

Essay

Understanding Samapatti

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Abstract

Every observation by the dispassionate observer can be an entanglement of more than one individual conscious person. I am inclined to the view that the dispassionate observer is separate from the whole reality, and yet it appears to occupy the same space as the whole reality. From that I assume the whole reality exists in a different kind of space, most likely the space given the Sanskrit name of Akasha. I would say that Akasha is a nonlocal space which permeates our spacetime and is simultaneously in every space and all time. From that nonlocal viewpoint, consciousness, as a fundamental point of observation separate from the whole reality, is naturally dispassionate. This is why a seer is able to experience life and observe death without grief.

Keywords: Samapatti, consciousness, dispassionate observer, entanglement.

One of the differences I have noticed when thinking about how my Samapatti experiences are not normal in an everyday sense is that my memory lacks the subjective information of the experience. At first, this was not obvious to me, only becoming so after a very personal experience. I had been called interstate because my eldest daughter, Tracey, was hospitalised after her body rejected the heart and lungs transplant she received some five years earlier and was in a coma due to organ failure.

As I sat at her bedside, I went into a state of intense bliss, which remained with me for a couple of weeks. Later, when I recalled that time of sitting beside Tracey's bed I only had a narrative of the experience; there was no bliss, just the knowledge that this had happened.

I am aware that philosophy requires qualia, the subjective experience of something, before an example of an experience is regarded as acceptable in the context of understanding consciousness. I am also aware that this example of memory without qualia is anathema so far as using this experience as evidence in a discussion. With all due respect to those philosophers, I believe that to ignore evidence for whatever reason is to consign the hard question of what consciousness is to the nether world.

I have thought when running into what is now called the hard problem of consciousness, one of the obvious places to begin would be to consider the situations in which the existing theory of mind was unable to account for what appears to be fact. I can accept the Hindu traditions regard mind as manas, an illusion, which is not particularly helpful when the western mind can see this position as a put down.

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Whatever the reason our philosophers may have to dismiss this possible viewpoint which may have solved the hard problem, it is not a particularly clever one. I have tried in my relatively uneducated way to point out the incompleteness of the current theory of mind, not to be smart but simply to illustrate something seemingly unexamined. Coming from this uneducated direction, I have not been limited by the accepted model. My priority was to understand my own accidental experiences in Samapatti, and its relevance to the hard problem of consciousness was as much a surprise for me as it obviously remains for philosophy. I am aware that philosophers had already reached the conclusion that consciousness could be a fundamental of reality, and for most the notion generates religious overtones.

Rather than give an explanation from the perspective of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, I will try to explain what Patanjali said about memory and Samapatti with some simple diagrams. Hopefully, I will write what I now know in the more familiar language of our time. I will still use some of the Sanskrit terms until I work out alternatives, bearing in mind that at some point I will replace Mahat with the recent phrase, the dispassionate observer.

Before getting to Samapatti, Patanjali describes memory, and points out there are two distinct kinds, the difference being that we are looking at different viewpoints; the viewpoint of dispassionate observer, Mahat, and the subject who has an experience and subsequently remembers that experience by re-experiencing it. The person having the experience and remembering it from the viewpoint of Mahat does not re-experience it at all; there is only the narrative of an observation of the experience.

I will try to explain both kinds of memory with some simple graphics:

In the first kind of memory, Mahat consciously observes each part of an experience

