



NO EGO NO DEMONS



No Ego No Demons



a life at ease

by
Wim van den Dungen

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First Edition

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Frontispiece :

Thangka of Six-Armed *Mahākāla*, private collection.

Enough now with trying to teach
what I found with so much hardship.
This *dharma* is not easily understood
by those oppressed by lust and hate.
Those fired by lust, obscured by darkness,
will never see this perplexing *dharma*,
deep, hard to see, subtle, going against the stream.

As the Blessed One reflected thus,
his mind inclined to a life at ease,
not to teach the *dharma*.

Samyutta Nikāya
Brahmasamyutta, 6:1.

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I maintain that truth is a pathless land and cannot be approached by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized ; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path.

Jiddu Krishnamurti : *Truth is a Pathless Land*, Ojai
1930.

Preface

Dear reader, this book is about the basics of escaping our ego-prison, showing you where the bars are.

It is not an actual cage but the cramp of *self-delusion*, a mental fabrication superimposed upon what appears. With colored eyeglasses on, the interrelated make-up of the process underlying reality is filtered out. Understanding impermanence and existentially “seeing” reality’s character ends the confusion about “I” and “other,” breaking the irons put on oneself, taking off the spectacles, liberating self-slavery.

The getaway is hindered by two bolts : the thought “ego” and its egology and a mistaken take on reality’s nature. The first has existential import and is rooted in the second. The latter is a fundamental *cognitive error repetitively entertained* by the mind. It takes what is ultimately impermanent to be permanent. It presumes the cause of suffering (nihilism and eternalism) to be the beacon of happiness, observing the world differently than how it exists.

The contraction enforced by the ego on consciousness binds it to a single, monolithic circular “field” defined by the duality between this grasping “I” and the objects possessed, between a knower and a known, between a grasper and what is grasped. The unbounded groundless ground of mind condenses to the finite, limited dyadic forms of identity. Absolute consciousness turns into a partial, partisan, and relative ego with its “own” mind. The intense, radiant, and multicolored joy of *just existing* is overshadowed by the various “adventitious” shades of dull, gray egoic anguish.

Fooled into believing something exists that cannot be found, the mind is not calm, pliant, and wide-open enough to recognize the profoundness of *un-*consciousness. However, as soon as one is no longer bamboozled by the illusion, the mind’s lock-in instantly

ceases, opening the vast prospects of a spacious (full-empty) and luminous cognizing awareness. How unfortunate that innate tendencies and educational patterns condition the mind to accept that it, and the phenomena appearing to it, exist *from their own side*. Sensate objects appear separate from the conceptual mind, with independent, self-powered “beingness,” “thingness,” “essence,” or inherent existence from its own side, never other-powered.

At first, the Buddha was not inclined to teach his wisdom, his *dharma*. Was it not too exceptional, too profound, intricate, and subtle for those fired by the poisons of hate, craving, and ignorance? This remarkable wisdom went *against* the stream, both socially and spiritually. This reluctance to teach and *live at ease* got reflected in *Brahmā’s* mind, who despaired and asked the Blessed One to teach his *dharma* to those with “little dust in their eyes.” Having seen them, the Buddha gave his consent regarding teaching the Buddhadharmā.

The image of a ladder, gradually reaching from ignorance to awakening, is deceptive. While preparation is welcome, it does not *guarantee* one realizes anything in terms of full enlightenment or degrees of awakening, notwithstanding the collateral advantages of practice (like health, long life, more peace of mind, etc.). Nor is an official or heretical account of the path’s stages to *nirvāṇa* inevitably relevant to one’s training. As each mind has its idiosyncrasies and needs, generalizations about training can be counter-productive for each individual’s path. Squeezing different minds in the same template is, therefore, relatively futile.

Moreover, each mind reacts differently to identical practices, and everyone has their *karma*. Its ramifications are so complex, diverse, and subtle that to isolate a clear-cut cause-and-effect relationship is daring but pointless. Nevertheless, beginners often find assistance in an organized, gradual approach. The ultimate kind of practice is without coercion (free) and our natural grant.

The greatest potential for ending suffering lies in the *present moment*. The mysterious pass found in each instant leads to the indelible *maṇḍala* of actual existence's immediacy. It is like a Great Gate in "nowness" vanishing when passed through, finding ourselves continuously in this wondrous timeless display of existence in the space of the Great Time (*Mahākāla*).

