

This Is All A Dream

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[This essay was awarded first prize in the special Kern Foundation Essay Contest held in 1983. Finally scanning this with OCR technology into digital form, I have dropped the diacritical marks, made just a few changes in grammar, used italics and boldface instead of underlining for key terms and names, and added a few descriptions for certain teachers quoted herein. I could have added many more quotes, insights and bibliographic references to this paper, gleaned over twenty-three years since I first wrote it, but, to save time and in the interests of “authenticity,” I have refrained from doing so and decided to let the essay stand as is, so that readers may see how the original paper read.]

In the wisdom tradition constituted by the teachings of the world's greatest spiritual masters and most sublime spiritual texts, it is stated that we suffer from a case of mistaken identity: our true nature is not that of being a discrete mass of protoplasm with an ongoing epiphenomenal mind-chatter; no, our true identity is the GodSelf, the supreme, absolute, unqualified, infinite Being-Awareness-Bliss (*Sat-Cit-Ananda*), *Brahman* (Reality), *Atman* (Self), Buddha-nature (*Tathagatagarbha*), *Bodhi-Citta* (Awake Mind), *Viviktadharma* (Sole Reality), *Advaya* (The One), *Tao*, *Allah*, *al-Haqq* (Truth), *Yahweh* (I Amness), Godhead, Christ-consciousness, Spirit, Life. This God-Self transcends all phenomena and subsumes them as their source/destiny/ground/context/matrix and very substance (i.e., the “world-stuff” is “God-stuff,” it is “made out of” pure Being-Awareness-Bliss.[1]

In this wisdom tradition which presents such a radical idea about who we really are (beyond before what we chronically *think* we are), there also occurs the rather strange idea that our sense of being exclusively this body-mind entity (“me”) in a world of “other” body-mind entities is a *dream* of the “sleeping” God-Self—who/which appears to be imposing upon itself a kind of ignorance (*ajñāna*, *avidya*), evidently for the sake of playing “hide-and-peek” with itself.

Further, as we shall shortly see, many spiritual masters consider the phenomenal world of our “night-dream” to be essentially no different from the phenomenal world of our “daydream” (i.e., “normal,” “waking” consciousness). The notion that “this is all a dream” is a most unlikely and unexpected one for the common (hu)man on the street, and a most misunderstood idea for many scholars in philosophy, psychology, etc., who presume to think that they have all the answers about the nature of existence (whether explicitly or implicitly), and reject outright this notion of the world as being a “dream,” an idea which does not fit in with their current empirical experience or their mental models of reality. Yet—the truth must be known—a significant number of the world's greatest spiritual masters—past and present—have held this view; and if one goes by the criterion, “By their fruits ye shall know them,” these spiritual masters are humanity's choicest specimens, and deserve to be heard for their insights into the fundamental nature of reality. To support the dramatic claim that we are living in a “dream,” let us take some time here to extensively document the literature; we will also do well to hear some of the other metaphors—which may not be so metaphorical!—for our “normal” condition. The reader should understand that the term “dream”—and other terms which we will encounter in the following section—is being used to refer to both A) our ignorance of our supreme identity, or deluded ego-sense, as well as to B) the phenomenal world, including our body-mind (sensations, perceptions, thoughts, memories, fantasies, and other psychic impulses), which appears, in our ignorance, to be a distinct, self-subsisting, independent entity outside of consciousness. As we document the material, discern which of the two meanings of the metaphor “dream”(or whatever) is intended.

Chuang-tzu, a sage in the ancient contemplative Taoist tradition (to be distinguished from the later liturgical, magical, or religious “Taoism”), wrote, in the work of the 4th or 3rd century BCE that bears his name, “There is the great awaking after which we shall know that this life was a great dream. All the while the stupid think they are awake.”[2]

In the *Vajracchedika (Diamond) Sutra* of Mahayana Buddhism (first to second century AD/CE [“Common Era”]), the world is referred to as a “dream,” as well as “a fault of vision, a shadow, a mock show, dew drops, a bubble, a lightning flash, or a cloud.”[3] Another great Mahayana Buddhist work, the *Lankavatara Sutra* (same time period), urges us to “Know that the world has no self-nature

[no substance of its own] and has never been born, it is like a cloud, a ring produced by a firebrand, ... a vision, a mirage, the moon as reflected in the ocean, and a dream.”[4]

Buddhists of the Yogacara or Vijñānavada school call this the *cittamatra*, or “mind-only” (consciousness-only) view of the world; world is a figment of mind. The eminent Indian Vajrayana Buddhist saint, **Naropa** (1016-1100), who passed his lineage on into Tibet, where it has come down to us as the Kagyutpa line, the most rigorous and sublime of the four main Tibetan Buddhist schools, had twelve similes for the world of phenomenality, many drawn from a tradition going back to Nagarjuna and, before him, the Buddha Siddhartha: “A magic spell, a dream, a gleam before the eyes, a reflection, lightning, an echo, a rainbow, moonlight upon water, cloud-[images], dimness before the eyes, fog and apparitions.”[5]

The Tibetan hagiographer of Naropa declares, “Both *Sutras* and *Mantra*-texts assert that the whole of entitative reality is like a dream.... The fact of dreaming is the most excellent index from among the twelve similes as to the illusory-hallucinatory nature of our world.”[6]

Nagarjuna (1st-2nd cent. CE), one of the founding “fathers” of Mahayana Buddhism, in his *Mahaprajñāparamitopadesa*, gives the following explanation for the usefulness of the dream-simile:

“A) There is no reality in a dream, and yet, while one dreams, one believes in the reality of the things one sees in the dream. After one has woken up one recognizes the falseness of the dream and laughs at oneself. Just so a man who is plunged into the dreamy state which results from his fettered [ego-centric] existence, has a belief in things which do not exist. But when he has found the Path, then, at the moment of enlightenment, he understands that there is no reality in them and he laughs at himself.

“B) A dreamer, by the force of his dream, sees a thing where there is nothing. Just so, a man, by the force of the dreamy state which results from ignorance, believes in the existence of all sorts of things which do not exist, such as “I” and “mine,” male and female, etc.. C) In a dream one rejoices although there is nothing enjoyable, one is angry although there is nothing to annoy, one is frightened although there is nothing to frighten. So do the beings with regard to the things of the world.”[7]

It is not just in ancient times that the Buddhists maintained that “all is a dream.” For instance, **Seung Sahn** (1927-[2004]), the great Korean Zen master who has brought the Ikkyo (Kuei-Yang) lineage of Zen Buddhism to the Western world—and who served in the Korean military, fixed washing machines when he arrived in this country, sponsored the founding of more than a dozen Zen centers, flies all over the world, and in many other ways leads a stable, “down-to-earth” lifestyle, nevertheless is one of the current Buddhist masters who frequently uses with his students this notion that “this is a dream”:

S.S.: Now you are living in a dream. Wake up! Q.: What is this dream?

S.S.: This is a dream.

Q.: Do I look like I'm dreaming?

S.S.: Yah. What is not a dream? Give me one sentence of not-dream words. . . . All is a dream.

Q.: Are you dreaming?

S.S.: Yah! (Loud laughter.) You make the dream, so I am having it. It is a good dream. It is a Zen dream. A Zen-lecture dream. (Laughter.) But how can you wake up? This is very important. Your whole past life is the same as a dream, isn't it? The future is the same as a dream. And this present moment is the same as a dream. So tell me—how can you wake up?[8]

Before going further, we pause to note that these masters are not just idly playing with words in a poetic or clever or, in this last case, teasing manner. They are challenging us to examine our ongoing process of experiencing and to enquire into the validity of our concepts, the basis for our sensations, perceptions, and feelings, and the reality of our “normal,” chronic sense of self (“me” and “mine”). But more on this later....

In the Western spiritual traditions as well as in the East we find that this metaphor of the dream is employed. **Plotinus** (204-270?), the profound mystic trained in Alexandria (though he desired to be in India), later to teach in Rome, is one early Westerner (admittedly likely subject to some Eastern influences) who often spoke in terms of the dream, though rather enigmatically:

“This, then, is our argument against those who place real beings in the class of bodies and find their guarantee of truth in the evidence of pushings and strikings and the apparitions which come by way of sense-perception; they act like people dreaming, who think that the things they see as real actually exist, when they are only dreams. For the activity of sense-perception is that of the soul asleep; for it is the part of the soul that is in the body that sleeps; but the true wakening is a true getting up from the body, not with the body. Getting up with the body is only getting out of one sleep into another, like getting out of one bed into another. [Plotinus here seems to be referring to rebirth/transmigration]. But the true rising [awakening] is a rising altogether away from bodies, which are of the opposite nature to soul [spirit, awareness, Self] and opposed in respect of reality. Their coming into being and flux and perishing which does not belong to the nature of reality, are evidence of this.”[9]

Descartes (1596-1650), the French philosopher—not noted for his mysticism—candidly remarks: “The visions of a dream and the experiences of my waking state are so much alike that I am completely puzzled and I do not really know that I am not dreaming at this moment.”[10] One wonders just how far Descartes went into this possibility/likeness that he was dreaming a “day-dream,” or whether he left off with his enquiry and returned to a more habitual kind of consciousness.

In the Middle East, we find the **Prophet Muhammad** (570-632), the powerful Arab founder of Islam, saying in the collection of such sayings known as the *Hadith*: “Man is asleep; must he die before he wakes?”[11]

The Muslim Sufi tradition is the mystical way that kept the truly spiritual element alive within Islam (when the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties’ orthodox corruption and/or rigidity threatened to extinguish it). In Sufism, the world is seen as Allah’s “veil”—which, like a veil, is in itself actually a flimsy thing, even rather transparent. Other descriptions of the world abound:

Observed **Abu Hamid al-Ghazali** (d.1111), most prominent of the medieval Sufi prose writers, a very orthodox and respected theologian turned mystic:

“Know that the visible world is to the World Invisible [the formless God-Self principle] as the husk to the kernel, as the outward form and body to the spirit, as darkness to light. . . .

“When [the] mystic [who has awakened to the fact that Allah is the sole reality] returns [from his state of absorption] to this world of unreality and shadows, he regards mankind with pity, because they are deprived of the contemplation of the beauty of that celestial abode and he marvels at their contentment with shadows. . . .

“Each thing hath two faces, a face of its own, and a face of its Lord; in respect of its own face, it is nothingness, and in respect of the Face [Presence] of God, it is Being.”[12]

Abu'l-Majdud ibn Adam “Hakim” Sana’i (d.1131), another great Sufi, and one of the greatest of Persian poets, caustically remarked: “Everyone in the ordinary world is asleep. Their religion—the religion of the familiar world—is emptiness, not religion at all.”[13]

Farid al-Din 'Attar (d.1229), another of the great Persian Sufi poets, wrote in a most provocative vein:

“This is what I see the world to be: it is like a closed casket in which we are placed and in which, through our ignorance, we spend our time in folly. When Death opens the lid of the casket, each one who has wings takes his flight to Eternity, but that one who is without wings, remains in the casket, a prey to a thousand afflictions. . . . Before the lid is taken away from the casket, become a bird of the Way to God and develop your wings and your feathers. Nay, rather, burn your wings and your feathers and destroy yourself [the egocentric principle] by fire, and so you will arrive at the Goal before all others. . . .”

