

2016 SUMMER PROGRAMME

Practice and Non-practice

The nature of mind is to divide experience into objects. As a result, our lives are spent experiencing, manipulating, acquiring and judging objects. Wherever there is thinking, there are objects. So it is hardly surprising that when we look for enlightenment we look for it as an object, and the question immediately arises: 'what do I need to do to acquire enlightenment?' There is no shortage of spiritual teachers and teachers of various physical and mental disciplines ready to tell what to do (or to tell us that nothing can be done because there's no-one there to do it). Direct Path teachers take a different approach. They start by explaining that enlightenment is not an experience or a state. In other words, it is not an object that can be acquired:

We believe that if we meditate for long enough or practise hard enough we may eventually have the experience of enlightenment. And as a result, we go off and undertake all kinds of practices, hoping that if we are sincere enough, devoted enough, we go to our teacher in India often enough, we sit on our mat for long enough, whatever it is that we do, we will eventually get this extraordinary experience called enlightenment.

However, enlightenment is not an experience. Awakening is not an experience in the mind or the body. It is the simple knowing of our own Being as it is. It is the recognition of our ever-present and unlimited nature. [Rupert Spira: *The Light of Pure Knowing*, Meditation 1]

So is there something we can do to enable this recognition to arise? Here is Rupert's answer given in an interview in 2010:

Q: What do you tell your students to do (practices, mental preparation, meditation etc.)?

I do not have a prescription, formula or set practice. However, broadly speaking there are two aspects: firstly, to notice that what we *are* is Awareness; that is, to notice that 'I' is both ever-present and aware, without limit or location; and secondly that this Awareness is not just the witness but also simultaneously, the substance of all seeming things. ...

Q: Will these practices lead them to self-realization/enlightenment?

No activity (or lack of activity) of the mind will bring about enlightenment. The best the mind can do is to explore its own belief systems and come to the conclusion that it knows nothing about reality although, at the same time, it is an expression of it.

When this is clearly seen the mind comes effortlessly and spontaneously to an end and in that moment we find ourselves open, available, unknowing and present.

In this openness there is no waiting and no expectation because the mind is not present. There is simply Being or Presence. And whatever it is that knows this Presence is Presence itself. That is the only 'one' present 'there' to know itself. That is, there is only Presence knowing its own Being. It knows itself. ...

To begin with it seems as if Presence only knows its own Being when the mind is not present. Later on it becomes clear that Presence is always only knowing its own Self.

[\[Interview with Paula Marvelly, June 2010\]](#)

It is all too easy to be drawn back to the old habit of seeking enlightenment as an object and to turn this exploration into a practice: 'I want enlightenment; therefore, I need to explore my experience in

order to get it.' So we replace our old practices by a new set, not realising that it is precisely this effort, this striving towards 'something' that is getting in the way. It is perhaps for this reason that the Katha Upanishad describes the spiritual path as being like 'the sharp edge of a razor' – we *do* need to make some effort, but it needs to be (or quickly become) an 'effortless effort'. When, as children, we learnt how to ride a bicycle, initially we wobbled all over the place, and unless there was someone there to catch us, we probably fell off. That was because we tried too hard and over-corrected. Suddenly, when we relaxed a little and stopped all that over-correction – all that effort and 'doing' – we found that balancing the bike was effortless. And once learnt, it is never forgotten. It is much the same with enlightenment: walking along the razor's edge becomes easy and natural when we relax and stop trying too hard. And in time, we realise there is no edge and nowhere to fall.

Those of us who come from a highly disciplined traditional path such as that taught by Mr Ouspensky or the Shankaracharya, don't find this easy. Rupert teaches us that all 'practice' must come only from interest or love. And in my experience, that is the key to 'effortless effort'. So before going on to some practical suggestions, here is Rupert's description of how that interest and love arises and is cultivated:

Most people are so fascinated by the objects that they know – that is thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions – that they never even notice the presence of the knowing with which these are known. So the first thing we do here is simply to notice that all our experience is known, and that this knowing of our experience, this being aware of our experience, runs consistently throughout all experience. Our most intelligent and unintelligent thoughts are known alike by this knowing. Our most pleasant and unpleasant sensations are known equally by this same knowing. And the world – whatever its situation – is known by this same knowing.

First of all, we simply notice that. 'Wow – there is something that illuminates my experience. Why didn't they tell me that at school?' We become interested in whatever it is that is aware of our experience. We cease being fascinated by thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions. And we become interested instead in the knowing with which these are known.

I sometimes liken this first acquaintance with the experience of being aware, to meeting someone at a party. (Of course I realise that this is not our first acquaintance.) We go to the party and on the far side of the room we spot somebody. 'She looks nice', 'he looks nice'. And after some time we muster up the courage to go and say 'hello'. And we just begin a conversation. We begin to become acquainted. The party ends, we go home, we go to work the next day. But we notice the next day, that in between all our thoughts, feelings, activities and perceptions, the image of this person keeps returning. Their memory disturbs us. Their memory infiltrates the normal flow of thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions. We are no longer exclusively focused on our normal thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions. Some part of our interest and energy is directed in this new direction.

A couple of days later we call the person, we go out for dinner, we get to know one another. And the more we get to know this person, the more interested we become. And we notice at work during the following days, more and more of our attention is drawn towards this person. And as a result, we cease being so exclusively interested in our normal thoughts, sensations and perceptions. They seem to lose their attractive power over us: our attention has been attracted by something else. We begin to spend more and more time with this person – evenings, days, weekends. We begin to lose interest in the previous objects that held our attention so strongly. Something else has appeared in our life which is far more interesting. And we notice after a while

that our interest in this person is growing into more than just an interest – it is a love. It can no longer simply be called ‘interest’. Each time we go to visit our friend, we stay for longer and longer periods of time. We spend less and less time in the old habitual places. And at a certain point, we move in.

