

TRANSPARENT BODY,  
LUMINOUS WORLD

## INTRODUCTION

As a young adult my interest in truth or the nature of reality involved the study and practice of the non-dual tradition of Advaita Vedanta. I received the initial teaching in this tradition at Colet House in London from Shantananda Saraswati, at that time the Shankaracharya of the north of India, and through the writings of Ramana Maharshi, who was my constant companion during those years. This exploration reached its culmination when, in my mid-thirties, I met my teacher, Francis Lucille, who introduced me to the teachings of Atmananda Krishna Menon and, more importantly, directly indicated the ultimate reality of experience.

Until this encounter, my primary interest had been the recognition of my true nature, which I considered to be the height of the spiritual path. However, soon after we met, Francis also introduced me to the Tantric approach of Kashmir Shaivism, which he had learnt from his teacher, Jean Klein, who himself had brought it from India to the West towards the end of the twentieth century. As a result, I realised that the recognition of our true nature is a stage in but not the end of the spiritual path. The aim of this approach is to establish the non-dual understanding in all realms of experience. It involves a process of realigning the way we feel the body and perceive the world with the recognition of our true nature of eternal, infinite Awareness.

Many traditional and contemporary commentaries place the Tantric tradition in opposition to the Vedantic approach. As a student I was spared this conflict, for the two approaches were presented as inner and outer faces of the same complete teaching. It is in this spirit that *Transparent Body, Luminous World* presents the Tantric teaching in this collection. Although the purpose of this collection is to present a contemporary

rendition of the Tantric approach to sensation and perception, I would like to place this approach in the context of the Vedantic path.

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The essence of the Vedantic path involves an inversion of attention upon its source, which can be triggered by a question such as, ‘Who am I?’, ‘What is it that is aware of my experience?’, ‘Am I aware?’, ‘From where do my thoughts come?’, ‘What element of experience cannot be removed from me?’ or ‘What is the essential, irreducible nature of the mind?’ Such questions have the power to invite the mind away from its customary objects of interest – thoughts, images, feelings, sensations and perceptions – towards its source, the subjective experience of being aware, or Awareness itself. This enquiry culminates in Awareness’s recognition of its own eternal, infinite nature.

This path is sometimes referred to as self-enquiry or self-investigation. However, these terms – translations of the Sanskrit term *atma vichara* – are potentially misleading. They imply an activity of the mind rather than, as Ramana Maharshi described it, a sinking or relaxing of the mind into ‘the heart’, that is, into its source of pure Awareness or Consciousness. The term may, therefore, be more accurately translated as ‘self-abiding’ or ‘self-resting’, and is the essence of what is known in various spiritual and religious traditions as prayer, meditation, self-remembering, Hesychasm in the Greek Orthodox Church, or the practice of the presence of God in the mystical Christian tradition.

In order to undertake this ‘inward-facing’ path, one first has to separate oneself from everything that is not inherent in one’s essential being, which shines in each of our minds as the knowledge ‘I’ or ‘I am’. To establish the presence and primacy of our essential identity of pure Awareness, we have to separate ourselves from those aspects of experience that are not inherent in us: our thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions. In doing so, we arrive at the conclusion, ‘I am nothing that can be thought, felt, sensed or perceived; that is, I am nothing, not a thing or any kind of objective experience. I am the ever-present witness of experience, but am not myself an object of experience.’

In the Vedantic tradition this path of separating oneself from everything that is superfluous to one’s essential being of pure Awareness is often

initiated by a process referred to as *neti neti* – ‘I am not this, not this’ – and leads to the recognition ‘I am Awareness or Consciousness itself’. This recognition is not itself enlightenment (although it is often mistaken as such in contemporary expressions of the non-dual teaching), but it paves the way for it. A deeper exploration of the nature of Awareness is required, culminating in Awareness’s recognition of its own eternal, infinite nature. In this recognition, no new knowledge is gained or experienced. Rather, previous beliefs are removed from Awareness, enabling its essential, indivisible, irreducible nature to stand revealed.

