

From Witness to Witnessing

The first step on the spiritual path is to recognise that we are that which is aware of body, mind and world, rather than being just a body or a mind. One way of establishing this firmly as being our experience is through understanding ourselves to be the witness of all our perceptions. We witness our thoughts, our bodily sensations and our sense perceptions. In that way the identification with body and/or mind vanishes. Jean Klein explains how this approach works:

True awareness cannot be obtained by projecting known factors in terms of concepts and perceptions. What you are fundamentally cannot be experienced through reason and is only reached once you eliminate what you are not.

A wilful ego hinders you from being. The witness must enter upon the scene, enabling the ego to be recognized for what it is, an object. This witness is a pedagogical device that opens the door to being. The ego cannot “know” itself because it identifies with what it thinks, feels, experiences. For the ego, there is nothing but resistance, defence, agitation. It is the witness that shines forth and shows up the ego for what it is, an illusion.

The contemplative witnessing state leads us to discover what we are not. We become aware of our body and thought-patterns, the reasons that motivate our actions of which we were previously scarcely conscious. When we observe thought without interference or evaluation, without reference, the thought vanishes in the observing. As the emphasis is no longer on the thought process and content but on the observing itself this witness state becomes a purification, a letting go, without there being a person who purifies or lets go. A whole world of unsuspected energies releases itself. Mental activity ceases to be agitated and spontaneously follows its natural course. We discover ourselves in attention. We completely abandon the “I am this, I am that,” reflex. This attention transcends the experience and the experiencer. It is pure awareness.

[Jean Klein, *I Am*, ch2]

Francis uses the same pedagogical technique to help us separate our personal history from our identity as the witness of that history:

You are not your personal history because you are the witness of your personal history. You are the impersonal witness of your personal history. Your personal history has kept evolving over time, has kept changing, the baby, the child, the teenager, etc. You are the witness of those changes, the personal history changes. But your true identity doesn't. It has always been the same. However, the false identity, which is coexistent with the true identity, which is its witness, hides, veils the true identity.

[Francis Lucille, [You Are Not Your Personal History. Discover Your True Identity](#)]

But Jean Klein warns us not to objectify the witness and identify with it as an object:

Q. You often say that we are not the doer but the witness of doing. This seems to be crucial in your pedagogy. Would you speak more about it?

A. When you say 'I have done this' or 'I am angry' you have established a personal relationship with the situation. When the situation does not refer to a centre, for example, when you think 'This is done; there is anger,' there is an absence of affective relationship. This absence feels like a space and the space around you frees you from attachment to the object. The object appears in this space.

This feeling of space, the witness, is only a crutch, a pedagogical device, but it is a very important one. You can find the witness by seeing that whenever you take note of change, your taking note is always in the present. To know the witness is to become acquainted with the observer of change. But this observer must not be an attitude. It is a dead-end to identify with a position. When the witness is not objectified it dissolves in the spaciousness which you are and to which it points. In other words, as long as there's an 'I' there's a witness, but when there's no 'I' there's no witness. The witness disappears with the person's disappearance.

[Jean Klein, *Who Am I?: The Teacher and the Teaching*]

Many spiritual teachings include witnessing as a practice. Francis explains how this can actually support the sense of separation. Real witnessing cannot be practised. It happens automatically – it doesn't require effort:

Q: I can place my attention in such a way where I just watch the body going through motions taking actions. I'm just watching things happen seemingly automatically. Do you think this is a useful activity to practice or is it a distraction?

FL: The problem with this practice is that it doesn't necessarily get rid of a personal and limited observer, of the belief to be a limited observer, a limited consciousness. Often this type of practice is a result of a misunderstanding and sometimes this practice is suggested by teachers who really shouldn't be teachers because they don't have the real experience.

They have heard somewhere, real teachers, authentic teachers say, you are the witness of the motions of your body. You are the witness of your thoughts, which is true. And they have, through their lack of understanding, they are teaching a practice, place your attention so that you are just the witness. You, Peter, Mike, a separate being, you are just the witness. What is missing there is the universality of the witness.

So rather than trying to place your attention in such a way, be simply open to the possibility that this consciousness, your consciousness, which is hearing these words, is in fact universal. Then you don't have to place your attention anywhere. You are naturally this attention. Whatever appears, it appears to this universal consciousness.

It's very different from making an effort to watch my thoughts like a controller, like the Gestapo, or the KGB being there and forcing the rule of witnessing. No.

To be the witness for consciousness is in fact more natural than it is for our body to breathe or for our heart to pump. With no effort, no effort is required to be the witness. We are it naturally. The only problem is that we believe to be something else.

