

## Dealing with Addiction

In the previous paper we looked at the habits of thinking which form the basis for the belief and feeling of being a separate self. But as Rupert explains, by far the largest aspect of the separate self that we imagine ourselves to be, lies hidden in the body:

The first form in which the separate inside self appears is a belief. This belief has already been explored in great detail so suffice it to say here that the investigation of the belief in separation is, in fact, just a prelude to the deeper exploration of the feelings of separation.

Very few teachings ever address this realm. At best feelings are traced back to the stories that precipitate them—what our parents did or didn't do to us in childhood, how our intimate partners, children, employers, etc. treated us. But this is not really exploring our feelings. It is exploring stories about our feelings but not the feelings themselves. As such it is another aspect of the investigation at the level of the mind.

However, feelings live in the *body*. These feelings in the body account for by far the largest aspect of the sense of separation. In fact, there are layers upon layers of feelings in the body, each layer hidden by and more subtle than the one above it.

The fear of disappearance and the feeling that something is missing are the two essential forms of the separate inside self which have colonized the body and turned it into a network of contraction, tension and resistance which veil its natural openness and transparency.

In fact, our true body is the body of aware presence but the imaginary self has appropriated this presence and turned it into an entity that seems to be solid and dense. This density is comprised of layers of feelings that invisibly dictate our postures, movements and activities and which are, in time, enshrined in the physical body itself. ...

The 'me-ness' in the body could be likened to a box full of old family photos dating back to our earliest childhood. On the top the images are quite distinct and easy to make out. However, as we progress down through the photos they become more faded. They begin to lose their sharpness and clarity.

The 'me' feelings are like this. The most obvious ones may be enshrined as a general feeling that pervades the head and chest but as these are clearly seen, the subtler layers of 'me' feelings in the body are revealed. The only thing that these feelings cannot stand is to be seen clearly, for in seeing them clearly they are understood and felt to be simply neutral bodily sensations with no separate self at their centre. [Presence Volume 1: Happiness is the Highest Spiritual Practice]

We may not be aware of these layers of feelings. They are uncomfortable and so we have all developed favourite methods for keeping them hidden, to avoid feeling that discomfort. These favourite methods are essentially addictions<sup>1</sup>. The most common form of addiction, is the addiction to thinking. This is Rupert's description of how these addictions operate:

These little rivulets of thought find successful ways of engaging our attention so we never have to fully feel the deeper, darker, less comfortable feelings which remain, as a result, safely buried deep inside the body and surface rarely.

---

<sup>1</sup> Serious problems of addiction to drugs, alcohol, gambling etc. are best dealt with using conventional medical and psychological methods.

These subliminal feelings are the real location of the sense of separation and we usually avoid them successfully through thinking or addiction to substances and activities. As a result, the separate self that they conceal remains intact. In this way the body becomes a refuge for the sense of separation.

Although these deeper feelings are not seen or felt most of the time, they subliminally influence and dictate the more easily perceived thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships.

In fact, all addictions are an extension or modulation of our primary addiction to thinking. When incessant thinking, with its excursions into the past and future, no longer has the power to allay these uncomfortable feelings — the sense of lack, dis-ease, unworthiness, failure, inadequacy, loss, despair etc. — then we take to more extreme means, such as addiction to substances or activities, in order to avoid ever having to face these feelings fully.

[*Presence Volume 1, Surrendering Everything to Presence*]

So what can we do to escape from our addictions? Obviously the first step is notice them. After that, the basic principles are explained in this dialogue which Rupert had with someone who had an addiction to watching television:

*Q: I don't seem able to just let things happen. For example, maybe I'm not happy enough and I observe myself going upstairs and turning on the television ...*

RS: It would be very interesting to observe what takes place in you if you were to resist or at least delay for some time turning on the television or checking your emails or whatever it is.

*Q: I even gave it away. ... But then I bought another!*

RS: It's not necessary to go as far as giving away your TV! I would just suggest delaying turning it on for five minutes and to see what happens. Because you may well find that there's a little rebellion in yourself, that there is some discomfort, frustration, rebellion, that there is something in you that is seeking to be relieved by switching on the TV, or having a drink or whatever it is in your case. That, that is seeking to be relieved, is your suffering.

*Q: I try to see what it is, and I don't know, but certainly sadness is there.*

RS: But you'll see that the impulse to turn on the television is the attempt to avoid the discomfort of your sadness. Indeed, when you turn on the television and your attention is caught by a particular programme, your sadness does seem to go away. In fact, it doesn't go away. It's just that your attention is no longer focused on it. So it seems not to be there because your attention is focused on the object. But as soon as you turn the television off, your sadness will bubble up again. ... It's just the fact that your attention was taken off your suffering and onto the object, and then you invested the object with the cause of your happiness — 'watching the TV made me happy'. It didn't, it distracted you from your suffering temporarily.

*Q: But I look at myself doing this — so what?*

RS: Yes, but all this activity of your mind prevents you having to feel your sorrow. So that's why I suggest delaying turning on your TV, in other words, delaying reaching for an object — whether it's the TV, the fridge, the drink, whatever it is. ... And there will be this rebellion, because if you delay distracting yourself with the object, you will feel your suffering. And that will be uncomfortable. From force of habit, there will be this impulse to avoid your suffering. And I would encourage you to do the opposite — turn towards it. Because what you are seeking lies on this side of your suffering. It lies underneath your suffering. Your suffering is, as it were, a

colouring of your essential being. In order to get to your essential being which is inherently free of suffering, you have to go *through* your suffering. ...

