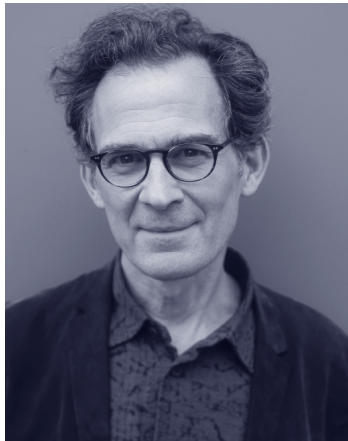


PRESENCE, VOLUME I

The Art of Peace and Happiness

Rupert Spira



From an early age Rupert Spira was deeply interested in the nature of reality. At the age of seventeen he learnt to meditate, and began a twenty-year period of study and practice in the classical Advaita Vedanta tradition under the guidance of Dr. Francis Roles and Shantananda Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of the north of India.

During this time he immersed himself in the teachings of P. D. Ouspensky, Krishnamurti, Rumi, Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta and Robert Adams, until he met his teacher, Francis Lucille, in 1997. Francis introduced Rupert to the Direct Path teachings of Atmananda Krishna Menon, the Tantric tradition of Kashmir Shaivism (which he had received from his teacher, Jean Klein), and, more importantly, directly indicated to him the true nature of experience. Rupert lives in the UK and holds regular meetings and retreats in Europe and the USA.

‘Your self, aware Presence, knows no resistance to any appearance and is, as such, happiness itself; like the empty space of a room it cannot be disturbed and is, therefore, peace itself; like this page, it is intimately one with whatever appears on it and is thus love itself; and like water that is not affected by the shape of the wave it assumes, it is pure freedom. Causeless joy, imperturbable peace, love that knows no opposite and freedom at the heart of all experience...this is our ever-present nature under all circumstances.’

– RUPERT SPIRA

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Plump apple, smooth banana, melon, peach,
gooseberry... How all this affluence
speaks death and life into the mouth... I sense...
Observe it from a child's transparent features

while he tastes. This comes from far away.
What miracle is happening in your mouth?
Instead of words, discoveries flow out
from the ripe fruit, astonished to be free.

Dare to say what 'apple' truly is.
This sweetness that feels thick, dark, dense at first;
then, exquisitely lifted in your taste

grows clarified, awake and luminous,
double-meaninged, sunny, earthy, real –
Oh knowledge, pleasure – inexhaustible.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Sonnet XIII, from *The Sonnets to Orpheus, Part One*

Translated by Stephen Mitchell

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Foreword

It seems that every generation produces a few unusually clear voices that call us back to our essential, undivided nature. Rupert Spira is such a voice, and the collection of essays in these two volumes are his songs, his hymns of remembrance and celebration.

As with any song, we must be available to truly hear it. These overlapping writings are meant to be carefully pondered in order for their underlying, vibrant Silence to be heard and felt. Savour them slowly as you would a fine wine, a delicious meal or an exceptionally beautiful sunset. Let the wisdom and love from which they come saturate you. Feel how they act on you. That in you which knows and loves the truth will respond to their call to come home to who you really are.

These elegantly written and concise essays invite us to radically enquire into our direct experience. We are repeatedly challenged to investigate the apparently dual reality of a separate-inside-self and separate-outside-world. When we carefully observe our actual experience, the common-sense distinction of self and other dissolves like a line drawn through the air. Once the apparently separate self, which is a process of seeking and resisting, is clearly seen through, it loses its foothold in both our thinking and feeling. An apparent veil thins and eventually dissolves, revealing what is always already here: a Presence which is both the witness to and the substance of all experience. We recognise this seamless, intimate knowing of ourself, both with and without form, as love.

These essays are both timeless and contemporary. They are timeless in pointing to that which never appears or disappears. They are contemporary in expressing non-dual understanding in a way that is free of cultural baggage and that is accessible and relevant to ordinary Westerners. While some modern non-dual teachings, in my opinion, overly emphasize

the transcendent, these writings include a healthy dose of immanence. It is a balanced approach.

Rupert encourages us to welcome all of our human experiences, including our most difficult feelings and uncomfortable sensations, since it is in the body that our deepest identity as a separate self resides. As our bodies and minds are liberated from the oppressive tyranny of the illusory separate self, we are increasingly free to love, create and play. We are happy, grateful and peaceful for no reason. This transformation radiates out into our work and all of our relationships. It is a quietly revolutionary way of being.

Enjoy these potent and revelatory writings, and be prepared to be unveiled as you truly are and to discover life as it truly is: open, self-illuminated Presence.

John J. Prendergast, Ph.D.

Preface

The cellist Pablo Casals explored and practised Bach's cello suites for thirty-five years before recording them. In many ways the contemplations in this book follow a similar approach, exploring a single theme with gentle but somewhat relentless devotion.

In fact, even now there is some reluctance to commit to the form of a finished book something whose nature does not lend itself readily to the written word. I would prefer the form of music, which dissolves as soon as it is uttered, leaving its true content as a formless perfume in the listener's heart.

This book is a meditation on the essential nature of experience, taking us on a journey into its heart. It is inevitable, therefore, that there is a certain amount of repetition.

For a mind that seeks new ideas, stimulation or entertainment, this repetition may seem frustrating at times, but for one who seeks the heart of experience it will not be experienced as such. Instead, we may see these contemplations as an ever-deepening exploration of experience, giving way in time to an immersion in its essence.

In this exploration layers of subtlety and meaning are uncovered, but we never rest for long on any particular formulation. Each new understanding dissolves the previous one, only to find itself being dissolved in time.

In fact, the potency of words which attempt to explore and express the nature of experience lies in their dissolving quality rather than their ability to formulate something that cannot accurately be put into words. It is in this spirit that I hope this book will be read.

Introduction: The Search for Happiness

If we were to conduct a poll of all seven billion people living on earth, asking what they most wanted in life, almost all would answer, 'Happiness.'* Some may not answer as directly as this, saying instead that they want, for instance, an intimate partner, a family or more money, but all these are desired only for the happiness that they produce. In fact, most activities are undertaken with a view to obtaining happiness.

To begin with, in our search for happiness, we explore the possibilities that are available in the conventional realms of the body, mind and world. From an early age we discover that the acquisition of the object[†] of our desire seems to produce the happiness we long for and, as a result, the correlation between the acquisition of objects, activities or relationships, on the one hand, and the experience of happiness on the other, is established as a fundamental fact of our lives.

However, after some time, although we may still possess the desired object – whether it is a physical object, a relationship, an activity or a mental state – the experience of happiness that it seemed to produce begins to fade. This alone should be enough to indicate that happiness is not a result of the acquisition of objects, relationships or states. If happiness were related to objects, then as long as the object remained, happiness would remain.

Instead of receiving this simple message, we simply discard the object that once seemed to produce happiness and seek another one in its place, in the hope that it will redeliver the happiness that is now missing. In fact, this pattern of seeking one object after another in an attempt to secure happiness, peace or love is the basic pattern of most people's lives.

After the repeated failure of the normal objects of desire to produce happiness, we begin to seek other means. Either our search in the

conventional realms of work and money, food and substances, or sex and relationships will increase to an obsessive level, resulting in various degrees of addiction, or we will turn our attention away from the conventional field of possibilities and begin a spiritual search.

The spiritual search is usually undertaken as a result of the failure of the quest to secure happiness, peace and love in the conventional realms of experience. Instead of happiness, which seems to be available only in fleeting glimpses, we now seek a permanent state of enlightenment. In fact, our search for enlightenment is simply a rebranding of the conventional search for happiness.

This search takes us to new realms of experience, tending to focus on the acquisition of states of mind rather than objects or relationships in the world. And just as the acquisition of an object or relationship puts a temporary end to the conventional search, giving us a brief taste of happiness, so these newly acquired states of mind bring the spiritual search to a temporary end. We are given a glimpse of that same happiness, which we now call awakening or enlightenment, but just as we previously mistook the acquisition of objects and relationships for the source of happiness, we now confuse these new states of mind for enlightenment.

These brief glimpses, like the previous moments of happiness, are soon eclipsed by the old patterns of seeking happiness, peace and love in objects, relationships and states. As a result we are again faced with the failure of our search, only this time there are no more possible realms in which to search. Like the prodigal son, we have ventured into a 'far-off country seeking happiness, and we have now exhausted all its possibilities.

For some this failure is experienced as a time of despair or crisis. There are no further directions in which to turn and yet the search has not been brought to a satisfactory end. The usual means of bringing the search to an end, or at least avoiding the discomfort of it, through substances, activities and relationships or subtler meditative states of mind, may have temporarily numbed it, but in our hearts it is still burning. There is nowhere left to seek and yet we cannot stop seeking.

We do not all have to go to such extremes. In some cases intelligence rather than despair precipitates the understanding that what we truly long for cannot be found in any state of the body, mind or world. In fact, it is always our own innate intelligence that is operating. In some it takes the shape of a crisis that strikes at the heart of our lives. In others it may be more measured.

In either case a new doorway may open up, the only one that has yet to be explored. Who is this self that is in almost constant search of happiness, and what is the nature of this happiness? This is the moment when the prodigal son turns around. This book starts with this turning around. It is a profound exploration of the nature of our self and the happiness that we seek.

* In this book 'happiness' is synonymous with peace, love, beauty and understanding.

† In this book 'object' refers to anything that is experienced in the mental, emotional or physical realms, including all thoughts, images, feelings, sensations and perceptions.

OUR TRUE NATURE

WHO OR WHAT AM I?

All we know of the mind, body and world is our experience of them, and experience is utterly dependent on the presence of our self, whatever that may be. Nobody has ever or could ever experience a mind, body or world without their own self first being present.

All experience is known by our self, and therefore our knowledge of the mind, body and world is related to and dependent upon our knowledge of our self.

The poet and painter William Blake said, 'As a man is, so he sees.' He meant that the way a person sees or understands him or herself deeply conditions the ways he or she sees and understands objects, others and the world.

Let us start with our self, for everything depends upon this. What do we know about our self for certain? In order to find this out we have to be willing to lay aside all we have learned about our self through others or our culture and to rely only upon our own intimate, direct experience. After all, experience must be the test of reality.

The first thing we know for sure is 'I am'. This simple knowing of our own being – so simple and obvious that it is usually overlooked – turns out to be the most precious knowledge that anyone can have. I may not know *what* I am, but I know *that* I am.

Nobody can legitimately deny their own being, for even to deny oneself, one must first be present. No one asserts 'I am' because they have been told it by their parents or learned it in a book. Our own being is always our direct, familiar and intimate experience. It is self-evident and beyond doubt. So, being or presence is an inherent quality of our self. What else can we say for certain about our self?

Whatever our self actually is, 'I' is the name we give to it. In order to assert with certainty that 'I am' – and this assertion is one of the very few that we can legitimately make – we must know or be aware that 'I am'. In other words, the reason we are sure about our own being is that we know it through direct experience. We do not rely on second-hand information or information that comes from the past to certify our own being. Right now our being or presence is obvious.

What is it that knows or is aware of our being? Is it 'I' that knows that I am, or is 'I' known by someone or something other than myself? It is obviously 'I' that knows that I am. The 'I' that I am is the very same 'I' that knows or is aware that I am. So, awareness or knowing is another inherent quality of our self, and it is our self, 'I', that knows it is both present and aware.

Our self doesn't need to know something special in order to know it is present and aware. It knows itself just by being itself, because it is *by nature* aware or knowing. Nor does it need to do something special, such as to think, to know that it is present. The knowing of our own being is the simplest and most obvious fact of experience. It is prior to all thinking, feeling or perceiving.

If someone were to ask us, 'Are you present?' we may pause for a moment and then answer, 'Yes.' In that pause we refer to our intimate and direct experience of our self, and from that experience comes the certainty of our answer. In that pause we do not refer to thinking, feeling or perceiving; we refer directly to our self. It refers to itself.

Our self knows that it is present and aware *by* itself, *through* itself alone. It doesn't need any other agent, such as a mind or a body, let alone an outside source, to confirm its own aware presence. It knows itself directly.

So it is clear from our own intimate and direct experience that I am not just present but also aware. It is for this reason that our self is sometimes referred to as Awareness, which simply means the presence of that which is aware. The word Awareness' indicates that the being we intimately know our self to be – that knows itself to be – is inherently present and aware.

In this book our self is also referred to as ‘aware Presence’ or simply ‘Presence’, or as ‘Consciousness’ or ‘being’. Most simply this aware Presence is known as T. Whatever we may choose to call it, it is just the intimacy of our own being – Awareness’s awareness of itself – which is the most obvious, familiar and direct knowledge that anyone has.

Before we know anything else we first know our own being. It knows itself. That is, the aware Presence that we intimately and directly know our self to be knows that it is aware and present. ‘I’ is the name we give to this simple knowing of our own being.

In fact, this knowing of our own being is so simple and obvious and, above all, so apparently insignificant that it is usually overlooked. This forgetting or overlooking of our most intimate being, although apparently such a small thing, in fact initiates almost all of our thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships and turns out to be the source of all unhappiness.

But what is it that could forget or overlook this simple knowing of our own being, Awareness’s knowing of itself? Our being obviously cannot forget or overlook itself, because the knowing of our own being is not something we *do*; it is what we *are*.

It is thought that seems to obscure this simple knowing of our own being and makes it seem that our self is something other than the presence of Awareness. This obscuring thought is later substantiated with feelings and results in the veiling or loss of the knowing of our self as it truly is – its knowing of itself as it truly is – and the belief and feeling that we are something other than this aware Presence.

The history of humanity, on both the individual and the collective scales, is the drama of this loss of our true identity and the subsequent search to regain it.

FROM 'I, THE BODY AND MIND' TO 'I, AWARE PRESENCE'

What qualities does our self, this aware Presence, possess other than simply being and awareness?

The fact that our self is present and aware is beyond doubt. However, to this simple knowing of our own being we normally add many attributes. In this book we proceed very slowly, referring only to our direct and intimate knowledge of our self, adding attributes, if any, that truly come from experience – that is, from our self's own experience of itself – rather than from any belief.

The first attribute we usually add to our self, to the simple knowing of our own being, is the belief that it resides *in*, is made *of* and is limited *to* the body and mind. We consider that our self resides inside the body and mind and that everyone and everything else resides outside.

This primary belief is responsible for the fundamental presumption of our entire culture, that experience is divided into two parts: a separate, inside subject – the self that knows, feels or perceives – and a separate, outside object, other or world that is known, felt or perceived. This essential belief that 'I, aware Presence' is synonymous with and limited to the body, and therefore shares its characteristics, is responsible for the veiling or forgetting of our true identity of aware Presence.

The simple knowing of our own being is not actually veiled or forgotten as a result of this belief, any more than a screen is veiled by the appearance of an image that appears on it, but it seems to be. This illusion is tremendously powerful and profoundly conditions the way we think, feel, act and relate. Let us look in more detail at this apparent fact that our self resides in and shares the characteristics of the body.

First, notice something in the apparently outside world, for instance the sound of passing traffic or the sight of buildings or the landscape. The sound or the sight is known or experienced by our self, aware Presence. We believe that I, this aware Presence that apparently lives inside and is limited to the body, hears the traffic or sees the buildings or landscape.

I am obviously not a sound or a sight; I am whatever it is that is *aware* of the sound of traffic or the sight of the buildings or landscape. These sounds and sights come and go, but I, aware Presence, remain. For this reason we know that I am not a car, a building or the landscape.

Now, what about the body? Are we not also aware of the body in a similar way to being aware of sounds and sights? For instance, if we have a headache, we are aware of it as a sensation that appears and disappears, just as we are aware of the sound of traffic that appears and disappears. For this reason we know that a headache is not essential to our self. Our experience of our self – Awareness's experience of itself – is that it is ever-present. Therefore, whatever we essentially are must also be ever-present.

It is because a headache appears and disappears, as opposed to our self, which remains after the sensation has gone, that we know that a headache is not essential to our self. It is not what we *are*. Even if we have never formulated it in this way, it is because a headache appears and disappears that we understand that a headache is not essential to our being.

If we now turn our attention to the tingling sensation of the face, hands or feet, we discover that we are aware of that sensation just as we are aware of the traffic, the buildings, the landscape or a headache. And just as sounds and sights appear and disappear, so do the sensations of the body, leaving our self, aware Presence, remaining. In other words, the body – in this case, the sensation of the face, hands or feet – is an object of our attention just like the sounds and sights of the world, and we, aware Presence, are its subject or knower.

In this way we come to a simple but revolutionary discovery: it is not 'I, the body' but rather 'I, aware Presence' that is the subject or knower of experience. The objects of the body, like the objects of the world, are

known or experienced. We are aware of the sensations of the body in the same way that we are aware of the perceptions of the world.

We may object that a headache is not always present and is therefore not inherent in our self, whereas the body *is* always present and is therefore legitimately considered to be our self. However, if we go to any sensation or perception of the body we find that it is not always present.

If we look closely at the actual experience of the body rather than the idea we may have of it, we find that our only experience of it is the current sensation or perception. All sensations and perceptions appear and disappear, but our self, aware Presence, remains throughout. This ever-present 'I' cannot therefore be made out of an intermittent object such as a sensation or perception.

* * *

Now what about the mind, which most of us consider to be identical with our self? The mind consists of thoughts and images. In fact, no one has ever experienced 'a mind', that is, a permanently existing container of all thoughts, images, memories, fears, hopes and desires. The existence of such a container is itself an idea. We do not know a mind as such; all we know of the apparent mind is the current thought or image.

Take any thought, such as the thought, 'What shall we have for dinner tonight?' That thought appears as a subtle object, similar to a perception of the world or a sensation in the body. In other words, it is not 'I, the mind' that is the subject or knower of my experience, but rather 'I, aware Presence' that is the subject or knower of the objects of the world, body *and mind*.

Ask yourself if, in your actual experience, the body is the subject or knower of experience. Can a face, hand or foot know or experience something? Can a face, hand or foot hear, taste, smell or, for instance, see these words? Or are the face, hands and feet known or experienced along with everything else?

And what about a thought or an image? Can a thought or an image know or experience something? Can a thought see or an image hear? Can a thought

see or understand these words, or are thoughts seen and understood by our self?

If we stay close to experience, using only our actual experience as a test of truth or reality, we will see that the body and mind do not know or experience – they are known or experienced. See clearly that it is not ‘I, the body and mind’ that is aware of the world but rather ‘I, this aware Presence’ that is aware of the body, mind and world.

The discovery that our self is not essentially a body or a mind, but is in fact the aware being or Presence that knows or witnesses them, has radical and profound implications.

* * *

The first step in this consideration is the discovery that we are this aware Presence and to see that it is this Presence that knows or witnesses the mind, body and world. The second is to *be* that, knowingly, instead of imagining that we are something else, such as a body or a mind. We do not *become* this witnessing Presence as a result of this exploration; rather, we notice that we always only are that and now we abide as that knowingly.

Previously we took our self to be a body and a mind, and all experience was conditioned by and appeared in accordance with this belief. Now we reclaim what was always ours. We stand knowingly as the witnessing Presence that we always are but which is nevertheless sometimes veiled, forgotten or overlooked.

When we witness our body and mind in this way, we stand, without perhaps realising it at first, as the aware Presence to which they appear.

In the following chapters we will take our stand as this witnessing presence of Awareness and explore our experience of our self as that. That is, we will explore Awareness’s knowledge of itself from its own intimate and direct experience.

Although the results of this exploration will be formulated by the mind, it is important that the experiment itself not be based on thought, on the *ideas* we may have about our self. Rather, the investigation is based on our

actual experience of our self, on the simple knowing of our own being as it actually is in its own experience of itself.

OUR SELF IS WITHOUT LOCATION OR LIMIT

For a mind that has become accustomed for so many years to knowing only objects – that is, to focusing its attention and interests on the body, mind and world alone – it is inevitable that the desire to know oneself as some kind of a subtle object will persist. We will search for this aware Presence and try to make it an object of our knowledge or experience. However, if we return again and again to the experiential understanding that our self is the knower or witness of all objects, it becomes clear that it cannot itself be an object.

It is our simple experience that our self is present and aware but has no objective qualities. As this experiential understanding deepens, so the attempt to search for our self as an object decreases correspondingly. But the inability to know our self as an object does not mean that our self cannot be known. It simply means that it cannot be known in the way that an object is usually known, that is, through the subject–object relationship. Our true self is known in a more intimate and direct way, simply through being. In fact, we discover that the only way to *know* our self is to *be* our self and not to mistake our self for any kind of an object.

If someone were to ask us to turn our attention towards a sensation in the body, a thought or image in the mind or an object in the world, we would have no difficulty, just as we have no difficulty in turning our attention towards these words. But what if someone were to ask us to turn it towards our self, towards the aware Presence that *knows* the objects of the body, mind and world?

Try to do that. For instance, try to turn your attention towards whatever it is that is seeing these words. Some of us may be inclined to turn our attention towards a sensation around the eyes or head, but notice that the eyes and the head are themselves sensations of which we are aware.

Try again to turn your attention towards whatever it is that is aware of these sensations, and is not itself a sensation. In which direction do we turn? Notice that any direction in which we turn is always towards some kind of an object, more or less subtle. If we take our attention away from that object and try to turn it towards whatever it is that knows or experiences that object, we are always frustrated. Every direction turns out to be the wrong one. It is like standing up and trying to take a step towards one's own body; every step is in the wrong direction. And yet, at the same time, no step takes us farther away.

At some point there may be a spontaneous collapse of the attempt to find oneself as an object in the body or mind. In this collapse, the seeking mind comes briefly to an end, and in that moment – it is, in fact, a timeless moment – our self glimpses or tastes itself as it is, pure aware Presence, unconditioned by any of the beliefs or feelings that thought superimposes upon it.

This is a transparent or non-objective experience that does not come in the form of a thought, image, sensation or perception. Nevertheless, when the mind and body reappear, they will often seem to be pervaded by a new kind of knowing, which is intimate and familiar yet at the same time comes from an unknown direction.

The mind and the body are in fact transformed, albeit temporarily, by this transparent experience and may even be bewildered or even occasionally frightened by it. However, because the mind is not present during this transparent and timeless experience, the experience itself cannot be remembered. There is nothing objective there to remember. As a result, the mind will, in most cases, dismiss this transparent experience as insignificant or even non-existent and get back to its usual business of focusing on objects in some form or other.

However, this dissolution into our true nature leaves a residue within us that can never be completely forgotten. It often remains for decades as a sort of nostalgia or longing for something that once existed in our past, often in childhood, and for which, in quiet moments or at a time when the normal flow of our life is interrupted, we deeply long.

In fact, it did not exist in our past. It is present in our self. It *is* our self, and it is present and available now as it was then, in that first brief acquaintance.

If we ponder this new but strangely familiar experience and keep returning to it, we come to the extraordinary and profound realisation that we cannot find our self – it cannot find itself – as an object located in space. We discover that we are aware of all objects and places but that our self is not itself an object, nor does it have any actual experience of itself being located in any particular place. If we stay close to the simple, direct knowing of our being – its knowing of itself – we find that we have no knowledge of our self being located somewhere.

It is only a thought that first identifies our self, aware Presence, with the body and subsequently imagines that we are located within it. This thought is superimposed upon our true nature of aware Presence, but never actually locates it. In identifying our self as a body, thought presumes that we, aware Presence, share the qualities and therefore the limits that the body possesses.

* * *

Can we find any limit to our self, aware Presence? The mind may imagine limits, but do we actually experience any? It is our self, aware Presence, that knows or experiences whatever is known or experienced. So the question may be rephrased by asking if our self, aware Presence, has any experience of *itself* being limited.

To begin with, the imagined limits that the mind superimposes upon our self may seem so obviously true as to eclipse our actual experience. However, if we put these beliefs on one side and really explore whether or not there is any real experience of a limit to our self, this aware Presence, we realise that there is none.

Every limit that the mind suggests turns out to be some kind of an object. The mind claims that our self is a body and, having made this initial presumption, subsequently claims that it has an age, a history, a future, a nationality, a gender, a colour, a weight, a shape and a size. However, all

these characteristics are qualities of the body, not of our self. They are known by our self but do not belong to our self. They do not limit our self any more than an image limits the screen on which it appears.

If we return again and again to our self in this way, looking always for any quality that actually limits it, it becomes clear that our self has never experienced any limit within itself. Aware Presence always experiences itself as being without limits, though this experience is usually eclipsed by the beliefs that the mind superimposes upon it.

We have become so accustomed to thinking and, more importantly, to feeling that our own being shares the limits of the body that we now take it for granted. Subsequently most, if not all, of our thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships express this fundamental presumption.

The discovery of the unlimited nature of our self, like all understanding when it actually takes place, is always sudden. In fact, it is timeless because the mind is not party to our self's own experience of itself, and without the mind there is no time. However, it may not always be immediate. It may take a period of contemplative and sensitive exploration of our experience to come to this understanding.

This realisation may have dramatic and immediate effects in our life. The mind may even be quite confused when its own belief systems no longer seem convincing but have not yet been replaced with a new interpretation of experience. However, this experiential understanding may just as well go almost unnoticed for a while, in which case the mind will gradually become accustomed to our newly discovered experience of our self.

Either way, if this experiential understanding is explored and its implications allowed to permeate our lives, it will turn out to be the greatest discovery we can ever make. It is the key to resolving the dilemma that exists at the core of nearly everybody's life: the almost constant search for peace, happiness and love.

THE FORGETTING OF OUR ESSENTIAL BEING

Having overlooked the simple knowing of our own being as it is and imagined it instead to be located in and as a body and mind, we have come to believe that our self, aware Presence, shares the qualities of thoughts, feelings, images and sensations.

We have forgotten that we are the one that is *aware* of thoughts, feelings, images and sensations and instead believe and, more importantly, feel that we actually *are* those thoughts, feelings, images and sensations.

If a feeling of sadness appears, we feel that *I* am sad. If we look at our face in the mirror and see that it has aged, we think that *I* am aging. If a thought tells us that we are forty years old, we think that *I* am forty years old. If an agitated thought appears, we feel that *I* am agitated. If a sensation of hunger appears, we feel that *I* am hungry. If we got poor grades at school, we feel that *I* failed; if the grades were good, that *I* succeeded. If there are no friends around, we feel that *I* am lonely. If the body is sick or dying, we feel that *I* am sick or dying. If there is resistance to the current situation and a desire to change it for a better one, we feel that *I* am unhappy. We could go on almost indefinitely.

Suffice it to say that our understanding of our self is deeply conditioned by our beliefs and feelings. We have invested our being with the limited qualities of the body and mind. Just as the screen seems to be overtaken by the qualities of the film that appears on it, so our essential being seems to be overtaken by the qualities of the body and mind.

For instance, the screen seems to become blue when the sky appears in the film, but blueness never becomes an essential quality of the screen; it just seems to colour it temporarily. Our being has become coloured by the

qualities of the mind and body in the same way, to such an extent that it seems to have actually *become* those qualities.

The screen is in fact colourless, and it is precisely this colourlessness that enables it to assume all colours without itself ever actually becoming a colour. Likewise, our essential being is objectless, transparent, open, empty, aware Presence. It has no objective qualities that pertain to the body or mind, and it is precisely because of this that we are capable of the entire range of thoughts, feelings and perceptions without ever actually becoming a thought, feeling or perception.

All thoughts, feelings and perceptions shine primarily with the light of our essential nature, by which they are illumined or known, irrespective of their particular characteristic, just as all images shine with the light of the screen. When the film starts we forget the screen and pay attention only to the film; in fact, the screen seems to become an image. This is what happens to our essential being. It seems to have become so taken over by thoughts, feelings and images as to be indistinguishable from them.

This inadvertent mixture of our self with a collection of thoughts, feelings, images and sensations has taken root in us to such an extent, and is so encouraged by our culture and education, that it is now normal to think and, more importantly, to feel our self as a sort of collage of such thoughts, feelings, images and sensations.

