meditations (not losing detachment from what I was viewing), but it was triggered by looking back at where we're usually looking out from, actually seeing something for the first time, and watching it for an extended duration. Whether watching is/isn't "doing" depends on the viewing platform. Watching without a subject sounds to me like losing detachment from what you're viewing. In fact, I'd say that being conscious of awareness is as close to "consciousness without an object" as we get when still looking in the mind dimension, because we're seeing what we are, objectified. When something then breaks consciousness free from the mind dimension, we discover our true identity.



What's really hard is to see through the following: realized folks point out that the thoughts "my mind, my thoughts" etc., are the problem, as they supposit an "I." Makes sense intellectually, as I can see no evidence of the supposed "I," and certainly haven't seen form or shape to the "I." But feeling-wise, there's near 100% conviction of an "I." I've been trying to relax and simply see what all these projections are coming out from. Nothing has budged so far.

We don't know what is-ness is until we transcend the mind. We do know the primary fact that the mind-us has to work with, and that's the sense of self we get when the mind remembers itself or someone asks if we're awake and the mind checks back to see. Using English language to think about it or talk about it, it makes sense that we refer to it as I-am-ness. So of course there's a self (i.e., a body-mind that exists, that we may see as standing outside the center) ... and although I didn't see anything for the first hundreds of times I looked back to see myself, I couldn't conceive of that conscious-me as a nothing, and I concluded I just hadn't seen it yet.

I don't see that "my mind, my thoughts" were the problem. My view is that they are necessary equipment for Self-Realization. I feel that the underlying problem was not having all the experience necessary for "the head to stop." My mind had let go (and relaxed, to my great surprise) when I was caught in a rip-tide, flailed until my arm and leg muscles were like spaghetti, and I gave up. I lost consciousness and then experienced a life-review. Some time later, I came back to consciousness when my knees scraped on the sand quite a way down the beach from where I'd been swimming. Twenty-some years later the experience arrived that did the trick of detaching consciousness fully from its hypnotic, faulty self-beliefs.



I feel like a commitment to improve the truth-fold [of the Threefold Path of the way, the life and the truth] of my search might go back to the bit of faith I have that the truth will set me free, and acting on that. I feel hesitant to get to specifics potential commitments here. But

I think I do need ways and means to keep it from just continuing to be a story of “yeah, I need to focus on truth more.” How can I get unstuck?

In my view, what keeps consciousness trapped in this dimension (i.e., duality) are the beliefs it has about its identity. Life's experience erodes those beliefs. Getting unstuck involves those beliefs being challenged. If we seriously want to get unstuck, then I feel that the first hour of our waking day will be devoted to that.



OK, so keep looking for what is looking, but work for other people; what else gives one a higher chance of experiencing what you call awareness?

Regarding probability, I don't know whether it's a random occurrence, preordained, or somewhere between. My feeling is that it can't be gamed, that it requires help from a higher intelligence, and that the timing has to be right. I also suspect that not working for oneself is a progression from working for ourselves, working for others, and eventually working for something greater.



If I'm seeing that it's impossible to know anything for sure through the mind-relative knowledge, but rather through being-identity, and in another place you said love is identity, does it follow that knowing something for sure is possible through love?

Yes, when you become what you love beyond time and space.



I'd say that the bhakti component of our path results from seeing that what we want most from life (desire most; love most) towers over other desires and fears, and we need to become it.

I like how if what we love most is eternal, then any other fear/desire will not overshadow it because fear only can threaten something non-eternal. So if we become that, would we lose love for that (love still needs two?) Also do you think a person needs to be strongly prepared physically/energetically/psychologically to retain/handle the memory of being/becoming the absolute (because probably everyone has it happening to them but something blocks from remembering/connecting it to their real identity)?

I'm using love as a metaphorical synonym for identity. When we love a child, or a car, etc., that association becomes an important part of our identity. (And losing it, or something bad happening to it, etc., hurts.)

If we fall in love with an absolute abstraction—seeing clearly that it's the ideal that we want to pursue more than anything, and intuiting that to attain it, we have to become it—then we won't want any temporal pursuit to interfere.

The ultimate pursuit of love is to become what we love, to lose our sense of separation and its consequent vulnerability.



True or False?

1. Finding absolute satisfaction doesn't require finding our true identity.
2. Finding our true identity requires finding the source of awareness.
3. God / the Source of all is omnipresent—both outside and inside.
4. Finding the source of awareness requires going there.
5. When you become “one with the view” your identity changes.
6. When you graduate from school, your identity changes.
7. When you become a parent, your identity changes.
8. I was born into a preexisting world.
9. The world of my consciousness arises out of my consciousness.
10. I am this body.
11. This body is an object in my consciousness.
12. Consciousness arises from this body.
13. This body arises out of consciousness.
14. The world was here last night while I was sleeping.
15. The world disappears when I sleep.
16. I am a person like the other people in my consciousness.
17. I am the unknown conscious subject while other people are objects in my consciousness.

=> Koan: What is the source of your awareness?

18. I am the originator of thoughts and feelings.

19. Thoughts and feelings are objects in my consciousness.

20. I am the decision maker.

21. Decision-making is a witnessable process in my consciousness.

=> Koan: What do you want most from your life?

