

The Nature of Consciousness

by Richard Blum

Consciousness is mysterious and wonderful! It touches the essence of our being, imbuing our existence with awareness. Yet its true nature remains elusive.

The concept of consciousness lies at the very core of Meher Baba's writings. Baba's cosmology can be summarized as: The purpose of the universe is for God to evolve from Infinite Unconsciousness to Infinite Consciousness. As Baba states, "The whole of evolution, in fact, is an evolution from unconscious divinity to conscious divinity . . ." (*Discourses* 1995, p.266).

If anyone doubts the extraordinary emphasis that Baba places on consciousness, they only need consider that the term appears over 500 times in the *Discourses*, and over 1,000 times in *God Speaks*. But in spite of the huge importance that Baba gives to consciousness, nowhere does He define it.

And of course, what need is there? Isn't consciousness an a priori concept? Don't we all know that while awake we are conscious, and while we sleep we are unconscious? Of course we do.

But it is my opinion that in spite of knowing that we have consciousness, very few really comprehend what it truly is and even fewer directly experience it. This article is an attempt to reflect upon the nature of consciousness, first from an experiential point of view, and then from what I call a "physics of mind" perspective, with the intent of shedding some light on the subject. My speculations are based upon Meher Baba's writings and my own meditation process.

What Is Consciousness?

Most people tend to equate human consciousness with thinking. "I think; therefore I am." But consciousness is not thinking. Thinking belongs to the mind; consciousness belongs to the soul.

Baba makes it clear that consciousness is separate from the mind and survives it. He writes:

When the individual mind is dissolved, the whole universe relative to the mind vanishes into nothingness; and consciousness is no longer tied to anything. Consciousness

is now unlimited and unclouded by anything and serves the purpose of illumining the state of infinite Reality. (ibid., p. 143).

If consciousness can transcend the mind and exist separate from it, then clearly it is different than thinking. Thinking is a mental activity and therefore only occurs within the mind. So if consciousness is not thinking, then what is it?

My understanding is that consciousness is pure, unadulterated awareness. And being pure awareness, consciousness has no other attributes. It is not thinking, it is not feeling, and it is not sensation. Consciousness cannot be touched, tasted, or smelled. Neither can consciousness be heard or seen.

Whereas thoughts are experienced through inner senses, such as a voice within one's mind, or as images visualized, consciousness is void of any sense experience.

The paradox is that whereas consciousness is the awareness of all that one sees, hears, touches, tastes, and smells, none of those faculties can be used to experience consciousness. So while we can be aware of our thoughts and feelings, and all of our senses, we cannot use those same faculties to be conscious of our own consciousness. Thus, there is not even a way to describe consciousness.

To be conscious of one's consciousness is like an eye trying to see itself. An eye cannot see itself, except with the aid of an external mirror. But there is no mirror that can be placed within one's mind or soul in order to be aware of one's consciousness.

Consciousness and Nothingness

So, the irony is that consciousness, that which gives awareness to our very own existence, lacks any attributes, and can therefore only be described as being of "nothing."

Of course it is not nothing, but in a way it makes perfect sense that consciousness should be of nothing. If consciousness were of a particular sense faculty, such as seeing, then it couldn't hear. Or if consciousness were an act of feeling, then it couldn't see. If consciousness were limited to any particular sense or faculty, we would be limited as to what we could be conscious of.

There is a tremendous implication in the fact that consciousness does not have any attributes. Having no attributes, i.e., being of "nothing," allows each and every possible thing to be experienced through consciousness. In other words, by having no attributes, consciousness can take on the attributes of whatever experience it is aware of.

And there is an even greater ramification for consciousness having the attributes of nothingness: it is through contrast with non-existence, i.e., nothingness, that we know something exists. We know who and what we are by knowing who and what we are not. We know light because we know darkness. We know that we are awake, because we know what sleep is. We know that we are alive, because we know what death is. In other words, knowledge comes to us by knowing opposites.

Nothingness can act as the opposite to anything and everything. It is the universal opposite. Because everything can be contrasted to nothingness, and because consciousness is of “nothing,” each and every thing can stand opposite to it. And it is the inner contrast of an object to non-existence that endows it with existence, and makes us aware of it. So consciousness must be of nothing.

