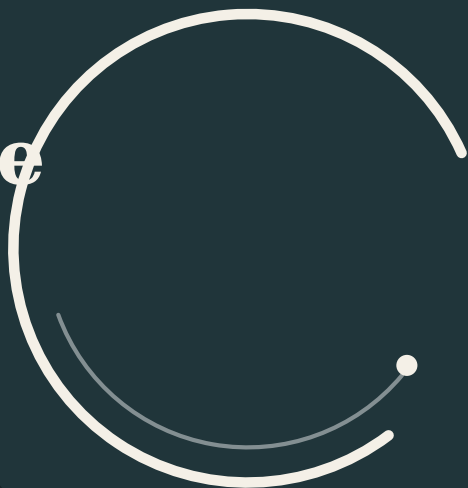


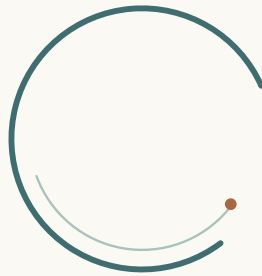
PROBING CONSCIOUSNESS

The Essence of Knowledge

An Introductory Edition



DHARMENDRA SINGH



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PROBINGCONSCIOUSNESS.COM

An invitation, not a conclusion

No authority.

No required belief.

No promised destination.

This introductory edition invites direct investigation into knowledge, identity and Consciousness. It does not ask the reader to accept a spiritual system, reject science, or adopt a predetermined conclusion.

Its guiding commitment is simple: no imposed religious doctrine or scientific bias. Religious, philosophical and scientific perspectives may illuminate a question, but none is permitted to close the inquiry on the reader's behalf.

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Why this introductory edition was developed

A book can be encountered in two very different ways. It can be explained from a distance, or it can open a door through which the reader begins to look for themselves.

This introductory edition was developed as such a doorway. It offers the central movement of *The Essence of Knowledge* in a shorter form so that a reader can meet the inquiry before deciding whether to enter the complete work.

It is not a summary of conclusions. The full book does not present a system that can be reduced to a list of beliefs. It proceeds slowly, examining knowledge, thought, identity, perception, the knower and Consciousness. A shorter edition must therefore preserve the movement of investigation, not merely announce where that investigation might lead.

I have also written it for those who may be cautious around spiritual or philosophical language. Caution is welcome here. No religious doctrine is imposed, and science is neither rejected nor made into another unquestionable authority. Each has a legitimate field of inquiry. Neither should prevent us from looking directly at experience.

You are not asked to agree with me. You are invited to notice what is happening, distinguish what is known from what is assumed, and remain honest where the answer is uncertain.

The purpose is not to give you another description of yourself. It is to ask whether you can discover what you are directly.

The question behind all our answers

Human beings have accumulated an extraordinary body of knowledge. We can describe distant galaxies, examine the activity of the brain, preserve the histories of civilizations and place vast libraries inside a device held in the hand.

Yet beneath this achievement there remains a simple question: What does it mean to know?

We say that we know our name, our history, our work, our relationships and our beliefs. We can describe ourselves in great detail. But description is not necessarily knowledge. A biography can contain thousands of accurate facts about a person without revealing what it is to be that person.

The question becomes more intimate when we ask: Who is the one who knows? We ordinarily answer with another description - my body, my mind, my brain, my personality, my memories. Each answer may contain something true. But each answer can also be observed, examined or thought about. Is the knower merely another known thing?

This book begins without deciding the answer. It moves from what we have learned toward what is directly present. It asks us to look at thought, sensation, identity and awareness without forcing experience into a religious or scientific conclusion.

What do I actually know - before I repeat what I
have been told?

The movement of the inquiry

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What this introductory book does

The arrows show a movement of attention, not a ladder of belief.

INFORMATION

What have I learned?



BELIEF & INTERPRETATION

What have I accepted?



DIRECT EXPERIENCE

What is actually present?



THE KNOWER

Who or what knows?



CONSCIOUSNESS

Can knowing itself be seen as an object?

The inquiry does not end in a doctrine. It returns the reader to direct investigation.

What do we mean by knowledge?