What do we need to understand our human condition ?

This book offers an essential set.

It contains consciousness, perception, sensation, ego-formation, the dimensions of consciousness, emotions, category mistakes, *karma*, worldly choices, wandering about, demons, mindfulness, etc. The two essential emancipatory means presented are thoughts turning the mind and putting the ego to work.

Mindfulness is also offered, focusing on body, breath, and mind. Like scale practice prepares the opera singer, causing an easier transition to the actual performance, mindfulness brings in the crucial *attention* factor. Without the latter, the nature of mind cannot be spotted.

While this is not a book about the Great Completion (*Dzogchen*), it is inspired by this *view of no-view*. Hindu Tantra, Royal Yoga, Zazen, and Vajrayāna techniques warmed the soup. I confess that my long previous engagement with Qabalah was also helpful.

In the immediacy of the totality envisioned in each consecutive timeless moment, Atiyoga reveals the *always present* natural base of the mind. While the disclosure that this is *always current* and *immediately given* informs, this text is not about nondual mysticism per se. It is a scratch book touching some of the sharp nails of the human condition and a few fugal salvic ideas.

May you who came across it find something to empower your practice and benefit others.

Yoga is the restriction of the flux of consciousness.

Patañjali : *Yoga-sūtra*, 1.2.

As a flame blown out by the force of the wind
goes to rest and cannot be described,
so the sage freed in mind and body
goes to rest and cannot be described.

Sutta Nipāta, 1080.

1 | (Ur) Consciousness

Ur-consciousness¹ is the groundless ground, bornless base, or unconditional matrix of consciousness. All acts of consciousness have always happened, happen, and will happen in this insubstantial, naked, open, and clear awareness.

Rest in just *that*, in this *Gestalt* or *maṇḍala* of the moment and suffering ends. It begs the question : What is consciousness ?

Generally speaking, consciousness is another word for “mind,” its mental events and properties. These are considered subjective, private states saying “what this-or-that is like” for a given person at a given time and place. This *surface* consciousness is always consciousness-of-*something* and dualistic. Intentionality is this mind’s *directedness*. It gives rise to sensate, volitional, affective, cognitive, and self-conscious states. They are identified by an ego owning these sensate and mental objects.

Consciousness embraces sensations, volitions (actions, behaviors, deeds), affects (emotions and feelings), cognition (various thoughts), and is aware of itself (ego identity).² It is intentional and positional, placing its objects *before* the mind’s eye to hold them. It moves beyond itself to reach out to these objects, exhausting itself in this process, identifying with the object at hand.

Turning inwards and stilling the mind, deeper layers of consciousness are spotted. When the ripples are gone, the bottom of the lake is seen. This innermost *ur*-consciousness pervades amidst the ego’s encounters with its objects. Reflexive, non-positional, and auto-referential, it may be recognized without any ongoing intentionality and pervades all intentional states of both the coarse and subtle levels of the mind. *Ur*-consciousness is the very subtle level, our *natural, innermost awareness*.³

It *just exists as it is*, without the egoic overlay.

In Western philosophy, psychology, and cognitive sciences, the mind is presented as a single, separate entity enduring over time and space, with various features, like dispositions, capacities, and operators.⁴ Its core is defined chiefly as self-powered, separate and isolated, with fixed “beingness” of its own (*ousia, eidos, substantia*), explaining the unit’s permanency. Identified by Descartes as a “thinking thing” (*res cogitans*), with a separate existence of its own, materialism and later physicalism would eventually reduce or eliminate the mind and its states to cerebral activity, thereby crippling our understanding of knowledge itself.⁵ *Bodhi*-mind is not a static substance but an unending process or “holo-movement,”⁶ a dynamic view also partly found in Taoism.⁷

The crucial distinction between (surface) consciousness and (deep) *ur*-consciousness was noticed by mystics worldwide.⁸ While understood differently in theist and dharmic explanatory superstructures (Staal),⁹ the direct, yogic experience of the deep mind remains available. Mystics are those humans who have at least one, but usually more, *direct, existential experiences* of the Divine. The latter word is *generic*. It refers to the *whole gamut* of holotropic, transpersonal, meta-rational phenomena, and incidents. Mystical experience (from the Greek *mustikos*, hidden, secret) lies at the heart of theism. It is the hidden secret of faith and the living soul of human spirituality. Religions are dry and fruitless without holotropic experiences. But with them, the direct experience of the Divine daily animates spiritual life.

