Ten Levels of Myself: Part 2

The previous chapter explored the first 6 levels of our inner landscape, and hopefully made clear that these levels exist in every one of us, barring a severe dysfunction. The incredible diversity between people is explained by the fact that all these forces, currents, and levels mix together in endless ways. This is true whether a person is aware of them or not. If they are not within a person's consciousness, they are in the unconscious, affecting that person's life in multiple ways.

I also tried to convey that understanding the human psyche is amazingly complex, partly because all the parts of ourselves do not have clear boundaries between them; they do not fit into neat boxes. It is like trying to sort out the mix of sounds one hears on a busy street, or putting specific images and thoughts on the figures in a dream. In an attempt at understanding, we use names to designate the various parts of ourselves, but they are only rough pointers toward a world that is fluid, dynamic, constantly shifting and changing.

Increasing the difficulty of understanding, these various parts of ourselves do not function separately, but are constantly overlapping and influencing each other. The value of putting names on this inner landscape is to have a rough, though very imprecise, way of moving toward greater consciousness and awareness. The more we can do this, the more we will be able to bring all the currents together into a coherent life, one that is moving toward the possibilities we have consciously chosen—rather than being carried this way and that by forces about which we are not conscious. Accomplishing this was exactly what Socrates was urging us to do when he admonished each person to: "Know Thyself."

An image I like is of the leader of a great choir working with the members, who at first are not singing in rhythm or harmony with each other, gradually bringing the many voices together into a beautiful song. In the same way, each of us has many different voices within, and the work of a lifetime is to find a way to bring all the parts of ourselves into harmony, working together toward a fulfilling life. We each have this capacity, no matter how we feel about ourselves right now.

The first 6 levels discussed last week are the voices that have been the focus of much of modern psychology, beginning with Freud, followed by Jung, Adler, and behaviorism, and then various branches of cognitive, humanistic, and self psychology. To understand the next 4 levels of who we are, however, it is necessary to turn to the wisdom traditions of the world (just as Jung did as he struggled to define the Self in his own model of who we are). This turn starts with an understanding of the *full self.*

7. The Full Self: If the ego includes everything I am conscious of about myself, what shall we call the complete individual me, the "me" that includes the parts of which I am not yet conscious. For most of us, there is a lot within ourselves of which we are not conscious. Freud said that the unconscious is a territory much more vast than the small citadel encompassed by the conscious mind. Jung added that there is both a personal unconscious and a collective unconscious. The personal unconscious includes a person's own individual repressed fears, buried anxieties, unacknowledged longings, unspoken hopes and dreams, unknown talents and abilities, and the disowned shadow.

My term for the ego plus the personal unconscious is the "full self." Every culture has developed techniques for bringing unconscious elements into consciousness, and this has been the main thrust of many schools of western psychology for the last one hundred years.

In essence, your "full self" includes everything of which you are now conscious, along with all the unconscious personal desires, fears, images, values, beliefs, and thoughts. Psychological growth, in this model, involves developing a healthy ego and then incorporating more and more of your unconscious material into conscious awareness. As you do this, your healthy ego self will gradually move toward becoming one with your full self.

Some schools of western psychology stop here, but Carl Jung, in conjunction with much ancient wisdom, said the full self includes a connection to the "collective unconscious," the name he used for currents of deeper knowing that are shared with others. Jung did not suggest he understood what this was very well, and no one to this day does either, but many people have experienced a shared deeper knowing that cannot be explained by any means we now understand.

One aspect of the collective unconscious Jung called the *archetypes.* An example of archetypes at work in animals is the way many have the ability to perform complicated tasks without being taught, or even seeing an example of an action. (Birds that have never had contact with their parents fly thousands of miles to the hereditary mating location of their species; other birds build complicated nests like those of the species without seeing an example, and many animals know how to raise their young by ancient species-wide methods even though they never experienced or saw it demonstrated themselves.)

In just this way, Jung believed that each human could, and often did (without consciously thinking about it) access an archetypal image of how to be a Nurturer, Mother, Boss, Warrior, King, Queen, Enlightened One, Lover, Submissive Subject,

Dominant Partner, Caregiver, Artist, Tyrant, Healer, Peacemaker, Counselor, Spoiled Child, and on and on. Some Jungians have tried to explain the archetypes as being contained within the individual psyche. If this is the case, then the archetypes would be included in the full self that is contained within each person.