At some stage you have to feel the failure of objective experience to provide the peace and relief and fulfilment that you want. When you truly understand 'I can no longer distract myself in objective experience', then there is this turning around. You have to turn round, face your suffering, allow your suffering. Because what you are seeking is on the other side. You don't even face it – you allow it to come into you, don't you go into it. Don't get busy with your suffering. You allow it to come into you and you face your impulse to avoid it. You allow it inside yourself, and you bring it closer and closer and closer, rather than the old habit of pushing it further and further away. See what happens to your suffering when the resistance to it diminishes. Keep bringing it closer. And each time you bring it closer there is less and less resistance to it. And ask yourself the question: what remains of my suffering when there's not the slightest resistance to it? At the heart of our suffering is joy. If you bring the suffering so close to you that you cannot even separate yourself from it, and label it suffering - in order to label anything as an object, we have to separate ourselves from it - if you bring it so close that you no longer know what it is, you just experience the raw experience, without naming it. You won't even know that it's suffering. You'll discover the joy that is at its core. So what we are seeking lies at the heart of our suffering, not at a distance from it.

Even a non-dual YouTube clip is a kind of spiritual way of distracting us from our suffering. In fact, in that case it wouldn't be spiritual practice at all. It would just be an egoic practice, wrapped up in spiritual paper. The whole purpose of going towards the spiritual YouTube clip would be a kosher way of avoiding our suffering. In that case, the ego has appropriated the non-dual teaching for its own ends. So even as you feel yourself going towards the non-dual YouTube clip, pause, see what happens in that pause. See if the discomfort increases. See if there is this little rebellion in you that is addicted to non-dual books or YouTube clips, or whatever.

[Buckland Hall, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2016 *You Cannot Come Closer to Yourself*]

As Rupert explains, addiction to thinking requires a different technique:

With our thoughts, it's different. We can't – and I'm speaking relatively here – we can't stop the train of thoughts in the same way that we can stop going to the fridge. So there, with thoughts, it's more a matter of letting them go rather than stopping them. Letting them carry on, but not giving them our attention. Become interested in the space of awareness in which they appear, or the self to whom they appear. So in that case, you let the thinking activity go on, you don't try to stop it in the way that you stop going to the fridge. So it's a slightly different way of relating to the object. If the object is a substance, then stop going there. If it is an activity of thinking, you just let the activity flow by, but don't give it your attention, don't feed it with your interest.

[Buckland Hall 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015: *Getting Acquainted to Our True Nature*]

Some addictions are easily seen but seem more difficult to deal with, especially those associated with past trauma. In these situations, Rupert suggests using techniques from his yoga meditations to help fully face traumatic images and the feelings associated with them:

*Q: I want to ask about traumatic images that come up again and again, that seem to be caught in the body. Letting go of these Images of traumatic events doesn't seem so easy and so simple. They continue to repeat themselves and don't seem so simple to just let go of. Is there something else these images might need, rather than just letting go?*

RS: Yes, because when you say 'letting go of them', what you are really trying to do in letting go of them, is get rid of them. And in trying to get rid of them, you are perpetuating them. So is there something they need, other than your desire to get rid of them? Yes – your loving attention. So do the opposite. When one of these images appears, you say to it: 'for as long as you have been visiting me, I have been afraid of you, I have been trying to get rid of you, and it's never succeeded. So I'm now going to start doing the opposite. I'm going to turn towards you. In fact I'm going to more than just turn towards you, I'm going to totally invite you in.'

So you take one of these images and you let it appear inside of you, in just the same way that in our morning meditations, we take the sensation of the body and we see that this sensation is floating weightlessly in this open, empty expanse of awareness. You do the same thing with the image. You take some time to allow the image just to hang weightlessly in this open expanse of awareness. But it's more than just an open expanse, it's not a neutral expanse of awareness. Awareness is totally intimate, totally loving with everything that appears within it. So feel this loving aspect, this embracing aspect of awareness, and feel that this image is completely held in this loving openness. And let the image just soak in this welcoming, loving embrace.

And then after a while, you can actually feel that the awareness in which this image appears begins to permeate the image. The image is porous, it's just made of imagining, there's nothing solid there. So it's very susceptible to knowing. Really visualise this and feel it. I'm describing it with words now, but actually do this in a visceral way. Feel that the image is first of all suspended in this loving emptiness, and then gradually permeate it by this loving emptiness, totally holding it and permeating it and infiltrating it.

And as this empty, loving presence infiltrates the image, the image gives up some of its tightness, its density, it begins to soften. Try that. And just to be sure, because there's such a strong tendency in us to get rid of uncomfortable feelings, or in this case, uncomfortable images, you have to be very sure that you are not doing this in order to get rid of the image. So the test – and it will be difficult for you – but the test when you have this image that is suspended in awareness, you have to be able to say to it genuinely, 'you are welcome in me for as long as you want to stay. I have no agenda with you. You can come and go as you please'. Take some time to feel that awareness is inherently without any agenda. It's like an empty space. Or rather it is an empty space-like presence.

*Q: And so the image also comes with lots of emotions.*

RS: OK. That's fine. You take the emotion – the image has generated this emotion – you do exactly the same with the emotion. You feel the impulse to go towards an object in order to distract yourself from the discomfort of the feeling. And you do the opposite. Instead of running from the feeling, turn round, face it, say to the feeling 'I have been running unsuccessfully from you all these years. I now want to get to know you. I'm going to totally open my doors to you and you can stay as long as you like. And treat the feeling in the same way.

*[San Raphael 30/6/2014 Make the experience of being aware your intimate partner]*

## Contemplation

*Non-duality is not an immunization against feeling. In fact, it is the opposite: it is unconditional openness, sensitivity, vulnerability and possibility.*

*[Rupert Spira]*