

I Am Always Right Behind You

by Art Ticknor

I had been searching consciously for my self-definition since meeting Richard Rose in 1978. The paradigm for finding the self that I'd been working in was one of the self being inside, the observer, with the non-self being outside, the observed. As introspection broadened my view, the dividing line between inside and outside became progressively more interior. First thoughts and then decision-making and other mental processes became observable and therefore outside, not-self. I no longer defined myself as the thinker or the decider, having peeled off the false-identifications until what was left was the conviction of being an undefined but separate observer-self with no attributes.

In October 2003 I wangled an invitation to meet with Douglas Harding in his home outside Ipswich, England. His first words to me were: "Your job isn't to become Douglas Harding or anyone else -- it's to become yourself, your true self." On my third and last day there, he invited a couple of his long-time students to come and participate in a mini-workshop. He did his tube experiment (see the experiments section of www.headless.org for a description) with me as his partner, and I had a very clear vision of what it was I was looking out from. This vision produced the conviction that everything observed was inside me, and for the following six months I could flip back and forth between the contradictory inside-outside paradigms, seeing each one as equally true.

I made a second visit to the Hardings in February 2004. On my return I purchased a copy of his Little Book of Life and Death. When I read the Prologue, it left me with a strong desire to get more serious than I had yet become, and I hoped the mood would last until my scheduled retreat at the beginning of May. The following notes are from that week-long retreat.

Isolation 2004

I spent the week from Monday 5/3 through Monday 5/10 in a cabin at Listening Point, a collection of three hermitages in a wooded area on the property of a Benedictine monastery just east of Erie, PA.

Douglas Harding's *Little Book of Life and Death* -- the Prologue in particular -- had triggered a desire to really get serious a month or two earlier. Along with this, I had a growing sense over the preceding months that I was running faster and faster to avoid facing something.

I began the isolation retreat with two days of fasting, water only, cutting off the planned third day due to discomfort and the shortness of the retreat. On Wednesday evening I began drinking other liquids and stayed on that plan for the rest of the period. On Thursday I was feeling much better and began taking walks during the day, one of which was across the main road that divided the property and down to the shore of Lake Erie.

By Friday my physical vitality had revived. I had several periods of quiet contemplation and began getting inspirations for personal and group work. I went through the first four of Harding's "tests for immortality" in the above book and had no trouble seeing what the tests were aimed at.

On Saturday I went back over the four tests more thoroughly, with the idea of distinguishing very clearly what I saw versus what I didn't see in those exercises on in-seeing. I also reread the sections in Harding's *On Having No Head* titled "The Barrier" and "The Breakthrough." I regretted not having a copy of the transcript of Franklin Merrell-Wolff's "Induction" talk with me so that I could compare his material on the ego with Douglas's.

A doubt that troubled me at this point was on how I could distinguish what I actually saw inwardly from what my imagination might create, suspecting the ego's ability to confuse the latter with the former. As an example, I could see that there was an awareness watching images on a blank screen or featureless background. But I couldn't see whether this awareness was self-aware or whether there was another observer separate from it. My concept of an observer implied (unwittingly) the existence of a thing, so if this space or no-thing is the ground of all things, then it would include any separate observer-thing. Thus the awareness as self-aware seemed reasonable.

But then I was not aware of this awareness during dreamless sleep, so it seemed possible that it was a limited consciousness dependent on the existence of my physical organism and not the "true awareness" that people throughout history had discovered as being the essential self. My tentative conclusion was that it may well be true that this self-aware capacity is what I am, but the ego was not likely to ever accept its own non-existence or subservient position without some catalytic shock.

During further looking I saw that this featureless capacity must be unique -- i.e., there could be only one shared by all of us.

There was a great deal of additional mentation that occurred when going through each of the four tests carefully, which I won't go into here. My summary notes for Saturday were as follows.

I see that:

1. I'm the featureless space in which all thing (thoughts, fingers, other creatures, scenery, etc.) occur. I first saw this clearly as a result of Douglas's doing the tube experiment with me when I had visited him last October.
2. This featureless capacity is:
 - > Boundless
 - > Motionless (no coming or going, e.g.)
 - > Timeless (in terms of no time at the center)
 - > Unchanging (and unaffected by the seeming changes it reflects/projects, including the birth and death of Art Ticknor)
 - > No-thing
 - > The First (and Only) Person (meaning the I AM)

3. "I am That" (i.e., Nothingness)

I don't yet see that:

1. I am also Everything (as the tests point to) -- i.e., all the things that appear on and disappear from the screen. But I do see that all things are within Me, and must be projected from Me.

