

## The Colouring of Awareness

One question that is frequently asked of spiritual teachers is 'how did you become enlightened?'. Collections of 'enlightenment experiences' can be found in books, videos and on the internet. But however often spiritual teachers say 'no-one becomes enlightened' or 'only awareness can know awareness', many still hold a secret belief that it is possible to 'become enlightened' and that when this occurs, something rather magical happens. So we feel disappointed when, after studying the teaching for some time and feeling that we now understand it all, nothing magical has been experienced. This is how Rupert replied to someone who asked him to describe what it feels like to be enlightened:

RS: The term enlightenment just refers to the recognition of the nature of our being. I could try to describe the nature of your being to you, but why do you want me to describe the qualities that are inherent in our being? After all, you are yourself, aren't you? You have a feeling of 'being myself'? So your being is present in your experience. You refer to it all the time when you say 'I' or 'I am'. So if enlightenment was something that you did not know, or that you did not have access to, then it would be legitimate for someone else to try to describe it. For instance, if you were to ask me 'describe the inside of your study in Oxford', that would be a legitimate question because you can't see the inside of my study in Oxford. But I can see it, so I can tell you about it. But I have no more access to my being than you have to yours, or indeed than Ramana Maharshi or the Buddha had to theirs.

So if you want to find out what enlightenment is, and what the peace that accompanies it feels like, why don't you just go to your being? Then you won't need to ask me or anyone else – it'll be yours. You see, your question 'what is the nature of your being like?' is not like asking me 'what is your study like?'. It's more like asking me 'what is the *space* in your study like?'. The space in my study in Oxford is exactly the same as the space in your study in Hong Kong. You don't need to ask me about it. You are experiencing the space in your room. It's the same space that each of us is experiencing in whatever room we are sitting in, whatever country you are located in. That just an analogy. My being is identical to your being. Your being is identical to the being of everybody on this in this gathering, everybody in the world. ...

*Q: But where's the joy? I don't feel the joy that you sometimes talk about.*

RS: Think of joy or happiness, to begin with, as the absence of suffering. Think of it as an absence rather than a positive feeling or state. You said that your being is at peace, awareness is at peace in the background of experience. That peace is the absence of suffering. It is not agitated by experience; it is not affected by experience. It's not an aloof witness of experience. It is intimately one with all experience, but it is independent or free of experience. So to begin with, feel it as peace. The more deeply we go into it, the more deeply we know ourselves and feel ourselves as that, the more that peace begins to turn into joy. Feel it first as peace.

*Q: At the moment it feels as peace, but also it feels a little bit bland. Nothing affects it.*

RS: Well OK. Bland is better than suffering. It's neutral as opposed to suffering. So at least start there. If you stay with that apparent blandness, you will begin to see that it is also joy. It grows into a quiet joy, and in time that joy grows in you. It turns into the great happiness.

I'm going to go on now to your question about effortlessness. Awareness has become so accustomed to losing itself in the content of experience, and seems as a result to have become this temporary, finite, separate self, that the separate self feels 'this is my natural condition'.

Therefore, that separate self has to make an effort to go back to or to recognise its true nature. If it seems to require an effort, then make the effort. The more often we return to our self and recognise ourself, the less and less effort is required, until at some point, we just feel that being knowingly the presence of awareness is our default state. It is our natural condition and no effort is required to maintain it.

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It would be natural to conclude from this discussion, that since there is only one being which has no objective qualities, enlightenment must involve the dissolution of everything that is unique to our body-mind. That includes all of our conditioning, all our skills and practical knowledge, all our memories, and everything else which colours our experience. But that doesn't happen. In the following dialogue, a questioner explores more deeply what is meant by 'being myself', and what happens to the feeling of being 'a person' after enlightenment:

*Q: It takes no effort or very little effort in recognising my true being. When I'm in deep meditation or when I'm asleep and my mind is relaxed, I have no experiences, I am at peace. When I wake up and I have experiences – thoughts and everything – there's always a colouring as you called it, or a fragrance, a scent of Jane<sup>1</sup>, ever since I can recall. I don't recall me being born but going back with memory to when I was a 5-year-old or 10-year-old. There has always been besides my being aware, something that has coloured my experiences with 'Jane'.*

RS: OK, let me ask you a question: without referring to thoughts or feelings, tell us about Jane.

*Q: I can't tell you.*

RS: There you are, that's it.

*Q: But I thought that was awareness?*

RS: What is present in between your thoughts and feelings and behind your thoughts and feelings and in the absence of your thoughts and feelings and in the presence of your thoughts and feelings, is you, awareness. If you don't refer to thoughts and feelings you have absolutely no knowledge of being Jane at all. So let's carry on the experiment again. Without referring to memory, just referring to your current experience – keep your eyes closed – this is the first experience you've ever had, don't refer to memory, tell us about yourself.

