

Am I the one who makes things happen?

The second of the five sheaths veiling the Self in the Advaita Vedanta tradition is *pranamaya*. *Prana* means 'life-force' – that which animates the physical body and causes it to move. Those who stay with a person or animal who is dying often say something like: 'I saw the point at which the life-force left the body. Then there was nothing there – just an empty shell'. We may not know what the life-force actually is, but we feel its presence or absence. So it is natural to think: 'I am not a dead, inert body made of matter – I am the life-force which enables or causes the body made of matter to move'. 'I am the doer', 'I make things happen'.

Our Western culture encourages this belief. It's common to say of a lazy employee: 'He's useless, he never gets anything done.' Or at the other end of the spectrum: 'He's a high achiever'. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with this model of human behaviour when applied in the practical world of work and production, *provided that we don't take it to be ultimate reality*. Things happen, things get done, but the teaching tells us that there is no individual doer. Those who have read Chris Frith's book *Making Up the Mind* (recommended in the 2014 Summer Programme) will know that this is consistent with recent advances in neuroscience. However, as always, it is both pointless and counter-productive to adopt this as a belief. We need to discover the truth of the situation for ourselves, based on our own direct experience.

When Rupert was asked about this he started by encouraging the questioner to examine carefully all aspects of his experience to see where this concept of a separate doer might fit in:

Q 'The question of choice and personal doership in this exploration of experience arises frequently. I'm struggling with the conflict between myself as the doer versus the non-doeer.'

Our apparently objective experience comprises thoughts, images, sensations and perceptions.

Only one object can appear at a time, so it would be more accurate to say that at any moment there is one thought/image/sensation/perception present. See clearly that there is only ever one appearance present at a time, just as there is only ever one image present on a TV screen at a time.

It is thinking alone that splits the current experience into a multiplicity of objects, such as words, hands, table, walls, sky, etc, just as it is thinking that imagines the single TV screen to comprise houses, people, cars, the street etc. However, in our actual experience there is only ever 'one thing' appearing at any moment. Later it will be seen that, in fact, there isn't even one 'thing' present; there is only presence, present to itself.

This 'one thing' that seems to be present is a seamless whole just as the image on the screen is a seamless whole. It is only thinking that draws imaginary lines around parts of the image to create an apparent multiplicity and diversity of objects.

Now take the current appearance, this current experience, and see that the entire appearance is permeated with the awareness that knows it, just as the entire image on the screen is permeated by the screen on which it appears. ...

No apparent part of experience is any closer to or further away from awareness than another. In fact, there are no parts to experience that could be at varying distances from awareness.

When anything appears it is so utterly and intimately one with the awareness that knows it that there is not the slightest room for any distance or separation from it. In fact, there is not even an object, other or world, as such, there to begin with that could subsequently be divided in parts.

It is thought that rises up and imagines that awareness does not equally and intimately pervade *all* experience. This thought veils the presence of awareness and, as a result, divides experience into two parts – one part, the body and mind, that is considered to be permeated by awareness and becomes, as a result, the separate inside self, and another that is considered not to be pervaded by awareness and becomes, as a result, the separate outside object or world.

With this thought the reality of awareness is no longer felt and understood to be the essence of *all* experience – both our self *and* the world – but is considered to be the reality of *only* our self.

Thought now imagines that this separate inside self, which is an illusory thought-and-feeling-made self, is autonomous. It becomes the knower, feeler, perceiver and doer. ...

That part of the seamless totality of experience that thought considers to be permeated by awareness is called 'me,' and that part of the totality that is considered by thought *not* to be permeated by awareness is called 'not me.'

That part of the totality that is considered to be 'me' is the thinking, feeling and sensing part, that is, the mind and body. And that part of the totality that is considered to be 'not me' is the perceived part, that is, objects, others and the world.