But there is another way to understand archetypes: They can be seen as pure models for ways of being, similar to Plato's Pure Forms, that exist in a shared field of awareness outside of, or transcendent to the individual. The existence of a shared field of awareness would explain many things that are today mysteries to us, such as the way flocks of migrating birds can act and move as one unit, as if they share one consciousness. This would also explain why people sometimes feel a crisis is happening to a loved one, even though there is no normal means of communication between them.

Other examples include the ability of people to move into synchronization without words, as often happens with soldiers on a mission, a sports team getting into sync, or jazz musicians playing together—the group coming into harmony while playing a song being composed as they play, each aware of the tone and timing of everyone else in the group without any recognizable means of communication we know. This ability includes dancers moving into rhythm with each other in a way that defies physical explanation, a couple sensing the thoughts and feelings of each other, and the incredible link that can sometimes exist between a parent and a child.

However archetypes arise, their presence is valuable. But they further complicate living a human life, for the many archetypes compete for our time and attention, and if they are not recognized and managed, one or more will take over one's life. (Think of some of the world's worst tyrants.) Thus, one important goal for each of us is to learn to use the energy of each archetype when it is needed and useful, but not to let ourselves be taken over and dominated by any of them—for therein lies madness.

To become conscious of our id energies and shadow elements, to manage the complexes and personas, and then use the archetypes in a contained and healthy way requires a strong, conscious ego. (Although the archetypes arise from a deep shared field and usually affect us at the unconscious level—they are seldom directly available to consciousness—we can learn to intuit their energies and manage them, to some degree, to function in a healthy way and in alignment with our ego goals.)

With so many different currents within us, many of which are constantly vying for attention and control, the work of a healthy ego is to become increasingly conscious of all the voices, gradually expanding conscious awareness to include each and all—an ideal that is never completely reached by most of us. But it is a worthy aspiration.

Where is the collective unconscious? As noted earlier, some argue that it is contained entirely within each individual, and some of Jung's early writings can be interpreted in this way. There are countless problems with this interpretation, however, and Jung's later writings strongly suggest a view more in line with that of Plato and many other wisdom figures. This broader view is that there is a shared field of awareness that exists beyond each individual. And this is the jumping off point for an exploration of the higher levels of the self, the ones that go beyond the theory that everything is contained in each person's "skin-encapsulated" ego self.

8. The Witness: Several modern theories limit our identity to the ego and personal unconscious. For my part, I believe we include more, that there are several higher levels of identity into which we can move. The first of those levels emerges any time you are able to step back and observe yourself—are able to look at your life, your ego, and at other people without judgments, opinions, or defending a position. Haven't you experienced this at times? It is the heart of mindfulness training. The one who is observing is not the ego self, but the witness; others call it the observer. It is the part of you that can rise beyond the ego, and even beyond all the unconscious material contained in the full self. This is to step into the level of yourself that can see the whole picture, including the ability to observe your own ego self.

Think of a time you were in a park, or on a trip, and did not know anyone. Perhaps you stopped and saw a family on a picnic, or an argument between two people you did not know, or a small crowd gathered around those playing checkers in a town square. You observe, appreciate the life unfolding before you, but do not feel caught up in any of the scenes in a personal way. You are simply an observer, a witness to all that is happening. Your ego self is not engaged in any of it, and no emotions are dominating your thoughts or understanding of what is going on in your awareness.

For most of us, most of the time, every experience, everything we see or hear will trigger something in us, even if only vaguely. Most experiences bring back memories or excite hopes and dreams. But occasionally we have a moment when are just present with the scene in front of us and not caught by it in any way.

When this happens to me, I usually feel a tender warmth toward life, toward other people, or perhaps an animal I am observing. This experience is what I imagine brings the slight smile to the face of the Buddha as depicted in many statues of him. It is an expression of tenderness or compassion for those struggling with the issues of life, but detached from unease with praise or blame concerning oneself. It conveys an acceptance of life as it is, the good and the bad, the light and the dark. This captures the mood of the state the Buddha considered "deathless," which is outside or beyond the individual body/mind we usually think of as who we are.

Related to this state, the remarkable thing I have discovered for myself is that I can practice moving toward this perspective at any moment. It is possible to learn to step into the place of the witness, become the observer of my own life, free from the fears, anxieties, ambitions, cravings, desires, and emotions that usually drive and govern who I am. And, any time I can step into this place, either by choice—or when it happens of its own accord—I have discovered the witness once again. Doing this can be very healing, and lead to much inner peace.

