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QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Is there something outside of death?
or beyond death or different from death?
Is there something unaffected by death?
am I deluding myself with these questions?

QUESTIONS

How do you search for answers that don't exist?
Are some mysteries unsolvable?

QUESTIONS

What does it feel like to grasp at smoke?

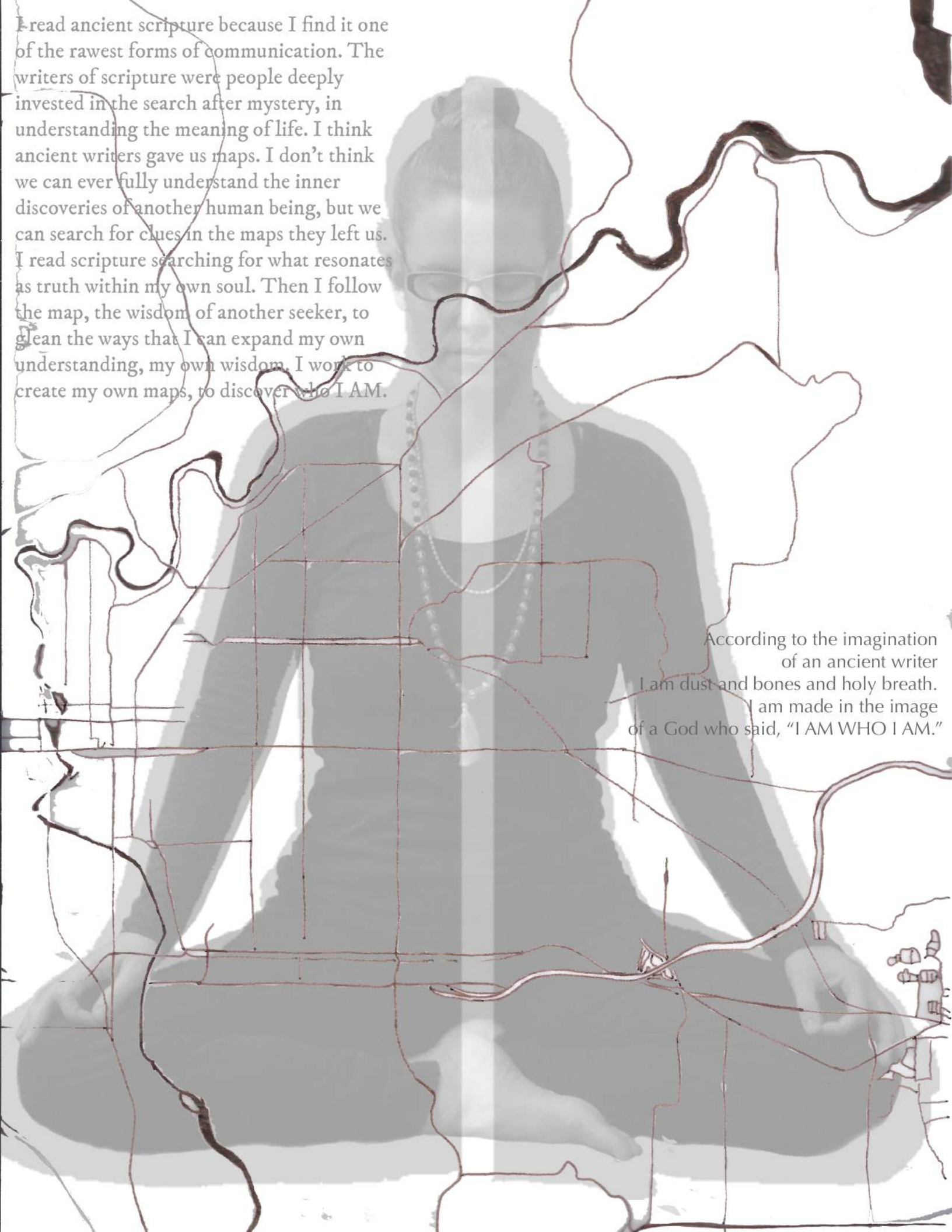
QUESTIONS

is it worth the effort?

