

## The Direct Path to Happiness

What is it that all of us want above all else? Surely it must be happiness? The story of our lives can perhaps be seen as a search for happiness. In the course of that search we make a number of assumptions about where happiness is to be found – in money, power, an interesting job, a loving relationship, children, exciting sports, absorbing pastimes, drugs, alcohol ... But at some point we come to recognise that while these things can produce a temporary state of happiness, none of them could ever bring us the imperturbable peace and happiness that we really want. It is that understanding which leads us to a spiritual search for enlightenment, the discovery of our true nature. As the Direct Path teacher, Rupert Spira, explains:

We all know that peaceful states of the mind, body and world do not last and do not deliver the depth of peace that we truly desire. Only the peace that is inherent in our true nature can truly put an end to the longing that initiates and sustains so many of our activities and relationships.

*(Presence, Part 2, ch 1)*

The great religions and spiritual philosophies such as Advaita Vedanta, Buddhism, Sufism and mystical Christianity all point to the non-dual nature of reality: there is only one reality; we *are* that reality. The traditional paths to this non-dual understanding start with a process of purification of the body and mind for which spiritual practices and disciplines are prescribed. This is considered necessary before a full understanding of the non-dual teaching can be imparted. Practices such as meditation, prayer, yoga, and devotional rituals often lead to happier states of mind, but these happier states come and go and are not the permanent happiness that we are really seeking. Proficiency in the practices and adherence to the disciplines that form an essential part of the various traditional paths are preparation for the goal of the path and are not the goal itself. The goal is realisation of our true nature and its intrinsic qualities of peace, happiness and love.

The Direct Path leads to this same non-dual understanding but it works differently. Right at the beginning it leads us directly to an experiential understanding of what we really are. The state of our bodies and minds is irrelevant – purity of mind and virtuous living are *not* prerequisites.

The first step is to investigate the ‘I’ that I believe that I am. What is it that has remained present and unchanged all my life, from my earliest memories to the present time? My body changes over time, my mind is constantly changing as thoughts and perceptions come and go. So I cannot be my body and I cannot be my mind. By a process of what is known as ‘self-enquiry’ we arrive at the conclusion: ‘I am that which is aware of my experience’. But what *is* that? We cannot *know* it with the mind. When we look for it we discover it only by ‘going to it’, by simply being aware of being aware. Words can only point towards this discovery – there are no words that accurately describe it. But words are necessary if we want to talk or write about it. The words used in the Direct Path teaching to point towards our true nature are ‘awareness’ or ‘consciousness’<sup>1</sup>. These two words are used synonymously.

At this point we begin to question more of our fixed beliefs and ideas about ourselves and the world. There are no set subjects for investigation. We become more like children, exploring ourselves and the world for the first time. Direct Path teachers may suggest areas for exploration, but where we go

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<sup>1</sup> We should not confuse either of these words with the meaning of the word ‘conscious’ in the context of medical science. If a doctor says ‘this man is unconscious’ he means that the man is not aware of his body and his surroundings. But in this article, and in Direct Path literature in general, ‘consciousness’ includes the possibility of being aware without there being any objects of mind, body or world that one is aware of, i.e. ‘consciousness without objects’.

and what we look at is driven mainly by our natural curiosity and interest rather than following a fixed syllabus. We might ask questions such as: Am I, consciousness, located inside the body? Where does the consciousness that I am begin and end? Does it have a boundary? What happens to consciousness during different states of the mind – deep sleep, dreaming sleep, waking state, day-dreaming, and under anaesthesia? The sages say there is just one, universal consciousness, but how can this be so when I can't see the contents of other people's minds? How did the universe come into being? Was consciousness here first or did it evolve from an increasingly complex organisation of matter, leading to life on earth? Do time and space really exist?

The approach taken in the Direct Path is to refer all questions to our direct, raw experience. We temporarily set aside all the conceptual models and beliefs we have acquired from early childhood and imagine that we are a new-born infant experiencing our bodies and the world for the first time. Although our questions start in the mind, each of these lines of questioning leads us to a place where the mind can go no further, and we come to rest in, or more correctly, *as* our true being of pure consciousness – being aware of being aware. That is the deeper meaning of the term 'self-enquiry' – to rest knowingly as awareness, or to allow attention to rest in its source of awareness. When we practise this (although it's not really a practice) we discover over and over again that it is only from this placeless place of pure awareness that answers to our questions arise. A key feature of the Direct Path is that there is no place for disciplined practice – the impulse to explore and to abide as awareness must come only from interest and love. A teacher can provide help and guidance through books, videos, webinars and retreats, but ultimately the enquiry must be our own.

