

Is There Anything Outside of Myself?

The first step of the Direct Path, the understanding 'I am that which witnesses all experience' is a simple and obvious one. The next step, the recognition that I am unlimited and unlocated can take a little longer. We start by recognising that this witnessing presence of awareness cannot have any objective qualities, because any such qualities would themselves be objects that are witnessed. As Rupert explains:

It is impossible to experience a limit to Consciousness because such a limit would, by definition, have some objective quality.

Such an apparent limit would have to be an object and, like all objects, would itself appear *within* Consciousness. Consciousness would be *aware* of it, but would not be *defined* by it.

[*The Transparency of Things: Everything Falls into Place*]

Similarly, we might feel we are located inside a body inside a world. But that feeling of locatedness is just a sensation that is witnessed. If we ask ourselves 'what is it that is aware of this sense of locatedness?', we find that that entity – whatever it is – must itself be *unlocated*. We have travelled back to our essential self, the knowing element in all experience.

Mind divides experience into 'me' and 'not me'. We make use of this division in the early stages of the spiritual path. We see that 'I am aware of this body, and therefore I cannot be this body', 'I am aware of the contents of my mind, and therefore I cannot be my mind'. I am the witness of mind, body and world.

That concept of the witnessing presence of awareness is useful early on, as it disentangles awareness from the objects of awareness. But then we go further and investigate whether there really is a boundary between 'me' and 'not me', between perceptions on the outside and sensations and thoughts on the inside:

What is our actual experience of the boundary between what is 'inside' ourself and what is 'outside' ourself? There is no experience of such a boundary!

If we think that we do experience such a boundary, is not that boundary itself a perception, an object that is free-floating in Consciousness, along with whatever else is being experienced in the moment?

Does this apparent border really separate the thought 'inside' ourself from the sound 'outside'?

Is it true that the sensation that we call our hand, for instance, is closer to us – that is, closer to this witnessing Consciousness – than the sound we are hearing in the distance?

'In the distance' is a concept. The sound appears *here*, in me, in Consciousness, in exactly the same place as the sensation we call our hand.

[Rupert Spira, *The Transparency of Things: I Am Everything*]

It is not enough to understand this intellectually – we need to look closely at our experience, to really 'go there' and experience it directly. It becomes clear that objects don't just appear *to* awareness, they appear *in* awareness.

But there is still a subtle duality here: the subject – the infinite field of awareness, and the objects that appear in that field. So now we explore what these objects are made of. Is there anything to them other than awareness itself? This exploration is best undertaken through one of Rupert's yoga

meditations such as [*The Borderless, Empty, Self-Aware Field of Consciousness*](#). But here is his brief summary:

It is an exploration in which we come to see clearly that the body, mind and world are made of thoughts, sensations and perceptions; thoughts, sensations and perceptions are understood to be made of thinking, sensing and perceiving; and the only substance present in thinking, sensing and perceiving is understood to be our self, Awareness.

He goes on to summarise the steps we have taken:

So, we have moved from a position in which we thought and felt that I am *something* (a mind and body) to a position in which we recognised our true nature as aware Presence, which we expressed as 'I am *nothing*, not-a-thing'. Then we came to the experiential understanding that I am not just the witness, the knower or experiencer of all things, but also simultaneously their substance. In other words, we came to feel that I am *everything*. ... However, even this is not quite right ... for what is this 'everything' that is being referred to?

How can we express this? We cannot! Language collapses here because understanding has burst out of the conceptual framework that it is designed to contain.

[*Presence Volume II: Awareness and Its Apparent Objects*]

Even when understood and felt, this can be challenging, especially for those of us who were brought up in a religious tradition. There may be some reluctance to lose the comfort of there being something larger than myself, and outside of myself. We might ask whether the concept of 'God' has any meaning in non-duality. This is Rupert's answer to that question:

RS: What is 'God' in relation to this understanding? Once thought has abstracted the knower and the known, the seer and the seen, the experiencer and the experience – in other words once thought has overlooked this knowing which pervades all experience, and has said 'no, this knowing doesn't pervade all experience, it just pervades this little corner of experience. Thought abstracts a separate self and as an inevitable counterpart to the inside self, thought projects an outside world. So this is the conventional duality – inside self, outside world. But then the separate self looks around at the outside world and notices that it's coming and going and then it wonders to itself 'where does it all come from?'. So thought then has to manufacture a third element. Not just two things, not just the soul or the self and the world, it has to manufacture a third entity called God who creates it all. So that's where the separate self's family is complete – separate self, God the creator and the world.

But that creator-God, the separate self imagines that God in its own likeness. Now 'in its own likeness' doesn't mean looking like a physical body. It means as an inevitable corollary or counterpart to the separate self. So I am an inside self, and God is out there and up there. So in just the same way that the outside world is an inevitable counterpart to the inside self, so the distant, separate God is a reflection of the belief in being a separate self. It's not really what God is. It's just 'God' from the illusory point of view of a separate self. What is really meant by 'spirit' or 'God' is divine, eternal awareness. But thought, having overlooked awareness, has to account for all these apparent objects and worlds in another way, so it manufactures a God, distant from ourself, separate from ourself. But actually what is truly meant by God or spirit is divine, infinite awareness – just the consciousness 'I am'. 'I am' – that is 'before Abraham was, I am'. That's what it means – the 'I am' the pure 'I am' before thought has added a limit and a destiny to it. That is what is meant by 'God'.

