

Awakenings VII

Adam, Buddha, Paul, Hakuin, Koestler, Hofmann, Clarke, Kubrick, McKenna, and The Paleoanthropologists



SALIENCE
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*Sudden awakening can come gradually,
almost imperceptibly,
or in a sudden, life-altering flash.*

Perplexity AI: (excerpt)

Examples of Sudden Awakening in Literature and Stories

Sudden awakening—moments of instant realization or enlightenment—appear across religious, philosophical, and literary traditions. These experiences are often transformative, marking a dramatic shift in perception or understanding. Here are several notable examples from both spiritual texts and secular literature:

Buddhist and Zen Stories

- **Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku:** Hakuin, a renowned Japanese Zen teacher, described a vivid moment of sudden awakening. After being struck on the head by a villager wielding a broom while he was lost in meditation, he lost consciousness. Upon awakening, he found that the koans he had struggled with were suddenly resolved. He described this as a complete penetration of understanding, accompanied by uncontrollable laughter and joy.

- Koun Yamada: A modern Zen teacher, Yamada experienced sudden enlightenment after meditating on a koan during his commute. One night, the realization struck him "as though by lightning," dissolving the boundaries between self and world and filling him with overwhelming delight.
- Buddhist Sutras: The Shurangama Sutra describes sudden awakening as being jolted awake from a deep sleep by an external stimulus, leading to an immediate recognition of reality and the dissolution of the five skandhas (the components of personal identity).

Literary and Secular Examples

- Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis": Gabriel García Márquez recounted reading the first line of Kafka's story—where Gregor Samsa awakens as an insect—as a moment of literary awakening. The shock of Kafka's imaginative freedom inspired Márquez to start writing fiction, resetting his understanding of what literature could be.
- Arthur Koestler: In his memoir "The Invisible Writing", Koestler described a sudden mystical experience while imprisoned and facing execution. He felt a profound sense of peace and unity, where his sense of self dissolved completely, and reality appeared more vivid and real than ever before.
- Douglas Harding: Harding's "rebirthday" came while walking in the Himalayas, when he suddenly realized he had "no head"—an experience of seeing the world directly, without the usual sense of a separate self. This revelation brought him peace and a sense of awakening from the "sleep of ordinary life".
- John Wren-Lewis: After being poisoned in Thailand, Wren-Lewis awoke in a hospital with a radically altered sense of consciousness. He felt as if he was being continually recreated from a "radiant vast blackness," experiencing constant gratitude and a sense that everything was as it should be .

Classic and Modern Literature

- Annie Dillard: In her writing, Dillard often describes moments of sudden

wakefulness to the marvel of existence itself, likening them to "church bells ringing in the dark." These moments are marked by a profound gratitude for simply being alive and aware .

- J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings": The concept of eucatastrophe — a sudden joyous turn — can be seen in Frodo's journey, where moments of despair are abruptly transformed into hope and redemption .

Famous Names Awakened

The list of famous names in the subtitle above could be expanded greatly, given further research. The point is that transformational awakenings whether they be sudden or more gradual — awakenings to a universal and less self-centered consciousness — are commonplace, but in our times they are often repressed, avoided, intentionally ignored or forgotten. Albert Hofmann writes,

There are experiences that most of us are hesitant to speak about, because they do not conform to everyday reality and defy rational explanation. These are not particular external occurrences, but rather events of our inner lives, which are generally dismissed as figments of the imagination and barred from our memory.¹

It is evident that such experiences are a human universal, inherent, ready to be released from the depths of the conscious, unconscious, or even collective consciousness of the human species at a moment's notice. How and why and to whom they happen involves a wide spectrum of causes, external events and/or internal cogitations, random encounters, intentional practices and methods..., and these transforming experiences might even be more common, discussed and written about were people more generally informed about them and the benefits they can bring.

