

Exploring the reality of the unreal world

The feeling that there is a real, solid, material world outside myself is a common-sticking point. We say to ourselves: 'I can see and touch tables, chairs, people, flowers, trees, cars, houses etc. I can feel that they are solid. This teaching defies common-sense'. After some experience of practising meditation, we may have been able to reach a place of complete emptiness where there are no such objects. But when we open our eyes and engage in activity, all the objects come flooding back in and we feel ourselves to be separate, small entities in a large universe. Getting beyond this sticking point requires some very detailed, careful and honest inquiry. This paper provides several different ways of approaching the subject. However, ultimately the discovery has to be made by each one of us in our own way, and we need to allow enough time and space in quiet contemplation and openness for this feeling-understanding to arise. First here is an extract from an essay by Rupert:

Well over a hundred years ago, the painter Paul Cézanne said, "A time is coming when a carrot, freshly observed, will trigger a revolution." ...

Cézanne meant that if we could see even a simple everyday object such as a carrot, as it truly is, our experience would be revolutionized. But what does it mean to see an object as it truly is? The key is in the phrase 'freshly observed,' which means to see clearly, unobstructed by the concepts that thought superimposes on our experience. In fact, most of us are completely unaware that our experience is filtered through a fine mesh of conceptual thinking that makes it appear very different from how it actually is.

As the Chinese sage Huang Po said, some 1200 years ago, "People neglect the reality of the illusory world." The illusory world? Now that's even more radical than Cezanne! It's one thing to look freshly at a carrot, spade, house or world, but quite another to consider it an illusion. What did he mean?

We often hear phrases in the non-dual teaching such as, 'The world is an illusion.' But such phrases may create a rebellion in us, for we know that our experience is very real. So how to reconcile these two positions – one, 'the illusory world' and two, the undeniable reality of our experience?

Anything that appears must appear *in* or *on* something. For instance, an image appears on a screen; a chair appears in the space of a room; the words of a novel appear on a page; a cloud appears in the sky.

What about the mind, body and world? Our only experience of them is what currently appears to us as thoughts, images, feelings, sensations, sights, sounds, textures, tastes and smells. In other words, all we know of a mind, body or world are appearances, and all these are continually appearing and disappearing. We may have a *concept* of a continuously existing mind, body or world, but we never actually experience such an object.

Start with thoughts: wherever our thoughts appear is obviously what we refer to as our 'self,' 'I.' Our thoughts don't appear outside of our self! However, we cannot see or find that 'something' in which thoughts appear because it has no observable qualities. As such, it is open, empty, transparent. But that doesn't mean it is not known. It cannot be known *as an object* and yet it is not unknown.

If we are reading these words we are, by definition, seeing the screen on which they are written, although we may not be *aware* that we are seeing it. If we are reading a novel we are, likewise, seeing the paper. If we are watching a movie we are, whether we realize it or not, seeing or

experiencing the screen. If we are seeing clouds, we are experiencing the sky. It is not possible to see the words, novel, movie or clouds without, at the same time, experiencing whatever it is they appear in or on.

So, if we are experiencing thoughts we are necessarily experiencing whatever they appear in. Likewise, if we are experiencing a sensation or a perception – and the only experience we have of a body or world are sensations and perceptions – then we are also knowing or experiencing whatever these appear in or on.

In what does our perception of the world appear? In what do bodily sensations appear? Perceptions of the world don't appear *in the world*; sensations of the body don't appear *in a body*. Perceptions and sensations appear in exactly the same 'place' as thoughts, that is, they appear in the open, emptiness of our *self*.

However, they do not just appear *in* our self; they are simultaneously known *by* our self, for our self is not just *present* but also *aware*; not just *being* but also *knowing*. Hence it is sometimes known as Awareness – the presence of that which is aware – or the light of pure Knowing. ...

Love is the common name we give to experience when the 'other' is no longer experienced as 'other;' when the subject/object relationship collapses. It is to see the *appearance* of an image but to *know* it only as screen. It is to attribute the *reality* of the image to the screen. It is to know everyone and everything as one's own self.

It is this transparent, empty Presence that, refracted through the mind, appears as a multiplicity and diversity of names and forms. However, the mind is itself a modulation of that very Presence. In other words, it is pure Awareness itself which, vibrating within itself, takes the shape of mind and, from the illusory point of view of one of the selves contained within that mind, *seems* to see a multiplicity and diversity of separate objects and selves, each with their own independently existing reality. In other words, the separate self is only a separate self from the illusory point of view of a separate self. [\[Rupert Spira, January 2014: The Ultimate Revolution\]](#)

But as Rupert explains in answer to a question at a Buckland Hall retreat, that does not mean that after enlightenment we cease being aware of 'a world' or of apparent objects in the world.

Q: When we allow attention to relax back, then I feel that there is still some kind of very, very subtle model or superimposition or 'colouring' – almost nothing, almost transparent if there's no attention going out to somewhere. And my question is: 'Is that inevitable? Or am I not going deeply enough?' Because if I close my eyes and withdraw from mind, body and world, then I enter a kind of empty, vast, space-like something and I think the same happens in deep sleep. But if I have my eyes open and there's 'seeing', even though there's not any division into forms, or naming of anything – there's just complete, relaxed 'seeing' – I feel that there's still some kind of superimposition.

