

Consciousness

— from —

Zombies to Angels

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The Shadow and the Light of Knowing Who You Are

“If you get rid of the demons and the disturbing things, then the angels fly off, too.”

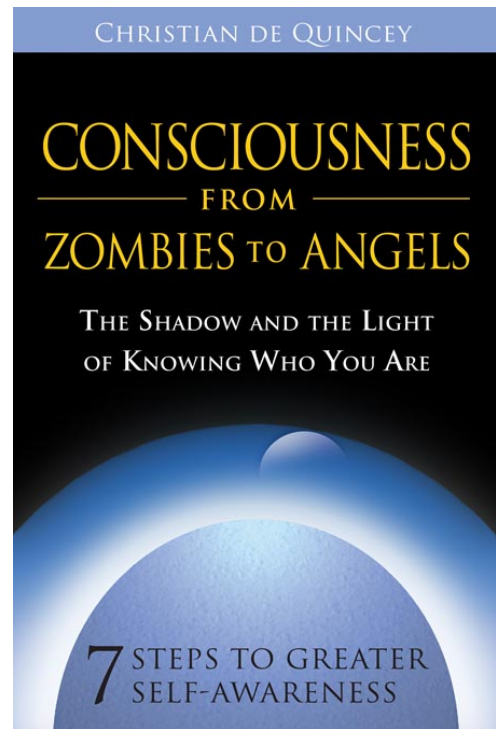
—Joni Mitchell

An Interview with Christian de Quincey, Ph.D.

Q: What will people learn from [Consciousness from Zombies to Angels?](#)

A: Readers will join me on the greatest adventure of all: an exploration of philosophy’s hardest problem, science’s final frontier, and spirituality’s deepest mystery. They will find seven simple steps on the path to knowing who they truly are.

I’m a professor of Consciousness Studies at John F. Kennedy University and Dean of Consciousness Studies at the University of Philosophical Research. I’ve been teaching and writing about consciousness for decades. It’s my life-long passion. I wanted to create a comprehensive, easy-to-understand “user’s guide” to the mind—exploring the full spectrum of consciousness from philosophy through science to spirituality. This book is based on presentations and handouts I created over the years for my students to inform and inspire them about the nature and possibilities of our most intimate reality—*consciousness*.



Q: How did you come up with the title?

A: Originally, I wanted to write a kind of *Consciousness for Dummies* book—like *Meditation for Dummies*, *Yoga for Dummies*, *Philosophy for Dummies*, etc. But I wanted to call it *Consciousness for Zombies*. You see, in philosophy, a “zombie” is a very special kind of creature: It is just like a human in every way, *except it has no mind or consciousness whatsoever*. But I realized that probably only philosophers would get the pun. So I went to Plan B.

The subtitle of the book is *The Shadow and the Light of Knowing Who You Are*. It means that if we are really serious about exploring consciousness we must be willing to work with our own shadow and light. Everyone has a “Shadow”—those negative aspects of ourselves (our fears, guilt, shame, anger) that we have pushed down into our unconscious from early childhood. But whatever we suppress remains in us and we either project it onto others or it erupts in some kind of mind-body illness.

However, we not only suppress our “miserable” selves, we also suppress our “magnificent” selves—those parts of us that are creative, powerful, compassionate, and loving. To really know who we are, and to grow as healthy spiritual beings, we need to embrace both our Shadow and our Light. As Joni Mitchell said: “If you get rid of the demons and the disturbing things, then the angels fly off, too.”

We need to embrace our inner “zombies” as well as our inner “angels.” And so: *Consciousness from Zombies to Angels*. It’s a “user’s guide” to the mind from “Z” to “A.” To make the most effective use of this guide, we need to use our four gifts of knowing.

Q: What are the ‘Four Gifts of Knowing’?

A: Each of us has many *different ways of knowing*, with the potential to be a philosopher, a scientist, a shaman, and a mystic. It all depends on where we focus attention and what gifts we decide to cultivate.

