

Being Myself

There is one experience that we all have in common, and that is 'being myself'. Throughout our lives, we have known and felt 'I am myself'. It is a universal experience – we all know it and feel it.

Most of the time we qualify or limit that very basic feeling – we say: I am a teacher or an engineer or a brick-layer or a computer programmer; I am a vegetarian, a democrat, a conservative, a mother, a father, a son, a daughter and so on. None of these is an inherent characteristic of myself. Even to say 'I am a man' or 'I am a woman' is to place a limit on the feeling of 'being myself'.

What we are referring to here is the very basic, fundamental sense of 'being myself'. We can think of all those limiting qualities as being like the layers of clothing we put on in the morning. We dress ourselves in those clothes in order to venture out into the world, but they are not essential to 'being myself'. When we take our clothes off in order to go to bed, there is just our naked body. Likewise, when we take off all the limiting qualities with which we have clothed ourselves, we are left with our naked self. It is that naked self that is aware of our experience. And for that reason it is often referred to as 'awareness' or 'consciousness'.

If we spend time contemplating and just being our naked self, naked awareness, we find that this self is entirely neutral and uncoloured by any limiting characteristics. Our experience of mind, body and world colours that naked awareness, but does not change it, just as a movie colours the white screen, but doesn't change it.

If we ask ourselves 'are there any differences between my feeling of "being myself", or my "naked awareness" and that of any other person?', we can't find any. If there did seem to be a difference, it would be just another piece of clothing which we need to remove. So are there billions of absolutely identical naked awarenesses, all clones of each other? Or just one? Our deep intuition will tell us there is just one.

If there is anything to be done to find the happiness we are all looking for, it would be to simply 'be myself', knowingly. Of course, none of us could ever actually be anything else, so in reality there is nothing to be done. But there is something different about being *knowingly* myself. Rather than any kind of 'doing', it's seeing clearly what we really are, and resting as that. In other words, self-abidance.

In the second livestream session at the last Buckland Hall retreat, there were several questions about the practical application of this to our normal lives in the world. Here are Rupert's answers to three of them:

Q: At this point in my life, I'm learning to live with this understanding while having a family and keeping everyone happy and fulfilled. What, in your opinion, is the best way to live day-to-day on this planet? Is it to sit in our awareness of being? How can we have a fun and full life without becoming attached to our experience, thoughts and perceptions?

RS: I think the best way to live in this world, the most important thing, is to explore and to recognise who we essentially are. And having recognised who we essentially are, or as we are engaged in this exploration, to think and feel in a way that is consistent with our understanding of ourself. And to act in a way that is consistent with those thoughts and feelings. In other words, our knowledge of ourself, our understanding of ourself, is the most important aspect of life, because everything we do, everything we think, all the relationships we engage in, we think and feel and act and relate on behalf of ourself. And therefore, *everything* depends on our understanding of ourself.

So this would be the first thing. Investigate who you essentially are, recognise who you essentially are, and then think, feel, act, perceive and relate in a way that's consistent with this understanding, whatever that means for you. What that means for different people varies hugely, but whatever that means for you, whatever seems for you to be the fullest expression of your understanding of yourself, that would be the life to lead. And if you lead that life, that would be the best possible gift you could give your children.

[Buckland Hall, 5th December 2019, Livestream Q&A]

A second question explored whether being knowingly myself, resting in the peace of our true nature, is compatible with performing mundane tasks or with tasks requiring fully focused attention:

Q: Could it be that when experiencing happiness and bliss, we do not feel the need for mundane things like tidying up and keeping deadlines?

Would you agree that when learning a highly complex skill like flying an aeroplane or a sailplane, we cannot access happiness and bliss in these moments?

RS: Happiness and clearing up and keeping deadlines are not mutually exclusive. There's no reason why one shouldn't lead a life that is informed by and an expression of the peace and happiness that are inherent in your true nature, and at the same time, be respectful of your relationships in the world. For instance if you have a meeting to attend at work, and there are several of you, you turn up for the meeting on time out of respect for your colleagues, just as I turn up on time for a meeting here out of respect for everyone, and for the smooth functioning of our retreats. Likewise, tidying up a room, there's nothing to suggest that one shouldn't be able to keep one's home or one's environment clean and tidy, and still lead a life that is informed by the peace that is inherent in your true nature.

Again, there's no reason why one shouldn't learn a skill and still be in touch with the peace of your true nature. However, if you are learning to fly an aeroplane, I would certainly agree that that would not be the time for investigating your true nature or practising self-enquiry. I recommend being fully focused on the task at hand. But there's no reason why one shouldn't be fully focused and feel your innate peace in the background of your experience.

[Buckland Hall, 5th December 2019, Livestream Q&A]

Sometimes people feel that their conditioning hinders or prevents them finding the happiness they are looking for. They feel that a long period of spiritual practice is needed to undo this conditioning – learning how to be free of thoughts, how to love everyone, how to overcome negative tendencies etc. But this is not the case. It's simply a cunning ploy by an illusory separate self that is coming under threat and misusing the spiritual teaching for its own ends. In fact, the opposite is true: it's having an *agenda* with our conditioning, wanting to dissolve it, that seems to get in the way of peace and happiness. As Rupert explains, all that's needed is to see our conditioning for what it is – whatever that might be – and to see clearly that it is not a problem:

Q: I know there's peace and happiness in my being, but it seems to be a huge step from saying that, to truly feeling that I am peace and happiness. Is it just a matter of abiding, being willing and interested in the dissolving of layers of conditioning?