[In *baqa*, the awakened Sufi state of “abidance” or “remaining” in/as God:] “you will know that when you were alive you were dead, and only thought yourself alive.”[14]

Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi (d.1240), “the greatest Sheikh,” raised in Andalusia, Spain, widely travelled, settling in Damascus, a major influence on not only later Sufism but also later Christian

mysticism, and one of the markedly “non-dualist” (mistakenly called “pantheist”) Sufi writers, declared: “If they knew themselves, [men] would know God; and if they really knew God,... they would realize that He is Himself the Essence of the kingdom of the heavens and the earth.... God [is] all which perceives and all which is perceived. ... His veil, that is, phenomenal existence, is but the concealment of His existence in His oneness.... There is no other and there is no existence for any other, than He.”[15]

In Buddhism, one of the reasons the world of phenomenality in itself is considered to be an unreal dream is that it is entirely impermanent and transient (*anicca*, Pali); it is arising and passing away from moment to moment to new moment. Each new moment brings with it an entirely new world-appearance, discontinuous from the last; our dulled sensitivity, and our memory which strings discrete sensations together and fuses them into an appearance of a continuous some-“thing” “out there” in the field of our experience to define our self-sense by and to cling to for a sense of solidity and security—these combine to delude us into believing that there is a real, self-subsistent world outside of our consciousness, and that there is a “me” “in here” watching, being affected by, and acting on, the world. This whole “dream” of ignorance arises from the inability to discern the impermanence of the phenomenal world.

Jalal al-Din Rumi (d.1273), “greatest of the Persian Sufi poets,” and a famous saint as well, gives an analysis of the transiency of the world: “Every moment the world and we are renewed. Yet we are ignorant of this renewing. . . . Life, like a stream of water, is renewed and renewed, though it wears the appearance of continuity in form. That seeming continuity arises from its swift renewal, as when a single spark of fire is whirled round swiftly. . . . It seems to the eye a continuous line of fire. This apparent extension, owing to the quick motion, demonstrates the rapidity with which it is moved....”

“... This world, which is only a dream, seems to the sleeper as a thing enduring forever. But when the morn of the last day shall dawn, the sleeper will escape from the cloud of illusion; laughter will overpower him at his own fancied griefs when he beholds his abiding home and place [as pure consciousness].... Whatever you have done during your sleep in the world will be displayed to you clearly when you awake. Imagine not that these ill deeds of yours exist not in this sleep of yours and will not be revealed to you. But your present laughter will turn to weeping and woe [of regret], on the day of revealing;. . . Your present wailing and sorrows and griefs, on the other hand, will be joy when you awake.”[16]

Rumi brings up here the *ethics and morality* of our situation, the idea that certain behaviors are appropriate, others not; and he also suggests the need for *equanimity* in the face of adversities since ultimately they have no power over us when we awaken. The idea seems to be that in this dream of phenomenality which the God-Self has conjured up for itself, if It is to maintain its integrity and sense of well-being, it must refrain from, a) on the one hand, getting caught up in immoral activities which would threaten to enmesh It (the God-Self) inextricably in the egocentric, alienated sense of being the violent or angry or lustful or gluttonous one, and b) on the other hand, getting trapped in the equally alienating sense of being the sufferer, the victim.

So if we would authentically maintain our true identity as the God-Self, we must needs stay free of attachments which come from immorality, and from aversions which come from losing equanimity. And viewing the world as a dream helps in this, for, just as when one becomes *lucid* in a night-dream one has no real desire for attractive objects since one knows them to be but projections of one's own consciousness, and one has no real aversions to noxious-seeming elements in the dream (or even nightmarish, monstrous or demonic ones) for the same reason (i.e., that they are but projections of one's consciousness, albeit the *shadow* aspect of one's consciousness), so also if one becomes “lucid” in this “day-dream,” all attachments and aversions, likes and dislikes, desires and fears or hatreds, will disappear. And it is these which perpetuate the egocentric sense of self so tenaciously.

Therefore, to view the world as a “dream” or as “shadows” or the like *serves an heuristic purpose*—it *weans us from attachments and aversions which perpetuate our mistaken identity*, simply by undercutting their power over us, by revealing them to be downright silly, unnecessary, irrelevant to our fundamental state of well-being (Being-Awareness-Bliss).

Continuing on with our documentation, we would hear from **Mahmud Shabistari** (d. 1320), another Persian Sufi saint: “How can you doubt that this is like a dream: that beside Unity, duality is just a delusion? . . . The world has no being except as an appearance; from end to end its state is a sport and a play.”[17]

Sarmad (d.1657), the famous friend of Mughal prince Dara Shikoh and Sufi poet-martyr saint (originally from Iran), observed that “This world is a *mirage*. Look carefully at it./ It is mere froth of the bubble, a mere ripple in the sea./ . . . This world is like the line drawn on water. / [It is] a shadow and a mirage.”[18]

Bulleh Shah (d.1752), whose *Kafis* (songs) are famous all over West Pakistan and Punjab, India, fused Sufi and Hindu elements into his thought, yet refusing to be identified as a Sufi, Hindu or the like (one of the strange games of mistaken identity that the God-Self plays with itSelf is to take itSelf to be a “Hindu” in one case, a “Christian” in another case, a “Muslim” in another, etc., and then, having split itSelf into distinct “beings”—forgetting its true nature as Being absolute—it feels separate from “other beings”). Bulleh Shah sang:

“As the world is a dream and all who dwell in it are dreamers, / So do I live in it, as in a reverie [“lucidly dreaming it”]. / ... In this world darkness prevails and it is full of dust and is a mire of sensuality. / Seek within; there He dwells, the ignorant seek Him outside [they seek fulfillment from phenomena]. / In this world all is false and is an empty show. / He, the great secret, is entirely different from this world [though subsuming it as its essential Beingness]. / All this world is a manifestation of a scintillation of His Fire of Effulgence.”[19]

Shah Latif (d.1752), greatest of the known Sufi saints of the Pakistan (Sind) area, again uses the “sleep/dream” metaphor: “O sleeping one! Wake up. It behooves not thus to sleep. / Thy companion of life [the God-Self] lives; the Lord shall not meet thee if thus thou sleepest.”[20] (Note that sometimes the spiritual masters will refer to the God-Self as the “Beloved,” as “He,” apparently outside oneself, actually one's truest Self; this is undoubtedly done so as to preclude the possibility that the ego-sense appropriate the mere concept of being the God-Self while continuing to perpetuate its constrictions, pettiness, attachments and aversions and overall sense of separateness from absolute Being.)

It is **Meher Baba** (1894-1969), a modern day Indian Sufi saint (with Zoroastrian parentage, initiated into full God-Realization by Sufi matriarch Hazrat Babajan, and later influenced with strong Hindu Vedanta leanings by his second guru, Upasani Baba Maharaj) who presents us with one of the clearest and most profound statements of how “this is all a dream.” Note that it is Baba who has popularized the idea that this is the God-Self's game of “hide'n'seek” with itSelf.

“I definitely know from my living experience that God is the one and only reality, and that all else is illusion. All that you see and hear at this moment—this hall, our being in each other's presence, these explanations which I give and you hear, and even my incarnation as the Avatar—all this is a dream. Every night you go to sleep and have different kinds of dreams, yet every morning you wake up to experience anew the same old dream that you have been dreaming since your birth into your present life in illusion. You will say, “Baba, we are wide awake; we actually see you sitting before us; we can and do follow what you are explaining to us.” But you will admit that you would say the same thing to me if, in a dream, you found that you were near me and heard me telling you that all you felt, saw and heard was a dream. As long as you do not wake up from a dream, you are dream-bound to feel it to be stark reality. A dream becomes a dream on only when you wake up; only then do you tell others that the life you lived in the dream was just a dream. Good or bad, happy or unhappy, in reality the dream is then recognized as having been absolutely nothing. Therefore I repeat that, although you are now sitting before me and hearing me, you are not really awake. You are actually sleeping and dreaming. I say this because I am simultaneously awake in the real sense and yet dreaming—with one and all—the dreams which all dream.

“All your pleasures and difficulties, your feelings of happiness and misery, your presence here and your listening to these explanations, are all nothing but a vacant dream on your part and mine. There is this one difference: I also consciously know the dream to be a dream, while you feel that you are awake....

“The: process of repetitive sleeping-dreaming-awakening [the three conventional states of the spiritually unawakened being] is a result of your inability to wake up in your sound-sleep state (i.e., conscious union with God). Therefore alternately you remain asleep [unconsciously] or keep dreaming either the dreams-in-sleep or the dreams of creation [daily physical reality]. It is only when you wake up in the true sense (God-realization) that you find that you alone (God) exist and that all else is nothing.[21]

“In the dream state you enjoy and suffer. When you wake you realize that your enjoyment and suffering was nothing but a dream—an illusion. But know that your present state of consciousness which you call being awake, when compared to the Real Awake State, is nothing but a dream state. Your life is a dream within the mighty Dream of God which is the universe....

“God's imagination is unending and the Creation which is the product of His Imagination goes on endlessly expanding.... In what is called space numberless universes are continuously created, sustained and destroyed. This procession of creation continues so long as God goes on imagining. And when God's imagination is suspended, as it is at moments in Eternity when God withdraws Himself into His Sound Sleep State (just as a man's imagination ceases when he is in deep sleep), the Creation is withdrawn and dissolved (Mahapralaya). Creation, Preservation and Dissolution are based on ignorance. In fact there is no such thing as creation, so preservation and dissolution never actually occur. The very cosmos has no foundation save that of ignorance. Ignorance believes: The cosmos is a reality; birth, death, old age, wealth, honour, are real. Knowledge knows: The cosmos is a dream. God alone is Real....

“To awaken means to consciously experience the sound-sleep State of God. When you awake you find that the Great Dream containing all the varied illusory aspects of dreaming, has vanished for ever. Heaven and hell as well as all the planes vanish within your self, to remain, as nothing. In this Awakened State, there is no scope for anything besides you—the Self, the Existence eternal and Infinite.”[22]

Having encountered some masters with Hindu-leanings, we would now turn to document the extensive amount of material which comes out of the Hindu tradition employing the “dream”-simile, and other similes, to account for our “normal” state of consciousness.

In the ancient classic Hindu text devoted to the Avatara-Incarnations of Lord Vishnu, especially that of the God-man Sri Krishna, known as the *Bhagavatam Purana* (written by a refined author circa 9th century CE), the world is referred to as an unreal, transitory projection of consciousness,[23] a mirage,[24] and, most frequently, a *dream*:

“Everything happening within time, which consists of past, present and future, is merely a dream [*suptam*]. That is the secret understanding in all Vedic literature.[25]... Birth and death and all the experiences of life are to the *Atman* [Self] the experiences of a prolonged dream.... As in a dream one seems to meet with actual experiences, so the ignorant man, immersed in illusion, mistakes shadow for substance.”[26]

Tripura Rahasya, another the early medieval work (no confirmed date) displaying the fusion of Indian *advaita* [nondual] *Vedanta* and Kashmir *Shaiva tantra*, crucially declares that “The whole world is manifested in [Consciousness] like a city in a mirror,”[27] and says that this world is “mere figment of imagination... an image on the screen of the mind... an image on the mirror of consciousness... a mental image,”[28]. It urges us to “cultivate the contemplation of 'I Am,' abide as pure being and thus give up this delusion of the reality of the world.”[29]

Like many other Indian sources, *Tripura Rahasya* tells us that the world is a dream and offers this cogent argument to anyone who would contest the point:

“Consider the dream as a dreamer would and tell me whether the trees do not afford shade to the pedestrians [in the dream] and bear fruits for the use of others. Is the dream realised to be untrue and evanescent in the dream itself? [No.] Do you mean to say that the dream is rendered false [only] after waking from it? Is not the waking world similarly rendered false in your dream or deep sleep? Do you

contend that the waking state is not so because there is continuity in it after you wake up? [But] is there no continuity in your dreams from day to day? [Here the term “continuity” does not refer to similar content in one’s dreams from night to night, but to the stability of images within one’s dream.] If you say that it is not evident, tell me whether the continuity in the wakeful world is not broken up every moment of your life. Do you suggest that the hills, the seas and the earth itself are really permanent phenomena, in spite of the fact that their appearance is constantly changing? Is not the dream-world also similarly continuous with its earth, mountains, rivers, friends and relatives? Do you still doubt its abiding nature? Then extend the same reasoning to the nature of the wakeful world and know it to be equally evanescent. The ever-changing objects like the body, trees, rivers and islands are easily found to be transitory. [Physics would agree with this, claiming that objects are transitory at the macroscopic and also certainly the microscopic and sub-microscopic/sub-atomic levels.] Even mountains are not immutable, for their contours change owing to the erosion of waterfalls and mountain torrents....