Consciousness and the Original Nothing

Consciousness has been linked up with nothingness from the very beginning of creation. In the beginning of creation was the Whim, an attempt by God to know Himself, an attempt to become conscious of who He is. In order for God to know who He is, to answer the question “Who Am I?” God became what He was not. And in order for God, the Infinite Everything, to become what He is not, He became His very opposite, the Nothing, or the “most gross first impression.”

As Baba explains:

Simultaneously with reverberations of the first urge to know Itself, a **most-gross** first impression emerged, objectifying the soul as the absolutely opposite and most-finite counterpart of the absolutely infinite Over-Soul. (*God Speaks*, p. 172).

It is during the original Whim, therefore, that the Nothing separates from the Everything. Just as we humans know what we are by knowing what we are not, so too does God learn what He is by knowing what He is not. And that begins the evolution of consciousness.

When the Nothing first became manifested as Nothingness in the shape of Creation, the primal manifestation of the Nothing gave rise to the first trace of consciousness in God. . . . (ibid., p. 87).

Thus it is the opposite of the Infinite Everything, the Nothing, which possesses first consciousness.

The principle of knowing who one is by knowing who one is not starts with the Whim and continues throughout the entire evolutionary process up through the human form, resulting in higher and higher degrees of consciousness.

When we, as humans, connect with our own consciousness, which has nothingness as its attribute, we connect with the original Nothing.

How to Experience Consciousness?

So here's the paradox: we all know that we are conscious, but we cannot experience our own consciousness directly, because consciousness has no attributes. The only way to experience it is by experiencing the nothingness within ourselves.

And how can one experience the nothingness within? Only by stilling one's mind, and at the same time retaining one's consciousness. In other words, making the mind experience nothingness so as to experience the "no attributes" of consciousness. As Baba says:

The disappearance of mental operations of all types contributes toward making the mind absolutely still without allowing consciousness to fall into abeyance. (*Discourses*, p. 239).

Ridding the mind of all operations leads to annihilation of the mind (*manonash*). This is one of the gateways to God. As Baba says,

The piercing of the mind amounts to the complete withdrawal of consciousness from the universe to its total absorption in God. (*ibid.*, p. 250).

This state, in which the universe becomes a zero, allows for direct experience of consciousness, or what I call consciousness of consciousness. It occurs immediately prior to God Realization. As Baba explains in *God Speaks*:

Nirvana is that state where apparently "God Is Not." This is the only state where "God Is Not" and "Consciousness Is" . . . only consciousness remains, experiencing absolute vacuum. (*God Speaks*, p. 127).

What makes consciousness so fascinating to me is that the consciousness we possess today will be the same consciousness that we'll use when we become conscious

of God. During spiritual advancement, our consciousness will not change. What will change is what we'll be conscious of. Baba explains:

In short, there is no **new** consciousness to be attained to realize Reality—the Eternal. It is the **same** consciousness . . . (ibid., p. 81).

Not only will our consciousness remain the same throughout our future spiritual advancement but it is also true that our consciousness is already linked to Baba's consciousness. As He said in His message "God Alone Is":

. . . I am infinite consciousness. I am everything and I am beyond, beyond everything. I am ever conscious that I am in you, while you are never conscious that I am in you. Daily I support you and share your consciousness. Now I want you to uphold me and share my consciousness one day. (*The God-Man*, p. 344).

This statement by Baba had a profound effect on me. It opened to me the realization that through awareness of my own consciousness, I am able to experience Baba's presence in myself. If His consciousness is indeed infinite, then it must include my consciousness. Therefore, He has full awareness of me. Through sharing my consciousness, He experiences every thought and feeling that I experience. He and I share being me. I experience Him when I experience my own consciousness.

Consciousness and Meditation

So how can we still our minds in order to discover our consciousness? How can we experience, to some degree at least, the nothing within? Meditation is one means.

Baba states that the ultimate goal of meditation is to make the mind blank, which "involves the cessation of all mental activity and having absolutely no thoughts or ideas" (*Discourses* p. 236). In other words to experience the "Nothing."

