

Mind, World, and Love
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This morning, we're going to go a bit beyond common sense. We're going to explore what is called non-dual reality—non-dual means “not two, just one reality”—a central concept in Zen Buddhism since about 600 CE. This refers to the world and your mind being not two separate things, but one thing. Understanding non-dual reality expands your notions of what you are, of who you are. A firm self-identity with your non-dual nature begins to dissolve many of your daily anxieties and frustrations, and it can increase your expression of care. Non-dual identity also increases your sense of connection with the ultimate creative force in the universe, and gives a sense of the meaningfulness of your life that extends beyond your individual existence.

So, open your mind to new ideas, temporarily lower your intellectual guard a bit; you can raise it again as soon as this talk is finished. And we'll have plenty of time for discussion. I'm going to begin with a bit of the rational support for non-dual reality—I promise not to make this too dry—and then I'll go into some of the spiritual implications of non-dual reality.

First, I think it will help us have an open mind about non-dual reality, which goes against common sense, to see a very important example of how common sense can be wrong, or at least too limited. This example is from everyday astronomy.

The common sense of early preliterate cultures told them that the sun was created every morning on the eastern horizon, moved itself across the sky each day, and was destroyed each sunset on the western horizon. The next morning a new sun was created again on the eastern horizon. This fact was obvious to anyone who could see.

At some point, that earliest common-sense understanding was seen to be wrong. The sun wasn't created and destroyed every day. Instead, the sun moved around the Earth in a great circle. Half of the circle was in the sky. The other half was out of sight below the horizon. Same for the moon, the planets, and the stars. Every day they moved in circles around the earth, which stood still. You could plainly see that the Earth was standing still, and that everything in the heavens revolved around it.

However, Copernicus about 1500 developed his model of the Earth and planets moving in circles around the sun. This went against common sense. Looking at the sky, no one could see the Earth and planets revolving around the sun. However, with modern refinements, Copernicus' sun-centered model is still our understanding of the solar system.

And yet, we are far from common sense here. Nothing in our immediate experience suggests that we are sitting here right now moving about 67,000 miles per hour in a great orbit around the sun. Yet, indeed this is happening, right now, and most of us accept that even though it goes against our immediate experience.

So, keeping in mind the limitations of common sense that is based on what seems obvious, let's move away from astronomy, and toward our own consciousness. Common sense tells us that we are sitting here looking out at a world that is completely external to us. You can see that for yourself. You are in your body, and the world is outside of you. You reach out and touch objects that are completely separate from you. You have the clear impression that the world will be here exactly as it is whether you are here or not.

All of this is obvious to us anyone who can see. But remember, it was once equally obvious that a new sun was created every morning.

From the time of the ancient Greek philosophers, beginning with Anaximander, our common everyday experience that the world is completely external to us, has been questioned. Philosophers noted that our mind can create hallucinations. In these instances we are capable of *creating something in our own minds* that we perceive as being in the world. So, just because we perceive something as being out in the world doesn't mean that it necessarily exists outside of our mind.

Philosophers also realized that some qualities we attribute to objects in the world are actually produced *in the mind*. Color is created in the mind in response to light waves of different wavelengths stimulating the retina of the eye. The light itself doesn't have color, just different wavelengths. The color is produced by the brain in response to the various wavelengths. Longer wavelengths of light cause the brain to see the color red. Shorter wavelengths of light cause the brain to see the color blue. Sound is *created in the mind* in response to air pressure waves impacting the eardrum. Smell is *created in the mind* in response to chemical molecules stimulating nerves on the inside of the nose. Without the mind to respond to these things, there would be no color, no sound, no scent. Without the mind there would just be electromagnetic waves, there would just be pressure waves in the air, there would just be chemical molecules. There would just be blackness and silence.

By the mid-1600s was becoming accepted among philosophers that the world we perceive is *constructed* by the mind. The writings of Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and others demonstrated this.

Modern philosophy generally accepts what is now called the *Constructivist* model of the world. No one thinks that our perceived world is one big hallucination. But it does seem that our mind *constructs* our world using as raw materials the inputs of our several senses. All the physical laws of the world apply, of course, because these are all laws about the perceived world even if we are constructing the perceived world.

