

2015 SUMMER PROGRAMME

Self Enquiry

Attending meetings, reading spiritual books, undertaking spiritual practices and adopting a new set of 'more enlightened' behaviours will not in itself lead to self-realisation. At some point – and for those who are following the Direct Path, this point is right at the beginning – deep self-enquiry is needed. The summer break is an ideal opportunity for this.

There is much confusion in non-dual circles about what self-enquiry – *atma vichara* – really means. First we need to be clear about what it is not. It is *not* continually saying to oneself 'Who am I?' It is *not* examining one's life and judging it based on its supposed spiritual merits, with a view to improving it. And although it involves the mind at the beginning, it does *not* end in the mind.

Self-enquiry starts from stillness – from being aware of being aware. We set aside all our beliefs and conceptions of the world and look at our experience from pure openness and unknowingness as if we were a new-born infant. We then ask a question, and allow the question to remain in awareness, without further thought or logical analysis around the subject. Sometimes an answer will come; often it will not. It is important not to stick with the first answer, not to fix it as the ultimate answer, but instead allow it to unfold further over time. The best times for engaging in self-enquiry are when we are lying in bed just before going to sleep at night or immediately on waking in the morning. Additionally, it can be worthwhile returning to our enquiry following a period of silent meditation.

Asking the right question in the right way brings the restless mind to a stop. The question we ask will depend on where we are on the spiritual path. Here is a reminder of the stages of the Direct Path:

We normally think and feel that the world is the largest element of our experience. That the world, or the universe, is like a vast container which houses all kinds of objects, including this tiny object called 'my body', which we consider to be 'me'. And inside this body is 'my mind', and inside the mind, or part of the mind, is considered to be something called 'consciousness' or 'awareness'. This is our normal view of experience, and all our thoughts, feelings, activities, perceptions and relationships are subtly informed by this belief. And this belief is enshrined in our language in such phrases as 'I know my next-door neighbour', 'I love you', 'I see the tree' or 'hear the music' or 'taste the food' or 'touch the chair' or 'smell the flower'. Always I, the body-mind, joined to an object other or world through an act of knowing, feeling or perceiving. I, the body-mind – the subject; the other or world – the object.

So as a **first step** towards a deeper and truer understanding of our experience, the teaching points out that it is not I, the body-mind, that knows, feels or perceives the object, other or world. But rather it is I, awareness, that knows the mind, body, and world. This is the first step we take: 'I am not the mind, body and world; I am that which knows the mind, body and world' – the classic neti-neti approach.

And then we pause here for a while and investigate the nature of this 'I' – the knower of the mind, body and world, by turning our attention away from the objects of the mind, body and the world towards this knowing 'I'. That's the **second stage** in the spiritual process.

And then the **third stage** – having discovered the nature of 'I' the knower – we go back to the objects of the mind, body and world, and reconsider them from our new understanding. ... And it is this stage that these yoga meditations are primarily involved with.

[Rupert Spira, 13/11/2013 Yoga meditation: *Dissolving the world into luminous, empty knowing*]

Self-enquiry is mainly relevant to the first two stages, culminating in what is known as enlightenment, awakening or enlightened duality. In the third stage, self-enquiry becomes or is replaced by self-abidance and yoga meditations. Our meetings during this summer term gave a preview of the third stage, but we will be returning to stages 1 and 2 during the autumn term to have a closer look at some of the sticking points. This Summer Programme is a preparation for that.

Self-enquiry is a private, personal undertaking and it is up to each of us to find our own approach and discover the questions that will take us closer to understanding what we really are. But here are a few hints and ideas:

Stage 1

There are so many labels we apply to ourselves, so many attributes that we claim as 'I' – I am an engineer, a musician, a designer, a vegetarian, a kind person, an intelligent person, an unlucky person, a good neighbour ... See first that none of these is the essential 'me'.