That’s how it is with this discovery of the knowing with which our experience is known. First of all, we just make brief acquaintance: ‘Oh yes – there is something that illuminates my experience – that’s interesting. What *is* that? We ponder it for a few minutes and then the old habits, the old fascination with our thoughts feelings, sensations and perceptions eclipses our interest. But once we have noticed this ever-present knowing, we can never forget it again. It keeps disturbing us. When our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are no longer focused on an object or no longer required by circumstances to be directed towards an object, there is this – like a memory, like a calling from another direction. We begin to become more and more interested in it. Just going out for dinner is not long enough. We want to spend the weekend there.

We notice that our interest in the experience of being aware is growing into a great love to know the nature of this experience. Much of the attention that we previously directed towards objects – that is thoughts, sensations, feelings, and perceptions is now directed towards this experience of being aware. ‘How could I not have noticed this before? It has been with me all my life. It is the essential ingredient of all experience. It pervades all experience. And just because it cannot be known as an object, I failed to notice it.’ The more attention we give the experience of being aware, the more its implication begins to dawn on us: ‘Nothing can be known without this knowing. It is the essential ingredient of all experience. How could I have overlooked this? How come our culture has systematically ignored its presence?’ What could be more interesting than to know the nature of the knowing with which our experience is known?

At some point it dawns on us: until we know the nature of that which knows our experience, we cannot know the nature of anything that is known. And this understanding precipitates a crisis in us. It is not possible to know anything that is true about the mind, the body or the world, without knowing what is true about that which knows it.

[Meditation, 25th June 2014: The White Radiance of Eternity]

At the last retreat at Buckland Hall there was a question from someone new to the Direct Path who had been following a discipline of various Buddhist meditation practices for one hour a day. He had decided to leave his current path and wanted to know how best to use this one hour. Here is Rupert’s advice:

RS: Yes. I would encourage you to use this hour, divide your time, between the inward-facing path and the outward-facing path. Not rigidly, but just like we do in the mornings. To begin with, trace back your experience to the experience of being aware, and rest your mind in awareness, rest your mind in its source, which is another way of saying ‘be aware of the experience of being aware’. It’s another way of saying ‘be knowingly the open, empty presence of awareness’ – there are many ways of saying this. So this is not an activity of the mind in any way. It’s not a directing of the mind towards the breath, the space between breaths, or anything. It’s the opposite of that. It’s a non-practice. In fact you can’t really practise it – it’s a non-practice, it’s a resting of the mind, what Ramana Maharshi called ‘a sinking of the mind into the heart’. And rest there. Leave the mind just resting there in awareness. Be awareness knowingly.

But then, add a space-like quality to awareness. So first visualise awareness as a vast, borderless field. But it’s a *knowing* field, it’s not like a dead, inert space, it’s a knowing space. And establish

in your experience that everything you experience – your thoughts, your feelings, bodily sensations, sounds of people coughing, traffic on the streets, the aeroplane – establish that everything is taking place in yourself and begin to explore your experience from this point of view. You can explore your experience of the world – sounds and sights and also your experience of the body. So yes, this second part is what I call the outward-facing path, facing towards objects – the body and the world.

So I would encourage you to do both. You might decide one day you may spend the whole hour or so just resting as awareness, and the next day you may spend the whole time exploring just the experience of the head, because the head is a place where so many ‘me’ feelings reside – ‘me’ the thinker, ‘me’ the see-er, ‘me’ the hearer etc. So mix it up. Don’t feel it’s got to be half an hour and half an hour. Yes, I would encourage you to explore your experience in this way and not just focus on the breath.

Of course, it’s not necessary to follow a disciplined pattern or programme of exploration. These suggestions can be used anywhere at any time, whenever you feel like it.

Following on from this, a second questioner asked about the meditations on Rupert’s website:

Q: I know you have many guided meditations on the website, but most of them are quite long, like one and half hours or two hours. Do you also have guided meditations that are specifically designed for what we just spoke about, that are like half an hour or an hour long or 45 minutes?

RS (after explaining that he is in the process of developing a new website which will include a set of shorter meditations): But a lot of the meditations – as you know there are lots of meditations on the website – although they last for between one and two hours, they’re usually broken into sections. This morning’s meditation, for instance, could easily have been broken into half a dozen sections. So if you took the first three lines of one of these meditations, that would be enough. You could spend a whole week with a single meditation. So there are lots on the website.

Rupert went on to mention *The Light of Pure Knowing* which has 30 shorter meditations – all under an hour, with an average length of about 36 minutes:

... but there again they are split up into sections. You don’t have to go through the whole meditation. In fact, I would recommend you just take a section, listen to it for 10 minutes, and the idea is not to listen, because in fact, when you are listening to the meditation you are not meditating. When we are listening to the meditation we are directing our attention towards an object – in this case the word – so the real meditation takes place in between the words. So if you were to listen to a meditation – and this goes for the meditations here, or in the collection, or on-line – listen for five minutes and then just pause for 20 minutes. And it would be fine to go through them five minutes at a time.

The meditations in *The Light of Pure Knowing* take you through the whole of the teaching, focusing initially on the inward-facing path and then later on the outward-facing, tantric path.

You will also find several free general meditations (inward-facing) and yoga meditations (outward facing) on Rupert’s Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/user/ruPERTSPIRA. These are all videos, but I find it’s best just to sit in a comfortable position (i.e. not at a desk) and listen with your eyes closed.