This *witness or observing self* has been recognized by all the wisdom traditions. In the *Upanishads* of Hinduism, we find this passage:

> Two birds, one of them mortal, the other immortal, live in the same tree.
> The first pecks at the fruit, sweet or bitter;
> the second looks on without eating.
> Thus the personal self pecks at the fruit of this world,
> bewildered by suffering, always hungry for more.[1]

Thus, over two thousand years ago, whoever wrote this text recognized that there is a part of us that engages with the world, is caught up and absorbed in it, but that there is a second consciousness that can observe what is happening without being engaged.

The great German writer Goethe put it this way two hundred years ago:

> Alas, two souls are living in my breast,
> And one wants to separate itself from the other.
> One holds fast to the world with earthy passion
> And clings with twining tendrils:
> The other lifts itself with forceful craving
> To the very roof of heaven.[2]

Many meditative practices are designed to bring forth the observer or witness. Learning to sit as the observer, we begin to notice that the mind has one thought after another and that this stream of multiple thoughts is often disorganized and confused. But if we become proficient at observing this passing parade, we become less and less attached to its details. Our identity begins to shift from the *one caught up in the action* to the *one who can observe everything* without attachment. When this happens, we watch the parade as it passes by, with no scene compelling us to identify with it. This ability provides enormous freedom, as well as an incredibly broad perspective. As Henry David Thoreau captured this experience:

> By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good or bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra

> in the sky looking down on it. I may be greatly affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I may not be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more.[3]

Gradually, the more proficient we become at stepping into our observing self, the more the other parts of ourselves that had been unconscious are revealed. As we identify more and more with the bird that can watch without being caught up in the action, the parts of ourselves that had been unconscious drift into the view of the conscious observer. And, as these unconscious aspects appear to consciousness, we can see them more clearly for what they often are—fears, anxieties, desires, fantasies, enculturated beliefs, and embedded societal rules. Of central importance, as this happens, we become less subject to their power. As we continue to shift our identity to the observer, we begin to let go of judging, which brings an exhilarating sense of freedom, as well as recognition that who we really are is more vast than anything we have glimpsed before.

The spiritual literature of the world is filled with reports of such experiences, and transpersonal psychology is increasingly exploring their importance for health and well-being. Arthur Deikman, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California in San Francisco, writes of the importance of the observing self for psychological growth and development. The observing self, as he defines it, is fundamentally different from any other conception of ourselves because it cannot be turned into an object. It can observe, but it cannot be observed. This means that it is "featureless" and "cannot be affected by the world any more than a mirror can be affected by the images it reflects." He continues: “In the midst of the finite world” is an “I" that is quite “different from the world.”[4]

> All else can be objectified, has limits and boundaries that can be described. All else is a segment of a world of fixed or relative dimensions. The observing self, however, is not like anything else we know.[5]

The way I have come to understand this is that when I look out at the world, my mind organizes what is out there into images, creating an orderly pattern that makes sense to me from my point of view. Since the work of Immanuel Kant (in some ways the person most responsible for the pivot to modern philosophical thought), philosophy and science have begun to understand that the mind receives input through the senses from the “blooming, buzzing confusion"[6] out there (to use William James’ phrase), and organizes it into a coherent pattern in our minds, so we will be able to function in the world.

But what we see is not what is out there. There is an almost limitless amount of information "out there," so the mind selects and organizes bits of that information into concepts and patterns that make our lives manageable. (One scientist estimated that we are able to take in only one-half of one percent of all the information available to us in fairly busy circumstances.) Thus, to be able to function within this endless stream of data, we form images and concepts in our minds, and thus, when we interact with the world that we believe is "out there," we are actually dealing with images and concepts put together in our own minds.

In other words, in order to function in the world I have to create a concept of the world "out there," as well as a concept of a self that is acting and functioning in that world. I must create an image in my mind of myself functioning in a world—neither of which is what it seems. This means I must think of myself as an **object**. And this object I create in my mind is my ego self. If I pay close attention, though, I will discover that there is a part of me that can **look at, can observe**, both the "world out there" as well as "me"—the ego self my mind has created of who I am.

