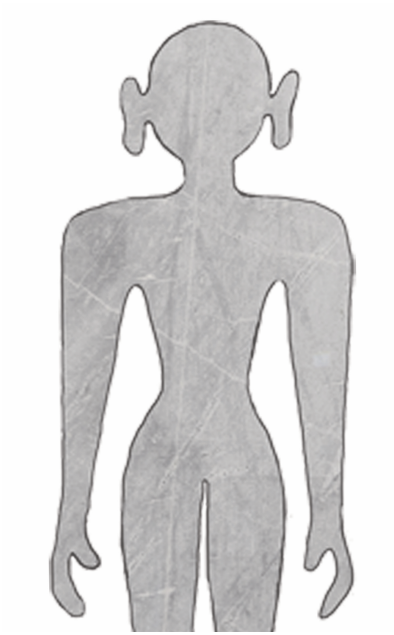


A dialogue about body, mind, ego and awareness



This Mystery and I

Peter Ingle

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Foreword

In response to my previous books, readers were asking to organize a series of gatherings where they could learn more about how I was combining ideas from non-dualism and the fourth way to deepen an understanding of both traditions. A small group eventually met for several sessions which were recorded and edited for publication as this book. What follows is a dialogue about how body, mind, and ego contribute to our sense of 'I', and how this relates to the self-realization of awareness.

As ideas about enlightenment have become more popular, it has become easier to misconstrue enlightenment as an experience that happens to 'me' the person becoming more enlightened, more mindful, more awake. Bringing together ideas from the fourth way and non-dualism helps explain the cause of this psychological pitfall, how to recognize it, and how to avoid it.

The book's title, *This Mystery and I*, was inspired from a line in Walt Whitman's poem 'Song of Myself' which can be understood in two ways at the same time: that body, mind, and ego are seen as a mystery by the real 'I' of awareness; and conversely that the egoic 'I'

purported by body, mind, and ego can sense but never comprehend the mystery of awareness. The title can also stand as simply a statement that the dialogue comprises both topics, which it does.

The discussion that follows does its best to suggest and hint and convey what awareness *is*, but that remains an elusive goal. As Gurdjieff said, “Man cannot explain what he himself really is.” This is because awareness is a higher dimension that is incomprehensible to the body and mind and to the ego they foster. At their best, body and mind can intuit the flavor of awareness, learn to recognize some of its traces, and deduce what it is *not*. The more this happens, the more awareness comes to realize itself as the consciousness of itself.

This Mystery and I



I and this mystery,
here we stand.

Walt Whitman



I would like to better understand what the ego is and how it operates as our identity.

The ego is a psychological hologram that the mind projects every few seconds as a sense of 'I'. This hologram bends and twists and takes on different colors according to the situation. As a result, we project a slightly different persona at work, another at home, another at dinner parties, another when we meet strangers. We look the same, but our sense of 'I' and our projection of 'I' changes. To understand why the ego does this, you have to understand it in relation to awareness.

Whereas the ego is your feeling of 'I' and 'me', awareness is your consciousness of this sense of 'I'. But this consciousness is not usually aware of *itself*, and because of this it unwittingly attaches itself to what it perceives. When it attaches to thoughts and emotions, the mind uses this attachment to project the ego.

The more awareness attaches to your mind, the more it loses consciousness of itself and the more it strengthens your feeling of identity as a person. This is why attachment is also called identification, although it is more accurate to say that attachment ends up as identification.



Where does the feeling of 'I' reside?

In between awareness and the mind there is a thin membrane. Over time, the ego accumulates in this membrane as an image of 'I'. The mind projects the image of 'I' into the membrane where it leaves an imprint, almost like a developed photograph. But because awareness is not conscious of itself, and because the membrane is transparent, awareness does not distinguish between itself and the image of 'I' in the membrane. It thinks it is the hologram. Only when awareness brings *itself* into focus does the distinction become clear.



But the ego comes from somewhere, doesn't it?

We are not born with an ego. It is not a natural part of who and what we are when we are born. It accumulates during our life as a by-product of awareness repeatedly identifying with our thoughts, emotions, and sensations. After just a few years as a human being, this accumulation molds the foundation of a sense of 'I'. By the age of six or seven, most children have a well established ego. After that, their

sense of 'I' grows stronger and the membrane housing the ego gets more opaque until awareness no longer shines through as itself.