Regrettably, organized religions fail to deliver because they replace “my Lord,” i.e., my first-person experience, with “our Lord,” a communal God “present” in the holy books, hierarchy, rituals, and the like. Truth is a pathless land (Krishnamurti). Because of the disparity between superstructures and their jargon, finding the contrast between the conventional mind and the original face is challenging. Institutions often want to serve as bridges but work as closed doors leading the horse away from the water.

In the Hindu Royal Yoga of Patañjali,¹⁰ consciousness (*citta*) belongs to Nature (*prakṛti*) and thus is *constantly in flux* (*vṛtti*). In this view, the (thinking) mind (*manas*) and consciousness are not the “seer,” the innermost “great man” (*puruṣa, ātman*) disentangled from Nature – they are part of the “seen,” the external world. The path then involves the *separation* (*vi-yoga*) of “seen” and “seer.” It demands “inward-mindedness” (*pratyak-cetanā*) and the “vision of discernment” (*viveka-khyāti*), disclosing the seen as existing in cyclic existence and the seer as eternally self-existing in aloneness (*kaivalyam*). The fruit, or the total restriction (*nirodha*) of all fluctuations (*vṛtti-nirodha*), reveals this “spirit,” the non-intentional root of the mind or source consciousness.

Here we see the divide at work between, on the one hand, a superficial, outward state of consciousness, defined by the mind’s “I-am-ness” (*asmitā*) or ego, and, on the other hand, its root, the fundamental, egoless, nondual level, inward and concealed by the many fluctuations caused by Nature’s multi-dimensional activities. In the dharmic outlook, mystical union refers to the nondual, non-conceptual realization of ultimate reality and its truth, the ultimate nature of phenomena. The Divine then refers to an *unbounded wholeness*, simultaneously lacking substantial core and completely interdependent, engendering pansacralism.

Grosso modo, the “path” from the “view” to the “fruit,” is graduated or laddered, meaning a step-by-step approach (Tib. *lam-rim*). It can also be instantaneous or suddenist. In an intellectually “causally” organized “route to Buddhahood,” this intrinsic awareness at the bottom of the “lake” is to be generated ! Then it is considered merely potential, the possibility of awakening to be manifested through training. In this view, *bodhi*-mind is the result of eliminating the superficial mind. In the existential view, the Buddha Within is fully awake and abounding with enlightened qualities. Just to recognize this is the sole initiation necessary.

Consciousness

vijñāna

In the Buddhadharmā, consciousness is not a single entity lasting over time but *episodic*.¹¹ It is a dynamical *continuum* (*santāna*) of mental moments, instants of consciousness, or “mind events.” Each acts as a cause for the next moment and is unique. Thus a string, stream, flow, or ongoing movement can be attended. In this view, it is possible to speak of having several “minds,” i.e., singular mental events, without breaking apart the underlying idea of consciousness being *a single and unique continuum*. Mental events may be grouped as various states of consciousness.

Consciousness is “mere clarity and awareness.”¹²

○ **clarity** : “giving rise to,” the subjective event of something arising, of an object owned, the mind being clear-cut about it ;

Two Sanskrit terms can approach the phenomenology of consciousness. With *prakāśa* or “luminous, luster, bright, light,” one evokes that consciousness “illuminates” or “presents” contents (objects), like *a lamp illuminates what is nearby*, making it obvious. With *prabhāsvara* or “transparent, brilliantly shining, clear,” all objects of mind are transient like objects seemingly appearing in the mirror. They cannot alter the original mind, the luminously clear *ur*-consciousness (or mirror surface) ;

○ **awareness** : to be aware (*saṃvit*) means to *cognize something*, namely the sensate and mental objects of cognitive attendance and engagement. In other words, consciousness has *epistemic relevancy*. The mind not only illuminates but also *informs*. Consciousness is about its object, presenting it relevant to actively engaging that

object. As consciousness is aware, it is active, constructive, and interpretative. It is its cognizance.

