

True Consciousness

Sanford Baran: It's wonderful to be together again; what an incredible opportunity to bring something of depth and substance to focus! Actually, such opportunity has always been with us here on earth, but maybe the difference now, in this moment, is that there's a greater conscious awareness of what is ours to do, coupled with an appreciation of the rich and abundant provision, generously made available, enabling all manner of creative opportunities. From my perspective the potential for positive creative action has never been greater.

Speaking from the vantage point from above, we declare through our living, "Behold I make all things new." This quite naturally occurs as we allow the freshness and vibrancy of spirit to flow freely through our capacities of body, mind and heart. A key component of this machinery is our built-in capacity of consciousness.

Consciousness is an absolutely remarkable piece of divine technology. Just think of all the things it does. First of all, it provides the wherewithal of self-awareness, enabling our core understanding of who we are, and from whence we come. Consciousness also gives us the ability to perceive and understand the world we live in, and it houses our cognitive capabilities. Consciousness provides instrumentation to make sense of what is moving both internally and externally around us, giving the ability to process and express feelings. And most importantly, consciousness plays the key role of transforming spiritual pulsations and currents emanating from undimensional source into divinely useful forms like thoughts, words, actions and emotions. In other words, it provides the means for us to express the tone, in service to the larger whole.

So it's vital that our *state* of consciousness be in good working condition and well maintained. Fortunately, this is something within our control... and *how* we go about doing it makes all the difference.

Often the approach is to jump in there roughshod and start to micromanage... basically ego trying to boss our consciousness into submission. "Okay time to clean house. This thought goes; that one stays; Get rid of that one..." Yeah, good luck with that!

But there's a much kinder and gentler way. Like all divine technologies, consciousness is a masterpiece of design and knows exactly what it's doing. It really does know how to do its job to the extent that it's in good working condition. Where we come in, as custodians of our earthly facilities, is to keep it in tip-top shape. If we notice that it's not doing so well, is stuck in a rut, is endlessly churning out stale old stuff, it's our job to nurse and nudge our consciousness

back to a state of well-being. This rightly occurs through a process of immersion, immersion in the healing power of love—naturally and gently letting the current of love flow freely through us—and welcoming it to permeate every fiber and cell of our capacities. By just doing that, the magic of love’s healing power takes care of the rest.

There’s no mistaking the quality and nature of a vibrant, flourishing consciousness aligned with Being. It’s spacious, roomy and expansive. It’s supple and malleable—effortlessly adapting to what is needed in the moment. It’s uncluttered, airy, and filled with light. And it has the most wonderful and inviting atmosphere. It’s the most perfect workplace and design studio where all manner of creative possibilities can emerge, born of the spirit. And the best thing is that it’s here, right here, wherever we happen to be.

I want to switch gears a bit and point out the obvious that there is a hardware component to consciousness, carefully crafted and designed by spirit. We call this organ the brain, which varies in composition, complexity and architecture across the sprawling kingdom of animals. And even though the brain is just a part of the story of consciousness, the brain itself is an extraordinary piece of divine engineering.

Just last week it was announced that after a decade of work scientists have unveiled the wiring diagram and architecture of the brain of a fruit fly in remarkable detail. Now, a fruit fly’s brain is smaller than a poppy seed, but it packs tremendous complexity into that tiny space. Over 140,000 neurons are joined together by more than 490 feet of wiring! And within this microscopic space are 54 billion synapses or connections between these neurons. Presently this is as complex a brain that science has been able to map down to the level of the individual neurons, but there is a strong sensing that analyzing the circuitry in the fruit fly brain could reveal principles that apply to other species, including humans, whose brains have 86 billion neurons.

Rather than delving too deeply into the scientific details, I’d like to share an animation created by the research team. This 3D rendering visualizes their findings, offering a glimpse into the amazing world of divine engineering. ([Click to watch the animation](#))

It’s funny, but the other day I was pretty annoyed by a fly buzzing around in my car that kept landing on me while I was driving. I actually now have a newborn appreciation for these amazing yet, at times, irritating creatures.

Watching the animation I was fascinated by how this vast network of neurons in the brain of a fly are so artistically and compactly wired together, almost like a beautiful piece of sculpture. It turns out that even on the tiniest of scales, this pattern of extensive

interconnectedness is an absolutely critical component as it relates to cognition, thought and ultimately to that of consciousness.

So I did a little experiment. Here is a graphic of the fly brain published in the same research article. ([Click here to view it](#)) I fed this into the artificial intelligence computer program called *Claude* along with these instructions: “This is the wiring map of the brain of a fruit fly. Can you write a haiku about it.” And here’s what Claude came up with, including its explanation of why it produced what it did.