What happens to the ego in enlightenment?

Because the ego is just a hologram, it evaporates under the light of conscious awareness. If the light is strong enough, it completely absorbs the image of 'I' and the image disappears. As this happens, the membrane that housed the ego becomes transparent again and the mind returns to being simply an instrument absent of identity. Awareness prevails as the conscious realization that it is pure awareness.



Can you say more about the membrane of the ego?

It is just a description, an analogy. But we can say that near the back wall of the mind there is a thin membrane where the ego accumulates as a sense of 'I'. Due to the transparency of this membrane, the ego and awareness mistake themselves for each other. Awareness thinks it is 'I' and 'I' thinks it is awareness. The

question, “Who am I?” forms in this membrane. The self-realization of awareness happens on the other side of it.



How does identification come into play?

Identification acts as an electric current that cauterizes awareness to the mind and body. It transfers unconscious awareness to the mind and body where it is appropriated as a feeling of ‘I’. With self-realization, this energy returns to awareness and the feeling of ‘I’ dissipates.

You can also think of identification as an electric cable. By means of this cable, the energy of awareness attaches itself to whatever it perceives. If you reverse the flow of energy in the cable, it returns to awareness and awareness becomes aware of itself as pure perception.

A good way to notice identification is in the form of momentum. You can’t stop moving or talking or emoting or eating. Identification has absorbed you in its flow. The opposite happens when momentum gets broken, such as when you get ill or injured or suffer loss. You suddenly find yourself more established in presence. The next step is then whether presence becomes aware that it is present.



You said attachment ends up as identification. Aren't they basically the same thing?

Attachment is the beginning of identification. Awareness starts to attach itself to something and then it sticks. It becomes identified with it. At that point awareness either puts its identity in the thing and believes it is that thing, or it imbues the thing with an identity of its own. An example of the first instance is when awareness takes itself to be a thought or emotion or sensation or action. An example of the second instance is when awareness believes that an object or person or event is more significant than its awareness of it. In both cases awareness loses itself in the object it perceives.



Does it make a difference what we get identified with?

It makes no difference. It is still identification. The form it takes is secondary. What is important to understand is how identification happens and how it affects awareness. For example, some people are identified with their bodies and beards and hair. Other people are

identified with their clothes and cars. Others are identified with food or money or family, or with politics or health or the environment. Everyone is constantly identified with one thing or another. We identify with each thought, each feeling, each opinion, each activity, each project. Our life becomes a series of one identification after another and it all happens at the expense of awareness.

A good example of identification is mobile phones. It is easy to see that people are identified with their phones, immersed in the screen, always holding the phone, even while driving. They feel comforted by having it with them and they feel anxious without it. It is also apparent when a person's awareness disappears into 'phone zone'. They do not see anything else and often do not hear anything that is said to them. It is equally apparent when their awareness emerges from the phone. You can see the light returning to their eyes.

The truth, however, is that people are not addicted to their phones as much as they are addicted to their ego. The phone is merely an enabler. The ego feels important just to be seen talking on the phone. It also loves social media because the ego is all about how it is perceived by other egos and how it compares to others. It thrives in the arena of appearance, recognition,

status, and reputation. With a phone it can indulge in this arena even while sitting alone at home. In this sense, identification is not just physical and psychological. It has become electronic. Identification has morphed into electronification.



Can we see the hologram of the ego?

You don't see a visual image, but you can feel it behind your thoughts because the main thing that gives the ego shape are the thoughts and feelings generated by the mind. These are then reinforced by more thoughts and feelings in a self-perpetuating wheel that grinds a sense of identity into the psyche. Look behind your thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Notice the feeling of 'me' lurking in their shadow. Learn to distinguish this feeling from your ability to be aware of it. The more you do this, the more visible the ego becomes. Instead of it feeling like 'you', it starts to feel like a gremlin living inside the field of awareness.

You can also see the ego by studying identification in yourself. When awareness gets identified, there is turbulence in the mind and body. We feel proud, anxious, boastful, flustered,

zealous, frantic, hurried, afraid, upset, angry. All of these reactions are the ego being boosted positively or negatively and taking on different shapes accordingly.



Is the ego more pronounced when we are upset and angry?