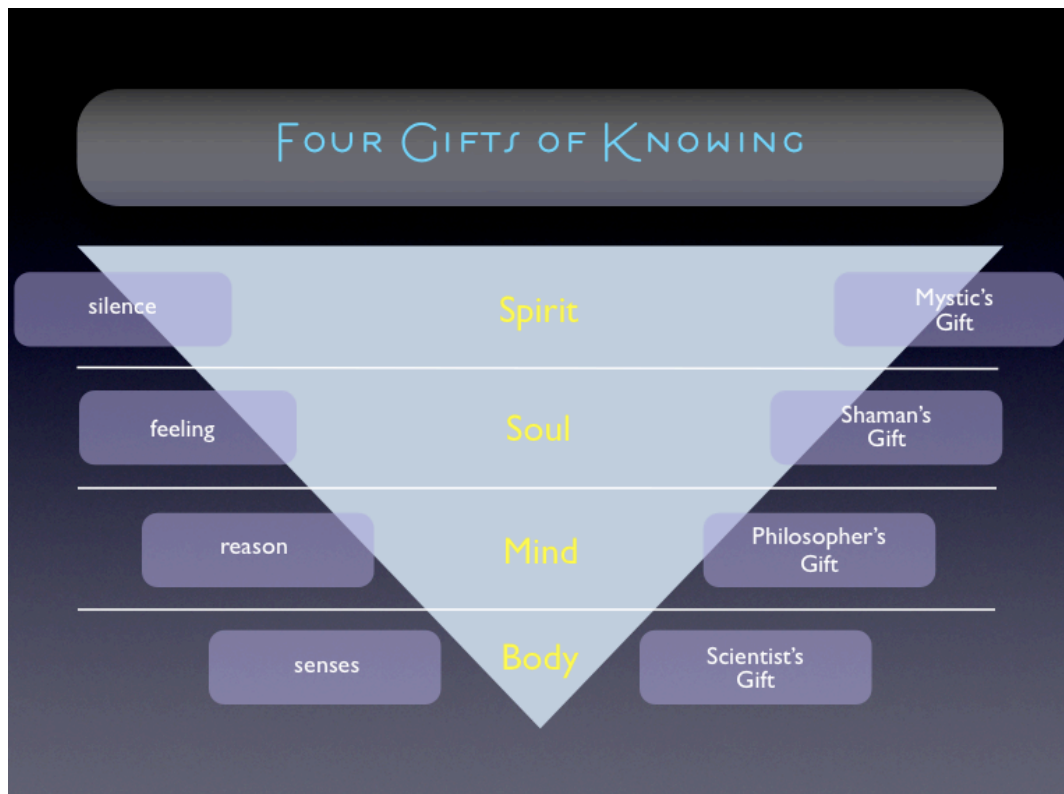
The **Scientist’s Gift** is our *senses*—and a *method for testing* our assumptions and beliefs through the power of rigorous *observation*; we use this gift to explore the world of matter, including our bodies.

The **Philosopher’s Gift** is *reason* and *language*; we use this gift to explore the realm of mind.

The **Shaman’s Gift** is *feeling* and *alternative states of consciousness*; we use this to explore the domain of soul.

And the **Mystic’s Gift** is *intuition* and *sacred silence*; we use this to unite with the essence of spirit.

If we wish to truly understand consciousness, we need to cultivate and integrate all our “gifts of knowing.” It’s not enough to just study the brain using the Scientist’s Gift (though that is valuable, too). And using just the Philosopher’s Gift of reason, logic, and language gives us only intellectual knowledge *about* the mind (also useful if we want to talk or write about consciousness). However, it cannot bring us to the heart of consciousness itself which is *experience*. For that, we need to also cultivate deep awareness of *feeling* and *intuition* (the Shaman’s and Mystic’s Gifts).



We need these last two gifts to develop and evolve consciousness. No amount of information about how the brain works or intellectual knowledge of the mind will ever lead us to *transformation*. We need to be willing to be open to the full spectrum of consciousness—including our shadow and light, our inner zombies and angels. And to do so effectively, we need to engage in some form of psycho-spiritual practice.

It seems to me that the essence and aim of all spiritual practice is to help us cultivate what I call “*experience beyond belief*.”

Q: What do you mean by ‘experience beyond belief’?

A: These days, it’s quite common to hear people say, “you create your own reality” or “reality is whatever you believe.” The idea is that we can create or change the world simply by changing what we think or believe.

That seems to me to be a big mistake. Yes, indeed, consciousness does play a role in shaping the physical world. But be careful. The truth is not so simple—or as simplistic—as the popular cliché would have us believe. It is based on a confusion between “belief” and “intention.” Beliefs are mental habits that block our creative power. Intentions, however, are creative and have power to change lives. They are purposeful, focused expressions of consciousness through choice.

