

## The Sense of Lack

Many of us have experienced marvellous glimpses of our true nature only to have those glimpses fade along with all the enjoyable feelings of relaxation, happiness or ecstasy that accompanied them. If the glimpse arose during or soon after meditation, then we try to meditate more and more in order to get back to that happy state and make it permanent. But after a while we recognise that that doesn't work.

So what is going wrong? Usually, the problem will be that we are conceptualising consciousness as an object. We may regard that pleasant state as a kind of 'higher level of consciousness' or a 'purer form' of consciousness. Or we may believe that it's only when we are in that state that we are 'in consciousness'. In other words, we are conceptualising consciousness as an object – a state of body and mind that comes and goes. We want permanent happiness and imagine that the way to find it is to somehow make that state permanent. But as Rupert explains, consciousness is ever-present, irrespective of the state of the mind: it is our deeply-held sense of lack that is preventing us abiding as consciousness knowingly, and discovering the source of permanent happiness:

The desire to experience Consciousness as an object comes from the belief that Consciousness is not already present. This belief is fuelled and substantiated by a deep sense of lack at the level of the body, the feeling, 'I want something. I need something.'

Every time this sense of lack is relieved by the acquisition of a desired object, Consciousness briefly glimpses itself, and this experience is known as Happiness. In fact, it is not a *brief* moment. It is a *timeless* moment.

However, it is not the acquired object that causes the Happiness. It is the dissolution of the sense of lack, which is apparently brought about by the acquisition of the object, that allows the *pre-existing* Happiness to be revealed.

So the relaxation of this desire to experience Consciousness an object, which actually prevents us from abiding as Consciousness knowingly, requires more than simply the understanding that Consciousness is not an object.

It requires a deep sensitivity to the sense of lack, to the feeling that we need something that is not present in order to make us happy, to the feelings and impulses at the level of the body and how we escape them through thinking.

Once this is understood, we no longer need the acquisition of an object to dissolve the sense of lack. *[The Transparency of Things, Knowingness is the Substance of all Experience]*

It is common for people who have been on a spiritual path for many decades to still feel a sense of lack, despite having a clear intellectual understanding of the non-dual philosophy. This is illustrated in the following dialogue with Rupert:

*Q: Recently I could see that there's no separate self and all the questions fall away. There's nothing for them to stand on. I feel like I'm in a paradox. I can see that there's no separate self. ... But I have this lingering feeling that I'm missing something.*

*RS: OK, but you see right there is the separate self whose existence you deny. And that's very honest of you. So, although you have understood intellectually that there is no separate self, that awareness is an unlimited field, this understanding hasn't penetrated your feelings. You still *feel* that you are a separate self and that feeling is in conflict with your understanding. In fact,*

the feeling of being separate is by far the larger part of the separate self.

[18<sup>th</sup> April 2018, Deepak Homebase New York, *The Essence of Non-duality*]

How can we develop this 'deep sensitivity to the sense of lack' that Rupert describes? One approach is to make use of two questions that Rupert posed during a yoga meditation in 2017<sup>1</sup>: "What is preventing you from being totally at peace, fully happy, in this moment? What is preventing your total enjoyment of the current experience?" Just asking those questions leads us straight to the sense of lack. There may be a story attached to it, and if so, we can deal with the story by investigating the 'I' around whom the story revolves. But more importantly, we can identify the feeling of lack as a sensation in the body.

The approach Rupert recommends is not to try to get rid of the sensation or to suppress by saying to ourselves 'I have everything I need, this feeling of lack makes no sense, best to just ignore it and find something else to occupy the body-mind'. Instead, he suggests allowing the feeling to be there, welcoming it. Here is Francis's explanation of how this approach works:

If we totally welcome this feeling, instead of doing what we usually do, go out, see a movie, or call up a friend, in an attempt to escape the situation, we would see this lack gradually lose its dynamism and evolve into a peaceful non-experience. This peace comes directly from our true nature. It has always been available. Our sense of lack was our real being reminding us of its presence when we were seeking happiness outside, in the objective world. When we understand this, and open ourselves to our inner core, this lack, as if by magic, changes into causeless bliss.

