

Another Perspective on Self-enquiry

Our 2015 Summer Programme gave an introduction to the method of self-enquiry which is the cornerstone of the Direct Path. Our subsequent study of the five sheaths veiling the Self (and related topics) covered virtually all of the vedantic stage of Rupert's teaching. In other words, we have covered all the knowledge needed for enlightenment. But as the Shankaracharya said: 'Such knowledge is at best good information. ... Only when the knowledge is realised does the individual become Realised.'

It is up to each of us to carry out our own self-enquiry, or self-investigation. But we need to be very clear about the method as there is much confusion and misinformation among teachers and students of non-Duality about how this should be done. It might be worth looking again at the 2015 Summer Programme which describes Rupert's approach, before reading the following clear and forthright description from Francis Lucille which explains the same method from a different perspective:

In a sense if we are investigating it's because we don't have the answer. When we have the answer we stop investigating. Then we are too busy just having a good time or living. There is a right way and there is a wrong way to investigate. The wrong way is to investigate as a practice. And a practice is, for example: 'I don't feel well, I want things to be different, and I have been told that if I repeat Coca Cola, Coca Cola or if I repeat Who am I? Who am I? or What am I? What am I? at some point all of a sudden all my problems will disappear. This sense of lack will disappear.'

That investigation is not a real investigation – in other words practice and investigation are two different things. Practice assumes a repetitive pattern which is almost mechanical and you go through the same steps or whatever, and then you do it again. That doesn't really qualify as an investigation. To qualify as an investigation, we must have a real question. In order to have a real question we must be interested in the answer. We need to have the *desire* for the answer - the *eagerness* to investigate, to try to find out. So just to ask What am I? What am I? or Who am I? is too general in my view. Because it is a little bit ambiguous - how am I going to proceed? OK, I ask: 'What am I?' And so what?

You see we could be more precise and more surgical. The way I suggest we conduct the investigation is as a two-step process. First, we have to ascertain for ourselves that what we are is consciousness, meaning the reality which is reading these words right now, whatever this reality might be. It may have no shape. It may be something that I cannot define other than through these definitions that I just gave: the reality which is reading these words, which is perceiving them, which is understanding them. In fact, it would be counter-productive to add any image to this reality, for instance the image of a body – as a man, as a truth-seeker or whatever.

You see this consciousness shouldn't have any image associated with it. And that's why in many, many religions they warn us about idolatry. Idolatry comes from a Greek word which means the worshipping of images. To fall in love with images. And that's why also in some religions any representation of the divine is not OK. But the real esoteric meaning of that is not that it is 'not kosher' to have an image of the divine, it is simply that it is impossible. It is not something that has to be prohibited, because it is impossible. So we have to leave it at that, to understand that what we are is consciousness, the reality which is reading these words and that every time I try to have a representation of it, I am wrong. I can only be wrong every time I try to have a representation of it.

In other words, when I use the word consciousness even the word has to have a vanishing quality to it. Because even the word 'consciousness' is *not* the presence which is reading these words. I may have a very fleeting image but then this image has to dissolve for me to understand that that which is reading these words right now cannot have any representation. And that's *me*, obviously it's not somebody else reading these words, that's *me*, that's what I call 'I' or consciousness. So 'I' and consciousness are identical. That's a first step. The first step is to understand what I am saying, and to come to this conclusion: yes that's true, that's what I am, I am consciousness before I am a body, before I am a human being, before I am an object. ...

So the first thing is: 'I know *that* I am, I don't know *what* I am'. I know that I am – consciousness, but I don't know *what* I am, because every time I give a 'what' – a man, a body, a spirit, a soul, whatever ..., I'm wrong. I can only be wrong if I say *what* I am. I know that I am; I don't know what I am – we have to leave it at that. And that's the first step. We have to be very clear. In this first step, we distance ourselves from all objects, from all created beings. We distance ourselves from everything that can be known. So we identify with the unknowable presence – unknowable by the mind, of course. But on the other hand we *know* that we are conscious, so we have some experience of it.

Now the second step is to ask oneself the question: What is the evidence that this consciousness which I now know myself to be, is limited? Then I will come up with all kinds of objections. I have to go through all of them and through all of that part of the teaching. In the Zen tradition they say 'you can place your objects at the feet of the guru'. And that's one of the functions of the guru – to answer these objections. The guru has to *really* answer the question. The guru cannot be 'tramp-like'. He must not answer a question by a question. He must answer it.

So that's a path to investigate which is quite different from asking 'What am I', 'What am I'. It is a two-step process that has to be done very thoroughly, especially the second part. We first have to ascertain for ourselves that we agree with the first part: I am consciousness, rather than anything else. And then to go further, to move to the second part and this is when all the objections are going to come to the surface. There are all different kinds – rational ones, and irrational ones that come from gut feeling, like: 'I am a woman, I am this body, you may tell me everything you want and intellectually I agree with you, but my gut feeling – come on, I am a man, I know it'. And that's when you have to stick to your clarity, stick to your intelligence and to ignore the gut feelings – to trample on the feelings, to dance on them. The feelings are nothing precious.

[from Youtube video: *Advaita 5 of 24, Am I Investigating too much?* (no longer available)]

Courage and persistence are needed. Courage to see through any attempt of the separate self to construct fake objections and excuses, and to surrender them to the light of awareness. Persistence to keep asking more questions and raising more objections until every possible doubt is satisfied. Understanding comes from awareness itself – not from the mind. However, until mind is satisfied and brought to a stop, realisation of our true nature is not possible.