RS: 'Seeing' is a colouring of consciousness. So when you're seeing, that experience – for instance, now what you're seeing – that experience is 'known'. And you're sensing your hand on the mike. So the experience of 'sensing' is also 'known'. And you're thinking, and the experience of 'thinking' is 'known'. And you're hearing, and the experience of 'hearing' is 'known'.

So the knowing with which the seeing, the sensing, the hearing and the thinking is known – that 'knowing' is common to all of those four experiences. And is not limited by any of those particular experiences. In other words, the 'knowing' itself is colourless, but all those four experiences – seeing, thinking, sensing, hearing – are a colouring of that knowing. They're not apart from the

knowing. All there is to seeing is knowing, or experiencing. All there is to thinking is knowing. So all these are not really 'superimposed', in other words they are not put on top of this knowing from the outside. They are self-assumed. It is this knowing that is taking the form of seeing, hearing, sensing, thinking. So, although I understand what you mean by 'superimposed', it seems that the image is superimposed on the screen, it's not really placed on top of the screen. It is the screen itself that is taking the shape of the image. So it is this knowing that is taking the shape of seeing, sensing, thinking, hearing.

You don't need to get rid of the colouring of this knowing. In other words, you don't need to get rid of the objects of experience – seeing, sensing, thinking, hearing – in order to know this knowing. You don't have to turn the movie off to see the screen.

[2/12/2015: *The Forgetting of Our True Nature is Inevitable*]

A similar question was asked at one of Rupert's one-day meetings at Colet House:

RS: Don't expect the appearance of three-dimensional space and objects within it to disappear. Don't think that somehow when you're standing in your true nature of awareness that somehow you don't see the world from a point of view. Remember: Mary falls asleep in London, she feels she's Jane on the streets of Paris. The only way Mary, asleep in London, can see the streets of Paris is from the point of view of Jane – through Jane's body/mind. Jane's body, we could say, is the agency through which Mary sees the streets of Paris.

So don't expect magically, somehow, to no longer seem to see your experience from a point of view or a place that is located. I experience this room from a point of view. So that doesn't go. What goes is the belief, and more importantly the feeling, that the knowing with which we know or see our experience is limited by and located in the body. In other words, to use Indian terminology, ignorance goes but Maya remains.

In the same way, when you know the drama in a movie is made only of a two-dimensional screen, it still appears as a three-dimensional landscape. The appearance remains, but you know its reality. Its reality is the two-dimensional screen. Thereafter, the three-dimensional landscape is no longer seen as an illusion – it is like a creative display. It is the play of the screen. So illusion turns into creativity, or turns into play. The power of the illusion diminishes.

So when you open your eyes, don't feel that the fact that there seems to be a world outside, that there seem to be people and objects separate from you – it's natural, it's the common way we perceive – don't feel that that is magically going to change. When you know you are watching a screen, the movie continues. It still appears in the same way, but you know its reality. In the same way, we know that all of this is a perception appearing in Consciousness, known by Consciousness, and made of Consciousness. And then just let the appearance carry on as it normally does.

[05/09/2015: *Holding the understanding in our heart Part 2*]

And now yet another explanation of the same points, this time from Greg Goode:

You've written that the notion that physical objects are external "is a block to nondual inquiry". Can you say more about that?

Using objects in everyday activities does not block your inquiry. You can actually put on your clothes in the morning or drink a cup of coffee and do inquiry at the same time. But it is a block to take objects literally as external, independent, solid chunks of reality separated from yourself. If you regard objects as separate, then you regard yourself as separate. This sense of separation is based on these unwarranted object-beliefs, and gains a false conviction from kinaesthetic

experiences and the feelings of bodily muscular contractions. In truth, however, the body is not separate. It is unlimited and infinitely light, as awareness. The body is not in space, it is infinitely more subtle than space. It is awareness itself.

OK, so are you saying there are no cups or people?

Not independent from experience. Not as separate from you. It is not your experience that things exist in and of themselves, apart from experience. Think about the way you experience a cup. It is not apart from seeing or touching or thinking. Seeing, hearing, touching and thinking are never present without awareness within which they arise. It's all awareness all the time. And awareness is the very nature of you.

You never experience an unexperienced cup. You might think you do experience a cup that is in itself an unexperienced object. This is what classical Western science has taught. Heisenberg began to show how experience itself conditions the supposed object of experience. Experience is always in the makeup of anything experienced. There's never experience of something existing apart from experience. So this whole notion of independent existence can be dropped as incoherent and productive of feelings of separation.

So what's left?

Experience, which is always whole and non-separate. And when it doesn't seem like there's anything other than experience, then it won't seem like there's a real thing called experience either. Existence/nonexistence, being and non-being will stop making sense and will drop away, no longer serving as partitions. You'll never feel cut off from the world again.

Well, I sure seem to experience this chair, this pencil, this cup of coffee. What is it like not to have any experience of these things?

Free, light, weightless, uncrowded, unburdened, sweet and peacefully present.

Like really connected ...

... There's neither a feeling of connection or disconnection with the chair and pencil. It's all present, here, now. There's not an impression of the pencil as something on the other side of some spatial relation. ...

So it's all in the mind then?

No, because without an outside, how can there be an inside?

How can someone come to experience this?

By coming to see that all experience is whole as it is, and not disconnected from you. Experience doesn't indicate objects outside of experience, so there's no gap. One key to this is not to associate unpleasantness or pain with disconnection. Allow these to be as they are, without creating symbols or metaphors out of them. [Greg Goode: *Standing as Awareness*]

Contemplation

An object exists because we think about it; we don't think about it because it exists.

[Rupert Spira]