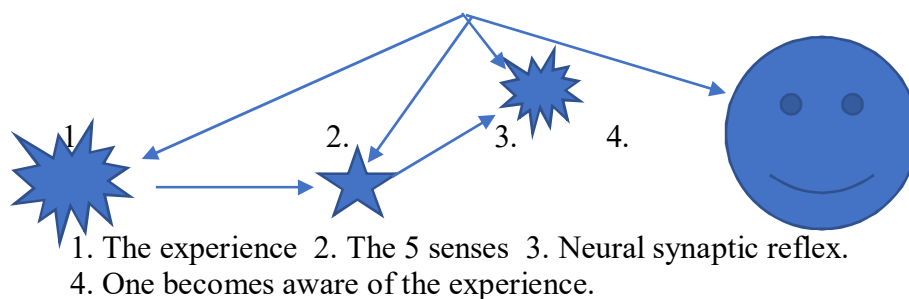
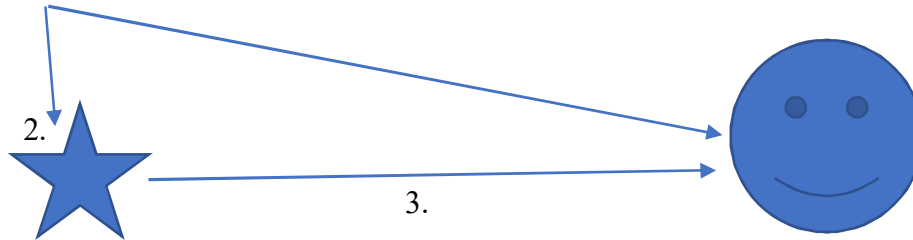


Fig. 1.

The experience is observed by Mahat, which simultaneously observes the corresponding neural reflex, which is retained as a memory related to the experience. This memory becomes a samskara, an automatic response (a reflex) to that experience, and as a memory it becomes a current memory in our awareness.

In recalling the memory of the experience, the process is reversed.

1. Mahat consciously observes the thought which triggers the related samskaras.

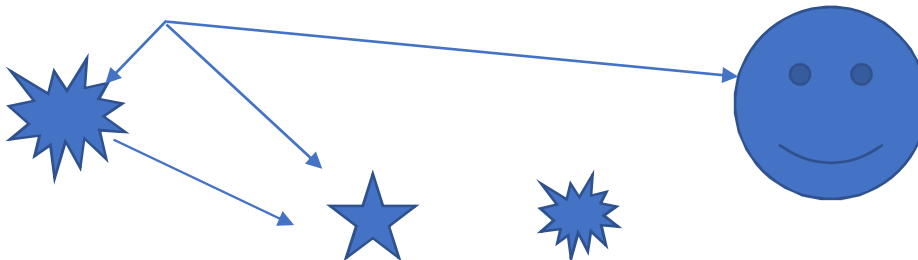


2. Specific neural network activity related to the experience creates the samskaras, which leads to ...
3. One becoming consciously, physically, and emotionally aware of the experience.

Fig. 2a.

In the case of the second kind of memory, the initial experience is registered as it was in Fig. 2a, but since the person is in the state of Mahat, all that is retained as a memory is Mahat's observation of the experience and does not create a samskara. This means the mind has not been modified by the experience.

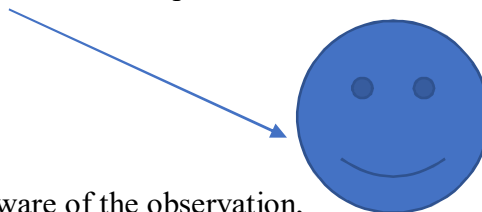
Mahat consciously observes the experience and its effects.



1. The experience
2. The 5 senses
3. Neural synaptic reflex does not create a samskara.
4. One becomes consciously, physically, and emotionally aware of the experience.

Fig. 2b.

1. The person in the state of Mahat recalls the experience.

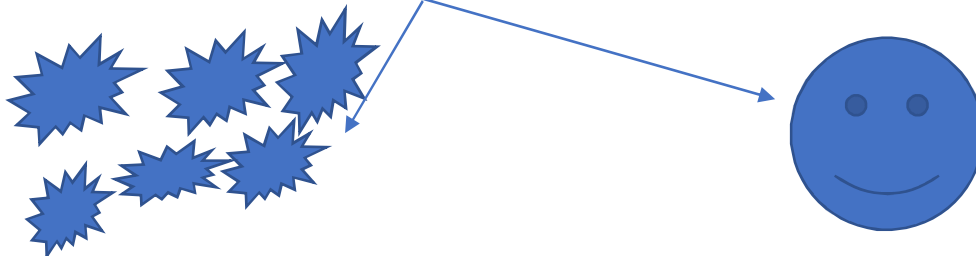


The person becomes consciously aware of the observation, but does not have the physical or emotional experience of the memory.

