

“Read this book carefully and you will get more than a glimpse of eternity.” —DEEPAK CHOPRA



the
untethered soul

the journey beyond yourself

MICHAEL A. SINGER

“In the book, *The Untethered Soul*, Michael Singer takes you step-by-step through the process of Gyana, the Yoga of the Intellect, to the Source. Moreover, he does it with elegant simplicity. Read this book carefully and you will get more than a glimpse of eternity.”

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“This publication has released boundless joy for the hungry souls of the world.”

—**Ma Yoga Shakti Saraswati**, founder of Yogashakti International Mission, recipient of *Hinduism Today* ‘Hindu of the Year 2000’ award

“East is East and West is West, but Michael Singer bridges these two great traditions in a radiant treatise on how to succeed in life from our spiritual quest to our everyday tribulations. Freud said that life was composed of love and work. With great eloquence, wit, and compelling logic, Singer’s brilliant book completes this thought by showing them to be two poles of the same selfless devotion.”

—**Ray Kurzweil**, inventor, National Medal of Technology recipient and author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, *The Singularity is Near*, and other books

“This is a seminal book that quite frankly is in a class by itself. In a simple, yet paradoxically profound way, Michael Singer takes the reader on a journey that begins with consciousness tethered to the ego, and ends having taken us beyond our myopic, contained self-image to a state of inner freedom and liberation. Michael Singer’s book is a priceless gift to all who have futilely searched and yearned for a richer, more meaningful, creative life.”

—**Yogi Amrit Desai**, internationally recognized pioneer of modern yoga

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New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Publisher's Note

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A copublication of New Harbinger Publications and Noetic Books.

Distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books

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New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

5674 Shattuck Avenue Oakland, CA 94609

www.newharbinger.com

Acquired by Catharine Sutker

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Epub ISBN: 978-1-60882-049-8

The Library of Congress has cataloged the print edition as:

Singer, Michael A.

The untethered soul : the journey beyond yourself / Michael A. Singer.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-57224-537-2

ISBN-10: 1-57224-537-9

1. Consciousness. 2. Self. I. Title.

BF311.S5683 2007

153--dc22

2007028150

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acknowledgments

The seeds for this work were planted many years ago when Linda Bean was transcribing some of my lectures and encouraged me to write a book. She patiently labored through years of archived material until it was time for me to begin writing. Her commitment and dedication to this project are deeply appreciated.

Once I began writing, Karen Entner assisted me by organizing materials, making content suggestions, and maintaining the manuscript. We worked together to edit version after version until the flow of words brought a sense of peace to the heart, mind, and soul. Her dedication and heartfelt work are much appreciated and one of her lifelong dreams comes to fruition with the publication of this book.

introduction

“This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.” —William Shakespeare

Shakespeare’s age-honored words, spoken by Polonius to his son Laertes in Act I of *Hamlet*, sound so clear and unambiguous. They tell us that to maintain honest relations with others we must first be true to ourselves. Yet if Laertes were to be totally honest with himself, he would realize that his father may as well have told him to catch the wind. After all, to which “self” are we to be true? Is it the one that shows up when we’re in a bad mood, or the one that is present when we feel humbled by our mistakes? Is it the one who speaks from the dark recesses of the heart when we’re depressed or upset, or the one that appears during those fleeting moments when life seems so fanciful and light?

From these questions we see that the concept of “self” may turn out to be a bit more elusive than initially presumed. Perhaps if Laertes could have turned to traditional psychology, it would have shed some light on the subject. Freud (1927), the father of psychology, divided the psyche into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. He saw the id as our primal, animal nature; the superego as the judgment system that society has instilled within us; and the ego as our representative to the outside world that struggles to maintain a balance between the other two powerful forces. But this certainly would not have helped young Laertes. After all, to which of these conflicting forces are we to be true?

Again we see that things are not always as simple as they seem. If we dare to look past the surface of the term “self,” questions arise that many people would rather not ask: “Are the many aspects of my being all equally part of my ‘self,’ or is there only one of me—and if so, which, where, how, and why?”

