"When someone asks me who they are or what God is I smile inside and whisper to the Light: 'There you go again pretending.'"  
- Adyashanti

Perhaps a reason that the Understanding is not a more common occurrence is that it is too simple, too close to home, too subtle. All the seeking is in the other direction, toward something other, something grander. Consider this: a common response when the Understanding happens is laughter. A common response is, "Oh, that!" Right here, that which is most familiar to you, but overlooked because the looking has been for something else, something beyond. That's why the finding is in stopping, in stillness. "Be still and know I am God." Your natural state. Subtle. It is lost, overlooked if there is positive movement, direct searching, active thinking, anything but profound stillness.

A metaphor. In the retina of your eye there are two kinds
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of cells: cone cells and rod cells. The cones are clustered toward the center of the retina; what is in the center of your field of view is focused on them, and they register shades of light and, especially, color. The rods are more numerous around the edge of the retina, and they pick up what is on the edge of your field of view, in your peripheral vision. They do not distinguish color, can discern only black and white, but pick out contrast better than the cones. This is why the rod cells are important for night vision, and explains an odd phenomenon; that night vision is better in your peripheral vision.

Walking in the Vermont woods at night, I learned at a young age that what you could make out in the darkness, what you could see, depended on how you looked. Repeatedly, you would see a movement in your peripheral vision and turn to look directly at it, to see only darkness. Eventually, one learns not to turn, not to look directly, but to keep it just in your peripheral vision, just at the point where you are almost not looking at it at all. That is when you can see it best.

Subtle. It is lost, overlooked if there is positive movement, direct searching, active thinking, anything but profound stillness. Focus on it, and it is gone. All of the talking, all of the asking questions, reading books, meditating, thinking, focusing, seeking, is all counterproductive because it is pushing in the wrong direction, creating activity and turbulence and noise. Just as there is wei wu wei, the action which is not action, action which is not willed, is not volitional but witnessed as spontaneously happening: so too there is a seeing which is not seeing, a seeing which happens without trying, without looking.

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Asleep in the dream, the everyday activity is to look without truly seeing. What is called for is seeing without looking, the seeing happening without there being one who looks.

The poetry of Rumi and Hafiz, of Kabir and Tagore, is all about this, this sideways seeing, creating a still quiet openness where the subtleness which would be missed in direct seeking can present itself.

"Don't wish for union!
There's a closeness beyond that...
Fall in love in such a way
that it frees you from any connecting.
Love is the soul's light, the taste of morning;
no me, no we, no claim of being...
As eyes in silence, tears, face:
love cannot be said.” (Rumi)

Cannot be said, because saying is looking directly. It’s the Observer Principle in reverse. Your true nature, What Is, is pure Subjective Awareness. So become an observer to try to find it, try to look at it, try to turn it into an object, and you will not see it anywhere because as an object it is not. Pure Awareness in which everything arises is what you already are: how can it possibly be found? In stillness this is known.

The sheer enormity of the misperception, the misunderstanding, is staggering. That’s why the laughter when there finally is seeing: it’s not like we’re even close. Almost the entire human endeavor, from daily life, daily thought and actions, to philosophy and theology, psychology and sociology, biology, physics, history and politics, is all based on a completely erroneous premise and is headed wildly, blithely, obliviously off in the wrong direction.
Only in non-action can anything meaningful happen. This is the meaning of Krishna's admonition in the Bhagavad Gita to “be awake to what the world is asleep to, and asleep to what the world is awake to.” Being quiet in stillness, doing nothing, aware, is the only thing that is not wasting time.

Wait. How about the unconscious?

The unconscious what?

What is called the unconscious. The unconscious mind, the unconscious self.

This is what I mean by everything being based on a mistaken premise. Once you accept the widely held but unfounded belief in an individual self and an individual mind, you can then go to work and subdivide that mind into any number of conscious and subconscious and unconscious and superconscious parts and develop whole sciences to deal with each of them. But you're heading pell-mell down a dead-end road with all that. It'll keep you and everyone you know occupied in the dream for many generations, but it will never lead anywhere.

But when I work to uncover the unconscious reasons why I do the things I do or feel the way I feel, this seems to be getting in touch with a level that is more real and more meaningful, the unconscious level, which is what drives and motivates this more superficial conscious level.