Fig. 2c.

This may better explain what happens in Samapatti. Without samskaras the seer's mind is inactive, which means it does not have the viewpoint of Ahamkara ego. When the seer contemplates the subject, he has Mahat's observation of the seer, which includes the subject samskaras, and therefore will 'think like the subject' and know the subject as the subject knows himself. The subject is aware of what the seer knows, which is nothing because the seer's samskaras are inactive. The same result is what one finds in meditation.

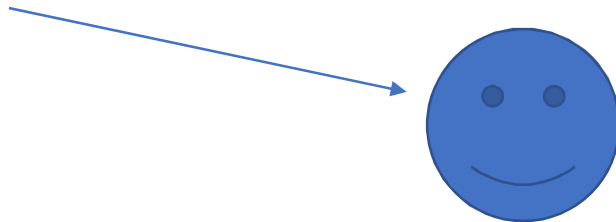
When a person is starting to meditate, Mahat observes the mind's activity



Samskaras create a busy mind. Meditator is aware of busy mind.

Fig. 3a.

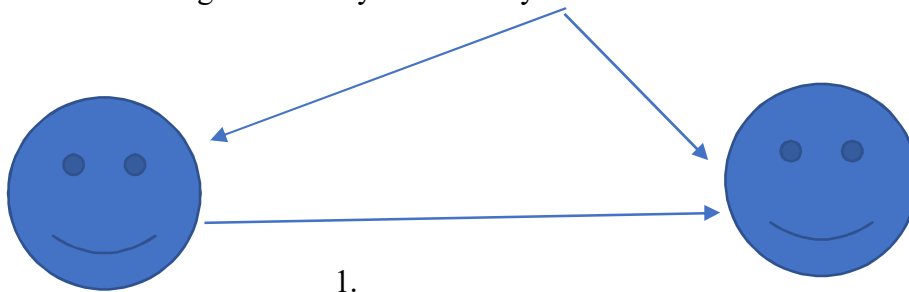
When the meditator reaches Samadhi, Mahat is aware of itself as the true Self.



Samskaras are inactive which creates a quiet mind.

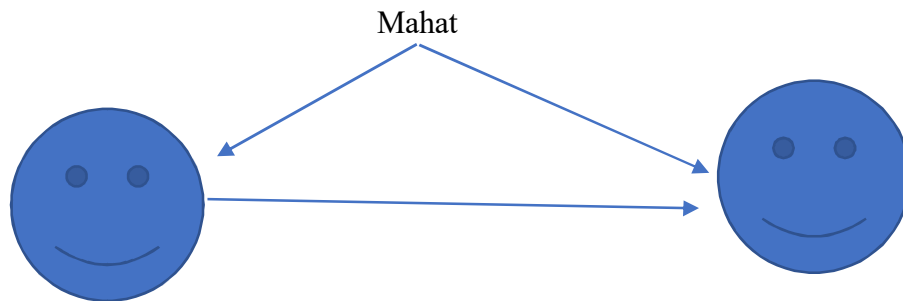
Fig. 3b.

The next step is to progress the diagrams to describe Samapatti.
On the left is the seer and on the right is the subject.
Each are being consciously observed by Mahat.



1. The seer contemplates the subject and is aware of the subject's mind activity because the seer's mind is inactive in the state of Mahat and is aware of the observation of the subject by Mahat.

