

THE ESSENCE OF MEDITATION SERIES

BEING
MYSELF

Rupert Spira

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FOREWORD

There is a common discernment that runs like a thread through the world's spiritual and philosophic traditions. It has been gestured to by many names in many languages, but the name by which it is best known is the perennial philosophy.

Although its lineaments may be traced through comparative study of the world's scriptures, mystics and sages, its essential tenets may be derived from first principles. One begins with the metaphysical Absolute, that Ultimate Reality or Supreme Principle indicated by such terms as the Godhead of Meister Eckhart, the Good of Plato, the One of Plotinus, Ibn al-'Arabi's Divine Essence, Shankaracharya's attribute-less supreme Reality, the eternal Tao of Lao Tzu and the primordial Ground of Dzogchen.

The Absolute is necessarily without limitation, restriction or determination. It is at once unique and an all-encompassing totality. It is, of necessity, partless, as the finite and relative could have no common measure with Its absoluteness and infinitude. Manifestation arises in consequence of Its infinitude or universal possibility, yet manifestation is neither separate from nor identical to the Absolute.

Ultimately, there are not two realities, the Absolute and manifestation; rather, the Absolute alone is real and yet manifestation is ultimately not other than the Absolute. The human being, as part of manifestation, participates in the inherently paradoxical relation between manifestation and the Absolute. Just as manifestation is not other than the Absolute, so we also share this indivision.

The Spirit or Self is at once the immanent presence of the Absolute and the true ground of our subjectivity. It is our very principle and essence, through which we derive our entire existence. The realisation of our identity with the Spirit or Self is at once our perfection, our liberation and our return to the Absolute, from which we have never in fact been apart. This realisation stands at once as the fulfilment and the confirmation of the perennial philosophy.

Yet how may this unitive identity be realised? Each tradition, with its attendant path, provides its own means, but such teaching and spiritual practice may only lead to the realisation's outer boundary. There is a chasm yet to be leapt. In Plato's *Seventh Letter*, he speaks of the sudden passage from discursive reasoning to intellectual vision. As with the seeress Diotima's description in Plato's *Symposium* of the apprehension of the Form of the Beautiful, the vision comes 'of a sudden', revealed to the soul as a spontaneous, immediate presence:

For a thing of this kind cannot be expressed by words like other disciplines, but by long familiarity, and living in the conjunction with the thing itself, a light as it were leaping from a fire will on a sudden be enkindled in the soul, and there itself nourish itself. *

In a similar manner, the course of instruction in Advaita Vedanta is presented in terms of a threefold process of deepening engagement: hearing the teaching, reflecting upon it and stabilising oneself in it. It is through this process of engagement – at once rational and experiential – that direct insight or realisation may arise. The 'moment' of how this may come about is a mystery, but the process is not: it is the result of skilful teaching suitably received.

Rupert Spira is precisely such a skilled teacher, one who speaks at once out of a depth of realised understanding and a breadth of practical experience in guiding seekers towards this fundamental insight. An ancient spiritual metaphor contrasts green wood with dry wood as a measure of the readiness of the seeker. As the wood is seasoned, it may eventually catch flame. Rupert's teaching may be seen as the throwing off of numerous 'sparks' that progressively 'season' the seeker and lead – as with Plato – to the eventual kindling of unitive realisation.

The essence of non-dual understanding is summarised by Shankaracharya as, 'The Absolute is the only reality; the world is not in itself real; the individual self is not different from the Absolute'. In *Being Myself*, Rupert's focus is primarily on the concluding section of this statement, highlighting the essential identity between the individual 'I' and the Absolute 'I Am'. Everything that Rupert has to say in what follows is a pointer, a 'spark', to that essential insight.

The seemingly ordinary referent 'I' is a key to this realisation. What is this 'I'? Just as Ramana Maharshi repeatedly instructed seekers to enquire of themselves, 'Who am I?', so also the familiar question of Christ might be taken personally and directed inward: 'Who do you say I am?'

The words addressed to Moses from the theophany of the burning bush reply, 'I am that I Am', which may be understood as 'I Am is who I am'. The same answer may be found in al-Hallaj's ecstatic declaration, 'I am the Real', as well as in the 'great saying' of the Upanishads, 'I am the Absolute'.

Francis Bacon once observed that only some few books deserve to be thoroughly 'chewed and digested'. I would suggest that this is such a book. The process of hearing and reflecting is, for most seekers, gradual and protracted. The teaching is at once obvious and yet subtle; even when it is clearly grasped intellectually, the ego-sense remains persistent. Further, as much as Rupert's words are pointers, they are also, inescapably, veils. What he is gesturing towards is That for which we have no words and before which language fails. With patience, deep consideration and 'rumination', the veils of his words may eventually be pierced through and the reality shining behind and through them clearly recognised. May the reader find it so.

Peter Samsel
Ithaca, New York
September 2020

* Translated by Thomas Taylor.

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NOTE TO THE READER

The contemplations in this book are taken from guided meditations that Rupert Spira has given during meetings and retreats over the past several years. They were originally delivered spontaneously but have been edited for this collection to avoid repetition, and to adapt them from the spoken to the written word.

Meditation takes place in the space between words, although it remains present during the words themselves. Therefore, these contemplations were originally spoken with long silences between almost every sentence, allowing listeners time to explore the statements in their own experience. The meditations in this book have been laid out with numerous breaks between sentences and sections in order to invite and facilitate a similarly contemplative approach.

CHAPTER 1
THE SENSE OF BEING MYSELF

Everyone has the sense of 'being myself'. The sense of 'being myself' is our most ordinary, intimate and familiar experience. It pervades all experience, irrespective of its content. It is the background of all experience.

