

When I submitted a proposal to speak at SAND, it was my intention to present a talk originally titled “How to Love a Mass Murderer.”

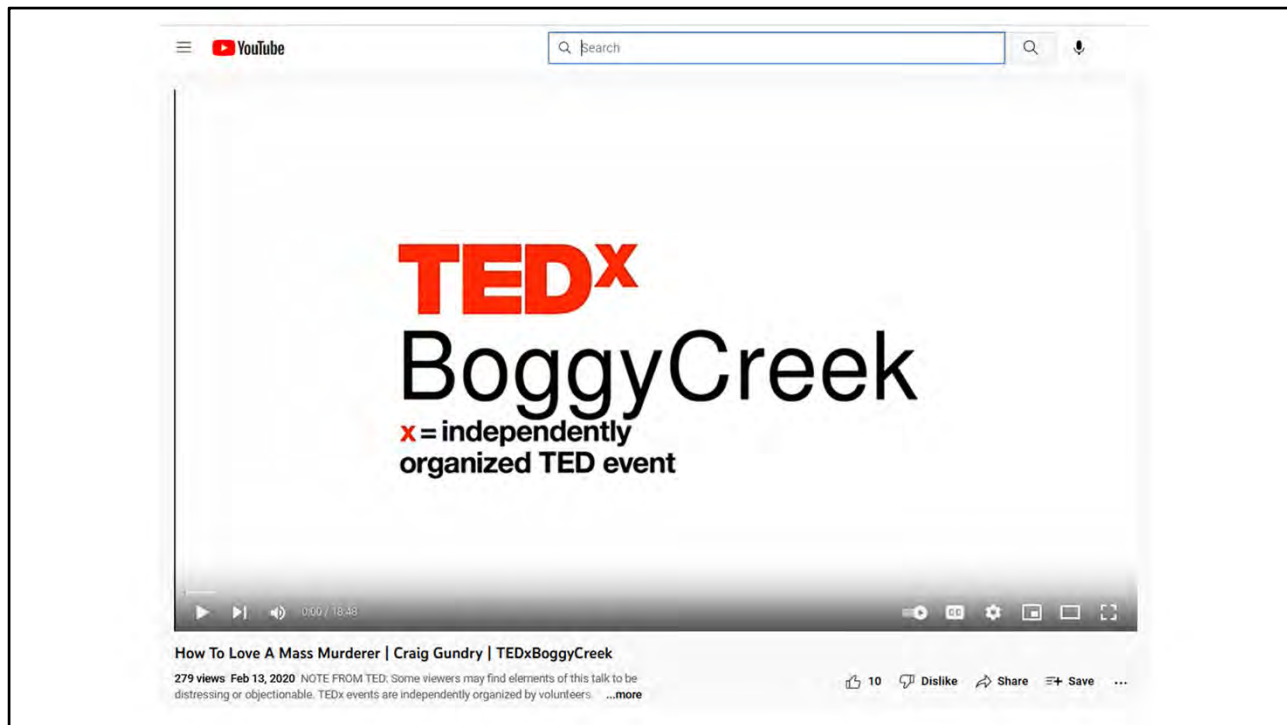
I delivered that talk for a TEDx event in Orlando last month. And that was the right audience for that presentation. It was aimed at people largely unaware of their conditioned state and introduced self-knowing as a process of eroding perceptual obstructions to the experience of love and freedom—ideas which I suspect are familiar to most here at SAND.

The part about mass murderers was mainly a device for segue through points in the talk.



Instead, I'd like to retain the theme of Self-Knowing and Love, but use this opportunity to share some tools which may be of greater benefit to those already engaged in spiritual work.

Let me precede by stating I am not a spiritual teacher. I'm a student, and the aim of this talk is to share some ideas that have been quite valuable in my life experience—Ideas which are touched on in many teachings, but rarely in a cohesive manner useful for practical experimentation and spiritual work.



If you're interested in the original presentation, it's on YouTube under the title "TEDxBoggyCreek - How to Love a Mass Murderer." Just run a search of those keywords in YouTube and it should pop up.

So, if no one objects to the change, let's begin with a story...



Popular legend has it, there was a naked couple who once lived in a grand garden of paradise.

In this playground of divine perfection, everything they needed was provided for them—Air to breathe. Plants to eat. And a marvelous diversity of living creatures to share in the splendor of this amazing world.

Now this existence in the Garden wasn't without challenge or effort. They still needed to gather food and fetch water, maintain their shelter, and all the other necessary tasks of living. And it also wasn't without pain. If they stepped on a sharp rock, they'd cut their foot and avoid stepping there again.

And the key point here: All they needed was provided for them!

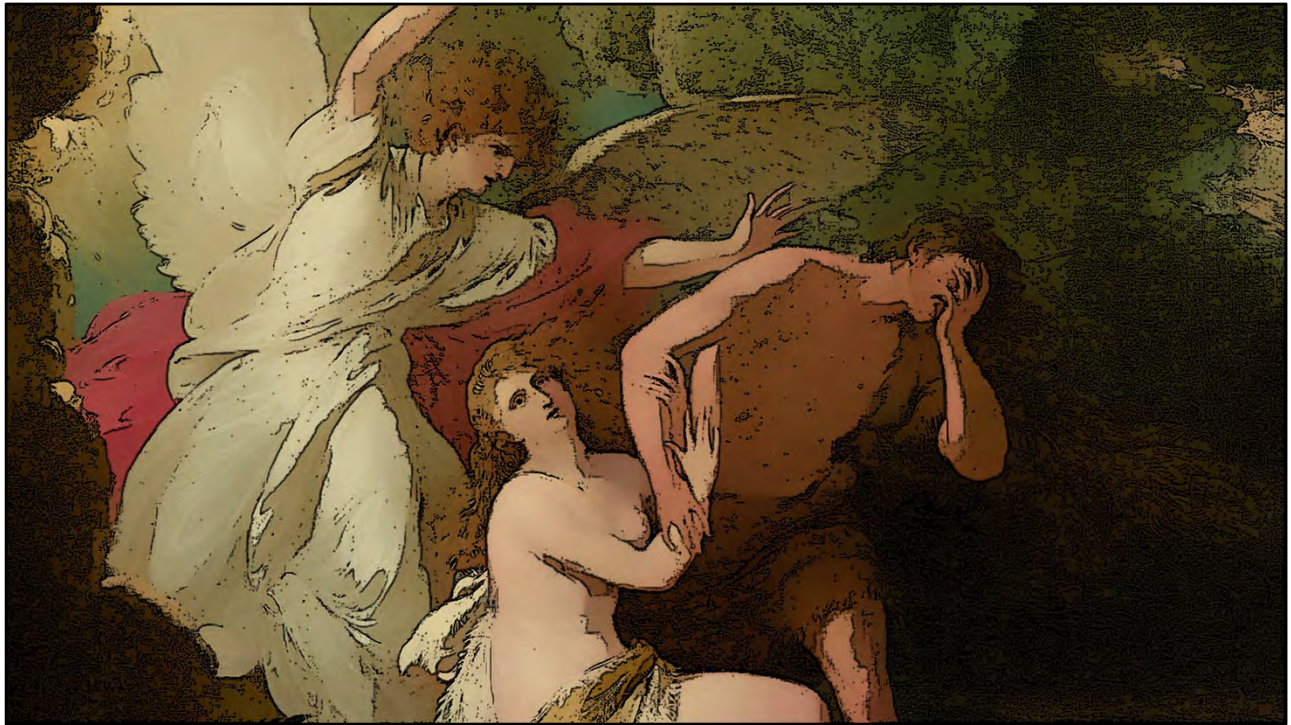
Now there was one rule to remain in this garden of paradise—Don't eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

In other words, The Tree of Judgement.



So one day a serpent with persuasive tongue comes along and suggests there's nothing to fear in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. There's only knowledge to be gained and to eat from the tree would open their eyes and make them as equals to the great power which breathed life into their existence, capable of knowing good and evil.

And so they ate and ingested the seed of the Tree.



And before they knew it, they were exiled from the Garden, ashamed, and now fearing the specter of mortality.

Most of us in Western culture are quite familiar with this story. For those with strict Judeo-Christian beliefs, it's often regarded as sacred history. For others, simply a creation myth. Regardless, Eden has become a universal symbol in our culture for an ideal existence far removed from the perceived flaws and pains of our world.

Yet, maybe there's more to the story than meets the eye (an inner message, as it were), with profound significance for all of us.

And here I offer a hypothesis: "Man never left Eden. He only lost sight of it."

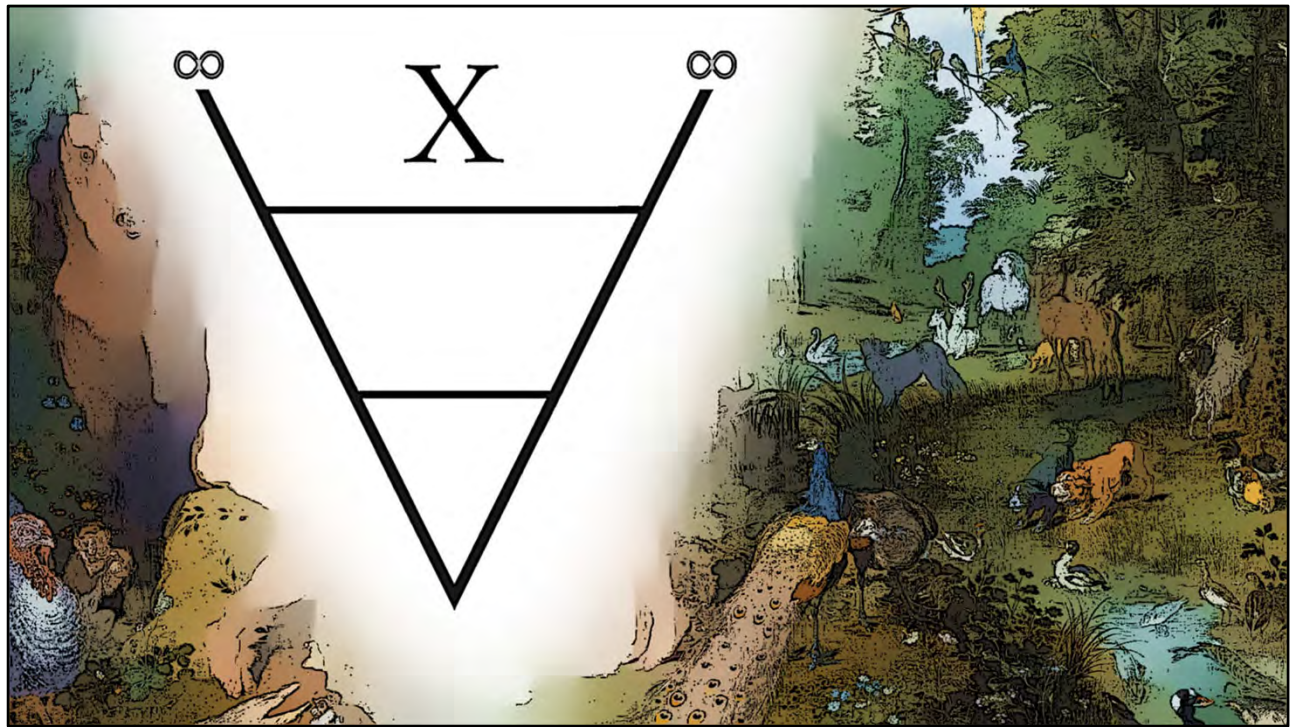
Perhaps what the parable describes as exile is simply a case of distorted perception (a state of hallucination) resulting from intoxication by the fruit of judgment.

To investigate this idea, let's take a closer look at the Fall of Man starting first with our couple in paradise.



For this purpose, we won't focus on their physiology, but rather examine how they function in a fundamental sense.

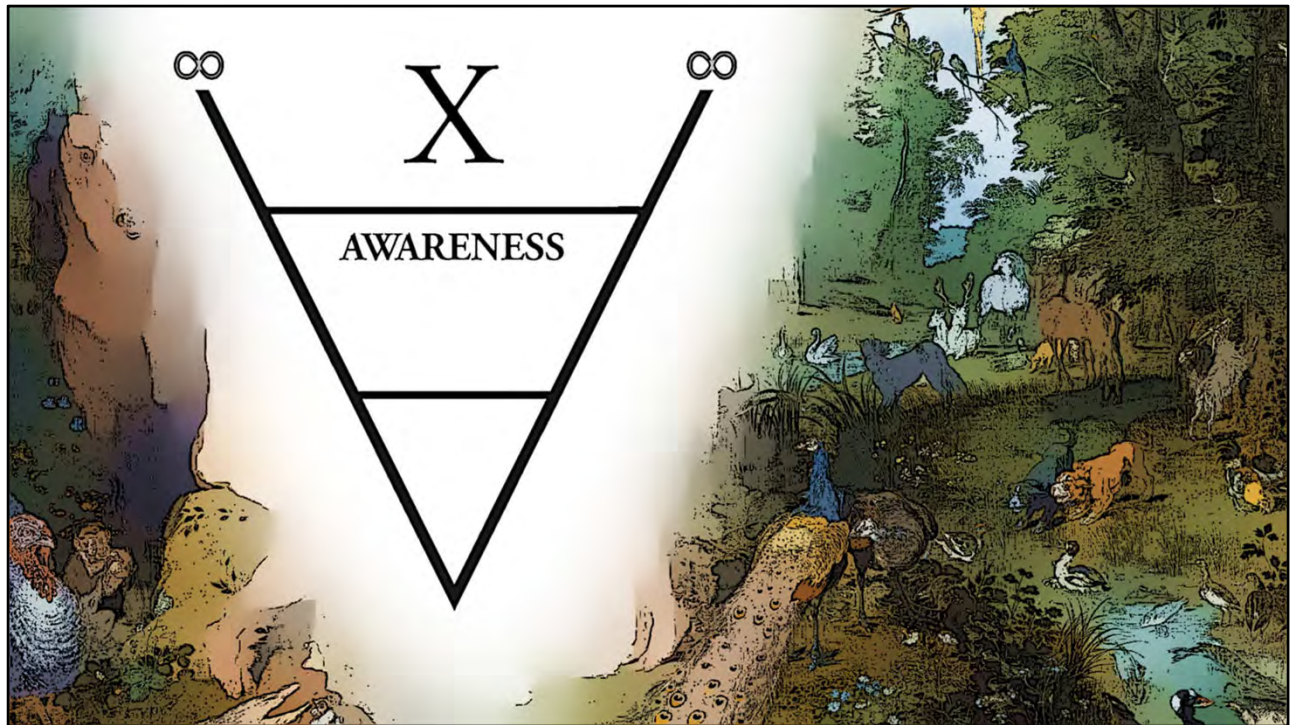
Genesis calls them Adam and Eve. But could just as well be Craig, Mike, Nancy, Jose, Elina, or thousands of other possible names.



For this, we'll use a diagram in the shape of the letter 'V' with lines extending infinitely above.

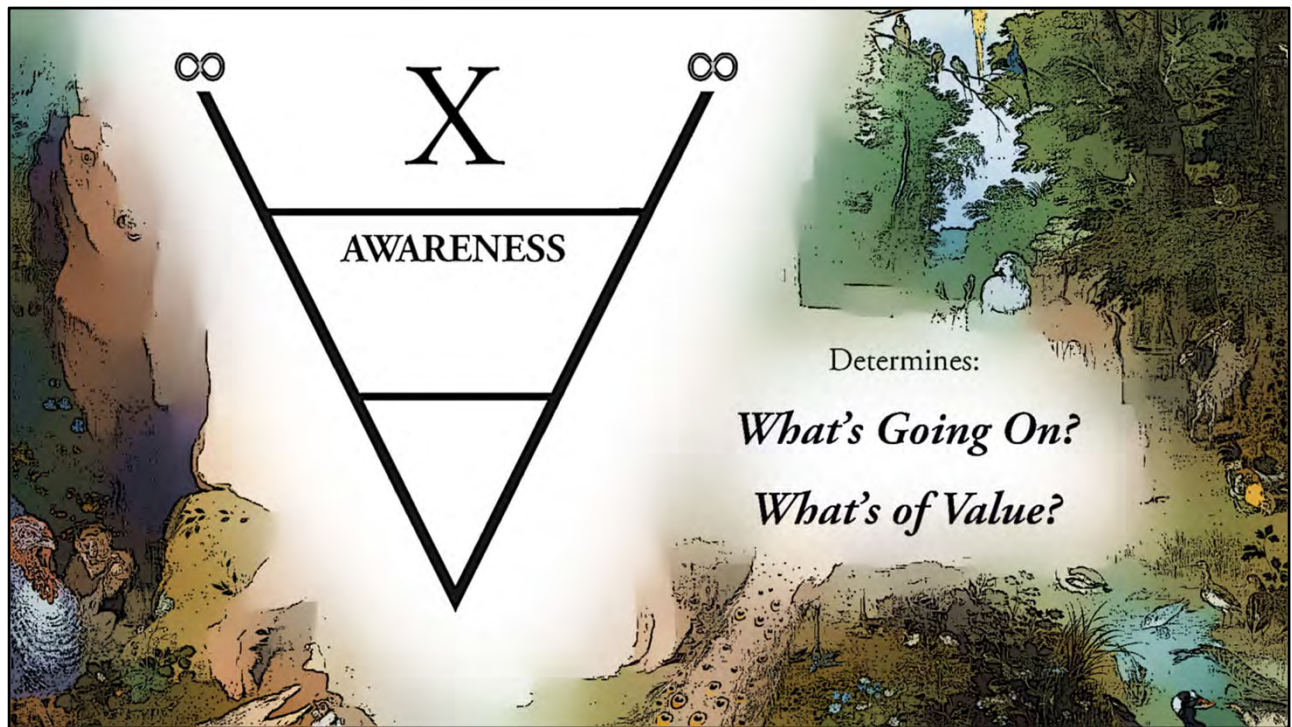
At the top of this diagram is what we'll call "X"—The life principle. The animating force of existence. The source of all energy.