Baba describes various methods of meditation. In a sense, He indicates that each form of meditation is a partial participation in the ultimate goal of God realization. And in that sense, each form reflects an aspect of consciousness.

Several forms of meditation deal with the subject of experience and watching mental operations. By "subject of experience" I believe that Baba is referring to consciousness.

The forms of meditation concerned with the subject of experience, however, suffer from the handicap that the true subject of experience can never be the object of thought or meditation in the ordinary sense. (ibid., p. 237).

In these meditations, one is to consider oneself the observer or witness to all mental operations. By identifying with the observer or witness, we identify with our consciousness, the awareness within. One discovers the agent of actions for all of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, and disassociates from them, while realizing that the true Self simply witnesses all that occurs. This, of course, is what consciousness does: it watches.

In another form of meditation, Baba recommends repeating a formula, such as "I am not this body" or "I am infinite" (ibid., p. 210). He also often recommended the repeating of His name. When doing so, one is to focus on the single thought to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Regarding meditation, Baba says:

. . . the mind is engrossed in intense thinking about a particular subject to the exclusion of all other irrelevant things. (ibid., p. 202).

But why does intensive concentration on a single thought, which quiets the mind, lead to awareness of consciousness? Because intensive concentration mirrors what the unconscious mind is constantly doing: i.e., reflecting thought infinitely, as we shall see.

The Physics of Mind

Even though consciousness belongs to the soul, it develops through an evolutionary process that is interconnected with biological evolution. During biological evolution, not only do species evolve, but so do subtle and mental bodies. It is through evolution of the physical, subtle, and mental bodies that consciousness evolves. In the human form, the brain, along with the subtle and mental bodies, is so completely developed that full consciousness emerges.

One of the fascinating questions is, How does something physical, the human brain, create something with no physical attributes? How does the physical brain create consciousness?

Baba provides a clue. In both *God Speaks* and *Infinite Intelligence*, Baba explains that evolution comes to an end when the human form is obtained. But He presents slightly different reasons why in each book.

In *God Speaks*, Baba states that evolution ends in the human form because human consciousness is full and complete.

In human-form the soul achieves full and complete consciousness. Therefore the soul, having now gained full and complete consciousness in human-form, does not need any more or any other higher forms to evolve consciousness. (p. 35).

In *Infinite Intelligence*, He states that “. . . the evolution of thinking from the most finite to the infinite ends in the human form because in this form thinking has reached its original infinite state,” i.e., infinite thinking (p. 17).

So, if “full consciousness” and “infinite thinking” complete the evolutionary process, is there a relationship between “full consciousness” and “infinite thinking?” I believe there is. Even though we have already seen that there is a difference between thinking and consciousness, I believe that consciousness is derived from thought, just as energy can be derived from matter. In fact, I suggest that it is infinite thinking that creates full consciousness. But how? And what is infinite thinking?

Creating Full Consciousness from Infinite Thought

By infinite thinking, I do not mean speeding up the normal chatter occurring within our gross minds. Rather, I am referring to the deeper aspects of reflective thinking occurring unconsciously in our mental bodies, for it is on the mental level where infinite reflective thinking takes place.

I suggest that it is the human mind’s ability to reflect upon itself that leads to awareness. In other words, it is the ability to think about thinking that creates full consciousness.

To get a grasp on infinite thinking, let’s first consider how finite gross-level thinking speeded up might lead to full human consciousness. Let’s look at thinking in slow motion, particularly reflective thinking.

In slow motion it might go like this. I see a beautiful red rose, and I have an immediate reaction. I am drawn to gaze at it. That reaction is subconscious. But immediately I reflect upon my reaction and have a thought, “That rose is beautiful.” Then I have another thought, “I really like that rose.” I observe myself liking the rose. As I continue to gaze at the rose, I remain absorbed in the experience, and I have full awareness of the rose.

