

20 - *I don't want anyone following me*

Q: I watched a video of Bentinho Massaro saying “Fuck your relationships, fuck your family, fuck all that shit,” and there’s a guy well on in years nodding submissively and approvingly as he listens. Now that’s what really intrigues me. How on earth does someone like Bentinho get a following? How does that work? What makes people so gullible? I mean you seem to be the real deal, and I can’t even follow you. Ha, ha.

A: Well, that’s the difference right there. I don’t *want* anyone to follow me. The very nature of my understanding precludes a hierarchy of leaders and followers. Whether we recognize it or not, we are all in this together—all in the very same boat. I talk about my experience and my perspective, but not with the idea that anyone will follow or imitate that. No one could, even if someone wanted to. My words are self-expression, not “teaching.” Someone may learn from my words just as I have learned from the words of others, but learning is a personal matter. I cannot *give* you learning, even if I try. Some things can be taught, but self-understanding is not transferrable. Self-understanding occurs only in your *own* mind.

The aliveness we call “myself” is a mystery without final answers, so following others who claim to have such answers can lead only to an exacerbation of ignorance—a deepening of the trance of transcendence, by which I mean the fantasy that there is a known and teachable means of gaining an escape from the biological facts of life.

Transcendence of the human condition is a fallacy, a fantasy, a fraud. This right now is it, I say. And *this* is melting away like the morning dew in the first rays of the sun. The idea of getting somewhere “else” is a folly foisted upon eager students by self-proclaimed teachers—once eager students themselves—who bought into so-called “spirituality.” Why do I put the scare quotes around the word “spirituality?” Because it is a *nonsense* word. I have no idea what it means.

Does “spirituality” mean that there is a world of unseen “spirits” interpenetrating *this* world—the world we see and feel? That is what our distant ancestors believed, and some say it today, albeit they have no evidence, but only repeat rumors heard from others. That kind of magical thinking goes back to the cave painting days when hunters would carve or paint images of animals on the walls, and then repeatedly attack those representations with the points of their spears. We know that because the marks of those attacks are still visible among the lines of the images.

Or does spirituality mean that a god created *you* for a specific purpose, which is to find “Him” in this life and follow the rules that He has set down, so that by following them you will earn a ticket to an eternity in Heaven with Him? What arrant nonsense! When I think how many otherwise mentally intact humans believe that drivel, I feel a mixture of melancholy and wonderment at such ignorance.

The ones who say, “Of course I don’t think of God as an old man in the sky. When I say ‘God,’ I mean all and everything, or the universe, or ‘nonduality,’” seem more confused to me. At least the naive, childish believers in “Him” use the word “God” sincerely. They may be intellectually challenged, but they are not hypocritical, and their credulity may be all they have. But the ones who define “God” as “all that exists” are living with fingers crossed behind their backs. If you mean the universe or all that exists, then *say* that.

Clinging to the word “God” is superstitious nonsense, like trying to avoid stepping on the cracks in a sidewalk. You don’t *really* believe that your mother’s back will break if you fail to avoid the cracks, nor do you *really* believe in the idea of a god who created this vast universe and made Earth this one special place where one particular species of primates—but not any other animals—have “souls” that require saving; a god who makes rules, demands obedience, watches and judges, hears prayers and responds. You are pretty sure that such fodder for the simpletons can’t be true, but, just in case there is something to it, you cling to the phony insurance of Pascal’s wager. And don’t tell me that the image of “God” is a “metaphor.” A metaphor for what?

I try to avoid exposing the sincerely religious to my skepticism. I don't want to hurt them, and hearing words from me cannot possibly do them any good. But when someone like that—a naive believer in the religion of his or her childhood indoctrination—does come upon my point of view, he or she may react by pitying me because I am not “saved.” I don't mind. I understand that. Some try to preach to me. If only they could see how deeply benighted such preaching sounds to my ear—a dismal clatter of one inane idea rattling against the next.

