



“It’s So Damn Simple”

By Michael Mendizza

He said, then, leaning closer at lunch he added, “I have only said one thing my entire life, but I have said it a thousand ways.” Summarized by his ‘Truth is a pathless land’ proclamation in 1929. “Truth, being limitless, cannot be organized,” he continued. To which I add; defined, named, described by words, held as a concept, an abstract mental image, symbol or metaphor. If not these, how?

‘True’ or ‘truth’ means perceiving directly, something fresh, original, not fake, not a copy or counterfeit. To perceive what is ‘true’ the mind must be free of distractions and self-induced enchantments no matter how enticing or revered. What we call thinking or thought, the use of words, metaphors and stories are theater, make-believe, which are not ‘true’ or ‘truth’ as used by the speaker, J. Krishnamurti.

It *is*, so damn simple. A path, a goal, method, system, collection of steps, beliefs, concepts, symbols, icons, churches, temples, so-called sacred text or enlightened identities, egos, culture, and so much more, are all images, all theater.

‘If you see Buddha, kill him,’ is the Zen reminder. We must distinguish between what is ‘true,’ and what is imagined, most intimately, regarding who and what we, and everyone else, actually are. ‘Know thy self,’ carved in the Greek temple at Delphi, means developing the capacity distinguish what is true from fake, including our counterfeits and social costumes.

Seduced and enchanted by this emerging ‘theater of the mind’ led to a chronic and pervasive ‘misuse of memory,’ that shaped civilization and its legacy. A mass transgenerational-juvenile-tantrum; endless cycles of comparison, name calling, greed, racism, crusades, colonialism, endless wars, and genocide.

The ancients were familiar with our addiction to this self-deception and they warned us. In the Eden myth, the book of *Genesis*, 6th to 5th century BCE— we glimpse paradise lost, shame found. Original sin is self-deception. The tree of knowledge represents a turn from innocence to ego, from ‘truth’ to illusion.

In the East, Laozi (Lao Tzu Tse), believed to have lived in at roughly the same time, taught *Wu wei*: effortless action—and *Tao*: the natural order of the universe, or ‘intelligence,’ which cannot be fully described. Both highlight the loss of intelligence and innocence caused by the self-deceiving nature of words and imagination. The first stanza in the Tao Te Ching begins: “The name that can be named is not the eternal. The name that can be named is the beginning of 10,000 things.” Naming is illusion, more theater.

Not long after, Plato gave us his ‘Allegory of the Cave,’ written around 380 BCE, considered one of the most powerful metaphors in Western philosophy. Plato’s allegory explores how perception, knowledge, and ‘waking up’ from dreamlike images changes reality. Krishnamurti’s observation that we are ‘second hand human beings,’ echoes this. All have a common root, beware of self-deceptions created by thought and imagination, more specifically, our images of self and others.

If it is so damn simple, having been warned and reminded that ‘the word is not the thing’ for thousands of years, why does this theater continue to dominate human consciousness? Why are most unaware that self-deception, falsely believing that images are ‘things,’ is the source of so much of our personal and collective human conflict and sorrow? Waking up implies distinguishing what is ‘true,’ original, present and fresh, from conditioned memories.

Simple, but not easy, because it actually feels like there is a 'me' inside, experiencing, doing, thinking and remembering. But, no surgeon or Xray has ever found one. This "me" is a shadow—an image, a mental echo of experience, not an entity. The key insight; thought creates the image of a thinker, not the other way around.

With the evolution of the 'thinking' or 'imagining' brain, more or less 50,000 years ago, things got complicated. Suddenly, we identified not only with experience but with *thoughts* about experience—and abstract concepts of "me," of you, others and culture. To understand what happened we need to look at form and function. A defining characteristic of a brain, as compared to a liver or finger, is the capacity to create 'resonate representations,' or 'images,' of that brain's interactions with experiences, outer and inner. Brains create inner images. Toes do not.

The sensory brain registers changes in the external environment and creates a virtual reality, a hallucinated inner representation of those changes that we experience as the exterior world or 'reality.' This image, updated in real time, allows us to move and interact with focused intent, proprioception. We believe we are perceiving the outer world, similar to looking through a window. In fact, we are perceiving an inner image that our brain is creating. The same is true for the mammalian or limbic brain. That brain generates images that represent changes in our inner states. What we call feelings or emotions are images.

It is relatively simple to see how primary perception, the experience of our body moving and interacting with the environment, generates the appearance or feeling that there is separate 'me' inside, feeling and doing everything. This impression was created by the awesome processing power of the neocortex. Just as we accepted and identified with our sensory experience and subjective inner emotional feelings, we accepted and identified with the abstract thought-image of a 'me,' ignoring that this 'me' is just an image.

