

## The Pathless Path. Part 1: The Vedantic Path

The spiritual path taught by Rupert Spira comes from two sources – Advaita Vedanta and the tantric teaching of Kashmiri Shaivism. At the beginning, the focus is on the Vedantic path, also known as the path of discrimination. We start by seeing that we cannot *be* anything that we are aware of. We cannot *be* an object of experience:

Normally we are so absorbed in the objective aspect of experience that we overlook the presence of Consciousness within and behind every experience.

Consciousness, or that to which we refer as 'I', is that which *perceives* or *experiences*. It is that which witnesses the mind, the body and the world. It is that which is seeing and understanding these words right now.

In this moment, something is being experienced, and whatever that something is, whether it is the mind, the body or the world, it is being perceived or experienced by Consciousness, by that which we call 'I', or 'me'.

This Consciousness is an undeniable fact of our experience. Even the denial of Consciousness requires Consciousness.

However, we have forgotten that the real nature of this 'I', of our Self, is Consciousness, the Presence that is witnessing and experiencing whatever it is that is being experienced in this moment.

This presence of Consciousness stands alone, independent of any of the objects of the mind, body and world that appear to it, in the same way that a mirror stands alone, independent of whatever is reflected upon it.

We have confused and identified this witnessing Consciousness with the body and the mind and, as a result, we have come to think and feel that 'I' is *something*, that it is a body/mind.

[Rupert Spira: *The Transparency of Things*, Our true body]

Through the Vedantic path we arrive at the understanding 'I am nothing' – not-a-thing, not a body/mind, not any kind of an object:

When the imaginary self is divested of the beliefs and feelings that confine it to one little corner of experience—this little cluster of thoughts and feelings called the body and mind—it stands revealed as the one and only self there is, intimately pervading all experience equally.

We don't *become* that; we have *always only ever* been that.

Relieved of the straitjacket that seemed to keep it confined within the limits of a body and mind, the self recognizes itself as it is.

[Rupert Spira: *Presence Volume 1*, Part 3]

The initial method used in the Vedantic path is Self-enquiry. (This method was described in detail in an earlier paper: *20160519 Another Perspective on Self-enquiry*). Once we have understood that we are the witnessing presence of Consciousness (or Awareness), we need to spend time abiding knowingly as that in order to discover the nature of that Awareness:

The first step in this consideration is the discovery that we are this aware presence and to see that it is this presence that knows or witnesses the mind, body and world. The second is to *be* that, knowingly, instead of imagining that we are something else such as a body or a mind.

We do not *become* this witnessing presence as a result of this exploration. Rather we notice that we are *always only* that and now we abide as that *knowingly*.

Previously we took our self to be a body and a mind and all experience was conditioned by and appeared in accordance with this belief. Now we reclaim what was always ours. We stand knowingly as the witnessing presence that we always are but which is nevertheless sometimes veiled, forgotten or overlooked. [Rupert Spira: *Presence Volume 1*, Part 1]

This path is sometimes known as a 'pathless path', because no effort is required, nothing needs to be purified, we don't need to become 'more spiritual'. All that is required is openness; all that happens is clear seeing. As Jean Klein explains:

There are basically two known approaches to truth, the gradual and the direct. In the direct approach the premise is that you *are* the truth, there is nothing to achieve. Every step to achieve something is going away from it. The 'path', which strictly speaking is not a path from somewhere to somewhere, is only to welcome, to be open to the truth, the I am. When you have once glimpsed your real nature, it solicits you. There is therefore nothing to do, only be attuned to it as often as invited. There is not a single element of volition in this attuning. It is not the mind which attunes to the 'I am' but the 'I am' which absorbs the mind.

In the gradual approach, you are bound to the mind. The mind is under the illusion that if it changes, alters states, stops, etc., it will be absorbed in what is beyond it. This misconception leads to the most tragic state in which a truth-seeker can find himself: he has bound himself in his own web, a web of the most subtle duality. [Jean Klein: *I Am*, Ch 4]

The misconception that Jean Klein refers to arises because the traditional Advaita path of Adi Shankara lists a number of pre-requisite qualities that must be developed by the aspirant before the truth about our real nature can be imparted. Therefore, traditional teachers of Advaita prescribe a discipline and practice designed to purify the mind and body so that these pre-requisites are met. However, those disciplines and practices cannot and do not in themselves lead to enlightenment. At most, they provide a preparation for understanding the true Advaita teaching. Direct Path teachers suggest that, for most people, this preparation which was developed in response to an earlier culture and way of life is no longer necessary. However, for those of us who have been devoted to certain disciplines and practices for many years, it can be hard to admit the possibility that they are actually hindering enlightenment. Here is Jean Klein's advice:

*Q: Should we not make some effort to improve ourselves?*

J.K.: What do you want to improve? You are perfect; uncover the person who feels something is missing, and what remains is perfection. What is false disappears of its own accord, once it has been seen as false. You identify yourself with your body and your mind and because of this you want to improve. You will be dominated by these instruments just as long as you believe in them.

