

Ghost in a Box

by Bob Ferguson

In the realm of spiritual seekers, many and varied are the conceptions of what the Final Realization will be. Most of these are meaningless discussions of symptoms rather than any serious attempt at understanding the final state, much less becoming It. The projected outcomes of these students are as varied as the different schools and teachers in which they place their trust. Given this Gordian Knot of thinking and feeling, fueled by ego, and projected by unexamined minds, what can one do, and expect? How can a serious seeker find assurance that they are on the right course, and how can one be sure that they themselves, or someone they know and trust, has had the Final Realization, a Total Answer?

First off, the final judge must be the person themselves. In order to pass beyond the duality of the finite mind, we must be aware of the trap of putting yet one more level above us. This is a never-ending game of the mind. There will always be someone out there who claims to have a higher, more complete, more total realization than what we, or our teacher, may have found. Only in our Selves can we rest. The trap of endlessly judging levels of attainment may be a way to keep our own spiritual ego afloat, but is a dangerous distraction if taken as the quest itself. We must press on within, and leave the fate of others to themselves.

The above said, there still remains the problem of the mind's ability to fool itself with its own projections. Driven by ambition, mental laziness, and fear of the Unknown, we may unconsciously decide to claim realization by virtue of these desires and fears, and take an easy out. How can we check and compare our own level of spiritual attainment and not be misled, by our mind or the minds of others? Let us take a look at the stages of spiritual becoming, and hope that the words herein will serve as a guide to keep our vector moving and on track.

There are three states or levels of being that we find in this search, before reaching what might be called the final or absolute state. The first may be called the level of experience. The second, the level of union. The third, the level of becoming.

The first level, that of experience, may be likened to someone in his room watching a television, and being identified with the characters in the dramas as they unfold on the screen. Losing contact with himself, he has become hypnotized into believing he is a character in the TV. The freedom he began with, that he *was* (and still *is*), the innocent observer, has been lost, traded for the mind-motion of thought and feeling projected into the plastic box in front of him. He places his highest value on the screen-character with the most motion and energy, in relation to his upbringing and education by other screen characters. The more the characters move and are dominant (whether positive or negative does not matter), the more energy is expended and the bigger the reaction that is drawn from the person. His innocence and detachment have been replaced with the sense of motion and thought, and the thrill of losing energy. Now that he is inseparable from his role in the drama, he places a high meaning on the feeling of belonging, which he now values as part of his very definition. He has fallen deep into sleep and is dreaming the life he thinks he lives, a mere ghost in a box of motion, emotion and thought. He will

evaluate a mystical experience in much the same way. If the experience has much motion, much release of energy, and if the character involved succeeds in his tasks, whether positive or negative, he will place a higher value on him and claim his identity for his own.

This level is very basic and body-oriented, having to do with visions of power and ego and control over the environment. Any mystical experience or contact with spiritual systems or teachers a person on this level has will be interpreted from this level. It constitutes no real change, or becoming, in what might be called the basic animal man, who, perhaps frustrated in his ambitions in normal life and society, has chosen a path of lesser resistance through fantasy for the fulfillment of his animal urge to power and dominance. He is the level of the mind and its motion, with which he is wholly identified. Fear and desire drive his every move, and he is firmly engrossed in his dreams.

The second level is only found through the disastrous failure of the first, combined with a serious inner commitment the seeker must have previously made to finding the truth about himself at any cost. Given this commitment, he will sooner or later be rudely shaken awake from his dreams of fantasy and forced to face the facts about himself. For a true change to occur, a true failure of the first level's ego must be brought about. His sense of personal identity, which is rooted in the fictional characters in the box, one after another, must be cut away. The resulting trauma will be in proportion to the size of the ego that was created. The symptoms of this collapse, meaning emotional and mental trauma, are individual and should not be taken as the change itself. The possibility of the inner witness coming closer to the surface is the only important matter. The man then becomes identified with not just the individual character(s) on the screen of the TV as it continues to hold him entranced but now becomes identified with everything that enters the universe-box from the projecting Light. His sense of self expands to include all the characters in the drama as he gains a sense of unity with all the many dots in their coordinated dance across the screen. He may feel exalted and full of love for this picture show and imagine this union to be the end-all of possibility. His very sense of exaltation, of still clinging to a higher and lower, with his remaining sense of being a "being," give him away. The experience, though of a greater level than that of the first man, is still relative. He still believes himself to be a thing apart, in contact with another, though higher, Thing apart. The very idea of existence, of himself and anything else, is still intact, and unquestioned. His new profound experience is just that, and it fades into a memory, though the conviction may remain. He soon finds himself back in the position of the first man, in motion and identified, subject to the environment for his feeling and concept of himself in the moment. Only in his memory and understanding is there a change. His perspective is still that of a man, a human entity, alive and living in a now conscious Cosmos, with which he is united.