QUESTIONS

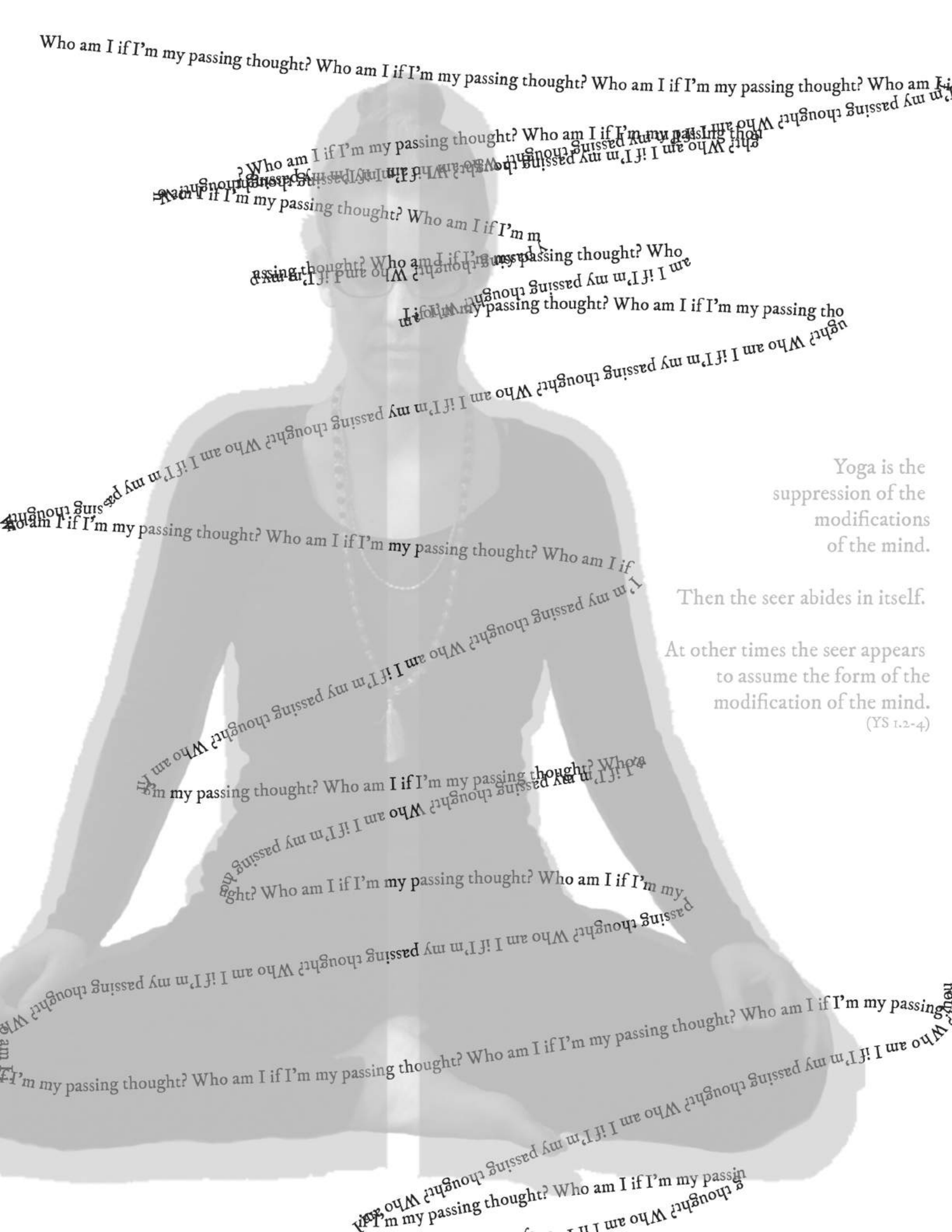
QUESTIONS

glimpses of thought



I read ancient scripture because I find it one of the rawest forms of communication. The writers of scripture were people deeply invested in the search after mystery, in understanding the meaning of life. I think ancient writers gave us maps. I don't think we can ever fully understand the inner discoveries of another human being, but we can search for clues in the maps they left us. I read scripture searching for what resonates as truth within my own soul. Then I follow the map, the wisdom of another seeker, to glean the ways that I can expand my own understanding, my own wisdom. I work to create my own maps, to discover who I AM.