The beliefs that make Awareness appear to be temporary and finite, that is, that make Awareness appear to share the destiny and limits of the body, are referred to in the Vedantic tradition as ‘ignorance’. Ignorance is not an object that obscures the nature of Awareness, but rather an activity of thinking and feeling. The cessation of this obscuring activity is the process through which Awareness ceases to hide itself from itself in the form of mind, and recognises itself as it is. The *neti neti* process is, therefore, a prelude to the deeper exploration of self-enquiry or self-investigation, leading to self-abidance or self-resting. In this self-abidance, Awareness is, in most cases gradually but occasionally suddenly, divested of its limitations and, at some point, stands revealed to itself as it essentially is.

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Awareness’s recognition of its own eternal, infinite nature is variously known in the spiritual traditions as enlightenment, awakening, illumination or the simple recognition of one’s essential, self-aware being – its recognition of itself. It is the culmination of the Inward Path, the Path of Exclusion, the Path of Return, the Path of Discrimination, the Path of Knowledge, Jnana Yoga or, as it is known in the Zen tradition, the Great Death. This approach is sometimes referred to collectively as the Direct Path, in that the mind turns its knowing or attention directly towards its source, irrespective of the content or condition of objective experience. No preparation, manipulation or purification of the mind or body is required as a prerequisite to this approach. In fact, from the point of view of the Direct Path, the progressive approaches are considered preparations for this final stage of the inward-facing path.

All the highest spiritual teachings express the same essential understanding, because the nature of reality is not something that varies from culture

to culture. However, the form of its expression arises out of the culture in which it is expressed. A teaching is conditioned, though not essentially changed, by the local and temporal traditions of that culture. The Direct Path is, in my opinion and experience, the one that is best suited to our age and culture, and it is made most explicit in the Vedantic path of self-investigation and self-abidance.

However, this turning away from the objective elements of experience – thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions – for the purpose of establishing the presence, primacy and nature of Awareness still leaves a distinction between Awareness and its objects. In some traditional expressions of the teaching, this distinction may inculcate a negative attitude towards objective experience, considering it a hindrance to Awareness’s recognition of its own being. It is in this context that we find expressions such as ‘the despicable body’ or ‘the filthy ego’ in some traditional and even some contemporary non-dual texts. For the full integration of this new understanding into all realms of our lives, the relationship between Awareness and its objects must be fully explored, and eventually dissolved.

Even after the recognition of our essential nature of eternal, infinite Awareness, it is common for many of us to find a discrepancy between what we understand and what we feel. We may understand that everything appears in Awareness, is known by Awareness and is made of Awareness, and yet we may still feel the body as something solid, dense, limited and located. Likewise, and as an inevitable corollary to this feeling, we may perceive the world as something that is separate and at a distance from ourself. Thus, our thoughts may be more or less free of the separate self, but our feelings and perceptions, and subsequent activities and relationships, may betray the residues of an apparently separate self still present in the deeper, more hidden layers of experience. The yoga meditations presented in this collection are aimed at dissolving this discrepancy.

This approach, which I call the Tantric Yoga of Sensation and Perception, starts with the recognition of our true nature and proceeds from there to fully explore the relationship between Awareness and objective experience. Although this relationship is implicit in the Vedantic tradition, it was made explicit in the Tantric traditions, particularly that of Kashmir Shaivism. Ramana Maharshi would sit for many hours in silence with his students, and the exposure and dissolution of these feelings would be brought about in this silence. In the Tantric traditions, of which this Yoga

of Sensation and Perception is a contemporary expression, a more proactive approach is taken to exploring the feeling of separation in the body.

Thus, the two traditions of Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism are complementary aspects of a complete approach to the exploration of experience, and not, as we so often find in scholastic commentaries on these two traditions, at odds with each other. Unfortunately, many contemporary Western expressions of the Tantric tradition are not sufficiently adapted to the culture in which they now find themselves and, as a result, the form of these teachings is often adhered to at the expense of their meaning.