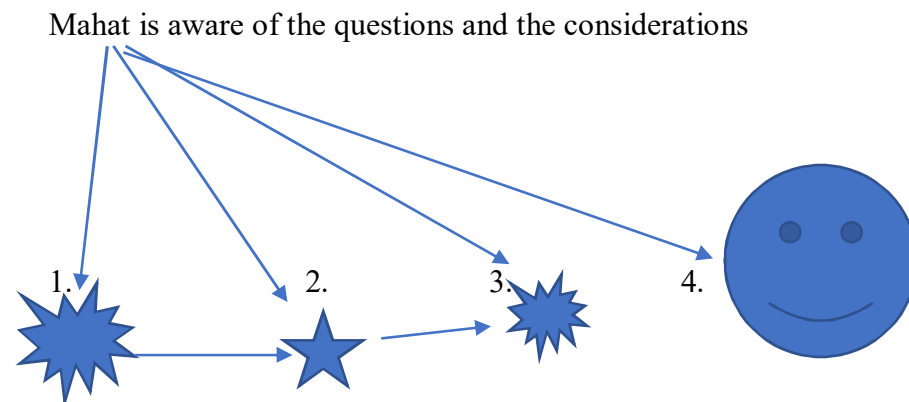
Fig. 4a



2. The subject becomes aware of Mahat's observation of the seer's inactive samskaras, resulting in the subject's samskaras becoming inactive too. This change will last for the period of the seer's contemplation, and the subject will know during this period that his previous state has changed.

Fig. 4b.

A practical application of this model of the dispassionate observer, Mahat, can be applied to the decision process. The process begins with a question and several strategic considerations against which the decision must be made.



1. The question and the considerations. 2. The 5 senses.
3. Neural synaptic reflexes. 4. One becomes aware of the decision.

Fig. 5.

The considerations will always relate to our subconscious concerns which are the basis of our samskaras.

In my opinion, all life functions in this manner from the first simple cell to the blue whale; consciousness is not the exclusive faculty of humans. The process of evolution has developed our human version of mind and it can be understood that our characteristics are a simply variation of that same consciousness. I believe what we gained through having a relatively larger brain is a greater diversity in what we can learn and think. What we gained came at the cost of what we were born with, and by that, I mean that we are born, like all other species, with Samapatti intact. We lose that faculty during the transition from infant to child around the age of three.

I am aware that some parts of the community in general talk about extra sensory perception, and suggest this esoteric viewpoint explains how we must have communicated with our fellow humans before the evolution of language. I take a slightly different viewpoint. I believe that what was the first form of communication must still be in existence today as the product of evolution. I think the term, extrasensory perception, is an impediment to ever understanding the issue.

When one considers Samapatti from the perspective of it being attainable today, it becomes the primary candidate for what was the forerunner of language. "Use it or lose it" becomes obvious. Understanding Samapatti is not so difficult a task if one begins with the explanation of memory, which has two forms.

First is the one we know now; the second is the form of memory present in Samapatti, and this can give a simple explanation of how even the first appearance of life would have learned about its environment and how to survive there. Consciousness as we know it only operates through life, and what I am saying here is that the dispassionate observer, as a fundamental of reality is present as the observer throughout that whole reality. The hologram is a good analogy provided we realise it is also present between the cycles of reality because, by definition, the whole hologram can be reconstructed from any point in the hologram, including both prespacetime and postspacetime.

Returning to Mahat and Samapatti for just a moment, my notion of the dispassionate observer observing the first appearance of life assumes the observer to be something other than that specific form of life, and this is where the analogy of the hologram diverges somewhat. What we know from Samapatti is that the seer is in the same state as Mahat, the dispassionate observer. We also know that the seer is aware of what the subject knows, and that the subject is aware of what the seer knows. When we apply that model to the first form of life it is obvious that this form would have no Samskaras, which it is in Samapatti with its environment, which is observed by the dispassionate observer.

Everything this life form needs to know about its immediate environment is already known by the dispassionate observer, and because it is the subject in the context of its Samapatti with the dispassionate observer, it will know what the dispassionate observer knows. Moreover, as it replicates through cell division, each of its replicas will know what it has learned too.

We can recognise Samapatti active in other animals as their form of communication; the synchronous behaviour in a school of fish escaping from a predator; the same synchronous behaviour in a flock of birds. Animals communicate through the senses, triggering learned responses which are remembered via the same human model of memory. I would suggest all life thinks in the same way we do, albeit each with its own non-verbal equivalent of words. If it was any different, domestication of animals would be impossible. I also suggest we too begin life with that form of communication.