"X" has been given many names in different cultures and traditions, but we'll avoid language that has often been obfuscated by theology and just use the term "X" as a placeholder for an undefined principle.

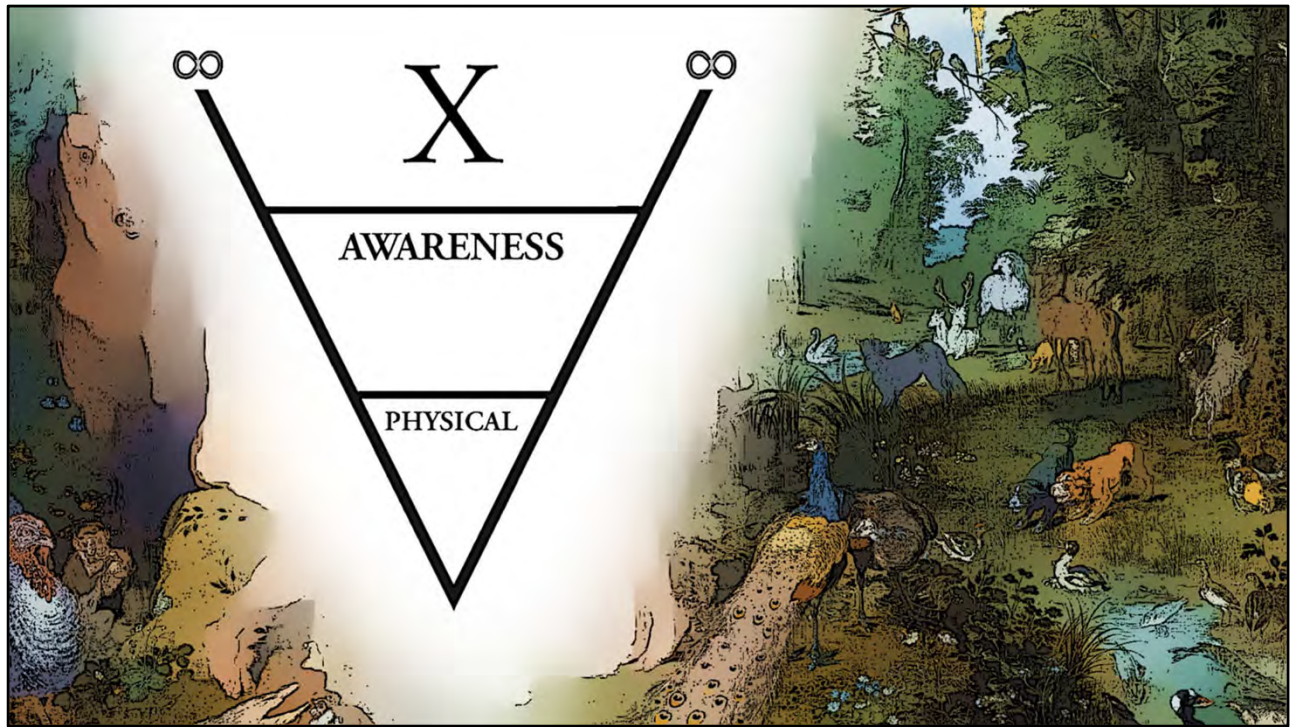


Next, we have the Awareness function of “X,” the prism of conscious experience.

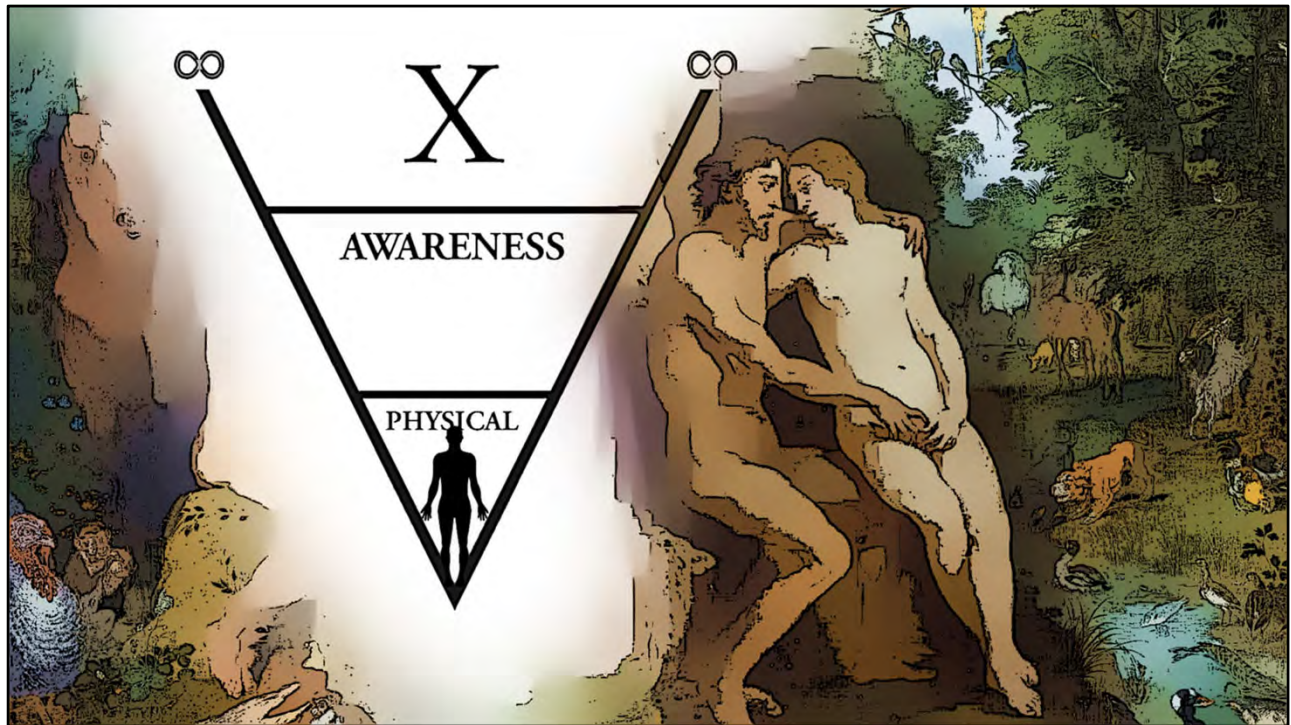
The Awareness function of “X” has also been described symbolically in different ways over the years. One example is William Blake’s poetic expression, “The Doors of Perception.”



The primary purpose of Awareness is determining what's going on and what's of value.

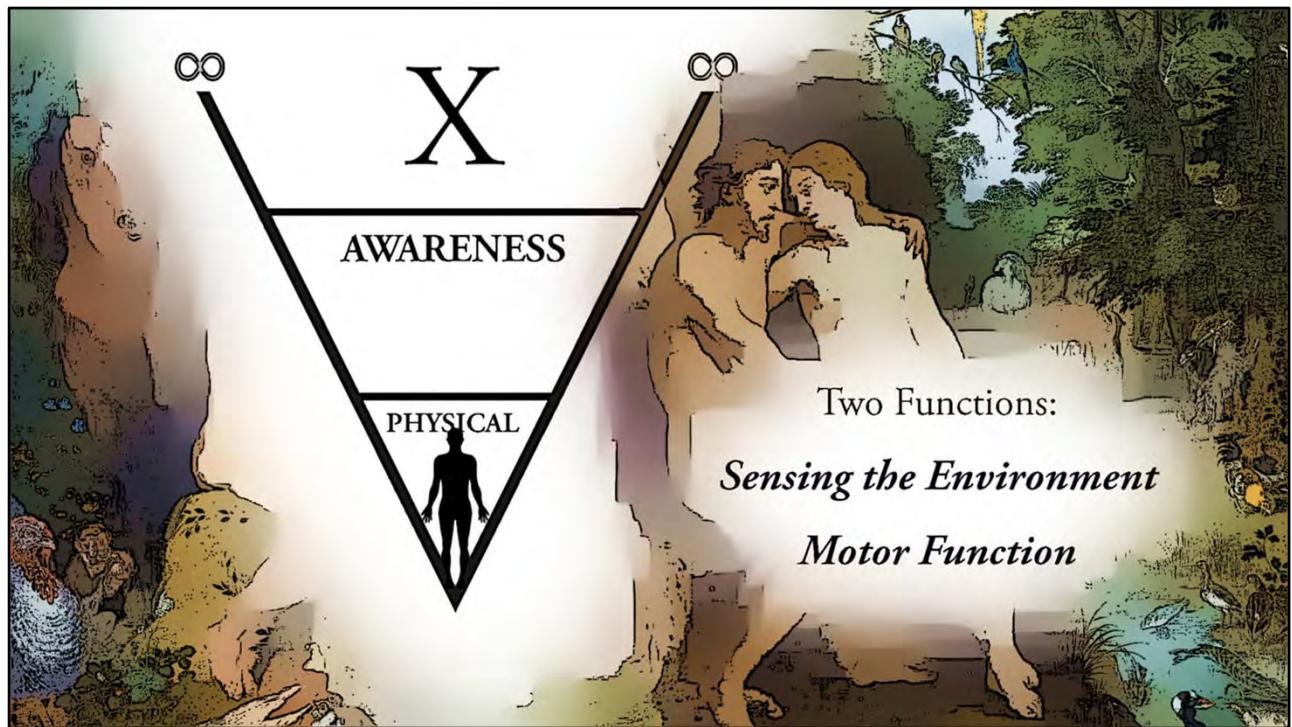


And at the base of this diagram, we have the Physical function of “X”



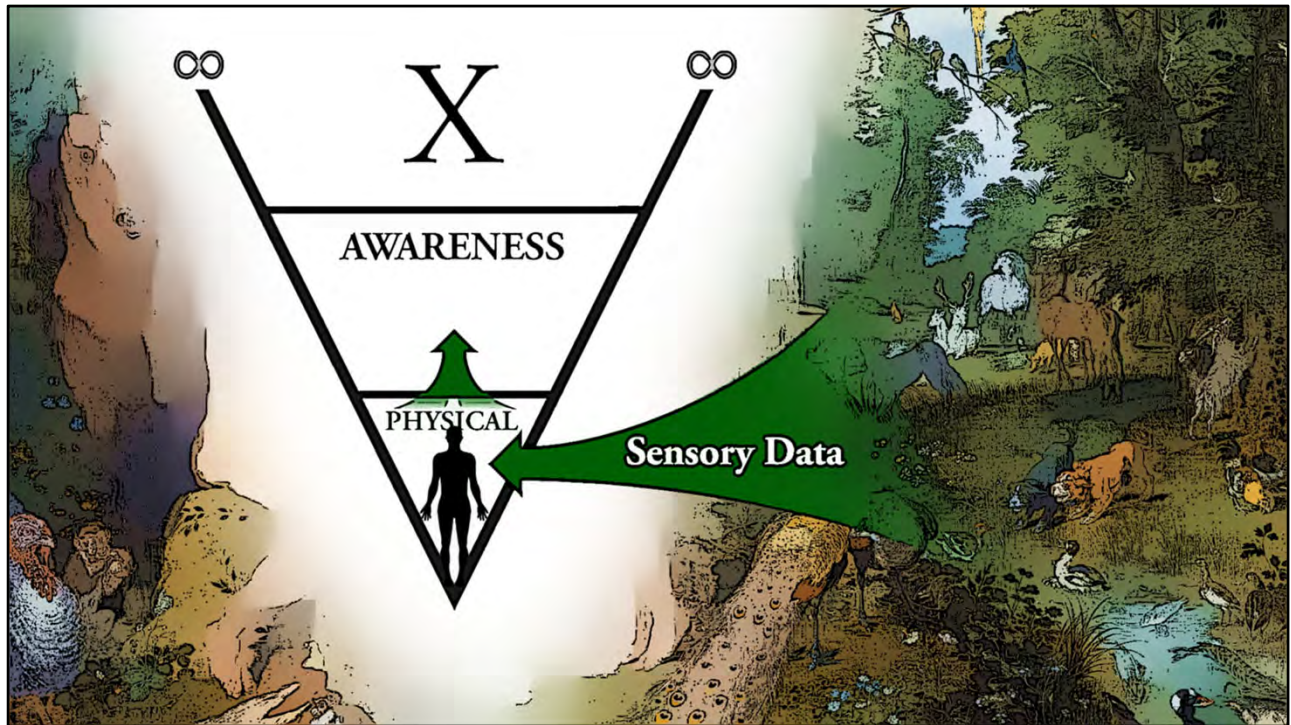
...manifest in the Garden as a human body.

Now this human body has many complex, interrelated systems to facilitate its operation, but also serves two principal functions.



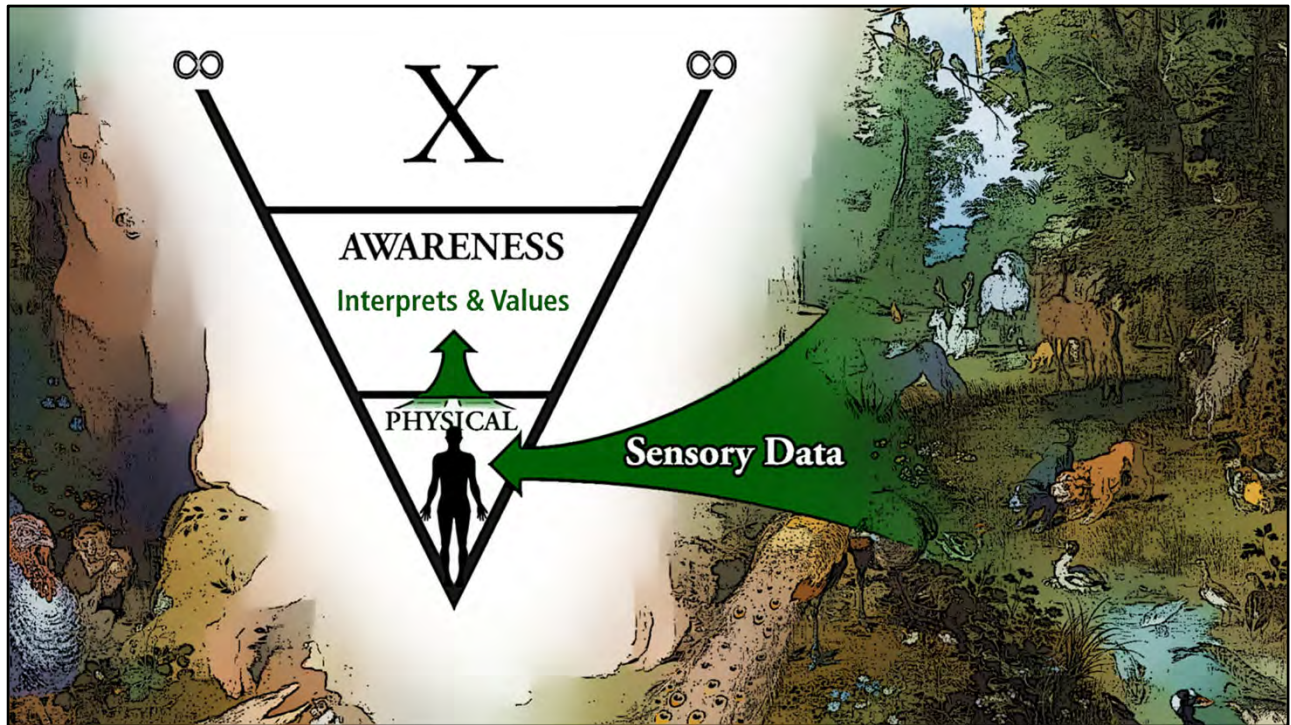
First, sensing the environment. And second, motor function for animating the body in relation to the environment.

Now let's look at how this all ties together.

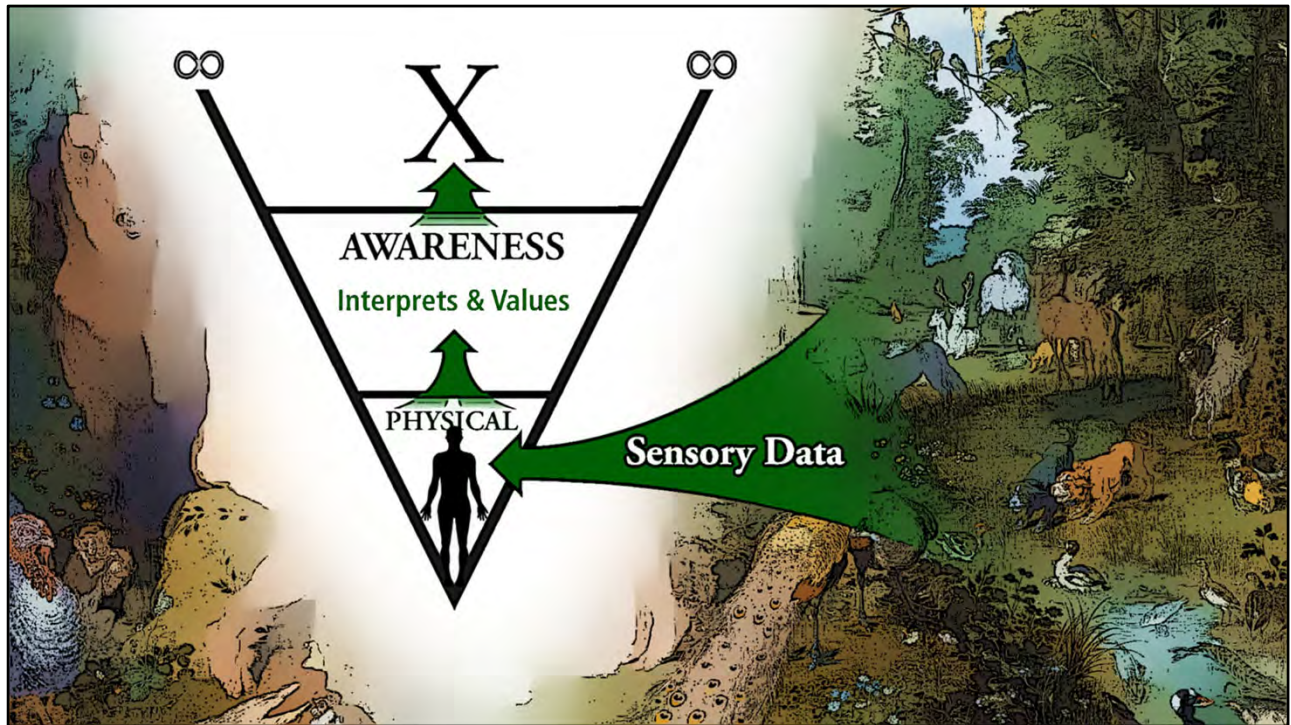


Stimuli from the environment (physical phenomenon such as reflected photons, sound waves propagated by air, temperature and density differences of matter, etc.) are sensed through the body's organs and relayed into Awareness as sensory impressions.

