

**Yet more words about
silence**

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This edition was printed 09 August 2026

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Back cover *anonymous*

ISBN: xxx-x-xxx-xxxxx-x



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Yet more words about silence

“The voice of the people expresses the mind of the people, and that mind is made up for it by the group leaders in whom it believes and by those persons who understand the manipulation of public opinion. It is composed of inherited prejudices and symbols and clichés and verbal formulas supplied to them by the leaders.”

— Edward L. Bernays, Propaganda

“We live in a society whose whole policy is to excite every nerve in the human body and keep it at the highest pitch of artificial tension, to strain every human desire to the limit and to create as many new desires and synthetic passions as possible, in order to cater to them with the products of our factories and printing presses and movie studios and all the rest.”

— Thomas Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain

“As things become dulled and inauthentic, they become conceptualized rather than experienced; they are taken out of their living context, a bit like ripping the heart out of a living body. Heidegger called this process that of -Gestell-, or framing[...]Inherent in it is the notion of an arbitrarily abrupt set of potential relationships, with the context — which ultimately means the totality of Being, all that is — neatly severed at the edges of the frame.”

— Iain McGilchrist, The Master and His Emissary

Be careful. The moment you start talking you create a verbal universe, a universe of words, ideas, concepts and abstractions, interwoven and inter-dependent, most wonderfully generating, supporting and explaining each other and yet all without essence or substance, mere creations of the mind. Words create words, reality is silent.

— Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

What is necessary?

Survival

From time to time I think about chopping wood and carrying water.

The majority of us in the West don't do those things any more except as a pastime, so the words don't have the same meaning as the original words at the original time. Now they probably mean something like *keep it simple*, and while that's good advice, it's not the point, because they once meant doing what is necessary. And whereas *keep it simple* is lifestyle advice for weary consumers, *do what is necessary* is serious advice given in order to help you survive.

So it seems that what is necessary is simply to survive, and this is what our instinctual behaviour is directed towards.

Survival requires that we recognise and respond to what the world is telling us. We instinctively run from danger, avoid pain, and try to spend time with people who share our attitudes, for example. And mostly we don't think about it, we just do it.

The problems begin when we do start thinking about it.

The illusory world

The more we think about the world that surrounds us, the less comprehensible it becomes, and we are forced to look for answers that let us ignore the difficulty we have in explaining just exactly *how* the world operates.

But the difficulties are so fundamental that we eventually come to realise that, just as with a good magic trick, we don't know how or why *anything* happens, so we begin to invent secret forces, forces that behave sensibly. And the further we get into our explanations, the more abstract our thinking gets until we arrive at the conclusion that the world as we perceive it is actually an illusion, and that there must be something else that underlies and supports it in some way, a reality that consists only of forces.

The main problem with thinking about things in that way is that these forces—be they gods or magical contrivances such as those described by natural or scientific laws—cannot be experienced, only inferred. In other words, they are objects of the mind, not of the world.

What the mind creates is not the world, but *descriptions* of the world, and when we investigate the descriptions we find that they are partial, incomplete, and biased by the purpose and circumstances of our investigation.

Similarly, our senses create the world that we see, smell, hear, touch, and taste. There are no colours, no sounds, no surfaces, no forms, no aromas, without an instrument that separates those wavelengths of energy from the universal hum. My fingers touch your skin—but your mind creates the touch sensation from interpreted electrical impulses. Your mind also creates ‘me’ and ‘you’ and the memory of touch.

To be interpreted, a sensation must be collected and integrated with the other sensations being processed, that is, sensations are already a memory and in memory when we become aware of them. This awareness is what we call ‘now’, a construction in memory. There is no ‘who’ that is having these experiences unless you count the organised memory as a person. The organised memory is the ‘self’.

This is the world that we consciously interact with. It is cinema, our creation.

We call this world illusory when we finally understand that the human mind is limited to a human point of view, and that the descriptions of the world—the films we play in our cinema of the mind—are not examples of the world but examples of the limitations of the mind.

Unfortunately, we can’t get beyond the descriptions to see what is behind the illusion. We—that is, our consciousnesses—are part of the illusion and survival is part of the illusion, and even the idea of an illusion is part of the illusion. There is nothing that is *not* part of the illusion, and so the illusion compels our attention, always.

This means that whatever we do, we can’t reach a more real state. We can’t find the real me, or discover the real meaning. We can’t tap into the world of forces or switch worlds. We can’t escape.

We are creatures of the illusory world. Entirely.

But that’s not how we feel about things, or at least, it’s not how we *think* we feel. Even as we talk about our existence as a cog in a machine or a spiritual wanderer we feel that some essential aspect of us is apart and above and outside—independent of—the machine or the world spirit or whatever. We feel *individual*. We feel we have *choices*.

As individuals, we feel that there must be a way of living that would make us more comfortable with the way things are, that there is actually

something real to be found, and that we can somehow tune in to that reality, perhaps in order to lose that burdensome individuality.

The problem is that whatever we find in our search for the real turns to dust before our eyes, because we cannot make sense of it.

For example, where do we look for the real? There seem to be plenty of alternatives. But say we choose a belief in Science, and become absolutely convinced of its materialist truths. What does it mean if, later, something happens to change our mind and we become a Catholic monk?

In both cases, we think we are somehow connected to the real thing. Does changing our mind mean that the scientific, materialistic, world we thought was real is *actually* now illusory and the Catholic *actually* real? How can that be possible?

We might argue that there are as many realities as roads to them, and we just choose the reality that's right for us. Alternatively, we might say that whichever road we take, we arrive at the same place, the same reality.

But both these conclusions undermine any meaning that the word 'reality' might have. We coined the word so that we could use it as a thought-anchor, a reference point. We needed it so that we could contrast it with the world as it appears, with illusion. But if we allow multiple realities, the difference between real and illusory disappears. Similarly, if we allow only one reality but multiple roads to it, we effectively undermine the meaning of 'roads', since any kind of behaviour of any kind could be part of one of the many roads.

It seems that these metaphors must be misleading, and that there is neither a road nor a destination. If the phrase *there exists a reality* means anything, then we must already be in it, regardless of our thoughts about it.

And yet we call it illusion. We are real but what we perceive is illusory. How can that be?

Many believe that there is a kind of awareness that gives us access to reality in the form of a shareable universal consciousness, and that although we are already part of that universal consciousness—which is the only real manner of existence—nevertheless it is somehow hidden from us.

The trouble is, not only does this explanation violate reason, but, as an explanation it doesn't tell us anything, and even if we could work out how to access the universal consciousness, nothing changes. What is there to change or understand that is not already part of the universal consciousness?

Another answer could be that the distinction between the real and the illusory is also illusory, but this is just re-categorising, playing with words, which is an endless path.

The real problem is that the words we are using are not doing the job that we assume they are. We assume that the words are describing *things*—other independent existences—but in fact they are only describing thoughts—fictions—and *the real world* and *the illusory world* are just as much fictions as *the million pink elephants* or *the gold at the end of the rainbow*.

A word is a token for a category, and categories are judgements, are fictions, even basic categories of sense data. For the human organism, sense data is just an interpreted electrical pulse. Wired differently, we would hear what we normally see, or taste what we smell.

What we are conscious of, are interpretations.

None of what we say or think reflects anything real, which is why we can say and think anything we want.

You might argue that some of what we say and think seems to be confirmed or denied by other people or by subsequent events. Surely those words and thoughts must be valid or significant or even true?

It might seem so, but *validity* and *significance* and *truth* are words, and words are ideas; and confirmation and denial are ideas *about* ideas, and as such are even more remote from reality than others.

Experiences cannot be reduced to thoughts. Reality cannot be described or experienced through ideas or words. Nothing you can talk about is real.

What is real?

Sensation

We are confused by words, by thoughts, when we try to make sense of things.

However much we want to believe that our consciousness and intelligence are the most important and precious things about us, and however much we want to rely on our intelligence or intuition to tell us what is real, the words we use in thinking and speaking suggest that what we actually *do* is take bodily sensations as the measure of reality.

So if we assume that *trying to make sense* is shorthand for *trying to make [a thought] as real as a sensation*, things might become clearer.

Unfortunately, we have only indirect access to the world. Our sense organs are stimulated and produce something we call *sensations*, but those sensations are just electrical pulses, and they must be interpreted somehow before we can react. So the ‘reality’ process is:

sensation → interpretation → response.

Once, interpreting a sensation was what our modern, civilised, intelligence would consider a crude process. Something was good, neutral or bad on a sliding scale determined by our physiological makeup. The body and the primitive brain were coordinated, and reacted directly and freely. For an idea of what that might have been like, watch a cat crossing a garden.

That crude process was sufficient because life was simple. We lived in one place and did what everyone else did. We knew everybody in our immediate environment. There were few surprises or unknowns. We needed to be alert a lot of the time, but most sensations were familiar and needed little or no response except acknowledgement. Our environment was essentially still, and we were able to stay alert because being alert was not the impossible drain on attention that it is now.

Becoming civilised changed everything, especially our sense of what is real. Instead of a direct connection between sensation and response, we grew a multitude of conscious interpretations—ideas—and we began to speak about those interpretations as if they had the same kind of reality as sensations. We began to speak in metaphors in an attempt to *give* interpretations the same kind of reality as sensations.

The result is that we have the same bodies that we had thousands of years ago, but now we are disconnected from sensations by a giant and

seemingly impenetrable barrier of interpretation, and we live in thought rather than sense.

Truth and reality

In our thought-world we sometimes use the word *true* as a synonym for the word *real*. However, the word *true* applies to statements, whereas the word *real* applies to things. A thing cannot be *true*. The statement *this is a chair* are words signalling agreement with an idea. It is not equivalent to experiencing the complex of sensations that is described as a *chair*.

So, if we are searching for the truth, we are looking for a *statement about* what is real, rather than wanting to experience the complex of sensations that *constitute* the real. We are looking for an interpretation.

