10.

**Gone Beyond**

"Gone. Gone. Gone beyond. Gone, completed, beyond. Awakening: Svaha!"
- The Heart Sutra

**Telling the story is problematic.** In particular, like so much else in the teaching, it can fall prey to what I call the prescriptive/descriptive fallacy. The Understanding, Truth, what is apperceived, cannot be expressed. 'The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao.' What is expressed is conceptual only, a translation into terms available in the dream; the reflection of the moon in a puddle of water, not the moon itself. And between the moon and its reflection, between Truth and its translation into dream concepts and terms, lies a conceptual chasm crossable only by the occurrence of the Understanding itself. Many are interested in crossing the chasm; they are the spiritual seekers, and they are hungry, insatiably so, for any shred of evidence, or guidance, or advice, or indication of what that chasm, and its crossing, and the other side, are like.
Essentially, the truth is that the other side is not like anything, and you can't get there from here. Rather, this already is the other side; all is 'here,' there is no 'there.' End of story. This is the true nature of things, always everywhere right before your eyes. But who can see it? Once seen, it is obvious that 'beyond' is this, here. But say that to an ardent seeker and you're likely to get a groan of frustration.

There is a recurring archetypal image that appears often in dreams and myths, in fantasy and science fiction stories. A traveler arrives at a great wall. After much searching he finds a door, a gate in the wall. When he opens the gate and steps through, he finds himself in a world, a universe, which is different from the one he came from but somehow familiar; the same universe, but somehow very different. When he turns around to look back through the gate at the place he came from, he sees that not only is there no gate, there is no wall. Not only is there no going back, but he has not come from anywhere. Thus it is with awakening: there is no wall, no separation between a 'here' and a 'there.' In a sense there has been a going beyond, yet that beyond is not other than here already. This is 'the gateless gate,' and 'I' has always been here. Where else?

Nevertheless, seekers are a persistent lot, driven or drawn by a force they do not understand; and those who they know, or believe, or at least suspect to have 'gone, completed, beyond' are watched, and examined, and plied with questions, and even imitated, in the hope that some of what they seek might wear off. But despite long tradition, the Understanding is not a contact high, nor is it known to be contagious. Whatever can be learned by observation of or contact with a known sage, or from direct answers to questions posed, is descriptive only; an attempt, however
apparently feeble or skillful, to translate the inexpressible into terms available in the dream. The story, the description, of how the Understanding occurred in a certain body/mind organism, and descriptions of the ongoing experiencing in that body/mind organism are only that, descriptions, and cannot be taken as prescriptions of how another body/mind organism might 'get there from here.' But of course, they usually are taken as prescriptive: that's how you get religion out of spiritual experience, how you get teaching about various practices, various paths, yogas, mantras, diets; advice on ways of thinking, ways of acting: the four applications, the five precepts, the six powers, the seven virtues, the eight impediments, the nine stages... the ten commandments.

One in whom awakening has occurred is observed to have no attachment to the outcome of actions, so this is taught as a prescription; you must work hard to somehow no longer be attached to outcome! One in whom the Understanding has happened is seen to sit quietly in deep stillness and silence for periods of time, and when asked what he is thinking, replies that there is no thought: so it is taught that you should try to sit quietly and have no thoughts! The teacher lives a celibate life, alone; so the students become renunciates. The teacher is married, so the disciples go out and get married. The teacher eats meat, or does not eat meat, and the devotees follow suit. Nisargadatta Maharaj smoked cigarettes, and a startling number of his followers took up smoking.

But what is happening in the awakened is happening spontaneously, without trying: either as a consequence of the natural programming and conditioning of that body/mind, in which case it has nothing whatever to do with
awakening; or as a spontaneous outcome, a natural side effect of awakening in that particular body/mind organism. There is no one to try. This is what I mean by saying it comes naturally ‘from the other side’ and cannot in any way be achieved by working at it ‘from this side.’ This is another miserable metaphor and of course there is no this side and other side, but can you see what is trying to be said? If awakening, the Understanding, is to happen, it will happen, but I absolutely assure you it will not happen as a ‘result’ of a dream character performing some practice. A practice may happen. Awakening may happen. But there is not a linear causal relationship between the two.