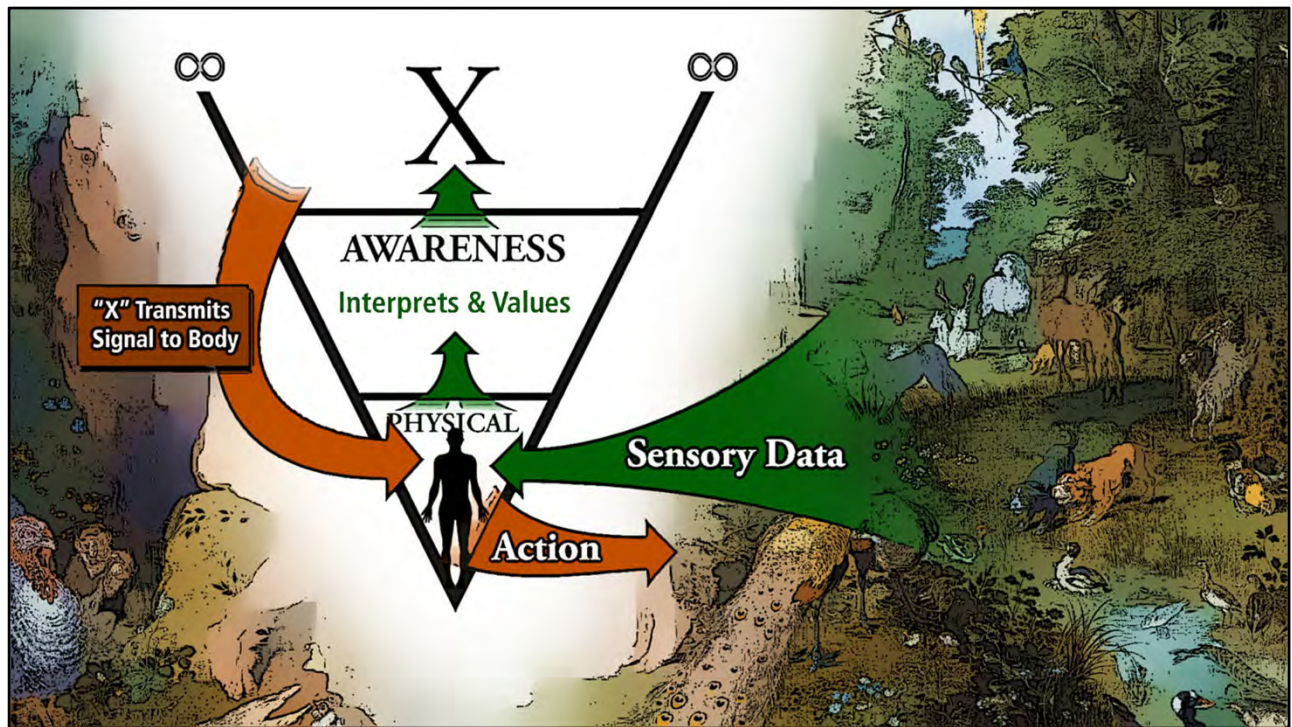
Likewise, internal sensations (such as thirst, hunger, and pain) are passed into Awareness similarly.



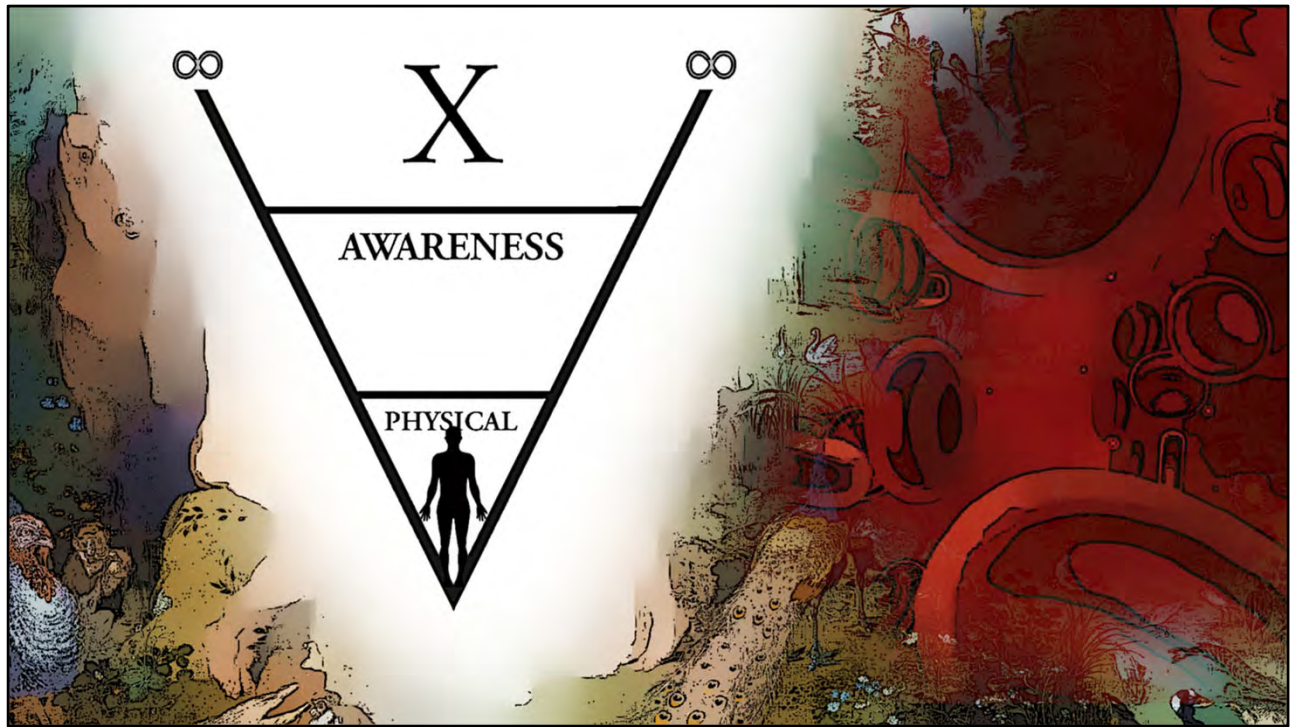
Awareness now interprets and values what's going on.



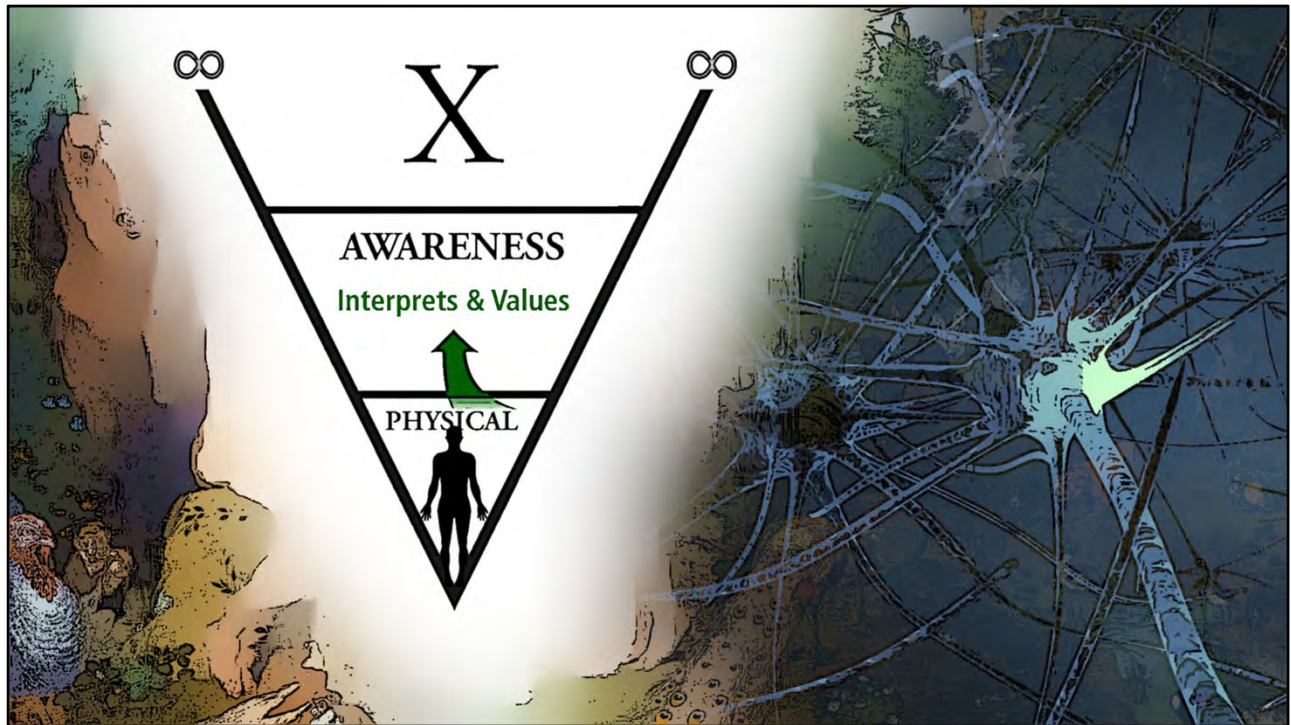
And without effort, this information is seamlessly reported to “X.”



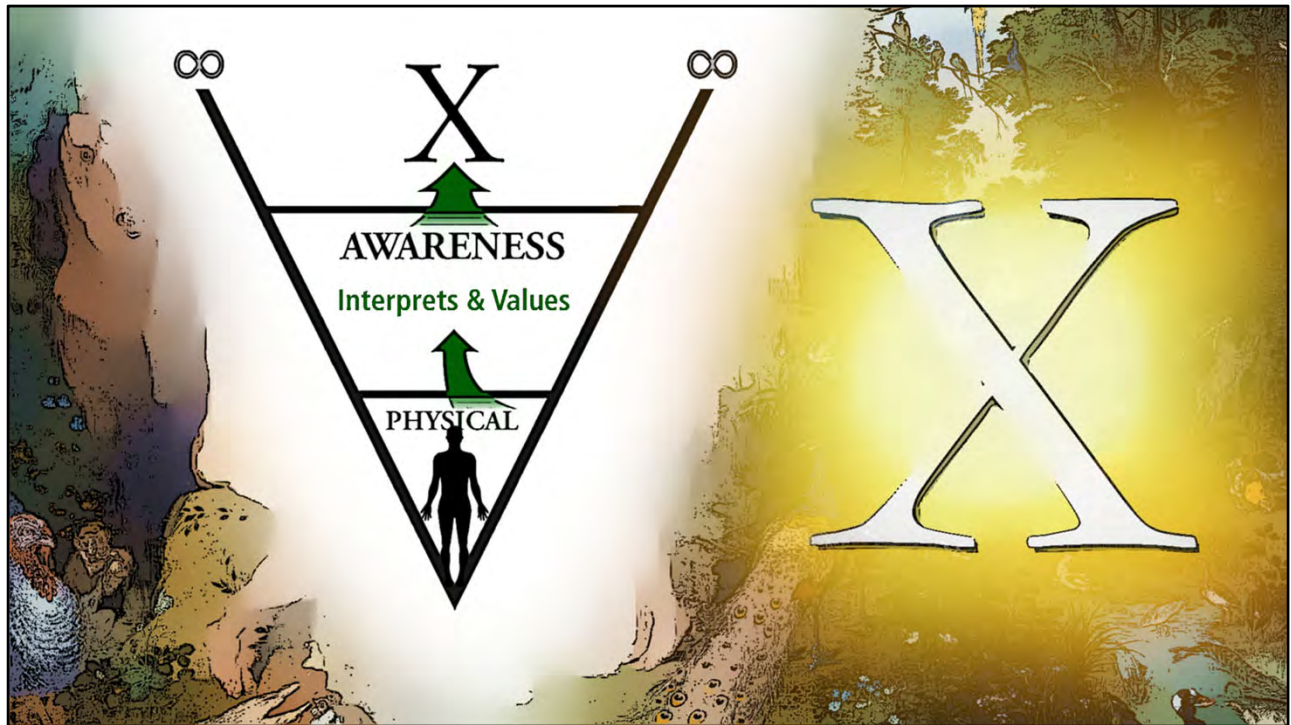
And “X”, functioning directly as the active force in this process, does the appropriate thing for the information received and animates the body accordingly.



So the body, entering a state of dehydration, produces a sensation of thirst.

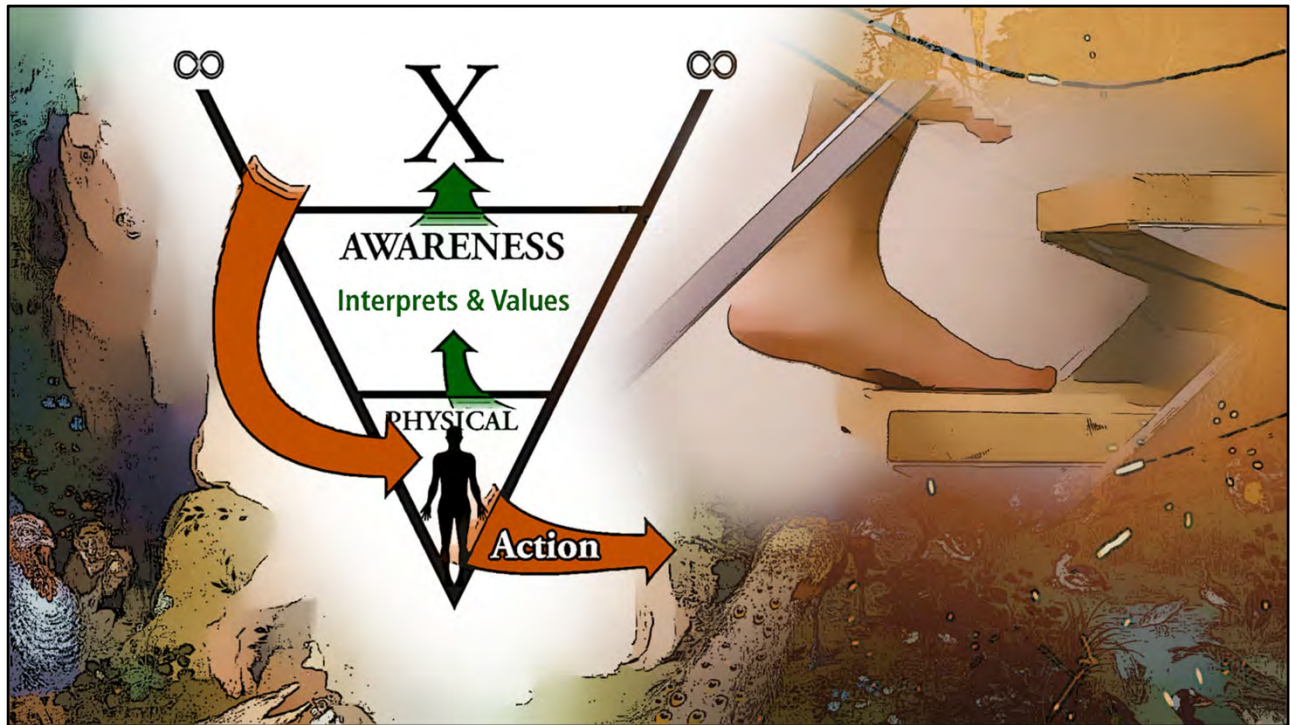


Awareness interprets and values this sensation and relays that information to...

