

Paul Brunton The Wisdom of the Overself, excerpts from ch. 6: "The Secret of the I"  
From What Am I booklet p.15-22 + quotes from The Notebooks  
See other file for more quotes from Booklet—PB and AD and Nisargadatta. P.15-

### **Lessons from dream**

1. It is easy, even after we have begun to believe in the truth of mentalism, to make the mistake of taking the world as being a form of consciousness - and even to take all other people as such - but to forget to take our own personality in the same way. A little further reflection about dreams can help us to correct this subtle error.

3... the arrival of wakefulness shows that the dream-self was at the time but an idea, and is now but a memory, that is also an idea. If we can apply this lesson we can also convert the whole of our past wakeful-self experience into a memory. But a wakeful memory is not less a thought-structure than a dream one, however much more vivid it may be. Therefore the wakeful self must be such a thought-structure too. For if we take a retrospective glance at the stretched-out span of our own life, at the years of infancy childhood adolescence and maturity which relentless time has buried in the past, at all those years whose motley episodes are recoverable only as memories, everything that has happened to us now seems like the happenings of a prolonged and vivid dream. It seems such an appalling thing to believe that those events which were so solid, so substantial and so real when they were actual are only like dream-stuff.

*The dreamers mind projects a dream. "The dreamer is immanent in the dream and gives to the appearing ego the sense of its own existence. " That sense of being real independently is a mistake, but is based on reality of the dreamer's mind....*

4. If all our past personal experience... turns out in the end to be a series of ideas, what are we to say of our coming life.... What of the vivid present? ... They will then appear to possess neither the same reality nor the same value which they possess now.

...Because past, present and future constitute the whole of our human existence what else is demonstrated by it than that our own wakeful existence is itself only a thought-series and that our personal experience is a mentally-constructed affair? . Yet this day, this minute, this very moment through which we are now passing must actually possess precisely the same characteristics which they have before or after.

7. ... For what are we really aware of? We are aware of a series of physical sensations, separate changing mental states and fluctuating emotional moods which follow each other throughout wakeful life. But of a self *apart from* the totality of this series, we are not ordinarily aware. As a person we are, in the end, what other things are - a thought.

12... The whole mental life is a continuous flux and unrolling film of momentary thoughts. Those which are held most strongly within the focus of attention at any particular moment constitute the self at the time... If this world extended in space and changing in time is really a thought-structure and if the person is a part of the world, then it logically follows that we are just as much a thought-structure too. When mentalism reduced the world to an idea, it inevitably reduced everything and everyone contained within it to an idea too. The world-idea springs from the same root as the person-idea but both flower in contrasting colors.

**[[And this all points to the Awareness of the thoughts.]]**

Everything remembered is a thought in consciousness. This not only applies to objects, events, and places. It also applies to persons, including oneself, he who is remembered, the "I" that I was. This means that my own personality, what I call myself, was a thought in the past, however strong and however persistent. But the past was once the present. Therefore I am not less a thought *now*. The question arises what did I have then which I still have now, unchanged, exactly the same. It cannot be "I" as the person, for that is different in some way each time. It is, and can only be, "I" as Consciousness. [Notebooks 8.2.3](#)

### ***Self-inquiry: what is the I?:***

**13. The first of our thoughts is 'I'. All other thoughts follow its arising. It does not stand alone but instantly associates itself with the thought which next follows. And this is the body-thought....**

Consequently the original 'I' thought becomes converted into 'I am the body.' After this there arises the world-thought. The 'I' unconsciously provides the particular space-time characteristics through which the world must first pass before it can emerge into its consciousness. Thus the 'I' veritably holds as its own thought both the body and then the world outside the body. But because it began by deceiving itself about its own relation to the body, because it took the body for what it is not, it ends by deceiving itself about the things outside and around the body and takes them for what they are not too. Hence the arising of a triple error: the world, the body and the 'I' are all regarded as non-mental.

14. The 'I' every person knows is indeed his self but it is not his ultimate self. When he discovers that his own personal existence is no less a thought-structure than that of his physical surroundings, that everything including himself has an imagined existence, he comes close, very close, to the gate of initiation into a higher world of understanding. **He who witnesses the events of a dream, who participates in them, and who creates them are one and the same entity.**

15. We have found that thoughts and sensations constitute the person. But does the person constitute the whole of the 'I'? Can we separate self from the ideas, the perceptions and the memories which it holds?

16. Although the 'I' changes from instant to instant we feel somehow that it knows itself indirectly through its thoughts, acts and experiences, and that something remains constant and stationary through all these changes. If in one sense, there is a continuity between what we once were and what we now are, then this persistent core must be a deeply buried mental one. What is this mysterious core? Can the "I" know itself directly?

