

## Exploring the 'Sense of Me'

We have been conditioned by our education system to think that knowledge, understanding and proficiency in academic subjects is acquired in clearly defined stages. This approach is echoed in most spiritual paths, although in that context, recognition of progress mostly comes from self-assessment rather than through school examinations. The attainment of interim stages and goals provides reassurance that progress is being made. So it can seem a little unnerving and confusing to be told that in the Direct Path there are no prescribed stages, and there is no 'progress' to be made.

Nonetheless, Direct Path teachers do tend to present the teaching in a particular order of understanding when talking to or writing for a general audience, rather than responding to an individual questioner. This is one way in which Rupert described that order of understanding or recognition:

1. I am that which is aware of my experience.
2. I am that within which all my experience arises.
3. I am the substance of all experience.

In most cases there are initial glimpses of these recognitions and those glimpses provide starting-points for further exploration of the implications. These recognitions are not stages, because rather than completing one recognition and then going on to the next without ever revisiting the first, there is a never-ending deepening of understanding. This deepening process often involves a more wide-ranging or rigorous questioning of our experience. Once the mind is completely satisfied, feelings in the body soon catch up, and the glimpses are replaced by a permanent, unshakeable recognition. This paper goes more deeply into the implications of the first of these recognitions: 'I am that which is aware of my experience'.

The first point to notice is that this first recognition does not define what I am as an object. It's OK to say I am consciousness or I am awareness provided that we are simply using the term consciousness or awareness as a short-cut to mean 'that which is aware of my experience'. In other words, we are saying 'I don't know what I am, but just for convenience, I'm going to call whatever it is that I am, consciousness or awareness'. That way we avoid objectivising 'I' or 'awareness' or 'consciousness'. All three words refer to the subject of experience, not to an object of experience. As Francis explains, this understanding is the basis of meditation:

*Q: Are there cues to look out for to know when one is abiding as awareness?*

FL: It's very simple – when you are not abiding as anything other than awareness. Meaning, the moment you believe to be a human being, you are going out of meditation. The moment you really understand that you don't know you are a human being, then you go back into meditation. And you remain in meditation up until you believe to be a human being.

*Q: It seems like there's an ebb and flow ...*

FL: But when you think about it, it's so easy, so effortless not to know what you are. You don't have to make an effort, you don't even have to look for what you are. Because you have been looking enough to know that you don't know. To abide as awareness means that you don't know what you are. Because when you don't know what you are, you are in fact, perfectly what you are.

[Francis Lucille, webinar 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020: [Spiritual Dentistry](#)]

Whenever we feel a sense of limitation, incompleteness or contraction, we are not abiding as awareness. Here is a dialogue from the same webinar in which Francis takes a questioner more deeply into this understanding:

*Q: I know that I am, but really I don't know what I am. At the same time, each time I say 'I', it feels like a contraction. I go back to ignorance.*

FL: It just means that what you call 'I' is different from consciousness. You have to understand first when I say 'consciousness' and when you think 'consciousness' it means the same thing. In this moment, you are hearing my words? What you call 'I' is that which is hearing my words. There is an element of reality in this hearing. In other words, you are not making up that you are hearing my words. It's not fake. Perceiving is real. What I call 'consciousness' is the reality which is hearing these words. I'm not saying it's a woman, I'm not saying it's Sophie, I'm not saying it's a human body, I'm not saying it's a human brain. I'm saying it's just whatever it is which is real in this experience of hearing Francis's words. Whatever it is which is real, is consciousness. In other words, it's the reality that is hearing these words. And since you say 'I am hearing these words', it must also be that this consciousness is the real 'I', the real you. Would you agree with that?

*Q: Yes, absolutely.*

FL: Now we agree on what I call 'consciousness'. Do you see any limits to it?

*Q: No.*

FL: So is there any feeling of contraction, as you were describing?

*Q: Not as consciousness.*

FL: Exactly. And you have agreed that 'I' and 'consciousness' are the same. Right? ...

*Q: With the 'I', I have a difficulty, but it's difficult for me to explain the difficulty ...*

FL: Wait. I am planning to pull these teeth from you. I know it's painful! ... In this moment you are hearing my words, and you understand there is something real, right? It's not an invention or an illusion – there is something that is real? So what I call consciousness is this element of reality in this experience of hearing my words. You would agree also that it is *you* that is hearing these words, not somebody else?

*Q: If I say 'yes', then there is a contraction.*

FL: Then say 'no'.

*Q: But I can't say 'no'.*

FL: What we are doing right now, we are pulling the tooth. With this tool, with this lever, I'm doing that, but the tooth doesn't want to come out. I mean, we don't have to pull the tooth today. I want to place you in this context where it becomes very uncomfortable to say 'no'. You don't want to say 'I am the one who is hearing these words'. But it seems so far-fetched to say 'I'm *not* the one who is hearing these words'.

*Q: So I am hearing your words.*

FL: So remember, we have said that consciousness, reality, is that which is hearing these words too. Therefore, you are consciousness. So consciousness is whatever is hearing these words right

now. ... So what you have admitted to is that you are consciousness. So then you were saying it is very uncomfortable for you to say that, to agree 'I am consciousness'.

*Q: So I think I just have to disidentify the sense of 'I' in my body.*

FL: Yes. Because the 'sense of me' appears in consciousness. The 'sense of me' is not consciousness.

*Q: Yes, it's an object.*

FL: Right. You are not an object.

