

Closing the Circle

Atmananda Krishnamenon, the founder of the Direct Path, suggested thinking deeply about what the poet Tennyson meant when he said: 'to follow knowledge, like a sinking star, beyond the utmost bound of human thought'¹. Contemplating that could 'take us a long way'. There are two directions we can follow. The first is the one that Atmananda suggests, which we could conveniently label as 'inwards' (although ultimately we discover there is no inwards or outwards):

Sinking implies relaxation. You have only to retreat and retreat into the 'I'-principle, and rest there. Allow yourself therefore to be led on. Sink, sink, sink... Sink from the body, sink from the senses, and sink from the mind...

[Atmananda Krishnamenon *Notes on Spiritual Discourses* no 39]

The other direction is to look outwards to the reality of all that is. Francis encourages us to explore both directions. When we go 'inwards' we sink beneath the flow of experience and rest in the experiencer, awareness. When we go 'outwards', we explore the reality of that which is experienced, the universe.

Francis often uses the image of a circle. If we go far enough in both directions around the circle, we find that the reality of the knower and the reality of the known come closer and the circle closes. The reality of awareness and the reality of the universe are seen to be the same.

First, we need to be clear about what Francis is referring to when he uses the word 'reality':

Q: I'm unclear about the meaning of the word 'reality'

FL: The beauty of the word 'reality' is that it points at the being of the planets, of the mountains, of the atoms, of the particles, of the light, of everything which is physical. That's the beauty of the word 'reality' that it points at the being of that which is physical, whereas the word 'awareness' points, at the beginning, at the being of sentient objects, at the being of mind. If there is only one being, these two beings are the same – the being of the external world, also known as reality, and the being of mind, also known as awareness. If there is only one single being, they both are the same.

As long as this junction is not there, the circle is not full. It is this closure of the circle that is the glimpse of our true nature. Before this glimpse, before this deep intuition comes to us, we are still on the path to the path.

Q: I feel I have that connection of the sat [being] and the chit [consciousness], but I'm still walking the tightrope and falling off.

FL: That's a different story. That which is important is to have had a glimpse of the full circle and of this identity between *sat* and *chit*. Of the closure of this circle. That's the glimpse, that's moksha, that's liberation. That's the beginning of the real path. The rest is just a preparation.

[Francis Lucille 28/2/2021 *The Only Game in Town*]

Sometimes the term 'consciousness-only model' is used to imply that reality is essentially mind-like and what we call 'the world' consists only of perceptions appearing in 'universal mind'. In this model, awareness and reality are self-evidently the same. There is no concept of a circle closing, as there is only one direction – 'inwards' towards awareness.

¹ From Tennyson's poem *Ulysses*

But this is not the only form of consciousness-only model. There is a less restrictive form which is equally consistent with non-duality and in which there can be more to reality than just perceptions. Here is Francis's interpretation:

Q: When someone says 'consciousness-only model', that's also in some ways a mental construct?

FL: The expression of it is a concept. But it refers to the experience of awareness's reality. In other words when we know that there is awareness, we know that awareness is real. Because we cannot separate the experience of awareness and the experience of its reality. Whereas we can separate the experience of mind from the experience of its reality, just as we can separate the experience of the world from the experience of its reality. Because we experience the world through the mind and since we can separate the experience of the mind which is made of perceptions from the experience of reality, awareness, we cannot have the perception without awareness, but we can have awareness without the perceptions. So awareness is really the experience of reality. So if we go to the intuition or the realisation that there is only one reality, then we close the circle. So really the fundamental experience is that the reality of our human experience and the reality of the universe are the same. The reality of our human experience in Sanskrit is atman and the absolute reality of the universe is brahman. So we close the circle when we reach the conclusion 'atman is brahman'.

To reach this conclusion we have first to understand that the reality of our human experience is what we call awareness. That is not sufficient, because there could be more than one reality. But if there is only one reality, the circle closes and everything comes to its fulfilment in the sense that there is only one reality. My reality which I experience as awareness is also the reality of this universe. And the centre of my being as a human being, I find *[to be]* the centre of the universe.

