In this annihilation, every longing, hunger, and thirst is dissolved, perfected, healed and made forever irrelevant.
**QUESTION/ANSWER**

"A voice comes to your soul, saying:
Lift your foot, cross over;
move into the emptiness
of question and answer and question."
- Rumi

"Keep asking those deep questions, sleep on -
when you wake even you'll be gone!"
- Ikkyu

You must continue to ask questions, pursuing each question as it arises, with great earnestness.

Any question which may arise here is answered immediately, and they all have the same answer.

*And that is?*
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That that question, that thought, like all thoughts, is empty. When there is the misconception, the idea that there is a separate entity here out of whose individual mind the thought or question arises, then questions are taken as important. When all is seen as it is, all thoughts, feelings, and actions are seen to arise as the infinite expression of Consciousness. Whatever arises can only be the perfect unfolding in Consciousness, however it appears to the apparent individual. These body/mind things are only instruments, objects in Consciousness and therefore cannot possibly know the basis, the purpose, the reason by which Consciousness works. When any question is asked in this context, the question dissolves. All simply is as it is.

Well, there you are. So, that’s good. (pause.) How long has it been since you awakened to this?

Here we go again. You should know better. Since who awakened?

What you call this body/mind thing, the apparent individual.

You miss my point. There is no one here. The body/mind is an object only; the individual is only apparent, a character in the dream. It cannot be the character in a dream who awakens.

So, it is the dreamer who awakens.

The idea of ‘awakening’ is only an analogy; be careful not to begin taking it literally. Any analogy breaks down eventually, and this one does here. The Dreamer is Consciousness, which is All That Is: it has never been
asleep, has no need to awaken.

*So, who awakens?*

The analogy of awakening, like any analogy, can have a certain limited usefulness. It is one of the straws grasped at in an attempt to describe the indescribable, to communicate what cannot be communicated. It also has its drawbacks. In particular, it can be used to make a demarcation, a distinction. A false separation between those perceived individuals who have awakened and those perceived individuals who have not. This is artificial, a construct of the mind. There is only Consciousness, streaming through and expressing as all these body/mind things. What happens in one body/mind thing as distinct from another is insignificant unless you believe they exist as individual persons and you identify as one of them. As the Third Zen Patriarch wrote, “Distinctions arise from the clinging needs of the ignorant... What benefit can be derived from attachment to distinctions and separations?”

*Surely there is a difference between one who is awakened and one who is not.*

Not at all. As Huang Po said, “There is just a mysterious, tacit understanding, and no more.”

*The difference then is that some of us have this understanding while most do not.*

You are taking it personally, setting up “us and them,” which makes nonsense of it. These are the distinctions that the Zen Patriarch was talking about. Please understand, what you are referring to as ‘us’ or as ‘them’ are personal
reference points which are seen here to be illusory, purely mythical in spite of being taken quite seriously by you and just about everyone else. There is Understanding. There is no one here to have understanding, or to have anything for that matter.

*But you yourself use words like 'you' and 'everyone.'*

If you went to a foreign country, you’d find it hard to communicate unless you learned and used the language that the locals used. Our language is structured in a way that makes it all but impossible to speak without using personal pronouns and other words which seem to refer to individuals. This makes things difficult, but language must still be used. Trying to avoid these words altogether just results in stilted and awkward speech which calls attention to itself and fails to communicate. So one must continue to use the conventions of language which include personal pronouns to refer to an experience and an understanding which is completely impersonal.

It’s a little like continuing to talk about ‘sunrise’ and ‘sunset’ even when you know quite well that the sun doesn’t revolve around the earth, and so it doesn’t rise or set but only appears to because of the earth’s own rotation. When I use the terms ‘I’ or ‘me’ they refer to nothing personal at all, since it’s completely obvious from this perspective that there is no person here. There is only All That Is, streaming through all these apparent forms. On the other hand, when you say something like, “some of us have the understanding but most do not,” it’s evident that you are taking the distinction between yourself as an individual and others as individuals quite seriously, and are busy comparing and judging between them.
To return to your earlier comment, earnestly asking questions should not be seen as an end in itself. Asking questions does not actually lead anywhere. In the tradition of jnana yoga, asking questions operates a bit like the Zen koan, gradually backing the mind into a corner or exhausting it to the point that it realizes that while questions can go on forever, Truth will never be found there. The Third Zen Patriarch again: "To seek Mind with the discriminating mind is the greatest of mistakes."