I felt that I was changed and forever unchangeable thanks to Douglas and his tests for immortality.

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It had started raining Saturday afternoon and continued throughout the night. I expected to sleep well, making up for lack of sleep the previous night. But I didn't get to sleep until around 3:30 and awoke around 7:30.

It was overcast most of Sunday, but the sun came out late in the afternoon, raising my hope that I could see the sunset over Lake Erie, which I had left for the last night. I noted in my journal on Sunday evening that Sunday had been an "unplanned transition day" from the relaxed but intense focus of Friday and Saturday to the expected end of the retreat on Monday. I also recall feeling "antsy" all day, up through and including my 8 P.M. walk to the lake.

At 9 P.M. I noted the following:

Have been sitting not doing anything since I got back to the cabin around 8:30. Great! This is something I have never been able to do as long as I can remember, always having to have some distraction to occupy the time. Found myself looking into what I look out from spontaneously, as has happened a couple times earlier today. Just occurred again as I finished tea, moved from the kitchen table and sat in a chair in the living room. This might have been a deeper glance, for it became obvious that what I'm looking out of is Self-aware -- that there's no "little person" inside my head watching a movie screen. The screen is self-aware. There can only be one observer -- and that's IT.

I -- the Screen -- am seeing pictures that I create and project. And one of those pictures is this body with its thoughts and feelings and sense of individual identity.

So, yes, I'm not just Nothing. I'm also Everything.

When I attempt to look, the question: "What am I looking out from?" pops into my head, and that seems to be the open-sesame.

Then at 10:12:

This creature moves from the chair to the kitchen table, to record what has occurred over the past hour. His hand writes, not knowing how it knows. His memory is somewhat sketchy, so he will see how much of what occurred comes back. I say "he," but he is really Me. Well, as real as a shadow gets. I have created this one -- a tableau of events, a story -- and projected it so that he

thinks he's alive, experiencing events over time. Experiencing his "inner" and "outer" changes as well as the changes in his environment.

One of the occurrences in the tableau of tonight's realization was the realization that I -- his newly found I -- created him ("this creature sitting in the chair...") and projected him. Then he thought of the nice old nun, Sister Phyllis, who's in charge of hospitality here -- and realized that he/I had created her to think that she is alive. And then he/I felt the love I have for My creations - - and he/I felt the poignancy of that creature's belief that she is a separate being who was born alone and is going to die alone. And he wept for her. And then he/I realized that he (this creature) had really *felt* for the first time.

Then this creature realized that he/I had also created the projected story [what he knew of it] of his friend SN, and of his friend BC, and of Richard Rose, and of Douglas Harding. He thought of seeing the SN-creature and, with a grin, saying to him: "I created you!"

And he thought of MC, another of his/My creatures -- and instead of the previously critical, let-me-correct-you attitude, he/I now considered him with love and concern.

And then a current-time reflection:

He/I just took a pee-break then heated water for another cup of tea. Everything is the same and yet somehow slightly -- no, extraordinarily -- different. He had a thought that has escaped him, so he/I went back to stand by the stove, and memory returned it: "I can see now why Richard Rose thought he might have been crazy (after his self-realization)." This creature is questioning whether he's gone off his rocker, too. And he sees, too, why BC may have wanted to wait for a few days after his self-realization before saying anything, to be sure the change was permanent -- because he's thinking the same thing.

This creature's brain feels like it's been fried (he thinks...).

He took his first sips of tea -- and immediately realized why Douglas Harding says drinking is like pouring liquid into a great hole.

And now he's thinking about Sr. Phyllis again -- and how he'd like to hold her hand, and tell her: "I couldn't have said this before yesterday, but God is closer to you than your breath or your heartbeat -- and He loves you. You are his precious child." And this creature is crying again -- he doesn't know why (he's feeling His love). I am feeling My love through this creature -- and he weeps.

And this creature wondered if his friend BC was aware of what was occurring here. And I turned his body toward NC, and I commanded Bob's attention. (11:00 P.M.)

And now he's thinking about tomorrow's self-inquiry meeting in Pittsburgh. And the thought comes to him: "I created these creatures and their stories, as I created this creature, and the stories include the 'right' words being said at the proper place in the play."