[Francis Lucille, [*No Effort Required To Be The Witness*](#)]

Jean Klein says the same – we should not try to witness:

You are always witnessing your actions, so don't try to witness. Witnessing is not a function and cannot be represented. It is extremely important that you realize that you are the witness and that you cannot try to be it. It is enough that you become fully aware that you are the witness, for that eliminates the old patterns and the habit you have of considering yourself to be the thinker or doer.

When you act you are one with the action, it is only afterwards that the ego appropriates the act from which it was absent, and says "I have done this." At the moment of acting there is only

acting, without an actor.

[Jean Klein, *I Am*, ch4]

Unfortunately, it is common for teachers who lack clarity and are not well-established in the non-dual understanding to promote the concept of 'just witnessing your thoughts'. They describe that as a position of non-duality or 'resting in consciousness', whereas in fact the witness is still seen as limited and personal. It can be hard for students who have practised this for several years to become free from the mistake, and see that the real witness is universal and is always witnessing without any effort being involved. Here is Francis's advice:

Some teachers who are not really authentic, they use the witnessing system, in which they say, 'just be the witness'. 'Be the witness of your thoughts.' But because they believe themselves to be a separate consciousness, a separate witness, they cannot tell you, they cannot really, in an efficient way, reveal to you that you are the universal witness. So then you witness, but you witness still as a separate entity. And this witnessing does very little for you towards real meditation. The great secret is that consciousness is universal. You have to be open to that. Before you do all of these exercises, at least be open to this possibility.

[Francis Lucille, [*Regarding the Apparent Contradiction Between Self-Inquiry and Meditation*](#)]

Jean Klein explains that the way to escape from this witness-witnessed duality is to recognise and fully understand that you are not the doer or the thinker:

Q: How can I stand back and observe myself and the different situations that appear? In other words, how can I be a spectator and not feel involved?

You are not the doer, the thinker that rejoices and suffers. Take this for a fact and do not try to be a spectator, to be detached. The fact that you can recall your previous acts proves that you were a witness to them. So above all do not try to be a witness—this would only be projection, and would keep you in the frame of ideas and expectations. If you accept this, a change will come about within you, probably without your even realizing it at the time it occurs.

The witness is only a crutch to bring you to understand that you are not a doer. Once you are free from doership there will be a change of axis and the energy once directed towards the object will shift to the subject aspect, to the witnessing. In the end all residues of subjectivity dissolve and the witness with them. You discover yourself as that in which the object and subject exist, but you are neither one nor the other. Then there is only living silence.

[Jean Klein, *I Am*, ch16]

On a recent online retreat, Francis was asked for further clarification of that quote from Jean Klein:

FL: What will clarify this is that he meant don't be a limited and separate Witness. There is only one witness which is consciousness and that's the one which we truly are. But don't be a limited witness with an intention to achieve sensing through this witnessing. Because then whatever is expected to happen as a result of this witnessing is allegedly going to be to the advantage of this separate witness. So as a result, this type of activity only perpetuates the belief to be a separate witness and we are caught in the same type of activity which is an even more insidious mistake because it seems to be spiritual, whereas in fact it is more of the same.

Jean Klein used to say the worst type of ego is a spiritual ego. He said I very much prefer a bulky, obvious ego. A clear, present, enormous ego which is right there for everybody to see rather than one which hides behind all kinds of knowledge.

Q: Yes, it gives that type of action it gives more self-importance –I am a witness I am witnessing this, I am able to distance myself. it falls back a little bit into the sense of self-importance. You are encouraging us all the time instead of becoming more active it's like falling back and just letting things be.

FL: Instead of seeing witnessing as an activity, understand that you are already the witness. We are already the witness. We simply believe this witness to be limited and separate, but we are already the witness. We are already this simple and clear consciousness which we simply believe to be limited whereas in fact it's universal.

[Francis Lucille, 1/8/2023, Summer online retreat]

Jean Klein explains further that the witness doesn't really exist because time and memory are just constructs of mind. All that happens is Now. And since there's no time, there's no 'somebody' that persists in time. All there is, is universal awareness.

It is important that after every action you don't consider yourself as the doer. Say rather, 'There was a doing.' This witness state is a teaching principle, a crutch. It is a device to break the habit of identifying with thoughts and actions by creating a space relationship. But in fact the witness doesn't exist because in reality there is no such thing as memory or recalling. What you label the past is a present thought. Thought is always in the now, in present, conscious awareness. When the idea of being somebody disappears, the need for a witness disappears too.

[Jean Klein, *Who Am I?: Knowing Yourself*]

Contemplation

In looking there is no looker, there is only looking. There is no "observer" and no "observed." An observed is only possible when there is an observer, but the observer is a creation of the mind. ... Eliminate the observer, and the observed automatically disappears too. Looking is then oneness; consciousness is one with its so-called object.

[Jean Klein: *Open to the Unknown*]