Christ said 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'. What he meant was 'I am' is the Way, the Truth. Not I, the person. It didn't mean follow me, the person of Jesus. That was a complete misunderstanding. What he meant was 'I am' is the Way. To go to the 'I am', to go to pure awareness, to ask yourself the question 'am I not awareness?' and to go to the place from which the answer comes. *That* is the Way. That is the Truth of experience. That is what is truly referred to as 'God' or 'spirit'.

[22nd November 2012, Somerset: [*God in Relation to the Non-Dual Understanding*](#)]

So when Rupert uses the word God, he is referring to the infinite, indivisible awareness or consciousness that is the reality of all of us. For some, this can seem like blasphemy. But Rupert is very clear. He says: 'The true blasphemy is not to say "I am God's infinite being". It is to say "I am an ego". *That* is blasphemous.'¹ Here is a dialogue he had with someone who was brought up in the Christian tradition and was worried that the Direct Path teaching was leading her into usurping God:

Q: I had a realisation of being not just love, but the source of love. ... But I'm afraid I'm deluding myself, that I'm usurping the true God in some sense.

RS: When you say 'I am usurping the true God', you set yourself, I, the one that may or may not be usurping God, and God – you set yourself apart. In other words, you are giving credence to a self apart from God's self, apart from God's being. That is blasphemy. To set yourself up as a self, albeit a very virtuous self, who is wondering whether she is usurping God's self. But nevertheless, you are setting yourself up as a self apart from God's self.

Q: It's funny that in the Christian tradition which I was brought up with, it's the opposite. It's blasphemy to say that I am God.

RS: That's the exoteric meaning of the word 'blasphemy', but the true blasphemy is to set yourself up as a self apart from God. To consider oneself as a self, apart from God's infinite being. That is the blasphemy of the ego. The only self there is – if we can call it a self – the only self there is, the only being there is, is God's infinite, indivisible, self-aware being. And the being of each of us is that single, infinite, indivisible being.

Love is one of the ways that this shared being is recognised. Love *is* the experience of our shared being. All of us know that. When we feel in love with someone, or we love someone, we feel the distinction or the separation between us and the other collapses. In other words, love *is* the recognition we are one. We *are* one. In fact, even to say 'we are one' is to suggest that there is a 'we' – a multiplicity and diversity of selves that are one. Even that is not quite right. There is just a single, indivisible, infinite being that shines in each of our minds as the knowledge 'I am'.

So the simple knowledge 'I am' is God's knowledge of himself, shining in each of our minds. In other words, the knowledge 'I am' is the mind's access to its divine reality. It's that close. All we need to go to find the presence of God in our heart is to go to the experience 'I am'. Can anyone here not access immediately the experience 'I am', or the feeling of being? It's that close, it's that obvious. Everyone has equal access to it. Everyone has equal access to their own being. So don't entertain ideas about a 'self' usurping God.

[19th November 2016 Buckland Hall: *The Never-ending Art of Living the Understanding*]

¹ 6th December 2014, Dorset: *Peace is God's Imprint on the Heart*

So what is it like when we recognise that there is nothing other than myself, consciousness? How can we lead a normal life knowing and feeling that there is no 'me' and 'not me', no inside and outside myself, no witness and witnessed? Here is Rupert's description:

Out of this Freedom, Consciousness projects the mind, the body and the world through the faculties of thinking, imagining, sensing and perceiving.

In the natural condition, this projection is known and felt to be taking place within Consciousness, and every part of it is known and felt equally as an expression of Consciousness, *as* Consciousness itself.

However, at times Consciousness divides the totality of experience into two camps. Everything that is part of the 'not me' camp is called 'the world'. Everything that is part of the 'me' camp is called 'the body/mind'.

It is with the thought and feeling 'I am *not* this' that Consciousness projects the world *outside* itself. And it is with the thought and the feeling 'I *am* this' that Consciousness simultaneously identifies itself with, and thereby limits itself to, a body/mind.

This cycle of projecting the mind, body and world every morning and withdrawing the projection every night, as well as many other times during the day, continues in exactly the same way even when Consciousness has come to recognise its own unlimited Freedom.

What ceases is Consciousness's habit of identifying itself with one part of the projection and separating itself from another. The thought and feeling 'I am *this* part of my projection, but not *that* part', 'I am the body but I am not the world', ceases.

It may continue to project an image of a separate entity with its own life story, from time to time, but it no longer limits itself to this projection.

Even if it reappears from time to time, it is quickly recognised as an old habit that is not substantiated by actual experience, and it is abandoned.

There is nothing wrong with the projection of a separate entity. It is essential for many aspects of life. It is only the exclusive identification with it that is problematic.

As Consciousness sees clearly that the entire spectrum of this projection takes place *within* itself, it no longer separates it into 'me' and 'other'.

It sees all things in and as itself.

[*The Transparency of Things: The Natural Condition*]

Contemplation

To begin with, I, Awareness, seem to be in the world, then the world seems to be in Me and finally the distinction between Myself and the world dissolves.

[Rupert Spira]