My experience with the other type—the ones who imagine that the word “God” has some philosophical utility—is more complex. From them, I don't get preaching so much as invitations to debate. I used to have some patience for that kind of discussion—at least it might help me to clarify my own perspectives—but nowadays, I rarely take the bait. Mostly, I say what I see and leave it at that. The majority—even some who say they like my point of view—will misunderstand me, and continue to comfort themselves with half-baked metaphysics anyway.

Now and then someone really *does* get it, and that is a joy. For example, this from a reader in Austria:

“Reading 4T for the first time gave me a headache, as I wanted to grasp it all at once. Only months later it all fell into place, or still is falling into place and probably will always be. And now I can approach the whole idea of a non-permanent self and non-permanent world from my gut feeling, from my heart. This feels so liberating.”

Many who can be satisfied with half-baked metaphysics will find just what they desire with a Bentinho, a Mooji, or someone of that ilk. For me, those shenanigans are just a crying shame. Other self-proclaimed teachers seem to offer better approaches. I mean a Rupert, an Eckhart, an Adyashanti, or someone of that caliber. I am willing to take people like that seriously. Some of their views could be useful—not useful to me perhaps, but to someone. Still, at times, they too seem hypnotized by dogma, self-deluded, and driven to collect followers—which I view as a bad sign. Most assuredly, they are being carefully

marketed as cash cows. Real sages and truth-tellers don't *want* people paying to sit at their feet.

What, you ask, makes people so gullible? Fear, I'd say—fear of impermanence, and fear of missing out on the promised “deathless, changeless state” with the power to trump biology. Deathless? Changeless? Really? And you know that how?

As my Austrian reader has discovered, when you really see that “myself” is a mixture of countless fragments, many of which have no staying power at all, and is in no way a changeless, unitary “thing,” then you find that each instant of actual awakensness is a kind of death. Like it or not, there is no going back, not even one millisecond. Nothing can be repeated or retained. It's now or never.

This very moment is *sui generis*—a thing unto itself—a never to be repeated once-upon-once. That is not some spiritual mumbo-jumbo. That is my actual living experience. That's what I mean by “awake.” Someone may want to be awake “like Robert,” but that's not possible. You can only be awake like *yourself*, right now in this moment, or not. Awake is not a matter of degree, but of a clear-cut, night-and-day difference in perspective. Unless you are a light unto yourself, which is part of what I mean by “awake,” you will be hypnotized by someone else's version of “reality.” To me, this is entirely obvious, but somehow, for others, the hankering to transcend biology, impermanence, and mortality occludes the transparency of *this* moment with vain hopes for something “better” in the next.

To be a light unto oneself is a main theme of *The Ten Thousand Things*, stated explicitly right at the beginning in Chapter 1:

Following others will not lead to seeing myself and the world as the mystery they are. Quite the opposite. Awakening is when you don't follow.

Q: Yes, Robert. I understand. It's amazing what people will follow. I went to a concert last night, and the band was awful, singing praises about the devil and such, but nonetheless, they had a massive following.

Q2: The major difference with a band, of course, is that, whatever bilge they are singing about, they are not offering themselves as saviors and asking people to follow them slavishly. They may be stupid, as many death metal bands are, but they are not creepy cults.

A: Precisely, Q2. I am glad you raised that point. Anyone who claims to be able to *teach* enlightenment or awakening, or call it what you will, risks becoming the cynosure of a cult. Regardless of the details of the teaching, if it promises an escape hatch from the anxieties, pains, boredom, ennui, apparent meaninglessness, and all the rest of what people find unsatisfactory about this aliveness, there will be many customers willing to buy that—to have something delivered to them like a commodity, without real suffering on their part beyond whatever demands are placed upon them by the teacher.

If one *really* wants to understand, much more is required, I say, than just handing over some money, or kissing someone's feet.