The spontaneous word is better than the planned word. (This doesn't negate the value of planning.)

This creature (Art T.) is hanging out of me. Dan [one of the regular participants at the Pittsburgh meetings]: you are hanging out of your creator. He has created you to think you're alive. The end of worry comes when you turn your attention toward what you are looking out from -- the real you -- and you will see that your position is impregnable.

You are the observer -- but the observer is not a thing. It's a self-aware no-thing.

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Notes from Monday:

Went to bed at 11:45 Sunday night. This creature felt something like a switch thrown sometime after falling asleep and immediately awoke -- time 1:45. Lay in bed hoping to fall back asleep; got up to pee; lay back down and checked the clock-radio: 1:45! Watched it for a long time and it finally changed to 1:46. Couldn't fall asleep and the voltage (?) in its inner ear (?) became so uncomfortable that it got up.

Q: Do you know yourself?

A: Yes.

Q: Who are you?

A: I am not a who. I am a no-thing. And everything.

Q: Where are you?

A: I am here -- but where I am, here is everywhere. (And nowhere.)

When you are with Him (your creator), you are not two.

Later Monday, before leaving Listening Point:

Finally went back to bed around 3:30 AM. Awoke around 7:30. Now 9:00 -- have showered and put on clean clothes to go for breakfast (near the Interstate). Awoke with the ringing in my inner ear -- still there.

Thinking typically gets in the way of observing. It's not necessary to fight it. *Relax into the looking.* (This may be a key -- to put forth effort then allow for conditions that let the mind relax. Mr. Rose says something about that at the end of the Temptation paper.) For this mind, isolation retreats have provided the only conditions where relaxation of the mind occurs.

Verses from 5/10/2004:

*I am always right behind you
But turn around and you won't see me
I am never not with you.
Why aren't you always with me?*

I am at the center
while you stay at the periphery
I am there, too,
but you won't find me there.
When you turn round
the center stays behind you
Stand still while turning your gaze around
and look at what you're looking out of.

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Are you looking for love?
Love on the periphery is partial and fleeting
When you are with me
We are not two -- and I am Love Absolute.

Are you afraid of dying?
I created you to think you are living
Return to Me here, at the center
and find your undying Self.

Are you pursuing understanding?
It's a path to Truth
But conceptual understanding is of the periphery
To return to the center is a subtractive process,
leaving behind the pride of knowing.

*

Looking for love?
Keep looking and it will find you
It may not be what you expect
but it will be satisfying beyond your imagining.

*

Forget what you're looking for?
That may be a good sign.
Keep looking.

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Retrospective note, September 2005: When my conviction of being a separate observer-thing was burned out or blown out during that Sunday night in May 2004, the understanding that came to the mind was: "Art T. was never alive." I had expected that all thought would stop before the identification with the mind was broken, but in my case the mental activity continued without

interfering with the observing. And it took considerable, repeated staring at what I was looking out from before the mind admitted or accepted the truth of what was being observed.

It was some months later before the mind became comfortable with the fact that conviction is within the mind and always subject to doubt, whereas knowing that what you truly are is beyond the mind, in fact the source of mind, is an unquestionable Unknowing. This is not something that can be captured by thought or feeling but, as Merrell-Wolff phrased it, is a knowledge by identity -- by realizing your complete oneness with what you're looking out from. You can't discard your conviction of individuality. It has to be taken away by shock or erosion. And when that happens, there won't be any regret.

When people first asked me about how I was different and whether all the years of effort were worth it, I sometimes gave flippant responses. When you lose the faulty conviction of individuality and realize that what you are is a self-aware, immortal no-thing, it seems absurd to try to explain that to someone who thinks you're the body-image that appears in their consciousness. But there are noticeable effects on the mentality of Art T. who doesn't exist. The most dramatic change is that the feeling of neediness is no longer there. I recently recalled a remark attributed to Gautama Buddha that I'd heard or read long ago about how the ridgepole of the house had been broken. I looked it up:

Through countless births I wandered, seeking, but not finding, the builder of the house. I have been taking birth in misery again and again. O builder of the house, Thou art now seen! Thou shalt build no house again. All thy rafters are broken. Thy ridge-pole is shattered. My mind has attained the unconditioned. Achieved is the end of craving.

Attaining the unconditioned is what occurs when the individuality-sense is blown out during the conscious state. And the result is exactly what Gautama stated: the end of craving.