

3. Examine the nature of awareness. If everything is just a passing memory and you can't really grasp anything, as in a dream, you have to wonder: Who says so? Who knows this? Who is aware of this? Who is reading these words right now? We know the answer to these questions: "Me! I'm listening to these words. I'm aware of the fact that everything is like a dream, I'm a little skeptical of that, but I'm aware that that's what I just read." Nothing could be more obvious than this. But have you really examined it? Let me propose another meditation experiment, another experiment in awareness. You could even try it right now. Put the book aside and find yourself, the me mentioned in the last paragraph. Find a yourself, find a definite, concrete, identifiable somebody there within your awareness. . . . I think you will find this is not so easy to do. You can find plenty of thoughts and emotions, sensations, opinions, sense experiences, but I think it's very difficult to find an I. If suddenly, for no reason, your mind were to become very, very quiet and there were only a sound, maybe the sound of silence or the sound of wind or water or machinery, and simply a feeling of presence, and there is nobody complaining and there are no stories going on in your mind, there is only awareness—an experience you may well have in a meditation retreat or maybe any time, in nature, or in spontaneous repose—in that moment there isn't anybody there to congratulate you for it. And as soon as there seems to be someone to notice or congratulate, the experience passes and the inner dialogue resumes. If you should experience a moment like this, it will become instantly clear to you that awareness is something very profound and extremely mysterious and that we really don't know where it comes from or what it is at all. It's powerful, vivid, and very alive, but we don't know what it is. We have a word in our language—consciousness—but no one knows what this word means. It's a word that simply covers over our confusion. To recognize this fact and train in it is the burden of this slogan. Recent brain science corroborates this point. There is, in fact, no brain area, no combination of areas, that corresponds to our sense of "me." Though the sense of "me" does seem to occur subjectively, it is not an experience and does not exist in a location. It emerges somehow from thoughts and emotions that can be seen in brain scans, but it itself cannot be seen or measured. It both exists and does not exist at the same time.

The next slogan: **4. Don't get stuck on peace.** What Don't get stuck on peace means is, more or less, forget the last two slogans! When you practice See everything as a dream and Examine the nature of awareness, life gets rather dreamy and abstract, as you will have noticed if you have actually been working with them (or even just reading about them). The practice is pleasant but also makes you feel perhaps a bit removed from your life. You begin to focus on the uncanny feeling of time passing, and time begins to seem strange and profound. And it begins to dawn on you that your usual sense of self is some kind of mental habit that might not have any actual basis. You

notice how clunky and crude many of your self-thoughts actually are. If all of this is not disturbing to you, and especially if you are a Buddhist or are Buddhist friendly, you might be thinking, "This is great! Everything is empty; everything is a dream, just like the slogan says. There isn't any person in there really, there is just awareness itself, so I'm free of all my self-worries and I can enjoy life a lot more." What the slogan Don't get stuck on peace is saying is that when you start thinking like that, you are caught all over again. You are mistaken. You have merely exchanged one set of confused concepts for another. This train of thought will not be sustainable. It will cause you trouble. The point of Don't get stuck on peace is: don't get excited about the empty, dream-like nature of everything, because now you've conceptualized it and made it into something, an idea, and soon that idea is going to trip you up. And forget about how great it is to be nobody, because that's just another excuse. It is too easy to make these slogans into belief systems. The important thing is to hold them lightly and don't think you have understood them. They are just devices. Take them with a grain of salt. They may not really be true at all.