Buddhist Psychology			
The Five Aggregates of Suffering			
mind	<i>viññāna</i> consciousness	clarity and awareness	mental objects
	<i>saṃjñā</i> cognition thought	thoughts, judgments, propositions	
	<i>vedanā</i> feeling	affects, feelings, emotions	
	<i>saṃskāra</i> volition	will, intent, motivation, and other factors	
body	<i>rūpa</i> body / form contact	sense-perception sensations	sensate objects

Conceptual knowledge always co-dependes on a particular perspective, view, theoretical connotation, set of concepts, or paradigm, co-determining what appears as its object of knowledge.¹³ Common consciousness is an *object-possessor* and *dualistic*, with a grasper (ego, knower) and a grasped (the object known).¹⁴ This is the “nominal” way of being “aware,” i.e., knowing this-or-that object thanks to positional consciousness. Its object is believed to exist separate and independent from it.

Shedding light on what appears, awareness is *luminous*, like “to see what the case is.” To observe is to be aware, to be cognizant, consciously attending objects, knowing, apprehending. The subject possesses its objects and not *vice versa*. To exist, it exhausts itself in what it owns. Identifying with its objects, it suffers.

“Normal” awareness differs from “pure,” indwelling awareness in the sense that the latter refers to the cognitive, epistemic activity of *un*-consciousness, not that of the surface mind. It is “pure” because it is no longer bewildered by mental obscurations ;

○ **mere** : a mind is *merely* a cognitive event giving rise to an object and experiencing its appearance. For consciousness to operate, there is no need for sharp attentiveness to the contents of the experience (as in mindfulness). No sharp observational focus (as in concentration) or conceptual understanding is implied (as in analytical meditation). Nor are a solid object “out there” or a subject of experience “in here” a necessity (as in a dream). The “arising” may be a blur or confused (as when intoxicated). It may be crisp and sharp (as in so-called “superior seeing”). All these different states do not take away the fact that the experience is *merely* occurring, nor that it is *personal*.

Consciousness is the mere arising and illuminating cognitive engaging with the contents of momentary experience, the ego’s sensate, and mental objects. It is noetic light, luminous cognizance, clarifying awareness.

With the idea of the mind being a continuum, demarcated by moments rapidly succeeding one another, the notions “mindstream” or “stream of consciousness” emerge. This never-ceasing moment-to-moment arising, abiding, and ceasing of

mental events constitutes the ego's "conscious experience." It encompasses all sensate and mental objects owned by the ego, the knower, or the subject of experience. It apprehends what it sees, hears, touches, smells, and tastes (sensate objects) and attends mental objects of volition, affect, thought, and self-reflection.

At the center of the "field of consciousness" in which all these mental activities occur stands the ego, contracting the field to a single point of reference, *the first-person perspective*. At the center of the conditional surface mind, this ego is the knower of a consciousness apprehending its objects, turned outwards, exhausting itself in what it owns.

Like water running in a river, this flowing consciousness streams in the "riverbed" of the very subtle mind, the "brightly shining mind" (*prabhāsvara-citta*) or *ur*-consciousness, also known as the "Buddha Within" (*tathāgatagarbha*).¹⁵

In the *Pali Canon*, removing what obscures the ultimate, having "blown out" what fetters, or *nirvāṇa*, leads to the end. This is the state without corruptions, the truth, the further (shore), the subtle, the very hard to see, without decay, firm, not liable to dissolution, incomparable, without differentiation, peaceful, deathless, excellent, auspicious, rest, the destruction of craving, marvelous, without affliction, whose nature is to be free from affliction, without trouble, dispassion, purity, freedom, without attachment, the island, shelter, protection, refuge, final end, the subduing of pride, elimination of thirst, destruction of attachment, cutting off the round of rebirth, very hard to obtain, where there is no becoming, no misfortune, where there is nothing made, sorrow free, whose nature is without danger, profound, hard to see, superior, unexcelled, without superior, unequaled, incomparable, best, without strife, clean, stainless, happiness, immeasurable, (a firm) standing point, possessing nothing.¹⁶

Simply put, in the Lesser Vehicle or Theravāda, the state of “true cessation” or the *irreversible* end of suffering merely negates what the suffering state stands for. It is likened to extinguishing the afflictive and mental “fires” fueling cyclic or conditioned existence (*saṃsāra*). In the logic of this still dualistic approach, *nirvāṇa* is then the *absence* of the suffering of *saṃsāra*, in other words, happiness = \neg suffering. But those who distinguish both are still suffering. Those who fool themselves judge cyclic existence harshly and cannot find *nirvāṇa* there. Yet, both *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are that-what-is or just existence, viewed without or with self-delusion, respectively. The wise realize that duality does not appear to the awake mind, for the whole of cyclic existence, from the deepest hell to the highest heaven, is its unending sacred bliss. In this sense, *nirvāṇa* is the liberation and unbinding of the “fire” of the existents (*dharmas*) from its source, thus becoming self-blazing as the mind of clear light or *ur*-consciousness.

