

Understanding

Those of us who come to the Direct Path having studied other traditional non-dual teachings notice an immediate difference in the words written or spoken by Direct Path teachers: they are clear, logical and easy to understand. This seems to be in stark contrast to many of the ancient texts from traditional schools of non-duality. It's only when we return to those ancient texts having understood the Direct Path teaching, and started to incorporate it in our lives, that we realise: 'Oh that's what it meant, I read it so many times before, I thought I was beginning to understand it, but I now realise I was way off-beam.' It's not generally the fault of the translators – many of them do an excellent job. The problem arose because we were unable to tune in to where those sages were pointing.

One reason for this may be that in most of the ancient texts there is much less detailed and logical elaboration of the ideas, which means there are many possible interpretations of the words. But I don't think that's the only reason. Something magical happens in the living presence of an awakened teacher who is established in his understanding. We ask a question and are taken directly to our true nature, not through the words of the answer – which are really just a tuning-in mechanism – but in the space between, within and around the words. In the Foreword that Rupert wrote for Francis Lucille's book *The Perfume of Silence*, he says:

... nothing new is given by the teacher. The question contains the answer, in fact it arises out of the true answer. If this were not the case, if we did not already know the answer, how would we recognize it when we hear it? From where would that "Yes" that we feel when we understand something come from?

The openness from which the question arises and the openness from which the answer comes are not two different openesses, they are one and the same. The asking of the question is the creative aspect of this openness. Its dissolution is the meditative aspect, the dissolving of all that exists in that which is. If we ask, "What is the purpose of a question? Why this movement, this creativity, why not just rest?" we cannot answer because the mind is itself part of the creativity about which we are asking. ...

So the real question is not in the words and the real answer is not in the words either. The words must vanish for their true meaning to be understood and in that moment we realize that we do not understand what is said in these pages; we are that understanding. So the true content of both the answer and the question is this openness, this not-knowing, out of which they both arise, in which they are both maintained, and into which they are both dissolved. It is that which is present behind, between, and within the words.

[*The Perfume of Silence*: Foreword by Rupert Spira]

That is why an intellectual understanding based just on the words of a teacher is not the real understanding. In fact it can be misleading. A competent teacher will always start from where the questioner is in his/her understanding, and that means that some of what is said may be couched in highly dualistic language and may appear to contradict previous explanations and advice. But as Rupert explains, there is no contradiction – it's just that the truth is being approached from a different place:

It doesn't matter whether the words are framed in kosher Advaita formulations, or whether they may appear to condone the apparent entity and give the apparent entity something to do. It doesn't matter. Because the true import of the words is the origin from which they come. And if they come directly from this Presence, whatever the form they come in, even if they come in apparently dualistic forms, they will deliver their origin. So there is a very wide range of

formulations that are possible, including formulations that seem to be a little bit less direct, that seem to condone the existence of a separate person and a practice for them to do. Just because a person uses this kind of terminology, doesn't mean they believe that the apparent entity is real, or that they have something to do. But because of the sensitivity in the teacher who listens deeply to the question – not just the formulated question but to the feeling behind the question, the question behind the question – this sensitivity allows a formulation of the teaching that is absolutely uniquely tailored to the question.

[Rupert Spira: [Is a Living Guru or Teacher Necessary](#)]

Here is a further explanation of how this works:

Q: Our nature is pure, unclouded Awareness. Love is not a definable thing. It is beyond the realm of our habitual thoughts-feelings-actions. However, our thoughts-feelings-actions originate within this Awareness. How would you define in a quick, simple statement the core essence of this teaching and the way to get there?

RS: The essence of this teaching is precisely the pure, unclouded Awareness that you cite. Without a question, there is no teaching. There is only this pure, unclouded Awareness, knowing-being-loving itself. It is not known by someone.

A question is like a bucket that is dipped into this ocean of pure, unclouded Awareness. What comes out is intimately and uniquely fit to the shape of the bucket. When the answer is heard it resonates with the same pure, unclouded Awareness in the apparent hearer. That is, aware Presence recognises itself.

At this stage the bucket dissolves and only pure, unclouded Awareness remains. There is no teacher who answers and no student who hears. Nor is there any formulated teaching or fixed point of view or attitude from which the responses come.

It is precisely because the water is fluid and transparent and has no form or colour of its own that it is able to flow into each bucket and take up its unique shape. This is how the teaching works at the level of words: pure silence 'flows' into the question, acclimatises itself to it and finally dissolves the question into itself.

The teaching is not the words that are framed in response to a question. The words are just the packaging. The teaching is that from which the words come. The only reason pure, unclouded Awareness takes the form of a response in words is to dance with the form that it took in the question.

A true question that arises in the heart compels this pure, unclouded Awareness to appear in a form that will correspond with it. That is why a sincere desire for a friend or a teacher will always compel this pure, unclouded Awareness to appear in human form. Pure, unclouded Awareness is simply responding to its own desire, and in this sense the human teacher is a devotee of pure, unclouded Awareness every bit as much as the student is.