According to the imagination
of an ancient writer
I am dust and bones and holy breath.
I am made in the image
of a God who said, "I AM WHO I AM."




Yoga is the
suppression of the
modifications
of the mind.

Then the seer abides in itself.

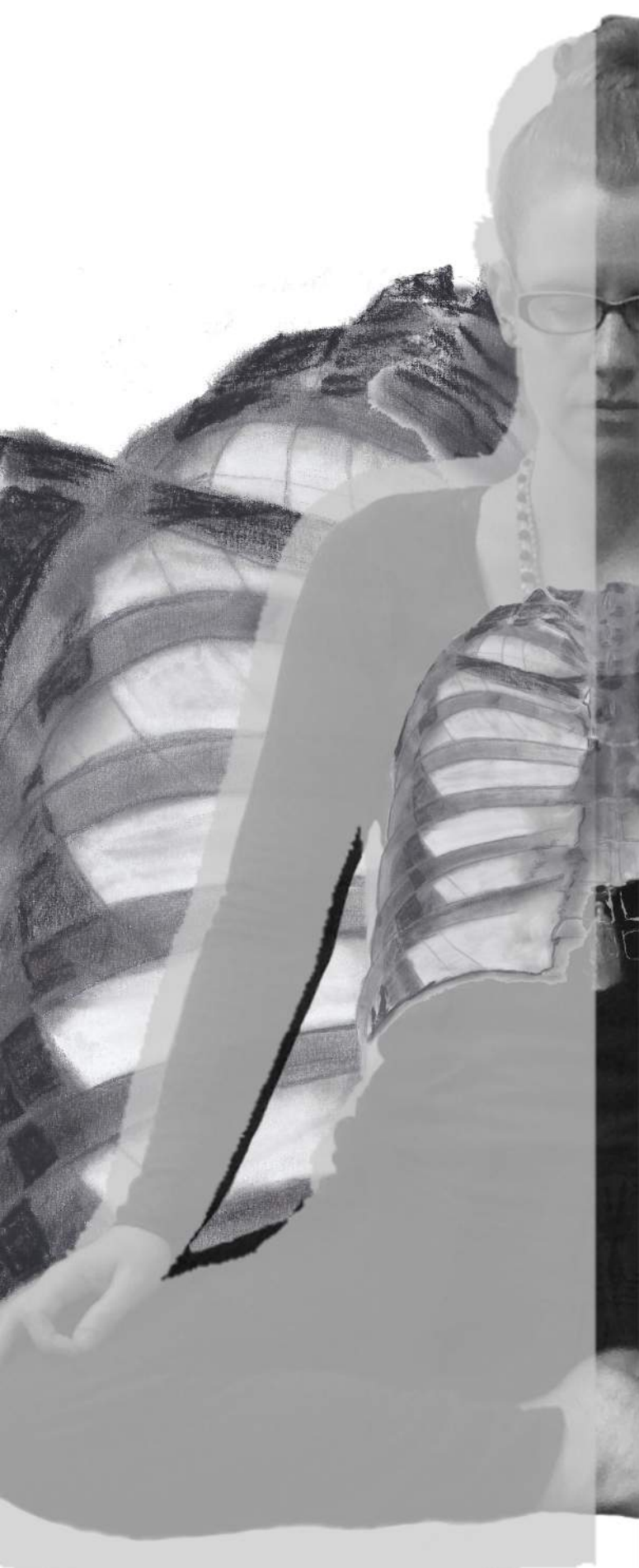
At other times the seer appears
to assume the form of the
modification of the mind.

(YS 1.2-4)



Who
am I
when
I am
the
ditches
I've
dug
in my
brain?

Absolutely every action
(no matter how large or small)
creates an impression in the mind.
The more times I move the same way,
or make the same decision,
or take the same action,
or think the same thought,
or say the same words,
or emotionally react the same way,
the deeper the imprint becomes.
Until finally I have a huge ditch.
Until I have a trough of mental impressions.
Until I've given away choice through the repetition of my choices.



