

Chapter 8: Consciousness—Beyond the Mask

"Catch your life... it's running away from you."

— Nita Ro

A professor once posed a question that stayed with me long after the conversation had ended.

"If a person can observe their thoughts, who is doing the observing?"

At first, I found the question fascinating. It carried a certain philosophical elegance to it, inviting the mind to consider the relationship between thought and awareness.

The more I reflected upon it; however, the more another question began to emerge.

What if a person can't observe their thoughts? Who, then, is doing the observing?

Perhaps an even more important question follows:

What happens when no observation is taking place at all?

For many people, thoughts are not observed. They are believed. Emotions are not examined. They are obeyed. Conclusions are not questioned.... They are defended. And before long, an entire life can be shaped by patterns that have never been consciously observed.

This is where consciousness becomes more than an interesting philosophical discussion. It becomes essential.

People speak of consciousness as though it is a destination already reached. I am not convinced.

If consciousness is as present as we believe, why do so many of our patterns remain hidden from us?

The answer may not be what most people expect. Many patterns do not survive because they are hidden. They survive because they are useful. At some point, the pattern solved a problem. It provided protection. Created some certainty. Reduced some discomfort.... Delivered approval—preserved belonging... Or... helped a person survive a version of life they weren't yet equipped to navigate.

The challenge is that what once protected us can eventually begin restricting us. And what once served us can quietly begin serving itself.

Patterns aren't merely hidden. Patterns are often employed.

So, what happens when a pattern outlives the purpose that created it?

At first, nothing... Life continues. The pattern remains in place, performing the task it was designed to perform.

The problem begins when circumstances change, but the pattern doesn't.

A child learns silence to avoid conflict. An adult continues silencing themselves long after the danger has disappeared.