Beliefs, on the other hand, are frozen fragments of consciousness, static snapshots of reality. It works like this: first, at every moment, we are having an *experience*. Then, we *interpret* our experience using thoughts (words and ideas). But every thought is an *abstraction*, literally plucked from the ongoing stream of experience. Next, we solidify our thoughts by turning them into *beliefs*. We assume that what we think is true (that’s a definition of “belief”). But we don’t stop there. We often go a step further and turn our beliefs into *dogma* by *believing our beliefs*. We insist that our beliefs equal reality (that’s the definition of dogma).

The problem is we then *act* based on what we believe. But, as everyone knows, a belief can be right or wrong. For example, some people believe that God exists, some people don’t. Who’s right? They can’t all be right, because those beliefs cancel each other out. And if beliefs really did create reality, then here’s what would happen: When people believe in God, God would exist, and when people don’t believe, God would not exist. So, God would be popping in and out of existence on the whims of what human beings believed. What a strange Supreme Being that would be!

It’s important to remember that *any* belief can be right or wrong (it may more or less accurately match reality or it may totally miss the mark).

However, an *experience* can never be wrong. Every experience always is *exactly what it is*. You can never have a “mistaken” experience. You can be mistaken only about your interpretation (thought or belief) of your experience.

Therefore, since beliefs run the risk of being wrong, and experience is never wrong, it makes far more sense to pay attention to your experience than to act on your beliefs. I’m saying that the goal of every spiritual practice is to eliminate the “middle man” of interpretation and belief, and to *act directly from experience*.

Here’s what typically happens:

experience → interpretation → belief → dogma → action

By contrast, when we cultivate “experience beyond belief” we become like martial artists, great athletes, or creative artists who act *in the moment* based on what they actually experience.

Have you ever noticed that consciousness or experience always happens *right now*. And, have you noticed when reality happens? Like experience, reality also happens *right now*. That’s very convenient. It means that our experience connects us directly with reality.

However, our thoughts and beliefs always distort reality in some way. They remove us from the *in-the-moment* experience where we connect directly with *what is*. That’s why I encourage us to cultivate *experience beyond belief*. And to learn to act directly from experience:

experience → action



Q: Are you saying we should give up all our beliefs’?

A: Not at all. We can’t help having beliefs (it’s what our minds have evolved to do, and they do that job very well). But we can choose whether or not to be attached to our beliefs. We can choose whether or not we *believe* our beliefs to be true. I’m encouraging us not to believe our beliefs. Rather, I suggest that we learn to notice them, and then release them, let them go.

Wisdom resides in our moment-to-moment experience, not in our beliefs. As habits of mind, beliefs are conditioned by the past. Experience, on the other hand, always occurs in the present moment—*now*.

Of course, I don’t want you to believe what I’m saying, either. I do, however, want you to listen with an open mind, and to allow yourself to *feel* and *experience* whatever comes up for you as you respond to the meaning of my words. *Pay attention to what you are feeling*—to the sensations rippling through your body. That’s the source of your wisdom. Not your abstract thoughts.

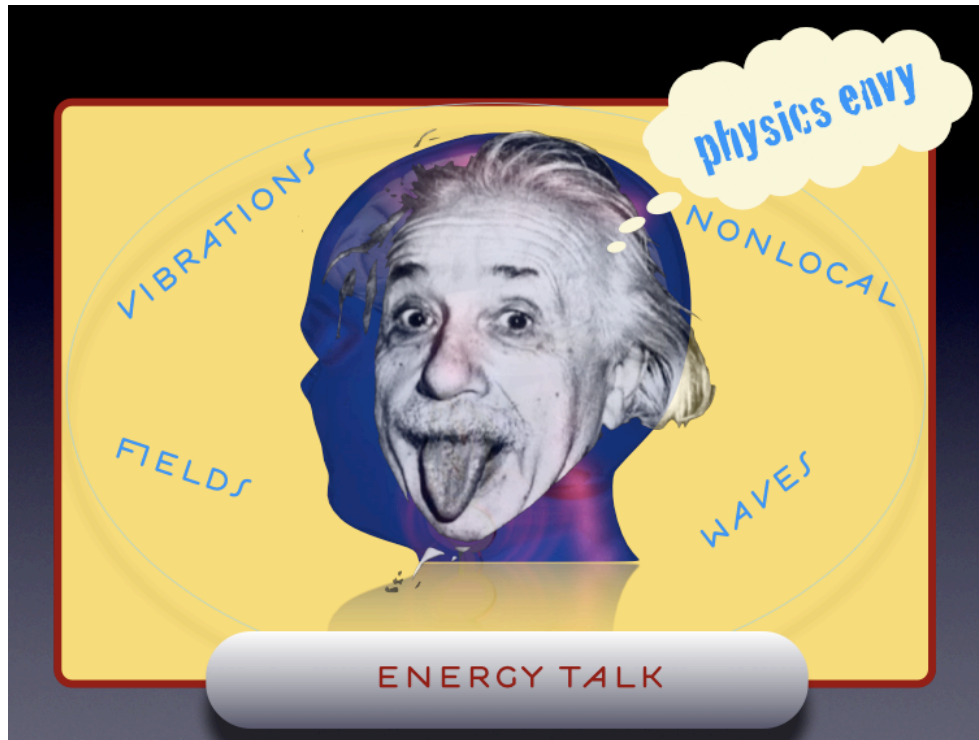
As long as we have bodies, we will have ego-minds, and as long as we have ego-minds we will have beliefs. We don’t have much, if any, choice about that. But we do have a choice whether or not to *believe* our beliefs.