The moment you no longer believe you are the body and mind the energy used up in this error will be freed. Leave the mind and body free to be what they are and you will no longer be their slave. They are only fragments of the whole which you are. Simply take note of your imperfections and this awareness will take care of them. Once you understand that you are not the body and the mind, you can then accept whatever happens. [Jean Klein: *I Am*, Ch 4]

More generally, we need to discover for ourselves that any kind of desire for enlightenment or seeking enlightenment is a block to enlightenment:

Desire or seeking is always a movement of the mind towards an object of experience. Meditation, prayer or surrender is a relaxing or sinking of that movement of mind into the subject of experience. In religious language, desire is a movement towards God; grace is a call from God. If we desire God or seek enlightenment, we have made God or enlightenment an object of experience. And all objects are by definition, temporary and finite. Therefore, if we are desiring God, we are not really desiring God. If we are seeking enlightenment, we are not really seeking enlightenment. We are simply desiring or seeking an object of experience. Having been failed by all the conventional objects of experience, the mind conceives God or enlightenment as the ultimate object. Whilst this desire is understandable and almost inevitable in the early stages of our exploration, at some point it has to be abandoned. At some point, it has to be seen clearly that it is only possible to desire or seek an object of experience, and no object of experience can deliver the peace and happiness for which we long. Surrender is the inevitable outcome of this understanding.

See that wherever your mind goes, it is always a movement away from 'what is' towards 'what is not'. 'What is' can never be desired or sought, because it already 'is'. We can never know with the mind, who or what we surrender to. The desire to know with the mind, who or what we surrender to, is the desire to make *that* an object of the mind. Surrender that object.

[Rupert Spira, Buckland Hall, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016: *Surrendering Feelings and Sensations to the Loving Space of Awareness, the Divine Mother*]

Does this mean we have to abandon all thinking? And if seeking is pointless, does that mean there is nothing we can do? It is true that what we are cannot be known by the mind, because the mind can only know objects. But that doesn't mean that the mind has no role to play. We use the mind for self-enquiry and in doing so the mind takes us beyond itself to the subject of all experience, the real Self. Similarly, from the point of view of Awareness, there is nothing to do – Awareness is never hidden from itself. But from the point of view of an entity that thinks and feels itself to be separate, there *is* something that needs to be done: to enquire into its true nature.

Once we have understood that we are not a body/mind, we are that which is aware of the body, mind and world, all that is needed is to abide as that. It is through this self-abidance that the unlimited and imperturbable nature of the Awareness that we now know ourselves to be is revealed. Francis Lucille gives this advice:

We are this awareness which is not an object. We are that in which this body-mind and all other body-minds, all other objects, appear. We are much bigger than a body-mind. Keep returning to this understanding.

A time comes when we no longer need to question the validity of feeling and knowing that we are not the body-mind. Whenever the image or the thought that we are the body-mind appears, we drop it immediately because we know that it is not the truth. Whenever we have doubts, we can go back to the understanding that we are the awareness in which all objects, including the body-mind, appear. ...

If you want to practise self-inquiry when you feel that you are separate, then do so. Ask yourself, 'Who feels separate?' This will lead to the higher understanding that you are this consciousness. Then there is no need to practise self-inquiry; just enjoy life and be happy. Therefore, practise self-inquiry only when you feel something is missing. When you feel happiness just rejoice. Know that it comes from your true nature, give thanks, and celebrate. That's all!

[Francis Lucille: *The Perfume of Silence*, 'Don't Leave the Throne']

Quite quickly this pathless path becomes a path of openness, welcoming and surrender. We accept the invitation to stand knowingly as the witnessing presence of awareness whenever we are invited, and allow the peace, happiness and love that is our true nature to shine in the foreground of experience.

## Contemplation

*The discovery that peace, happiness and love are ever-present within our own Being, and completely available at every moment of experience, under all conditions, is the most important discovery that anyone can make.*

[Rupert Spira]