It might not be a common thought, but I am suggesting that conscious awareness is not a trait exclusive to humans. All life, plants and animals, respond to their environment in fulfilling their basic needs of food, shelter and procreation; in the animals at least, there is some semblance of conscious awareness operating within a sensory system and the brain. I know that when we talk about thought we tend to get caught up in the concept of information, a move which can isolate the conversation to be only about humans. I would assert that all animals think about what they see, hear, feel, and smell, and in the main they are making decisions based on their thoughts and their samskaras; the only difference is their language.

Just look at your pet and you will see they have emotions and preferences; they grieve, and they demonstrate love; they even know when their owner is coming home. Like us, their sensory system has evolved in tandem with their inner maintenance functions to provide the feedback on what they should eat when they feel a discomfort. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say our cognitive functions are overlaid on our sensory and response systems. The other animals' ability to feel these states can also resonate with their experience of the external environment and the other animals, interpreting some as food and some as threats.

I believe our inner systems do the same, and our responses are like our mammalian counterparts. We feel the same way they feel through the same senses. I would guess they have similar thoughts, albeit in their own form of inner language. Few would doubt a dog's ability to communicate fear as well as joy. From all of this it is evident to me that Samapatti is the common thread of life.

We know from what I have written already that to be in the Samapatti state one needs to have the mind 'under control', which means the Samskaras have been rendered inactive, placing the person in the role of the seer. I recently read "*Being There*"¹, a book about the importance of motherhood in the infant's first three years by Erica Komisar, in which the author says the brain of a foetus MAY be mapping its experience while in utero.

If that is so, then it is also possible that the mother's brain would have a map of the foetus because at that time the foetus is a part of the mother's body. Researchers such as Komisar say that a foetus is aware of the mother's heartbeat, and post-partum the child is comforted when placed on the mother's left side where it can feel the mother's heartbeat. It would be likely that these two brain maps develop during gestation and would be added to by mother's interaction with the child. From what Komisar says in her book, I think the experiential dialogue between mother and infant is a de facto form of Samapatti, where the communication is initiated by what is seen as the mother's intuitive understanding of the child's needs.

In my view, while the mother's intention reinforces a response in the child, I believe the infant is the seer in this Samapatti, and the mother is the subject. If we look at this from the context of Samapatti we can get a different perspective on this infant and mother Samapatti.

At birth the infant has not had any direct experience of life other than being part of its mother. Post-partum the infant has not developed the practical use of its physical and cognitive senses, which means it is unable to make any meaningful samskaras, and therefore no memory, both of which require the ego, I AM. Therefore, I believe that, by default in a cognitive sense, the infant is at the level of the dispassionate observer and thus is the seer in Samapatti with its whole environment.

When its birth process begins the foetus is still part of its mother and its brain will have some reflexes developed in the womb in tandem with its mother's brain. I have read that during gestation the mother incorporates some of the infant's DNA in her own, presumably to prevent her immune system rejecting the foetus. I believe the DNA of the foetus is similarly set to not reject the mother's body. I believe this commonality, together with the possible similarity of the shared brain maps sets the foetus into its part of the birth process because, at this point in the process, it is part of the mother. It is equally possible that the mother's DNA initiates the process of birth and co-ordinates the foetus and the uterus in a joint effort.

The act of being born requires the infant to be provided with elements of its mother's immune system, and vaginal birth achieves part of that provision. Then there is the need to breathe and become separated from the mother's body by having the umbilicus severed. One could say this is a death followed immediately by a birth, although we don't usually express it that way.

Now an infant, the new individual, has only the samskaras developed in utero and the common parts of its brain map, together with the trauma of birth, few of which relate to its new existence. It does come primed to suckle and has some familiarity with the senses of touch, taste, smell and sound. As the seer it does develop some sense of its surrounding and quickly begins to suckle, making a direct association with its mother taste, feel and the familiar heartbeat it learned in utero.