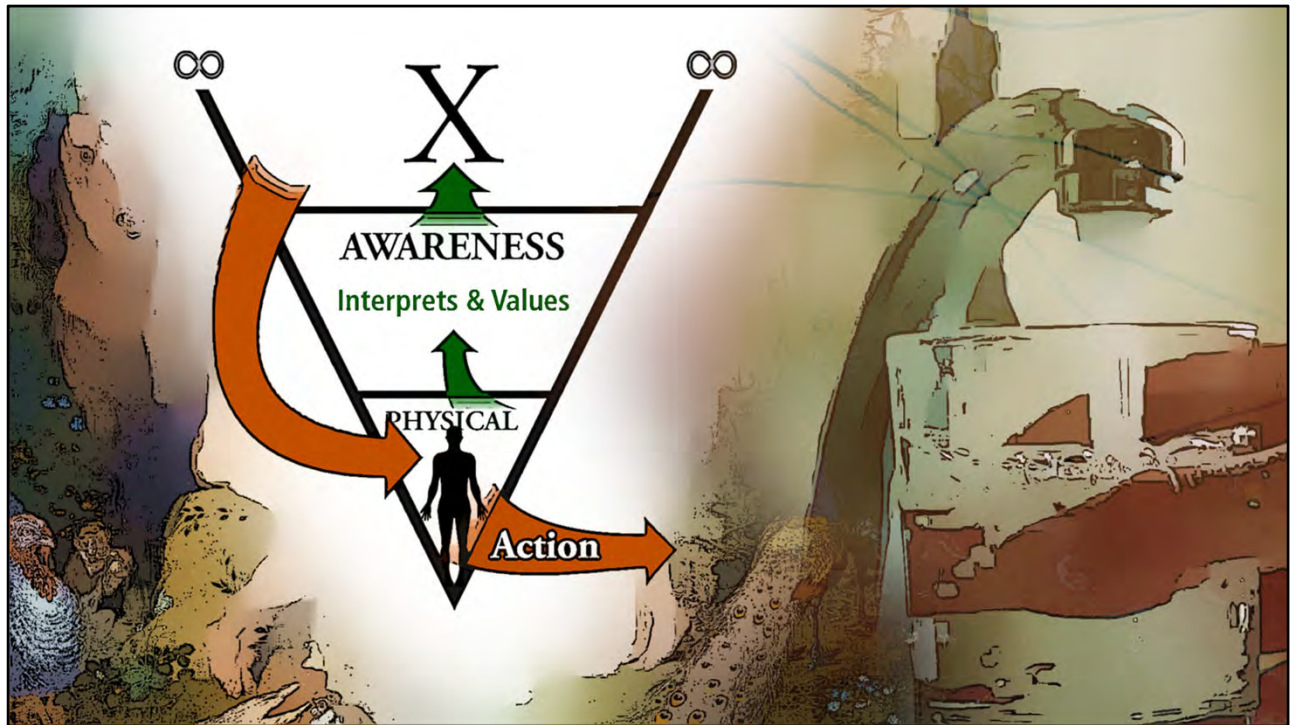


..“X.”

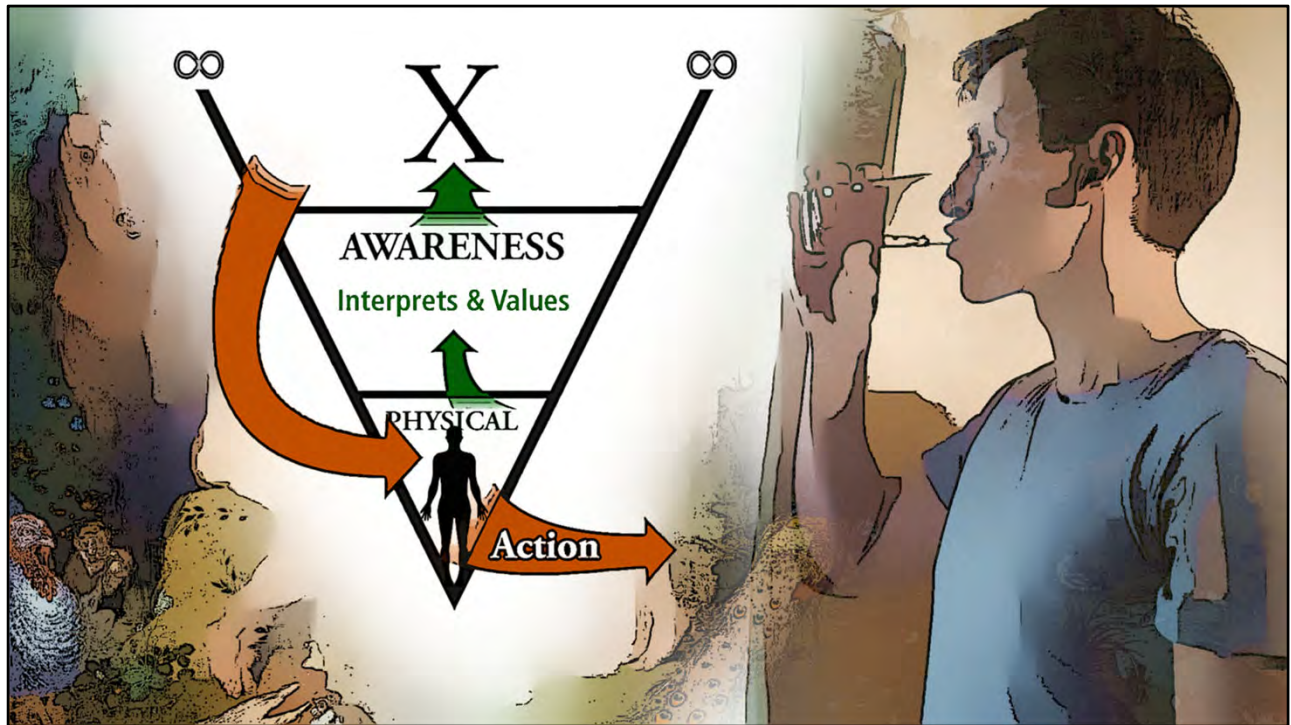
“X” then operates on that information and animates the body...



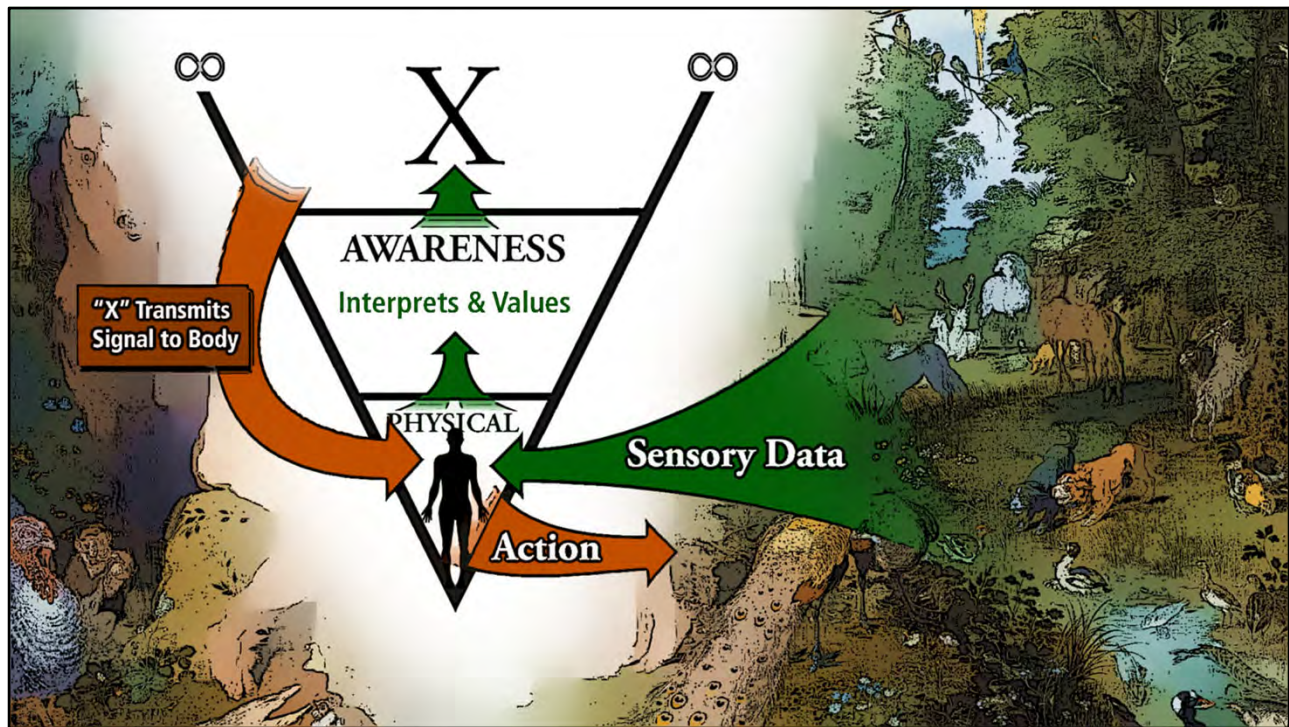
...to walk to the sink...



...pour a glass of water...



...and drink.



And this basic process describes all of Man's functioning including talking with others in conversation, driving a car, working at a computer, making love, and even waging war.

Now we walked through this diagram pretty quickly. I encourage you to spend some time with this. There may be something quite profound suggested in this diagram that may not be apparent at first glance. I'll pause for a moment if you wish to draw a copy or take a picture of this slide with your phone.

Students of Buddhist teachings may recognize this diagram as a functional description of Zen—harmonious perception and action as a human being.

Now, let's look at the Tree of Knowledge...



Like all trees, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has an anatomy.

Starting at the base of the tree...



...with a subterranean root system providing support and nourishment for the tree.

Only with the Tree of Knowledge...



...this root system was sprout from a primal urge...



...to regain the non-disturbed state. A fundamental condition of security and satisfaction.



And from this now sprouts other roots—polaric driving urges aimed at fulfilling this corrupted purpose of living.

Urges such as...



...gaining pleasure and escaping pain



Gaining approval and escaping disapproval



Gaining attention and escaping feelings of rejection

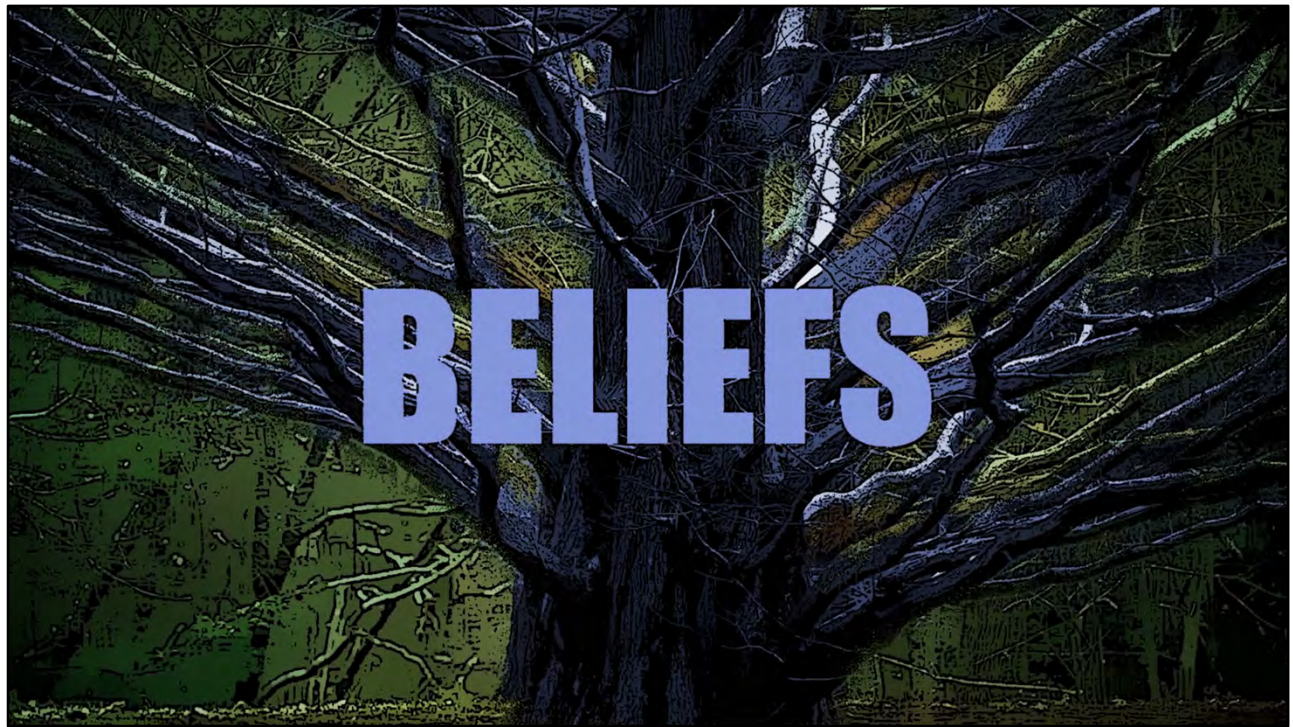


Gaining feelings of superiority and escaping feelings of inferiority.

And many similar variations.

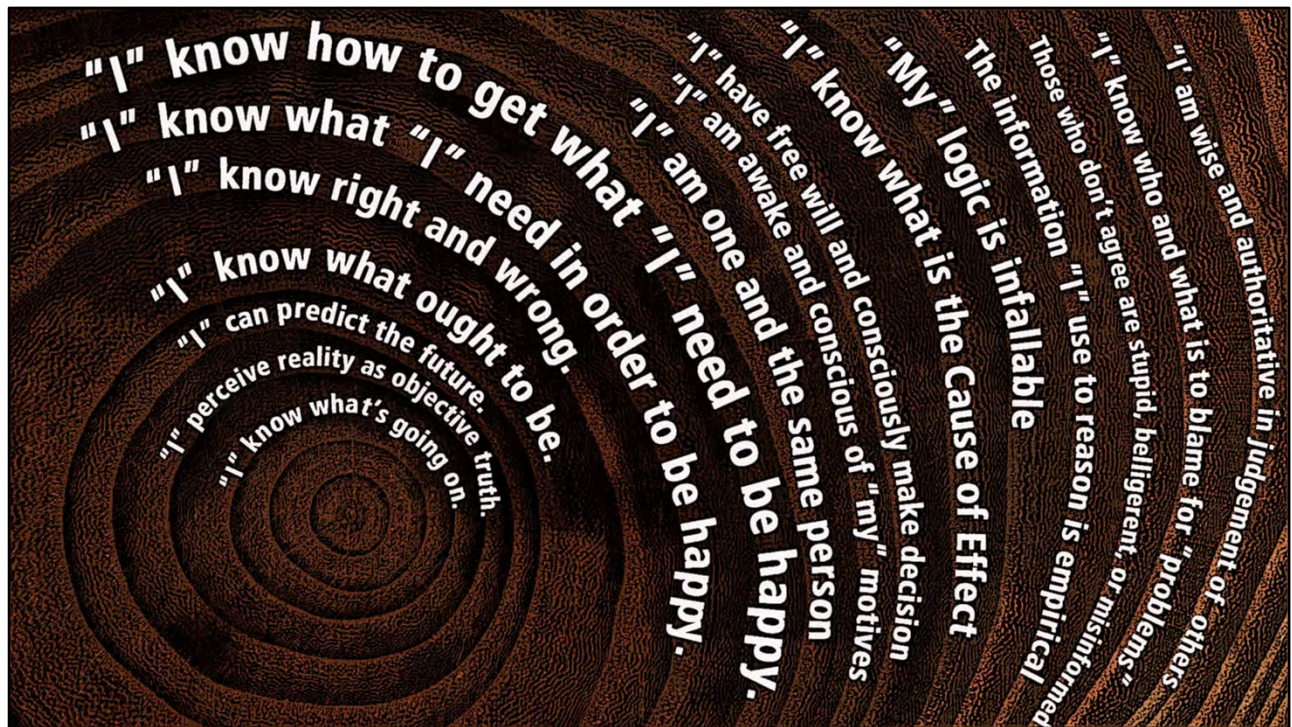


And emanating from these roots is a thick trunk composed of...



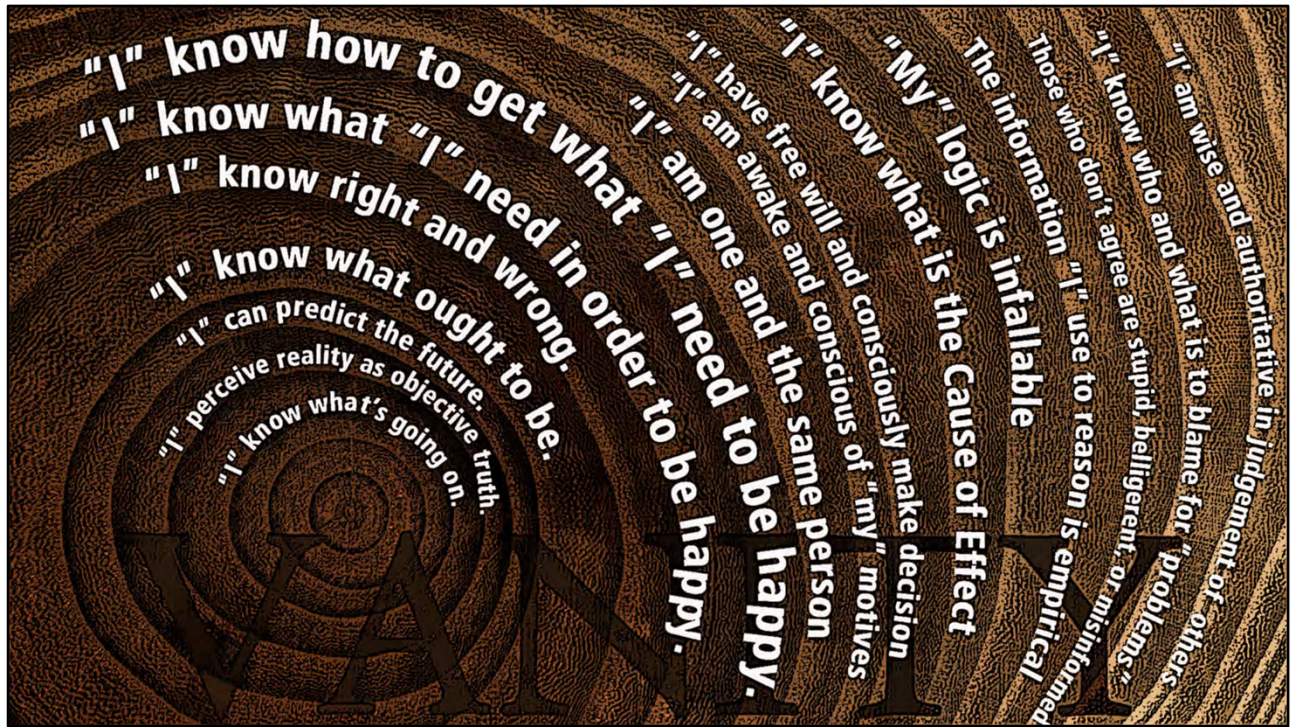
...Beliefs. Often layered around each other like rings.

