

‘After lunch on the fourth day I wandered off into the woods to do some lying-down meditation and hopefully fall asleep and make all this internal torment go away. I hiked into the small canyon and found a perfect flat spot of clean sand in the middle of a dry creek bed; I lay down and closed my eyes. I began by following my breath and then tried one of Ajahn’s body scans he had taught us the day before. I was drifting off into a deep and spacious meditative zone when my mind (and body) were overtaken by what I can only describe as a vision. It was similar to a spectacularly vivid dream at night, in which you wake up screaming or sweating, or at the very least are freaked out for days afterward because of the intense “reality” of it.....

I find myself transported back in time to 1973 to the cold, tiled, downstairs hallway just outside the bedroom of my childhood home in Connecticut, which we called the Clock Tower in honor of the large clock adorning its Georgian facade. I’m four or five years old. Grendel, our vicious governess, is there. Her eyes are full of rage; venom is in her voice. She’s wearing a blue nightgown — torn, frayed, and full of holes. Instead of skin underneath that threadbare cloth I see tiny points of light and what appears to be smoke spilling through the tatters. The hallway is dark and hazy. Miss Hedy screams at me, in some kind of apoplectic state, to pick up my clothes. She is ranting in a demonic German tongue. I can’t understand what she’s saying; it’s just pure, garbled rage. It’s as if all the words have gotten sliced into incoherent pieces on the rusty blade of her tongue and have shattered all around me. The sound is making my rib cage rattle. Suddenly, she lunges at me and grabs my arm to show me what an incredible mess I’ve created. She yanks me into the pile of clothes, trying to push my face in it like she did with my cat, Snowy, that time he peed in my bedroom closet. But my arm breaks off in her hand. More frustrated than shocked, she throws it aside, blood spewing, like a cheap mop handle. Then she grabs my ear, which comes off in her grasp, peeled from my head with a slurping sound, and she tosses it aside like a grapefruit rind. Then she goes for my hair, tufts of it filling her sweaty palms as if she’s pulling dead weeds. She attacks my other limbs, each time filled with a more virulent rage, until I’m reduced to a ragged, limbless stump. I’m just wobbling there — torn and bloody, utterly useless to her. She expands and bloats, turning from a fuming red to a dark purple, bursting the seams of her tattered nightgown. Suddenly, she explodes. And just like that, she vaporizes into a puff of pale blue smoke. She is cast into the Outer Void, beyond this world, and I am jarred awake.

I sat up in the creek bed, feeling the earth beneath me as if for the very first time; the air was crackling with the electricity of liberation. I was filled with a sensation of absolute release. A profound wave of freedom and complete relief overtook me — my body bright with the weight of sunlight. I grabbed onto a couple of large rocks to keep my body from drifting up into the canopy of trees. I found myself sobbing into the riverbed, the tears of a thousand lifetimes. I was convinced I’d just experienced an exorcism of sorts — something dark and metallic, horrific and sticky, had been ejected from my body, and along with it my story of abuse and abandonment, neglect and disconnection. That narrative of illusions burned up in the roiling blue smoke with Miss Hedy. And I realized in both body and mind that in some sense I’d been reborn. I was definitely *not* my story.

Back to that primal human question: Who am I? Am I this list of experiences, these memories of my childhood and young adulthood? Am I these feelings and emotions associated with those memories? Am I my opinions and beliefs? Am I even this flesh-and-bone body that will grow old and die? These are all examples of what words can describe.....

What I discovered is that *I am that which makes language possible* — that which makes stories possible, that which makes joy, hope, and love possible; writing and poetry possible; that which makes all emotion and compassion possible. This is who we really are, who *you* really are — an open, poetic, living, breathing language-body of possibility! ...’