We have forgotten our essential identity of pure aware being and allowed it to become mixed up with the characteristics and qualities that define the body and mind. Most people live almost constantly in this state of amnesia and their lives are a reflection of that simple forgetting.

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Who is the one that has forgotten this? Our self is always only itself, prior to and independent of any thought that may or may not be present. Awareness is not a quality that our self turns on and off. Awareness is its nature. It is always present and aware and, therefore, by definition, always aware of itself.

This self-awareness, or Awareness's knowing of itself, may be eclipsed by the appearance of a thought or feeling but it is never extinguished by it, just as the screen is never truly veiled by the appearance of an image, although it may seem to be.

The self that we seem to have become as a result of the forgetting or veiling of our essential being is an imaginary one. It is in fact a *thought*, not an entity or a self, that has caused this exclusive association of our self with an object of the body and mind.

This thought equates or identifies the characteristics of the body and mind with our essential being and collates them into what seems to become a separate, independent entity or self that resides in the body. This thought takes the Awareness that is present in and as our essential being, mixes it together with the limited qualities of the body and mind, and produces, as a result, an imaginary, limited, separate self that lives inside the body and mind.

These two, Awareness – our self – and the limited qualities of the body and mind, seem to become one entity, one self. However, this apparently separate, inside self is made only out of the thought that thinks it.

It is like mixing oil and vinegar and producing one single substance, salad dressing. However, when the salad dressing is allowed to settle, the oil and vinegar separate and we realise that they only seemed to be one homogenous substance. The investigative and contemplative exploration of our experience that we are engaged in here is the settling out of these two qualities – the qualities that are innate in our essential being and those that properly belong to the appearances of the body and mind.

Having imagined this 'I, the separate, inside self, thinking then further invests it with numerous other attributes, thereby transforming what is, in fact, just a fragile, ephemeral thought into what seems to be a dense, complex entity.

This forgetting of the true nature of our essential self is never an experience of our self; it is always only a thought. Our self – the true and only self – never forgets itself, from its own point of view, which is the only real point of view there is. It is for this reason that all the subsequent

thoughts and feelings that depend upon this primary 'I, the separate, inside self thought are only for the separate, inside self that thinking imagines us to be, and never for our real self.

Later it will be seen that all psychological suffering is born of this 'I, the separate, inside self thought and therefore all suffering is for the imaginary self, never for the true and only self that we always are. In reality, our true self is never sad, of a certain age, agitated, hungry, lonely, sick or dying. Even in the presence of such beliefs and feelings, our self is utterly free of them. Our self is present as the knower or experiencer of such qualities but is not made out of them.

At the same time, whenever such thoughts or feelings appear, they are intimately one with our self, just as the image on a screen is intimately one with the screen. In this way, our self is both the knower of all such thoughts and feelings – hence our inherent independence and freedom – and, at the same time, intimately one with them. This intimacy of experience is love. It is for this reason that all true intimacy or love is always combined with freedom.

Our essential being is never truly obscured by these thoughts and feelings, just as the screen is never truly covered up by the image. It is thus a matter of recognising the true nature of our being rather than finding it.

The exclusive mixture of our essential being with the appearances of the body or mind is the single event that dictates most of the thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships of this apparent entity. However, it is not an event that happened long ago and is now cast in stone. It is re-enacted moment by moment and can be dropped at any moment, simply by recognising who we really are.

OUR SELF IS BIRTHLESS AND DEATHLESS

If we stay close to our own being's experience of itself, without referring to thought, we discover that it has no knowledge of itself being born, evolving, growing old or dying. Only an object, such as a body or a mind, could appear and disappear or be subject to birth, growth, evolution, decay and death. Our self, aware Presence, knows these changes but is not itself subject to them.

It is only thought, having exclusively associated our essential being with these appearances and changes, that has given rise to the belief and feeling that we share those qualities. This belief and feeling is so deeply ingrained, and seems to have become such an integral part of our being, that we are barely aware that it is simply a belief and feeling and take it instead to be the absolute and indisputable truth about our self. This belief and feeling then becomes the basis upon which all subsequent thoughts and feelings, and most activities and relationships, depend.

Notice, however, that *you* are aware of the current thought, the current sensation, these words, perceptions of the world, and so on. Was it not this same you that was aware of yesterday's thoughts and feelings? And was it not the same you that was aware of last year's thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions, and those of the previous year, and ten years ago, twenty, thirty? Was it not the same you that was aware of the very first sensation or perception you ever had, perhaps even in the womb?

Were these known by someone else, or were they known by you, this very you that is seeing these words? Are you the same you now that you were then, or are you a different you? If it was a different you that knew or experienced all those things then, how come this present you knows or remembers them now? When we refer to 'my first school', the 'my' that

we refer to is the very same ‘me’, the same self, to which our current thought belongs.

Thoughts, feelings, sensations, images, memories and perceptions change, but the self that knows or experiences them does not. Has our self ever registered any change in itself? And who is the one that would register such a change? That one would be our changeless self.

If we think that our self changes, that at one moment it is five years old and at another twenty-five, then the same self must have been present to know both the five-and the twenty-five-year-old. In order to legitimately claim the experience of change, we must first stand as the changeless knower of any such change.

You are the one that registers the changes of the body, mind and world but never register a change in your self. You are the ever-present, objectless, aware Presence that intimately pervades all knowing or experiencing. In fact, you are made out of pure knowing or Awareness. You, the light of knowing by which these changes are known, always remain the same, just as the screen is always the same screen and never itself undergoes any of the changes that the images appearing on it undergo.

Our self is not made out of pure knowing or Awareness like bread is made out of flour; our self simply *is* that. But who is the ‘our’ in ‘our self? It does not belong to a body or a mind. The self belongs to itself. It is impersonal. The body and mind belong to it, but it does not belong to anyone or anything. It is *the* self, not *our* self. The self of aware Presence is intimate but impersonal.

* * *

Birth is a series of sensations and perceptions experienced by you. That *you* is not a sensation or perception; it knows all sensations or perceptions. The you that experienced those first sensations and perceptions is the same you that experienced the five-and the twenty-five-year-old, and is the very same you that is aware of these words now.

If our self, aware Presence, were not present at the birth of the body, we would not be able to claim that it was born. The self that experienced the

birth of the body was not born with it. It was 'already' present when the body appeared and hence we are able to say that the body appeared. It is only because thought imagines that our self, aware Presence, is the body that we think and subsequently feel that we were born when it was born.

For the same reason we believe that we will die when the body dies. This belief is responsible for the fear of disappearance that lies at the heart of the separate, inside self that thinking imagines us to be. It is the first emotion to arise as a result of thought's exclusive association of our self with the body and is the dominating emotion that rules, more or less consciously, the life of the imaginary separate entity.

Is it our experience that our essential self was born when the body was born? Were we not aware of the sensations and perceptions that accompanied this birth? Did we ever have the experience of our essential self, aware Presence, being inside our mother's womb, or were we *aware* of all the sensations of the unborn infant in the womb?

Are we, aware Presence, sitting in a room now, or are sensations and perceptions appearing to our self? And is that self not the very same self that was aware of the appearance of the body, that is aware of its disappearance in sleep every night and will be aware of its final disappearance at death, and is now aware of these words?

Have we changed and grown old as the body changes and grows old? Was it not our self, this very self that is present now, that was aware of the infant, the child, the teenager and the adult in all their forms and throughout all their changes?

When the body and mind disappear during sleep, does our self disappear? Who is present to witness such a disappearance? That one must be present and aware. Our self has no experience of its own disappearance. Who would be present to witness and claim such a disappearance? Only our self!

And if we claim that our self dies when the body dies, who is the one that knows or experiences that death? Is it not our self alone that could make such a claim? If the death of our self is a real experience and not simply a belief, then *we* must be there to know it and remain afterwards to claim

that it happened. The experience of death proves that we do not die, just as the experience of change establishes our self as its changeless knower. If there is no *experience* of the death of our essential being, why presume that it ever takes place?

See clearly that we have no knowledge of our self ever having been born, changing, evolving, growing up or growing old, and that we can never have the experience of death. Nor have we, aware Presence, ever become sad, angry, anxious, depressed, in need, agitated or jealous. At the same time, we are intimately one with all such feelings when they are present. Although we are the substance of all such feelings, just as the screen is the substance of all images, we are inherently free of them. Unhappiness is made out of our self, but our self is never unhappy.

The belief that we were born, that we change, evolve, grow old and die is simply a belief to which the vast majority of humanity subscribe without realising that they are doing so. It is the religion of our culture.

We normally think that to be born, change, evolve, grow old and die is our experience and that to consider our self without birth or death is some sort of extraordinary experience, usually requiring religious belief. However, the opposite is in fact true: we have no knowledge or experience of the birth, change, evolution or death of our essential self and yet we subscribe to what is, in fact, simply a belief in our own mortality.

Of course, the body and the mind appear and disappear; as such, they are born and die. It is only because of thought's inadvertent and exclusive identification of our essential self with these – that is, with thoughts, feelings, images, memories, sensations and perceptions – that we think and, more importantly, feel that when *they* go *I* will go.

The belief in our own mortality is the fundamental presumption upon which most other beliefs and feelings, and subsequently our activities and relationships, are based, and it turns out to be the source of all psychological suffering. The fear of disappearance or death is the primary emotion of the imaginary entity created by the exclusive association of our self with the body or mind. Most feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety,

depression, lack, psychological need, agitation, jealousy and so on are simply variations of this essential fear of disappearance or death.

It is for this reason that when the true nature of our essential being becomes clear, all these feelings are gradually cleared up. The belief upon which they depended has been seen through.

THE ETERNAL AND INFINITE NATURE OF OUR BEING

The experiential understanding that our self, aware Presence, is without limits or location is not a special kind of knowledge that needs training or education. It is obvious, intimate and well known to everyone, prior to anything that the mind may or may not know. It is an experiential knowledge that is independent of how intelligent or otherwise the mind may be, or of how old or young, well or sick the body may be.

In fact, before we know anything else – before our self seems to know anything other than itself, such as a mind, body or world – we know our own being, and no subsequent knowledge of the mind can bring us closer to this experiential knowing, or indeed further away from it.

It is thought, which is later substantiated at the level of the body with feelings, that *seems* to veil this experiential understanding or to take us away from it. Most of us have invested thought with such a degree of importance and truth that this simple knowing of our being is deemed insignificant.

However, see clearly that without reference to thought or memory, there is no knowledge of our self having a limit, contour, shape, border, dimension, colour, age, history, future, past, destiny, weight, nationality or gender. Only an object, such as a thought, feeling, image, sensation, memory or perception, could have such attributes. You, aware Presence, are *aware* of these qualities but do not yourself *possess* such qualities.

Only an objective quality could limit anything, and our self, being without such qualities, is inherently without any such limit. For this reason our self is said to be infinite. Our culture, which has lost touch with this deeper understanding of our true identity, tends to think that infinite means indefinitely extended in space, whereas in fact it means without any finite,

observable qualities or dimensions, and therefore not located within three dimensions of space.

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Likewise, notice that our self is always present – not always present in time, but ever-present *now*. Without reference to thought we have no knowledge of time.

Time is the duration between two events, and although we may imagine two events, we never actually experience them simultaneously. For instance, when breakfast this morning is present, breakfast yesterday morning is not. The twenty-four hours that separate these two events are made out of thought, not out of experience.

In the intimacy of our own being, which is prior to thought, there is no time. In fact, our self is not *prior* to thought; without thought, there is no time present during which our self could exist. Even *with* thought there is no time present, but in this case at least the *illusion* of time is present.

To exist, from the Latin *ex-*, meaning ‘from’ or ‘out of’ and *sistere*, ‘to stand’, means to ‘stand out from’. For something to exist in time, time must first be present for that thing to exist in, like the space of a room must first be present, relatively speaking, for objects to appear in it.

However, we have no experience of anything prior to our self. Something would have to be present to have such an experience, and that something would have to be both present and aware – it would be our self. In our actual experience there is nothing prior to our self.

Our self is ever-present now, and we do not experience a succession of nows. This present now is the only now there is. The now in which the body was born is the very same now in which these words are appearing. It is the only now there ever truly is.

For this reason our own being is said to be eternal. This doesn’t mean that we last forever in time, but that we are ever-present now. There is simply no time ever actually present in our experience in which our self could exist other than this present now.

Our self did not appear at a particular time and will not disappear at a particular time. There is no time present in our actual experience in which something could appear or disappear. There is just this ever-present now, and this now is not a moment in time; it is timeless Awareness, our true nature.

Our culture has lost this knowledge and therefore equates the eternal with the everlasting. However, these two belong to completely different realms, one real and one imaginary. 'Everlasting' is related to time and denotes something that supposedly lasts forever. 'Eternal' is related to the timeless and denotes that which is ever-present now. It is not about life everlasting. It is about eternal life.

Ultimately no word can accurately describe our self, because words can only describe objective qualities. However, if words truly come from the experiential understanding of our essential nature they somehow have the power within them to indicate and evoke it.

In the end, all words should be forgotten, leaving only the experience to which they refer, the eternally present and unlimited nature of our essential being.

PRESENCE IS SELF-LUMINOUS

Every object of the mind, body and world is known or experienced by our self. Without our self, aware Presence, nothing would be known or experienced. All experience is made knowable or illumined by our self.

Just as, relatively speaking, all objects are rendered visible by the light of the sun, in reality all experience is rendered knowable by the light of our self. Our self illumines all experience with the light of knowing. This knowing is inherent within and inseparable from our self. It *is* our self.

All experience is inseparable from the knowing of it, that is, inseparable from the light of our self. All that is known or experienced shines with the light of our self, just as all objects shine with the light of the sun. Before any experience tells us of its objective qualities, it first announces the light of Presence by which it is known. That light is shining in all experience just as the sun's light shines in all objects.

It is the light of our self that makes all apparent things knowable, but what is it that makes our self knowable? With what light is the certainty of our own being known?

The body, mind and world are known by the light of our self, but our self is not known by any light other than its own. It is our experience that the light by which our self knows itself is its *own* light. Our own being shines with its own light. It is not known by anything other than itself. It knows itself by itself, through itself alone. It does not require a body or a mind to be known. It is self-knowing, self-luminous and self-evident.

In reality, we don't really know or experience objects, as such; we just know our knowing or experiencing of them. The experience of knowing is all we know of objects or the world, and the knowing by which we know the apparent objects or world comes from our self. It *is* our self. It is the light of our own self, aware Presence, that shines in the knowing or experiencing of any object.

When we look at an apparent object we seem to see an object, but actually all that is seen is the reflected light of our own aware Presence which illumines or knows it. All apparent objects shine with the reflected light of our own being.

In fact, we don't know objects; we just know knowing. And what is it that knows knowing? Knowing is not known by something outside or other than itself. Knowing is known by knowing. All that is experienced in the experience of an object, other or world is knowing.

This knowing *is* our self, aware Presence. All that is ever experienced is our self knowing itself, Awareness aware of Awareness.

This experience of Awareness knowing itself admits of no otherness, distance or separation. At the same time it is made out of the pure intimacy of our own being. This utter intimacy and lack of otherness is the experience of love. Everything, all seeming things, are made out of love alone.

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If we forget about the light of our own being we think that we see a physical object, but as soon as we remember our self – as soon as our self is no longer seemingly veiled by the 'I, the separate, inside self thought – we realise that it is only a modulation of the light of our being that is really known, that knows its own ever-present self, just as in trees, hills and mountains we see only the modulated light of the sun.

It is only an act of thinking that makes it seem that something other than the light of our being is known, just as it is only an act of thinking that makes it seem that something other than the sun's light, such as a tree, a hill or a mountain, is seen. Likewise, it is only an act of thinking that

makes it seem as if our self is a body and mind, whereas in fact, the body and mind are modulations of the light of knowing, which is our own aware Presence.

Normally we think that the mind knows objects. However, the mind *is known*; it does not *know*. The mind seems to know objects in the same way that the moon seems to illumine objects on a dark night. In fact, the light with which the moon illumines objects at night is the reflected light of the sun. It seems as if the mind knows objects, but the light or the knowing with which the mind seems to know something comes from our own aware being.

When we look at an object in nature, such as a tree, a hill or a mountain, all we really see, relatively speaking, is a modulation of the sun's light. If we forget about the presence of the sun we seem to see objects, but as soon as we remember the sun we realise that we really only see a modulation of its light.

Likewise, in reality, all we really know is knowing, and that knowing *is* our self. When we forget the presence of our self or, rather, when it is apparently veiled or obscured by the 'I, the separate, inside self thought, separate objects, others and the world seem to acquire an independent existence of their own; they seem to become real in their own right. But as soon as our true self is remembered, all 'objectness' and otherness collapse and all experience is revealed to be only the light of aware Presence shining by itself, self-knowing, self-evident, self-luminous.

We cannot see the sun at night and yet all we see is its light, reflected first by the moon and then by objects. Thus all objects at night tell us first and foremost about the sun. They announce the presence of the sun. Likewise, we cannot 'see' our own being and yet all we ever know, in all experience, is the light of our self. It knows only itself.

All experience first and foremost announces the presence of Awareness, the light of our own being. All other knowledge is only relative knowledge. The knowing of our own being, its knowing of itself, is the only absolutely true knowledge that we know. That is all that is ever truly known.

All objects celebrate the sun. All experience celebrates our self, aware Presence.

As the Sufis say, ‘Wherever the eye falls, there is the face of God.’

THE ONLY SELF THERE IS

Our own being is like an open, empty, transparent Presence.

Attention is always towards an object – a thought, feeling, sensation or perception. In our self there is nothing objective towards which we could direct our attention. Divested of all directions, attention stands revealed as the aware Presence that is our self.

We may at first try to turn our attention towards our self, but anything we find would only be another object, however subtle. It is enough to cease investing our attention, and therefore our identity, in any kind of object, that is, in thoughts, feelings, sensations or perceptions.

It is not necessary to get rid of them, only to cease investing our attention and, above all, our identity in them. At some point it becomes obvious that our essential nature is not a thought, feeling, sensation or perception. There is, as it were, a falling back into our self.

At the same time it becomes clear that no thought, feeling, sensation or perception can ever compel us to be something other than what we already are, and for this reason all agenda with appearances ceases, unless such an agenda is required as a practical response to the current situation.

In relaxing our involvement with thoughts, feelings, sensations or perceptions we are, without knowing it at first, allowing their hold over us to diminish. We are allowing our being to become disentangled from the matrix of thoughts, feelings, sensations or perceptions with which thinking has embroiled it and, as a result, to stand revealed as it always naturally is.

There are not two selves, a separate one and a real one. The real self is always the only self there is, although it has become so entangled with thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions as to seem as if it were

another kind of self – one that is limited, separate, located and inside. There is no such limited self. Our true self of Awareness never becomes a separate self, any more than a screen becomes a landscape when the film begins. In ceasing to invest attention and identity in the objects of the body and mind, our being is gradually divested of these accretions.

Whatever we give our attention to flourishes. Whatever we give our attention to becomes our reality. In giving attention to our self of aware Presence, attention is relieved of its direction, focus or tension and stands revealed as Presence itself.

The one that is looked for stands revealed as the one that is looking.

* * *

This falling back into our self relieves the body and mind of many of the contractions and tensions that were present as a result of the ‘I, the separate, inside self thought. This relaxation is not itself the experience of our self; it is an aftereffect at the level of the body and mind.

Under normal circumstances, the body and mind exist in a state of tension and contraction that is the expression of the ‘I, the separate, inside self thought. However, we have become so accustomed to this state of contraction that it is no longer registered as such. It just seems normal. Like someone whose fists have been clenched in defence for so long that they are no longer aware of it and thus feel perfectly relaxed, so our body and mind have been permeated by the tensions that are generated by the ‘I, the separate, inside self thought and yet we are not aware of it.

With this falling back into our self, there is a release which sends waves of relaxation through the body and mind, dissolving these tensions and contractions in their wake and giving rise to a lighter, more expanded disposition. This may be very strong in some cases, provoking unusual bodily movements, tears or laughter; in others it may be milder. In either case, as this lighter, more expanded disposition becomes the norm, it will cease to be felt as such. It only felt unusual in contrast to the habitual state of tension and contraction. Now it has just become our normal state.

As a result of this disentanglement, our self returns to its natural condition of open, empty, transparent Presence, and the peace and happiness that are inherent within it begin to percolate through all appearances of the body, mind and world. The body and mind begin to express these qualities of openness, emptiness and transparency, and even the world begins to express the friendliness that is a reflection of the intimacy of our true self

However, although there is an end to the belief in and feeling of being a separate, inside self, there is no end to the implications that this realisation has on the appearances of the body, mind and world. It is a continuous and never-ending journey of revelation.

THE NATURE OF PEACE, HAPPINESS AND LOVE

OUR ESSENTIAL BEING IS PEACE ITSELF

Our essential self is the ever-present being or aware Presence that knows or experiences our thoughts, feelings, images, memories, sensations and perceptions but is not itself made out of thoughts, feelings, sensations and so on. For this reason it could be described as being empty, but it is only empty relative to the existence of objects. In reality, it is full of Presence and Awareness.

Our being could be likened to an open, empty space, such as the space of the room in which your body is presently sitting. Such a space offers no resistance to the objects or activities that appear in it. In fact, the space has no mechanism within it with which it *could* resist or deny any appearance. Out of what could such a resistance be made? It would have to be made out of an object, not out of empty space.

The space of the room seems to be defined and limited by the walls that surround it, but before the walls were erected the space of the room was exactly as it is now, and after they are dismantled it will remain just the same. The apparent shape and qualities of the space are superimposed upon it by the quality of the walls, furniture and activities that take place within it, but at no time does the space ever actually take on these qualities; it just seems to.

Our being is like that. It seems to have taken on the qualities of the body and mind, but in reality it has not. Before the appearance of the body and the mind our self 'was' exactly as it is now and as it 'will be' when the body and mind die. The 'was' and the 'will be' are this very now, the only now there is.

Our self is like an open, empty space, but a knowing or aware space that, like the space of the room, is inherently free of resistance. In fact, our self doesn't know the meaning of the word 'resistance'. It is a wide-open 'Yes' to all appearances. Like the empty space of the room, our self is inherently free from any of the objects or activities that appear within it – thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions – and yet, at the same time, allows them all without preference or discrimination.

Thoughts, sensations and perceptions may be agitated or calm, but we, the aware Presence that knows or experiences them, do not share their qualities. We are the empty, aware space that cannot be agitated by any appearance of the mind, body or world, just as the space of the room cannot be agitated by anything that may or may not take place within it.

Our self witnesses all agitation but cannot itself be agitated. This absence of resistance or agitation is known simply as the experience of peace. Our self is inherently peaceful. Our inherent peace does not depend upon the nature or condition of appearances. Peace is not a quality or attribute *of out* self. It *is* our self. It can never be parted from our self, just as the inherently peaceful quality of space cannot be parted from it. We *are* peace itself.

Peaceful states of the mind, body and world may come and go – and it is in the nature of the mind, body and world that cycles of calm and agitation follow one another – but our self is the ever-present and inherently peaceful Presence which knows and allows all such states, and is intimately one with them, but is never in the least affected by any of them. Our self, like space, is undisturbable.

This peace is ever-present, sitting quietly behind and within every thought, feeling, sensation or perception, open and available at every moment, simply waiting to be recognised. Whenever we long for peace, it is in fact the peace of our true nature that we are longing for, although sometimes we mistake the peace of our true nature for a peaceful state of the mind, body or world. 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 put an end to the

longing that initiates and sustains so many of our activities and relationships.

The longing for peace is itself the peace of our true nature, thinly veiled by the 'I, the separate, inside self thought and feeling. When this longing is divested of time, that is, divested of the past and future into which it projects an imaginary self, it stands revealed as the peace that is ever-present within our own being, quietly shining at the heart of all experience, simply waiting to be recognised.

To mistake the peace of our true nature for a peaceful state of the mind or body simply postpones the realisation of the peace that is inherent in the simple knowing of our own being as it truly is. And yet, when we have accessed the peace that is ever-present in our self under all circumstances, the body, mind and world are profoundly affected and, in time, become increasingly permeated by it. They begin to shine with the peace of our true nature.

HAPPINESS IS INHERENT IN OUR BEING

It is our self that knows or experiences the sense of lack or dissatisfaction – the subtle or not-so-subtle sense of unease or the desire to change the current situation – that characterises much of our thinking, feeling and acting. This sense of lack is known as unhappiness or suffering. It may be acute or just a vague sense of dissatisfaction that subtly pervades our experience and expresses itself as an almost constant urge to replace the current situation with a better alternative in the future.

We are aware of the thoughts that seek to change the current situation for one we deem more desirable, but we are not those thoughts, nor the feelings that they seek to avoid. The sense of lack is for thought, not for our self.

Happiness is not a state of the mind or body, although it is often mistaken for such. Of course, pleasant experiences of the mind and body come and go, but happiness itself has nothing to do with pleasant experiences. Nor is happiness a quality that we have or an experience that comes and goes. It is the innate lack of resistance or dissatisfaction that is the natural state of our self. It is not something that can be separated from our self. It is what we *are*.

Without the arising of thought, our true self of aware Presence knows no resistance to the current situation. It is utterly, intimately one with it. Aware Presence says ‘Yes’ to all appearances. The fact that anything is appearing means that Presence has already said ‘Yes’ to it. That ‘Yes’ is happiness. It knows no resistance or seeking, no desire to change the current situation for a better one.

This happiness is present under all circumstances. It is the natural condition of all experience prior to the arising of the resisting/seeking

thought and even during its appearance, although seemingly veiled by it. Happiness, like peace, is inherent in our self. It *is* our self.

Just as our self is ever-present, quietly observing all the changing appearances of the mind, body and world, and yet intimately one with them, so the happiness that is inherent in our self is also ever-present. Although it is sometimes seemingly veiled, this happiness rests at the heart of all experience, waiting to be recognised.

The reason we so often fail to notice it is that we turn away from the current experience and try to replace it with a better one. We seek happiness in a future object or situation, whereas it is, in fact, sitting quietly at the heart of all experience now, no matter what the particular characteristics of that experience. It is only our turning away, our rejection of the current situation, that makes it seem as if happiness is not present now and, therefore, to be found in the future.

The longing for happiness that characterises most of our activities is only a longing to taste the happiness that is inherent and ever-present in our true nature and that has been temporarily eclipsed by our rejection of the current situation, our rejection of *this, now*.

This perpetual longing for happiness – which can, by definition, never be fulfilled because it denies the very happiness that is present in our own being now – condemns us to an endless search in the future and thus perpetuates unhappiness. It is for this reason that Henry Thoreau said, ‘Most men lead lives of quiet desperation.’

LOVE IS THE NATURAL CONDITION OF ALL EXPERIENCE

Returning to the metaphor of the space of the room, see that all the objects in the room are at an equal distance from the space in which they appear. Everything – the table, chairs, carpet, curtains, windows, books, your body – is equally close to the space. The space is ‘touching’ them all. It is no closer to one object than another.

A better analogy would be the relationship between a screen and the image that appears on it. The image appears to be something other than the screen. The name and the form of the image – for instance, a tree or car – seem to define it as something that is other than and separate from the screen. However, we only have to reach out our hand and touch the apparent image to discover that it is only screen.

Our being is like that with respect to appearances. Thoughts, feelings, images, memories, sensations and perceptions are all known by our self. Everything appears to our self, aware Presence, and if we look closely we never find any distance or separation between our self and any appearance, just as there is never any distance or separation between the image and the screen. The daffodil in the foreground is no closer to the screen than the mountains in the background. Our self is like that with respect to all appearances. It is intimately one with them, ‘touching’ them equally.