And beginning at the inner core...



...with dense layers of foundational beliefs regarding ourselves and relationship to society.

As a collective image of oneself, this core of belief is called...



...Vanity.

Then protecting this trunk is a thick sheathe of bark called....

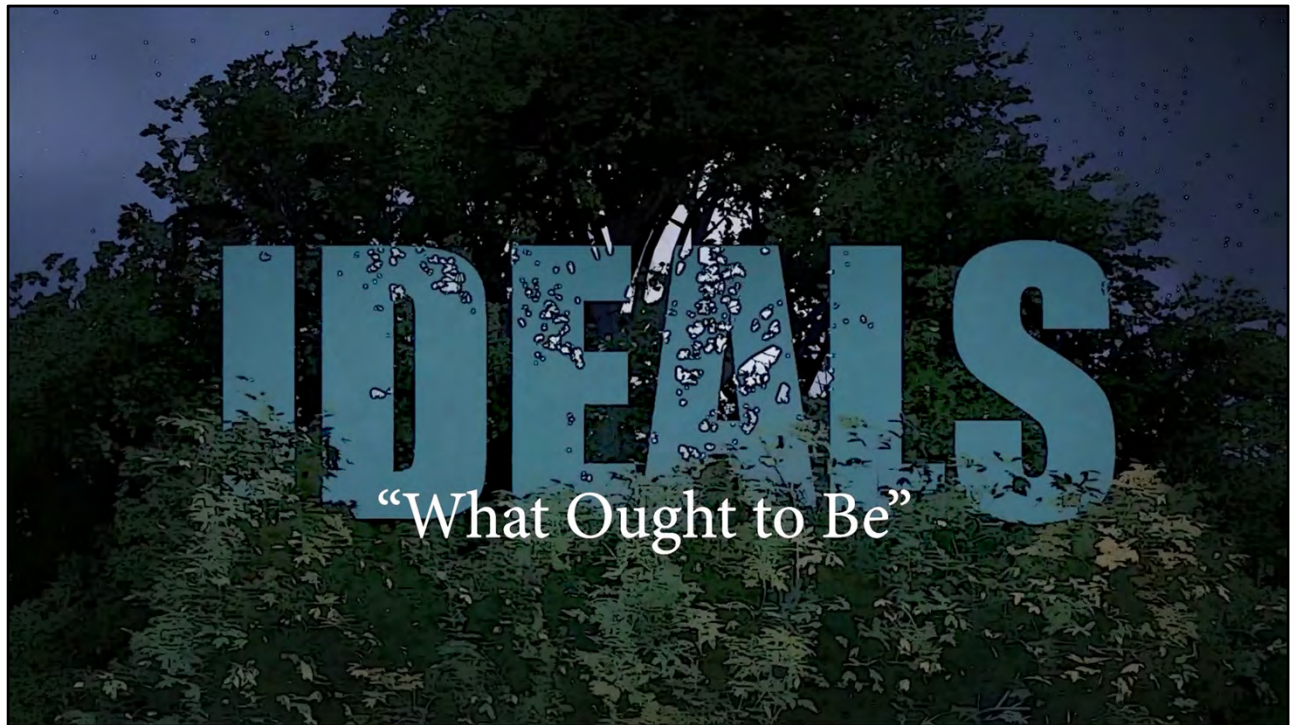


...Pride.

And sprouting from this trunk...

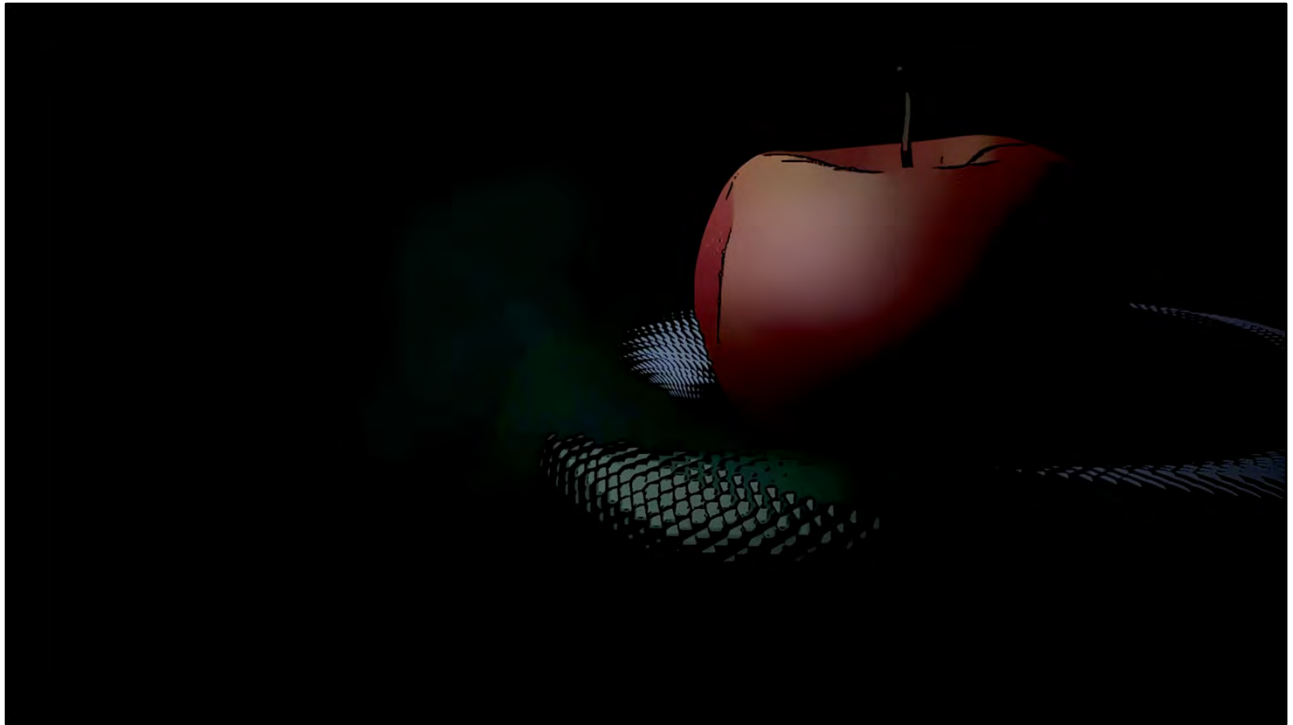


...is a dense canopy of radiating branches and leaves composed of...



...Ideals. In essence, our vision of what ought to be.

And these limbs then bear...



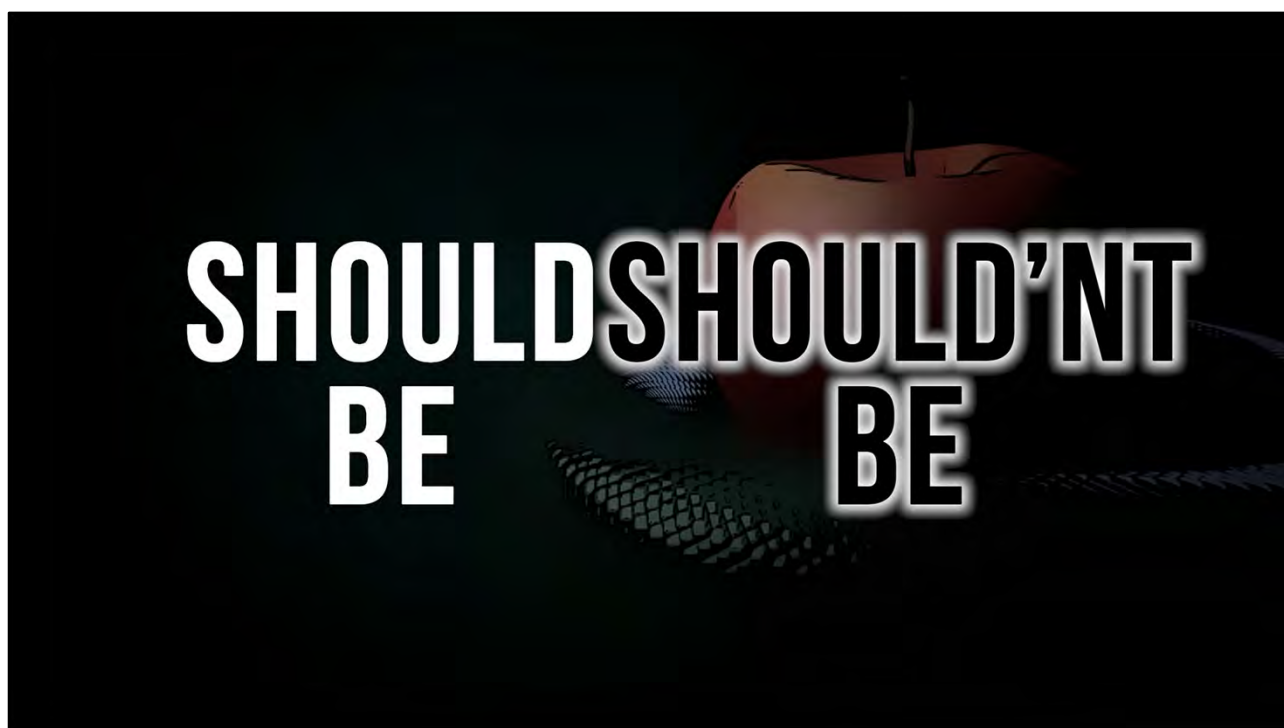
...the fruit of judgement...



Good and Bad.



Right and Wrong.

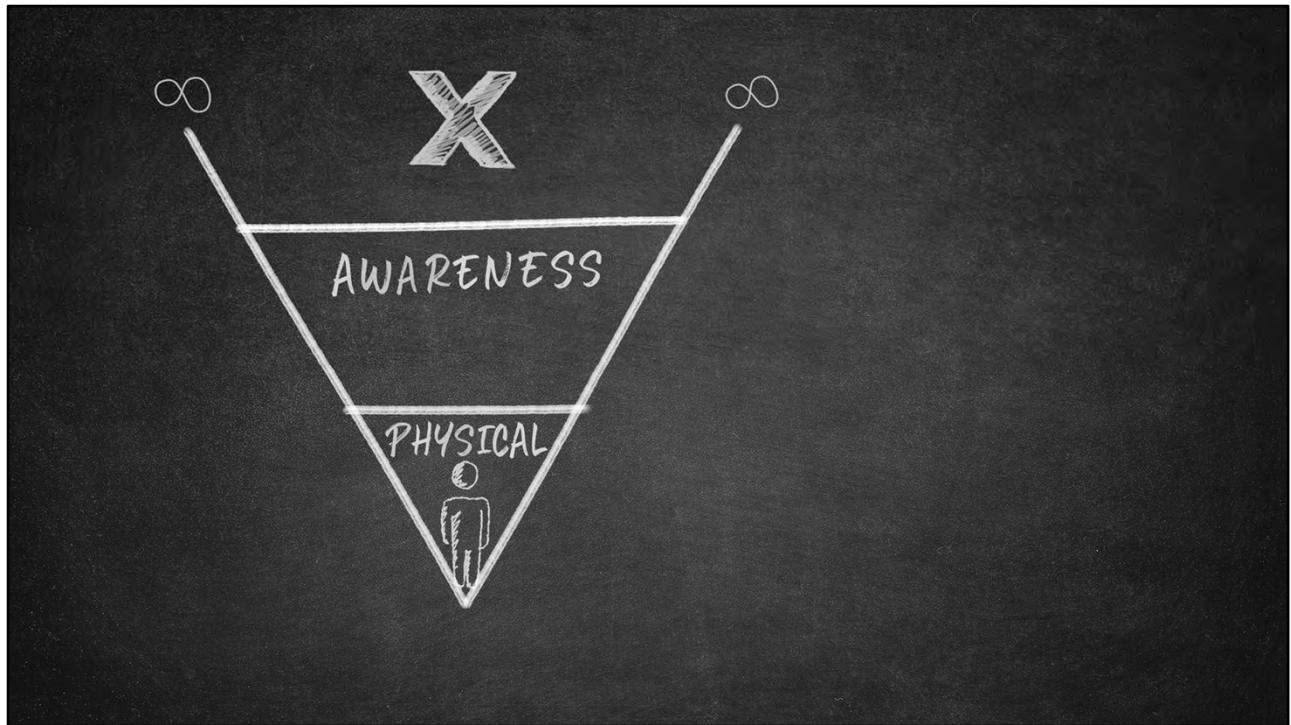


Should be and shouldn't be.

And numerous other ways we judge 'What Is' through the lens of...

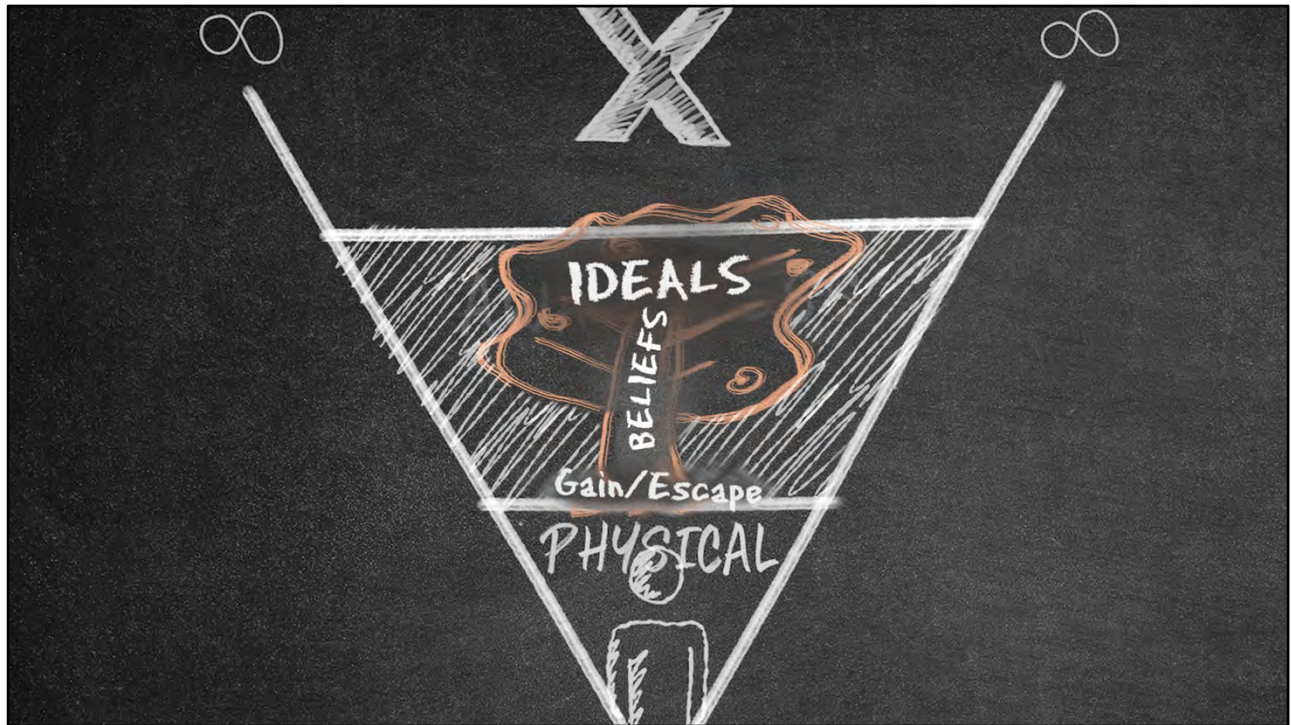


...fear and desire.



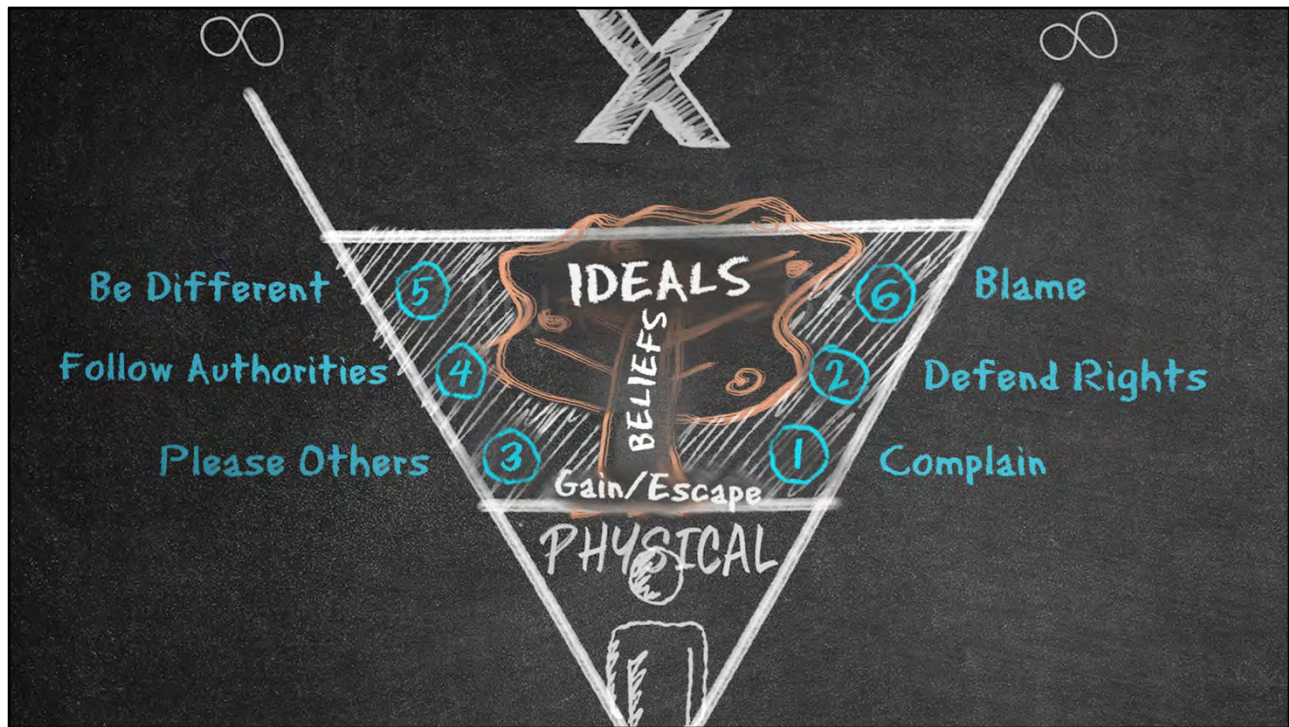
Now let's now look at Man after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge.