RS: You don't even need to dissolve the layers of conditioning. All that is necessary is to see that they are not essential to you. There's a big difference between getting rid of your conditioning which would require an awful lot of work, and seeing that your conditioning is not essential to you. All that is necessary is to see that no conditioned aspect of your experience is essential to you. Your thoughts, your images, your feelings, your sensations, perceptions etc., none of these

are essential to you. They do not need to be changed, and nor do they need to be removed. They just need to be seen to be not *essentially* a part of you. The essence of yourself is that aspect of yourself that never leaves you or cannot be removed from you.

And this does not really require a big step, as you say. In fact, it's a small step. You just have to go from your idea of yourself, or from your feeling of yourself, to yourself. In fact, it's not even a small step. You are *already* yourself. All that is necessary is to see yourself clearly. That is to see yourself before you have been conditioned by experience. You do not need to take *off* your conditioning, you don't have to have an agenda with your experience or your conditioning, just see that it is not essential to you. It doesn't define you. It doesn't limit you.

[Buckland Hall, 5th December 2019, Livestream Q&A]

This approach, based just on clear seeing, is simple, direct and immediate. But of course, we need to revisit this clear seeing every time an illusory separate self tells us that our conditioning is preventing access to the peace and happiness of our true nature.

For those who are devotionally inclined, here is an equivalent approach, as described by Francis Lucille, which is equally simple, direct and immediate:

Q: Many traditions refer to surrendering at the feet of the guru. If the real guru is this impersonal presence and not a physical person, what is really meant by 'the feet of the guru'?

FL: Meditation is the constant offering of our hopes, fears, beliefs, disbeliefs, doubts, thoughts, feelings, concerns, and world perceptions to the guru, to the conscious presence. It is a constant *prasad*, a constant giving and receiving. We place all our hopes and fears, our problems, joys, and sorrows at the feet of the guru. The 'feet of the guru' is the threshold of consciousness, this place in the mind that doesn't belong to the mind, this openness, this window through which consciousness sees the mind. It is this conscious presence in us.

This offering is not something that we do once and for all. It is a continuous offering to the threshold from moment to moment. It is from the same threshold to which we offer, that we receive. However, we cannot receive if our hands are full of objects. So we have to give, to offer, in order to be empty-handed, empty-minded. We have to be in not-knowing in order to receive the gift from the guru, the grace, the understanding, the presence, the life. As long as we hold onto the problem or try to solve the problem, there is no offering. There is no not-knowing.

Offer your thoughts especially. Let the universe take care of the problem. If your thoughts are running in circles, just offer them to the infinite. This will break the circle of your repetitive thoughts so that you can be graced with intuition and understanding.

Let the emptiness pervade your mind and your body. Offer body, mind and world to the presence constantly. As soon as you realize that you are stuck, gently liberate yourself from the stickiness. It is not an effort. In fact, it is the ending of an effort. Don't make an effort out of it. It is a relief to let go. If you make an effort you pile up an effort on top of a pre-existing effort. This is not what "letting go" means. Give it back to the infinite. Let the infinite take care of it. You don't have to carry the weight.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence*: God is Very Mischievous]

On the last day of the last retreat at Buckland Hall, Rupert gave this beautiful short meditation which covers the core of the Direct Path teaching. If we can allow every sentence to find its counterpart in our own experience, and allow it to penetrate the heart, what more could be needed?

Whatever we are experiencing, it is *we* who are experiencing it. We may be deeply depressed, we may be madly in love, or we may simply be drinking tea. In all cases, in all experiences, *ourself* is present there, at the heart of the experience. In other words, the sense of being myself, accompanies and pervades all experience, irrespective of its content.

In most cases, we allow the content of experience to eclipse the feeling of being myself. And as such, the sense of being myself is coloured, or endarkened by experience. All that is necessary is to stay with the experience of being myself. And in so doing, our self is, in most cases gradually, occasionally suddenly, divested of the colours or qualities that it borrows from experience, and begins to shine more and more brightly as it is. We don't *become* an enlightened self: as a result of this, our self is simply no longer endarkened by experiences. It emerges, as it were, from the background of experience and shines as it essentially is.

In this approach, being with myself is both the path and the goal. And if we were to distil all the practices in all the great religious and spiritual traditions, into one practice, it would be simply this: being with myself. The non-practice of being with myself, variously known as self-abidance, self-remembering, meditation, prayer or the practice of the presence of God. Being with being.

[Buckland Hall, 8th December 2019, Meditation: *Being with Being*]

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*I lost my world, my fame, my mind—
The Sun appeared, and all the shadows ran.
I ran after them, but vanished as I ran—
Light ran after me and hunted me down.*

Rumi