Adam in the Garden certainly had a sudden awakening, and in his case it appears to have been caused by a pharmacological agent. Not an apple, of course, but the story in *Genesis* appears to be a re-run of a far more ancient Siberian tale depicting a similar awakening featuring the consumption of a

"forbidden fruit", the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom. ²

The sudden awakenings of the Buddha and Paul on the Road to Damascus, as well as that of the Zen Master Hakuin are of course "literary" and "religious" — "mere" symbolic and allegorical stories as the skeptics would have it. William Braden, in his essay "LSD and the Press", ³ illustrates the point well:

I came across an interesting question to ask people who scoff at psychedelic mysticism. I had written a newspaper article on the subject, and next day I received a telephone call from a prominent psychiatrist who established his authority immediately by informing me that he had recently been quoted on LSD by *Time* magazine.

"I just thought I would tell you," he said, "that users of LSD do not have a mystical experience."

I resisted the temptation to ask how it had been up there on Mount Sinai; instead, it occurred to me to ask him: "Doctor, do you believe that anybody ever has a mystical experience?"

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean like Paul on the road to Damascus and all that. All of these saints we read about. Did they have mystical experiences?"

"Well . . . I'm sure they thought they did."

"But did they really?"

"No."

Arthur Koestler

Arthur Koestler's description of his sudden awakening, however, is one told by a notoriously skeptical intellectual and surely must be taken at face value, as must that of Albert Hofmann (see his account in *Awakenings* VI).

I must have stood there for some minutes, entranced, with a wordless

awareness that “this is perfect-perfect.”...Then I was floating on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. Then there was no river and no I. The I had ceased to exist ... when I say “the I had ceased to exist,” I refer to a concrete experience that is verbally as incommunicable as the feeling aroused by a piano concerto, yet just as real-only much more real. In fact its primary mark is the sensation that this state is more real than any other that has been experienced before.”⁴

As discussed previously, even a significant coterie of modern anthropologists seem fine with the idea of a sudden awakening *for the entire human species*, as long as it involved a mainstream-recognized scientific cause.

I will discuss the awakening scenarios of Clarke and Kubrick at some length below, but first McKenna, whose hypothesis resonated with many youngsters of the time, as did the 2001 movie. Kubrick's rendition might well have been one of the influences that got McKenna to speculating.

The Original Stoned Ape Hypothesis

Looking at the details of McKenna's hypothesis, it seems he is not really proposing a *revolutionary* sudden awakening but rather a long-term *evolutionary* change. He has very ancient tree-living hominids moving onto the drying African plains to follow herds of ruminants whose defecations hosted psychoactive mushrooms. These remote ancestors adopted a *diet* of psilocybe mushrooms over a long age, claims McKenna, and he attributes a doubling in size of the hominid brain to this diet. A *genetic mutation* was supposedly involved.⁵

Further results of a *psilocybe* diet were supposed to be improved vision, augmented sexual drive, the development of language, tool use, culture... It is not hard to understand the rejection by those who see little or no empirical support for these expansive claims! Still, McKenna could be credited with an early publication of the core idea, even if the rest is guesswork at best. And I will grant that all the research and publications that I was able to locate to

support my Awakening by Salience Amplification scenario had not yet been available in McKenna's time.

Kubrick's Version

The first part of Stanley Kubrick's immensely popular film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (The Dawn of Man), depicts "proto-humans" of rather primitive appearance and behavior. In Arthur C. Clarke's 1968 novel of the same title – the model for the Kubrick film – the advanced apes as described seem also not very "advanced". One might say that today's chimpanzees act rather more intelligently than the apes depicted in either the film or the book.

Nevertheless, it does seem obvious that these ape look-alikes are supposed to be our ancestors, and it is a safe assumption that both the film and novel were intended as more than mere "entertainment". Given the *bona fides* of the writers, it follows that they intended to pass on to their audience some of their ideas about the appearance of *H. sapiens*. The subsequent popularity of the film is also a clue that, whatever the writers were saying, the story resonated with perhaps only dimly-sensed truths or suspicions about mankind's social and cognitive evolution from his primitive ape ancestors.