There is no problem asking fundamentally the same question at meeting after meeting if new lines of reasoning surface which have yet to be explored or if the question was not answered properly in the first place. It is *not* impolite to continue asking until you get a satisfactory answer – it would be a response from intelligence and love of truth. If no satisfactory answer emerges from our meetings, the next step, as Francis Lucille explained, is to 'place your objects at the feet of the guru'. In other words, to consult an expert authority and continue the dialogue until all doubts or objections are

resolved. (We are very fortunate in the UK to have so many opportunities for attending Rupert's meetings. See: http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/meet/#united_kingdom)

It is not possible to prove logically or scientifically that awareness is unlimited, but equally it is not possible to prove that it is limited. Once all the arguments in favour of its limitedness have been thoroughly examined and shown to lack any supporting evidence, we are left with an open mind, in a state of 'not-knowing'. If we stay there, spending as much time as we can abiding, resting, as the presence of awareness, at some point we may come to an intuitive feeling-understanding that the consciousness we now know ourselves to be has no border or boundary. It is unlimited in space or time. The materialist model which we were taught as children then ceases to be the default colouring of our experience and a new default colouring begins to establish itself. The world is seen from a different perspective and our experience of mind, body and world seems to change. At this point, the vedantic path has done its job, the tantric path – the path of inclusion – takes over, and we discover how to live in accordance with our new understanding. Rupert gave this description in a yoga meditation at the recent retreat at Buckland Hall:

Consider again the fundamental presumption of our world culture. First of all there is time and space, then matter, then the world, then the body, then the brain then the mind, then awareness. Awareness is a fleeting, fragile, insubstantial, intermittent experience that is a by-product of brain activity. Consider this idea and measure it against your actual experience. Is this idea, this fundamental presumption upon which our world culture is founded, is it an accurate description of your experience? Is awareness an experience *in* and a by-product *of* your body, or is your body an experience *in* and a by-product of awareness? Is awareness a fragile, fleeting, insubstantial experience that appears *in* the world? Or is the world a series of fleeting, insubstantial, intermittent perceptions that appear *in* awareness? What is your experience?

Don't allow your mind to tell you: 'Oh that's crazy – how could the world possibly appear in dimensionless awareness?' Imagine 2,500 years ago, when people first suggested that the world was round, that it was floating, suspended weightlessly in empty space. Can you imagine what people thought – people who thought that the earth was flat and that it rested on some solid, never-ending sub-stratum? Can you imagine what they thought when it was first suggested that the earth was just a sphere, a minute speck, suspended weightlessly in space? What I am suggesting is no less extraordinary than the fact that the earth is like a speck suspended weightlessly in empty space. I'm suggesting that the universe is a series of specks suspended weightlessly, not in empty, physical space but in empty, self-aware consciousness. ...

Could it be that there are not billions of separate, limited, finite consciousnesses floating around in each of our heads? Could it be that there is one, borderless, infinite, consciousness in which each of our minds is appearing? After all, if none of us can find an edge to the awareness in which our experience appears ... if nobody has ever or could ever experience an edge to the awareness in which their experience appears, what legitimacy is there to the belief that there *is* an edge to awareness? There is no legitimacy to such a belief: it is simply a belief. It is a religion; it is the religion of materialism – as ignorant as the flat earth or the geocentric universe ideas. ...

How would it be to lead a life that is consistent with the understanding that there is one, limitless awareness, and that that limitless, indivisible, infinite awareness shines in each of our minds as the knowledge 'I am' or the feeling of being? How would it be to live the possibility that the 'I am' that each of us knows is the *same* being, the *same* infinite consciousness, refracting itself in each of our minds? Could it be that the experience of love is this knowledge of our shared being? ...

What I am suggesting is a complete reversal of perspective. But it is not one that comes from abstract, philosophical thinking. It is one that comes from rigorously exploring our experience. After all, experience must be the test of reality. I don't have any special access to this reality. I have just explored it very thoroughly and am making the pathways along which I explored available to other people to travel. Everyone has the same access to reality, because everyone *is* the same reality. In fact, there aren't lots of separate 'everyone's'. Each of our minds is just a temporary, self-assumed limitation of the only one that truly is – infinite, indivisible, self-aware being, God's infinite being.

All that is required is to take the journey, to make the exploration yourself. Use these pathways that are being shared. Excavate your entire experience. Explore it and be courageous. Only trust what you, yourself, know from your own experience. Refuse everything your culture has told you. They told us the earth was flat. They told us the earth was the centre of the universe. They were wrong. Could they be wrong about consciousness? Could it be that consciousness is not an epiphenomenon of the brain? ...

Explore your experience, trust your experience. And then the last stage: have the courage to *live* the implications of what you discover. Ponder the implications of this perspective, and then try it out. To the best of your ability, think, feel, act, perceive and relate in a way that is consistent with whatever you discover. The old habits will, of course, reassert themselves. Don't worry about that: just go back again and again and again – explore your experience and live the implications of what you discover. And the more we make this exploration and the more we try to *live* its implications, the more this picture fills out. It's not just one discovery – it goes on and on and on revealing itself.

[Extract from '*Whosoever Knows their Self Knows their Lord*', Buckland Hall, 26th April 2016]

Contemplation

Thought has taken the ever-present reality that properly belongs to Me, Awareness, and superimposed it upon the mind, body and world. Give back to Me what properly belongs to Me, and everything will fall into place.