

Beliefs and Habits

We saw in the previous paper how throughout our lives, we develop a series of models which we superimpose on ourselves and the world, in order to make sense of our experience. As models, they are not a problem. Many of them are needed for practical purposes. They only become a problem when they are held as firm beliefs. It is those beliefs that seem to veil the knowing of our true nature and impose imaginary limitations on it. For example, the belief that what we are is nothing more than a body-mind that was born into the world and will eventually die.

So the first step on the Direct Path is to examine our beliefs and see whether they correspond to our direct experience. We may have help from a spiritual teacher in doing this, but all our teacher can do is to suggest an alternative model – a thorn to remove a thorn. No model can be absolutely true. The idea is just to remove the fixed belief by offering another ‘less untrue’ explanation which will satisfy the mind. Once satisfied, the mind lets go, and we arrive at that place of not-knowing that is our true nature. The idea is not to replace one belief with another one. We need to make sure we throw both thorns away once we have finished with them.

However, the habits of thinking, feeling and behaving associated with those beliefs take longer to unwind:

Imagine that you have spent your whole life living in a large house, serving a demanding old man who lives in a room on the top floor.

Although you never see the man, you spend from morning till night doing his chores. One evening, during a rare break, you are lamenting your fate to a friend. The friend suggests that you reason with the old man.

When he hears that you never see him, let alone speak to him, he is puzzled and encourages you to go and find him.

You are reluctant to begin with, but after several such encounters with your friend, you venture into the old man’s room.

On your first visit you only have the courage to peep round the door, but you cannot see the man. When you report this to your friend he encourages you to be bolder and have a good look into the room.

You make more visits to the old man’s room, and each time you search his quarters a little more thoroughly. It is only after several visits that you are convinced that there is no old man.

However, such are your habits that for some time you continue to wake at six every morning and perform many of the tasks that you used to perform while serving the imaginary old man. Some of these habits cease immediately, whilst others take time to come to an end.

In this story the old man is the separate entity and the friend is the teacher who encourages you to look inside and find out who this one that rules your life really is.

As we look more and more deeply into the nature of ourself we find that there is no entity there. We spend our lives serving a non-existent entity. It is only our imagination that binds us, and it is clarity that liberates.

In most cases this requires revisiting the issue many times, each time going a little more deeply into it, in order to be absolutely certain that there is no personal entity there.

Even after this discovery, some of the habits of the body/mind that were developed while serving the non-existent old man may linger out of inertia, but in time they will dwindle.

Our subservience to a separate entity consists, at the level of the mind, in the belief that 'I am a separate, personal entity', and at the level of the body, as a feeling that 'I am this body', or 'I am *in* this body'.

However, Consciousness is never actually bound by this belief or feeling. It just thinks and feels that it is. [Rupert Spira: *The Transparency of Things, Ego*]

It can seem strange that all those habits of thinking of oneself as a separate entity continue to reappear from time to time, even after we have a clear, unshakeable understanding of our true nature. Here is Rupert's explanation:

Q: I don't understand how one can realise one's true self and then find after a while that somehow the 'self' starts to arise again. How can the belief in a separate self remain, even when you've seen it?

RS: Yes. It's quite simple. It's because the mind is a habit. The mind has been rehearsing the belief and feeling of separation for decades. It was educated to think and feel on behalf of a separate self by our culture. And then, for decades, day in, day out rehearsed being a separate self. Surprise, surprise, that's what the mind does. That's what it has been trained to do. Then, when it becomes clear to us that what we are is not a separate, limited awareness, the mind doesn't overnight just turn around and start serving the true self of awareness. It's got this momentum running.

The analogy that is sometimes given is: imagine a steamer on the ocean; it's one thing to turn the engine off, but it takes time for the steamer to come to a standstill. If you have a little motor-boat and the steamer and the little boat are both going along, if you turn the engines of both them off at the same time, the motor-boat will come to rest relatively quickly, the steamer goes on for 30 miles. Although both engines were turned off at the same time, but depending on the momentum behind them, they come to rest at different times. Our body-minds are like these different boats. There is a certain momentum behind each body-mind. How long each body-mind takes to become acclimatised to this understanding varies greatly from body-mind to body-mind. The same realisation can take place in two body-minds, but one will go on acting out the neuroses of the separate self for far longer than the other, depending on the conditions.

