

Welcoming uncomfortable feelings

The separate self – which is actually nothing more than an ephemeral cluster of thoughts and ‘me’ feelings – grows roots in the body to substantiate its fragile, illusory existence. These roots are stored as feelings and tensions which survive enlightenment. Rupert gives this analogy:

The best analogy that I know that indicates the way this network of feelings is laid down in the body, is that of a deep well, in which only the creatures at the surface of the well are active. As you go down into the depths of the well, the creatures become less and less active, until right at the bottom they are completely dormant. The creatures are feelings. Once a day, at noon, the sun is shining directly above the well, and for a brief period its light penetrates the entire depth of the well, allowing the creatures at the bottom to wake up for a brief period and bubble up towards the surface. The sun passes over the well, its light ceases to shine into the depths of the well, all the creatures except those at the surface, fall asleep again and sink back down to the bottom.

So our feelings are like that; and by feelings I don't refer to feelings such as peace or love, I'm talking about the feelings that revolve around the belief of separation. A certain proportion of them are at the surface of the well – we are in touch with them, we can name them. But as we sink down deeper into the well, the feelings become less clearly differentiated, or nameable. They are resting dormant in the body, and are only occasionally triggered by certain situations.

So in this yoga – and we shouldn't really call it yoga, I just can't think of a better name – it is as if the sun stays permanently above the well. The sun is the light of pure knowing, pure awareness. This approach was in fact implicit in the original direct path teachings such as those of Ramana Maharshi or Atmananda Krishnamenon, although they were not very often in those cases elaborated. In this approach, which I learnt from Francis and he learnt from Jean Klein, which comes from the tantric tradition of Kashmiri Shaivism, it's more explicit.

[Yoga meditation, 1st November, 2013: *The Real Substance of the Body*]

Most of the time our attention is so focused on objects that there is little room for these feelings to come to the surface. But as Rupert explains, once we begin to explore our true nature and start abiding knowingly as what we are, there is now space for these feelings to arise:

What's happening in your case is that as you're losing interest in objects, you're no longer distracting yourself with objects, and all this fear and anxieties and tensions – they are all beginning to bubble up. As you rightly described, this morning something caught your attention, you gave your attention to it and that temporarily alleviated the discomfort of your feelings. And in fact this is why most people are addicted to objects, because as long as our attention is exclusively focused on the movie or whatever it is, there's no room for these feelings to come up. So these difficult, unpleasant, painful feelings are kept suppressed as a result of our exclusively focusing on objects.

So in your case, you've lost interest in objects, or at least you've lost interest in objects as a means to provide lasting happiness. So now there is this big space in you which would previously have been filled by your attending to objects. And into this big space all these feelings are bubbling up which have been kept so successfully at bay all these years. And it's a bit of a disappointment to you because you were expecting that immediately there would be a feeling of peace and happiness. The peace and happiness is there, but it's underneath all these feelings. They have to come up and work through the system before we get to the reliable, unconditional

happiness which is underneath them.

[\[Youtube clip: 30th November 2014, Allowing is What We Are, Not What We Do\]](#)

These feelings take many different forms: boredom, irritation, anxiety, sadness, shame, fear, loneliness, unworthiness, unlovableness ... So how should we respond when we experience such feelings? Here is Rupert's suggested approach:

See clearly that these feelings comprise a bodily sensation plus a thought or story that revolves around 'I' as a separate entity.

At some point this belief that we are a separate entity has to be fully investigated until it becomes completely clear that there is no experiential evidence to suggest that what we are is either personal or limited.

For the time being, simply be open at the level of the mind to the possibility that what we are is not limited and separate, and leave that aspect on one side for further investigation.

Return to the uncomfortable feelings and see that without their accompanying support system of beliefs, these feelings are simply bodily sensations.

See clearly that these bodily sensations are completely neutral. By themselves they are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. They are just little vibrations of sensation appearing in you, not 'you' a body, but rather 'you' the Awareness or Consciousness that is seeing these words and experiencing whatever else is being experienced at this and every moment.