The word knowledge appears to be simple until we look closely. I know that Ottawa is the capital of Canada. I know how to open a door. I know the feeling of cold air. I know that I exist. These statements use the same verb, yet they do not describe the same kind of knowing.

Knowledge about something

Much of what we call knowledge is information. It is held in memory, communicated through language and checked against other information. This kind of knowledge makes education, technology, medicine and shared culture possible. Its value is immense.

But information is generally knowledge about something. The word water is not wet. A scientific account of pain is not the pain being felt. A description of love does not contain the lived movement of loving.

Knowledge by direct presence

Some things are known because they are immediately present. I do not need an argument to establish that a sensation is occurring. I may be mistaken about its cause, but not about the presence of experience itself. A thought may misdescribe the moment, yet the thought is present and known.

The distinction matters: what I think about experience is not identical to the experience appearing now.

The first distinction

The map and the territory

Concepts are maps. Good maps help us orient ourselves, communicate and act. Trouble begins when the map is mistaken for the territory. The label fear may help me identify a state, but the label does not contain the tightening in the chest, the quickened breath, the image of what might happen or the impulse to move away.

Similarly, the word self may refer to personality, memory, bodily identity and the personal story. These are meaningful features of human life. But the word does not settle what I am.

This inquiry uses lowercase self for the ordinary psychological identity - the person with a name, history, preferences and social existence. When the word Self appears with a capital S, it refers to Consciousness itself, not to a hidden or improved personality. The distinction is linguistic; whether it points to something true must be investigated.

A beginning experiment

Look at an object near you. Notice the name that arrives. Now allow the name to recede for a moment. Colour, shape and texture remain. The concept has not created the seeing; it has organized it.

Can I notice the difference between experience and
what thought says about experience?

Information, belief and knowing

A belief can be reasonable, carefully supported and useful. It can also be inherited, emotionally protected or false. The strength with which I hold a belief does not make it knowledge.

Much of daily life depends on justified trust. I cannot personally repeat every scientific experiment, verify every historical record or inspect every system on which society depends. I rely on testimony, institutions and expertise. That is not a failure of intelligence. It is part of living in a complex world.

But reliance becomes dangerous when I lose the ability to distinguish evidence from authority, or authority from truth. Religious claims can be protected from questioning by reverence. Scientific claims can be extended beyond the evidence by cultural prestige. In either case, the inquiry closes too soon.

The honesty of 'I don't know'

There are questions for which evidence is incomplete, interpretations differ, or the limits of investigation remain unclear. Saying 'I don't know' is not intellectual defeat. It prevents belief from disguising itself as knowledge.

This honesty is especially important when we speak about ultimate reality, the nature of Consciousness, or what happens after death. A tradition may propose an answer. A scientific model may explain measurable processes. Neither permits me to claim more certainty than the inquiry supports.

What survives examination?

Three questions for any claim

When a claim presents itself as knowledge, we can ask:

What is being claimed?

How is it known?

What would show that it is mistaken?

These questions do not belong exclusively to philosophy or science. They can be applied to personal identity. If I say, 'I am a failure,' what exactly is being claimed? Is a painful event being turned into a permanent identity? If I say, 'I am my body,' is this direct knowledge, a practical convention or an assumption that has never been examined?

Inquiry does not require me to distrust everything. It requires proportional confidence. Some matters are well established. Some are plausible. Some are beliefs. Some remain unknown. Confusion begins when these different degrees are treated as equal.

The discipline of this book is therefore not belief or disbelief. It is careful attention. We neither accept a conclusion because it is ancient nor reject it because it is ancient. We neither accept a statement because it sounds scientific nor reject science when its findings disturb us.

What do I believe most strongly about myself - and
how do I know it is true?

The limits of conceptual knowledge

Conceptual knowledge can describe an experience without becoming the experience. This limit does not make concepts useless. It reveals their proper place.

A musician may understand harmony intellectually and still need to hear the chord. A physician may know the mechanisms associated with grief and still meet grief as a living human reality. A person may read hundreds of books about meditation without ever becoming quiet enough to notice a single thought arise.

The mind reaches through representation

Thought works with distinctions, categories and symbols. It says this rather than that; before and after; cause and effect; observer and observed. This capacity is indispensable. But when thought tries to grasp the totality of experience, it divides what it is trying to understand.