Sure. And doing this kind of work can lead to a higher level of functioning of the body/mind organism, once the forces that are at work are understood?
Yes, definitely.

Yes. But this is all within the dream, within the construct of mind in which these phenomena of body/mind organisms, and individual self, and mind divided into various levels, all have apparent reality. In this dream there are things experienced as pleasant and there are things experienced as painful. If there is a disturbed childhood in one of the dream characters, much of the later so-called life of that character may be unhappy. If there is going through successful therapy, maybe some of the rest of that life will be happier. There are many things in the dream which, if they happen, can make a part of the dream less unpleasant. If the character takes a cooking class, it may have the opportunity to enjoy better tasting foods than canned beans. If it takes a seminar and learns a new strategy or a new way of thinking or acting, the dream will be experienced in a new way that the dream character may like better. The world is full of ways to improve your experience of the dream, from the trivial to the deeply valuable and useful.

But none have anything whatever to do with what we are talking about here. We are not talking about improving your experience of the dream. We are talking about seeing the dream for what it is: as a mental construct, a mind-generated-fantasy, a projection of what is called the 'mind,' but which in fact does not exist, either conscious or unconscious.

What do you mean, the mind doesn't exist?

What mind? What is it that you are calling your 'mind'?

Well, I would probably agree that there isn't a 'thing' called
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a mind. It's not an organ because I think it is throughout the body and not just in the brain, but it's the mind part of the body/mind organism.

So instead of a 'thing,' would you call the mind a function?

Okay, the thinking function, the reasoning function, and more than that; there are intuitive and other things that happen subconsciously, those are the mind too.

I agree that there is functioning in these body/mind organisms. There is physical functioning and there is mental functioning. Physical functioning is experienced as bodily activity of various kinds. Mental functioning is experienced as thoughts and mental activity. And it is because of these activities, what the Buddhist tradition calls the skandhas, the thought processes, sensory perceptions, and so on, the functioning of the body/mind organism, that there is an assumption made that there is something, someone, here doing these things. But that's an unfounded assumption. To perceive that the skandhas are empty of an individual self doing them, is to awaken. All there is, is Consciousness. There is the apparent functioning of Consciousness in and through these apparent body/mind organisms, but they do not exist as separate entities as such.

That's why we call this the dream; everything, including the body/mind organism you call yourself, does not exist as something separate in itself, but only as an apparent functioning in Consciousness. There is no separate self or mind, only dream characters in Self or Consciousness. There is only thinking happening in this apparent organism, in these dream characters. We experience this. We experience
thoughts happening; but the assumption that they originate inside these heads in something we call a mind is an unwarranted leap. It's the basic misperception from which everything else, all of dualism, all of the illusion of separation, all samsara, follows.

So this... (pause) Wait. What I'm saying right now, I'm not saying, it isn't coming from this mind?

Exactly.

(pause)... Okay, you keep calling this a dream. I understand the analogy, it's a simple one really, but I don't see how it applies.

The value of the dream analogy is that it gives a sense for how it is that physical reality, all of consensus reality, is basically not real, but is also in a sense real. The analogy is to how we think of our sleeping dreams. If you dreamed something at night when you were asleep, when you woke up you wouldn't say that what happened in the dream 'really' happened; it was only a dream. On the other hand, it was a 'real' dream; if you are telling someone about a dream you actually had, you aren't lying or making it up, you really did have this dream. What we mean by saying that the dream isn't real in the sense that consensus reality is real, is that the dream does not exist independently on its own the way it is believed other objects do: it only exists as a dream of the one who dreamt it.

What I'm telling you is that this is the case for all of what you think of as reality, what we are calling consensus reality, what humanity generally agrees is real. It is not real like you think it is: it exists only as a dream in
Consciousness. It has a certain reality to it, yes, it exists in a certain way. All there is is Consciousness, and this exists in Consciousness as an expression of Consciousness, so it does have a certain existence. But it does not exist on its own, independently; it is only here as an expression, a projection in Consciousness, the ultimate dreamer; it does not have any existence other than that.

Another similar analogy which hasn't been around as long is the hologram. A hologram is really only an illusion created by projecting a beam of coherent light. Yet a very sophisticated hologram would have the potential to look and sound and otherwise seem very 'real,' as real as physical reality, so that you could interact with a hologram of a person as if there were a 'real' person there, which of course there wouldn't be.