In the following chapters, we will undertake a journey of exploration of “self.” But we will not do so in a traditional manner. We will neither call upon the experts in psychology, nor upon the great philosophers. We will not argue and choose between time-honored religious views, or resort to statistically supported surveys of people’s opinions. We will, instead, turn to a single source that has phenomenal direct knowledge on the subject. We will turn to one expert who, for every moment of every day of

their life, has been collecting the data necessary to finally put this great inquiry to rest. And that expert is you.

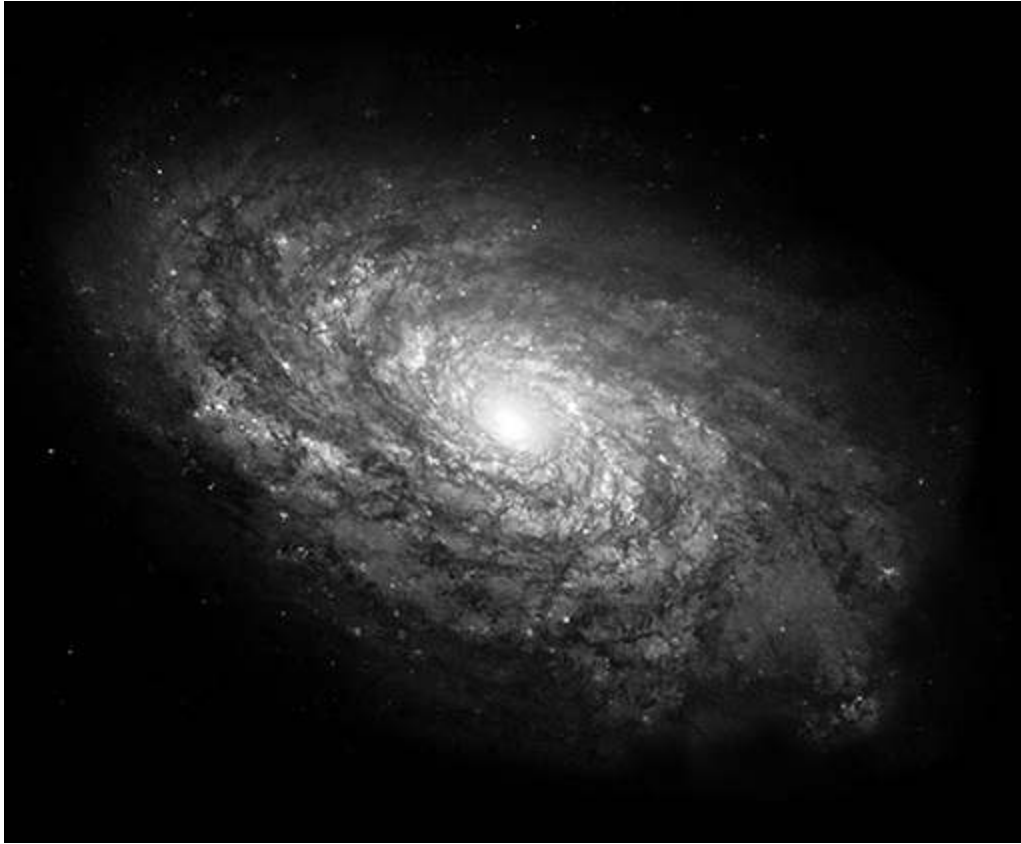
But before you get too excited, or decide that you're not up to the task, first be clear that we're not after your views or opinions on the subject. Neither are we interested in what books you have read, classes you have taken, nor seminars you have attended. We are only interested in your intuitive experience of what it is like to be you. We are not looking for your knowledge; we are seeking your direct experience. You see, you can't fail at this because your "self" is what you are, at all times and in all places. We simply need to sort it out. After all, it can get quite confusing in there.

The chapters of this book are nothing but mirrors for seeing your "self" from different angles. And though the journey we are about to embark on is an inner one, it will draw upon every aspect of your life. The only requirement asked of you is the willingness to honestly look at yourself in the most natural, intuitive manner. Remember, if we are seeking the root of "self," what we are actually seeking is you.

