

The Pearls of Perception

The lack of a clear distinction between the concepts of mind and consciousness is a common barrier to the recognition of the universality of consciousness. It's obvious that mind is limited. We don't have direct access to the thoughts of others. So we reason that if consciousness is synonymous with mind, then consciousness must also be limited. The first step towards resolving this confusion is to define what we mean by 'mind' and 'consciousness'. In this context, we define mind as the flow of perceptions, the totality of our phenomenal experience – thoughts, sense perceptions and bodily sensations. And we define consciousness as 'that which perceives'.

Francis uses the traditional Indian analogy of the string of pearls to illustrate that perceptions are discontinuous, but there is a thread running through all of them which is continuous. That thread is consciousness. The thread is visible in the gaps between thoughts. But it's a subtle gap that often goes unnoticed. This how Francis describes it:

FL: Let's take the discontinuity between two thoughts in succession. Thought number 1: I am on a beach in the south of Spain lying in the sun. I picture myself on the beach in the south of Spain. Then also all of a sudden, I realize I am just daydreaming – that's thought number 2. Obviously thought number 2 is not the continuation of thought number 1. It takes into account number 1 because of the way we formulate thought number 2. So thought number 2 is a formulation of an experience and this formulation goes 'I just became aware that I was daydreaming'. That's the formulation of the experience that just took place. Now while I was daydreaming, I wasn't aware that I was daydreaming. The moment I became aware that I was daydreaming, I wasn't daydreaming any longer. Therefore at that moment, daydreaming had stopped. Therefore at that moment thought number 1 had stopped – thought number 1 was the daydreaming. Thought number 2, the formulation, had not begun yet because in order to be able to formulate 'I just became aware that I was daydreaming', a prerequisite was that this 'becoming aware', this experience, took place. So obviously that is evidence of a discontinuity, of a gap, between thought number 1 and thought number 2.

I, as consciousness, am the link, the continuum, which 'stands under' therefore understands both thought number 1 and thought number 2. In the Indian tradition there's this traditional image of the thread that establishes a continuity among the pearls of the necklace. The pearls are discontinuous, but the continuity is established by the thread. So in this metaphor the consciousness is the thread; the discontinuous thoughts are the pearls. ... If you take any case of understanding, the thought that we understand has to cease to exist as we understand it.

[Francis Lucille, Omega Institute retreat, 4/6/2014, Satsang]

Once we understand, there is no going back. The understanding never leaves us. Glimpses seem to be distinct and separate, but they are just a return to an understanding that is ever-present, the thread uniting all the pearls of perception. We may forget, and we may, from habit, act as though we haven't understood. But as we become more aware of the thread of understanding, the glimpses keep returning, becoming stronger, and lasting longer. Here is Francis's description:

FL: What is important to understand is that understanding is not in time. From the vantage point of the mind, understanding seems to be made of discrete glimpses. But in fact, it's the mind-content itself which is not continuous. Understanding is continuous. It's just that it appears as awareness in the presence of perceptions. But it is the same awareness which is aware of the perceptions, which also understands. So there is no discontinuity, no experiential discontinuity in awareness itself because it is the same 'I', aka awareness, aka reality, which both understands

and perceives. There is no jump from an understander to a distinct perceiver. So when we understand this, we see that the continuity is not in the perceptions. The perceptions are coming and going – it changes all the time. The continuity is in the awareness, and it is this awareness that unites one perception with the next one.

In India they compare it to the thread of a pearl necklace. So the awareness is the thread that unites all the pearls. The pearls are the perceptions. While the thread is in the pearl, you only see the pearl – you don't see the thread. Between the pearls you have a very tiny opportunity to see the thread if you observe carefully. But the strength of the necklace is in in the thread. Ultimately you could have a necklace without pearls. It will still hold around your neck.

So if we keep this metaphor we could imagine a necklace, a kind of magical necklace, which starts with a thread and then it grows pearls. So then, when instead of the pearls being separate adjuncts, completely different from the thread, if they are just made of the thread itself, they are like the thread growing locally into a pearl. Then if what you seek is the thread, you no longer have to try to find the thread between the pearls: as you see the pearl you see the thread. The moment you understand, you see that the pearl is simply made of the thread, the magic thread. The magic colour is different from the usual colour, because then it grows its own pearls and the pearls are made of the thread, and the thread is made of the pearls, because you cannot make a distinction.

Q: Beautiful. Something to nurture means the understanding is not complete, is what I'm concluding with this conversation. Because if I really understood there is only thread, what is there to preserve, or what is there to nurture?

FL: Or what is there to seek? We are already that. Well, it's enough to have a glimpse of what I've said. Eventually these glimpses will become stronger and stronger. Because this glimpse is simply a description of an understanding of what is already the case, and therefore eventually that which is already the case can only reveal itself more and more to be the case. There is no going back. So in that process, the feeling or the belief to be separate, to be *one* of the pearls of the necklace, disappears. Because even if you believe yourself to be one of the pearls of the necklace, you see that the pearl is not separate from the necklace. It's made of the necklace.