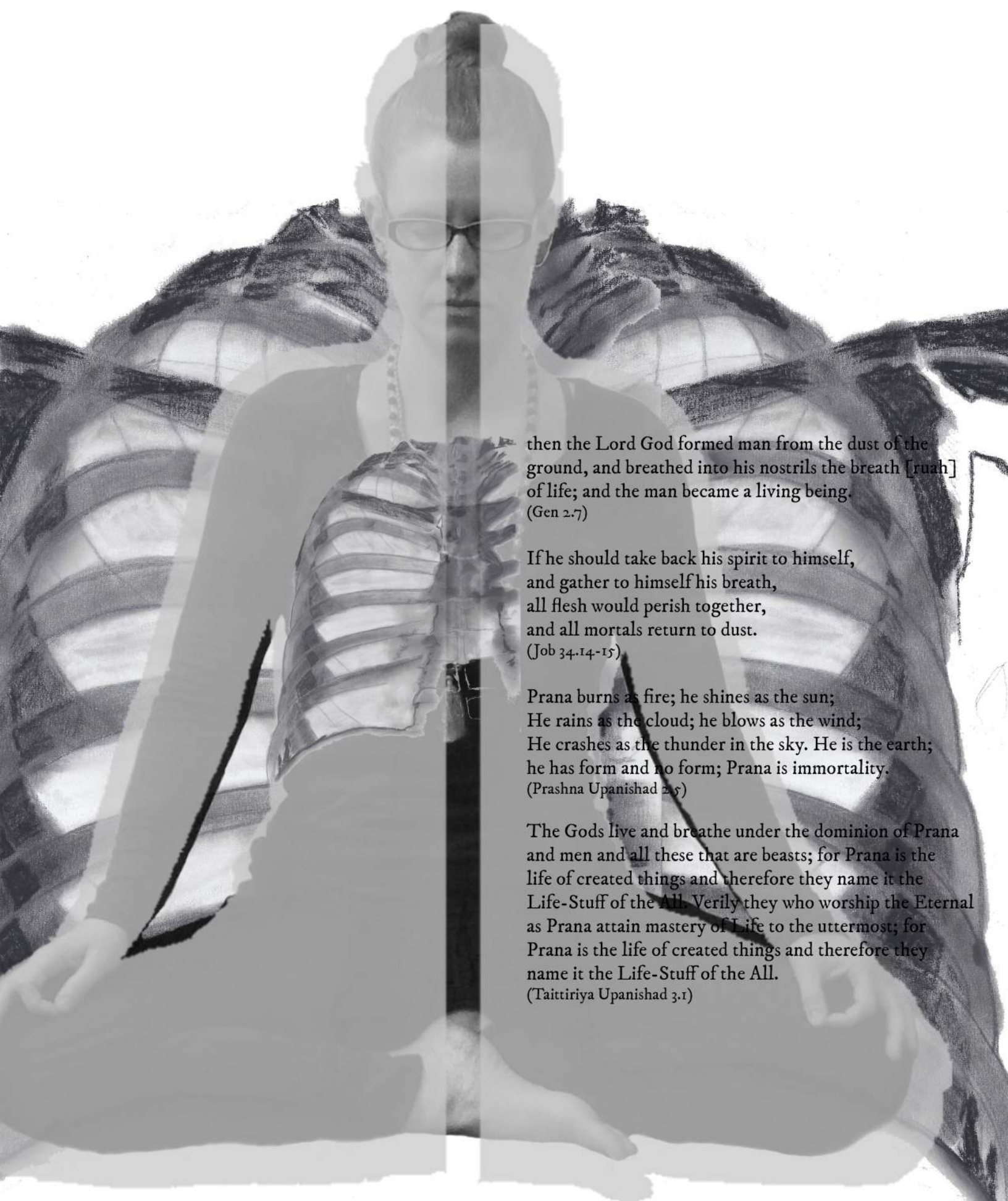
It is said that the prana rides on the breath.
And that life is measured, not through time,
but in the number of breaths we take.
It's the animating force.
But, we humans aren't special.
Dogs breathe. Trees breathe.
I'm sure the universe in some sort or fashion
breathes.

How is prana spirit?

If breath is the animating force,
does that mean that it's the cause?
In Genesis, God breathed into the dirt and
we had life. This is the imagination at its best.
Ruah—holy breath—can turn dust into life.