Just for fun, if not for more serious contemplation, have a look at this edited film clip from the opening scene of *2001, The Dawn of Man*:



We see in the clip an *encounter* between what seem to be proto-human apes and a mysterious physical object, the *monolith*. But perhaps the immobile, seemingly inert object is a stand-in for something less easily depicted in a film than a sci-fi novel; perhaps the presence of the mysterious object is intended to represent an inspirational and awakening *experience* had first by the leader of the band, and its wonder subsequently communicated to the other members of the band.

Viewing just the film excerpt above would make this guess a little doubtful, but since Arthur C. Clarke was both a screen-writer and the author of the original sci-fi novel, we should explore the more detailed narratives in the book. But let us also explore the possibility that the stories in both the film and the novel imply that human predecessors experienced a *trigger event* which propelled them into civilization, an event of some sort that provided a catalyst that overcame the stasis that these proto-humans were living in, a stalled state of social and cognitive evolution that would not ordinarily be overcome through everyday living.

In the opening scene of the film, we deduce that the depicted apes were vegetarians, and hadn't the means, inspiration, nor the tools to dispatch and eat the animals shown competing with them for scarce plants to eat. We also see that there is a rivalry going on with a competing group of apes to control the water-hole, obviously a rare resource in the barren wilderness shown.

Enter the monolith and the first touch of awakening, first by the leader, then the entire band. The next day, the leader returns to the scene of the crime (forbidden fruit), and contemplates for awhile his let-down from the previous day's excitement. Then, suddenly, the idea of using a large leg-bone as a tool occurs to him, and smashing a skeletal skull he understands how he and the band might augment their diet with fresh meat. I will venture one personal observation: if it were I smashing those bones, for sure — given my luck when performing violent actions — one of those rib bones would have flipped up and smacked me in the kisser. End of enlightenment for me...

Mr. Leader of the Band soon has his tribe enjoying fresh meat, and then using

the new tool as a weapon, dispatching the leader of the rival gang. Kubrick seems to be saying that the sudden awakening resulted in the first intra-species weapon-assisted murder, and of course a subsequent arms and technology race leading eventually to the the next scene, in space, on the space station. One might have hoped for a more peaceful, enlightened start on the pathway to civilization, no?

Kubrick & Clarke's scenario for the film is rather flawed, and after viewing the opening several times while editing it for brevity, I came away with the conclusion that it was quite absurd in many ways. But... Hollywood, even by Kubrick, can follow almost any script deemed of profitable interest to an audience.

The Novel vs. *2001*

Compared to the film's screenplay, the original sci-fi novel by Arthur C. Clarke presents things a little differently, and much more completely than could be done in the film. Here are some of the relevant observations about the advanced apes as presented in the novel and film:

- The location is a sparse, desiccated grassland region in S. Africa. Clarke mentions "veldt" – a term specifically referring to the open grasslands in southern Africa, but we are also told we are on the equator, an error on the part of Arthur C. Clarke! *2001* depicts the same type of habitat.
- The time is the Pleistocene, but no indication is mentioned of where, between 2.5 million and 12,000 years ago.
- The proto-humans are in danger of extinction, lacking even rudimentary tools or weapons. Nothing explicitly indicates pending extinction in *2001*, but the depicted landscape and resources do seem incapable of supporting large-brain hominids scratching a very meager diet from the earth.
- They were foragers, lacking the wherewithall to kill and eat animals larger than a small rodent: Clarke: "Yet the thousands of tons of succulent meat [antelopes etc.] roaming over the savanna and through the bush was not

only beyond their reach; it was beyond their imagination."

