

dismantling  
the  
fantasy

an invitation to the fullness of life

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# introduction

There are no traditions in this.

It is not an attempt to convince or to convert.

It is a dream questioning itself.

## the cloud

Once upon a time, a group of friends lay on a hillside watching a cloud. They had become fascinated with its appearance while walking in the country. It was a marvellous cloud, massive and surging, one moment appearing to be a house and the next a bevy of balloons. In turn there were forests and cities, animals and people, comings and goings, no end of activity.

As it so happened, an old man, a stranger, was wandering close by. When the group of friends saw him, they cried out in their excitement, *Old man, come join us! Come watch this cloud!*

After hurried introductions and the shifting of bodies, he took his place within the group.

The afternoon passed pleasantly as the cloud continued to surprise. There were soldiers at war and children at

play. There were creatures of the wild: birds, mammals, and fish, as well as beasts of work and burden. There was a mother and her child. There were the many scenes of life: birth, death, sickness, youth and old age. There were lovers and fighters, friends and enemies, the interaction of groups, and single, poignant portraits.

Time wore on, the afternoon dwindled, and eventually the old man stood to leave. He thanked his new friends and made his goodbyes, but hesitated, looking at the gathering.

*May I ask you a question?*

*Of course, they replied, in their various ways.*

*Were you at all concerned for those we saw this afternoon?*

*Who? they asked.*

*The figures we saw in the cloud: the soldiers, the animals, the children.*

The friends looked at each other, perplexed.

One answered, *Old man, there were no people, no animals; there was only the cloud.*

The others nodded in agreement.

*How do you know that?*

*How do we know what?*

*How do you know there was only the cloud?*

*It's obvious, anyone can see it.*

*See what?*

*There is only the cloud; it's still there.*

*What about the forms we saw?*

*There were no forms; there is only the cloud and it has no particular form.*

*How do you know that?*

*Just look, and you can see it.*

*What do you see?*

*There are no forms there.*

*How do you know that?*

*Because they're always changing. No form is ever really there; whatever form you think you see is always altering, rearranging in some way.*

*How do you know that?*

*Just look! That's all you have to do.*

*There were no soldiers, no animals, no children?*

*No. It may have seemed like that, but there was only the cloud.*

*There were no soldiers deciding to fight, no lovers deciding to love?*

*How could those false appearances decide to do anything?  
There is only the movement of the cloud.*

*So the cloud decides to move?*

No. *The cloud does not decide to move. It has no form. It simply moves. That's its nature.*

*How do you know that?*

*Have you ever seen a cloud that stopped changing? Every aspect of it is shifting in some way. It doesn't decide to do it; it's on automatic. The movement simply happens.*

*There were no people?*

*There was no birth and death?*

*Birth and death of what? There is only the cloud. It seems like many forms coming and going, but it's always only the unformed cloud.*

*And no one is deciding to do anything?*

No. *The forms that appear to be there are not really there, because each one is altering in some way and eventually disappears. There is simply action or motion. The forms are not the reality; they are false appearances. There is only movement, a streaming that has no particular form.*

*But the lovers who moved closer together ...?*

*There were no lovers, no soldiers, no animals. There is only the cloud.*

The old man pondered this slowly.

*There were no forms there?  
No decisions to act?  
No birth and death?*

*That's right!* said the friends, thinking they had finally gotten through to him.

*But how do you know that for certain?*

*Just watch! The forms that you see are changing all the time. They never stop. No particular form is ever really there. If you had to describe a cloud, you wouldn't say it looked like a horse or a soldier. That wouldn't give you a true sense of the cloud. A cloud is constantly changing.*

*The appearance of form is not the reality. The altering is. That's the basic fact. There is no coming or going, no birth or death, no decisions being made, no matter how much it seems like that. There is only motion. Anyone can see that if they watch it long enough.*

The old man considered this carefully.

*You're absolutely certain?*

Yes! *We're absolutely certain.*

*And you can tell all of this from seeing this constant change, this motion, this dynamic?*

Yes.

The old man contemplated this.

*May I ask another question?*

The friends remained silent, waiting.

*Are you actually people?*

*What are you talking about? Of course we're people.*

*But you're changing.*

What?

*Everything you are – your bodies, thoughts, emotions,*

*interests, urges, desires, capacities, decisions, focuses,  
ideas, activities – in fact, more than just you, all  
things that you know of.*

*What about them?*

*They're constantly changing.*

Yes, sighed the members of the group, *They're changing.*

*Do you change them?*

*No, old man, they simply ...*

The friends stood staring at him, their minds racing,  
exploding to find some other response.