The dance that ensues may be long or short, but in the end both the thoughts that make up the question and the thoughts that make up the response dissolve in the true answer, which is their source and substance. In this dissolution the teacher and the student lose their apparent separateness and find themselves as one in love or friendship.

[Rupert Spira: *Presence Vol II, The Intimacy of All Experience: Pure Unclouded Awareness*]

So we need to allow the words to take us beyond words, beyond mind. Arguing over the meaning of words – a favourite activity of some Advaitins – is not only pointless, it is a block to understanding. But that doesn't mean that we should just accept everything that is said. If we don't understand something, if it doesn't seem to correspond to our experience, or if the words have failed to take us beyond words, then we need to ask for clarification. Francis describes the process: listen to the teaching in openness; contemplate it; investigate it in your experience; and if it seems not to match, then come back with a question:

Consciousness knows itself directly, without any agent, without any intermediary. You have to be open to this possibility. It's not something that is extraordinary, because all human beings know that they are conscious. Only a few know that they are conscious through direct experience. Most of them know that they are conscious only because they perceive objects. Now if we know we are conscious out of an experience which is not objective, what kind of experience is it? The experience of consciousness knowing itself is of a different kind. So be open to that. Investigate your own experience. Don't hesitate to come back with objections. Objections will present themselves to you – 'no that's not possible because, because, because ...'. That's the function of a teacher to address these objections in a satisfactory manner.

[Francis Lucille: [Understanding Comes First, Understanding Is Absolute](#)]

But after a while, just the presence of the teacher is enough. Ramana Maharshi regarded silence as the highest form of teaching: if we ask about the nature of the Self, silence is the only accurate answer. This is what Francis Lucille said (in the same video) about his own experience of silent transmission with his teacher, Jean Klein:

I would experience that [*silent transmission*] with my teacher. Sometimes I wouldn't listen to the words, and sometimes he would do a gesture with his hand and it could go very deeply in me.

[Francis Lucille: [Understanding Comes First, Understanding Is Absolute](#)]

Jean Klein stresses the importance of approaching a teacher from openness, and explains how our openness paves the way for this wordless transmission:

When you encounter your guru, you must have quite a different approach from the one you usually maintain when you meet people in everyday life where aggressions and defences are used in pursuit of some goal. At this encounter, you must totally accept yourself, surrender, be ready to receive. Then your listening will be deeply attentive, completely free from any preconceived ideas. The presence and words of the teacher are the mirror reminding you of, and reflecting, your own open listening, your own presence. Thus the way is shown, the door is opened to grace and you find yourself on the threshold, ready to be taken by your true self.

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Learning things objectively is always a fragmentary process. The guru passes on the knowledge of truth in its totality, for he and his teachings are one. Simply by his or her presence the teacher helps because this presence reminds the seeker of his own presence which he is in common with the teacher and in which all existence appears. Unintentional reminders of totality thus will come about and the disciple will be attracted by them. What was knowingly lived in the teacher's presence will renew itself.

[Jean Klein: *I Am*, chs 3, 7, pages 17, 49, 50]

Jean Klein also explains the importance of not trying to hang onto the words of the teaching. We need to let go of the words so that the understanding to which they point can flower within us:

The answer given by one who knows himself to be, never derives from memory. Each and every real answer flows directly from this being knowledge. Welcome the answer with awakened attention, and then forget it. It is indispensable that we let go of the spoken word so that the essence behind it may spring to life within the questioner. When contemplating the sayings of the guru you recall them, not so much from the mind but from the Truth from which they spring. It is not the verbal syntax that has transformative power but the source from which the words come, and with which they are impregnated. It is the feeling of the source which brings the words back to you.

[Jean Klein: *I Am*, ch 8, pages 57-58]

At the end of a retreat, when we are all about to go back to our normal lives, Rupert often urges us not to try to remember what was said, but instead to take away with us the 'perfume of the teaching'. Here is a transcript of a short meditation that he gave at the end of a week-long retreat at Buckland Hall:

Anything that can be remembered, can be forgotten. Indeed, any that can be remembered, *will* be forgotten.

Only that which cannot be remembered, cannot be forgotten.

Only that which cannot be found, cannot be lost.

When we allow everything that can be remembered to be gradually forgotten, that which remains eternally present begins to shine more and more brightly in our lives.

We all take the perfume of these meetings out into our lives, and we make it available in our own way to anyone who has the sensitivity and interest in it.

Treasure this perfume.

Live with it, surrender yourself to it.

Allow it to gradually infiltrate all realms of your experience – the way you think, feel, act, perceive and relate.

Don't be anxious to acquire it, just let it come to you.

Don't try to find it, let it find you.

If we do anything at all, it's to simply turn towards it.

[Buckland Hall, 1st May 2016: *The Perfume of Understanding*]

Contemplation

There is no knower of experience and no experience that is known; there is just the knowing of it. In fact, not the knowing 'of it'. We never find the 'it'; we know just Knowing, and it is Knowing that knows only Knowing.

[Rupert Spira]