For the man of union to Become, he must again suffer a complete disaster and have an impossible bit of good luck, to boot. Through somehow seeing the still remaining dual nature of his mind, he may find the hint within that there is something of the intuition, which led him this far, still in contact with him. He may see from time to time that he senses he is somehow behind himself, apart and unconcerned with the "thing" that he previously called "I." He may even experience moments of "headlessness," in which he loses his usual sense of "self" and instead sees the world without the noisy filter of his mind. He may even have the intuition that the secret to Becoming lies in this detachment and not in the blissful union he values so much. This detachment has yet to become a steady factor in the present moment, but he begins to sense that

the unaffected yet somehow aware screen, the very *capacity* for existence, and not the mind-made images that run across it in an ever-changing flux, is his true nature. That the Light and the screen it illuminates are but two different aspects of the same thing: Himself. Intuition now plays the bigger part, with reason and logic now only functions of the practical aspect of his environment.

Many little hints may come to him now, and if he is lucky enough to place a value on them, and follow them, he will continue to move. Most of these hints are along the lines of what has been called "headlessness" or the "listening attention." He may find he is observing without labeling or judging. That he is now free, for a moment, to gaze upon the world without knowing what he sees. These moments may be accompanied by a strange feeling of peace or silence, which he may come to know as the quiescence of his mind. Here, the former work on fear and desire come to fruit, as one cannot look into the Unknown if any vestige of fear or worldly ambition are still dominant. The sight of the world without the mind's interpretation can be frightening for those still attached to its false security. By continuing to look within, he may sense that the Light he feels is not only healing him but has a direction, a Source. If he travels back far enough to merge with this Source, he may find It to be the opposite of the "world" and hence come to the possibility of triangulating the difference between Samsara and Nirvana, and so coming to Himself as that which contains, and simultaneously is, All.

This return to our original nature extracts a high price, but only to the ghost in the plastic box. The ego, which has evolved from identification with the character on the screen to that of the ego of the spirit united with its source, now has died. For the original awareness, this is release, yet it finds itself to be unchanged and knows it has never been any different. To friends and family, the symptoms of this final ego-death may, or may not, be visibly dramatic. The trauma of release is indicative of the size of the ego that dies rather than of the nature of the underlying Reality. Any value we place on the size or spectacle of the resulting trauma of others may be due to our own need for distraction and longing for continued sleep in our pride as sincere seekers. Facing our own coming headlessness is much more difficult than ruminating about the possible symptoms of the decapitation of others. Much of what may have happened in another's becoming may not have been made available for our personal viewing and consequent judgment.

The worded description of this final state is something that has caused much consternation in seekers and teachers alike through the centuries. Perhaps the best that can be said about it is what it is not. It is not an intellectual conclusion reached through deduction, no matter how astute. It is not a feeling-state, no matter how sublime. It is something we receive, though we give it to ourselves. We become It, rather than "get it" and then know we have never not been It.

In most schools, words such as *awareness*, *witness*, *absolute* and *void* are used to describe the causeless state, which we seek to become: an aware witness, void of any other qualities; an unbiased, empty Observer, having no cause, but being the cause of Itself, alone; a conditionless yet aware state that is itself unconditioned and not witnessable by other than itself, there being nothing other than Itself. Any description one hears which adds a word or words after "I am" is not a description of the Self but, at most, a description of a symptom or view. Be very wary of those who claim unending Bliss and Peace, for any relative state calls forth its opposite and is subject to change. You, and only you, will come to know what your final state is, and then, later, you will struggle to find words to describe it.