I often remind students of Plato’s final words. On his deathbed, the great philosopher gathered his followers around him and told them that everything he had taught and written was nothing more than a “likely story.”

That’s how we should hold our beliefs—lightly, as “likely stories.”

Q: You also talk about going beyond ‘physics envy.’ What do you mean?

A: Many people use “energy talk” to describe consciousness or spirit. They use words such as “energy,” “vibrations,” “frequency,” “resonance,” “waves,” “fields,” “mechanism,” and a current favorite, “nonlocal.” All of these words are borrowed from physics. They describe what goes on in the *physical* world.



But mind or consciousness is not part of the physical world. It is *non-physical*. In my work, and particularly in *Consciousness from Zombies to Angels*, I encourage people to “watch their language” when talking about consciousness. I point out that using “energy talk” misses the most important point about consciousness—namely it is *subjective*. Everything in physics, and all the terms borrowed from physics, refer to *objects*, to things in the objective world.

Consciousness is not an object, it is not objective. It is the *subject of experience*. It is *awareness* and *choice*. It cannot be detected by physical senses or instruments, and cannot be measured. Therefore, it makes no sense to use the language of physics to describe what cannot be physically measured.

Nevertheless, people tend to cling to “energy talk”—because, paradoxically, they think it makes what they say sound more “scientific” or more “grounded.” Actually, the opposite is true. The language of physics is the language of abstractions. If we want to be truly “grounded” then we should ground what we say in what we actually experience—and

use “mind talk” instead of “energy talk.” We should not confuse the *experiencer* (consciousness) with what is experienced (energy).

Frequently, when I make this point, someone says: “But if we give up energy talk then we would have to invent a new language.” This surprises me. I point out that, in fact, we already have a very rich vocabulary for talking about consciousness—words such as “intention,” “attention,” “purpose,” “meaning,” “perceiving,” “observing,” “remembering,” “wanting,” “anticipating,” “believing,” “doubting,” “affirming,” “denying,” “imagining,” “judging,” “understanding,” “feeling,” “experience,” “choice” . . . and on and on. None of these words can be reduced to “energy talk” or be explained by physics.

Consciousness has its own very appropriate language. I’m suggesting that if we want to push beyond the final frontier, then we will make much better progress if we “watch our language” and use “mind talk” instead of “energy talk.”

Q: Your book has four parts. Can you summarize the key points?

A: In **Part 1**, we begin with the Philosopher’s Gift to explore: *What is consciousness?* I focus on the three core problems in philosophy of mind: (1) **Mind-body connection:**



How are mind and body related—does the brain produce mind, or does consciousness create the brain; do they exist in parallel universes or does consciousness “go all the way down”? (2) **Other minds:** How can we tell if anyone else has consciousness—or even if rocks can feel anything? (3) **Free will:** Do we really have choice, or is everything determined by God, by genes, or by physics?

In **Part 2**, we then shift to the Scientist's Gift to explore: *How the brain works* and *how consciousness is related to quantum physics*.

We enter the curious wonderland of the quantum to see how its strange inhabitants may give us insights into the origins and nature of consciousness. If you ever wondered what a quantum is, what “nonlocality” really means, or why quantum physics might be relevant to consciousness, you will find easy-to-grasp keys to this fascinating domain.