Statements are words, ideas, and are not connected to the world, only to thoughts. We can understand what is true because both *understanding* and *truth* are qualities of mind, but we cannot understand what is real because the thing we call 'the real' cannot be a quality of mind.

We cannot discover what is real by listening to, or reading, explanations. You will not discover what is real by reading this book.

Nevertheless...

We make it all up

In the reality process (sensation → interpretation → response), only the middle step—interpretation of sensations—can be influenced, and the constant stream of sensations from our environment influences those interpretations in specific ways. For example, if the reaction is appropriate, ie it aids survival, the interpretation is consolidated.

We are the product of our environment, and all our behaviours are attempts to live with it. As that environment has become more managed—artificial—so have we. We are already artificial beings, manufactured by the systematic, all-pervasive marketing of the society we live in.

This means that we are quite different people—made of very different acquired interpretations—from the 12000 year old biological body we inhabit, and the struggle to integrate that ancient biology with the highly complex web of conditioning that is required for us to function in the artificial world of the West means we are in a permanent state of conflict.

Some of the interpretations we have acquired might appear to be harmful or maladaptive, but we cannot trust our judgements about the value of those interpretations, because we do not know what it is that is trying to survive. Is it the 'ego'? the 'self'? individual consciousness? cosmic

consciousness? or just the body? If it's the body, is it this particular body or is it the tribal gene pool? The human gene pool? The primate gene pool? And so on.

There's no way of knowing because these are all abstractions—made-up answers to made-up questions.

We acquire interpretations at all levels, from unconscious mirroring of somebody we like or admire, to deliberate copying and learning. At the extremes, interpretations give rise to behaviour that we call *pathological*, and we label that as a problem. And yet it has been argued that schizophrenia, for example, is a coping response to an otherwise impossible domestic environment.

At a semi-conscious level, the level of preferences and habits of thought, when we read a particular poem that made us feel sad, we'll probably not have to read the actual words very closely to feel sad again.

At a conscious level, if we successfully work our way through a complex procedure, then we tend to use the same method the next time. It is tempting to think that this is a conscious choice and that we learn some lesson and apply some abstract rule to our subsequent behaviour, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, a computer system can be designed that appears to learn in a similar way to the way we learn: by trial and error-correction, and by remembering successful strategies. Yet no decisions are made, no hunches are followed. Everything that happens in a computer is a result of switches being either on or off. There is nothing else.

Because we readily acquire and apply standard responses by stereotyping, we don't have to know much about somebody before we start feeling that they are familiar, especially if they behave mostly as we expect—that is, broadly in line with our catalogue of stereotypes. We feel comfortable because we have effectively stilled one little corner of our environment so that it demands only background attention.

We like to think that we are discriminating, but all the evidence points to the very opposite. If we have a stereotype, we try to apply it to anything vaguely appropriate that we come across. Although we might say that we 'know' 100 people, we interpret most of their behaviour using stereotypes.

In other words, the people we know are not people in the same complex way we regard ourselves as a person, and often, the behaviour that we observe in them is imaginary and entirely absent from them. The limited knowledge we have of others means that we could not possibly determine

the complex chain of mental states needed to satisfy our reading of the behaviour we are projecting.

The truth is that we feel a certain way because of the interplay of ‘me’ with ‘my’ entire environment, but in civilisation so much of the environment is artificial, and there is so much of it, and it is so complex, that we cannot comprehend anything like the entire interplay, so we focus on a small part as a scapegoat, knowing that we are more or less completely wrong to do so.

We want answers, and in order to get them we constantly reduce the scope of questions until they have no import—and so it doesn’t matter if an answer is wrong as long as it can be *framed* to appear significant. This is how we can get to blame particular people or things for what happens. We select people—agents—or we select things—circumstances—as scapegoats, depending on what kind of outcome we desire, and we frame words and actions so they get to be the cause.

For example, many people blame their parents for problems they have in life, but as they get older they begin to consider why their parents acted as they did, and to take into account the circumstances surrounding their parents’ actions. This *re-framing* process often softens their attitude, and, taken to its conclusion, it means that nobody is the causer of actions, which are just links in the chain of effects. But we don’t take it to its conclusion because of our deep need to believe we are agents and other people are agents (else how could we blame them?) and that our choices are determined by our personalities.

So much for awareness and objectivity.

Another problem is that it is impossible to analyse a living situation. In the same way that we need to stop the heart to perform heart surgery, in order to answer any question we must take a snapshot of a moment—freeze perception—and so any explanation cannot apply to the current moment. No decision can be made that deals with a current problem, since that problem only exists as a frozen and framed selection, abstracted from a memorised past.

Crudely speaking, we make it all up. If we encounter situations or behaviour we have encountered before, we react as we did before unless some other situation has modified our response in the meantime. The situations and people are not necessarily significant in themselves.

We transfer the attitudes in our stereotypes to actual people, without verifying the stereotype against an unbiased perception of those people’s behaviour, because we just can’t be bothered. We don’t pay attention to what is actually being said or done. There’s too much of it.

We are so cut off from the natural way that it has become a lifetime project to refine our stereotypes and to refine our perception in order to be able to live an ordinary life as an ordinary human animal. And then it is called enlightenment.

Learning and doing

There are arguments for and against the proposal that human and machine learning are different, but the existence of these arguments just shows that *learning* is essentially not a judgement about behaviour, but an appeal to principles.

Actually, it is an appeal to pride: biological entities are assumed to be better than man-made entities, and so it is assumed that *real* learning is something that only biological entities can do.

The reverse is also true: we assume that changes in behaviour of biological entities do not proceed mechanically from the application of manipulated stimuli. That is, we assume that human learning is a metaphysical process that is only *signalled* by behavioural changes, and that machine learning just mimics the behavioural changes.

However, there is no need to assume a metaphysical process. Most of us assume that human behaviour involves something more than switches being on or off, but mechanical acquisition of behaviour is simple to understand and efficient in practice. It is recognisable as the way things actually work, although the number and complexity of interactions that result in a particular behaviour often makes the process itself appear to involve something other than mere mechanics—and that gives us hope. We don't want to believe that our behaviour is mechanistic. We want to think we can exercise some influence over our actions.

This is a difficult thing to speak about.

On one hand we appear to live in a world of unvarying cause-and-effect. We even rely on the idea of cause-and-effect when we *object* to living in such a world, because otherwise we could not *intend* an effect, ie we could not freely choose between two possibilities and expect that choice—a newly-conjured cause—to produce the intended effect.

On the other hand we want to believe in miracles, in prayer, in divine intervention, in free will, and so on—especially free will. We want causative power, and we want to believe that we can demonstrate that we have it.

However, if you examine your own behaviour, you will realise that how you want to act and how you want to think you act does not describe how you actually do act. You interpret your own behaviour in ways that allow

you to deceive yourself, and you know it, and you ignore your deceit or make excuses for it or *manage* it in your mind in some devious way.

In other words, you say one thing and do a different thing. You don't do what you want to do and you don't do what you should do. Something just gets done. And then, after it's happened, you make up stories to explain your choice.

A thought is a frozen snapshot of the ever-changing. Your thoughts are necessarily of the past. You are not an actor in the present, you are an observer and rationaliser of the past.

And because of this, because of your various and often lurid explanations, you struggle to see a pattern, and you are full of contradictions and anomalies. Effectively, you are a disintegrated personality.

We are all disintegrated personalities, and that is the fault of civilisation.

Conscious interpretations

In civilisation, personalities are disintegrated because the reality process is disrupted. Put simply, civilisation breaks our natural environment, and the broken environment creates broken people.

First, the number and intensity of sensations is hugely multiplied to the point where we are physically, brutally, overloaded and have to ignore most of them.

Second, instead of a simple one-one relationship between sensation and interpretation, there is a one-many relationship. We are *provided with* multiple interpretations for sensations in the form of education, news, advertising, and many other less obvious social and environmental pressures.

This means that, in civilised behaviour, a particular sensation is almost completely disconnected from its eventual response. Instead, there is a competition between multiple interpretations, and *those interpretations effectively replace sensations to become the fundamental driver of what is real for you.*

Your ideas about what is real are not random, nor are they the result of deep analysis, nor are they extrapolated from unquestionably real things. Your ideas about what is real are simply given to you, and they are given in a way that makes them appear unquestionable.

You have a so-called free choice, but in civilisation your response, your choice, is determined not by the innate survival interpretation with which you are biologically equipped, but by the strongest of the conscious interpretations you have been given, which translates as the most

consistent environmental influence. And in civilised society, it is the society itself that determines the nature of your environment, and it is the society whose survival the conscious interpretations serve.

So, on the one hand it seems that cause-and-effect is universal and that everything must be predetermined. On the other hand, we have just attributed causal power to those who supply interpretations. Can we reconcile this? Well, yes, but only by observing that apparent contradictions are normally resolved within a greater scheme, which is specifically designed to avoid the specified contradictions.

There cannot be alternative movements to the single movement that is in any single moment. This implies that to expect, due to cause and effect, cannot be justified by reason and logic, because all there is in any particular moment is a single movement without an alternative. The wise understand that the intelligence in life, which is consciousness, manifests an illusion of actual cause and effect for diverse activities out of a singular movement of life. This signifies that cause, effect and diverse activity is absent in life. Diverse activity and cause and effect is maya meaning an illusion

-Dr Vijai S Shankar

We can get round any problem by redefining it. We rationalise our desires, which then become beliefs.

In that light, we'll assume for the moment that free will does indeed exist, and therefore coercion—imposition of one's will upon another—is possible. We can then see how it is in the interests of those that run society to maintain it by supplying two distinct sets of interpretations to its members.

One set promotes and consolidates the apparent power and inevitability of the society's culture and leadership, enshrined in laws and customs.

The second set consists of interpretations that deliberately *divide* the members of the society, that arouse conflicts between artificial tribes, and classes, and sexes, and religions, and countries, and so on. These interpretations are designed to distract the members from questioning the first set of interpretations.

You can be given many interpretations for a particular behaviour or set of circumstances, you can be told many ways to respond, and you probably have no idea what your innate survival response is. You might even find yourself asking what your response should be.