Until it does develop an ego the infant learns very slowly from its mother and carers, to replicate their samskaras so far as the senses are concerned. As the seer, the infant has the faculty of discrimination and will come to cognitively know the parent or carer. For example, it will associate the touch, smell, and taste of its mother as it feeds in exactly the way all other mammalian infants learn these responses. These responses will gradually establish the neural correlates for every response, including moving parts of its body as it tries to mimic gestures and the like.

We need to realise that the infant is observing the whole environmental context. Years ago, while helping people through my Samapatti, I was counselling a woman, Emma, who believed her mother had never expressed any love for her. At some point I asked Emma, "When was the first time you saw your mother"? She immediately started to cry, and when I asked why she was crying, Emma said, "I just saw the love on my mother's face as the nurse handed me to my mother at my birth".

In the Samapatti state Emma answered my question from the perspective of the dispassionate observer. I say this because the dispassionate observer is observing the whole context of Emma's birth, and that includes all who were present at that time; her mother, the midwife or nurse, and Emma herself. When I asked Emma that question I was as surprised as Emma to hear me ask that, and I can only say this demonstrates Mahat knowing what I didn't even think to ask; it just came out unbidden by the context of my earlier part of the conversation with her about her mother.

Emma could only have had that experience because we were in Samapatti at the time. Over a long period, I would have Emma experience Samapatti. When she entered palliative care, I continued this practice and she learned to associate that calm state with awareness being out of her body. When she came to die she was in that calm state to such an extent she announced she was getting married. When I asked who she would be marrying She said, "I am going to marry Emma." At her memorial service the hospice staff commented on Emma's wonderful preparation for her death. I would say the same process can explain 'Near Death Experiences' and 'out of body experiences'.

I am inclined to think the febrile convulsions I experienced around the age of three set me in this Samapatti state. At that age I would have established an ego to some extent, and my interactions with my older siblings would have taught me some degree of understanding of the things they had shown me. When I was hospitalised, I understand that I was unconscious for some time, and during that period of being unconscious I reverted to my infant seer state, which, unlike a child emerging from infancy, my experience had created the samskara of being in that state of no Ahamkara.

Alternatively, I had recreated that samskara from an earlier life; which one is not particularly relevant here. This would account for the apparent permanence of my Samapatti state, as well as explaining why after I returned home from hospital, my siblings noticed I was unable to grasp meanings the way I had done prior to the convulsions.

Realising this, it was not a major cognitive leap to notice that other mammals learn from their parents in the same manner. One only needs to look at any newborn to see it for what it is. Not only mammals; chickens learn from their mother hen in the same way.

One of the stumbling blocks for reaching some degree of understanding of consciousness is that most of us assume we must find a way to demonstrate how a conscious subjective experience, qualia, can enter our awareness through electrical or chemical processes within the brain. The Holy Grail would be to develop some means of interpreting those brain signals into understandable human language. What we can learn from the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is the role played by our samskaras in the formation of a memory, and what the Yoga Sutras might tell us in that regard.

In the role of the seer, a person still has the subjective experience, qualia, in the same way a person not in Samapatti will have. The difference is that when remembering that experience, the

seer does not have the same subjective experience; he or she will only have the narrative of an observation of the experience.

Returning to the foetus as something attached to the mother after conception which is finally expelled from her body, I take the view that until it has been born as a separate entity it should be understood to be the same as any other part of the mother's body. And bearing in mind it is wholly sustained by the mother's body, I cannot honestly support the idea of any other person having any direct say or influence on whether the woman should or should not continue to sustain that foetus; that is her decision entirely. Any attempt to prevent any woman having this fundamental right is a violation of that woman, one which is no different contextually to any other individual's right.

Until the foetus has been delivered it remains a part of her body, and nobody has any right to interfere. What we all can do is give the support she needs. Do unto others is a good maxim in this matter, just as it is in any other situation.