Q: I think I knew that intellectually, but I find it very hard to deal with. Because it doesn't make any sense any more.

RS: You mean the separate self doesn't make any sense anymore? You're right. Once it's been seen through it doesn't make any sense either to act and relate on behalf of a separate self, or indeed to relate to a separate self in somebody else. You want to relate to who they *truly* are. Even if they are acting like a separate self and doing all the usual defence mechanisms and games that egos play with each other, you don't want to play that game anymore. You want to relate to who they truly are. And as you say, it's easy in congenial circumstances, when everything is going your way and like now – it's one reason why these events are provided, it's easy. ... But it's just a matter of taking this understanding gradually out into your life. And see in time, that less and less situations or events or people have the ability to pull you out of this understanding.

[Rupert Spira, 23rd June 2012: [The Mind is a Habit](#)]

As Rupert explains, every time we come back to abiding as awareness, the habits associated with old beliefs are weakened:

Each time Consciousness returns to itself, each time it relaxes its fixation on a separate entity, each time it opens itself without choice or preference to the full spectrum of whatever experience is appearing within itself, it is, without knowing it, undermining the habit of Self-avoidance, the habit of avoiding its own Reality.

In this way, Consciousness becomes more and more accustomed to remaining in itself, as itself, to no longer pretending to be something else, something other than itself.

[Rupert Spira: *The Transparency of Things*, Consciousness Shines in Every Experience]

When old habits reappear, there's no need to feel a sense of failure. We don't need to engage in a project of hunting them all down in order to get rid of them. It happens naturally:

If we have understood, in our own way, what has been said here, we just allow that Understanding to express itself naturally. It will condition our life in just the same way that our previous understanding conditioned our life effortlessly.

When we go into a darkened room, we see nothing to begin with. Slowly shapes start to emerge until in the end we see quite clearly. We do not have to do anything to facilitate this. It happens naturally.

Likewise, Understanding, which is not a knowing *of something*, but rather Knowingness itself, permeates every aspect of our life from an unknown direction. It just happens naturally.

On the outside there may or may not be much change. That is not important. But on the inside there is more and more Peace, Freedom, Happiness and Love.

Old habits still come up, but as they are no longer fuelled by mistaken ideas, they show up less and less frequently.

This change happens either gradually or rapidly. It doesn't matter. Who is the one that cares? That one is non-existent. Perhaps some of these habits may stay around forever. So what? We all have characters that are conditioned at the level of the body and mind.

[Rupert Spira: *The Transparency of Things*, Openness, sensitivity, vulnerability]

The Knowingness that Rupert is referring to is an open, empty, luminous, objectless Knowingness. As he suggests, it seems to manifest in the body-mind as feelings of peace, happiness, freedom and love.

Here is a description from Wolter Keers, a Direct Path teacher who was a student of Atmananda Krishnamenon and Ramana Maharshi, and a friend of Jean Klein and Francis Lucille:

But now you only have to wait, you only have to make your self open to the Unknown.

Gradually the symptoms of the great harmony arrive. A deep feeling of peace, of warmth, a feeling that everything is good, arises from the heart. This feeling that comes and goes, is not the absolute, not the Unknown, but it is a manifestation, it is like the first rays of dawn coming over the horizon.

Above all, you must not allow the personality, the automatic habits, to be in a hurry, to desire that it has to happen now. As long as there is any notion of 'now' you are still caught in time – therefore in the mental – and the realization can never take place in the mental – you have to be

constantly aware of that. So, you need only allow that warm, soft feeling to wash away the last traces of the personality, blown away like a light feather in an almost imperceptible sigh on a still evening.

Then the complete emptiness breaks through. ...

'The use of a bowl depends on its emptiness' says Lao Tzu. A full bowl can no longer be used for something else. And so it is when thinking and feeling are filled with other things, that they cannot be filled by the Unknown, by the Essence. Therefore, one must take care to be always 'empty'.
[Wolter Keers: [Absent](#)]

Contemplation

Once the body is no longer presided over by the tyranny of a separate self, it gradually returns to its natural state of peace, openness, transparency, availability, sensitivity and love.
[Rupert Spira]