I also show why recent advances in neuroscience and brain imaging that claim to “photograph God” are highly misleading. Yes, it is useful to know what goes on in the brain when someone is having a mystical experience, but no scientific instruments can probe or capture what goes on in an *experience*. Information about the brain is not the same as information about consciousness. Brain is not mind, and brain science is not consciousness science.



For that, we need a very different kind of science, with a very different approach. Instead of standard Plate-Glass science, which separates subject from object, we need a new “Looking-Glass” science, where there is no separation. In true consciousness science, the mind is exploring itself.

And once we turn the beam of inquiry back on itself—when awareness is focused on itself—we must be open to whatever bubbles up in consciousness. We must be willing to engage with our Shadow, with all the fears, and shame, and anger hiding out in our

unconscious mind. In short, a consciousness scientist must be willing to undergo psycho-spiritual *transformation*.

Only when we open up to our inner “zombies” and “angels,” can we move forward on the path to enlightenment.

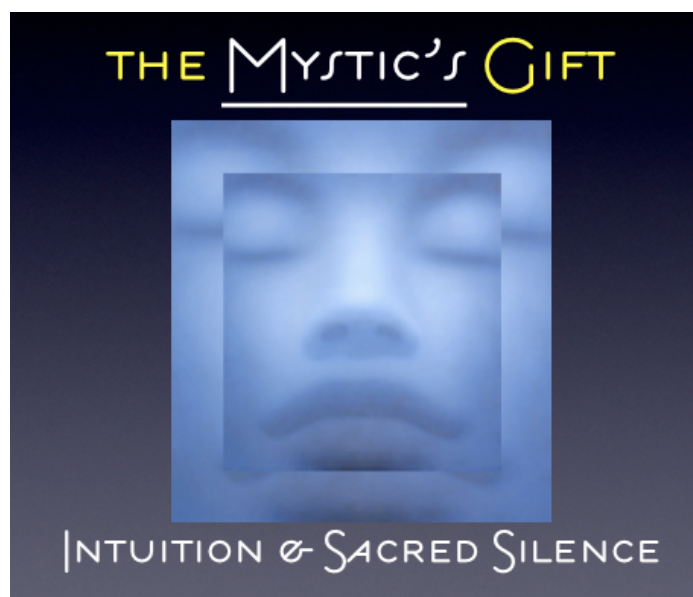
Then, in **Part 3**, we focus on the Shaman’s Gift and Mystic’s Gift and explore: *Why consciousness is important*. We learn how our minds fall into different patterns, or grooves of thought, and how to shift out of the habits that keep us stuck.

We learn how to recognize “strange attractors” that pull our minds this way and that. We learn how the ego is formed, how it grows into our personality, and becomes embodied. We also learn how to transcend these restrictions through creative acts of choice and letting go to realize our full potential.

Besides learning to recognize our patterns, the Mystic’s Gift takes us

into the realm of sacred silence, rooted in experience beyond belief. It helps us to accept *all of who we are*—our ego, our personality, our shadow, our light, our zombies and angels. We discover what it means to “Know Thyself” by following the seven steps to knowing who you really are.

Finally, in **Part 4**, we shift to “Consciousness in Dialogue.” One of the greatest satisfactions of being an author, teacher, and public speaker is the feedback I get from people who have read my books, attended a talk, heard me on the radio, seen me on TV, visited my website, or taken one of my classes. I get a lot of emails, and, thankfully, I’m often challenged to defend or clarify something I’ve written or said. It keeps me on



my toes. Sometimes a real gem of a question whizzes through cyberspace and gets me thinking deeper and more carefully about an idea I've put out there.

I've collected these "gems" over the years, and have created an archive of "MindBytes"—a series of questions and answers organized under headings such as "God," "Energy," "Cosmos," "Evolution," "Miracles," "Quantum," "Time," "Beliefs," and, of course, "Consciousness." These are "learning nuggets" that highlight important questions, and I include examples at the end of each chapter. Part 4 of the book is composed of longer dialogues on topics such as "experience beyond belief," "consciousness, energy, and evolution," "are rocks conscious?" and "is consciousness the same as spirit?"

Q: What are the seven steps to knowing who we really are?