A certain kind of person imagines that to be the customer in that kind of transaction is a privilege or a blessing. The instructions of the so-called "master" are seen as a shortcut: "I pay to attend the retreat, and then everything I need to know will be explained to me." Attractive young people may try to cut to the head of the line by offering to have sex with the teacher. Then, they imagine, the supposed transfer of *shakti*, *satya*, *prajna*, direct wisdom, or call it what you like, will be even quicker and more powerful than just paying in cash to sit there listening to a lecture. That kind of sex may be gratifying for the teacher, but it is ultimately demeaning to the student; and in a setup like that, any pretensions to honesty fly right out the window.

The entire landscape of spiritual teaching past and present is littered with examples of abuse, ill-treatment, and lies. As long as one imagines that there is some sacred, holy, or faultless aspect in the words of those who call themselves spiritual teachers, those perversities will be swept under the carpet until finally, the shit hits the fan, as it did for Bubba Free John (Adi Da), Rajneesh (Osho), Muktananda, Satchidananda, Yogananda, Sai Baba, Bikram Choudhury, Andrew Cohen, Sogyal Rinpoche, Sakyong Mipham, Noah Levine, Bentinho Massaro, et al.

To be clear, I have no first-hand knowledge of bad behavior involving any of those people, but stories about them all have been published widely and confirmed by various witnesses.

Back in the 1980s, I wrote about the case of Osel Tendzin, the successor to Chögyam Trungpa. I did have inside information about that situation. Tendzin was diagnosed with AIDS but continued having sex with many of his students, both male and female, without advising them of the risk. In many of those encounters, Osel passed on the virus to students and consequently to their unknowing spouses and partners. When *that* scandal came to light, it was accompanied by a grotesque controversy over whether Trungpa had told Tendzin or not told him—there was testimony on both sides of the question—that he could carry on having sex with his students confidently, because as long as he kept up his esoteric *Vajra* practices, no one could be infected. You can't make this shit up.

Due to the AIDS factor, that is a particularly lurid case. But even if less salacious, the way that power differentials between teacher and student are used to procure sexual gratification in exchange for a leg up (sorry) on the teaching, is commonplace, and entirely regrettable in my view.

As for the money aspect, many teaching operations are carried out along the lines of the most modern business models aimed at branding, growth, and "revenue enhancement," just like any other for-profit operation. That, in my view, is also entirely regrettable. Wisdom has no price, and those who charge large fees for discussing it probably don't have the real thing in the first place. Or, if they do, they are acting like spiritual sex-workers who may offer some cheap, counterfeit "love" to the rubes, but who save the real thing for their personal lives, the lives the customers never see.

Suffice it to say that the teacher in such a setup, motivated by the material, sexual, and other narcissistic gratifications that being "the one" can provide, has every incentive to recruit and retain followers/customers. That, in my opinion, is already perverse. If you are really free yourself, why do you *want* followers and want to keep their numbers growing? Why do you *care* how many followers you have? You

care because they pay.

The famous Sri Nisargadatta, who inspired so many contemporary teachers like Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, and Wayne Dyer, had few followers and earned his own livelihood as a shopkeeper. That man shared his point of view in a small attic room, refusing to accept money or gifts of any kind in exchange for that teaching. Eckhart, Deepak, and Wayne, I observe, are not so scrupulous. They are all about the bread, and in it to win it, although it is Nisargadatta's ideas, misunderstood and watered-down, that they are selling. Why do I say "misunderstood?" Because Nisargadatta himself said that only one person ever understood what he was saying. The rest only *imagined* understanding, and still do.

You might ask, "Robert, why do you focus so much on the *money* aspect of the spiritual supermarket?" I suppose that's because I have seen that, once a high-gain business model is the focus, veracity goes right out the window. It must, because fulsome honesty rarely leads to the kind of popularity that gins up six- or seven-figure profits. Cashing in big requires a painless, palatable product—something that goes down easy—not the troublesome truths of transience.

Spiritual seekers, who are the clients of these so-called teachers, *claim* to want "Truth," but they are *lying* to themselves. It is not "Truth" they are after, but a reduction in anxiety, an improvement in the way they feel, a purpose and a meaning to this aliveness beyond living itself. And most of all, they want and are willing to pay for the promise of a path that leads to transcendence of or escape from mortality and human limitation—which is flat-out nonsense, I say.