If, for a moment, I try to turn my attention around and observe who is looking, if I try to discover who is creating the concepts, I cannot find it. I can create another concept of myself, but that concept is not my direct experience; another concept is not a direct observation. My only immediate, direct experience is of simply being aware—of observing. I am aware of people, of things in the world, of feelings, images, plans, hopes, and fears within me. Each of these can be seen only because it has been made into an object in my awareness. But as hard as I try, I cannot observe the awareness itself. I cannot find who or what is observing. I can only recognize that, in some way, I "am" it.

To get a sense of this, close your eyes and turn your attention inward, toward the observer inside you that is looking out at the world. If you turn and look at the one who is looking, what do you see? Don't get caught up in ideas and concepts about this "I." Try to get behind these concepts to an immediate experience of what is there.

When I do this exercise, I realize that my immediate experience is of an openness, a receptive space in which ideas, images, and concepts come and go, form and dissolve. When I think of an object or person, it becomes a part of my awareness. Then, when I think about or look at something else, that becomes part of my awareness. Whatever I focus on is included, soon to be replaced by the next idea, object, or person that comes into mind. In my direct experience, this awareness is not an object like the objects I am observing. And, although I can have the thought, can form a concept that "this awareness is in my brain," I have absolutely no direct evidence for this. I have no evidence at all that the center of this awareness is in my physical brain.

You can shift your attention in many directions: toward the sky, a tiny insect, a specific part of your body. You can focus on emotions, ideas, or another person. You can focus on the past or the future. So your awareness is not limited by space or time. You can imagine being in any number of different places—the seashore, a mountain top, a space station looking down on Earth. When you form these images, your awareness is not limited to here, or now.

As an experiment, think about a discomfort in your body. Now, think about a powerful emotion you experienced recently. Now think of someone you love. Next, think of a movie you like. Now look out and focus on the furthest object you can see. When I do this, as I shift my awareness, each thing I focus on seems to be a part of my awareness. When I focus on any of these things, it becomes an "object" to me, but none are the awareness itself. And these objects are not directing my attention to themselves one after another. What is? Something in "me," a mysterious "something" that opens toward the most fundamental part of who I am.

Once again, try to turn and look at who or what this is. If you can't find it, try for a moment to describe it to yourself.

When I do this exercise, I can never find the observer, but I do sense that it is quite different from the way I normally think about myself. Although many wisdom traditions talk about the witness, they do not describe it the same way. I think this is because it does not lend itself to concepts, so each tradition comes up with its own imperfect set of words, each has created different words and images to talk about it. But since this awareness does not fit into any conceptual box, none of these attempts is fully successful—it is rather like trying to trap light in a mirror or find love in a brain scan. Space that appears dark is not free of light, but only lacking any object to reflect the light. We can only see light because objects reflect it, and so we infer light's existence because we see the objects. Awareness is something like that.

Rather than trying to reconcile these different concepts, therefore, let us simply recognize that all the wisdom traditions point to an aspect of ourselves that exists beyond concepts, and that whatever this is, it is an essential part of who we really are. But all the traditions agree on the crucial importance of discovering this deeper part of ourselves, and those who are able to do this come closer to knowing who they really are, and have a much greater chance to live into an authentic and fulfilling life.

9. The Higher Self: Some spiritual traditions stop with the witness or observer, but one characteristic of someone completely centered in the observer is that there is no motivation to act. Life is just "as it is." There is no motivation to change "what is"—it doesn't feel like anything needs to be changed. From the point of view of the pure

witness, why would you try to change the way things are? The witness simply sees life as it is, and "accepts what is."

Importantly, there are times in our lives when this is the ideal response—such as times when we are being driven by unhealthy urges and fears. But if everyone were centered in witness consciousness all the time, human life would grind to a halt. There would be no motivation for anyone to act. And, if some people were centered in the witness and some were not, and those who were not started acting from unhealthy motivations causing bad outcomes—then those centered in the witness would simply "accept what is." A person centered in witness consciousness would have no point of view from which to decide how things should be any different than the way they are.

If a person is totally in witness consciousness, from where would the motivation to help others arise? And who would they choose to help, the robber or the person being robbed? If I look out at the world from a place of complete calm, I can see countless people engaged in endless activities that are creating pain, sadness, even starvation and death. But it is endless—the endless flow of normal human life. This cannot be fixed. To do anything requires choosing a specific place to start, a particular problem to engage, specific people to focus on, a specific place to give one's energy and attention. But from the point of view of the witness, there is no basis upon which to make such choices. Thus, through the ages, most spiritual traditions have suggested that who you are goes beyond the witness.

