

Models of Experience

Soon after birth, an infant begins the process of creating models of its experience. It senses its mother and associates that sensory experience with food, warmth and comfort. As it grows up, it learns to divide its experience into a multiplicity of objects, and it creates models of them and the relationships and interactions between them. For example: 'Bananas are edible fruits'; 'If I put my hand in the fire I experience pain'; 'I am inside my body, the world is outside it'.

By adulthood, we have all accumulated an immeasurably vast collection of models that condition and colour our experience. Our models of space and time form the backdrop for all the other models. Some of these models have an emotional content – good or bad, like or dislike. Others are neutral. Some models are personal, and derive from personal experience. But many of our models, especially those derived from basic science, are shared by the majority of people within our culture. We regard them as the ultimate reality of our experience and tend not to question their validity or limitations. We don't even recognise them as being models – we regard them as truth, whereas they have actually become beliefs. We lose touch with our raw experience, which becomes overlaid with layer upon layer of models. In Advaita literature, this is often referred to as 'superimposition'. Rupert sometimes describes it as 'colouring' – like the coloured filter on ski goggles which makes the snow look orange.

The Direct Path is a process of seeing through all these layers of models to discover the reality of our experience. In the following conversation, a scientist who is convinced by the materialist scientific model, starts by suggesting that the fact that this model correctly predicts experience (i.e. behaviour of objects in the world) and enables developments in technology is an indication that the model gives a true picture of the reality of the world:

Q: The success of science, that model that is based on matter existing separately from us – independently, I mean ...

RS: But the strange thing is that science has never found that stuff on which it bases its model.

Q: So it has no evidence, but it has indications in the technical success that it has ...

RS: I'm not suggesting that the model, the concept of matter, is not a valid concept. Of course, it is. There's nothing wrong with science's model of matter, and molecules and atoms. That model works very, very well for all kinds of practical purposes. But the fact that that model works well when you want to build a car or a rocket or a house, isn't a proof that that model is a model of reality. It just works well for this particular application. But to presume that just because this model works when I want to build a house, therefore it must be a model that represents the reality of all experience – that is a huge leap of faith.

Q: Yes, and it collapses itself in quantum physics ...

RS: Absolutely. Even science itself recognises that that model is a valid model but it is a limited model. *All* models are limited models. I mean, in a thousand years' time, what do you think physicists are going to be saying about quantum mechanics. Is it going to be cutting edge science then, when they talk about quanta and qualia and quarks? No, it will be old hat. It will seem primitive. Now, it's cutting edge stuff; in a thousand years' time it won't be. That model will have been replaced. It may still work in a certain field, just as the model of molecules and atoms and electrons still works in a certain field.

To believe that that, or any model, is a true model of reality, including the model that I'm suggesting – that also has its limits. ... But the truth that is being referred to, will still be the same truth in a thousand years' time. And that is one of the tests of truth – it doesn't change. The test of reality: what is real cannot change, cannot disappear. The ways we express that truth, including the ways that I'm expressing it, will all change and disappear.

[Rupert Spira, Somerset, 19th November 2012: *The Limitless Field of Pure Knowing*]

That last point is important as it highlights the difference between a religion and a teaching that leads us to a direct understanding of the reality of our experience. Rupert makes it clear that nothing he says or that anyone can say is absolutely true. The best that words can do is to point us in the direction of our true nature: they are limited, they are not a true representation. If we recognise that, once they have done their job, we see that they too are just models, not truth, and we see their helpfulness and their deficiencies. It is the origin of the words in silent, wordless understanding that is important – not the words themselves:

By accepting the limitations of language, we understand that nothing we say is ultimately true and yet, at the same time, words that come from experiential understanding, rather than philosophical debate or belief, somehow have the capacity within them to evoke the understanding towards which they are pointing. In other words, words are more than pointers. They are missiles!

If they come from silence, they are pregnant with it. They don't simply point towards silence.

They deliver it!