A new dawn is realized the moment the contractions caused by the ego are removed from the field of consciousness, the mind resting in the luminous clarity of the awakened mind. The ego’s presence is the *striking difference* between consciousness (the nominal, personal, conceptual mind) and *ur*-consciousness, the pure, impersonal source mind. The field of consciousness is contracted by egoic activity, and this sets dualistic elaborations in motion. These discursive thoughts cause consciousness to be dammed up. The mind is fettered and cannot expand beyond its insidious and uneasy egology.¹⁷

Compare the bright mind with an infinite, unobstructed, open space (*śūnyatā*). With no separate existence nor self-identity, it does not empower itself. Still, it is permeated by luminous wakefulness coupled with primordial intelligence (*vidya*). Like the surface of an untainted, immaculate mirror, it reflects its objects with flawless accuracy and clarity, without ever being conditioned by them. Uninterruptedly, things manifest in the mirror. The

actors are on the stage of the world. Angels and demons. They come and go. The innermost mind remains unaltered, acting as support, background, and witness.

It is tempting to say *ur*-consciousness is perfect. Understandable, this is nevertheless not an accurate attribution. For when perfection is attributed, imperfection lurks behind. Equating consciousness and its egoic suffering with imperfection and the natural mind with perfection does not remove dualism. It underlines it. To call the nature of mind “perfect” is a mental manipulation by the ego and its dualism. It also opens the debate about how an always afflicted and imperfect mind may conceal a perfect and radiant *ur*-consciousness. How can something happy become miserable ? We must return to this question, for if *ur*-consciousness has, is, and will always be fully awakened, then where do the ego and its mess come from in the first place ? How to explain ubiquitous suffering if the mind’s root has, is, and will be *everlastingly blissful* ?

The root of consciousness is not perfect but *complete*.¹⁸ Because it is complete, whole, and always present, it is called “all-good” (Samantabhadra). Thus it moves beyond duality, encompassing and pervading all possible perfections and imperfections. Perfection is bound by imperfection and vice versa. But one cannot move beyond what is complete and thus all-encompassing, i.e., including all possible duality, division, discrimination, differentiation, discursive thoughts, and judgments.

The base mind is nondual and across-the-board, sweeping over the turpitudes of *saṃsāra* and the joys of *niroāṇa*. It is a complete mind and unbounded because it lacks all tightening, tenseness, or contraction.¹⁹ This open, peripheral, *centrifugal* mind is current in all possible states of consciousness, always focal and *centripetal*. Due to the ego’s diminished horizon, eventual demise, and replacement by the translucent I, the ordinary mind radiates

through as “*presence*,” the embodiment of *ur*-consciousness. Indeed, pure, reflexive awareness is not a transcendent affair. Nor is it purely immanent. Its nature may be supramundane and formless (*arūpa*), but its manifestation as light and display is not.

How to explain the rise of cyclic existence, wholesome (white *karma*), and unwholesome (black *karma*) superficial consciousness out of complete *ur*-consciousness ? These suffering states covering the six “realms” of woe²⁰ are rooted in *false ideation*. It is an epistemic error or category mistake, attributing permanency to what is impermanent. It is *not* the case that the nature of *samsāra* is ontologically defined. In other words, that its severe and easy-going forms of suffering are an attribute of a particular “afflicted” state of the world “out there.” No. Nature itself is not the culprit (as the Vedic tradition has it). The bewilderment of the mind wreaks havoc. Not the world’s state, but our mind’s state produces the dissatisfaction and unease experienced in cyclic existence.

The totality that we call “the world” (*dharmadhātu*) is OK as it is. Cyclic existence is “cyclic” because of the conditions defining the surface mind. It has ignorance at its core. It produces the reactive patterns of afflicted emotions, of exaggerated attractions, and repulsions. These “conceal” or “cover-up” the radiant mind. Hatred and craving succeed each other, and so we circle from pleasure to displeasure and back. Cyclic existence appears because of the *wrong attributions* of the superficial mind. It does not exist “out there” but is solely the outcome of a wrong mental operation “in here.” In philosophical terms, we say suffering is not ontological but epistemic.