Every experience is illumined or known by our self, and that knowing is intimately connected to whatever is known – they cannot be separated. In fact, we have no knowledge of an object apart from our knowing of it. We cannot therefore say that we know an object, as such, but rather that we know only our knowing of it. So there is no ‘it’, no ‘object’ – there is just knowing. And what is knowing made of? Our self!

What happens to our experience of the moon or a bodily sensation if our self, aware Presence, is withdrawn from it? The experience cannot stand. The moon or the sensation vanishes from experience. Both the moon and the sensation shine equally with the light of our knowing Presence. One is not closer to knowing or experiencing than another.

Thinking may conceive of one as far and the other as close, but in our actual experience, both experiences are equally close to our self. *All* experience is intimately close to our self, closer than close. There is only our self, only knowingness.

As we explore our experience more deeply we find that the line between our self that *knows* all experience and the objects of the mind, body and world that are *known* gradually, or abruptly in some cases, fades. It either explodes in a moment of clear seeing or dissolves in time.

This experience of the absence of distinction, separation or otherness between our self and whatever is experienced is known as love. Love is normally conceived as the quality of intimacy that characterises a small handful of relationships, connecting one person to another, whereas it is, in fact, the natural condition of *all* relationship, of *all* experience. Love is not selective; only thinking is.

Love is simply the felt understanding that our experience is not made up of two essential entities – a separate, inside self and a separate, outside object, other or world. Love is the collapse or dissolution of this apparent duality, or rather it is the felt understanding that the duality never existed in the first place.

This division of experience into two apparent parts was only superimposed by thinking upon the ever-present and essential nature of experience. When experience is relieved of this division it is known as love. It is, in fact, all that is ever known.

* * *

The discovery that peace, happiness and love are ever-present within our own being and completely available at every moment of experience, under all conditions, is the single most important discovery that one can make.

Normally we consider our self to be a limited and separate entity, a body and a mind, born into a pre-existing world, moving along in time, negotiating circumstances in an attempt to secure the peace, happiness and love for which we long, continuously growing older and destined eventually for death.

However, our essential nature is pure being itself – aware Presence – that neither resides in nor is dependent upon the body and mind. It doesn't come or go; it was not born and does not die; it is eternally present now, and peace, happiness and love are its very nature.

In peace and happiness we know our self as utterly independent of all appearances of the body, mind and world. That is our innate freedom. In love we know our self as intimately one with all such appearances. Freedom *from* appearances; love *within* appearances.

And who is it that has made this discovery about our self? It has not been made by someone other than our self. This discovery comes from our own intimate experience of our self, its intimate knowing of itself. The simple knowing of our own being as it is, is a self-evident truth that requires no confirmation from any other source. Of course, it is thought that is formulating this discovery, but the discovery itself does not come from thought.

The implications of this discovery are simple yet profound. It means that in each one of us, the peace, happiness and love that *is* our essential nature is ever-present and always available. What we truly long for in life is available at every moment, under all conditions, in the simple knowing of our being as it truly is.

If we look closely and honestly at the vast majority of our thoughts and activities we find that they are orientated towards securing peace, happiness and love through the manipulation of circumstances or the acquisition of objects and relationships in the future. This projection of peace, happiness and love into an imaginary future veils the peace, happiness and love that lie at the heart of all experience.

The imaginary, inside self is created by this veiling of peace, happiness and love and, once created or imagined, is condemned to an endless

search, in a non-existent future, for something that cannot, by definition, be found there.

This is the tragedy and comedy of the human situation.

THE ETERNAL NOW

All experience takes place now. 'Now' is normally conceived of as a fraction of time sandwiched between the two endless expanses of the past and future. The now is considered to be a moment of minute duration – hence the phrase, 'the present moment' – moving along a line of time. The now is undoubtedly known or experienced. But what about time?

Time is the duration between two events. For instance, there is apparently a duration of twenty-four hours between breakfast this morning and breakfast tomorrow morning. But what is our actual experience of this duration? What is our experience of breakfast this morning at this moment?

It is only a thought or an image. And breakfast tomorrow morning is likewise only a thought or an image. All thoughts and images take place now, never in a past or future. Right now we have no *actual* experience of breakfast this morning or breakfast tomorrow morning. We experience thoughts or images of breakfast, but these take place now.

The time at which breakfast this morning is believed to have taken place and the time at which it is believed breakfast tomorrow morning will take place are both imagined. They are never experienced. When the actual experience of breakfast takes place, it is now, and when the thought about breakfast takes place it is also now.

We truly only know now; we never actually know a past or future. If we don't actually know a past or future, how can we know time? We cannot! And if we do not know time, how do we know that the now in which this current experience is taking place is not the same now in which all experience takes place? How do we know that the now in which our very

first experience as a newborn infant took place is not this very now in which these words are appearing?

It is only a thought that tells us that *this* now is different from *that* now. And that thought is arising now. We simply cannot escape the now. Nor is there any time present in which another now could exist.

* * *

Try to step out of the now. Try to take a step out of the now into the past by one second. Can you do it? Try to step one minute into the future. Where do you go? Where *could* you go?

If we stay close to our experience we find that this now is the only now there ever is. It is eternally now. This now is not going anywhere in time. There is no time present in which it could travel forwards or backwards. The now is not a moment in time. It has nothing to do with time. It is not made out of time-stuff.

What is the now made of? The now is ever-present, and so it can only be made out of something that is also ever-present. What in our experience is ever-present? The mind, the body, the world? No, only our self! The now *is* our self. We are not present *in* the now – we *are* the now. The now is not a container that holds our self along with everything else. It *is* our self, eternal Presence.

What motive is there for our self to avoid the now – not our self, a body or a mind, but our self, aware Presence? Prior to thought there is no motive in our self. Even during a motivating thought, the motive is only that thought. All motives are for thought, never for our self.

Thought alone believes that a motivating thought is a motive for our self, but the self that has a motive is an imagined self. That imagined self doesn't *have* a motive; it *is* a motive – a movement of resistance or seeking, away from the now into an imaginary past or future.

The true and only self is inherently free of any motive, plan or purpose. It is that for and out of which all motives, plans and purposes are ultimately

made. We are pure peace and happiness, which know no resistance to the now, nor any desire to replace it.

It takes thought to resist the now and seek to replace it with a better situation of its own imagining. Prior to that thought there is no motive to leave the now, to seek peace, happiness, love or enlightenment in the future. So, in order to seek peace, happiness or love in the future we must first forget the true nature of our self in the now, that is, we must forget that these qualities are present here and now in our self.

The search for happiness, which is another name for unhappiness, is simply the forgetting of our self.

* * *

Now, what is it that could forget the presence of our self? Obviously not our self, because our self cannot 'not know' itself. It *is* the knowing of itself. What other kind of self is there that could forget the eternal nature of peace and happiness which *is* our true self, aware Presence? Only an imaginary one. And that is exactly what the separate self is.

The imaginary self is made out of the thought that imagines it. It is an imaginary, thought-made self which imagines that peace and happiness are not present now, in the current circumstance. If peace and happiness are not present now, where might they be found? Only in the 'not now'. Time is the name we give to the imaginary place that is 'not now'.

In fact, time is the theatre of the separate, inside self, a sort of playground where the resistance and seeking that are inherent in the imaginary separate self are given meaning and acted out. The separate self cannot afford to understand that time is not real, because if it did there would be nowhere for it to go and pursue its dreams.

When it is truly seen that this now is the only now there is, this resistance and seeking activity of the separate self collapses. With the collapse of resistance and seeking, the separate self itself collapses, for the separate self is not an entity that seeks but rather the very activity of seeking.

If we understand experientially that this now is the only now there is, and that all the peace, happiness and love that could ever be are present right here and now, in this current situation, what would become of our search? What would be the motive to seek enlightenment? And who would be seeking it?

Not our self, aware Presence, for without thought there is no mechanism within our self with which to reject the current situation and seek to replace it. Only an imaginary self would seek such a thing, in an imaginary future.

* * *

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.

As a result, the resistance and seeking that were enshrined in our thoughts, feelings, gestures, postures, behaviours, activities and relationships begin to unwind. This unwinding may be accompanied by the release of tensions and contractions in the body and mind, which may result in pleasant experiences, but these inevitably come and go. However, the peace itself does not come and go.

In most cases this re-orchestration of the body and mind takes place gradually, but occasionally the change is dramatic. As a result of such a dramatic change the body and mind may become disorientated and the loss of the familiar structures in which we invest our identity may result in fear and even panic. At this point the desire to return to the old habits of thinking and feeling as a source of security may be strong and, if succumbed to, will allow the imaginary self to assert itself again.

However, if we have the courage and the love to remain in the openness and unfamiliarity of this new landscape, the fear will subside, leaving us in our true nature of peace and happiness. In time, the residues of the separate self are gradually washed out of the body and the mind, not

through any effort or discipline but simply because they are no longer being fed and reinforced by the belief in the reality of such a self.

Eventually, the whole structure of the body/mind returns to its natural state of openness and ease. It no longer serves the insatiable demands of the imaginary inside self and no longer makes impossible demands on an imaginary outside world or other.

Such a body/mind is free and spontaneous, responding to the requirements of the moment and then returning to its natural state. The moment is met on its own terms. Thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships no longer leave traces in the body and mind, and as a result they become open, spacious, transparent and loving.

If some knowledge from the past is required, it is made available. Whatever is needed in each moment is provided, no more, no less. For instance, ideas that contain the past and future may be provisionally adopted if required by the situation, but they are never mistaken for reality.

Previously, we had to make an effort to think about matters such as these because of the depth of conditioning to which the body and mind had previously been subjected. But now that they have been reconditioned by the qualities of peace and happiness that are inherent in our self, it sometimes seems that an effort is required to think along the old lines.

For instance, when a friend asks us how long our flight took, we may be puzzled for a moment. The journey didn't take time. It is now all the way. 'Nine hours', we reply with a smile. The 'nine hours' were for the mind; the smile was for the friend.

* * *

Enlightenment could be defined as the absence of resistance to what is, the total intimacy with whatever is taking place without any desire to reject or replace it; so intimate that there is no room for a self to separate itself out from the whole, to stand apart and look at the situation from the outside, to judge it as worthy or not worthy, good or bad, right or wrong, desirable or undesirable; so intimate that there is no room, nor any time, in which a

separate self could take refuge inside the body, so that it finds itself without boundaries or borders, pervading the whole field of experience; so intimate that there is no 'me' on the inside and no object or other on the outside, but only seamless, intimate experiencing; so intimate that there is no room for a 'self and an 'other', a 'me' and a you', a 'this' and a 'that', a 'now' and a 'then'; so utterly now and here that there is no time for time and no place for distance or space.

* * *

We cannot, nor need we, practise being our self. We are already aware Presence, intimately one with all experience. In fact, we can only practise *not* being our self! And this is exactly what we do. However, the 'we' that does this is a non-existent 'me' made only of thoughts and feelings.

For decades we have been practising being a separate, inside self, rehearsing its lines and roles, until it has become second nature to think, feel, act and relate on behalf of such an entity. However, this entity is entirely the product of imagination. It is thought alone that does all this.

Our relationship to all appearances of the body, mind and world is the same as the relationship between an image and the screen. In other words, there is no relationship. There are not two things there in the first place – an image and a screen – to be related to one another, however intimately. There is only the screen at all times. Houses, cars, people, buildings, sky, trees, animals and so on are all simply names we give to the screen when we forget that it is only a screen. But even when we forget, there is still only the screen.

We are like that in relation to all appearances of the body, mind and world. All we know is experience. In fact, we do not know a body, mind or world, as such; we just know experiencing. And where does experiencing take place? At a distance from our self? Is experiencing made out of something other than our self? How much distance is there between our self and the experience of the moon? Is it millions of miles away or is the experience of the moon – which is all we know of the moon – intimate, close, one with our self?

In fact, we do not *know* experiencing. There is no entity apart from experiencing that *knows* it. There is no separate subject that stands back from experience and knows it from a distance. Experience is far more intimate than that. Experience *is* the knowing of itself. It is not known by anything other than itself. There are not two parts to experience – one that knows and one that is known. There is just pure experiencing. ‘I’, aware Presence and experience are one and the same.

* * *

This is not about maintaining an attitude of the mind. It is about seeing clearly what is already the case, irrespective of what the mind says about it. See clearly that all problems are for thinking, not for our self. Our self – the one that is aware of all situations, or the one in which all situations appear – is not *in* the situation. The situation is in our self. For that one there is never a problem, just as there is never a problem for the space of a room in which activities are taking place. The space is inherently free of the activities and their outcome.

Nor is there ever a problem in the situation itself. Problems are always for the separate, inside self that thinking has imagined. Thinking has divided experience into two parts – a ‘me’ part and a ‘not me’ part – and the problem is always for the imaginary ‘me’ part. In the absence of this imaginary division of experience into two parts, there is the intimacy of experiencing: seeing, hearing, touching, thinking, feeling and so on.

Whatever is required of one particular body/mind by the totality of the situation will spontaneously appear as more thoughts, activities, sensations and so on, and if such is the case, we will find our body and mind engaged in the situation or not. In neither case is there ever a separate, inside self experiencing or orchestrating the activity.

In fact, for our self, there is not really even any activity; there is just thinking, feeling, sensing, perceiving in the now. These are not going anywhere. They are not appearing for any particular reason, they are not destined for any particular outcome and they leave no psychological trace

behind. All reasons, destinies, purposes, plans and outcomes are for the thought-made self, not for the true and only self.

The ultimate purpose of the body/mind's activity is to find happiness or, if we are spiritual seekers, to find enlightenment, which is the same thing. But our self is *already* that for which the mind is in search. Happiness, which is the simple knowing of our own being as it is, is not dependent on the conditions of the body, mind or world. It is our ever-present nature. It lies shining quietly in the background of all experience, and when it is recognised it overflows into the foreground, pervading experience with its qualities.

That is freedom, not a freedom that is aloof or removed from experience, not a freedom that is an intellectual refuge, but one that is present at the heart of all experience.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SEPARATE SELF

THE ESSENTIAL FORM OF THE SEPARATE SELF

The essential form of the separate self is a thought that imagines that our self, aware Presence, does not pervade all experience intimately and equally but rather just pervades one little part of it, this cluster of thoughts and feelings here called ‘me, the body/mind’.

It is like imagining that the screen does not pervade all the documents and images that are open on it but just pervades one of them. In fact, even that is not quite true because the documents and images are not pervaded by the screen. They have no existence apart from the screen. There is no such thing as a document or image with its own independent existence; there is really only the screen. ‘Document’ and ‘image’ are just the names that are given to the screen and the forms that it appears to assume.

From the point of view of the screen itself there is no real, independent document or image, as such. There is just itself. Documents and images are only considered real in their own right when their reality – the screen – has been overlooked. In other words, documents and images are only considered real from the imaginary point of view of a document or image.

As soon as the screen is forgotten, the documents and images seem to assume their own independent reality. They seem to become real, separate, independent objects, made out of something other than the screen, such as words, colours, shapes, objects and so on. However, from the real and only point of view of the screen, there is only the screen. In reality, there are not two things – one, the screen, and two, the document or image. There is just the screen. Two things (or a multiplicity and diversity of things) only come into apparent existence when their true reality – the screen – is overlooked.

Experience is like that. All we know is experience, but there is no independent ‘we’ or ‘I’ that knows experience. There is just experience, or experiencing, and experiencing is not inherently divided into one part that experiences and another part that is experienced. From the point of view of experience, which is the only real point of view, experiencing is too intimately one with itself to know itself as ‘something’, such as a body, mind or world.

To know itself as ‘something’, experiencing would have to be divided in two. It would have to forget its true nature of pure, seamless, intimate experiencing and imagine instead that it was just one little part of experience. And this is just what experience does. It takes the shape of a thought that seems to divide itself in two.

Having divided experience in two in this way, thought can then imagine that our self is one part of experience, the ‘knower’, and the rest of experience can then become the ‘known’. From the imaginary point of view of this now separate knower, known objects seem to come into existence and acquire a reality of their own. However, this apparently separate existence of known objects depends upon thought first imagining that our self is a separate, inside subject, the ‘knower’.

In other words, the belief that objects such as the body, mind and world are real and substantial in their own right depends upon the belief that our self, aware Presence, is located in and as the body, becoming as a result the separate, inside self. In reality, which means in our actual experience, all experience is one seamless substance. The duality between the inside self and the outside object, world or other is never actually experienced. It is always imagined.

What we call this one substance doesn’t matter, for there is no longer anything else to contrast it with. However, whatever the substance of experience is, it is made out of our self, and hence Awareness and Presence are good names for it. This intimacy and lack of separation or otherness is also known as love. It is the natural condition of all experience.

Sometimes experiencing takes the shape of a particular thought, a thought that imagines that experience is not one seamless substance, but is instead divided into two essential parts – a subject that knows or experiences and an object, other or world that is known or experienced.

The subject is known as ‘me’ and the object, other or world as ‘not me’. This thought seems to divide experience into two separate parts that are related to one another through an act of knowing, feeling or perceiving. This division of experience into two essential parts is the birth of the imaginary inside self and its corollary, the outside object, other or world. With this belief the seamless intimacy of experience is veiled, and along with it the love that is the natural condition of all experience.

At this moment, something other than Awareness seems to come into existence. Instead of feeling that our self pervades all experience equally, we now feel that our self just pervades this little fragment of experience, the body and mind. In this way our self, Awareness, apparently contracts inside the body and mind, and the world and all others seem to be projected outside.

This is the primary division of experience into two apparent entities – the self and the world – that veils the natural condition of all experience – love. For this reason, the imaginary inside self is always on a mission to secure love in the imaginary outside world.

* * *

The apparent separation of experience into two essential parts is similar to imagining that a screen is divided in two when two images appear on it side by side. If thinking imagines that the screen is only contained in only *one* of the images, then thinking will also have to imagine a substance that is ‘not the screen’ out of which the second image is made.

This is exactly how the ‘me’ and the ‘not me’ are imagined by thought and superimposed upon the seamless intimacy of experience. Thinking imagines that our self, aware Presence, does not pervade, or is not intimate with, all experience equally, but rather that it pervades or is intimate with only one little part of it. That little part, the body/mind, becomes ‘me’.

Everything that is not pervaded by or intimate with our self is now considered to be made out of something other than our self, other than Awareness. This ‘other than Awareness’ – the ‘not me’ – is known as ‘matter’. It is a substance that is conceived by thinking but never actually experienced. In fact, although the Greeks invented the idea of matter two and a half thousand years ago, scientists have still never found it.

The belief in the reality of an independent outside world, distinct from Awareness, is a natural corollary to the belief in the reality of an inside self. These two always go together. When the separate, inside self collapses, the separate, outside world collapses with it, leaving only the intimacy of love, in which there is no room for distinction, separation or division.

In this way, our experience of the world always reflects and confirms our understanding: if we think we are a limited, located, inside self, then the world and others will seem to reflect that belief back to us. They will seem separate, distant and other. Above all, they will be seen either as a source of peace, happiness and love or a threat to it and, as a result, our relationship with them will always be one of attraction and repulsion, seeking and resistance.

When it becomes clear that there is no separate, inside self, the very same world confirms this new understanding in our experience. This is the magical nature of the world: it seems to confirm both the belief in duality and the understanding of non-duality.

In the collapse of the separate, inside self and the separate, outside world, experience is revealed as it truly is. It is no longer seen or felt to comprise the mind, body and world. In this experiential understanding, first our experience of the mind, body and world is reduced to pure, seamless, intimate experiencing, and then the substance of this experience is revealed as pure Awareness itself. We find that all experience is a modulation of our own intimate being.

THE VEILING OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS

All objects of the body, mind and world – that is, all thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions – appear equally within our self, aware Presence. However, thought exclusively identifies our self with the body and mind and, as a result, the world is projected outside, at a distance from our self, which is now considered to be ‘inside’.

With this thought our true self, aware Presence, which in fact pervades all experience equally, seems to pervade only the body and mind and as a result seems to become ‘I, the body and mind’, although in reality it never actually does. With this belief a new ‘I’ entity that seems to live inside the body comes into apparent existence.

As a result of this exclusive identification of our self with the body and mind, the qualities that are inherent in our self are exchanged for the characteristics of a limited object. The open, empty, spacious, luminous, ever-present, indestructible nature of our self is eclipsed by this exclusive association and we seem to experience our self instead as being limited, fragmented, contracted, and subject to birth, change and death.

This association results in what we subsequently consider to be our self – a physical, mental entity that resides within the body. As a result, we now think of and feel our self as an inside, separate self that is no longer intimately one with *all* appearances, but rather just intimately one with a single body/mind, cut off from others and the world.

As a result of this exclusive association of our self with a body and mind, the peace, happiness and love that are inherent in our true nature are veiled. The imaginary separate self created by this belief is, therefore, felt to be devoid of these qualities, and is always on a mission in the outside world to secure the peace and happiness that it deems to be missing.

In fact, the search for peace and happiness is the defining characteristic of the separate self.

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The thought that imagines our self to be contracted within and limited to the body and mind is a fragile entity, a belief made out of the alliance between our self, aware Presence, and a network of bodily sensations. This exclusive mixture of our self with the qualities of the body and mind results in a pseudo-separate self that seems to be both aware (because it is essentially made of our true nature of Awareness) and limited (because it seems to share the limited characteristics of the body).

This new entity seems to share the characteristics of the body and mind, and also their destiny. That is, the separate entity feels that it is essentially fragile and vulnerable – because the body and mind are made of thoughts, sensations and perceptions that come and go – and, therefore, subject to disappearance and death. Thus, the fear of disappearance or death, and the subsequent need for psychological survival, are the essential ingredients of the imaginary self.

In order to allay this essential fear, the inside self seeks to substantiate its fragile nature with further beliefs, feelings and associations. These include our memories, hopes, failures, successes, achievements, ambitions, and feelings such as fear, guilt, inadequacy, worry, anxiety and regret, as well as physical attributes. As a result, the separate, inside self grows into a complex structure made of thoughts, feelings and sensations, thereby developing an identity that has depth, weight, meaning, size, location, purpose, age, nationality, history, destiny and so on.

All these mixed together are like a densely woven fabric – each strand by itself almost nothing, but woven together becoming a seeming whole that gives the impression of meaning, solidity and durability. This colourful woven fabric becomes our identity; however, this identity is a fake, made of nothing but little coloured threads of thought, feeling and sensation all interacting with one another, interweaving around an empty centre. When we look inside, we find only emptiness, space, transparency, our self.

And what is it that ‘sees’ our self, that recognises this transparent Presence? Our self, aware Presence, is the only one that is aware and present that could ‘see’ or recognise this empty, transparent Presence. When we look inside, towards this apparently separate self, a moment comes, and it is always a timeless moment, when our self recognises itself.

As we become accustomed to taking our stand as this empty, transparent presence of Awareness, we cease adding new threads to the dense, colourful fabric of the pseudo-self and it begins to become old and worn out, more and more threadbare, falling apart at the seams.

The seeming solidity and durability of the separate, inside self is just like this garment, made of a collection of thoughts and feelings that are in themselves almost nothing – what substance does a single thought or feeling have? – but when clustered together give the impression of being substantial.

Feelings are the most deeply rooted of these, taking our sense of identity deep into the body, and it is for this reason that the sense of separation – and the unhappiness that attends it – usually remains long after an intellectual understanding of the nature of the separate self has occurred.

PEACE AND HAPPINESS ARE NOT STATES OF THE BODY OR MIND

Peace and happiness are not states of the body or mind. All states of the body and mind, however pleasant, appear and disappear in Awareness.

Peace may be thought of as an absence of a sense of agitation or resistance, and happiness as the absence of a sense of lack. This absence of the sense of agitation, resistance and lack is our natural condition. It is inherent in our true nature of aware Presence.

The arising of the sense of resistance and lack eclipses the peace and happiness that are naturally present within us, and it is responsible for the contraction of our self into an apparently separate entity. This imaginary entity is defined by its rejection of the now, the rejection of the current situation, and its subsequent search for peace and happiness in the future. In fact, the separate self is not an *entity*. It is an *activity* of avoiding and seeking.

This sense of resistance and lack is the essential ingredient of the imaginary inside self. In resistance we are pulled towards a past; in the sense of lack we seek something other than the current situation, and this propels us towards a future. Resistance and seeking are the two essential forms of the separate self and are responsible for the avoidance of the now.

In order to avoid the now, we have to imagine the ‘not now’, which is time. Thus, the separate, inside self is the mother of time.

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If we think of peace and happiness in this way – as an *absence* of agitation and lack, rather than a *positive* state of the body or mind – they never become objectified. They never become an object that can be sought in the

realm of the mind, body and world, but always remain synonymous with the simple knowing of our own ever-present being as it is, independent of the conditions of the mind, body or world.

When our natural condition of peace and happiness is eclipsed by the resisting/seeking activity of thought, the body is profoundly impacted. In fact, the body becomes a reflection of the mind's activities. This takes the form of a network of tensions in the body that seems to house the sense of separation and indeed impersonates a separate, inside self. Over the years this tension becomes chronic and is enshrined at all levels of the body, expressing itself in our postures, gestures, movements, activities and relationships.

When the resisting/seeking activity of thought is temporarily relieved by the acquisition of a particular situation, object or relationship, the separate, inside self dissolves. In that timeless moment, our true nature of peace and happiness, which has been sitting unnoticed in the background all along, is revealed.

As a result of this dissolution, the tensions in the body and mind that were previously engaged in expressing the resisting/seeking activity of the separate, inside self are momentarily relieved and the body and mind are flooded with a sense of relief and relaxation. This is simply the after-effect of the cessation of the chronic resisting/seeking activity, but this after-effect is usually mistaken for peace and happiness itself. In this way our true nature of unconditional peace and happiness is made into an object of the body and mind.

All objects of the body and mind are temporary, and yet everyone seeks permanent peace and happiness. Hence the vast majority of humanity is seeking for permanent peace and happiness in a temporary object – a state of the body and mind – and hence the search for peace and happiness, of which the spiritual search is simply a refinement, is destined to fail.

Most of humanity is in a perpetual state of dissatisfaction, seeking something that cannot be found in the form in which it is conceived, and thus trapped in a cycle of dissatisfaction, punctuated by brief moments of

respite. Because this respite is misinterpreted as a state of the body and mind, the cycle is perpetuated ad infinitum.

As a result, most people live in a more or less subtle state of conflict that plays itself out in friendships and intimate relationships, in addictions to substances and activities, and, on a larger scale, in activities that threaten our species and the planet itself.

THE SEPARATE SELF IS AN ACTIVITY, NOT AN ENTITY

The process of resisting and seeking which constitutes the experience of unhappiness or suffering is an activity of thinking and feeling. The separate self is not an entity; it is this very activity of resisting and seeking.

When this resisting, seeking activity comes to an end, the apparently separate, inside self comes to an end. Because this activity is an appearance within our self, aware Presence, when it comes to an end all that remains is our self. We, aware Presence, no longer know the activity of thinking and feeling but just remain, open and empty, simply knowing our self. This simple knowing of our self, the simple knowing of our own being, is the experience of peace and happiness.

This experience is timeless, for when there is no thought there is no time. In fact, the timelessness of peace, happiness, beauty and love is a familiar and common experience. When we say 'the beauty took my breath away', we really mean that we were brought to a moment of utter stillness in which there was no room for the movement of thought.

Without thought, there is no resistance or seeking and therefore no imaginary inside self. With no inside self, there is no outside object, world or other, for these are two aspects of the same erroneous belief. All that remains is the indescribable intimacy of pure being, which *is* peace, happiness and love itself.

Peace and happiness are synonymous with the dissolution of the imaginary self.

It is for this reason that the imaginary self can never find the peace and happiness that it seeks. Its very activity of seeking prevents the peace, happiness and love that are ever-present just 'behind' the seeking thought

from being known or experienced. However, nor can the imaginary inside self *cease* seeking. The separate self *is* unhappiness itself.