As you read through these pages, you will find that you know much more than you thought you did about some very deep subjects. The fact is, you already know how to find yourself; you have just gotten distracted and disoriented. Once refocused, you will realize that you not only have the ability to find yourself, you have the ability to free yourself. Whether you choose to do so or not is entirely up to you. But upon completion of your journey through these chapters, there will be no more confusion, no more lack of empowerment, and no more blaming others. You will know exactly what must be done. And should you choose to devote yourself to the ongoing journey of self-realization, you will develop a tremendous sense of respect for who you really are. It is only then that you will come to appreciate the full depth of meaning in the advice: "This above all: to thine own self be true."

PART I

AWAKENING CONSCIOUSNESS



Dusty Spiral Galaxy NGC 4414

Image credit: The Hubble Heritage Team (AURA/STScI/NASA)

1

the voice inside your head

“Shoot, I can’t remember her name. What is her name? Darn, here she comes. What is it... Sally... Sue? She just told me yesterday. What’s the matter with me? This is going to be embarrassing.”

In case you haven’t noticed, you have a mental dialogue going on inside your head that never stops. It just keeps going and going. Have you ever wondered why it talks in there? How does it decide what to say and when to say it? How much of what it says turns out to be true? How much of what it says is even important? And if right now you are hearing, “I don’t

know what you're talking about. I don't have any voice inside my head!"—that's the voice we're talking about.

If you're smart, you'll take the time to step back, examine this voice, and get to know it better. The problem is, you're too close to be objective. You have to step way back and watch it converse. While you're driving, you hear internal conversations like,

“Wasn't I supposed to call Fred? I should have. Oh my God, I can't believe I forgot! He's going to be so mad. He may never talk to me again. Maybe I should stop and call him right now. No. I don't want to stop the car right now...”

Notice that the voice takes both sides of the conversation. It doesn't care which side it takes, just as long as it gets to keep on talking. When you're tired and trying to sleep, it's the voice inside your head that says,

“What am I doing? I can't go to sleep yet. I forgot to call Fred. I remembered in the car but I didn't call. If I don't call now...oh wait, it's too late. I shouldn't call him now. I don't even know why I thought about it. I need to fall asleep. Oh shoot, now I can't fall asleep. I'm not tired anymore. But I have a big day tomorrow, and I have to get up early.”

No wonder you can't sleep! Why do you even tolerate that voice talking to you all the time? Even if what it's saying is soothing and nice, it's still disturbing everything you're doing.

If you spend some time observing this mental voice, the first thing you will notice is that it never shuts up. When left to its own, it just talks. Imagine if you were to see someone walking around constantly talking to himself. You'd think he was strange. You'd wonder, “If he's the one who's talking and he's the one who's listening, he obviously knows what's going to be said before he says it. So what's the point?” The same is true for the voice inside your head. Why is it talking? It's you who's talking, and it's you who's listening. And when the voice argues with itself, who is it arguing with? Who could possibly win? It gets very confusing. Just listen:

“I think I should get married. No! You know you're not

ready. You'll be sorry. But I love him. Oh come on, you felt that way about Tom. What if you had married him?"

If you watch carefully, you'll see that it's just trying to find a comfortable place to rest. It will change sides in a moment if that seems to help. And it doesn't even quiet down when it finds out that it's wrong. It simply adjusts its viewpoint and keeps on going. If you pay attention, these mental patterns will become obvious to you. It's actually a shocking realization when you first notice that your mind is constantly talking. You might even try to yell at it in a feeble attempt to shut it up. But then you realize that's the voice yelling at the voice:

"Shut up! I want to go to sleep. Why do you have to talk all the time?"

Obviously, you can't shut it up that way. The best way to free yourself from this incessant chatter is to step back and view it objectively. Just view the voice as a vocalizing mechanism that is capable of making it appear like someone is in there talking to you. Don't think about it; just notice it. No matter what the voice is saying, it's all the same. It doesn't matter if it's saying nice things or mean things, worldly things or spiritual things. It doesn't matter because it's still just a voice talking inside your head. In fact, the only way to get your distance from this voice is to stop differentiating what it's saying. Stop feeling that one thing it says is you and the other thing it says is not you. If you're hearing it talk, it's obviously not you. You are the one who hears the voice. You are the one who notices that it's talking.