What should my response be? If you are asking this question, then you might also ask yourself two further questions. The first is, Am I afraid to respond wrongly? And the second is, What am I being asked to respond to?

If the answer to the first question is ‘yes’, then you know that you are trapped in the web of deceptions and artificial structures created by the social manipulation of interpretations. There cannot be a wrong innate response.

You should then look for an answer to the second question with a severely critical attitude, keeping in mind that when you are disconnected from the reality process, often there *can* be no innate response to a particular situation because what you are being asked to respond to is entirely imaginary, and is provided by an interpretation posing as a sensation. Your response, if you have one, is then the consequence of another conscious interpretation, and so on.

This applies particularly to political and social situations and constructs, which are interpretations in the form of laws or agreements or contracts which you are *trained* to treat as seriously as sensations.

More precisely, you are trained to treat them as *threats*, and you are trained to think of the issuers of these threats as powerful. In civilisation, most of what you think and do is determined by these kinds of threats, and mostly what you do is *conform*. You live in and pay taxes to a *country* that doesn’t exist. You obey *laws* that don’t exist. You read in the press about *racists* and *sexists* that don’t exist. You are scared of *risks* that don’t exist.

These words and many others are fabrications whose sole purpose is to trigger and reinforce a conscious interpretation with which you have been supplied. You are far less in control of what you are doing and thinking than you realise.

The swamp of illusion is not difficult to maintain because you have no idea what it would be like to live without these illusions, illusions that make a simple world appear complicated. The world is not complicated, only our diseased conceptions make it so.

It’s easy to give examples. Religious and other enemies are identified and labelled. Crimes and mental diseases are invented. Wars are manufactured. Fashions and trends, factions and false tribes are created and encouraged. Change and upheaval are institutionalised and promoted as normal, and even though nobody feels secure in those circumstances, anybody who resists is *unaware of the way things are*, or *living in fantasy-land*, or has some other insult thrown at them. Sections of society are accused of unfair privilege, and other sections are encouraged to condemn and vilify them. Victims and heroes are created. And so on.

Choice and freedom

While the interpretations you are given in themselves are highly fragmenting, there is a second, even more damaging, consequence of being given multiple interpretations.

We are led to believe that the more choices we have, the freer we are. However, we are then told that *we* are responsible for our choices and therefore we are responsible for the fractured state of society, in spite of the fact that we are being fed the interpretations that create the choices that we believe determine our eventual behaviour. It is *our* fault that we are broken! And we can only be healed by more conditioning, by more *education*, by more *laws*.

This is an impossible burden. It is also a physical impossibility. Whatever we like to think, the body is still what it is and the monkey brain is still what it is. A choice is an abstract result of analysis, not a thing. The choices are illusory, but the pressure to choose is real, and often overwhelming.

We think we choose, but we cannot, and yet, often, we hear that we should choose to control something: often ourselves, or our emotions. We are told that we are irrational, that we are wrong or misguided or uneducated, but these are just excuses to replace our innate responses with conscious interpretations supplied by the people who run society in their own interest.

We are also told that we must take back control from those in charge, take back power from those who have somehow accumulated too much. But *control* and *power* are words—ideas—and measurements are ideas, so just how is anybody supposed to accumulate or lose them?

The people in charge don't care that we exhaust ourselves trying to outwit them, because they don't have the power we attribute to them. We *allow* them to become authorities, and we sabotage ourselves. They are our creations. Control and power are fantasies of mind.

Mind

In mind, nothing is impossible. Things can be imagined that behave in an opposite way to everything else. Words can be made to mean their opposites. Impossible abstractions can be treated as unquestionable realities.

Mind has nothing to do with the real that we are searching for. Mind is a theatre of ghosts. The Mahaparinirvana Sutra says:

The mind controls the body. The body does not control the mind. The mind can fool the body and it can kill the body. The mind can choose to be an Arhant or it can choose to be in heaven. It can choose to be a person, an animal, an insect, a wild bird, or it can choose to be in hell. The mind can choose to be a hungry ghost and it can choose the appearance of its body. The mind can do anything.

This is saying that something *unknown*, something that we give the label ‘mind’ to, is all that really exists.

That mind cannot be the conscious, personal, mind, because the latter mind is the experience of *I*, and we know that the *I* cannot do those things. The quotation is speaking of the universal mind that gives rise to the illusion that is *I*.

Why do we give the same name to the personal mind and to the universal mind? How are they similar?

It is because we are once again betrayed by words. The personal mind is the experience of *I*, and *I* is located *here*. The idea is that if the qualities we associate with mind—awareness, location of awareness, and intention—are *not* personal, not *here*, then they must be *there*, because we are simply unable to imagine the nonexistence of those qualities, and existence requires location.

That is to say, that if the qualities of the personal mind cease to exist in one way, we seem to be compelled to make them exist in a different way, and that way is as a component of a universal mind.

But the *universal mind* is yet another notion, like *eternity* and *infinity* and *now* and *I*, whose existence is explained by simply asserting that the necessary conditions for existence in the illusory world do not apply to it—conditions such as cause-and-effect, and the need for a location—but that it nevertheless exists as a magic dustbin for attributes of the personal mind, just as eternity is a dustbin for time and infinity for space.

The truth is that these are not attributes of the real, they are simply the negative versions of the criteria for existence in the illusory world. In fact they are the criteria for nonexistence. Universal mind, like infinity and eternity, is a fiction.

If universal mind is a fiction, then what becomes of the causative qualities of the personal mind, the consciousness, the *I*, that we are attempting to transfer to it? What becomes of *intention*, and fundamentals such as *cause-and-effect*, and *responsibility*, and so on, that we are attempting to offload into the *mind* dustbin?

The answer is that we are wrong about the existence of the personal mind—the mind that seems to exhibit intention and so on—and without a personal mind there is no need for a universal mind.

As we will see in the next chapter, the idea that the personal mind, the *I*, is in control of anything is fantasy, and an especially cruel one that sets up an unbearable tension between itself and the body.

The *I* thinks it is in control, but it is struggling in a swamp of artificial possibilities, and since its eventual choice is not connected to an initiating sensation but to a complex of competing interpretations, there is no real closure.

Not only that, but because there is actually no choosing happening at all, the eventual choice can turn out to be something that has not even been considered as a choice. Have you never said to yourself, *I don't know why I did that?*

If we often feel bewildered, frustrated and resentful at our lack of success in getting what we want, perhaps this might help to explain why. Those feelings are signs that we have submitted to the ideas of the personal mind, that we are suffering from the lack of an imagined freedom—that we are living in the fantasia of mind instead of in the body.

Anger and authority

Those feelings of frustration and resentment and so on are often accompanied by anger, and this anger is roundly condemned by many authorities, who consider that it is *unwanted*. Unwanted? But isn't *want* to do with desire? And aren't we supposed to be avoiding desires?

The important point is that none of the named feelings are experiences. Experiences have no name. What we experience are impulses to action, but we have been conditioned to judge these impulses via interpretations and to allow or disallow them according to those interpretations.

There is no such thing as *anger* (or *resentment* or *love* or *hate*). They are all interpretations, judgements, *thinkings*. To be called angry is to be classified by someone's scheme of interpretation, to be judged by someone's idea of acceptable behaviour. This scheme might differ from your own or it might not, but that is not important because if it is the same as yours it only means that you have internalised the same scheme—you have both been given the same interpretation.

I am reminded of a Japanese film version of Hamlet I watched as a teenager. Judging by his loud and aggressive speech, the Hamlet character seemed to me to be about to murder someone or die of apoplexy in every scene, but I was assured by my teacher that I was misreading the cultural

conventions, and that in fact he was simply musing in exactly the same way as the English Hamlet I was used to. I was equipped with the wrong interpretations.

We are living in a world of interpretations, of illusory facts and of illusory classifications, and those who are unwilling or unable to stop and evaluate the interpretations they are given believe these illusions are real.

People who can be persuaded that what they think is fundamentally *wrong* are easy for society to control. The implication is that they are deficient in some way and need to be *educated*. *Authorities* tell us whether particular illusions are good or bad, and to be sought or to be rejected.

In society, obedience to laws—proposed and instigated by society's controllers—is more important than survival.

One of the consequences of this situation is that people claim spurious authority, ie they demand that their personal inclinations be categorised as authentic—innate—interpretations.

It is quite usual to be told that certain kinds of behaviour are not acceptable, with the implication that the behaviour is universally unacceptable rather than that a particular person simply doesn't want you to behave that way.

While the multiple interpretations we are given are often contradictory, vague or even absurd, they are only *thoughts*, fictions, created by and maintained in the mind. If we could reduce the number of these kinds of thoughts we might be able to reconnect the body to itself, and avoid much confusion—and much anger. That really would be magic. And the way to achieve it is to live in a less hostile environment—to abandon civilised life.

Are we ready for that? Of course not. We couldn't abandon it even if we wanted to. We wouldn't know what else to do. We are disintegrated.

Living in the illusory world

The Theory of Evolution is the fundamental theory of the illusory world and it suggests that environmental conditions determine what and who thrives.

What lesson is there in this? That you are a survival machine conditioned by your environment, where *your environment* consists of everyone you know, everything you perceive, and everything you think.

Your body relies on its sense organs to react to its environment and, despite appearances, your mind is a crude instrument whose function is to coordinate what it receives from your senses in order to better use and protect your body. Your mind has little in the way of protection itself from whatever its environment provides. It is responsive, and easily manipulated. It is not in control of what happens in the world.

In civilisation your senses are already overwhelmed by continuous, unstoppable waves of sensation, and then your mind has to choose between multiple interpretations of this tumult. In this way, you can easily lose the innate survival response to a sensation that your body would judge as harmful.

Civilised living causes such confusion that you might not even realise that you are being harmed, or to what extent. For example, people can be poisoned by traffic fumes because they can be persuaded that living in a fume-filled atmosphere is normal and acceptable. The appalling noise and stink of a city can become an *exciting bustle*.

