

Consequences of Unawareness

James Low, January 2024

All phenomena are empty of self, of inherent existence, and due to this emptiness they are easily filled with concepts providing the delusion of existence and identity. These concepts are fleeting in their actual presence yet the deluded ego takes them to be inherent in what appears. By repeating the conceptual interpretation the ego generates a sense of true knowledge of what phenomena are — and this gives the ego a sense of mastery and agency. The self is an empty signifier, an empty concept that is ceaselessly filled with memories, sensations and so on which are taken to be signs of existence.

When awareness of the whole is lost then manifestation, which is a part of the whole, is taken to be apart from the whole. Who does this? The ego-self born in the moment of separation. The ego, our self-referential consciousness, arises with the experience of the lack of presence of awareness. It is not the cause of this lack: it is not 'my' ignorance that is causal. Actually, there is no cause since all that occurs is unborn like reflections in a mirror or a mirage. This uncaused illusion is empowered by the belief in existence. There is no existent believer who then believes this. The belief itself is the nature of unawareness.

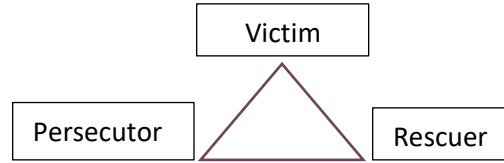
Unawareness of the open source and belief in existent entities is one wave in the ocean. The wave is not different from the ocean yet the belief that it is constitutes the ego. It is as if the source and what is displayed by, with, and as the source, are two separate areas and so it seems that manifestation has nothing to do with the source. From this mistaken identification the belief that I exist arises along with the belief that you exist and that you are not me. Are you useful or harmful, friend or foe? Your value for me is established by how I see you in relation to myself. Your value for me is not fixed. Circumstances change and with this so does your value for me. Friends become enemies and enemies become friends. Although I may believe that I am an autonomous entity, being simply myself, in fact I am part of the ever-changing manifestation of the whole. I change with the changing circumstances because I am part of the changing circumstances.

I may feel like an observer, like one who stands apart watching the flow of events, yet I am in the flow, influencing and being influenced. I have no self-existing personal essence; I am a changing patterning within this field of ever-changing patternings which is inseparable from the whole. The ego-self does not wish to know this, for this simple truth illuminates the ego as a pretender, a deceiver, a construct presenting itself as the eternal 'I am'. Moreover because I insist on trying to control the definitions of myself entertained by myself and by others, I am concerned not to go under the power of others. The definer is powerful. The defined are powerless.

The reification of self and other sets in motion contestation as I and others seek to control the shifting sands of events. When I take myself to be an entity in a world of entities it seems vital for me to ensure my status as a winner. Losers are killed, enslaved, evicted, exploited, abused. I want to win, to be honoured to be successful — for this is the best way to ensure that I will be safe. If I can control you and limit your freedom to undermine me then you cannot harm me. My freedom depends on the restriction of your freedom. If I can act on you to make you be what I want you to be then I can restrict your impact on me. However since the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, the deluding myth of ego-autonomy results in anxiety, fear and uncertainty.

This delusion that I am an existent, a thing amongst things, maintains the dull opacity that hides our ever-open ground. In imagining that I am self and not other, I do not see that this delusion is denying my presence as the radiance of unborn openness. Misinterpreting all that occurs I try to overcome the relativity of my existence by insisting that I am. The anxious vehemence of my self-assertion keeps me blind to the ever-present actual. Being incomplete yet yearning to be complete, I seek to complete myself by how I position myself in the world. When I feel a lack I seek to gain what I need from the field I inhabit. I want to possess items, identify with them, internalise them, become them: *"I am a successful carpenter; all that I have learned has become part of me."* When I feel an excess I seek to disidentify with aspects of myself and project them onto others: *"You are selfish and unkind; I am not like you."* In this manner by pulling in and pushing away I am endlessly adjusting my sense of self according to circumstances, circumstances which I can never stabilise.