In the cultures in which these teachings originated, their forms were tailored to the requirements of the people at hand, evolving and changing spontaneously, and always developing new pathways that corresponded intimately with their questions, difficulties and resistances. As such, the true Tantric tradition was a living, growing flame that was passed on from generation to generation, not a series of codified practices that could be disseminated by teachers and mechanically applied by students. In our culture, in the absence of this living tradition, a surrogate tradition of dogmas, codes and practices, still redolent of its countries of origin, masks the true teaching with elements that are foreign to the culture in which it now finds itself. This shrouds the teaching in an air of mystery, obscurity and esotericism, which the seeking ego mistakes for profundity and authenticity, and in which it takes refuge.

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The Tantric path, of which the meditations presented in this collection are a contemporary expression, involves a turning towards experience. It is an exploration of objective experience in the light of our enlightened understanding, rather than a turning away from experience in favour of its background of pure Awareness, as is the case in the Vedantic approach. If the Vedantic path is the path from 'I am something' – a body and mind – to 'I am nothing', the Tantric path could be said to be the path from 'I am nothing' to 'I am everything'. If the Vedantic path is one of exclusion or discrimination, the Tantric path is one of inclusion or love. In the Zen tradition the Vedantic path is known as the Great Death, the Tantric path as the Great Rebirth.

This path of inclusion or love involves a realignment of feelings, sensations, perceptions, activities and relationships with the recognition of our eternal, infinite nature of pure Awareness. It is the second stage of the spiritual process, in which we return to the objective realm of experience, having already recognised our true nature. It is the path in which the residues of the separate self in the body are gradually exposed by, surrendered to and, in time, dissolved in the light of Awareness. It is an invitation to the body to be felt and the world to be perceived in a way that is consistent with the understanding that our true nature of eternal, infinite Awareness is the sole and ultimate reality of all experience. We do not want to simply *know* that I am ever-present, unlimited Awareness; we want to *feel* it, and we want to live in a way that is consistent with this feeling-understanding in all realms of experience.

The way we think, feel, act, perceive and relate has been conditioned for decades by the fundamental presumption of our world culture that our essential identity of Awareness is a temporary, finite entity that lives in and shares the limits and destiny of the body. This apparent mixture of Awareness and the limitations of the body gives rise to the belief and, more importantly, the feeling of being a temporary, finite entity or self. Being temporary, the apparently separate self or ego fears death or disappearance; being finite, it feels incomplete, and thus suffers from a chronic sense that something is missing.

These two feelings – the fear of death and the sense of lack – are the two elements that define the apparently separate self around whom most people's lives revolve, and on whose behalf our fears, desires, insecurities, neuroses and anxieties arise. The separate self is not an entity; it is an activity – the activity of thinking, feeling, acting, perceiving and relating on behalf of an imaginary, temporary, finite consciousness. That activity has been rehearsed for decades, and it does not come to an end with the recognition of our true nature. The source of that activity comes to an end, but its effects in the way we feel, act, perceive and relate continue. In other words, the feeling of separation in the body outlives enlightenment, in the same way that picking a flower cuts it off from its source of nourishment in the earth but doesn't bring it to an immediate end.

The deeper feelings that are the core of the separate self are often laid down early in childhood and, being too painful to face or bear, are buried in the body. They lie there, layer upon layer, below the reach of rational thought, as a network of tensions and feelings that betray themselves later

in life as strategies of resistance and avoidance, frequently at odds with our deepest love and understanding.

Long after the recognition of our true nature, this great well of feelings can remain just below the surface of our waking-state experience, but susceptible to the slightest provocation in our relationships and circumstances. These are not just temporary, local feelings that arise in response to circumstances, such as, 'I am upset by this or irritated by that'. They are the subtler, chronic feelings that seem to pervade our experience, such as the feeling of being unlovable, unworthy, ashamed, afraid, inadequate or guilty. These feelings are buried below the threshold of rational thought and are beyond its reach, and reside, as a result, as a network of sensations in the body. It is as a result of this network of sensations that, in spite of our genuine understanding to the contrary, we still feel solid, dense, limited, separate and located.