*Q: I feel more that I'm the space in which this 'sense of me' appears.*

FL: You are not the 'sense of me'. The 'sense of me' appears to you as a tree in the forest, but it's not you.

*Q: So I have to clarify the difference between the 'sense of me' and the 'sense of "I"'*

FL: No. Between the 'sense of me' and 'me'.

*Q: I just have to see the 'sense of me' as an object inside 'me'.*

FL: You have to see yourself as the invisible, unperceivable consciousness, reality, to which the 'sense of me' appears. So you know, in the light of what has been discussed, when you think 'I', do you still feel a contraction as this consciousness?

*Q: No, because that's only the 'sense of me' in the body.*

[Francis Lucille, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020: [Spiritual Dentistry](#)]

Another implication of this first recognition, is that I am not the doer of my actions. In this dialogue, Francis gives different approaches to help the questioner arrive at a deeper understanding. One approach is via our direct experience, the others use scientific models from neuroscience and physics. Whichever starting-point we adopt, we arrive at the same conclusion:

*Q: When I look at my thoughts, it seems that they come to me, there's not a separate entity choosing them, but when I'm going about my daily business like washing the dishes or going to the grocery store, there's a kind of instinctive feeling that this body-mind has some sense of autonomy, a sense of being a personal doer. How can I investigate that belief at the level of thinking and feeling?*

FL: The first thing to clarify is that if we eliminate our instinctive actions and only consider deliberate actions, our deliberate actions don't originate from the body, but rather from decisions we make. If I decide to buy a 2-cent stock in the stock market and I click the 'return' button on my computer to buy or to sell, obviously it is not my finger that is making the decision. So all of our deliberate actions are of the same kind, meaning they come from a thought and the thought itself is a decision. Now as you said, it is at some point obvious when we investigate our thoughts, that all of them come to us. We don't choose them. All of our thoughts are cosmic events. Then, as a result, all of our decisions are cosmic. So I'm not denying that we have the sense that the thoughts are *our* thoughts. And this sense is perfectly all right, provided the owner and the creator of these thoughts is not construed as being a separate body-mind, but rather, as being this cosmic creator of the thoughts.

Now this explanation according to which every thought that we have is a cosmic event, I can point at it from two sides. The first side is the one I have already used which is that if you look at our thought processes, we see clearly that they come to us like the weather. Now the experiential way is to see that our thoughts are not personal, meaning that they don't originate from a separate entity here who would go shopping for thoughts to the thought-market. And at the thought-market, I pick that one and that one and that one and then I go to the cashier. No. That's not the way it works. It works just like the weather. That's the first aspect.

Now, there is a conceptual aspect, which can help to convince you that all thoughts are cosmic events. And this is based on the materialist assumption, which I don't necessarily share, but let's assume the current academic view, according to which the thoughts are created by brain processes. Now if you look at the brain as a bio-computer, the brain is not isolated from the universe. It corresponds with the universe through the sense organs. It shares. And also with all the bodies affected by the weather and by the pandemic and by whatever happens to us. And in addition to that, the brain has access to the personal history, the personal memory, past events, past experiences, knowledge acquired, skills acquired. And all of that came from the universe.

The body didn't program itself. It programmed itself in some kind of adaptive programming process in the computer, some kind of artificial intelligence, through education, through past experience, the decision-making process by this machine has been made whatever it is right now. And the decisions are made upon the input from the universe. All of that runs on automatic. So that if I make a decision right now – let's say I choose to sell a stock in the stock-market, it seems to be a decision that originates from this little box here (*he points to his head*). But no. This little box has been programmed by the universe, has read *The New York Times* this morning or has access to the internet etc. So the decision that comes is not local – it is a universal convergence. Because this (*the brain*) is not a separate system. Therefore whatever happens in this little box, whatever thought and decision gets created, even from this vantage-point, is a cosmic event.

Let's even look at it from a purely physical vantage-point, so it's as materialist as you go. This brain here that apparently creates the decision, the thought, is made of cells, made of molecules, made of elementary particles. And these elementary particles are part of the quantum fields of the Standard Model (*of particle physics*). And these quantum fields – the equations are global. So whatever neurons are firing here in the decision-making process, at the finer, less coarse, microscopic level they are part of the situation of the quantum field. And therefore, it's a universal process. It's really a cosmic process. So even from the vantage-point of science – if we believe that science applies to everything – even from that vantage-point, the thought-process is argued to be a cosmic event. Therefore, there is no local decider. There is the appearance of a local decider. But there is only a local instrument in fact, which has been programmed and which is deriving its input from the entire universe.

So I give you arguments to enable you to revisit the cave-man arguments – very unsophisticated and simplistic arguments – according to which there is a local decider and there is a local creator of the thoughts. So both from the vantage-point of our inner experience if we look more closely at it, and from the vantage-point of a rational, scientific view if you look more closely at it, from both vantage-points, all thoughts are cosmic events.

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Later in this webinar, in answer to a follow-up question about decision-making from another questioner who said she didn't know what she is, Francis responded:

FL: Attribute your decision to yourself, if you don't know what you are. If you don't know that you are a woman, attribute your decisions to whatever it is that makes them. If you don't know what you are, then it's legitimate to say: 'I'm the maker of my decisions, however I don't know what that maker is.'

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## Contemplation

*When we look at the actual experience of the body, we discover there are no feelings, no emotions – only bodily sensations. And that includes the sense of 'me'. The moment we have debunked the sense of 'me' in this manner, it becomes de-activated.*

[Francis Lucille]