Once the fruit was ingested...



...the seed sprouted and the Tree of Knowledge grew inside the inner man, also referred by some as the 'spiritual body' or 'the psyche.'

And as this tree began to grow in early youth, a number of conditioned behaviors developed as a means of reconciling conflict between "What Is' and 'What Ought to Be.' In some teaching, these conditioned behaviors are described as 'Not-I's." As in false personalities—various methods we learned and adopted with the aim of satisfying the demands of the Tree of Knowledge.



Similar to the dualistic urges at the base of the Tree, these behaviors are split into two opposing categories.

On one side are behaviors rooted in the expectation that others should behave a specific way. These include...

- Complaining—expression of dissatisfaction
- Sticking up for our so-called rights
- Blaming—holding others accountable for failing to fulfill an ideal or threatening an ideal

And on the opposing side, we have behaviors rooted in the belief that “I” should behave a certain way, including...

- Pleasing others—pushing their happy buttons, currying favor, and whatnot
- Believing and obeying authorities
- Being different—through deception, concealment, self-improvement,

or otherwise trying to conform to some type of ideal

And this division in Awareness and multitude of competing motives and ideals now give rise to...



...conflict and a spectrum of corresponding emotions such...



...annoyance, frustration, anxiety, anger, guilt, resentment, jealousy, and envy.

Now assuming any of this is true, how can we apply these ideas in our spiritual work?

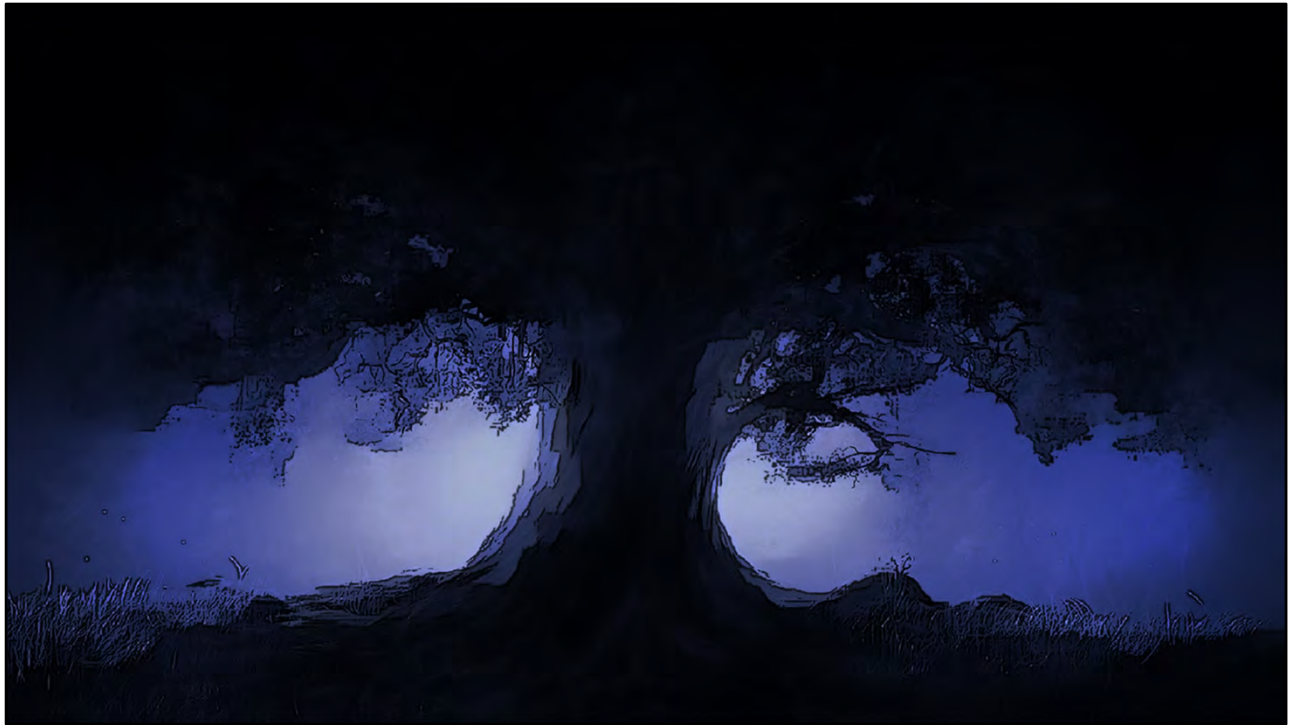
How do we remove a Tree of Knowledge and restore Awareness to its purpose as a faithful function of "X"?



Well, you can't pull the Tree up by its roots. Those roots are deeply embedded into the psyche.

Any effort to remove the Tree by force is simply a manifestation of the self-improvement behavior. The Tree trying to remove the Tree.

So what can we do?



Unlike other trees in the Garden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil grows and thrives in darkness—the darkness of identified awareness and ignorance.

So with this understanding, weakening and diminishing the Tree of Knowledge is quite simple.



It requires light.



The light of disidentified and objective observation.

Many here in this room are already familiar with disidentified awareness. We often call it meditation. In esoteric Christian teaching, objective observation is called 'confession of sin' (homologeo hamartia)—literally translated from Greek as, “to say the same as missing the mark”

In the Fourth Way school of teaching, it’s the beginning of what’s called “Self-Remembering”—a process of remembering our spiritual identity by first cultivating awareness of what we are not.

To assist this process of disentangling awareness from the Tree of Knowledge, there are some exercises in self-observation which may be useful for casting light on the Tree’s presence and influence.

For those new to self-observation, it may be useful to keep a journal for a while. Something about the act of writing one’s observations - “putting it out there” as it were - seems to aid in cultivating disidentification and

weakening attachment, also stated as 'possession,' of what we observe.



Starting with the most visible part of the Tree, the branches and leaves, let's devote some pages to documenting conflicts we observe between 'What Is' and 'What Ought to Be.'

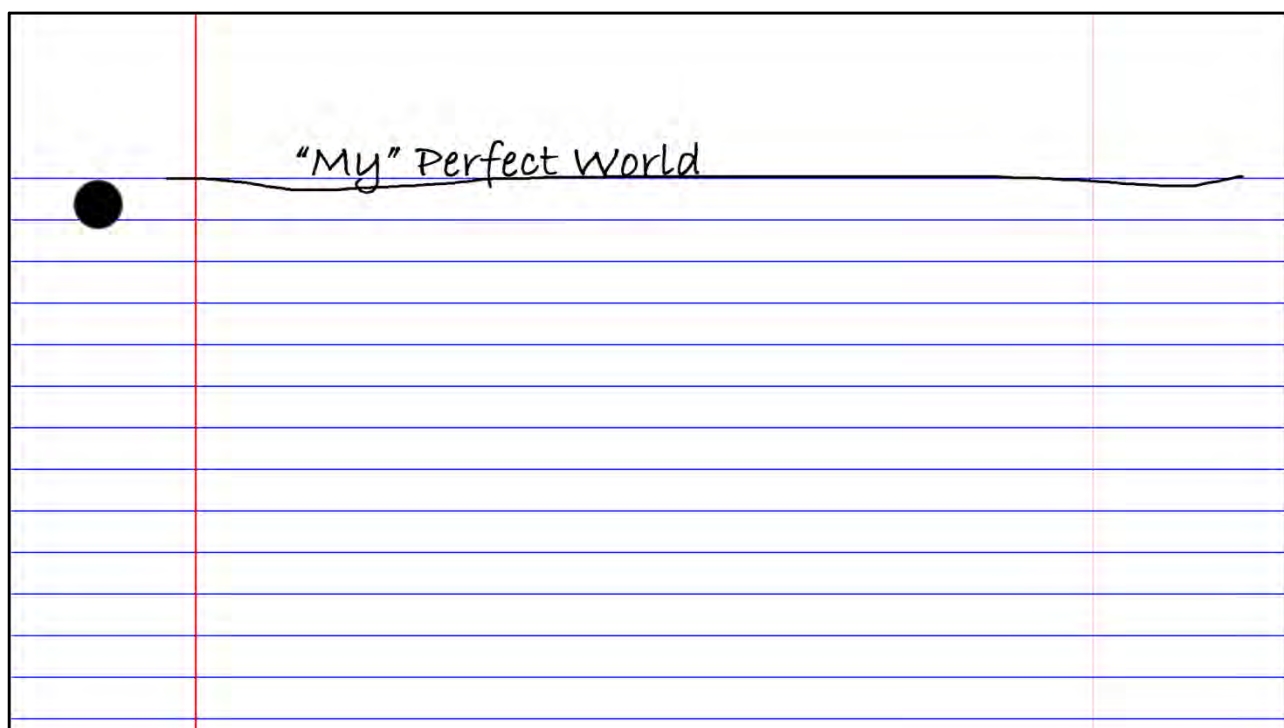
	What Is	What Ought to Be (The Ideal)

Just create two columns, titled 'What Is' and 'What Ought to Be.'

And as we observe a conflict, witness a judgement, or maybe see a negative emotion arise...

What Is	What Ought to Be (The Ideal)
Craig is jet lagged and tired from his trip today	Craig ought to get good sleep after traveling and has a body that immediately adjusts between time zones.
Craig's client is late in payment.	Clients ought to pay on time.
MS Outlook takes several minutes to load email.	Outlook ought to load email immediately when opened.
Craig's daughter got an F in math class.	Craig's daughter ought to get "good" grades and be a "dedicated student."

...just write it down.



If you'd like to accelerate further with a deep dive into the world of ideals, choose an uneventful weekend and write an essay about "Your Perfect World."

No need to give it a lot of thought. Just let it flow as random ideas emerge into Awareness. It's actually quite fun.

Here's some historical examples from Craig's Perfect World...

"My" Perfect World

All traffic lights turn green as he approaches intersections.



All traffic lights turn green as he approaches intersections

"My" Perfect World

All traffic lights turn green as he approaches intersections.
All cigars taste like black pepper and cocoa.



All cigars taste like black pepper and cocoa.

"My" Perfect World

All traffic lights turn green as he approaches intersections.
All cigars taste like black pepper and cocoa.
Planes always fly on time.



Planes always fly on time.

"My" Perfect World

All traffic lights turn green as he approaches intersections.
All cigars taste like black pepper and cocoa.
Planes always fly on time.
All women on the planet are petite brunettes with specific features and find him sexually attractive



And all women on the planet are petite brunettes with specific body shapes, and find him sexually attractive.

"My" Perfect World

All traffic lights turn green as he approaches intersections.
All cigars taste like black pepper and cocoa.
Planes always fly on time.
All women on the planet are petite brunettes with specific features and find him sexually attractive
And Sandra's okay with that too!!!



And his wife is fine with that too.



Now as we engage this work, many ideals driven by historical desires and fears naturally begin to fade.

But keep in mind, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is resilient and adaptive. And as old branches begin to wither and die, new branches often sprout in their place. Here's some common examples...

"My" NEW Perfect World

I ought to be free from judgement and negative emotions.



I am free from judgement and negative emotions.

"My" NEW Perfect World

I ought to be free from judgement and negative emotions.
I ought to be presently aware all the time.



I am awake and presently aware at all times.

And at the summit of the mountain...

"My" NEW Perfect World

I ought to be free from judgement and negative emotions.
I ought to be presently aware

Samadhí!



Samadhi! Cosmic Consciousness! Nondual awareness! The Kingdom of Heaven!

After all, what reward promises non-disturbance greater than a state of being beyond the reach of all disturbance.

And then there's a host of other ideals that may emerge as our value shifts toward harmony and we begin to perceive the interconnectedness of life. Ideals such as...

"My" NEW Perfect World

There is no violence in the affairs of man..."World Peace"



There is no violence in the affairs of man—only world peace.

"My" NEW Perfect World

There is no violence in the affairs of man. "World Peace"

Presidents are conscious beings,
or at least not "narcissistic" or
"belligerent" beings.



Presidents are humble, empathetic, and unitive in their leadership.

"My" NEW Perfect World

There is no violence in the affairs of man... "World Peace"

Presidents are conscious beings,
or at least not "narcissistic" or
"belligerent" beings.

Mankind is aware of its reckless
influence on the Earth and
implements measures now to
save the environment.



Mankind is aware of its reckless influence on the Earth and implements measures now to save the environment.

And so on.

Now I suspect most of us see these as ideas of value. I don't think there's anyone here who likes the idea of war, divisive leadership, or a polluted planet.

Idea (*noun*)

1. a thought or suggestion as to a possible course of action.
2. the aim or purpose.

Yet the Tree of Knowledge can easily absorb an idea of value...



Idea (*noun*)

1. a thought or suggestion as to a possible course of action.
2. the aim or purpose.

Ideal (*noun*)

1. a person or thing regarded as perfect.

...and corrupt it into an ideal.

Signs that an Idea of Value has been corrupted into an Ideal

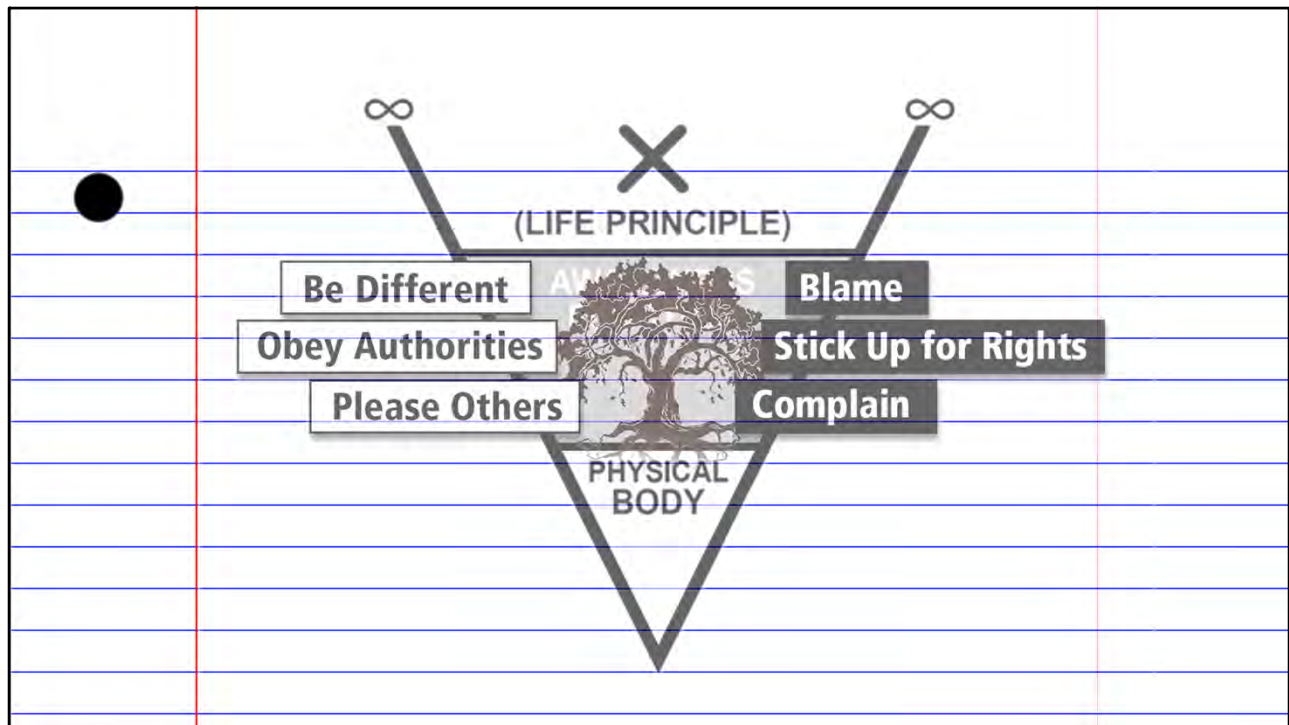
- Feelings of tension, negative emotions, or indignation when a perceived idea of value is challenged by resistance.
- Invested confidence when using the words "should," "good/bad," "right/wrong," etc.
- Feeling that the idea of value is very important.
- Thoughts or statements in conversation stating justification or rationale for the idea of value.

Here's some signs that maybe an Idea of Value has been corrupted into an Ideal.

