

Thought

The incessant, uncontrolled flow of thoughts – inner chatter – is seen by both Mr Ouspensky's system and the Shankaracharya's teaching as one of the chief impediments to realisation of our true nature. In Mr Ouspensky's system, it is called 'imagination'; the equivalent concept in the Shankaracharya's teaching is vikshepa – usually translated as 'distraction'.

Here is Mr Ouspensky's description:

The second dangerous feature he finds in himself is *imagination*. Very soon after starting his observation of himself he comes to the conclusion that the chief obstacle to observation is imagination. He wishes to observe something, but instead of that, imagination starts in him on the same subject, and he forgets about observation. Very soon he realizes that people ascribe to the word imagination a quite artificial and quite undeserved meaning in the sense of *creative or selective faculty*. He realizes that imagination is a *destructive faculty*, that he can *never* control it and that it *always* carries him away from his more conscious decisions, in a direction in which he had no intention of going. Imagination is almost as bad as lying, it is, in fact, lying to oneself. Man starts to imagine something in order to please himself, and very soon he begins to believe what he imagines, or at least some of it. [Third Psychological Lecture]

Mr Ouspensky recognised that 'imagination cannot exist without identification'. Identification – another of the chief impediments – can be defined as believing ourselves to be something other than what we are and identifying ourselves with passing desires, likes, dislikes, beliefs etc. It is 'imagination' that creates and sustains the false 'I's that we believe ourselves to be, and it is those false 'I's that use 'imagination' to veil the light of the real Self. So Self-remembering is the obvious remedy.

The Shankaracharya emphasises the effect that this flow of thoughts has on our attention:

Vikshepa is that which creates temporary hindrances, so instead of attending to one thing, one attends to another—not necessarily opposite. It may be analogous but it will never be on the point one should act on or attend to. This is because of movement in the Manas [mechanical mind]. [HH Record 1975, 22 September]

He prescribed the same remedy:

Vikshepa is really terrible and very subtle. Only if mind is still and all ambitions and desires are discarded, will Vikshepa lose its hold, otherwise it keeps company in very subtle way without being noticed. This is the field to work on. [HH Letter to FCR 25/11/76]

Our mind has the property of thinking something or the other all the time. It cannot remain idle. If it does not think of the Param Atman [Self-remembering], it would think of the world.

Thinking of Param-Atman leads to happiness and thinking of the world leads to unhappiness. [HH Record 1971, 7 May]

'Thinking of Param-Atman' and 'Self-remembering' have been much misunderstood. We can only 'think of' or 'remember' an object – something either inside or outside the body/mind, and in some way separate from 'me'. (The Self is commonly and erroneously felt to be inside, and Param-Atman, outside.) In real Self-remembering there is no subject, no object, no thinking and no remembering. We simply rest in the peace of our own being, as pure, unlimited Consciousness.

Mr Ouspensky was convinced that the System must have included a natural method of Self-remembering, but he never managed to find it. Dr Roles believed that he had found it in the method of mantra meditation from the Shankaracharya tradition. It was through his practice of this traditional teaching under the close guidance of HH Shantanand Saraswati that he eventually realised his real nature and gained liberation. However, as the connection with the Shankaracharya tradition has been lost our group now takes its guidance from the Direct Path lineage from Atmananda Krishnamenon.

The Direct Path takes a slightly different attitude and approach to thoughts. It doesn't use any device such as a mantra to occupy attention and thereby suppress thoughts. (Such devices are, by their nature *indirect* as they require a second step involving allowing attention to relax back into itself. It is the omission of this second step – i.e. not letting go of the mantra – that causes many of the common problems experienced in the practice of mantra meditation.) In the Direct Path, thoughts are not regarded as a problem. Instead, the approach to 'unwanted thoughts' is to simply allow thoughts, feelings, and perceptions to flow through the mind without giving attention to them or resisting them.

In the following extract taken from Rupert Spira's description of how to meditate, it should be noted that 'meditation' in the Direct Path is not something that we *do*: true meditation is *being knowingly what we are*. Unlike most other methods of meditation, it is not a practice that occupies a specific period of time. It does not (intentionally) start and stop. As Rupert explains, 'true meditation never ends' – it eventually becomes our natural way of living. In the Direct Path the method and the goal are the same:

Some minds may be relatively quiet, others may be commentating on what is being said here, or thinking about other matters. All kinds of thoughts may be going on. It doesn't matter whatever is going on in our mind. Give the mind total freedom to go wherever it wants, whenever it wants, and to think about whatever it wants.