Now, this process happens over a period of several seconds. But I believe that this type of reflection is happening all of the time in the human mind, but extremely rapidly. It goes something like this. I have a thought, “The rose is beautiful.” Then I have another thought, “I am thinking, the rose is beautiful.” Then again another, “I am thinking that I am thinking, the rose is beautiful.” If this process happens extremely rapidly and continues without stop, I believe it would create awareness. In other words, the human mind is always in a state of “I am aware that I am aware that I am aware that I am aware.” I believe it is continually happening in the human mind, but so rapidly that it remains an unconscious process.

A way to visualize this process is to imagine a thought as being like a beam of light bouncing back and forth between two mirrors. Every time the light hits the mirror, there is another thought. Start with an original thought, “the rose is beautiful,” which is shot in the direction of one of the mirrors. The thought hits the mirror, and when it does it sparks a new thought, “I just had a thought that the rose is beautiful.” This new thought is projected toward the other mirror. When it strikes that mirror it again triggers another thought, “I had a thought that I had a thought that the rose is beautiful.” This new thought is sent back to the first mirror, where a new thought occurs. “I had a thought that I had a thought that I thought . . .”

Now imagine that the thoughts travel back and forth between the mirrors as fast as possible, as fast as a beam of light. These back-and-forth reflections occur so rapidly that the individual reflections are not discernable by the mind.

This is akin to how a laser works. Laser light is made by continually reflecting light between two mirrors. The light is amplified and made a coherent single frequency. The result is that an ordinary beam of light is transformed into a laser, so powerful that it’s able to burn steel.

Now imagine reflections occurring billions of times a second inside your mind. Non-stop and innumerable, these reflections of thought become infinite. And when thought becomes infinite, something magical happens: infinite thinking transforms thought into consciousness.

Scientific Correspondence

The transformation of a lower form into a higher form, i.e., thought into consciousness, fits very nicely both within Baba’s cosmology and in physics.

In Baba’s cosmology, the initial transformation occurs during the descent of the soul from the Beyond State down to the physical stone form. During this descent, the soul

passes through the mental and subtle planes, transforming from mental, to energy, to physical form. Baba describes this hierarchical derivation:

Mind begets energy and matter. Without mind there can be neither energy nor matter. Energy is derived from mind and is continually sustained by it; it cannot subsist without mind, latent or manifest. Matter depends upon energy and cannot remain matter without energy, latent or manifest. (*Life at Its Best*, p. 38).

During involution, a soul ascends back through the subtle and mental planes, and experiences being transformed first from a gross body into an energy (subtle) body, and then second from an energy body into a mental body.

As the physical world is a projection of the higher subtle and mental planes, there are corresponding scientific laws that reflect the higher spiritual realities. For example, the spiritual relationship between matter and energy is expressed in physics through Einstein's equation $E = mc^2$.

The letter "c" stands for the speed of light, and nothing can travel faster than that. The amount of energy that can be transformed out of a given amount of matter is equal to the force that must be applied to that matter in order to accelerate it to move at maximum speed, the speed of light. Matter must be taken to its extreme, or infinite, state in order to transform into energy.

Are there other scientific equations that also express reflections of spiritual truths in the physical world? None exist to my knowledge, but I postulate these three:

1: Thinking = E / c^2 Organized

or

Thinking = Energy captured, organized and controlled

2: Consciousness = Infinite Thinking

3: God = Infinite Consciousness

Physics of Thinking

What does it mean for energy to be captured and controlled? And how does organized energy create thought? That is too large a topic to cover in this article, but here is a short synopsis.

Captured energy is potential energy, i.e., energy ready to be released. In both neurons in the brain and transistors inside computers, potential energy is stored as electrical potential. Electrical signals entering a neuron or a transistor control when the potential energy is released. The released energy, flowing out as electrical current, contributes to controlling other neurons or transistors.

Inside the brain lies a vast complex of neurons, numbering 100 billion. Each neuron is connected to as many as a 1,000 other neurons, creating trillions of connection. It is through this extremely vast, but highly organized, network of neurons that thinking is produced.

The same is true, but to a lesser degree, for computer chips, which today contain about one billion transistors. Rudimentary circuits are able to perform elementary thinking in the form of logic and mathematics, such as addition and multiplication. More complex thinking is programmed through software. In both cases, it is the highly organized and controlled flow that transforms energy into thinking.