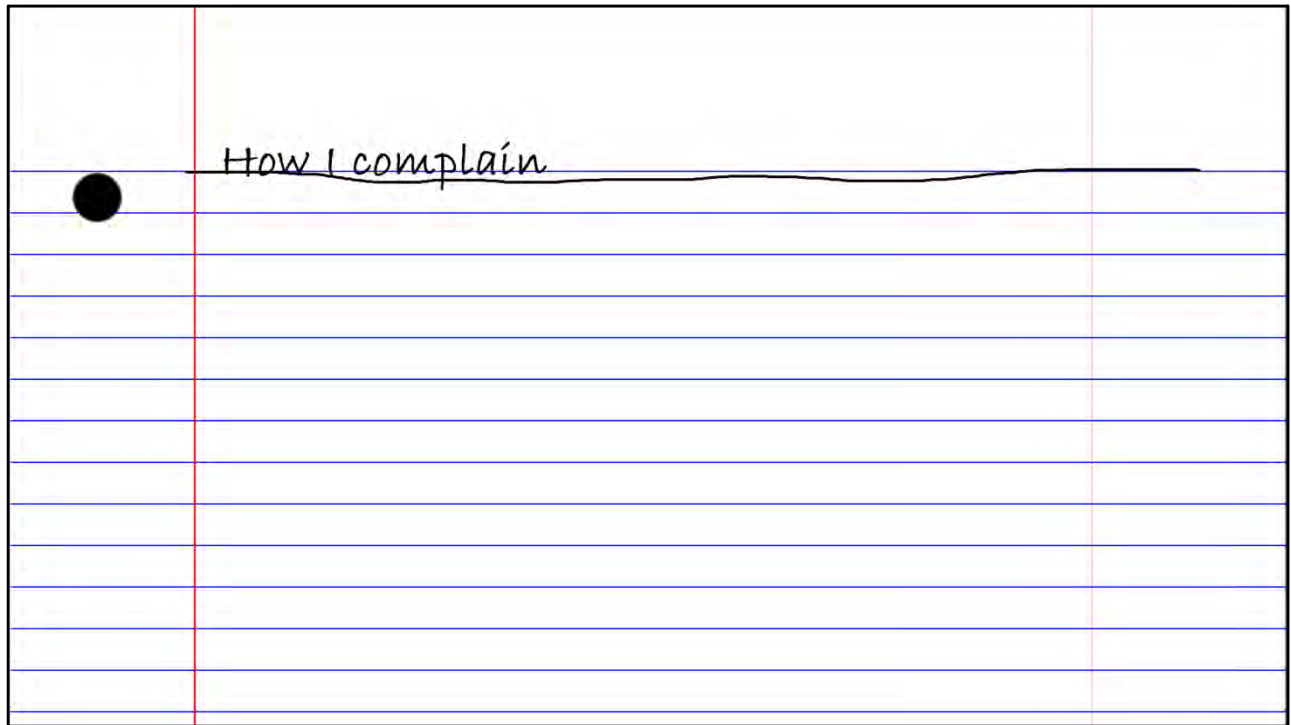
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- Invested confidence when using the words "should," "good/bad," "right/wrong," etc.
- Feeling that the idea of value is very important.
- Thoughts or statements in conversation stating justification or rationale for the idea of value.

Let's be clear. Our aim in the work is not to mold the Tree of Knowledge into a bonsai. Rather, just simply observe and objectively report what's going on.

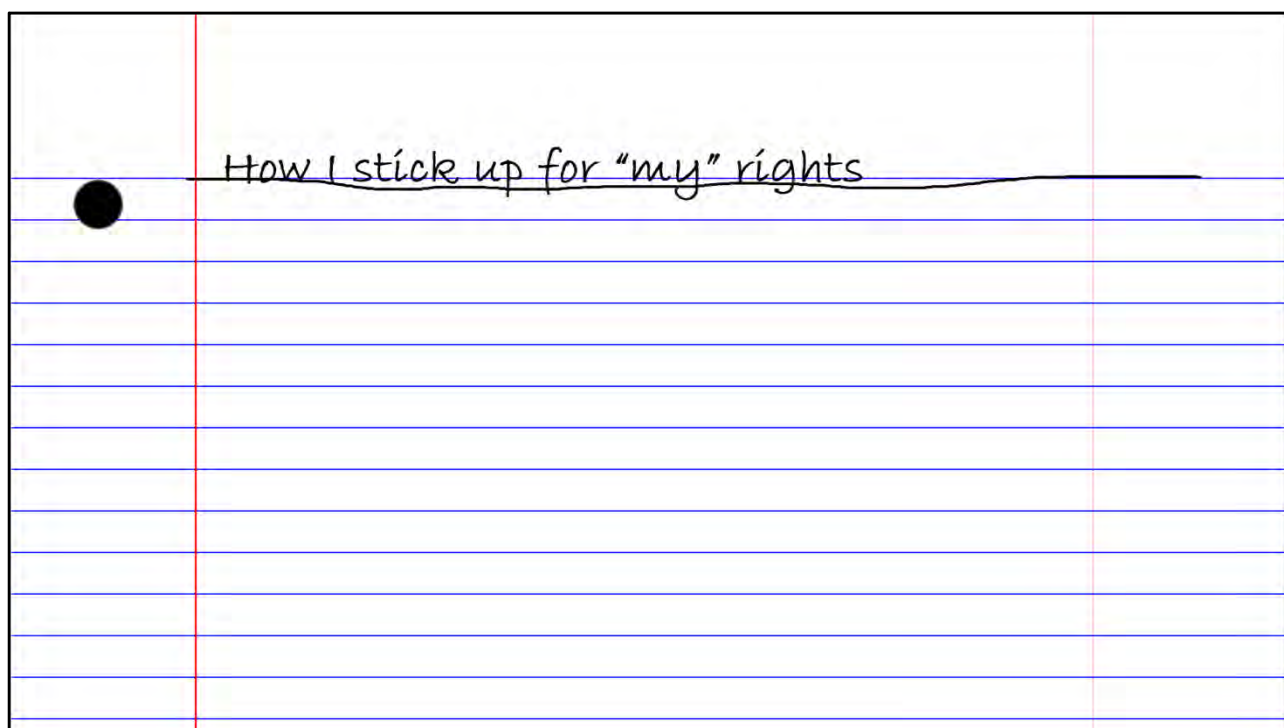
When we report directly 'What Is' through the prism of Awareness disentangled from the Tree, action seems to happen quite naturally. And quite harmoniously.



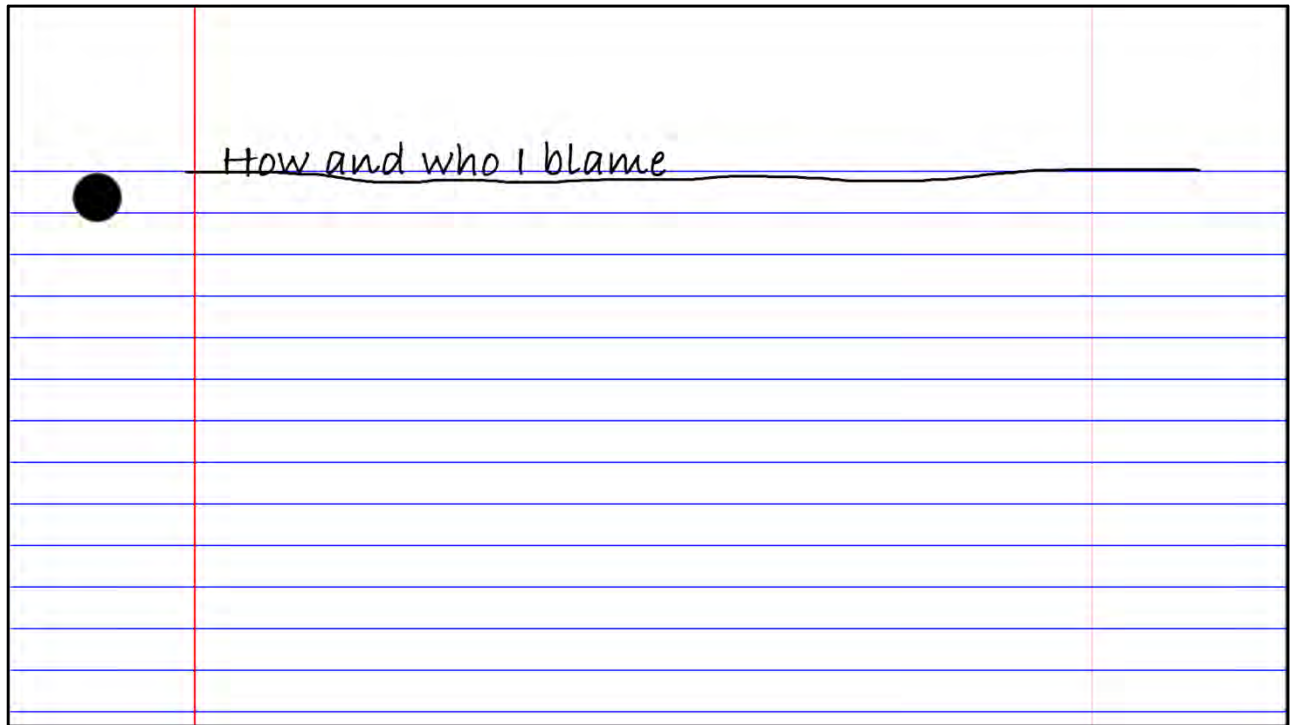
As another exercise, observe and document how one reacts to situations or attempts to gain the ideal through conditioned behaviors such as...



