"We dance 'round in a ring and suppose while the Secret sits in the middle and knows."
- Robert Frost

"When we Understand, we are at the center of the circle, and there we sit while Yes and No chase each other around the circumference."
- Chuang Tzu

In a sense, it is all a matter of perception, of perspective. The ultimate Understanding spoken of in the perennial wisdom can be seen as a massive and total shift or alteration in perspective. But just how massive or total is hard to imagine until it occurs.

When I was in high school in the late sixties and early seventies, Edwin Abbott’s Flatland became popular among
students. The small book was originally written in 1884, but it found new interest and several reprintings as it resonated with the counterculture and mood of the Nixon years. Flatland is a two dimensional universe inhabited by two dimensional beings who know only width and length, such as the stick figures you might draw on paper. Existing on the flat plane of the paper, they know nothing of height or depth, which do not exist in their world. Consequently they have never thought of these 'unreal' directions or dimensions and have no words for them; our words 'height' or 'depth,' 'above' and 'below,' as well as the ideas or concepts which these words represent to us, do not exist in their world.

The book narrates the experiences of one such two dimensional being, a square, when his comfortable two dimensional life is invaded one day by an incomprehensible creature from another dimension: a sphere. Only gradually was the square able to come to comprehend the initially disorienting experience of a third dimension. Needless to say, the great difficulty arose when the square tried to express his experience to other two dimensional figures like himself. How does one describe 'above' in a context where there exist only forward, back, and two directions of sideways? The square tried using existing words ('forward, but not forward, a different forward,') and tried using new words he had learned from the sphere (but 'above' was only nonsense syllables to the Flatlanders.) So the square, who knew he had had real experiences of this third dimension, found himself being regarded as an idiot talking nonsense.

The experience of the Flatland square will be familiar to anyone who has had a spiritual or mystical experience of 'Otherness,' of another dimension beyond our familiar physical three dimensions, and then tried to express this to
23. Perspective

others in comprehensible language. And it can be useful as a metaphor to illustrate or express how the Understanding cannot be described in any terms or concepts available here. But the shift in perspective inherent in the Understanding is even more total than the inclusion of another dimension. Rather than the mere addition of a dimension, it is a shift out of all dimensions in that it is not a question of seeing differently or of seeing new or different things, but of the disappearance of the one who sees.

In a sense, the Understanding is the opposite of the discovery of the third dimension by the two-dimensional Flatlander. In the common shared experience of this world of duality and process, what is experienced is always the triad of the experiencer, what is experienced, and the experience itself. There appears to be the doer of an action, the thing acted upon, and the action. The one who thinks, that which is thought of, and the thought. The seer, that which is seen, and sight. And so on; even the one who is, what one is, and the being of that.

But in the unity consciousness of the Understanding, these perceived discreet dimensions of otherness collapse into Oneness and in place of the 'split mind' perception of experiencer, the experienced, and the experience, there is in 'whole mind' only experiencing. No doer, no object, no thing done, only functioning. Only seeing. Only being, not in the sense of a being, but rather be-ing. All there is, is not some-one conscious of some-thing, but rather simply impersonal Conscious-ness. Consciousness is all there is, and Consciousness is the functioning, the seeing, the being, the experiencing, which is perceived by split mind as some one doing or being some thing.
Perfect Brilliant Stillness

How does this shift occur? How does one go from perceiving with split mind to the Understanding of whole mind? Well, the point is that one doesn't. No one ever understands, in this sense. There is only understanding, and the Understanding is that there is no one to understand and no thing to be understood. The very essence of the Understanding is that while events seem to be happening, and deeds appear to be done, "no one does it, nor is anything done; it is pure doing." (Wei Wu Wei) There is no individual to do or understand anything. There is no thing to be done or understood. Appearances notwithstanding, there are no discreet individuals or entities of any kind, any where. This seeking, this quest for understanding, ultimately leads to the annihilation of the seeker; to the realization that there never was a seeker to begin with, that the entire world perceived by split mind, including the perceiver, is an elaborate illusion. Wei Wu Wei:

"It is important to understand that there is nothing to acquire, but only an error to be exposed, because acquiring necessarily involves using, and so strengthening that spurious 'I' whose dissolution we require. For this merely a readjustment is needed, such readjustment being the abandonment of identification with an inexistent individual self, an abandonment which leaves us unblindfolded and awake in our eternal nature.

"To seek to persuade ourselves that we do not exist as individual entities is, however, to ask the eye to believe that what it is looking at is not there. But it is not we alone who have no existence as entities: there are not any anywhere in the reality of the cosmos, never have been, and never could be. Only whole-mind can reveal this knowledge as direct cognition which, once realized, is obvious. This is the total readjustment. And only 'I' remains."
It’s not new or even unusual to think of all this world and life as an illusion or a dream: the analogy is all around us, from Shakespeare, (“we are such stuff as dreams are made on,”) to nursery rhymes, (“merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.”) What hardly anyone realizes is that the one who might think he understands this is himself a dream character, part of the illusion. That the mind which thinks, “life is but a dream” does not itself have an existence apart from the dream; that this thought arises only within and as part of the dream.

Naturally, this is enough to put off most of the human race. Does exist. Cannot be expressed.