**17. The fact that he could examine his own thoughts showed that there was something in him which was itself deeper than them,** for it could not simultaneously be both the owner of the thoughts and the thoughts themselves, both the examiner and that which was examined. What is this 'something'?

17. It is, it must be a still deeper 'I' which although usually ignored, must matter most of all. And this, when traced through the conventional confusions and unconscious processes which habitually surround it, is nothing else than that intangible principle of awareness itself whose own existence makes the existence of all the multiple items of awareness itself possible. ...

***disentangle awareness (switched page from booket)***

**22. What the hidden teaching says is that the awareness is itself a separate principle.**

The part (of awareness) which thus acts is the part which is projected into a particular space-time existence and which thenceforth imagines itself to be an entirely complete and self-sufficient being. It is indeed what we know as the person. **It is this projected fraction of awareness which is what we ordinarily term consciousness**, that is the sum of all our personal sensations, thoughts and feelings.

**22. I as thoughts changes from moment to moment, but what is it that knows the changes?**

**The deeper I is the principle of awareness which makes modes of consciousness possible.**

**The activity of this awareness projects a space-time existent person, which then "imagines itself to be an entirely complete and self-sufficient being.**

**23. Thoughts are only phases of consciousness. Consciousness is only a phase of mind. Mind is outside the limitation of any particular place. It is not really flesh-tied, but our belief about it is.**

**It is the disentanglement of consciousness from its own projections, its thoughts of every kind, which is the final and first work of a would-be philosopher. Consciousness is then in its pure unconditioned being. 23.7.181**

**If there is anything worth studying by human being, after the necessary preliminary studies of how to exist and survive in this world healthily and wisely, it is the study of man's own consciousness--not a cataloguing of the numerous thoughts that play within it, but a deep investigation of its nature itself, its own unadulterated pure self. 1.1.81**

Trace consciousness back to itself, unmixed with bodily sense reports, emotional moods or mental thoughts. This can be done successfully only by withdrawing it inward as you analyze. This process becomes a meditation. In the final term, you are aware of nothing else: That is, of nothing but being aware. But at this point you cannot know it as a second thing, an object, but only by being it. (23:7.208)

The first question is also the final one; it is quite short, quite simple, and yet it is also the most important question which anyone could ever ask, whether of himself or of others. This question is: "What is consciousness?" Whoever traces the answer through all its levels will find himself in the end in the very presence of the universal consciousness otherwise called God. 19.3.32

If you will try to perceive the mind by which you perceives the world, you will be practising the shortest, most direct technique of discovering the Overself. This is what Ramana Maharshi meant when he taught, "Trace the 'I' to its source." 22.5.6

31. Indeed it is impossible to advance farther in this metaphysical study unless the ability is developed to separate analytically two opposing concepts - the self from the not-self, the observer from what is observed.

32. The present examination of the wakeful self has shown us that it points beyond itself to a principle of awareness which makes possible all conscious experience - and consequently the personal 'I' along with it - but which is itself hidden deep beneath the threshold of consciousness.

**33. When we believe that we are conscious of ourself we are really conscious of a heavy disguise of the powerful complex of thoughts constituting the conscious 'I' which the unknown self puts on and takes off. ...**

Thinking, being itself a part of the field of our observation, unfortunately cannot break through into the consciousness of the observer which transcends that field. The consciousness which knows cannot itself be included in what is known. ...

**The 'I' is indeed a symbol which stands for something immeasurably wider than itself.**

This unusual interrogation of yourself, this demand to know what you are, may take a full lifetime of the deepest examination to satisfy. 8.1.42

**Think! What does the ``I'' stand for? This single and simple letter is filled with unutterable mystery. For apart from the infinite void in which it is born and to which it must return, it has no meaning. The Eternal is its hidden core and content. 8.1.8.**

The "I" is not a thought at all. It is the very principle of Consciousness itself, pure Being. It is neither personal mind nor physical body, neither ego nor little self. Without it they could not exist or function. It is their witness. Notebooks 8.1.72

"I am not I." These words are nonsensical to the intellect, which can make nothing of them. But to awakened intuition they are perfectly comprehensible. 8.1.19

We all think, experience, feel, and identify with the "I." But who really knows what it is? To do this we need to look inside the mind, not at what it contains, as psychologists do, but at what it is in itself. If we persevere, we may find the "I" behind the "I." 8.1.73