22. I am the doer of this body's actions.

23. This body's actions are a witnessable process in consciousness.

=> Koan: Where do you look for Truth?

=> Koan: How do you look for Truth?

24. I am a witnessable object in consciousness.

25. I am that which witnesses and never that which is witnessed.

=> Koan: If your sense of self "talked" to you, would it say:
"I'm always right behind you?"

26. "The love that lasts the longest is the love that's never returned." ~ Somerset Maugham

27. "I knew, for a moment, that the only nightmare is the masochistic mind." ~ Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Cross Creek*.

28. "If you want to have true romance and love in your life, you have to first love yourself, because love is a mirror. What you see in yourself is reflected in others." ~ Karamo Brown
29. We may suffer because we believe that we are affected by what we experience. Behind that conviction are many unscrutinized beliefs about what we are.
30. All beliefs are conclusions whose truth depends on the hypotheses of the paradigm through which they're being looked at.
31. Cause-effect relationships are speculative; we may be experiencing what already occurred in the reverse sequence of which it happened. Our journey may have started on the mountaintop coming down into the valley and we're now experiencing it, in reverse, as a trip from the valley back to the mountaintop. ~ William Samuel
32. We can't conceive of that which experiences not being an individual something. We can't conceive of our awareness not being a separate awareness.

[Chapter 9](#): *Who or what are you?*

Who or what are you?

Who or what do you believe yourself to be?

Inspiration, Intention & Commitment

Many of my younger friends are afraid of commitment to a spiritual path. They worry about making a wrong choice and cutting themselves off from all the pleasures they assume such a commitment would eliminate. They typically develop the sense of a dichotomy between spiritual work—i.e., defining the self, answering the “Who am I?” question—and “living life,” by which they mean pursuit of games other than the Master Game.

This is not said to knock their seriousness or their effort, which impress me. But in the dimension of duality where our attention is captive until we cut the Gordian knot, we cannot transcend contradictions. We can't both eat our cake and have it remain uneaten. The serious young seeker on a “qualified” spiritual path, a project that's not wholehearted, may become expert at seeing both sides of any issue as having equal value and thus be unable to distinguish the more true from the less true. Introspection may bring the seeker to the point of seeing that thought and decision-making are automatic processes within the mind. Or an internal “voice” may tell the seeker that he's powerless to choose or to act. In various ways the uncommitted seeker may arrive at an obstacle that leads to temporizing and then giving up the search.

Richard Rose said he became determined, as a young man with soft features, never to let anyone intimidate him. When I met Rose, I found the missing purpose and meaning that I'd been searching for during the previous ten or twelve years. Shortly afterward, I made a commitment to become the Truth regardless of the cost. Over the following years there were several times when I renewed the commitment, sometimes finding new words to footnote or refine my understanding of

it. I remember clearly one instance, which occurred when I was on a solitary retreat and read a remark made by Ramana Maharshi that seemed to echo my commitment to become the Truth, and it was to obey the Lord in thought, word and deed. I felt, though, that it would require being conscious of every thought, word and deed before they happened, which I didn't see as possible.

It was mainly during solitary retreats where I experienced inspiration, which I attribute to the fact that my mind only relaxed sufficiently during those times. And my impression is that it was only when I felt inspired—which would come to me as if my insides were filled with champagne-like bubbles—that I could make commitments. But I can see that it's misleading when I describe that to my young friends. Commitment isn't something you force yourself into or trick yourself into. It's basically finding words that express an inner yearning and an intuitive reading of a desired intention. I believe that's what motivated both Rose's determination and my commitment.

I was always irritated when I heard or read the advice that all a seeker needs for success is x or y . "Earnestness" or a "pure intention" were among the two most irritating to me. But here's my attempt: all a seeker needs for success is whatever motivates him to persist.

[The Last Sunday in May](#)

The last Sunday in May....
Could be the last year
Or the last May
Or the last Sunday

Or the last day.

How many are there
Of years?
Of Mays?
Of Sundays?
Of days?

Will they go on forever
In other consciousnesses?
Or are other consciousnesses
Figments of our imagination
As are days, Sundays, Mays, and years?

The past may be questionable memories of questionable
experience
Or a picture book created by some unseen author.
The future may be grand imaginations,
Concatenations of bits and pieces of those questionable
memories
Or a picture book of creation.

There is only the evanescent now that we can be certain of
And any certainty about it is immensely questionable.
We have no unmoving, unchanging point of reference
Until we find our essence,
The core of our being.

Letting Go

Jason McElwain, a senior at a Rochester, NY area high school,
had a big night in February 2006.

Jason was the basketball team's water boy for 4 years and the team's most enthusiastic supporter. In fact, his father was worried that his enthusiasm would go overboard and earn the team a technical foul. It was the last home game of the season, and the coach told him to suit up, to see how it feels. Then, with four minutes to go and the team ahead double digits, the coach put him in the game.

His teammates fed him the ball for 3-point shots, which apparently he practiced a lot. His first shot an "air ball," as Jason later described it— missed by a mile. Then he tried a layup, which he also flubbed. The coach said he put his head in his hands, praying he'd done the right thing for Jason.