It was in relation to such feelings that the Zen master, when asked on his deathbed how things were going, responded, 'Everything is fine, but my body is having a hard time keeping up!' The Zen master, in his humility and honesty, recognised that whilst his mind was clear there were still some residues left in the body that had not yet caught up with his profound realisation. This is the situation in which most people on the non-dual path find themselves. Carl Jung is supposed to have said of Ramana Maharshi that he was 'like a white spot on a white piece of paper'. However, most of us are various shades of grey!

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Is it absolutely necessary to undertake the second stage of the process, this Tantric Yoga of Sensation and Perception? No, it is not required for the recognition of our true nature. The recognition of our true nature requires only Awareness's knowing of its own being and is independent of the content or quality of the mind or body. It is between Awareness and itself. However, if we want to access the peace and fulfilment that are inherent in our true nature of pure Awareness, and live and express this in life, that is, in our activities, relationships and perceptions, then yes, it is necessary to undergo this second part of the process.

In this yoga, the distinction between Awareness and its objects, which was effected in order to establish the presence, primacy and nature of



Awareness, is dissolved. In fact, it is not dissolved; it was never real to begin with. However, under normal circumstances our true nature of ever-present, unlimited Awareness is so completely lost in or merged with the objects of experience as to seem to have become limited by and, therefore, identical to them.

In the path of self-enquiry, Awareness is separated from its objects, and returns, as it were, to itself and recognises itself as it is. In the Tantric Yoga of Sensation and Perception, Awareness turns again towards the objects of experience. There is then a progressive infiltrating, pervading or saturating of the objects of knowledge and experience with the peace and happiness that are inherent in Awareness's knowing of its own being. That is, instead of Awareness being merged with experience, experience is merged in Awareness.

In ignorance, I, Awareness, seem to share the destiny and limits of the body and thus seem to be identical with it. In wisdom or understanding, Awareness recognises its own eternal, infinite being. In love, the body is known to share the qualities of Awareness and is felt, as such, to be open, empty, transparent, light, loving and intimately connected with all others and its environment.

One following the Vedantic path, or the Path of Discrimination, starts with 'I am not this, I am not this' and discovers the presence and primacy of Awareness, which is then, in the process of self-abidance, relieved of its apparent limitations and stands revealed as eternal and infinite. On the Tantric path, having discovered our essential nature of eternal, infinite Awareness, we no longer say, 'I am *not* this; I am *not* this'; rather, we say, 'I *am* this; I *am* this'. We turn towards experience, not away from it. We stand knowingly as the open, empty, transparent, loving presence of Awareness and allow experience fully into ourself, facing it with unconditional openness.

This is no longer something we have to do or practice. It is our nature. This unconditional openness to all experience is what we are, not what we do. We allow all experience – particularly those experiences that in the past we would have been motivated to avoid through the use of substances, activities, states of mind and relationships – to come fully into ourself. We stay with experience throughout all its permutations, thus allowing it to be gradually and progressively permeated and saturated with the light of Awareness, until in time all experience is revealed at an experiential level as a modulation of that. All experience is like a current in the ocean of Awareness.

The density and solidity of the body and the otherness of the world are penetrated and suffused with the light of pure knowing, God's infinite being, and are gradually outshone by it. The body becomes impersonal like the world, and the world becomes intimate like the body. At some point, there is a feeling-understanding that there is only God's infinite being, and everything is that. As the Sufis say, 'There is only God's face.'

The two paths of Vedanta and Tantra, in the forms in which they are presented in this collection, are not two opposing paths competing for the ultimate truth. They are complementary approaches which, divested of the cultural packaging that has alienated so many people from the simplicity and immediacy of the Great Tradition, provide our generation with an experiential path that stands up to the scrutiny of reason and includes all aspects of experience. It is a path that is thus well adapted to the requirements of the twenty-first century.