About 10,000 years ago small-band-hunter-gathers settled down, built villages, domesticated animals and farmed, which sprawled into civilizations. For small-band-hunter-gatherers an apple was just an apple. With domestication and farming the apple became 'my' apple. Collecting and hoarding stuff changed the nature of the inner image of 'me' forever. Comparison changed everything. The more stuff I controlled, the more important that image of 'me' grew, and with that class, racism, social hierarchy, gender inequality, gangs, nationalism, competitive capitalism, cultural and religious wars, and much more. All emanating from the reification of an abstract and often delusional inner image.

Every incident, every word, every action creates an image... A word is registered, if it is pleasant you purr. It is nice. If it is unpleasant, you will immediately shrink from it and that creates an image. The pleasure creates an image; the shrinking, the withdrawal creates an image. So, our actual relationship with each other is based on various subtle forms of pictures, images and conclusions. When there is an image like that, 'she has and you have,' then in that there is division and the whole conflict begins. Where there is division between two images, there must be conflict. The Jew, the Arab, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Christian, the Communist, it is the same phenomenon. It is a basic law, that where there is division between people there must be conflict. The man may say to the woman or the woman may say to the man "I love you", but basically, they are not related at all.

Then the factor arises, can this mechanism of image-making, not just Image-making, that is the desire for certainty, the tradition, the whole structure of that, end?

J. Krishnamurti
Brockwood Park 2nd Public Dialogue 31st August 1978

Physicist David Bohm brings the challenge of thought as image-making up to date.

We don't really understand the nature of our thought process. We're not aware of how it works and how it is disrupting, not only our society and our individual lives, but also the way the brain and nervous system operate, making us unhealthy or perhaps even somehow damaging the system.

Krishnamurti recognizes that thought, rational, orderly, factual thought, such as doing proper science, is valuable, but the kind of thought that he has in mind is self-centered thought.

At first sight one might wonder why self-centered thought is so bad? If the self were really there then perhaps it would correct to center on the self because the self would be so important, but if the self is a kind of illusion, at least the self as we know it, then to center our thought on something illusory which is assumed to have supreme importance is going to disrupt the whole process. It will not only make thought about yourself wrong, it will make thought about everything wrong so that thought becomes a dangerous and destructive instrument all around.

There is an assumption or concept which, if the self were real, it would be extremely important, the highest value of all things... This stirs up the mind and brain inside so it feels, just from that assumption, that something is going on inside which corresponds to this assumed self and gives it an apparent reality. Once it has been assumed that this self is real and not merely an image, it takes first priority and everything else comes second, so everything is distorted. For example, if somebody tells you that the self is bad, this will create a disturbing feeling inside this image. There will be a very powerful move to change that, to falsify, to say instead that you are good. This distortion becomes universal.

There is a tendency for self-deception built into the thought process because there's no intelligence in it. It's just a system of reflexes. Take Pavlov and his dog, for example. The dog salivates when it sees food. If you ring a bell every time it sees food, it will salivate when you ring the bell. Eventually it skips the stage of perceiving the food so you'll get a conditioned reflex. In a similar manner, thought is a conditioned reflex. Confused, incoherent thought leads to confused, incoherent emotions, to confused a confused chemistry and eventually to a breakdown of the brain. I'd like to call this electro-chemical smog. The brain is in that state and is continually getting more and more confused and breaking down.

The first point is to realize that intellect is not intelligence. The rules of formal logic are not the same as intelligence. They're a product of intelligence which have crystallized. An intelligent idea, once it becomes a reflex or knowledge, is no longer intelligent. It requires something beyond knowledge to see whether the abstractions are relevant, appropriate and valid. Intelligence should be able to use intellect, but it won't work the other way. Intellect cannot control and use intelligence. Intelligence must be the ground, the context or primary movement, which makes use of the structures of the intellect when needed and appropriate.

David Bohm with Michael Mendizza

For thousands of years we have ignored these insights, sleepwalking like Henny Penny in a dull, semi-daydream-state, assuming that much of what we think or imagine is real and therefore true. We are defined by images, our vanities and relationships, judgements, humiliations and embarrassments, comparisons, blue ribbons, trophies, and failures. When none of these, our social costumes and pop-culture attempts to compete, express our authentic nature.

Similar to Krishnamurti's; "you are secondhand human beings." G. I. Gurdjieff, a mystic, philosopher, composer, and choreographer, believed most people live in a state of "waking sleep"—a mechanical existence where we go through life unconsciously, driven by reflexive habits, impulses, and fragmented identities. His mission was to help people "wake up" and live more authentically. "Life is real only when you are," was one of Gurdjieff's last essays.

