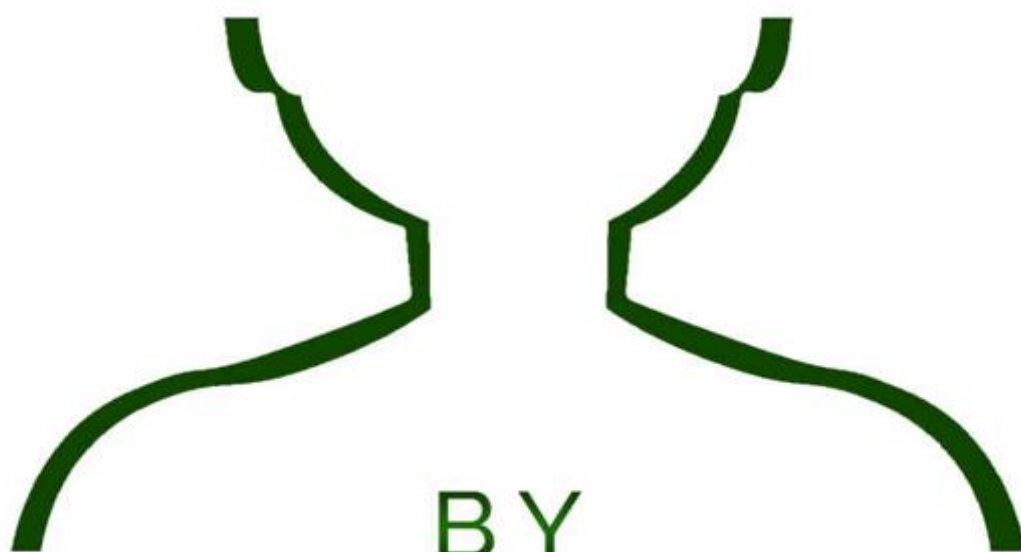
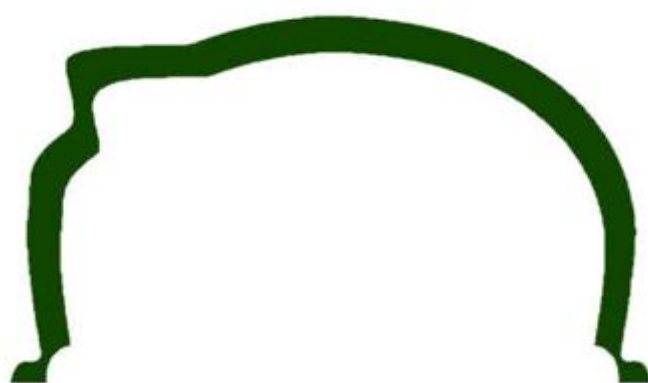


SANE

GETTING REAL WITH
REALITY



BY
CLARE DIMOND

FOREWORD BY NICOLA BIRD
AUTHOR OF *A LITTLE PEACE OF MIND*

SANE

GETTING REAL WITH REALITY

CLARE DIMOND

To the loves of my life, Francesca and Finn.

*May temporary, beautiful, necessary confusion give way to the
sanity of knowing who you really are and what really is.*

With all love always, Mummy x

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CONTENTS

Foreword

SANE

Prologue

I. Introduction

1. A misunderstanding
2. Beyond belief
3. A new blue print for sanity.
4. A case of mistaken identity.
5. All delusions are equal but some are more equal than others
6. Concept
7. Let's be clear

II. Reality.

8. The experience is real but 'reality' is not.
9. Reality is 'this' and it is also 'not this'
10. Who or what is the perceiver?
11. Reality becomes less real while immersion in that reality increases.

III. Insanity of separation

12. One
13. Separate other, separate object, separate circumstance
14. Separate self

IV. Insanity of control

15. Emotion
16. Thought
17. Others
18. Behaviour
19. Experience
20. Who we are

V. Sanity.

21. Honesty
22. End of the search
23. Aliveness
24. End of blame

25. [Immersion](#)
26. [What is](#)
27. [Transparency of need](#)
28. [Freshness](#)
29. [Change](#)
30. [Loss](#)
31. [Love](#)
32. [Death](#)
33. [Completeness](#)

VI. [Now what?](#)

34. [How?](#)
35. [Does it change anything?](#)
36. [Why bother then?](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Clare Dimond](#)

FOREWORD

Here's what apparently happened in 2018. There I was, merrily going about my business in the world, doing the work that I do, helping people with anxiety and stress find peace of mind and a level of sanity they just didn't believe would be possible.

I liked Clare.

I'd met her on a couple of trainings and she had a way of such gentleness about her. She said some weird things sometimes but I liked her, so when she ran an online course called REAL back in 2018 I signed up, curious to hear what she had to say.

So innocent. No idea what was coming.

I didn't like Clare very much after that.

What she shared on that course turned my world upside down and inside out. What she showed me was that although 'I' appeared to be helping "them" in truth neither of us was real in the way I thought they were. That my life and work had been based on a misunderstanding of who and what we really are and who and what they really were.

Insanity attempting to uncover sanity.

I know, right?

Don't stop now. Or try if you like. I did my best to.

But there was truth here and truth pulls in an unstoppable way.

What followed was a year of exploring what Clare shares so beautifully in all of her books, blog posts, courses and

coaching.

“ARghghghghghg WTF I HATE you!!!” was the message she received from me more than once as my ego fought against the idea of it’s non-existence.

But life kept exploring her teaching and falling in love with itself nonetheless.

Experience changed through exploration until love was all there was.

Love and life and thriving and peace and beauty and freedom never before known.

Until what is contained here is seen, the apparent self - the thing you THINK is you - will forever be seeking sanity in places it can never be found. And attempting to help others do the same.

When Clare asked me to write this foreword, I replied ‘Hmmm, let me read it first in case it drives me and potential readers MORE insane’....and as I read, I saw Clare’s unique teaching and gentleness show itself as this beautiful writing unfolds.

“The lock is the idea that something ‘out there’ can make this ‘in here’ finally, permanently ok,” Clare writes.

Agree. Looks true to most of my clients.

“And so life becomes vigilance. The avoidance of any experience that threatens or embarrasses or frightens. The quest for the experiences that will build us up, make us feel good, confident.”

Agree. Sounds like the anxious experience I lived in for over 20 years. And many of my clients.

“The self is a limitation of infinite possibility, fixed in space and time, boxed in on all sides. The self and the experience are the same thing. It just doesn’t look like it...”, Clare writes.

WTF?

I know. Read the book.

What is contained in these pages contains the keys to freedom.

Sanity.

And now I love Clare to bits and we go on spa days and all that, so it all worked out fine in the end.

Nicola Bird

Author of 'A Little Peace of Mind'.

SANE

Sanity, being whole, and integration lie in the realisation that we are not divided, that man and his present experience are one, and that no separate 'I' or mind can be found.

Alan Watts

At the root, at the core, there is pure sanity, pure openness. Don't trust what you have been taught, what you think, what you believe, what you hope. Deeper than that, trust the silence of your being.

Gangaji

*You are not controlling the storm,
and you are not lost in it. You are the storm.*

Sam Harris

PROLOGUE

Nothing happened or needs to happen to see this. This is all there ever is. As a story I simply stopped appearing and there is just what is. It is exactly the same as before, but without me. And strangest of all ... in the absence of me it is obvious that nothing has been lost and nothing is missing.

Tim Cliss

What is the point or the benefit of this book?

Well we could sum it up in four words.

There is no point.

There isn't one. There is no benefit. There is no better experience of life to be had. There is no more success to bring about or money to earn. There is no better emotion to have than this one right now. There is no better life.

And that, my friends, is sanity.

But from the mind's point of view this is bleak indeed. This is the moment to toss the paperback in the bin or delete the copy on the tablet. The mind in all its delusion will demand a benefit. It will demand a solution, a finding, an end to the suffering.

But we've been looking for the point for forever. And it has got us nowhere.

There is no point.

There is no point to the beauty of the rose.

It just is.

And, ironically, the realisation of that... it changes everything.

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

ONE

A MISUNDERSTANDING

We live in a fantasy world, a world of illusion.

The great task in life is to find reality.

Iris Murdoch

Imagine asking how to get somewhere and everyone you ask giving you completely different directions.

And then even when you follow that advice to the letter you still don't end up where you wanted to go. In fact, often you end up even further away.

And even the people giving out the advice can't seem to get where they want to go. They are just as lost as you, sometimes obviously, sometimes not so obviously.

In some walks of life, we are far from lost.

Over the last 20 years, human capability, exploration and discovery has transformed beyond recognition. We've found water ice on the moon, the promise of a cure for HIV/AIDS and how to grow human organs from stem cells. We've proven the existence of dark matter and completed the sequencing of the human genome. We've exited the solar system, determined the age of the universe and can have a live, video conversation with anyone on the planet.

Yet, when it comes to mental health...

In that same 20 year period, anti-depressant use in the US has risen 400% with 11% of all people in the US over 12 years old now taking the medication. In the UK, deaths from alcohol

misuse have doubled. Twenty five per cent of people in Europe now suffer from depression or anxiety.

Worldwide, depression is now the number one cause of disability and the major contributor to the burden of suicide and heart disease. A suicide occurs every 40 seconds and is the 2nd leading cause of death globally of 15-29 year olds. Three hundred million people suffer from anxiety. Eight billion dollars a year are spent on mental health medication.

What is going on with this? How is it that the human race can create extraordinary life changing devices and technology and yet our mental health seems to be in free fall?

What if this is because we have it all wrong?

What if all psychological suffering, confusion, exhaustion, stress and conflict have only ever come from one innocent misunderstanding?

What if we have been trying to find mental health, peacefulness, happiness, freedom and fulfilment in the places that continually prolong the search?

We're going to look at an understanding that might be so diametrically opposed to how you view yourself and others that it might seem absolutely ridiculous.

There might be ideas in this book that you have never even contemplated before, that have never crossed your path.

Yet there is nothing new in this, nothing complicated and nothing radical. It is as old as time. It is as simple as waking up. It is as ever present, yet as often unnoticed, taken for granted, as life itself.

This is going to be a strange sort of book.

It's a book about sanity and delusion.

Much of it might well sound insane.

It's not.

TWO

BEYOND BELIEF

Belief is the death of intelligence.

Robert Anton Winston

In ancient Rome and Greece ‘aimless wandering’ was considered a form of madness. The ‘treatment’ was stoning and beating.

In mid 1800s America, the label ‘Dysaesthesia Aethiopica’ indicated that black men and women were incapable of living in freedom. The ‘treatment’ was slavery.

In the 1850s and 60s when train travel was becoming possible, it was believed that the shaking motion injured the brain, sending travellers mad. The ‘treatment’ was to stop using trains.

In Victorian times, the ‘vapours’ were proof that women were fragile, delicate and unable to cope with the demands of life. The ‘treatment’ was to isolate them from them any responsibility.

Only 100 years ago, women who became pregnant outside marriage were deemed insane. The ‘treatment’ was institutionalisation.

Right up to the 1980s, homosexuality was classified by the World Health Organisation as a psychological disorder. The ‘treatment’ was therapy and drugs.

Beliefs are the product of familial, educational, social, historical, geographical, religious and cultural influence. They

are not objective truths.

And yet they create the entire set of ‘truths’ through which all experience of self and other is judged and categorised and corrected.

In other words our entire reality, which also includes every idea of who we are, of what is wrong or right with us, is a creation of thought and belief, a product of conditioning.

So let’s be very clear from the outset on this...

Categorisations will inevitably change as collective or personal belief changes and are therefore inherently temporary.

To take a concept or label and to believe it to be a fundamental truth is to not understand concepts and labels.

History has shown only too well the fallacy, violence, inhumanity and danger of believing a concept without enquiry, curiosity and openness.

In this book we will explore how the degree to which we suffer, to which we feel separate from the reality around us, to which we are lost and deluded, to which we are in conflict with others, experience, nature, emotions and thoughts, is the degree to which there is confusion about what is true.

So if we cannot use labels to determine sanity or insanity, who we are and who we are not, what is right or wrong, what can we use?

The answer is so simple.

WE REALISE WHAT IS THERE BEFORE LABEL AND CONCEPT.

AND WHAT REMAINS AFTER.

And this might sound incredibly disappointing to those of us seeking the magic cure for the confusion and exhaustion.

It sounds like nothing. It sounds like some facile play on words that has nothing to do with real life. The mind is screaming - tell me what to do, tell me how to feel better, tell me how to stop the unrest, tell me how to make my life easier.

And this pointing beyond label and concept sounds desperately inadequate.

Yet it is the only sanity. The misunderstanding of this is the only reason why we spend our lives trying and failing to feel better.

Let's have a look in more detail at what it involves:

It is the realisation of the role of belief in creating the apparent reality, the judgement, the meaning of all experience of self and other.

It is the realisation of what these labels and concepts are. Indeed it is the realisation of what **all** labels and concepts really are.

It is the realisation of what does not change, what is beyond the transient, ephemeral and insubstantial.

Sanity lies in the essence that is revealed when judgement, belief and thought are no longer taken as reality.

And this shift between the delusion of unquestioned belief and the sanity beyond all belief is the case whether we are therapist or client, doctor or patient, teacher or student.

It is the case whether we are running a government or sweeping pavements.

It is the case whether we are earning billions or begging for coins.

It is the case whether people wait on our every word or we are spurned by society.

This book proposes that there is only one question when it comes to sanity.

Do we understand the true nature of self and other?

Just that one simple question.

The sanity that we are considering here is the sanity of knowing who we are and what we are not, about what is true, objective and real and what is not.

It is the sanity of knowing that, ultimately, nothing is true, objective or real.

It is the sanity of understanding that belief is not reality. And that everything, ultimately is belief.

It is the knowing that every form, including the form of our apparently 'own' mind and body is a temporary creation of perception.

What difference would it make to the world if we realised that delusion was an inevitable aspect of the human condition?

And that the simple realisation of inevitable delusion was enough for all of us to become sane...?

THREE

A NEW BLUE PRINT FOR SANITY

To recognise one's own insanity is, of course, the arising of sanity, the beginning of healing and transcendence.

Eckhart Tolle

Beliefs.

What enormous power they have and yet they have no power at all.

While believed, they are reality. They create an identity and a world in which that identity lives. Beliefs are everything.

And they are also nothing. Because, the moment they are no longer believed, they cease to exist, as if they hadn't even been there. And the reality they created ceases to exist as if it had never been there. Which isn't surprising because that reality wasn't there. It was only ever an apparition - an apparition that can disappear at any moment.

Beliefs are hand-me-down clothes put on without any idea that something else is possible.

And where does this leave the idea of who we are? This idea that is created from nothing but beliefs?

And where does it leave the idea of reality? An idea also created from nothing but beliefs?

It leaves these ideas with nowhere to go. They are not true. They are not the objective facts they have always been assumed to be.

They are thought, beliefs, unquestioned conclusions, blindly accepted associations.

So who are we and what is real?

It is the answer to this question that determines whether life is a life of delusion, a Truman Show of unquestioned 'reality' playing out over and over again.

Or... or what....?

What lies beyond the beliefs? Who are we if not the idea of who we are?

Let's look at this...

FOUR

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

*Reality is that which,
when you stop believing in it,
doesn't go away.*

Philip K. Dick

Do you believe yourself to be a separate individual in a world of other separate individuals and separate events?

Does it look like these individuals and events appear as they do because that is the reality of them?

Does it look like how they appear is unrelated to the way the self appears in that moment?

Very logical and natural that that is how it looks to be.

Here is a proposal that might sound insane.

What if that is not the case?

What if who you are is not a separate individual?

What if all thought of separation was only that: a thought?

What if who you actually are is life itself. The life that animates the body. The life that makes it possible for concept, thought, belief to arise and disappear.