The science of brain physiology supports the constructivist theory. Light does not get into the brain. Air pressure waves do not get into the brain. From each of our sensory organs, only electrical signals are sent to the brain. In the brain these electrical signals are amplified and organized to create our perceived world. One theory of how this happens is called the *field* theory of consciousness.

Every brain cell creates an electric field around it. This electric field is what an EEG records. The field theory of consciousness suggests that the electrical fields that surround every brain cell generate consciousness in an endless feedback process with that brain cell. The chemistry of the brain cell modifying the electrical field, and the electrical field modifying the chemistry of the brain cell.

There are billions of neurons in the human brain, and the billions of electrical fields thus created interact with one another to create our consciousness, our mind, and our perceived world. Our consciousness *is* the inside of this electromagnetic field surrounding our brain. The world that we see, hear, taste, feel, and smell, is the inside of the brain's *field of consciousness*.

Our field of consciousness is, of course, greatly determined by the signals from our five senses. So our consciousness, the world we create and perceive, is in *harmony* with the structures of the "outside" unperceived things—called noumena—that interact with

our five senses. If our consciousness, our perceived world, were not in harmony with “outside” things, not directly perceived, with which we interact, our species would never have survived. We would have walked off a cliff, so to speak, that we never even saw. So all the physical laws of the objective world still apply in the world we are constructing.

That the world is constructed by the mind has support from quantum physics. Quantum physics studies the very smallest particles and waves in the universe. These are the basic matter of the world, of reality, the amazingly small components of atoms: protons, neutrons, electrons, and quarks, which are the even smaller components of protons and neutrons; as well as strings, which are the even smaller components of quarks.

Within quantum physics there are facts that are most easily explained if consciousness is constructing the world. Without going into too much detail, quantum physics shows that particles don’t exist until consciousness attempts to perceive them, which causes the quantum *wave function* to collapse into a particle. Erwin Schrodinger, one of the key developers of quantum physics, wrote, “What we observe as material bodies and forces are nothing but shapes and variations in the structure of space. Particles are just appearances. ...The world is given to me only once, not one existing and one perceived. Subject and object are only one.” Quantum physics is quite mystical.

If your field of consciousness, your mind, is constructing the world you perceive around you, then that world is part of your consciousness; your mind and the world you perceive are the same thing. Just as the pain in your finger is part of you, created by your mind with input from the nerves in your finger; so your world is also part of you, created by your mind with input from all of your senses. Your mind and the world you live in are one. This is called non-dual reality.

Non-dual reality is a term that is most familiar to Buddhists. Their subjective experience in deep meditation is that of their world and their consciousness being one seamless whole.

We are far from common sense here, but for the moment let’s accept this notion of the non-dual nature of mind and world; the notion that, using electrical input from all your senses, your mind is constructing the world you perceive about you; that your experienced world exists *within* your field of consciousness, not outside of you; that you and your world are one and the same thing.

What are the implications of this oneness? The first is a change in your *identity*. Our common-sense identity is that we are individual persons living *within* an outside world that just happens *to* us. It’s me against the external world; it’s me coping with the external, world.

When you live with the sense of oneness with your world, the understanding that you are the consciousness constructing your world, your identity expands into what is sometimes called Big Mind: You understand that you are both a subject living in the world, and you *are* the perceptible world within which you live. Subject and world are the same. You as individual, and you as the world are two sides of the same thing.

Attaining a non-dual identity has an effect similar to rising from street-level in Manhattan up to 30 feet in the air: you have a more encompassing view of what’s going on, of how events are coming to be. With a non-dual identity, your perspective on life events—even just moment-to-moment events and conversations—shifts from that of one actor in the drama to that of surveyor of the whole stage. With that larger perspective

your responses are less scripted, less in defense of one character (your “small self”) and more based on the needs of the whole of your world, which is the whole of *you*.

The purpose of Zen meditation is to help bring about this shift in identity from the small self to Big Mind; from living in the constant, anxious chatter of thinking, replaying events and fantasizing events, moving to the peacefulness of basic awareness. As in our brief experience today, meditation involves repeatedly refocusing on the quiet place in your mind in-between thoughts. With lots of practice, the quiet place grows and is more easily maintained. And, most importantly, the quietness of basic awareness begins to be present not just during meditation but throughout your day. Your identity begins to shift into that “you as your entire consciousness” rather “you as a character” within the world. A sense of peace accompanies that shift.

