

PART I

awakening consciousness

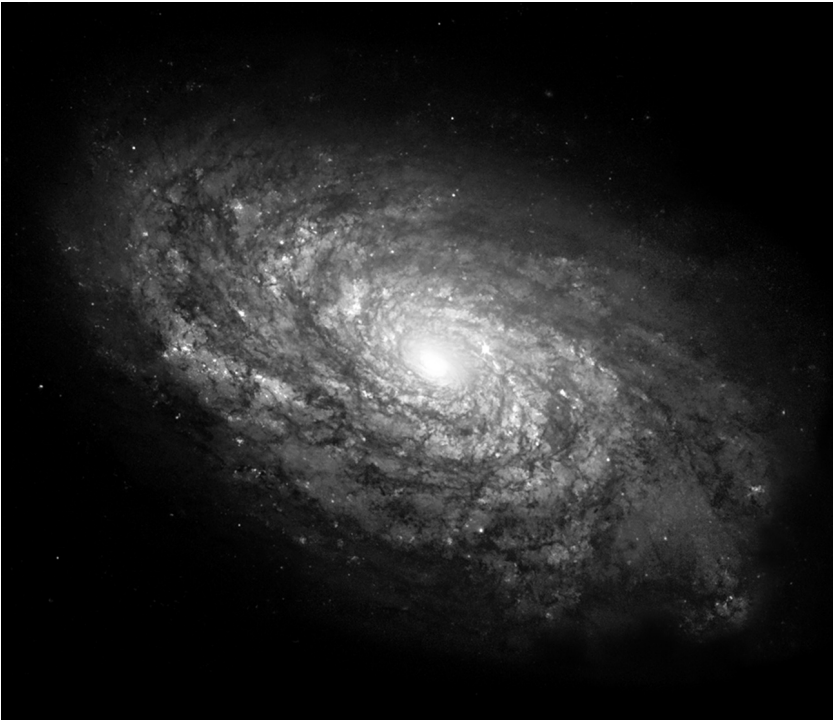


Photo (previous page)  
Dusty Spiral Galaxy NGC 4414  
Image credit: The Hubble Heritage Team (AURA/STScI/NASA)

## CHAPTER 1

# the voice inside your head

“Shoot, I can’t remember her name. What is her name? Darn, here she comes. What is it... Sally... Sue? She just told me yesterday. What’s the matter with me? This is going to be embarrassing.”

**I**n case you haven’t noticed, you have a mental dialogue going on inside your head that never stops. It just keeps going and going. Have you ever wondered why it talks in there? How does it decide what to say and when to say it? How much of what it says turns out to be true? How much of what it says is even important? And if right now you are hearing, “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t have any voice inside my head!”—that’s the voice we’re talking about.

If you’re smart, you’ll take the time to step back, examine this voice, and get to know it better. The problem is, you’re too close to be objective.

You have to step way back and watch it converse. While you're driving, you hear internal conversations like,

“Wasn't I supposed to call Fred? I should have. Oh my God, I can't believe I forgot! He's going to be so mad. He may never talk to me again. Maybe I should stop and call him right now. No. I don't want to stop the car right now...”

Notice that the voice takes both sides of the conversation. It doesn't care which side it takes, just as long as it gets to keep on talking. When you're tired and trying to sleep, it's the voice inside your head that says,

“What am I doing? I can't go to sleep yet. I forgot to call Fred. I remembered in the car but I didn't call. If I don't call now...oh wait, it's too late. I shouldn't call him now. I don't even know why I thought about it. I need to fall asleep. Oh shoot, now I can't fall asleep. I'm not tired anymore. But I have a big day tomorrow, and I have to get up early.”

No wonder you can't sleep! Why do you even tolerate that voice talking to you all the time? Even if what it's saying is soothing and nice, it's still disturbing everything you're doing.

If you spend some time observing this mental voice, the first thing you will notice is that it never shuts up. When left to its own, it just talks. Imagine if you were to see someone walking around constantly talking to himself. You'd think he was strange. You'd wonder, “If he's the one who's talking and he's the one who's listening, he obviously knows what's going to be said before he says it. So what's the point?” The same is true for the voice inside your head. Why is it talking? It's you who's talking, and it's you who's listening. And when the voice argues with itself, who is it arguing with? Who could possibly win? It gets very confusing. Just listen:

“I think I should get married. No! You know you're not ready. You'll be sorry. But I love him. Oh come on, you felt that way about Tom. What if you had married him?”