Then the 3rd went in, and everyone cheered. As did 4th, the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th! The audience and team were going wild. And just before the buzzer, Jason's 9th shot went in! The team and the students in the bleachers flooded onto the court. A couple of the players lifted Jason onto their shoulders and paraded him around. Coach Jim Johnson, when he was interviewed, said: "I couldn't stop crying." His mother, Debbie McElwain, said: "This is the first moment Jason has ever succeeded and been proud of himself."

In March, President Bush met with Jason, his parents and his coach, who waited on the tarmac for the President to come down the steps of Air Force One. Jason walked arm-in-arm with his mother on one side and Bush on the other to a waiting group of reporters.

When asked by a reporter, Bush said: "I wept, just like a lot of other people did," as McElwain beamed beside him. At the end

of the press conference, Jason said to the President, "It was an honor to meet you." The President replied, "No, my honor."

Jason could have run off the court after missing his first shot by a mile, or could have given up after missing his layup. But he stuck with it. He let go of the ego of embarrassment, the fear of ridicule—and that's when the magic occurred. Jason has high-functioning autism.

What Is Love?

I fell in love once,
at age 19,
and I fell into
capital-I Love
almost exactly
40 years later.

Based on those
two experiences,
love can move
the personal self
out of the spotlight,
shifting the light onto *other*
temporarily, while
capital-I Love can move
the personal self
out of the spotlight,
shining the light on
capital-s Self
timelessly.

In Love we lose the self,
and in Love we find the Self.

Life is Love in action.

Philosophical Self-Inquiry

- What are you at the core of your being?
- Whence, what and whither? (Wittgenstein.) Finding our true identity answers all three questions.

Why is it relevant?

- Certainty. “Nothing can be known until the knower is known.” ~ RR
- Wholeness, completion.
- The end of suffering (Buddha). Heaven on earth (Jesus).

What you believe yourself to be may not be the truth.

- Are you something that was born and is going to die?
- Are you something that is affected by what you experience?
- Are you looking out of a head or out of nothingness?

Retrospect

What worked for me:

- I actually “saw” when consciously watching my thought stream what I really wanted most from life. I assume it was the product of intuitional processing.

- I scanned the mind to see if there were any holdouts that could challenge it and didn't see any, making it my #1 commitment.
- I found words to describe it ("to become the Truth at any cost").
- I stuck with it for 26 years although arguably sidetracked for 7 years of hopelessness, when I continued to function to help other seekers.
- I was also committed to celibacy, which descended on me as a gift for nearly 5 years, after which I struggled for nearly 6 years to regain it for more than months at a time, and was largely successful for the rest of the 15 years). It began with a revelation during my first solitary retreat where a glowing lightbulb appeared in my mind, and the words that followed were that my only hope for mental clarity was an extended period of celibacy.

Apparently not necessary for me:

- I have little/no conscious psychic ability.
- I did little to try improving my intuition, which I'd say was satisfactory in the final analysis. I've seen the process at work at different times, and its only limitation seems to be the data it has to work with, which appears to be the database of my life-experience.
- Working to improve my intuition could have provided more data for it to work with and thus sped up the seeking.

Passing on what I've found:

- I've experienced deep rapport with another person, but it has only happened twice; I have no intentional psychic transmission ability.

- My work has continued to focus on questioning the self-beliefs of people who want help with self-definition.
- If the interaction with another person triggers deep rapport, I feel that transmission could occur.

Confrontation Game Rules

Self-inquiry discussion groups as forums for discussing issues related to *self-inquiry* and *self-definition*: this is a tricky proposition—using the mind to understand the mind. To expedite the process, a facilitator directs the discussion in a structured way as recommended by Richard Rose. He called it confrontation, by which he meant a friendly questioning based on trying to understand where the questionees’ beliefs and convictions were coming from—not the common connotation of hostile argumentation.

Typical meeting formats are round-robin style, where participants have an equal amount of time to air their views. The object of this airing is to help each person clarify contradictions, tracing them back to prides and fears that cloud our mental processes. One of the ways of doing this is a friendly mode of challenging, or confrontation, not of the person but of their assumptions, beliefs, values and ethics. The facilitator is not to be confronted, as this disrupts the flow of the meeting. Similarly, if the facilitator opens the questioning to other participants not on the hot seat, the questionee should not respond to their questions with a question.

A successful interchange relies on the cooperation of all participants and their willingness to “play the game.” No one

should preach or be subject to preaching. As much as is humanly possible we should try to:

- Listen actively, without interrupting, maintaining a felt connection with the speaker.
- Keep the focus on each participant in turn, avoiding the temptation to shift the attention to ourselves—either out of a desire to rescue the person from tension or a desire to be the center of attention ourselves. When such a shift occurs, the facilitator or other participant should point it out.
- Try to understand the speaker's point of view and challenge them to question their own thinking, not argue with them or try to sell our views.
- Refrain from giving advice.
- Allow time/pauses for questions to sink in.
- Refrain from suggesting possible answers to questions.
- Express curiosity and help the person become curious as well about contradictions, blind-spots, hidden assumptions, etc., implied by their responses.
- Do not try to solve a speaker's problems.
- Avoid theorizing/philosophizing.