Why and how does duality appear out of unity ? Why and how do we fool ourselves ? How does the unbound, blissful space of the clear mind become veiled by the restricted, cramped space of the ego-mind, the nominal mind ?

Duality cannot understand this.

Starting with two makes it hard to understand how the monad becomes a dyad. Let's try metaphors.

Imagine a pole vault springer ready to cross the bar, or a ballet dancer just before executing one of the seven ballet movements, or a golf player seconds before hitting the ball, or an opera singer a moment before that harrowing passage, or a chess player visualizing the game ahead, or a Picasso improvising, or an archer stretching the bow with an arrow, etc. What do these and many others have in common? They are "in the flow state." Informally known as "being in the zone," this state fully immerses the performer.²¹ Entirely involved, a strong, energized, but relaxed presence prevails. One enjoys the activity utterly without any sense of ego, stress-free while seemingly tense.

When the monad of *ur*-consciousness turns into a dyad, space's unbounded wholeness is gone, and the "zone" is left. Confusion is generated because this spaciousness invited this mind to be deeply inspired to dance about in such a playful way (*līlā*) that this openness of space is no longer expressed.²²

At this point, one becomes self-consciously aware that "I" am dancing in the space. Hence, space is no longer an "open" space at all and has become firm. No longer one with space or "in the zone," the sovereignty of space is congealed. It is experienced as a *separate* entity, a tangible reality "outside" the dancer in which the dance occurs. As soon the athlete is aware of the forthcoming jump, the move's spontaneity is lost. When the piano player observes himself improvising, "mistakes" are bound to happen. These slips are the outcome of the mind's contraction, of the sudden presence of the ego, the thought "I." When a separate entity is experienced, duality is at hand. When the ego knows it is dancing in space, spontaneous flow is halted. The intentional mind may try to observe the action while it happens, but it never does because of the time lag. Being conscious that "I" am dancing

moves the dancer away from the directness and causes the mind's contraction. This shrinkage instigated by the ego means the "space" and "I" are distinguished, and this is the birth of "otherness." A sudden arrest occurs. It makes us turn around to discover "compact space," as if we did not generate this duality. Now the dancer (ego) *knows* he is dancing. Openness is transformed into an overwhelming, frozen space. When this happens, the even and open quality of being "in the zone" is gone. Un-intelligence or ignorance (*avidya*) has been generated. The automatic sharpness, precision of the endlessly flowing continuum of the mind's root has become dense and still. We want a partner, another to witness our dance. We lose fluidity because of this concern. Possessing otherness, we ignore the flowing quality of the original mind.

There are, Migajāla, objects cognizable by the eye — attractive, pleasing, charming, agreeable, enticing, lust-inspiring. And if a monk takes pleasure in them, welcomes them, persists in clinging to them, then because of this taking pleasure, welcoming and persistent clinging, enjoyment comes, and from enjoyment, infatuation. Infatuation brings bondage, and a monk who is trapped in the bondage of enjoyment is called "one who dwells with a mate" (...) But, Migajāla, there are objects cognizable by the eye ... ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind — attractive, pleasing, charming, agreeable, enticing, lust-inspiring. And if a monk takes no pleasure in them, does not welcome them, does not persist in clinging to them, then, because of his not taking pleasure, not welcoming them, and not persisting in clinging to them, enjoyment fades away. Without enjoyment, there is no infatuation. Without infatuation, no bondage is generated, and the monk who is freed from the bondage of enjoyment is called "one who dwells alone." — *Samyutta Nikāya, Saḷāyatana-samyutta*, 63.

||: Reprise :||

Consciousness is the *cognitive engagement* bringing *clarity* to the contents of momentary experience, the knower's sensate and mental objects. The former comprises the five senses. The latter involves action, affect, thought, and sentient activity. Common, or "nominal" consciousness is intentional, positioning its objects before and outside the subject of knowledge, generating duality and its elaboration. It possesses these objects, exhausting the grasper in the grasped, the subject in the object.