Peace, happiness and love – the simple knowing of our own being, or Awareness’s knowing of itself – is the dissolution of the activity that is the separate, inside self. That is why the separate self can never experience happiness. The separate self is like a moth that seeks a flame, longing to unite with it. The moment it touches the flame, the moth dies. The death of the moth is its union with the flame. It *becomes* flame. That is its only way of knowing it.

The separate self cannot experience peace, happiness and love. It can only die in it.

Like the moth and the flame, the separate self we imagine our self to be becomes the flame as it touches it. At that timeless moment, seeking/resistance comes to an end, and with it the imaginary inside self. All that remains is the flame in which the imaginary self has been consumed. All that remains is our essential being.

In fact, we don’t *become* anything. Rather, our identity – which is always only the same aware Presence whether it is recognised or not – is relieved of the beliefs and feelings that have been superimposed upon it and seemed to turn it into a separate, limited entity, and is returned to its natural condition, in which there is no sense of resistance or seeking.

All that remains is the seamless intimacy of experiencing, where there is no time present in which a thought may rise up and separate out an inside self, thereby creating an outside object, other or world. Right there in that timelessness, shining at the heart of all experience, simply waiting to be recognised, lie the peace, happiness and love for which we long.

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When the imaginary self is divested of the beliefs and feelings that confine it to one little corner of experience – this little cluster of thoughts and feelings called the body and mind – it stands revealed as the one and only self there is, intimately pervading all experience equally.

We don't become that; we have always only ever been that. Relieved of the straightjacket that seemed to keep it confined within the limits of a body and mind, the self recognises itself as it is. This simple recognition of our own being is the transparent experience of peace, happiness and love.

When the body and mind reappear, they are saturated with the peace of our true nature. The body and mind are re-orchestrated by this timeless experience of peace, happiness and love, and all sorts of pleasant states may appear in them as a result. The nature of these states may vary: in some they may be extraordinary and exotic; in others, less dramatic, with more of a dissolving or melting quality.

However, these states naturally wear off in time. If we believe that peace, happiness and love *are* such states of the body and mind, we will inevitably think that peace, happiness and love have worn off with them and will go out in search of them again. The separate self is recreated with this search and our true nature is correspondingly veiled.

For many of us, deep sleep is our main access to the peace and happiness of our true nature. In deep sleep, our real self is naturally divested of the burden of being an imaginary separate, inside self. That is why deep sleep is peaceful and that is why we look forward to it!

When the body and mind wake from deep sleep in the morning, they emerge saturated with the peace of our true nature. In most cases, however, the appearance of the mind in the morning initiates a new round of resistance and seeking. The imaginary inside self is created anew with this rejection of the now, and again ventures out into the 'far-off country' – the imaginary world that is outside, separate and at a distance from itself – seeking the peace that was present in sleep and is now veiled by the very desire for it.

Such is the destiny of the separate self. It is defined by its insatiable longing for peace, happiness and love, and lives in what is traditionally known as hell. However, hell is not a place. It is a state – a state of believing oneself to be a separate, inside self, cut off from others and the world, endlessly seeking peace, happiness and love in a non-existent future, consumed and sustained by its own activity, resisting and desiring

in equal measure one thing alone – its own death, its own dissolution – thereby perpetuating itself endlessly.

Some so-called spiritual traditions institutionalise this longing in a more refined form and perpetuate it with subtler forms of seeking and practice, thereby perpetuating the imaginary self and the unhappiness that is inherent within it. Sooner or later, through an excess of suffering, through intelligence, or for no apparent reason at all, it becomes clear that what we long for is veiled only by the longing for it.

Some people explore their experience and come to this conclusion; others come to this conclusion and then explore their experience. It doesn't matter which way it happens. What truly counts is to see clearly that the separate self we imagined our self to be is and has always been utterly non-existent.

When the separate self collapses, the true self shines. However, this true self is not any kind of an entity or object, such as a body or mind, nor does it find itself born into a world, growing old and destined for death.

We drop out of experience as a separate knower, feeler, lover or perceiver – as a centre or location at which or from which all experience is believed and felt to be taking place – and instead find our self unlimited and unlocated, present everywhere and in everything, intimately one with all appearances but not made out of anything that appears, no longer able to confine our self to one little corner of experience but 'spread out over the face of the earth', touching all apparent things equally.

This is not a new or strange feeling. On the contrary, it is familiar; we have always known it. It is more like recognition. It feels like home.

HAPPINESS IS NEVER ABSENT

I am often aware that I am unhappy but do not always feel that I am searching.

The absence of peace and happiness is the experience we know as suffering or unhappiness and is always accompanied by a search to recover them. It is not possible to be suffering and not to be in search of peace and happiness.

We, aware Presence, have no resistance to anything, nor do we lack anything. Awareness simply does not know lack or resistance. It is very easy to check that this is true in our experience. In order to experience anything, that apparent thing must first appear in Awareness, and for it to appear in Awareness, Awareness must already have said ‘Yes’ to it.

We could liken Awareness to the empty space of the room in which our body is sitting. The space of the room is inherently open and empty; it has no ability to resist what appears in it. Whatever appears in the room has already been ‘accepted’ by the space. This openness or allowing of whatever takes place within it is not a quality that the space turns on and off at will; it is inherent in its nature.

Our self, aware Presence, is similar. This open, empty allowing, this absolute ‘Yes’ to all seeming things, is what our self *is*, not what it *does*.

Awareness only knows ‘Yes’. Without the arising of thought within it, there is nothing present that could say ‘No’ or resist the current appearance or situation. Prior to the arising of thought, there is no seeking, no rejection of the current situation or wanting it to be other than it is. In fact, without the arising of thought, experience is too intimate even to be known as ‘something’, such as a body, mind, world or situation.

There is only the indescribable, pure, seamless intimacy of experiencing. In this intimacy there is no room for any sense of lack, and therefore it is known as happiness; there is no room for resistance, and therefore it is known as peace; there is no room for separation or otherness, and therefore it is known as love.

For this reason peace, happiness and love are said to be qualities that are inherent in our self, Awareness. In fact, they are not qualities; peace, happiness and love are just other names for Awareness, other names for our self.

* * *

If peace and happiness are inherent in our true nature, why are they not always experienced?

How is it possible for peace, happiness and love to be both ever-present and yet not experienced?

It is due to a single thought that appears in aware Presence. This thought states that we are not the aware Presence that *knows* our thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions, but rather that we *are* a thought, feeling, sensation or perception.

With the arising of this thought we seem to cease being and knowing our self as aware Presence, and seem instead to become a limited, located entity, a body and mind. It is as a result of this thought that the inherent qualities of aware Presence – peace, happiness and love – are veiled. We never *actually* cease to be this aware Presence, nor do the qualities that are inherent within us truly disappear. But instead of knowing our self as the peace and happiness that prevail in the background and at the heart of all experience, we seem to know our self as a limited, located object of the body and mind.

Our self is downgraded from the open, empty space of aware Presence to a limited object, and our essential nature forgoes its inherent qualities of peace, happiness and love. It seems instead to take on the qualities of objects: limited, subject to disappearance and change, and ultimately destined to die. However, peace, happiness and love never truly disappear;

they are always available at the heart of every experience. They make themselves known when the seeking and resisting activity that characterises the separate, inside self dissolves. At that moment, which is timeless, the ever-present peace and happiness of our true nature is experienced. It experiences itself.

There is only peace, happiness and love, or the veiling of them, but never their absence.

* * *

I often feel happy when I acquire something and, in particular, often feel love in relationship to a person. It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the objects and people are responsible for happiness and love.

Once the 'I, the separate, inside self thought has arisen and our self, aware Presence, has apparently contracted inside the body, the happiness and love that are inherent in the simple knowing of our own being is, by definition, veiled. It is for this reason that the imaginary inside self, which results from this exclusive conjunction of our self with a fragment, is inherently unhappy and thus always on a search in the imaginary outside world for the happiness and love that have been lost.

This search has an impact on both the body and the mind, winding them up, as it were, into a state of tension, agitation and unease that seeks to be relieved by the acquisition of an object or relationship. In many cases this state of agitation and tension becomes the defining characteristic of the person, whose whole life is more or less subtly orientated towards relieving this state of tension through activities, substances and relationships.

When the desired object or relationship is acquired, this activity of seeking comes briefly to an end. With the end of seeking, the happiness and love that are the natural condition of our self are no longer veiled and, as a result, shine for a moment in our experience. In fact, they do not shine for a moment; in the absence of mind, there is no time. They shine eternally, timelessly now.

However, the acquisition of an object or relationship does not *produce* this happiness or love. Rather, it temporarily puts an end to seeking, and thus to the state of tension and agitation that accompanied it, thereby allowing the happiness and love that were sitting quietly behind it to be fully felt.

The happiness and love are, in fact, always being felt, but modulated through the prism of the separate-self thought they are experienced as a state of longing or desire. Hence even the agitated states of longing and desire are an expression of our innate happiness. Even hatred comes from love.

The tension and agitation of the body or mind are temporarily relieved as a result of this dissolution of the separate self, and a wave of peace, lightness or joy may flow through them as a result. These waves are just the after-effects of the transparent and timeless experience of happiness and peace, which is not itself an experience of the body or mind.

When the body and mind reappear out of this plunge into our true nature, they will often seem at first to have been washed clean of the tensions and agitations that were previously present, giving rise to pleasant states. However, if the separate self has not been seen to be utterly non-existent, a new round of thinking and feeling on behalf of an imaginary self will again inscribe the characteristics of resistance and seeking onto the body and mind, and the familiar tensions and anxieties will reappear.

If the separate, inside self has been clearly seen, in our actual experience, to be and to have always been non-existent, the separate self will not be recreated. This does not mean, however, that the old residues of its imaginary existence will immediately be washed out of the body and mind.

It is rather like waves breaking on a beach and gradually erasing the sand drawings that the children have left behind. With each wave, part of the drawing is erased, but it may take many waves to wash it away, depending on the depth of the lines.

Likewise, the residues of thinking and feeling on behalf of a separate, inside self leave scars in the mind and, in particular, in the body. These

may take some time, several years in some cases, to be truly permeated by the transparency, openness and lovingness of our true nature.

DESIRING THE END OF DESIRE

The mind knows nothing of happiness and love. It is precisely the dissolution of the mind that allows the ever-present, though sometimes seemingly veiled, happiness and love to shine, timelessly, in our experience. They don't shine 'for a brief moment', any more than the sun shines for a brief moment when the clouds part. They are always shining, just as the sun is always shining.

The experience of happiness and love is always timeless. Always? Where is 'always' when there is no time? Now? Where is 'now' when there is no time? The mind cannot go to this timelessness, although it is swimming in it. It is thought that translates the timeless experience of happiness and love, during which it was not present, into its own language of time and space. 'A brief moment' is the best the mind can do with the timelessness of our true nature.

When the mind is not present the apparent division of experience into a separate, inside self and a separate, outside object, other or world, no longer clouds the true nature of experience. Thus happiness and love are never the experience of an inside self, knowing, loving or perceiving an outside object, other or world. They are timelessly present.

Happiness and love are never experiences that the separate self can have. They are the death or dissolution of the separate entity we think and feel our self to be. That is why we like them so much and why they have such a profound effect on the body and mind.

What we truly love or long for is never an object or a person. If an object or person were truly the source of happiness and love, then once it was acquired it would continue to deliver the happiness and love we seek.

In fact, there would be no more seeking! But we all know well enough that an object or person that once seemed to provide happiness or love can easily turn into an apparent source of unhappiness.

What we truly desire is to be relieved of the state of agitated tension that has pervaded the body and mind for so long and apparently veiled the happiness and love that are ever-present within us. We long for the end of longing; we desire the end of desire. That is, we long only for the peace, happiness and love that are our true nature.

All desires are the desire to return to our self from which we seem to have strayed.

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Who is the one that has strayed from our true self?

Obviously not our true self. Aware Presence is ‘always’ resting in the peace of its true nature. It is only an imaginary self that seems to stray into a ‘far-off country and then seeks to return. That imaginary self is only a real self from the point of view of its own imaginary self. From the true and only point of view, which is not a point of view, there is no such imaginary self. There is only love and the veiling of love, but never the absence of love.

Once this whole mechanism of the veiling of happiness and love, the subsequent search for them in the imaginary outside world, the collapse of this search and their eventual unveiling has been clearly seen, a profound change is initiated in our life. Objects, others and the world are no longer approached with the same demands and expectations and, as a result, our thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships are relieved of a tremendous burden.

However, it would be a mistake to think that all desires were expressions of the belief and feeling of separation. They are not.

There are two essential types of desire. One is initiated by the ‘I, the separate, inside self thought and always seeks to acquire happiness and love through an object, situation or person. The other proceeds directly

from our being, unmodulated by the sense of separation, and it expresses, shares and celebrates itself in the world of form, that is, through objects, activities and relationships.

The first kind of desire goes *towards* happiness and love; the second comes *from* it.

Ultimately, all desires are an expression of the peace, happiness and love that is our self, but if this is not clearly understood, happiness and love will always seem to be the goal of our activities and relationships rather than their source.

THE FAILURE OF THE SEARCH

The contraction of our self into a limited, located entity is the cause of all psychological unhappiness. Although we never actually become a limited, located entity, the illusion is so strong that most of us spend our whole lives thinking, feeling, acting and relating on behalf of the separate entity that thinking imagines our self to be.

The peace and happiness that reside in our self are derived from the innate knowing of our being as it is – its intimate knowing of itself. This is not an intellectual knowledge, although it may be expressed in intellectual terms. It is a knowledge that is derived from the intimacy of our own being, prior to the arising of thought. It is not extraordinary or unfamiliar. In fact, it is thought that tends to cover over this understanding and make it seem as if it were not known.

However, thought can never truly obscure our essential nature, just as an image, however dark, can never obscure the screen on which it appears. If the peace and happiness of our true nature were really obscured we wouldn't know what to long for. It is precisely because the light of peace and happiness shines even in our darkest moments that we are motivated to seek them.

It is not the separate self that seeks peace and happiness. The separate self is an object – a thought or a feeling – and an object cannot do anything, let alone seek happiness. Rather, the search for peace and happiness is itself the experience of peace and happiness, modulated through the sense of separation.

There is only happiness or the longing for happiness, but never the absence of happiness; only love or the veiling of love and the subsequent search for

it, but never the absence of it. This understanding is beautifully expressed in the Christian prayer, 'Lord, Thou art the love with which I love Thee.'

The search for peace, happiness or love is inherent in the belief and feeling that we are a separate, inside self. If happiness is likened to a pan of boiling water, the separate, inside self is like a lid that is tightly placed on it. It is a constriction of our true nature, a knot around the heart. The pressure that builds up in the pan is the essential form of resistance and seeking that defines the separate self and is the source of our addiction to substances and activities, through which we hope to secure happiness. To begin with, this addiction is mild, but it increases in intensity over time.

Our self knows itself to be intimately one with all appearances and yet inherently free of them. Our self knows in a non-verbal way that it does not share the fate of the body and mind. We experience this vividly every time we fall asleep at night. However, upon waking and through a convoluted act of reasoning, we misinterpret the experience of sleep in which we rest deeply in our essential nature of peace, and therefore overlook the opportunity that it represents.

Our self neither needs nor wants anything from the body or mind, let alone from the world or anyone else, nor does it fear their eventual destiny – their disappearance or death – for it knows that its destiny is not theirs. This inherent freedom from the fear of death or disappearance is the first thing to be veiled when our being is taken over by the belief and feeling of separation. In fact, it could be said that all the apparent activities of the separate, inside self are simply aimed at alleviating this fear of death.

The longing for happiness and the fear of death are, in fact, two aspects of the same syndrome. The syndrome is the imaginary inside self. Future generations may one day diagnose this SSS – Separate Self Syndrome – from which the vast majority of humanity suffers and which is the main cause of most psychological unhappiness.

The apparently separate, inside self is always on a mission, seeking to secure happiness in the objects and relationships of the world that it conceives to be outside itself and desperately trying to alleviate the fear of death which haunts it. Between these two fires the separate self burns.

Sooner or later, it may begin to dawn on us that this activity of avoidance and seeking is destined for failure. This may come about through a sense of hopelessness, frustration or despair, in which case the normal process of thinking, by which the illusion of an inside self is perpetuated, can simply find nowhere further to turn in its pursuit of fulfilment.

In this case the resistance and seeking may collapse, at least temporarily, allowing the light of peace that lies quietly behind every seeking impulse to be briefly glimpsed. In other cases, the same brief glimpse may come through an investigation of one's experience. If, during this exploration, we have the courage to face the facts of experience simply and honestly, the avoiding, seeking thought may again collapse, for the imaginary self cannot stand being clearly seen. In this way, seeking will bring seeking to its own end.

The taste of our true nature – its taste of itself, un-apparently-modified by the separate-self thought and feeling – may also happen for no apparent reason. This moment, however it is apparently initiated, is a defining one in our life. If we have the courage not to overlook its significance and simply return to the habitual ways of thinking and feeling, this glimpse signals the beginning of the end of the separate self. It is the moment at which the prodigal son turns around.

For decades we have looked towards the objects of the body, mind and world to deliver the peace, happiness and love for which we long. Now we turn around and look in the only remaining direction – the direction of the one who is seeking. Who is this insatiable one that lives in the head and in the chest area, apparently dictating our thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships?

We begin to trace our way back through our thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions, looking for the one that lies at their heart. At some stage this exploration reaches a critical point: we simply do not find the inside self around which our life has revolved for so many decades.

To begin with, the investigation may be confined to our thoughts, but long after it has become clear that the separate self does not reside in the mind,

the feeling that it is located in the body usually remains. In fact, by far the larger part of the imaginary inside self is made out of this feeling. This realisation may precipitate a much deeper exploration of the sense of a self inside the body.

At some point it is clearly seen, which means that it is understood in our experience, that the separate, inside self is a pseudo-self. It was never there. There is only ever our true self of aware Presence, unlimited and unlocated but apparently veiled by the belief and feeling that it resides inside the body and mind, and shares their qualities and destiny

This may feel at first like a return to our self, but in fact there is no return. Who is there to return? The one that would return to the true self is an imaginary self. We have never for a single moment been anything other than our true self. That is, *it* has never for a moment been anything other than itself.

It is not even ‘our’ self. There is no ‘me’ for that self to belong to. It is impersonal. All that has happened is that our essential being has been divested of the layers of belief and feeling that were superimposed upon it.

But even that is not true. The appearance of an image on a screen never even partially obscures the screen, although it makes the screen appear to be something other than it is. Such are the beliefs and feelings of being a separate entity. They seem to obscure our true nature but do not. However, the illusion is very strong, strong enough to persuade us that peace, happiness and love are missing and are instead to be found in objects, activities and relationships.

With this understanding the inside self is clearly seen to be and to have always been utterly non-existent. The exotic name for this understanding is enlightenment or awakening, but it is more simply the knowing of our own being, its knowing of itself. It is the end of ignorance, or the ignoring of our true nature.

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Because this understanding was, until recently, more fully explored and explained in foreign cultures, it is often associated with the cultural

conditioning through which it was expressed. This inevitably led to many misunderstandings when the cultural conditioning was not clearly distinguished from the universal nature of the truth that was being pointed at.

One of the main misunderstandings is the belief that when it becomes clear there is no separate, inside self, the expressions of ignorance that dominated the body and mind for so long immediately come to an end. This is not so.

The body and mind are very good servants; they do what they are trained to do. For decades they have been trained to serve an imaginary inside self, and the vast majority of most people's thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships are devoted to fulfilling the voracious demands of this imaginary self. When it becomes clear that there is no such self, the belief in it is no longer fuelled, but the old habits of thinking, feeling, acting and relating on its behalf will inevitably continue for some time.

So, although the experiential understanding that there is no separate, inside self brings one chapter to an end, another chapter begins: the colonisation of the body, the mind and even the world by this experiential understanding.

The belief in separation, and the numerous ways this belief has manifested in our thoughts, succumb relatively quickly in most cases to our new experiential understanding, but the way we feel the body and perceive the world usually takes much longer.

The sense of a separate self has been laid down over many years, in most cases, as layer upon layer of feelings in the body. It takes time, courage and sensitivity for these layers to be exposed to the light of understanding and for their density and 'me-ness' to be dissolved. Likewise, it takes time for the world, with its apparent solidity and otherness, to yield its sense of 'not-me-ness' and stand revealed as a modulation of the light of our own intimate being.

For so long our being has assumed the characteristics that properly belong to the body and mind – local, temporal, limited, solid, subject to birth and destined for death. Now that this exclusive association has been

abandoned, the body and mind and even the world begin to be permeated by the qualities that are inherent in our self. They become progressively more luminous, open, empty, transparent and peaceful in a never-ending dissolution of all form into Presence.

Everything begins to shine with the light of our own being. This is the meaning of the transfiguration in the Christian tradition.

THE BODY

THE SENSE OF SEPARATION IN THE BODY

The sense of separation starts with a thought that exclusively identifies our self with a body. From the moment this thought arises – and it always arises now – our true nature of transparent Presence seems to become a dense, solid, material self, that is, it seems to become a body. We don't just *think* we are a limited, located self; we *feel* it.

All thoughts that revolve around an imaginary inside self leave 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. In fact, talking endlessly about the nature of Awareness, how everything arises in Awareness, how there is no separate entity, nothing to do and no one to do it can become a smoke screen for the far deeper feelings of separation which are too uncomfortable to be faced fully and honestly.

In many cases the understanding 'Everything is Awareness, there is nobody here, there is nothing to do' has been appropriated by the inside self and laid like a thin veneer over our much deeper feelings of separation and unhappiness – hence the new religion of non-duality.

To account for the feelings of irritation, sadness, lack, agitation, loneliness and so on that still persist, and to reconcile them with its new enlightened status, the imaginary self, through a convoluted act of reasoning, persuades itself that all these feelings simply arise in Awareness and are made out of it. Happiness and unhappiness are considered equally to be appearances in Awareness with nothing to choose between them. This

allows the separate, inside self to remain intact, hidden in the body, subliminally dictating our thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships.

But sooner or later the veneer begins to crack and expose the separate self that lies beneath it. At this point we may be moved to investigate the sense of separation at the deeper level of the body. This involves an exploration of all the sensations that impersonate a separate, inside self. To begin with, these seem to be in the main areas of the head and chest, where 'I, the thinker' and 'I, the feeler or lover' are felt to reside. As we become more sensitive to the sense of 'me' in the body, deeper layers of feeling are exposed, and in time all of these layers are brought up into the light of Awareness.

The separate self thrives on inadvertence, and these deep, dark layers of feeling in the body are an ideal hiding place for it. The separate, inside self is, in fact, just a bodily sensation with a 'me' story attached to it. Divested of the story, the sensation itself is no more 'me' or 'not me' than the sound of traffic or the sight of the sky. However, as long as this is not clearly seen, the 'me-ness' of the body endures.

Clear seeing is the one thing that the separate 'me' feeling cannot stand. As these feelings are exposed to the light of our being, they lose their 'me-ness' and are seen for what they are, pure sensation.

In time, these sensations are experienced as being suspended in our aware Presence like clouds floating in the sky. They begin to lose their definition, density and objectness, and become so permeated with the light of our own being as to be indistinguishable from it.

The body becomes progressively pervaded by the transparency, light and love of our being.

THE PERCEPTION OF THE BODY

Our actual experience of the body comes in the form of a sensation or a perception. The body as it is normally conceived – a well-defined, solid entity, housing internal organs, having existed for a number of decades – is never actually experienced.

There are ideas and images of such a body, but the body is obviously not an idea or an image. Our actual *experience* of the body does not correspond to the ideas we have of it. So put these ideas and images aside and go directly to the actual experience.

Let us start with the visual perception of the body. At any given moment this does not correspond to the conventional image of the body. At any one time we see only a fragment of the body as it is normally conceived. The conventional image of the body is a collection of such fragments, fleeting perceptions drawn from memory, that are collated in such a way as to represent a cohesive, solid body.

Such a body is a collage, based on memory, arranged in such a way as to give the impression of solidity, durability, permanence and reality. We have never actually experienced the body that this conventional image represents. It is undoubtedly a valuable image but not one that corresponds to the reality of our experience.

Nor do we experience the body as the fragment or fleeting image that we perceive. Our experience of the body is that it is real and whole. From where does the reality and wholeness of the body come? It cannot come from an image, idea, memory or perception. How could wholeness come from a fragment?

To account for our *actual experience* of the wholeness of the body, thought collates a series of perceptions, relying on memory, and constructs an

image of the body that represents this reality. The conventional image of the body as a cohesive whole is a pictorial representation of the *true* reality and wholeness of the body that we actually experience.

This reality and wholeness is not made of thoughts, images and perceptions. The sense that our body is one seamless whole comes from our own intimate and direct experience of the seamlessness and intimacy of our essential being.

The reality and wholeness of the body is a reflection of the true and only reality of Awareness, upon which the various sensations and perceptions that constitute the body have been superimposed. In other words, the body borrows its wholeness and reality from Awareness, as does the world.

* * *

The body is never seen in isolation. It is only one element in the total visual field that always includes aspects of the world as well. And the total visual field is, at any given moment, one seamless whole, made only of seeing.

It is only a thought that artificially divides the current field of visual perception into a multiplicity and diversity of well-defined and discrete objects, one of which is the body. Experience itself doesn't know any division of itself into separate objects. It knows only the seamless intimacy of seeing, the seamless intimacy of itself.

The total field of seeing is one seamless whole without separate parts, just as a screen is one seamless whole. It is only thought that divides the screen into a multiplicity and diversity of objects – people, flowers, trees, fields, hills, the sky, birds and so on. From the point of view of one of these imaginary objects, all of them, including itself, are real in their own right. But from the point of view of the screen, which is the only real point of view – and it is not in fact a *point* of view – there are no real, separate, independent objects; there is just the screen.

To think that seeing is located in one part of the field is like imagining that the screen is located in just one of the objects appearing on it. The pure

intimacy of seeing doesn't see separate objects; it knows only the seamless intimacy of seeing, just as the screen knows only itself.

The body and the world are only a body and a world from the imaginary point of view of a separate self. Once it is seen that there is no body or world as they are normally conceived, this imaginary point of view dissolves and the seamlessness of experience is restored – that is, love is restored.

This does not mean that experience is not real. Experience is absolutely real; that is undeniable. All that is denied is the interpretation that thinking superimposes upon experience, which then profoundly conditions the way it appears.

In order for the collapse of a separate self into a separate body to take place, thought must first arise and claim that our self, aware Presence, does not permeate the entire field of seeing equally but only one little fragment of it, one corner of the universe called 'the body'. With this thought, the seamlessness of pure seeing that is intimately pervaded by our own being is separated into two essential elements – one part that is pervaded by our self, aware Presence, and another part that is not. This is the primary division of the seamless intimacy of pure experiencing.

At this moment our self, aware Presence, seems to become a body, and everything else – others, objects and the world – seems to become everything that our self is not. Once thought has divided the seamless intimacy of experience into a body and a world, the way is paved for a further division of experience into a multiplicity and diversity of objects, giving rise to 'ten thousand things'.

It is the loss of this seamless intimacy, or love, that gives birth to the body and the world as we normally conceive them, as separate, independent, solid, permanent, physical objects. Once this belief has taken hold, all experience will appear in conformity with it and will seem to validate and substantiate it.

This essential belief infiltrates the body and in time multiplies into a network of feelings that are, in turn, expressed in our activities and relationships. As a result, our own body, the world in which we act and

others with whom we relate all perfectly mirror this essential loss of intimacy or love.

* * *

The world as it is normally conceived is, like the body, an abstraction made of a series of fleeting perceptions. However, we cannot deny the reality of our experience of such a world. Where does this reality come from?

