

Being 'Open to the Openness'

*There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.* (Leonard Cohen)

The traditional paths to self-realisation require some preparation or purification before the truth about ourselves and the world can be imparted. It can take many decades. The Direct Path is different: all that is needed is openness. Openness is the starting-point for self-enquiry, the foundation of self-abidance and the means by which our body/minds become realigned with our new, enlightened understanding. This is how Rupert describes the essential role of openness in self-enquiry:

Before the formulation of a question there is the feeling, 'I don't know'. It is out of this openness at the level of the mind that a question comes. This openness is expressed the only way the mind can express something, through concepts, but the true essence of the question is the openness from which it originates. We could say that a question is this openness in the form of a concept; it is the shape that 'I don't know' takes in the mind. ...

That which puts an end to the question is that which dissolves the concept, the form in which the question was asked, and that into which the question is dissolved is that from which it came in the first place, openness. There is nowhere else for it to go. So we could say that the answer undresses the question and returns us to naked openness, to the original not-knowing. ...

The difference between the openness before the question and the openness after the answer is simply that, because the question has been satisfactorily answered, there is at least temporarily a cessation of agitation in this openness, there is no impulse to escape from it into conceptual thinking, and in this moment we therefore have a glimpse of our true nature; openness experiences itself as such. ...

When this openness is revealed to itself through this play of dialogues, one of the ways it is experienced is as friendship, as love, and this love is the dissolution of boundaries, the dissolution of all that makes us think and feel we are separate from each other and from the world. Strangely enough it is this very dissolution of 'other' that makes us truly capable of loving an 'other'.

[Rupert Spira's Foreword to *The Perfume of Silence* by Francis Lucille]

It is sometimes said that 'all questions contain their own answers'. Here is Jean Klein's explanation of how this happens and why struggling to understand or find an answer doesn't usually work:

When you really ask yourself a question, it comes from the answer. You are not able to ask a question without already in some way having the answer. The question comes from the answer, so live with your question, wait. You must wait without waiting for the answer to appear in the question; wait without grasping, without taking, without concluding. Be totally open to the answer; the answer will come only in your complete openness. The answer never comes from the brain, the brain knows only the already known. [Jean Klein: *Transmission of the Flame*, p5]

As Rupert explains, it is our pre-existing beliefs that block openness.

The mind has built a powerful edifice of concepts about Reality that bears little relation to actual experience, and as a result Consciousness has veiled itself from itself. These concepts are built out of mind and therefore their deconstruction is one of the ways through which Consciousness comes to recognise itself – that is, to know itself again. ...

Concepts are not destroyed in this process. They are still available for use when needed. ...

In the disinterested contemplation of our experience we measure the facts of experience itself against these beliefs.

The falsity of the ideas that the mind entertains about the nature of Reality, about the nature of experience, is exposed in this disinterested contemplation. ...

As a result of the exposure of beliefs and feelings that derive from preconceived, unsubstantiated notions of Reality, a new invitation opens up, another possibility is revealed.

This possibility cannot be apprehended by the mind because it is beyond the mind. However, the obstacles to this new possibility are revealed and dissolved in this investigation.

They are dissolved by our openness to the possibility that in this moment we actually experience only one thing, that experience is not divided into 'I' and other, subject and object, me and the world, Consciousness and Existence.

We are open to the possibility that there is only one single, seamless totality, that Consciousness and Existence are one, that there is only one Reality.

The edifice of dualistic ideas, which seems to be validated by experience, is well constructed, made up of beliefs at the level of the mind and feelings at the level of the body, tightly interwoven, mutually substantiating and validating one another.

In the disinterested contemplation of these ideas and feelings, their falsity is unravelled. We see clearly that our ideas do not correspond to our experience. This paves the way for experience to reveal itself to us as it truly is, as in fact it always is, free from the ignorance of dualistic thinking.

We begin to experience ourself and the world as they truly are.

