

Resistance, Openness and Questions

The Fourth Way system of knowledge, in common with all genuine spiritual traditions, tells us that what we really are is consciousness, that there is just one consciousness and that *everything* is that one, undivided consciousness. As Dr Roles realised towards the end of his life we do not need to develop new skills or capacities in order to understand and experience this – we simply need to remove the ‘impediments to that consciousness’.

So now that we have the answer, why are we not Self-realised? What are these ‘impediments’ that are preventing us knowing and feeling *in our own experience* the truth about what we really are? We have previously discussed identification, incessant inner chatter, self-will, negative emotions etc., but could there be a single factor underlying all of these? The Direct Path teachers tell us that there is. In common with the Shankaracharya tradition, they say that the Real Self, universal consciousness – unlocated and unlimited in space and time – is shining all the time in all of us. It is only the resistance put up by an illusory separate self – a collection of false ‘I’s, in Mr Ouspensky’s language – that seems to veil the light. Here is Rupert Spira’s description:

The apparent self could be described as ‘the resistance to what is.’ This resistance takes two forms:

1. I want or need such and such to take place in order to be happy, or
2. I don’t want what is present and need it to disappear in order to be happy.

These two, desire and fear, are in fact two sides of the same coin. The coin is the apparent self.

See clearly that in order to resist what is, there has to be a stance, a point of view, a located entity, an apparent self. This resistance depends upon the apparent self. If we then resist the apparent self and try to get rid of it, we are resisting our resistance. We fear our fear. We simply compound the problem.

So, first of all see that we have an agenda with the apparent self and as long as this agenda is present it is more of the same. Just look clearly until your looking naturally becomes disinterested, just as you would look at a passing car....no agenda for or against.

See clearly that the apparent self, which is simply a current thought and feeling, arises effortlessly within us but does not in any way touch, harm, move, change or implicate us, Consciousness, in any way. We do not need to *make* this the case. It *is* already the case.

It is from this position or rather from this open, welcoming, allowing space that we are able to contemplate the apparent self. ...

At the level of the mind we may come again and again to the understanding that what we are is not limited and located only to lose this understanding again. The mind arises again with an objection and this objection seems to invalidate our previous understanding and, as a result, peace is lost.

For instance the mind may say (and often does!) ‘Well, if Consciousness is unlocated how come I cannot see what you are seeing?’ In this and numerous other ways the mind will present apparently valid reasons for the belief that Consciousness is limited.

For those of us with enquiring and tenacious minds each of these objections has to be fully explored until we come, from our own experience, to see that all our beliefs about Consciousness are invalid.

[Rupert Spira: <http://non-duality.rupertspira.com>]

Resistance arising from beliefs

As discussed in the Summer Programme, this does not imply that we should replace our existing set of beliefs with a new set. Adopting a new set of non-dual beliefs is *not* Self-realisation. The Fourth Way – both in its traditional forms and in the Direct Path – requires us to abandon *all* beliefs and discover the truth for ourselves *in our own experience*. The only purpose of the knowledge we are given is to point the direction in which the truth is said to be found. Words can be no more than pointers: ‘the Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao’. It is up to us to discover for ourselves what we really are and what the universe really is. No-one else – even a fully-realised person – can give us the answers. They can only show us where to look.

The aim of our group, and of all genuine Fourth Way groups, is to help each of us to make that discovery. As Rupert suggests, this means discussing and exploring carefully all objections and counter-suggestions to the ideas being discussed from an open, neutral position. The way this is done is the same in all traditions – through question and answer: we listen to (or read) a concept from the teaching, ask questions to clarify it, examine it against our own experience and raise any doubts or objections. If these cannot be resolved within the group, external input can be sought. Above all, we do not take anything on trust. Once we have experienced and understood for ourselves what the concept is pointing to, the concept itself as originally formulated, becomes unnecessary (except perhaps as a means of communication) and we discard it in favour of our own experiential understanding.

If our group is to achieve its aim, we must all take care not to discourage persistent or challenging questioning and to avoid encouraging acceptance of specific beliefs. It is only when resistance or lack of understanding is exposed through questions that the impediments to which Dr Roles referred can be dissolved. Every one of us has resistances – if we did not, we would be already fully realised. It is up to each of us to allow them to surface so that they can be clearly seen. Asking questions, raising objections, exploring thoroughly all possibilities is a sign of spiritual maturity and serious intent. As Mr Ouspensky is reputed to have said: ‘no questions means no work is being done’. The Shankaracharya said exactly the same. Perhaps instead of seeing questions as a sign of inadequacy or failure we can start to see them as an indication of cracks in the fabric of the separate self through which the light of understanding can pass unhindered in order to reunite with its source?

Resistance to the present situation

How do we react when something happens that we don’t like? Or when someone says something hurtful? Or something we disagree with? Careful, truthful and impartial self-observation shows us that however spiritual we imagine ourselves to be, the separate self has an agenda with almost everything that arises. We try to organise our lives so that that agenda is met, so that most of the time we get what the separate self, this multiplicity of false I’s, wants. But inevitably things don’t always work out the way we would like. So what happens then? A ripple of agitation in the body (often very tiny and easily overlooked) betrays the uprising of the separate self.

Can we see when looking back at those situations, that the separate self’s agenda takes one of two forms: to aggrandise itself or to protect itself? And the choice it makes determines our resulting thoughts, feelings and actions? For example, we either do battle with the person who criticises us, or we shrink back in self-protection and say nothing. Either one of these – the movement towards or the movement away – is resistance associated with an illusory separate self. ‘I did what I felt was

right – it's *his* understanding of the situation that is flawed. I had to put him straight'. Or 'I'm a spiritual person and will demonstrate my superior level of spirituality by remaining silent and serene in the face of his unfair and unreasonable criticism'.

But resistance is not confined to our interactions with others. When we really look closely at what is going on in mind, body and world we begin to see the full extent of our resistance. How often do we wander off into thoughts and inner conversations to avoid the boredom of the 'now'? How much of our lives is filled with unnecessary activity of all kinds for exactly the same reason?

As Dr Roles explained, the solution does not lie in changing our lives or trying to change our experience. All that is needed is a change in attitude: to give up thinking, feeling and acting on behalf of a separate self:

When you have given up everything you ordinarily call 'I', then your spirit (the Real I) rises, and you have a feeling of expansion, because your spirit is no longer weighted down by all the characteristics associated with 'I'. [*Voyage of Discovery*, p30]

This 'giving up' is not something that can be 'done' by the separate self – any attempt along those lines is simply the separate self making use of the teaching to perpetuate itself. The only reliable method is through tracing our way back to what we really are. Ask yourself 'what is it that is feeling hurt or angry, wanting to escape into the future, or wanting the present to be different? And what is this entity really looking for?' The truthful answer will almost certainly be: 'it is an illusory separate self looking for happiness, peace and fulfilment.' Once we see that clearly and recognise that what we are seeking cannot be found that way, resistance dissolves and all that is needed is to allow our attention that was busying itself with objects, people and situations to sink back into itself – infinite awareness. Then simply to rest there being what we really are.