The same life that gives rise to trees, plants, animals.

And what if all idea that you are anything other than life itself is just a concept, a product of the incredible faculty of

imagination of the human brain?

What if the only thing that ends when you die is a concept of who you are (which, let's face it can end or transform at anytime, regardless of the physical body) while the life you really are is inextinguishable and constant?

That would be a big deal wouldn't it?

That would pretty much turn the whole idea of who we are and of what reality is upside down.

It is a proposal that is almost impossible to comprehend because at every twist and turn it looks absolutely set in stone that we are this self we believe ourselves to be and we are separate from other people.

But the moment we start exploring the nature of belief, the moment we question what exactly is this self, the moment we investigate the apparently fixed nature of reality, a possibility opens up.

And that possibility is sanity.

FIVE

ALL DELUSIONS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME
ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

*One of the definitions of sanity was the ability to tell the
difference between real and unreal.*

Soon we will need a new definition.

Alvin Toffler

This is a book about sanity. It is a book saying no belief is objectively true.

There are beliefs that look right because they seem to be endorsed or everyone seems to concur with them.

But apparent 'rightness' means nothing more than temporary agreement. All beliefs will eventually dissolve in the face of new information.

It wasn't so long ago that the earth was flat. Bad smells caused disease. Diamond was the hardest substance. It was physically impossible to fold a piece of paper more than seven times and for something heavier than air to fly. Smoking was good for your throat, lead-based cosmetics were de-rigueur and mercury was perfectly safe for school kids to play with in a science lesson.

The rightness of a belief only stands until more compelling information blows it out of the window.

Then there are beliefs that look desirable because they seem to be rewarded.

But apparent ‘desirability’ has nothing to do with truth. Numbers of followers, income, power, position do not equate to absence of delusion. The rewards of absolute power, wealth and deference did not, for example, make Hitler’s beliefs true or right.

We can’t look to the world around us for evidence that we are right or wrong, sane or insane. After all, the world is only a creation of the same beliefs that form the idea of self.

We can’t look to labels and concepts as they will always change. We can’t even look to our own thoughts and belief in reality as our own sanity or our own delusion are both also thought created.

And we know this.

We know that insanity is the blind belief in whatever thought throws up from moment to moment. The confusion of believing what can never be true. Mistaking convenient agreement or temporary imagination for objective reality.

We know that sanity lies in those momentary clearings in which thought and belief, seen for what they are, fall away.

Hence the title of this chapter pinched from Orwell’s *Animal Farm*.

All delusions are equal because all delusions are a move away from reality.

But some are more equal than others - some take us deeper and deeper into a deluded idea of who we are and what is real. While others are just a bit closer to the freedom and openness that remains when belief falls away.

In other words some delusions create such dramatic portrayals of separation, such unquestioned assertions about reality, such fixed beliefs about the nature of others that they densely obscure the simplicity of being.

Let’s look at some examples.

THE BODY

There is the everyday delusion that we are this body.

And there is the 'more deluded' delusion that the body must be starved to death to be acceptable or that permanent peace can be found in food, sex or cutting.

(And then there is the sanity of realising that self understanding determines how the body appears. Always.)

THE SELF

There is the everyday delusion that I am who I think I am.

And then there is the 'more deluded' delusion that I am so worthless I should kill myself.

(And then there is the sanity of realising who we are is way beyond thought or belief).

OTHER PEOPLE

There is the everyday delusion that I am separate from other people.

And there is the 'more deluded' delusion that for me to be safe I must annihilate those that seem to threaten my identity.

(And then there is the sanity of realising that all others are created from the same conditioned thought that creates the self.)

REALITY

There is the everyday delusion that how reality appears is how it is.

Then there is the 'more deluded' delusion that the thought-created reality must be fought against.

(And then there is the sanity of realising there is no objective reality. Ever.)

THE VOICE

There is the everyday delusion of sometimes believing the commentary in the head.

And then there is the 'more deluded' delusion of carrying out its orders no matter how harmful.

(And then there is the sanity of realising the 'voice of separation' never provides information about reality.)

ALL DELUSIONS ARE CREATED equal - all are made of thought and belief. None are true. But some are more deluded, further away from the sanity of completeness, wholeness, freedom and love.

Some delusions are lightly held, ready to be given up and seen through. But some are clung onto with clenched fist, moving us deeper into an ever-greater conviction of a separate, fixed individual in a separate and true reality.

We need a new definition of insanity / sanity that does not depend on the transient activity of delusion, belief and thought.

How about this?

WE ARE DELUDED AND INSANE TO THE EXTENT THE THOUGHTS OF WHO WE ARE AND OF WHAT REALITY IS ARE BELIEVED.

WE ARE SANE TO THE EXTENT THAT THERE IS REALISATION OF NO FIXED, OBJECTIVE INDIVIDUAL SELF AND NO FIXED, SEPARATE, OBJECTIVE REALITY.

That's it.

Sanity.

CONCEPT

A thought is harmless unless we believe it. It's not our thoughts, but our attachment to our thoughts, that causes suffering. Attaching to a thought means believing that it's true, without inquiring. A belief is a thought that we've been attaching to, often for years.

Byron Katie

Let's talk about concepts.

Because concepts are useful right?

When we talk about nothing being objectively true it could sound as though this means giving up everything that has been learned. As though we are advocating a return to the pre-concept naiveté of baby-hood.

Pushing our fingers into plug sockets because there is no concept of electricity and shocks?

Running into the road because there is no concept of cars or speed?

Putting anything found on the floor in the mouth because there is no concept of germs and health?

Why would we do that? Concepts can be very helpful for the survival of the body mind.

Not all of us can understand or master every concept.

My friend tried to explain bitcoin to me and there just didn't seem to be anything there to grasp it, no reference to it, it was so alien. The words didn't seem to point to anything.

The inability at the moment to understand the concept of bitcoin doesn't make me insane but it apparently limits the ability to trade in it, to have conversations about it, to teach about it, to run programmes on it.

Similarly if someone can't grasp the concept of time it limits their ability to navigate a world of meetings, schedules, planners, travel.

The concept of fire is necessary to have an idea of fire when it is not present. Without it, fire prevention and fire response would be impossible.

If the concept of self and other is beyond our grasp, language, communication, respect, appreciation and boundaries are all affected. Without an understanding of this entity here and that entity there, we would be like toddlers climbing over people to reach a toy.

Conceptual limitations are no different from physical ones. It seems I can't easily grasp the concept of bitcoin and I can't run 100 meters in 15 seconds. I could get closer to both through diligent trial, practice and attention. But for the moment, they are apparent limitations of this mind and body.

These aspects don't make us insane of course. They are simply tendencies that will shape the path that life will take.

The acquisition and understanding of concepts create ease, opportunity, possibility, exploration. That is the point of them after all.

But what happens is that these concepts look so real that they are mistaken for reality.

And, when that happens, the delusion starts to set in and insanity looms.

Because instead of being seen for what they are—agreements that represent that which is not there—they are believed to be reality. They are taken at face value, as objective truth.

Instead of being a holding space for possibility, a lightly held frame for exploration, an agreement for ease of living and

expansion - they become tight, compressed, rigid and utterly misunderstood.

And that is the point at which all problems arise.

I am this.

He / she is that. They are this. The world is this way.

The past was this. The future will be that. Success is this. Failure is that. Security is this. Risk is that.

We stay there within that fixed, unexplored, unquestioned concept. Trying to make life better, trying to suffer less, trying to have better experiences without actually ever questioning the nature of that life, the nature of the suffering, the origin of all experience, the transience and illusory nature of all ideas and concepts.

We fight within the concept, exhausting ourselves, instead of seeing the concept for what it is.

No change, no expansion, no transformation is possible without the understanding that a concept is only a vehicle for information, a stepping stone to be lightly trodden.

The baby has no beliefs, no concepts. It is pure openness.

The developing mind enters the world of concepts and acquires beliefs. It is learning to navigate a conceptual world. It gains a concept of self, of other, of time, of reality. This is brilliant. It is a vital part of human development and the fundamental requirement for everything humankind has created.

But to stay in these beliefs is to remain limited, deluded.

Sanity is the movement through and beyond beliefs.

Concepts, even that fundamental concept of self, are understood for what they are and are transcended.

Maturity.

Freedom.

Sanity.

SEVEN

LET'S BE CLEAR

Thought creates a reality and says 'I didn't do it'.

David Bohm

Let's end the introduction by being really clear about what we are talking about here.

There is life.

Or whatever name we would give the force that grows the acorn into the oak, that moves the new born baby towards its mother's breast, that takes the crawling baby to upright and walking, that provides exactly the right amount of sunshine, oxygen, moisture for plants, animals and humans to thrive. And which creates a brain able to create an idea of brain, self, other babies, milk, walking, sunshine, oxygen and thriving

That is who we are: that force. The totality, the completeness, the uncontainability, the presence of aliveness.

And we are that force experiencing a world of form through an apparent body, mind, sense organs.

The experience of form is enhanced by the ability of the mind to imagine and conceptualise. These abilities take humans far beyond the creative potential of animals and plants.

But the gift of imagination is so vivid and the gift of conceptualisation is so robust that they start to be mistaken for reality.

An idea of self is created and believed. An idea of reality is created and believed.

The identification with this self and this reality is powerful, dramatic and compelling. It appeals to the fascination with stories, meaning, creation and association.

In all this misidentification, the quiet, simple, constant, loving, peaceful, ever-present aliveness of who we really are is overlooked.

The belief sets in that we are the thoughts. The stories become reality and momentarily obscure who we really are. We want to get back to the peaceful, unconditional aliveness. And instead of realising that the way back is through and beyond the stories, we search desperately for ourselves in that made-up, illusory reality.

And this is the great delusion, the insanity of our age.

This is the reason for that year on year increase in depression and anxiety. This is the misunderstanding behind suicide and addiction. This is the source of all suffering, conflict and mental exhaustion.

It will continue until there is realisation of who we are and what reality actually is.

Sanity.

PART TWO

REALITY

*We take that which is unreal to be real
and that which is real to be unreal.*

Rupert Spira

We're going to look now at the reality that we take to be absolutely real.

Firstly, there is unquestioned reality. Reality seems to be something that just is. Experience is believed to simply be the experience of reality. There are objects, people, events, circumstances, places, ourself even that exist as objective truth. Whatever is perceived is the apparent verity of that object.

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THIS SEEMS TRUE IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THERE IS SUFFERING, CONFUSION AND DELUSION.

Secondly, there is the understanding that the experience is *not* the objective reality of it. The way something (including the self) appears, sounds, feels and is experienced is not a function of the object. It is a function of the perceiver. It is a creation of thought, belief and conditioning. As David Bohm said, 'Thought creates a world and then says, 'I didn't do it'. The extent to which this is realised is the extent to which freedom, ease and peacefulness are experienced.

ALL SUFFERING ARISES IN THE FORGETTING OF HOW EXPERIENCE, PARTICULARLY THAT OF THE SELF, IS CREATED.

The implications of this are stratospheric.

Particularly when it comes to psychology and mental health.

Because the quest for mental health, peace of mind, clarity, freedom or whatever else is sought, can take us deeper and deeper into misunderstanding. More confusion.

Or it can be a genuine exploration of how all experience of self and other is created. Freedom.

EIGHT

THE EXPERIENCE IS REAL BUT
'REALITY' IS NOT.

*We don't see things as they are,
we see them as we are.*

Anais Nin

The experience right now of writing on my lap top is real but to say that I am experiencing 'reality' is not true in any way.

The experience is real, as in the experience is happening, but the 'reality' experienced is a microscopically limited, distorted, interpreted, conditioned film.

It looks as though we go about the world experiencing other people, objects, circumstances and events *as they are*, in other words the *reality* of them. But nothing could be further from the truth. Perception is a reality creating machine.

Do you like cats? If you answered yes, do you have a friend who doesn't like them? If you don't like cats, do you know anyone who likes them?

Cats. Gorgeous bundles of purring deliciousness?

Hateful creatures of zero value?

Which are they?

They aren't either. Those aren't properties of the cat. They are simply telling us about the perceiver of the cat

Fair enough you might say, but still, if you took the like and dislike away, a cat is a cat. That's the reality of it. Four legs, a tail, ears, fur. A cat.

But what is a cat to a flea that lives and dies on the cat's back? What is it to the bird that the cat is carrying around in its mouth? What is it to the dog straining at its lead to leap after the cat? What is it to the bacteria multiplying in the cat's stomach?

What is a cat to global experts in feline physiology and behaviour? What is it to a baby?

The properties of the cat belong to the perceiver not to the cat. There are perceptions in common and these give rise to labels. 'Cat' is an agreement but the meaning it holds is always that of the perceiver.

The baby, growing up, is a label gathering machine, amassing these agreements. And the agreements solidify into beliefs.

Where does belief take place? What decides what input will stick? What dictates which information will become a reality through which the self and other is judged?

Maybe we will never know. But we do know that the baby initially pre-concept and pre-belief matures into a toddler, a child, a teen and then an adult that has amassed all manner of beliefs and holds them as absolute truth. All these labels stop looking like temporary agreement and start looking like objective fact.

That seems to be a necessary stage of human development. But to stay there, to remain in that stage of unquestioned belief is to suffer in an imaginary prison.

The labels and everything that comes with them become set in stone. We forget they are a short cut. They just seem to be reality.

We forget that cat, sky, rain, rose, hate, table, fun, money, success are agreements. And agreements that are held somehow in unique form. We forget that they come furnished with association, meaning and memory. We forget that although there is an apparent, agreed reality to them, they contain no objectivity.

We forget that actually what is experienced is simply a reflection of what has been learned and believed, the conditioning of the brain.

We forget that the labels are never the truth. Concepts are never anything but concepts. The map is never the territory. The representation is never the reality.

The same is also true when it comes to the labels of the self. 'I am happy / gloomy / successful / a failure / shy / a parent / a CEO...' The label becomes so unquestioned that it becomes reality instead of just a temporary label that is only in place because it has not been questioned.

So the experience is real.

No question about that.

But the 'reality' experienced...?

No. That is not real.

In other words, reality does not exist 'out there'. It exists 'here' - and we will explore where that 'here' actually is...

'Reality' has nothing to do with reality and everything to do with the filters of belief, concept and thought.

The realisation of that?

Sanity.

NINE

REALITY IS 'THIS' AND IT IS ALSO 'NOT THIS'

Life is an endless manifestation of possibilities. When it is realised that limitation is a product of the imagination and not a fixed reality, anything becomes possible.

Lisa Cairns

Perception is necessarily interpretive, limited, distorted, biased, deluded. And the status report it provides is taken as reality. And that reality is apparently all there is. Nothing else is available in that moment.

But what about everything that the incredibly narrow perceptual window cuts out? In other words perception says 'this but not that' and in doing so hides everything else that also is. In other words: 'this is all there is'. And this 'all there is' is obscuring all other possibility in that moment.

I'm writing these words on a train. The seats are grey and green. It is hot and crowded. The woman next to me is putting on nail varnish and the smell of acetone is heavy in the air. Someone that I can't see is eating crisps. I got on at Swindon and will be getting off in Cardiff. The journey lasts an hour.

And all this is unquestionable.

I am real.

I am on the train.

The train is a real train.

The seats are real seats.

The woman next to me is real.

The towns are real.

The journey is a real journey.

An hour is a real hour.

This is our reality.

An unquestionably real self (me) perceiving the sights, sounds, textures, temperatures, pressures, past and future of the real world around it.

Unquestionable.

All of it - apparently real.

This view of reality that is happening right now is all there is. This is it. This experience whatever it is, all there is. The details the colours, the sounds, the textures, the emotion, the beliefs, the appearances.

This is all there is.

