

## Four Myths about Enlightenment

It is commonly imagined that enlightenment or awakening or self-realisation is:

- An exotic experience, possible for only a few special people
- Is difficult and requires effort
- Takes a long period of spiritual practice – usually many decades
- Is incompatible with living a normal life in the world, doing a normal job

None of these is true. But although that may be understood intellectually by those who have been studying Rupert's teaching for a while, it is common for there to still be a hidden inner feeling that some or all of those myths are actually true. Feeling that we lack the exotic experience that others speak about. Feeling that we are 'not good enough', and lack the natural qualities and spiritual disposition of enlightened sages. Feeling that we need to work harder to stay in the now, or remain abiding as awareness. Thinking that enlightenment is something that might happen in the future and that we need to work towards. Thinking that perhaps we need to give up our job as a banker, a salesman, a business executive, a politician because it is taking us away from our true nature, and instead become a psychotherapist, a healer, or a teacher of non-duality ...

In an early interview with Rick Archer, of Batgap, Rupert discussed the way in which these kinds of mistaken beliefs reinforce the sense of being a separate self:

RS: I think many people who went primarily or solely to India for enlightenment still have some residue of a notion that somehow awakening, or enlightenment - I don't like using these words because they're so laden with exotic experiences –somehow it can wipe the character clean and you can barely function.

I was at a meeting recently and somebody even suggested that when I put on a sweater in the cold weather, it was somehow a resistance to the current situation, and that therefore was a sign that I was a separate self. And I asked him, "Well what about when I eat? You could say that was a resistance to the feeling of hunger and therefore an expression of ignorance." And he said, "Well yes, I do think that."

So these crazy notions and these kinds of ideas make enlightenment something *impossible* to ever realize, something that you have to be superhuman ... "How could I with all my faults, all my character, how could I ever realize what these people are talking about, because you have to be this bland, whitewashed, perfect creature?" And this just projects enlightenment further, and further, and further away in the distance, when actually the teaching should make it seem closer and closer and closer, and easier and easier and easier, because real enlightenment is not an exotic experience; it is the natural condition of all experience, it is the most familiar thing we know. Just the knowing of our own being as it is, and it shines at the heart of all experience, it's *always* present, it's the best-known thing – if we can call it a "thing" – that we know.

It's *India* that's exotic and far away, it's not enlightenment. Enlightenment and India have *nothing* to do with each other. India is truly exotic but enlightenment is not exotic.

The knowing of our own being, the knowing of the light which truly illumines all experience is the most familiar, the most natural, the most easily recognizable thing in our experience. And by allying enlightenment to an exotic culture or to an exotic experience, it puts it at a distance. And by putting enlightenment at a distance, over there, you just crystallize the sense of a separate self in here, that then has to meditate and work hard for 30 years.

So these kinds of beliefs, they just perpetuate the separate self, and the separate self, the more it tries to achieve enlightenment, the more it strengthens itself. In fact, one of the best ways the separate self perpetuates itself is by trying to get rid of itself, trying to attain enlightenment. And this is why people complain ... I hear this so often in my meetings: "I've been doing this for 30 years and I've been trying." [8/11/2011 [Rupert Spira Batgap Interview](#)]

In progressive paths, there are pre-requisites for understanding the reality of our being such as being able to control the mind and senses, following a specific physical discipline, and behaving according to some moral code. But none of that is necessary. As Rupert explains, it really is very simple and natural:

There are no prerequisites for the recognition of knowing or being aware. To recognise the experience of knowing or being aware does not require a particular qualification or level of intelligence.

No effort is required to recognise the experience of knowing or being aware, any more than an effort is required to see the screen during a movie.

It is not necessary to control our thoughts, sit in a particular posture or practise something called meditation in order to be aware of the experience of being aware. The non-objective experience of being aware is the simplest and most intimate, obvious, self-evident fact of experience.

The experience of being aware is independent of whatever we are aware of. No experience affects the non-objective experience of being aware, just as nothing that takes place in a movie affects the screen upon which it plays.

It is not necessary to change or manipulate experience in any way in order to notice the background of simply being aware. We may be afraid, bored, agitated, depressed, in love or at peace; the experience of being aware remains the same in all cases.