If you watch carefully, you'll see that it's just trying to find a comfortable place to rest. It will change sides in a moment if that seems to help. And it doesn't even quiet down when it finds out that it's wrong. It simply adjusts its viewpoint and keeps on going. If you pay attention, these mental patterns will become obvious to you. It's actually a shocking realization when you first notice that your mind is constantly talking. You might even try to yell at it in a feeble attempt to shut it up. But then you realize that's the voice yelling at the voice:

“Shut up! I want to go to sleep. Why do you have to talk all the time?”

Obviously, you can't shut it up that way. The best way to free yourself from this incessant chatter is to step back and view it objectively. Just view the voice as a vocalizing mechanism that is capable of making it appear like someone is in there talking to you. Don't think about it; just notice it. No matter what the voice is saying, it's all the same. It doesn't matter if it's saying nice things or mean things, worldly things or spiritual things. It doesn't matter because it's still just a voice talking inside your head. In fact, the only way to get your distance from this voice is to stop differentiating what it's saying. Stop feeling that one thing it says is you and the other thing it says is not you. If you're hearing it talk, it's obviously not you. You are the one who hears the voice. You are the one who notices that it's talking.

You do hear it when it talks, don't you? Make it say “hello” right now. Say it over and over a few times. Now shout it inside! Can you hear yourself saying “hello” inside? Of course you can. There is a voice talking, and there is you who notices the voice talking. The problem is that it's easy to notice the voice saying “hello,” but it's difficult to see that no matter what the voice says, it is still just a voice talking and you listening. There is absolutely nothing that voice can say that is more you than anything else it says. Suppose you were looking at three objects—a flowerpot, a photograph, and a book—and were then asked, “Which of these objects is you?” You'd say, “None of them! I'm the one who's looking at what you're putting in front of me. It doesn't matter what you put in front of me, it's always going to be me looking at it.” You see, it's an act of a subject

perceiving various objects. This is also true of hearing the voice inside. It doesn't make any difference what it's saying, you are the one who is aware of it. As long as you think that one thing it's saying is you, but the other thing it's saying is not you, you've lost your objectivity. You may want to think of yourself as the part that says the nice things, but that's still the voice talking. You may like what it says, but it's not you.

There is nothing more important to true growth than realizing that you are not the voice of the mind—you are the one who hears it. If you don't understand this, you will try to figure out which of the many things the voice says is really you. People go through so many changes in the name of "trying to find myself." They want to discover which of these voices, which of these aspects of their personality, is who they really are. The answer is simple: none of them.

If you watch it objectively, you will come to see that much of what the voice says is meaningless. Most of the talking is just a waste of time and energy. The truth is that most of life will unfold in accordance with forces far outside your control, regardless of what your mind says about it. It's like sitting down at night and deciding whether you want the sun to come up in the morning. The bottom line is, the sun will come up and the sun will go down. Billions of things are going on in this world. You can think about it all you want, but life is still going to keep on happening.

In fact, your thoughts have far less impact on this world than you would like to think. If you're willing to be objective and watch all your thoughts, you will see that the vast majority of them have no relevance. They have no effect on anything or anybody, except you. They are simply making you feel better or worse about what is going on now, what has gone on in the past, or what might go on in the future. If you spend your time hoping that it doesn't rain tomorrow, you are wasting your time. Your thoughts don't change the rain. You will someday come to see that there is no use for that incessant internal chatter, and there is no reason to constantly attempt to figure everything out. Eventually you will see that the real cause of problems is not life itself. It's the commotion the mind makes about life that really causes problems.

Now this raises a serious question: If so much of what the voice says is meaningless and unnecessary, then why does it even exist? The secret to answering this question lies in understanding why it says what it says

when it says it. For example, in some cases the mental voice talks for the same reason that a teakettle whistles. That is, there's a buildup of energy inside that needs to be released. If you watch objectively, you will see that when there's a buildup of nervous, fearful, or desire-based energies inside, the voice becomes extremely active. This is easy to see when you are angry with someone and you feel like telling them off. Just watch how many times the inner voice tells them off before you even see them. When energy builds up inside, you want to do something about it. That voice talks because you're not okay inside, and talking releases energy.