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## MEDITATIONS

## MEDITATION I

### EXPLORING THE TRUE EXPERIENCE OF THE BODY

In most of the great spiritual traditions there are two complementary paths, the inward-facing path and the outward-facing path. The inward-facing path is based on the mind's recognition of the essential nature of its own experience. The mind notices that all it knows is its own experience. That is, the mind notices that all it ever knows or comes in contact with is itself: thinking, imagining, feeling, sensing, perceiving. Everything that is known by the mind takes place in the mind.

If everything appears in the mind, then everything that appears must share the essential nature of the mind. Therefore, in order to know the essential nature of anything, such as the body or the world, the mind must first know its own nature. The mind's knowledge of things is only as good as its knowledge of itself. As the Sufis say, 'Whoever knows their self knows their Lord.' That is, whoever knows the essential nature of the mind knows the ultimate reality of the universe.

This recognition that in order to know the nature of anything we must first know the nature of our own mind is a pivotal moment in our lives and triggers a revolution. It is this recognition that the painter Paul Cézanne was referring to when he said, 'A single carrot freshly observed will trigger a revolution.'

This recognition triggers the ultimate revolution, and I mean 'revolution' literally. It triggers a turning around of the mind. The mind recognises that in order to know the nature of anything, it must first know the nature of itself. Therefore, there can be no higher endeavour than to explore and discover the nature of the mind. That is, there can be no greater endeavour for the mind itself than to discover its own nature.

With this simple recognition, the mind turns around – the ultimate revolution – and it questions its own reality: ‘Who am I? What am I? What is my essential nature? What is the nature of the knowing with which all knowledge and experience is known?’

The mind recognises that thinking is not inherent in it. It is not essential, therefore cannot be what mind essentially is. Feeling, sensing and perceiving are not essential to the mind. They come and go, but the mind is always present throughout all these changes, therefore they cannot be inherent in what it is.

The mind asks itself, ‘What am I? What is my essential, irreducible, unchanging nature?’ and this question triggers the inward-facing path. When I say ‘inward’ I don’t mean inwards towards the body; I mean inwards towards the source or the essential nature of the mind.

This Direct Path of self-investigation has been the essential ingredient of the traditional Vedantic teachings for many centuries. However, because many people found it too difficult, the teachers in this tradition elaborated other, more progressive approaches and, as a result, this direct approach fell into disuse and obscurity. It was only resurrected by Ramana Maharshi and Atmananda Krishna Menon, amongst others, in the middle of the last century. They reformulated this approach for a new generation.

They brought this Direct Path of self-investigation out of the esoteric schools, where it was given to initiates who had done thirty or forty years of preparatory practices, and made it available to everyone. They felt that our world culture had reached a sufficient level of maturity to enable this direct approach to be made available to everyone, not just the initiates in ashrams and monasteries. I feel very much the same way, that our age is ripe for the Direct Path. We no longer need to go via an object to our true nature.

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So, as the mind turns its attention, or turns the light of its knowing, upon itself it embarks on what we could call the return journey, the return to the source from which it initially arises. In doing so, the mind is, in most cases, gradually and progressively relieved of its limitations. Occasionally this happens suddenly, and we are all familiar with the few stories of cases in which this liberation from the limitations of the mind happened

suddenly. But this is very rare, and we shouldn't expect it to happen in our case like that. In almost all cases, it is a gradual and progressive liberation of the mind from its self-imposed limitations.

Why do I say 'self-imposed limitations'? Because Awareness, or pure Consciousness, the source from which the mind arises, itself freely assumes the form of the finite mind. Nothing imposes the mind on Consciousness from the outside. It is infinite Consciousness that freely assumes the form of the finite mind, thereby limiting itself, in order to realise a part of the unmanifest potential that lies within it, in the form of the world.

So, the finite mind is not a mistake; it is not a problem. In Sanskrit the activity of the finite mind is sometimes referred to as *avidya*, which is usually translated as 'ignorance'. However, it is ignorant only in the sense that it involves the ignoring or veiling of the reality of the mind, just as a movie involves the veiling of the screen.