It is more pronounced the more identified we are. For instance, when we feel proud. But it also gains intensity through negativity because our instinctive energy is then behind it full throttle. When you see yourself or someone else expressing negative emotions, you are seeing the result of awareness identifying itself with the mind and body and *becoming* the ego. As identification increases, the ego gets stronger and negativity gets more intense.

Negative emotions, however, are not the ego. They are byproducts. The mind and body act as a conduit for negative emotions and the ego uses negative emotions as a club to fight with, a shield to protect itself with, and a cloak to disguise its phantom identity. When you take negative emotions away from the ego, it atrophies and a state of clear awareness starts to view you and your life in a new light.



Why does the ego exist in the first place?

It exists because awareness is not aware of itself. When awareness is unconscious it gets appropriated by the mind and body as a sense of identity that forms as the ego. But the mind and body can also be a medium through which awareness realizes itself as awareness. In both cases, the ego is the hinge. When identification prevails, this hinge swings in one direction and you live with the turmoil of identity as a person. When awareness prevails, the hinge swings in another direction and all the space that was filled with identity becomes an arena for pure awareness. The ego itself is an artificial growth in our psyche, but it is not bad. It is simply a matter of whether awareness is identified with it or not. What will it take for awareness to unplug itself from this socket and realize itself? This is our concern.



Can we recognize awareness in people?

Awareness can, but what it sees is not a mental or physical characteristic of the other person. What awareness sees in another person

is awareness, or the absence of awareness, or the material of awareness caught up in a notion of 'I' in the person. Awareness can also see this about itself. It can see that it is starting to get entangled again in the identity of 'me'.



When you talk about awareness and consciousness, are you talking about one thing or different aspects of the same thing?

The words are interchangeable, with a slight distinction. Consciousness is the consciousness of things. Awareness is the consciousness of consciousness itself. As Jean Klein often said, we are too accustomed to thinking of ourselves in relation *to* things and being conscious *of* things. Seldom do we consider consciousness in relation to itself as pure awareness with no relation to anything else. Seldom do we consider the nature of awareness itself, its formlessness, its stillness and silence, its inherent mystery as pure perception.

When awareness starts to discover itself, you realize that everything which awareness is aware of is secondary. In the light of conscious awareness, your sense of identity as a person fades into the shadow.



Can the mind see awareness?

Awareness sees the mind, but the mind cannot see awareness because the mind cannot step out of the maze of its own mental concepts. When someone in whom awareness is conscious talks about awareness to someone in whom awareness is dormant, it inevitably gets interpreted on the level of mind and body. They look for evidence of it on their level, in their respective domains. They conclude that they should be able to see or hear or touch awareness in some way.

It is also true that as the mind hears about awareness, dormant awareness can pick up the scent of its own self-realization. This is the influence of awareness in one person loosening the shackles in the mind of another person, which is inferred in the story about the angel opening the prison door and the apostles walking out. What is interesting is that the angel only opened the door. They walked out by themselves.



Does the mind know when this happens?

The mind knows it is being affected in some way, but it does not know the awareness that moves through it and animates it. It is like a wind instrument which is unaware of the wind that makes it sing. The instrument does not know the wind. It knows only the music it makes.



Did you say that the question “who am I” comes from awareness?

I said it comes from the membrane between mind and awareness. But this is just an analogy to explain how it forms. The thought ‘Who am I’ springs from the mind and settles in this membrane as the feeling of being a person.

When this question poses itself in you, try to realize that it is just a thought. There is a subtle shift from being the sense of ‘I’ to being the awareness that sees ‘I’ having thoughts.

Awareness itself is always just out of reach of the mind and body. It is not tangible to them, but it is discernible to itself as a silent dimension of perception. It never asks, ‘Who

am I? or ‘What do I really want?’ At best, these are the mind questioning itself or questioning awareness. The fact that the mind poses these questions demonstrates that it does not comprehend the nature of awareness. It thinks it wants to know awareness, but it cannot *be* awareness. Awareness can, however, make its presence known to the mind and the mind can then align with awareness. The primary way it aligns with awareness is by becoming quiet and yielding to the utter reality of circumstances.



So becoming quiet refers to the mind?

It can refer to both the mind and to awareness. When teachers say, “Just be quiet,” they usually mean ‘quieten the mind’ so that the empty space in the mind can be available for awareness to realize itself. But the expression “Be quiet” can also be an imperative directed at awareness, imploring awareness to *be* the quiet stillness of itself and realize itself as that.