

The Witness Within

Discovering the One Who Has Always Been Watching

Rev. Blaine Tinsley

March 1, 2026

Introduction: Who Is Doing the Noticing?

Last week, we noticed how quickly the brain assembles a story after any event. Today we go one layer deeper. The question at the center of this talk is simple, and if you follow it honestly, it will change your life: Who is doing the noticing? Right now, you are aware of thoughts, feelings, inner commentary. But who is aware of that? That quiet, steady presence behind every thought — the one who observes without being consumed — is what every wisdom tradition in human history has found. They gave it different names. They all arrived at the same door.

“The moment you can observe a thought, you are not identical to that thought.”
— The Witness Within

If you can see it, you are not it. There is a you behind the thought, watching. The eye cannot see itself — and the mind cannot fully observe its own thinking. But something else can. Think of a cinema screen: steady and white, storm scenes and love scenes playing across it, yet always unchanged and unharmed when the credits roll. You have a screen like that inside you. The gap between the one who thinks and the one who notices the thinking is where your freedom lives.

Ancient Maps to the Same Territory

Vedanta: Ramana Maharshi

Asked “*Who am I?*” — not philosophically, but in this moment. Follow every thought to its source and ask: Who is aware of this? You uncover a presence prior to every story you have ever constructed.

Buddhism: Mindful Awareness

The Buddha taught students to watch thoughts like clouds crossing the sky. You are not the clouds. In Tibetan practice, rigpa — pure awareness — is already present. Not manufactured. Uncovered.

Christian Mysticism

Elijah hears God not in wind, earthquake, or fire — but in a still, small voice. Teresa of Ávila found an interior castle of silence; nothing external could disturb. The sacred is underneath the noise.

Psychology: Observing Self

Steven Hayes (ACT) describes the observing self — the part that watches thoughts without fusing with them. Not “*I am anxious*” but “*There is a thought of anxiety. I am the one who notices.*”

What the Brain Scientists Found

Neuroscientists call it the Default Mode Network — the brain’s storytelling apparatus, running on autopilot while we ruminate, rehearse, and replay. Most of us do not watch the story; we live inside it. But research on long-term meditators tells a different story:

“Long-term meditators can observe the stories, the ruminations, that mental chatter, without being swept away by it.”

— Neuroscience Research on Contemplative Practice

They have not silenced the storyteller. They have moved their seat from inside the movie to the balcony. The traditions were not teaching mystical escapism. They were teaching a trainable neurological skill.

The witness consciousness isn’t supernatural. It’s your most natural state. We’ve just been taught to forget it.

Emily's Waterfalls

Emily was a watercolor artist who painted waterfalls and beach scenes with a gift for catching light the way it really behaves. She made the world feel more delightful. And then she was gone. The morning after, I rested in the silence grief creates — a silence somehow louder than noise. My mind scrolled: the last conversation, the lunch we kept meaning to have, the loop that said too late, too late, too late. Over time, without effort, something shifted. A millimeter of space opened between me and the wave. I became aware I was watching the grief — not numb to it, not above it, not completely in it — but watching.

"The witness doesn't fix the loss. It holds it."

— The Witness Within

Waking the Witness: Three Daily Practices

1 Three-Breath Pause

Swept up? Stop. Take three deliberate breaths. On the third, ask internally: "Who is aware right now?" Just asking the question creates the gap.

2 Label the Weather

Instead of "I am anxious," say: "There is a thought of anxiety. I notice anger arising." That small shift — from I am to I notice — is the witness stepping forward.

3 The Inner Reporter

Narrate your inner weather without judgment: "There's urgency right now. There's residue from that conversation." The reporter is always slightly outside the story.

I am not the story. I am the space in which the story arises.

The Christ Within as Witness

In Unity, the Christ consciousness is the divine nature already present within each of us — the I AM. What traditions call "witness consciousness" and what neuroscience calls the "observing self" is exactly what Unity means by the "Christ within": the part of you that remains when every label, role, and story is stripped away. Luminous. Steady. Already here. The still, small voice was never absent. It has been speaking all along. We were just, sometimes, too loud to hear it.

So, we end up where we began: Who is doing the noticing? Follow that question when the hard moment comes — when grief arrives, when the loop won't stop, when the story has you convinced. Ask: "Who is aware of this?" The witness is not built or achieved. It is uncovered. It has been quietly present through every storm you have ever weathered. You are not the storm. You are not the story. You are the one who sees. And that has always been enough.

AFFIRMATION

I am the awareness behind the thought,
the peace beneath the storm,
the presence that never leaves.

A BLESSING FOR YOU

*May you find, in the midst of every storm,
the one within you who watches — and is not afraid.*

*May the events that have wounded you
become the ground from which your greatest wisdom grows.*

*May you remember that you are not the storm —
you are the one who watches it, and holds the pen.*

*And may the still, small voice — always present, never absent —
be your anchor and your home.*

You are not the storm. You are the one who sees. Go gently.

With love, Rev. Blaine