You do hear it when it talks, don't you? Make it say "hello" right now. Say it over and over a few times. Now shout it inside! Can you hear yourself saying "hello" inside? Of course you can. There is a voice talking, and there is you who notices the voice talking. The problem is that it's easy to notice the voice saying "hello," but it's difficult to see that no matter what the voice says, it is still just a voice talking and you listening. There is absolutely nothing that voice can say that is more you than anything else it says. Suppose you were looking at three objects—a flowerpot, a photograph, and a book—and were then asked, "Which of these objects is you?" You'd say, "None of them! I'm the one who's looking at what you're putting in front of me. It doesn't matter what you put in front of me, it's always going to be me looking at it." You see, it's an act of a subject perceiving various objects. This is also true of hearing

the voice inside. It doesn't make any difference what it's saying, you are the one who is aware of it. As long as you think that one thing it's saying is you, but the other thing it's saying is not you, you've lost your objectivity. You may want to think of yourself as the part that says the nice things, but that's still the voice talking. You may like what it says, but it's not you.

There is nothing more important to true growth than realizing that you are not the voice of the mind—you are the one who hears it. If you don't understand this, you will try to figure out which of the many things the voice says is really you. People go through so many changes in the name of "trying to find myself." They want to discover which of these voices, which of these aspects of their personality, is who they really are. The answer is simple: none of them.

If you watch it objectively, you will come to see that much of what the voice says is meaningless. Most of the talking is just a waste of time and energy. The truth is that most of life will unfold in accordance with forces far outside your control, regardless of what your mind says about it. It's like sitting down at night and deciding whether you want the sun to come up in the morning. The bottom line is, the sun will come up and the sun will go down. Billions of things are going on in this world. You can think about it all you want, but life is still going to keep on happening.

In fact, your thoughts have far less impact on this world than you would like to think. If you're willing to be objective and watch all your thoughts, you will see that the vast majority of them have no relevance. They have no effect on anything or anybody, except you. They are simply making you feel better or worse about what is going on now, what has gone on in the past, or what might go on in the future. If you spend your time hoping that it doesn't rain tomorrow, you are wasting your time. Your thoughts don't change the rain. You will someday come to see that there is no use for that incessant internal chatter, and there is no reason to constantly attempt to figure everything out. Eventually you will see that the real cause of problems is not life itself. It's the commotion the mind makes about life that really causes problems.

Now this raises a serious question: If so much of what the voice says is meaningless and unnecessary, then why does it even exist? The secret to answering this question lies in understanding why it says what it says when it says it. For example, in some cases the mental voice talks for the same reason that a teakettle whistles. That is, there's a buildup of energy inside that needs to be released. If you watch objectively, you will see that

when there's a buildup of nervous, fearful, or desire-based energies inside, the voice becomes extremely active. This is easy to see when you are angry with someone and you feel like telling them off. Just watch how many times the inner voice tells them off before you even see them. When energy builds up inside, you want to do something about it. That voice talks because you're not okay inside, and talking releases energy.

You will notice, however, that even when you're not particularly bothered by something, it still talks. When you're walking down the street it says things like,

“Look at that dog! It's a Labrador! Hey, there's another dog in that car. He looks a lot like my first dog, Shadow. Whoa, there's an old Oldsmobile. It's got Alaska plates. You don't see many of those down here!”

It is actually narrating the world for you. But why do you need this? You already see what's happening outside; how does it help to repeat it to yourself through the mental voice? You should examine this very closely. With a simple glance, you instantly take in the tremendous detail of whatever you're looking at. If you see a tree, you effortlessly see the branches, the leaves, and the flowering buds. Why then do you have to verbalize what you have already seen?

“Look at that dogwood. The green leaves are so beautiful against the white flowers. Look how many flowers there are. Wow, it's so full!”

What you'll see, if you study this carefully, is that the narration makes you feel more comfortable with the world around you. Like backseat driving, it makes you feel as though things are more in your control. You actually feel like you have some relationship with them. A tree is no longer just a tree in the world that has nothing to do with you; it is a tree that you saw, labeled, and judged. By verbalizing it mentally, you brought that initial direct experience of the world into the realm of your thoughts. There it becomes integrated with your other thoughts, such as those making up your value system and historical experiences.

