"The crows assert that a single crow could destroy the heavens. This is certainly true, but it proves nothing against the heavens, because 'heaven' means precisely: the impossibility of crows."

- Franz Kafka

A FEW LINES OF DIALOG from the movie, The Matrix:

'Morpheus:' I imagine that right now, you're feeling a bit like Alice; tumbling down the rabbit hole?

'Neo:' You could say that.

'M: I can see it in your eyes. You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he is expecting to wake up. Ironically, this is not far from the truth.
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Do you believe in fate, Neo?

N: No.

M: Why not?

N: Because I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life.

M: I know exactly what you mean!

Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know, you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is. But it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?

N: The Matrix?

M: Do you want to know what it is?

The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes.

It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

N: What truth?

M: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.
Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself.

Remember; all I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more.

... 

M: Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?

... 

N: This... this isn't real?

M: What is 'real'? How do you define 'real'? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.

... 

N: I know what you're trying to do.

M: I'm trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You're the one who has to walk through it.

II

For the past few years, I'd been going around telling friends, acquaintances, people I came across in my shamanic travels, even my therapist (which was a little dangerous), that reality was not what it pretended to be. I said that the whole structure of reality seemed very fishy to me; like it was phony, rigged, set up. I would have moments when I would stop in my tracks, whatever I was doing, the feeling was so strong. What you know, you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. Like a feeling of déjà vu,
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except that this was a feeling that I almost saw something: almost saw through the hologram, the pretense, of what we called the real world. There was a frustration, because it never quite happened: it remained elusive, a splinter in my mind.

This feeling came most strongly when I read about some new scientific discovery. A new galaxy out there, where they had looked before and had never seen anything; the astronomer interviewed said they “must have overlooked it” before. Or a new sub-atomic particle to join the mesons and gluons and quarks; somehow these things just kept appearing. I couldn’t help but feel, “Yeah, right.” Too convenient.

What I told my shrink was that I was becoming convinced that somehow we were making it all up as we went along. I couldn’t explain how or why, but the whole thing just did not make sense, did not add up, did not stand up to skeptical scrutiny. Too many exceptions to every rule, too many unexplained events and effects that everyone, scientists and doctors and theologians and teachers and sales clerks and carpet salesmen alike all tried to disregard and shrug off and feebly explain away.

It was this splinter in my mind that had me dabbling around in shamanism, doing weird things in the company of tribal medicine men in the middle of the Amazon rainforest, playing around on those edges of “how do you define ‘real’”... when I fell off. When I finally saw what I had been seeing.

The truth, Who you Are, what ‘really’ Is, is always here; has always been here. It is not something new you have to learn. It is actually completely and totally familiar to us,
even though we are not conscious of realizing it. This is the shock of recognition when it occurs: complete familiarity. Of course, this has always been! More than familiar. This truth is what is most intimate to you: more familiar and intimate than anything that you think or believe or 'know' about yourself. Because these things turn out to be constructs, beliefs, an added layer, outside the most intimate truth, which you have convinced yourself that you don't know. But you do. Go back. It is your own Self.

Once when I was in Bombay I found myself one afternoon in a remarkable little hole-in-the-wall shop in the old Fort section of the city. Dark, dingy, ancient, the shop specialized in all types of Indian handcrafts. The owner met me at the door with the classic eastern hospitality of a merchant for a prospective customer. I was offered a seat, a cup of hot chai, and he and his assistants proceeded to bring out and parade before me sandalwood carvings, bronze castings, statues, rugs, silk scarves, jewelry, furniture, boxes, chests, figurines, paintings, gods, goddesses, buddhas.

A particular specialty of the house was the carved wooden screens that are used as room dividers. Composed of several panels, each about a foot and a half wide by six feet high, four or five of these panels hinged together. One after another, these carved teakwood screens were unfolded in front of me, and they were dazzling. Every inch of every panel was intricately carved; and it was pierced carving, cutting right through the inch-thick wood so that the air could pass through the panels, which of course is why they are called 'screens.'

As I examined the carving on one screen, I found that the closer I looked the more I saw. It was amazing. There were
elephant caravans, the palace of the Raj, tigers in the jungle, the great River Ganga, \textit{sadhus}, temples, naked women, processions, the whole life of the Buddha, the myth of Lord Ganesha, Prince Arjuna in battle, more naked women, Shiva dancing the world into existence, and on and on, the whole history of India, of the world, of the universe. The carving was marvelous: the fringe on the carpets on the elephants' backs was detailed. The naked women were... detailed. No individual image on the screen was more than a couple inches high, and this went on for several square feet.

The carved screen had my complete and undivided attention for some time. Eventually, around the edges of that concentration, I started to become aware of something else. Something going on, that I had on some level been aware of but had not been paying attention to. The shop owner and his helpers were still at work, running around, hauling out stuff: "And also we have..." "For you, special price..." "Please sir, if you would look at this..." I was sitting on the chair, still holding half a cup of sweet tea, leaning forward toward the screen standing a couple of feet in front of me, scanning the marvelous carved landscape, when...

Pop. My focus changed, and I was suddenly looking \textit{through} the screen. In fact, the screen and its carved universe which had occupied all my attention was suddenly vague and fuzzy, semi-transparent: I was seeing through it, past it, to...

...well, here the analogy breaks down, because what I was seeing through to was the rest of the shop, with its enthusiastic staff piling up rosewood elephants and brass engravings.
But nevertheless. Pop. A very simple thing, a very ordinary thing. The suddenness of seeing through the veil. To the background, the substrate. To what is always there, and ultimately 'real' and true, but not perceived because our focus has been on the propped-up artificial screen, on the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth... A prison for your mind.

What is always there, What Is, Who you truly Are, is precisely the background, the milieu, in which the phony hologram, the matrix, the maya, exists.

Back when I was in seminary studying theology, there was a Christian theologian, Paul Tillich perhaps, who was rocking the boat by pointing toward 'God' not in personal terms but in terms of 'the ground of our being.' The background, the substrate, Teillard de Chardin's milieu divin, in which all this other stuff, including science and philosophy and gods and trees and thoughts and people and mountains, all appear to exist.

You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he is expecting to wake up. Ironically, this is not far from the truth. Who you really are knows you are asleep and is expecting to wake up.

But no amount of teaching or learning or talking or listening or trying or practicing can bring this about. This is the teaching of all the masters and my experience as well: no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself. The 'pop' of the change of focus cannot be taught; it cannot even be done: it has to happen.

This is the consistent message of mystics from all traditions:
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one can storm the gates of heaven, but there is no guarantee, no formula, no practice that will ensure that they will open. For that there is only unearned grace, and a willingness to be surprised by joy, to be gifted with utter emptiness of self, with the Being Consciousness Bliss that you already Are.

III

LISTEN. AMONG HUMAN BEINGS, it is said that any individual human being can attain enlightenment. Now, within the context in which it is said, this is undoubtedly true. However, it tells you absolutely nothing about enlightenment - because 'enlightenment' means precisely: the impossibility of the existence of any individual human being.