

CHAPTER ONE

The Paradoxical Essence of Consciousness

God is everywhere and does everything. God is within us and knows everything. God is without us and sees everything. God is beyond us and is everything. God alone is.

— *Meher Baba*

One of my favorite Zen stories is that of Manjushri, the sage of supreme wisdom, arriving late to a gathering of fellow *bodhisattvas*, or awakened masters. When he got there, everyone had already left except for the Buddha and a young woman who was completely absorbed in a transcendental state. Surprised, Manjushri asked how it was possible that such a young student had attained such a profound state. “Bring her out of it,” the Buddha suggested, “and ask her yourself.”

The sage walked around her snapping his fingers, but she didn’t budge. He gently tapped her shoulders, clapped his hands next to her ears, and even transported her to a higher realm to wake her up. It was all in vain; she remained undisturbed. Observing this, the Buddha realized the only one who could arouse her from this deep level of consciousness was Momyo, the *bodhisattva* of delusion. Once summoned, Momyo emerged

from the depths of the earth. After bowing to his masters, he snapped his fingers at the woman and she immediately came out of meditation.

Momyo represents the knowledge of the external world that veils the reality of our divine nature. It is the ordinary consciousness that shapes our perception of life with memories, desires, and the attachment to people and things. You may think you are conscious because you can appreciate different situations, make choices, and interact with other beings, but you don't have any control over the way your life unfolds or the events that trigger negative impulses and emotions in you. For the most part, you simply *react* to life, driven by unconscious tendencies of perception that dictate your behavior.

Your attention is mainly on the outer world. You are busy with activities and obligations, tending to your personal needs and the needs of those you care for, spending most, if not all, of your time and energy seeking satisfaction and validation through your endeavors. These are natural aspects of your human adventure. Your search leads you to accumulate experiences and achieve your goals, but it also keeps you swinging between pleasure and pain as you run after desires that only yield more desires. This goes on for a long while, until you comprehend that the peace and happiness you yearn for can never be found outside of you.

Worldly pursuits rely on appearances and social recognition (success, wealth, power); they don't require self-awareness. But a more fulfilling self-expression demands honesty and integration to embrace who you are and what your life is about, to be at peace with yourself and others. Without inner peace, no matter how much success or wealth you may acquire, you remain dis-

connected from life in some way, craving more of what you already have or what you think you need, in an attempt to fill an internal emptiness that seems endless.

Accomplishing your goals and fulfilling your desires are valuable pursuits that keep you going, but they don't help you understand what causes unpleasant events in your life, why you feel and react the way you do, or why you are compelled to chase one craving after another. They don't explain why a steady sense of contentment remains elusive and you only experience fleeting moments of enjoyment. They don't reveal what may prompt you to give your power away with self-destructive behaviors or negative habits that offer a temporary escape from a persistent, deep-seated restlessness.

Comprehending the paradoxical essence of Divine Consciousness, and how it infuses your experiences with meaning and purpose—through the challenges you encounter—turns your life into a journey of self-discovery toward emotional and spiritual freedom. But you have to step out of the usual perception of life as something external, material, and separate from you, by accepting it as a cosmic dream or play of Divine Consciousness that you don't need to fix or control. When you surrender to life as it is, you gradually uncover what lies beyond ordinary consciousness and get to experience the eternal joy of your divine nature.

The idea of anything being external, including God, arises from a deeply ingrained identification with the body and mind that creates the illusion of separation. This illusion colors our human perception at every level, thus distorting the true nature of reality. Some religions portray God as an authority figure deciding what is right or wrong through punishments and rewards,

like a stern parent. These types of concepts have shaped rigid, dogmatic systems used to manipulate believers with the promise of redemption or salvation, yet they often benefit only those at the top of their hierarchical structures.

A less human-centric view of the infinite force inspiring life can help you recognize that God does not need intermediaries, because God is the Divine Consciousness you are, along with everything else in the universe, and ultimately, that this universe is imaginary. This infinite Presence has been called *Purusha*, *Brahman*, *Paramatman*, *the Supreme Self*, *the Tao*, *Source*, *Krishna*, *Ishtvara*, *Shiva*, *Rama*, *Allah*, *Yahweh*, *Hu*, *the Universal Mother*, *the Eternal Father*, *the King of Kings*, *God*, and a wealth of other names and titles that merely reflect different cultural expressions of the mysterious power that pervades all existence. Being infinite and all-encompassing, the Divine appears and can be conceived in myriad ways.

The spirits, entities, angels, archangels, avatars, deities, gods, goddesses, celestial beings, and ascended masters, as well as the enlightened saints of every spiritual tradition, represent the many forms and qualities of Divine Consciousness, which is pure light. Their rivals, so-called evil forces and demons, express the negative tendencies of the mind that veil or disturb the light, turning human life into a shadow play depicting an imaginary battle between light and darkness. Because our mind perceives and interprets everything according to its capacity, based on previous concepts and our identification with the physical body, we give human form to the energies or archetypes on both sides.