“Because a dream creation is obliterated and rendered false by present experience—what distinction will you draw between the fundamentals underlying the dream objects and the present objects? If you say that the dream is an illusion and its fundamentals are equally so, whereas the present creation is not so obliterated and its fundamentals must therefore be true, I ask you what illusion is. It is determined by the transitory nature, which is nothing but appearance to, and disappearance from, our senses. Is not everything obliterated in deep sleep? If you maintain however, that mutual contradiction is unreliable as evidence and so proves nothing, it amounts to saying that self-evident sight alone furnishes the best proof. Quite so, people like you do not have a true insight into the nature of things. Therefore, take my word for it that the present world is only similar to a dream world. Long periods pass in dreams also. Therefore, purposefulness and enduring nature are in every way similar to both states. Just as you are obviously aware in your waking state, so also are you in your dream state.... The wakeful universe appears so real to all only by force of habit. If the same be imagined vacuous it will melt away into the void.... Obviously you cannot distinguish this from a dream and cannot help concluding that the world is nothing but imagination.... Therefore convince yourself of the dream-like nature of the world....

“Just as the dream creations are pictures moving on the mind screen, so also this world including yourself is the obverse of the picture depicted by pure intelligence [the Self] and it is nothing more than an image in a mirror.... Realise that the Self is the self-contained mirror projecting and manifesting this world. The Self is pure unblemished consciousness.”[30]

The *Ashtavakra Samhita*, a profound, purely *advaita* work evidently from an earlier period, says that the world is a magic show,[31] and is “like the illusory silver in the mother of pearl, the snake in the rope, and the mirage in the rays of the sun.”[32]

Sankara (c.700), usually considered the most brilliant sage in all Vedanta tradition, industriously revived the Hindu *dharma* (yes, even though the sage says “it is all a dream,” his appearance within the dream is impeccable and admirable for frequent creative vigor and courageous perseverance). Sankara taught, like the Buddhist sage Nagarjuna and the Madhyamika and Yogacara Buddhist sages who also influenced him, that the world is unreal, a dream. A much-read classic, the *Vivekachudamani*, ascribed to Sankara but likely by a somewhat later in the Advaita Vedanta tradition, declares: “The apparent world is caused by our imagination, in its ignorance. It is not real. It is like seeing the snake in the rope. It is like a passing dream.”[33]

Sankara also often called the world a “mirage” (like Nagarjuna) and a “deluded superimposition of the unreal upon the Real.”[34]

Among the classic early medieval Indian sources, the *Yoga-Vasishtha* (its core composed c.6th cent. CE, the full text completed around the 11th century), is one of the most sophisticated and also entertaining and inspiring spiritual texts in existence. Of all our wisdom texts, it is the Yoga-Vasishtha that most repeatedly, convincingly, forcefully presents the idea that the world of phenomena is a dream. First we would hear all of the different ways it describes phenomena: they are “like dream-experiences, visions in a state of delirium, hallucinations of a drunkard, optical illusions, psychosomatic illness [hypochondria?], emotional disturbances and psychotic states”[35]; the world is the

mere fancy of a deluded mind,[36] a mirage (“in the corner of consciousness”),[37] a rainbow,[38] fog,[39] cloud-formations,[40] like a number of echoes spreading out from one initial sound (vibration),[41] a “son of a barren woman,”[42] a confusion, like “blue” sky,[43] like future waves in a calm sea, a potentiality of differences,[44] illusory projection of mind,[45] imagination,[46] wonderful manifestation of consciousness,[47] the thought-form of *Brahman* (Reality),[48] ideation,[49] like an illusory circle formed by swinging around a firebrand,[50] the accidental manifestation of *citsakti* (the power of consciousness),[51] superimposition on consciousness,[52] a vibration in consciousness,[53] a reflection of consciousness,[54] the playful notion of pure consciousness,[55] a juggler’s trick,[56] the jugglery of *maya* (delusion),[57] an unreal non-substance,[58] mere appearance,[59] the mysterious play of consciousness,[60] a production by no one out of nothing on nothing![61]

In many places, *Yoga-Vasishtha* declares the world-appearance to be unreal,⁶² but finally reveals to us that, ultimately, it is neither real nor unreal:

“[The] world is neither real nor unreal. The only reality is the movement of energy within the cosmic consciousness. This, on account of deluded understanding [ignorance], appears as this creation....”[63]

Just as the night dream can be said to be both real and unreal, or neither real nor unreal, so is this “day-dream,” this world of daily experience. *Yoga-Vasishtha* drives home the idea of this world as a dream over and over again:

“In the infinite being at the beginning of an epoch, there arises a vibration on account of latent ignorance; and this manifests as diverse beings, as if in a cosmic dream....

“[The world] is like a dream: in a state of ignorance, the intelligence within oneself appears as numerous dream-objects all of which are nothing other than that intelligence. Even so, in what is known as the beginning of creation, such an appearance happened; but it is not independent of Brahman, it does not exist apart from Brahman, hence it does not exist. . . .

“... This creation appears to have emerged from the one pure undivided cosmic being, even as dreams appear in the consciousness of the sleeping person. All this happens merely by the creative thought inherent in the cosmic being, not as real transformations of the Infinite....

“... All these countless forms appear and disappear repeatedly, even as cities come and go in a dream.

“It may be said that the elements ... have arisen in consciousness like dream-objects.

“When the absolute ‘thinks,’ as it were, that it is a *jiva* [particular body-mind entity], the *jiva*-nature manifests itself. Just as a sleeping person appears to create diverse creatures within himself [i.e., in his dreams], without ever abandoning his own unique and sole reality, a mere thought or will, the absolute brings into being these countless creatures, without ever suffering diminution or change....

“... Even as from the waking state experience, there is no materiality in the objects seen in a dream though while dreaming the objects appear to be solid, this world appears to be material yet in reality is pure consciousness. There is not even a temporary or subtle river in the mirage; even so there is in no sense a real world, but only pure consciousness. ... The world is as true in relation to Brahman as the dream-city is true in relation to the experience of the waking consciousness....

“This universe is but a long dream. The ego-sense and also the fancy that there are others, are as real as dream-objects. The sole reality is the infinite consciousness.... This universe and all in it are but a long dream; to me, you are real, and to you I am real, even so the others are real to you or to me. And, this relative reality is like the reality of the dream-objects....

“Creation is but agitation in consciousness; the world exists in the mind! it seems to exist because of imperfect [spiritual] vision, imperfect understanding. It is really not more than a long dream....

“This world-appearance is experienced only like a day-dream; it is essentially unreal; it is a painting on void like the colours of a rainbow. It is like a widespread fog; when you try to grasp it, it is nothing. [This is what modern particle physicists have discovered!]....

“This world-appearance is but a long dream which manifests everywhere being the imagination of Brahma the creator and all others [who are, in turn, mere notions in Brahman, infinite consciousness or awareness]. The objects thus born in the Creator's dream migrate from dream to dream, from embodiment to embodiment—thus generating the illusory solidarity of this world-appearance....

“... Though this universe seems to exist, nothing really exists as the universe. It is but the appearance or reflection of the infinite consciousness, which alone is the reality. In that consciousness the creation appears as if in a dream. Hence, only the reality in which it appears is real; and that is the infinite void....

“The one cosmic consciousness sees diversity within itself even as a dreamer dreams of diverse objects within himself....

“Know this to be a long dream or a long-standing hallucination or day-dreaming, or wishful thinking. When, by the grace of God or the self, you attain awakening, you will then see all this clearly....

“Even as the objects seem to exist and function in the inner world of consciousness in a dream, objects seem to exist and function in the outer world of consciousness during the wakeful state. Nothing really happens in both these states. Even as consciousness alone is the reality in the dream state, consciousness alone is the substance in the wakeful state too. That is the Lord, that is the supreme truth, that you are and that am I and that is all....

“O Rama, for your spiritual awakening I declare again and again: this world-appearance is like a long dream. Wake up, wake up.”[64]

Here we would pause to note that, according to *Yoga-Vasishtha*, and other works, the dream itself has never really happened, that not only has the One never become many,[65] but that, fundamentally, no change in consciousness has ever even occurred,[66] consciousness has never truly undergone any modification or impurity in its apparent-dreaming up the apparent-world.[67] This is the *ajati*, or “no-creation” doctrine that **Gaudapada**, Sankara’s *paramaguru* (guru's guru) formulated, the view that “nothing has ever really happened,” a point which many modern gurus have iterated, despite the apparent “some-thing-ness” which is characteristic of our current experience.

What do the modern gurus have to say of the phenomenal world and/or our egocentric ignorance? To begin with some of the diverse metaphors to describe our situation: it is a “mirage,”[69] a “stage-play,”[70] an “illusion,”[71] a “dance-drama,”[72] a “phantasm,”[73] a “shadow-play,”[74] “clouds,”[75] “superimpositions,”[76] a “painting on the canvas of Reality,”[77] a “drop in consciousness,”[78] a “pencil-drawn picture (with the “point” of awareness),”[79] a “big hoax, a nothing created out of nothing,”[80] a “cinema” or “movie,”[81] a “figment, or ideation of the mind,”[82] and, yes, a “dream.”

Sathya Sai Baba (1926-), considered by his millions of followers to be a full *avatara* (conscious incarnation of the God-Self), but, in light of some of his less-than-savory behavior (well-documented since 2000), more likely a powerful but “fallen” yogi or, alternatively, a flawed personality channeling the powerful energy of the great God-man of an earlier generation, Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918), has often been asked how this creation of “his” (the God-Self's) world came into apparent being. Sathya Sai, who has been known to be associated with both real and also faked materializations, but has also been involved since childhood in fascinating paranormal anomalies attested to even by his detractors (such as instantly disappearing from people’s midst and suddenly re-appearing at a distant place a few hundred meters away), had this to say:

“... If you can understand how your dream comes into being, you can know how this creation came into being. Sleep causes dreams; the Maya (the deluding power) of the Divine has caused this creation! This universe is as unreal [and as real] as the dream. It is only relatively real; it is not absolutely real.”[83]

He also has said:

“The visible world is as unreal as the dream world. Just as through illusion a snake is imposed upon a rope, the world too is imposed on *Brahman* [Reality]....”[84]

“[Q: How did this delusion come about?] You [the *Atman*-Self] slept and so you dreamed. You slept the sleep of *Ajñāna* [ignorance] and *Moha* [delusion] and so you dreamt this *Samsara* [cycle of rebirths]. Awake. And you will have no more dreams. When the dream is gone, the delusion also goes....”