He gazed back at them.

They looked.

He looked.

For what seemed to be a very, very, long time.

Then he smiled, turned, and wandered away.

## dialogue one

Q: *Good morning.*

DB: *Good morning.*

Q: *I want to ask you some questions regarding your perspective on life. I've heard some of it already, but there are certain aspects I want to clarify.*

DB: *Okay, but this is simply my perspective. I don't ask anyone to believe it and I don't expect anyone else to approach life in this way.*

Q: *I understand that. Perhaps I can begin by asking if you see yourself as a spiritual teacher.*

DB: *No.*

Q: *But you give spiritual teachings at a local yoga centre.*

DB: Not exactly. A number of years ago, I was invited to offer my perspective in that setting. It's an examination of our direct experience of the moment, in order to discover if the ideas we have about life are actually matching our experience.

Q: *Though much of what you say sounds like the teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, Advaita, and some others.*

DB: Yes, in some instances even Christianity. There are portions of those traditions that sound very similar to what I'm saying as well as portions that don't.

Q: *But you spent years exploring those traditions. You were a monk; you lived with well-known Buddhist teachers; and you spent time with independent teachers who were generally considered to be enlightened.*

DB: Yes. From a very early age, there seemed to be something odd in the process of perception, something I couldn't quite clarify, and this is what attracted me to various meditation traditions and teachers, because they expressed an interest in examining the process of perception. Over the years there were many of them.

This current situation at the yoga centre offers the

chance for others to investigate their experience. And there are lots of surprises for anyone who wants to join in.

It began as an exploration with one friend and has now grown to a larger situation. There are a number of people who say they find it supportive in their daily lives.

Some tell me it's a very clear consideration of life. Some say it explains all the traditional spiritual teachings. And some say it's really off the mark.

I'm not concerned with any of that. I'm interested in a certain kind of freedom that sometimes arises in this exploration.

Q: *Can you describe that freedom?*

DB: No. The most profound aspects of freedom turn away from defining life. There is eventually no belief in the stories of thought. They're needed for functioning, but the obsessive urge to explain existence falls away.

There's no way to convey this freedom by focusing on more explanations.

Q: *Some say if we drop the focus on perception and thought, we come to pure awareness, or pure consciousness. Do you agree?*

DB: No. That's just another thought. These are incorrect assumptions about existence. No one ever left the womb thinking they were an awareness or a consciousness. It takes a long time for society to program us to think like that.

People often object to this kind of statement, saying that to dismiss such things is nihilistic, useless, life denying, and even damaging.

Q: *Isn't it?*

DB: Not in my experience. A reaction like that indicates they don't understand what I'm pointing to.

People desperately want to describe existence and, historically, they speak of matter, energy, consciousness, spirit, oneness, and mystery. But descriptions are merely limited interpretations. All of them. They can never tell us what life actually is.

I say there is no matter, energy, consciousness, spirit,

oneness, or mystery. This is often misunderstood, because people think it's saying there's nothing at all, and that sounds very bleak.

To say that life is not mystery, not oneness, not consciousness, not any thing, this is not the same as saying there's nothing. It's not pointing to some state of oblivion or bleak emptiness. In fact it's just the opposite.

Try asking a newborn baby whether there is awareness or consciousness. Ask an infant if a world exists. Awareness, consciousness, and world are merely labels taught to us by society long after we leave the womb. For a newborn, there are no things, no definable forms, no labels, no awareness, no body, no mind, and no world.

However, this doesn't mean there's nothing. I don't have the impression that a newborn baby is feeling lost and bleak without ideas of awareness, consciousness, or the many other things of life.

An infant is a vital, pulsing event – lively, sensitive, alert, and highly responsive. There's nothing nihilistic in that.

Ideas don't tell us what life is. They don't even focus on life. They focus on abstract notions of division and

comparison, dividing life's constantly vibrant movement into false impressions of static form, describing one false form as different from another.

That's how we get the impression of understanding something; it's one form, or thing, as opposed to some other form, or thing.

But calling one portion of the moment "awareness", and another portion "the object of awareness", never tells us what the basic happening is. Instead, it gives the mistaken impression that this happening is divided into different forms that can be understood.

When you're one hour old, you're not thinking you're an awareness experiencing a world. According to research into child development, it takes seven years to be fully trained to think like that.

You may think I'm ultimately saying life is a mystery, but I'm not. "Life" and "mystery" are just more labels. To me this is not about coming up with another label. It's not about fixating on another thought. It's about dropping the obsession with thought, by seeing its limitations.

Q: *If we drop the focus on thought, what are we left with?*