This ***you,*** beyond the witness, does not just observe what is, but sees the harmony beyond the chaos and can provide guidance as to what is truly meaningful—for you and for other people. This is the still small voice within, the voice of conscience that says, "Don't do that, even though it is popular." It is the voice that calls you to the hard task, the one that provides a sense of the values that are truly important for your life. How can you separate this higher self from the ego? It is complicated, and usually involves a lifetime's work. But one clue given by Jung is that, if a feeling inside suggests acting in a way that seem like a "defeat for the ego," this is a sign you are having an "encounter with the Self," your Higher Self.

Trying to think about this aspect of ourselves is especially complicated, because it goes so far beyond the categories of the thinking mind. The Higher Self is completely beyond thoughts and concepts. If we try to capture it in words, it slips through our mental fingers—which is why it is so often approached through riddles, metaphors, and parables. This is also the reason that different wisdom traditions might seem to be talking about different things when trying to describe this level of our being—and their words can create more confusion than clarity. It is quite possible all the words and concepts of the different traditions point to the same thing. Or perhaps they

don’t. How will we ever know? Those who have truly experienced the Higher Self and want to describe it to the rest of us must use language that is totally inadequate for the task.

Despite this difficulty, however, most wisdom traditions say there is "something" that exists beyond the ego, beyond the unconscious, and even beyond the witness. Crucially, they all tell us this is the most authentic, the deepest or highest Self. Hindus call it the *Atman*; Quakers speak of the Inner Light or Inner Teacher; Christians tell us about the soul or the Holy Spirit; Jews speak of the spark of the Divine within; some modern teachers call it our "essence" or authentic self, and many Buddhists say we find the Buddha within or that we become one with Buddha-nature. The images of Buddhist compassion through the centuries come from those who have gone beyond simply “accepting what is” and are living from this level of being.

Most importantly, all the traditions agree that only by discovering and living from this level of ourselves will we ever come to know who we really are, and only by doing this will we have a chance to live a truly authentic and fulfilling life.

10. The Unitive Self: Here, at the tenth level, we reach what Jung believed to be the final stage of existence:

> This is the decisive question for man: Is he related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of life. Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance. If we understand and feel that here in this life we have a link with the infinite, desires and attitudes change. In the final analysis, we count for something only because of the essential we embody, and if we do not embody that, life is wasted.[7]

Jung did not think the goal of life was to disengage from the world, as some spiritual traditions suggest. Rather, he emphasized the importance of developing a healthy channel of communication between the ego and the Self in which the ego turns to the Higher Self for guidance. In so doing, we find the best way to relate to the Infinite, and the best way to implement the Self’s guidance into the living of our lives. In this model, the Higher Self is the link to the Unitive, the Numinous dimension, the Infinite. In Jung’s view, the goal of “individuation” is to become a whole human being, not someone cut off from human life. To become whole is not easy, of course, for it requires making the darkness in oneself conscious, getting to know all sides of oneself, forming a connection to the Higher Self—which connects us to the Infinite, and then integrating everything in a healthy way.

On this path you do not disown any part of yourself, since you can never truly get rid of any of the levels that are part of you. In fact, if you consciously—or unconsciously—reject or despise any part of yourself you will just drive those parts into your shadow, where they will wreak havoc on your life. If you haven't owned your shadow, haven't recognized how your shadow side is affecting everything that is going on in you, you will blame negative outcomes on others, or on chance. On the other hand, if you get to know your shadow, you will be able to integrate the enormous energy contained therein in a healthy way, and be able to use it in living of your life. Through a fully developed conscious awareness you will gradually be able to bring all the parts of yourself into balance and harmony, learning to use all your energies appropriately—like a dancer moving in perfect harmony with all the currents within and without.

In the three higher realms, the Witness, the Higher Self, and the Unitive Self, all the distinctions I am making with words ultimately fail, for these levels overlap and interact. But we can catch a glimpse of the whole. As Dante said at the end of the *Paradisio*:

> Mine were not the wings for such a flight.
> Yet, as I wished, the truth I wished for came
> Cleaving my mind in a great flash of light.[8]

Because he is a human being, Dante does not have the "wings," the ability (metaphorically speaking) to fly into the highest realm. Yet his aspiration to catch a glimpse of the highest truth is so strong that his devout wish is fulfilled—not as a thought or concept, but by a vision that cleaved his mind "in a great flash of light."

