

Exploring the Sense of Otherness

Our previous paper explored the deeper understanding of the recognition 'I am that which is aware of my experience'. In this paper we look more deeply at two other recognitions in the Direct Path: 'I am that within which all my experience arises' and 'I am the substance of all experience'.

One common difficulty in bringing the non-dual teaching into everyday life, is the feeling that it's not possible to be aware of our true nature at the same time as being aware of objects, and engaging with objects in the world. The peace of our true nature seems to disappear into the background whenever we are attending to objects, and we can't see how to keep hold of it when engaged in activities. The answer is to stop trying to do this. If we try to keep hold of the presence of awareness, we are treating it as an object, a state of the mind. Instead, all that is needed is to return to being knowingly the presence of awareness in between thoughts and activities. We just relax and allow attention to sink into its source, our essential self of pure awareness. In a recent webinar, Rupert explained how this non-practice eventually leads to being knowingly the presence of awareness all the time, whatever is happening around us and whatever activities we are engaged in:

Q: Do you, Rupert, maintain the capacity to fall back into pure formlessness?

RS: What happens to begin with is that we go back and forth from the foreground of experience to the background of our self and experience gradually loses its capacity to take us away from ourself. This is what's called being established in your true nature. That's a valid formulation, but in time, the distinction between the background and the foreground begins to blur. So we no longer feel that we have to retreat from experience, we no longer feel that we have to take refuge in our being, because we discover that our being, the presence of awareness, does not just lie in the background of experience it also pervades all experience. And in time it doesn't just pervade experience it is the very stuff that experience is made of. So then we notice that we don't feel so much that we step back from experience. We would only have to step back from something that still retained the capacity to take us away from ourself. So more and more we find ourselves being knowingly the presence of awareness when it's not just in the background of experience, but in the midst of experience. And this conflict between the foreground of experience and the background of ourself diminishes until there is no longer a distinction between ourself and experience. We simply feel one with our experience. We no longer separate ourselves out, as a separate self, from experience. We are simply one with the moment, responding appropriately, but the moment has lost its capacity to veil our being. So that is progressively my experience.

[Rupert Spira, 18th June 2020 Webinar]

Later in the same webinar, a physicist asked about how to make the transition from the intellectual understanding that all sensations and perceptions are made out of awareness to a feeling understanding of this. He was concerned that his intellectual understanding was like an overlay on his experience and while he felt that this was a legitimate first step, he realised that it didn't go far enough:

RS: You're absolutely right. It is legitimate. It's an intellectual's gateway into the felt understanding. So it is perfectly legitimate as an intellectual that your understanding precedes your felt experience. That's absolutely legitimate. It's the way many people go, a valid pathway. But what is beautiful – and this is by no means always the case with intellectuals – is that there's something in you that longs for more than just intellectual clarity. You want to make this your lived and felt experience. You realise that there is a limitation to this overlay, albeit a very true

overlay, but you realise there's another step to take. What I would suggest is that you could start with reasoning with yourself, namely that whatever there is out there, whatever the world and all these objects are, that existence is common to all of them. And existence is common to yourself. So there is something that is shared. There are differences between you and the ten thousand things, but those differences are obvious. There are differences of name and difference of form. There is also something that is shared. You all exist. There is one common element. So in fact what is the common element? It is the names and forms that exist that give everyone and everything their apparently separate and independent existence. But what is it that existence emerges from? It emerges from this shared background of being. And this being knows itself. You know the experience of being in yourself as 'I am'. You know the experience of being in the world as 'it is'. Everything that exists, is. So you could reason with yourself in this way, and then *feel* that being is the element, or the aspect that you share with everything and everyone. It is at the level of being that we are one. Names and forms – we are all different. ...

What is now important is to feel, before you see the name and the form of either another person or another object, that you first feel the being that you share with that person or thing. Then respond to the name and the form, whatever that response might be. But make sure that your response to anyone or anything is informed by the felt understanding, not just the understanding, the *felt* understanding, that you share your being, your essence, with that person or thing. And *feel* it. I know you understand it, but *feel* it. And not just with people – obviously, the felt sense of our shared being with people is what we call love. And not just with animals. And indeed, not just with plants and trees, but with so-called 'inanimate' objects. Inanimate objects exist. Their existence comes out of being. It is derived from being. It is derived from exactly the same being that your apparent existence is derived from. Feel it with *everything*.

Q: Can I ask one related follow-up question? For some reason it is harder for me to see the internal contents of my mind as awareness or even contents in awareness, or being, in the same way that I can see externally perceived things and the world at large. I'll give you a concrete example: a mood that I might carry, of say sadness. ... I can say that that mood is not me, is not my 'I', but it feels very close and harder to separate from my sense of 'I-ness'.

RS: Yes you're right, it does feel like that. But if you take any aspect of your experience, no experience you have is either closer to or further from the fact being aware, than any other experience. For instance, how close to you – and when I say you, I mean the presence of awareness or the fact of being aware – is the experience of hearing? Is hearing taking place a little further away from you than feeling? It's the same distance from yourself which is no distance from yourself. It is true that 293 people are hearing these words at the moment, so in that case my words are not personal to you in the same way that – let's imagine that you're feeling sad now – that your feeling of sadness is unique to you. But that doesn't make the feeling of sadness any more essentially yourself than the sound of my voice. It's an illusion. The feeling of sadness is intimate, utterly intimate to you, but it does not define you, awareness. It is not with you all the time. It actually comes and goes in your experience just as the sound of my voice does. It is *as* objective as the sound of my voice. It is intimate but at the same time objective.

