

The terms are abstract and metaphysical, but the awareness itself is so vividly concrete that for the first few months afterwards I was often impelled to put my hand up to the back of my head, feeling for all the world as if the doctors had opened my skull to the dark infinity of space — not just the space of astronomers, which is simply another special perspective, but the infinite aliveness that is the inside story of all possible universes, which Harding calls “a dark which is the brilliance of a thousand suns.” With hindsight, I’m quite surprised I didn’t recall Harding immediately, but in 1983 it had been more than 20 years since I’d read or heard about him, and I was preoccupied with adjusting to this astonishing new perspective on life.

When I started to write my story for publication, the thought did briefly flash across my mind, “Could this be what that strange chap Harding meant all those years ago about having no head?” But his books weren’t readily available in Australia, and not knowing if he was still alive, I didn’t pursue the subject. Then, in 1989, he read an account of my experience somewhere and, out of the blue, sent me a copy of the just-published *Little Book of Life and Death* for comment. My first response was an apology for not getting his point until life forced it on me the hard way!

Like Ram Dass, I found this book a delight. It raised directly the very issue about which I’d been puzzling for six years: if the sense of alien human individuality is just an illusion, are there less drastic ways of unlearning it than playing dice with death? Harding contends there are, and asks in his own distinctively humorous fashion: why wait for and risk an NDE, when you can at any time have a “present death experience (PDE)” simply by following the advice of the medieval Chinese sage Huang Po and observing things as they are, instead of believing what you’ve always been told about them?

Harding then reiterates his classic “no head” exercise: if you actually look at your experience, you’ll find you’ve already undergone one of the most reliable processes for ensuring death of the self, namely, decapitation; because in actual experience there’s nothing above your shirtfront but the world presenting itself. You think your head is there as the center of your consciousness only because you’ve been conditioned to identify yourself with what you see in mirrors or photographs. Take this experience seriously as the basis for living, he urges, and you already have enlightenment; you don’t need to find eternity, because you’ve never really been without it, and never could be.