What distinguishes a life that is real from fake? Implicit are two states; what Buddhists call our 'relative' and 'absolute' realities, or 'knowledge' and 'intelligence.' One can be named and defined. The other cannot. Our true nature, and most astonishing potentials, express in what David Bohm, Krishnamurti, Joseph Chilton Pearce and others call 'insight-intelligence,' a state when the noise generated by our conditioning is silent, empty of self-generated mental images. David might use the metaphor of looking at the universe through a keyhole to represent the limitations of conditioned knowledge, including culture, society and our self-images.

Silence, freedom from the limitations of thought, might be compared to gazing up into the heavens on a sparkling night, where our 'infinite potential' might suddenly express in our human brain like a Mozart symphony. Preoccupied with conditioned memory however, this infinite potential is pushed off stage by thought and its phantom image—our ego.

In conversations spanning five years with Tibetan Buddhist scholar and close colleague of the Dalai Lama, Samdhong Rinpoche described how 'silence,' or 'emptiness' of conditioned memories, thoughts, and words, open the doors of perception to compassion and insight. Recall, thought creates the ego, the thinker or observer, not the other way around. Rinpoche described how thought and the ego are two sides of a single process. Where thought is, you will find the ego. One is the shadow of the other.

Sitting with Professor Emeritus Allan W. Anderson, who shared more than eighteen hours of recorded dialogues with J. Krishnamurti, Allan described how this pervasive 'misuse of memory' is the essential focus or theme of Krishnamurti's talks and dialogues. Misuse implies that there is a true or correct use of memory and imagination. I suggest that discovering this difference is the most powerful approach to ending the ego's reign of terror.

Krishnamurti described, 'with complete attention there is no observer.' No thought, no ego. Thought and the thinker, the observer or ego, come into being only when there is inattention, which is distraction, fragmented attention. In contemporary terms, complete attention is the state of Flow, the Zone or authentic Play. Researcher Fred Donaldson, described, 'when I play, Fred disappears.' The ego exists only when we look, only when we focus attention with that unique self-centered quality of thought. As the popular saying goes, sing as if no one is listening, dance as if no one is looking, not even you.

What has been described about the ego or self-image, applies equally to culture. Culture is a collective or mass-ego. Culture and ego are two expressions of the same process, just different points of view, and both suffer the same fears, shame, embarrassments, hubris, vanities, jealousy and aggression. Think nationalism, patriotism and wars. Identify with one image, German or Muslim, for example, and instantly you are in conflict with everyone else. This conflict remains even when pretending to be tolerant of other images. When we identify with an image there must be conflict. Identifying with an image is a misuse of memory. But we forget.

Why do we identify so deeply and completely with our images? All cultures, more or less, are shame based. 'Shame-based culture' is a sociological term scholars use to describe societies where public perception and avoiding disgrace play powerful roles in shaping behavior. Taken to extreme this includes "honor killings," where a person, often a woman or girl, is harmed or killed by family members for actions perceived to bring shame or dishonor to the family, such as refusing an arranged marriage, being in a relationship, or engaging in sex outside of marriage. In Japan, the idea that overwhelming shame or dishonor can lead someone to take their own life has been historically linked to concepts of "honor suicide," or Seppuku, also known as Harakiri. While these forms are extreme, shame remains the most powerful and pervasive form of behavior modification during childhood. What is shamed? The image. No image, no shame, no psychological control. Culture does not like that.

The childhood rant, 'sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never harm me,' is the classic antidote, little understood and even less embodied. Not identifying with our social image or ego negates culture's most powerful control strategy. What is embarrassed? The image. If I don't accept or identify with the image there is nothing to be embarrassed or compared. Extrinsic control disappears, save the threat of physical violence which was the norm for most of the civilized world.

The Roman Catholic church, for example, built its empire on violence and retained control via violent and grotesque images of torture, the threat of eternal damnation, and reinforced these threats with dramatically staged theater, public spectacles and confessions. Cathedrals and humble places of worship were filled with vivid depictions of heaven, hell, martyrdom, and divine judgment. These weren't just artistic expressions—they were tools of emotional manipulation and social control. By design, these visuals instilled fear, reinforced obedience, and emphasized the Church's role as gatekeeper to

salvation. And it worked for thousands of years and continues. Throughout history parents adopted the same behavior modification strategy. Any wonder comparison, shame, humiliation, public torture and even murder were so common, and still are. All grounded in the human brain's vulnerability to images, our misuse of memory or original sin.