[Francis Lucille: *Eternity Now*. Real Life has no Purpose]

Welcoming a sense of lack can seem a little illogical – why would we welcome uncomfortable feelings, even if they are only mildly uncomfortable? And is it really necessary to investigate a sense of lack that is so mild and subtle that it doesn't give us any real problems? In the following dialogue, Francis suggests that we allow it to be present and investigate it, not in order to get rid of it, but out of *interest* in it. It is, after all, the deeper root of what we once thought and felt ourselves to be, so it should be of interest:

*Sometimes there is nothing, no enjoyment, and the emotions are quiet.*

When you say there is no enjoyment it means that, in your opinion, things are not as they should be. What makes you feel that there is no enjoyment? It is a label that we put on a situation when we feel there is a lack. Explore the lack when it arises; welcome it. Do not do anything to eliminate it, just be interested in it. Let the lack arise without interfering with it, without blindly doing what it tells you to do.

*When I look, the mind seems to block me.*

This lack is not just in the mind, it is a feeling also, a sensation in the body. In order to explore this lack, you have to look in the body as well as the mind. If you completely welcome the lack or the boredom, it may evolve and reveal other feelings. Just let it be present in you, don't try to eliminate it. It is not going to kill you. It just consists of sensations in the body. ...

*What is the difference between being interested in a feeling and asking the question, "Who is having this feeling?"*

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<sup>1</sup> Buckland Hall, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2017: The Heart of Awareness is Our True Heart

There is no difference because the feeling of boredom, fear, lack, is the apparent one who is having this feeling. It is the ego. However, in self-inquiry we are not interested in who is having the feeling, but in what is the source of the I-thought, the I-feeling, the ego. It is not about the ego itself. We go upstream from the feeling to the ego and from the ego to its source. When we reach this sense of lack that has no cause, we have already reached the legs and the arms of the ego.

[Francis Lucille: *The Perfume of Silence*, Be Present Without Intention]

What seems initially to be a mild, unimportant feeling is often covering layer upon layer of deeper feelings. As each layer is revealed, we get closer and closer to the core sense of lack at the root of the illusory separate self and that can sometimes bring a feeling of fear or panic. It can take courage to face those feelings, but it's through facing them, that the residues of the separate self in the body dissolve in the light of awareness. This is how Rupert describes that process:

In time, and in our loving and disinterested contemplation, the distinction between the sensations and the presence in which they appear begins to blur. And if we have the courage to stay with these sensations for long enough and not escape them through the usual channels of thinking and acting, they are revealed as nothing other than this presence. In fact, they were always that but are now known and felt as such.

As each layer of feeling evaporates in this experiential understanding, the next one, which resides deeper in the body, closer to the essential 'me' feeling, is exposed and is again relieved of all superimposed 'me-ness' as it is subjected to the light of awareness.

At some point the core separate self feeling—the fear of disappearance and the sense of lack—is exposed. For some this is the *first* feeling to be exposed. If this is the case it may be a frightening experience and we may shrink from opening ourselves totally to it. In which case, we may approach it again gradually as outlined above.

Or we may face it full on the first time and have the courage and the love to completely surrender to the invitation to release it to the transparent presence of our own being. In this case, the residues of feelings in the body will, in almost all cases, remain and will gradually, effortlessly and naturally be flushed out of the system in time.

However, if we approach it more gradually, the exposure of this essential fear and lack will not be such a dramatic event and may even pass un-noticed. It will only be later that we discover that the core knot of separation in the body has been dissolved.

Either way, a time comes when the whole fabric of the separate self feeling in the body has been fully exposed and offered to the light of aware presence, which has, as it were, completely absorbed it into itself.

All that remains now is presence itself abiding in and as itself. This abiding in and as aware presence is the essence of meditation and, indeed, the essence of the teaching. In time, it becomes the essence of our life.

[*Presence Vol I: The Art of Peace and Happiness*, Happiness is the Highest Spiritual Practice]

## Contemplation

*The mind, body or world may lack something but our Self – luminous, open, empty, Awareness, which knows this sense of lack – is inherently free of it. Thus, happiness is its nature.*

[Rupert Spira]