Then see that I am not my body – my body grows and changes over my lifetime. I am not my mind – my thoughts, ideas, knowledge change over time. But there *is* something that has been with me and remained the same all my life. What is that? Recalling memories of childhood, including one's earliest memories can be helpful. Don't try to formulate an answer in words – it can't be described. The answer to genuine self-enquiry comes in feeling, a kind of sense or intuitive understanding that arises in silence.

If objections arise in the mind, don't dismiss them or suppress them. First welcome them – they are a sign that your self-enquiry is working. Then investigate them, but *based only on your direct, raw experience* – not on concepts learnt in childhood, and above all, not on any spiritual belief.

Once we have come to an initial understanding of what we are, we can use the question 'What is it that is aware of my experience?' to take us back there (although of course it is not a 'place'), whenever we want. We no longer need to formulate an answer to the question, we just rest in the place where the answer is to be found. After a while, we begin to enjoy spending more and more time there and want to find out more about the nature of the awareness that we know ourselves to be.

Stage 2

The great discovery to be made during this stage is that the consciousness (or awareness) that we are is universal and unlimited in space and time – i.e. infinite and eternal. The implications of this are that there is only one consciousness, and that this consciousness that we are is not subject to the limitations of the body/mind. The body is born and is destined to die. But we, universal consciousness, were never born and are not destined to die.

At this stage a whole host of objections and logical arguments usually arise. So the first step is to look carefully at all of these from our direct experience and separate out what we really know based on our experience, from concepts based on our assumed model of reality. There are a number of video and audio clips on Rupert's website that can help with this. Here is one example:

<http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/watch/how-do-i-know-consciousness-is-universal-infinite-and-unlimited>

All that is needed at this stage is to discover that there is no absolute proof of our limitedness, just as there is no absolute proof of our unlimitedness. Either model is possible. This removes the remaining barrier to the realisation of our true nature. Understanding can then unfold in its own

time in this state of openness and unknowing. For most of us this is a gradual process, but for some it comes as a sudden insight.

We can encourage this unfolding in two ways: first by abiding knowingly as pure consciousness for as much of the time as we can; and second, by choosing to live our lives on the (unproven) assumption that we *are* universal consciousness, not separate from anything or anyone else in the universe. The response we get from the universe may then provide the confirmation we are looking for.

For those who need to explore this subject in more detail including all the arguments 'for' and 'against', especially those who are scientifically inclined, I recommend the following book:

'Brief Peeks Beyond: Critical essays on metaphysics, neuroscience, free will, skepticism and culture' by Bernardo Kastrup. ISBN 978-1785350184.

Other relevant resources

1. Those who enjoy Rupert's guided meditations may like to try this one:

<http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/watch/being-aware-of-being-aware-is-the-highest-meditation>

As usual, it's best to choose a time when you won't be disturbed and listen to the whole of it in one sitting with your eyes closed, following what is said in your own immediate experience.

2. If you prefer a more traditional approach, you might find this book helpful:

The Open Path – Recognizing Nondual Awareness by Elias Amidon ISBN 978-1591811794.

It is an approach to non-duality from a Sufi perspective, and uses ideas and practices from the traditional path of Sufism as preparation for the Direct Path. It's entirely compatible with the approach we take in Cotswold Group.

3. Or, if you would like to look into Dr Roles synthesis of Mr Ouspensky's and the Shankaracharya's teaching in much more detail than we normally do in our papers, Part 2 of the new Fourth Way book gives a comprehensive account:

<http://www.ouspenskytoday.org/wp/about-books/ouspenskys-fourth-way-the-new-book/>

This covers a huge range of ideas and practices, most of which are not specifically related to self-enquiry but will be of particular interest to those attracted to Mr Ouspensky's teaching.

If your self-enquiry encounters a block that does not get resolved, it is important not to give up or dismiss it. Keep it with you, returning to it from time to time. We can of course discuss it in our meetings next term, but the best approach is to bring it as a question to one of Rupert's meetings. For details see:

http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/meet/#united_kingdom

It is the uncovering and resolution of these more stubborn blocks with the help of a realised teacher that leads to enlightenment.