The problem, you see, is that all questions arise out of their answers. You can't ask a question about Self, or Truth, or the Understanding, that you don't already, on some level, know the answer to: if you didn't know the answer, the question never could have occurred to you.

That's why the great Zen and Advaita masters rarely answered a question; they redirected it. The point of asking a question is not to get the answer, which you already have; despite what you may believe, there's really no benefit in getting answers. All the answers in the world will not lead to Understanding. All answers are within the dream, as are all questions. What you want is no-answer, which can only be arrived at by no-question. For each body/mind, there is only one no-question, what I sometimes call the dangerous question, the asking of which contains the end to all questions, the asking of which stops you, annihilates 'you.'

If a question arises, then by all means ask it. Sometimes it is all that can happen. But there is nothing sacred about asking questions. It is when the questions cease and the mind is empty that there is an opening.
When you say, ‘there’s nobody home,’ what do you mean? Who isn’t home?

It is the sense of being a separate self, an individual, a separate autonomous independent entity.

So the separate self is no longer home.

Yes, although I tend to say the sense of being a separate self is what is no longer there, because the separate self as such has never existed, was never there, was only an idea – and a mistaken one.

The ego?

I tend to equate the ego with the sense of a separate self, yes. Others may mean different things by the ego.

But some teachers say the ego is still there, but transformed or made ‘harmless.’

You’re referring to Ramana Maharshi’s analogy of the burnt rope. He said the ego of the sage is like a burnt rope; it is harmless in that it cannot any longer be used to hold anyone in the ‘bondage’ of samsara. Some teachers take this and say that although the rope is burnt, it is still there. But in fact, it is not still there, as a rope. The ego is not still there, as an ego, as a sense of separate self. What is still there is the appearance: various forms of functioning in the body/mind instrument. But this functioning does not add up to a separate entity. It never did.
Have you ever actually experienced a burnt rope? This is another one of those agricultural parables that might be a little hard to understand in the modern world. The burnt rope phenomenon is quite an extraordinary thing. When I was twelve, the tool shed on the farm burned; and as I was picking through the charred remains with my father, to salvage tools and hardware, I came across what appeared to be the big coil of manila rope that we used on the farm for jobs like felling trees.

I was surprised that it had survived the fire, but when my hand tried to close on it, the fingers passed through the fine powdery ash with no resistance. There's something about natural manila or sisal rope that causes it to burn thoroughly, but for the ashes to remain in place and retain the appearance of the whole rope. This is the meaning of the Maharshi's image; what remains is not a rope (the 'ego') at all, but only looks like one! There is only the appearance of a rope, not a rope itself!

But like all analogies this one too only goes so far. Unlike the rope that burns and is then only an appearance of a rope made of ash, the ego never really existed in the first place: it was only a mistaken idea. So then, this is where that other traditional analogy takes over, the image of the coil of rope that was mistaken for a snake. At first the response is fear; then when it is realized that it is only a coil of rope and not a snake at all, the experience is quite different. But what has changed? Nothing, because there never was a snake there, it was only a mistaken idea. The separate self, the ego, was never there; only the idea, the sense of being an individual, which turns out to be misled.

And yet even that's not the point. Finally, even that falls
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away. Even the appearance never was: always everywhere there is only the changeless Self. This, at least, is what is understood here.

This is what is meant when the Understanding or awakening is called a shift in perception. Wei Wu Wei said it well;

"...merely a readjustment is needed, such readjustment being the abandonment of identification with an inexistent individual self..."