We flip between conflict and collaboration trying to secure the best outcome. Yet each and every outcome is transient for change is the truth of how manifestation is. Hence if I feel that I am a victim I know that I am persecuted and I hope that I will be rescued. These roles form the drama triangle whose dynamic keeps the conflict of protagonist and antagonist alive.



The rescuer needs a victim in order to be a rescuer. The victim needs a persecutor in order to be a victim. The persecutor needs a victim and the possibility of their rescue in order to maintain their force as persecutor.

If the victim remains a victim this will defeat the rescuer and strengthen the persecutor. This may sound crazy yet attachment to a hopeless role is often tempting for the ego which seeks security of identity. The role of victim can also be maintained as a cover story for the actual activity of persecution. We can see this operating in several current wars. These cynical games of identity arise from unawareness of the ever-open ground. No matter how awful some people's behaviour seems to be, there are no actual existent people. All limitations — all patterns governed by the five poisons of opacity, desire, aversion, pride and jealousy — are illusory. Of course, in the face of the intense emotions that arise in conflict and wars, to state that victims are illusory (as are persecutors and rescuers) may seem unbelievable and cruel. Yet, due to the nature of unawareness, we cannot think our way out of samsara by thinking about samsara.

We are hurt and say that the perpetrator of this hurt is cruel. We feel that we have accurately defined them on the basis of our experience. Yet other people have different experiences of the person I designate as 'cruel'. We think we are identifying the fixed qualities of real entities yet we are merely giving names to shadows and clouds. The resources of samsara do not provide us with the means to escape samsara. All our thoughts and analyses and interpretations merely pull us further into the web of delusion. Obscuration, veiling and illusion are constructs, patterns which occur only within duality. Once the identity of entities is imagined and established there is no end to the permutations of allies and enemies.

It is for this reason that we must again and again return to the source so that we can awaken from the dullness of imagining that we are existent entities and come to experience the freshness of the uncontrived. As the teachings set out again and again, all the delusions of samsaric duality arise from unawareness of the ground source. Spending our brief lives in trying to improve the patterning of our experience is futile since we and the field we inhabit are ever-changing. Moreover, we have the

opportunity to be pointed towards the source. This is a very rare chance which we should utilise as it is nonduality with the source that alone offers the open door of liberation.

Virtuous concepts and feelings are thinner than the gross concepts and feelings that lead to harmful intent. Virtue comes from kindness and consideration — and this is beautiful in itself. Yet for liberation we need to see through all concepts, feelings and occurrences so that their actual open ground is visible. With this it is obvious that there is no substantial reality to any occurrence. This clarity reveals our participation as apparitional aspects of the whole.

When we look for our mind we cannot find a mind entity. Our mind is empty of self and empty of substance. This is not a belief but the actuality. It is how it is, unconstructed, intrinsic, unborn and unchanging. Although experiences keep arising they also keep vanishing. They have no existence. They appear as the appearances of emptiness which itself never appears. Staying present with this under all circumstances is the heart of the practice. With this the temptation of identifying with appearances as they seem to be under the delusion of duality is cut off for good. Our mind is open and empty and yet, spontaneously and without effort, it is full of a shifting panorama of thoughts, feelings, memories as well as all the perceptions of the senses. We are unborn in never having separated from the whole and unimpeded in that the flow of experience, including all that we take to be ourselves, does not stop. The patterning of experience is ever-changing and our manifestation within this is also ever-changing.

This has always been the case yet it has been hidden from us by our own effort to maintain the image of our self by editing the actual patterns of our experience. We look to concepts such as 'I exist', 'I know who I am', 'I am not like you', to underpin our interpreted experience and thereby cover up the fresh ungraspable nature of direct experience.

It is for this reason that liberation is in the palm of our hands. Relaxing identification of and with arisings will reveal the self-liberation of both subject and object. This revelation is the radiance of intrinsic awareness.