Q: Is the answer then in practical terms to keep coming back to the kind of analysis you're just laying out now? When this sensibility comes up, just keep bringing the analysis back to it, and it will eventually shift or give.

RS: Yes. In relation to feelings if you want an image to accompany this, rather than the rather clinical analysis 'I am the presence of awareness that knows the feeling', try to feel 'I am the sky

of awareness', 'I am the space of awareness within which this cloud ...' Thoughts are like birds they just fly through the sky and they vanish. But feelings of sadness are more like clouds – they linger all day long or sometimes all week long. So feelings are like that. But still, you are the sky of awareness in which the clouds appear. The clouds are made out of the sky, but the sky is not made out of the clouds. Your feelings of sadness or whatever feelings are made out of you, awareness, but you, awareness, are not made out of them. And being the sky of awareness, the space of awareness, you have no problem with the clouds. ... *Feel* that I am this openness, I am the space and this mood this cloud, you are welcome within me. Just stay. I'm not losing myself to you, and nor am I rejecting you in any way.

Q: So this is a sort of 'as if' practice, you might say? It works in the context of intellectual analysis, but also in the evocation of feeling. You take on the attitude 'as if', and you actually are, but because you can't necessarily go there immediately, you can take on this practice ...

RS: No. I am not just saying behave as if you were the space of awareness. I'm saying be knowingly that. Don't fake it because you don't have to fake it, because it is your experience 'I am the presence of awareness to which all experience appears and *within* which all experience appears. So you can go further than just 'as if'. But in order to do this, you first have to recognise 'I *am* the presence of awareness. and I know you know that but make that your felt experience: I am the presence of awareness, the knower of my experience, but also the space, the openness, within which my feelings arise.

A lot of people don't make the transition from intellectual understanding to felt and lived understanding. Your understanding has brought you to this, to the recognition that there is a limit to what you have understood and that your understanding is really a prelude to a deeper experiential, felt understanding. That is the perfect use of intellectual understanding – that it is a prelude to this deeper understanding.

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One common block to really feeling that we share our being with everything and everyone, is the underlying feeling that if we really were all one being, then we would all know each other's thoughts and have access to each other's experiences. But that is not our experience. Here is Francis's explanation of the flaw in that belief or presumption:

Q: If consciousness is truly unlimited, and we share the same consciousness, why is it that we can't know each other's thoughts?

FL: It depends what you mean by 'we'. Of course, consciousness knows everyone's thoughts because there is only one consciousness. The thoughts are known, therefore consciousness knows all the thoughts. I once asked my teacher this question, when walking downhill in Switzerland on a very narrow path. I asked him 'why is it that I don't have access to your thoughts?'. His answer was: 'how do you know you didn't, and just forgot?'. To make more clear what it means to know and not to know at the same time, to be the creator of something, and in a sense, organise mind so that the mind doesn't know. That's what happens. For instance in our night dreams, it may happen that an unexpected, sudden event happens and surprises us. We have all had this experience of being surprised – some danger or some happy surprise. Now as it turns out, we were both the creator of the surprise and the one being surprised by it. We could make the claim: 'How can I be surprised, if I was the one creating the surprise?'. In other words: 'How can I create the surprise, without knowing the surprise in advance, and then be

surprised?'. And because we have the experience of that quite often, we cannot object to it because we experience it.

Here it's different because we ask the question from the vantage point of the mind. And it seems to us that we don't have the experience that we have, because in the analogy I was using, during the waking state, we realise 'I was also the creator of the surprise'. So in the glimpse of our true nature, we realise that we are also the witness of all the other minds, because we realise all there is, is consciousness, and consciousness is the reality of everything. And there is only one consciousness.

Now, the counterpart to this, is that I can show to you that your claim that you should know the other minds wouldn't prove or disprove anything. What you are claiming is this: if it is true that consciousness is universal, the same, shared by all, I should be aware of the other minds. In other words, my human mind should be aware of all the minds. Not only the human minds, but the cats' minds, the dogs' minds, the viruses' minds, the bacteria's minds, the extra-terrestrial minds – whatever minds there are. So that's a lot of minds to put in a small human mind. It's not possible. If and when that happens – because sometimes it happens – it's called telepathy. We catch somebody else's thoughts or perceptions. But then the conclusion we draw is not 'consciousness is universal'. No. The conclusion we draw is 'there are two consciousnesses, one attached to each mind, and there is a communication between these two minds. We don't infer from that experience of telepathy, when it happens, that consciousness is the same. We simply infer from that, that there is a strange communication, an unusual one, a mysterious one, established between two separate consciousnesses/minds.

So what I am trying to do here by defining consciousness as the reality that perceives the mind – if we take the example I just mentioned of telepathy between two minds, communication between two minds – if there is communication between two minds, it implies that these two minds belong to a higher reality that enables this interaction between them. Therefore, each of these minds is not a reality on its own, because each of these minds depends on a higher reality that makes this communication possible. And so this higher reality, that allows for the communication, is also the reality of each of those minds. And therefore, it must be the reality that perceives each of those minds. And this reality is precisely what I call consciousness. That is why it is so important to define consciousness not in terms of minds – meaning in terms of content of perceptions – but in terms of the reality that truly perceives. Because that's what we are interested in. We are interested in knowing our reality. What I call 'I' – obviously I think, I perceive – so the real 'I' must be the reality that perceives.

[21st April 2020 Francis Lucille webinar: [Why Don't We Know Others Thoughts](#)]

Contemplation

Be neither the knower nor the known; be only the knowing of experience, and you will find yourself as everyone and everything. [Rupert Spira]