Something that is real in itself cannot disappear, for whatever it disappeared into would be more real than itself. For instance, bread is more real than toast in the sense that toast is just one of the possible names and forms of bread. We could say that bread is the reality of toast. However, flour is more real than bread, which is simply one of the possible names and forms of the flour. Flour is the real substance of bread. However, wheat... We could go back and back.

But at some point we come to an end. Where do we end? What is the ultimate reality of the world, of which all objects are simply names and forms? Our only knowledge of objects or the world is perception. Our only knowledge of perception is the experience of perceiving, and the only substance present in perceiving is our own being, Awareness.

Awareness is the knowing element in all experience, and all we know of the world is our knowing of it. In fact, we do not know a world, as such. We just know knowing. And what is it that knows knowing? Knowing is not known by something outside or other than itself. It knows itself. Knowing knows knowing. Experiencing experiences experiencing.

Therefore, in our experience of the world, Awareness is, ultimately, only knowing itself. That is all that is ever known or experienced.

THE SENSATION OF THE BODY

Having explored the visual perception of the body, let us explore the actual sensation of it, for this is the form in which the body seems most real and most ‘myself.

Let us close our eyes to ensure that we are relating only to the pure sensation of the body rather than to the thought, image or memory of it. Without reference to thought or memory, what is the nature of this sensation?

If our eyes are closed, the only knowledge we have of the body is a physical sensation. In fact, without reference to thought or memory, we don’t even have any knowledge of a body, as such. We just know the current sensation. It is only thought that labels this sensation ‘a body’; without that thought it is just a sensation. And even that is too much. Without thought we cannot even know the current experience as ‘a sensation’ – it is just raw, intimate, nameless experiencing.

Put this book down, close your eyes and experience the sensation that is referred to as ‘my body’ as if it were the first experience you have ever had.

If we were to make a drawing of this sensation, what would it look like? Would it have well-defined edges? Would it be solid and dense?

Is this current sensation thirty, fifty, seventy years old, or is it just appearing now? Is the current sensation male or female? Does it have a nationality? How much does the current sensation weigh? In fact, do we have any experience of weight? Is not weight itself simply a sensation? That sensation does not weigh anything.

Does the current sensation come with a ‘me’ label attached to it? Apart from the ‘me’ that thinking attaches to the sensation, where is the *actual* ‘me’? What is it that defines this sensation as ‘me’? It is simply a thought. And from where does this thought get its authority? Obviously not from experience! Experience tells a very different story.

* * *

Go to the current experience of your body sitting on a chair. Our only knowledge of the apparent body sitting on an apparent chair is the current sensation. Go to that sensation.

Do we not feel both the body and the chair present in that *one* sensation? As chair, that sensation is considered to be ‘not me’. As body, it is considered to be ‘me’. Which is it? It cannot be both. It cannot be two things, body and chair, because in our experience it is one sensation. And if it cannot be *both* body *and* chair, it can be *neither* body *nor* chair, because one only has meaning in reference to the other.

See clearly, in your direct experience, that it is neither body nor chair. There simply is no body or chair present there, in actual experience, for this sensation to be. Body and chair are abstract concepts that are superimposed onto experience by thinking.

Prior to this superimposition – and, in fact, during it – what is the actual experience itself? As soon as thought tries to name it, we go into abstraction again. Thought cannot go to the heart of the experience and know it *as something*. Experience itself is too intimate, too close. We cannot get away from experience to stand back, look at it from a distance and see or know it as a body, a chair, a thing or an object. Only an imaginary self could do such a thing, and it could only do such a thing in its own imagination!

In reality, it is just raw, nameless, intimate experiencing, made only of knowing or experiencing, that is, made only of our self, aware Presence. All experience is like that – not just the chair but the fields, streets, stars, people, houses, traffic...everything!

It is only thought that divides this seamless intimacy of experiencing into two parts, a 'me' and a 'not me', one part that knows or sees and another that is known or seen. This apparent division veils the true intimacy of all experience – the absolute lack of distance, separation or otherness that is the natural condition of all experience – and makes it seem as if experience comprises a 'me' that knows, feels or perceives and an object, other or world that is known, felt or perceived.

* * *

Return to your drawing of the raw sensation called 'the body'. Do not refer to an image, memory or idea but only to the direct sensation in this moment. Your drawing might look a little like the Milky Way, an amorphous cluster of dots floating in empty space. In fact, it is mostly empty space.

Allow the empty space of your own Presence to infiltrate the sensation, percolating deeply into its fabric. Take time to allow it to pervade even those areas that may offer some resistance, that may seem to cling to their objectness, their density, their 'me-ness'.

Feel that this empty space of your own being is not just present and aware; it is also love, pure intimacy. It loves everything it touches. That is the only way it can know something – by loving it.

The empty, loving space of your own being turns everything it touches into itself. Allow layer upon layer of resistance and withholding to be pervaded by this love.

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 colonised the body to such an extent that it 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. Like piles of old papers in the basement, they have become faded and unrecognisable. They have long

since lost the associations which once rendered them meaningful and are now experienced as a slumbering mass of incomprehensible feelings.

These may be dormant much of the time but may also be triggered for irrational reasons at unexpected times, and betray in us, over and over again, the residues of a separate, inside self.

* * *

Go the sensation of the skin. We normally think of the body as a container of skin that houses all the sensations that constitute the body. However, if our eyes are closed, our only knowledge of the skin is itself a sensation, and we do not experience one sensation appearing inside another. All these bodily sensations, including the skin, are floating in the empty space of our aware Presence, just as the amorphous cluster of dots is floating on the page.

See clearly that the empty space of our Presence doesn't just surround the sensation; it permeates it. And this space in which the sensation is floating is not an inert space; it is an aware space. It is full of Awareness, permeated by the light of knowing. It *is* the light of knowing or Awareness, the light of our own being.

It is this aware space that makes the sensation knowable, just as it is the sun's light that, relatively speaking, makes an object visible. And it is the knowing quality of the space that *is* the known element in the experience of the sensation, just as the sun's light is all that is actually seen in an object.

Our only knowledge of the sensation is the knowing of it, and that knowing belongs to the empty space of our aware Presence. It is the aliveness and knowingness of our own being that lends itself to the apparent sensation, giving it life, making it knowable, imparting reality to it.

All that is known of the sensation is the knowing of it, and that knowing belongs to our own intimate being. It doesn't belong to an object. There is no independent object present there for it to belong to in the first place. It is our self, our own being, which lends its own reality to the sensation and

gives it apparent reality. The true and only reality of the sensation belongs to our self.

We are right to feel that the body is real, whole and independent, but its reality, wholeness and independence belong to our self, not to an apparent object.

It is only when we forget our own being that the reality that properly belongs to it is mistakenly ascribed to an object, such as a body or a world. What we actually experience as our own ever-present nature is projected onto the apparent object of the body or world, and as a result they acquire apparent reality, permanence and solidity. It is, in fact, our self that is real, and not permanent but ever-present.

It is the intimacy of our own being that imparts reality to all seeming things. What we know when we know an object is our self, and it is our self that knows itself. What we love in all others is only our self. That is, it knows and loves itself alone.

All desires long for this alone. All friendship celebrates this alone.

* * *

Return again to the sensation and see that each time we return to it with disinterested contemplation, it is divested of another layer of superimposed belief. Its density, solidity, opacity, history and 'me-ness' are dissolving.

The sensation is beginning to be experienced in its raw, naked form. It is becoming transparent, open, empty and luminous. It is beginning to take on the qualities of the aware space of our own being in which it appears.

Keep going more and more deeply into the actual experience of the body. We are not trying to change anything but rather to see what is truly there, to relieve our seeing of the superimposition of beliefs. See that we do not experience a sensation as such, but that we experience 'sensing'.

With your eyes closed, reach out an imaginary hand and try to touch the experience of sensing. Do you find anything solid there? Anything solid would just be more sensing. This imaginary hand is only an image. Does

the image meet something solid as it travels through the experience of sensing, or does it flow through sensing like the wind flows through the sky?

As you stand up and move around, see that you, aware Presence, do not stand up or move around. You remain as you always are, just as the sky always remains as it is, only a new wind flows through it.

Sensing takes a new shape, but it is always made out of the same stuff, the empty sky of our being, going nowhere, becoming nothing, eternally at rest in itself.

RAW, UNFILTERED EXPERIENCE

The body is usually considered to be a container of skin, full of solid objects such as organs and bones. Close your eyes and go directly to the actual experience of the body.

If we take a sensation of the ‘surface’ of the body, the skin, and also the sensation of something ‘inside’ the body, for instance, the tingling behind the eyes, do we experience one sensation inside another? No! Both sensations are experienced ‘inside’ our self, aware Presence.

It is interesting to look at our deep-seated belief that we experience a body *in* the world and a mind *in* a body. Our only knowledge of the body and the world is a series of sensations and perceptions.

Look closely at your experience and see if you ever actually experience a perception inside another perception, a sensation inside another sensation, a sensation inside a perception or a perception inside a sensation. See clearly that you do not, nor would it ever be possible. No one has ever experienced a body or an object *in* a world. ‘Body’, ‘world’ and ‘object’ are all concepts superimposed onto the reality of our experience.

Likewise, look clearly at your experience and ask yourself if you have ever or could ever experience a thought inside a perception or sensation. No! It is our experience that we never experience a thought – that is, the mind – *inside* the body or inside the world. Our experience of the body and the world do not appear *in* mind. They *are* mind.

Experience is just one seamless totality, with no separate inside or outside parts or entities anywhere to be found.

See clearly that, in our actual experience, it is not that the skin houses various parts of the body but rather that Awareness ‘houses’ all the sensations we call the body.

Awareness is our true body. See that all the sensations we normally consider to be our body are actually free-floating in this limitless, borderless space of Awareness. Awareness is the true body, the true ‘container’ of all things, and everything is made out of its own transparent, luminous substance.

What then are these objects, such as the body, that are apparently contained within Awareness? If we go deeply into the sensation of the weight of the apparent body, we find only the experience of sensing there. How heavy is sensing? Don’t think about this; this is not theory. Go to the actual experience, divested of all interpretation.

Sensing has no weight. Therefore, it is our direct and intimate experience that the body is weightless. ‘Weight’ is a concept superimposed onto our actual experience by thinking.

Now touch something that seems to be solid, and all you will find there is touching, sensing. How solid is touching or sensing? See clearly that ‘solidity’ too is a concept superimposed onto experience by thinking.

To say that objects appear within Awareness is a halfway stage. It is a concession to the belief in the existence of objects. If we go deeply into the objects that seem to appear within Awareness, we find only experiencing, and experiencing itself is weightless, transparent and luminous or knowing. That is, we find only Awareness. Awareness finds only itself.

* * *

See that this space of Presence is wide open. It is openness itself. It says ‘Yes’ to everything. It welcomes everything. It is pure welcoming, allowing. In fact, it is more than that. It is intimately, utterly one with all seeming things; that is, it is loving.

Our true body is a body of love and intimacy. Everything is held unconditionally within it.

In time, even the 'everything' and the 'within' dissolve and all that remains is the intimate, loving nature of experiencing – too close to itself, too utterly, intimately one with itself to admit an inside or an outside, a close or a far, a 'me' or a 'you', a lover or a loved – just pure experiencing.

All that is needed is to start with direct experience and to remain there, not with a concept, an image or a memory of the body or the world but simply raw, unfiltered experience.

Close your eyes and just go in a childlike way to the raw experience of the body. Simply contemplate your actual experience and, divested of superimposition and interpretation, its nature will reveal itself to itself.

THE EVER-PRESENT SEAMLESSNESS OF EXPERIENCE

You have used the analogy of the hand and the fan, where the feeling of the hand and the sound of the fan are experienced in the same place, in Awareness. However, once I leave the area, I will no longer experience the fan and yet I will still experience the hand, because the hand is always with me, following me around wherever I go. This seems to imply that the fan but not the hand is separate from me.

It is only a thought that thinks, 'The hand is always with me, following me around wherever I go.' This thought bears no relation to experience. Our only knowledge of the hand is either a perception or a sensation, and our only knowledge of the fan is a perception. All perceptions and sensations are intermittent. Thus the hand, like the fan, is an intermittent experience; it is not always with you. Our self, Awareness, is not intermittent. It is ever-present.

Check to see that this is true in your experience. Are there not many moments during the day when neither the hand nor the fan is present as an actual experience and yet you, Awareness, are present? Only that which is always with you can be said to be your self, and if you look closely and simply at experience, only Awareness is always 'with you'.

Experience is the proof of existence, so if something is not experienced we cannot be sure it exists. There is no evidence for the existence of an object, other or world outside of experience, and if we look closely at our experience, there is no evidence of an object, other or world *within* experience either.

When the fan, the hand or indeed anything else is experienced, its apparent existence is not separate from Awareness. All experiences are equally

close to, equally 'one with, Awareness. When the apparent object disappears, Awareness remains as it is.

The only substance present in the experience of any apparent object is Awareness. The idea of an object is superimposed by thinking onto the reality of experience itself. This does not mean that there is no reality to the *appearance* of objects. It means that objects *as such* are never experienced. Experience itself is undeniably real, but that reality belongs to Awareness.

What are normally conceived of as objects are, in reality, the changing names and forms that are superimposed by the mind and the senses onto the ever-present, underlying reality of Awareness.

To say that Awareness is 'underlying' is a half-truth spoken to one who deeply believes in the separate existence of objects. In fact, Awareness is not just 'underlying'; it is also 'on the surface'. That is, it is not just the witnessing background but also the substantial foreground of all seeming things.

* * *

You say that Awareness is not only the background on which objects appear but also their substance. I have trouble seeing that Awareness and those objects that appear to it are one and the same. What am I missing?

You are not missing anything. Experience is already complete as it is. Rather, you are adding something, a concept, on top of your experience, and you believe and subsequently feel that the concept rather than your experience is true. All that is necessary is to cease superimposing concepts on top of raw experience. Experience then shines as it is, pure Awareness alone.

If this is not clear, go deeply into any experience. Take, for instance, the feeling of your hand on the table. Refuse the abstract labels 'hand' and 'table' and just go directly to the raw experience itself. Imagine that this is the first experience you have ever had and that you have no references or memories with which to compare or contextualise it. After all, references

and memories are thoughts, and the experience of the hand on the table is not a thought. It is raw sensation.

There is no need to destroy the interpretation of thought; just put it, as it were, on one side for the time being and don't refer to it. Take as much time as is needed to allow the raw sensation to be fully felt without any of thought's customary labels. Is the raw experience itself not an amorphous, tingling vibration? In fact, even to say that is too much.

Does the sensation have a contour, shape, density, weight, location, size, colour, history, age, value, function or cost? Does it come with a label 'hand' or 'table' attached to it? Does it come with a 'me' or a 'not me' label attached to it? Is it one sensation or two?

See clearly that all these are labels attached by thinking, as an afterthought, onto the raw experience itself. I am not suggesting that these labels may not have their practical purposes, just that the labels 'hand' and 'table' are not inherent in the raw experience itself and, by implication, that the labels 'body', 'world', 'me', 'not me' and so on are also simply superimposed by thinking as an afterthought onto the reality of experience.

We never *actually* experience a hand, table, body, mind, world, other, object, 'me' or 'not me'. If we strip away all these labels that thinking superimposes onto experience, all that remains is Awareness, which is another name for the seamless totality of experience.

Now go again deeply into the experience of the 'hand' and the 'table', or indeed any experience of the body or world. Is it not permeated by and saturated with Awareness? Is there any part of the experience that is not one with Awareness? Is there any substance present other than Awareness in the experience itself?

Take any experience – a thought, image, sensation or perception – and explore it in this way. Take something that is supposedly hard, soft, loud, quiet, near, far, pleasant, unpleasant, something that seems to be 'me', something that seems to be 'not me', something internal, external, beautiful, ugly and so on, and explore it in this way.

As we explore our experience it becomes more and more obvious that all experience, no matter how apparently near or far, no matter how apparently ‘me’ or ‘not me’, is in fact intimately one with Awareness. It becomes obvious in our actual experience that Awareness is not just the witness of all experience but also its substance. There is, in reality, no substance present in experience other than Awareness.

To be the witness of all seeming objects, others and the world is a valuable halfway stage that relieves Awareness of the apparent superimposition of the thought that identifies it exclusively with one body/mind. But we can go further than that and see, by deeply exploring our experience, that the witnessing subject and the witnessed object, however subtle, are themselves superimposed upon experience by thinking. Relieved of this superimposition, experience is revealed as it is, pure Awareness. Exploring our experience in this way doesn’t make it so; it reveals it to have always been so.

This is not an intellectual understanding, although it may be formulated in intellectual terms, as is the case here, in response to a question or situation. Rather, it is an experiential knowing that is intimately our own and cannot be taken away. As we explore experience in this way, our experiential conviction grows and it becomes our own unshakeable experience. We live it.

To begin with, this understanding may seem intermittent, apparently eclipsed from time to time by the old habits of thinking and feeling on behalf of a separate entity. However, as our investigation deepens and expands to cover all realms of experience – thinking, imagining, sensing and perceiving – so does our conviction, and with it the stability of this experiential understanding.

There comes a time when this is no longer an extraordinary realisation or understanding that is at odds with our previous conventional, person-centred view of experience. It becomes natural, effortless and ordinary. In fact, it would require an effort *not* to be this openness, this experiential knowing, this aware Presence.

The effort we make that gives rise to the feeling that we are something other than Presence is what defines the apparent separate entity. It is simply the process of dualising thinking, by which the ever-present seamlessness of experience is divided up into an apparent multiplicity of objects and entities, one of which is deemed to be 'me' and all the rest 'not me'.

As we abide knowingly as this aware Presence, it reveals itself to be not simply the neutral background and substance of experience but one that is synonymous with peace, love and happiness.

THE WORLD

OUR WORLD IS MADE OUT OF PERCEIVING

Our only knowledge of the world is seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. Let us call these ‘perceiving’. Our experience of the world – and all we know of the world is our experience of it – is made out of perceiving. Perceiving is made of mind, and mind is made of our self, aware Presence.

Aware Presence has no colour of its own, and because the world as we know it (that is, perceiving) is made out of only this colourless Presence, it is referred to as being transparent.

Aware Presence is the light that illumines all experience, that makes experience knowable. Because there is no substance to our experience of the world other than the knowing of it, the world is said to be luminous, made out of the light of Awareness or knowing. Aware Presence *illumines* the apparent world and its light is also the *substance* of the world that it illumines and knows.

The knowing of the world and the existence of the world are made out of the same transparent, luminous substance.

* * *

I’m fascinated by the discovery that in my direct experience everything is made out of sensing and perceiving, that there aren’t any actual objects, as such, only experience.

Yes, our only knowledge of the mind is thinking, our only knowledge of the body is sensing and our only knowledge of the world is perceiving – that is, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. Or we could say

more simply that all we know is experiencing, and experiencing is made out of our self, aware Presence.

Now take the world, which is normally considered to be at a distance from and made out of something other than our self. For instance, take an object in the world such as a distant mountain. How far is that mountain from experiencing? Obviously, no distance at all.

Now ask how far experiencing is from your self, that is, from aware Presence. Obviously, no distance at all. If it has been seen clearly that the mountain is no distance from experiencing, and experiencing is no distance from Awareness, then it is clear in our actual experience that the mountain is at no distance from our self.

Now start again and ask what substance is present in the mountain other than experiencing. Obviously none, for we have no knowledge of a world outside the experience of it. Now ask what substance is present in experiencing other than our self, Awareness. Obviously none. Therefore, it is our direct and intimate experience that the mountain (and everything else) takes place in and is made out of our self, Awareness.

However, we can now ask, ‘What is this mountain?’ We have already discovered that it is only our self, Awareness. Why then speak of a mountain? ‘Mountain’ is just one of the names and forms of our self. There is *only* our self. Not our self *as* a mountain, but just our self, period.

* * *

This is very easy to experience when focusing on hearing, touching, smelling and so on, but it’s very hard for me when I’m seeing.

Yes, the visual realm is the realm in which the illusion of duality, separation and otherness is at its most convincing. However, if it is obvious that all hearing, touching, smelling and so on take place in and are made out of nothing other than our self, then we have the key. We need only to transpose that feeling-understanding to the realm of seeing.

Here is a practical suggestion: start with your eyes closed and establish, for instance, that the tingling vibration called ‘the sound of the traffic in

the distance' is made only of hearing, and that this hearing is one with and made out of your self.

See, with your eyes still closed, that the dark reddish-brown visual image that is appearing is made only of seeing, and that this seeing is made out of the same substance and appears in the same 'place' as hearing.

Now open your eyes slowly and see that your knowledge of the grey floor (or whatever appears) is made of the same substance as the dark reddish-brown image – that is, is made of seeing – and appears in the same place.

If the world seems to 'jump outside' when you try this, just close your eyes again and establish experientially that everything is appearing within and is made out of your self. Then open your eyes and try again. As you experiment in this way it becomes more and more obvious that our only knowledge of the visual world is made of experiencing, that is, is made of our self, aware Presence.

As you get the taste of this, there is no need to confine this experiment to a meditative type of environment. Try it while walking down the street, doing the dishes, talking with your friends. As time goes on it will become more and more ordinary, effortless and natural to experience the world in and as your self.

The feeling that the world is 'outside' and 'not me' is the inevitable counterpart to the feeling that 'I' is inside the body as 'me'. The exploration of the world outlined above is the exploration of that part of ignorance that considers the world to be outside, separate and other. The exploration of the body addresses that aspect of ignorance that makes us feel we are located 'here', in and as a body. These are two aspects of the same exploration, and go hand-in-hand.

This exploration is a part of self-enquiry in the fullest sense of the term. It is important to understand that self-enquiry is not an investigation that is limited to the realm of the mind. It is much more than simply asking the question 'Who am I?'

It is true that self-enquiry often starts with a question in the mind as to what 'I' really is. However, if the investigation is to be complete, it has to penetrate into the deepest layers of our sense of 'self and 'not self. That is,

it has to infiltrate the ‘me’ feeling at the level of the body *and the* ‘not me’ feeling at the level of the world.

PERCEPTION AND THE LIMITS OF MIND

Our only experience of the world comes in the form of perceptions, that is, sights, sounds, textures, tastes and smells. Typically we think and feel that the separate self, inside the body, is connected to these perceptions through an act of knowing, experiencing or perceiving.

For instance, we think, 'I see the tree.' 'I' is considered to reside inside the body, the tree is considered to exist outside in the world and the two are considered to be joined together, in this case, by an act of seeing.

In fact, the separate self inside the body and the separate outside object, the tree, are never actually experienced as such. All that is experienced is seeing. We do not really know a tree, or indeed a world, as separate, independent objects made out of matter; rather, we know only the experience of seeing.

Where does seeing take place? It doesn't take place at any place, because our only knowledge of places *is* the experience of seeing. So, we could say that seeing takes place in seeing or in experiencing. And seeing and experiencing are just other names for our self, aware Presence.

Nor is the experience of seeing composed of parts. Whatever our self is and whatever our experience of the tree is are contained as *one* in the experience of seeing. However, such a statement makes a concession to the belief in a separate, inside self and a separate, outside world. If we stay close to experience, all that is known, in this example, is seeing.

Therefore, we should start with seeing, simply because it is our experience, rather than starting with the presumption of an inside self and an outside tree or world. From this understanding, there is no need to divide seeing into one part that sees and another that is seen. There is always only the seamless intimacy of seeing.

* * *

This example can be transposed to any experience of an apparent object, other or world. Take any sight, sound, texture, taste or smell and see that the same is true. All we know of these is the experience of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling. However, there is no 'we' that knows this experience. The experience itself – the seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling – is all there is to the experience.

The apparently separate self that knows, thinks, feels, sees, hears, touches, tastes or smells is itself made out of knowing, thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling. Likewise, all that is known of the apparently outside object, other or world is seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling.

Experience is always only one seamless intimacy. But even to say that experience is 'one' is to say too much. To name experience as one thing is to imply another thing with which it could be contrasted. When this is seen clearly, thinking comes to an end in front of the majesty and indescribability of experience.

This does not mean that the reality of experience is unknowable. On the contrary, the reality of experience is all that is ever known, although that reality can never be known or described by the mind. It is known by our self, as itself. It *is* our self.

All experience is absolutely real. There are no real illusions. If they were *real* illusions, there would, by definition, be a *reality* to them. An illusion is only an illusion from the illusionary point of view of an illusion!

Even an apparent illusion is made only of thought. For instance, a mirage is a real experience. It is only an illusion if we think it is made of water. The illusion – water – is for thought, not for experience. Whatever that thought refers to – water – is non-existent as such, but the thought *itself* is made out of the same substance as all thinking or experiencing. Its reality is the same as the reality of all experience.

We cannot step outside that reality to know it as 'something', and yet we *are* that reality. The reality of experience is all that is ever known, and yet

it cannot be known by thought. At the same time, all thinking is made only of that reality.

* * *

This view should not be confused with the more popular and solipsistic view that mind is all there is. Just the fact that peace, happiness and love are very real, albeit non-objective experiences, should be enough to indicate that there is much more to experience than mind.

The mind is, by definition, limited and therefore can never know how things truly are. It can only know how things are not. The mind cannot know whether or not there is something beyond its own limits; it can only know its own limits. It *can* dismantle its own belief systems, or at least put them in perspective, and it is indeed well placed to do so, for it created them in the first place.

It is for this reason that these contemplations explore our experience and do not limit reality to the mind alone. We go inwards to the heart of experience. We use the mind to deny conventional beliefs but do not replace them with speculation or assertion, unless such an assertion comes from direct experience.

There is nothing to suggest that mind is the only form that appears within Awareness. For instance, our perceptions may be a cross-section of a larger reality that the human mind is unable to perceive. However, even in this case, the essence of our perception must share the essence of the larger reality of which it may be a limited and distorted view, just as the essence of the wave is the essence of the ocean.

Imagine, for instance, a creature that only has the capacity to perceive in two dimensions. This creature lives on the surface of a pond and can only see forwards, backwards and sideways, not up and down. At the edge of the pond the branches of a tree dip into the water. What is the creature's view of the branches? They will appear as horizontal lines in its world – the thicker the branches, the longer the lines.

If the creature observed the lines for some time it might notice that they were continually lengthening or shortening as the wind moved the

branches, sometimes disappearing as a branch was lifted out of the water. Or if it rained – and of course rain would just appear as little explosive lines in its world – the surface of the pond would rise up the branches, causing them to appear as longer lines in the creature's world. Likewise, in summertime, when the pond began to dry up, the lines would get shorter as only the tips of the branches touched the water.

Over many years of observation the creature might build up theories about the nature of its world. However, its theories would reflect the characteristics and limitations of its own mind rather than the reality of the 'real three-dimensional world' of ponds, trees, fields, rivers and sky. The important point is that the essential reality of the lines that our creature observes will share the essential reality of the tree of which the lines are a cross-section, and indeed they will share the essential reality of the fields, rivers and sky of which the tree is a part.

The creature doesn't need to perceive the totality of the tree, or nature as a whole, to know its essential reality. If it goes deeply into the nature of just one of the lines that appear in its world, it will eventually arrive at the inescapable truth that whatever the lines really are, whatever the tree really is, and whatever it, the creature itself, really is, are all one.

The creature's mind will never know this oneness, nor need it, because the creature *is* that. All it needs to know is itself, and in knowing itself it knows the essential nature of the tree, pond, fields, rivers and sky, and whatever else there may be. In knowing itself it knows the reality or essential nature of all of nature. It knows nature's eternity. And how does it know itself? Simply by being itself, without adding anything to this essential being.

All that is necessary is to see this clearly once, and in time that glimpse will consume the world as we know it.

