

The Direct Path

What is the Direct Path?

We conclude our study of the various models of the Fourth Way path to Self-realization by looking at what has become known as the Direct Path. It is based on the Eastern philosophy of Advaita, but is expressed almost entirely in Western terms and avoids complications that belong mainly to culture and tradition and which are unnecessary for Self-realization. Here is Rupert Spira's description:

It [the Direct Path] is the clear seeing that Consciousness is simultaneously the witness and the substance of all experience, the one Reality that gives seeming existence to the mind, body and world.

The first true glimpse of this is sometimes known as Enlightenment or Awakening, although in almost all cases the habitual tendencies of the mind and the body reappear and apparently veil this Knowingness again.

The subsequent establishment in this understanding, sometimes known as Self-realisation, is not a process towards a goal. It is a re-orchestration of the body, mind and world that comes from understanding, rather than going towards it. Enlightenment is instantaneous. Self-Realisation takes time.

Enlightenment could be said to be the deep understanding that there is no separate entity located inside the body experiencing the world and all others outside and separate from itself.

Self-realisation could be said to be the re-absorption of the mind, body and world into this Knowing Presence from which they proceed, and from which they were in fact never for a moment separate.

It is a re-orchestration of the mind, body and world in line with our understanding that it is this Knowing Presence that takes the shape of thinking, sensing and perceiving and, as a result, seems to become a mind a body and a world, but in fact never becomes anything other than it already eternally is.

There is only Presence taking the shape of the totality of our experience from moment to moment. *[http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/an_introduction_to_non-duality]*

Who is the Direct Path for?

The starting point for those who wish to follow the Direct Path is the desire and the resulting search for happiness, truth, beauty, love, freedom, peace, consciousness or something similar. That desire arises from our belief that we are a separate self, and that belief produces a feeling of lack – that something is missing. It is said that all (unrealized) human beings experience some kind of feeling of lack and that this causes them to start searching for something that will give them what they feel is missing. Some find it in the work they do, some in accumulating wealth, some in a relationship, some in substances (alcohol or drugs), some in gaining a position of power. But such happiness, love, peace etc. does not last: work comes to an end, relationships run into difficulties and so on. A few start following a spiritual path and learn to achieve happier and more peaceful states of mind through various kinds of spiritual practice. But they too find that these states of mind come and go or that something is still missing. This is where the Direct Path begins. The concepts and methods are not new – they are said to be contained within all genuine spiritual traditions, but in most traditions, are complicated and sometimes over-shadowed by many other ideas, beliefs and rituals.

Pre-requisites

Although it is said to be possible for some people to achieve Self-realization through the Direct Path without ever receiving any training in traditional spiritual practices, most seem to need to start on a 'progressive' or more indirect path which gives basic training in self-observation, attention and stillness. This seems to tie in with Shankara's pre-requisites, most of which are developed through these three practices. And of course it is these practices that are fundamental within Mr Ouspensky's system as they help us uncover our natural capacity for Self-remembering. From this perspective, could we perhaps see the Direct Path as being a continuation of the Fourth Way beyond Man Number 4? In other words, does the beginning of the Direct Path coincide with the beginning of the Way?

The Direct Path methods

The primary method used in the Direct Path is *self-enquiry*, in other words enquiring into 'the self that one thinks and feels oneself to be at any moment'. What is it that is aware of your thoughts, perceptions (sights and sounds) and bodily sensations? It is not possible for 'thinking' to investigate itself. We need to get behind the thinking mind and start from pure, direct experience – i.e. experience that has not been massaged and manipulated by thought. (Chris Frith's book *Making Up the Mind* is very helpful in showing us the various ways in which thought manipulates our experience.) Our practice of impartial self-observation – the cornerstone of both Mr Ouspensky's system and the Shankaracharya's teaching – is an excellent preparation for the method of self-enquiry that we need later on.