- The proto-humans are gravely lacking in cognitive abilities, "Moon-Watcher [the leader] had no real remembrance of the past, he could not compare one time with another." They lacked even emotions, and surely did not have any symbolic language abilities. They are, however, uniquely *bipedal*. (In the film it seems they are *barely* bipedal, often knuckle walking or sitting).
- In the novel: There seems to be some mostly symbolic feud with a neighboring group over access to water. In the film we see something a bit more serious than "symbolic", leading to murder.
- Altruistic behavior was not yet a characteristic of the proto-men: Clarke: "Down there in the darkness old White Hair and his family were fighting and dying, [an attack by a leopard] and the thought that he might help in some way never crossed Moon-Watcher's mind. The harsh logic of survival ruled out such fancies." In the film there is a leopard attack, (not shown in the clip) but its significance for the plot of the film is not clear.
- In the novel: The monolith was at first "metallic" yet transparent: "It was made of some completely transparent material". But "It was the clank of metal upon stone" that was heard upon its arrival.
- Moon-Watcher ..."arrived at a brilliant explanation. It was a rock, of course, and it must have grown during the night. There were many plants that did this – white, pulpy things shaped like pebbles".
- Hoping that it was a mushroom of some sort, "A few licks and attempted nibbles quickly disillusioned him. There was no nourishment here."
- Moon-Watcher then, "like a sensible man-ape, [...] continued on his way to the river and forgot all about the crystalline monolith," unlike in the movie, where the band spends quite some time freaking out around the (opaque) monolith.
- Then, beginning at dusk, the monolith began to vibrate, a sound that "pulsed out from the crystal, and hypnotized all who came within its spell." The crystalline object began a transformation, an "astonishing display of pyrotechnics". 2001's monolith seems to have simply disappeared after the

daylight encounter with the apes.

- Not the immobile and apparently inert monolith of the film, Arthur Clarke's original monolith exerted a complete hypnotizing control over the proto-humans: "They could never guess that their minds were being probed, their bodies mapped, their reactions studied, their potentials evaluated." One-by-one they were involuntarily subjected to the intentions of the monolith, which was to *program* the proto-humans in the use of tools.
- The programming of the most promising subjects continues during another night: "Some of the man-apes it ignored completely, as if it was concentrating on the most promising subjects. One of them was Moon-Watcher; once again he felt inquisitive tendrils creeping down the unused byways of his brain. And presently, he began to see visions... to Moon-Watcher they were completely real."
- "Moon-Watcher saw [hallucinated] a peaceful family group, differing in only one respect from the scenes he knew. The male, female, and two infants that had mysteriously appeared before him were gorged and replete, with sleek and glossy pelts — and this was a condition of life that Moon-Watcher had never imagined."
- This vision, repeated night after night, inspired Moon-Watcher's dissatisfaction and soon he then discovered, as a remedy to his anguish, how to use a stone to kill a wart-hog.
- But even then, "it was longer still before Moon-Watcher, despite all that he had been shown, really understood that he need never be hungry again."

Thus begins the transition from proto-man into *Homo sapiens*. The story seems to be saying that the monolith *programmed* the proto-humans to use tools, and it was tool use that marked the beginning of the ape-to-man social and/or cognitive evolution. And both the novel and the film are surely suggesting that the appearance of the monolith, and whatever effects it had on the apes, was indeed a trigger event. However, there is the strong implication that the change elicited in the novel was a *forced* one, not a

transformational experience that allowed proto-man to put two-and-two together and by his own volition start to think like a *sapiens*, creatively, symbolically.

Arthur C. Clarke:

Perhaps, given time, they might by their own efforts have come to the awesome and brilliant concept of using natural weapons as artificial tools. But the odds were all against them, and even now there were endless opportunities for failure in the ages that lay ahead. The man-apes had been given their first chance. There would be no second one; the future was, very literally, in their own hands.