Yes, but a hologram wouldn't really seem real, because it isn't substantial; you could but your hand through it or walk through it, for example. But that's why I say I don't see how it applies; I don't think you or that wall are dreams or holograms, because they are very substantial; I can't walk through you.

Exactly. So I ask you, under what circumstances would a hologram seem very substantial? Or put it another way, to whom would a hologram appear solid?

Another hologram...

Exactly.

I... (long pause)...

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Take your time.

_The... (pause) I'm sorry, I seem to have lost my train of thought._

Just stay with that for a while. Relax, don't try to struggle with it, just be still for a minute... (pause) Can you tell me what we were talking about?

_Umm... Advaita, non-duality._

What was the last thing that was said before you lost your train of thought?

_I'm afraid I've sort of blanked out here._

That's fine. A little disoriented?

_Yeah. I'm okay, but that was definitely strange._

_"Then as a stranger, bid it welcome!" Just stay with that disorientation a little before it slips away. Savor it, get the feel of it. This is very beautiful. This is actually what you are looking for, without realizing it._

The last thing that you said before blanking out was to recognize the possibility that all of this seems real only because 'you' yourself aren't real either. You said that only another hologram would see holograms as substantial or 'real.' The idea occurred to you that maybe 'you' are only a hologram.

_Oh, yeah._
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Now, if you didn’t really take that as a serious possibility, that would have seemed like just an interesting idea and you would have breezed through it without any problem. But because of what’s happening here, the ego, that constructed, built-up sense of an individual self, was faced with the real possibility that what you have always thought of as ‘you,’ this mind/body apparatus operating in the world, does not exist in any true sense as anything real but only as a hologram, a projection, a dream; and the ego is not able to deal with that, so it checks out.

This is the difference between the intellectual understanding, in which these ideas are tossed around and argued about, and the Understanding going deeper; it goes to another level, where the ego, the sense of individual self, gets exploded, annihilated. No doubt that would be experienced as a bit disorienting, yes? The ego sense of self spends all its time trying to stay in control, and that means trying to keep you away from these moments of disorientation when the bottom drops out and it doesn’t know what to do.

This is so beautiful. This is what I mean when I talk about asking the dangerous question, the question that may end your life. This idea that this ‘you’ is not real, is only a thought, a projection, stopped you. That’s why I said to savor that feeling of disorientation. Get to know it, to not fear it, to welcome it. You’ll be back there again. That place where the ego is completely disoriented is what you’re looking for. The Zen practice of meditating on unsolvable koans, for example, is designed to get the ego/mind to that place where it can’t cope, and blanks out. One day, instead of bouncing back from it, going back there to the familiar, you won’t. You’ll stay here, fall deeper, break through to the
other side. Then you won't go back. Then you won't be there anymore. It'll be perfectly obvious that there isn't any mind, isn't any self, isn't any 'you,' isn't any this side or other side, anything to go back to. That's what's called awakening.

Of course, please don't go around trying to disorient yourself. There's the prescriptive/descriptive fallacy again. This is just describing what happens, not something you can do. You can't cause it. Just welcome it when it comes.

*It sounds a little scary, actually, like I might lose my mind."

You don't have a mind to lose. You'll just lose the mistaken idea that you have one. But scary, yes. That's the ego, the sense of being an individual self, reasserting itself and not wanting to go where it isn't in charge any more. That's why I say sometimes that left to our own devices, no one would choose this. The ego can't choose its own annihilation. Fortunately, it's not up to you.

We've all been conditioned to get scared at this point and worry about going insane. When you step beyond the boundaries of the almost universally accepted parameters of the dream, of consensus reality, and thoughts happen that are really 'outside the box,' outside of Plato's cave, then it is quite possible there may be some experience of psychological pain or turbulence. And also, everyone else still in the dream is going to think you are pretty weird. But trust me, the place that is really insane is where you are now, believing you are separate; not knowing your own true nature, thinking you are this thing, not realizing You are All That Is, the pure choiceless Awareness in which all this appears; Being Consciousness Bliss, Outpouring.

This book and much more is available free at www.PerfectBrilliantStillness.org