II

Two more examples:

Get in an airplane in Oklahoma. Fly straight south. What do you fly over? If you answer ‘Texas,’ I have news for you. There is no such thing as ‘Texas.’ If you look down while flying south, you will not see any such thing as Texas. You will see what is there: arid desert, farm land, mountains, rivers, roads, cities. Texas is only an idea; it exists only as an agreed-upon conceptual construct. There is nothing ‘real’ about the border between Texas and Oklahoma, and you will not see it if you fly over it. The delineation, the distinction, the decision to call this bit of land Texas and a few feet over here to call it Oklahoma, exists only in the mind, as a thought construct. The separation into discreet separate entities is a layer added in thought only. This distinction, this naming, this separation, these ‘things’ as separate entities, do not exist except as ideas.
'You' and 'me' are 'Texas.'

Next time you go to a movie, stop when you leave the theater and think about what you have just seen. When you start to describe the movie, I would ask you to stop. The movie may be what you saw, but it is not what was there. You were in the movie theater for some two hours, and for almost the entire time you were staring steadily at the screen in the front of the theater; yet if I asked you to describe that screen to me, you might look at me blankly. Because of the beams of colored light that were projected at the screen the entire time, you did not see the screen, even though it was there and you were looking at it. There were no 'real' people or landscapes or events up there on the screen, although you probably got caught up in the story and the emotion of the movie as if it were real; that's what you go to movies for, and if you spent any time during the movie thinking, 'this isn't real,' it probably wasn't a very good movie. The projection of light onto the screen caused the appearance of people and places and events that looked real and evoked mental and emotional responses in you; but all the time you never saw the screen, which is what you were actually staring at for two hours and without which the projected light would not have fallen on anything and you would not have been able to see the movie either.

'You' and 'me' are the movie.

III

It's also all a matter of perspective in an even simpler, more subtle way. How we perceive things, and therefore what we call 'real,' or 'true,' or 'right,' has to do with
our perspective from where we sit in the overall continuum. This is basic, but is so often completely overlooked. The tendency is to absolutize one's own perspective, to make everything relative to that, when in fact our perspective is what is relative. The entire 'history of humanity' including the present is filled with every form of exploitation and subjugation and injustice and intolerance, all of it made possible by the fact that from some perspective, from some point of view, it seems justified. Clearly, the basic assumptions about the way things are, are in fact very relative and dependent on perspective, on one's relative position in the overall spectrum.

The Understanding carries with it a massive shift in this perspective. To the dream characters, things in life matter and are important. From the latest war, to the environment, to what your children are being taught in school, to the way that man just looked at you, things and events are thought to have significance and to be important. That's what seems to make life worth living. Thinking of things as important and having value; causes, crusades, principles, values, getting involved in what you believe is right, working against what you believe is wrong, making the world a better place.

But in the Understanding, it is seen that all this only serves to further the illusion and perpetuate suffering. Values, seen as absolute in the dream, upon examination turn out to be arbitrary. The values espoused in one body/mind are dependent on the programming and conditioning from a certain time and nation and culture and race and family, and are the opposite of values held just as dearly in another body/mind.
Right, wrong; good, evil; important, unimportant; according to whom? From whose perspective? It is the way of all the earth for most people to feel that those things that are closest to them are most important. From your perspective, you will most likely feel more distraught over the death of one family member than you will over the death of thousands in a foreign country you have never seen. From one perspective, an act of terror is evidence of evil; from another, it is evidence that God is great. It is neither; it just is. It all simply arises in the wholeness of Consciousness, which is totally impersonal, and entirely neutral. Right or wrong, important or not, are only your projections, from your perspective.

But the ‘perspective,’ as it were, of impersonal Consciousness is unfathomably immense. Uncountable zillions of life forms in uncountable billions of solar systems, matter and life and energy in forms we cannot imagine and on scales that make all life we know, all this planet itself, all of the universe that we know or can imagine, hardly noticeable. The beauty is that in fact all this we know is more than noticed, is in fact nothing other than Consciousness, is Consciousness Itself, as perceived by us as these things. But that anything we may think we are, or think we know, or believe we want, or believe to be ‘right,’ is of any special importance, is simply a matter of our extremely limited perspective.

Anyone who writes or talks about this subject will at one time or another be inundated with questions around this issue of importance and value, right and wrong, good and evil. How can there be evil in the world; how can there be natural disasters; how can there be wars; how can a God allow poverty, or violence; how can a God, or Presence, or Consciousness, allow children to suffer?
All of us have experienced (or been close to someone who has) some form of tragedy, some form of violence or loss or misfortune or pain. Some more than others. There is no escape from this; it is of the nature of this dream ‘reality’ that it contains what is experienced as pleasure and pain, good stuff and bad stuff, and no one knows what the next moment will bring, or what the overall mix will be for any body/mind. There is no answer, no reason, from within the dream.

“Suffering is a call for inquiry. All pain needs investigation.” (Nisargadatta Maharaj)

Suffering and pain raise questions like nothing else does. Inquire into it; investigate it. The “Why?” question gets nowhere; that is only the ego/mind seeking for nonexistent control. It will never be satisfied, and leads only to resentment and more suffering. Instead, investigate into the suffering. Who is it that is suffering? From whose perspective is this unacceptable?

Buddha said, samsara is dukha. Taking the dream to be real is not what causes suffering; it is the suffering. The only possible solution to the question of evil and suffering is to see through the illusion. Suffering in all its forms is the greatest invitation to awaken, and it is never far away.

Or in the immortal words of Humphrey Bogart’s Rick, in Casablanca,

“It doesn’t take much to see that the problems of three little people don’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you’ll understand that.”