“[What real distinction is there between the waking stage and the dream stage?] Both are of the nature of illusion; in both we have the *vasanas* operating [the tendencies, mental conditioning, reactions of binding likes and dislikes—see below, for fuller discussion of this important issue]. The *jagat* [waking world] is the stable illusion; the dream is the unstable illusion. This is the distinction, there is no other.[85]...

“When the waking state is transcended, it also is seen to be a dream,... the waking state is seen to be a dream, and the dream state a dream within a dream. . . . The ‘I’ in the dream state is taken to be the body. The ‘I’ in the waking state is taken to be the mind. And the ‘I’ in the transcendent [awakened] state is God [Self].[86]...

“While you dream, the thing is very real, but when you wake up it turns out to be unreal, and the waking stage seems to be real. But both are dreams—one a night dream and the other a day dream. During both dreams *you* are present and *you* experience both. So *you* [the witnessing Self] alone are real; the rest is a mixture of true and false....

“What is the cause of dream, how does it come into being? The right answer is: sleep is the cause. So, too, the cosmos is caused by *maya*. The cosmos is as ephemeral and as vagarious as a dream.[87]...

“The time will come when the whole of this dream will vanish. To everyone of us there must come a time when the whole universe will be found to have been a mere dream....[88]

“The world is but a mental image of the individual. How this happens is a mystery. One can only say that just as sleep is the cause of dreams, *maya* or the basic ignorance is the cause of creation. ... Dreams are nullified when the person becomes *ajñāni* [one aware of the Truth]. At that stage one gets rid of [transcends] the night-dream as well as the day-dream.”[89]

Other modern gurus echo the same idea of the world being a dream; **Swami Sivananda** (1887-1963), formerly a very prominent doctor, later a dynamic founder of many service institutions (like Sathya Sai Baba after him), nevertheless declared:

“... The world is a dream.... All that is happening around you is nothing in reality. It is a play of the Lord.”[90]

“Whatever you see is false. . . . Whatever [objects] you see do not really exist. They are mere illusory appearances like the objects in a dream. But the seer exists when the objects appear and disappear. ... *Srutis* [Scriptures] and sages declare that the objects of the world are as false as the objects of the dream. They call the world *Dirgha Svapna*, or a long dream. . . . An objector says, ‘A man dreams that he has four hands and that he is flying in the air. Is this not false? *Jagrat* [waking] state is not like this. Therefore it is true.’ [Answer:] A man obtains the [re-]birth of a *deva* [celestial] or animal or a bird on account of his Karmas egocentric actions, good or bad]. He becomes Indra [a god] with a thousand hands in the waking state. He becomes a bird and flies in the air in the waking state. He becomes an animal with four legs, a centipede with hundred feet or a snake without feet. Therefore waking state and dream state are the same. Just as in dream some objects are false, some are true, so also in waking state some objects like the snake in the rope are false, some, like jar, cloth [etc.] are true. The objects of the dream and waking state are not so absolutely true as *Atma* or *Brahman*.[91]

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-86), the simple master from Bengal, who in the 19th century effected through his many disciples an explosion of *advaita*/nondual Vedanta (in both its wisdom and devotional forms), not only throughout India, but throughout the world, once declared: “Attaining Self-Knowledge [*Atma-Jñāna*] one looks on pleasure and pain, birth and death, as a dream.”[92]

Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), of Tiruvannamalai, South India, considered the wisest, most beloved sage of nondual Advaita Vedanta of the last millennium, and most famous for his frequent use of the “Who am I?” self-enquiry method with visitors, offers these insights in response to a comment:

[“We speak of the world as illusion, yet everything in it follows rigid laws, which proves it to be well-planned and well-regulated.”] “Yes, He [the Self] who projected the illusion gave it the appearance of order and sound planning.... In dreams one also sees a well-regulated world with saints, scriptures, etc., but the moment one wakes up they all disappear. So also waking from this dream into the Supreme Consciousness causes them all to disappear.... The moment [the Self] turns its attention on its own nature as consciousness, and not as form, the illusion of diversity or separateness breaks as a dream breaks when waking takes place.”[93]

“There is no difference between dream and the waking state except that the dream is short and the waking state long. Both are the result of the mind. Because the waking state is long, we imagine that it is our real state. But, as a matter of fact, our real state is what is sometimes called *turiya* or the fourth state which is always as it is and knows nothing of the three *avasthas* [states], viz., waking, dream or sleep. Because we call these three “*avasthas*” we also call the fourth state also *turiya avastha*. But it is not an *avastha*, but the real and natural state of the Self. When this is realised, we know it is not a *turiya* or fourth state, for a fourth state is only relative [to the other three], but *turiyatita*, the transcendent [lit., ‘beyond the fourth’].”[94]

(Maharshi here clarifies that the Self, pure Being-Awareness-Bliss, is beyond the three avasthas, or conventional states of consciousness, as their witness, the *turiya* or “fourth state”—which, when it is not considered to be relative to anything [i.e., to the three states] is realized as an absolute, non-relative, transcendent state, or *turiyatita*, “beyond the fourth.”)

Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981), a *jñani* or sage from Bombay, who taught with profound insight and great wit and has come to be regarded as the second most powerful exponent of nondual wisdom in the modern era along with Ramana Maharshi, had this to say:

“Both sleep and waking are misnomers. We are only dreaming. True waking and true sleeping only the *jñani* knows. We dream that we are awake, we dream that we are asleep. The three states are only varieties of the dream state. Treating everything as a dream liberates. As long as you give reality to dreams, you are their slave. By imagining that you are born as so and so, you become a slave to so and so. The essence of slavery is to imagine yourself to be a process, to have a past and a future, to have history. In fact, we have no history, we are not a process, we do not develop nor decay; see all as a dream and stay out of it....

“Your world, of desires and their fulfillments, of fears and their escapes, is definitely not my [the Self’s] world. I do not even perceive it, except through what you tell me about it. It is your private dream world and my only reaction to it is to ask you to stop dreaming. [“Surely wars and revolutions are not dreams. Sick mothers and starving children are not dreams. Wealth, ill-made and mis-used, is not a dream.”] What else? [“A dream cannot be shared”] Nor can the waking state. All the three states (of waking, dreaming and sleeping) are subjective, personal, intimate. They all happen to and are contained within the little bubble in consciousness, called “I.” The real world [the Self] lies beyond the self [the ego-self]....

“Engrossed in a dream you have forgotten your true self....

“The world is not, you alone are. You create the world in your imagination like a dream....

[“When did the dream begin?”] “It appears to be beginningless, but in fact it is only now. From moment to moment you are renewing it. Once you have seen that you are dreaming, you shall wake up. But you do not see, because you want the dream to continue. A day will come when you will long for the ending of the dream with all your heart and mind and be willing to pay any price; the price will be dispassion and detachment, the loss of interest in the dream itself.... Wanting it to continue is not inevitable. See clearly your condition, your very clarity will release you.”[95]

In the 1970s, there arose two vedanta-influenced and highly flamboyant American spiritual teachers, **Bubba** or **Da Free John** (Adi Da, 1939-) and **Lee Lozowick** (n.d.), who occasionally have used the “dream”-notion with their students. Free John, in a classic lecture in his early teaching work, observed, in part:

“Truth is ... consciousness itself. Truth is to all of this what the waking state is to the dreaming state.... When understanding is perfect, it becomes obvious that all that has occurred has been a modification of your own consciousness. This whole thing... has been a modification of your own state [Being-Awareness Bliss].[96]

Lozowick, who in his early years used the same forceful, abrasive “awakening” style with his followers as Free John, points out how we are dreaming, but, rather than address our sleeping nature, he talks to the awake Self-principle in us:

“... You are already realized.... You will never become anything other than what you are. You can awaken as what you are already, and that is the process of our relationship.... The fact is that you are realized [as the God-Self, you are real, the sole reality], and the *guru* [“dispeller of darkness,” the “awakener”] is in the world simply to wake you up from being asleep.”[97]

The idea that our situation is just a dream, an illusion, a mirage, a movie, a stage-play, and so forth, is very disturbing to many people in conventional society, who are so extremely infatuated with, and caught up in the world of phenomena. This body-mind (“my” body-mind) and other bodyminds seem so tangible, so substantial, so real. But taking here the idea of the phenomenal world as a dream, let us notice how the night-dream, with its full-blown world of body-minds which we conjure up when we lie down to sleep, *also seems so tangible, so substantial, so real*—capable of producing during our immersion in it tremendously vivid feelings of elation, pleasure, wonder, fear (abject terror, for many people), humor, frustration, sorrow, and so on, just as the “day-dream” is capable of doing.

If one of our night-dream figures were to confront us within the context of the night-dream and inform us, “This is only a dream; stop dreaming, wake up!”[98]—we would probably not believe him. We would instead try to assert the tangibility, the substantiality, the reality of the dream—perhaps by slapping him on his dream-back with our dream-hand, or stomping our dream-foot on the dream-ground, receiving, of course, a dream-sensation of “solidness” under(dream)foot—and then we would continue to dream on, feeling satisfied that we had thus “proven” the reality of the dream world. Yet, in the morning when the alarm clock rings, or the sunshine pours in on us, rousing us from our sleep, the entire dream-world and our dream-body-mind with it *completely vanishes!*—leaving only a more or less dim memory trace behind. And we marvel to ourselves, “Yes, as the fellow said, it was indeed only a dream! How could I have been so convinced of its reality during its occurrence?”

Similarly, as we have learned, the spiritual master or *guru* is telling us that this present world of our so-called “waking” experience is also only a dream, a “day-dream,” so to say, somewhat longer, more stable, consistent, and “logical” in its structural patterns, and more consensually verifiable—i.e., it is more of a “mutual dream” than the night dream, which is less commonly shared as a “mutual dream” by other dreamers—but it is a dream, nevertheless. As so tangible, so substantial, so real.

But taking here the idea of the Nisargadatta Maharaj and *Yoga-Vasishtha*, quoted earlier, declared: “You will have the proof of it in your very waking up” and “When, by the grace of God or the Self, you attain awakening, you will then see all this clearly.” Therefore we should be open to the possibility that the tangibility, substantiality and reality of our daily experience is apparent only, and that it is ultimately as ephemeral as the night-dream.