* * *

With this understanding we realise that nothing is mundane. All experience is only the experience of the absolute reality. How the mind represents that reality is not important, just as the particular appearance of

an image on a screen does not alter the fact that only the screen is truly seen.

When we see an image as 'image' the screen seems limited, but the very same image when seen as the screen is realised to be unlimited. Likewise, as mind, experience is limited, but as Awareness the very same experience is eternal and infinite. Both possibilities are available at every moment. That is our freedom. Nothing binds us. As we see, so experience appears.

And what determines the way we see? In Blake's words, 'As a man is, so he sees', that is, it all starts with our self. Everything depends on how we see and experience our self. If we consider our self to be a separate, inside self, the universe will appear in conformity with that belief. If we know our self as unlimited, aware Presence, the very same universe will confirm that also.

How do we know that our four-dimensional world of time and space is not simply a reflection of our mind? We do not. What makes us think that the mind can know or represent the reality of what truly is, let alone that it is the totality of all that is? Only the arrogance of the mind.

Our minds may well be in the same relation to the totality as the creature with two-dimensional vision is to the three-dimensional world. Our three-dimensional vision and our four-dimensional experience may well be a cross-section, a limited view, of a multi-dimensional totality that the mind cannot begin to imagine.

However, in just the same way that the essential reality of a leaf is identical to the essential reality of the tree, or a carrot to the earth, so the essential reality of our self is identical to the essential reality of the universe. Whatever the world truly is, its essential nature is identical to our own innate being, aware Presence.

Atman equals Brahman.' 'I and my Father are one.'

* * *

In this investigation the mind brings itself to its own end and, rather than discovering the true nature of experience, realises its own inability to

know what anything truly is. At the same time it realises that whatever is real in any of its perceptions – and there is no part of perception that is not real – *is* the ultimate reality of all. Like a fish searching for water, it can never find it, although it is immersed in it.

As a result, the mind comes to a natural ending, not as a result of effort or discipline, and stands open and unknowing in front of the majesty of experience.

All the mind can know is the mind – thinking, sensing and perceiving – but the knowing with which it knows itself does not belong to itself. It belongs to something far greater than itself, just as the light with which the moon illumines objects at night belongs to something far greater than itself – it belongs to the sun.

The knowing with which all seeming things are known belongs to our own being, the transparent, luminous presence of Awareness. And all that is known is knowing. All that is truly known is the light of our own being, pure Awareness.

It always only ever knows itself.

NATURE'S MIRROR

From the absolute point of view art has no purpose. There can be no higher purpose in any endeavour than to reveal the fundamental reality of our experience, for everything else is dependent on that while it depends on nothing. From the absolute point of view this fundamental reality is already as fully present now in this current experience as it could ever be, and therefore nothing is needed to further reveal it.

From this point of view, art is simply a song to the absolute, a hymn of praise, gratitude and celebration, an outpouring of love.

However, if this seems not to be the case, if it seems that there is something missing, if it seems that whatever we are is somehow separate or cut off from the reality of the universe, then art has a function.

When the reality of our experience is ignored, our culture provides various means to reassert the truth or the reality of experience. These are known as religion, philosophy and art. Each of these three corresponds to one of the three modes of experience: feeling, thinking and perceiving. All these forms of knowledge are, at least in their original forms, means by which the truth or reality of experience can be explored and revealed.

Here we are concerned with the perceiving aspect of experience. Art, from this point of view, could be said to be the path through which perceiving is returned to its original condition or is, more accurately, seen afresh in its original form, devoid of the conceptual superimpositions of thinking and imagining.

When we look at nature, at the world, we feel that we are seeing something that is real, substantial. However, the world is composed only of fleeting perceptions, arising and fading moment by moment. What then is the reality of what we see? What is it that gives our experience the undeniable seal of reality? What is the reality of our experience?

When we look at nature, what are we truly seeing? Everything we know of the world is through sense perceptions, and they all depend on the senses. However, if the world has a reality of its own, that reality must be independent of the particular qualities that each of our senses confers upon it.

For instance, what is the nature of the seen, independent of the qualities that are dictated by our eyes? If our eyes were constructed differently we would see a different world. For instance, if we had the eyes of an ant or a flea, the world would appear very differently. What is it that the world of the human being, the ant, the flea and all other creatures have in common?

If we take away all those qualities that are conferred upon the world by our senses and we remove the abstract conceptual labels of the mind, what remains of the world? If we remove the forms and labels that are superimposed by the senses and the mind upon the world, what remains of that world? Nothing?

No, not nothing! Nothing remains that is perceivable by the senses or conceivable by the mind, that is, no *thing*, not an object. At the same time we know that there is a reality to our experience of the world. Even if it is a dream, nevertheless there is a reality to that dream. That reality is made out of *something*.

Whatever this current experience, A, is made out of is still the substance of this next experience, B, and indeed all subsequent experiences. Everything objective that is present during the first experience, A, has vanished by the time we have the next experience, B. However, there is a continuity between the two experiences, and indeed between all experiences, which cannot be accounted for by intermittent perceptions. What is the nature of this continuous reality of our experience?

That continuity is undeniably experienced, and yet at the same time it has no objective qualities. Both these facts are derived from this current experience, irrespective of the particular characteristics of that experience. So the only place we can find an answer to this question is in our own intimate and direct experience.

What in our actual experience in this moment is undeniably present now and yet has no objective qualities? Only Awareness and being, which together constitute our self. Therefore, we can say from our own experience that the underlying reality of the world onto which the mind and the senses superimpose their qualities is this present Awareness that is the essential reality of our own self.

Experience is not inherently divided into a perceiving subject and a perceived object that are connected through an act of perceiving. It is one seamless, indivisible reality, which appears to refract itself into a myriad of different objects and entities but is in fact always only ever one perfect whole.

The purpose of art is to give us a taste of this seamless, indivisible intimacy and oneness of experience.

The purpose of art is to heal the wound that lies at the heart of the imaginary separate self, the belief and the feeling that what we are is a fragment, a separate, inside self locked up in the body, communicating sporadically and intermittently with an alien and hostile world, in which we feel vulnerable, lost, afraid and, above all, destined for death.

It is to restore, in an *experiential* way, our original and natural condition, in which we know and feel our self to be intimately one with all things. Even more than that, it is to reveal experientially that there is no separate, inside self and no separate objects, others or world with which to be one. Rather, there is one seamless, intimate totality, always moving and changing and yet always the same, ever-present, taking the shape of every experience of the body, mind and world and yet always remaining itself.

The French painter Paul Cézanne said, 'One moment in the life of the world passes. To paint the reality of that moment and forget everything for that. To become that moment, to be the sensitive plate. To give the image

of what we see, forgetting everything else that has happened before our time.'

To *be* that moment, to know oneself *as* that moment, as the totality of experience from moment to moment; to know oneself as the substance of this and every moment and, as an artist, 'to give the image'; to make something that conveys this understanding, not simply to convey it but to *transmit* it; to make something that has within it the power to cut through or dissolve our habitual and dualistic ways of seeing and induce this experiential understanding.

Cézanne left us with visual images that come as close as is possible in form to the formless but ever-present reality of experience, just as Parmenides, Rumi, Krishna Menon and others did with words.

The way of the artist is the way of perception, just as the way of the philosopher is the way of thought and the way of the devotee is love.

Cézanne said, 'The day is coming when a single carrot, freshly observed, will set off a revolution.'

He meant that if we look at any thing, no matter how simple or commonplace, and truly go to the heart of that thing, which means to the heart of that experience, we will find something so extraordinary that it will revolutionise the way we see ourself, others and the world. This is the true revolution that makes all others revolutions pale.

An artist tries to make something that expresses and evokes this realisation, something that takes the viewer directly to this experiential understanding, that is, that triggers this revolution. An artist tries to represent – to re-present or present again – a vision of experience that evokes its reality, to make something that has the power within it to draw the viewer into its own reality.

That is what the French painter Pierre Bonnard was trying to capture: the timeless moment of perception before thinking has divided the world into a perceiving subject and a perceived object and then further subdivided the object into 'ten thousand things'.

And what did that vision look like in Bonnard's view? It was a world brimming with colour, intensity and harmony, dancing with vitality. It was a world in which the edge of the bath or an old wooden floorboard were given the same attention, the same love, as were the curve of a cheek or the gesture of a hand.

It was the same moment that William Blake wanted to evoke. He was once questioned, 'When you see the sun rise do you not see a round disc of fire somewhat like a guinea?' And he replied, 'Oh no, no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying, "Glory, glory, glory is the Lord God Almighty!"'

Likewise, William Turner is reported to have been returning home from Hampstead Heath with a painting under his arm late one evening when a local resident stopped him and asked to see the painting. After looking at it for some time the resident remarked, 'Mr Turner, I have never seen a sun set over Hampstead Heath like that,' to which Turner replied, 'No, but don't you wish you could?'

The body and mind of the artist is the medium through which nature interprets itself to itself. It is the medium through which nature explores and realises its own identity. As Cézanne said, 'I become the subjective consciousness of the landscape and my painting becomes its objective consciousness.'

* * *

Look outside the window. What is there, in that timeless moment before thinking has time to rise and call it a street, a building or a landscape? Take some time to answer this question from experience rather than thought.

What is there before thinking has time to call it perception, perceiving or simply experiencing? What is there before thinking has had time to rise and locate our self in a body?

That fraction of a moment of time is not, in fact, a moment of time. It is the only and ever-present now. That is what Pierre Bonnard was trying to give form to.

When we truly see, or indeed experience, there is no room for thought. In pure experiencing there is never any room for a separate, inside self and a separate, outside object, other or world. All that is known is pure experiencing.

This timeless, thought-free experience of pure perception is what is known as the experience of beauty. When thought reappears and again divides perception into two parts – an inside self and an outside object, other or world – it imagines that the inside self experiences the beauty and that the object, other or world is itself beautiful. In other words, thought imagines beauty to be a property of objects.

Beauty is simply one of the names that are given to experience when it is relieved of the dualistic interpretation of thought.

All perception is made of beauty, just as all feeling is made of love. In fact, beauty and love are identical. They are the essential nature of all experience, only ‘beauty’ tends to be the word that is used when perception is relieved of superimposed beliefs and ‘love’ tends to be used when feelings are relieved of superimposed beliefs. Likewise, ‘understanding’ is used when thinking is relieved of superimposed beliefs or doubts.

* * *

Beauty is an apprehension of reality. It is a form of knowledge. It is a revelation of the reality of our experience.

Art heals the fundamental malaise of our culture, the feeling of alienation, despair, separation, the longing for love.

We do not view a work of art; we participate in it. The nature of art is to bring back the world that we have rejected, the world that we have deemed other, separate, made out of dead matter; to bring it close, intimate; to realise our self as one with its very fabric.

It is not a relationship made of seeing or hearing – that is too distant – it is a relationship of love, intimacy and immediacy. An artist is simply one

who doesn't forget the freedom, innocence, freshness and intimacy of experience.

The role of the artist is to transmit to humanity the deepest experience of reality. Art is remembrance. It is love. It is like a sword that distinguishes between appearances and reality.

Beauty is the form of God.

* * *

The purpose of art in our culture is to point towards this essential nature of all perception. It is to relieve perception of the superimposed beliefs that make it seem to be made out of selves, objects, entities, things or the world and reveal its true nature as identical with our own true nature of aware being.

An apparent object is never itself beautiful. True art is neither representation nor abstraction. It is revelation – the revelation that love, rather than inert matter, is the substance of all things.

A true work of art has a power within it that derives from the clear seeing, love or understanding from which it comes. This power either cuts through or slowly dissolves thought, leaving experience itself divested of all objectness and otherness, standing raw, immediate, naked and intimate.

In this sense, all true teachings are works of art. In fact, any object or activity that comes directly from this love, beauty or understanding – unapparently-mediated by the belief in separation – contains within it the power to reveal its origin.

Cézanne said, 'Everything vanishes, falls apart, doesn't it? Nature is always the same but nothing in her that appears to us lasts. Our art must render the thrill of her permanence, along with her elements, the appearance of all her changes. It must give us a taste of her eternity'

Are the human body and mind not a part of nature? 'Nature's eternity – that which is essential and ever-present in her – is the same ever-present essence of aware being that is our own self. All true art points directly, not conceptually, to that. It has a penetrating or dissolving quality that is able

to take the apparent elements of perception – sights, sounds, tastes, textures and smells – and so arrange them as to precipitate this collapse of the normal dualistic ways of seeing into pure experiencing itself. *That* is beauty – the collapse of all objectness. *That* is love – the collapse of all otherness.

Artists and scientists tend to look towards the apparently outside world and mystics tend to look towards the apparently inside self. It doesn't matter where we start, because the outside world and the inside self, as they are normally conceived, are two sides of the same belief. If we explore either of these beliefs and are courageous enough to stop at nothing in our desire for the truth, both investigations will lead to the same place.

The outside object or world and the inside self cannot stand the scrutiny of this investigation, and in time both will collapse. In this collapse the separate, inside self dies and the separate, outside world is dissolved, leaving only the raw intimacy of experience. This collapse *is* the transparent experience of peace, happiness, love, beauty or understanding.

What we call it depends usually on the nature of the experience prior to this collapse – whether it was precipitated by feeling, thinking or perceiving. If it was precipitated by feeling, it is known as love, if by thinking, understanding and if by perceiving, beauty. All these words refer to the same essential, transparent experience of our own Presence.

This understanding has been lost in our culture, which has reduced peace, happiness, love, beauty and understanding to experiences within the realm of the body, mind and world, as they are normally conceived. It is similarly misunderstood in some expressions of contemporary non-duality that equate happiness and unhappiness, beauty and ugliness, peace and agitation, considering them simply pairs of opposites arising equally in Awareness.

These teachings have reduced the living understanding of non-duality that is the source of all love, beauty and understanding to a politically correct system of equality and relativity. In this case the fierce clarity of understanding has been appropriated by ignorance. The separate, inside

self, which is created by the ignoring of the reality of our own being, has appropriated the true non-dual understanding and is using it as a means of validating and substantiating its own erroneous beliefs.

THE WORLD AND AWARENESS CHANGE PLACES

Our experience is always only one seamless, intimate totality. Only a thought appears to split it up into different categories of experience, such as mind, body and world, each made out of a different substance. In fact, all experience is made out of the same stuff. It could be called experience, Awareness, our self or T.

No part of experience is any closer to or farther away from experience, Awareness or our self than any other part. It is not even that the experience of the mind, body and world is *close* to experience, Awareness or our self. It is closer than close. How close is an image to the screen?

There are not ‘two things’ in experience. In the final analysis, which is just the analysis based on our true experience, it is not even correct to say that all experience of the mind, body and world is permeated or saturated with Awareness or Presence. To say so would imply that there is an independent mind, body and world present in the first place, which can be permeated by something in the way that a sponge is permeated by water.

Such a statement is valid, as a halfway stage, if we believe in the independent reality of the mind, body and world. It draws attention to the fact that every experience of the mind, body and world is utterly one with Awareness or Presence. As it becomes more and more obvious that all experience is permeated with Awareness, the Awareness aspect of experience becomes more predominant and the apparently objective aspects of mind, body and world – the changing names and forms – begin to lose their apparent solidity and independence.

Initially Awareness seems to be the hidden, insubstantial, intermittent aspect of experience and the mind, body and world by contrast seem evident, substantial, stable and real. Thus we see only the objects of the

mind, body and world. Then our attention is drawn to the fact that Awareness permeates every apparently objective experience of the mind, body and world.

The more we contemplate our experience, the more obvious it becomes, gradually in most cases, that Awareness is, in fact, the stable, ever-present and substantial aspect of experience. As this becomes more and more our lived experience, so the corresponding reality of the mind, body and world, as independent objects in their own right, begins to diminish.

This contemplation may begin at the level of the mind, but in time it descends into the depths of our being and takes us over completely. It pervades our feelings and perceptions as well as our thoughts.

The world and Awareness change places.

* * *

At a certain point there is a shift. The reality we once attributed to the mind, body and world is understood and experienced to reside with our self, Awareness.

The experience of the mind, body and world in the waking state becomes more and more like the experience of them in the dream state. It loses its apparently independent, solid and separate reality, and is understood and experienced instead to be a dreamlike superimposition upon Awareness. Although we continue to see the appearance of the images on the screen, our actual experience is always only the screen itself.

It is not that normal experience becomes unreal or insubstantial. Rather, it is that the reality and substance of experience is known and felt to be made only of the intimacy of our own being, Awareness. The mind, body and world are experienced to be unreal as objects but real as Awareness, just as the fields in a film are unreal as fields but real as screen. They were only ever real as fields from the imaginary point of view of the film. From the real and only point of view of our self, Awareness, experience is always only ever real as Awareness.

So the objectness of objects slowly fades and is replaced by the 'presentness' of Awareness, just as darkness is slowly replaced by light in the early hours of the morning. We can never say how, when, why or where this dissolution happens, precisely because the how, when, why and where dissolve along with the darkness. Those questions no longer remain to be answered.

This shift is natural. At first it may seem that we have to make efforts to understand this, but after a while the truth of our experience, the obviousness of it, begins to impress itself upon us effortlessly. It is like reaching the top of a hill and starting to walk down the other side. Suddenly the hill, which initially seemed to oppose our efforts, now begins to cooperate with them.

Or we could say it is like doing a jigsaw puzzle. To begin with, the pieces seem abstract, incoherent and unrelated. However, as we proceed the picture begins to fill in and it becomes easier and more obvious. There are fewer and fewer possibilities. This places us on a straight and narrow track where everything falls into place quickly.

It is the same here. All the mind's objections are met with understanding until a time comes when there are no more objections left. The mind, which constructed the apparent duality in the first place, has deconstructed its own edifice.

Those residual bodily sensations that seemed to support the now discredited belief in a separate, inside self and its correspondingly separate, outside objects, others and world are left to tell their empty story and are slowly consumed in the light of understanding. This leaves us on the brink, in openness and unknowing.

From here Awareness shines more and more brightly, dissolving within itself any last vestiges of separation and otherness that have lingered out of habit, revealing Awareness shining in and as itself. It doesn't matter if the dissolution is long and slow, for there is nothing to wait for anymore, nothing to long for, nothing that is lacking and no one to wait.

Even our desire for truth or reality somehow loses its fierceness and can no longer really be called desire, for there is no room for desire here,

however noble. Our desire is transformed into love. In fact, it was always love, disguised as desire by a thin veil of otherness.

It was always only that for which it was seeking.

THE FRIENDLINESS OF THE WORLD

I sometimes hear it said that when it becomes obvious that there is no separate entity, everything carries on as before, including the irritations, problems and so on. I always imagined and hoped that this understanding would have a profound impact on my life.

The experiential understanding that there is no separate entity does have a profound effect on one's life. However, it is not intellectual understanding that transforms life, but rather the ever-present knowing, being and feeling of the oneness of experience.

It is true that sensations and perceptions continue to arise as before. However, those sensations that seemed to validate and substantiate the belief in a separate entity fall away, gradually in most cases. As a result there is a great sense of ease and peace at the level of the body and mind.

Although the dualistic beliefs that seem to separate our experience into a perceiving subject and a perceived object never actually do so, the separation seems to be real, and therefore the suffering that is inherent in this position seems equally real. Once this fundamental ignorance has been exposed, the thoughts, feelings and activities that rely on it for their existence fall away, either dramatically or, in most cases, gradually.

Those thoughts, feelings and activities that depend on the sense of separation may continue to arise and may appear to be exactly the same as those that were once fed by the fundamental belief in duality, but they are not. They are like a rope that has been burned and yet still for a while maintains its old shape. When you blow on the rope you realise that it no longer has any substance; it is empty, hollow. It has been burned out.

Only those thoughts, feelings and activities that relied on the fundamental belief in duality cease to appear. All other thoughts, images, sensations

and perceptions continue as before. In this way, the mind is relieved of the agitation, confusion, longing, suffering, addiction, restlessness, defensiveness and so on that once characterised much of its activity. Freedom, creativity, peace, lovingness, humour, warmth, friendliness and intelligence become its natural habitude.

The appearance of the body continues as before and is, of course, subject to the normal laws of nature, including physical pain, but is relieved of the terrible and impossible burden of fulfilling the voracious demands of a non-existent self. As a result, a deep relaxation takes place at the level of the body that penetrates to its deepest layers. The body returns gradually to its natural, organic ease. It is felt to be open, loving, sensitive, light, spacious.

The world – that is, sense perceptions – continues as before, only it is relieved of the feeling of otherness, of ‘not-me-ness’. We no longer experience a world at a distance from our self. The world ceases to be a potential source of peace, love and happiness for an imaginary self and is, therefore, no longer a potential source of misery either. The world is experienced as closer than close. It is experienced as intimate, lively, vibrant and friendly. In fact, we no longer *experience* a world; we *are* the world. Awareness and experience are realised as one.

In fact, there is no ‘we’ and, by the same token, there is no ‘world’. We no longer separate our knowing of the world from its being, its existence. As we realise that knowing the world and the existence of the world are one and the same experience, so we realise that loving is not something that is done *by* ourself *to* an other, *by* ourself *to* the world, but rather that it is the inherent nature of all experience. There is nothing separate from that.

To *know* the world is to *be* the world, and to *be* the world is to *love* the world.

* * *

This brings us to the claim that irritations and problems carry on just as before. First of all, let us be clear that we are speaking of psychological problems, not practical problems.

Practical problems, such as dealing with your car if it breaks down, with insurance if your house burns down, with financial and health issues and so on, are dealt with efficiently and practically and generate no psychological involvement, and therefore leave no psychological trace. It is precisely because these are solely practical problems, with no psychological counterpart, that they can be approached simply and efficiently and do not, as a result, generate suffering.

So, having ascertained that we are talking about the continuation of psychological problems such as irritation, anger, boredom and jealousy, we can now ask specifically, do such reactions continue? The answer is, very simply, 'No.' There may be a period of time in which these old patterns of thinking and feeling on behalf of a separate entity continue simply out of habit. In time they dissipate.

However, it is disingenuous to claim that psychological problems such as irritation, anger and jealousy continue and then try to justify these reactions with non-dual ideas such as 'Everything is equally an expression of Awareness', 'Everything just arises spontaneously', 'There is no doer' and so on. This is pseudo-Advaita, justifying behaviour that comes from the sense of separation with a pretence that it comes from non-dual understanding.

All these psychological problems are forms of suffering, and suffering, by definition, always revolves around the belief in being a separate entity. Sooner or later it is necessary to have the honesty and courage to face that fact.

We may fool ourselves for a while, thinking that we have seen through the whole mechanism of the apparently separate self and yet continue to suffer, but sooner or later the seeking that is inherent in suffering will break through the thin veneer of non-dual beliefs that the separate-self-sense has appropriated and initiate a new round of seeking.

EXPERIENCE

THE INTIMACY OF EXPERIENCING

See clearly that all we know is experiencing. Do we or could we know anything outside experiencing? Our only knowledge of thoughts, images, memories, feelings, bodily sensations and perceptions of the world is experiencing. Is there any substance present in our knowledge of the body, mind and world other than experiencing? Try to find or imagine such a substance.

We normally think that there is a world with which we connect through an act of experiencing. We believe that world exists as a separate, independent object in its own right and that it is joined to our self, the separate, independent subject, through an act of knowing, feeling or perceiving, that is, through experiencing.

Have we ever experienced such a world? If we knew such a world, its existence would be within our experience. We don't experience that independently existing world; we only know experience. This is not a proof that no such world exists; we cannot make such an assertion with the limited mind. However, it draws attention to the fact that all we know is experiencing.

Now, where does experiencing take place? Does it take place inside a body, a mind or the world? No, our only knowledge of a body, mind or world is made out of experiencing. Experiencing doesn't take place in a place, inside a body, a mind or a world; the body, mind and world take place inside experiencing. In fact, they don't take place *inside* experiencing; they are, in our experience, simply made out of it.

Try to find a place where experiencing occurs, and see that any place that you come up with is simply made of experiencing.

Imagine the ocean asking water, ‘Where do you take place? Where do you exist?’ The water doesn’t take place inside the ocean. Ocean is only water.

What is the relationship between our self and experiencing? Is there any part of experiencing that is not utterly, intimately pervaded by our self? In fact, can we find two substances – one, experiencing, and two, our self – or are experiencing and our self utterly one, indivisibly one, seamlessly one?

What is the relationship between ocean and water? Are there two things there – one, ocean, and two, water – that can be related to each other? No!

Likewise, there are not two elements present in our experience. Experiencing is one seamless substance made only out of the knowing of it. There is only knowing or experiencing – no separate, inside self that knows and no outside object, other or world that is known, but just the seamless intimacy of knowing or experiencing, with no separate parts, objects, entities, selves, others ever actually found.

This seamless intimacy, where there is no room for distance, time, separation or otherness, is love.

* * *

Can we find any part of experience that is closer to or farther from experiencing than any other part? Is the sound of a bird or the traffic farther away from experiencing than our most intimate feelings? No, our only knowledge of the sound of the bird or the traffic is hearing, and hearing takes place *here*, not here a location in space, but here in this unlocated intimacy.

Thinking divides the intimacy of hearing into a self on the inside that hears and a bird or the traffic on the outside that is heard, but experience knows of no such thing. From the point of view of experience there is only the pure, seamless, indivisible intimacy of itself.

Go to the experience of the world. If our eyes are closed our only knowledge of the world is the sound of the traffic or the feeling of the chair on which our body is sitting. Thinking tells us that both the traffic and the chair are separate from and other than our self. Thinking tells us

that the sound of the traffic takes place fifty metres away and that the chair is close, made out of inert matter. But what does experience say?

Go to the experience of the sound of traffic or whatever other noises are present. Refer only to direct experience now, not to thought or memory. To ensure that we are relying on experience only, we may imagine that this is the first time we have ever had an experience. We have no knowledge about the current experience, the sound of traffic or a bird. In fact, we don't even know it is 'traffic' or 'bird'. It is just pure hearing.

Do we have any knowledge of the traffic or the bird other than the experience of hearing? Where does hearing take place? Fifty metres away? Five metres away? Or is it intimately, utterly one with our self, not our self, a body or mind, but our self, this sensitive, aware Presence?

In fact, can we find two things in the experience of hearing, one, myself, this aware Presence, and two, the experience of hearing, or are they intimately, utterly one?

Is there any substance present in the experience of hearing other than this sensitive, aware Presence that is our self? See if we can find two substances in the experience of hearing, one, myself and two, hearing, or if it is just one substance, utterly intimate?

Now what about an object in the so-called outside world, such as the chair? If our eyes are closed our only experience of the chair is the experience of sensing. Where does the experience of sensing take place? At a distance from our self? And how intimate is it?

Is the experience of sensing made of two parts – one part that senses and the other that is sensed – or is it intimate and seamless? And is the experience of sensing dead and inert, or it is full to the brim with the aliveness and knowingness of our self? Do we really have the experience of inert matter or do we experience alive, vibrant sensing?

If we now open our eyes and claim that the sight of the chair confirms its independent, objective existence, see that the sight of the chair is made only of the experience of seeing. Where does seeing take place? How intimate is it? Is there any inert matter there? Is there any part of seeing

that is not pervaded by our own intimate, aware Presence? In fact, are there parts to seeing?

It is our self, aware Presence, which is taking the shape of seeing. There is nothing there other than the intimacy of our own being. Only thought divides this seamless intimacy into a 'me' part and a 'not me' part. These parts are for thought, not for our self, that is, not for experience.

See that our self is not sitting on a chair. We did not walk into a room. There is just sensing and seeing, and sensing and seeing do not happen at a particular place. All places are made out of sensing and seeing, that is, out of our self. We are not in them; they are in us.

* * *

What about the moon, which seems to be at a vast distance from our self? Our only knowledge of the moon is the experience of seeing, and seeing takes place here, not here a location in space, but here in this intimacy of our own being, inseparable from it, made out of it. There is truly no distance in experience, that is, no space.