The faculty of attention is interiorized and turned back upon itself. 23.7.216

*Stillness is your essential nature. What is stillness? The inner space or awareness in which the words on this page are being perceived and become thoughts. Without that awareness, there would be no perception, no thoughts, no world. You are that awareness, disguised as a person. --Tolle: Stillness Speaks*

***Consciousness appearing as a person seeks itself. ... 23.1.3***

## **Changing and changeless consciousness** (page shifted from p.21 in booklet)

34. Again, the personal self is gradually changing through the years but the mental principle which informs it and makes it possible for us to be aware of the changing conscious and bodily states, is not affected by this process and remains ever the same. This principle is the relatively permanent element within us and the ultimate basis of all our kaleidoscopic state of consciousness. To become aware of the arising and disappearing of all those thoughts which make up the totality of the waking self, their witness must be relatively changeless for it is only the striking contrast between them and itself which could possibly make it aware of such transience. The constant succession of sensations, the innumerable changes of perception and experience could themselves be evident only to some observer whose own mental permanence and unity must be presupposed or he could not notice the facts of succession and change.

35. ... The fact that we are conscious of the changes which make up the stuff of time, is itself possible only because there is something hidden in us which is above change and beyond time.

What we commonly think of as constituting the "I" is an idea which changes from year to year. This is the personal "I." But what we feel most intimately as being always present in all these different ideas of the "I," that is, the sense of being, of existence, never changes at all. It is this which is our true enduring "I." 8.2.1

How is it that I am--and know that I am--substantially the same person today as yesterday, that I remember the happenings of a year ago? The answer must be that there is a continuous self, or being, or mind, in me, distinct from its thoughts or experiences. Notebooks 8.2.97

We exist for a fragment of time only and therefore relatively. But is there something behind time itself which is absolute, a principle of Foreverness? The Buddhists firmly deny it; the Advaitins just as firmly proclaim it, while philosophy accepts and reconciles both schools. (19:3.188)

### **Pointers To Awareness**

46. Now we have learnt that it is useless to look for the whole self in the wakeful state alone and utterly ignore the other two beads on its string. For dream and sleep no less pertain to it than waking. It is useless to take only a fragment of experience and then expect a full answer to the question "What am I?"

47. The physical body, the personal thoughts and feelings are only *contents* of the self, not its real *character*. The sense of awareness accompanies every act, every feeling and every thought. It is their common factor.

...Were the 'I' nothing more than this series of changing thoughts and fitful feelings it could not become aware of itself as an *individual*. **Such awareness evidences a deeper principle in its own being. The presence of this principle may be inferred, even though it may not be separately experienced, from its being reflected into every thought, image and perception as the stuff of awareness of them.**

That which is aware of the world is not the world. That which is aware of the ego is not the ego. When this awareness is isolated, the person ``experiences" the Overself. 22.5.5

The fact that we know our bodies is a guarantee that we can know our souls. For the knowing principle in us is derived from the soul itself. We have only to search our own minds deeply enough and ardently enough to discover it. 22.5.14

When you begin to seek the Knower, who is within you, and to sever yourself from the seen, which is both without and within you, you begin to pass from illusion to reality. 22.5.15

The mind's chief distinguishing power is *to know*--whether the object known is the world around or the ideas within. When this is turned in still deeper upon itself, subject and object are one, the thought-making activity comes to rest, and the "I" mystery is solved. One discovers his real self, or being--his soul. 22.5.16

**[[Note: p. 23-30 of booklet-- PB and Nisargadatta Quotes in part2 file]]**

***Now we deepen our awareness of the I-Am p.31-33  
Hidden Observer—Witness I part 2 of “The Secret of the I”***

**14. He who witnesses the events of a dream, he who participates in them, and he who creates them are one and the same entity [14]**

**28. Thus an understanding of the simple experience denoted by the words, "I dreamt," raises us to the level of a witness and clear above that of the personality**

If the real Self must have been present and been witness to our peaceful enjoyment of deep slumber--otherwise we would not have known that we had had such enjoyment--so must it likewise have been present and been witness to our rambling imaginations in dream-filled sleep and to our physical activities in waking. This leads to a tremendous but inescapable conclusion. We are as near to, or as much in, the real Self, the Overself, at every moment of every day as we ever shall be. All we need is awareness of it. 22.3.25.

The Overself perceives and knows the individual self, but only as an imperturbable witness - in the same way that the sun witnesses the various objects upon the earth but does not enter into a particular relation with a particular object. So too the Overself is present in each individual self as the witness and as the unchanging consciousness which gives consciousness to the individual. 22/3/338

42. In The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga a tentative definition of the term 'mind' as being "that which makes us think of anything and which makes us aware of anything," was offered. To this definition we may now add: "and which reveals its existence in every thought but is unknown to us apart from such manifestation."