People can be persuaded of just about anything, and they are.

In one experiment, a hundred subjects were shown two sticks of differing lengths. Ten assistants had been planted among the subjects, and those ten assistants insisted that the longer of the two sticks was in fact shorter than the other one. Subsequently, ninety of the hundred subjects agreed with the assistants, regardless of the evidence of their own eyes and even after they held the sticks in their own hands.

Through authority, and through persuasive interpretations, society—the people who run society—turns *its* needs into *our* needs. Our civilisation needs us to work, to shop, and to be distracted, and these have replaced the simple needs that we actually have. It has taken away from us, as far as it can, the means of making ourselves self-sufficient, and so we have become completely dependent on it. If civilised society was a person, it would be called a malignant narcissist.

In such a society, we cannot exercise even the illusion of causative power. Laws, education, and social controls restrict our behaviour both directly and indirectly so that we do only what we're *given* to do. We can induce the state to punish our personal enemies by demanding and invoking more and more intimate and coercive laws. The more laws there are, the more divided the society.

But all this is theatre. In fact, we are passive consumers of life, which has become mere entertainment—even while we insist that we have more and more freedom of choice.

We have no choice. We never had a choice, we were only persuaded that we did.

Framing an answer to the why? question

The objects and processes of the illusory world are not understandable, but thinking they are understandable brings comfort to many people. So, within the illusion, *knowledge* is actually a synonym for *comfort* and the biggest source of comfort is an answer to the question, *Why?*

But there is never an answer to Why? except one that traces the chain of cause-and-effect to give a mechanical answer that stops at a chosen cause.

It stops at a chosen cause. Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side. But why was the chicken on the wrong side of the road? Because... Why?... Because... Why?... and so on.

Any answer in the world of cause-and-effect depends on an assumed initial state, and that initial state has to be chosen. The process of selection—the bias—is called *framing*.

I screamed because the spider ran across the floor. The framing of this explanation deliberately ignores almost the entire universe of cause and effect. Why did I scream rather than laugh? Why did the spider run?

If you are feeling particularly conscientious you might try to trace an explanation back to the first animate life, or even the Big Bang, but that would make no difference. You always have to break the cause-and-effect sequence somewhere, because otherwise there can be no answers. How can there be answers if events either loop infinitely or proliferate infinitely?

And just like cause-and-effect in the illusory world, you have to choose a start point and an end point for your thoughts. You have to *frame* your thoughts.

You might argue that at the limits of experience you will find words that seem to allow you to avoid framing—words such as *infinite* and *eternal* and *now*. But these are words invented to get around the need to set boundaries to our experience when we *think about* our experience, and they contradict the whole of our experience, which is immediate and concrete. They mean, ‘I can’t explain what happens beyond this point, so here’s a word I made up to express that’.

There are no things or thoughts that are infinite or eternal.

Our thoughts are necessarily framed and bounded by a beginning and an end, and it is this framing that allows the possibility of alternative interpretations.

What is It?

A functioning human is a loose complex of sensations. Sensation—or its substitute, conscious interpretation—and response to sensation is the whole of human reality.

Thoughts *arise* from sensation, and are the witnessing of sensation—just like the familiar smell witnesses the dogshit on the sole of your shoe.

The connection between sensation and thought isn’t mysterious. Your computer monitor or phone screen is a mechanism of perception. Its input is electrical charges of one set of wavelengths that it shifts into another set of wavelengths using transistors and diodes, and outputs as patterns of light on a sheet of glass.

The lights in the monitor are fixed and discrete and mean nothing without an observer. The picture you see is a creation of your eyes and brain, and does not exist in the monitor or anywhere else.

With different sense organs you would be able to interpret—see—the pattern of electrical charges directly, and dispense with the monitor.

Patterns of electrical charges are the closest thing to reality that we have, and whatever the mechanism of perception is that interprets those charges is the closest thing to reality that we can be.

The interplay of inputs and interpretations creates the world we sense.

We become conscious of that interplay when an interpretation is *re*interpreted—shifted into yet another set of wavelengths—and recorded in our memory as a further abstraction.

Nothing exists as it appears to you or is memorised by you.

Thinking is manipulation of these second-order abstractions. Linking them creates descriptions of the external world—stories. Thinking is story-telling.

A human—yes, you and me—is a fictional creature formed by interpretations, and a human-being is the *story* of a fictional creature. The story can include pictorial and verbal concepts in any amount and proportion. Some of us prefer pictures and others prefer words. There's no difference in effect, since a concept is pure meaning, ie has no relation to the complex of sensations that constitute the perceived world for us.

When thoughts are directly concerned with evaluating and responding to sensation—with throwing water on a burning yurt, for example—they are useful. These thoughts can help find a bucket and a well. But when other thoughts arise from those primitive thoughts, such as *What would be the best place to relocate the yurt to avoid fires?* or *Can I make my yurt fireproof?* then they—second-order thoughts—become more problematic.

They are problematic because they are no longer directly related to the original input, that is, they are not merely shifted wavelengths of the same pattern. Instead, they are pattern breakers.

Any decision that is made about the relative truth or wisdom or practicality of an idea is a third-order thought, and the actual course of action that is taken by a human is not the result of a decision. A decision is not in or of the world and cannot affect the world.

Thought arranges—frames—memorised sensations in order to explain interpreted inputs so that it appears that *I* caused an action by means of a decision. But the *I* has no means of affecting anything, because it is not a thing, it is an inference, an abstraction. Intention, like decision, is nothing but an artefact of analysis.

Attributing intention is like coming across a temple in the jungle and wondering who built it, because *it must have been built* is an unquestionable principle. Because we live in a cause-effect world, we observe a process of thought, and we infer an agent, *I*, because thought is metaphorical and the rules of sensation apply to it, so the rules of cause and effect apply to it.

In other words, we observe an effect (a temple/a thought of a temple) and infer a cause (a builder/a thinker), and we further infer that the thinker has volition in the same way that a builder has desire to build, even though we don't know how the metaphor relates to the experience. That is:

1/ we know what a temple is but we don't know what a thought of a temple is,

2/ we know the /process/ of building but we don't know how the intention to build arises,

3/ and yet we ascribe intention to the builder and to the thinker

We don't know what *creation* or *to create* means, except that there is a notion of free-will and elevated ability involved. In other words, to create is to be independently powerful, an ultimate source of reality. A creator of thoughts is therefore a magician.

What is conscious?

Consciousness is witnessing, and requires a witness, a point of view: a conscious subject that can be separated from what is witnessed. But what is witnessed is a thought, not a thinker, and neither is the witness a thinker. It is not an initiator or a creator except in the way a writer is a creator. Thoughts arise, the writer writes, and writing gets written. There is nothing that a thinker *adds* to a thought except its mode of expression, that is, the point of view determines how the thought appears.

We only witness thoughts. If the thoughts are interpretations of the world, we infer causes. If the thoughts are interpretations of meaning, we infer a thinker.

Sensations only need to be memorised—in the form of descriptions—if the descriptions are to be given a meaning, ie. a role in a story. We can function happily without stories, and actually it is stories that create problems. Without a story, there are no problems, only circumstances.

Most spiritual advice reduces to 'avoid storytelling'.

This is the only way to actually live in the moment.

Being enlightened just means being alive, alert and aware, and minimally engaged with the kind of thought that Jiddu Krishnamurti calls *psychological*.

The closest we might come to this natural state might be living something like today's Amazonian tribes. Two women from an uncontacted Amazonian tribe walked out of the forest one day and asked to be shown the outside world. Eighteen months later they walked back in. They weren't impressed.

These people are us, stripped of the absurdities the women weren't impressed by. And the absurdities are so profound, they want no contact at all.

The interesting question, the one we are desperate to ask, is: *Where is the point on the scale of abstraction at which awareness of psychological thoughts is optimal?* This would be the point where humans live optimally.

Unfortunately, the question is unanswerable because it depends on habits of interpretation of thoughts, and therefore on the kinds of thoughts that are witnessed. That is, the question and any answer both arise from environmental influences—conditioning—and conditioning cannot tie thoughts to the source of sensations, nor can it answer questions.

Not only that, but the idea that there is a universally applicable optimal way of living is untenable. This is the kind of thought that causes severe problems, because anyone who thinks it tries to detect flaws in their experience in order to compare it with an ideal, but all they are doing is comparing one of their stories to another one of their stories.

It is impossible to intentionally curate our thoughts with the aim of living optimally except by rewriting/rethinking our stories to reflect what is—if we can discover what is. *What is* is the only way of living that can be lived—and it *is* lived by our bodies. All we can do is try to be there with them.

Unfortunately, we do not live in the same place as our bodies, nor in the same way. We live as a thought within a thought—in a fantasy world—and we cannot influence the sensational world via will, since we are not agents.

We are thoughts—we are constructions—*we* are cinema.

Abstract thought

Abstractions have no connection with objects of the sensory world even if they appear to somehow represent them or be a substitute for them. You might reluctantly allow a particular observation of an apparent object (*it*) to be called a *chair*, but *it* is not a chair. Nor is it a *chaise* or a *cathedra*. You can sit on the *it*, but you can't sit on a word. Words are abstractions.

Because abstractions do not have the qualities of the things they describe, you cannot say exactly what they mean. For example, have you ever really thought about what a chair is?

You might say, *this is a chair*, and you might think you understand what you are saying and that others understand what you are saying. But what *is* that chair? Does it have something that distinguishes it from tables or other chairs? Does it have a unique shape or size or texture? Is it still that chair if it is upside down, or at the bottom of the sea, or broken, or burned? And so on.

Have you ever agreed an explicit, authoritative, definition with your social circle? Of course not. Yet it is one of the words that we utter, and that we expect to be understood. The word *chair* cannot be analysed to its ultimate constituents because it is not a chair and it has no constituents. Even if you could analyse the word, it would still not represent a thing because there is no definitive sensation that is *chair*. The word *chair* is an underivable and indivisible token that you are imprinted with.