And this 'all there is' is obscuring everything else.

Because this 'all there is' represents a fixed perception, a stake in the ground, a 'reality'. But it is not reality, it is a momentary 'take'. What is experienced right now obliterates all other possibility, that is also happening simultaneously.

Schroedinger's cat is both alive and dead until the box is open and the gaze fixes it in place as one or the other.

There is both wave and particle until observation makes it one or the other.

Observation creates a fixed reality and obscures the possibility of the opposite of what is observed.

Byron Katie whose enquiry into reality is transforming the lives of millions takes people through a process called 'The Work'. It includes 'turnarounds' in which the beliefs of the participant are turned around to the direct opposite and seen to be just as true. For example 'My mother is unhelpful' becomes 'My mother is helpful'. These inevitably elicit disbelief, shock and eventually laughter from the participant. It becomes obvious that the reality fixed in place was obscuring the exact

opposite which was simultaneously happening and equally as obvious.

Present apparent reality, that apparent 'all there is' is just one of infinite versions.

Even while this reality is happening, infinite other possibilities are also occurring. But because of that current perceptual, limited, distorted, selective slice of reality, they are momentarily obscured.

The realisation of that?

Sanity.

TEN

WHO OR WHAT IS THE PERCEIVER?

True freedom is when all the stories, all the insights, all the realizations, concepts, beliefs and positions dissolve. What remains is what you are; a vast, conscious, luminous space simply resting in itself, not knowing a thing, at the point where all things are possible.

Enza Vita

The body exists in a swirling maelstrom of data. Data is gathered and transmitted through sense organs.

The on-going assumption is that the me, the self, the 'I', is the perceiver, organiser, controller and interpreter of this data.

But what is that self exactly? Where does it reside? What is it made of? And how does the self exist if not via the same perceptual process as everything else?

Could it be that this self that seems so real is also just a creation of perception?

And that it is in fact less real than the apparently real world perceived by the sense organs? Because, when it comes to the self, what actual information is it based on?

Nothing is coming into the sense organs. It cannot be heard or felt or seen. There is a body but where is the self?

Could it be that this real individual self is only an idea? A delusion?

As this 'self' seems to be the basis of our entire existence, it deserves a fairly close examination.

We have considered how what is perceived is a function of the perceiver.

And we might have ended the last previous chapters with the thought: Ah ok. I get it. Individual realities. I perceive certain things differently from others. That makes sense. I have different likes, dislikes, associations. Different perceptions. No biggy.'

Well it is quite a biggy...

Because now we are considering the possibility that the 'I' doing the perceiving is not the 'I' that we commonly believe to be the individual self, the me, myself.

And again, yes I know, this sounds insane.

Because if the ultimate perceiver is not the me here, this identity that is me, then what is it?

Let's consider sight...

Light stimulates the retina and causes chemical reactions. The optic nerve is stimulated and sends electrical impulses into the brain. The impulses go back to the visual cortex. These can be tracked.

But where is the perceiver of this information? Where does the world appear. What is it that sees, hears and feels?

All this electrical information is going somewhere but there is no image, sound, sensation or world in the brain.

If we consider the cat of the previous chapter. It appears as electrical impulses in the brain. But who is making the cat appear? Who is seeing the cat? Where is the watcher? There is no mini Clare in the brain turning all this data into cat.

And yet this information is received and constructed as an idea of the world. Who or what is doing that? And where does that perceived world reside?

It is the same for hearing with sound waves stimulating the ear drum.

It is the same for touch with pressure stimulating receptors in the skin.

We believe it is perceived by the self. I am seeing. I am hearing. I am writing.

But what and where is that self?

We can't find the self in the brain. We can't find it in any part of the body.

And this is almost impossible to comprehend. Because what looks through these eyes, what hears, what touches is believed to be this individual self.

There is this tight, almost unbreakable identification of this idea of self as the seer, hearer, feeler, doer.

We say 'I am listening'.

But we cannot in any truth say that 'I, this individual self, am listening' because there is no individual self making listening happen. Listening is just happening or not happening. There is no 'I' making it happen or not happen. If the 'I' had to explain how it was making listening happen, how it was taking vibration and converting it into meaning and imagery, it could not. It could not because it is not doing anything.

There is no 'I' making seeing happen. Seeing is just happening. There is no 'I' making touch or sensation happen. Touch is just happening.

And this is ENORMOUS.

It is almost beyond comprehension.

It might sound so nihilistic. It might sound as though, if we don't exist as the self we have always believed ourselves to be, then we don't exist at all.

But for sure existence is happening. Awareness is happening. There is aliveness and life. Experiences are taking place.

It is just not being 'done' by the self.

Because the self is, itself, only an experience, a perception, an idea, a thought, a belief.

In other words, the self is, itself, being 'done'

It is a creation. It is not the creator.

The realisation of this?

Sanity.

ELEVEN

REALITY BECOMES LESS REAL WHILE
IMMERSION IN THAT REALITY
INCREASES.

Isn't it incredibly wonderful that there is no one to meet anyone else and yet in this dream of two we can meet one another....that is what makes me cry for the love of this... knowing there is no me or other and yet seeing the beauty and love in everyone and everything.... even myself.

Tim Cliss

The screen writing expert Robert McKee, who has contributed to over 30 Oscar winning films, talks of naive writers, who, knowing nothing about the category in which they are attempting to write, stumble blindly around in it, inadvertently trampling on the unspoken conventions that hold consistency and meaning for the viewer.

He compares them to the nervous writers, on the other hand, who are so scared of doing something wrong that they obey, without question, the apparent category rules. In their subservience, they can only churn out cliché after cliché.

Then there are the few... the few who know the genre, who have celebrated it, questioned it, experimented with it, who are so relaxed in it that they are entirely free. They both honour and transform. Knowing the rules inside out they play games with them. In their loving disruption, they pay deep homage to what has gone before. This is the space of originality, of excitement, of transcendence.

Warren Buffet's, the billionaire investor, understanding of money is so deep that its essential meaninglessness became clear to him. He talks of how it makes no difference whether

you are penniless or a millionaire, but what you understand about money, what it can do and not do, what you are with or without it.

Jim Carey, the multi-award winning actor who has transcended the idea of personal success, has said “I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer.”

We live and work in a world of form, of concepts, of things. And so easily these forms scare or master us. We become a slave to the wage packet or to the idea of success or approval or of getting things right. We are held in fear or confusion by money or other people or life.

Naive about the form, we are lost in it. The writer who does not understand the genre, is tripped up by the obvious, stumbles around, gets nowhere.

Scared by the form, we are trapped by it. The writer who does not dare question the form is penned in, limited by the inability to move beyond cliché and mundanity.

It is the same in our own lives, the form, whatever it is - money, work, another person, life can appear as a fixed, real, daunting thing - impossible to understand or impossible to question.

And it will remain that way...

Until...

Until what...?

Until we realise there is nothing to lose in learning?

Until we realise that there is no shame in asking questions, finding out, exploring, being curious?

Until we realise that the only risk of experimenting, of putting things out there is a dent in our self image (and the sooner that goes the better)?

Until we realise the form is never how it appears to be and reality is never reality?

And then, with that understanding, we go right into the form. Immerse ourselves in it. Explore it. Understand it. Embrace it. Love it until there is no us and no it. And as we do so it transforms and we transform. Both it and we become what we could never otherwise have been. The rules give themselves up. Predecessors send ideas through the eons and ether. Doors swing open. Sparks fly. Each moment a tiny miracle.

Reality becomes less real while immersion in that apparent reality increases.

This really is the definition of sanity and is the central core of this book.

Reality is understood for what it is - apparently real, and simultaneously not real.

And that realisation creates an unprecedented intimacy with and openness to what is, with no reliance or fixation on it.

This is the essence of freedom, unconditional love and peace. This is the essence of sanity.

Most of us live in an unquestioned reality of self and other. We believe it to be totally real.

Much of this apparent reality of self and other is not welcome. We don't like the feelings, the thoughts, the emotions, the experiences. We think we should be different. We think they should be different. We think it should be different. We wish for something better.

So we resist the reality and push it away and try to make it something else and complain about it. We suffer in it, believing all the time that we and the world need to change but we are completely unable to change it.

The reason we can't change it is because the 'I' that is looking for something different is made of the same thought created perception as that which is being resisted.

And that's the insanity of our time.

We have everything backwards.

We don't enquire into the nature of that self and the reality it wants to change. We don't explore how it has arisen, what it is made of.

And the uninvestigated belief in this (thought created) self that needs (a thought created) reality to change simply keeps that whole tableau in place.

Thought is drawing ghosts and, instead of seeing them for what they are, we run from them or do battle with them.

Insane.

But perhaps something different has been heard in what has been written so far. Or perhaps before picking up this book, there was already realisation.

And perhaps that fixed idea of self does not look quite so real.

Perhaps the reality the self is fighting does not look quite so separate from the self.

And as all that gets lighter, less dense, there is only 'what is'. A body and mind that cannot be separated from the allness that is life. With no self to separate itself out, there is only completeness. Everything can be experienced.

Freedom. Creation.

Sanity.

PART THREE

INSANITY OF SEPARATION

The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same form of mental pathology does not make these people sane.

Erich Fromm, The Sane Society

Auto immune disease is when the immune system, instead of preventing disease and infection, mistakenly attacks the body.

In other words, the part of the system designed to protect the system destroys the system. The body in defending itself, fights itself and unchecked can lead to destruction of the whole system.

Essentially, this book looks at how the human faculties of imagination and conceptualisation lead to a created, imagined, believed idea of self and reality. And how that idea of self, unquestioned and unexplored turns in on the very life from which it arose.

Insanity.

In this section we are looking at what happens when that idea of self is believed to be something it never could be: an independent, objective, real entity, the controller and experiencer of thought, emotion, experience and behaviour.

We are looking here at how the self, in trying to protect itself, ends up fighting itself. An exhausting, never-ending battle from which no victor can emerge.

The established belief system of who we are, of what others are, of what we are in control of or should be in control of leads to confusion, exhaustion and conflict.

And we are looking at the freedom, love, peace and magnificence that is revealed as that delusion of the insecure self is seen for what it is.

So what is the exit from this vicious circle of defending a self against itself?

Just to consider it, to be still with it, to hold up to the light the beliefs that create apparent separation.

Ultimately whatever is not true will fall away.

And in the falling away, the fundamental sanity of who we are is revealed.

It becomes clear that all suffering arises from the miracle gift of creative imagination.

The confusion of misunderstanding and misidentification can be seen.

The pain and exhaustion when the idea of self turns in on itself can be realised.

The impossibility of ever securing ourselves in a world that only reflects back the insecurity becomes obvious.

Let's explore this in detail.

TWELVE

ONE

Realisation of Oneness means being constantly open to the possibility that we are like two flowers looking at each other from two different branches of the same tree, so that if we were to go deep enough inside to the trunk, we would realise that we are one. Just being open to this possibility will have a profound effect on your relationships and on your experience of the world.

Francis Lucille

You might have heard this word ‘oneness’ bandied about a bit. It might seem a bit naff and new age and very far from the solution to mental unrest.

But let’s have a look at it.

What does it actually mean?

It means that the idea of a self separate from the world around it is only that. An idea.

It means that separation is an illusion.

It means that, no matter how it might appear, there is no actual separate individual here in a world of objects, people, circumstances that are separate and independent of it.

The idea of other people, places, events, circumstances, sights, sounds, textures, past and future are all created in exactly the same way as the idea of self: through conditioned thought and belief. All of it is made of the same stuff and experienced in the same way.

Forgetting this, the self believes itself to be a real entity that must be secured and defended. It looks out on a world that is full of danger. It forgets that it is looking in a mirror. So the self goes into self defence. It attacks not realising it is only attacking itself, its own reflection. And the more the self attacks, the more the world seems to fight back. The self, increasingly insecure, ramps up and the world looks more and more perilous.

This is a set up for a life of suffering and a never-ending attempt to resolve that suffering by going deeper into a reality that doesn't even exist in the way it appears.

On and on and on and on and on and on. Fighting a world that is only ever itself. A vicious circle of self. The attempt to protect becomes the destruction.

Let's have a look at how the confusion plays out through the belief in:

- a separate self
- separate other

THIRTEEN

SEPARATE OTHER, SEPARATE OBJECT, SEPARATE CIRCUMSTANCE

In the stillness of your presence, you can feel your own formless and timeless reality as the unmanifested life that animates your physical form. You can then feel the same life deep within every other human and every other creature. You look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of oneness. This is love.

Eckhart Tolle

It certainly looks as though there are other people. There are people we love. People we care for. People we are attracted to. People we seem to be responsible for. People who irritate us. People who make us angry. People who scare us. People who seem to control our lives.

We look out on these people: real, solid individuals with their own ideas and thoughts and behaviours that impact us.

It certainly looks as though there are other things, circumstances and events. There are things we love. Animals we care for. Stuff we seem to be responsible for. Circumstances that irritate us. Events that make us angry. Situations that seem to control our lives.

We look out on these things. Real, solid circumstances or events and the way they impact us.

If someone were to tell us there is no separate other, now that would sound insane.

So here we go...

There is no separate other.

And yes that sounds insane.

But with genuine enquiry into who we are and who other people are, that separation between us collapses.

Because it starts to become clear that the idea of another is made of the same conditioned thought and belief which creates the idea of self. No separation there. And the life that is animating the self and other is exactly the same life. Absolutely no separation possible on any level of existence.

Yet the unquestioned assumption of separation is the basis of pretty much any practice that aims to relieve suffering. And as such it only increases, ultimately, the sense of isolation and confusion that led to the suffering in the first place.

But there is a way to realise the peace, freedom and joy that we have been searching. And that is to get very still with the fact that reality is always a creation of perception from moment to moment. There is nothing objective or fixed or independent about anything out there. What is perceived is always a function of the perceiver, never the object of perception.

So if this is true then why can't we just change the perception, change the thoughts to be happy all the time? Why can't we just believe whatever we want to believe in and have it instantly?

Because we have forgotten something vital.

We have forgotten that the self who wants to change this perception, who wants to have different thoughts and beliefs is also... all together now... a creation of perception.

The idea of self is not the perceiver. It is the perceived.

Without belief (and it is only ever belief) saying 'this is who I am', what is there?

Nothing. There is nothing there.

The idea of a fixed real me that wants something is made of the same thought and belief, the same perception-created transience, as the apparent object or person 'out there'.

An idea of self appears in the same way and at the same time that an idea of need or being scared of someone or worrying about giving a presentation. They do not exist independently.

There is no objective self or objective world. Beliefs are a function of understanding in the moment, of the extent to which the only reality of being is veiled or revealed.

In reality, there is nothing to change and no one there to change it.

But belief, so convincingly, hides this. It creates an illusory separation. It says this is me and this is them. A duality of self and other, good and bad, right and wrong. It creates an apparent reality that looks absolutely unquestionably real.

So what does this mean?

It means a completely new perspective on who we are and on what other people are.

We begin to understand that the idea of self, other, circumstances, good, bad, desired, not desired appears, changes and disappears within the absolute that we really are.

Concepts lose their fixed meaning. Judgement and blame cease. Resistance to any experience falls away. The need for anything other than what is right now disappears. There is only openness, presence.

That presence in which all experience arises and dissolves, in which there is nothing to chase or resist is pure peace. Experience arises in peace, is received in peace, dissolves in peace.

The self that had been seeking this peace in the partner, the job, the income, the self that only ever existed in that search, now has no job to do. With the disappearance of that blinkered, distorted, fearful lens, the whole world opens up.

The understanding of reality is such that nothing is missed, everything is available. Love, beauty, joy look out and see themselves everywhere.