In that sense, mind is sometimes said to be ignorance, but the term ignorance in this context does not carry the connotation that it does in the English language, where ignorance is analogous with stupidity. However, because of the association of ignorance with stupidity in English, the translation of the Sanskrit term *avidya* as ignorance has given rise to the belief that objective experience – the mind, the body and the world – is somehow wrong or a mistake. This led to many body-negative or body-denying attitudes in some traditional expressions of the Advaita or non-dual teaching.

The finite mind is not a mistake. Consciousness doesn't make mistakes; it is complete freedom. Consciousness assumes the form of the finite mind out of its freedom, limiting itself in order to give birth to manifestation in the form of the world.

However, manifestation comes at a price. Consciousness limits itself in order to manifest its infinite potential in the form of the world, but in doing so ends up as a temporary, finite consciousness – the separate self, mind or ego – inside the very world which it has created, just as a spider spins a web out of herself and then becomes entangled in the web. Consciousness gives birth to the world within itself and then becomes a separate subject of experience in that world, from whose point of view that world is now known.

Consciousness gets lost in its own creativity. It seems to become a self in the world. In the form of that temporary, finite self or ego, Consciousness

then has to trace its way back home to discover its true nature again, just as the spider has to extricate itself from the web in which it now finds itself entangled.

This tracing back of the finite mind to its infinite source of pure Consciousness is the inward-facing path, the path of self-investigation. ‘Who am I? What am I? What is the nature of the knowing with which I know all experience? What is it that is aware of my experience?’ All these questions are triggers that effect this turning around or revolution of the mind, in which it gradually returns to its source and, in doing so, is progressively relieved of its self-imposed or self-assumed limitations.

This return of the mind to its source involves a relaxation of the mind, a sinking of the mind; it doesn’t just happen in a moment. As Jalāl ad-Dīn Rumi said, ‘Flow down and down and down, in ever-widening rings of being.’ Ever-widening, that is, as the mind flows down, or back and back and back into its source, it widens: it gradually loses its limitations as it sinks into its source.

As the mind sinks deeper and deeper into its source, it simply rests there. What began as a process of self-investigation ends up simply in self-abidance, mind resting in its source. It is in this self-resting that the mind is relieved of its limitations.

If we want a metaphor for this self-resting or self-abidance, we could imagine a dirty dishcloth. In order to clean the dishcloth we place it in a basin of warm, soapy water and scrub it. The scrubbing removes much of the dirt, but the deeply ingrained stains remain. In order to remove these more deeply ingrained stains we simply leave the dishcloth soaking in the warm, soapy water. It is this soaking that effects the cleaning of the deeper layers of dirt. Self-abidance is the soaking of the mind in its source of pure Consciousness.

The Sanskrit term *atma vichara*, which is normally translated ‘self-enquiry’ or ‘self-investigation’, has two parts to it. The first part is a process of questioning in which there is something for the mind to do: ‘What is the nature of my self? Who am I? What is the nature of the knowing with which I know my experience?’

In time, this activity becomes subtler and subtler until, in the end, there is no more for the mind to do other than to rest its source of pure Consciousness, which is the experiential answer to these questions. It is in this self-resting or self-abiding that the mind is relieved of its limitations. That

is why the larger part of the path of self-investigation is really self-abidance or self-resting.

This is what Ramana Maharshi was referring to when he said that the highest meditation is simply to be – not to do anything with the mind, not to direct the mind towards anything, just to leave the mind resting or abiding in its source, the self-resting of the mind.

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So that is a brief summary of the inward-facing path, and we find this path in some form in nearly all the spiritual traditions, whether it is called self-investigation, self-enquiry, self-abidance, the practice of the presence of God, as the Christian mystics call it, self-remembering, as the Russian philosopher P. D. Ouspensky called it (although it was very often misunderstood by his students), prayer, meditation, focusing on the 'I am', or simply giving our attention to the feeling of being.

This effortless form of meditation, which is in fact a non-practice, is the ultimate meditation, the highest form of prayer, because it is the only form of meditation that doesn't require an object for the mind to focus on. It doesn't require a mantra, a teacher, the breath, the space between breaths, a flame, and so on. All of these are more or less subtle objects towards which the mind directs itself. The Direct Path gives the mind no object to focus on. It is the opposite of focusing; it is the relaxing or sinking of the mind into its source. It is a sinking of the mind into the heart, as Ramana Maharshi said.