Like Dante, many of us on the ultimate journey long to catch a glimpse of the highest truth for ourselves. And, like Dante, sometimes our fervent wish does bear fruit. But when it does, if we try to explain it afterward, it is crucial to keep in mind that the words we use to describe what we have seen are not "IT," do not capture it, and never will. As T.S. Eliot said:

> Words strain, crack, and sometimes break,
> Under the burden,
> Under the tension,
> slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with the impression, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.[9]

Our words cannot pin "It" down because our thinking minds, and the words and concepts that thinking minds use, are part of ego consciousness, and that consciousness always experiences itself as separate from the whole. In contrast, when

experiencing the highest dimensions there is no such separation. Mystics of all traditions have confirmed over and over that when immersed in the highest dimensions one's identity is not separate from others, or from nature, or from the Divine. One anonymous Christian mystic called it the “Cloud of Unknowing.” Experiencing this for oneself means becoming one with the Tao, waking up as the Buddha, or joining a chorus of Christian mystics singing, "My me is God"[10] and "See! I am God; See! I am in all things; See! I do all things.”[11]

The difference between the Higher Self and the Unitive Self is, therefore, hard to put into words. But to make an effort, when in the Higher Self, one still feels a separate self exists. It is beyond the ego, and it is beyond the witness; this self sees how the whole fits together, but there is still an individual actor to which it is connected. When in the Higher Self, there is a perspective from which one looks at the whole, and in looking can see other unique selves who are also looking. In the Unitive state, however, what is experienced is that there is only One in the whole universe, and “Thou Art That,” as it is said in the Upanishads. In this place, there is no separate identity—who “you” are is One with everything. Your ultimate self includes “All That Is.”

The modern teacher Eckhart Tolle was trying to capture this when he said: “Can I sense my essential Beingness … my essential identity as consciousness itself?"[12] Several centuries earlier, the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said much the same thing after a profound glimpse. In his words, "For knower and the known are one."[13]

Stepping into this dimension—variously called the Numinous, the Tao, the Transcendent, the Infinite, God, the Divine, the Absolute, the Ultimate, Nirvana, the Great Spirit, Buddha-nature, Ein Sof, and Brahma—means moving beyond the observer and into the space captured by the Chinese poet Li Po:

> The birds have vanished into the sky,
> and now the last cloud drains away.
> We sit together, the mountain and me,
> until only the mountain remains.[14]

In the tradition of Islam, it is to discover that, as Ibn al-Arabi, one of the greatest Sufi mystics and philosophers, said, “He who knows himself knows his Lord.”[15]
Arriving at this place, one joins the 11th century Japanese poet Izumi Shikibu as she writes:

> Watching the moon at dawn,
> solitary, mid-sky,

> I knew myself completely:
> no part left out.[16]

Many of these quotes baffle and intrigue, leaving me with a sense that there is much more to step into than I have been able to do fully up to the present. So they urge me on, urge me to continue the exploration of "Who am I," until I eventually become the Ultimate that a few have been able to "Be."

If you are on this journey, but are not yet fully established in the Unitive, do not be discouraged. There is never any reason to be discouraged—that is the ego talking. It is always the ego that wants to get somewhere else.

And don't be concerned that many of the quotes I have shared are from long ago. Stepping into the Ultimate is an ever-present human capacity; it is a possibility for each life; it has existed always and will always exist. For contemporary confirmation, here is an account of a "normal" person like you and me. While on vacation in Cypress, Muz Murray was looking at the sea in the afterglow of sunset and suddenly, without warning, everything changed. In an instant, the world was new:

> I was shown that every cell had its own consciousness which was mine. And it seemed … that the whole of humanity was in the same condition: each 'individual' believing in his or her separate mind, but in reality still subject to a single controlling consciousness, that of Absolute Consciousness Itself.[17]

Another which I quoted in an earlier chapter, this one by Allan Smith, a 38 year old medical scientist in Oakland, California, who was sitting at home one evening and had this experience:

> There was no separation between myself and the rest of the universe. In fact, to say that there was a universe, a self, or any 'thing" would be misleading—it would be equally correct to say that there was "nothing" as to say that there was "everything." Saying that subject merged with object might be almost adequate but during the experience there was neither "subject" nor "object." All words and discursive thinking had stopped, and there was no sense of an "observer" to categorize what was "happening." In fact, there were no discrete events to "happen," just a timeless, unitary state of being.[18]