The concept of Consciousness is therefore not Consciousness. The statement 'I am aware' may be true, but the words arrive as an object in awareness. If we merely repeat the statement, we possess another idea. The inquiry asks whether the fact to which it points can be noticed directly.

At this boundary, the mind often searches for a more impressive explanation. Yet more language may take us farther from the simplicity of what is present.

Where explanation falls silent

Consider a simple sound. Acoustics can describe vibration. Biology can describe structures involved in hearing. Neuroscience can examine activity associated with auditory processing. These accounts may be accurate and valuable. Still, the sound as heard is present before the listener assembles those explanations.

This does not prove that Consciousness is independent of the brain. It also does not permit experience to be dismissed because a physical account is available. The relationship between experience and its measurable conditions is a serious question. It should remain a question until the evidence warrants more.

Not anti-science; not scientism

Scientific inquiry is among humanity's most powerful ways of examining the measurable world. Scientific bias appears when a method designed for particular kinds of evidence is treated as if it has already answered every philosophical question. Religious imposition appears when revelation or tradition is treated as proof for everyone.

This work stands between those closures. It welcomes evidence, argument and tradition while returning repeatedly to first-person investigation.

A boundary in explanation is not permission to invent an answer. It is an invitation to look more carefully.

Turning toward experience

There comes a point when knowledge about experience is no longer enough. The inquiry must become immediate.

Hear a sound. Before saying 'voice,' 'traffic,' 'bird' or 'wind,' there is hearing. Feel the body. Before saying 'comfortable' or 'uncomfortable,' there is sensation. Notice a thought. Before deciding whether it is wise or foolish, the thought has appeared and is known.

The label follows the event. This is not a condemnation of thought. It is an observation of sequence. Experience is present before interpretation organizes it.

The ordinary doorway

Direct inquiry does not require an extraordinary state. It can begin while washing dishes, waiting at a light, speaking with someone, feeling irritation or sitting alone. The material of investigation is not hidden from us. It is the texture of this moment.

The difficulty is that we usually attend to the content of experience while overlooking the fact that it is known. We are absorbed in the thought, the sound, the memory or the emotion. Knowing is so constant that it escapes notice.

Without trying to change this moment, what is here
before I describe it?

A direct experiment

Take three unhurried minutes

Sit as you are. Do not try to become peaceful. Let the body be comfortable enough that attention need not struggle with it.

First, notice sound. Do not search for silence. Let sounds arrive and disappear. Notice that hearing does not need to hold them.

Next, notice sensation. Pressure, warmth, movement, ease or unease may be present. Allow each sensation to be exactly as it is for one moment.

Now notice thought. Do not prevent it and do not follow it deliberately. A word, picture, memory or judgment may appear. Whatever appears is known.

Finally, ask quietly: What is aware of this? If the mind answers 'me,' 'my brain,' 'Consciousness' or 'the witness,' notice that the answer is also a thought being known.

Do not replace the question with a preferred answer. Remain with the fact of knowing. Nothing dramatic is required.

The turning within is not a retreat from life. It is the movement from second-hand explanation to direct observation.

The knower and the known

Experience appears to have a familiar structure: there is something known, an act of knowing and someone who knows. The structure seems obvious. The inquiry begins by asking whether the knower can be found.

Look at a tree, a cup or your hand. The object is seen. Close your eyes and notice an image of it. The image is known. Notice a sensation in the body. The sensation is known. Notice the thought 'I am doing this.' That thought is also known.

Looking for the observer

Is the observer located behind the eyes? That location is itself an impression - perhaps pressure, orientation or an imagined point - and it is known. Is the observer a voice in the head? The voice comes and goes, and it too is heard or noticed.

Every candidate offered as the knower seems to become something known: body, sensation, image, thought, memory, attention. This does not prove that there is no knower. It reveals that the knower may not be discoverable in the same way as an object.

Can the one who knows be placed before me as
something known?

The witness - and a necessary caution

Some contemplative traditions use the word witness for the knowing presence in which experience appears. The word can be helpful because it loosens identification with every passing thought and emotion.

But it can also create a subtle division: a detached witness standing apart from life, watching experience from a protected inner distance. Then the old subject-object structure remains. It has merely been spiritualized.

Is there a boundary?