At some point there is the revelation that the essential nature of the mind is transparent, empty, ever-present Consciousness. It doesn't appear, it wasn't born, it doesn't move or change or age, it is not going to die or disappear, and it has no limits. Being unlimited, there is only one infinite Consciousness. Each of our finite minds is precipitated within and made of the same infinite Consciousness. Therefore, at the deepest level, all of our minds are connected. We are literally one. That experience, the recognition of our shared being, is commonly called love.

That is the great revelation, the culmination of the inward-facing path, which is referred to as illumination, or awakening, or enlightenment. All of these are rather exotic terms that for most of us have various cultural associations that make them sound as if they are extraordinary



experiences, only available to a few exceptional people. For this reason, I tend to avoid using such terms and just refer to the simple knowing of our own being as it is, its knowing of itself in us.

When this recognition takes place, the mind is not instantly relieved of all its old habits. The mind has been rehearsing its habits for many decades, and they do not disappear immediately on the recognition of our true nature. Habits last. Habits of thinking are relatively quick to disappear. Once we see our father tiptoeing out of our bedroom at three o'clock on Christmas morning, leaving a stocking on the end of our bed, our belief in Father Christmas ends instantly.

So, ideas and beliefs are relatively quick to realign themselves with our new recognition of infinite Consciousness, or its recognition of itself. However, our feelings are not so quick to realign themselves. It is possible in theory for our feelings to be cleaned up overnight, but it is very rare, and in almost all cases the feeling of being temporary, finite, separate and limited outlives the recognition of our true nature and continues to express itself in the way we feel the body, and in our postures, movements, activities and relationships.

It is this discrepancy between what we understand and what we feel that is responsible for so many questions that people have: 'I have been studying and practicing non-duality for forty years and clearly understand it, and yet still feel that something is missing, and still find myself behaving in ways that betray the presence of a separate self lurking in my experience, despite my genuine understanding that I am not a temporary, finite, located, separate self.' Or, 'I continually find that, in spite of my non-dual understanding, my feelings sabotage my behaviour, friendships and intimate relationships.'

This conflict between what we understand and what we feel is due to the echo of separation still reverberating in the body. The feeling of separation has not yet been flushed out of the body, although it has to a large extent been flushed out of the mind. This discrepancy between our ideas and feelings is also an explanation for a phenomenon that we see in many teachers and which gives rise to many questions: 'How come so-and-so can speak with such genuine understanding and clarity and yet behave in inconsistent ways?'

We have in our culture the idea that a teacher is a kind of ideal person whose beliefs, feelings, activities and relationships are absolutely perfect.

There may be a few people like that – as Carl Jung said of Ramana Maharshi, ‘He was a white spot on a white piece of paper’ – but most of us are various degrees of pale grey spots on a white sheet of paper.

I do not say this to legitimise inappropriate behaviour in those who speak or write about the non-dual understanding, but rather to make it clear that the feeling of separation in the body outlives the recognition of our true nature and, in doing so, to pave the way for the Tantric Yoga of Sensation and Perception that we are interested in here. There is a story of a Zen master who was asked by one of his students on his deathbed, ‘How are things for you now?’ The Zen master replied, ‘Everything is fine, but my body is having a hard time keeping up.’

Everything was fine. His mind was open, spacious, clear, at peace, and yet there was this beautiful and humble acknowledgement in him that there were some corners of his experience, his feelings in the body, that had not yet caught up with his great and genuine understanding. This was not a failure on the part of the Zen master; it was just a very human recognition that the body/mind had not yet been completely colonised, saturated, permeated with his understanding.

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So the approach to the body in these yoga meditations comes from the understanding that there is a further step after the recognition of our true nature, in which we encourage the body to be felt and the world to be perceived in a way that is consistent with our new non-dual understanding.