Meditation has nothing to do with what is or what is not taking place in the mind. Give the mind total freedom to do whatever it has been conditioned to do. There is nobody personally responsible for the activity of the mind. In fact, the entire universe conspires to make every event take place. That is, every thought, every feeling, every action, every wind that flutters, every butterfly that moves, everything in the entire universe, is involved in the slightest thought or feeling. So the universe is responsible for our thoughts.

If we're going to take on our thoughts, we will have to take on the entire universe. Leave thoughts alone.

Be effortlessly and knowingly that which is aware of our thoughts. Notice that we are that, and simply be that knowingly. Know yourself as that.

[Rupert Spira, *The Light of Pure Knowing*: ch. 2 Meditation]

So what do we do when a train of thought takes our attention away from being knowingly aware of being aware? As we learnt at the end of last term all that is necessary is to simply allow attention to sink back into its source in universal Consciousness. We don't give our attention to thoughts and we don't try to stop them. As we practise this more and more, we begin to learn more about the mechanism underlying this constant stream of thoughts. Here is Rupert's description:

However, in time we may discover that the purpose of these daydreaming thoughts, these rivulets of thought that keep running in little excursions into the past and the future, is precisely to prevent us from being aware of deeper layers of feeling in the body that may be more uncomfortable.

These little rivulets of thought find successful ways of engaging our attention so we never have to fully feel the deeper, darker, less comfortable feelings which remain, as a result, safely buried deep inside the body and surface rarely.

These subliminal feelings are the real location of the sense of separation and we usually avoid them successfully through thinking or addiction to substances and activities. As a result, the separate self that they conceal remains intact. In this way the body becomes a refuge for the sense of separation.

Although these deeper feelings are not seen or felt most of the time, they subliminally influence and dictate the more easily perceived thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships.

In fact, all addictions are an extension or modulation of our primary addiction to thinking. When incessant thinking, with its excursions into the past and future, no longer has the power to allay these uncomfortable feelings — the sense of lack, dis-ease, unworthiness, failure, inadequacy, loss, despair etc. — then we take to more extreme means, such as addiction to substances or activities, in order to avoid ever having to face these feelings fully. [Presence Vol1, p167]

All these forms of addiction are simply strategies of avoidance — avoidance of ‘what is’, avoidance of ‘this’, avoidance of ‘now’. They are the familiar refuges of the sense of a separate self. ...

To go to the root of the matter means to go to the source of the apparently separate ‘I’, not just the *belief* in the separate ‘I’ but, more importantly, the *feeling* of such.

It is only when the whole mechanism of the apparently separate self has been seen clearly in all its subtlety that we are free of it, that is, that ‘I’, awareness, stands knowingly in and as itself, unapparently-veiled by the belief and feeling of separation. [Presence Vol2, pp192, 193]

Rupert is careful to point out that the arising of these negative feelings is not a sign of failure of our meditation: it is actually an early sign of success. The next paper will include a discussion of the attitude and approach to negative emotion in the Direct Path. In the meantime, all that is needed is to keep coming back over and over again to being knowingly what we really are — to being aware of being aware — and allow thoughts and feelings to be as they are, in the background of experience, without either encouraging them or resisting them. That is true Self-remembering.

If a specific train of thought becomes persistent, self-enquiry can often help. Ask yourself: ‘On whose behalf is this thought arising? What is that entity looking for? The truthful answer is usually ‘it is arising on behalf of an imagined separate self that is seeking happiness’. Then just remind attention that happiness lies in the opposite direction and allow it to relax back into itself.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that all thoughts revolve around an illusory separate self and are therefore ‘bad’. Thinking that is required in practical situations in the world, the thinking that is involved in self-enquiry, and thoughts involved in celebrating our true nature do not come from the separate self. We simply need to be sure that when such thinking comes to an end, attention flows back naturally into its source.

In summary, 'it is not necessary to get rid of thoughts, images and ideas; just cease deriving your sense of identity from them'.

Contemplation

Don't lose yourself in thoughts and feelings; let them lose themselves in you. [Rupert Spira]