The infinitely creative life force, free of the veils of confusion and misunderstanding, is simply the infinitely creative life force. Endlessly creating, regenerating, expressing what is already there. Transforming from apparent form to apparent form with lightness, ease and inevitability.

Everything that has ever been sought 'out there' is here right now.

FOURTEEN

SEPARATE SELF

The real you is a field of intelligence in which the person you have identified yourself with, all other persons, as well as the environment in which they exist, all co-arise and co-evolve as a result of your own self-interactions.

Deepak Chopra

Nice to meet you. I'm Clare. I'm a writer and teacher and a mum. I am British. I am female, 49 and 5 foot 7. I am anxious about an event and tired because I woke up early. I am an introvert, a sagittarius and a seeker. How about you?

Or in other words:

Nice to meet you. This temporary experience of body and mind is mistakenly believed to be, in this moment, not just objectively real, but actually who I am. And I can apparently only relate to you through that lens.

The 'I' of being, of life is constant, unchanging. Yet any descriptor or definition of that 'I' is inevitably transient.

Jobs, marital status, emotions, mind-set, mental state, body shape and size, judgement, success, failure - all of this changes, comes and goes.

There is not one role or relationship that hasn't changed and which doesn't change continually in definition, appearance, state and meaning. How can a role or relationship be where the 'I' can be found?

The body now is utterly different from how 'I' appeared as a baby, so how can the 'I' be this temporary physical form?

There is not one single thought, state, belief, emotion or feeling that can be located, pinpointed, objectively identified. All of it transient, ever changing, impossible to fix on. So how can the 'I' be realised through identification with any of this?

And yet the existence remains. Life remains. Presence remains. Awareness remains.

This is the most fundamental shift in understanding that we can ever make. The truth of who we are, cannot be defined by what changes. It can only be defined by what is continuous.

And what is continuous?

Life, being, presence, existence...

Could it be that ultimately all we are is life? And the life or being just is. It exists. It is vibrant and dynamic and aware. And it cannot be defined or pinned down by the changing forms in which it appears.

Perhaps the ultimate unquestioned insanity of existence therefore, and the foundation of all confusion, is the belief in an independent, objective separate self.

And given how real that self appears, it would seem so utterly crazy to question it but question it we must if the relentless seeking and dissatisfaction of the self is to end.

The shift is enormous.

Believing the apparent objective reality of self and other, we suffer. And we try to end suffering by changing this self or changing what is 'out there' - other people, circumstance, events. This is exhausting and futile because it is impossible that this apparent reality is any different from the apparent reality of the self.

Believing that who we are is the physical body, we live in fear of death. Of course we do. We believe that in death we will be no more. But have you ever seen the body of someone you loved after death? That was only a body, a housing wasn't it? The loved one was no longer there. The body was just the

temporary clothes. What has moved on is life, and it is life that we loved. The person was only always the life inhabiting the body. Just as we are the life that animates this body.

Believing that who we are is this personal mind, these look like our thoughts, our emotions, our mental state that we have to control and manage in order to be OK. It can seem that there is something wrong with us, that there is stuff to fix. But how can that be who we are? We are the space that all this appears in, including the idea of a personal mind.

The identity, the idea of self is a belief.

A belief does not have beliefs. The self, therefore, cannot have beliefs.

A belief cannot change beliefs. The self, therefore, cannot change beliefs.

A belief cannot possess anything. The self therefore cannot have any object.

This might sound ridiculous. But it only sounds ridiculous because we are so conditioned to believe in the independent and fixed actuality of the personal self.

The self is nothing but thought and belief. It can never be secured or fixed because it is made of thought.

And therapy, practice, teaching, writing and coaching that tries to secure the self without understanding what the self is, can compound this confusion.

Aliveness or consciousness or the witness or presence or whatever word we want to use has to come first. For the very simple reason that the personal, the story cannot exist without it.

This is not a chicken and an egg conundrum.

Only one comes first. And that is who we really are. Everything else - all identity, thought, belief, meaning, association, labels arise within that.

Francis Lucille one of the great teachers of this understanding describes a tower with infinite apertures. Within the tower is life or consciousness. Each aperture represents the

limited personal mind. Life animates the personal mind and through conditioning, thought and belief a world is experienced.

So, incredibly, this is who we are. This is the 'oneness' that spiritual teachers speak of.

And that takes away all the confusion.

We rest in what is actually true: the constant, unchanging, unlimited, uncontainable.

The question 'Who am I?' can lead to more identification, more confusion, more prescriptions, more distractions, more suffering.

Or it is the end of delusion.

The end of insanity.

PART FOUR

INSANITY OF CONTROL

*Being an individual - or the experience of being an individual
- is an absolutely hopeless situation, because it can't find what
it's looking for.*

Jim Newman

This could be the saddest section of the book. Or the funniest.
Or the most beautiful.

Is it a cruel trick that we believe we, this self we are
believed to be, can or should control beliefs, behaviour,
emotions, thoughts, circumstances, life?

Is it the cause of escalating depression, anxiety, addiction,
stress and suffering?

Is it the ultimate, hilarious, cosmic joke?

Is it the most sublime poetry?

Is it the gift of being human to experience the ultimate
freedom, peace and joy of who we really are because we have
experienced and lived who we are not?

The idea of self comes from the same conceptual ability
that creates the idea of buildings before they are built,
businesses before they exist, products before they are made.
The concepts of time, space, past, future, other, money,
success, failure, security, insecurity all come from that same

faculty of imagining the existence of something that is not there.

The tricky thing is that this concept of self seems so real that it starts to identify with and personalise whatever is being experienced. It experiences thoughts, ideas, decisions, emotions as though the self somehow created them. As though they are personal.

But what does 'personal' refer to? The 'us' of identity is not true or reliable. It is made of the same perceived thought-stuff as all of the rest of it. All of it a collection of thoughts believed.

And with this knowledge and understanding, the idea of self is loosely held. Like all concepts, it is a useful and convenient agreement but because it is not true, there is nothing to secure or defend. All experience, including experience of self, can be allowed for what it is, fluid, transient, ever-changing.

Forgetting this though is a whole other matter. The self believes 'This is who I am'. That 'who I am' is made of thought and thought is by nature unstable, so the self goes into overdrive to secure what can never be secured.

It seeks to limit experience, thoughts, emotions, states to only that which will make it secure, happy or peaceful. It tries to remove, deny or eradicate what seems to threaten it.

In other words, thought tries to obliterate thought. Belief tries to control belief.

Impossible. All that happens is that thought ramps up thought. More beliefs pile in. More frustration. More self blame and criticism. More conflict with other people and circumstances.

The mistaken belief in the objective reality of this self and the mistaken belief that the self is able to control anything results in a never-ending quest to secure what cannot be secured, to resist what cannot be resisted and to pin down what cannot be pinned down.

The belief in control is insanity.

Let's have a look at what is going on....

FIFTEEN

EMOTION

We have tried everything to get rid of suffering. We have gone everywhere to get rid of suffering. We have bought everything to get rid of it. We have ingested everything to get rid of it. Finally, when one has tried enough, there arises the possibility of spiritual maturity with the willingness to stop the futile attempt to get rid of it and, instead, to actually experience suffering. In that momentous instant, there is the realization of that which is beyond suffering, of that which is untouched by suffering. There is the realisation of who one truly is.

Gangaji

A thirteen year old girl I was working with said ‘I get really sad sometimes. I worry that I might cry in my class. Can you take away the sadness?’

Take away the sadness.

Take away the fear and the worry.

Make me always happy.

That’s what she wants.

And pretty much all of us say the same.

Take away the anger.

Take away the low state.

Take away the feelings of overwhelm.

Take away the grief.

Take away the fear.

Take away the anxiety.

Take away the frustration.

Take away the insecurity.

Take it all away and make sure it never comes back.

We want the eternal sunshine of the spotless mind. We want it for ourselves and for the people we love.

And there is a world poised to provide it through whatever means - therapy, meditation, yoga, exercise, work, alcohol, sex, drugs, diet, distraction, video games, shopping... Much of it provided by people seeking the same end to suffering.

But again what if we have it completely, utterly, absolutely, heart-breakingly wrong?

That little girl and I could have embarked on a journey to try to eliminate all experience of sadness, all fear, all low thoughts.

We could have done that.

We could have practiced all sorts of exercises and techniques in the attempt to cleanse her life of 'negative' emotion as we would wipe the traces of an ice-cream from the cheeks of a toddler.

And what would it have achieved?

It would have cemented in place the idea that there is something wrong with being sad.

That sadness has to be chased away.

That a self that feels sad has something wrong with it and must be corrected.

That a life of constant happiness and the eradication of sadness is not just possible but a requirement.

That happiness can be separated from sadness. That it can exist alone as though hot could exist without cold or up without down.

It would have turned sadness, that exquisite human emotion, into a demon.

We would be setting her on a never-ending, unfulfillable quest.

We would be setting her up for a life of self blame and futile attempt to control every 'wrong' emotion.

Why on earth would we do that?

Insanity.

SIXTEEN

THOUGHT

We cannot understand how the mind works if we don't understand what the mind is.

Garret Kramer

Does a more powerful pervasive myth exist than the idea we have or should have control over 'our' thoughts?

Where do thoughts come from?

What controls whether and when they appear or how long they stay around?

What controls which thoughts are believed and which are dismissed as soon as they are formed?

One thing for sure is that the idea of who we are has zero control over any of that.

And yet thoughts are labelled 'my thoughts' as though 'I' made them happen.

They are made personal and apparently controllable. Like this self makes everything personal and apparently controllable.

But we don't know where thought comes from. We don't know what makes it stay or what causes it to go. We don't know where it appears or what experiences it.

And yet our entire lives can end up being an attempt to do the impossible - to stabilise thought, to change thought, to get rid of thought.

Why?

Because we are trying to stabilise this idea of self. We are trying to make it consistent.

So we fight these thoughts. We believe they say something about who we are. In making them personal they become us and therefore laden with meaning about our security, our future, our mental health, our happiness.

In believing them to be controllable, we make them intolerable when they do not fit with the idea of how this mental space should be.

What we have completely forgotten is that the whole idea of the self is, itself, a thought.

None of it is personal or real or says anything about who we really are.

Imagine if we knew that thoughts weren't personal. That they are to our true nature what clouds are to the sky. Momentary appearances that have no effect whatsoever on the space in which they appear.

Without that personalisation, without that claim, what would thoughts be? Without that futile illusion of control would the struggle dissolve?

Would they be simply met with as the earth meets the rain? No resistance? No idea of separation? No idea that anything should be different?

SEVENTEEN

OTHERS

*We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants,
old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but
always meeting ourselves.*

James Joyce

It really looks like our happiness, security and well-being depend on the actions and words of others.

At the level of physical impact it is certainly true that the behaviours of this body here can cause that body there physical harm and vice versa.

It really makes sense that this body here would move out of the way of whatever would damage it.

We see this happening all the time as the form moves away from anything that would threaten that form. Zebras run from the pride of lions. Plants move out of the dark towards the light. Amoebas in a petri dish move away from the point of a pin.

And this shows us that the form will do what is necessary in that moment for the form to survive. And it can do this without any concept of self, any concept of past or future, any concept of separation.

This is truly fascinating.

Our concept of self is not what is keeping us safe, keeping harmful others at bay. Response is happening regardless of the idea of self.

And the preservation of life in form is simple, straightforward, obvious and inevitable.

But when we add in confusion, misunderstanding and delusion it starts to get very complicated.

We add in a collection of beliefs that is the concept of self. This concept is full of needs and insecurity. And it looks out on a world to try to secure itself, forgetting that the world is made of the same thought and belief as the idea of self.

And now of course there is fear, stress, exhaustion but they have nothing to do with physical danger and everything to do with trying to secure and protect a self identity. The fear of public speaking is, for many, worse than the fear of death. But what is the very worst that can happen? We shake and stumble over words? We throw up on stage? We humiliate ourselves in front of people we cannot bear to be humiliated in front of?

For the self this is absolutely intolerable. But it is a fear based in insanity, an intolerance arising from delusion because we are fearful of losing and desperate to protect something that doesn't even exist. It is only the preservation of the idea of self we are talking about here - not the physical body, not life. Life will continue regardless. And this idea of self...? What is it?

And because it is a fear of the self there is no solution to it. Fearing the fear, as I well know from my own exhausting battle with this, we are utterly trapped. Round and round in circles we go. Because there is nothing that will guarantee the self idea will never be challenged, humiliated or rejected.

But this is our fear when it comes to others. A fear that is maintained by the temporary relief of approval or acceptance.

The only exit is to see what is going on. To see that terrified defence of something that isn't there.

We cannot protect the self from others. We cannot secure the self through others. We cannot control others. Because there is no self to protect or secure and no separate others to control. Self and others are made of the same thought and belief.

And yet how desperately we try. How convinced we are that approval or declarations of love or awards or recognition will finally make us secure.

When it looks like there is a separate me and that the security, happiness, success or future of that separate me depends in some way on you as a separate you then I will seek to control or manipulate you.

There is no choice in that.

Insecurity and dependency is running the show and will dictate the behaviour. The behaviour will try to bring about whatever it is I think I need to be OK.

In those moments, the current infrastructure or hardware is the belief in separation. The identification of ourselves as an independent entity has only one mission: to take away this feeling of vulnerability and separateness.

The false belief in separation depends on the creation of a separate other. The two are made of the same thought and belief.

And these feelings of insecurity look like they are caused by that 'other' over there.

They are not, they are caused by the *belief* in a separate other.

Believing the separate other causes our suffering is close enough to the truth to look completely real. But, at the same time, so far off the mark that it sends us down a path of utter delusion.

We seek to control the other, change them, avoid them so that we can be ok not realising that the other is created from the same confusion as the self.

EIGHTEEN

BEHAVIOUR

*In ignorance, I am something;
in understanding, I am nothing;
in love, I am everything.*

Rupert Spira

Self control. Will power. Determination. Commitment.
Dedication. Restraint. Mind over matter.

All ways of describing the power that this apparent self of ours has or should have over what this body does or does not do.

It looks like this control is not just possible, but necessary for every aspect of life.

To succeed, we have to persevere.

To be happy, we have to banish negative feelings.

To be in good shape, we have to resist the bad food and do the exercise.

To be free, we have to give up all addiction and bad habit.

And all of this seems to be managed and controlled by this self right here.

It is all on the shoulders of the self. All of it.

But let's get very still here.

Who or what is controlling the reading that is happening now? Who dictated that the eyes would follow the words or gaze off in the distance for a moment and then return to look at

the screen or page again? What is translating black shapes into words and meaning appearing in an inner space. What is creating understanding of those words? What is reflecting on those words.

The self would say, 'Me Me Me. I am doing all this'. But is it really the self doing that? Or is reading just happening? Understanding just happening?

If we asked the self 'How are you doing that? How are you reading? How are you making meaning arise from those apparent words? How do you distinguish whether a word is spelt right or wrong? How does an image arise? How do the words create feelings?' there could be no answer.

'How are *you* doing all that?' No answer.

And as it is with reading so it is with writing, speaking, listening, cooking, walking, singing, typing, dancing, jumping, catching, swimming, writing, loving, breathing, digesting, healing, choosing, deciding, going to sleep, waking up... Everything.

The self doesn't know how these things happen. Because the self is not doing them. These things are happening. Just as the idea of self is happening. They are happening because they have been programmed in. Just as the idea of self is happening because it has been programmed in.

And again this is an enormous shift. It leads to the realisation that behaviour is essentially the programming of the software, the automatic response according to what has been learned and acquired.

If it is not the self that decides what happens, then what does? Where does change come from?

Behaviour comes from the operating system in place.

Change can only come from a different operating system.

Change comes when the old software of behaviour is no longer compatible with the new understanding. With a new platform in place, old patterns, beliefs and habits automatically disappear.

