

CHARLES T. TART, PH.D.

AUTHOR OF WAKING UP

# OPEN MIND, DISCRIMINATING MIND

*Reflections on Human Possibilities*



OPEN MIND,  
DISCRIMINATING MIND

ALSO BY CHARLES T. TART

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Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential

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CHARLES T. TART



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# Introduction

In 1987 my friend Jo Ann Norris, a founder and director of the Rim Institute, Phoenix's main growth center, called me to tell me about an experience she knew I would appreciate:

One day Jo Ann's four-year-old grandson Tabor lost a toy in her house. Jo Ann and Tabor looked all over for it. Finally they saw it on the living room rug.

As Jo Ann said, "There it is," and started toward it, Tabor suddenly shouted, "Stop, Grandma! It might be an illusion!"

Taken aback, Jo Ann stopped. Then she asked Tabor how you can tell whether something is an illusion or real. "You pick it up and shake it," replied Tabor. "If it's still there after you shake it, it's real, not an illusion."

"Where did you learn about real things and illusions?" asked Jo Ann.

"In school."

"In school?" asked Jo Ann, looking puzzled. Tabor was only four, he didn't go to school.

"Not regular school," Tabor explained, "the school in my head."

Grown-ups are so slow to get things sometimes.

This is an excellent allegory of the human situation. Many of the things we desire and reach for in life are illusions. We need to learn how to "pick up and shake" our ideas and attitudes, our concepts and desires, so that we can distinguish the real from the unreal. We can develop this inner wisdom by going to the school "in our heads."

## **Closed Mind/Open Mind**

When we think we already know everything important we stop learning. When we stop learning we begin dying. I call this "the closed mind." How can you identify a closed mind? The closed mind:

- is insecure; the danger of new knowledge upsetting its balance outweighs the joy of exercising curiosity
- reinforces and guards the borders of the everyday world
- takes either no risks or foolish ones
- has forgotten the joy of using its powers, of testing its limits
- flees from doubt in rigidity or fanatic belief, or poisons itself with useless doubts
- tries to control the universe too much from fear of mystery, and so loses the marvel of existence
- gives too much respect and power to authority and is emotionally and inappropriately dependent on or rebellious to authority
- wants approval from others rather than genuine feedback
- gives too much power to the approval or disapproval of others
- pursues pleasure at the expense of truth and avoids pain at the expense of truth
- has too much distrust of emotions as sources of information
- fails to respect and maintain its body as a source of information and joy

To learn how to discriminate truth from illusion—indeed to experience the joy of life—we have to dare and refresh an open mind. The open mind:

- is curious
- wonders what's beyond the everyday world
- enjoys using its powers
- enjoys testing its limits
- respects authority but doesn't take it too seriously or hesitate to test it when it seems wrong
- appreciates the feedback it gets from sharing its understanding and experience with others, and takes that feedback as more information that may or may not help its understanding
- recognizes its emotions as valid sources of information about reality and itself, as well as possible sources of confusion
- recognizes its body as a further source of information and joy, and respects and maintains it well
- recognizes its limits as current limits rather than absolutes
- is willing to take calculated risks
- cherishes and grows from its doubts
- always takes its beliefs as working tools, not absolutes
- appreciates living in a marvelous and mysterious universe