Completely welcome these neutral sensations. They appear in you just like the sound of the rain or the traffic appears in you. They do not affect in any way the Awareness or Consciousness in which they appear. That is, they do not affect *you* in any way. They have absolutely no power over you.

Make this clear experiential distinction between the open, welcoming space of Awareness or Consciousness that you are and all that arises within it. Once this is clear there is no longer any agenda with these sensations. They are allowed to appear, evolve, remain and disappear as and when they will.

We simply take our stand knowingly as the Presence in which all bodily sensations appear. We are completely free and independent of all these sensations, although they are utterly dependent on us, that is, on Awareness or Consciousness, for their existence.

Once this clear distinction has been made, not just in theory but rather experientially, we can then look again at the relationship between the appearances of the body, mind and world and the Awareness or Consciousness in which they appear.

[\[28th August 2009: Negative Feeling\]](#)

The natural reaction is to try to get rid of uncomfortable feelings. But if we do this, as Rupert explains, it will just make them stronger:

These feelings rely on our having an agenda with them. Every time they are met with our welcoming openness, as opposed to our resistance, we rob them of their power. That is, we rob them of their apparent power to veil our being, aware Presence. In time, their ferocity will diminish because they are based on an old story that is no longer believed – the old story of a separate self.

It is important to be sure that there is no agenda with them, that we are not welcoming them in order to get rid of them. The feelings you describe thrive on this kind of subtle agenda.

Once it has been clearly seen that the separate self around whom these feelings revolve is utterly non-existent, their heart has been removed. Only waves of innocuous bodily sensations remain. In due course, those feelings that were dependent for their existence upon the belief in a separate self will die down. They die of clear seeing and neglect.

Once the mind and body are no longer presided over by the apparent separate self, they gradually return to their natural state of openness, transparency, sensitivity, availability and love.
[*Presence Vol II*, 'The natural state of openness and transparency']

Deep feelings are often covered up by incessant thinking or masked by a kind of numbness, and then the only sign of their presence is a subtle feeling of tension, constriction or unease in the body – scarcely noticeable. In those cases, Rupert suggests taking a slightly more proactive approach using techniques from the yoga meditations:

RS: Invite that feeling to come completely into awareness and to unfold. Give it the space to unfold, because feelings are never one thing, they are usually layered.

Q: So that 'inviting', is that by just sitting quietly with it?

RS: Yes, but it's a little bit more proactive than just sitting quietly. You sit quietly but first of all you understand and feel that what you are is the space of awareness, the open, empty space of awareness in which this sensation is arising. So you really establish that in your experience: 'I am this open, empty space. The feeling or the sensation is appearing in me.' It's like a cloud – a cloud of density appearing in me, which is like a contracted knot or energy that has condensed. To begin with you can be neutral with it: just allow the feeling to sit, to be suspended in your open, empty, allowing presence. But then you can begin to encourage the feeling to expand into the space in which it appears.

For instance, I know you've done some of these yoga meditations. You can feel that you are breathing into the sensation all over its entire surface. So there are various ways that we can encourage these feelings to loosen up their density. It's a little bit more proactive than just sitting as the space of awareness. It starts as that, allowing the feeling just to hang like a cloud in awareness. But then you can begin to very gently encourage or invite the sensation to expand into awareness and you can use these 'homeopathic yoga' techniques that I speak of on the retreats to breathe consciousness, to breathe love into the sensation all over its entire, porous surface and feel that the sensation is being permeated with the loving presence of consciousness. And then on the exhale, you breathe out this loving presence all over the entire porous surface of the sensation, carrying its density out into the space all around.

[\[5th September 2015 Colet House: Holding the Understanding in our Heart Pt 2\]](#)

When using any of these techniques we need to be sure that we are not welcoming uncomfortable feelings in order to get rid of them. As Rupert frequently explains, the test of whether we are really welcoming our feelings is: 'Can I live with this feeling forever?'. The answer must be 'yes'.

Contemplation

If we replace the impulse to avoid uncomfortable feelings with a desire to face and explore them deeply, we find, at their heart, exactly what we were seeking by trying to avoid them.