Just as no particular event in a movie has the ability to obscure the screen unless we allow it to do so, so no experience has the ability to veil the experience of knowing or being aware unless we permit it to do so, in which case it will seem to do so. As soon as we withdraw that permission, the experience of knowing or being aware becomes self-evident.

Allow the experience of being aware to come into the foreground of experience, and let thoughts, images, feelings, sensations and perceptions recede into the background. Simply notice the experience of being aware. The peace and happiness for which all people long reside there. [*Being Aware of Being Aware*, ch 1]

When Rupert was asked by someone who had had a glimpse of her true nature, how to become established in that understanding Rupert's immediate response was to say 'I would recommend that you erase the words "enlightenment" and "establishment" from your repertoire'. He went on to speak about people who have spontaneous glimpses of their true nature, and explained that in most cases they find that sooner or later this becomes clouded by experience, and that leads them to search for teacher or a teaching that can help them find their way back. But this is not the norm, and he then described how most of us come to the direct path and how we come to understand our true nature:

RS: Other people have this great longing for peace and happiness in their life – this is I think the case for most people. They spend the first 10 or so years of their life trying to fulfil this longing in the normal ways – objects, activities, substances, states of mind and relationships. When they

have been failed sufficiently often by the conventional means of securing peace and happiness, they then begin go beyond those means and they meet someone who tells them about a particular teaching or recommends a book by Ramana Maharshi. They then begin to consciously take this journey back. They notice 'I can't be my thoughts, because my thoughts are always coming and going, but I'm not always coming and going'. 'I'm aware of my thoughts but I am not myself a thought'. So they begin to walk their way back in this way, consciously, as a practice.

Many people do this and as a result of this, get a glimpse of their true nature. And then the old habits of thinking and feeling close in again and obscure it. And so we have to walk ourselves back again, and again and again. And each time we go back, the pathway becomes a little easier and a little shorter. And the capacity of our objective experience to cloud the knowing of our own being diminishes correspondingly. So we begin to feel that we don't just visit our being from time to time, we begin to spend time there. Instead of just going for dinner, we spend the weekend there and after a while, we feel we move in. And for many people, it is gradual. Our objective experience loses its power to veil our own being, so our own being and its innate peace begin to shine more and more in our life. We may never have the feeling 'I am enlightened'. I have to confess I have never had the thought or feeling 'I am enlightened'. I'm sorry if that's a disappointment to some of you!

*Q: I'm not bothered about that. I just want be happy. It's just this idea of a process – like the progressive path, it's still a process? We have to keep practising and then we'll get there? It's the Direct Path, but there's still a process to it?*

RS: The direct path from here [*Buckland Hall*] to London is straight down the A40. You don't take the M5 and then the M6 and then the M1 – that's the indirect path to London. So the direct path just means the quickest and shortest route – it goes in a straight line. But it doesn't necessarily mean you get there instantly.

Just feel that you are already, not an enlightened self, but the light of the self. The light of your being is already everything it could ever be. It's in the same condition now as Ramana Maharshi's being was, or the Buddha's being was. It's in the same condition, but in most of us, our being is still coloured or clouded by experience. In time, the capacity of our experience to obscure our being diminishes and as a result, our being and its peace begin to shine through our experience.

And you notice, hopefully, that by coming to these retreats, not just because of the guided meditations and the conversations, but the whole experience of being here both in our meetings and outside our meetings, that something takes place that magnifies our being in our experience and diminishes the capacity of our objective experience to obscure our being. In other words, our experience becomes more and more transparent to the light of our being.

[Buckland Hall, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2018, [When Will I Finally Be Awakened?](#)]

For most of us, a period of deep exploration is needed. We have a glimpse of our true nature and through that glimpse we come to understand that we are that which knows our experience, pure consciousness. And we see and feel that this consciousness that I am is unlimited, eternal, has no objective qualities. But then this understanding bumps up against our conditioning – 'surely there are things that are separate from me – fields and houses and trees?'. And 'if I am pure consciousness and everyone else is the same consciousness why can't I see their thoughts?'. And 'if there is no separate me that is choosing my thoughts, what is choosing them?'. And so on. The mind needs to be satisfied that what we were taught as children is belief and not fact, and that it is not the only way of interpreting our experience. Here is Rupert's advice:

What I am suggesting is a complete reversal of perspective. But it is not one that comes from abstract, philosophical thinking. It is one that comes from rigorously exploring our experience. After all, experience must be the test of reality. I don't have any special access to this reality. I have just explored it very thoroughly and am making the pathways along which I explored available to other people to travel. Everyone has the same access to reality, because everyone *is* the same reality. In fact, there aren't lots of separate 'everyone's'. Each of our minds is just a temporary, self-assumed limitation of the only one that truly is – infinite, indivisible, self-aware being, God's infinite being.