Now go to the body, for instance the soles of the feet. Our only knowledge of the soles of our feet is the current sensation. Thinking imagines a foot of a particular shape, weight, position, colour and so on, but experience only knows sensing.

Where does sensing take place? Does it take place at a distance from our self? Are there two substances there – one, our self, aware Presence, and two, the experience of sensing? Or is there just the pure, seamless intimacy of experiencing, with no separate parts or entities that could be located at a distance from one another?

Does the experience of sensing – called 'the body' – take place closer to our self than the experience of seeing – called 'the moon'? Stay close to experience; don't go into thinking. Hold up these two experiences of sensing and seeing in front of your self, as it were.

Thinking says that the sensation of the body is close and the sight of the moon is at a distance. But what does experience say? Does seeing take

place farther away from our self than sensing? Or are they not both utterly, equally intimate, made only out of our own aware Presence?

Go now to the third realm of our experience, the mind. In fact, nobody has ever found a mind as it is normally conceived; we just know the current thought or image. And even that is not true. No one has ever found a thought or an image; we just know the experience of thinking and imagining.

How far is thinking from our self? Is there any distance between thinking and our self? Are there two substances there, one, our self, aware Presence, and two, the experience of thinking? Or are they utterly, intimately one? See clearly that there are not two things there in the first place to be intimately one with another. There is pure intimacy right from the start, only conceptually divided into two parts by thinking.

Now return to the belief that our thoughts and feelings are the closest, most intimate aspect of experience; that the body is a little less close but still considered to be our self; and finally that objects, others and the world are at a distance, separate from and made out of something other than the intimacy of our being.

Our only knowledge of the mind, body and world is the experience of thinking, sensing and perceiving. Is thinking closer to our self than sensing, and is sensing closer than perceiving, that is, closer than seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling? Or are they all equally close, in fact, not close, but closer than close, inseparable from our self?

Are there two elements in experience in the first place, one, our self, aware Presence, and two, the experience of thinking, sensing and perceiving? Or is there just the raw intimacy of experiencing?

* * *

See clearly that matter is a concept, never an experience. It is a concept that was invented by the Greeks two and a half thousand years ago and yet, strangely, scientists are still looking for it! Of course, they will never find it as it is normally conceived, because whatever they find will always be

made of experiencing, and experiencing is made only of the intimacy of our own self.

The ultimate substance of the universe is the stuff out of which *this* current experience is made. We don't have to be scientists, artists or mystics to discover it. In fact, when we discover it we become true scientists, artists or mystics. A carrot, the face of a stranger, an old chair in the corner of the room, a distant galaxy, a subatomic particle, this book in our hands...our only knowledge of such things is pure experiencing, our own intimate Presence.

In fact, we don't have any experience of such 'things'. We only know experience. And what is it that knows experience? Experience is not known by something other than itself Experience knows itself There is only the experience of our self, aware Presence, simultaneously being and knowing itself

This intimacy or lack of otherness is the experience of love. All that is known is our self, aware Presence, being, knowing and loving itself in every minute detail of experience.

THE INTIMACY AND IMMEDIACY OF THE NOW

See clearly that all we know is experiencing. However, experiencing is not known by someone or something other than itself. It is experiencing that experiences experiencing.

Where is the inside self and the outside world in our actual experience? Stay intimately with pure experiencing and see if you find such a self or world there.

Where is the line in pure experiencing that separates an inside from an outside? Search experience and try to find this line.

This absolute intimacy of pure experiencing is what we call love. It is the absence of distance, separation or otherness. There is no room for two there. Love is the experience of pure non-duality.

See clearly how artificial are the 'me' and 'not me' labels. We have never experienced anything that was not our self, nor would it be possible to do so. And what is it that experiences our self? Only our self! There is only one substance in experience, and it is pervaded by and made out of knowing or Awareness. In the classical language of non-duality this is sometimes expressed in phrases such as, Awareness only knows itself, but this may seem abstract.

It is simply an attempt to describe the seamless intimacy of experience in which there is no room for a self, object, other or world; no room to step back from experience and find it happy or unhappy, right or wrong, good or bad; no time in which to step out of the now into an imaginary past or into a future in which we may become, evolve or progress; no possibility of stepping out of the intimacy of love into relationship with an other; no possibility of knowing anything other than knowing, of being anything other than being, of loving anything other than loving; no possibility of a

thought arising which would attempt to frame the intimacy of experience in the abstract forms of the mind; no possibility for our self to become a self, a fragment, a part; no possibility for the world to jump outside and for a self to contract inside; no possibility for time, distance or space to appear.

* * *

What can we call this raw intimacy of experience? What is its nature? If we say it is 'one' we subtly imply the possibility of either more than one or fewer than one. That is why the ancients, in their wisdom and humility, called this understanding 'non-duality' rather than 'oneness'. They knew that to say 'one' was to say one thing too much.

Only thought tries to name experience or find its ultimate nature. Our self, aware Presence, does no such thing. It is only thought that says experience consists of a body, mind and world; that the body, mind and world consist of sensations, thoughts and perceptions; that sensations, thoughts and perceptions consist of sensing, thinking and perceiving; and that sensing, thinking and perceiving consist of our self. All of these more or less subtle objects are only for thought. Indeed, it is only thought that says that all these are thoughts. Experience itself knows no such thing.

Experience itself doesn't even know sensing, thinking or perceiving, let alone sensations, thoughts or perceptions. Experience itself is too intimately itself to be able to step back from itself and know, let alone conceptualise itself as, 'something'. It doesn't even know itself as 'experience'. In order to do so it would have to divide itself into two parts – one part that knows, experiences and describes and another part that is known, experienced and described.

How would it do this? Only by taking the shape of thought. Once it has done so, pure, indescribable, seamless intimacy can be divided into two imaginary parts – one that knows, loves or perceives and another that is known, loved or perceived. In order to do this, pure, indescribable, seamless intimacy would have to collapse into a separate, inside self and a separate, outside object or world. It would have to forgo the intimacy of

love and become a separate self, moving around in an imaginary world of objects, time and space.

No such thing ever happens. All that is only for thought, and even a thought is only a thought for thought.

* * *

Sooner or later it becomes clear that thinking can never go to the heart of experience; it can only seem to go away from it. When this is clearly seen, thought comes to its own natural ending. We find ourself plunged into the intimacy and immediacy of the now.

The intimacy and immediacy of the now is the only place that thinking cannot enter. The now is our only security. It is utterly vulnerable and completely secure. No harm can come to us in the now, no sorrow and no death. All our longing longs only for this.

Like the fish in the ocean looking for water, all resistance and seeking – that is, the separate, inside self – is already made out of the very thing it is looking for. But it can never find it.

The thought that tries to enter the now is like the moth that tries to touch the flame. It cannot touch the flame; it can only die in it.

For some time the residues that thinking has left in the body will continue to rise up and initiate the old search for peace, happiness and love – the search of a non-existent self in a non-existent world for the one thing that is ever-present in experience. But sooner or later these residues vanish like a fading echo.

We seem to have been on a long journey only to discover that experience is experience again. It is now what it always was. But something has been removed. We may not know how or why or when this happened, or it may seem to have happened in response to the intensity of our search. Either way, all experience is now pervaded by the intimacy of our own being.

We may find ourself again moving out into the so-called world, but this time without motive. The inclinations of our particular body and mind are

undertaken spontaneously, without calculation, and they leave no trace of a separate self.

We may find ourself still having desires, but they are no longer motivated to find peace, happiness and love. They only seek to express, share and celebrate them.

WHICH SELF IS BEING ENQUIRED INTO?

Which self is being enquired into here? It seems that there is a false self and a real self and that as the investigation into one's true nature goes deeper into the former, it dissolves, allowing the reality of the latter to come into the light.

The self that is being enquired into is the self we think and feel ourself to be at any moment. It is an investigation into what *seems* to be our self, leading to the realisation of the self that we truly *are*.

In this current situation, 'I' is the name we give to whatever it is that is knowing or experiencing these words and whatever else is being experienced, such as the sound of traffic, bodily sensations and our most intimate thoughts. It is the knowing or experiencing element in every experience and it is, by definition, present.

Therefore, knowing and Presence are inherent in our self. For this reason our self is sometimes referred to as knowing Presence, aware Presence or Awareness (that is, the presence of that which is aware, or the knowing of our own being).

I am and I know that I am.

Self-enquiry is an investigation into the nature of our self. What can we say about our self from experience, other than that it is aware and present?

It is taken for granted by most people that this aware Presence is located as an entity inside the body and, at the same time, *is* the body. However, here we take nothing for granted. The only way to find out what can truly be said about this self that we intimately know ourself to be is to look at it.

So, right now, turn around, as it were, and give your attention to whatever it is that is aware of these words, and whatever else is appearing at present,

such as thoughts, bodily sensations and perceptions. Try to find it and look at it.

A strange thing happens when we try to do this. Whilst this aware Presence is undeniably present, we cannot find it as an object when we look for it. In fact, we do not even know in which direction to turn to find it. Right there in that experience, the belief that our self, aware Presence, is an entity, located in or as the body, is exposed and undermined.

As we enquire more and more into our experience we find that there is, in fact, no experiential evidence for the belief that our self is located or limited. This conviction comes from the experience – our own self's experience of itself – that our being has no limits or location.

Ironically, when our being becomes clear to itself, un-apparently-modified by dualising thought, we see at the same time that we have only ever been this unlimited, unlocated Presence. It becomes clear that for our self there has never been another self, a false self, a lower self or a personal self, and therefore for our self there has never been a journey or a process through which this apparently 'other self reaches, knows or becomes our 'real self.

However, until this is experientially clear it is inevitable that some sort of process, investigation or journey is apparently undertaken by the limited, inside self that we imagine and feel ourself to be. That search, which is sometimes known as self-enquiry, is implicit in the separate self.

* * *

So, let us begin with three basic possibilities of what we are: one, the mind and the body, two, the witness of things and three, Awareness or Presence. Each of these possible stances for our self has its corresponding view of the world.

The first could be called a position of ignorance. The term 'ignorance' is not meant in a judgemental or pejorative sense, but rather in a factual one. It is a position in which our true nature is ignored and, as a result, we mistakenly believe and feel ourself to be a mind and a body.

The second could be called a position of wisdom or understanding, in which it is clear that we are the Awareness to which or in which all objects – body, mind and world – appear.

The third could be called a position of love, in which it is clear that there are no objects, others, selves or world, but rather the seamless intimacy of pure experiencing, whose substance is Presence, Consciousness or Awareness.

Self-enquiry belongs to the first two positions. In the first, it is inevitable that self-enquiry will seem to be a process undertaken by a separate entity towards a goal of enlightenment.

In the second, in which there is no longer any sense of being a separate entity, it is an impersonal exploration of the nature of the body, mind and world of which we know our self as the witness. In this impersonal investigation the subtle duality that seemingly exists between the witness and the witnessed is gradually realised to be non-existent. From this point of view, self-enquiry is a progressive falling away of the successive layers of concepts and feelings with which Awareness seems to have been veiled.

This reveals the third possibility, that of Awareness itself, in which self-enquiry has come to its natural end. Here, Awareness has been relieved of all the gross and subtle superimpositions of thinking that seem to limit and locate it, and stands revealed simply abiding as it is, knowing and being itself alone, intimately and utterly one with all appearances.

From this point of view it is clear that there has never been either a process towards Awareness nor a dropping away of layers of ignorance that seemingly veiled it. Rather, it is seen that there is only ever Awareness and that Awareness never knows anything other than itself.

* * *

The belief that I am a mind involves the belief that I am located primarily in the middle of the head, somewhere behind the eyes, as a knowing centre of experience. This location in the head is the place where the thinker and knower of experience is believed to reside. The ‘I’ that is believed to reside in the head has many guises, each one seeming to substantiate and

validate its apparent location there: the thinker, the knower, the chooser, the decider, the planner, the memoriser, the judge, the desirer and so on.

In this moment, for instance, the 'I' in the head may seem to be the knower, seer, reader or one who understands. However, if we turn our attention towards that one who knows or sees these words, we do not find any kind of an object there. That one is undoubtedly knowing or experiencing and present, but it cannot be found to have any objective qualities, nor is it located anywhere in space.

This investigation into the belief that 'I' is located and therefore limited has already been described in various ways, so all that is necessary to add here is that with the clear seeing that there is no experiential evidence for this belief, it simply falls away through lack of supporting evidence.

We may not know at this stage that our self is unlimited and unlocated, but at least we know that there is no evidence to the contrary, and this knowledge leaves us at least open to the possibility that it is so. Above all it leaves us open to exploring the apparent experience of our self more deeply, that is, of exploring the feeling of being located in the body.

Many people have the intellectual understanding that there is no evidence for a personal, limited 'I' but then sabotage any deeper exploration of the feeling of 'I' in the body by adopting the mantra 'There is nothing to do'. The feeling that 'I' resides in and as the body is by far the larger aspect of the apparently separate self and has a deeper taproot, as it were, than the belief in the separate T. Again, much has already been said about the feeling of 'I' in the body, so suffice it here to say that self-enquiry at this level involves an experiential exploration of the 'me-ness' of bodily sensations.

Some contemporary explanations of self-enquiry have reduced it to a simplistic mental exercise involving a repetition of the question 'Who am I?' However, the feeling aspect of the apparent separate self lingers, in most cases, long after the belief in a separate entity has been undermined. For this reason self-enquiry also involves an exploration of the sense of 'I' at the level of feelings, in which the process of investigation at the level of

the mind is taken into a silent and contemplative exploration of the more hidden layers of the sense of the separate self in the body.

In this exploration the deeper layers, such as feelings of fear, guilt, shame, inadequacy and unlovableness, are allowed to surface without resistance or agenda and to slowly reveal the sense of separation that lies at their heart. It is, in many cases, this deeper exploration of experience which distinguishes intellectual understanding from real experience.

This investigation leaves our self naturally, effortlessly and spontaneously relieved of the superimpositions of thoughts and feelings with which it seems to be limited and located, knowing itself as the witness of the mind, body and world. At this point the body, mind and world are all seen on the same level, so to speak; nothing is closer to or farther from our self than anything else; nothing is more or less intimate. Everything is ‘not me’ – the classic position *of neti neti*: not this, not this.

Whatever appears in the body, mind or world is seen to appear *to* this witnessing presence of Awareness. As the exploration deepens, the body, mind and world are experienced not just appearing *to*, but *in* Awareness and, in time, not just *in* but *as* Awareness. Awareness is known as the very substance of all objects.

At this stage we may ask, what are these objects of which Awareness is the substance? And it now becomes clear that there are, in reality, no objects present in the first place for Awareness to be the substance of. Awareness is seen to be the substance of itself alone. This leads spontaneously and effortlessly to the cessation of all self-enquiry or higher reasoning, to a simple abiding as Presence. We now simply take our stand knowingly as this Presence. We abide as that.

So, self-enquiry is, for the mind, a process of investigation and exploration which naturally gives way to what is, from the newly established position of the witness, an unveiling of apparent limitations, giving way in its turn to simply abiding as the only self there is.

Although the first stage may seem a little more active than the more passive and contemplative position of the witness, at no stage do we actually do anything other than ask and look. In fact, we could say that we

simply look, and in this seeing, the layers of apparent superimposition gradually fall away. However, it should be emphasised that at no time is there ever an entity that undertakes or undergoes a process.

* * *

Imagine an actor playing the role of Hamlet. Self-enquiry is the process whereby Hamlet asks the question ‘What is my true nature?’, or simply ‘Who am I?’ And well he might ask! After all, who is he – the actor or a suit of clothes? As actor he already knows and is himself and has never even become Hamlet. As Hamlet he is a fictional entity that amounts to a suit of clothes and a few lines. Such is the apparently separate entity.

The self that is being enquired into is the only self there is. This self seems, for a time, to be limited, but this very same self is later discovered to be unlimited. During the enquiry the apparent limitations of this self drop away naturally and effortlessly, leaving only the very same self, naked, as it were, unmodified by any of the apparent superimpositions of the mind.

We could say that as the enquiry goes deeper into the sense of ‘I’, all those qualities that were superimposed upon it by the mind are seen clearly to have no real limiting power over it. As a result that same ‘I’ shines forth as it is, unlimited and unlocated, knowing its own being with its own light.

The above description is written for one who believes and feels him or herself to be a limited entity and, as a result, sets out on a process of self-enquiry to ascertain the truth of the matter. When Awareness is seen to be entirely independent of all the superimpositions of body and mind that seem to limit it, we realise at the same time that the entity we thought and felt ourself to be was always non-existent.

This apparently separate entity did not undertake a process of self-enquiry and discover itself to be unlimited, unlocated Awareness. Rather, there is always only this unlimited, unlocated Awareness, whose knowing of its own being seems sometimes to be veiled by the belief in and feeling of being a separate self.

We can now reformulate what self-enquiry is from this deeper perspective, although this formulation is also inevitably limited. We can say that Awareness takes the shape of a thought that seems to limit it to and locate it within a body. Our self, Awareness, seems as a result to know itself as an entity, a body. As it withdraws this projection it comes to know itself again as it is, unlimited and unlocated.

It is only for the apparent entity that self-enquiry is considered to be a process in the mind. When it is seen that this entity is non-existent and cannot therefore enquire into its own nature or indeed do anything else, it becomes obvious that there is always only Awareness and that self-enquiry simply means to abide knowingly as this Presence. That is, self-enquiry is ultimately to abide knowingly in and as our own being.

We could say that self-enquiry is like an image on a screen slowly fading. What seemed to be an object or entity (the image) is revealed to be only screen. That is, the apparent 'I' is revealed to be and always to have been made of the real and only 'I', Awareness.

There is always only Awareness, at times seeming to be limited and located, but in fact always only ever being and knowing its own unlimited self.

The 'I'-ness of the separate, inside self is relieved of all the superimpositions of thought and feeling with which it seemed to become a separate, limited, located entity, and that very same 'I' is revealed as the true and only 'I' of Awareness.

I AM SOMETHING, NOTHING OR EVERYTHING

See clearly that this sensitive, aware Presence, this nothing, this nothingness that we call our self, is in fact the substance, the reality of everything.

The belief and feeling that ‘I am something’ is a position of ignorance, in the sense that it presupposes the ignoring of the true nature of our experience. It is an imaginary position.

The position in which we know our self as nothing, not-a-thing – the open, empty, luminous presence of Awareness – is a position of wisdom or enlightenment.

And the position in which we know our self as the substance of all seeming things – the substance of all appearances of the mind, body and world – is a position of love, pure intimacy, in which there is no room for an inside self and an outside object, other or world.

These are the only three options that are available to us – ‘I am something’, ‘I am nothing’ and ‘I am everything’ – and we are free at every moment to choose where we stand. Depending on our choice, our experience will mirror whatever position we choose. Experience will seem to confirm our stand.

If we believe we are a body and a mind, objects, others and the world will seem to be very real; they will correspond to our belief and seem to validate it.

If we consider that we are the open, empty presence of Awareness, to which or in which the objects of the body, mind and world appear, our experience will appear consistent with that position. We will know our self as the detached, impartial background of experience. We will know our

innate freedom and the peace and happiness that lie at the heart of all experience.

And if we know our self as not just the witness of experience but also its substance, in other words, if we take the position that 'I am everything', our experience of the apparent world and others will confirm and validate that understanding. We will experience love as the natural condition of all experience.

Our experience always appears in conformity with our understanding. We can experiment with these three possibilities in turn and see what response we get from the universe. For it is this response, the response that comes in our actual experience, that confirms which of these possibilities is true.

In what form does this confirmation come? In what form would experience really convince us that the position in which we stand is in line with reality? An intellectual understanding of non-duality? No!

The experience that would convince us that our understanding, position or attitude is true would have to be the experience that we value most in life. And what is it that we value most in life? It is the experience of happiness. That is the form in which the universe confirms that our understanding is true. Happiness, or any of its synonyms such as peace, love or beauty, is the highest confirmation.

Happiness is the form in which experience says 'Yes' to itself when it has been relieved of all erroneous beliefs and feelings.

SURRENDERING EVERYTHING TO PRESENCE

Sometimes we may not feel like undertaking the detailed investigation of the 'I' thought at the level of the mind or the exploration of the 'I' feeling at the level of the body. At such times we may simply surrender everything to the aware Presence that we intimately know our self to be.

This surrendering may take two forms. If it is obvious that what we are is this open, empty, spacelike presence of Awareness, in which the apparent objects of the body, mind and world are arising, then we may simply take our stand as this Presence. We take our stand knowingly as this Presence and allow everything to take place within it without any agenda or interference, just as the space of a room allows whatever takes place within it.

However, if we seem to be something other than this Presence, if we think and feel that we are a separate, inside self, our surrendering may be a little more active. It may take the form of an offering. We offer our thoughts, feelings and perceptions to this Presence.

Either we take our stand as this open, allowing Presence or we offer everything to it. The two are, in fact, identical. There is nothing that cannot be allowed or offered – from our most trivial thoughts to our deepest, darkest feelings. We allow everything, offer everything.

To begin with, we may allow or offer the most obvious thoughts and feelings – the daydreaming thoughts and everyday feelings or bodily sensations. In time we may discover that the purpose of these daydreaming thoughts, these rivulets of thought that keep running in little excursions into the past and the future, is precisely to prevent us from being aware of deeper layers of feeling in the body that may be more uncomfortable.

These little streams of thought find successful ways of engaging our attention so we never have to fully feel the deeper, darker, less comfortable feelings, which remain as a result safely buried deep inside the body and rarely surface. These subliminal feelings are the real location of the sense of separation, and we usually avoid them successfully through thinking or addiction to substances and activities. As a result, the separate self that they conceal remains intact and the body becomes a refuge for the sense of separation.

Although these deeper feelings are not seen or felt most of the time, they subliminally influence and dictate the more easily perceived thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships. In fact, all addictions are an extension or modulation of our primary addiction to thinking. When incessant thinking, with its excursions into the past and future, no longer has the power to allay these uncomfortable feelings – the sense of lack, unease, unworthiness, failure, inadequacy, loss, despair – then we take to more extreme means, such as addiction to substances or activities, to avoid ever having to face these feelings fully.

As soon as the discomfort arises, we reach for our chosen substance or activity. As a result, the sense of unease temporarily abates and we experience a brief respite in which the peace of our true nature shines briefly, thereby alleviating the mind and body of their anxieties and tensions. The mind then attributes this glimpse of peace and satisfaction to the activity or substance, which only reinforces the habit.

As some point we may see this whole strategy of avoidance and seeking and have the clarity and courage to face the feelings that we have been avoiding for so long. This may produce a rebellion in us, where the body will do everything it can to engage our attention again in the activity of suppressing, avoiding, denying and seeking. But if we are courageous and loving we may let this display of energies flow through us without allowing our self to become their accomplice.

In this way, and without realising it at first, we are taking our stand as aware Presence and, by doing so, robbing these feelings of the one thing they require: our attention. These feelings do not mind whether they are being indulged or suppressed – they thrive equally on both. If we have the

courage and the clarity not to escape these feelings through activities and substances, nor through subtler forms of avoidance such as boredom, anticipation, fear, expectation and doubt, layer upon layer of such feelings will be exposed to the light of Presence.

All these feelings are the various forms of the separate, inside self, and the one thing the imaginary self cannot stand is being clearly seen. It thrives on inadvertence. Like a shadow, it cannot stand the light.

Nothing needs to be done to these feelings. Our self, aware Presence, has no agenda with them. Nothing is a problem for our self. It is only an imaginary self that would want to get rid of them. In fact, wanting to get rid of the separate self is one of the subtler ways it perpetuates itself.

* * *

Nothing more than this allowing or offering is required. In the past, our being – this open, empty, allowing Presence – was appropriated by the body and mind and seemed, as a result, to take on their properties. That is, our self seemed to become limited, located, of a certain age or gender, dense, solid and destined for death.

This surrendering or offering is the reversal of this process. Instead of our self taking on the qualities of the body and mind, the body and mind begin to take on the qualities of this open, empty, transparent Presence.

It is like dropping a sugar cube in a glass of warm water. The water doesn't do anything and the sugar cube doesn't do anything, but the sugar cube slowly becomes like the water. It loses its name and form. The quality of the water – transparency, warmth, openness, emptiness – takes over the sugar cube; it dissolves it into itself. That is similar to what happens in this allowing or offering. Nothing is done by anyone to anyone or anything. The one that would seem to be doing the offering is itself offered up.

The body, mind and world are simply surrendered and, in their own time, they become infiltrated and pervaded by the transparency, openness, emptiness and intimacy of our own being. The fears, anxieties and tensions that characterise the separate, inside self slowly dissolve in this

transparency, not through effort, discipline or manipulation of the body or mind, but effortlessly and spontaneously.

* * *

Allow Presence to take care of everything. Whatever is present is only present because it is *already* totally accepted by Awareness. If it were not already accepted by Awareness, it would not be appearing. In fact, it is not just accepted. All appearances are *loved* by Awareness.

As William Blake said, ‘Eternity is in love with the productions of time.’ Love, or pure intimacy, is the only experience that Awareness knows. Every appearance, even our deepest, darkest feelings, is completely, unconditionally loved by our self, this Presence.

In fact, Presence is so intimate with all experience that it doesn’t know unhappiness or sorrow. Sorrow always involves the rejection of the current situation. Presence cannot reject anything. It is inherently wide open and without resistance. All rejection, and therefore all sorrow, is for the imaginary self, not for the real and only self, aware Presence.

We normally think that sorrow needs to be avoided. It is the opposite. The only thing sorrow cannot stand is being embraced. The end of sorrow is not brought about by escaping from it, either into substances and activities or into an ivory tower of spiritual perfectionism. It is brought about by embracing the situation so intimately that there is no room for the least resistance to it.

And what becomes of sorrow when it is completely allowed without resistance? The name we give to experience when there is not the slightest impulse to avoid it is peace and happiness. That is what all sorrow is – peace and happiness thinly veiled by the attempt to avoid it.

Everything we have ever longed for lies at the heart of all experience, simply waiting to be recognised. All that is required is to cease avoiding what is, in favour of an imaginary past or future. Sorrow simply cannot stand in the now. It needs a past or a future to survive.

All seeking takes us into the future and, by definition, veils the peace and happiness that are ever-present at the heart of all experience.

The first words I ever heard my teacher say were, 'Meditation is a universal "Yes" to everything.' Everything that came after that was simply a commentary on these words, although I didn't realise this for some time. Everything started with that and resolved into that. At some point life, love and meditation become indistinguishable.

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
& in this world of
yes live
(skillfully curled)
all worlds

E. E. Cummings

'Love Is a Place', from *Complete Poems 1904–1962*

THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS

You, aware Presence, have no problems, just as the space of a room has no problem with anything that appears within it. The fact that something is appearing means that you, aware Presence, have already said ‘Yes’ to it. In other words, there are no real problems. Problems are always for the self that thought imagines us to be, never for our true self of aware Presence.

Imagine throwing a ball across a room. The ball is not a problem for the space. In fact, the space has no mechanism within it with which it could resist the ball. Only another object that would rise up within the space would be able resist the ball.

The separate self is like that. It is a thought or a feeling that rises up within the space of our self and resists the current situation. That resistance turns our self into a separate entity and turns a neutral situation into a problem. In the absence of that resistance there is simply the immediacy and seamless intimacy of experiencing, in which there is no room, nor any time, for a ‘me’, an other or an object.

A problem is always one imaginary part or object wrestling with another, but experiencing is seamless and intimate; there is only the seamless whole. Pure experiencing is not made up of parts, selves, objects or others, each one fighting the other. Problems are always for thought – a thought wrestling with a thought, a feeling resisting a situation. All these thoughts appear *in* our self but are not *for* our self.