The self is not making the change. The self is not doing anything ever.

The new understanding of who we are creates automatic alignment. Behaviour is no longer driven by the insanity of separation, desperation and insecurity.

Instead the sanity of integrity, wholeness and ease starts to run the show.

NINETEEN

EXPERIENCE

He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall.

— **Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus***

*Pleasure, I remind myself, is inseparable from its lawfully
wedded mate, pain.*

T.C. Boyle

In insanity, pleasure is a release from the prison cell. It is temporary relief.

The greyhound is allowed to catch the rabbit before the chase is back on again.

The hamster wheel stops momentarily.

But it is a temporary fix and it is a fix that ultimately can make the prison harder to bear. Because we have experienced the relief of the end of the search.

The yoga class, the pills, the alcohol, the shopping hit, the love affair. All brilliant. The search for oneness ends for a moment. We feel normal again. The weight of the self has disappeared. The prison doors open.

And then of course we are ushered back, a guard on each shoulder and the door slams shut.

The prison is the prison of unquestioned identification with this idea of self.

The bars are unquestioned belief.

The lock is the idea that something ‘out there’ can make this ‘in here’ finally, permanently ok.

And so life becomes vigilance. The avoidance of any experience that threatens or embarrasses or frightens. The quest for the experiences that will build us, make us feel good, confident.

The self is a limitation of infinite possibility, fixed in space and time, boxed in on all sides. The self and the experience are the same thing. It just doesn’t look like it.

From the perspective of the self, there is this experience happening which is entirely separate from the self, and the self reacts to it - great experience, more of that please or terrible experience, never again. We do everything possible to control what experience takes place. This of course is addiction - the attempt to control the experience of self, other and reality, to use pleasure to mask the pain of this misunderstanding.

But there is no control over what experience arises. There is no control over the apparent actions of others. Crucially there is no control over the way these actions are perceived and interpreted. There is no control over what thoughts come in, what beliefs are upheld. The entire happening is out of the control of anyone.

Sanity is understanding this. It is meeting experience as the arising of all there is right now. Nothing else is possible. And this is the portal to the realisation of simple aliveness.

Sanity is about the living, wholly unpredictable world of experience. It is about the possibility of a life of peace because nothing needs to change, a life of freedom because there is no one to be restricted, a life of joy, beauty and love because all form is welcomed.

Sanity is life in tune with itself, living itself. Seeing the miracle of itself reflected back again and again.

TWENTY

WHO WE ARE

Anything that appears and disappears cannot actually be you because it is being observed by you. By removing the attention from these things and noticing what remains, you are left only with what is permanent — the truth of who you are.

Enza Vita

Oh the decades of working on this self. Of trying to have more self belief. More self confidence. More self esteem. The thousands of self help books and courses.

Of trying to be more. And trying to be less.

Trying to shape this self so that it matches up with this received idea of what and who this self should be.

What impossibility. What futility.

How could that even happen?

All it ever was was belief working on belief. Thought trying to pull up thought by its boot straps. An illusion trying to make of itself a more definite illusion.

All of it fuelling the search for the existence that is obscured by the arising of the self.

This is the fundamental misunderstanding of our time.

We believe that who we are is this body, mind and self. There is total identification of self with the physical and conceptual form.

There is so much meaning, so much judgement and attachment in this false identification. So much self blame. So

much attempt to push away or deny what is apparently happening and so much attempt to address issues with fixes that only exacerbate the problem.

This is not to deny that there are physical, biological, genetic and emotional aspects to this body and mind. Of course there are.

The understanding we are looking at in this book does not deny those. It simply allows them to arise in the sanity of what they really are. It takes from them the confusion that they say something objective, permanent or true about a self identity. It dissolves the idea that how they appear, the meaning they seem to have is anything other than a creation of perception.

In this sanity, life will continue to move the body, just as breathing continues - without delusion.

Believing that this mind and body is who we are is deluded. They are fixed as entities through the confusion and folded into all the other beliefs. In other words they become an extension of the self identity.

The realisation that we are life in an apparent form moving through a world of apparent form is sane. The mind and body are known for what they are - the miracle of life, being and unconditional love.

Sanity.

PART FIVE

SANITY

Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence— whether much that is glorious— whether all that is profound— does not spring from disease of thought— from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect.

Edgar Allan Poe

Where does sanity sit? It is not sanity of the mind. Because the mind is only ever a creation, only ever thoughts believed.

It is beyond the mind. It is a clearing, a dissolution of what is not true, of what does not exist, of what cannot be controlled.

It is a falling away and a resting in the cradle of what is, of being, of life. Within that cradle of love, experience, thought, behaviour, self and others arise. And these arisings are met with that knowing of no separation.

Life happens still. Of course it does. Existence continues. Of course it does. And it is a life of sanity. An existence of congruence and knowing.

In understanding, the idea of self and idea of other are a miracle gift. Lightly held.

Creative imagination, instead of attacking itself, comes into the service of freedom, love and joy.

The form remains, separation is apparent but there is the understanding of sameness, of mirror-image. And this understanding allows for immersion in this apparent world that is only ever a reflection of who we really are.

Sanity.

TWENTY-ONE

HONESTY

Our greatest contribution to humanity is our awakening. It is to literally leave the state of consciousness that the mass of humanity is in and discover the truth of our being, which is the truth of all beings. When we do this, we come back as a gift, a newborn.

Adyashanti

Do any meditation teachers struggle to control the mind?

Do any GPs tell their patients to lose weight or to reduce alcohol consumption and then go home to eat and drink what they themselves are trying to avoid?

Are any psychotherapists haunted by the past?

Do any relationship therapists find themselves in conflict and resistance?

Do any life coaches sometimes think their life is a total mess?

Do any business coaches fail to create a thriving business?

Do any confidence experts feel low self worth?

Do any psychiatrists have moments of delusion?

Do any attraction experts find themselves unable to attract or hold onto what they want?

Do any parents operate on the do what I say not what I do principle with their kids?

Are any yoga teachers stressed?

Do any managers find themselves unable to manage something?

Of course.

The question is do they (or we - as this could be true for pretty much all of us) ever pretend otherwise. Do they find themselves passing on ideals of behaviour, experience, state and belief that they themselves can't match?

Do we ever tell another to do what we are not able to do ourselves?

Do we put on a front of capability when in secret we are struggling?

Do we preach control - of mind, body, thought, emotion, other or behaviour - but cannot put our own rhetoric into practice?

Because if so, then we are just part of this whole insane story that says control of thought, emotion, relationships and behaviour by the 'self' is possible. We are propagating the myth of self control and self security while at the same time floundering within it.

And when this propagation comes from the experts, from the ones people look to, from role models then it creates an unquestioned framework for how to live in which no one is actually thriving.

Or... do we share the struggle? Do we share how impossible it seems to be calm when one is not calm, or happy when one is miserable or to detach when one is not detached, or to stop a habit when that habit cannot be stopped or to come to terms with a past that is not resolving itself?

Not from a place of victimhood, identification or self blame - but from curiosity, honesty and intrigue.

If there is no pretence and nothing to defend, if there is just a joint, open exploration of what lies beyond perceived limits and of what is true, then every conversation is ultimately about freedom and integrity.

The Emperor's new clothes are the belief that the self can be secured, that it is a separate entity from the reality in which it appears, that it can eliminate certain emotions, experiences, thoughts, behaviours and circumstances.

Are we part of the circus of unquestioned acceptance of conditioned thinking? Agreeing, trying, blindly believing while thinking all the time 'what is wrong with me that I can't see?'

Or are we the one that looks around in bewilderment at a crowd believing what cannot be true?

Are we the little boy shouting 'The Emperor is naked!'

Are we sane in a world that does not understand what sane really is?

TWENTY-TWO

END OF THE SEARCH

The end of the seeking is the end of the seeker, is the end of the experience, that 'this' is real.

Jim Newman

In a conference on building mega brands and mega businesses, years ago, my colleague Nicola Bird asked the only question that mattered: 'How do we know when to stop? What is enough?'

The seminar leader couldn't answer.

'Enough' was, for that leader, an unexplored concept. And this lack of enquiry, this assumption that the next thing is always, unfailingly necessary and better meant the underlying theme of the conference was actually 'how to spend your life in relentless seeking'. With break-out modules on 'Burn-out - how to get there faster' and 'ten ways to reach the death bed and think what have I been doing all my life?'

Until each of us answers the question 'What is enough?' we will believe that the next bonus, meal, award, conquest, fix or purchase will finally be the one to stop the seeking. And it is. Temporarily. Then, immediately after, in comes the need again.

In restless seeking there is no sense of what has gone before, what has accumulated already. That counts for nothing. It might as well not be there. In comes the feeling of lack, the horror of not being, having or doing enough and it drives the body out into the world wanting whatever it is we believe will stop these feelings.

The billionaire believing his wealth is not enough lives in poverty. The world's most obese woman was starved as a child.

We are the billionaire and the woman and this has nothing to do with greed, not for any of us. It is only about lack.

Until we question the wanting and the self that wants, the desiring of more of anything whatever it is - profit, attention, food, drink, income, love, fame, recognition, property, clothes, control, sex, power, followers, sales - does not come from greed or excess, it comes from absolute insufficiency.

What happens when we question that idea of lack?

Something wonderful happens.

Greed happens.

Greed happens, in all its abundant, bounteous, overflowing glory.

When we genuinely, honestly and bravely explore, as my colleague did, the concept of enough, we hold this insecure needy idea of self up to the light.

That feeling of lack had come from an idea of a self that is incomplete and insecure. It could never be completed or secured because it is made of thought. Insecurity looks like it has to be fixed. It looks like we should not feel insecure. And this of course drives that seeking behaviour.

With this realisation, insecurity is no longer something to avoid or fix. The seeking, restless self that desperately needed to control experience starts to soften, dissolve even.

And what remains?

Life. Awareness. Being.

Life is living. There is nothing not to live.

Awareness is aware. There is nothing to not be aware of.

Being is being. There is nothing not to be.

All of it. No limits. No boundaries. No this is ok but not that. No resistance. No pushing away. No seeking.

The self dissolves, we see who we really are, what is really there.

And we are greedy for the whole entire lot.

We want it all.

Including, amazingly, that fear of not having enough.

Including the experience of poverty, hunger, insatiability, desperation.

Including the inferiority, the insufficiency, the comparison, the inadequacy.

All of it is life being lived, felt, inhabited.

The idea of closing off to any of it is ridiculous.

We could die in five minutes time. These could be the last five minutes of experiencing anything so why on earth would we not open to every aspect of life with all the attention and care in the world.

Five minutes of life left alone with our soul mate. To celebrate, absorb, marvel at and explore.

And our soul mate is whatever is there, whatever is now. Fear and lack are the loves of our life when we understand them, when we welcome them in.

Now we know the answer to that question. 'What is enough?'

Now is enough. This feeling of not enough is everything we could ever want, right here. Such richness to explore.

TWENTY-THREE

ALIVENESS

When you get out of the driver's seat, you find that life can drive itself, that actually life has always been driving itself. When you get out of the driver's seat, it can drive itself so much easier—it can flow in ways you never imagined. Life becomes almost magical. The illusion of the “me” is no longer in the way. Life begins to flow, and you never know where it will take you.

Adyashanti

Conception. Experiences. Death.

Life. One experience after another. Transient, temporary, split second, fleeting experiences.

Depending entirely on how we understand the nature of those experiences and us as the experiencer, life can be hell on earth or the miracle beyond all miracles.

And, if we're honest, it can be really awful.

Terrible experiences coming at us out of nowhere – arguments, boredom, betrayal, redundancy, poverty, bullying, anxiety, depression, illness, divorce, addiction, loss. All that stuff that we wish would just leave us alone. Everything we most fear but which seems to follow us around.

And to get away from it we cling desperately to the stuff that gives us some respite, living in terror of losing the only ray of light we have. Or relentlessly seeking out something better.

And that seems to be what life is. Fearing or fighting the bad experiences. Clinging on to or yearning after the good ones. Trying to come up with the key to escape it all. Life spent looking for a better life. And let's face it, in all that exhaustion, resistance and unrest, death starts to look more and more welcome.

From conception to death. Fighting, fearing, clinging, seeking.

Are some of us just born unlucky, destined to never have the great life that others seem to have? Or can it be different?

Let's have a look in a bit more detail at this whole conception, experiences, death thing.

There is conception. (If you want to know more about that, get another sort of book.)

And then there is a body. A body that is charged, electric, energetic, alive, in constant renewal, growth and change.

This body, all the while changing, remains a miracle of sensing. Sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, all riding in to compensate for each other when necessary. A body designed, down to the tiniest most mind-blowing detail, for sensory experience. And – would you believe the luck – this sensory miracle is born into a miracle world of things to see, hear, touch, taste and smell.

So what have we got so far?

A vibrant, dynamic, sensory being in an energetic, uncontainable sensory paradise. An infinite world to experience. A body designed for the experiencing. And a lifetime in which one experience after another can take place. Aliveness experiencing aliveness.

The aliveness of the baby moves it towards its mother's breast and continues moving towards what will sustain, nourish and nurture. Life moves itself towards what will allow it to continue. Life moving towards life. Movement to and from what is indivisible. This is the nature of life. Daisies emerging from the cracks in concrete. Trees, roots exposed on

the cliff face, flourishing. A lost dog finding its way home over hundreds of miles. Life knows how to be alive.

So far so brilliant.

But then this fluid intelligence, this rolling wealth of riches, this seamless merging of life into life seems to pause.

Pauses because an idea of self has emerged.

And this self in order to exist must separate self and other. It must divide up life.

There is this self, here, me, I. And there are those others which are better or worse than this self.

There is this moment here and there are other moments that are better or worse.

There is this experience and there are other experiences which are to be feared or sought.

There is that way of life which is good and this way of life which is not.

And the self tries to navigate its way to a secure life.

Resisting and seeking. Trying to establish, protect, defend itself. Trying to create a life.

It tries to take on, with struggle and confusion, the job that life is already doing so effortlessly.

To exist, the self must reject this moment. It must reject this experience. But this moment, this experience is who we are. It is all there is. And all it is is life experiencing itself. Us, as life itself, experiencing ourselves.

This idea of a self cannot allow for the fact that no experience is separate from it. It cannot comprehend that it is made of exactly the same transient thought stuff as the experiences themselves. It cannot fathom that life only exists right now. It cannot admit that there is no other.

As long as the self continues with this faulty premise, then it looks like there is a separate identity called 'I' in a world full of things to resist and to seek out.

And this is what makes for a difficult life, a deluded life.

Because the misunderstanding masks the glorious, pulsing, vibrant aliveness of the right now. It covers up the miraculous perfection of this exact experience. It hides the uncontainable, unstoppable life force that we really are and makes us out to be some fearful, limited, vulnerable being.

And this will continue right through until death unless something more truthful emerges.

The truth is, there is no job for the self to do. Life does not need managing or re-directing. Life has life nailed. Experiences cannot be resisted and sought after. They just are as they are. There is no other for the self to defend itself against, there is only, always the real self, life itself.

And when the thought-created self sees this it can relax. It can see that there is nothing for it to do. It can drop its illusion of control. It can just let life live itself (which of course life was doing anyway). This is the end of the seeking and resistance.

And now there is only openness. There is just life finding its way through the perfect vehicle of this body. Beating its heart. Breathing air into its lungs. Moving its limbs. There is the pure joy and vibrant peace of life creating and experiencing itself. This is who we are.

Unstoppable, irrefutable, uncontainable life. All of it.

Enormously. Abundantly. Magnificently.

Alive.

TWENTY-FOUR

END OF BLAME

The greatest discovery in life is to discover that our essential nature does not share the limits nor the destiny of the body and mind.