Acceptance

The best test of acceptance I've come across is Hubert Benoit's: consider an affliction to the sense of self (a painful event that rocked our boat) with our whole being and decide if we would change it if we had the power to do so.

If the answer is "yes," we haven't reached acceptance of it. Either we're stuck at the emotional end of the scale of feeling,

we haven't heard the intuitional conclusion at the other end of the feeling scale, or the intuition hasn't collected enough life experience to arrive at a "no" answer.

Merging With the Source

Merging with the Source,
One doesn't lose the self
But finds the True Self.

One doesn't lose awareness
But finds the source of awareness.

One becomes the source of awareness
But doesn't change.

One finds that the alone one
Has always been the All One.

One recedes from the outer world,
From looking outward.

One recedes from the inner world,
Also looking outward.

One feels the Source saying, "I am,"
But tries to run away, outward

Until one goes *inward*

Facing the embrace of Self,

Merging with the Source.

One doesn't lose the self

But finds the end of separation

From one's True Identity.

What Is Love?

Bernadette [Roberts] defined love as non-emotional, desiring to do no harm. If that's true, then I'm a very loving person. Is she right?

There's no absolute point of reference in this dimension, so definition always relies on comparison. If hate is defined as emotional + desiring harm, and if love is defined as the opposite of hate, then we could arrive at Bernadette's definition.

Let's take that as a possible definition of love. Suppose I then look at my intentions and conclude that I have a general desire or intention not to cause harm. I could then say, applying Bernadette's definition, that *my* desire or intention is a loving one. I might also describe myself as a loving person, in which case I am defining my self by a desire or intention I have observed.

My actions may not always correspond with that desire or intention, however. In some situations my actions may reflect non-emotional caring and concern for not doing harm, but in other situations—when I feel angry or threatened, for example—my actions may be emotional and harmful. If I define my self by my *actions*, rather than by my *intentions*, I may come

up with a different self-definition that contradicts the former one.



Questions & Answers 9

Q: I have been thinking about A. saying that she found her suffering was directly proportional to her self-centricity. I have a strong intuition that this is true for me as well. I sense that Bob C. makes a similar point when he emphasizes Pulyan's admonition to drop the egocentric position. What I don't understand is how you can follow that advice and honestly answer the question, "what do you want?" Isn't what I want based on self-centricity and ego? Who wants, if not the self and ego that pops into my mind? If I wasn't self-centric and ego driven, would my wants change? I assume the answer to the last question is yes, but I'm wondering what your experience is with non-ego based "wants."

AT: I don't see that we can drop the egocentric position while we're experiencing life. I do think it's possible for the conviction state that determines our actions to change when we intuit that what we want most from life isn't going to perfect our little-self, and we continue working toward self-definition in service to Truth. That's what I assume Richard Rose meant by an egoless vector.



Do you think it's possible that, for some, a heavy focus on the "doing" side of spirituality becomes another layer of belief and one that reinforces the belief in being an individual/doer?

Certainties about what we are exist because our life-experience hasn't yet challenged/weakened them. The concept of doing is paradoxical. I like what I recall of Rose's comment that you are the doer until you know otherwise. The certainty of not being

the doer could be as problematic as the certainty of being the doer.

I think it's a good sign for the seeker to feel longing, to remember it daily, and to carve out time for their mental machinery to focus on it.

From your perspective is there a kind of individual-free-will leverage that can affect the outcome of things (i.e. between-ness, manifesting, etc.) - or would you say everything is just happening and there's nothing an "individual" can "do" because there's no individual (no individual will, no individual to "hold their head a certain way", etc.)?

My view of that is the same now as before Realization. I have no certainty about whether experience is random, preplanned, or some combination thereof. My feeling is that there's unknown intelligence sometimes involved in perceptions hitting the mind in both the waking state and dreaming state.

What we are in this experience-dimension is witnessing life through an individual manifestation, and that individual seems geared to try to thrive and survive. Most of the time we may be caught up in what's occurring. It's a happy accident or gift when we realize that we're able to watch mind-movement as it's happening—i.e., we're transposed to a more interior position of observation. The mental machinery may react in a way that establishes a habit of encouraging that "detached" activity as well as other activity aimed at a more conscious existence.



Did your memories of yourself change after you had your breakthrough (or possibly earlier)?

I'll explain the context. When I remember myself, including in the early childhood, the sense of 'me' in those memories is the same that I have now. Either the sense of self has been constant throughout my life, or I am transferring my current sense of self onto the memories.

Once you realized your true identity, could you also recognize this identity in your pre-breakthrough memories? Or has your attitude to your memories changed in some other way?

My pre-Realization self-definition was of being a separate awareness that might be dependent on the body for its existence. I was working with a paradigm of opposites: self/knower/conscious subject vs. not-self/known/object of consciousness. I knew nothing about what consciousness or awareness was and thought defining myself as awareness vs. something-that-was-aware was a confusion of complexity.