Who am I? This is the question.
But it seems that I can't answer
without first exploring the breath.
For it's plainly obvious that I am no one
without breath. Is it my breath that carries on?
That moves out into the world, into the lungs
of something or someone else. Through breath
life is constantly being transferred and moved,
part of the constant change of everything else.
Maybe there's only so much breath and we all
have to share it (this is true isn't it?) and so
there can only be so much life. And hence death.

Am I my breath?



then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [ruah] of life; and the man became a living being.
(Gen 2.7)

If he should take back his spirit to himself,
and gather to himself his breath,
all flesh would perish together,
and all mortals return to dust.
(Job 34.14-15)

Prana burns as fire; he shines as the sun;
He rains as the cloud; he blows as the wind;
He crashes as the thunder in the sky. He is the earth;
he has form and no form; Prana is immortality.
(Prashna Upanishad 2.5)

The Gods live and breathe under the dominion of Prana
and men and all these that are beasts; for Prana is the
life of created things and therefore they name it the
Life-Stuff of the All. Verily they who worship the Eternal
as Prana attain mastery of Life to the uttermost; for
Prana is the life of created things and therefore they
name it the Life-Stuff of the All.
(Taittiriya Upanishad 3.1)

Notes from my practice journal
(from the rare experiences of deep meditation):

10/15/13 In the cave of the heart I went right into the Light.
I couldn't go through my offerings, I was just pulled
into the Light. I was fully there. Distractions came,
but they didn't disturb my mind.

In sitting, there was no physical distraction. I could feel the
presence of effort and even muscle ache, but
only in idea, no sensation. My body was held. It was light.
It was ease. Almost floating. But grounded.

I had a difficult time coming out of meditation.
I tried, but then had to stay.

11/5/13 Something electric happened. In the cave of the heart,
my sankalpa came to me and I started visualizing
myself being emptied and I started repeating "I am open"
and then I said "I am open for the energy of God."
Almost instantly a chill started in my root and shot up my
body, or overtook my body, and my eyes burst open and I felt...
oddly I didn't feel anything really. Just this sense of wildness.

Who was I in that deep meditative state?

I realize now, I wasn't thinking about it.

I didn't wonder that question.

I simply felt. I felt the safety of water all around me.

I was enclosed in something.

I didn't wonder.

This realization...
the realization that there is a place
where I don't wonder - don't fret -
over the question of who I am
came over a year after the experience.

The Self cannot be pierced by weapons or burned by fire;
water cannot wet it, nor can the wind dry it.
The Self cannot be pierced or burned, made wet or dry.
It is everlasting and infinite,
standing on the motionless foundations of eternity.
The Self is unmanifested, beyond all thought, beyond all change.
Knowing this, you should not grieve.
(Bhagavad Gita 2-23-25)

Well, I certainly don't want to be pierced by weapons or burned by fire.
I know that my body (I) would feel the pain and suffer the consequences.
I know that I (my body) can be wet by water and dried by wind.
What is the "Self" that cannot?

I wish this everlasting, infinite Self,
would show itself.

SHOW YOURSELF

SHOW YOURSELF

I scream toward the
motionless foundations of eternity.

Again, I remember being in meditation so deep I couldn't rouse myself out of it.
But in that moment, I wasn't pondering the foundations of eternity.
I simply was.
Is that where the seers come up with this stuff?
They didn't wonder in their states of unity who they were and so they figured they were without definition?
Without time or change?