These yoga meditations, as I call them, are designed to do just this: to help and encourage the body liberate itself from feelings of density, limitation, location, heaviness, separateness. It is not a rational exploration. In other words, these yoga meditations don’t use the clean, clinical lines of reasoning that we use in our conversations or dialogues. These lines of reasoning are very effective at exposing, uprooting and dissolving belief systems, but they do not touch our feelings. Our feelings lie below the threshold of rational thought and survive even the most astute, intelligent analysis.

It is for this reason that these yoga meditations proceed in non-rational ways, using visualisation and feeling rather than reason. Let me give you an example. Imagine we are a musician. We play the flute, violin, piano

or guitar, and we prepare a piece of music for our teacher. Our teacher asks us to play it for her, but before we play it she asks us to imagine that we are performing it on our first night at Carnegie Hall, and to visualise and play the piece as if that were the case.

If we are a pianist we are playing one of the slow movements from one of Beethoven's piano sonatas, if we are a flautist or violinist we are playing a slow movement from one of the Bach partitas, and if we are a singer and guitarist we are playing a love song that we recently composed for our sweetheart. So we play the piece of music as if to an audience at Carnegie Hall, and our teacher listens and at the end says, 'Thank you. You played that perfectly.'

Now our teacher ask us to play the same piece of music again, but before we play it she asks us to imagine that we are in a room with our dearest and most intimate companion, and he or she is about to take a long journey, and we don't know if or when we will see each other again. Our teacher asks us to imagine that this piece of music is the last communication we are going to have with our friend, and then asks us to start playing.

So, we play the same piece of music. In both cases we play them note-perfect, but the quality of the two pieces of music is completely different. All we did was first visualise playing in front of an audience at Carnegie Hall and then in a room with our dearest and most intimate companion. Just that feeling-visualisation was enough to profoundly change the quality of our playing. That is the power of visualisation, feeling-visualisation, to re-orchestrate the body, to re-orchestrate our feelings, sensations and perceptions.

These yoga meditations work in a similar way. It is not necessary to analyse why there is a difference between playing at Carnegie Hall and to our most intimate companion. We don't need an explanation. The fact is that it works.

If we really want to be established in this understanding at all levels of our experience, a further investigation of the body and the world is important. When Atmananda Krishna Menon was asked, 'How do I know when I am established in my true nature?' he replied, 'When thoughts, feelings and perceptions can no longer take you away.'

He did not say when just thoughts can no longer take us away. It is not just when our thoughts are clearly aligned with the non-dual perspective but, more importantly, when our feelings and perceptions are fully

aligned, that we can say that we are really established in this understanding and that all aspects our life – thoughts, feelings, perceptions, activities and relationships – are an expression of this understanding.

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I suggest, to begin with, that we keep our eyes closed. The only reason for closing our eyes is that we are going to explore the experience of the body, not the experience of the world. We close our eyes just to temporarily shut out the vision of the world, which is not the focus of our attention at the moment.

Allow the experience of the body to come to your attention. I want to take some time to be sure that we all understand clearly what is meant by the phrase ‘the experience of the body’.

First of all, think about your body. Now, that series of thoughts is not the actual experience of the body; it is the experience of thought. Put those thoughts on one side. We’re not going to be referring to them now.

Now take the image of your body, the image that you might see in the mirror or a photograph, or looking down at your body. Again, that is not the actual experience of the body. Put it on one side.

Now, what remains of our actual experience of the body? Whatever that is, is what I refer to as the experience of the body. It is simply a sensation or a network of sensations. By the word ‘sensation’ I mean something very specific.

### *Traffic sounds*

The sound of traffic outside is not a sensation; it’s a perception. Leave it alone. A thought or an image or a perception is not a sensation.

Go to the experience of the tingling of your face. That is a sensation. A headache is a sensation. The experience of hunger is a sensation. The tingling of our hands or the soles of our feet is a sensation.

Simply allow the sensation of the body to come to your attention. One way that sometimes helps us to be very clear that we stick only to the actual experience of the body is to imagine that we are a newborn infant. The reason for doing this is that a newborn infant doesn’t have any thoughts or images of its body. The newborn infant is like a bundle of