Watch Your Language

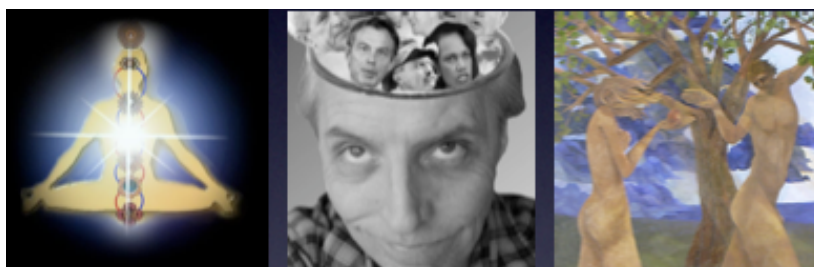
Pay attention to the words you use when talking about consciousness.

Be precise. Get beyond "physics envy." Use "mind talk" not "energy talk."

Identify the Problem

What do you want to know about consciousness?

1. *Mind-body problem*: How are body and mind related?
2. *Problem of other minds*: How do you know whether anyone else has consciousness, or what's going on in others' minds?
3. *Problem of free-will*: Do you really have a choice or is everything determined by physics or by god?



Learn How to Look

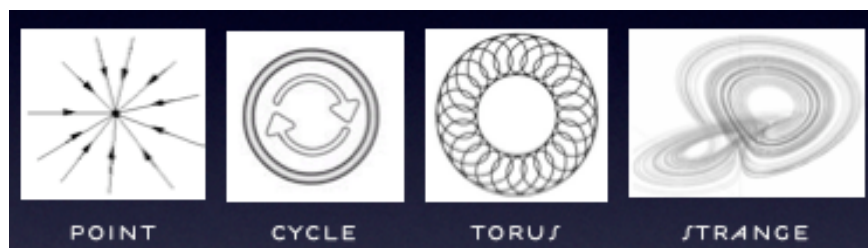
How do you explore consciousness? Learn the difference between our Four Gifts of Knowing—Scientist’s Gift of *senses*; Philosopher’s gift of *reason*; Shaman’s gift of *feeling*; and Mystic’s Gift of *intuition* and *sacred silence*. Learn why understanding the brain is not the same as knowing your mind.

Recognize Your Patterns

How do you organize your thoughts and beliefs? An attractor is a tendency of a system to fall into a recurring pattern. We all have unconscious habits of mind and patterns of behavior that drive us. What attractors or patterns drive you?

Consciousness is a complex system that shapes itself around four major types of “attractors”— *point* (ego), *cycle* (personality), *torus* (new possibilities), and *strange* (creative self-expression).

- * *Point attractor*—kicks in when you are fixated or obsessed with something. When used to focus attention, it can be positive. It is the way of the **ego**.
- * *Cycle attractor*—jumping from one fixation or addiction to another, oscillating between competing desires. When the cycle attractor kicks in, we move back and forth between attraction and aversion, between positive and negative. It is the way of **personality**.
- * *Torus attractor*—a way out of the repetitiveness of ego and personality habits. Instead of cycling back and forth between pleasure and pain, we “break the spell” and spiral into new possibilities. It is the way of **embodied imagination**.
- * *Strange attractor*—combines order and chaos, creativity and stability. Opens us up to choice and creativity. It is the way of **self-expression**.



Transformation is a whole-system shift that involves *all* attractors—the ego point, the personality cycle, the embodied torus, and the strange Self.

Know Thyself

The keystone of every spiritual philosophy—from Socrates to Buddha—is the question: *Who are you—really?* Are you your ego, your personality, your body, or your soul? Do you have a core self? Are you an avocado or an artichoke? Can you get beyond your ego? What happens if you let go of your cherished beliefs?

Embrace Your Shadow

Only by accepting and integrating *all* of who you are, can you truly know who you are and step on the path to transformation.

From early childhood, we have all suppressed fear, shame, guilt, and anger. We have stuffed “negative” experiences down, out of consciousness. But these demons never went away. They live in us, in our bodies and minds, as our “shadow” self—our “inner zombies.”

We have done the same with our “light,” too. Along with our miserable selves, we have blocked off our magnificent selves. We often fear our greatness and are ashamed of our power. We suppress our “inner angels,” too.

Transformation happens only when we acknowledge and embrace our full humanity—our Zombie shadow and Angel light.

Practice Transformation

Transformation is not a one-time event. It is a lifelong process that requires cultivating consciousness at every moment, in every circumstance. It’s a never-ending dance between ego and spirit, between Shadow and Self, between Zombie and Angel.