Put another way. When you are asleep and dreaming, what does a character in your dream ‘do’ to cause that character to wake up? It is the dreamer, not the character, who ‘wakes up,’ and waking up happens when it happens, for reasons well and thoroughly outside the control of any of the characters in the dream, including the character which in the dream you think is you.

Gathering stories about awakening can serve as a huge impediment, keeping the seeker running in circles. I have had sincere seekers at Ramesh’s morning talks in Bombay, when they heard some of my story, come and ask me how to book a trip to the Amazon jungle, and how to gain access to the tribe I was staying with. This is crazy. Forget it. It will not happen that way for you.

Two illustrations. One, a Zen saying, hence rather brief:

Once a master has used a ladder to climb to the top of the wall, that ladder is thrown away forever and never used again.
Find your own damn ladder. Better yet, know that it will find you; that it already has; that your feet are already on the rungs!

The other, a rabbinical tale, hence somewhat more verbose:

A woman came to the rabbi complaining that she could not conceive a child, and asking for the rabbi's advice and help. "Ah," said the rabbi, "that is difficult. But you know, it was the same for my mother. For many years she could not conceive, and so she went to see the great rabbi, the Bal Shem Tov. He asked her only this: 'What are you willing to give, and what are you willing to do?' She thought about it; she was a poor woman and did not have many possessions. Finally she went home and got her most valuable possession, the shawl she wore at her wedding, a family heirloom which had also been her mother's and her grandmother's. Then she returned with it to the rabbi: however, since she was poor she had to walk, and by the time she returned the itinerant rabbi had left for another town. For six weeks she walked from town to town, always arriving just after the Bal Shem Tov had left. Finally, she caught up with him. He accepted the gift and gave it to the local synagogue. My mother walked all the way home," the rabbi concluded, "and a year later I was born."

"How wonderful," cried out the woman, truly relieved. "I have my wedding shawl at home. I will bring it to you, you can give it to the synagogue, and surely I will be given a child!"

"Ah," said the rabbi, shaking his head sadly, "unfortunately, that will not work. The difference, you see, is that now you have heard this story, while my mother had no story to go by."
Perfect Brilliant Stillness

Descriptive, not prescriptive.

This is why the Teaching has traditionally been called "a finger pointing toward the moon." Take your dog outside some evening. Say, "Hey, look!" and point dramatically at the moon. Your dog will most likely stare expectantly at your finger. It shows great devotion and is quite endearing, but demonstrates a basic lack of understanding, of any ability to see beyond. Fixating on the story, or elements of the Teaching, or practices, or a guru or teacher, or spiritual experiences, is staring at the finger, unable to realize that these are only pointers. None of these things have any importance in themselves. Look past these, beyond them to what is being pointed toward.

Once this is understood, descriptions and stories can perhaps be useful or at least interesting as pointers. There have always been texts, sutras, stories of the ancient masters and how it was that the Understanding occurred in the case of the Buddha, or Hui-Neng, or Shankara, or Ramana Maharshi. And there is no reason that the telling of these stories should stop there. As Suzanne Segal introduces her own account, Collision with the Infinite, "The story that follows is my contribution to the modern version of the ancient texts."

Yet ultimately, in Ramana Maharshi's summation,

"There is neither creation nor destruction,
neither destiny nor free will,
neither path nor achievement.
This is the final truth."

There really are no stories, as there is nothing happening here. The stories are only what the dream characters tell to
themselves and to each other over and over, and in so doing keep the dream going. As my friend Koshen would say with great irony, “It’s something to do until Jesus comes!”

The story-telling is the dreaming, and the dreaming is desire – the desire to be. And more than that: the desire to be some one; someone separate, someone special; someone with his or her own story. The dream character is completely caught in this spinning of a personal web, building and maintaining the personal story, driven by that unknown, unexamined wanting to assert and continually reconfirm the individual self.

Awakening does not occur while pursuing a story, desire fueling desire, need fueling want, all of it constantly strengthening the sense of a separate self that does not exist. Awakening occurs when this desiring is irrevocably seen to be misguided, seen to be futile. Then the story telling stops. Then the story stops. That is the going beyond.