Most interestingly, a large body of evidence and theoretical speculation in the fields of subatomic physics and astrophysics reveals the notion that the nature and origin of our “waking world” are as mysterious and inexplicable as that of our night-dream-world, leading us to suspect that they are not that very different, as the *gurus* in fact claim. For instance, just as we would be hard-pressed to discover, within the context of the night-dream, the “building blocks,” the fundamental material constituents of our dream-world, since it is evidently but a projection of consciousness, so also subatomic physicists have thus far been unable to discover the fundamental material particles, the “stuff” of which our daily universe (including our psycho-physiological perceptual apparatus which constructs the world) is composed and now begin to suspect that it is only a projection of consciousness.[100]

When we look at our own body and at other physical objects, we presume that there is really “something” substantial and tangible “out there” in our visual and tactile fields. But at a level subtler

than that which our “normal,” habitual mode of sensation and perception is capable of monitoring, there is only the insubstantial, intangible no-thingness of pure *energy* (which sounds very similar to consciousness in its properties) and its incessantly-changing transformations into and back out of fleeting “material” forms. (One hears a lot about “quarks” as being the fundamental particles; but the quark model has serious problems at the theoretical level which invalidate the notion that they are the ultimately-basic “stuff” of which the universe is made.[101])

This “energy” is nothing other than what the *gurus* refer to as *Cit-sakti*₂ or “consciousness,” the “power” of awareness to apparently manifest itself in forms, to “play hide-and-seek” with itSelf. Sage Nisargadatta Maharaj declares, “The world you perceive is made of consciousness; what you call matter is consciousness itself.”[102]

Let us remember the *mahavakya* (“great saying”) from the *Mandukya Upanisad*₁ “All this [phenomenal world] is Brahman,” all is but Being-Awareness-Bliss, in “disguise,” so to speak.

Professor B.L. Aitrea, in his very useful, if rather limited, comparison work, *Yoga Vasistha and Modern Thought*, has quoted some eminent Western thinkers of the middle part of this century on the subject of the universe as a dream, the universe as a mind-projection, mere appearance. Let us here reproduce some of these views, which are actually still very valid at the present, several decades later:

“I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything we talk about, everything that we postulate as existing requires consciousness.” (Max Planck)

“To put the conclusion crudely—the stuff of the world is mind-stuff. The mind-stuff of the world is, of course, something more general than our individual conscious minds; but we may think of its nature as not altogether foreign to the feelings of our consciousness.... The mind-stuff is not spread in space and time; these are part of the cyclic scheme ultimately derived out of it.... Consciousness is not sharply defined, but fades into subconsciousness, and beyond that we must postulate something indefinite, but yet contiguous with our mental nature. This I take to be the world-stuff.” (Sir Arthur Eddington) [This is what the *gurus* would call *Cit*, pure Awareness]

“The universe can best be pictured, although still very imperfectly and inadequately, as consisting of pure thought.... The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter—not of course, our individual minds, but the mind in which the atoms out of which our individual minds have grown exist as thoughts.... The old dualism of mind and matter ... seems likely to disappear... through matter resolving itself into a creation and manifestation of mind.” (Sir James Jeans)

“There is no being or fact outside of that which is commonly called psychical existence.... Feeling, thought, and volition are all the material of existence and there is no other material actual or ever possible.” (F.H. Bradley)

“If modern physics is to be believed, the dream we call waking perceptions have only a very little more resemblance to objective reality than the fantastic dreams of sleep. They have some truth, but only just so much as is required to make them useful.” (Bertrand Russell)

“The fundamental difference in character between the two (waking and dream) can be established... While it lasts, ... a dream has all the characteristics of reality. So with our present life: it seems real and rational, because we are yet asleep, because the eyes of the soul are not yet opened to pierce the veil of illusion... It (dream) is real while it lasts, so is our world.... When we awake, both cease to be true.... And both, moreover, may be seen through by reflection, just as we are sometimes so struck by the monstrous incongruity of our dreams that even as we dream we are conscious that we dream [this is termed “lucid dreaming”], so philosophy arouses us to a consciousness that the phenomenal is not the real.” (F.C.S. Schiller)[103]

Just as the origin, the ontogenesis, of the dream is most difficult, if not impossible to account for from within the context of the dream (i.e., where does the dream-world come from? how exactly does it start?)—so also the origins of our waking-state-universe are apparently impossible to account for.

Sathya Sai Baba has said, “Many are affected by the problem that haunts them, namely, what caused the cosmos? How did it come into being? They advance various theories and lay down many opposing hypotheses. But there is no need for seekers to beat around the bush so much. What is the cause of dream, how does it come into being? The right answer is: sleep is the cause. So, too, the cosmos is as ephemeral and as vagarious as a dream. It is difficult to discover laws that explain or govern its infinite mysteries. . . . It is mostly a waste of time to probe into the origins of the cosmos...”[104]

The idea here is that we do far better to probe into our existential “sleep” of spiritual ignorance.

To date, the most plausible theory in astrophysics to account for the origins of our universe, the so-called “big-bang” theory,[105] maintains that our waking-state universe came from a primordial “stuff” which exploded, expanded, and evolved to form atoms, galaxies, stars, and planets, and, of course, everything on those planets (including the human body-minds we identify with so exclusively). The “big bang” theory really does not have any competition in astrophysics anymore, but it immediately raises a host of virtually unanswerable questions: if the universe was created at a specific instance, what was “happening” in the no-time before it? How did that original “bomb” of “stuff” get there to begin with? who or what detonated the bomb and made it go “Bang!” thereby differentiating it? And how was this executed? Alas, these are questions only for the metaphysical imagination to chew on—it seems that our astrophysics will never be able to answer them because the explosion effectively destroyed any evidence that might have preceded it.

Thus, our modern telescopes, which can look so far, far into the past (the further one can see, the farther back in time one is probing), will not be able to catch the God-Self in the “creative act.” (And if, indeed, it is the God-Self, pure Being-Awareness, which did the apparent creating or emanating, we could never see or witness it “objectively” through the “third-person” detection methods of science, since Awareness, being the subject, cannot be an object for itself. One could never observe Awareness just as the eyeball cannot see itself [without the help of a mirror], just as the finger-tip cannot touch itself.)

As for that primal “stuff” itself, which astrophysicists posit, what could it have been like “in the beginning,” “before” it exploded? This is a difficult question to answer. We need a model that describes behavior of matter crushed to the vanishing point, when the entire universe is infinitely dense, and infinitely small, completely unified in/as this “stuff,” with no distinguishable parts, spaceless, timeless. Mathematicians would call this ultimate state a “singularity”—it is not an object *per se*, just a point at which the known laws of physics come to an end. (It sounds very much like the “no-thingness” of consciousness which the masters posit as the source of all phenomena.)

As a physicist and an astronomer have each stated:

“Singularities are entry and exit points of that which is beyond space-time projecting itself into space-time. Space-time self-destructs at these locations (points)...” (Jack Sarfatti)[106]

“There we reach the great barrier of thought. . . . I feel as though I've suddenly driven into a great fog barrier where the familiar world has disappeared.” (Bernard Lovell)[107]

In speaking of the pre-“bang,” pre-explosion state of singularity as a “bomb” or “primal stuff,” there is a tendency to try to picture it in the mind as luminous, objective “thing” standing out against the background of a dark, empty, infinitely-extended space. But the truth is that this “stuff” included in itself that which we call “space,” as well as “time,” “matter,” etc.. Thus the “stuff” did not “stand out” against any background and therefore it cannot be pictured as an “object”-ive thing at all, since to picture “objects,” one needs to have them stand out as different in relation to their backgrounds in order to derive any existence (note that the term “existence” literally means “that which stands out”).

We might digress to note the kind of restless, searching mind activity that happens when the rational mind encounters this sort of impasse. The eminent physicist, John Wheeler, would say that there must

be a “superspace” which serves as the background, or stage, for the primal stuff. His reasoning stems from the common-sense (unawakened, we would add) notion that “nobody can be a stage for himself.” Superspace would embrace the singularity of primal stuff, and the universe it evolved into. Superspace would be n -dimensional; any one of its “points” would represent a universe such as our own universe of three-dimensional space. Wheeler's argument is, naturally, very appealing to the normal mind which insists that “nobody can be a stage for himself”—but let us remember that the singularity represents the point beyond which the “normal” is inapplicable. The law of physics, much less good old common sense, cannot penetrate that singularity and conceptualize it. Indeed, the singularity, as it is described, sounds very much like what the spiritual masters mean by the “God-Self,” or “Being-Awareness”: that which subsumes all space-time, cannot be known or experienced as an object (because it is beyond the subject-object dualism, being absolute, not relative), is not split up into material parts (i.e., it is infinitely dense, non-fragmented, non-differentiable), and is the source of all phenomenality, etc.

That the primal “stuff” may have been the stage for itself (just as the God-Self, the non-dual reality, is said to be the “stage for itself”) is simply a *paradox* with which we will have to live, without inventing notions of “superspace” or the like to satisfy our mental need to hang onto concepts and insulate ourselves from ambiguity and mystery. Even if we assume that Wheeler's notion of “superspace” is valid (it is an enchanting idea; it would certainly expand our notion of what is happening to include all sorts of potential, wonderful universes—an idea which is often expressed in the thought of *Yoga-Vasistha*, Nisargadatta Maharaj, and others[108])—we would never be able to make any more sense out of it than we are able to do with the singularity. The mathematics in support of it, as in the case of a singularity, do not lend itself to imaginable models. Being n -dimensional, superspace would transcend all of our models of what any “thing” could be like. And, yes, we would always be faced with the question, where did this superspace “come from”? Can superspace be a stage for itself? If so, if it is self-existent, not contingent on any other context or matrix, then it is probably referring to none other than what the masters mean by the notion of absolute Being-Awareness.

Interestingly, in the Hindu system, such as in *vedanta*, *tantra*, *yoga*, and in the thought of Nisargadatta Maharaj, a distinction is made which is roughly parallel to the distinction between the singularity and the superspace, with superspace corresponding to *Brahman*, *Siva*, *Purusa*, pure Awareness, and the singularity corresponding to the creative/illusion-making principle of *Maya*, *Sakti*, *Prakriti*, consciousness, which is considered to be the “power” of, respectively, *Brahman*, *Siva*, *Purusa*, and pure Awareness. There are, of course, significant differences between the different schools of Indian thought as to what their concepts precisely entail, not to mention the differences between these concepts and the concepts of the singularity and superspace.

For one thing, the *Brahman*, *Siva*, *Purusa* and pure Awareness principles are aware, intelligent, indeed omniscient; and they are of the nature of bliss. Thus, the unspeakable Referent for these terms has both *cognitive* and *affective* components—attributes totally missing from Wheeler's “superspace.” Furthermore, being our true nature, our true identity, this spiritual Reality can be awakened to in human experience. Humans, in other words, can intuitively discover that they are this God-Self principle, and function out of it as an intuitive context. Wheeler does not talk about superspace in this way as part of the potential for human awakening.

And if one does not endeavor to awaken intuitively into/as superspace as the source of phenomena, and treats it, instead, conceptually, as a mental datum, one will sooner or later be compelled to ask what would be the stage for superspace—super-superspace? Such kind of ever-regressing mental activity would be the kind of spiritual pathology that arises when one does not directly, intuitively awaken to one's own true identity as the transcendent, absolute principle of purely subjective Being-Awareness-Bliss (THIS which is beyond/before the subject-object split), the Absolute that is manifesting the phenomenal world in itSelf, by itSelf, through itSelf, out of the very fabric of consciousness/energy which is its divinely creative, expressive power—a power, we would add, which is not at all fundamentally distinct from itSelf. (The Hindu tradition in fact asserts that ultimately the pairs of principles posited above are not differentiable, not separate, not distinct—paradoxically though this may seem!)

Returning to the question of interest, i.e., “where did the universe come from, how did it start?” we honestly and vulnerably must admit that we *just do not know*. We could say that it came from the

“singularity” or, “more fundamentally,” from “superspace,” but in both instances we encounter a basic mystery which we simply cannot penetrate with our normal scientific or common-sense thinking. Even the spiritual masters will not give us an answer to this other than to tell us to discover, by spiritually awakening, “Who am I, and how have I been dreaming? How am I, right now, dreaming?”