### ***Shift Identity: I Am***

**34. The consciousness possessed by the hidden observer cannot be a fitful one. Being the very principle of awareness, able at any time to shine through its projections, the wakeful or dream selves, it must therefore be an unbroken and unfailing one.**

The ego self is the creature born out of man's own doing and thinking, slowly changing and growing. The Overself is the image of God, perfect, finished, and changeless. What he has to do, if he is to fulfill himself, is to let the one shine through the other. Notebooks 8.1.7

**45. the witnessing self is present in hidden association or mystic immanence in the personal self and reflects into that self the feeling of its own real existence.**

**45. It is this projected fraction of awareness which is what we ordinarily term consciousness,**

50. The person is only a projection from the Overself as a dream-figure is a projection from the mind of a dreamer. It is only a dependent creature which has forgotten its origin and now imagines itself to be the real I.

Because this emanated consciousness of the Overself ties itself so completely and so continuously to the thought-series, which after all are its own creations, it identifies itself with the illusory ego produced by their activity and forgets its own larger, less limited origin. 8.2.47

### ***Being the Witness* paras from The Notebooks [page shifted from p.33 in booklet]**

Everyone knows that he is aware of himself, others, the world. But that awareness exists also in an unlimited uninterrupted way he does not know. Yet to the extent that he has this limited kind of consciousness he derives from It, shares the spirit, is part of it. (21:2.98)

The practice of the impersonal point of view under the guidance of mentalism leads in time to the discovery that the ego is an image formed in the mind, mind-made, an image with which we have got inextricably intertwined. But this practice begins to untie us and set us free. 8.2.34

It is hard to look upon the reality of one's own personality as a myth. Few are likely even to make the attempt, so undesirable does it seem. And there would be small chance of success if there were not a concurrent attempt at discovering the reality of the Overself, which is to displace the myth. 8.1.22

To play the role of an observer of life, his own life, is to assist the process of inwardly detaching himself from it. And the field of observation must include the mental events, the thought-happenings, also. For mentalism shows that they are really one world. In the end everything belonging to experience belongs to mental experience. 23.6.82

The student has to stand aside from the thought-forms, which means that he must stand aside from the person and look at it as something external to himself. If and when he succeeds in getting behind it, he automatically adopts the standpoint of the Overself. He must make the person an object and the Overself its observer. Now this element of pure awareness is something constant and unbroken; hence it is not ordinary consciousness, which is a discontinuous thing made of totalized thoughts, but transcendental consciousness. 23.6.83

## ***World-Mind Is Ultimate Observer (page switched from p.32 booklet)***

48. Thus we have advanced from the narrow personal 'me' to the wider, more inviting and more inspiring 'I'. The final and most important member of the 'I' family is this unseen and unknown one. It is the subject of which they are the object. It is the silent spectator of a play in which the others are actors. It is the mystical quintessence of the 'I'. The ordinary 'I' is a thought, the ultimate 'I' is pure Thought. .

**49. It should now be clear that this consciousness must be identical with the fourth state of consciousness which we earlier found to transcend sleep. It** is the fundamental observer who notes the comings and goings of the other three states because it can stand aside from them in unbroken beatitude. It is our truest deepest self because it alone outlives unchanged the surface self of changing personality

49. Human experience is the final residue of a process of inter-action, a fabric conjointly woven with a common mind in which all human beings dwell and think and which dwells and thinks in them. The world itself is the outcome of a combined cosmic and individual imagination.

53. We have to think the world independently of whether we want to or not for the plain reason that this greater mind is thinking it into our own mind, is projecting and knowing the external world through the individual mind. Every object in the universe is held in the larger infinite consciousness, whether it is thought of or observed by the finite consciousness of any human being or not.

55. Thus mentalism breaks through these egoistic and nihilistic circles with its tenet of a mind which is cosmic in its operational field.

57. It comes to this, that there is ultimately only a single observer, the World-Mind, and only a single great world image and we as persons are contained within the great one.

Why I chose 'What Am I': (1) Because I wanted to start with the idea of a non-'I' consciousness instead of their own 'I' with which they are continuously occupied; (2) Because the word Brahman is of neuter gender, neither masculine nor feminine. Brahman in us is Atman, the Self--but utterly impersonal. 'What' lends itself more easily to this impersonality than 'Who'; (3) The answer to 'What Am I?' is multiple but it begins with 'a part of the world!' and is followed by another question, 'What is my relation to this world?' The answer requires the discovery of Mentalism, leading back through the thought of the world, thinker, and consciousness, to Brahman. 8.1.36