[Francis Lucille: 2/8/2020 *The Mechanics Of Self-Inquiry*]

This approach requires us to investigate whether there is more than one reality. In other words, to determine whether consciousness is universal. Only then does the circle close. We can show that there is no evidence that there is more than one reality. But we cannot verify through phenomenal experience that there is only one. That understanding comes from a deep contemplation of this question, and that takes time. It is a noumenal experience which becomes increasingly apparent.

FL: You cannot rely on your senses to make a determination as to whether consciousness is universal or not. ...

The direct verification comes from deep, deep meditation on the nature of reality that leads at some point to this certainty that there is only one reality and that the experience of this reality, by itself, as the reality that is hearing these words right now, is awareness. But the only axiom of non-dualism is there is only one reality. This axiom is posited, it cannot be verified through phenomena but it can be verified directly through the experience of awareness. I cannot tell you why I am convinced that there is only one reality, because if I tell you why, I would have to give you objective facts and no objective fact can bring about such a condition. It's a kind of a mystery, in the same way that I cannot give you objective facts that may lead you to you to the conviction that you are aware. This conviction that you are aware is directly derived from awareness itself. In the same way this conviction that there is only one reality, that everything is interconnected and that everything is global, is derived from the same experience of reality. Reality shines in each of us as this awareness. So this certainty that there is only one reality is derived from the same experience from which we know that we are aware. From this experience that we know that we are aware we also derive the knowledge that awareness is real.

In other words we cannot make it up. If I were to tell you there is no awareness you would laugh at me because you are hearing my words. Who is hearing them? Awareness. Then what is the reality that hears them? Is this reality separate from the words it hears? And if it is not separate from the words it hears, is it separate from the channels from which these words are coming to you? And if it is not separate from the channels through which these words are coming to you, it is not separate either from the channel from which it comes. And therefore, the circle closes and the source of the words and the reality that hears them, is the same. If there was a separation at any point, the transmission couldn't occur. Communication transmission requires continuity. Any discontinuity would interrupt the transmission, as would occur if you cut the telephone wire. And if there is continuity there is no separation.

[Francis Lucille, 23/8/2020: Childish v Childlike]

It is our habitual conceptualisation of what awareness is and what the world is that gets in the way. We see awareness as mind-like and the world as solid, granite like. Here is a description from Francis of experiments in conceptualising awareness and the world in a different way which may help to shift this habit:

Q: Am I in ignorance thinking there is something to be reached?

FL: What has to be reached is freedom from worries, freedom from the burden of being something mortal, being something impermanent, being something which is subjected to change, being something which is subjected to becoming. It's the disappearance of a belief. That's the goal. Then when the belief which is superimposed on what we really are is removed, then that which remains is what we are, the boundless reality. That's our true nature.

The missing point is often the residual identification of awareness with the body-mind. Actually, it's always that. That's why I point out to transition from a view of awareness that sees it as mind-like, to an understanding of awareness and an experience of awareness as reality-like. And simultaneously, concomitantly, to transition from a view of the world that sees the world as matter like, granite-like, or sees reality as matter-like, object-like, granite-like, to a view of reality which is seen as experience-like. In other words, reality is not an object, but reality is an experience.

To see reality as an object is a very intellectual view for which I guess, in the West, Aristotle is the culprit. It's so ingrained in us, this view of the world, that it is implicit in almost everything we do. That we see reality as not necessarily matter-like, but as object-like, instead of seeing reality as an experience. That changes everything. To see the Absolute as experience experiencing itself, through all kinds of agents, gimmicks, avatars whatever. To understand the true nature of reality as experience. And by the same token, to understand awareness as reality. It is the constant getting together of these two poles – reality and experience – that is the essence of non-duality. As long as we make the slightest distinction between reality and experience, there is always going to be this duality.