When my consciousness came back into Art's body after Self-Realization, conscious-me was just like before but with the memory of new knowledge. And that new knowledge was nutty in Art's computer. It didn't take long for Art's computer to admit it couldn't compute the new knowing and to bow to it as superior.

These days, I am Art *and* I'm not Art. I am each boulder and I'm not each boulder. The Truth is "under" each stone.



How does one know that one has arrived? Are all doubts put to rest? I understand one has to be their own authority here but was hoping if you are willing to share from your own experience/or of those you have seen, realized.

In my case, there was an abrupt discontinuity that might be described as my head had stopped, and I found myself in a timeless, spaceless condition where I knew myself by identity—a form of knowing I'd never experienced. It was a state of absolute being-ness—I was a state of absolute being-ness. The primary description of it was that it/I had no characteristics other than knowing itself/myself. Another way to describe it/me was nothingness—not a thing—something thing-less. It somehow knew itself as the source of everything, of the cosmos, that arose from it like a spiral of smoke (if there were smoke and something for it to arise from) but not why. It also knew that it had no parts, nothing that could change even if it wanted to (which it didn't)—that it had always been and always would be.

I knew that was Home. I then found myself on a ray of what I somehow knew was all the data in the universe and then back in Art's body in the retreat cabin. My first thought was that I could see now why Rose thought he might have gone nuts. What I knew couldn't be computed by Art's mind/computer—it wasn't big enough to get around absolute truth. So the mind experienced doubt and wrestled with it for some short period then bowed to a superior form of knowing. Art's mind also admitted that it could know nothing with absolute certainty other than its source, it's Real, True identity.



What about the possibility that when we don't feel good about an action that our actual convictions are different from what we believed, and our believed-in identity takes a hit?

I'm not sure I can picture what it means that your convictions could be different from what you believe. What would be an example of that?

My prime example was becoming mentally nauseous for the first (and maybe only) time in my life after I said something to a friend and realized that it contradicted a deep part of my self-image. I had believed that I would rather "take a bullet" than let a friend get hit. But my having "shot" a bullet back at a friend after feeling he'd disparaged me showed me that I had operated under a stronger conviction that damaged my previous self-image. I felt that I'd experienced what people talk about as guilt.



Consider how a moth (for example) might determine its identity ("Am I a moth?") if it had a mentality equivalent to yours.

Tbh I am not sure how to respond to the moth question. But I very much feel like a separate thing, that is a person, that has an internal world of the mind and also exists in an eternal kind of world. This is from the feeling perspective, how I reactively operate.

Suppose you awoke a week from today and found conscious-you in a moth's body. And with memories of having awakened on previous days in the moth body, observing moth-life over that period. And you believed you're a separate thing, a moth-

person or moth-being. And then the question occurred to you:
“Am I a moth?”

Wanted to stop a second and say thank you for this question Art. I can't think of anyone else in the world who would ask me something like this and I appreciate it :)

I don't know if a moth “knows” it's a moth or what it's mental capacity is. It's hard to imagine what consciousness is like for lower intelligence creatures. But let's say from a human being perspective, answering the question “Am I a human being?”, I have to check against something. And that something is essentially conditioning and what everyone around me has told me or acted as if is true. I appear to be a human being when I look at myself, and experience others react to me as if I am one. So to answer the question requires something from outside. I can't absolutely answer the question from an interior perspective. I can only make my best guess based on the info I have, which is what I see and how others react or don't react towards me. So that type of answer has to come from outside and from perception tied to beliefs and conditioning.

Your imagination is focused on a 3rd-person view vs. a 1st-person view. It's not a question of what a moth knows ... it's a question of what you'd know *as a*—i.e., *experiencing a*—moth-life vs. a human-bean life. Let's say that you experiencing a moth-life would be parallel to you experiencing a human-life: no memory of experiencing a different life as comparison. Human-experience or moth-experience is all you know. Experience is all you know. No “other” in its right mind would be asking you for an absolute answer (unless you've proclaimed you've become absolute). You experiencing moth-life and you experiencing human-life are identical. And your

existential question would be identical: Am I what I'm experiencing?



I'm most strongly identified with thinking and thought, and still am. However, I've seen it very many times, very clearly, that I am not thought, which occurs of its own accord and control. However, (via thought and feeling), I still have a high degree of consternation about death. So I do believe I'm something that'll die. I.e., this body-mind. I feel like this loose-floating ghost in this strange dimension. I can viscerally see I'm not the body nor the mind, but surely I've got to "be" (I do exist, after all), so where/what/how am I?

Existence is temporal, a temporary hypnosis; being is eternal. Consciousness comes and goes. The conscious self struggles in the dark and in the light to return to its source. It's arguably how the Self knows itself. It's arguably very impersonal. My feeling is that living life with the primary goal of serving the Truth at least improves the chance of Realization (consciously "becoming real").



Do you have a sense for what the point of all this is? Love, becoming love, becoming Love, etc.? Why? Why all the illusion, suffering, seeking, Finding, etc.?

It's our nature, how we know ourself.