You will notice, however, that even when you're not particularly bothered by something, it still talks. When you're walking down the street it says things like,

“Look at that dog! It's a Labrador! Hey, there's another dog in that car. He looks a lot like my first dog, Shadow. Whoa, there's an old Oldsmobile. It's got Alaska plates. You don't see many of those down here!”

It is actually narrating the world for you. But why do you need this? You already see what's happening outside; how does it help to repeat it to yourself through the mental voice? You should examine this very closely. With a simple glance, you instantly take in the tremendous detail of whatever you're looking at. If you see a tree, you effortlessly see the branches, the leaves, and the flowering buds. Why then do you have to verbalize what you have already seen?

“Look at that dogwood. The green leaves are so beautiful against the white flowers. Look how many flowers there are. Wow, it's so full!”

What you'll see, if you study this carefully, is that the narration makes you feel more comfortable with the world around you. Like back-seat driving, it makes you feel as though things are more in your control. You actually feel like you have some relationship with them. A tree is no longer just a tree in the world that has nothing to do with you; it is a tree that you saw, labeled, and judged. By verbalizing it mentally, you

brought that initial direct experience of the world into the realm of your thoughts. There it becomes integrated with your other thoughts, such as those making up your value system and historical experiences.

Take a moment to examine the difference between your experience of the outside world and your interactions with the mental world. When you're just thinking, you're free to create whatever thoughts you want in your mind, and these thoughts are expressed through the voice. You are very accustomed to settling into the playground of the mind and creating and manipulating thoughts. This inner world is an alternate environment that is under your control. The outside world, however, marches to its own laws. When the voice narrates the outside world to you, those thoughts are now side by side, in parity, with all your other thoughts. All these thoughts intermix and actually influence your experience of the world around you. What you end up experiencing is really a personal presentation of the world according to you, rather than the stark, unfiltered experience of what is really out there. This mental manipulation of the outer experience allows you to buffer reality as it comes in. For example, there are myriad things that you see at any given moment, yet you only narrate a few of them. The ones you discuss in your mind are the ones that matter to you. With this subtle form of preprocessing, you manage to control the experience of reality so that it all fits together inside your mind. Your consciousness is actually experiencing your mental model of reality, not reality itself.

You have to watch this very carefully because you do it all the time. You're walking outside in the winter, you start to shiver, and the voice says, "It's cold!" Now how did that help you? You already knew it was cold. You're the one who's experiencing the cold. Why is it telling you this? You re-create the world within your mind because you can control your mind whereas you can't control the world. That is why you mentally talk about it. If you can't get the world the way you like it, you internally verbalize it, judge it, complain about it, and then decide what to do about it. This makes you feel more empowered. When your body experiences cold, there may be nothing you can do to affect the temperature. But when your mind verbalizes, "It's cold!" you can say, "We're almost home, just a few more minutes." Now you feel better. In the thought world there's always something you can do to control the experience.

Basically, you re-create the outside world inside yourself, and then you live in your mind. What if you decided not to do this? If you decide not to narrate and, instead, just consciously observe the world, you will feel more open and exposed. This is because you really don't know what will happen next, and your mind is accustomed to helping you. It does this by processing your current experiences in a way that makes them fit with your views of the past and visions of the future. All of this helps to create a semblance of control. If your mind doesn't do this, you simply become too uncomfortable. Reality is just too real for most of us, so we temper it with the mind.

You will come to see that the mind talks all the time because you gave it a job to do. You use it as a protection mechanism, a form of defense. Ultimately, it makes you feel more secure. As long as that's what you want, you will be forced to constantly use your mind to buffer yourself from life, instead of living it. This world is unfolding and really has very little to do with you or your thoughts. It was here long before you came, and it will be here long after you leave. In the name of attempting to hold the world together, you're really just trying to hold yourself together.

True personal growth is about transcending the part of you that is not okay and needs protection. This is done by constantly remembering that you are the one inside that notices the voice talking. That is the way out. The one inside who is aware that you are always talking to yourself about yourself is always silent. It is a doorway to the depths of your being. To be aware that you are watching the voice talk is to stand on the threshold of a fantastic inner journey. If used properly, the same mental voice that has been a source of worry, distraction, and general neurosis can become the launching ground for true spiritual awakening. Come to know the one who watches the voice, and you will come to know one of the great mysteries of creation.