Rupert Spira

Imagine buying a new car. You drive it home from the garage and it turns out the navigation system isn't working. You might spend a moment blaming the car but you would know it was not the car's fault. The issue with the navigation system is the software. It is a programming issue. So whose fault is that? Whoever installed the software.

Now let's have a look at what is going on in the human equivalent of the car. Imagine a child having a tantrum. This looks like a problem. Whose fault is this tantrum? Who is in control of it? Who is making it happen? It is just happening.

'Well, sure' you might say. But that's a child. As adults we know better. But what do we know? Only what has been learned, only what has been installed in the 'software' of brain and body. Only what remains there unquestioned. That is all we know. This is the entirety of reality. There is nothing outside of it. So all thought and belief are judged within it. The software judges the software and believes it does an independent, objective assessment.

It will accept or reject new information accordingly. Always appearing as rational.

And from this all behaviour arises.

Until there is enquiry into the nature of self, belief, reality, experience then this body and mind is nothing but a robot, a programmed machine.

How does this software get installed? Through belief? Who or what controls the mechanism of belief? Maybe we will never know the answer to that.

All we know is that the nascent system of the baby is wired to learn and acquire information. It is wired to turn processes as quickly as possible to automatic running patterns that require minimum attention. It is wired for stories and meaning and concept.

And these concepts reinforced over time come to seem like reality. The patterns of the software only get more and more embedded. Each time they run, making it easier and less effortful for them to run the next time.

There is no place for blame here. No place even for responsibility. The self did not choose that software. It *is* a product of the software. We cannot critically evaluate it because there is no other benchmark other than the programme itself. It can only be assessed by the same beliefs on which it is running in the first place.

There is no self in charge of the actions. There are simply actions arising. It is automatic. And all the thought, rumination, assessment, judgement in the world will make no difference because it is all taking place within the same programme.

And that programme is 'I am an individual in a separate world and I need to find a way to secure myself.' That is the humanity-wide conditioning. It is a programme of defence and protection and confusion. That is why there is conflict, stress and exhaustion.

Enquiry and exploration are the undoing of this programme. They are the end of belief. Sanity is the software seen for what it is.

And as realisation occurs, the software is still available. Skills learned are still in place. Cars can still be driven. Meals can be cooked. Words can be spoken and written. Faces can be recognised and names recalled.

But the boundaries that kept that software as unquestioned reality are loosening. The programme is running but it now runs on an entirely different system.

The system on which it now runs is.... what? Love? Wholeness? Consciousness? Aliveness?

Within this new sane system, behaviour still happens, the body still moves but the old patterns that arose out of that tightly held belief in a separate self fall away. The old exhaustion of trying to secure what no longer even exists has gone.

TWENTY-FIVE

IMMERSION

Absence, the highest form of presence.

James Joyce

Who we are is not limited to this body and mind. In fact, the body and mind is an experience of perception, in the infinite field of awareness that we really are. With this understanding, the idea of an objective self becomes less and less believable. As we realise we are the space in which all appears, separation between self and other, between other and other begins to fade.

Hearing this can send us into a spin. After all, our entire lives so far have been about controlling, managing and protecting this body and mind, worrying about them, trying to secure them, avoiding the bad experiences, people, emotions and seeking out the better.

Sometimes, in a conversation about the unreality of self, people say, 'This is very nihilistic. I don't want to lose who I am. I don't want to disappear. I don't want to see no division between things. I don't want to live a non-existence thank you. I don't want to be open to everything because some things are really shit. I want to be in control. This isn't for me.'

And that is very logical. Because we believe so much in our idea of self, as in control of it all, making it all happen. It looks as though if we let go of it that there would be no life, no enjoyment, empty, blank nothingness.

So let's have a look at that.

How about we start with the best sex you've ever had or can imagine having. Of that total merging of self with other.

The absence of self, the irrelevancy of control gives rise to pure presence, pure freedom. The body moves because it cannot not.

Or how about the best book you've read or film you've watched or concert you've listened to? Of no resistance to the emotions, the story. Of rising and falling with the tremendous highs and lows as you sit safely, perfectly in your chair.

Or think about that time you looked up the night sky, to the mystery of infinity and lost yourself in the wonder. The infinitesimally small body, marvellously insignificant in that vastness and yet somehow there is the knowledge that the vastness is who we are.

Or the most fun you've ever had? The pure joy. No trying, no holding back. The exhilaration of immersion in laughter.

Or those moments in work? The time when the writing or conversation flowed. Ideas emerging. A voice being heard. No self reference. No 'what impression am I giving here'. Non-creation creation. No one there to create, nothing tangible or objective being created. Yet somehow this is where all the magic lies.

Or the most spectacular sunset or dawn you've ever witnessed? Or the faces you love the most. Self dissolving in beauty.

Yes we could call it nihilism. And it is in one sense. It is the dissolving of boundaries and distinction and separation. It is the realisation that nothing is as it seems. It is just that this nihilism opens the floodgates to everything.

Yes we could say we become nothing because where are you in all those things? You, as you believe yourself to be, are not there. Yet it is that very absence that reveals the astonishing presence.

In the absence of self we experience who we are.

In the disappearance of self we become more than we could ever imagine.

Before realisation of who we are, the sex, the sunset, the music, the books, the holidays, the love were relief from an

insecure reality. Momentary respite before the burdens, suffering and restrictions of self descend again.

Understanding who we are means that we don't need to escape ourselves because we realise there is no self to escape from. There is just the being. The being doing. And it doesn't matter if that doing is the best sex in the world or the washing up. It doesn't matter if the witnessing is the most spectacular sunset or rubbish piled up in a concrete corner. It doesn't even matter if the experience is unconditional love or intense anger, frustration and hatred.

The loss of self is the reality. The absence is who we are. The moments of believing a limited self are momentary insanity.

From the nothing comes everything.

This is who we are.

Sanity.

TWENTY-SIX

WHAT IS

*If you desire healing,
let yourself fall ill
let yourself fall ill.*

Rumi

What comes to mind when reading a book about no objective reality, no self, no identity, no ego, no separate other? An author telling us that everything is illusory?

Maybe you think:

‘Well who the hell are you talking to then?’

‘Why write a book if there is no one to tell?’

It’s an interesting conundrum.

It becomes more and more obvious that the apparent reality of who we are and of everything else is illusory. Ultimately there is no one here. There is a transient idea of me and a transient idea of you arising and that is not who we are.

We are not here in the way we think we are.

Yet, even in the midst of this exploration, here we are apparently talking to each other, messaging each other, arguing with each other. Here are we together on webinars or chatting in the street, talking about apparently real events and real circumstances.

So what's going on here? In this exploration of reality, how do we know what to take as real, what to honour, and act on?

It's easy.

If it looks real, then it is just what is in that moment.

To experience something here in our reality or self and try to say it is not real makes no sense. In the denial, the person or thing we are trying to refute just gets more and more apparently real.

We could look at a bill on the table and say 'well non dualism says nothing is real so there is no bill there, there is nothing to do'. What happens? The bill doesn't get paid, charges and interest are added on and the bill just gets bigger. Through attempted denial, the bill just gets more present not less, more consequences, not fewer. This is because in our experience of reality, the bill is actually there.

We could look at two hungry, cranky children in the kitchen at dinner time and say 'well this exploration says there is no other so there are no children, there is no such thing as food or hunger'. What happens? The kids, of course, get more cranky, more hungry. They are not going anywhere. And this is because, no matter what we try to tell ourselves, in our experience, they are actually there.

We could sit with a client and tell them they are not who they think they are, that their experiences, needs, desires and wants aren't real. What happens? They cling even tighter to those experiences, to that identity. And this is because it is ludicrous to tell an apparently real client sitting in a chair in our office that they do not exist.

If someone denies my existence and experience, I just get more fixed in what I need, more apparently real, not less. More distant from the denier. More separate. And the denier will feel the same because, even though they are denying the existence of a separate person, in their actual experience I am real and I am separate and we are apparently moving further away.

Trying to tell another person there is no separation when we clearly, in that moment, do not see it for ourselves (by virtue of the fact that we are talking to an apparently separate person) is incongruous and slightly insane.

It always begs the question - who are you talking to then?

It makes no sense to mix up the two. There is the understanding of how reality arises and then there is the reality that is here. And that reality is apparently real.

And this ultimately is about the honouring of and intimacy with that reality as it appears.

The only thing to do with a bill is honour the apparent reality of it. Explore it. Say 'yes' to it. Just meeting it exactly as it appears. Noticing everything that arises with it. Any attempt to deny just fixes it in place.

The only thing to do with hungry children is honour them. Notice how they appear in this apparent reality. No resistance. No pushing away. No denial. Just the doing of whatever makes sense given that reality.

The only thing to do with a friend is honour them. Notice everything about them. No overriding, no arguing, no spiritualising away their experience or needs. Just presence to whatever is right now.

The only thing to do with a feeling, a thought, an experience, a reality is to honour it. Meet it as it appears. Welcome it in. Ask it questions. Explore it.

The only thing to do with someone who needs something is honour them. No resistance. No denial. No pushing away. The 'yes' or the 'no' to their request will arise from the apparent reality of the right now.

And it is only in that openness, only in that 'yes' to reality, only in that absence of denial and resistance, that we can get so close to it, so intimate with it, so complete with it that it no longer exists as separate from us.

Through the opening up to whatever is, we move into it. From the honouring and welcoming of apparent separation we

see that ultimately there is nothing to resist or deny in bills or children or clients or issues or circumstances.

There is nothing to resist and there is nothing that could do the resisting.

Nothing to deny and nothing that could do the denying.

We explore this apparent reality of self and other with humility, congruence, sanity, authenticity and honesty.

There is just the simple reality of what appears for us all to explore more and more deeply and more and more lovingly.

It is in the honouring of apparent reality and openness to whatever is right in front of us that its true subjective, temporary nature reveals itself.

Always that way round.

TWENTY-SEVEN

TRANSPARENCY OF NEED

Only living stillness, stillness without someone trying to be still, is capable of undoing the conditioning our biological, emotional and psychological nature has undergone. There is no controller, no selector, no personality making choices.

Jean Klein

‘I’m not an addict’

I heard those words come out of my mouth one evening. I was at a meeting of Cocaine Addicts Anonymous with a dear friend who was celebrating his one year clean and sober.

During the meeting, people would say the words we are all familiar with “My name is X and I am an addict.”

Someone asked me afterwards what I was struggling with. ‘Oh I’m not an addict’ I said. Because I believed that I was different.

And I am different from the people at the meeting.

Because I’m not an addict.

I’m not an addict.

Right up to the moment that I’m prevented from...

breathing

or drinking

or eating

or cuddling my kids
or seeing family and friends
or walking
or sleeping
or having a roof over my head
or keeping warm
or having financial security
or wearing clothes in public
or driving
or working
or being liked
or being right
or being noticed
or having sex
or being desired
or feeling sunlight
or avoiding pain
or checking email
or being alive.

(Not necessarily in that order...) I can't stop doing or wanting or striving for any of these things.

And if any of that were to be taken from me then just watch the suffering, the struggle and the desperation as I fight heaven and earth, push through anything in the way, to get what it is I think I need.

These are needs that I haven't seen through. They look essential. I would steal, lie, manipulate to feed myself or my kids. I would scramble over you to breathe. I would get nasty if you make me look wrong.

I am an addict all right. Chemically, physically, biologically, emotionally and personally addicted.

Are you like me? An addict too? We might not be in rehab or in meetings. But that's only because our needs are less immediately harmful and more socially endorsed. Or the substance or feeling we depend on is currently legal and free or in plentiful supply. Or it has side effects that are endorsed rather than despised by society.

At the level of body, we are all addicts to whatever substance the body craves be it oxygen or heroin.

At the level of mind, we are all addicts to whatever mental or emotional state looks necessary - happiness, peace, blankness, security.

At the level of identity, we are all addicts to whatever the self needs to exist - approval, respect, validation, being heard.

All of us, believing that we are this body, this mind, this self are addicts. Driven by need and seeking, because that is ultimately all we are. Life is one addiction after another.

The multi-millionaire believing he needs to win the next deal or secure the next property is no more free than the guy on the bench with a vodka bottle.

Where is our recovery? What form can our rehab take?

It lies in a shift of understanding. It sounds like an inconsequential distinction but it is freedom.

The body, mind and self are not who we are.

The body, mind and self are transient experience.

In other words, we are not an entity that can be secured through obtaining from out there what it thinks it needs. There is nothing ultimately 'out there'.

Experience is arising here, right here, in this space of us.

The perfect experience.

As the perfect experience it can be met with openness, the miracle of life experiencing life. This is not static and motionless. This openness of understanding continues into the

flow of behaviour and words. An experience of tiredness, met with openness, flows simply into sleep. An experience of inability to sleep flows simply into awakeness. Nothing to seek or to change. Indeed, nothing there to do the seeking.

But sometimes (often? always?) experience is met with the checklist of needs. The self resists because this is not the *right* experience. I shouldn't be tired now. I mustn't sleep. Or: I must sleep now. I should not be awake. Resistance to what is.

In this resistance there is suffering. Of course there is, we are fighting reality. (As Byron Katie says, when we fight reality, we lose. But only 100% of the time.)

There is resistance to the suffering because we think we should not suffer. And this activity of resistance, of need, which is the only place the self can exist, will go after whatever will take away the suffering. The next deal, sip, hit, deprivation, whatever.

As long as there is any vestige of need to change experience, to change self or other, of need to avoid the suffering, we remain an addict. As Clare, this body, mind and self that needs things a certain way, I will always be an addict.

And experience is there to show this right now.

The perfect experience.

There for the the marvel of life, love peacefulness, totality.

Or there to draw into the open the feeling of separation, the needs, the resistance, the misunderstanding. The suffering is our gift. It holds it all up to the light, like a jeweller revealing a precious jewel. The insanity will continue to sparkle, glint and glimmer until finally it can be realised.

This need cannot be who we are.

Who we are is open presence to what is.

Who we are is the knowing of completeness.

Who we are is not... never was and never will be... an addict.

TWENTY-EIGHT

FRESHNESS

Being is totally whole just being. And it is alive and fleshy and sexy and juicy and immediately this; it's not some concept about 'there's no-one here'. It's not some concept about 'there's nowhere to go'. It's the aliveness that's in that body right now. There is pure beingness, pure aliveness.

Tony Parsons

It turns out that who we really are has nothing at all to do with who we think we are.

And, because, up until now, we believed that life only works through this idea of who we are, this exploration can sound so dry and empty.

If my idea of who I am falls away, we wonder, what remains? Nothingness? Grey? A merging into blankness? All diversity blurred into one monotone consciousness? No desire, no will, no passion? Will life just be dull and dry?

Let's have a look at that...

Because, not to be rude, but this idea of who you are - that is about as dull and dry as it can get.

Our idea of self is an unquestioned hand me down of inert, stale belief after belief. It is an attic full of dusty bags that were pushed up there unexamined. It is the barren weight of all imagined expectation and failure. It is the dry stone wall of offence taken, of needs unmet, of desire unexplored.

Our idea of self? Dry and dull.

But as we hold it up to the light, like the ancient tissue paper it is, it disintegrates.

And what is revealed is the pure, pulsing, sensual flow of life itself. The life that we are, have always been. We just couldn't see it because attention had been distracted. We were monitoring our phone for scraps of validation and distraction, head bowed, while the Northern Lights danced our magnificence, unseen.

This is who we really are. Expanding, uncontainable life in all its pulsing, urgent playfulness. Sensuous, rich, passionate, the unstoppable will of life itself. We are the green shoot pushing through the earth. The tree blossoming. The sap rising through the stem.

We are Being. Doing. Living. Just for the sheer breathtaking magnitude of it all. The sparkling, unmatched, indescribable essence of each of us bubbles to the surface.