[Francis Lucille: 18/10/2020 *Now And Always Are Two Sides Of The Same Experience*]

A subsequent questioner in the same satsang asked for further clarification on the coming together of reality and experience:

FL: There is the reality which is experiencing, which is awareness, and there is a reality which is experienced – the mind, the body, the world. The dualist view is that they are different. It's almost as if the body was not part of the cosmos, the mind was not part of the cosmos. So once we understand that they all share the same reality, this reality that they share cannot be gross,

meaning physical, like a physical object, because there are thoughts, there is mind. So it cannot be either like mind or like matter. It has to be something else. And awareness gives us the answer. It is like experience experiencing. Experiencing is neither matter nor mind. Neither matter, nor thoughts or perceptions. Both matter and perceptions are the result of this understanding of the nature of reality as experienced. Then both matter and thought – this dualism between matter and thought, between matter and mind, disappears. They merge together as reality.

[Francis Lucille: 18/10/2020 *Now And Always Are Two Sides Of The Same Experience*]

If we look deeply into the reality of the universe from a scientific viewpoint, starting from apparently solid objects, what we find at each stage is more and more space. The constantly vibrating molecules that comprise the table in front of me are separated by space. If we look inside the molecules at the atoms which comprise them, we find more space between the atoms. If we look inside the atoms we find electrons orbiting a nucleus, with huge amounts of space between the electrons and the nucleus. And if we look inside the nucleus, we find elementary particles coming into and out of existence in yet more 'empty' space. So we discover that the universe has no real solidity. Its reality is more like tiny packets of energy fluctuating between potentiality and actualisation as particles. Elementary particles coming into and out of existence. Here are two descriptions from physicists working in this field:

For now, this is what we know of matter: A handful of types of elementary particles, which vibrate and fluctuate constantly between existence and non-existence and swarm in space even when it seems that there is nothing there, combine together to infinity like the letters of a cosmic alphabet to tell the immense history of galaxies, of the innumerable stars, of sunlight, of mountains, woods and fields of grain, of the smiling faces of the young at parties, and of the night sky studded with stars.

[Carlo Rovelli: *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, Fourth Lesson – Particles]

In the 3,000 years since the philosophers of ancient Greece first contemplated the mystery of creation, the emergence of something from nothing, the scientific method has revealed truths that they could not have imagined. The quantum void, infinitely deep and filled with particles, which can take on different forms, and the possibility of quantum fluctuation lay outside their philosophy. They were unaware that positive energy within matter can be counterbalanced by the negative sink of the all-pervading gravitational field such that the total energy of the universe is potentially nothing; when combined with quantum uncertainty, this allows the possibility that everything is indeed some quantum fluctuation living on borrowed time. Everything may thus be a quantum fluctuation out of nothing.

[Frank Close, *Nothing: A Very Short Introduction*, ch 9 The New Void]

It is not hard to see the similarity between physical space-time in which particles come into and out of existence, and the 'space-time' of mind in which thoughts and perceptions come into and out of existence. We can conceptualise both of them as continuous, homogeneous, unchanging fields within which the ever-changing, discontinuous phenomena manifest. The 'closing of the circle' would then be the recognition that the reality of both of these fields is the same. There is only reality.

There can be no objective or phenomenal proof that the circle closes in that way. The metaphor of the circle closing is just one way of pointing to a noumenal experience that there is only one reality. Our deep intuition of beauty and harmony tells us it's obvious, it cannot be otherwise. This understanding becomes available to us when our habitual beliefs have been dropped and we are

open to the openness of not knowing. In that field of not knowing, patterns have the freedom to form and dissolve, and re-form in a different way. Opposites have the freedom to come together:

From being nothing, to being everything. These two are very close. They are two points where the circle closes in its perfection. All the rest is the relative world. All the rest is 'something'. 'Something' is between everything and nothing. You take the two points of everything and nothing and you close them. That's it. It closes the circle. Then you realise that once the circle is closed, the point where it closes can be everywhere. So that at every moment, in every context, you are nothing and everything.

[Francis Lucille, 6/5/2020: [Presence Is That Which Can Never Be Absent](#)]

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We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.

[T S Eliot, Four Quartets, from Little Gidding]