"Unquestioned acceptance of the given," was Jean Piaget's description of the early child. Monkey see, monkey do. Nature designed the 'absorbent mind' of the child to imprint and become the model given, including, and perhaps most importantly, their mental images. Consider the tremendous power and importance of spoken language, and later written words in general, are given throughout a child's development. We enforce strict rules governing the use of words, syntax and spelling, with zero attention given to what words and metaphors do inside us. 'Shame on you,' rules the day.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice, written by Goethe in 1797, applies to every thought we think. As a species we have never faced this challenge, the correct and true use, and the misuse, of thought. Perhaps in Tibetan monasteries, a few philosophers during the so-called Enlightenment, or esoteric courses in positive affirmation, prayer or neurolinguistic programming, but not as an essential foundation for every child, everywhere, every day, cultivating penetrating insight into reification, the delusional misuse of treating abstract images as concrete independent realities, such as nationalism and personal egos. We are not isolated Christians, Muslims, Russians or Americans. We are human beings coexisting in symbiotic harmony with every other living species, and the entangled energies we call the cosmos. It is long past due that we begin acting that way. Identifying with delusional images is a mental illness.

Samdhong Rinpoche described three stages of mental purification and development. The first, like Gurdjieff's self-remembering, comes mindfulness. To simply be completely present with a silent or empty mind, sensitive, aware, empathic and compassionate. This is kindergarten, affirming nature's default state or foundation of everything that follows. Without this foundation, everything that follows is distorted, and as David Bohm describes, grows increasingly dangerous.

Second, Rinpoche described 'using the illness as medicine,' a strict form of logic and language that questions and negates reification, creating and identifying with false images about myself and others, plus all our cultural images; nationalism, religious images and beliefs, including all their associated feelings. Discovering and seeing clearly that we are not those images, nor is anyone else, stops our destructive global brain drain, inviting undreamed of possibilities. Understood correctly this negating distills, intensifies and gathers wasted mental clarity, attention, affection and power.

Upon this distilled clarity there are exercises or contemplative practices that use mental energies and laser focused passion (Tantra), in causal-creative ways. Having negated the dangerous and wasteful influences of our personal egos, that of others and culture, what is left is 'enhancing the well-being of all sentient beings in increasingly creative ways,' because that is who we all are, our true identity, and the only thing left to do, which is a nice description of a classic Bodhisattva.

A Bodhisattva is someone 'always awakening' from the imaged and conceptual enchantments the human brain creates, leaving nothing else to do but to help others wake up too. Spontaneously, the suffering caused by the dream dissolves. There are no monsters hiding under the bed. The dream monster, or ego, is replaced with *Compassion*, deep empathy for all day-dreaming beings. With *Wisdom*, insight into the nature of true reality. *Generosity*, natural giving without expecting anything in return. *Patience*, enduring hardship with grace. *Ethical Conduct*, living with integrity. And *Skillful Means*, inventing new ways to help others effectively. All these qualities arise without effort when the mind is free from chasing wasteful and destructive self-images.

Krishnamurti's 'freedom from the known,' reveals the true and correct use of conditioned thought and, more importantly, its misuse. Without discovering what a silent mind feels like, and how different that physical experience is from thinking, we are endlessly drifting in an imagined house of mirrors where all images are equally true or false. We need to be well grounded in stillness before the true nature of noise becomes clear. As Rinpoche described, everything depends on mindfulness, silence and complete attention.

With this in mind, the classic definition of a Mystic, 'perceiving directly what lays hidden from the mind of image and concept,' becomes clear. This is where Joseph Chilton Pearce's lifelong explorations began, to understand our 'Astonishing Capacities and Self-Inflicted Limitations.' Joined by Gurdjieff's insight, that human beings live in a state of "waking sleep." Waking up from the dream changes everything. As Krishnamurti described, 'this is the first and the last step.' Always Awakening,' from our self-induced enchantment is the most fundamental practice, a combination of complete attention, presence and wise, compassionate action.

Appreciating that the 'known' is a keyhole-reality that filters out our 'infinite potential,' helps us understand why silence, emptiness or 'intelligence,' opens the doors of perception to non-ordinary levels of sensitivity, awareness and insight. Pearce devoted most of his life exploring the astonishing capacities that remain latent, undeveloped for most chasing the dream. In this regard AI, machine learning and technology, compound our sleepwalking-daydream exponentially. But that is another story.

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Note: On Emptiness as Footprints (Buddhapada): In early Buddhist art, the Buddha Mind or presence was symbolized through absence, reminding us of impermanence and spiritual direction, that truth transcends image and form, and how the Buddha Mind reveals in what was not shown or named. If you see Buddha kill him.