It is obvious, therefore, that just as the nature and the origin of the night-dream are mysterious and inexplicable, so also with the daydream, our so-called “waking” reality. Now in order to prove that, in fact, the world of waking reality is actually “real,” actually self-existent, it would seem that we would have to conclusively show the “objectively existent,” basic “stuff” out of which the world is made, so as to demonstrate that the world is not just a mere appearance, a projection of consciousness, a dream. Since science has tried to do this and has failed to come up with anything intelligible, saying only that the universe is made up of “energy”—a concept that is virtually identical to what the masters refer to as the creative/expressive/dreaming power of Being-Awareness-Bliss (equivalent to *Brahman's maya*, *Siva's Sakti*, etc.)—then when the *gurus* tell us that our “waking” world of phenomena is but a dream of the Self, a projection of consciousness, mere appearance, not much different from our night-dream, *we would do well to consider that perhaps they are right.*

The fact that the guru, as the author has shown in another work,[109] occasionally displays *siddhis*, supernatural “accomplishments” or powers, which totally violate the “laws of Nature” as we currently understand them, suggests that he/she *knows more about the nature of Nature than do the most eminent scientists, with their hesitant, uncertain, theoretical explanations.*

The miracles of Ramana Maharshi, the two Sai Babas, Neem Karoli Baba, Bhagavan Nityananda, Amma Amritanandamayi, Anandamayi Ma, Hsuan Hua, Padre Pio, Maria Esperanza, John Maximovitch, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, et al., are a case in point. Eyewitnesses, journalists and some scientists around these figures, documenting the materializations, bi-locations of their “physical” forms, teleportations of lost objects, curing of “incurable” conditions, knowledge of past and future and remote happenings, etc., have confessed that these anomalies simply defy all current knowledge, and that the scientific paradigm must be radically altered to account for these kinds of powers.

Given this kind of authority, when the *guru* says that this is all a dream, on what basis will we propose a counter-argument?

Let us now turn to *another big issue which needs clarification*: when we wake up from a night-dream, the dream-world which we have conjured up totally vanishes from our experience except for a memory trace, and we find ourselves back in “waking” reality resting in bed or wherever we were when we began dreaming (i.e., if we are not somnambulently sleep-walking). So the question arises: upon perfect spiritual awakening from the “dream,” do the body-mind and its perceived universe completely disappear for the awakened one, like our night dream vanishes upon our morning “awakening”? Evidently not immediately, according to Nisargadatta Maharaj and Ramana Maharshi:

“The very idea of going beyond the dream is illusory. Why go anywhere? Just realise that you are dreaming a dream you call the world and stop looking for a way out. The dream is not your problem. Your problem is that you like one part of your dream and not another. Love all or none of it and stop complaining. When you have seen the dream as a dream, you have done all that needs to be done.”[110] “When you see your dream as a dream, you wake up.... You need not bring your dream to a definite conclusion, or make it noble or happy or beautiful; all you need is to realise that you are dreaming.”[111] (Nisargadatta Maharaj)

“The mirage does not disappear even after knowing it to be a mirage. The vision is there but the man does not run to it for water.... The world is a myth. Even after knowing it, it continues to appear. It must be known to be Brahman [Being-Awareness] and not apart.”[113] (Ramana Maharshi)

The trickster *guru* Da Free John / Adi Da has said: “The dream doesn't have to be changed in any way for the waking man to feel that he is awake. Nothing has to happen to the dream. Only waking is necessary. To one who is awake, the dream is obvious. There is no illusion, no suffering, no implication, regardless of what appeared in the dream. A blue god, a dirty old drunk, the gorilla of death, it makes no difference makes a difference. It makes a difference within the circumstances of the dream, to those who are dreaming. But to the man who is awake, it no longer makes any difference....

Nothing needs to happen within the dream to verify waking. Waking is its own fullness. While awake, anything can appear.... Real consciousness is not antagonistic to this world or to any form within it. It is the Truth of all appearance, disappearance, or non-appearance.”[112]

In other words, to awaken is not necessarily to immediately and irreversibly cause the world-appearance to disappear altogether, leaving the awakened one in an entirely blank, formless void state with no objects of perception—though this does in fact temporarily happen for many masters in their process of spiritual maturing at a certain stage along the way. They undergo the experience (or non-experience!) of pure, blank, objectless awareness, *nirvikalpa samadhi* or *nirodha*, which may be engaged in for anywhere ranging from a few seconds on up to days or weeks on end. But eventually the vast majority of masters avoid this “attachment to emptiness” (as it is called in Zen) and emerge from this void state back into a “natural” awareness of non-duality, termed *sahaja samadhi*, an awareness of the phenomenal world. But now this world is intuitively, continuously realized to be a dream-appearance, permeated by, constituted by, subsumed by, and essentially *none other than* the absolute, ultimately formless awareness, which is “in disguise,” so to say. Herein the awakened one realizes that the world per se is unreal, but as the dream-play of the Self, is relatively real.

Consider the situation of a movie: images superimposed on a blank screen, projected by white light. Most people are rather unconsciously caught up in the drama of the movie, identified with its inextricably-involved experiencer in an egocentric way. In the “movie” of this worldly life, which is the God-Self’s radiant expression of itSelf, one is not being asked by the awake *guru* to destroy or eliminate the series of discrete images arising in awareness and to have the contents of one’s consciousness go blank. Rather, one is only to be dis-identified from this movie (for example, not *thought-less*, but *thought-free*, a point which the Zen masters and the Hindu *jñanis* are quite clear about); one is to be unattached in one’s experiencing of the movie while apparently functioning in it as a participant; one is to realize, “Ah, this life is only a movie, a projection and modification of the Light of the Self,” enjoying its wondrous mystery for what it is, until it inevitably ends (and one is not averse to its ending). One is to come from the more expansive, spacious, open, and free context of one who can witness the movie of life without having one’s attention be totally captivated by it, lost in likes and dislikes, attachments and aversions (*raga* and *dvesa* as the Hindus say, *lobha* and *moha* for early Buddhism).

It’s like this: when, in a movie, one suddenly “comes to,” and realizes it to be a movie, not real-life, one becomes totally equanimious about the contents of the movie, and one’s focal attention expands to include not only the passing show on the screen, but also the sense of one’s body-mind sitting in the seat watching it, other body-minds in the movie theatre, the screen, the projector and its projecting light, the spaciousness of the theatre, and so on. Likewise, when one realizes *life* to be a movie or a dream appearance, one becomes equanimious about the content of one’s life. And one’s focus of attention opens up to include not only the play of forms—this body-mind and all “other” body-minds—but also to *intuitively include the formless matrix, context, or ground for this play*: namely, the pure, absolute Being-Awareness, the Self in its formless no-thingness, which mysteriously, playfully gives rise to, allows, permeates and essentially *comprises* the play of forms. Thus, in the awakened state, “One witnesses the dream while the dreamless (the Self) goes on,” as an old enlightened *jñani*, Annamalai Swami (a spiritual son of Ramana Maharshi), told this author.[114]

In sum, we may wish to say here that the awakened one, the *jñani*, is lucidly dreaming this world appearance,[115] always knowing it to be a dream while it plays itself out, not becoming lost in it.

So, for the *jñani*, the world-appearance *does* continue after his spiritual awakening, though he (or she) is now no longer attached to it through desire or fear, like or dislike, attraction or aversion, and he is no longer feeling separate from its contents, as though they subsisted independently of his own consciousness, “outside” of his awareness. He is no longer identified with the exclusive sense of being a particular body-mind entity which is experiencing this world-phenomenon as “other.”

As for how long the world-appearance does continue, this is said to be a function of the amount of *prarabdha karma* still in need of being played out.

Here we would explain briefly the Indian theory of *karma*. “Karma” simply is any moment of action

or experience which is tainted by the egocentric principle, the sense of being the separate, distinct “doer” or “experiencer.” There are three kinds of *karma*, one present, two past: 1) *agami* or *kriyamana karma*—the egocentric, deluded actions of attachment or aversion that one is currently perpetrating and which will, as a consequence, necessitate a rebirth in a future life, after this one has expired, so as to allow for the working out of the effects of this karma. (For the law is: “every action has an equal and opposite reaction,” “as ye sow, so shall ye reap.”) 2) *prarabdha karma*—that portion of one's past egocentric actions which are currently manifesting all the circumstances and dispositions of this moment and all subsequent moments up until the end of this life, and which are in fact destined to manifest in this life. And 3) *sañcita karma*—the “storehouse” of all one's past actions that are destined to manifest future lives after this one has expired.

It is said that if one awakens from the dream into/as the God-Self—thereby transcending the egocentric principle of felt-separation, attachment and aversion, the sense of being the “doer” or “experiencer” slave to likes and dislikes, and thus no longer generating any *agami-karma*—one's *sañcita karma* will be spontaneously obviated. Hence it will no longer be necessary for one to be reborn and play out the karmic effects (whether these be positive, in a “heavenly” rebirth, as a result of “good karma,” or else negative, in a “hellish” rebirth, as a result of “bad karma”) in a future life. One's *prarabdha karma* will continue to lawfully manifest all the positive and negative (heavenly and hellish and everything in between) circumstances and dispositions (pleasure and pain, joy and sadness, etc.) throughout the rest of this life; and when this *prarabdha karma* has been played out and exhausted, one is no longer bound by karmic law to staying alive in a body to work out any karmic effects.

On the matter of the various kinds of *karma* and their status in the case of the *jñani*, the *Vivekachudamani*, for one, affirms the view of Sankara and the tradition of Advaita Vedanta:

“The fire of knowledge [*jñana*, awakening] destroys the whole accumulation of present and future karmas [*agami karma*], and of past karmas [*sañcita*] which have not yet begun to produce effects. But it cannot destroy those past karmas which have already begun to produce effects [*prarabdha karma*].”[116]

Tripura Rahasya echoes this point: “The three kinds karma 1) mature (*prarabdha*), 2) pending (*agami*), and 3) in store (*sañcita*) are common to all—not excluding the *Jñani*. The first of these alone remains for the *Jñani* and the other two are burnt away.”[117]

Tripura Rahasya goes on to say that the *jñani*'s “body continues [to manifest] on account of his *vasanas* (predispositions) and destiny [*prarabdha*]. *Jñanis* do not identify the Self with the body but remain completely detached from their bodies. Their work is like that of a charioteer driving a chariot, who never identifies himself with the chariot. Similarly, the *jñani* is not the body. . . he is pure intelligence [awareness]. Though entirely detached from action within, to the spectator he seems to be active. He performs his part like an actor in a drama, and plays with the world as a parent does with a child. [...] So long as there is the *prarabdha* (residual past karma) unaccounted for, the manifestation of the world will continue for the *jñani*, though only as a phenomenon. This will also vanish as soon as the *prarabdha* has played itself out and then pure, unblemished Intelligence [or Being-Awareness-Bliss] alone will remain.”[118]

Thus, the dream-body-mind and dream-universe continue for the sage for a certain time as a function of his *prarabdha karma*, then this body-mind and universe do in fact disappear when this *karma* is played out and exhausted. Upon bodily death, the *jñani*, who has attained “final liberation,”[119] abides solely in/as the formless Reality or Self, *nirguna Brahman* (Reality without attributes or qualities), no longer subject to *saguna Brahman*, the Reality appearing in the guise of forms, attributes, qualities. This entirely “beyond” state is void of anything. Here the *jñani*, also called the *jivanmukta* (“one liberated while still in the body”), is translated into the state of being a *videhamukta*, a liberated one in the disembodied, formless condition. Sivananda states:

“As soon as the *Prarabdha* is fully exhausted, the *Jivanmukta* attains the state of *Videhamukti*, just as the pot-ether becomes one with the universal ether [space] when the pot is broken. In *Videhamukti*, the world entirely vanishes from the vision of a sage.... Then the pure, self-luminous *Satchidananda Brahman* remains behind.”[120]

Here the God-Self is awake, free of any pretence of ignorance, no longer playing “hide-and-peek” with itSelf, no longer dreaming up any phenomenal world, much less a mistaken identity within such a world.