I use terms such as *Consciousness*, *Pure Awareness*, or the *Self* indistinctly to convey the pure, neutral quality of the Divine, as opposed to the transient aspects of the ego-mind. In this con-

text, all the capitalized words throughout the book refer to this infinite principle, including the word *God* as the totality of existence rather than a separate Creator, since this timeless Presence pervades yet also transcends Creation.

The ancient Egyptians believed the world was originally water and darkness, like a womb, from which a blue lotus or a shiny egg sprang to reveal a sacred child whose light banished the darkness. He was the source of life—the Sun God or Creator. Similarly, in the Hindu traditions, the Divine Mother symbolizes the eternal Void or Cosmic Womb of pure potentiality from which everything emerges, including the deities Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who represent the creative, sustaining, and destructive or transforming principles of Consciousness inherent in all life. In both cultures, as in many others, life itself was born out of the absolute, unmanifest reality.

The Unmanifest precedes all manifestations. And yet, in the world of duality and polarities, God has been reduced to externalized forms, leading humans to argue and wage wars over the different concepts and attributes to which they have become attached, unaware that the highest spiritual goal is to realize the Divine as the unifying force of the universe—the eternal Self we all are and everything is. We achieve this goal individually, through self-knowledge, devotion, or spiritual disciplines leading to superconscious or blissful states, where Pure Awareness clears the delusion of separation.

Removing the division seems to be the primary purpose of non-dualistic or pantheistic sources of wisdom, but even in the dualistic devotional paths, the idea of being separate from God creates great distress, expressing a deep yearning for a sacred or mystical union, which is the true meaning of *yoga*. In reality, this

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union is not between two separate entities; it is reclaiming our very essence. Duality strives for unity or Oneness. The human soul longs to merge with the Supreme Soul. That which is manifest wants to return to its original state of undivided, timeless, pure *being*.

Religions teach people how to follow moral standards to live in the human dreamworld, offering definitions of God or the promise of better dreamworlds in other planes of experience, but they cannot grant the realization of your divine nature, where all divisions and suffering disappear. Only you can achieve it in yourself, by yourself, as you awaken from your dream, on your own. This process requires breaking free from the constrictions of the mind and the ideas of God as an external parental figure, which will become clearer later on, once you understand how what I call your *sense of otherness* maintains this delusion of duality and separation.

Divine Consciousness cannot be constrained to any particular form, and yet, it appears as every possible form. It also gives you the capacity to comprehend the external world and relate to the Supreme in your individual way. The same force that creates and sustains the universe motivates the inquisitive mind of a scientist to explain the cosmos. It inspires the creative drive of a musician or an artist or a writer to give expression to the human condition. It fuels the passion of a visionary to promote wellness and balance or equality and justice. It also manifests through everything you feel, hear, see, touch, taste, think, and experience, as well as the choices you make and everything you do, imagine, and learn.

You cannot prove or measure the existence of Divine Consciousness; it is a mystery far beyond the limitations of the men-

tal and material realms. Those who believe in God cannot prove God's existence, and those who don't believe are also unable to prove that God doesn't exist. Wanting proof is like asking a fish to demonstrate the reality of water, even though the fish couldn't live without it. Consciousness is not perceivable because it is what makes perception possible. Your spiritual awakening is an intimate experience beyond sensory perception.

You don't have to prove your own existence; you simply know that *you are*. This *I-am-ness* transcends the mind; it is an absolute truth that does not rely on anything, not even time or space, since these are mental concepts. The certainty of *being* is internal, subjective. It arises in the Pure Awareness you are that precedes thoughts while making everything appear real. But to comprehend this truth, you have to seek what lies beyond ordinary consciousness, opening up to a non-cognitive, heart-centered perception that dissolves the ignorance preventing you from realizing what you truly are. When you cultivate self-awareness, you redirect the mind inward, gradually removing all divisions until you are able to see the Divine everywhere: in those you have loved and those you have hated; in the so-called good and the so-called evil; in all creation and destruction; in light and darkness; in nature and all living creatures; and in the breath and flow of life itself.

Divine Consciousness is the absolute harmony of Feminine and Masculine, *yin* and *yang*, stillness and movement. The desire to experience itself is the original thought that splits these aspects and configures the dream of Creation as a multiplicity of forms, thus giving rise to duality. The Divine Masculine is the Consciousness principle directing life with its magnetic force, and the Divine Feminine is the principle of Primordial Matter

or creative potentiality that crystallizes Consciousness in all shapes and attributes. This is how the Supreme Self experiences itself in all possible forms, in a continuous, eternal unfolding.

Although essentially one and the same, Consciousness and Matter become the interdependent aspects of the cosmic dream. The first manifestation of their interplay is the Cosmic Mind expressing itself as “I am,” which becomes the ego in the human mind. This original I-thought creates all other thoughts, shaping your private dreamworld by hijacking the role of the eternal Self as the true director. Objects appear separate because of the individualizing principle we call *ego*, when in reality they are appearances of the eternal Self, which embraces all there is, all there has ever been, and all there will ever be.