This shift of identity from “I am in the world” to “I am my world” brings about a spiritual effect of non-dual consciousness: an evolution of *care*. What we know we *are*, we naturally care about. Because my foot is part of me, I care about it, I want it to be well developed, to stay strong and healthy. Deep down, I really don’t have the option of *not* caring about my foot, because my foot’s well-being and my well-being are one.

In the same way, when you live with the understanding of the oneness of you and your world, your care naturally extends to the world—because you know that it is you. You care about the development, strength, and health of your world. The well-being of the *individual* that is you, of course, is still something that you care about. That individual is an important *element* of your world. However, as you begin to see that individual as just a *part* of you, a part of the world that is you, your care becomes less self-centered in that small-self, *contracted* sense.

What begins to matter more to you is that your *world, including the individual that is you*, is doing well. Your need to bolster the self-esteem of your small-self begins to wane, as what you most care about becomes the well-being of your world, of *all of what you are*. Ironically, in this state of Big Mind, because you are less on the defensive about your small self, you are more *open* to the full experience of your world, and so you are better able to see what you as an *individual* in the world really needs. When we see ourselves in this way many of the anxieties and irritations of the small self begin to fade.

A wonderful aspect of human consciousness is that when we come together we share our constructed worlds in one interpersonal reality. I am in your world and you are in my world. To borrow a term from the 20th-century philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer, when we are together we experience a *fusion of the horizons* of our worlds, of our consciousnesses. Being in your world, I am part of you. Being in my world, you are part of me. When you have a non-dual identity, because your care is less contracted on your small-self, you are more open to the other person with whom you are co-creating an interpersonal world. You are more open to experiencing fully the other person, to knowing the other’s world and making it more completely part of *you*. Then, you are naturally better able to extend care to the other person. Your interactions becomes less about what your small-self fears or thinks it needs, and more about what you sense the other needs, because what the other person needs, being part of your world, is a need you also feel.

With a non-dual identity we naturally care about nature, because as part of our constructed, perceived world, nature is us. We care about maintaining nature’s health and beauty because the loss of nature’s health and beauty is the loss of our own.

A third spiritual consequence of non-dual identity is that we understand better why beautiful or sublime experiences affect us so powerfully. It is because when we perceive them—construct them—in our world we *become* those experiences. Because our world is us, we *are* that rose, we *are* that waterfall, we *are* that canyon. At that moment we become that beauty, power, vastness. In sublime and beautiful experiences our identity is forcefully pulled out of the small self and expanded, producing a feeling of awe.

A fourth spiritual effect of non-dual identity is that, understanding the oneness that is you and your world, you are careful not to introduce negativity into this oneness, in the same way that you are careful not to hit your finger with a hammer and not to drink poison. That is, we are careful not to ourselves, with negativity. When we are critical, complaining, aggressive our world becomes less beautiful and less good. When we are selfish, jealous, envious, our world becomes less beautiful and less good. When we hurt others, we hurt ourselves, for being in our world, they are part of us. Understanding this, kindness becomes natural.

Within your consciousness, the dark, silent universe of radiation and atoms is transformed into the experienced world of sound, taste, touch, smell, and light. With input from your senses, you are creating this world. To a large extent, you control the kind of world in which you live. By living in a state of identity with your entire consciousness, not just the small-self living *in* your world, you will be free to open yourself to experience and to express your care, your creativity for goodness, most fully.

Then, you will live in your best possible world; and through the fusion of the horizons of consciousness you will help others to live in their best possible world. You will find such a life fulfilling of your authentic self, and meaningful in the deepest sense. For you will be always creating new a world more beautiful and more good for everyone touched by you, including the next generations. This is *uncommon* sense.

The leading edge of the evolution of consciousness has for 100,000 years been moving in the direction of more understanding and more compassion. We are—you are—the living consciousness of the universe in its most developed form on Earth. You are the cosmos becoming more self-aware, seeing itself, understanding itself, now *consciously* developing itself. At your core you are Eros: the creative force of the universe endlessly evolving toward goodness, and through your consciousness Eros has become aware of itself. Amen.