Intentional consciousness is a "surface" phenomenon, a series of momentary mental events fueled by the five aggregates' activity : form, action, affect, thought, and consciousness itself (reflection and correction). Because it grasps at its objects, wearing itself out in what it deems to own, it is inevitable that the knowledge thus acquired calls for duality, separating consciousness and its objects. Objects, to maintain this unnatural severance in a consciousness entailing a continuum or "field" of transitory mental events, must be fixated as long as possible, making them stable enough to illusory appear as solidly disjointed from the grasper. This being in the grip of the mind's tendency to stabilize and turn into separate things is ignorance cut at the root by wisdom. Unawareness carries a reactive mind, a dissatisfaction poisoning consciousness due to the ongoing unease of attraction and repulsion. The former, also "made" permanent by hardening, leads to craving's afflictive emotional states. The latter to negation, rejection, hatred, and violent dislikes. Delusion spawns division and, to continue to fissure, has to fake to make the impermanent permanent. The more reactive movement needed, this culminates in overstated desire and abject rejection.

Most soteriological approaches start with suffering and move from this state to one without woe. There is a “view” on the nature of reality from which a “path” can be derived, leading to a “fruit” co-relative with the task of the view, i.e., lasting happiness. Humanity’s existential situation is sorrow-stricken. It seems obvious to start with disease and work towards the ease of wholeness, exhibiting pliancy of body and mind.

The individual wild waves crashing into each other cause turbulence on the surface only. The deep is calm, clear, and interrelated. Likewise, the human condition is not flawed, given to evil or incapacitated. No “second Adam” is needed to save us from the original sin of the first. While cyclic existence does chain our freedom, it does so by veiling the *clear noetic light within*. We are not willy-nilly victims. If we dedicate ourselves, we can step into the day²³ and be a light unto ourselves. If we choose not to, we will continue our ignorant circling until our gross body dies and our panic-stricken consciousness, driven by our karmic winds, is hurled into its next sordid misadventure. And this again and again and again. So be it ! Is all this not of our own making ?

By contrast, commence with *ur*-consciousness, the natural, fundamental, ordinary and, omnipresent radiant mind. This *bodhi*-mind is deemed “the fruit” and hardly used as a starter by most practitioners. It is seen as a distant goal, a summit top hidden in the clouds ; heaven attainable after death only.

How to safely plunge from the surface into the deep ? Can *pure* awareness be recognized amid its common, impure form ? How to appreciate the emergence of positional consciousness from *ur*-consciousness ? Why and how was the paradisiacal state replaced with the chronic disease of mind and body ? Why this self-inflicted “fall from Grace”?

Consciousness, to spot the luminous and spacious awareness from which all thoughts emerge, must “turn” inwards (*metanoia*).

sf The Point

Fool ! You must know
your inmost nature –
then you'll cut the net
of ignorance, every strand.

Tilopa : *Treasury of Couplets*, 9c

Consciousness is awareness (cognizing) and clarity (illuminating). Our waking state of mind, this field of consciousness with a centralizing and reifying ego, is merely an intentional, positioning, outwardly turned surface mind.

Underlying rests the original mind, the uncaused mind normal as breathing. Beyond subtle, this *ur*-consciousness is non-positional, non-intentional, non-conceptual, and nondual. Nothing can bring it into existence, nor can it be made extinct. Unborn, it ever abides and is therefore uncaused. There is no path to this nature of mind, this secret *guru*. Here is unity, but not without differentiation ; a paradox. These *two-in-one* is the unchanging wisdom-awareness of the empty nature of the ever-changing reality of all appearances, the union, *moment after moment*, of space (the wisdom realizing emptiness), and bliss (the direct experience of absolute reality).

Despite that the nature of mind is ineffable, poets, troubadours, dancing mystics, and wise fools have continued to be tempted to speak and write about what cannot be said or spoken of without hurting the delicate momentariness of the direct non-positional awareness in the “fourth time of timelessness,” thus leading away from it rather than wittingly suggest an approach (which does not exist). In the mystical tradition, inspired songs (*dohas*) intend to use words to say something about *ur*-consciousness.

In the *Samten Migdron*, one of the early tomes of Dzogchen literature, written by Nubchen Yeshe (9th century), the so-called “Nine Views Concerning the Ground” are enumerated.²⁴

1 *Ur-consciousness is free from thematic focus*, i.e., non-positional, nonreferential. It cannot be designated like any other object in any possible phenomenal or noumenal existence. This negation is fourfold. In Nāgārjuna’s *tetralemma*, the ordinary mind is denoted in the negative. It is “not this, nor its opposite, not both this and that, not neither this nor that.” Language can never do this most profound mind justice. The grammar of all languages is dualistic and so cannot express the nondual. Without a reference point, the mind’s root never begins, moves towards a goal, or develops purpose. It rests in itself, the dual-union of space and bliss.