Before continuing, I want to say that I am not questioning the *sincerity* of one particular self-described teacher or another. Probably some of the ones I have mentioned here and elsewhere, along with others I have not mentioned, are sincere in wanting to convey a certain message that they take to be "Truth" and, in some cases, parts of a message like that might be reasonable.

But even if their intent is sincere, they seem equally earnest, or even more, in believing that they ought to be *paid* for teaching, so that their *job description* is "spiritual teacher," which I find an absurd

designation. A mind like that says to itself, "If I had to work otherwise to pay my bills, I would not have the time to teach, to travel, to conduct retreats, etcetera." So, it is clear that making a living from spiritual teaching is the intention right from the start, and no bones about it. Selling sex is said to be the world's oldest profession. If it is, priestcraft is right behind.

As someone who has provided professional services for pay—I practiced depth psychotherapy for twenty years or so—I feel well-equipped to comment on this point. I cannot view conversations like this about our ultimate existential being as a "professional service." To provide therapy is one matter. This is *not* that. The questions that arise here, and are part of *4T*, need another approach entirely—one based on coming clean about all one does *not* know and never will know. The only valid "spiritual teaching" I can imagine would say something along these lines:

No one knows what any of this is. No one ever has. We find ourselves alive and aware without knowing how or why, if there even is a why. Our brains invent questions that they are not powerful enough to answer. A great deal about this aliveness must remain always beyond our ken. The deepest questions have no final answers but must remain open. To accept final answers is to be deceived. No one is an expert in the art of living, which is an art of improvisation, not certainty. Now, with that in mind, what do you want to do?

Just watch one of these professional teachers at work, sitting on the throne, surrounded by the paying customers, and often plenty of flowers and portraits of famous gurus in whose "lineage" they claim to belong—what foolishness. If asked a question, how often does one of these self-described teachers say something like, "I don't know. I'm not sure. To be honest, I have no idea about that. Maybe no one does or ever did?" Your chances of hearing a reply like that are either slim or none, and Slim, it seems, just left town.

Relentless certainty is a chief feature of the product. The customers pay to have their doubts assuaged, not aggravated.

I was sent a video of one of the most highly regarded contemporary teachers in which he was asked why evils such as child abuse exist. Well, this cat twisted himself into knots trying to answer that ancient, insoluble question, smiling all the while—his stagecraft seemed obvious—as if in those dulcet, carefully modulated tones, interrupted by oh-so-thoughtful pauses, he was proffering profundities instead of tendering tired tropes.

Rather than saying, “I don’t know *why* there is evil in the world”—which would have been simple and honest—this man occupied ten minutes riffing on “universal consciousness.” When the questioner, exasperated by that performance, interrupted to ask for something more concrete—which I admired as a sign of acumen—this supposed “teacher” just twisted himself into the next grandiloquent knot. He seemed to be up for anything but saying, “I don’t *know*.” Equivocation on that level would be difficult to parody, but the teacher was deadly serious, and nothing funny about it.

I did not think this famous teacher was *lying* exactly, but is just deluded himself by the religious dogma of nonduality which *claims* much explicatory power but actually *explains* nothing. So, his answer to the question of why evil exists was not an intentional fib, but the common misapprehension that religious *beliefs* can explain observable *facts*. From his perspective, he *did* have that answer: the one that was poured into his ear while sitting at *his* teacher’s feet.

Q: “Why did the plane crash?”

A: “Oh, simple. It was God’s will.”

But even if he *had* felt uncertain, his glibness, that never missed a beat, suggested that he would never let on publicly. He might justify such an evasion with the argument, “My job is to present and convey the ‘teaching’—not to be entirely candid about my own mind.”

I can see the attraction of that angle. It must be fairly relaxing to be able to stick to “Love is all there is,” or whatever platitude applies, while concealing—perhaps even from oneself—a mind that comprises thoughts and emotions that have nothing to do with love.