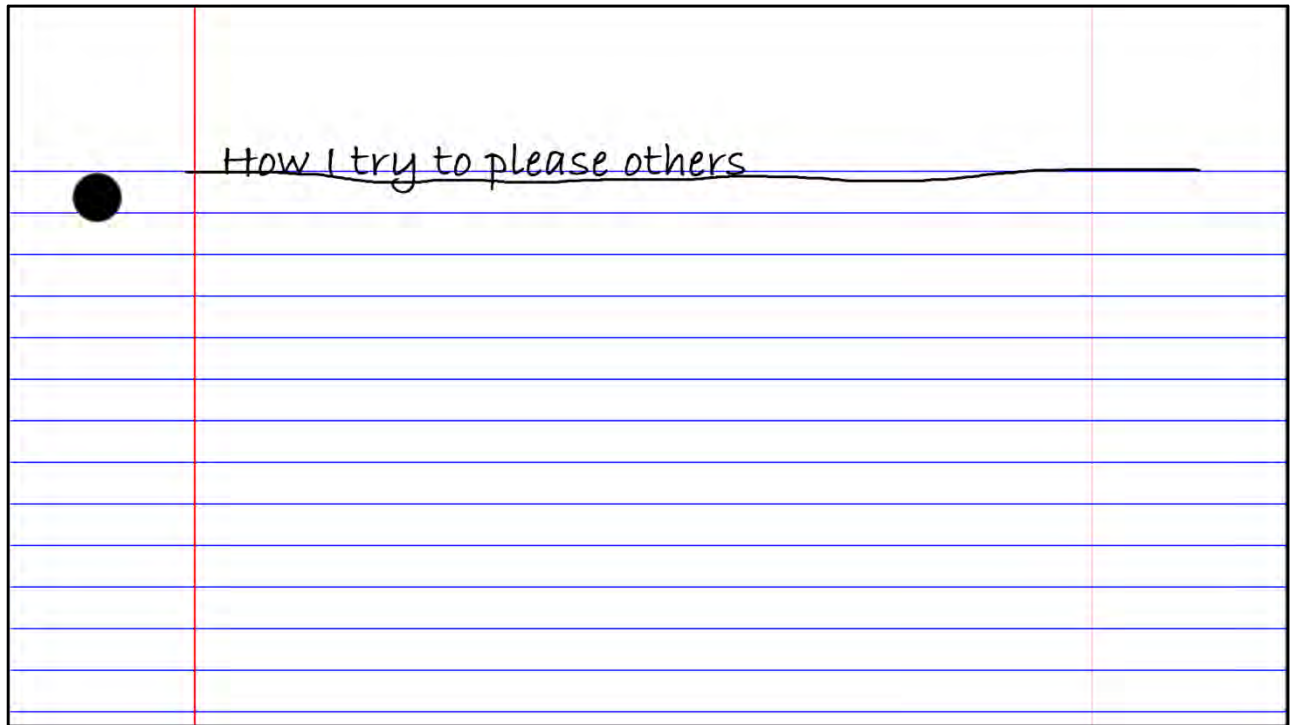
How I complain



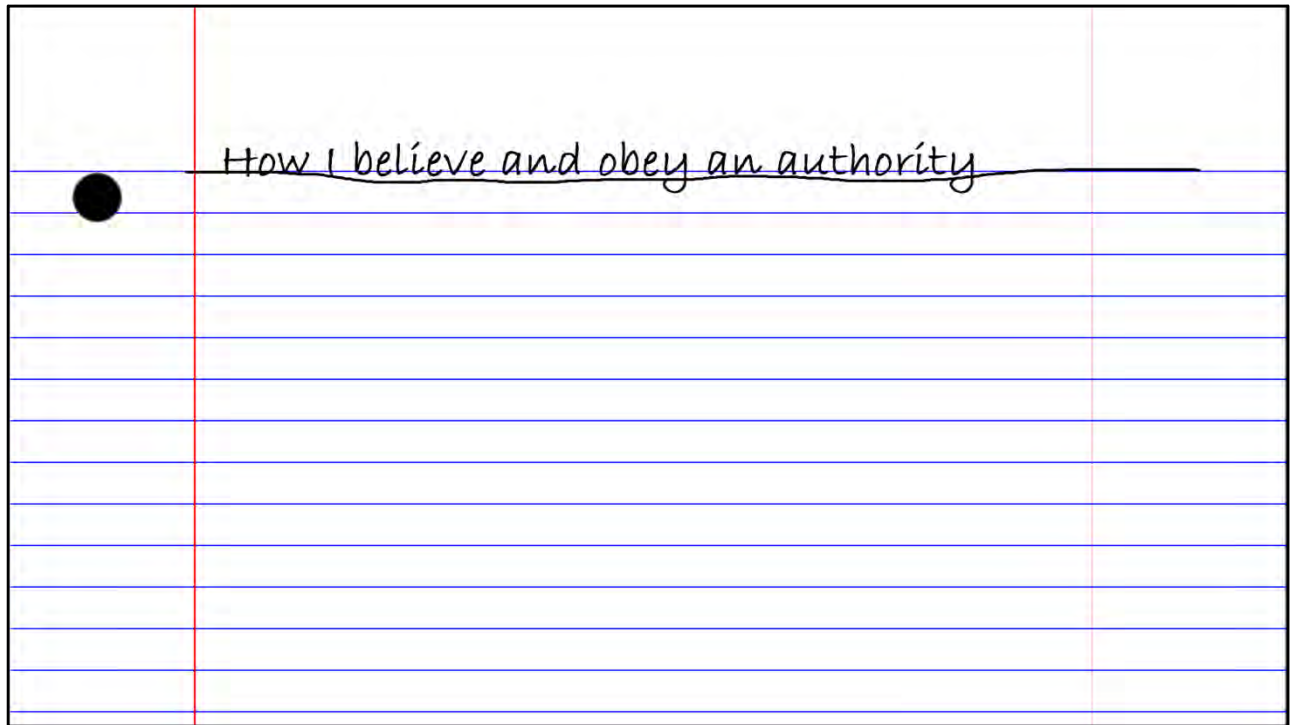
How I stick up for "my" rights



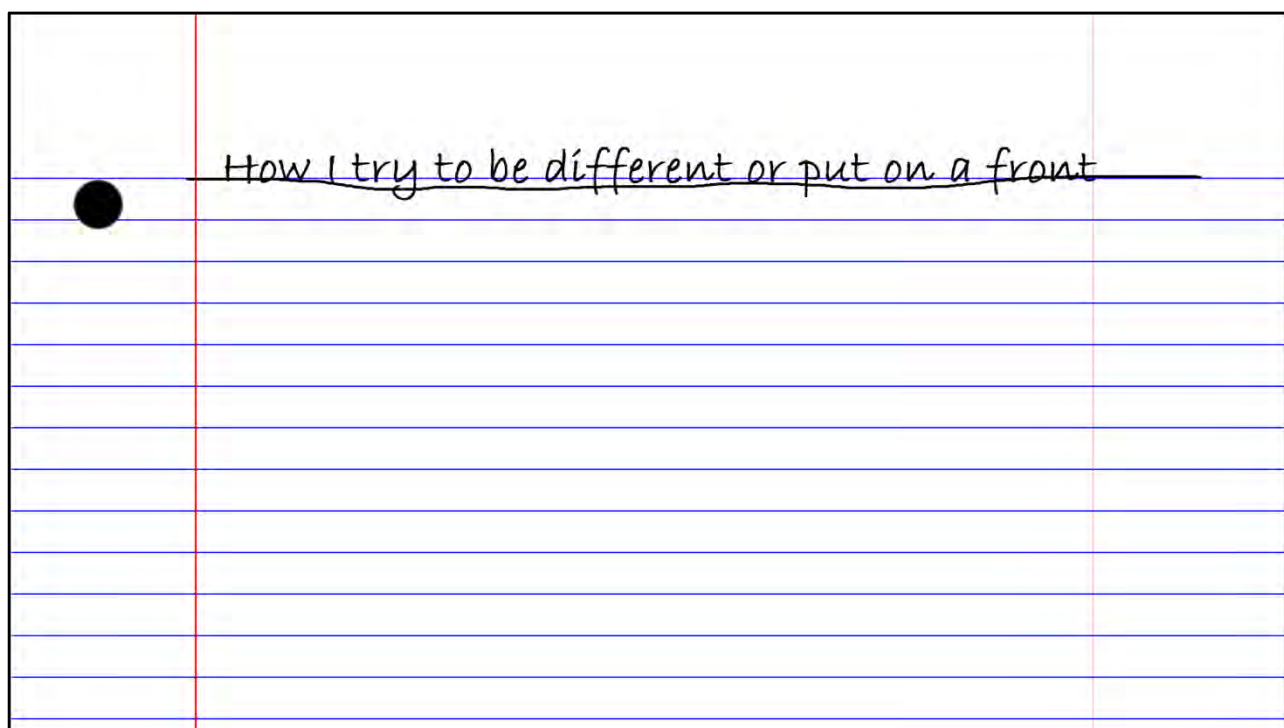
How and who I blame



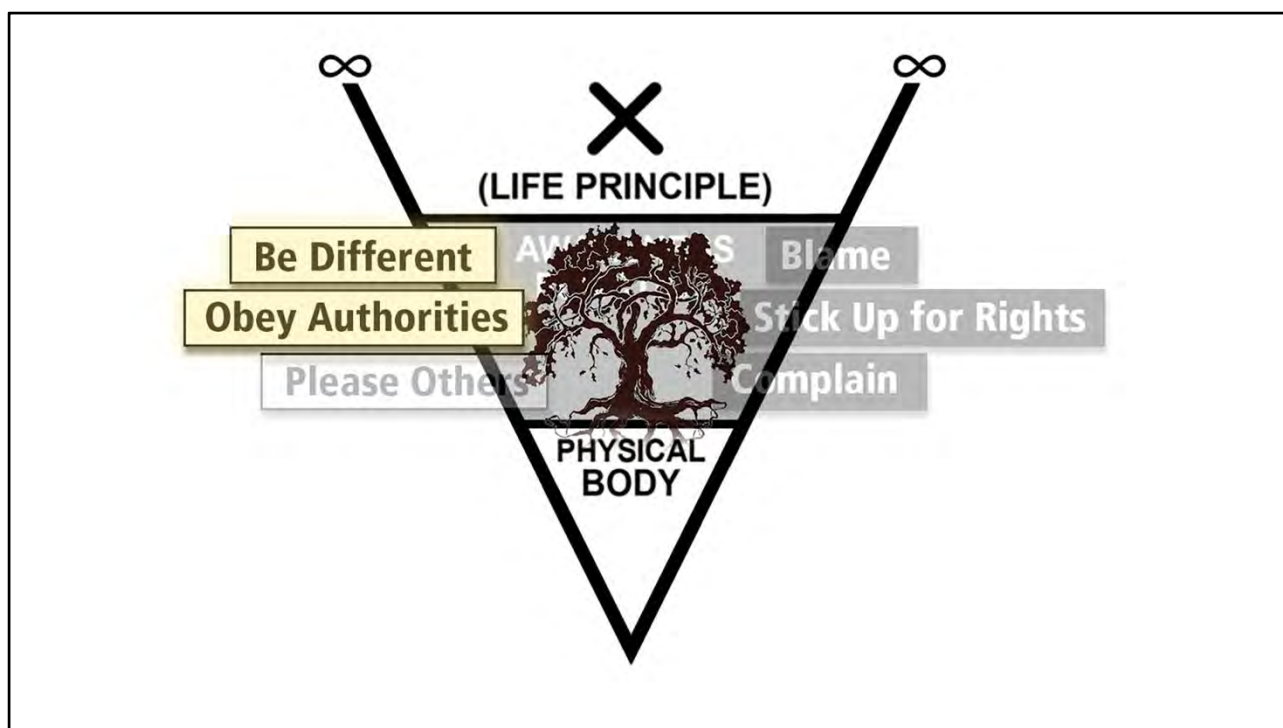
How I try to please others



How I believe and obey an authority



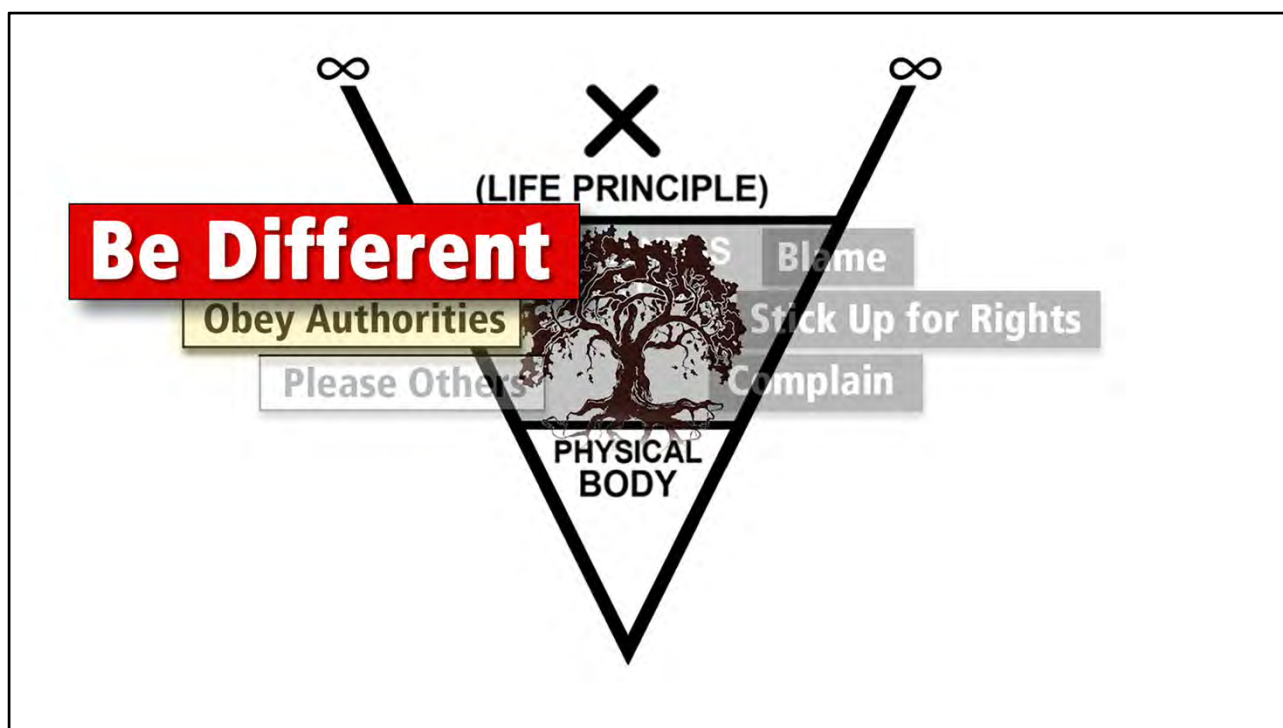
How I try to be different or put on a front



For many engaged in spiritual work, conditioned behaviors associated with how others should be different are easily recognized as illusory and often diminish quickly. The same is often true for pleasing others. They often linger around and resurrect in various ways, but they're often quickly recognized as "Not-I" when they appear and don't get a lot of oxygen.

But for many of us, appealing to authorities and being different can be persistent obstacles in spiritual work.

So let's take a closer look at this.



For many who commence spiritual work, the effort was propelled by a question about the purpose of living and what's going on here. We suspect there's a possible state of perception that reveals answers to those questions, but we don't know to access that awareness in our conditioned state. We begin to recognize our susceptibility to button presses and negative emotions, our lack of attention, and our disintegrated state of being.

And naturally we wish to change that. We wish to be more conscious. More free. More loving. Hence, we wish to be better.

The language used in spiritual traditions often contributes further to this self-improvement ideal. First generation Fourth Way writers, such as Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, often used the term "work on oneself," which implies a process of improvement. In the Buddhist teachings, we are encouraged to follow the eightfold path (right view, right resolve, right speech, etc.). These terms are also easily interpreted as idealized behaviors.

Now in the early stages of spiritual work, this behavior may be useful. It drives the effort and discipline necessary to initiate spiritual work and persist through habitual temptation to fall asleep, contracting back into identified awareness.

But at a point, this behavior exhausts its useful value and now reveals itself as...



...Lucifer the Angel of Light.

Lucifer wants to be helpful to spiritual growth.

He points out our conditioning, encourages us to meditate better, struggles to bring attention to the present, flagellates us for our mechanical behavior and selfish desires, and so on.

But despite his well-intentioned appearance, Lucifer is nothing more than another servant of desire.

How I try to be different or put on a front

Alarm Clocks

- Guilt, regret, or feelings of disappointment in oneself
- Doubt or concern about your spiritual work
- Measuring your spiritual growth
- Concern about how others perceive you



Here's a few things to watch for. Signs that perhaps Lucifer is busy at work.

- Guilt, regret, or feelings of disappointment in oneself
- Doubt or concern about your spiritual work
- Measuring your quote-unquote "spiritual progress"
- Concern about how others view you

And if Lucifer seems extra active at time or you observe self ruminating about the approval of others, there's a mantra you might find useful in loosening the grip of that pattern. I learned it from a folk philosopher as a young boy. His name was...

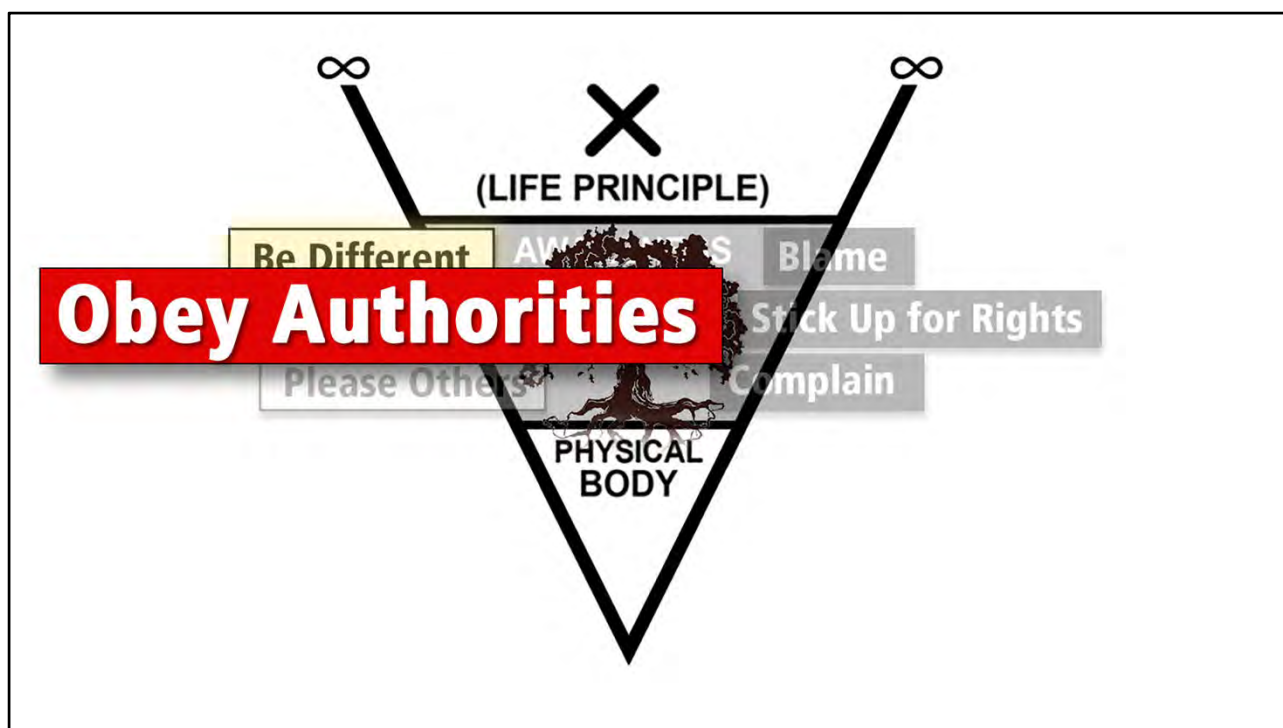


...Popeye.

"I Yam what I yam..."

So if those self-improvement thoughts and self-judgements seem sticky or overwhelming at times, maybe give that little mantra a try. Maybe shake it loose a little so one can step back and objectively observe that vicious cycle at work. And who knows, maybe one day that "I Yam" takes on a more profound meaning.

Humor is often a beautiful tool in the work.

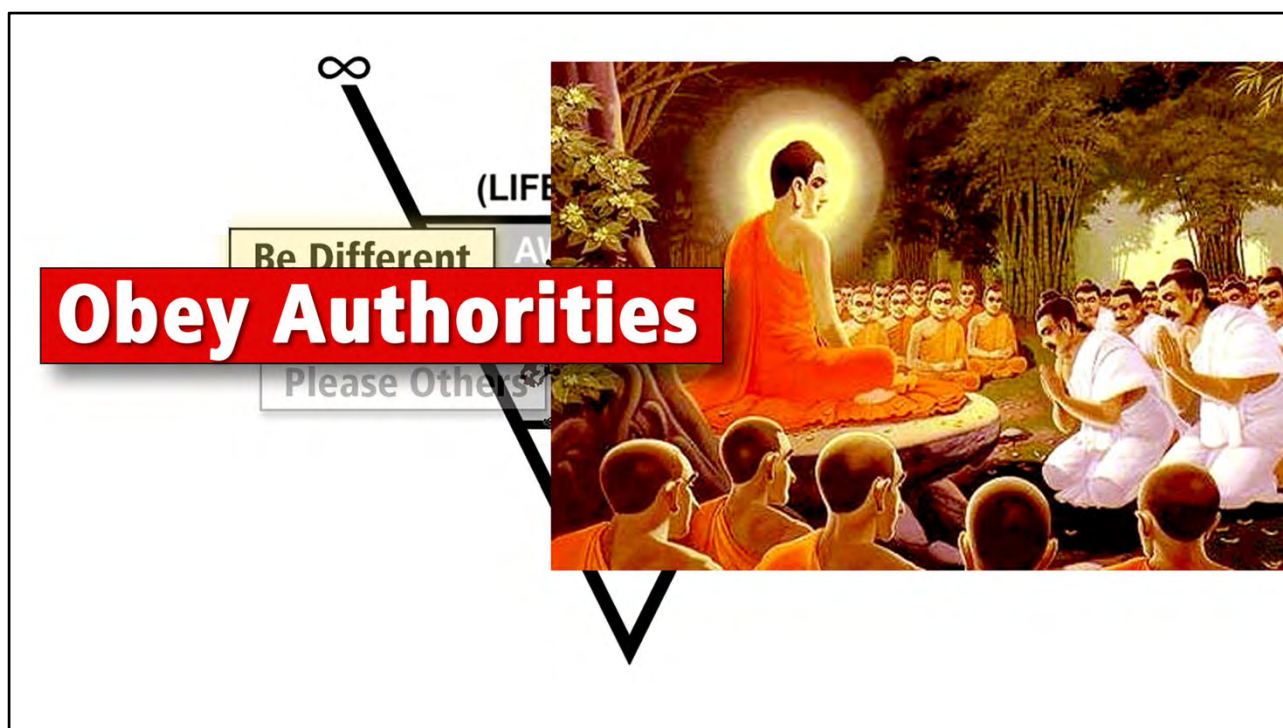


Believing and obeying authorities is another common obstruction for many of us engaged in spiritual work.

From our earliest days of childhood, we've been told by society that others know more than we do and believing or obeying them is essential to our success. It started with Mom and Dad, then progressed to teachers in school, clergy, influential authors, and so on.

Quite often in spiritual work, we reevaluate our beliefs and confidence in authorities in light of our new focus and discoveries.

But as we discard the old, often new authorities are adopted in their place.



And this often relates to spiritual teachers and others who are newly embraced as sources of absolute truth and knowledge. After all, they're the enlightened ones!

And this often results in a new system of beliefs—which is really nothing more than 'new stones mortared into an old brick wall.' Or what the gospels call, "a new patch on old garment."

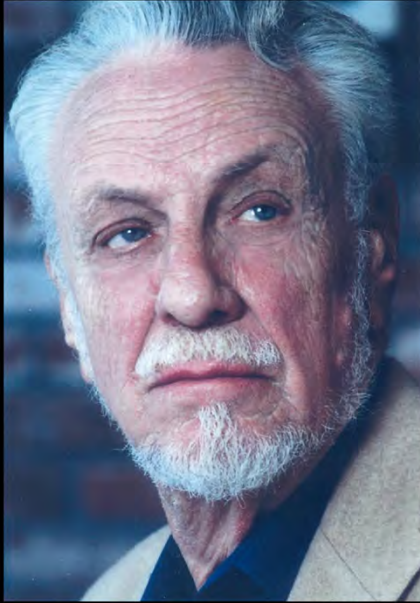
And for some, the sense of peace and security in a teacher's presence can be quite hypnotic, often reinforced further by the teacher's charisma and sense of confidence. And dependency can now emerge as the student begins to idealize and adore their new authority.

Effective spiritual teachers seem to recognize this issue and present teaching in a manner that discourages untested belief and idealization of the teaching or themselves.

And when a teacher recognizes a student has developed an unhealthy

dependency, disengages and removes themselves accordingly.

On those points, I consider myself quite fortunate. The man whose words introduced me to these ideas died before I was introduced to the work. His name was...



Dr. Robert Rhondell Gibson

July 25, 1916 – December 18, 1994

www.harmonyworkshop.org

www.marshasummers.com

...Dr. Robert Rhondell Gibson.

He's not well known today. In the 1980's, Dr. Bob had a community of several thousand students or so. He died in 1994, but his teaching was largely preserved through audio recordings of a 48-week school program and various talks.

If you found value in this presentation or would like to investigate these ideas further, you can find many of those lessons on the Harmony Workshop web site. Marsha Summers, one of his first generation students, also has transcripts and audio files of his talks on her personal web site.

Although Dr. Bob's presentation of the work is somewhat unique and seems effective for many students, it's just one expression of ideas which seem to have been around since at least the dawn of written word.

Maybe in the end, the real teacher is just simply...



X

Thank you for letting me share with you.