

Abandoning all Beliefs

The early stages of the Direct Path are mainly about letting go of our existing beliefs – religious beliefs, scientific beliefs and beliefs in the ordinary models of experience that we all share – and tracing our way back to what we know for certain, which can never be expressed in words. But in many of us, there seems to be an innate, deeply-held desire to replace old beliefs with new non-dual ones. We want something to hold on to. And that is how non-duality is turned into a cult or a religion. The ideas acquire a fixed form, a fixed vocabulary, a fixed set of ‘rational arguments’. They are preached in evangelical-style meetings, and groups form around them in which discussion and questioning is discouraged. So why does this happen? Rupert explains it this way:

The apparent separate entity, the sense of separation, is extremely skilful at surrounding itself with layer upon layer upon layer of feeling and belief. It even appropriates the spiritual teaching in order to maintain itself. ... As we become more interested in spiritual life, the separate entity – and of course I am caricaturing it here – the separate entity thinks: ‘That’s fine, I’ll just appropriate the spiritual teaching. I’ll make that my new identity and I’ll take refuge in that. I’ll use that to substantiate and validate myself.’ So it appropriates the teaching for itself and it validates itself with all kinds of spiritual practices, fools itself that it’s trying to get rid of itself. In fact getting rid of itself is one of the more subtle means – in fact it’s not very subtle – but getting rid of the ego is one of the ego’s main tools. It’s safe sometimes for decades keeping up that activity. ... So the ego can appropriate anything at all. It’s a past master at using anything.

[15th August 2010: [Interview with Areti Alexova, Urban Guru Café](#)]

At Buckland Hall last year, Rupert spoke about the importance of keeping the teaching free from dogma, not crystallising it:

It’s very important not to ‘can’ the teaching. That’s why originally the teaching was an oral teaching. This teaching, for centuries, was never written down, because as soon as we write it down we frame it. It’s fine, of course, to write the teaching down. We’ve all benefitted from writings. But it’s so important that the teaching doesn’t become crystallised. Religions are crystallisations of the true, free, non-dual teaching. As soon as they become crystallised, the real teaching which is something which is very alive – it’s delivered in the moment in response to a question or a situation, [is lost] ... Now that doesn’t mean that each time a teacher speaks, he or she has to start from scratch, and build up a new vocabulary, find new words, find new images and metaphors etc. There is a limit to the number of words one can use and analogies and metaphors. So of course there are repeating metaphors, but even within that, still the teaching should come fresh, in the moment. And that’s why an alive teaching is always growing, always changing. My first teacher Dr Francis Roles said ‘the truth should be reformulated by every generation’.

It’s also very important on these retreats that there’s a balance between those of you that come regularly – and many of you have been coming regularly for many years now – but always there’s a fresh influx of new people, because new people don’t just take the concepts for granted, don’t just agree with what’s being said. They question everything, they test the teacher, they push and maybe argue a little bit. That’s fine, that’s very good.

I remember very early on, soon after I had met Francis, I asked him a series of questions and we were having a conversation, and I was being a little challenging with him, because what he was saying seemed not to be my experience. So I was pushing and testing and objecting and at one stage, I lost confidence and thought that perhaps I was being disrespectful, so I said something

like 'I'm sorry, I don't mean to be argumentative or belligerent'. He just cut me off straight away and said 'Oh, no, no, no – I'm enjoying this so much'. It was a very sweet way of saying 'no, challenge everything I say, argue with me if you want. Test me, don't trust me – you have to validate everything I say in your own experience'.

And that's a very good thing about having new people. If there aren't new people, that's how cults develop. They become very inward-looking, everybody agrees with all the same ideas. So it's very important that there's a balance in these meetings between those of you that come often – because it creates this peaceful, loving space into which we all come – but then also new questions, because new questions draw out new pathways. Unless the teacher is just speaking from memory, the teacher is really trying to meet the question to the best of his or her ability, then the response will open up a new pathway, which hopefully will be uniquely tailored to that person, but will also be a pathway that many others can walk at the same time. And this keeps a teaching spontaneous and alive.

[7th May 2017 *The Essence of Beauty: The Real Teaching is Alive*]

In his first 'Buddha At The Gas Pump' interview with Rick Archer, Rupert was asked about his approach to teaching, and to comment on the use and misuse of 'kosher' non-dual words:

RS: I agree with you completely that just to speak the kosher nondual words doesn't qualify one as a teacher. In fact, if one is truly coming from the experience - if we can call it an experience, or let's call it 'from the experiential understanding towards which the nondual teaching points', then it frees us completely from any convention of teaching.

Now in response to a question, this type of true nondual teaching may respond with perfectly kosher nondual language, but in another situation it may not. The teaching may seem to condone the apparently separate self that is concealed, more or less, in the question. It may even suggest to that separate self, "Why don't you try doing this? Why don't you explore this? Why don't you investigate this?"