All seven steps to knowing who you are can be summed up in a single phrase: *experience beyond belief*. And this last step itself involves its own seven steps—reflecting the fractal nature of transformation.



Q: What are the seven steps to transformation?

🌐 Step 1: Accept that beliefs are natural.

We all have beliefs. There's no getting away from that. It's a simple fact of life. It's natural to have beliefs—it's what our minds are for. They evolved to give us maps or shortcuts that help us navigate through life. Just don't mistake your beliefs for reality. The map is not the territory. You don't drive your car onto the map and you don't eat the menu. Yes, beliefs are natural, nevertheless they disconnect us from reality.

🌐 Step 2: Realize that every belief is a habit of mind.

Thoughts and beliefs are *abstractions*—literally “snapshots” of reality taken from the ongoing flow of experience as it happens moment by moment. They are frozen fragments of consciousness, mechanical habits that keep you stuck in the past. Mesmerized by your beliefs, real life flows past unnoticed. Here's how it works: You have an *experience*. Then you *interpret* it. Turn it into a *belief*. Then into *dogma*.

Beliefs, then, are nothing but mental habits, stepping stones to dogmatism and fundamentalism.

 **Step 3: Recognize the origin of beliefs.**

Every belief is composed of thoughts, and every thought begins as a feeling. Think about it: Long before you could think or speak, as an infant your life was flushed with feelings. Feelings come first. They are grounded in your body and connect you with reality.

 **Step 4: Focus on feelings in the body.**

Feelings are literally the sensations you experience in your body. Learn to pay attention to them. Take time out to sit quietly and just notice what's going on, without trying to change anything. Simply feel your sensations—in your chest, around your eyes, in your legs, your back, your belly . . . Remember: Every thought begins as a feeling, and feelings connect us with the world. They are messages from nature. Learn what it means to *feel your thinking*—and not just think your thoughts.

 **Step 5: Stop believing your beliefs.**

“But,” you say, “if I don't have any beliefs, I'll have nothing.” Far from it. In fact, letting go of beliefs opens you up to *what is really happening in your experience—right now!* And experience is the royal road to reality. Have you noticed: Experience and reality always happen together, *right now*. Also, notice I didn't say “stop having beliefs.” That would contradict Step 1. As long as you have a mind, you can't help having beliefs. It's what the mind does naturally, and you have little choice about that. But you do have a choice whether or not you *believe* your beliefs. You do not have to believe that your beliefs are *true*. Instead, you can learn to hold beliefs as “likely stories,” as Plato once said. So, take courage, let go of your beliefs, don't hold onto them, and see what happens. I promise: You won't disappear, you won't die.

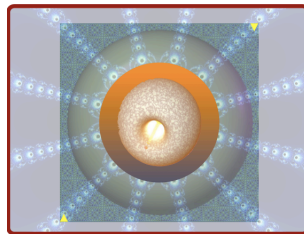
 **Step 6: Cultivate being the Witness.**

As you practice sitting quietly, feeling the sensations in your body, noticing thoughts as they come and go, arising from your feelings, you will come to a new realization about who you are. *You are not your mind. You are not your thoughts or beliefs.* In

fact, you are not even your feelings. In this evolving state of consciousness, you will begin to experience a new sense of freedom. You may begin to notice something quite profound: *someone, or some other part of you, is observing everything that is going on.* The question is: *Who?* That's the sixty-four-billion dollar spiritual jackpot. It's the essence of spiritual practice. Who, then, is observing the flow of thoughts through your mind? Well, *that's* who you are! You are the Witness that unifies self and world. And the way to get to this realization is by practicing experience beyond belief.

🕒 Step 7: Spend more time in 'sacred silence.'

In the end, the core wisdom of all spiritual traditions is some form of “Let go and let God.” Learn to just *be*—by yourself or in community. Be comfortable beyond thoughts, words, judgments, or beliefs. You don't need to sit still and quiet to practice this, but it helps. It takes some discipline to tame the mind, to wean it off its diet of beliefs, to break the habits of thoughts, desires, and fears that inevitably distract us and distort reality. After a while, though, when you pay more attention to the Witness, you come to realize that the deepest source of wisdom is not what you think or believe. Rather wisdom lies in that space of “sacred silence” beyond all words and ideas, where *what is* shines forth. Those who open up to it, often call it the Source.



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consciousness and cosmology are available at www.deepspirit.com and www.TheWisdomAcademy.org