[Rupert Spira: [Words Are More Than Pointers](#)]

Models are essential to us in practical, everyday life. All experience that passes through mind is coloured. It is not possible for mind to know its own true nature as awareness. But we don't need to regard this 'coloured' experience as real:

Awareness never ceases being its own essential, irreducible 'self'. It only seems to become something else – a finite mind – when it colours itself with the activity of thinking, sensing and perceiving, thereby obscuring its essential, unconditioned nature from itself. ...

In the form of mind, awareness cannot know its own essential, uncoloured condition, just as it is not possible to see a white page through a coloured lens. However, in the pause between two thoughts, awareness 'becomes' aware of itself. It recognises itself, or knows again something that it has always known – or rather eternally knows – but seemed to forget when it coloured itself in the form of objective experience. [Rupert Spira: *The Nature of Consciousness*, ch7]

When I first heard this explanation from Rupert, I was puzzled. Surely it means that ultimately, all models, all superimpositions, all colouring must disappear whenever I am resting in and as my true nature of pure knowing? In other words, my experience of the world should dissolve into a kind of uniform blankness. This was in contradiction to Rupert's previous insistence that it is possible to be aware of being aware in the presence of objects. It was also in contradiction to my own experience. In a dialogue to resolve this apparent contradiction, Rupert explained that whenever there is experience of a world, knowing inevitably takes on some kind of colouring, but that colouring doesn't have to obscure the knowing of our own being:

'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. ...

There’s the feeling/understanding that the knowing with which I know this experience is not limited by, is not conditioned by the limits of this body. Although my *experience* is limited, what it is made out of, is not. That’s all that’s necessary. To hold in our minds and our hearts that the stuff that our experience is made of is infinite, in other words, is God’s infinite being. As the Sufis say: ‘there is only God’s face’.

[Rupert Spira, Buckland Hall 2nd December 2015 *The Mind Is Not a Mistake*]

In this extract from a yoga meditation, Rupert describes how, in the outward-facing path, we come to see and feel that the mind’s models or colouring of experience, never actually veil reality:

In the early stages of our investigation on the inward-facing path, objective experience seems to be a distraction from reality. Objective experience – thinking, feeling, sensing, perceiving – seems to veil the reality of pure knowing, or God’s infinite being, and therefore we have to turn away from it. But in the more advanced stages of our exploration, in the outward-facing path, there is no question of ‘being distracted’ from pure knowing. If there is nothing in experience other than pure knowing, what could distract us from this knowing? What would be the need for the focusing of our attention, with the resisting of any experience, or the accepting of any experience? In the more advanced stages of this investigation, objective experience is not a distraction or an obscuration of reality: it shines with reality. Every experience announces, celebrates, indicates God’s infinite being.

[Rupert Spira, Buckland Hall, 3rd May 2017: [Reality is Not Two](#)]

So what, if anything, changes when we recognise our true nature? Here is Rupert’s description:

When Blake said, “As a man is, so he sees” he meant ‘Whatever a man takes himself to be will condition the way the world appears to him.’

That is, if a man takes himself to be a separate entity located in and as the body, the world will appear in accordance with this belief as something that is outside and separate from himself and moreover, made out of something other than himself.

Likewise if a man takes himself to be Knowing Presence or Consciousness, the world will in turn appear in accordance with this understanding as being intimately one with and made out of himself, that is, made out of Presence.

The Reality of our experience never changes, just as the screen, which is the reality of the film, never changes. So Higher Reasoning is the subjection of the mind to the truth of our experience, Consciousness. It is in a way, a realignment of the mind with the Reality of our experience.

As a result of this realignment, appearances change. We see the same 'world' but because the interpretation has changed, or rather, because there is no interpretation, our experience 'in the world' is very different. Of course, it will vary in each case, but friendliness, peace, ease, beauty are some of the characteristics of this new appearance. But there are many others ... spontaneity, freedom, humour, sensitivity. ... [Rupert Spira: [As a Man Is, So He Sees](#)]

Contemplation

A colourless screen may assume all colours and thus appear as a person, landscape or building, but never actually becomes any of these. Likewise, I, the light of pure Knowing, vibrate within Myself and, as a result, assume all apparently limited names and forms, without ever actually becoming a limited object, self or world. [Rupert Spira]