Physics of Consciousness

Enormous numbers of neurons and a vast amount of interconnections create an immeasurable amount of thought processes, but does that constitute infinite thinking? I believe not. But perhaps by “infinite thinking,” Baba means “maximum thinking.” Just as light speed is maximum speed, and nothing can travel faster than it, so too, perhaps there is maximum thought. If so, what would it be? Perhaps it would be the result of maximum organization.

Intelligence is the result of an organized structure. In computers, something called tree structures represents intelligent processes. A search through the tree represents thinking. Likewise, evolution is a tree structure. (See my article “Evolution is God’s Thinking” in *The Glow International*, August 2006). Evolution is God’s vast search for Himself through innumerable forms over billions of years. Through the evolutionary thinking process, nature, starting with extremely limited intelligence and consciousness, gains greater and greater degrees of intelligence and consciousness. Animals have a more developed intelligence in the form of instinct. Finally, the entire evolutionary process is culminated in humans possessing full consciousness and infinite thinking.

But what is it about the human mind and brain that makes us unique? I believe the human mind possesses an organized structure of intelligence equal to the entire evolutionary structure. The human brain with its billions of neurons and trillions of interconnections is on par with the evolutionary tree structure. In each fraction of a second, a human is able to think at an order of magnitude equal to the entire evolutionary

thinking process. In each fraction of a second a person is able to perform a thought equal to what evolution took billions of years to perform. Thus the human mind, being a complete reflection of the evolutionary process, is capable of maximum thinking.

But still, I believe there is something even more magnificent about the human mind and brain that allows for consciousness, and that is its reconnection with the original Nothingness. How is that possible? By performing thinking at very elementary levels.

There is no doubt that human thinking occurs in the brain through neurons. All scientists would agree with that. But can thinking take place on lower, more elementary levels? I believe so, and there is evidence that it is true. For example, changes in DNA inside of neurons have been observed when neurons fire. This indicates that encoding of information not only occurs on the cellular level, i.e., neurons, but also on a molecular level, i.e., DNA. Although science has not discovered it yet, I believe that encoding is likely to take place on even lower levels, including the levels of atoms, subatomic particles, strings, and even lower. In fact, I believe that the human mind is capable of encoding and processing information on the lowest possible level, the level of nothingness.

In quantum mechanics there is an effect occurring on the most microscopic level of space and time, called the Planck level. At this level, there is the spontaneous emergence of an electron-positron pair from out of nothingness and then the almost immediate recombination of this matter and anti-matter, causing mutual annihilation. I believe that it is likely that there is a mechanism inside the human brain that is able to utilize this quantum effect in order to encode information.

If that is true, our mind would not only mirror the entire evolutionary structure, it would also reconnect with the original Nothing and the very act of Creation, i.e., matter and anti-matter springing out of nothingness. In every instant, nothingness, the attribute of consciousness, would reflect in the mind, creating awareness of one's own existence.

Conclusion

The first trace of consciousness comes into existence at the time of creation, when the Nothing separated from the Everything. Through the evolutionary process, higher and higher degrees of consciousness develop, until in the human form, a vast network of neurons in the human brain creates a thinking process equal to the entire evolutionary thought process. Thoughts processing through this massive network pass through all lower evolutionary levels, down to the lowest possible level, the level of the original nothingness. The combination of the brain's vast thinking network and the ability to process information at the level of nothingness makes possible infinite thinking.

Processing thought at the level of nothingness allows the human mind to contrast all objects of experience to non-existence, thus confirming their existence. It is this confirmation of existence through contrast with nothingness, combined with the process of infinite thinking that provides the mechanism for full and complete consciousness to emerge.

In this advent, Baba stated, “I have come not teach but to awaken.” And what is it that He awakens? He is awakening us to higher levels of consciousness through Divine Love.

Each one of us will come to a stage in which we will not only be conscious of our own consciousness, but we will also experience Meher Baba’s infinite consciousness, and we will merge with our original state of Nothingness and realize the original Infinity of our souls. To have awareness of this Infinity is to realize God.

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