Take a moment to examine the difference between your experience of the outside world and your interactions with the mental world. When you're just thinking, you're free to create whatever thoughts you want in your mind, and these thoughts are expressed through the voice. You are

very accustomed to settling into the playground of the mind and creating and manipulating thoughts. This inner world is an alternate environment that is under your control. The outside world, however, marches to its own laws. When the voice narrates the outside world to you, those thoughts are now side by side, in parity, with all your other thoughts. All these thoughts intermix and actually influence your experience of the world around you. What you end up experiencing is really a personal presentation of the world according to you, rather than the stark, unfiltered experience of what is really out there. This mental manipulation of the outer experience allows you to buffer reality as it comes in. For example, there are myriad things that you see at any given moment, yet you only narrate a few of them. The ones you discuss in your mind are the ones that matter to you. With this subtle form of preprocessing, you manage to control the experience of reality so that it all fits together inside your mind. Your consciousness is actually experiencing your mental model of reality, not reality itself.

You have to watch this very carefully because you do it all the time. You're walking outside in the winter, you start to shiver, and the voice says, "It's cold!" Now how did that help you? You already knew it was cold. You're the one who's experiencing the cold. Why is it telling you this? You re-create the world within your mind because you can control your mind whereas you can't control the world. That is why you mentally talk about it. If you can't get the world the way you like it, you internally verbalize it, judge it, complain about it, and then decide what to do about it. This makes you feel more empowered. When your body experiences cold, there may be nothing you can do to affect the temperature. But when your mind verbalizes, "It's cold!" you can say, "We're almost home, just a few more minutes." Now you feel better. In the thought world there's always something you can do to control the experience.

Basically, you re-create the outside world inside yourself, and then you live in your mind. What if you decided not to do this? If you decide not to narrate and, instead, just consciously observe the world, you will feel more open and exposed. This is because you really don't know what will happen next, and your mind is accustomed to helping you. It does this by processing your current experiences in a way that makes them fit with your views of the past and visions of the future. All of this helps to create a semblance of control. If your mind doesn't do this, you simply become too uncomfortable. Reality is just too real for most of us, so we temper it with the mind.

You will come to see that the mind talks all the time because you gave

it a job to do. You use it as a protection mechanism, a form of defense. Ultimately, it makes you feel more secure. As long as that's what you want, you will be forced to constantly use your mind to buffer yourself from life, instead of living it. This world is unfolding and really has very little to do with you or your thoughts. It was here long before you came, and it will be here long after you leave. In the name of attempting to hold the world together, you're really just trying to hold yourself together.

True personal growth is about transcending the part of you that is not okay and needs protection. This is done by constantly remembering that you are the one inside that notices the voice talking. That is the way out. The one inside who is aware that you are always talking to yourself about yourself is always silent. It is a doorway to the depths of your being. To be aware that you are watching the voice talk is to stand on the threshold of a fantastic inner journey. If used properly, the same mental voice that has been a source of worry, distraction, and general neurosis can become the launching ground for true spiritual awakening. Come to know the one who watches the voice, and you will come to know one of the great mysteries of creation.

2

your inner roommate

Your inner growth is completely dependent upon the realization that the only way to find peace and contentment is to stop thinking about yourself. You're ready to grow when you finally realize that the "I" who is always talking inside will never be content. It always has a problem with something. Honestly, when was the last time you really had nothing bothering you? Before you had your current problem, there was a different problem. And if you're wise, you will realize that after this one's gone, there will be another one.

The bottom line is, you'll never be free of problems until you are free from the part within that has so many problems. When a problem is disturbing you, don't ask, "What should I do about it?" Ask, "What part of me is being disturbed by this?" If you ask, "What should I do about it?" you've already fallen into believing that there really is a problem outside that must be dealt with. If you want to achieve peace in the face of your problems, you must understand why you perceive a particular situation as a problem. If you're feeling jealousy, instead of trying to see how you can protect yourself, just ask, "What part of me is jealous?" That will cause you to look inside and see that there's a part of you that's having a problem with jealousy.