My friend, Dr. Robert K. Hall, and I have had wonderfully deep conversations over the years. Robert, as previous readers know, spent many years as a Buddhist teacher and a Gestalt psychologist who trained with Fritz Perls himself, so we always had plenty to talk about.

If you have read *The Ten Thousand Things*, you may recall a conversation where Robert and I were discussing the desire to know “the self.” Robert said that after a lifetime of looking, he had found nothing (no-thing). The self, he meant, is empty at its core, so if you search for a lasting, permanent self, it’s not there. Like peeling an onion, if you keep at it long enough, you end up with nothing. I agreed that I too had found no-thing, and added, “So all of this religion, all the practice, all this talk about noble truths and such, is just a wall they build to keep out nothing.” Robert laughed and nodded his head yes.

Robert is in hospice care now and near the end, so our conversations are even more candid than before, which was already pretty wide-open. I asked Robert what he thought about spiritual teaching now that he is no longer involved. “Well,” he said. “It’s a good way of passing time, and it might make someone feel better, but that’s about it. I don’t see that it *leads* anywhere at all.” Robert, you are a beacon of honesty.

Another such beacon was Alan Watts, who never claimed to be a spiritual teacher, and certainly not “enlightened.” In fact, Alan often said that, being an ordinary chap, he had no obligation to act like a saint, and he didn’t. People tried to make a cult leader of him, but he would have none of it:

I’m an entertainer. That is to say, in the same sense, that when you go to a concert and you listen to someone play Mozart, he has nothing to sell except the sound of the music. He doesn’t want to convert you to anything. He doesn’t want you to join an organization in favor of Mozart’s music as opposed to, say, Beethoven’s. And I approach you in the same spirit as a musician with his piano or a violinist with his violin. I just want you to enjoy a point of view that I enjoy.

Thank you, Alan. That is my intention too. I’m an ordinary human primate animal who, like others before me, finds himself

awake. Since “awake” seems to be a point of view that people imagine is desirable and claim to be seeking, I am willing to speak about it in a simple way, but my words are phenomenology, *not* instruction. I have no “wake up magic.” I’m expressing how I see things, not telling others how to see them. Whatever I may say, the intention is not to collect followers, but to encourage finding one’s own mind. In finding your *own* mind, you *will* be enjoying the point of view that I enjoy, but in your own way.

Recently, the guru who calls himself Mooji has been accused of the same kinds of sexual transgressions and other forms of power-tripping that have brought down a few once-powerful men in this era of “me too,” when at least *some* chronic abusers of girls and women are being unmasked. Along with those allegations, which are multiple enough to be at least credible, the cult atmosphere that surrounds this man has been exposed, including people kissing his feet, and even worshipping him as “God on Earth,” which he encourages, although lately, probably because of increased scrutiny, he pretends not to, and even has lawyers threatening people who report that he does encourage it.

These cult members are not bowing to Mooji’s *ideas*, which are pretty much the same old platitudes about “love” and nonduality, but to his *person*—a sign of mental disorder and derangement, both on the followers’ part, and on Mooji’s. That is why a setup like this is called “a cult of *personality*.”

A friend of mine knows Mooji. She jumped to his defense. “He’s not like that,” she said. “He does not *want* people kissing his feet or worshipping him.”

I replied, “You know this guy personally, and I don’t, but in his public persona, he seems to manifest all the characteristics of what a friend of mine calls an ‘I-doll.’”

If you really don’t *want* to be the I-doll at the center of a cult, and if you *really* don’t want anyone kissing your feet, it should be a simple matter to end it. No big deal. “Hey,” you tell them, “I may have something worth saying, but I’m no god and neither is anyone else. Get off your knees. Do *not* try to kiss my feet. Do *not* call me ‘master.’ Do *not* say that I am God on Earth. Listen to what I have to say, and then go

home and live your own life.”

