

Q: Thoughts that pop-up while reading *The Ten Thousand Things*: Firstly, thank you for this exciting and unique book! Your take on spiritual awareness is incredibly genuine, uncompromising and revelatory. I would compare the way you roll it out with the technique of photography's development in the dark room. The blank paper, slowly but definitely starts unveiling details of a raw chunk of Reality that may strike the eye and mind by unexpected shades, contrasts and meanings.

Going to specifics: You imply that the state of Awareness in your case occurred in a dream, spontaneously and in the absence of any intentional spiritual pursuit and systematic 'work' such as meditation, prayer, yoga. I have no doubts about the sincerity of this affirmation, nevertheless something interesting could be noticed on the backstage, something that can be construed as an intense and effective exercise: the identification with the NOW of the photographer when shooting a photo.

The process of capturing a picture with a camera requires visual focus, sharp attention, a keen desire to find the perfect angle, the suitable amount of light, the intended visual effect, effort which eventually turns into... chasing the moment. The impassioned photographer is more prompt than other professionals to develop a sense of here and now. It means that all photographers are on the verge of enlightenment? Well, perhaps it's not that easy. There are for sure some other favorable circumstances in your case (Walter's prolonged influence on your stream of thoughts, other events that I am not aware of). So, I believe that the practice was there, and applied in the most effective way, by NOT 'hunting' an ultimate spiritual goal, but doing something else. Your thoughts on this?

A: In my view, an "ultimate spiritual goal," is an empty idea, so anyone who is chasing after that fantasy is on a snipe hunt, I say.

I don't imagine that all photographers are on the verge of enlightenment. Most of the ones I have known seemed about as confused as anyone else. And anyway, the idea of "enlightenment" is part of the snipe hunt.

To me, this seems a simple matter. Sages over the years have laid it out clearly, but most of their listeners—those with an interest in these matters, which already is only a small fraction of humanity— misunderstand what is being said. Another confusing factor is that many who claim to be sages are only pretenders who are deluded themselves.

Awakening, in the way I mean that word, is not a religious happening and has nothing to do with faith or believing anything. Those who make the sage into a prophet, you will never understand. The sage is NOT a prophet, but an awake human being.

In that awakesness, the sage has seen that the sense of self is a kind of illusion. That illusion has a source, which is the human nervous system. The countless data from the trillions of sensory cells are assembled moment by moment into a "world." That assembling is automatic--an

involuntary process that takes place entirely unconsciously. It can be neither noticed nor controlled. No one is "doing" it. No "self" is doing it! The self-referential "myself" at the supposed center of that confected world does not actually exist except as part of those unconscious, involuntary processes of assembling a "world."

The nagging understanding that "myself" has no permanence and will not survive death drives efforts to "realize" a "myself" that will not die. But that is to presume that some imagined "thing" that already does not exist except as habitual, self-referential thoughts will later "become" nonexistent. There IS no "later," and nothing is "becoming" anything. This is it. Bodies die of course. That is just natural. That is death. But apart from a body, what "dies" is thoughts such as thoughts about "myself" dying or thoughts about myself attaining something spiritual.

As far as I can see, there is no "myself" apart from thought. There is no "myself" that must go on living.

At this point, those on the snipe hunt will object. For example, someone will say, "But Robert, if there is no 'myself,' then who is the one that finds himself awake?" Failing to understand the limits of language, they fail to see how words have baffled them. And no matter how many times they hear me say "this is it," they will find a way to believe in something "better," something more "evolved," something "spiritual."

The real point of their objections is that the snipe hunt must never be allowed to end.

Be well.