We are the laughter that needs no prompt. The performance that needs no audience. The love that needs no reciprocation. The life that needs no purpose other than to live.

When who we think we are falls away and who we really are emerges...? Seriously... Nothing dry or fixed about it.

Only freshness.

TWENTY-NINE

CHANGE

He went to the church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and for, and patted the children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of homes, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed of any walk, that anything, could give him so much happiness.

Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol

The lottery started in the UK in 1994 and my sister suggested that our family should have a syndicate. Every Saturday we sat in the living room seeing if our numbers would come up. My 93 year old grandmother would sit there, not saying a word until all the numbers had been chosen. Then, when, once again, it was clear we hadn't won anything she would let out a sigh of relief and thank God for sparing us...

Her relief often comes to mind when people describe their dream life. The major successes they'd like to create, the sums of money they want to earn, the stream of clients they'd like to develop, the soul mate they'd like to find, the best seller they want to write, the business they'd like to set up, the promotion they'd like to achieve.

This might seem an odd thing to say but...

...if we are lucky, all this will remain a dream, an impossibility.

Because if we are unlucky, in comes what we think we need to be happy - the money, clients, partner, business, the book or promotion. And, along with it, more confusion, more exhaustion, more insecurity, more insanity...

And this is because we are not ready for what we think we want.

We know we are not ready for it because it looks like we don't have it already.

It looks like what we want is out there, separate from us, that it will bring the happiness, satisfaction, security or better life we seek. That it is on our shoulders to make it happen.

It looks like our dream of having the thing is actually how it would play out in reality.

But this is a misunderstanding. None of it is true. It is only an idea of who we are and an idea of what we need. Confusion sends us out, away from this moment, seeking and questing trying to bring in what we think we need. It keeps the concepts intact instead of remaining present enough for them to dissolve.

And as long as that idea of self and the idea of the desired object remain as unexplored concepts then having more of the object or a different object is only about having more confusion.

Same same as Gob Bluth and Tony Wonder might say. Same same and perhaps worse.

Because now the object is there in all its unexplored glory. In comes our dream and it looks like there is a way to get this right, to hold onto it. It looks like it is our responsibility. That we could mess it up. The object of our desire is here, and we have no idea what to do. It is impossible to get to grips with, to control and manage. We are living the dream and it's a nightmare.

This is the kindness of the design. It is showing us, either through the inability to get the object we think we need or the suffering once we get it, that we are not ready.

So what does it mean to be ready?

It means realising what we are and what we are not. Until we question the idea of self and the world it finds itself in, nothing can change. The self and the world are made of the same thought-created perception. Without enquiry, there is no shift, just uninvestigated patterns creating the same experience no matter how hard we try to escape. Insecurity about money doesn't get any less when there is a million in the bank. Loneliness isn't solved by having a partner. Feelings of inadequacy aren't fixed with a new job title. The future isn't secured with a new client.

We go out there seeking but it changes nothing. The only change is from the dissolving of these fixed ideas of self and separate world. It is in the dissolution that infinite possibilities reveal themselves.

The promotion, the new business, the money, the good health are revealed not obtained. They appear not because we have created them but because our idea of who we are and what they are has become thin enough that we can finally see them.

Michelangelo said 'Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it'. That is what life really is: non-creation. It is excavation. Dissolving, uncovering, unveiling, revealing what is here already.

We chip away at the idea of ourselves, at the idea of the world. We remove anything not true, not required, not real. And we watch what form emerges: the unique voice, the authentic way, the job that only we can do, the loves of our life, all the money, energy and time required. And like Michelangelo's David, this masterpiece isn't disappearing anytime soon. It has been revealed and it is here to stay.

As Rumi says, 'Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along.' Only in stillness, do we realise that what we have been looking for has always been us. Nothing can be lost. And with this understanding we are free to immerse ourselves in transience.

The layers blocking the spring dissolve away until the source of unstoppable purity pours forth, sparkling and

dancing in the light. A miracle of energy, life and presence.

THIRTY

LOSS

Enlightenment is a destructive process. It has nothing to do with becoming better or being happier. Enlightenment is the crumbling away of untruth. It's seeing through the facade of pretence. It's the complete eradication of everything we imagined to be true.

Adyashanti

Have you ever read a book and fell so much in love with the main character that you couldn't bear to turn over the last page? Slowing down the reading so that every word they uttered, every gesture could be absorbed?

Or has a film ever had you in such a tight grip that even as the credits are rolling up, you are still sitting there, resisting the end, still coming to terms with the intensity of experience?

Multiply that intensity by infinity.

Times the desire to hold on by eternity.

We still don't get close to what it means to give up the fiction of the self and the other.

Not just because it is there in every moment. Not just because it is woven into every cell of the body, every word, every act, every experience.

But also, of course, because it never looks like fiction. It was only ever reality.

Only ever who we are and who they are.

Only ever what is and what was.

This is what it looks like we are giving up. All of reality. Who we are. The world as it is known to be.

And this is impossible for the story-loving self to comprehend. That it is, itself, only a story. A story continued in the greatest dramatic tradition. The villain and hero of Greek mythology. The righteous warrior of the Upanishads. Shakespeare's love and loyalty and their betrayal. The monotony of Beckett. The every day ordinariness of Camus.

So why would we give up this idea?

There is no reason why we would.

The character does not gain when the book is closed and when the theatre lights come back on.

There is also no possibility that we could.

The character has no say in what happens to it. It does not get to dictate the end of the story.

Built into the fabric of the play is the audience's detachment, ultimately. The character of the novel, no matter how life-like and indelible lives only in imagination.

The nature of fiction demands that the story be seen for what it is: a story.

That at the same time as only ever being what is, it also is not what is.

At the same time as only ever being what was, it also was never that.

There is no loss. There is nobody to lose anything. There is nothing to be lost.

THIRTY-ONE

LOVE

Love is the natural condition of all experience before thought has divided it into a multiplicity and diversity of objects, selves and others.

Rupert Spira

This year, I met with someone with whom I've had a very volatile relationship over many years.

The meeting before that had seen us literally shouting at each other in the street. Both of us deeply offended, upset, let down and fearful of the other.

There we were on the pavement, shouting. Two robots.

'Robot...?' you might say. 'What has robot got to do with anything? You are two people, two individuals, two separate beings with free will and free choice.'

Well that's what it looks like. That's what we think we are. But it's nonsense.

Because this form here is nothing but a robot.

It is a programme. A piece of software. An on-going embedding of handed down belief, thought, association.

Its words are the only words that can be said given the conditioning that has shaped it.

Its actions are the only actions possible from the belief system in place.

Its perceptions are the only perceptions available given the honing of its senses.

The meaning it hears is the only meaning given how it has been schooled to hear.

The self identity, the idea of ourselves as a free individual, is a creation of the same programme. There is nothing free or individually chosen in any of it.

So that is what was arguing in the street. Two programmes, two robots, two unquestioned desires that the other be different, two sets of beliefs being defended. It could not be any other way.

But what is powering those robots? What is animating them? What is the energy or force that creates that movement of stamping away from each other in opposite directions? What moves the lungs to breathe and the mouth to move so those harsh words could be spoken?

Life does that.

And what are we? The programme? The idea of self created from a hotch potch of input? The absence of choice about what is believed or thought?

Or are we the animating force? Are we the life that makes all of this possible with no judgement, unaffected by whatever is said and done?

We know beyond doubt that we are life itself because when life leaves the form we are no longer there. The corpse is not us.

Isn't that interesting? Isn't that incredible?

We are not the programme. We are not the form. Never have been. Never will be.

We are life.

And when these robots met again. It was different.

The words being said created the same responses of tightness and defensiveness.

But this time there was realisation that those were the only words that could be said and the reaction was the only reaction

possible and that none of that had anything to do with the life that we are.

It was realised that the life animating one robot is inseparable from the life animating the other.

It was realised that the form is only ever a creation of conditioned perception. It has no reality.

And with that the robots became what they are: the miracle of unconditional love, freedom, peace, joy and beauty in form.

And then, over the coffee, for the first time in over a decade, laughter.

THIRTY-TWO

DEATH

Recognising who you really are, will destroy you and your whole life as you know it."

Unmani

Dynamically, extraordinarily, joyfully, peacefully, uniquely, passionately, gloriously...

All those great words.

Wouldn't that make for a great life? Extraordinary, joyful, glorious, peaceful.

Wouldn't that make for a great experience of self? Dynamic, unique, magnetic, passionate.

Well that is what life is. And it is who you are. It's just to see it we need to do something that we've been resisting all our lives.

We need to die.

We need to die in the sense that our idea of who we are must disappear.

The seeking, resisting, insecure idea of self must be realised so clearly for the illusion it is that it literally stops existing.

And this sounds like crazy talk. Because we believe that the reason any part of our life works is because of this self.

That without it, we could never be the dynamic, magnetic self we are trying to be.

There would be no chance of the extraordinary life we are trying to create.

We don't want to die. That looks like the end of us, the end of life. So we fight it with all our might. Our life becomes an exhausted effort to secure ourselves.

Yet this idea of who we are has nothing to do with anything. It is only an overlay on life. It is simply thoughts that have run away with themselves, created an identity, taken on the belief that they are running the show. And all this does is veil the life that we really are. The death of this idea of self is only the death of a belief, a thought. We can handle that.

Are you open to explore this? Are you ready to die? Let's start here:

If you are reading this now you might be thinking: I am reading.

That looks really true. It looks like I wrote this and you are reading this.

But the 'I' that I believe myself to be has got absolutely ZERO to do with this writing.

And the 'I' that you believe yourself to be has got NOTHING to do with the reading of this.

Words are being written. When I get very real with these words, very present with this act of writing I realise I have no idea how thoughts come to mind or where they appear, or the mechanism by which some of them are dismissed while some remain. I believe this happens in my head but how can that be true? Thoughts become movement of arms and fingers which become words on a screen. I'm not controlling any of that.

Words are being read now. But how? What is controlling the movements of eyes across the screen. How is the transformation of lines into words and then meaning happening? Where are those words as they are read? Where is the meaning, images, associations they seem to create?

Words are being written and read. The idea that the writing and reading is being controlled and managed by this being here and that being there is actually crazy.

This is almost too big for us to grasp. There might be tremendous resistance to this. Because without it, are we actually nothing? Are we actually not there. And if so who is responsible for behaviour? Who gets the blame for the bad stuff and the credit for the good stuff? If it is not us calling the shots would this body just become a blob of nothing? Would nothing happen?

Yet if we keep exploring we follow the logic of it and we come to the place beyond words in which we simply know that there is so much more going on than this small idea of a self with its apparent control over its thoughts, choices and behaviours. We know that in those moments of no self reference, no self consciousness there is just pure life happening, magnificence, love. Unstoppable.

We see that we have been holding on to an idea of self that wants to die. It wants to give itself up because it knows that it is responsible for all exhaustion, insecurity, suffering and conflict. It craves sleep, orgasms, drugs, drink, laughter, marvel, music, absorption, flow, focus, distraction because it craves its disappearance. In fact to survive it has to not exist for much of the time.

And all those things can become addictions. The spiralling of momentary obliteration leading to more self blame, more judgement, more self. Until we see what is really going on.

We see there is no self to disappear.

We see there is no 'I' here doing.

There is no 'I' here choosing.

There is no 'I' here making anything happen.

There is just thought. And there is no need to escape thought. It disappears of its own accord.

And as we see this more and more clearly the veil of imagined self gets thinner and thinner.

It becomes a piece of transparent gauze.

And through it shines the dynamic, extraordinary, joyful, peaceful, unique, passionate, glorious nothingness we really are.

THIRTY-THREE

COMPLETENESS

Whatever is happening—whatever feelings, thoughts, experiences are happening—that is the wholeness that is looked for. It's not the wholeness the individual's looking for. It's not the wholeness that the "I am" is looking for. It will always be dissatisfied with this. It's a wholeness that's beyond the personal seeking, beyond the personal need for something more or something else.

Jim Newman

One of the standard questions that coaches ask their clients is 'If we had a magic wand and you could have anything in your life what would it be?'

And the answers come back along the lines of - I'd have the perfect partner, I'd have the perfect job. I'd have the perfect income. I'd be living in the perfect house. I'd have perfect kids. The perfect car. I'd be making the perfect contribution to what I care about. And I'd have the perfect healthy life style and a perfect body.....

And the client says this because it looks as though having these things is the key to life. If I have more money then I will be secure. If I have a great partner then I will feel loved. If I have the perfect job then I will be successful. If I am making the perfect contribution then I will be fulfilled. If my kids are doing well then I will feel like a good parent. If I had the perfect body then I would feel attractive.

It sounds completely logical. Our entire society is based on this idea after all. And the coach and the client valiantly set to

work on achieving that perfect life. Drawing up schedules and sub goals and commitments and affirmations. And all the while the client continues believing the perfect life is out there somewhere. And that their happiness, fulfilment, success, well-being, security will arrive when they have what they think they need.

And unfortunately for the client, this means they will never have what they are looking for.

Never.

It is impossible. Because the utter and absolute misunderstanding of how life really works is standing in the way like a brick wall.

The misunderstanding guarantees that whatever we are looking for we will not find.

If I think security depends on money, I can never ever earn enough money.

If I think love depends on a partner, I will never find a partner who will love me enough.

If I think success depends on the right job, I will go from job to job trying to find THE job.

If I think I need to contribute to be fulfilled, I will never contribute enough or in the right way.

If my benchmark for being a good parent is kids doing well, they will never do well enough.

If I think I need the perfect body to be attractive, my body will never be right.

Because all it takes is the thought ‘not enough’ ‘need more’ ‘not quite right’ ‘look what they’ve got’ ‘should be different’ to come in and we are right back to square one. And who has a control over those thoughts? Not us. That’s for sure. Out of the blue they come in and wham! straight into an experience of lack, insecurity, loneliness... And back we go to the coach or the therapist or the bottle.

And yet... it is absolutely possible to have the perfect life. It is feasible to have it all.

More than feasible, more than possible, it is an obligation, a requirement of being alive. In fact, it could be said, that that is the only reason we are here, to see what having it all really means.

To have it all requires a complete reversal of our current understanding. A 180 degree about turn to face in the opposite direction. We are born to do this.

What do we need to see? What is this understanding?

There are three things to see.

1. We are not who we think we are

That client in that coach's office believes the thoughts that say he is this or that and he believes the thoughts that say he needs this or that to be happier. And out of this idea of a self and of needs, there are obvious goals. I need to feel more secure therefore I need more money. I need to feel more loved, therefore I need a partner.

But the whole entire thing is thought created. The whole entire thing. The self. The need. The problem. The imagined solution to the need. All of it is a momentary experience. It will change and shift and turn into the opposite and then back again. I am insecure. I am not insecure. I need more money. I don't need more money. There is nothing true in any of it.

Seeing this is the foundation of everything. The realisation that we are not who we think we are allows the illusory, transient self to give itself up, and reveal that perfect space of awareness in which experience of a self comes and goes.

This is who we are. The space in which experience occurs.

Now the very cool thing is that the space of awareness that we really are is open to everything. Awareness is untouched by anything that appears within it. All experience can come in and be welcomed. In this space there is nothing to resist.

This is step number one in having it all. Because as this space of noticing we literally do have it all. Experience after experience comes in. All of it is life. All of it is possible. There is nothing to resist. There is nothing that cannot be allowed.

In can come the experience of being poorer than poor and in can come the experience of being enormously, crazily abundantly rich.

In can come the experience of being lonely, left out, hated even. In can come the experience of being respected and appreciated.

In can come the experience of frustration, lack and difficulty. In can come the experience of fulfilment, purpose and ease.

All of it is life.

And as the space in which life lives itself, open to all of it, we genuinely have it all.