Here's a haiku inspired by this stunning image of the fruit fly brain's wiring map:

*Cosmic garden blooms
Neon neurons intertwine
A universe minds*

This haiku attempts to capture the visual complexity and beauty of the image:

1. ‘Cosmic garden blooms’ evokes the colorful, organic appearance of the neural network, resembling an otherworldly garden.
2. ‘Neon neurons intertwine’ describes the vibrant, interconnected nature of the neural pathways.
3. ‘A universe minds’ suggests how this tiny fly brain contains a vast, complex world of connections - a universe of cognition in miniature.

The imagery aims to convey both the intricacy of the neural map and the awe-inspiring nature of how such complexity arises in a small creature's brain.

A surprisingly creative response! And to test that this wasn’t just some canned answer that it looked up somewhere on the Internet I reset the system and asked it to come up with another haiku based on this same picture of the fly’s brain. Here’s what Claude came up with the second time.

The image shows an intricate, colorful visualization of a fruit fly's brain connectome - a map of neural connections. It's a stunning representation of the complexity packed into such a tiny creature's nervous system. Here's a haiku inspired by this fascinating image:

*Vibrant neural web
Microscopic universe
Fly's mind unfurled, vast*

This haiku aims to capture the visual beauty, intricate complexity, and surprising scale of information contained in the fruit fly's small but sophisticated brain, as revealed by this detailed connectome map.

Different from the first version and also surprisingly insightful and informative as well as its creative use of language. End of experiment.

This is all very interesting, but what's actually going on here? Can machines really think? Do they have consciousness? And is any of this useful as far as what we're here to do right now, spiritually speaking? These are good questions, and it turns out I've been casually playing around in this space for quite a while. This has included taking courses, watching lots of videos on the subject, and doing quite a bit of hands-on experimentation, mainly to explore what the creative potential is here. Now, as someone with a computer and programming background it makes perfect sense that I've been drawn to the developments in this space, but I realize it might not be on everyone else's radar or be your particular cup of tea. My hunch however is that in the not-too-distant future, this whole area of AI will become a ubiquitous part of our daily lives, like the cell phone and the Internet.

Understandably, there is significant apprehension about the potential for widespread misuse of such a powerful technology, particularly in the hands of human nature. There *are* ongoing efforts to put some guardrails in place. Whether this can effectively be accomplished remains to be seen. But at this point the cat has basically been let out of the bag. So, from my perspective, it's best to try to understand the various implications and, importantly, assess if and how spirit can creatively put it to use in service to the larger whole.

In this regard it's important to clear up a common misconception: Computer applications like Claude, which are a class of artificial intelligent technologies called *Large Language Models* (or *LLMs* for short), absolutely do not have consciousness. They are powerful tools capable of simulating language, mimicking conversations, and generating text, but they lack the awareness, self-reflection, subjective experience, and emotional understanding that characterize genuine consciousness. To be clear, LLMs only simulate intelligent behavior but are not really doing what we think of as thinking. For example, if an LLM generates text about being "excited," it's not actually experiencing excitement. It is producing the word "excited" because that word statistically fits the context, not because of any internal feeling or understanding on the part of the machine.

Nevertheless, the capabilities of current AI tools are undeniably impressive and useful. The real question is, are they useful to spirit?

As was considered earlier in the hour, we possess the unique gift of consciousness. This remarkable faculty serves as our primary conduit for spiritual expression, allowing the undimensional essences of our being to manifest in the tangible world. And while artificial intelligence and related technologies represent an extraordinary technological achievement, it's crucial to recognize that they all lack *true consciousness*. We neither expect nor desire them to replicate the profound depth of spirit-aligned awareness and thinking. The goal isn't to replace our innate consciousness with artificial constructs, but rather to harness these advanced capabilities as an extension of our own awareness and talents. In this symbiosis, AI acts as an amplifier, an extender, enhancing and expanding the reach of our conscious expression.

Despite my initial skepticism, hands-on experience with these tools has shown me how they can be useful. And I've been amazed at how quickly the field continues to blossom and evolve.

The way I see it is that these bold new advances become not a substitute for the expression of spirit, but rather a powerful tool under the control of spirit that, when wielded thoughtfully and responsibly, may amplify the depth and influence of what we express into our worlds.

So, this has been a rather unconventional service this morning. It's some food for thought, or maybe better described as some grist for the mill, and definitely not the final word. It certainly will be interesting to see how all this plays out in the days to come.

Following Comments...

Sanford: It's no coincidence that AI technology's fundamental architecture mirrors key elements of biological brains, which would explain why it all seems to work so well. Our primary focus however is on its spiritual usefulness. This of course depends entirely on the mindset and consciousness of those using it, which emphasizes why it's so critical that we keep our own consciousness fit and at the top of its game. As this becomes our priority, we're well positioned to use everything that comes our way to creative advantage.

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Pre-Service Music*1. Plant Life*

Composed by Jave Hughes & Kanako Yamamoto and performed by poetri

2. To Music

Caroline Shaw & Sō Percussion

3. excerpt from the film C'mon C'mon (Original Motion Picture Score)

Bryce Dessner & Aaron Dessner

Concluding Music*Hallelujah*

Composed by Leonard Cohen and performed by Chris Botti