But I heard Wei Wu Wei wasn't enlightened.

And?

He had Alzheimer's at the end, so he wasn't enlightened.

Whoa! One thing at a time here. First, whether or not Terrence Gray was awakened is a moot question. As I read his books, it seems there are at least a couple of places where he says himself that he is not. This need to label someone enlightened or unenlightened is misplaced: it is based on a belief in the separate self. If there are no separate individual selves, who's awakened? All there is, is Presence. Separating and making distinctions and comparing is the illusion.

Whether the one we know as Wei Wu Wei was enlightened or not, his works are among the clearest and most uncompromisingly accurate renditions of the teaching you can find. The complete Understanding and the ability to express it accurately don't necessarily go hand in hand. Some of the truly, deeply awakened can't express it at all, while some of the best expressions come from those who have an excellent intuitive grasp of the meaning of the teaching on an
intellectual level, even though it may not have gone deep enough that they no longer experience any separate self.

Now: this Alzheimer’s thing needs to be laid to rest. This is part of the misconception that with awakening the sage becomes an elevated or perfect human being. Alzheimer’s is a physical disease, affecting the organism. It results from genetic and environmental factors, and so in our terminology it is a matter of the programming and conditioning of that body/mind organism. As such it is no different than any other disease; no different from Ramana Maharshi’s or Nisargadatta Maharaj’s cancer. Since it affects the physical cells of the brain the results are not very pretty, but it’s still a disease of the organism, and arises as part of the organic functioning of that body/mind.

The so-called sage knows that whatever arises is the perfect unfolding of totality in Consciousness; and in which dream character what event happens is irrelevant. The body/mind organism of the sage has no special immunity conferred upon it at awakening. The Understanding is not a vaccine, against Alzheimer’s or anything else.

*But someone who has Alzheimer’s isn’t going to be making much sense a lot of the time.*

It sure isn’t going to look very pretty. It’ll be quite disturbing to those who need perfect enlightened beings to look up to, or have fantasies of disease-free enlightened living; or have absorbed some New Age ideas about causing your own sickness.

But if the awakening has truly occurred, and there was no longer any sense of a separate self, and then the body/
mind organism succumbs to an organic disease, you can’t go back and retroactively say that the awakening didn’t happen after all. It did. Then, the disease happened. Life is like that. It’s messy. It includes everything.

*Seems like that introduces a lot of confusion, or potential confusion.*

Confusion is already there. What’s ‘wrong’ with confusion? Again, it’s part of the overall functioning. In duality, you can’t have light without dark, up without down, beauty without ugliness, clarity without confusion. Declaring war on confusion and trying to eliminate it completely is misguided. Remember what Maharaj said to someone who wanted out of the dream?

“The dream is not your problem. Your problem is that you like one part of the dream and not another.”

Trying to eliminate the parts of the dream you don’t like will keep you occupied, but it will also keep you frustrated: it can never succeed because the manifestation is inherently dualistic. Awakening is seeing What Is, and acceptance of the whole – the whole messy lot. You don’t necessarily have to like it, but it’s What Is.

*I don’t understand. Just because there’s confusion doesn’t mean I still shouldn’t try to be as clear as I can.*

Then be as clear as you can! If you have been given that kind of motivation, you may be instrumental in contributing to the overall balance. But be aware that despite your best efforts, it’s always possible that the things you say or do may have unintended consequences. In spite of trying to be clear, it may be that what you say will still be confusing.
to some people, and may actually add to the overall confusion, even though that wasn’t your intent.

The point is that it’s not up to you. All of this, the overall balance, is being taken care of, in ways that are not up to the body/mind mechanisms and which they cannot begin to comprehend, with the level of cognition allotted to them. Knowing this, there is no intent here: just a consent to, a cooperation with, whatever arises. And sure, ‘whatever arises’ may include a motivation to be clear. Just don’t be surprised if that is not the outcome, because the outcome is not up to you. And the ultimate outcome in the long term will be to maintain the balance of clarity and confusion in totality.