Words are uttered, and then they are interpreted by hearers according to the dictates of the hearers' environment. When you claim to understand the phrase *this is a chair*, what you are saying is that you are comfortable with being *told* that a complex of variable sensations is *a chair*. There is no such thing as a chair. You are comfortable with an interpretation.

Your tribe's interpretations are your world.

Language is a never-ending deception. You are told what all kinds of things *are*. You are told what things exist, what things don't exist, and what attitude to have towards those things. You are even told what *existence* is and what it's worth.

This is the purpose of education. Formal education is one of the main ways that society sabotages sensations by supplying authoritative interpretations.

"As soon as the mouth is opened, evils spring forth. People either neglect the root and speak of the branches, or neglect the reality of the 'illusory' world and speak only of Enlightenment. Or else they chatter of cosmic activities leading to transformations, while neglecting the Substance from which they spring. Indeed, there is never any profit in discussion. "
—Huang Po

The objects of the world are created by the mind via interpretations. Those objects do not exist.

The objects of thought are created by the mind via metaphors. They too do not exist.

There are no words that can explain this lack of existence, and we have to ask, if neither the objects of the world nor the objects of thought exist, then how can anything exist, even the perceiver, the *I*?

That's an interesting question.

What am I?

"Parvizi, postdoctoral scholar Dian Lu, Ph.D., and their colleagues discovered that this archipelago of collaborating brain regions spearheaded by the aPCu is crucial for integrating information about your location, motion, muscle and joint positions and sensations to form a mental map of your sense of bodily, or physical, self."

To explain the system's significance, Parvizi invoked that odd couple, "I" and "me."

"For every action we take, even during dreams," he said, "there's always an agent behind it: We call that agent 'I'. 'Me' is everything we have stored in our memories about the 'I'".

The simple process of interacting with our environment isn't acceptable to us because we want to influence that process. It's not enough that there are thoughts, we want there to be a thinker of those thoughts.

The question then arises, what is this *we*? or more personally, what is this *I* that is so insistent? *I* seems to be a cause, but it isn't an observation or a sensation or a feeling, so what is it? How are we aware of it?

We can't be clear, because the words we are using don't have precise meanings. None of our words do, but some, like *I* and *will*, are spectacularly vague because there is nothing in the perceptual world that we can point to and say *it's like that!*

Our perceptions are constructed. Our thoughts are constructed from metaphors based on perceptions. The conceptual world and the perceptual world follow the same rules. They are the same thing. In effect, you have daily-physical-interaction stories and thought-stories (which include dream-stories). The only difference is what is presented to the mechanism of perception. Thought-stories and dream-stories are built entirely from old interpretations.

Daily-physical-interaction stories relate to sensation, but they are still stories about interpretations. In our perceptual world, things appear and disappear. You turn a corner and see a block of flats. It has appeared from nowhere, but you infer/construct a reason for its presence. The inference is essential—the perceptual world is constructed using rules, and without the rules there is no world. Without rules there can be no boundaries—so there can't even be physical shapes or structures, nor metaphorical structures such as plans and categories.

In the same way, a thought—say an observation of a body acting—appears from nowhere, and you infer an instigator of the action, an *I*. This is equally true whether the body and the *I* is mine or someone else's, yours or his or hers. There is no direct perception of *I*, nor of you or him or her, actually performing the willing.

Living is a formless interplay of sensation with which imagination plays.

In the perceptual world, something is in charge, but not *I*. In the conceptual world something else is in charge, apparently *I*. The idea of cause is itself a fundamental rule of both perception and conception.

We like to think of the *I* in our head as a hammer that hits a nail. We like the idea of hammers. And yet, in spite of our very best efforts, we cannot actually imagine a world where a hammer—an instigator—exists, and that is because we have no words or concepts to describe how something breaks out of the cause-effect chain to *will* something.

A causal *something* breaks the rules that create the perceptual world.

A causal *I* breaks the rules that create the conceptual world.

There is also the problem of the mechanism. If individual will exists, how is it exerted, and by what, and on what? Atoms? Assuming we can agree which particular atoms constitute my body, how do those atoms enact a decision? Are atoms conscious? And so on.

Nevertheless, we continue to demand ultimate causes. We invent an *I* like we invent a Big Bang, because we live in the illusory world of cause-and-effect and we need explanations involving causes, and the chain of causes has to stop somewhere.

We give the name *I* to that imagined cause, but it might as well be *unicorn* or *strange empowerment* for all that it tells us. And, confusingly, we also give the name *I* to the observer of that cause, to our conscious awareness.

The observer of that cause. The causal *I* has no characteristics except willpower, and the observing *I* cannot observe the process of willing. And yet the *idea* of these *I*-feelings are deeply embedded in us.

We are told that we have a will that makes our body act. We watch, and witness ourselves blow out our cheeks, wrinkle our foreheads and stare wildly, but that doesn't really count as willing, does it?

Sometimes we have to *persuade* ourselves that we willed something, and occasionally we can even argue with ourselves about whether or not we *did* will something.

Where then is the evidence for will? There is none. It's just a feeling, and feelings are interpretations: the *I-as-cause* is learned.

In spite of this, and although we never catch ourselves in the process of willing, we are convinced enough to speak even of *free* will, a speculative addition to an already evasive experience.

In the face of all this ignorance, we eventually come to realise that whatever we *think*, whatever we *say*, things simply continue, and the greatest comfort is found when we accept that we cannot affect the way things are—that we are, in effect, a process of witnessing. Not an initiator, not a cause, not an observer, but a witnessing thought.

But in the social, perceptual, world this is humility, acceptance, and—naturally—the *I* doesn't like it. The *I* always wants to interfere. But the idea that an *I* can somehow, on a whim, restructure the cause-and-effect world is nonsensical. *I* can't even make a decision. A decision *happens* when the response to the strongest interpretation is triggered.

Just like *infinity* and *eternity* and so on, *I* and *will* are only words, created in order to gloss over the otherwise incomprehensible edges of experience.

I is an interpretation.

The experience of we

When we speak of the illusory world and its limitations, it is no wonder we get confused. An illusion depends on the existence of a point of view that can be deceived, and in the illusion that is the apparent world, the location for that point of view is the *I*.

From the point of view of my *I*, there seem to be other *Is*, although my *I* doesn't have access to those *Is*, just as they don't have access to my *I*.

In that situation, I can see clearly how my imagination takes the outward behaviour of those beings and, from that minimal information, personalises them and gives them motives and intents, ie *presumes* an *I*.

This is a lesson: it shows how easy it is to presume my own *I*, and to attribute motives and intents to something that is entirely imaginary. This process is the basis for the creation of what Jiddu Krishnamurti called the *image*, the social/psychological persona.

Those other *Is* have no more and no less an existence than my own *I*, and so within the illusion we can speak of personalities and desires and materials and other people, because they are what the illusion *is*. We can

even speak of our *self*. We can speak of other individuals and their *selves*. We can speak of *communities* and *countries*. We can speak of the *we*.

However, we cannot import what might be called the truths of the real into that illusion, which means that we cannot rise above the illusion by pretending beliefs and emotions that, as human beings living in the illusion, we cannot have. We cannot take words that describe human emotions and make them universal just because it seems like a nice idea for the real to exhibit such super-emotions. We cannot love everybody, and everybody is not our brother. As humans, we are not all one. Nor can we avoid having a point of view, a location, an *otherness* from the whole. As humans, we cannot avoid conditioning, which is a non-judgmental term indicating mutual influence, but which is often understood as bias or malign influence—as if something could exist that is *not* biased.

We can speak of the 'we'. However, not only can we speak of the *we*, but we can experience the *we* instead of the *I*. There is no real difference, because both *I* and *we* are thoughts.

The experiences of *I* and *we* only differ in that when *I* make a conscious decision, a tight feeling of personal exposure and responsibility arises in me and I have an intense experience of subjectivity; but when I agree a consensual decision with others, distinctly different physical sensations, of dispersed warmth and relief arise in me. Sometimes, simple physical proximity to another person arouses similar sensations. The *we* feels good.

I take this as a protrusion of the sensational but unmemorised world—the *unconscious*—into the conscious world of memory and interpretation.

Just as unbaked bread is not the opposite of baked bread, the unconscious world, so-called, is not the opposite of the conscious world. The difference between baked and unbaked is just the process of baking. The difference between conscious and unconscious is the process of memorising. But we cannot sense either baking or memorising, only something being heated or something holding our attention. We can only apply the interpretations *baked* or *memorised* afterwards.

The unconscious is not different or mysterious, nor is it far away or closed off, it is simply unremembered. However, if we could live in that conscious but unmemorised state—the state of acting—the difference in our experience would be as significant as if it were truly transcendent.

The *I* of appearances can disappear just like that, and be replaced by the *we* of the Tao, or by nothing at all. All it takes is the right circumstances.

Isness and hereness

One question we might ask is *What is the simplest observation I can make in the illusory world?* Because, perhaps, that observation is the most likely to hint at something that really exists, so to speak. And the simplest observation we can make in English is a verb: *is*. [Something] exists. Everything else is unknown.

Of course, the meaning of *is* is also unknown, but it appears to be unarguable. However, in order to make sense of the claim that something *is*, that *isness* must be contrasted with itself when it *is not*, and it must be given a place to be—in other words, when a thing arises, so must its opposite or complement *and* its location.

There cannot be a single fundamental *particle* in the illusory world, nor a fundamental *vibration* nor a fundamental anything. The illusory world is not formed from any one thing.

The objects of the world are constructed, and they are simply as they appear, in whatever form they appear. They are ideas, and as such cannot be analysed to an ultimate source. There is no underlying structure, only interpretations derived from interactions, and these *create* the structure.

Thus the apparent simplicity of *is* conceals its nature as another *eternity/infinity* tactic. Its supposed meaning is to occupy a place in space and time, and it treats *existing* as a virtual observation, like flying or talking, but existence is not an observation, it is an inference, an interpretation, a *metaphor* based on physical presence or absence, and the metaphor is misleading. Flying can be observed but existence cannot be observed, because in a material world non-existence—occupation of no-place—cannot be observed.