The Self shapes and moves the universe, like an invisible magnet, by imagining or dreaming itself in infinite possibilities of expression while keeping perfectly still and undisturbed. When you are dreaming or daydreaming, you can imagine a variety of scenarios and interactions that arise from within you—from memories, thoughts, and desires. You may lose yourself in that state, but only momentarily. It takes much longer to awaken from the divine dreamworld you consider your reality, because you identify with sensory perception; however, it all emerges from within you, as thoughts. The paradox here is that the eternal Self casts the illusion of a false I-sense or ego appearing as the material world, where all sorts of dramas take place, while the Self remains unaffected, simply dreaming a cosmic dream.

Your soul is a spark of Consciousness, an individualized expression in the dreamworld; your mind is the screen where Consciousness is projected and filtered, and your physical body is a byproduct of the ego that grants you the experience of the

dreamworld. Your subjective-objective perception of life results from the interplay of the elements and qualities of nature (known as *gunas*) through which the Divine Feminine keeps the cosmic dream going. In this sense, the creative Matter principle is both the vehicle of the Consciousness principle and also what veils it with individualized experiences. The world is considered an illusion (*Maya*) because nothing in it is permanent or conscious; it evolves from the ignorance that produces a multiplicity of forms concealing the totality of the Self.

The Divine is the only timeless and unchanging reality there is. Every tangible and intangible phenomenon in the universe is a projection of Consciousness materializing through its creative potential. A good analogy is the light radiating from the sun. You could say it is the sun, and you could also say it is not the sun, since the light is a projection of the sun and does not exist without the sun. Then again, the sun is a transformation of cosmic matter, just like a tree is the modification of a seed or a mountain a variation of the earth. Every object evolves from something else and cannot exist on its own or by itself. Only the Supreme Self is a perennial, absolute reality.

The world is illusory because everything in it is relative and continually changing into something else. All objects are modifications of other objects and are bound to experience further transformations as well. They are impermanent; they appear, change, and disappear. How can something be real when it comes and goes? Your personal dreamworld is also a temporary illusion because it is a creation of your mind within the cosmic dream of Consciousness. Every single aspect evolves according to its function, in perfect synchronicity with everything else. You may think you are effecting these changes, but they happen

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without your control, as the dream of Consciousness unfolds into eternity.

Your mind translates these changes as sensory impressions through your ego, which is the false I-sense that thinks, “I am the one seeing, feeling, touching, or *doing* this, so this is *my* experience.” However, it is all a projection of Consciousness that the mind conceptualizes, labels, and identifies with to create the sense of experience. The world is not separate from you, because it does not exist apart from your mental perception making it real. What you believe to be tangible and solid disappears when you are asleep, if you go into a superconscious state or a coma, or when your body dies. These external aspects are as temporary as your dreams; they only arise with your consciousness.

Your knowledge of the world is the accumulation of thoughts and impressions from previous experiences. You may think that something does not exist simply because it hasn't left an imprint on your mind. Once it does, by contact with the physical senses, by imagination, inference, or awareness, its memory remains and is now added to the psychic reservoir that shapes your overall view of reality. You associate certain memories and thoughts with similar impressions, both consciously and unconsciously, and make assumptions based on them as well.

Your overall perception of life follows the same principle. As experiences leave mental imprints, and these repeat within a variety of contexts, they create dynamic tendencies of thought and action that color future events. So, although life is continuous change and fluctuation, how you interpret and experience it depends on your past impressions and memories. These hinder your ability to live fully in the present, limiting your capacity to enjoy life as it happens, without expecting it to

be any different. At the same time, because of your divine essence, these restrictions prompt you to seek a way out of your self-created limitations.

The paradox here is that the Supreme Self projects the world to experience itself through your mind while gradually driving you to dissolve the mental mirage of the world that blocks its absolute Reality. So, just like your dreams feel real in the dream state, with people, places, and situations appearing three-dimensional and real, your life is a personal dream or movie where people, objects, and events become individualized sensory experiences. It is like going on a roller-coaster ride that takes you through a variety of situations and emotions, only to realize at the end of the ride that you haven't moved at all, because it was all your imagination.

Another way of looking at it is as a game of hide-and-seek, where Divine Consciousness is concealed behind its material reflections while also looking for itself as their source. Your life is a smaller scale version of this game. Your physical reality is made of contrasting layers of light and energy that appear three-dimensional to you, just like a movie, a painting, or a photograph seem real on a flat surface. Your senses translate these layers of light into tangible objects and sensations, as well as distinct scenarios and events organized in space and time.

It is by the agency of the ego that the mind objectifies your true Self as the world, making it feel separate from you. But there is no separation; you are the subject appearing as a variety of phenomena, such as your body, your mind, people, places, objects, and so on. Everything you go through to grow and individuate gradually leads you back to your essential Oneness, where the illusion of an individual identity dissolves. Then, and