But that’s a bootless business model. Why admit to being an ordinary human being when you are paid well to pretend to be a holy man in the lineage of Ramana Maharshi (who, incidentally, *had* no lineage)? Why say “stop,” when you have willing women hanging on your words, and can sell photographs of your feet and samples of the earth you have stepped on in the gift shop? (I am not making that up.)

By the way, what’s with this foot fetish anyway? Why kiss his *feet*? Can someone who knows more about Eastern religions than I do explain that to me? Why not, for example, kiss his ass?

Well, my friend flipped out and went on a tirade. That was entirely unexpected. Somehow, in her eyes, Tony Moo is above reproach. In her view, Mooji *can’t* be just another bad penny holy man, so instead of seeing the cult for what it is, she disparages the reporter who wrote the “fake news” outing Mooji’s bad behavior.

Yes, reporters can get stories wrong, but a generalization like that cannot neutralize specifics such as the ones in the reports, particularly when there is corroboration from various ex-followers. This *I-doll*, it seems, has feet of clay. There it is again, the *foot* thing. Go figure.

Q3: If I understand right, everything is just happening—following, not following, awakening, dreaming. So, who cares? In this oneness, who is there to care?

A: *Really?* Are you actually saying you don’t care about *anything*? Are you really saying that, no matter what, it’s all the same to you? Or are you projecting some kind of nihilistic theory you picked up somewhere onto actual human *be-ing*? Speaking personally, I care about lots of things. If you ask, “Who is there to care?” the answer is “Robert. I care.” I care about every word in this reply, for example. If *you* really *don’t* care, how about a dog shit sandwich on rye for lunch?

I am *not* talking here about “this oneness,” as you put it, nor saying that we are “all one.” I am saying we are all in the same boat, which is not the same thing at all. In *this* boat, the vessel of life in which we all are sailing, each of us abides for a time, and then dies and

is thrown overboard—burial at sea, so to speak—while the boat sails on. So, “myself” is a passing biological phenomenon. But to notice that “myself” is transient and impermanent is not the same thing as saying, “No person really exists, so who cares?” That attempt to erase any boundaries at all between I and thou—or between peanut butter and dog shit—is a form of spiritual self-hypnosis. Snap out of it.

Q4: I see we have another victim of the folk theory of nondual enlightenment—holding on to it tightly, hoping to find themselves one with the universe some day, all the while being polluted with a constellation of ideas about what enlightenment is like as an experience, that is certain to keep them in ignorance. It’s the reason why actual enlightenment is so rare: everyone’s beliefs about it have them blinded to what’s always right in front of them as their entirely ordinary, mundane awareness.

But that doesn’t sell, does it? That doesn’t make you special. It’s not exotic. Not enough Sanskrit mumbo-jumbo or ancient gurus who were probably just as creepy as the ones we call out today. Nope. You can’t be cool if enlightenment is no big deal, and gurus can’t get rich, so the cycle continues and people stay in abject ignorance, despite knowing all the fancy words and reciting all the magic chants.

A: Thank you. That’s well seen. I will be more succinct: leave so-called spirituality to the ninnies, wake up to what is always right here right now, and you may get a glimpse.

Q5: Would you say more about how duality obviously exists? I have been taught that seeing life dualistically is an illusion, and there is really only one “thing.”

A: Sure. Imaginary/real, up/down, light/dark, dead/alive—all of that is duality. We live in a world of duality. In regards to the *material* world, that should be obvious: tall bamboo, short bamboo. On a more *psychological* level, happy/sad, fearful/confident, outgoing/introverted—the list is endless—are all dualistic opposites. The word

“spiritual” is entirely dualistic. If there are ideas or experiences that are “spiritual,” then there must be ones that are *not* spiritual.

No matter what motivates the attempt, you will never erase by fiat—by just *claiming* so-called nonduality—the obvious differences between one thing and another, including one person and another. If you consider that so-and-so is “realized”—as presumably was the person who *taught* you that duality is an illusion, whatever you mean by the word “taught”—then that implies that others are unrealized. So the term “realized” implies duality as soon as it is spoken.