*Q: I can't.*

RS: Do you have a name, now?

*Q: No*

RS: Without reference to memory, are you aware of having a gender?

*Q: No*

RS: Do you know that you are a woman?

*Q: No*

RS: Do you know that you are a person?

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<sup>1</sup> Not her real name.

Q: No

RS: Perfect. Tell us about yourself. You are experiencing yourself now? Yes? Tell us about yourself without reference to memory. *(Silence)* Exactly. The real meaning of the name 'Jane', is to refer to that nameless one. In other words, 'Jane' is one of the many names of that nameless one. And that nameless one is not inherently coloured by anything that has taken place in Jane, the person's, life. You have just demonstrated that to us. When you don't refer to your memory, there is nothing about your current experience that is coloured by Jane, the person's, life.

*Q: I understand. So when you are speaking, who is it that is speaking? This of course comes from the mind – it's my mind asking questions. But since I can recall memories and stuff, because I have this particular manifestation, it has a recurrent fragrance of Jane.*

RS: That's very true. The manifestation always has a fragrance of Jane, the person. That is very true. Your objective experience is always viewed through the eyes or from the perspective of Jane, the person, and it is coloured by her conditioning. For instance, she speaks English and Italian. She doesn't speak Dutch or Chinese. So Jane, the person, is like a pair of tinted glasses that you wear that colours or tints everything that you experience with its own fragrance. That's true. So Jane, the person, colours your experience, but you, the one who is knowing your experience, is not coloured by Jane, the person.

*Q: So how can I – it's weird to even say it, I don't know how to say it – but how do I relate to Jane? It sounds awkward to say it, but why Jane?*

RS: How should you relate to Jane? With great love and humour and affection. Jane is one of numerous perspectives or points of view through which God sees itself as the world. You are the eyes through which God sees itself as the world, and you Jane, the person, give God a unique perspective on itself. So God sees itself through your eyes in an absolutely unique way and you, Jane, the person, have come into existence in order to give God that unique perspective on itself. So that is a very sacred task that you have been given, that each of us has been given. Each of us gives God a viewpoint through which God is able to see a segment of itself as the world. So the most disrespectful and blasphemous thing we can do is to forget or overlook that we are the vehicle through which God sees or knows itself as the world. And having forgotten this, to imagine that we are a self or a person or a being unto ourself. That is blasphemy to think I am a temporary finite self apart from God's infinite being.

*Q: No, I absolutely feel that.*

RS: Perfect. Just make sure that when you have thoughts and feelings, and when you engage in activities and relationships, that they express the nature of your being, that they are worthy of your being. That means worthy of God's being. ...

*Q: This does not come out of a fear of dying – I have no fear of dying, but I wonder where the separate self goes, that colouring, that scent of Jane?*

RS: The separate self doesn't go anywhere, because the separate self is simply an imaginary limitation of the true and only eternal, unborn and undying self of awareness. Where does King Lear go at the end of the play when he dies? He doesn't go anywhere because there was no person called King Lear in the first place. John Smith simply loses a temporary name and form. What will happen to the space in your room, the room that you're sitting in, when your apartment is taken down which one day it will be? What will happen to the space in your room? It will simply lose an apparent limitation, but nothing will really happen to the space. It was not

limited when your building was built, whenever it was, 200 years ago. And when the building is taken down, it won't suddenly reunite with the great universal space because it was not separate from it in the first place. The space in your room, just an analogy, is not a separate package of empty space within the vast space of the universe. There is just one space in the universe. It seems to be enclosed by the four walls of your room, but in fact it is still only the infinite space of the universe.

Well the self, our being, is like that. It's not even right to say there is one being – there is simply being which shines in each of us as the knowledge 'I' or 'I am' or 'being myself'. And that knowledge 'I', 'I am', is coloured by our experience and seems as a result to become limited, in just the same way that John Smith is coloured by King Lear's thoughts and feelings and seems to become King Lear. But it's only a *seeming* limitation.

*Q: Exactly as you said it, when I stopped resenting the separate self it was liberating.*

RS: Perfect. Because if we resent the separate self, it means we have taken it for real. If we resent the separate self and try to get rid of it, we are actually strengthening it because we are giving it too much credence. We are believing in its independent existence or reality, thereby perpetuating it. That's one of the more subtle ways that the separate self perpetuates itself, particularly in spiritual circles – that is by trying to get rid of itself.

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## Contemplation

*A colourless screen may assume all colours and thus appear as a person, landscape or building, but never actually becomes any of these. Likewise, I, the light of pure Knowing, vibrate within Myself and, as a result, assume all apparently limited names and forms, without ever actually becoming a limited object, self or world.*

[Rupert Spira]