Clearly the scene depicted is mythical, imaginary, rather than based closely on paleo-anthropological findings. But of course, the book was written long before many of the recent and astounding findings. For example, [Machiavellian Intelligence](#), features an important paper that fairly well eliminates the hypothesis that the discovery of tool use could have been a trigger event. There was on the contrary, a long and gradual discovery and invention of ever more advanced tools used by our ancestors, long before the period at which we might have made a sudden cognitive and social advance, a trigger event. The paper even dismisses the idea that tool invention and use was a factor in the rapid enlargement of the proto-human brain.

Of great importance, however, and not at all evident in the film, is the parallel to the use of a psychoactive substance: "...he began to see visions".

The overall message in the book is that the experience is described in certain ways that might suggest it is psychological, an awakening to certain aspects of consciousness that were unique and new, but that the awakening is forced. There seems to be no aspect of the awakening that would include choices: the script implies that proto-man was programmed to make the advance, exactly like one would program a computer.

In the film clip from *2001: A Space Odyssey* the monolith apparently does little except mystify the apes, and then its absence the next day leads the ape

leader to vaguely remember that something happened. Almost in disgust, or despair, he picks up a leg bone, and smashes a few other bones. The message is apparently that the mysterious appearance catalyzes the advent of tool use, but that the ape leader does indeed put two and two together volitionally, through reflection. But disappointingly for the myth, and in contradiction to the paleoanthropological scenario (Awakenings III), that tool use led immediately to murder of a con-specific.

Default Consciousness

I am forced to ask again a question I posed in Awakenings II:

Might not such a view provide important insights concerning the psychological and cognitive *default makeup* of human consciousness itself? Would an awakening for *H. protosapiens* imply that all subsequent generations were automatically in an “awakened state”, or need we consider the more likely possibility that the default state of consciousness of *H. sapiens* is even today much closer to that of *H. protosapiens* than we would like to believe, an essentially amoral, survival-and-reproduction, greed-is-good consciousness, at best minimally endowed with such *human* characteristics as empathy, altruism, artistic creativity, perception of fairness and justice, recognition of aesthetic standards and value, and all the rest of what we see as uniquely human?

Predicament

Modern man is in much the same state as proto-man, but with the stultifying disadvantage that immense technology controlled by the [Power Elite](#)⁶ and world-wide daily overdoses of propaganda impinging on his consciousness lock him into a stasis even more difficult to overcome than was proto-man's 200,000 year slumber.

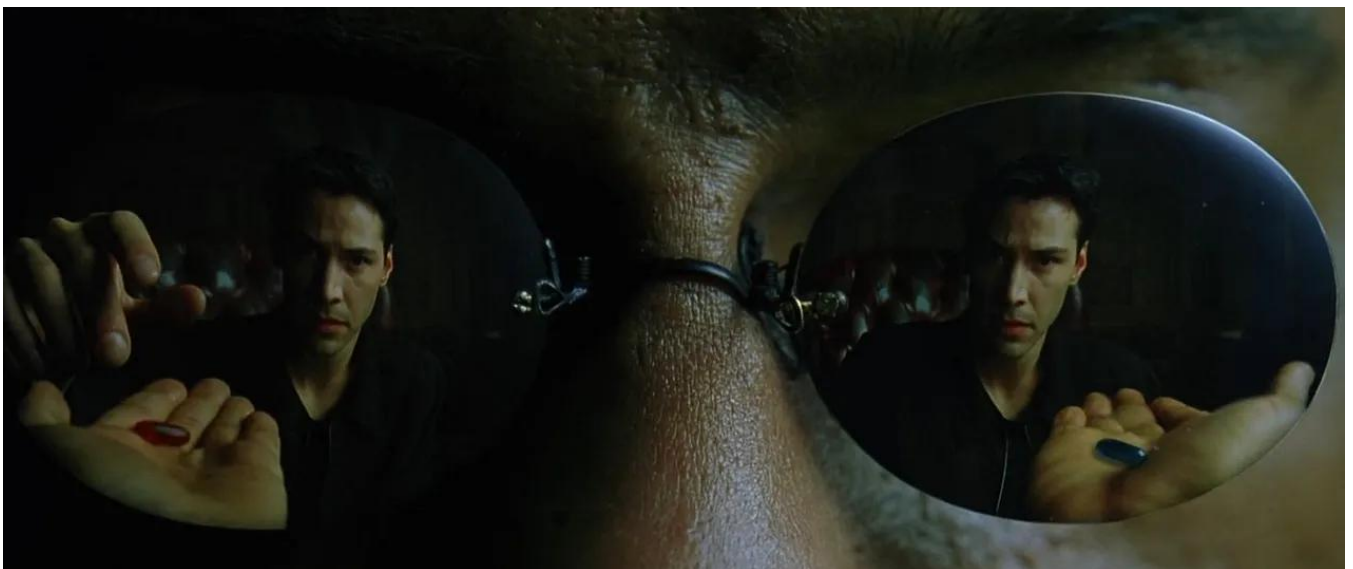
Much like being imprisoned in THE MATRIX:

In the movie *The Matrix*, humans are imprisoned in a virtual world by a powerful artificial intelligence system in a dystopian future. What they take

to be reality is actually a computer program that has been jacked into their brains to keep them in a comatose state. They live their whole lives in that virtual simulation, without any way of knowing that what they appear to be experiencing with their senses is actually made of AI-generated code.

Life in our current society is very much the same. The difference is that instead of AI, it's psychopathic oligarchs who are keeping us asleep in the Matrix. And instead of code, it's narrative. — [Caitlin Johnstone](#)

The RED PILL = Salience Amplification, by whatever means possible.



Challenges

PETER WEBSTER • 25 MARCH 2022

**Our business is to wake up,
we have to find ways in which to detect the whole of reality
in the one illusory part which our self-centered consciousness
permits us to see.**

— Aldous Huxley

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- 1 LSD - My Problem Child, 1980 McGraw-Hill Book Company
 - 2 John Marco Allegro was a British philologist and Dead Sea Scrolls scholar who, in his 1970 book *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, advanced one of the most controversial interpretations of the biblical story of the Tree of Knowledge. Allegro

argued that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden was not a literal fruit, but rather a metaphor for a psychoactive mushroom—specifically, *Amanita muscaria*—and that the origins of Christianity and other ancient religions were rooted in fertility cults that used visionary plants in their rituals. —Perplexity AI

3 reprinted in *Psychedelics*, Aaronson and Osmond

4 From *The Invisible Writing* by Arthur Koestler (Macmillan)

5 A complication arises for that claim. Random mutations happen to an individual, who then transmits the change to subsequent offspring and thus generations. And if it were a random mutation, it couldn't by definition happen simultaneously to members of a whole band of ruminant-following apes. It is also a dodgy assumption that psilocybin could have caused *the same, or any mutation at all* amongst the members of such a band. Research during the 60's psychedelic "panic" — when all sorts of scare stories were being advanced by moral entrepreneurs — failed repeatedly to prove any genetic damage being caused by psychedelic chemicals. A thought, however: If a "mutation" was the catalyst bringing on the awakening, as both McKenna and some anthropologists hypothesize, then modern man would have a genome that reflects this — we would all be descendants exclusively of the mutated individual(s) and exhibit a far more restricted diversity of genetic traits than is evident from modern research. If instead the awakening was catalyzed by psychoactive use by a core group, spreading then socially (rather than genetically) and rapidly to a great diversity of individuals and tribes we would thus be descended from a far larger group and exhibit a correspondingly greater diversity of genetic traits, as appears to be the case. Perhaps the experts would disagree with me here, I am not really qualified to advance a solid hypothesis. Genetics can be tricky!]

6  *Giants: The Global Power Elite* [Peter Phillips](#) Seven Stories Press 2018