And if the necklace eventually changes its shape, because it has this plasticity, and then it chooses to no longer show this pearl, it may grow something else. It may grow for example, a swastika or something different. It will still be the same eternal necklace. When you understand that what we are, this awareness, is the necklace itself, this thread, almost invisible, so tiny that it is invisible, but which can exhibit all the various shapes of the necklace sometimes pearls, sometimes something else. And constantly changes while remaining the same.

[Francis Lucille, 26/2/2022 [Awareness is the Magic Thread that Unites the Pearls of Perception](#)]

The analogy applies equally to our experience of the body. If we close our eyes, we experience the body as a flow of bodily sensations. Those sensations are like the pearls. There is a thread uniting all the pearls. The sensations come and go, but the thread is always present.

Starting from a question about the purpose of yoga meditations, Francis explains the importance of the experience of borderlessness. He goes on to describe how our real body is the thread connecting all the pearls and within all the pearls. Our real body is the universe.

Q: This is about the yoga meditation we just did. You use the word transparent and transparency a lot and I don't think I understand it. ... I just want to know what am I supposed to feel?

FL: It refers to the borderlessness of the experience of the body. It's a reminder that the experience of the body is borderless so that you can check it out if you have doubts. When you hear it, you verify and that's it. If at that moment you believe that you are experiencing borders to the experience of the body, then you have a problem, and then you can bring it up.

Q: But is this because later when we engage in life after the meditation, when we go back into not so real life, then our interactions would reflect ...

FL: Let's put it this way. It's a fact that the direct experience of the body, is the only experience of the body we have. ... Everything which is not direct is not experienced. So it's a fact that you can verify that the direct experience of the body has no borders. ...

Q: And that's all we are doing in this exercise?

FL: It's very important. It's not just that that's all. It's very important because we always believe that we have direct experiential evidence that the experience of the body has borders. ... Let's put it this way, the less you allow the erroneous conditioning to prevail, the less likely it is to keep prevailing in the future.

Q: I know you don't generally recommend any practice or anything like that, but if it's happening only when I'm here, should I be trying to do this on my own too?

FL: Ah well, either you are in a situation in which you don't believe there are borders to your body, in which case there is nothing you need to do. Now if you believe that there are borders, that your experience of you as a body and your real body has borders, then there is something you may do. And the quickest thing is to remind yourself that you are making a mistake. A less quick thing is to go back again to verify experientially for yourself the experience of the body at that moment. When you have verified it a sufficient number of times, then with your mind you say 'Oh I'm not going to verify it well one more time – that's fine, I'll drop this belief that I have borders'. Because then it's OK to identify with the experience of the body, provided we don't assign borders to it.

Q: I don't understand how it helps us when we are seeing people. Where would we apply that?

FL: If I feel *this* body is *my* body, *that* body is *not* my body, obviously somewhere there is a border. So if you are facing someone, and if you feel my body is this body, and that body is not my body, then *your* body has a border. It means you are identifying with something which is limited.

Q: Which is in opposition to what I found when I'm doing the experiment.

FL: Exactly. If you go back to your direct experience of your body, you'll see your direct experience of your body as the reality of your bodily sensations, because experientially your body is made of bodily sensations. So your real body is the reality of your bodily sensations because what we call the body is something which survives every single bodily sensation. I don't call a headache 'my body'. I don't call a sensation of hunger or pleasure anywhere, 'my body'. So my body is like a necklace and my body and the bodily sensations are like the pearls on the necklace. And what I call my body is the skeleton of the necklace which is the thread. In other words, my body has to be present within each pearl, when a pearl is present, and also between the pearls.

Q: Right. Because it's the thread that's connecting all of them.

FL: And so this common thread that ties together all the bodily sensations has to be my real body. Then it's this thread that I question: is it limited, experientially?

Q: Is it not limited to the sensations that I'm aware of?

FL: That's a fallacy. What this fallacy is predicated upon is that that which perceives is limited by what it perceives. ...

The fact that the mind is that which remembers, seemingly, and the fact that there is no memory in a specific mind of what is perceived in a different mind, doesn't imply that it is not the same perceiver that perceives both minds. In other words, from the perceptions appearing as a given mind, we cannot conclude that that which perceives this given mind is restricted to perceiving just this given mind.

[Francis Lucille, Thanksgiving retreat, 30/11/2021 week 2 day 3]

Finally, here is a meditation which takes the same analogy and applies it to the universe as a whole. Everything is interconnected. Our reality is the thread that unites all things.

There's a French statement that says one's culture is that which remains over when everything else has been forgotten.

And in an analogous fashion, we could say that awareness, our true nature, is that which remains when everything else has disappeared.

To the indiscriminating eye, it seems that the essence of the necklace is in the pearls. But the essence of the necklace, that which gives it its shape, that which unites the pearls, is the invisible thread that crosses their very centre. And that gives the necklace its shape, its unity, its reality, and its beauty.

In the same way, the invisible presence is that which unites all the perceptions we have of the world, but also all the objects in all the worlds – the minds, the physical worlds, the worlds of ideas, the moments, they interconnect with each other. The connection is through this invisible thread.

At the very centre of our human existence is the thread of reality that unites all things. Not only all sentient beings. No. All things in all worlds. One single string.

[Francis Lucille, 3/5/2021, Meditation: The Thread of Reality]