It is by spending time abiding as the presence of awareness and contemplating our experience from that place that we eventually come to realise that the consciousness that I am does not share the limits of the body and the mind. I am not the separate self that I once thought I was, living inside the body, separate and distinct from everyone and everything else in an outside world. The consciousness that I know myself to be is not located in space or limited in time. It is one seamless whole, the unmoving, peaceful, undisturbable background through which all experience flows. This discovery – knowing ourselves as that – is sometimes referred to as 'enlightenment'. This is how Rupert Spira describes the effects this realisation has on the mind and body:

When this is seen clearly, the imaginary separate self and its search for peace and happiness dissolves. This dissolution may be accompanied by a wave of relaxation in the body and mind. The body and mind, which have for so long served an imaginary entity, now find themselves relieved of this make-believe tyrant. *(Presence, Part 2, ch 4)*

However, that is not the end of the search for happiness. The 'me' feelings in the body that were present before enlightenment don't immediately disappear. We still *feel* that we are the body, or are located inside the body, even though we *know* that we are not. The approach taught by Rupert Spira involves conducting a deep exploration of the body in the course of which these feelings of separation are exposed to the light of awareness and eventually dissolved. As Rupert points out:

All thoughts that revolve around an imaginary inside self have an echo or imprint in the body that lasts long after the sense of separation has dissolved. In this way the body becomes a safe refuge for the sense of separation.

We may talk endlessly about the unlimited nature of awareness but all the time the separate inside self is sitting comfortably in the body. *(Presence, Part 4, ch 1)*

The methods used for this exploration come from the tantric tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. The conventional concept of the body as a solid, dense object is put to one side and we see that our

actual experience of it is just a sensation, with no border, no shape, no solidity. In sensing the body in this way the feeling of 'me-ness' gradually weakens. But there is more to the sense of separation in the body than just the feeling of solidity and locatedness. As Rupert Spira explains:

The body is a warehouse in which all our hurts, rejections, failures, fears and resentments are stored, long after thinking has forgotten them. These are laid down in the body, layer upon layer. In fact, these old feelings have colonized the body to such an extent that the body is, for most of us, a dense network of tensions and contractions.

It is these layers of tension and contraction that obscure the natural transparency and openness of the body and give the impression that a separate, inside self is in residence.

*(Presence, Part 4, ch 3)*

In this exploration we do not concern ourselves with the stories that lie behind these buried feelings. Instead, playful visualisations are used to invite these uncomfortable feelings to come to the surface where they are encouraged to expand, soften and eventually dissolve in the loving field of awareness.

In addition to exploring the feelings in the body, we also examine our perceptions of the world and ask the question: Where is my experience taking place? If we stay true to our direct, raw experience we discover that all my experience is taking place in me. By spending more and more time abiding knowingly as the presence of awareness, not just when our bodies are at rest but also in the midst of normal day-to-day activity, we come to realise and feel that all experience flows effortlessly through me. There's no-one moving, doing or orchestrating anything. There's nothing and no-one that is separate from myself. In fact there are no 'things' – no separate, distinct objects – there's just experiencing, experiencing itself.

This gentle, loving approach leads to a gradual realignment of feelings in the body and perceptions of the world with our understanding that we are the unlimited, unlocated presence of awareness. In time, this is reflected in our lives and relationships:

Relieved of the dictates of the tyrant self, the body and mind are now experienced as open, empty, transparent and sensitive, and are available to express, communicate, share and celebrate our being's essential qualities of happiness, peace and love.

*(Presence, Part 6, ch 7)*

Enlightenment is available to everyone; it is not the prerogative of a tiny minority of people leading a highly disciplined and 'spiritual' life. All that is needed is a love of truth, an interest in discovering our true nature and a longing for happiness.

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*More information on the Direct Path can be found on the non-duality section of Rupert Spira's website [www.rupertspira.com](http://www.rupertspira.com)*

*Rupert Spira's Youtube channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/rupertspira> has video extracts of meditations and dialogues from his retreats.*