Nothing exists, and nothing doesn't exist. The word *nothing* represents a blank hole in the fabric of space-time. The word exists but it has no referent, since a hole in the fabric of space-time cannot be observed. It is equivalent to the mathematical *zero*, just a convenient fiction.

The word *existence* also has no particular meaning other than, perhaps, *can be referred to*.

Even if we agreed that something *is*, any change to that *isness* would require that other somethings are created and the original something uncreated. But in a properly material world nothing could be created or destroyed. There would be nowhere for anything to come from or to go to.

Equally, there can be no space between somethings because space is not a material thing—space is the absence of material things—and only material somethings can exist in a material universe.

In a material universe the only thing there could be is a single, indivisible, homogeneous, immutable, *being*. But we already know that if one thing exists then at least two other things must exist—its complement and its location—otherwise *it* cannot be distinguished.

Living in the now

In the illusory ‘material’ world, it is said that things change all the time. But what changes? By what agency, and in respect of what reference point? The supposed *now*? But when is *now*?

No sooner conceived than lost, the imaginary point we call *now* cannot be observed. It is not a time in the same way that 3pm is a time, although that’s how we use it, and like 3pm, *now* has no duration. If there were a *now*, our experience of duration would be that of a series of discrete, no-length, chunks of *now*—even though each chunk could have no connection to other chunks. And, without memory, there could be no movement along the successive chunks. Cause-and effect could not apply, things would appear and disappear at random, and there would be no anticipation or consequences of actions.

As an answer, the concept of *now* creates more problems than it solves. Luckily, it is as unobservable as *the past* and *the future* and *eternity* and *infinity* and *I*.

Like *reality*, *now* is a thought-anchor, only a word, and just as there is no place to be, there is also no *time* to be. *Now* is the description of a frozen snapshot of thoughts that are assembled from the contents of memory. It says nothing about the contemporaneity of those thoughts, only their conjunction.

We may think to find comfort in words like *live in the now*, but words have no existence at all, not even illusory existence. In particular, the phrase *live in the now* has no meaning because we cannot do otherwise than live in the now, because that’s the purpose of the word, whatever it means. We cannot *intend* to live in the now. It is like telling us to breathe when we are already breathing. If someone says to us ‘Ah, but you must breathe like *this*, and like *this*’, we might try it, but we should not expect anything to change because there is nothing of that kind to change.

The mechanisms of perception and conception are real things, and they implement cause-effect chains. We cannot, in principle, know how those mechanisms come to exist, or in what way they exist, or how they operate.

Dealing with It

Why are we talking about all this? Not to show that we should or can ignore the illusory world, but to show that when we pursue any explanation for its existence or how it functions, we soon come to an abrupt halt, because explanations are not part of the world that they describe.

The so-called material world cannot contain interpretations, so interpretations cannot represent sensations, which are derived directly from whatever ultimately motivates the interactions that we experience.

Conscious interpretations—abstract thoughts—create the *I* that is formed by memory, but that *I* is not the thing that interacts with the world. Without consciousness, memory, and a point of view, there is just an interplay of sensations, and all that happens is *this*. And then *this*. And then *this*.

But interpretations can *replace* sensations. For example, just as we can talk about chairs, we can talk about *dogs*, we can even see and hear them, and yet there are no *dogs* in the world. There is not even one *dog*. You might once have seen a *this* that felt like *that* and smelled like *that*, and you might have met another *this* that felt a bit like *that* and smelled similar to *that*, but you haven't met two *dogs* unless you are told that a clutch of sensations that can include the sensations you have experienced can be *called* dogs, ie unless you are given an interpretation.

This applies universally, even to things you might think of as natural categories. No categories are natural, not even those you probably consider fundamental, such as that of male and female.

What exactly do you *perceive* when you are in the presence of a human animal?

'Almost nothing' is the answer. A vague shape or a particular feature that might become more detailed if it attracts your attention. A silent form that you might hear speak if you are interested in having a conversation.

Most of the humans that you know, you know as well as you know some stranger's photo in a shop, but in civilisation we are drowned in descriptions of characteristics and personalities, and our inflated stereotypes of 'other people' cover many behaviours, most of which we will never experience.

We are persuaded that these others have opinions and voices and should be taken into account when we act. But their opinions and voices are

manufactured by the media through which we are informed about them and by our biased, conditioned, perception.

We are trained to attach conceptual behaviours to our perceptions, that is, we are trained to *objectify* those other people. We create *men* and *women* objects according to the dictates of society, and we apply most of the characteristics of the object we label *man* or *woman* to the people we actually meet. Then we attribute those characteristics to the individual we have just created.

We create other objects in exactly the same way, by *labelling*. Labelling is a way of avoiding the need to pay attention. The labels are themselves carefully designed to further society's agenda. Once a label is established it is easy to ignore any vaguenesses and contradictions between the objects or people the label pretends to speak for. All *racists* are racist, whether they don't say hello to their black neighbour's dog or are a commando on a genocide mission. Just *racist* is enough to condemn anyone. The dog-avoider is as guilty as the commando.

This is the manipulation of cultural conditioning at its most basic. As we said above, we are very easily conditioned. But conditioning relies on making one interpretation stronger than the others, and this kind of conditioning can be altered or reversed by reinforcing a different interpretation until it is stronger than the interpretation we want to eradicate.

The leaders of society are skilled conditioners. *Black* is just a colour, a percept, but in the western world you can't call someone 'black' because the word has been redefined as a token, a cultural label, a concept. If you simply call someone 'black', you are a racist. This is a deliberate tactic that implements division and conflict.

The problem is that there is no way of judging the authenticity of any particular interpretation. We want to think and act properly and choose the right interpretation but thinking cannot help, because thinking is the source of the conflicting interpretations. It is thinking that turns 'saying 'black'' into *racist*.

If we pay full attention, the percepts—rather than the interpretations/concepts attached to the percepts—prevail, and so the tokens no longer apply. All that is left is witnessing.

If you could manage to live in this state of witnessing, if only briefly, daily life would become clearer and simpler. You would stop categorising your experience and would become intimately familiar with your immediate

surroundings in a way you can't imagine. No more good and bad. No more beautiful or ugly.

Instead of daydreaming or relentlessly telling yourself stories, you could think only when it is of practical use, and rest. This is what we might call a 'natural' life, and what most people would dismiss as an unacceptably 'primitive' life. But it's the life our bodies actually live.

The natural life

It is clear that if we want to live a natural life, as a minimum we must make ourselves aware of the matrix of interpretations that civilisation is constructed from so that we can escape its phantoms of *time* and *place* and *duty* and *responsibility* and *happiness* and *safety* and so on. We have to let go of speculative thought, let go of analysis and motive, and abandon the fortress of memory. And we can do this by paying attention to the illusory world.

That sounds very strange, contradictory even, but all it means is to be aware of sensations without invoking interpretations. If we pay attention in this way, eventually we stop noticing change until there is no change, until there is only *is*, only the everlasting present, which is not a time, not *now*, but a state of being, a state of witnessing: not a thing, but a process.

Instead of grasping anxiously at the elusive *now*, we can simply let go and live in *it*, witnessing without a witness and without a thing being witnessed. This is actually what we do, but we're too distracted by the cinema of the mind to notice. It can only be experienced, it can't be thought about.

Living in It

We each look for our own comfort, and some things and circumstances appear to be top of the list of preferences for many people: quietness, order, necessary things to do, and emotional connection.

None of those preferences requires much thinking, and I would say that they probably describe something close to the innate order of the illusory world, the *What is*, which I equate with the Tao.

Some people need to feel that there is also a possibility of control, and they seize on theory because this is their illusion of knowledge, that it confers agency—causative power—and they associate agency with comfort. But this is yielding to interpretation, to words whose *is*ness is

less than nothing. The comfort they seek cannot be found. There are no agents in the world.

Others prefer to be left to concentrate on daily tasks within the illusion, undisturbed by theory. These people do not suffer more than the order-and-control people, in fact you could say that they suffer less, because they do not suffer the mental pain associated with *lack* of order-and-control.

Instead they accept that anything but the exercise of immediate, physical—bodily—skills is not only unnecessary but is *beyond possibility*, that thoughts of order and control are merely uninteresting phantoms in the mind. What thinking they do is concerned with what their body is doing. The purpose of their thoughts is to aid in the exercise and protection of their body. They are close to *what is*.

Witnessing results in reinstatement of the one-one-one relationship in the fundamental sensation → interpretation → response process, where the middle step is the innate interpretation and the response is the urge to act in a particular way without being aware of the reason for the urge: that is, without the *I* being involved except as a fellow traveller. The body is far from stupid and these urges instantiate a risk assessment, as it does in every living creature.

When a being is caught up in the process of perceiving—when there is only witnessing—thought and actor are indistinguishable.

Bliss

The experience of witnessing might be called *bliss*. Human animals can live in a state of bliss, just like every other creature.

But bliss is not a feeling. It is not related to pleasure. It is the result of stopping all attempts to understand. It is, essentially, ceasing to infer the *I*, ceasing to strive. It is fundamentally different from joy or any other state.

The body does not strive, it simply acts, and by removing the conscious interpretations that seem to allow striving—intention—to allow *becoming*, the possibility of conflict between intending and becoming is removed, and there is only *being*. *Being* is not directionless, but it is focused.

We can experience bliss by paying attention to what is happening to our body and its immediate environment, and by paying attention to our body's response. This is what constitutes *the present*: a barely-memorised interplay of sensations.

You might think that in order to be a witness solely, somehow you must pursue the relationship of the body to the source of its sensations—to

address the physical sequences of the interaction—in order to put them aside, but it is not so.

We have already said that the world of cause-and-effect is also the world of *infinity* and *eternity* and *I* and *now*. In that world, ultimate causes cannot be found. You cannot pursue an observation to its cause, and you cannot influence what you observe. You cannot replace a cause with a different cause.