One more: C. G. Price, a farmer in England who was having financial difficulties and was trying to focus on nothing in particular except spreading straw for his livestock, said that suddenly:

> I seemed to be enveloped in a cocoon of golden light that actually felt warm, and which radiated a feeling of Love so intense that it was almost tangible. One felt

> that one could grasp handfuls of it, and fill one's pockets. In this warm cocoon of golden light I sensed a presence which I could not actually see, but knew was there. My mind became crystal clear, and in an instant of time I suddenly knew, without any doubts, that I was part of a 'Whole.' Not an isolated part, but an integral part. I felt a sense of 'One-ment.' I knew that I belonged and that nothing could change that. The loss of my farm and livelihood didn't matter any more. I was an important part of the 'Wholeness' of things, and transient ambitions were secondary.[19]

You too can step into this place. As many mystics have said, it is closer than breath, than heartbeat. You cannot force it to happen, but you can open to the possibility. You can do that right now. For a moment, sitting in the experience of reading this essay, and the quotes shared within it, simply let yourself rest in awareness itself. Give yourself permission to just be "Beingness," without thinking or doing anything. Don't try to keep from having thoughts; just let yourself be consciousness itself. Do not try, just *be* for a moment, and let whatever happens happen, without judgment, without opinions, without preferences.

If you step into the Ultimate, will it last forever? What part of you is asking that question? Whoever it is, it clearly is not the you that is in the Ultimate. The Ultimate is timeless. And, if the Buddha is correct, it is deathless. If Jesus is right, it is to be forever with *Abba*, with the "Father" in his native Aramaic language. And if Rumi is right, it is to be "one."

> I have thrown duality away like an old dishrag,
> I see and know all times and worlds,
> As one, one, always one.[20]

[1] Stephen Mitchell, ed., *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry* (New York, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 4.

[2] A. Hayward, Esq., *Faust: A Dramatic Poem by Goethe* (Boston, Massachusetts: Ticknor and Fields, 1838), 62-63. I use a popular translation I found years ago, but the more scholarly translation is: "Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast; the one struggles to separate itself from the other. The one clings with persevering fondness to the world, with organs like cramps of steel; the other lifts itself energetically from the mist to the realms of an exalted ancestry."

[3] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the Woods* (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala, 2010), 70.

[4] Arthur J. Deikman, M.D., *The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1983), 94-95.

[5] Deikman, *The Observing Self,* 94-95.

[6] William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), 488.

[7] C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffe, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York, New York: Vintage Books/Division of Random House, 1965), 325.

[8] Dante Alighieri, *The Paradiso*, trans. John Ciardi (New York, New York, Signet Classics, a division of New American Library, 2001), Canto XXXIII, 351.

[9] Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Four Quartets* (Orlando, Florida: A Harvest Book/Harcourt, Inc., 1943), 19.

[10] Baron Friedrich von Hugel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends* (London, United Kingdom: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1923), 265.

[11] Barry Collett, *Late Medieval Englishwomen: Julian of Norwich, Marjorie Kempe and Juliana Berners*, eds. Betty S. Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott (London, United Kingdom: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 32.

[12] Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* (New York, New York: Dutton/Penguin Group, 2005), 79.

[13] Meister Eckhart as quoted by Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 12. Also see Rudolph Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*, trans. Bertha Bracey and Richenda Payne (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 13.

[14] Stephen Mitchell, ed., *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry* (New York, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 32.

[15] Baba Rexheb, *Islamic Mysticism and The Bektashi Path*, trans. Huseyin Abiva (Chicago, Illinois: Babagan books, 2016), 376.

[16] Jane Hirschfield, ed., *Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women* (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 59.

[17] Nona Coxhead, *The Relevance of Bliss*: *A Contemporary Exploration of Mystic Experience* (New York, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 32.

[18] Erik Hoffman, *New Brain, New World: How the Evolution of a New Human Brain Can Transform Consciousness and Create a New World* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Insights/Raincoast, 2012), 122.

[19] Coxhead, *The Relevance of Bliss*, 33.

[20] Andrew Harvey, *The Way of Passion: A Celebration of Rumi* (New York, New York: J. P. Tarcher Putnam/ Penguin Putnam, 1994), 139.