From your response to O. last week: "In fact, I'd say that being conscious of awareness is as close to 'consciousness without an

object' as we get when still looking in the mind dimension, because we're seeing what we are objectified. When something then breaks consciousness free from the mind dimension, we discover our true identity."

This gets close to that line again for me, "Am I aware or is awareness aware?" Something has me held in the mind/body dimension, I am conscious of that. Answer this billion dollar question for me, where is the thread outside this seer/seen duality to the absolute? Stockpile of neural energy? Longing for wholeness? Or does observing the "self" in the moment you have discussed above have to be "completely" objectified in its truest sense, to know myself to the utmost, in my current actual level of ability to know myself?

For me it was becoming conscious of awareness (versus conscious of consciousness)—seeing something I'd never seen before when looking back at where I was looking out from.



You said: Watching without a subject sounds to me like losing detachment from what you're viewing. In fact, I'd say that becoming conscious of awareness is as close to "consciousness without an object" as we get when still looking in the mind dimension, because we're seeing what we are objectified (but not yet becoming it).

Ah, thanks, this, I think, clarifies smth for me.. Seems like I just need to go there in meditation. Could you say (I had the feeling) that before the mind breaks, one would first see "pure objectivity"/source of objectivity/first object? (Before the subject will be known and will cease being separate from object.)

Some experience has to challenge successfully whatever is preventing the mind from opening to Reality/Truth. You won't know what that is (it could be different from one person to the next) until you experience it. My belief is that we can't cook that up for ourselves. If your focus is on knowing what you are, then the productive work is looking at / listening to anything that feels relevant to that quest.



I notice lately that I seem to be so uncertain about everything spiritual in this world of seeming and vagueness. These feelings are not new but feel like a mood that suddenly popped up leaving me on particularly unstable ground. Most any certainty feels self-deceiving, and all of 'this' is just a pile of beliefs anyhow. I don't even know what to ask! I don't think I'm depressed, but I don't even know what depression feels like. It might simply be the surprisingly cool, rainy weather today.

To me depression results from a conviction that what we feel we need for completeness is impossible to obtain. An example that comes to mind is the soldier who wakes up in the hospital with amputated legs and is convinced that no sexual partner will ever love them now. The conviction of spiritual hopelessness hit me out of the blue one time after RR hadn't responded to a letter, which he always had previously. My intuition (?) pumped out the conclusion that he'd lost hope for me and, therefore, my case was hopeless.

Uncertainty / no solid ground to walk on mentally is a condition that the mind doesn't like. Boredom (which occurred for me only when fasting during solitary retreats with no material for distraction) is another condition my mind at least

didn't like. But I found that the two conditions together would transform my state of mind in a productive way.



I'd say that the bhakti component of our path results from seeing that what we want most from life (desire most; love most) towers over other desires and fears, and we need to become it.

I like how if what we love most is eternal, then any other fear/desire will not overshadow it because fear only can threaten something non-eternal. So if we become that, would we lose love for that (love still needs two?) Also do you think a person needs to be strongly prepared physically/energetically/psychologically to retain/handle the memory of being/becoming the absolute (because probably everyone has it happening to them but something blocks from remembering/connecting it to their real identity)?

I'm using love as a metaphorical synonym for identity. When we love a child, or a car, etc., that association becomes an important part of our identity. (And losing it, or something bad happening to it, etc., hurts.)

If we fall in love with an absolute abstraction—seeing clearly that it's the ideal that we want to pursue more than anything, and intuiting that to attain it, we have to become it—then we won't want any temporal pursuit to interfere.

The ultimate pursuit of love is to become what we love, to lose our sense of separation and its consequent vulnerability.



I guess this fear is to blame for the lack of serious attitude in my spiritual search. I use the word 'serious' in the sense you use in your essay 'Your Strategy'. The mind is attempting a cost-benefit analysis of seeking. On the one hand, the benefit is allegedly infinite, but the mind is unable to comprehend that. On the other hand, the chances of success appear to be infinitesimal. The mind attempts to divide two infinities by each other and cannot parse the result. The fear sets in: will I regret having sought if I don't find?

Have you seen what you want most from life ... the highest ideal you want to serve and become?



How do you know that what you really are was never born and will never die? What tells you that?

When I saw/became my Real identity, I knew-by-identity that my primary characteristic was that I knew myself. And that what I am is an absolute state of being or Is-ness that has no parts, no thing-ness, is unchanging, has always been and always will be. I don't know how to explain it other than saying that it's a different type of knowing than anything I/Art was familiar with. I think Richard Rose described it as the self becoming a mirror of the absolute.



You know that quote you've used on retreats before...about "standing around the well but there is no one to go down into it"? I got that sense from me in the AR. How do you encourage that voice that lets us go down into the well?

I think it all comes down to identity ... being unhappy with our current identity, trying to improve our current identity. Jumping into the well might require 1) seeing that incremental improvements in our identity aren't going to satisfy us, 2) admitting that a "perfect" identity may not be impossible, and 3) seeing that becoming that perfection is what we want more (love more) than any other desires or fears.

Item #1 requires enough life-experience to provide data for that intuitive conviction. Item #2 is logical but may require intuitive processing. Item #3 is an intuitive conclusion with possible help from outside or inside.