In immediate seeing, can a line be found where seeing ends and the seen begins? We can distinguish eye, nervous system and object conceptually. But within the field of visual experience itself, where exactly is the border between awareness and colour?

The question does not ask us to deny bodies, physical distance or practical individuality. It asks whether experience contains the separate observer we ordinarily assume.

Non-dual understanding proposes the absence of two independently existing realities - a knower inside and a known world outside. That is a philosophical and contemplative proposal, not a conclusion to impose.

The word witness may open the inquiry. It must not become the final hiding place of the separate self.

The question of the self

The ordinary self is not an illusion in the sense of being useless or nonexistent. A person has a body, history, responsibilities, relationships and a distinctive way of moving through the world. The question is whether this functional identity is the whole of what we are.

I say, 'my body,' 'my thoughts,' 'my memories' and 'my life.' Language places the 'I' as owner. Yet when I look, the I often appears as another thought, a felt centre or a remembered story.

The person we construct

Memory connects events into continuity. Thought interprets those events. Emotion gives them weight. Other people reflect an identity back to us. Together these form the psychological self - necessary for functioning, vulnerable to praise and blame, and continually changing.

If a memory fades, I still say I exist. If a belief changes, I do not feel that existence has ended. If the body changes with age, the simple sense of being remains, though everything used to describe it may differ.

What, then, is continuous? We should not answer too quickly. Continuity might be explained through biological and psychological processes. It might also lead the inquiry toward the ever-present fact of awareness. The honest investigation must consider both without forcing either.

Self is not an improved self

Spiritual language sometimes suggests that a flawed personal self must become a pure, higher or enlightened self. This can turn inquiry into another project of self-improvement.

In this work, Self does not mean a superior personality hidden beneath the ordinary one. Capital-S Self refers to Consciousness itself - that by which personality, thought, memory, sensation and world are known.

This terminology comes from a contemplative lineage, but the reader is not asked to accept its conclusion. The useful question is immediate: are the changing features of the person aware, or are they appearances that are known?

Removing mistaken identity

To say 'I am not merely this thought' does not require suppressing thought. To say 'I am not reducible to this emotion' does not deny emotion. Inquiry can loosen identification while allowing the full human experience to remain.

The practical self continues. It answers its name, keeps appointments, cares for others and accepts responsibility. What may change is the assumption that this functional pattern is a separate, permanent centre standing outside the movement of life.

What remains when I do not reach for a description
of myself?

Consciousness and the light of knowing

Whatever appears in experience is known. A sound is known. A sensation is known. A thought is known. Even confusion is known as confusion. We may disagree about the nature or source of this knowing, but its presence cannot be separated from experience.

Consciousness is often spoken of as though it were a thing we possess: my consciousness. Yet anything possessed should be available in some way to the possessor. Can Consciousness be placed before us as an object?

Self-illuminating presence

We need light to see an object, perception to register it and attention to notice it. But do we need another awareness to reveal awareness? If we did, a third awareness would be required to reveal the second, and the explanation would never end.

Some traditions therefore describe Consciousness as self-illuminating. The phrase does not mean that it literally shines. It means that knowing is not established by something outside knowing.

This may be conceptually puzzling because thought is accustomed to turning everything into an object. Consciousness is not easily grasped because it may never appear as one more item within experience.

Am I unaware until thought announces that
awareness is present?

A boundary we should not cross carelessly

From the immediate fact of awareness, it is tempting to leap toward a metaphysical conclusion: Consciousness is universal, independent of the brain, or the substance of reality. These possibilities have been explored by contemplative traditions and philosophers. They remain serious questions.

But direct awareness of experience does not, by itself, prove every claim made about Consciousness. Scientific findings about brain and experience also do not automatically settle the philosophical nature of awareness. Integrity requires us to distinguish what is directly evident from what is inferred.

The open edge of inquiry

What is evident now? Experience is present. Its contents change. Knowing accompanies whatever is experienced. A separate knower is difficult to locate as an object. Beyond these observations, different explanations become possible.

The full inquiry does not stop here. It examines the apparent division between subject and object, the meaning of non-duality, the relationship between Self and Consciousness, and what these questions may change in ordinary life.