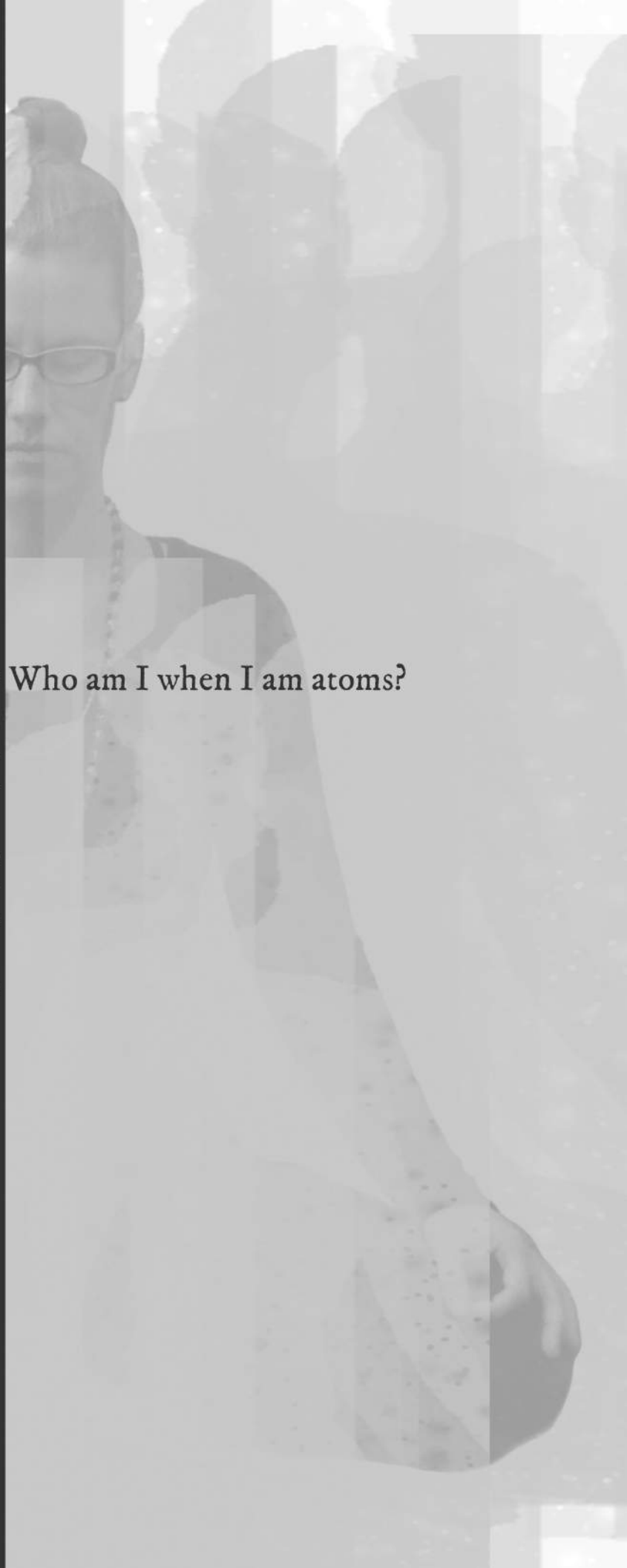
Am I that?

The atoms that I am made of
will survive my death,
but they will never again
form the exact combination that is me.

Of course, the atoms that I am made of now,
aren't the same atoms I was made of at birth.
And won't be the same atoms I am made of at death.

There is no exact combination that is me.

Who am I when I am atoms?



All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. (ecc 2.20)

Clinging to life is instinctive and self-perpetuating, even for the wise. (ys 2.9)