True or False II

From a first-person point of view (as opposed to what some supposed authority might say), seekers can testify to the fact that they are conscious/aware of objects and conscious/aware that they are conscious/aware. True or false in your view?

Similarly, seekers have no knowledge of what consciousness/awareness is. True or false in your view?

Similarly, seekers can testify that they are conscious/aware but have no knowledge of what they are. True or false in your view?

Similarly, seekers can testify that they are that which is conscious/aware although they have no knowledge of what they are. True or false in your view?

*

Maybe it would be simpler and equally valid to replace “conscious/aware” with “experience.” True or false in your view?

From a first-person point of view, seekers can testify to the fact that they experience objects although they have no knowledge of what experience is. True or false in your view?

Seekers can testify that they are that which experiences although they have no knowledge of what they are. True or false in your view?

Seekers testifying that experience is their identity are testifying that they know what they are. True or false in your view?

Vexations

Two categories of spiritual teachers: one that promotes their views and the comfort of increased certainty; and one that promotes doubt and questioning, leading to increased uncertainty.

=> Which do you prefer?

Koan: "To come to the knowledge which you have not, you must go by a way in which you know not." ~ St. John of the Cross

*

Let's say that God has projected all wants into cosmic creation and creation has to prioritize and satisfy wants. How would creation prioritize its wants?

*

Longing is a vibration of the human spirit that we feel. Can you connect the dots of what you've longed for over the years and choose an abstraction to label it?

*

Life is a temporal phenomenon. What do you love more than life?

*

Did you play hide-and-seek when you were a kid? The game (or at least some versions of it) begins by running away and hiding, hoping not to get caught. But the payoff is finding your way back to the home base and touching it before whoever is “it” calls you “out.” Has your game-play switched from run-and-hide to going-for-home?

*

Money saved is stored energy. Is there a parallel between your money management and your energy management?

*

Why are you *here*—in this location—where your body appears? Why are you *here*—alive—where your body appears and disappears?

Are *you* the body, or are you what experiences via the body? Are *you* in the view, or is the view in you?

*

Does one’s life-experience have or serve a purpose?

If not, is one’s life meaningless?

If so, is the individual the master or the servant?

Does life-experience serve the individual organism, or does it have a larger, perhaps impersonal, purpose?

*

Suppose that no thing is eternal but that what you are is eternal: What would it be worth to you to find if what you are is eternal?

Suppose that what you are doesn't suffer ... never has and never will: What would it be worth to you to find if what you are hasn't, doesn't and never will suffer?

*

Let me remind you
That the perceived
Cannot perceive.
~ Huang Po

*

What's the most you can hope for from life?

*

Does experience matter?

Let's say that what you are uses experience to know itself. And the *experience* of the observer becoming detached from its hypnotic attachment to experience is crucial to knowing oneself. What do you have at your disposal to work with?

*

If you could have one question answered with absolute certainty, what would you want that question be?



About the Author

Art was a student of Richard Rose beginning in 1978 and worked on the problem of his self-definition for a quarter of a century until a transformative realization in 2004. He is author of the books [*Solid Ground of Being: A Personal Story of the Impersonal*](#), [*Beyond Relativity: Transcending the Split Between Knower and Known*](#), [*Sense of Self: The Source of All Existential Suffering?*](#) and co-author with Anima Pundeer of [*Always Right Behind You: Parables & Poems of Love & Completion*](#). Art currently lives a life of *la dolce far niente*, leads the Philosophical Self-Inquiry Discussion Group in Gainesville, Florida, is an active member of the TAT Foundation, and organizes several group retreats most years.

Art as other people saw him over the years....

Brother Donny, Art in his first year, and Dad V.P. Ticknor (1945):



His mother told him that he said his first complete sentence while standing at a screen door looking into the back yard: "I want out!"

High school senior (1962):



Would the high school senior have recognized this fellow?
(2010):



Or this fellow? (2024):



See tatfoundation.org, especially the *TAT Forum* ezine and its archive, and selfdiscoveryportal.com for more material and contact info.

Graphics Credits

Cover design:

"Solitude" photo (inside front cover): Google image search doesn't find its source. Looks like it could be a photo of James (Jim) Baker, born 1911 on Grisbrook Farm in Lydd, Kent, England, died 1990 at Ashford Hospital, Kent. See <http://www.mckechnies.net/family/baker/jim/index.htm>.

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Self-aware (p. 113): widely spread on the web.

About the Author: (p. 215): 1945, 1961, and 2010: author's photos. 2024: image by Dan McLaughlin.

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As I Began to Love Myself

(In the manner of a poem by that title attributed,
maybe erroneously, to Charlie Chaplin)

As I began to love myself
I fell in love with my infant son
And called it *love of other*.

As I began to love myself
I suffered periods of dissatisfaction
And called them *identity crises*.

As I began to love myself
I met a man who rang my bell
And called it *the awakening of intuition*.

As I began to love myself
I fell in love with the Truth
And called it *a commitment to become*.

As I began to love myself
I made a commitment to a period of celibacy
And called it *losing my family*.