2. Life is perfect right now exactly as it is.

Seeing that all experience is equal - equally made of thought, equally transient, equally insubstantial creates a whole new understanding. A whole new perspective. Now there is no experience to be preferred over another. There is no judgment. No right or wrong. No should or shouldn't.

Which means that life, as it is right now, is perfect. Whatever experience is there - perfect. Whatever understanding of self - perfect. Whatever physical sensation - perfect. Whatever emotion, thought, belief - perfect.

How can it not be? It is experience after experience of being alive.

There is nothing to change, nothing to resist. Just all of life to notice. All of experience to notice. We could die tomorrow and know that we hadn't wasted a single second in wishing for something other than right now. Hadn't wasted a single one of the sights, sounds, textures, smells, tastes being offered to us. Hadn't missed a single heart beat, rain drop or glance.

We are right at the centre of life's fullness, eyes wide, ears open. It would be unbearable to miss anything of this miracle unfolding around us.

To the greatest extent that we possibly can, limited as senses are by the human form, we have it all.

3. Life lives itself

So now the limited, restricted, fearful, insecure, false idea of a self is out of the way, there is only life. Life in all its Grand Canyon, Aurora Borealis, Victoria Falls majesty. Life in all its butterfly wing, rose bud, new baby perfection. It is unstoppable. It is all there is. And we are it.

With no self to step in with the insanity that ‘there must be something better’, the miracle is truly respected and honoured.

With no self to step in with the insanity of insecurity and neediness, there is simple doing, no need. The body is moved by life to do that which affirms life. Idea and execution are seamless. No obstruction. No resistance, just pure flow from formless to form, from idea to creation, from thought to movement. And life unfolds

With no self to step in with the insanity that love, joy, peace and freedom must be looked for, there is only love, joy, peace and freedom. And that is all that can be seen. That is all that is reflected back.

We are life.

We are everything.

Complete.

PART SIX

NOW WHAT?

THIRTY-FOUR

HOW?

The 'me' searches for peace and fulfilment, the 'me' searches for self improvement or purity, presence or detachment. The 'me' seeks clarity or any formula which will give the 'me' what it thinks it wants or needs. But the 'me' not getting what it wants is not the dilemma.

The dilemma is 'me'.

Tony Parsons

You might be thinking 'this is all very well Clare but HOW does it happen? What do I have to do to get rid of the self.'

It is a good question because if all of us knew that we are love, peacefulness, joy, creation, freedom, there would be no scarcity, no lack, no jealousy, no hatred, no limits. Just the pure energy of life living itself.

Do you ever have the feeling when a friend or relative talks about everything that is wrong, all the ways they are limited, that there is a ghost of a trapped, stuck, inadequate person superimposed over their real self.

From the outside, this ghost is so obviously insubstantial and inconsequential that it might as well not be there. The life in front is vibrant, powerful, dynamic and vital. And then there is this flimsy, irrelevant, temporary veil over it. With one puff it could be blown away, never to be thought of again.

But the person sees this veil from an angle at which it looks rock solid, real and immovable. Their problems look

enormous and solution-less. It looks to them that this veil, this victimised apparition in a harsh world is who they are. And as a result they are suffering.

There are moments when it is not there at all. When the person is laughing or reflecting or considering something then the ghost disappears. In those moments there is just pure life, love, laughter.

And it is the same for us of course. Moments of seeing ourselves as this inadequate self with real issues and then moments of not.

So the secret to knowing who we are, to living life as it is here to be lived is to see this ghost for what it is - a nothing. There is nothing there other than thoughts of 'This should be different'. The thoughts are believed and the veil becomes a separate human being who is not ok.

How do we do it? How do we see this ghost for what it is?

This is the great conundrum. The catch 22. The unbearable irony of being.

Because it is in the seeking something different that the veil takes shape, creates substance for itself. This is not who I am. I am not like them. I am different. They are wrong. I am right. I am wrong and inadequate. They are right and better than me. I like this. I don't like this. As a self that is better or worse, right or wrong, perpetrator or victim, the opacity of the veil deepens.

Which makes it very clear that we cannot find who we are by looking for it. The search for sanity, when sanity is all we are, increases the delusion.

And this means that this seeing of our true self takes us into two crazy paradoxes that blow our mind. (Which of course must be part of the design because how else could it be seen?!)

Ready for the first one? Here we go...

WE HAVE TO NOT WANT TO SEE WHO WE REALLY ARE.

And I know that sounds ridiculous. Because of course we want to find out. And the more we are suffering the more it looks to us that we MUST find this truth about ourselves.

But it is the wanting to see something different that is in the way of seeing anything. It is only ever the veil, this idea of a self that wants and desires and needs something different. We desperately want to stop the suffering and yet it is resisting the suffering that keeps us going round in circles.

So the only way to see who we really are is to not give two hoots whether we see it or not.

Is that annoying enough or are you up for another one?

OK. Point two:

WE HAVE TO KNOW THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO FIND.

And again. This sounds ridiculous. Because this true self is pure life, pure love right? It is everything? Who doesn't want a bit of that? It would be very understandable to be shouting 'GIVE ME IT NOW'.

But the true self is only ever the realisation of nothingness. It is the falling away of everything that looks solid and real and meaningful to leave nothing there but the bliss of life being lived.

So the only way to see who we really are is to know there is nothing to see.

Yikes.

How do we do the impossible?

How do we sit in the deepest suffering and not want something different?

How can we change anything if there is nothing to find, nothing to be different?

The answer to this is very cool and it is so utterly not obvious that chances are you will need a prompt.

It will be a prompt that kisses goodbye to that flimsy veil of who you think you are. It is not you. It never was and never

will be. They want that veil to be absorbed into the force of life that your essence makes possible.

I was lucky enough that Garret Kramer said these most loving and respectful of words to me:

‘This is not about you.’

And this may sound crazy for a bit. As it did for me. Because we’ve long held this veil close and dear. And then perhaps it will sink in. Perhaps we will realise that every single ounce of suffering is coming from an idea of a self and an idea of other people and an idea of a world and that none of this exists in the way we think it does. The veil is not real.

And through this the personal, the individual, the ‘I’ gets less. It is not about me as I believe myself to be. It is not about you as I believe you to be.

And in seeing through the veil, we end the seeking, the desires, the resistance, the preferences, the demands for better.

In seeing through the veil we end the idea of something to find, an outcome, a result.

With the end of the seeking, comes all that we ever wanted.

In the realisation of nothing, comes everything.

It can only be that way round.

We realise who we are by knowing there is nothing to realise.

And this nothing is beyond our wildest dreams.

Sanity.

THIRTY-FIVE

DOES IT CHANGE ANYTHING?

Life continues very much as before.

One goes to the grocery store... the body develops aches and pains... loved ones are lost and mourned... a granddaughter tells you that she loves you after you wash her hair... but there is always the most sublime emptiness inside and nothing is taken personally.

The wonder of simply being kisses one on the forehead... love breaks free and runs like a Spring colt through the tall grass .

Michael Markham

Everything changes.

Nothing changes.

Of course - you wouldn't expect this to be any other way by now surely..?

Let's look at them both.

On the one hand, of course it does. Everything changes. The whole programme running the experience, the behaviour is different. The system on which the software is running is changing from a belief in separation to the realisation of completeness, from fighting delusion to simply being.

But on the other hand, the self that would judge that as a good thing, that would make itself superior as a result, that would distinguish now between good and bad, is no longer believable.

Words like better or more successful or happier just don't have that emotional personal pull anymore.

The judging, assessing self had to dissolve in order for the software to change.

It is no longer personal. There is no identification with it. It doesn't matter. Any experience can arise. It is what is and it is also not what is.

It's the ultimate transformation but there is no one there to judge it. And there might be comments of course but it will just be another experience, simply information.

The ultimate paradox. That desperate search ends and it doesn't matter. It makes no difference. It never happened in the first place.

Sanity.

THIRTY-SIX

WHY BOTHER THEN?

This image of yourself is obviously not real.

Any more than the idea of a tree is a tree.

Any more than you can get wet in the word 'water'.

Alan Watts

And as we dig deep into what is actually true it becomes clear that nothing is objective. There is nothing that is independent or separate from the observer. Everything that looks real and fixed is only always 100% subjective. A function of observation. Nothing more and nothing less.

This means that the closest we can get to seeing what is true is the realisation that life or being is the only constant. There is a knowing of existence, of life, of awareness that is beyond thought. After that, there is nothing objective to know. There is no separation between observer and observed.

And the big question is: what happens when we know that ultimately the world as we see it is an appearance? That none of it is true in the way it appears to be true? That none of it is separate from us the observer, all of it is a creation of the awareness that we really are?

Do our kids, friends, job, house suddenly disappear into a cloud of nothingness? Do mountains, flowers, sunsets, rain, animals suddenly become impossible to perceive? Does it suddenly look as though there are no other people in the world?

No of course not. We're still here. Exactly as we were before. Making dinner with food that looks real. Taking seemingly tangible children to school in a solid looking car. Earning a living in an actual job with actual colleagues. Brushing our apparently objective teeth with a non-illusory toothbrush.

So what has changed? Why doesn't the understanding of the illusory nature of reality wipe out reality?

Well when we watch a film in the cinema, we know it is not real life but we still get to see it, appreciate it, experience it. There are still characters on the screen, there is still music, still drama and tension. We may well have moments during the film where we are completely immersed in it. We could be terrified, distraught and, in the midst of the tears or the fear, someone could shake us and say 'this isn't real you know' and we would nod and say 'Duh! Now get lost you're ruining the good bit.'

We know it's a film and that doesn't stop us showing up for it. On the contrary, knowing it's a film we can fully give ourselves up to it.

And this is why the non-dual understanding is completely weird and mind blowing and at the same time just run-of-the-mill, everyday stuff.

It turns our entire understanding of self, life, everything upside down, spins it round, shakes it up, makes us marvel that the world as we believed it to be is not as we believed it to be. And at the same time, we are still in that same every day world of school runs and bills to pay and washing up to do.

So what really is the point? What does change?

Well it is fair to say that a lot of stuff will disappear.

As it is realised that the idea of who we are is infinitely less fixed, reliable, useful or true than believed to be, life hangs out more and more as it is: presence, unconditional love, joy, freedom.

And this means there is no longer that desperate need to secure the self, to defend and protect it, to project it into the

future and to cling on to the mirage of the past. So everything connected with safeguarding this idea of who we are, the stuff that was never there in the first place, has to go. The stuff that, unlike the kids, the job, the bills, the toothbrush, was actually only ever non-existent. That was only ever a fabrication out of thin air in order to say 'look how vulnerable, separate, isolated I am'.

Who knows what this will be for you? Certain needs and fears might fall away. Maybe those mind-numbing, thought-numbing, experience controlling practices and habits will fade out. Paranoia might well disappear. The idea that people hate you or look down on you or look up to you even might go. Who knows?

We just know that the non-existent stuff that existed solely in relation to an idea of self that had to secure itself cannot survive the understanding that there is no separate self. Gone. Impossible even to remember that it ever existed. (Probably because it didn't).

And with it goes all the exhaustion, stress, vulnerability, insecurity of trying to fix in place what can never be fixed.

If this were the only point of looking at what is true about who we are then it would more than reason enough. We could stop right there.

But then it gets even better.

Because then there is the stuff that doesn't disappear.

We can know from the depth of our being that somehow we are the observation that brings everything to life. That the world begins and ends within the life that we really are. That there is nothing that exists independently of that.

And this does not mean that we wake up in a world of nothing. It means that we wake up in a world of partners, kids, jobs, colleagues, bills, mortgages but with an entirely different perspective.

We are no longer an apparently separate individual needing to deal with these apparently separate things in order that we can be happy, secure and loved.

We are actually the space in which all of this appears. And the nature of that space is already pure joy, pure love, utter security.

The veil is off. And now this world - this body, these kids, partners, even the mortgage - appear as the miracle they really are. Creations of consciousness. They are real in the sense that they are there in front of us and not real in the sense that the way they appear can only ever be illusory.

From the joy, love and peace at the depth of our being we engage with what is in front of us simply because it is there in front of us. It would be impossible not to. Apparently real and also not. It is life worshipping, revelling in, delighting in its infinite, shifting, changing appearances.

Who we thought we were has gone and there remains a world of miracles to live. Unlimited, no ceiling, no edges, no separation.

There cannot be a point to this because there is nothing needed.

No point realised from the very real space of love, joy, peace and freedom.

And that, you might say, is the point.

CONCLUSION

The end of the seeking is the end of the seeker, is the end of the experience, that 'this' is real.

Jim Newman

When we were born there was no idea.

There was no idea of a mother or a father. There was no belief in hunger. There was no sense of lack or need. No concept of survival. And without thought, belief, idea or need, the body was moving towards milk, the lungs were breathing air, the heart was beating, limbs were moving, there was growth, movement, learning, sleep and waking.

All of this, happening without an idea of self. Life living, full out and story-less, in the form of baby.

Seeing was happening but not within an idea of 'I am seeing'. Hearing was happening but with no sense of 'I am hearing'. Perception was location-less and boundary-less.

The body was changing with no body doing the changing. Change was causeless.

Limbs were moving without the idea of 'I am moving'. Actions were doer-less.

Objects were reached for and grabbed without an idea of objects. Existence was seam-less.

What did not exist five minutes before could now be done. Life was limitless.

Even as we don't see it ourselves, we see it so clearly in babies.

We see, without doubt, the body as the vehicle for life living, for the expression of purest joy, for the moving, doing, thriving free of need and idea, for life marvelling at itself.

We look in their fresh, unguarded eyes and see pure life. And in their eyes we see ourselves as we really are.

And then in comes... what?

A contraction of the body? A limitation of the mind? A thought believed?

Whatever it is, a nascent self arises.

An idea of 'I am' and an idea of 'They are'. An idea of limits and boundaries. An idea of need and not enough.

And now it is personal.

A 'me' appears in the body, in the mind, in the thoughts, in the actions, in the mirror. Boundaried on all sides by the 'not me'.

And how perfect this is.

Because now there is a world of objects, of language, of ideas and concepts, of past and future, of goals and dreams, of horizons, of good and evil, of drama and tragedy, of others.

An entire world rises up. In place, only because the self has arisen.

And it is a tremendous world, this indivisible world of self. It is a miracle. It is absolutely real and, at the same time, nothing but story upon story upon story.

This world of form, of self and other is a miracle. It is vital. It is perfect.

And to stay here, unquestioning, without exploration can turn this perfect world of infinite form, shape, colour, scent, texture, idea and concept into the strictest of prisons.

Because while it is real, it is also not real. These concepts are not true. There is no self looking out through these eyes.

There is no self moving this body. There is no possibility of separate, independent objects.

But this idea of self is rifling through all these concepts. Trying to find the freedom, ease, joy, peace that was there already, before it arose. It has no understanding that it is looking for itself in itself.

It can never find what it is looking for because its very search chases the finding out of reach. Its very existence obscures what it is seeking.

To stay searching is to stay trapped.

And then in comes... what?

Grace? Luck? Design? Love?

Whatever it is, it speaks so clearly, directly, lovingly to the truth of the self that anything not true fades away.

The impossibility of a separate objective world is realised.

The impossibility of the self as doer is realised.

The impossibility of not peace, not freedom is realised.

Through this, the self sees that the job it was trying to do, of keeping itself safe, is not necessary.

For the self to release its grip can seem impossible.

It is also the most profoundly simple, obvious happening.

The simplest, most loving return to the place life had never left.

Sane.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clare Dimond works with individuals, schools, businesses and organisations exploring how excellence, freedom, love and creativity are our nature.

For materials, resources, programmes or to ask any questions raised by this book, visit www.claredimond.com



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