[The Transparency of Things: What truly is]

We can't just decide to give up a belief – it doesn't work. We need to investigate it thoroughly and impartially from our direct experience, unedited by subsequent conceptualisations. That often requires courage. There is a strong instinct to follow the herd, to believe what others believe. It's worth remembering that throughout history, almost all the major advances in science came from scientists who had the courage to go against the scientific consensus of their time and put forward models which were consistent with their experience and the experimental evidence. When Einstein was informed of the publication of the book 'A Hundred Authors against Einstein', his response was that if he were wrong, then one author would have been enough.

Spiritual beliefs can be especially sticky as they were often originally adopted to provide comfort and reassurance for the separate self that we considered ourselves to be. Later they become part of our perceived identity: I am a Christian, Buddhist, Miracle Worker, Sufi etc. And for some, our circle of long-term friendships is formed around people we have met in the context of such spiritual groups. Real self-enquiry requires us to let go of all the beliefs we have accumulated based on those teachings and be open to new possibilities and interpretations. Rupert often says 'I advise you not to believe anything I say. Find out for yourself'. If our friendships are real friendships they will survive the changes in our understanding.

Openness is also an essential feature of the outward-facing path: being open to everything that arises, not resisting any aspect of experience. Here is Jean Klein's advice about knowingly remaining in and as openness during difficult personal circumstances:

Q: When the situation in which you are living is getting worse ... ?

Ask the question: For whom does it get worse? If it becomes worse it means you have established a personal relationship with the situation. Look at your surroundings from the point of view of openness. Then things come up that you have never seen before. The conflict in your situation is only because you see a fraction, because you situate yourself as a fraction. From your completeness, from your wholeness, from your openness, there's no conflict.

[*Transmission of the Flame* p16]

As Rupert explains, openness is not something that requires effort; it's an inherent characteristic of ourself, pure awareness:

We could liken awareness to the empty space of the room in which our body is sitting. The space of the room is inherently open, empty and spacious. It has no ability to resist whatever appears in it. Whatever appears in the room has already been 'accepted' by the space. This openness or 'allowing' of whatever takes place within it, is not a quality that the space turns on and off at will; it is inherent in its nature.

Our self, aware presence, is similar. This open, empty, allowing, this absolute 'Yes' to all seeming things, is what our self *is*, not what it *does*. [Presence Vol I: Happiness is Never Absent]

So what should we do when old habits kick in and we find that our thoughts and actions come from resistance to the current situation, rather than from openness? Here is some advice from Rupert:

What do we do if we burn the toast when making breakfast? We just open the window! In time the residues of smoke and the smell of burning are naturally and effortlessly dissipated into the surrounding transparent air.

It is the same here. We simply abide knowingly as this open, empty transparent Presence and welcome the residues of feeling, moving and acting on behalf of a separate, inside self, without any agenda. We offer the density of the separate self to the openness and transparency of Presence and allow them to be infused with its substance. [Presence Vol. II, The Burnt Rope]

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It is this open, non-judging, non-avoiding allowing of all things which, in time, restores the 'I' to its proper place in the seat of Awareness. As a natural corollary to abiding in and as our true self, this allowing gently realigns our thoughts, feelings and activities with the peace and happiness that are inherent in our self. [Presence Vol. II, Addiction and Non-duality]

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In time, the whole structure of the body and mind returns to its natural state of openness and ease. It no longer serves the insatiable demands of the imaginary, inside self and no longer makes impossible demands on an imaginary, outside world or other.

Such a body and mind is free and spontaneous, responding to the requirements of the moment and then returning to its natural state. The moment is met on its own terms. Thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships no longer leave traces in the body and mind that, as a result, become open, spacious, transparent and loving. [Presence Vol I: The Eternal Now]

Contemplation

Our Self—luminous, empty Awareness—knows no resistance and is, therefore, Peace itself; it seeks nothing and is, thus, Happiness itself; it is intimately one with all appearances and is, as such, pure Love.