The deepest question is not answered by choosing the most comforting explanation. It asks us to remain honest at the edge of what can be known.

Not another belief to defend

An inquiry into knowledge has little value if it merely gives the mind a new position. The living question is how understanding meets work, relationship, fear, conflict, love and uncertainty.

When anger appears, can it be felt before the story around it becomes absolute? When criticism hurts, can I notice the identity being defended? When desire promises completion, can I observe the structure: I am here, fulfilment is there, and the next achievement will finally make me whole?

Observation does not require passivity. Harm may need to be opposed. A relationship may need a boundary. Illness may require treatment. Injustice may require action. Direct inquiry does not erase practical intelligence or human responsibility.

Ordinary life as the field

The investigation continues while speaking with a partner, caring for a parent, feeling lonely, making a mistake or watching the body age. These moments reveal identification more clearly than an abstract discussion often can.

What changes is not necessarily what appears. Understanding may change the relationship to what appears. Thought remains thought. Emotion remains emotion. The person continues to function. But experience need not be continually organized around the defence of an unquestioned separate centre.

A moment without seeking

A closing investigation

For a few minutes, stop trying to improve this moment. Do not make yourself peaceful. Do not meditate correctly. Do not search for awareness.

Simply notice what is here: a sound, a sensation, a thought, perhaps an emotion, perhaps nothing remarkable.

Ask: Is anything missing from this exact moment before thought tells me what should be here?

Then notice the movement toward the next moment. It may promise relief, achievement, recognition, certainty or spiritual completion. Do not condemn the movement. See it.

Ask: Who is the one who needs the next moment to be different?

If an answer appears, it is known. If silence appears, it is known. If uncertainty appears, it is known.

Do not answer from memory. Look.

The purpose is not to produce an unusual state. It is to notice whether the search for completion is built upon an identity that has never been carefully examined.

Where the full book begins

This introductory edition has opened the central questions. The complete edition of The Essence of Knowledge allows them to unfold slowly, challenge one another and enter more difficult territory.

In the complete book

The inquiry begins with dissatisfaction and the search for completion. It examines the birth of the separate self, thought and memory, the difference between experience and interpretation, the seer and the seen, the witness, the turning within, doership and surrender, non-dual understanding, fearlessness, happiness and the return to ordinary life.

It does not promise that the reader will reach a predetermined realization. It asks whether what we call knowledge can survive honest first-person investigation.

The book ends. The inquiry does not.

The complete edition can be obtained through:

ProbingConsciousness.com

There you will also find related books, essays, conversations, guided inquiries and other expressions of the same movement.

Dharmendra Singh

Dharmendra Singh is a writer and independent investigator whose work centres on Consciousness, human dignity, self-understanding and freedom from fear and imposed authority.

For more than four decades, his writing has returned to a small number of enduring questions: What am I? What does it mean to know? How does identification shape fear and suffering? Can the nature of experience be investigated directly rather than accepted through belief?

He is the creator of Probing Consciousness, a body of books, inquiries and educational work grounded in first-person investigation. His approach does not ask readers to follow him as an authority or accept the conclusions of a religious, spiritual, philosophical or scientific system.

Traditions and research may enter the conversation where they clarify what is being examined. The final responsibility remains with the reader: to look, question and discover what can honestly be known.

No authority.

No required belief.

No promised destination.

Learn more at ProbingConsciousness.com

Before you close this book

There is one question that no author, tradition, philosophy or scientific model can answer on your behalf.

What am I, before I tell myself what I am?

Stay with the question for a moment. Do not reach immediately for your name, history, body, mind, beliefs or the language of this book.

If an answer appears, notice that it is known. If no answer appears, notice that not-knowing is also present.

Perhaps the value of the question is not that the mind finally possesses an answer. Perhaps it reveals the quiet fact of knowing that was present before the question arose and remains when the words fall silent.

Look.

What does it mean to know?

We have accumulated extraordinary knowledge about the world while rarely examining the one who claims to know it.

The Essence of Knowledge begins with a distinction between information, belief and direct experience. It then turns toward the knower, the ordinary self and the ever-present fact of Consciousness.

This introductory edition offers a clear and substantial doorway into the complete work. It imposes no religious doctrine and no scientific bias. It asks only that the reader look.



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