You can do none of these things because within the illusion these things violate natural law, and outside the illusion neither you, nor your observation, nor the thing observed, exists. Only witnessing remains.

Living with *what is* provides an escape from the swamp of emotion and false possibility in which the civilised human being is drowning. The emotional life is a largely conceptual life, not a perceptual life, and it is a result of conditioning. *What is* does not inspire emotions, which are *mental* activities that give meaning and significance to other mental activities, it only inspires actions.

Detachment involves quarantining emotions, that are not actually feelings but conscious *thinkings*—interpretations—so that the innate interpretation is triggered. An innate interpretation is recognisable because it only triggers nameless action—or a positive lack of action—and thoughts related to that action, and nothing else. Many things that you *think* require a reaction then become irrelevant, requiring nothing.

The biggest change between living in the illusion and living with *what is* is that living with *what is* is much more straightforward and restful. Detached from the unceasing churning of thoughts and emotions, and the consequent need for abstract decisions and judgements about past and future events and circumstances and their consequent emotions, you can rest in immediacy and simplicity.

If we do not experience bliss in our relationships with the illusory world it is because we do not pay attention to the things of the illusory world. That is, we do not act appropriately, we act ideologically.

That sounds strange, as though the body is a runaway cart divorced from purpose or strategy, but that's because we live in an illusory world of ideological purpose and egotistic strategy. The body *is* a cart, but an intelligent cart. It knows what it is doing, and you can help it. Helping consists in being attentive to what your body appears to be doing, and being at ease in that attention to the point where 'you'—and therefore your body, which is no longer being attended to—both *disappear*. This is

the state I have called *witnessing*. Many things are irrelevant and can simply be ignored.

Krishnamurti says that in the meditative state, the observer and the observed 'disappear'. This should not be taken as mutual dissolution of things, because the words 'observer' and 'observed' are concepts, descriptions, not things.

It means that at some point we simply do not use those words any more. That does not mean that there is a thing that they were used to characterise which has disappeared, it's just we don't have a word for what's left, which is *what is*, indescribable in any terms.

The observed *I*, which is a concept inferred from a collection of interpretations of sensations and experiences, is no longer used when the observing *I* reaches a state of neutrality—when it applies no interpretations, and therefore has no conceptual or named responses to sensations or experiences. This witness of this uninterpreted world is the creator, God, the universal hum, manifest in its creation, witnessing the inevitable unfolding of its creation.

The personal *I* is an evaluation of this witnessing from the point of view of a particular instance of a mechanism of perception.

I have used the words *what is* for this unfolding, but I prefer the word *Tao*. I have used the word *bliss* for living in the Tao, but the Tao is not dramatic or wonderful or miraculous or extraordinary or sublime. It cannot be characterised. It is simply what is, and you have already had glimpses of it.

Practising

From a 'higher' perspective, we know the world as we conceive it is illusory, but we also know that we cannot consciously escape the illusion. We might learn from Zen that sitting in silence and darkness is the closest we can come to achieving real perception, to finding what we could call the real *Tao* state, but this is not my feeling. It is just sensory deprivation, therapy for overstimulation.

Although what you do in the illusory world is not your concern, because you cannot influence it, *paying attention* to what you do can manifest the Tao.

But how can you do anything if you cannot influence the world? The answer is that you start by consciously immersing yourself in the illusion, by paying close attention to the perceived world. Your body is fully engaged in the illusion, and in the illusion you have free will, intention and

so on. Therefore you can practise paying attention, which is simply becoming familiar with the world you apparently live in. The world you live in is supersaturated with sensation and so the first reaction when you pay attention is to withdraw to a place of quiet and order. This is Zen, but it is only the first step.

Practice is whatever you do, at any time, and means, primarily, becoming familiar with yourself, simply observing yourself, your actions and your thoughts, without judging or evaluating or categorising what you observe.

When you observe yourself, you are observing the image of yourself you have built during your life, and at the same time observing your actions. You will find many conflicts between image and action, and simply accepting that you create conflict in your daily life, and observing the ways in which you do so, begins an easy, natural, dissolution of the image. As you begin to speak and act confidently from the impulses of the moment, more of the image dissolves.

These impulses of the moment are not *impulsive* in the sense of frivolous or illogical, and they do not serve conscious desires. They are the reactions of the body and primitive mind, and in themselves they are neither pleasurable nor painful. Bliss is not a reward or a prestigious state, and it does not have to be earned. It is just the consequence of freeing yourself from the illusions created by the psychological mind.

Bliss is essentially being the interaction. You might sense bliss when you follow the formal rituals of Zen or another system, or you might never follow any formal system but still sense bliss as you go about your day.

However, you cannot both cultivate bliss and function in a civilised way at the same time. You do not want to live in a permanent state of bliss even if that were possible. This civilisation is not the place or the time for that. Civilised society actively and continuously undermines the possibility and the expression of bliss. So again, what do you practice?

This time the answer is to be practical: cultivate bliss, but pay enough attention to your psychological mind to function appropriately in the illusory world. Does that sound familiar? Shunryu Suzuki said the same thing in a more memorable way:

How much 'ego' do you need? Just enough so that you don't step in front of a bus.

You might ask exactly how much ego that is, and that would be a difficult question to answer, mostly because *ego* is just a description of an inference, just a word, and so can't be quantified. But by paying attention, you might discover that trying to quantify abstractions is only one of the

many ways abstractions get you to waste your time. Does she ‘really’ love you? This is a ridiculous question because ‘love’ is an abstraction and cannot have a scale. Ignore your ego, engage with your actions, and such questions will disappear.

‘Enough’ ego is pretty much meaningless until you discover how much is enough *for you*—by paying attention.

Following rules

Rules are necessary. Without rules, without order, there cannot be a coherent world, real or otherwise, and the many kinds of religions, beliefs and philosophies are rules for functioning appropriately in the illusory world. Being religious does not mean you belong to a religion, necessarily, nor does it require a search for meaning as such. It is a search for authenticity, for ways of acting appropriately. This is a good thing, and if you are drawn to a Buddhist life, for example, you will undoubtedly benefit.

However, you cannot choose to become a Buddhist or Taoist or whatever. The list of qualities that appeal to you will be impossible to achieve through intention, since ‘you’ are not an agent. This is a more-or-less standard teaching that is mostly ignored for the sake of practicality.

If you follow the rules it’s not because you want to, but because they’re right for you. Most people can only aspire to follow them because they are not right for most people.

I tell myself that I am attempting to distinguish those interpretations provided by society that are designed to consolidate its power, from the interpretations that I need to survive in what I consider an acceptable way. ‘Acceptable’ rather than ‘authentic’ because I feel that I’m in a process of discovery rather than on a search for meaning or authenticity.

My practice is to sometimes lose myself in what I have described as bliss. I like to think that it’s blissful because I’m not fighting the Tao. It feels good. I don’t remember much of my personal history. I assume that’s because losing myself in the Tao is my dominant state, and that’s probably why I felt drawn to write this little dialogue.

When I am recalled by the world from the state of bliss, it’s emptiness becomes apparent. There are no more problems, solutions, anticipations or recriminations. The more I see this, the weaker those thoughts become. Life becomes warmer and calmer.

Ask yourself: 'What is my dominant state?' How does being in that state affect me? You will very probably be surprised by what you find.

Observe your thoughts and actions.

Humans and society

Chopping wood and carrying water—Doing what is necessary used to mean gathering food and keeping safe. What is necessary now? Still gathering food and keeping safe: but the means have changed. We don't gather food from the earth but from supermarkets. We don't keep safe by building shelters and being wary of predators but by buying houses, accumulating money and placating authorities.

Our bodies are things of the illusory world and are engaged in relationships with things of that world, not with abstractions such as groups or societies or other mental fictions. I am engaged in the world in a way I call seeking the Tao but I am not physically seeking anything, and I am not a Taoist. There are no Taoists, just as there are no Buddhists, Christians or Jews, Blacks, Whites, Criminals or Pedestrians.

There are no natural divisions in the world. Boundaries, both perceptual and conceptual, are creations of the mind—even boundaries that you might consider fundamental, like body forms and gender differences.

What is happening when we perceive a human being? We experience a collection of sensations that are interpreted and categorised so that we don't have to perform that tedious and energy-consuming process every time we perceive a similar collection of sensations. We create a stereotype, a category.

A category cannot be precisely defined, because a category is not a thing. It has no shape, size, or weight, for example, and it cannot represent an instance of the category. Categories have no relation with the world. What you experience is not what there is.

In civilisation, overuse of categories has created extreme divisions where none exist. The categories *men* and *women* do not describe anything that exists in the world, for example. All we perceive of a human is a collection of sensations—characteristics—some of which are given significance by the circumstances and purposes of perception.

Each human characteristic is on a continuum whose extremes can themselves be categorised, and the collection of characteristics at each end of the continua for humans have been categorised as *men* and *women* for ease of reference. They could have been called *pimples* and *jellyfish*, or *ug* and *glug*.

You cannot perceive a *man* or a *woman*, only a particular human, a snapshot, a—small—selection of characteristics from the set of human continua. There is no set of characteristics that exactly defines a man or a

woman, and there is no need for those labels. They are convenient for reference, nothing more, and they are *vague*.

Sexual characteristics are often taken to be definitive, but you do not engage sexually with most people, and thinking of a vague acquaintance as a man simply means you are applying more of the male stereotype than the female. Your acquaintance's actual physical sexual characteristics are irrelevant unless you have sex with them in some form.

This is the same principle that applies to the world at large: what you think about things is irrelevant because those things don't exist as you conceive them. See, but do not believe.

What *is* important is how you interact with the things you actually encounter.

Societies are created when we stop paying attention

You only ever meet individuals, and yet you have opinions about groups. Don't you find that surprising? Especially when you know that what you know about even your closest friend or your partner, even your dog, is very little. How then do you know about groups, which are collections of virtually unknown people? How do you know there *are* groups? What is a group?

The answer is that it is a word, nothing more. Everything you know about groups has been given to you, even that groups exist. You have observed nothing because you cannot observe a group, you cannot smile at it, you cannot hold its hand. Because it does not exist. To live in a group such as a society is to live in a dream. Societies are illusory but nevertheless dangerous.

As we have already seen, you are suggestible: this means that when you do not pay attention to the things of the illusion but to words and thoughts within the illusion, you are living, not merely in an illusory world, but in a fictional world. Words have no existence at all. I will keep repeating this. Words are not even illusory, they are simply nothing. A spoken language is strictly optional. A word is just a noise.

But thoughts are something, and when a new group is magicked into existence, we begin to personalise it. We forget about its individual members to a large extent and we treat the group itself as another *I*, attributing characteristics such as *power* and *influence* and *tendency*. But that abstract group has no existence at all. Every single thought we have about that abstract entity is illusory. Some of it is simple personification but most of it is vague attribution. The nature of a group is as vague to you as

the nature of the person sitting opposite you on the bus. Neither the person nor the group is really there. Close your eyes, fall asleep. What's there?

But thoughts about things that do not exist are as real as thoughts about things that apparently do exist. You cannot trust your thoughts. But this is old news—how could you be deceived or misled or confused if you could trust your thoughts?

Paying attention

Paying attention is a method for reducing the number and impact of psychological thoughts, and for cultivating right-feeling. *Right-feeling* is what occurs when you *rest in the body*, and the result is an experience of bliss.

It is only because we stopped paying attention to what our bodies were doing that societies were born. It is only because we have to protect ourselves from the harms of society that we need to be reminded to pay attention.

It is only because we stopped paying attention to what our bodies were doing that we lost right-feeling. It is only because we have lost right-feeling that we have to give it a name.

Perhaps it would be helpful at this point to ask yourself what your expectations of life actually are. You will probably find that they are quite vague, and that when you try to make them more precise you begin to think they may not be so attractive. You want to be rich? How rich? Rich enough not to work? Rich enough not to work, and to have money for fun things? What fun things? How long will you find those things fun? And then what? And so on.

To expect is to submit to hope based on desire, and so to submit to the skilled manipulators of desire that run your society. The desires that they deliberately provoke in you are a means of controlling your behaviour, and they do not exist outside that society.

Much of their control can be neutral—or even beneficial—to you. Their purpose is not to punish or damage you unnecessarily, but neither is it to keep you safer than is necessary for you to behave in the way they want.

Many people believe that the way things have been fashioned and wrought by the governors of the world and used by the world's servants is itself the natural way of things. If those people are, in the common phrase, 'comfortable', they are unlikely to challenge their way of thinking.

Their internal cinema is showing a fascinating and comforting film in which virtue prevails, and where their own actions are seen as virtuous.

Equally, many people are consumed with survival, but in a conscious form. This parody of the survival instinct involves constantly thinking about getting the means to survive. They are anxious and desperate because they feel they are being denied the knowledge (or money, or power, or influence, or whatever) that would enable them to take control away from whoever it is they think wants to prevent them from flourishing. Their internal cinema is a disaster movie.

It doesn't matter what movie is playing, they are all movies, and this is my movie. I don't *believe* in it because to believe is to participate in a fiction, and I don't *understand* it because to think that you understand is to participate in a fiction. There is nothing to believe or to think or to understand. There is no fiction. There is no illusion. All these are thoughts. Use your thoughts to make your body comfortable.

Resting in the body weakens the power of thoughts.

Witnessing

The world is not a distraction from something else. We apparently function in it—we *must* function in it, since it is there, wherever and whatever *there* means—and although it is illusory, it is not a game.

However, we might consider it in the same way as a game, not thinking about its significance and value, but about sticking to its rules. This is very important, because you cannot play a game by breaking rules. The rules *are* the game.

Unfortunately, we know only one of the rules of the 'life' game—that cause-and-effect applies universally. Without it nothing could be done, nothing could be thought, nothing could be dreamed. Everything has consequences, and we are not in control.

The more your experience consists only of sensations, and your body's immediate response to those sensations, and a consciousness of the waxing and waning of your feeling of comfort or discomfort, the closer you can come to the state of witnessing. You can still be a complex social being, and your relations with the world can be vastly more detailed and intimate. Your senses can be renewed.

You already know this state. It is to lose yourself in attending to something. Not in *thinking* about something, nor in *concentrating* on a

process, but in *being* the something or process. The cat walking is only a cat walking.

Being the process is not a mystical experience. You probably do it a lot, just a few seconds at a time. Driving a car, or performing any task without thinking, is losing yourself in the process, and can be blissful. Sometimes, kissing is blissful. What stops us recognising the bliss is that we are always doing something else *while* driving or performing the task: we are thinking instead of paying attention to the world. We are not resting in our bodies the way the cat is resting in its body.

We kiss to conform, to get momentary pleasure, to initiate a plan. But we can kiss just to kiss, without intention, judgement or anticipation, like we kiss babies, who don't care.

Note that *paying attention* does not involve force. If there is any force involved, then the desire for intention is implied. The desire for intention is the desire for agency, for power. But the attribution of power is an inference: the desire for power makes you see power in others. But there is no power. They have no power. You have no power. Your desire is pointless and will make you frustrated and resentful. You can't arrive at the Zen state by trying, only by doing.

Mindfulness and freedom

There is no *intention*, there is only *attention*, and *mindfulness* is the wrong word: what is being described is lack-of-excess-mind, in other words, *mindlessness*.

What is mindfulness, really? It isn't staring at a pretty landscape when your teacher tells you, or going blank when people get angry, or sitting on a cushion with your eyes closed.

Mindfulness is expressed as meditation, and meditation is a way of living, not a particular kind of activity. You cannot 'do' mindfulness because mindfulness is a result of the way you approach life when you treat the whole of life as a meditation.

Meditation is essentially paying attention, reducing internal and external noise. It is not seeking the unknown, but becoming familiar again with the known. The more time you are able to spend in paying attention, the more intimate you will become with the tiny piece of the world that surrounds you, the more welcome you will feel, and the closer you will come to the Tao.

Unless you stop and look, you are a confused entity
- Jiddhu Krishnamurti

In the beginning, meditation is conscious performance of a role. It is being aware of your body and thoughts, being careful with your movements and your assumptions. Meditation is being concerned with doing tasks properly, and using tools appropriately. It's paying attention to why things are done and who does them. It is being observant in order to be *capable*. In the end, these things become habitual, and need no conscious direction.

An inevitable result of a meditative life is order: an orderly life. Such a life is not restrictive, it simply follows naturally from the care with which you relate to the world in which you must live—from the depth of your meditation.

Eventually, you realise that most choices you are offered are illusory, and that you are part of the flow, not an initiator or manipulator of the flow. What 'you' do is what your body does. You stop resisting.

If you pay attention to what your body is doing you will find that you can witness it without engaging or needing to engage, but still participating. You will discover how easily the fabrications of the illusion-creating mind fade away, and how choices fade away, and you will wonder at how tirelessly you had to play your part in maintaining the fictions, and you will understand why living seemed so difficult and complicated.

Finally, you rest in your body, in its actions. Without making any great decisions or choices, you become free from the weight of thoughts you have carried your entire life, free from your history, and free from your desires.

Freedom means release from your psychological mind, from the world of complex, vague, and ultimately irrelevant abstractions. It means 'you' disappear, and you rest in whatever it is that manifests as a body, a set of reflexes, and your human animal behaviour.

The only true meditation is the constant impersonal witnessing of all that takes place in one's life as mere movements in the universal Consciousness.

—Ramesh Balsekar

Stripped of the relentless but unnoticed or disregarded restraints imposed by civilisation, and of unnecessary abstract thought, what innate behaviour is most likely to be revealed? What material environment could arise? How far would we 'regress'?

You will never know. If conscious memory is present, psychological mind is present. Mindlessness means losing your memory. You are still aware,

sharp and attentive, but very little of the circumstances remain after the fact. There is continuity of thought, but with only minimal analysis and directly practical conclusions. Not a monkey or an ape, but a human animal. There will be an impulse towards simplicity and immediate action, otherwise nothing.

You experience all that you experience now, but no abstract conditioning remains. Your body acts, and your body learns, and then it forgets, and one day the mechanism is no more: sensation stops and thoughts stop, and 'you' are no more. It all ends. The rest is entertainment.

Losing your self

Meditation is the way to lose your abstract mind, and therefore to lose your abstract self. Just by paying attention.

The teachings of the Tao cannot be transmitted by theory and concepts. If you are able to still your thoughts and maintain peace and simplicity, the Tao will naturally emerge within. Those who are ignorant of the Tao spend their lives tiring the body and straining their mental capacity beyond their best function, not knowing that as their spirit and life energy are increasingly taxed, they get farther and farther away from the Tao. Even in pursuit of the Tao, you should not force your progress or see it as achievement. In doing so, you are already defeating the natural way of cultivating the Tao.

- Eva Wong, The Mystery Grotto

There is only one thing we can be completely, utterly, incontrovertibly sure about. It is that something is, and that that something can cause other things to be.

However, our abstract language is metaphor, making use of analogies from the perceived world, so our thinking is constrained by the rules and forms of the perceived world, even if the rules are broken. If there are no immortal magicians in the perceived world, then things can't cause other things to come into existence. Even 'existence' is just a word, a noise.

So how we partake of that something-exists-process is impossible to say, and any questions about the something's manner or mode of existence can't mean anything.

Yet, pay attention and you will find the Tao. Lose yourself in right-feeling and you will find the Tao. But you will not remember the bliss.

Accept what is, and pay attention to what you do and what you have. The beings and things that accompany you in the illusory world are not there

for a *reason*, but they belong with you as much as your hands and your feet belong with you. The beings and things that do not accompany you, do not exist. Let this be a comfort.

There is only one secret: *pay attention*. If you do that, as they say, nothing will change yet everything will change.

Świnoujście, January 2022

Vonny Thenasten is a poet and part-time odd-job man

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