The idea of “nonduality” is a religious concept—largely a Hindu religious concept—*not* a fact. And it is a concept that confuses people to the bizarre extreme that they deny the evidence of their senses and the thoughts and feelings of their *own* minds, replacing all that with second-hand ideas.

I am old enough now to have watched the notion of “nonduality” manipulated into a marketable mania. That term was barely ever heard until the 1990s. Now “nonduality” is a gimmick, a sales tool, a brand. If you tend towards materialism, you can now buy a “Cosmic Nonduality Mala,” and that string of magic beads, advertised on the internet, probably costs less than a Skype session, also sold on the internet, with someone who purports to “teach” nonduality. The beads might work better too.

To see things as they are requires rejecting “nonduality” entirely, I say. Just forget what you were taught about nonduality or anything else. Find your *own* mind. Personally, I never even think about nonduality unless someone asks me. What is, is. And that is neither, I say, dualistic nor nondualistic. It just is.

Q5: Well, Robert, you wrote this: “To the extent that there even is a ‘myself’ separate from thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, they just bounce around as they will, like a beach ball in a rapids, while I, being just another thought, albeit a repetitive, habitual one—a *pet* thought, so to speak—just bounce around with the rest. It’s *all* me. That’s what thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are: me. In my experience, there is no ‘self’ apart from that. Others, I know, believe differently.”

So, Robert, if there is no “myself” separate from thoughts, feelings, etcetera, then why does it matter what one thinks or feels?

A: I wrote that in the context of saying that no one is standing apart from thoughts, feelings, and perceptions *controlling* them. That is one aspect. But to say that because no one can *control* feelings means that it does not *matter* what one feels—that, for example, hatred is the same as compassion—is quite another aspect entirely. Of *course* it matters. It does to me at least.

And lacking control over the arising of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings certainly does not suggest that “Robert” does not exist at all, which is what the silly nonduality students are trying to make themselves believe. In the mistaken notion that selling themselves on such silliness will stifle their suffering, they pretend that “myself” is only a figment or a misunderstanding. That kind of pretense will not stifle suffering, but only deepen it, I say.

This is difficult ground. Many people I have known who try to explore these matters—including some well-known teachers—become disoriented and end up clutching at conceptual maps—the map, for example, of “No person really exists.” That statement may make sense from a certain angle, but to apply it across the board as a final “Truth” makes no sense at all. Do you really want to deny that “myself” as an individual focus of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, exists? If so, that is a disorientation from which it is difficult to recover, and I have seen it taken to absurd lengths such as, for example, avoiding the personal pronoun “I” entirely: not “I feel that...,” but “Here it is felt that...”

Well, here it is felt that talking that way is inane.

If you ask me “Who or what *are* you, Robert?” I will reply, “I am a human being.” If I were to say, as the self-described teachers try to claim, “I am pure awareness,” that would be a lie. No, people are *not* “pure awareness.” Pure awareness does not have opinions, *or* students, and certainly does not need lunch money from them. If you are paying to sit there listening to such drivel—including such idiotic classics as “Thought is not real, only love is real”—snap out of it.

And beware believing everything that a self-described “teacher”—even an illustrious, celebrated one—tells you. Jiddu Krishnamurti, who had many worthwhile things to communicate, was famous for his so-called “secret,” which many tried to copy in a kind of imitative stoicism. His secret was “I don’t mind what happens.” But in that, JK was lying. As a look into his biography will reveal, he was a man of *many* preferences. He *did* mind. We *all* do. Stoicism, which I recommend as a valid approach to ordinary living, is one thing. From that perspective, I will enjoy what I can enjoy, and endure the rest. But that is *not* the same as not *caring*.

“What’s for lunch?”

“Well, you have a choice between a bean burrito and a warmed-over vomit ragout. Which do you want?”

“Oh, I don’t care.”