When practised rigorously, self-enquiry can be seen as a technique for Self-remembering by tracing our way back to what we really are – infinite awareness. This quotation from Wu Hsin, a Chinese spiritual master from the 3rd or 4th century BC, was used in a recent meeting led by Rupert Spira as a basis for contemplation. It is reminiscent of Mr Ouspensky's teaching on personality and essence.

The departure from what is natural is the birthplace of personality. The world of persons (or personality) is a solitary place: each one separate and alone. To achieve peace one must retrace the way one came.

When we do this we find that the place we arrive at is that same place behind all thought which is described by Mr Ouspensky as 'state of attention' or 'passive attention', and by the Shankaracharya as 'natural Samadhi'. When we abide there for long enough to understand that this presence of awareness is what we really are, then that is Self-remembering and this becomes the only practice that is necessary.

The stages in the Direct Path

Unlike neo-Advaita, the Direct Path does have distinct stages and these are equivalent to the stages in the understanding of Advaita described by the Shankaracharya – the process of discrimination, subtraction or exclusion (*vyatireka* or *neti-neti* – 'not this, not this') and the less well-known process of inclusion or addition (*anvaya*). We will stick with the Direct Path description of these stages, but for those who are interested, the Shankaracharya's explanation of them is given in an Annex to this paper.

Most people in the West seem to need to start with discrimination, and this is the approach taken in Mr Ouspensky's system. In the Direct Path we first examine our experience and recognise that we

are not the body. Then we see we are not the mind – not our feelings, not our thoughts, not our perceptions, memories etc. All these things come and go, but we don't come and go - what we really are must be something that does not change. For example, there is something that was present when we were a tiny baby that is exactly the same now. We finally arrive at the conclusion that what we are is just the witness of all our experience – in System terminology the Observer of body, mind, and world. We see that this Observer is nothing more than a vast, empty, transparent space of awareness. Instead of feeling ourselves to be limited in time and space, we recognise that I, awareness, experiences no limits. We realise 'I am nothing – not a *thing*'. This is what is traditionally described as enlightenment or awakening.

But that is just a half-way point. The next stage – the path of inclusion – is to examine the relationship between the witness (Observer) and the world. Having kept body, mind and world at a distance we now allow them back into awareness. We realise that there is actually no separation between what we experience – mind, body and world – and our Self. Instead of perceiving objects as being some distance away from us 'out there', we perceive everything as being infinitely close. The Direct Path teachers tell us that in time, as we spend more and more time abiding as our real Self, our understanding of what we truly are comes to permeate our thoughts, feelings and relationships in the world. The old habits of thought, feeling and action that have their roots in our belief that we are a separate self wither away like a plant that is no longer being fed and watered. We realise 'I am everything' – pure knowing. The culmination of this stage is known as Self-realization.

The following quotation from the Shankaracharya, describes these two stages in a particularly beautiful way. The Direct Path leads us to realise that this description is not mere poetry - it is a simple, straightforward description of an understanding and experience that is accessible to all of us all of the time, whenever we really want it:

" If you begin to be what you are you will realize everything, but to begin to be what you are you must come out of what you are not. You are not those thoughts which are turning, turning in your mind: you are not those changing feelings: you are not the different decisions you make and the different wills you have: you are not that separate ego: Well, then, what are you? You will find when you have come out of what you are not, that the ripple on the water is whispering to you 'I am That', the birds in the mango tree are singing to you 'I am That', the moon and the stars are shining beacons to you, 'I am That': you are in everything in the world and everything in the world is in you since for you it only exists because it is mirrored in you; and at the same time you are that—everything"

Annex – The equivalent concepts in traditional Advaita

For those who like to read the Shankaracharya's dialogues in the Record or in Study Society publications, it is worth mentioning that there is a teaching method within the philosophy of Advaita described as 'using a thorn to remove a thorn'. This means using an idea that is not strictly true to help remove the student's false beliefs (which are more erroneous than the 'thorn' used to remove them.) But this 'thorn' must be removed later by another less incorrect 'thorn' until the final truth is understood.