All that is required is to take the journey, to make the exploration yourself. Use these pathways that are being shared. Excavate your entire experience. Explore it and be courageous. Only trust what you, yourself, know from your own experience. Refuse everything your culture has told you.

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Explore your experience, trust your experience. And then the last stage: have the courage to *live* the implications of what you discover. Ponder the implications of this perspective, and then try it out. To the best of your ability, think, feel, act, perceive and relate in a way that is consistent with whatever you discover. The old habits will, of course, reassert themselves. Don't worry about that: just go back again and again and again – explore your experience and live the implications of what you discover. And the more we make this exploration and the more we try to *live* its implications, the more this picture fills out. It's not just one discovery – it goes on and on and on revealing itself.

[Extract from '*Whosoever Knows their Self Knows their Lord*', Buckland Hall, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2016]

Finally, is it really necessary to change our job if we want to recognise our true nature and live a life that is consistent with our understanding? Here is an extract from a dialogue that Rupert had with a hospital consultant who had had glimpses of his true nature, but felt that his growing understanding made it difficult for him to do his job:

*Q: How about the doubts about remaining competitive? Not that I have to compete with colleagues, but working in an environment like that, with the non-dual understanding, can be difficult.*

RS: Well not half as difficult as working in an environment like that *without* the non-dual understanding! And if you're working in an environment that is dominated by male egos – ruthless and competitive and combative, how would that be tolerable without the non-dual understanding? How would you manage that sanely without an approach such as this?

*Q: I think that was probably the reason for my struggle beforehand and the sadness ...*

RS: Yes, because you felt the prevalence of the ego, egos battling each other, competing with each other. You felt the sorrow of that, but you didn't yet know how to extricate yourself from it. You knew you didn't want to be a part of it. But now you've found a way of being that you don't have to be an ego all the time. You don't have to be a big ego to be a good surgeon.

*Q: Have you met any good surgeons?*

RS: I have met surgeons. Over these past few years, I've met people from so many walks of life – surgeons, bankers, lawyers, ex-convicts – you name it. I've met people from so many walks of life, and I've never met anyone who felt that this understanding in some ways interfered with living a sane, loving, peaceful, intelligent, fulfilled life. Even professional people – lawyers, doctors, bankers these kinds of people – there's nothing incompatible with this understanding.

This understanding should only make all aspects of your life easier. And I've met people who work in extremely stressful situations and who have reported that this understanding has only enabled them to cope with those situations better than they were previously able to. I once knew someone who was an MP and he was universally loved and respected by members of all parties, because of the integrity and the intelligence and the honesty that he displayed. So there's nothing about this understanding that should make your life more difficult in your hospital.

[Buckland Hall, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018, *Happiness is the Nature of Ourselves*]

Rupert often refers to this advice from Atmananda Krishnamenon on the best profession for those seeking spiritual advancement:

*Q: Is it a fact that you had all your spiritual sadhana while serving in the Police Department?*

*Shri Atmananda replied firmly: 'Yes, it is perfectly true. And I am quite serious when I say that if anybody sought my advice regarding the vocation or profession most helpful towards spiritual advancement, I would always recommend either the police or the military. Because they offer the maximum obstacles and temptations. Success obtained under such conditions is final and irrevocable.'*

[*Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shri Atmananda*, p473]

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*This is an exquisite truth:  
Saints and ordinary folks are the same from the start.  
Inquiring about a difference  
Is like asking to borrow string  
When you've got a good strong rope.  
Every Dharma is known in the heart.  
After a rain, the mountain colours intensify.  
Once you become familiar with the design of fate's illusions  
Your ink-well will contain all of life and death.*

**Hsu Yun**

(English version by The Zen Buddhist Order of Hsu Yun)

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