So Krishnamurti, whose ideas inspired me when I first heard them, and whom I still admire on that level, was a liar. He professed to have no interest in sex—which his followers took to be a sign of spiritual enlightenment and tried to emulate, sometimes destroying marriages in the process. But JK’s claims to sexual asceticism were pure, unadulterated horseshit.

According to Radha Rajagopal Sloss, author of *Lives in the Shadow with J. Krishnamurti*, the famous “celibate” carried on a 25-year schtupping festival with a married woman (Sloss’s mother), including cooking up false accusations of embezzlement against the woman’s husband (Sloss’s father), which the author called “a personal vendetta fueled by passions of the heart.” So not just secret sex, but other lies as well, and nasty lies at that.

There is a capital lesson here: *eschew emulation*.

Krishnamurti voiced some lovely ideas—for example, “The seer *is* the seen”—but he was no saint, nor an “enlightened master.” To quote my friend John Troy again: “Take the message, and leave the messenger.”

Q5: This seems to be a matter of perspective. If you look from the position of the mind you are the wave. If you look from the position of the

flow of experience you are the ocean. To speak from both positions in the same sentence is difficult.

A: No. “You” are *not* the ocean, and *you* will never speak from the perspective of the ocean. That is the kind of spiritual lie people have been taught to tell themselves, I say. You may disagree, and if you do, fine by me. To each her or his own. But what is the difference between “the mind” and “the flow of experience?” Is there a difference?

Q6: But, Robert, isn’t the well-worn ocean/wave idea useful as a metaphor, pointing to the notion that we appear to be separate entities, even though ultimately the entire universe is one mysterious happening, one that cannot possibly be described or explained?

A: Yes, it might be useful on that level. However, to say that the universe is one mysterious happening, does not mean that “I” am everything, which is what people try to make of that idea. That is not wisdom, but solipsism.

To stick with the ocean analogy, if there were not an ocean, there could not be any such thing as a fish. So, the fish depends upon an ocean for its survival, but that does not mean that a fish *is* an ocean. A fish is *not* an ocean. A fish is a fish and an *ocean* is an ocean. They are *not* the same. Nor does the ocean *require* the fish. If you take the ocean away, there won’t be any fish. But if you take the fish away, the ocean does not disappear. It might be a *different* ocean without that particular fish, but it would still be there.

I am not quibbling. This is *not* a small point. Some people actually imagine that the universe is “inside” them, and, without their consciousness of it, the universe would not exist. That is, I say, delusional. Do you really imagine that the moon exists only when you look at it?

21 - *All the props are crumbling*

Q: From an early age we are indoctrinated into the notion that life is a journey, maybe even a Hero’s Journey of some kind. For the first few years of our lives, we are allowed to just wing it, but pretty soon we are told we have to perform well in school, pass exams, get into a good school, and climb up the ladder of achievement. In our teens, we have to consider a career or a trade and a means of making money to support ourselves. We are encouraged to enter into financial debt, first for our education, and then for the house we live in. We will be asked to choose a mate, have children, rise to the top of our chosen field, be successful, and all the rest of it.

In all this, there is an implied destination, and a false promise: get the job, make the money, choose the partner, have the children—and happiness and prosperity will be delivered. The reality, hidden in plain sight, is that the only destination is the grave. All success ultimately ends in failure, either through disgrace or senility, or both. But this destination is never explicated.

All romantic movies end when the boy gets the girl, or the hero rides off into the sunset—and we never see what happens next: the discord and the arguments, the dirty nappies, the sleepless nights, the infidelities, or the gunslinger waking up the next day to cold coffee and a lame horse. And it seems that much of the spiritual quest is a variation on this theme. If I stare at the wall long enough, or recite the Koran or the sutras fervently enough, chant enough and understand enough, I will one day be ushered into the True Life, the life in which I will finally be affirmed, suffering will end, and Paradise will be regained. Of course, that won’t happen today, because I’m not pure enough, worthy enough, practiced enough, wise enough, surrendered enough, analyzed enough. All I need is more time. Tomorrow, maybe.

This is the life of the caterpillar, as you used it in your metaphor, Robert: