

THE MYSTERY OF BEING

*'All that a human being can do is wonder and
marvel at the magnificence of God's Creation.'
Meister Eckhart*

Silence and Emptiness

Where does the mind come from? Where does it go? Where is the source of consciousness? Where is all experience created? The answer to all these questions is *nowhere*; it is all the same reality, the same energy, without source or beginning. There is no real separation between past and present, here and there. We are always within reality. Our mind is not separate from enlightenment. What then is the difference between enlightenment and ordinary existence? The enlightened state has great richness, openness and fullness of being, while the 'samsaric' state has tremendous suffering, ignorance and confusion. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of 'shunyata,' [absolute openness] the two states coexist; there is no separation between them. When we understand that the foundation of enlightenment is not any place or any person, we will know that we have never been apart from this awakened mind. We will see that enlightenment permeates our entire being and can no more be separated from us than the sound can be divorced from music. 'Shunyata' is nothing and everything. All our experience is included within this perfect realization of openness. (1)

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In true meditation, the emphasis is on being awareness, not on being aware of objects, but resting on primordial awareness itself. Primordial awareness, consciousness, is the source in which all objects arise and subside. As you gently relax into awareness, into listening, the mind's compulsive contraction around objects will fade. Silence of being will come more clearly into your consciousness, welcoming you to rest and abide. An attitude of open receptivity, free of any goal or anticipation, will facilitate the presence of silence and stillness, and reveal them to be your natural condition. (2)

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Solitude from what is ordinary, imaginary and false is something very great. It means that for the first time I know that "I am." It is a solitude from all the known and from all that is not right *now*, in the present moment outside of time. This solitude appears as a void. But it is not a void of despair. It is a complete trans-

formation of the quality of my thinking. When the mind is free of all talking, fears, desires and pettiness, it is silent. Then comes a sense of complete nothingness, the very essence of humility. At the same time, there is a feeling of truly entering another world, a world that seems more real. I am a particle of a greater reality. I experience solitude not because something is missing but because there is everything – everything is here. (3)

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When we pass beyond the last vestiges of dualistic thinking, we become the Unknowable. When identification with the body/mind falls away, the only thing left is the ephemeral play of energy – the rising and falling of sensations. Listen to the words of the Buddha: “In what is seen, there must just be the seen, in what is heard, there must just be the heard, in what is sensed, there must just be the sensed, in what is thought, there must just be the thought.” To what is he pointing? Amaro Bhikkhu interprets it this way: “There are forms, shapes, colors, and so forth, but there is no *thing* there. There is no real substance, no solidity and no self-existent reality. All there is, is the quality of experience itself. No more, no less.” We have no more substance than the notes of a sonata played on a flute, coming out of nowhere and just as quickly disappearing. Mystical freedom is radical and absolute: our boundaries disappear and our oneness with the All floods in. We become freedom itself, the fleeting, evanescent flow of what is. (4)

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There is an ocean of stillness in which we live, which pervades everything around us. So long as our attention is taken by movement, we don't have contact with this stillness. If we can hold back some of our attention from the activities of our centers, their movements, then we may at the same time come into contact with this stillness . . . You have all touched this stillness, this living silence, at one time or another. And you know that it is something, when you experience it, that is unmoving and unchanging, so when you encounter it and part of you merges with it, you are not in time in the ordinary way, because time for us is something we assume from movement, change, succession. And here, when we participate in this stillness – in it, there is no movement, no change, no succession. It is in this way not limited by time as we know it. It is also not limited at all by space as we know it, so it has an element of the infinite and an element of the eternal. And it is open to us all to experience it. It is through this contact that we are connected with the very ground of our existence, with a source of strength and help within. (5)

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Presence is the direct knowing that all experience is groundless; it simply arises and subsides. Here is where we open to the mystery of being. We begin by ask-

ing, "What is experience?" Experience consist of thoughts, feelings and sensations, all of which arise in the mind. Therefore, we ask the next question, "What is mind?" Nothing is seen, but in that nothing, the clarity of awareness is present. Mind is not simply nothing. It is empty, no thing, and clarity at the same time. Nothing impedes the arising of experience. The three aspects of mind – emptiness, clarity, and unimpeded experience – are the real mystery of being. In the open space of awareness, experience arises and subsides, but what arises is not separate from awareness. Presence is resting in awareness, knowing that mind nature is empty, clear and unimpeded, and knowing no separation from what we experience. (6)

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We learn to become conscious of life and of the Being incarnate in us, conscious of a rhythmic order in which we are included. This is not to observe from outside, holding ourselves apart, but to be one with the experience and be transformed by it. Usually it cannot transform us because we cut ourselves off from reality, lost in our ordinary 'I.' True consciousness is buried and plays only a secondary role. We must let all our images and preconceived ideas dissolve in order to become aware of its source. We have to let consciousness emerge and play the principal role. Then one can live according to one's Being. This active recognition of the life within brings a sense of obligation to listen to 'consciousness,' to change and live according to what we understand. Finally, a man comes to submission and trust in life and the Self. He gives himself up to the cosmic movement of ebb and flow, understanding with his whole being that all forms are created in the void, in silence, and are reabsorbed once they have fulfilled their role. He understands that he finds himself in losing himself. He becomes free from certain subjective limits, but realizes that his Self is a responsible participant in the great life of the universe. He participates in the Whole. (7)

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Silence, stillness, and awareness are not states and therefore cannot be produced or created. Silence is the non-state in which all states arise and subside. Silence is itself the eternal witness without form or attribute. As you rest more profoundly as the witness, all objects take on their natural functionality, and awareness becomes free of the mind's compulsive contractions and identifications, and returns to its natural non-state of Presence. The simple yet profound question "Who am I?" can then reveal one's self not to be the endless tyranny of the ego-personality, but objectless Freedom of Being – the Primordial Consciousness in which all states and all objects come and go as manifestations of the eternal unborn Self that YOU ARE. (8)

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Having access to the formless realm is truly liberating. It frees you from bondage to form and identification with form. It is life in its undifferentiated state prior to its fragmentation into multiplicity. We may call it the Unmanifested, the invisible Source of all things, the Being within all beings. It is a realm of deep stillness and peace, but also of joy and intense aliveness. Whenever you are present, you become "transparent" to some extent to the light, the pure consciousness that emanates from this Source. You also realize that the light is not separate from who you are but constitutes your very essence. (9)

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This silence is something that is present all the time. It is the normally unheard background against which we hear noise, just like the screen against which we see the movie. We see the alternation of light and dark without normally seeing the screen. When we think about silence in the ordinary way, we think of the cessation of noise, but this silence is quite different. It is in another dimension. It is not, as you must have experienced, just an absence of noise or sound, because it is a living silence. Our ordinary lives are filled with experiences that are experienced in time and space, and the reason we interpret experiences in terms of time is because they change. If nothing changes we have no measure of the passage of time at all. And if one makes contact with this living silence, there is no change, and so this silence is not of the world which is limited by time. (10)

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Everything rises and falls, appears and disappears. Yet behind these movements something remains still, unchanging. I must become conscious of it, not staying on the surface but concentrating as deeply as possible at a level I can hardly penetrate, much less remain . . . Each day I have to give as much time as it takes – sometimes more, sometimes less – to come to a clear perception of an inner Presence, a life in me that is much higher than my body. I need to know this Presence as something really existing, not merely a possibility that I sometimes touch. (11)

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There is no death. Life cannot die. The coating is used up, the form disintegrates. Death is an end – the end of everything known. It is a fearful thing because we cling to the known. But life *is*. It is always here, even if for us it is the unknown. We can know life only after we know death. We must die to the known and enter the unknown. We need to die voluntarily. We have to free ourselves from the known. Once free, we can enter the unknown, the void, the complete stillness, where there is no deterioration – the only state in which we can find out what life is and what love is. (12)

The Timeless Reality

We need to realize that all things are impermanent. They change, they are born, they have their life, they die. They are impermanent on different scales, certainly. Some are sub-atomic particles; their life is confined to a tiny fraction of our time which is unimaginably small, perhaps one-millionth of one millionth of one millionth of a second – a time we can't imagine how short it is. Some other lives may last for billions of years. But everything in the universe has its life; it comes into being, it lasts for a certain time, and it dies in that form. But behind all this is *Being*. And as we come to know – behind all this activity which we constantly take to be our life – as we ourselves come to know the experience of being, we come to realize that we are not and can never be alone. (13)

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Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it. You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the moment, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment. (14)

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The different fields in which the human being has his experience are thinking, doing, perceiving and feeling. These experiences keep changing from moment to moment, but the one experience, constant without any change, is the changeless experience of the 'I AM principle,' the screen on which the other experiences appear and disappear. With this deep understanding the sage ignores the fleeting experiences and stays anchored at the central I Am experience, in peace, harmony and contentment, in beauty and love. When the thinking-doing-perceiving-feeling disappears, the apparent thinker-doer-perceiver-feeler also disappears, and I remain as pure Consciousness. The ignorant person, in his confusion, believes that the body-mind lives, while in fact it dies at the end of every perception, thought, feeling or action. It is the I AM principle that continues unchanged throughout this process. The fact of the matter is that the I AM principle and the manifest phenomenal 'reality' can only be the One and not two. The actual 'reality' is neither the known nor the unknown, but the basis of both. In other words, the subjective I AM and the objective manifestation are one and the same. (15)

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Beyond the moving mind there is the background of awareness, which does not change. The mind must come to know the true self and respect it and cease covering it up, like the moon which obscures the sun during a solar eclipse. Just realize that nothing observable, or that can be experienced is you, or binds you.

Q: To do what you tell me I must be ceaselessly aware.

A: What you need is to be aware of being aware. Be aware deliberately and consciously, broaden and deepen the field of awareness. You are always conscious of the mind, but you are not aware of yourself as being conscious (16)

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Presence is the source of all experience. When the accent is on being aware, and not on thought nor on perception, we gradually become deeply relaxed, both on the neuromuscular level and on the mental plane. If we disinterestedly observe the arising and disappearing of all the states we experience, we soon come to realize that each state, each perception, each thought is reabsorbed into an unspoken unknown, knowing as being. This, the continuum, the only reality is there before activity commences. Let yourself sink deep within this stillness each time it makes itself felt. You cannot expect reality to appear, for it ever is. Events appear and disappear. Never forget the passing character of all experience, this is all you need to do and the door to grace will open before you. (17)

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With consciousness, I see *what is*, and in the experience "I am," I open to the divine, the infinite beyond space and time, the higher force that religions call God. My being is Being. To be one, whole in the face of life, is all that matters. So long as I remain conscious of this, I feel a life within me and a peace that nothing else can give. I am here, alive, and around me exists the entire universe. The life that is around me is in me. I feel this universal life, the force of the universe. And I feel myself existing as part of the world that surrounds me. Here everything helps, even the cushion on which I sit. I am present, wakened to what I am. And I see that the most important thing is *to be*. I know it – now – and as I know it, I feel related to everything around me. There is no before, no after, only life itself. I have the impression of emerging from a dream. Everything is real. I feel free and at peace. In this state, I do not seek, I do not wish, I do not expect anything. There is only what "I am" in this moment. I know now how I am here and why I am here. (18)

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You know that you are sitting here. Be attentive to that knowledge only. Just be in your beingness. Hold onto that; nothing has to be done. Become one with that and all your needs will be satisfied. Whatever you are doing, your attention should be there. When you are eating food, who is eating? Only that Beingness. Whatever you are doing is the beingness; pay attention to that beingness. (19)

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The world we see now is full of diversity. We must practise seeing the unifying force, the unifying spirit that is the substratum for this entire manifestation. That is the Self, the reality, God, or whatever name you may give it. Just like in the cinema the wide screen is the substratum for the manifestation, and what is going on here in this universe is the film, the moving picture. It is always moving but the screen is permanent. If we know that what we see in the world is moving, then we have realized the Truth and we do not see the world as such. We see it only as a moving thing within the unmoving or immutable existence. Then the world has a different shape for us, we don't see it as diversity, we see it as one. (20)

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Which is real: what I am conscious of, or consciousness itself? Deep down in my being *I am* already what I seek. This is the impetus of my whole search. When consciousness is here, I realize that consciousness is me. I and all that surrounds me are the same consciousness. My true nature is consciousness. The search for my self becomes the quest for the Self, more and more profound. The Creator appears as the "I," the "Self." Whether it is manifest or nonmanifest is immaterial when one remains turned toward it. There is no object to know. The Self is always the Self. When the true nature is known, there is Being without beginning or end – immortal consciousness. (21)

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You are what you are every moment of your life, but you are never conscious of it, except, maybe, at the point of awakening from sleep. All you need is to be aware of being, not as a verbal statement, but as an ever-present fact. The awareness that you *are* will open your eyes to what you are. It is all very simple. First of all, establish a constant contact with your self, be with yourself all the time. Into self-awareness all blessings flow. Begin as a center of observation, deliberate cognizance, and grow into a center of love in action. "I am" is a tiny seed which will grow into a mighty tree, quite naturally without a trace of effort (22)

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You are the one who sees it all, knows it all, and watches all that is happening. You are the still, silent source of all that is, the Being that animates the body/mind, the Being in which everything arises, including the apparent individual. That Being, that awareness, is what you are. You're not a part of the whole, but the *source* of the whole. Because you are, everything else is. Whatever we see, whatever we think is our life story, whatever we believe the world to be, is only an appearance of Being and unconditional love appearing as the invitation to drop the sense of "me," to drop the idea that there's any separation, to drop the idea that there's any individual sitting in this room. There's only Being, living in and as every apparently different body-mind. (23)

Meditations

Behind the tropical sky, behind the sunset, and behind the thunderstorm there is something other. And this "something other" is also behind and within each of us. It is called by many names: a living silence behind sound, a living emptiness behind form, the wordless principle behind naked being.

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You live in the silence. It surrounds you like an ocean, it interpenetrates every cell of your body. It is there, living all the time. And, in the same way, the emptiness, the void out of which all creation emerges and into which all creation disperses – it's here, it's now, within you, without you, surrounding you.

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Instead of searching for what you do not have, find out what it is that you have never lost. That which is there before the beginning and after the ending of everything; that to which there is no birth, nor death. That immovable state, which is not affected by the birth and death of a body and a mind, can be perceived *now*.

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Who are you? The answer is not in words. The nearest you can say in words is: "I am what makes perception possible; the life beyond the person who experiences and the 'story' or description of his or her own experience."

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Awareness implies that you are not only conscious of things (objects), but you are also conscious of being conscious. If you can sense an alert inner stillness in the background while things happen in the foreground – that's it! This dimension is there in everyone, but most people are completely unaware of it. Sometimes I point to it by saying, "Can you feel your own Presence?"

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Go to the I AM. Not I am *this* or I am *that*, but simply I AM. This is the stateless state, the ultimate principle, the ground of Being, the absolute Self. Everything, in essence, is this absolute principle called the Self.

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Awakening is outside of time. You awaken from time to That which is timeless. Wisdom and love are aspects of your own Self and as such do not need to be created, cultivated or pursued.

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Pure presence is a state of non-judgemental, non-interfering choiceless awareness or panoramic attention to the *isness*, *suchness* and *nowness* of all things.

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Take a moment just to be still, to be here, regardless of what is passing through you. Recognize that *you are the here-ness* that all is passing through. All the myriad changes, sights, sounds, smells, emotions, thoughts, events, births and deaths are all passing through the *ever-present stillness* that is here now in the core of your Being.

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We are seamlessly embedded in the web of life itself: deep within the web there is an invisible, intangible essence that allows for sentience and consciousness and the potential for awareness itself to transform ignorance into wisdom and discord into reconciliation and accord.

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You are the pure, infinite consciousness into which all worlds and all experiences arise and disappear. Are you big enough to embrace *all* that you are, to embrace your own pure, infinite Being?

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There can be an amazing awakening to our intrinsic wholeness beyond imagination and fantasy, revealing a vast stillness at the very core of this bustling existence. At a moment of touching this all-pervading vibrant emptiness, our illusory isolation has disappeared.

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By letting go of our fascination with the extraordinary and spectacular, we can allow ourselves to recognize the simple wonder that lies within the ordinary.

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The divine instinct is continually available, simply through the allowing of it. It is always at hand, in an eternal state of readiness; like the constant and faithful lover it is ready to respond to our every call.

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There is only Source – the uncaused, unchanging, impersonal stillness from which unconditional love overflows and celebrates. It is the wonderful mystery.

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If we can reach the silence, and the life of the silence within us, then we are at one of the gateways that lead from time to eternity, from space to emptiness, from activity taken as life to life itself.

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Presence is a welcoming, open stillness, which is the ground of what we are. It is our nature. Through dedication to the awareness of *what is*, there can come a moment when there is no longer a self or a seeker; there is simply *what is*.

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Fundamentally there is just open space, the *basic ground*, what we really are. Our most fundamental state of mind, before the creation of the ego, is such that there is basic openness, basic freedom, a spacious quality; and we have now and have always had this openness.

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Beneath the surface play of phenomena, there is a formless, undifferentiated realm invisible to the naked eye; devoid of all parts, there remains only the unceasing flow and energy of life.

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When you truly awaken to the nature of what is, you see that you are *that*, the *whole* of life, and your awareness of it is none other than the awareness of life itself. You find joy, peace, exaltation, wonder and the wisdom that comes from knowing the truth of what you really truly are. We recognize our oneness with the unimaginable expanse of life and the full wonder of creation.

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