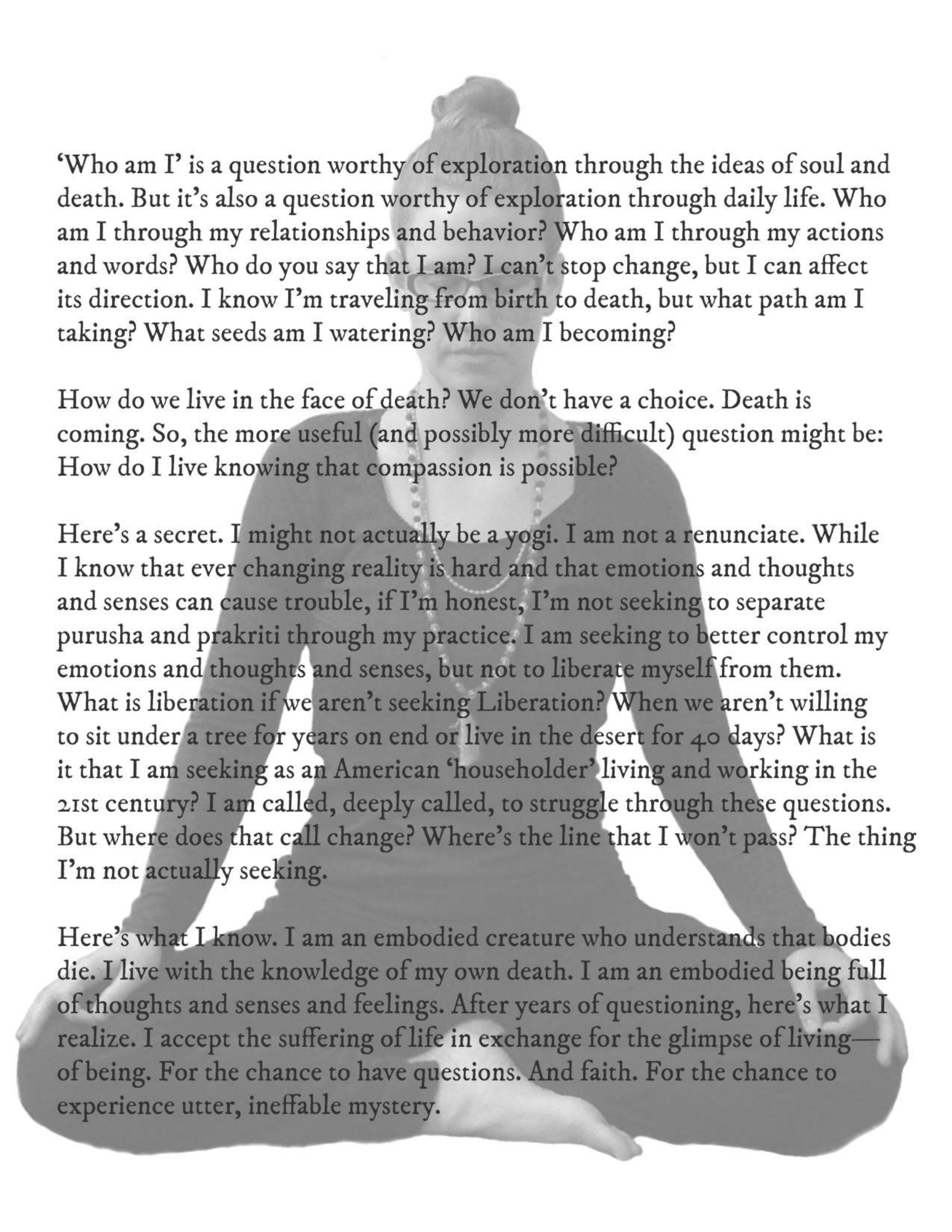
All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. (ecc 2.20)

I held my cousin's ashes when we picked them up from the crematorium.

Her partner remarked that they weren't as fine as she expected. They had a lot of texture.

Who am I when I am ashes





'Who am I' is a question worthy of exploration through the ideas of soul and death. But it's also a question worthy of exploration through daily life. Who am I through my relationships and behavior? Who am I through my actions and words? Who do you say that I am? I can't stop change, but I can affect its direction. I know I'm traveling from birth to death, but what path am I taking? What seeds am I watering? Who am I becoming?

How do we live in the face of death? We don't have a choice. Death is coming. So, the more useful (and possibly more difficult) question might be: How do I live knowing that compassion is possible?

Here's a secret. I might not actually be a yogi. I am not a renunciate. While I know that ever changing reality is hard and that emotions and thoughts and senses can cause trouble, if I'm honest, I'm not seeking to separate purusha and prakriti through my practice. I am seeking to better control my emotions and thoughts and senses, but not to liberate myself from them. What is liberation if we aren't seeking Liberation? When we aren't willing to sit under a tree for years on end or live in the desert for 40 days? What is it that I am seeking as an American 'householder' living and working in the 21st century? I am called, deeply called, to struggle through these questions. But where does that call change? Where's the line that I won't pass? The thing I'm not actually seeking.

Here's what I know. I am an embodied creature who understands that bodies die. I live with the knowledge of my own death. I am an embodied being full of thoughts and senses and feelings. After years of questioning, here's what I realize. I accept the suffering of life in exchange for the glimpse of living—of being. For the chance to have questions. And faith. For the chance to experience utter, ineffable mystery.

I accept death.

and maybe that's liberation. or at least part of it.



Atman
Soul, Self

Purusha
Pure Awareness, Pure Consciousness

Drasta
Seer, Observer

Mystery
A secret, hidden, or inexplicable matter

Ineffable
Unutterable; too great for description in words

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