The mind (Manas) thinks that the world is true and likes to live with it in ignorance. This is illusion, and to cure this illusion the discipline is prescribed. Now even this discipline shouldn't be taken to be true! The Truth is that one really is Atman and the Absolute, but one doesn't know this secret because of ignorance. Once you realize your Real Self the discipline also becomes useless. If you have a thorn in the foot, you take it out with the help of another thorn and throw both thorns away after use! So in some way even the discipline is illusion, but this illusion only will undo the fundamental illusion of ignorance. [HH Record 1964: 7th September]

So in some traditions, in the early stages of teaching, Param-Atman is presented as being like a god, and Atman as 'what is real inside the student'. But this is dualistic and is just a thorn that must later be removed if we are to understand one of the main tenets of Advaita: *tat tvam asi* – 'thou art that', or (Jiva) Atman = Param-Atman = Brahman. (In fact Direct Path teachers also make frequent use of the method of 'a thorn to remove a thorn', but unlike teachers on the traditional path, they make it clear when they are doing this.)

Vyatireka and Anvaya

According to the Shankaracharya, there are two steps in coming to this experience and understanding, called *vyatireka* and *anvaya* - the method of subtraction and the method of addition.

Everything is always united but because of ignorance this process has been forgotten and it has to be brought into action once again. In the Vedic text the same thing has been explained by stating that there are two ways of approaching Unity—one is Anvaya and the other is Vyatireka. Anvaya is the way of unity by addition, Vyatireka is the way by separation or subtraction, in the sense of discrimination. So, by discarding things one after the other one reaches the Self because that is at the end of everything. By addition one comes to the idea of Samashti where the Param-Atman prevails, so whichever way you choose to go, ultimately you will come to the Absolute either as Param-Atman or as Atman. Whatever seems useful to one at a particular time, one should respond to by either of these two ways, for one can see that if the discrimination, True Knowledge, the Viveka, prevails, then there is no separation of any sort—it is the same Absolute available within during the Meditation, and also available everywhere in every type of relationship which we find in this external and manifest world. There is none else to meet but the Self. [HH Record, 1975: 22nd September]

The 'place behind all thoughts'

The Shankaracharya has said that the moments of stillness we experience between two desires (which the Direct Path teachers describe as the moment between two thoughts when the mind stops – the result of self-enquiry) are similar to the state of samadhi reached in meditation. He calls

these moments 'natural samadhi' and says that everyone has them. All we need to do is to recognise them when they occur and try to extend them. This is what HH said:

Apart from these two [Savikalpa and Nirvakalpa Samadhi experienced during deep meditation] there is a third type of Samadhi which is a natural phenomenon, available to everyone but not tapped by us, not tapped by people usually. This Samadhi comes after the fulfilment of one desire and before the rise of the next desire. There is a point where there is no desire either fulfilled or unfulfilled. That moment in the life of individuals comes quite a number of times even during each day, and yet people do not realise and do not tap the energy which could be made available at that moment. It is a natural phenomenon but the energy cannot be acquired because people are not aware of its existence. If they could be aware of this Stillness, then the energy would be available to them, like the energy from Savikalpa and Nirvakalpa Samadhi.

[HH Record, 1975: 26th September]

All desires arise in consciousness, although this consciousness is not appreciated, or not registered by the common man. But one who knows, or who has taken to discipline, does realise that there is a moment when a desire arises, and of course everyone knows when the desire is fulfilled. So with ordinary man the cycle of desires and their fulfilment goes unnoticed – although it happens in consciousness, it is not registered. It can be registered if we want to register it and those who are following the discipline certainly would be able to do that. Because it is done in consciousness, when a desire is fulfilled, everyone can see for himself that there is a moment when he puts up a new desire. If you appreciate the moment of lack of all desires, then at that moment you will not have a desire, because only one thing can happen at a time – either there is a desire or there is no desire registered by you – you cannot register lack of desire and desire both at the same time. That is the moment to catch, and by practice it is possible to extend this moment. ... – if we practise the extended moment of Samadhi between two desires, we can, by practice, extend it and get the full benefit of this process. ...

[HH Record 1979, 28th August]