It is as if the screen were to think that it, the screen, is only present in one little part of the image that is appearing on it, just one little person, but not all the rest, not the others, the trees, the fields, the sky, the cars, the buildings ... etc.

In other words, the apparently separate entity and the apparently separate world are simultaneously co-created in thought by an imaginary division of the seamless intimacy of experience.

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Now what relation does all this have to the question about 'the conflict between me as the doer vs. the non-doeer'?

The doer and, while we are talking about it, the thinker, the feeler, the chooser, the lover, the decider, the enjoyer, the sufferer etc., etc., is considered to be this little separate entity that thought has artificially created within, and divided from, the totality.

This doer is not an entity. It has no separate reality of its own. It is simply the thought that has exclusively associated our self, awareness, with a little cluster of sensations.

However, our experience is one seamless whole. It is not comprised of separate parts, one part acting on another, one part giving and the other receiving, one loving and the other loved, one part dictating and the other part dictated to.

So, 'the conflict between me as the doer versus the non-doeer' is an artificial one. It can never be resolved at the level on which it appears because the entities around which it revolves are non-

existent. There are no selves, entities, parts, objects or others, as such, anywhere to be found in experience.

There is simply experiencing – thinking, sensing and perceiving – whose entire substance is made out of the awareness that knows it.

And when there is no thinking, sensing and perceiving, the essence of experiencing remains as it always is, awareness simply being/knowing/loving itself. [Presence Volume 2, p131-135]

If instead of understanding for ourselves that we are not the doer, we simply adopt this as a belief, we can easily fall into a nihilistic way of thinking – ‘there’s nothing to do, nowhere to go, there is no ‘me’, my unhappiness is simply an appearance in awareness’ ... Mr Ouspensky taught us that ‘we cannot do’ and ‘we must do’ are both true. Here is Rupert’s explanation:

Q: Many teachings tell us that there is nothing one can do to reach enlightenment.

It would be disingenuous to believe that there is nothing to do, that Consciousness is all there is, that there is no separate entity, simply because we have heard or read it so many times.

Such a belief leaves us worse off than we were in the first place. Not only do we still harbour the original belief in separation and its attendant feelings, but we overlay it with a veneer of ‘non-dualism,’ embedded in which is the deep belief that the mind only perpetuates ignorance.

If we make the statement that there is nothing that we can do to reach enlightenment, we make it either from understanding, from our own experience, or we make it from hearsay, from belief.

If the statement is made from experience, then it is true.

However, if it is not our experience that there is nothing to do to reach enlightenment, then, by definition, it implies that there is still an apparent personal entity present. That personal entity *is* the apparent doer, feeler, thinker, enjoyer, sufferer, etc.

So if we believe ourselves to be such a doer, it is disingenuous to say that there is nothing to do. It is a contradiction in terms. We are already doing something. To that apparent one it would be more appropriate to say, ‘Yes, there is something to be done.’

What is there to be done? Investigate the belief and the feeling as to whether or not what we truly are is a separate entity, an individual doer. When that issue is resolved, the question as to whether or not there is something to be done will not arise.

So the formulation ‘There is nothing to do’ and the formulation ‘There is something to do,’ can both be either true or untrue, depending on the understanding from which they are derived. In the end both are irrelevant, but in the beginning both can be helpful.

If we think that either one is truer than the other, then we are stuck at the level of mind. We condone and substantiate mind either through denial or through assertion, and there is not much to choose between those two positions. In fact they are the same position.

However, if we explore the relative truth of *both* statements, we free ourselves from the dogma attached to either position and, in this case, the issue is transcended in Understanding rather than resolved in knowledge. [*The Transparency of Things*, p223-224]

Contemplation

From the point of view of a finite self, experience consists of a multiplicity and diversity of finite objects and selves, some of which are conceived as 'me', others as 'not me'. From the point of view of experience itself, there is just the seamless intimacy of itself, one indivisible, unnameable whole, always changing in name and form but never changing in essence.

[Rupert Spira]