2 The nature of mind is *spontaneous presence* in a timeless moment (the “fourth time”). It cannot be objectified as a sensate or mental object. It is uncaused and cannot bring about changes. It cannot be called into existence, nor can it be destroyed.

3 The mind’s original face is our basic, *integral identity*, the single constant in our existence as a mindstream. Although some factors have a longer life in this stream than others, every aspect of consciousness besides the base is ephemeral. The face has an egoless sense of identity shared with all sentient beings and illuminates the particular. All sentient beings may identify with this meta-identity, but none may claim a monopoly.

The nature of mind is not permanent but continuous, uninterrupted.

No beginning, no end
no middle, not existence and not *nirvāṇa* ;
well, that utmost great bliss
is not another and not a self.
Saraha : *Treasury of Couplets*, 27

4 The nature of mind is fivefold *self-originated wisdom*, a timeless instant of pristine awareness. There is no cause preceding this, for the here and now does not depend on a precedent. Complete, it has no effect, no causal function. This pure awareness illuminates all forms, is identical to them, and at the same time detached from them. It is self-born awareness liberating every moment of nondual experience. It is formless clear light with a rainbow display.

5 *Freedom from action and searching* typifies intrinsic awareness. It is the nonaction, non-directedness of timelessness without any trace of intention or motivation. Therefore, it is an effortless, spontaneous display undirected by a controlling ego.

6 The original, very subtle mind is *great bliss*, complete joy, pure pleasure. This nondual heart of bliss lacks a subject to feel and an intellectual arbiter to comprehend and compare. It is an inexpressible feeling, and all human affectivity is its display.

7 The nature of mind is *nondual*. The “state” of nonduality cannot be examined but may induce an “intuitive” sense of absolute reality. The latter is not “oneness without a second,” or unity without division as in Advaita Vedanta (*ātman = Brahman*), but the “two-in-one” of Tantra (*yab-yum*).

Pure awareness is unitary (one), but its appearances or display are multivalent (two), divided into active (masculine, Solar, wisdom) and passive (feminine, Lunar, method). Nondual is the negation of any physical or temporal dimension.

8 The clear light mind is the *great seminal nucleus* or cosmic seed, egg, or circle. Thus unbounded wholeness, spaciousness without bounds is the unity of macrocosm and microcosm. This unity of outer and inner calls for the identity between subject and object and the *zero dimension* transcending these dualistic poles, with boundless space as the product. This spaciousness is not an empty nothingness but here and now, full of light, color, and sound.

9 Finally, the nature of mind is the *ground of all phenomena as it is*. It is our natural dispensation or “native soil.”

In nowness, the “being there” yields an awe-inspiring sense of entering a whole place, sufficient in itself without any conceptual projection. Our natural allowance is the present actuality selflessly cognized.

It is pure awareness experienced as our “homeland.”

Why sentient beings “fall out” of the luminous spaciousness of their own deepest layer of mind has nothing to do with anything external. At some point in the “history” of a specific mindstream, pure awareness was lost due to identification, attempting to grasp spontaneous presence, thereby losing “the zone.” Why this happened is difficult to explain in words, for involving a paradox. Something complete falls out of it, and the distinction between perfect and imperfect rose at that point. Why the whole can “fall out” completeness is incomprehensible. When all is there, why seek something else ? Because suffering was unknown and so alluring ? Apparently, the objects appearing in the mirror were more important than the glass itself. Did enlightened beings choose sentience to experience these objects, deciding to suffer to eventually experience everything as bliss ?

Consider the story of Eden. Did Adam and Eve fully understand the splendor of God’s paradise ? They saw the kingdom but never the King. Their minds snaked them into believing they, too, like the Lord, could know the difference between good and evil. Were they naive and living in total childishness ? The move out of this condition, the intention to know good and evil, or duality, was the start of their woe and the prospect of final release. They had to be thrown out and toil the Earth and suffer to understand what it is, to grasp “evil.” Only overcoming this leads back home. Seeing appearing objects as bliss no longer lures them to move out. They will relish their state and dance forever.