As I began to love myself
I spent many years in the wilderness of mind
And called it *self-inquiry*.

As I began to love myself
I lost hope in becoming the Truth
And called it *seven years of depression*.

As I began to love myself
I had an experience of accepting my past and present
And called it *bowing to something larger*.

As I began to love myself
I found myself working for others
And called it *offering the hand of friendship*.

As I began to love myself
I realized that “I” was in the way of becoming
And called it *a vector of momentum*.

As I began to love myself
I finally became my own authority
And shortly afterward *became reunited with my source*.



May 10, 2020: As I was waking up this morning, I was thinking about the progression concerning thinking that has occurred over my lifetime:

1. Didn't know I was thinking.
2. Remembered some thoughts.
3. Became aware of watching the thought-stream as it was going by.
4. Thoughts got out of the way of direct looking at awareness. The mind opened to its source, and I found myself "back Home."
5. Back into the mind, "mountains are once again mountains," etc. Still aware of watching the thought-

stream. Probably don't remember as many thoughts. May be regressing back to not knowing that I'm thinking. :-) But the mind still has contact with its source.

[January 4, 2024](#): Was thinking this morning about the conditions leading to or triggering my breakthrough in May of 2004. I was doing a solitary retreat—one of dozens over the 25 years of my commitment to become the Truth at any cost. It was the final night of the retreat ... relaxing after another intriguing effort that hadn't produced final results. The final few days had led to a strong conviction that some intelligent help was lining things up like tumblers in a lock. While sitting in a chair amazed at the very rare feeling that my always-busy mind wasn't doing anything, that apparently superior intelligence showed my mind something it had never seen before.

Locked into that view, my “subconscious” mind (i.e., I wasn't witnessing what I later concluded was the intuition process at work) recognized that there was a big problem: what I was seeing contradicted my strongest conviction of what I was, and they couldn't both be true. After another interval of unseen processing, it became obvious that my previous belief was the lie or delusion. I felt a quiet relief; then the world disappeared, and I found myself at Home—in an absolute state of being, before time and space, which I saw was my true identity, which I always had been and always would be.

After witnessing that what I was at the core of my being was the source of the manifesting universe, broadening my perceived identity from nothingness (primary) to include everythingness (secondary), I found my consciousness, or conscious self, to be riding along a ray of what appeared to be all the data of the universe, and then back to the body that had

been sitting in the chair in the retreat cabin. My first thought was: “I can see now why Mr. Rose thought he might have gone crazy.”



Surrender & Other Convictions

Surrender of personality/individuality isn't something we can do. What we can do is back away from untruth. Life does that for us by challenging the certainties we have about what we believe ourselves to be, and we may be able to accelerate the process with intentional “seeking.” An intentional path has two components: jnana (knowledge; self-inquiry) and bhakti (love of / devotion to an ideal that we become).



The story of an individual life is one of becoming, and there are two distinct views of that becoming: one is the view in the mirror, which I assume is how others see us; the second is the view of our inside world. When we find/discover/become our true identity, it involves a type of knowing that the mind wasn't previously familiar with. Franklin Merrell-Wolff termed it introception, or knowledge through identity. When that occurs, we know our state of being as capital-r Reality. It's the absolute Is-ness beyond/before the mind's duality. It's the capital-s Self beyond/before the small-s self and the conviction of no-self. It's beyond/before time—what we always have been and ever will be.



Our suffering pushes us, and our ideal is what draws us Home.
What do you love / want to become?



The answer is within. Going within = backing into Truth.



We back into Truth by focusing on beliefs—the conquest of illusion. Conquest is an interesting word, deriving from Latin *conquirere* ‘gain, win’, from *con-* (expressing completion) + *quaerere* ‘seek’.



The mind can’t turn to Truth. Truth will bring the mind onboard when conditions are right.



To *see* the absolute, we have to *be* it.



Consider the possibility that what we are projects life-force into conscious-us in order to see itself, and that life-force includes the self-seeing desire, which conscious-us may experience as a longing or yearning for something lacking or missing, in other words, a want.



Art's Steps of Becoming

- Becoming conscious of watching thoughts vs. only remembering them
 - Becoming conscious of the emotional swamp
 - Becoming conscious of what I truly wanted from life
 - Becoming committed to that sacred ideal
 - Becoming conscious of the decision-making process
 - Becoming conscious of the sources of thought (5 physical senses and an undefined 6th sense)
 - Becoming conscious of the turbocharged intuition process
 - Becoming increasingly disillusioned of faulty certainty
 - Becoming conscious of awareness vs. conscious of consciousness
-
- Discontinuity of conscious location
-
- Finding myself back Home; Self-Realization: Becoming Real



Identity Verse

Identity:

It's what you are, not what you see.

Why does it seem hidden from me,
Always behind the seeing-me?

We're at the tip of a vibrant beam,
Imprisoned here by hypnotic charm,
To awaken when conditions deem,
And we find ourselves back Home.

Who or what am I
essentially?

Am I something that
was born and will die?
Is eternality wishful
thinking or a possible



Am I looking in the
wrong direction?

How can I be(come) all
that I can be (am)?



discovery?

Am I the image
in the mirror?