'No', the nondual fundamentalists will say, 'Oh no, you're just promoting the sense of separation, you're giving the separate self something to do, therefore you're not teaching the true nondual teaching.' I find this approach really fundamentalist because there *is* no true nondual teaching. The only thing that qualifies a teaching as being nondual is that it comes truly from that understanding, and if it does, it's then completely free to use any kind of teaching skill or method, including apparently dualistic or progressive methods.

And I would far rather hear a teaching that seemed to condone the sense of separation, that says to an apparently separate self, 'Why don't you try doing this? Why don't you explore this? Maybe you could investigate that.' I would far rather hear that than hear every single question answered with the, 'Oh, there's nobody there. There's nothing to do, everything is made out of awareness'.

In other words, if there's a standard answer to all questions, that, to my mind, is suspect. It may be true – I'm not suggesting that all such responses are untrue, but if we only take the absolute point of view ... in fact, if we truly take the absolute point of view, we would never open our mouths. Anyone that speaks about this, anyone that says anything about it at all is *already* making a concession to apparent dualism.

Just by using the word 'awareness' we are subtly implying that there is something other than awareness – right there we imply duality. So once we're speaking about this we have to be honest enough and say, 'Whatever we say is not quite right, so I'm just going to do my very best

to tailor this love and understanding to the question, and be completely free to use language in whatever way seems appropriate at that time, for that particular question, even if it would seem to condone the sense of being a separate entity.' ...

So we have to acknowledge this limitation of language and work within these limitations. And I'd just like to add one thing to this conversation about teaching, it's not really that ... true teaching doesn't just take place at the level of the mind and exchange of words, it's really that the words come laden with their origin. They come full, permeated, saturated with the place from which they come, if they truly come from silence. If they come from experiential understanding, then somehow they deliver that.

Even if you're telling someone how to make a cup of tea or paint a wall, somehow, if that comes ... if that's the correct response in the moment and it comes out of love and understanding, then even that, somehow, will convey, at some subliminal level, will convey the experience of nonduality, or rather, the experiential understanding. It's not *in* the words; it's where the words come from that is the true import of the teaching.

[\[Rupert Spira -BATGAP Interview\]](#)

So Rupert responds to questions on an individual basis, starting from the models and beliefs implicit in the question, and taking the questioner a step closer to the non-dual understanding. He uses the teaching method of 'a thorn to remove a thorn' from traditional Advaita – repeatedly replacing one model with a more accurate one, and eventually throwing all the thorns away. In this example he leads the questioner all the way back through the layers of belief to that which can never be expressed in words:

Q: These things that I'm learning that feel true, I just want to be careful that I don't attach to the idea of them feeling true and have that get in the way.

RS: Would you agree that whatever you experience is real? What we are talking about here is 'what is that reality?'. We have been brought up to believe that the essential reality of what we experience is dead, inert stuff called 'matter', that exists outside consciousness. So that's where we start, and we explore in numerous ways, both rationally and in a more visceral way, we explore whether that theory of our experience is really true of our experience. And in doing so, we walk ourselves back in our experience to the reality of whatever it is that we are experiencing.

Now at various stages in that walk, we may pause and formulate our current experience: 'no, I can't be sure that this is a world, because all I know of it is perception'. So we pause there in the walk, and we say 'all I know is perception'. That's a valid thing to say in relation to our previous belief: 'it is a world'. No, all we can be sure of is that it is a perception. Pause. Formulate. Just as we get used to that, we are told: 'no, we never find a thing called "a perception", we only know the experience of perceiving'. So then the idea 'it is a perception', which is true in relation to 'it is a world', now becomes false in relation to our experience of perceiving. So we have to abandon the formulation which once led us to the truth of our experience and we pause again. We formulate: 'all I know is perceiving'. We pause, we make a formulation that seems to be true of our experience, but as soon as we become comfortable with that formulation, we look again more closely. And we go back – all there is to perceiving is the knowing of it etc.

At each stage we pause, and as we go further back, it becomes less and less easy to name the stuff we are experiencing. And eventually we realise that any name confers upon reality a limitation. Even the name 'knowing'. Because of course, 'knowing' implies the absence of knowing. Even the name 'I', the most sacred name, the divine name, the divine word 'I', in our

language implies 'not I'. But when the mind goes back and back trying to find a formulation that is true, eventually we fall silent. And that is why the ancient sages, in their humility and wisdom, simply said 'reality is not two', let's not name what it is, let's not even say it is One. Because 'one' only means something in reference to 'two'. So let's just say what it is not – that's as close as we can get.

So it's fine to formulate our understanding, but don't get stuck with any formulation – even the highest formulation I know: 'knowing, knowing only knowing' or 'I'. Let that very, very subtle formulation go – abandon it, and go one step further back to that which is utterly unnameable. And then from there, go forward again, and see that everything, all names and forms are only that.

[7th May 2017 *The Essence of Beauty*: Abandoning even the highest formulation]

Contemplation

You must really understand what it means to live completely in not-knowing. In this 'I don't know' you feel your vastness, immensity, a kind of space without a frontier, without a centre, you are nowhere.

[Jean Klein: *Transmission of the Flame*]