Once you clearly see the disturbed part, then ask, "Who is it that sees this? Who notices this inner disturbance?" Asking this is the solution to your every problem. The very fact that you can see the disturbance means that you are not it. The process of seeing something requires a subject-object relationship. The subject is called "The Witness" because it is the one who sees what's happening. The object is what you are seeing, in this case the inner disturbance. This act of maintaining objective awareness of the inner problem is always better than losing yourself in the outer situation. This is the essential difference between a spiritually minded person and a worldly person. Worldly doesn't mean that you have money or stature. Worldly means that you think the solution to your inner problems is in the world outside. You think that if you change things outside, you'll be okay. But nobody has ever truly become okay by changing things outside. There's always the next problem. The only real solution is to take the seat of witness consciousness and completely change

your frame of reference.

To attain true inner freedom, you must be able to objectively watch your problems instead of being lost in them. No solution can possibly exist while you're lost in the energy of a problem. Everyone knows you can't deal well with a situation if you're getting anxious, scared, or angry about it. The first problem you have to deal with is your own reaction. You will not be able to solve anything outside until you own how the situation affects you inside. Problems are generally not what they appear to be. When you get clear enough, you will realize that the real problem is that there is something inside of you that can have a problem with almost anything. The first step is to deal with that part of you. This involves a change from "outer solution consciousness" to "inner solution consciousness." You have to break the habit of thinking that the solution to your problems is to rearrange things outside. The only permanent solution to your problems is to go inside and let go of the part of you that seems to have so many problems with reality. Once you do that, you'll be clear enough to deal with what's left.

There really is a way to let go of the part of you that sees everything as a problem. It may seem impossible, but it's not. There is a part of your being that can actually abstract from your own melodrama. You can watch yourself be jealous or angry. You don't have to think about it or analyze it; you can just be aware of it. Who is it that sees all this? Who notices the changes going on inside? When you tell a friend, "Every time I talk to Tom, it gets me so upset," how do you know it gets you upset? You know that it gets you upset because you're in there and you see what's going on in there. There's a separation between you and the anger or the jealousy. You are the one who's in there noticing these things. Once you take that seat of consciousness, you can get rid of these personal disturbances. You start by watching. Just be aware that you are aware of what is going on in there. It's easy. What you'll notice is that you're watching a human being's personality with all its strengths and weaknesses. It's as though there's somebody in there with you. You might actually say you have a "roommate."

If you would like to meet your roommate, just try to sit inside yourself for a while in complete solitude and silence. You have the right; it's your inner domain. But instead of finding silence, you're going to listen to incessant chatter:

"Why am I doing this? I have more important things to

do. This is a waste of time. There's nobody in here but me. What's this all about?"

Right on cue, there's your roommate. You may have a clear intention to be quiet inside, but your roommate won't cooperate. And it's not just when you try to be quiet. It has something to say about everything you look at: "I like it. I don't like it. This is good. That's bad." It just talks and talks. You don't generally notice because you don't step back from it. You're so close that you don't realize that you're actually hypnotized into listening to it.

Basically, you're not alone in there. There are two distinct aspects of your inner being. The first is you, the awareness, the witness, the center of your willful intentions; and the other is that which you watch. The problem is, the part that you watch never shuts up. If you could get rid of that part, even for a moment, the peace and serenity would be the nicest vacation you've ever had.

Imagine what it would be like if you didn't have to bring this thing with you everywhere you go. Real spiritual growth is about getting out of this predicament. But first you have to realize that you've been locked in there with a maniac. In any situation or circumstance, your roommate could suddenly decide, "I don't want to be here. I don't want to do this. I don't want to talk to this person." You would immediately feel tense and uncomfortable. Your roommate can ruin anything you're doing without a moment's notice. It could ruin your wedding day, or even your wedding night! That part of you can ruin anything and everything, and it generally does.

You buy a brand-new car and it's beautiful. But every time you drive it, your inner roommate finds something wrong with it. The mental voice keeps pointing out every little squeak, every little vibration, until eventually you don't even like the car anymore. Once you see what this can do to your life, you are ready for spiritual growth. You're ready for real transformation when you finally say, "Look at this thing. It's ruining my life. I'm trying to live a peaceful, meaningful existence, but I feel like I'm sitting on top of a volcano. At any moment this thing can decide to freak, close down, and fight with what's happening. One day it likes someone, and the next day it decides to pick on everything they do. My life is a mess just because this thing that lives in here with me has to make a melodrama out of everything." Once you've seen this, and learn to no longer identify with your roommate, you're ready to free yourself.