

THE EYE THAT SEES ITSELF

Shimon Malin

self and Self

The ordinary sense of self is felt and seen as an object in front of the mind's eye. Of course, the self that is seen as an object is different from the self that is perceived as a thought-emotion complex—a complex that functions in the dark. But I can feel the relationship between the two. Something in me follows the process of objectivation, and confirms that the object I see is, in this case, a fair representation. The two are related—somewhat like the relationship between a film negative and the picture that is printed from it.

Real Self and self are very different. An intimation of Real Self can only come from the side of the Subject. After all, "I" am, first and foremost, a Subject. It cannot be approached from the objective side—Self can only be approached when one looks deeply into the Subject. By contrast, ordinary self is a pattern of thoughts and feelings that can be objectivized and examined without loss of essential features. The reason: this self is not really "I" at all.

The discovery of this difference between Self and self in relation to the process of objectivation is interesting not only in terms of content, but also in terms of implication: This discovery implies that *there is an attention that can be present to both sides, the objective and the subjective*, and this attention evaluates processes in both domains; it can be present even during the transition from one domain to the other. The subjective domain is

hidden from the ordinary mind of contrasts and distinctions, but not from this attention. Furthermore, this attention is also connected with the mind—otherwise, how could I have written the previous paragraph?

At this moment I feel connected to both domains, the subjective and the objective. The feeling is one of expansion in both horizontal and vertical directions. Thoughts continue, but they take only a part of the space to which and in which I am present.

Through this experience the subjective domain is revealed as the foundation of the objective. When I am grounded in it, I can be present to the world of objects while in a relaxed, relatively still state.

Self and It

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When the search for who I am is conducted from the side of relative consciousness, the results are uncertain. In fortunate cases, there is transformation, an inflow from the side of absolute consciousness. But there is no way to initiate this happening from the side of relative consciousness. So, when I (ego) initiate a search, I must be oblivious to the idea of attainment. It needs to be, simply, an honest search.

When experiences related to this search are combined with a theoretical understanding, conclusions emerge. For example, I know that Self cannot be objectified. Hence it cannot be an object of experience. Or, when it is experienced in the objectified mode, what is experienced is not really It. What is the relationship between such understanding and the search as it proceeds in the moment?

When the search is ongoing, it exists on a number of levels, and its essential quality must be openness. Therefore any thought carried into the moment by the ego is in the way. One must trust that understanding operates without the ego's participation. Likewise, relative consciousness cannot know Self. And yet, as we have just said, the search must begin with relative consciousness. How is this apparent paradox resolved?

An Open Search

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The point of the search, as it is conducted by relative consciousness, is not to find It, but to create conditions for It (absolute consciousness) to

appear. Paradoxically, these conditions include an honest search. Such a search, through its inherent limitations, leads to the interface between the relative and absolute aspects of consciousness, that is, to stillness.

Stillness is not the opposite of search. On the contrary, real search requires a background of stillness.

As I quietly survey the body and follow the breath, the stillness deepens. I know that the attention that surveys the body and follows the breath cannot lead to awareness of Self. However, it is through sensing of the body and awareness of breath that the stillness deepens. A feeling of "I" arises, an "I" that is not separate from the impressions, a feeling of "I" that permeates the impressions that keep coming.

This experience, clear and wonderful as it is, is merely a hint. While one part of this "I" permeates what is perceived as outer, another part looks into an inner space of incredible depth.

Truth and Falsity

It is obviously false to say, "I am not." But can I truly say, "I am?"

I

I cannot possibly have a true feeling of "I am not." When I do, or rather believe I do, the feeling is actually an aspect of "I am."

Then why do I doubt the feeling of "I am" that appears now? If this doubt is valid, it is not because my "I am-ness" is in doubt, ever—but rather because the feeling "I am" does not originate from the source of its truth.

Paradoxically, the validity of this doubt is a bridge to the Experience. I am the source of both truth and falsity. The realization of either is a true expression of Self. But the identification with such a realization falsifies it in the sense of placing the attention on a dead image, or a memory, rather than on the source of the image.

II

As I read this passage, it feels as both true and false. It is true in terms of content, but false in the rigidity of expression—the words are true, but the

music is false. The one who is good at theoretical formulations is not who I really am.

True beliefs, true statements dissolve now.

There is an open space in which nothing is false; it is just that some currents are truer than others. Even the so-called "false" is an expression of the truth.

I am at peace.

This is the beginning of openness.

III

In openness I am sensitive to the "I am-ness" that lies at the heart of every impression. The sound of a car passing by says, "I am." So does the texture of the piece of wood in front of me. The sound and the texture *are*, and only we humans have the capacity to recognize this. With this gift comes the capacity to imitate such recognitions—the capacity to be false.

IV

The recognition of the "I am-ness" at the center of every impression is the key that opens the gate to the experience of "I am," the Experience that transcends all experiences. The recognition of this "I am-ness" is passive; it comes when ordinary activities cease. Yet through the recognition, one comes to the truly active, the real doing, the authentic expression of "I am."

One need not say, "I am." One can say, "the flower is." Or one can just relax into the wonder of it all, and be this wonder. This recognition of "I am" in Self and in other, in every impression, is the role we are called to play in the drama that is the universe. It is our payment for the boon of enjoying the consciousness of who we are.

The essential feature of everything is that *it is*. Why not recognize this? If we recognize this unitive feature, then, paradoxically, the distinctive

features, the differences in sounds, textures, colors, are even more clearly present to our awareness.

V

Parmenides knew this twenty-five centuries ago. He said, "Being is. Non-being is not. These are the only true statements we can make."