Even the resisting thought or feeling is not a problem for our self; it is just another ball flying through the empty space. The resisting thought or feeling, out of which the imaginary self is made, is only a problem for the imaginary self.

Only a separate self would want to get rid of a separate self. In fact, only a separate self sees a separate self. And a separate self cannot even *see* something; it is *seen*. Separation and the problems that attend it are only from the imaginary point of view of separation. There is, in reality, no such point of view. Separation and everything that comes from it, such as problems, are always imaginary.

Our true self doesn't know or see any separation. It knows no separate, inside self and no separate, outside world. It knows only the immediacy and intimacy of pure experiencing, without parts, separation, selves, objects or otherness. That is, it knows only love.

* * *

Our self pervades all experience like the screen pervades the image. In fact, the screen doesn't *pervade* the image. There is no image there apart from the screen. 'Image' is just the name we give to the screen when it seems to be something other than the screen. 'Parts', 'separation', 'selves', 'objects' and 'others' are the names we give to experience when it seems to be something other than our self, aware Presence, pure intimacy.

How could our true self want to get rid of the sense of separation when it doesn't even see any such separation? What is it that sees a problem and wants to get rid of it? Only an imaginary self. It is the apparent presence of that imaginary self that turns a neutral situation into a problem to be solved. It is not possible to deal with a non-existent problem. By dealing with problems we grant them reality. Problems thrive on the attention we give them. In fact, they are made out of the attention we give them.

In the absence of resisting what *is* present and seeking what is *not* present – in the absence of the activity that *is* the separate self – there is simply the current situation, one seamless substance, and whatever is required of our body and mind will be orchestrated by the whole on behalf of the whole. If there is an emergency, our body and mind may be required to respond with energy. However, the imaginary self will not be present in

the response, which will as a result be free of the distorting lens of separation through which experience is so often filtered.

In such a situation, the body/mind will play its role in the situation, contributing whatever is required of it with efficiency and precision. After the emergency has passed, the body and mind return to their natural state of openness, transparency and ease, without any lingering residues or traces. In this way, the body and mind never become a refuge for the sense of separation, and their natural sensitivity remains intact.

Likewise, the world never becomes a distant, separate, inert object. It remains vibrant, alive and intimate, and our activities are always in line with it because they proceed from within it and are not superimposed from an imaginary outside.

HAPPINESS IS THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Many teachers say that there is nothing the apparent individual can do towards the realisation of the true nature of experience. Is this true?

If there is a belief and, more importantly, a feeling of separation, a sense that I am located in and as a body, then that belief and feeling veil the reality of our experience, making it appear that there is a separate self ‘in here’ and a separate object, other or world ‘out there’. In fact, this belief and feeling only *appear* to veil the reality of our experience and never actually do. The reality of our experience is that we are the unlimited, unlocated aware Presence that intimately pervades all experience.

With the apparent veiling of our true nature comes the veiling of the peace and happiness that are inherent in it. This veiling of happiness is the experience of sorrow or suffering, and inherent in suffering is the search for happiness. If there were no search for happiness – in other words, if we were completely content with the current situation – there would be no suffering.

So the ‘veiling of happiness’, ‘suffering’ and the ‘search for happiness’ are all synonyms. Another name for this search is ‘the separate, inside self. This separate, inside self is not an entity; it is the activity of resisting and seeking and, therefore, the activity of suffering. It is not that the apparent separate entity *searches* for happiness but rather that it *is* the search for happiness.

If we see our suffering as arising in Awareness along with everything else and believe, as a result, there is nothing to be done about it, we are fooling ourselves. Suffering is, by definition, a resistance to the current situation and the inevitable search for an alternative in the future. If there is no resistance to the current situation, there is no suffering. If the current

situation is the experience of suffering, and if there is absolutely no resistance to that suffering, then the suffering cannot stand, because suffering *is* resistance. The suffering is immediately transformed into happiness.

Suffering stands revealed as happiness as soon as all resistance to it ceases. Thus, happiness is the essential nature even of suffering. It lies quietly at the heart of all experience, including suffering, waiting to be recognised, waiting for our resistance to drop, waiting for us to have the courage and the love to turn around, as it were, and face the suffering without the slightest desire to resist it or move away.

It is for this reason that even in our darkest moments of despair we are never completely overtaken by unhappiness. If we were, there would be no room for anything else, not even room for thought to separate out a self to look back at the suffering and try to get rid of it, and then it would be perfect non-duality, and therefore perfect happiness.

There is no such thing as absolute suffering. Suffering is always mixed with something else, with a desire to get rid of it in an imaginary future, that is, with a desire for happiness. However, there *is* absolute happiness that is not mixed with the slightest tinge of anything else. That is our self.

* * *

If there is unhappiness, it is because we are taking our stand as a separate, inside self. In that case, the imaginary self cannot say that everything, including its own unhappiness, is arising in Awareness, because the separate self is precisely the belief that some things – such as our self – are Awareness and others – such as objects and the world – are not.

Therefore, to be unhappy and to claim ‘There is nothing to do’ is a contradiction in terms. The separate entity is *already* a doing, a rejection of the current situation, a search for happiness. It *is* the activity of suffering and searching. So if, as an apparent person, we think there is nothing to do, we are deluding ourselves. We are laying a veneer of non-duality over uncomfortable feelings that we have neither the courage nor the intelligence to face.

In this case, non-duality has just become our new religion and we are using it to avoid honestly and courageously facing our actual experience. The apparently separate, inside self has simply appropriated the non-dual teachings and is using them in its own defence. Such a position is simply a belief and does not touch the far deeper layers of suffering that live as feelings in our body. In fact, the more vehemently we assert our new religion of 'There is nothing to do', the more safely the separate self remains buried in the body.

However, sooner or later, in the privacy of our heart, our suffering will resurface and compel the search for happiness. If, as an apparent person, we feel there is nothing to do, we are in an even worse position than one who has never heard the teaching, for not only are we suffering, but we are also, by a convoluted act of reasoning, denying ourself the very means by which we may see the origin and, therefore, the resolution of our suffering.

At least one who is suffering and honestly searching for a resolution has the possibility of exploring his or her experience and coming to an understanding of the nature of suffering. The only thing that suffering cannot stand is to be understood, that is, to be clearly seen. Suffering is ultimately an illusion, but in order to see it as such we have to face it with courage.

The only way out of suffering is right through the heart of it. If we deny this possibility, we are stuck. It is denial masquerading as acceptance, fear masquerading as peace.

The true teaching is always spontaneous and can assume a great variety of forms to suit the needs of the moment. The prescription 'There is nothing to do' is just one of the possible forms of the teaching. If it comes in the moment as the response of love and intelligence to a particular question or situation, then it will be perfect. But if it is applied as a mechanical answer to all questions then it perpetuates the ignorance that it seeks to relieve. In fact, in such a case it comes from ignorance.

The true teaching is not in the words. It is in the love and understanding from which the words proceed and with which they are permeated. The words are just the packaging of the teaching. They are important but only

insofar as they lead back to their place of origin. As such, and in the hands of a skilful and sensitive teacher or friend, a very wide variety of means and expressions will be used, depending on the current situation. These will include, from time to time, expressions that would seem to condone the belief in an apparently separate entity and its corollary, the apparently outside world.

Likewise, if the teaching comes from clever intellectual analysis and presents words in perfect non-dual formulations but lacks the perfume of experiential understanding and love, it cannot be said to be true non-duality. Non-duality is a living experience, not a mechanical formula.

* * *

So what is to be done? Seek understanding, not intellectual understanding but experiential understanding, clear seeing.

Suffering depends upon ignorance, that is, the ignoring of the true nature of experience. It thrives on inadvertence. It cannot stand being clearly seen. It vanishes like a shadow when light is shone on it. It can never be found. That is why in India they refer to the ‘illusion of ignorance’ rather than simply ‘ignorance’.

Do whatever needs to be done to see that ignorance and the suffering that is attendant upon it are non-existent. What needs to be done may vary from case to case. That is for each of us to know for ourself

The understanding that there is nothing to do and no one to do it may be the *outcome* of this investigation. If it is, it becomes our own unshakeable knowledge; there will be no questions about it, nor will it need confirmation from any outside source.

However, except in extremely rare cases, the investigation of the belief in separation at the level of the mind, and the deeper exploration of the feeling of being located in and as a body, is a prerequisite to this experiential understanding. Without it, ‘There is nothing to do and no one to do it’ just becomes a new belief and ‘non-duality’ or ‘Advaita’ degenerates from living, experiential understanding into a religion.

It is true that when it is recognised that only Presence truly *is*, it is understood at the same time that the separate entity and its suffering are and always have been non-existent, and therefore the ideas about what that apparent entity might do or not do no longer arise. But until that is our own experiential understanding, the best we can do is to investigate the apparent duality of experience, for it is this apparent duality that veils the happiness, peace and love for which we long. That is, we can investigate the inside self and the outside world.

It doesn't matter which one we start with, for they are in fact two sides of the same coin. However, if we start with the world we very quickly have to take into account the one who perceives the world, and the 'self' is the name we give to that apparent one. Hence it is usual to start with the separate, inside self.

The first form in which the separate, inside self appears is a belief. This belief has already been explored in great detail, so suffice it to say here that the investigation of the *belief* in separation is just a prelude to the deeper exploration of the *feelings* of separation.

Very few teachings ever address this realm. At best, feelings are traced back to the stories that precipitate them – what our parents did or didn't do to us in childhood, how our intimate partners, children, employers and so on have treated us. But this is not really exploring our feelings. It is exploring stories about our feelings, but not the feelings themselves, so it is another aspect of the investigation at the level of the mind.

Feelings live in the body. These feelings in the body account for the largest aspect by far of the sense of separation. There are layers upon layers of feelings in the body, each layer hidden by and more subtle than the one above it. The fear of disappearance and the feeling that something is missing are the two essential forms of the separate, inside self which have colonised the body and turned it into a network of contraction, tension and resistance that veil its natural openness and transparency.

In fact, our true body is the body of aware Presence, but the imaginary self has appropriated this Presence and turned it into an entity that seems to be solid and dense. This density is composed of layers of feelings that

invisibly dictate our postures, movements and activities and are, in time, enshrined in the physical body itself.

* * *

The two main residences of the feelings of being a separate, inside self are in the head – ‘I, the thinker’ – and the chest area – ‘I, the feeler’ – but that is a superficial analysis. The head itself is a colony of such tensions: ‘I, the seer’ located behind the eyes, ‘I, the hearer’ located just inside the ears, ‘I, the taster or speaker’ in the mouth, ‘I, the smeller’ in the nose. Every sense, and therefore every sense perception, has its corresponding ‘I’ feeling in the head.

Then there is ‘I, the feeler or lover’ in the chest area, ‘I, the maker’ in the hands, ‘I, the mover, the walker, the doer’, woven into a dense, multi-layered fabric of ‘me-ness’ that pervades the body. The exploration of the ‘me-ness’ in the body is first the revelation of this fabric and subsequently its unravelling.

The ‘me-ness’ in the body could be likened to a box full of family photos dating back to our earliest childhood. On the top the images are quite distinct and easy to make out. However, as we progress down through the photos they become more faded. They begin to lose their sharpness and clarity.

The most obvious ‘me’ feelings may be enshrined as a general feeling that pervades the head and chest, but as these are clearly seen, the subtler layers of ‘me’ feelings in the body are revealed. The only thing that these feelings cannot stand is to be clearly seen, for in being clearly seen they are understood and felt to be simply neutral bodily sensations with no separate self at their centre. In this contemplation they lose their need to be either indulged or avoided; they no longer provoke resistance or seeking. They are simply allowed to be what they are, neutral sensations appearing in our transparent Presence.

In time and with our loving and disinterested contemplation, the distinction between the sensations and the Presence in which they appear begins to blur. If we have the courage to stay with these sensations for long

enough and not escape them through the usual channels of thinking and acting, they are revealed as nothing other than this Presence. In fact, they were always that but are now known and felt as such.

As each layer of feeling evaporates in this experiential understanding, the next one, which resides deeper in the body, closer to the essential ‘me’ feeling, is exposed and in turn relieved of all superimposed ‘me-ness’ as it is subjected to the light of Awareness.

At some point the core separate-self feeling – the fear of disappearance and the sense of lack – is exposed. For some this is the *first* feeling to be exposed; this may be a frightening experience and we may shrink from opening ourself totally to it. In this case, we may approach it again gradually as outlined above. Or we may face it full-on the first time and have the courage and the love to completely surrender to the invitation to release it to the transparent presence of our own being. The residues of feelings in the body will, in almost all cases, remain and will gradually, effortlessly and naturally be flushed out of the system in time.

If we approach it more gradually, the exposure of this essential fear and lack will not be such a dramatic event and may even pass unnoticed. It will only be later that we discover that the core knot of separation in the body has been dissolved. Either way, a time comes when the whole fabric of the separate-self feeling in the body has been fully exposed and offered to the light of aware Presence, which has, as it were, completely absorbed it into itself.

* * *

All that remains now is Presence itself, abiding in and as itself. This abiding in and as aware Presence is the essence of meditation, and indeed the essence of the teaching. In time, it becomes the essence of our life. Nothing other than that is really needed. All the words are meant only to point towards this abidance in and as Presence.

The investigation at the level of the mind relieves our being of the doubts and beliefs with which it was veiled and exposes the deeper layers of feeling in the body. The exploration and dissolution of these feelings

leaves our being relieved of the deeper layers of superimposed feelings, standing naked and unadorned.

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.

For Presence there is nothing to avoid nor any state that could add anything to its fullness. As such it is the simple experience of happiness.

Happiness is simply the knowing of our own being – its knowing of itself – as it is. To abide knowingly as that is pure meditation and, in the end, turns out to be life itself.

Happiness is the highest spiritual practice.

THE LIGHT OF KNOWING

You repeatedly say that Awareness knows the objects of the body, mind and world. You also say that Awareness does not know objects, selves, entities, others or the world. How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory statements?

The suggestion that Awareness knows objects is a halfway understanding that relieves us of the belief that the body/mind is an independent entity in its own right, with its own capacity to think, feel and perceive. Once this formulation has done its job of uprooting the previous belief in the separate existence of a subject and object, it can be abandoned in favour of the deeper understanding that objects, as such, are never truly known.

In time, of course, this new understanding also has to be abandoned and we find our self shining at the heart of experience, simply unable to move away from it into the abstract symbols of thought that conceive of selves, entities, objects, others and the world. So these two statements are not contradictory; the latter is simply an extension and a refinement of the former.

Imagine that the sun's light could see as well as illumine. On a dark night the sun cannot see the objects of the world. All there is for the sun is its own light shining in emptiness. Only the moon can see or know the objects of the world at night. However, the light with which the moon sees or knows objects belongs to the sun. Although objects are illumined, seen or known only by the moon and not by the sun, it is, at the same time, the sun's light with which they are seen.

Likewise, Awareness does not know objects. It simply shines in its own emptiness, knowing only itself. At the same time, the light or the knowing with which the mind seems to know objects belongs to Awareness alone.

And just as objects at night require the presence of the moon to be seen or known, so the apparent objects of the waking state require the presence of the mind in order to be visible.

Even though it is the moon alone that sees or knows objects at night – the sun never comes into contact with the objects themselves – nevertheless it is only the sun's light that is truly seen and only the sun that sees. From the point of view of the moon, there are objects; from the point of view of the sun, there are none. However, the moon's point of view is an illusory one. The light with which the moon views the world is not its own. Even when the moon seems to be seeing, knowing or illuminating objects, it never is. It is always only the sun's light.

In order for objects to appear, the sun's light needs to be reflected off the moon. Likewise, in order for objects to seem to be real in their own right, the knowingness that properly belongs to Awareness alone needs to be reflected off or refracted through the mind. When the knowingness of Awareness is refracted through the mind it appears as objects, just as when the sun's light is reflected off the moon, objects are visible.

What seem to be objects for the moon are, for the sun, only its own light. What seem to be objects for the mind are, for Awareness, only its own light of knowing.

However, we can go further. What is it that sees the moon? The sun? No! The sun only knows or sees its own light. What is it that knows the mind? Awareness? No, Awareness only knows itself.

The moon is only a moon from the point of view of the moon. The mind is only a mind from the point of view of the mind. Thoughts, sensations and perceptions are only thoughts, sensations and perceptions from the point of view of a thought.

Awareness knows no such thing. It only knows itself. That is pure peace.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH A TEACHER

How do you see the uprooting or exposure of personal blind spots that seem to block the release into the natural openness of being? Do you advocate a kind of one-on-one teacher/student pointing out that could lead to this type of release?

The teacher wants absolutely nothing either for or from the student. He or she has no agenda. The so-called teacher sees the so-called student as him or herself, that is, as Presence. It is this attitude that is primarily, in my experience, the effective agent in the apparent relationship between the teacher and the student.

For so long the world has treated us like a separate person and, as a result, we have learnt to think, feel and behave like one. One day, by grace or as the result of a deep longing in our hearts, which is also grace, we may meet someone who doesn't treat us like a separate person with all of its attendant demands and expectations, but treats us as our true self.

We may register this encounter simply as friendship, the simple feeling of, 'I like this man or woman.' We feel a sense of ease and freedom in their company. We may not know why and it doesn't matter. We just enjoy the ease and freedom, and find ourselves keeping their company as often and for as long as there is the desire to do so and circumstances permit.

It is such a relief not to be taken as a separate entity with all the usual demands and expectations that go along with this attitude. We are simply free to be ourselves, whatever this means for each of us. Sometimes the relief is small and only noticed as a relaxation at the level of the mind and body, and sometimes it is more dramatic and there are tears and laughter.

Sometimes, friendship is the only form in which the teaching takes place. There is little or no need for much talk or explanation. There is just being

together. In this way the ease and freedom of the teacher permeates us, as it were, and we find ourself catching it just like one catches a cold, by infection!

However, it is not the ease and freedom of a person that permeates us, but rather that which is inherent in our true nature, in which the body and mind of the human teacher are completely dissolved. We gradually become established in it without knowing why, how or when it happened. Nor do we care! Likewise, we may enjoy speaking about it, but we may just as well remain quiet, getting on with our lives and rarely mentioning it.

When my first teacher was asked, humorously, how he would like to be reborn, he replied, 'Self-realised but without the need to speak about it!'

Many of us are more questioning and want to explore this taste of ease and freedom, and as a result we start to ask questions. It is in response to this questioning that the teaching evolves and is elaborated. If one has the privilege and good fortune to spend time with such a man or woman, one sees that the teaching is always alive, spontaneous and, above all, tailored to the moment.

In this way the teaching never becomes formulaic or mechanical. It may be that in response to a particular question the teacher makes up, on the spot, a line of investigation or exploration or a certain exercise that may help address the specific issue at hand. Then it is forgotten, both by the teacher and by the student. The experiment was alive, in the moment. It is only the pundits and intellectuals who collate all these suggestions from the teacher and make out of them a fixed method or system, which subsequently becomes a religion.

In the early days with my teacher, I loved these experiments and explorations, particularly in relation to the nature of the body and the world. They were so experiential. After a while, and with his encouragement, I would make up my own lines of enquiry and exploration. It was so interesting and enjoyable!

To begin with, I would run these new experiments past him just to make sure I was on the right track, but after a while I stopped telling him about

them and simply enjoyed finding new ways of exploring my experience. This included true of lines of reasoning as well as explorations of the body and world.

After a while there were no more questions relating to the teaching. It didn't mean I knew everything. It just meant that I had been given the golden key and was learning to find my own way home.

For some time after this there were just questions relating to how this love and understanding expresses itself in relation to practicalities in the world, such as in work, art, relationships and family. And then there was almost no conversation about these matters, just enjoying being together, in whatever way our two characters would meet.

So the teacher is not, in my experience, like one with a bow and arrow, targeting ignorance in all its subtle forms, although the bow and arrow is always there if needed! In my experience the teacher is more like an ocean of love and intelligence. It is to this ocean, which at first we ascribe to the person of the teacher but later ascribe to impersonal Presence, that the beliefs and feelings of being a separate and limited entity are offered and in which they are subsequently dissolved. How that dissolution takes place I do not really know, but it is unique in each case.

For a few it will not even involve the presence of a teacher, but even in these rare cases it is still the same ocean of love and intelligence that dissolves the apparent ignorance.

When one looks back on the relationship with the teacher it is a mystery. We do not know what happened, when, how, or why. All that remains is a heart melted in love and gratitude. We do not know what we are in love with, nor do we know to whom we are grateful. It is almost impossible to speak of this. Nor is it necessary to, for more and more one finds that one's whole life becomes a gesture of this love and gratitude.

* * *

I had a dream about my teacher some time ago that graphically illustrated my relationship with him.

In the dream Ellen and I had been staying with him in a large old house and were due to depart the following day. I wanted to say goodbye and to thank him, so started to look for him.

After some time we both simultaneously entered a tiny room at the centre of the house, each through a different door. Our eyes met and we smiled warmly. I went up to him and embraced him and we held each other closely for some time.

At a certain point, still with our arms around one another, I started to rub Francis's back and said softly, 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.'

As I finished the last 'Thank you,' I began to lose my balance. I had been standing on tiptoe because, in the dream, he was taller than me. I began to sway, as if seasick, and stretched out an arm to find something solid to hold on to.

However, as I did this something inside me said, 'No don't hold onto anything solid. Let go completely.' As these words resounded, our bodies began to melt into one another. After some time our bodies were both completely melted and dissolved into one another. We remained like this timelessly.

At some point our bodies began to emerge and take their respective shapes again. Before long we were standing in front of each other in the normal way.

Francis then said to me, 'When you are speaking to others, remember to tell them who it is that bears the light.'

We said goodbye and parted.

* * *

In the Indian tradition, the teaching is a transference of insight or energy according to the capacity of the student, activated by a guru or teacher. Words can be used or not, but they are not the main vessel. As much as I enjoy the exchange with others on the path, all too often it turns from honest self enquiry into a battlefield of opinions. Would you comment?

You are quite right that the words are not the main vessel of the teaching. They are the outer layer of the teaching.

However, there is much more to language than the stringing together of abstract sounds. We all know, for instance, that there are innumerable ways to simply say 'Hello.' Each of these different ways will add depth and meaning to the word. In fact, it is the way we say the word rather than the word itself that is its true import. Likewise, there are many other aspects of the teacher or the teaching that convey the essence of the understanding.

Even more potent than these subtler ways of communicating are the silence, love and understanding from which the words arise. If our words come from this silence, they come, as it were, pregnant with it and they deliver their silence straight into the heart of the listener. The listener may not even be aware that this seed of silence has been planted in the heart. It is only later, when it begins to grow in us, that the mind takes note of the fact that something has changed. We do not need to know, in fact we cannot know, how or when this seed was planted.

It is like falling in love. Why was it that particular face or that particular smile that stirred this depth of love? Who knows and who cares? And when this love was stirred in us, was it not something that we had always known but had seemingly forgotten? Do we not recognise this love as the most intimate and familiar thing we know? Do we not know that it is for this that we live, not for the person, but for this love?

It is the same with the teaching or the teacher. What is it about the teaching or the teacher that seems to precipitate this awakening of love for the Absolute? I do not know! How is it that a look or a word or a gesture can melt the heart? I do not know!

To begin with it may seem that this love is dependent upon the teacher, just as when we are teenagers we feel that love is dependent on our sweetheart. But in time, this perfume lingers when the teacher or the teaching is not present. Maybe just the thought of the teacher or the teaching is all that is required to reawaken the love that lives in the heart.

In time, even the thought of the teacher or the teaching is not needed. Love simply awakens to itself at its own bidding. In fact, it has always been like that. The teacher, the teaching, the lover and the child were only the forms that love took to draw the apparent entity back into the heart.

Epilogue: The Heart of Experience

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble tabletop.
While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.

W. B. YEATS

Verse IV, from 'Vascillation'

All that is ever experienced is the experience of experiencing. What is it that experiences experience? Only experience. It experiences or knows itself. This pure experiencing is what we are. It is pervaded by the intimacy of our being.

There is only our self, pure experiencing, taking the shape of the totality of experience but never knowing itself as something other than itself, such as a body, mind or world.

The body, mind and world are only such from the point of view of the mind. But the mind's point of view is an imaginary point of view, like the point of view of a person in our dream or a character on TV. Such a point of view is only real from the imaginary point of view of the imaginary separate self.

In fact, there are no points of view. There is just the view, and every part of the view – although in reality the view is not made of parts – is permeated by seeing or experiencing. It is made only of seeing or experiencing. The view sees itself, but not as an object. It is too close, too intimate, to see or know itself *as something*, such as a view or an object. Experience is too close to itself to know itself as a body, mind or world.

What is experience's experience of itself? Look out of the window. In the timeless moment – which is, in fact, only the ever-present now – before thought has time to rise and say 'a tree', 'a house', 'a car', 'a person', before thought has time to say 'a sensation or 'a perception', before thought has time to say 'sensing' or 'perceiving', before thought even has time to say 'this is a thought'...what is that experience?

Experience is all that is being experienced, and yet the mind cannot go to that place. Thought simply cannot name the true substance of experience, for to do so would mean to separate itself from experience as a separate knower and look back, as it were, on experience. That is exactly what the inside self is, the imaginary separate knower of experience.

Only an imaginary mind can seem to do such a thing, and in fact it does this only in its own imagination. In reality it does no such thing. Indeed, the mind is only a mind from the point of view of the mind. From the point of view of experience itself, experience is so close to itself, so intimate, that it cannot rise up and know itself even as experience.

That intimacy that knows no otherness, that knows no objects, selves, entities, others or world, is the experience of love.

* * *

Some of us may find this complex, abstract and incomprehensible and dismiss it as philosophical rambling. For others it may articulate something we have always known but perhaps never quite brought into focus. Reading these words we may feel that we have written them ourself, so intimately and accurately do they describe our experience.

We may find the body, mind and world dissolving in understanding and will know this understanding as love. The mind may attempt to rise up

from time to time to know ‘something’, but it will again and again be effortlessly dissolved in this love and understanding.

From time to time we may find ourself simply sitting in silence, totally immersed in the immediacy and intimacy of the moment; not immersed as a person but rather knowing only this immediacy and intimacy; feeling that it is at once fleeting and eternal, without meaning but precious, simultaneously fragile and indestructible, unreal as an object but utterly real as love.

And as the phone goes, we reach for it knowing that all we could want in that moment is to answer the phone; as our child asks for a bag of crisps all we could want is to buy a bag of crisps; as we wash our face in the morning all we could want is the sensation of warm water on our skin. Whatever we touch, wherever we look, whatever we hear...we bless it with our touching, with our looking, with our hearing, and are simultaneously blessed by it.

We find our self at and as the very heart of life, without the slightest motive to resist or seek. We understand the artist’s motive to take up a brush and paint a face, a landscape or a bottle, expressing with every stroke the intimacy, the vibrancy, the aliveness, the love that pervade all experience, that *are* all experience.

We understand the desire to make a bowl in which the world dissolves. We understand how love is poured into a brushstroke, a note, a smile, a footstep or a gesture. We realise that it is this vision that renders all things beautiful, that in fact dissolves all seeming things in beauty. Everything we see and do is sacred.

* * *

At the heart of all experience is an open door. It is not a door that leads to a refuge that is apart from experience. It leads us so deeply into the heart of experience that experience itself loses its familiar names and forms.

We realise that it was, in fact, these familiar names and forms that kept us apart from experience, that veiled the intimacy, the love, that is the natural condition of all experience. The mind simply cannot go through that door.

It doesn't even know its whereabouts. It is safely hidden right at the heart of all experience.

At the heart of experience there is a fire that burns all we know, that turns all things into itself.

Offer everything to this fire.

This fire is the experience of peace and happiness for which all things are destined and from which all things proceed.

It is that for which we have longed all our life, and we find it here, shining at the heart of all experience.

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