The Theravada Buddhists had a view similar to all of this. For them, there are two kinds of *nibbana* (*nirvana* in Sanskrit: the term means the “extinction” of the *kilesas* [“defilements”],[122] thus it means “extinction of the egocentric tendencies,” or “awakening”); these two kinds are: 1) *savupadisesa-nibbana*—i.e., *nibbana* **with** the *upadi*, or body-mind; and 2) *anupadisesanibbana*, *nibbana* **without** this *upadi*, that is, after bodily death.[123] *Savupadisesanibbana* occurs while the *arahant* (“worthy one”—highest level of sainthood) is still living, still cognizing and acting in an ego-free manner in the world; *anupadisesanibbana* is that void-like state which occurs after the arahant's body-mind has died, when the *upadi*, or *panchakhandas*[124] irreversibly disappear, all future rebirths end, and “it is inept to say of him... that after dying [he] is, or is not, or both is and is not, or neither is nor is not.”[125]

We might pause to emphasize here that, contrary to popular belief, the awakened condition of pure Selfhood, in its ultimately void-like and formless nature, sans the dream-appearance, is not in any way a state of barrenness, impoverishment, diminution, or deprivation. Rather, it is, according to the *gurus*, one of tremendous *fullness*—*purnam*, as the *Upanishads* maintain. It is *Saccidananda*, Being-Awareness-Bliss. It is the *most* worthwhile of all “states” or “conditions” (if these words can even be applied to THIS Absolute which subsumes all states, all conditions). The only “thing” it is deprived of is the ego-sense and its world of agitation, which itself is the cause of all sense of barrenness, impoverishment, etc., because it is constricting, narrowing, limiting into a small, petty, private sense of “me,” excluding the rest of Being as “not-me.”

That the *videhamukta* is born no more, is affirmed by many *gurus*, among them such notables as Sankara and Ramana Maharshi and by the author of Yoga Vasishtha, as well as by the Theravada, Vajrayana, and Ch’an/Zen Buddhists.[126] Sometimes, however, it is thought that the Self may spontaneously manifest the *videhamukta* in a new body-mind as an *avatara*, a fully awake “divine incarnation,” or what the Buddhists would call a *buddha* or very high-level *bodhisattva*—for the sake of awakening all sentient beings.[127] But what can really be said to now characterize “him” (or her) as a distinct, particular entity? Ultimately, for the awake Self, whether or not the *videhamukta* appears as a body-mind in a world of phenomena will make no difference to “him” (the God-Self) since he is now always abiding only as Self, *Saccidananda*, which evidently cares not if it has form or no-form or whatever, such a distinction between these states being relevant only to those who still dream.[128] Nisargadatta Maharaj, speaking on this point from the standpoint of the Self, declares paradoxically, “The manifested (*saguna*) and unmanifest (*nirguna*) are not different.”¹²⁹

On the subject of the *jñani*’s body-mind remaining in the world after his awakening until his *prarabdha karma* is exhausted, it is interesting to note here how James Donahoe, a researcher in the psychology of dreaming, reported that once, while he was in a mutual, or collectively-shared dream (night-dream), when he awakened from the dream, the other persons in the dream experienced his body as disappearing, vanishing altogether from the dreamscape.¹³⁰ This being the case with the night-dream, we must consider ourselves very fortunate that the body-mind of the *jñani* does not just suddenly disappear from our midst upon his spiritual awakening, but instead remains with us for some time afterwards as a function of his *prarabdha* to serve as an example for us, teach us, guide us, encourage us, and so on. Curiously, the *jñani*, in most cases, also allows his body to undergo a normal decay and death process after his *prarabdha* has expired, though in a few cases,[131] the *jñani* has been alleged to have suddenly disappeared when it was “time for him to go.”

We here present one last major idea, a most heartening one: a number of *gurus* assure us that, eventually, *everyone* will awaken to the true Self, no one will be left in the dream state forever, no one will be “damned for eternity.” All will come home to who they really are: God.[132]

Conclusion:

In the foregoing pages we have heard the teaching from a number of the world's greatest spiritual masters on how “this is all a dream.” In addition, we have explored many of the notions and concepts pertaining to spiritual awakening.

In conclusion, teachers such as J. Krishnamurti frequently admonish their students not to live in an inauthentic, “second-hand” fashion on the words of others, relying for their views on the various “authorities.” In line with this, we could end on this note: let us suspend all the notions and concepts that we have heard from the masters in these pages and, on our own, directly, intuitively open up to and enquire into the process of our experiencing. Like a diligent Zen student, let us intensely work on the *koan*, the ongoing enigmatic, mind-breaking question, “Is this a dream?” “Who or What is dreaming this?” Let us go into this Reality with all our power, with the totality of our being, with our “mind, soul, heart, and strength,” as Jesus enjoined. Let us not sell ourselves short with any mere concepts or assumptions, let us not stop until we have gone deeply, deeply into the mystery and wonder of this life-experience, until we have *realized Whatever is to be realized*.

Endnotes:

1. For an elaboration of this timeless truth, and a rather exhaustive documentation of the point in the spiritual literature, see the author's unpublished manuscript, “The Teaching of the Guru.”
2. Clae Waltham, ed., Chuang Tzu: Genius of the Absurd, arranged from the work of James Legge (N.Y.: Ace Books, 1971), p. 58.
3. Edward Conze, ed., Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond and Heart Sutra, translated by Edward Conze (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1958), ch. 8, verse 32A.
4. The Lankavatara Sutra, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki transl. (Boulder, Col.: Prajna Press, 1978), ch. 2, section VII, line 42; p. 38.
5. The Life and Teaching of Naropa, translated by Herbert V. Guenther (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 63.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8.
7. Nagarjuna, in Conze, *op.cit.*, p. 70.
8. Stephen Mitchell, ed., Dropping Ashes on the Buddha: The Teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn (N.Y.: Grove Press Inc., 1976), pp. 107-8.
9. A.H. Armstrong, transl., Plotinus (London: G. Allen, 1953), Ennead III. 6.
10. R. Descartes, in B.L. Atreya, Yoga Vasistha and Modern Thought (Banares, India: The Indian Book Shop, 1954), p. 40.
11. Muhammad, in J. Fadiman and R. Frager, Personality and Personal Growth (N.Y. Harper and Row, 1976), p. 437 (chapter 12, “Sufism”)
12. A1-Ghazali, in Margaret Smith, Readings from the Mystics of Islam (London: Luzac and Co., 1972), pp. 59, 65; and in Martin Lings, A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi (Berkeley, Ca.: Univ. of Ca. Press, 2nd ed., 1971), p. 123.
13. Sana'i, in Idries Shah, Way of the Sufi (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1970), p. 190.
14. Attar, in Smith, *op.cit.*, pp. 80-1; and in Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
15. Ibn-'Arabi, in Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.
16. Rumi, in E.H. Whinfield, transl., The Teachings of Rumi: The Masnavi of Maulana Jalalu'din Muhammad Rumi (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1975), pp. 24, 217-17. Shabistari, in Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 111; and in Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 224. 18. Sarmad, in Bankey Behari, Sufis, Mystics and Yogis of India (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971), p. 117.
19. Bullah Shah, *ibid.*, pp. 134-5.
20. Shah Latif, *ibid.*, p. 156.
21. Meher Baba, Listen, Humanity, D.F. Stevens, ed. (N.Y. Harper Colophon Books ed., 1971), pp. 36-38.
22. Meher Baba, The Everything & the Nothing (Berkeley, CA: Beguine Library, 1963), pp. 52, 87, 11.

23. Swami Prabhavananda, transl., The Wisdom of God: Srimad Bhagavatam (N.Y.: Capricorn Books, 1968), Book XI, Ch. 2, pp. 223-4.
24. Ibid., Bk. XI, Ch. 6, p. 249.
25. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, transl., Srimad Bhagavatam (N.Y.: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1972, 1978), Bk. IV, Ch. 29, p. 1483.
26. Swami Prabhavananda, transl., The Wisdom of God, op. cit., Bk. XI, Ch. 15, p. 287, and Ch. 20, p. 309.
27. Tripura Rahasya, Swami Sri Ramanananda Saraswathi, transl. (Tiruvannamalai, S. India: Sri Ramanasramam, 3rd ed., 1971), p. 115.
28. Ibid., pp. 109-110.
29. Ibid., p. 109.
30. Ibid., p. 98-101.
31. Swami Nityaswarupananda, transl., Ashtavakra Samhita (Calcutta, India: Advaita Ashrama, 4th ed., 1975), VII. 5. A similar work, Avadhuta Gita, calls the world a projection of the mind (Ch. VI. 1), a mirage (Ch. VI. 8), and a magic show (Ch. VI. 32); see Hari Prasad Shastri, transl., Avadhuta Gita (London: Shanti Sadan, 1968).
32. Swami Nityaswarupananda, transl., Ashtavakra Samhita, op.cit., II. 9.
33. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, transl., Sankara's Crest Jewel of Discrimination (Vivekachudamani) (N.Y.: New American Library, 1970), pp. 69-70.
34. Ibid., pp. 84, 93.
35. Swami Venkatesananda, transl., The Supreme Yoga (Yoga Vasishtha) (P.O. Elgin Cape Province, S. Africa: The Chiltern Yoga Trust, 1976), V.53; for other references to the "world as hallucination," see III.51-2, 91, 101; VI.A.28.
36. Ibid., III.55, 80; IV.17.
37. Ibid., III.1, 5-6, 9, 61; VI.A.14.
38. Ibid., IV.1.
39. Ibid., IV.1.
40. Ibid., V.36.
41. Ibid., VI.A.11.
42. Ibid., III.11.
43. Ibid., I.3, and passim; see Introduction.
44. Ibid., IV.36.
45. Ibid., III.3, 18, 91, 103-4, 110, 109 ("mind-play"); IV.4-6, 10, 11, 17-8, 35, 38.
46. Ibid., III.13, 18.
47. Ibid., IV.33.
48. Ibid., III.2.
49. Ibid., IV.54.
50. Ibid., V.78.
51. Ibid., IV.40, 44.
52. Ibid., IV.36.
53. Ibid., III.14, 40, 60.
54. Ibid., III.2; IV.45; VI.A.28.