Being In To Affirming "I Am"

Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" is an *indirect* affirmation of existence, via a logical operation. It implies a trust in logic and in the mind's ability to perform logical operations correctly. Descartes' affirmation then, is not the direct experience of "I am," but rather the experience of thinking and of logical deductions.

By contrast, there is a way of directly experiencing "I am." But, discursively speaking, this experience can be rather puzzling. What is being affirmed, and how? The affirmation, "I am," is expressed in thought, but what is being affirmed is the entire subjective element that, as such, cannot be experienced by ordinary mind. Moreover, the certainty of the affirmation comes hand-in-hand with a paradoxical inability to elaborate on what is being affirmed. An inability that, from the point of view of thought, may be interpreted as vagueness and may even lead to a fading of the certainty.

The inability to elaborate is not necessarily inherent in the experience. It may merely indicate that while the affirmation "I am" is relatively accessible, the ability to stay with the experience as it deepens is not. And from the point of view of the experience itself, such elaboration may be unnecessary, anyway.

There is another riddle: Even if the capacity to experience one's existence as well as the capacity to think and express thoughts about that

experience are accepted at face value, the relation between the two remains a great mystery. How does the absolutely subjective experience become transmitted, with a sense of certainty, to the mind—the instrument of manipulating objectivized entities?

A computer cannot affirm its existence. The experience and expression of such affirmation is possible through the *richness of different levels* in a unified field of attention. The simple, almost ordinary affirmation of “I am” is really the affirmation of the existence of one’s *attention*; it is not the experience of subject as distinct from objects. In the experience of “I am,” the attention turns inward, toward its own depth, and objects momentarily disappear.

Being In Touch With Stillness

I see that as an isolated entity I cannot be still. To be still is to participate in the stillness that is always here.

At this moment I feel good. The feelings are alive. I see that it is important, while accepting this, not to be identified with it. Ego is only too ready to appropriate these good energies for its purposes, and forget about the impersonal dimension.

I try to see, with great acuity, the actuality as well as the possibilities of this moment. I discern an inner shift, which is an aspect of being still—a shift away from being me, away from being anybody. To be me is to be a subject for an object, that is, to be a subject in the act of perception in the subject/object mode.

I feel that this idea brings me to the verge of an important discovery. I see that I cannot go after this new discovery with the mind. When I try to think about it, it recedes. I see that my stance now needs to be presence without the slightest interference, presence without intention for anything.

When I am not a subject for an object, when I am in a nondual state, *I am this nonduality*. I feel a bit uneasy about writing this. Is there a vestige of me in the making of this statement? Yes, it comes not only from the experience but also from prior understanding, from memory.

I experience now the reversal of active and passive that William Segal wrote about. The stillness has an active quality to it, it tries to enter me. My part is to be present and passive, to be here, doing nothing. This is very clear.

As I noticed before, after being in touch with stillness for a while, I feel invigorated, and ego is ready to come back and take charge. Whether this is lawful or not depends on the situation. It could be lawfully appropriate, and it could be laziness, reluctance to continue the very subtle effort of not interfering. This very subtle effort is needed. This is the jumping board, a step into the place of no-effort. This step cannot be taken by "me."

The way to nonduality begins with an either/or. Either I am open, still, attentive—or I am not.

What, then, is the way to *not* being a subject for an object? Is it the seeing of the bifurcation, the transition from a unitive mode of perception to a subject/object mode? Can this transition be seen so clearly that, naturally, non-doing takes place?

Is it possible to observe the moment of transition from the unitive mode of perception to the subject/object mode? Is it possible to see this bifurcation or splitting so clearly that I can choose not to do it?

Total Subjectivity

As I faced the question, "Who am I?" while remembering that "I" is irrevocably the subject, that the attention will never find it where it is accustomed to look (among objects), the attention turned inward—and all hope of finding an answer was gone. Instead of an answer, this reorientation of the attention brought about a *presence* that was grounded in the subjectivity of oneself. From this grounding, I saw that ordinarily I am oriented toward the outside of myself, toward my projections, which I take to be independently existing entities. I saw that this orientation weakens me and cannot lead to genuine fulfillment. By contrast, being firmly established in the "middle ground," the place of attending to both the subjective and the objective, is a remedy for the malady of feeling dependent on the happenings in the objective domain. Furthermore, I saw that this grounding is a natural result of the cultivation of stillness, and that, without it, the stillness is thin, easily disturbed. With it, the stillness is an aspect of who one is.

A few days later, further contemplation led to another insight. Rather than being merely one pole of the subject/object relationship, total subjectivity is a higher state, one that transcends both subject and objects, while giving rise to them by bifurcation. Trying to rely on objects for support is like relying on the movie pictures that are projected onto a screen. One needs to

come back, again and again, to the place (or no-place) that is beyond both subject and objects.

These ideas led to still another experience. Listening to music, I became aware that I was receiving it in two distinct modes: I was hearing the music as a series of objectivized sounds, and behind that I was receiving the music as a quiet, energizing flow directly into the subjective domain. It felt at the time as if opening the gate for this flow was a matter of an inner shift, which could be initiated at will. Whether this is so remains to be seen. At any rate, I felt that by occupying the middle ground, as I did during this listening, I became the gate through which energies could flow from the outside (the sounds) to the inside (the domain of total subjectivity).

And how does all this apply to the issue of the personal and the impersonal? On one occasion of attending to this openness, the attending was understood as *giving up* experiencing as I know it—that is to say, giving up experiencing as if from a personal center, experiencing in the sense of “I am experiencing.”

At that moment of openness, I clearly saw that release from thought is the precondition for being in the middle ground and attending as pure subject.

FINAL NOTES