On the issue of what is the dispassionate observer, I can only conclude it is a fundamental of reality and interacts with living matter at the subquantum level; it is a conscious fundamental. My view is that the dispassionate observer is an aspect of the permanently oscillating energy at that subquantum level. I believe we can understand quantum entanglement from this dispassionate observer viewpoint. When any number of particles or atoms are simultaneously involved in an event such as a deliberate entanglement they are all involved in that same observation. Therefore, each is similarly defined by that observation to such an extent that any conscious measurement made on one is experienced on every other one in that entanglement. This is no different to the example given earlier, when I asked my friend Emma "When was the first time you saw your mother?" Emma first 'saw' her mother looking at her as the nurse or midwife handed the new born Emma to her mother.

In other words, every observation by the dispassionate observer can be an entanglement of more than one individual conscious person; it can include contexts from different times. I tend to the view that the dispassionate observer is separate from the whole reality, and yet it appears to occupy the same space as the whole reality. From that I assume the whole reality exists in a different kind of space, most likely the space given the Sanskrit name of Akasha. I would say that Akasha is a nonlocal space which permeates our spacetime and is simultaneously in every space and all time. From that nonlocal viewpoint consciousness, as a fundamental point of observation separate from the whole reality, is naturally dispassionate. This is why a seer is able to experience life and observe death without grief.

The infant as seer has the second kind of memory, which would be used in its education in those early years; I can say this because it has been my own experience. What it means is learning through repetition; an experience has to be repeated over and over because the memory of that experience does not have the experience replayed. All that is replayed is the narrative that this happened; the narrative is the memory of the observation, not the experience. When the infant finally develops an ego the observation becomes 'this is my experience', the memory of which will replay the experience which 'I' had.

I think this is probably the right time to attempt to explain just how I function, if only because from all of what I have written over the years most of my readers as are perplexed as they were from the beginning. To do this I will obviously include some of the points I have tried my best to explain throughout the past thirty years of writing.

The first point to make is that my mind is essentially empty all of the time, unless someone asks me a question or engages me in conversation. I don't have any perceived need to keep anything in mind, not because I am 'protected' by any mysterious force or feel myself to be invincible or other fanciful belief. That is just how it is, and it is the conundrum I have sought to understand because it was made obvious to me for as long as I care to remember that I was 'a bit weird'. Any sensory input I have will trigger a response just as it does for anyone; the difference being that I don't necessarily respond in the same way I described in the diagrams above. The weird part comes from what is seen as an autistic or defective mental process. It is not any of those; it is exactly as Patanjali and the Vedas describe for someone in Samadhi, with the difference being that I am that way all of the time, and that us a bit out of the ordinary for someone born into a western culture.

When asked a question, all I have to go on is not my experiences but the memory of the person asking the question. I don't even have to think because the question is a context of that person and the related answer comes out of that context. I can only notice myself thinking after giving an answer that I hadn't known that answer before.

As for not being able to have a subjective experience of an earlier experience, that is just the way it is for me and the mechanism has been described earlier. I am always writing the same story because each sentence finds its way to the sum of what I have written before; only the context changes because the story grows by referring to its larger self with each iteration. The same can be said of what I have heard, seen, read or done; it always relates back to this foundation question of why am I like this?

Someone recently asked me if I was 'channelling someone'; I said "No I am not doing that". To be channelling someone is a bit too proscriptive. I have no idea who had the thoughts which are in my answers because I only seek to answer the literal question. Some years back my mentor, Bevan Reid, said I seemed to be like the sibyls from ancient Greece, if only from the way I answered the question. Many other friends find my answers too minimal, requiring further questions. I can't do much about that.

What I do know is that after answering a question I am back to the empty mind again. I also know that I don't hear the answer, I just consciously know what is most likely the answer people before me have known in respect of the question.

So none of this makes me special, just the bit different bewildered little boy I have always been. I never left that child who was and still is that infant seer. I am bewildered to some extent that the philosophers look at consciousness that way I do, the way I would call the default position of every form of life.

I concede it might seem that having little in the way of self might help to attain this state but I haven't done anything to achieve this sort of non-self. It is just part of the whole state in which there is only the memory of the observation of an experience, almost one in which Alan had the experience and now I, (whomsoever 'I' is) am left with the book entry that this happened. Many questions later a more detailed explanation might emerge if one is patient enough for that tedium.