55. Ibid., IV.32, 44.
56. Ibid., IV.17, 33.
57. Ibid., III.80, 121; IV. 4-6, 46.
58. Ibid., IV.54.
59. Ibid., III.13, 66-7; IV.45.
60. Ibid., III.14.
61. Ibid., IV.1.
62. Ibid., I.3; III.13, 18.
63. Ibid., VI.A.22. See also III.14, 44, 80; IV.18, 21, 36-7.
64. Ibid., III.2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 42; IV.1, 18, 45; and VI.A.11, 28, 29.
65. Ibid., III.66-7, 119, VI.A.30.
66. Ibid., III.14, 40.
67. Ibid., VI.A.31.
68. See Swami Nikhilananda, transl., The Mandukyopanisad, with Gaudapada's Karika, "Preface," pp. ix-xxxiv.
69. Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Inana Vahini (Bombay: Sri Sathya Sai Educ. Foundation, 3rd ed., 1970), pp. 2, 16.
70. Ibid., p. 42.
71. Sathya Sai Baba, Dhyana Vahini (Whitefield, Bangalore District, India: Sri Sathya Sai Educ. Found., 4th ed., 1975), p. 10; Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. X, N. Kasturi, transl. (Prashanthi Nilayam, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India: Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications, 1980), p. 248; Sadguru Gnanananda, by "his devotees" (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1979), p. 249.
72. Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. X, op.cit., p. 270.
73. Sadguru Gnanananda, op.cit., p. 285.
74. Ibid., p. 300.
75. Ibid., p. 267.
76. Ibid., p. 266.
77. Ramana Maharshi, Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi (Tiruvannamalai, S.India: Sri Ramanasramam, 5th ed., 1972), p. 320; Day by Day with Bhagavan (same publisher, 1968), p. 206.
78. Nisargadatta Maharaj, I Am That: Conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, Maurice Frydman, transl. and ed. (Bombay: Chetana Pvt. Ltd., 2nd ed., 1979), Vol. I, p. 206.
79. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 146.
80. Nisargadatta Maharaj, personal communication, Bombay, evening of 1/11/81.
81. Nisargadatta Maharaj, I Am That, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 148, 205, 208, 267; Vol. II, pp. 106, 254; Sathya Sai Baba, Sandeha Nivarini (New Delhi, India: Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, 6th ed., 1975), pp. 17-8, 80; Ramana Maharshi, Talks, op. cit., pp. 320, 413, etc..
82. Swami Nityananda, Voice of the Self (Madras: P. Ramanath Pai, 1962), pp. 28. 51.
83. Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. VII, N. Kasturi, transl. (Bombay: Sri Sathya Sai Educ. Found, n.d.), pp. 348-9 (from a discourse on 11/22/70).
84. Sathya Sai Baba, Prema Vahini (Whitefield, Bangalore Dist., India: Sri Sathya Sai Educ. and Publ. Found, 4th ed., 1975), p. 24.
85. Sathya Sai Baba, Sandeha Nivarini, op. cit., pp. 117, 121.

86. J.S. Hislop, ed., Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Bangalore: Sri Sathya Sai Educ. and Publications Found., 1978), p. 102.
87. Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. X, op. cit., pp. 194, 251.
88. Sathya Sai Baba, handwritten message (n.d.), available from the Sathya Sai Baba Center of San Francisco, 380 Ivy St., S.F..
89. Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. IX (New Delhi: Bhagavan Sri Sathya Seva Samithi, 1975), p. 152.
90. Sri Indrajit Sharma, Sivananda: Twentieth Century Saint (P.O. Sivananda Nagar, Rishikesh, India: The Yoga-Vedanta Forest Univ., 1958), p. 192.
91. Sri Swami Sivananda, Gyana Yoga (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1944), pp. 63-6.
92. Swami Nikhilananda, transl., The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, recorded by “M” (Madras, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1942), abridged version, p. 260.
93. S.S. Cohen, Guru Ramana (Tiruvannamalai, S.India: Sri Ramanasramam, 3rd ed., 1967), pp. 61-2.
94. Day by Day with Bhagavan, op.cit , p. 79.
95. Nisargadatta Maharaj, I Am That, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 217; Vol. II, pp. 22-3, 102, 217, 278.
96. Franklin Jones (Bubba/Da Free John), The Method of the Siddhas (L.A.: The Dawn Horse Press, 1973), pp. 149, 154; see his “Gorilla Sermon,” pp. 149-78. 97. Lee Lozowick, In the Fire (Tabor, N.J.: Hohm Press, 1978), PP. 177-8.
98. The author has had three different night-dreams wherein Nisargadatta Maharaj appeared and presented him with this message.
99. On the subject of mutual night-dreams, see James Donahoe, Enigma (Oakland, CA: Bench Press, 1979), ch. 3, passim.
100. See quotes from scientists given on p. 20-1; also, Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics (N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1977), pp. 291ff.; Jagdish Mehra, “Quantum Mechanics and the Explanation of Life,” American Scientist, Vol. 61, No. 6, p. 723.
101. For the argument against the existence of quarks, see F. Capra, op. cit., p. 243, and many other works since then.
102. Nisargadatta Maharaj, op.cit., Vol. II., p. 28.
103. B.L. Atreya, op.cit., pp. 24-5, 27, 30, 40.
104. Sathya Sai Baba, Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. X, op.cit., p. 251
105. The “Big Bang” theory was first advanced by Abbe Lemaitre in 1927; it was later elaborated by George Gamov, et al. [Note: the “inflationary universe” model advanced by Alan Guth and Andrei Linde has, since the latter 1990s, served up a *pre-Big-Bang* scenario of “a bubble of quantum energy,” arising out of literally “no-thing,” in the “Planck moment,” an infinitesimal fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a second, and this “bubble of spacetime quantum foam” then almost instantly expanded to the size of a soccer ball, then mysteriously stopped such amazingly rapid expansion to begin expanding more slowly and vastly over billions of years according to the standard Big Bang model. This “inflationary, pre-Big-Bang” model helps physicists obviate the need for positing the scientifically-dreaded singularity, which reduces all mathematical equations of physics to “intolerable infinities.” One is, of course, left with the same old metaphysical problems as to how the omnipotent “laws of physics (specifically, quantum mechanics)” allow such a quantum bubble to emerge out of nothing in the first place—as Guth has candidly and humbly pointed out to his colleagues in his landmark book, *The Inflationary Universe*.]
106. Jack Sarfatti, in Bob Toben, Space, Time and Beyond (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1975), p. 145.
107. Bernard Lovell, The Individual and the Universe, quoted in Capra, op.cit., p. 183.
108. For the idea of other universes, see Yoga Vasishtha, op. cit., III. 62; VI.B. 59, 63; Nisargadatta Maharaj, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 31.

109. See the author's unpublished manuscript, "The Function of the Guru."
110. Nisargadatta Maharaj, *op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 135.
111. *Ibid.*, Vol. I., p. 294.
112. Franklin Jones, The Method of the Siddhas, *op. cit.*, pp. 150, 152.
113. Ramana Maharshi, Talks, *op. cit.*, p. 277.
114. Annamalai Swami, personal communication, Tiruvannamalai, S. India, 12/9/80.
115. On the phenomenon of lucid dreaming, see Stephen LaBerge, "Lucid Dreaming: Directing the Action as it Happens," Psychology Today, Jan. 1981, pp. 48-56; Charles Tart, Altered States of Consciousness, N.Y.: Wiley, 1969.
116. Sankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
117. Swami Sri Ramananda Saraswathi, transl., Tripura Rahasya, *op. cit.*, p. 197; see also Swami Ramdas, Ramdas Speaks, Vol. II (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan), p. 81.
118. Tripura Rahasya, *op. cit.*, pp. 189, 197.
119. Svetashvatara Upanishad, in Nikhilananda, transl., The Upanishads, abridged ed. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1963).
120. Sivananda, Gyana Yoga, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
121. Bubba Free John, The Way that I Teach (Clearlake Highlands, Ca.: The Vision Mound Ceremony, 1978), pp. 211-212.
122. The *kilesas* (Skt., *klesas*) are roughly equivalent to the *samskaras* and *vasanas*, the "conditioned tendencies" of attraction or aversion which constitute *karma* and perpetuate the ego-sense. It is often said that to eliminate these is to awaken spiritually.
123. For the two kinds of *nibbana*, see R.C. Childers, A Dictionary of the Pali Language (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tubner, and Co., 1909, 1974), p. 266, and Itivuttaka Sutta, in Edward Conze, et al. (Eds.), Buddhist Texts Through the Ages (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 96.
124. The *Panchakhandhas* are the "Five aggregates," viz, *rupa* (physical form), *vedana* (sensations), *sañña* (perceptions), *sankhara* (mental impressions), *vijñana* (consciousness).
125. Samyutta Nikaya, in Conze, et al. (Eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 106.
126. R.C. Childers, Dictionary of the Pali Language, *op. cit.*, p. 266; Yoga Vasishtha, *op. cit.*, II.13, III.97; Sankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination, *op. cit.*, p. 114; Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, *op. cit.*, p. 280.
127. See, for example, Yoga-Vasishtha, II.11; Swami Muktananda, In the Company of a Siddha (Oakland, CA: S.Y.D.A., 1978), p. 36. It could be that such statements as "the jnani is never reborn" refer to the idea of his never being reborn as an *ajnani*, i.e., an ignorant person. To a *jnani* there is no dualistic sense of anyone being born or not. There is just the nondual fact of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, Being-Awareness-Bliss.
128. Ramana Maharshi has said in different places (and certainly exemplified in his own person) that whether the body manifests or not is of no real concern to the Self, any more than a man's shadow matters to him.

Of those who have claimed, or about whom it has been claimed, that they are *avatars*, including Buddha, Jesus, Meher Baba, Caitanya, Ramakrishna, Sivananda, Aurobindo, Da Free John, Sathya Sai Baba, et al., the sages Ramana Maharshi, Bhagavan Nityananda, and the holy women Anandamayi Ma, Anasuya Devi, and Amma (Mata Amritanandamayi) are, to this researcher, the most impressive cases, with their demonstrated tremendous compassion, clarity of mind, and overall spiritual orientation from a very early age, and their beginning their public mission on behalf of humanity at tender ages, never seemingly having had a physical plane teacher or done any supervised spiritual training—all of which is good evidence for the claim that they were awake divine incarnations from birth, only needing a bit of a "trigger" to awaken to their respective missions.

129. Nisargadatta Maharaj, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 109; Maharaj also says (Vol. II, p. 258), “In reality all is real and identical. As we put it, *saguna* and *nirguna* are one in *Parabrahman*. There is only the Supreme. In movement, it is *saguna*. Motionless, it is *nirguna*. But it is only the mind that moves or does not. The real is beyond, you are beyond.”

130. James Donahoe, Enigma, op. cit., p. 61.

131. A list of saints who allegedly “left suddenly, when their time was up” would include Elijah, Tukaram, Jnanadeva, Ramalingam, Sankara, and Nisargadatta Maharaj's guru's guru, Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj.

132. On the idea that all will eventually awaken, see Yoga Vasishtha, op. cit., VI.B.68; Lankavatara Sutra, in Dwight Goddard, A Buddhist Bible (NY: E.P. Dutton, 1966), p. 356; Nisargadatta Maharaj, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 132, 241; Sathya Sai Baba, in N. Kasturi, ed., Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram, Vol. 1 (Prashanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi, Anantapur Dt., A.P.: Sri Sathya Sai Books & Publns., 8th ed., 1980), p. 244, and Vol. II (New Delhi: Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, 3rd ed., 1975), pp. 21, 72, 112-3; Meher Baba, The Everything and the Nothing, op.cit., p. 48; and Listen, Humanity, op. cit., pp. xvii, 117-8.