The sense of 'being myself' never leaves us and cannot be separated from us.

If I am lonely, the sense of 'being myself' is present, although it is temporarily coloured by the feeling of loneliness. If I am in love, the sense of 'being myself' is present, although it is mixed with the feeling of being in love. The sense of 'being myself' is equally present in both feelings.

If I am tired, hungry, excited or in pain, the sense of 'being myself' remains present, albeit mixed with the experiences of tiredness, hunger, excitement or pain. Indeed, *all* experience is pervaded by the sense of 'being myself'.

Just as a screen is coloured by the images that appear on it, our knowledge of 'being myself' is qualified or conditioned by thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, activities and relationships.

And just as the images change constantly but the screen remains the same, so experience changes all the time but the fact of 'being myself' is always the same.

'Being myself' is the ever-present factor in all changing experience.

* * *

Although we all have this sense of 'being myself', not everyone experiences their self *clearly*. In most cases, our sense of self is mixed up with the content of experience: thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, activities and relationships.

There are, as such, two elements to our normal experience of self: our ever-present, unchanging being, and the qualities it derives from our constantly changing experience, which seem to condition and limit it.

All experience is limited by nature, and this mixture of self with the qualities of experience gives rise to a limited sense of self. This is the apparently separate self or ego on whose behalf most thoughts and feelings arise and in whose service most activities and relationships are undertaken.

Divested of the qualities of experience, our self has no characteristics and therefore no limitations of its own. It is simply unlimited or infinite being: transparent, empty, silent, still.

Sharing none of the agitation of our thoughts and feelings, our essential self or being is inherently peaceful. Just as the space of a room cannot be agitated by any of the people or objects within it, so our being cannot be disturbed by anything that takes place in experience.

In the absence of any inherent sense of lack, our being is naturally fulfilled, needing nothing from experience to complete itself, just as nothing in a movie adds anything to or takes anything away from the screen.

Thus, peace and happiness are the natural condition of our essential being, and they inform the thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships of one who knows their self clearly.

* * *

When we allow our essential self to become mixed or identified with the qualities of experience, its natural condition of peace and happiness is veiled or obscured.

Just as water has no taste of its own but assumes the taste of whatever it is mixed with and seems to become, for example, tea or coffee, so our essential self or being has no attributes of its own but assumes the qualities of experience and seems to become a person, a finite self or an ego.

For instance, when a feeling arises, such as sadness, loneliness or anxiety, we no longer know our self as we essentially are: transparent, silent, peaceful, fulfilled. Our knowledge of our self is mixed with and modified by the feeling. We overlook our being in favour of the feeling.

In fact, we seem to *become* the feeling. 'I *feel* sadness' becomes 'I *am* sad'. We lose our self in experience. We forget our self. However, this forgetting never completely eclipses the sense of 'being myself'. It is a partial veiling, for even in the darkest feelings we still have the experience of 'being myself'.

In depression, for instance, our experience is so coloured by darkness that our innate qualities of peace and happiness are almost completely obscured. Our self seems to be tarnished or darkened.

However, just as the nature of water stays the same even when mixed with tea or coffee, so our essential self remains in its pristine condition even when mixed with the content of experience. It is only necessary to stay in touch with one's essential self or being in the midst of all experience.

* * *

Feeling limited, the separate self or ego is prone to vulnerability and insecurity, and thus it seeks to defend itself. This is the impulse behind emotional reactivity: it is an attempt to restore the equilibrium that is the natural condition of our essential self or being.

Being vulnerable, the separate self or ego is inclined to feel unconfident, inferior and unloved, and in an attempt to reestablish the dignity inherent in our true nature, it seeks to aggrandise itself. This is the impulse behind most complaining, criticising and judging.

And feeling incomplete, the separate self or ego is given to a sense of insufficiency, inadequacy and unsatisfactoriness, and in an attempt to recover its natural condition of wholeness, it seeks fulfilment through the acquisition of objects, substances, activities, states of mind or relationships.

Thus, the separate self or ego lives in a constant state of lack: a chronic and pervasive sense of insufficiency punctuated by periods of acute distress. This suffering is the inevitable consequence of the overlooking or forgetting of our true self.

The depth of the suffering depends upon the extent of the amnesia, that is, the degree to which we allow the current feeling or experience to veil the peace and happiness at the core of our being.

Just as suffering is inevitable for the apparently separate self or ego, so resistance and seeking are the two activities that govern its thoughts, feelings, activities and relationships as it attempts to restore its innate peace and happiness.

Little does the separate self realise that what it truly longs for is not to defend or fulfil the entity it imagines itself to be, but to be divested of its apparent limitations and return to its natural condition.

* * *

This loss of peace and happiness initiates a great search in the realm of objective experience, which is destined sooner or later to fail. Indeed, none of us would be reading this book if the search had not, to a greater or lesser extent, failed.

Once we have become sufficiently disillusioned with the capacity of objective experience to provide the peace and happiness for which we long, many of us turn to religious or spiritual traditions, which seem to offer a promise of fulfilment.

To this end, we might devote ourselves to meditation practices, prayer, yoga, visualisation, special diets, disciplined regimes and spiritual teachers. And these may, to some extent, relieve the pain of our longing and restore a degree of balance and harmony to our lives.

However, if our peace and happiness are dependent upon objective experience in any way, however refined or noble, we can be sure that underneath a veneer of peace, the sense of lack is smouldering. Sooner or later we must have the clarity and courage to return from the adventure of experience and come back to our self.

The great secret that lies at the heart of all the main religious and spiritual traditions is the understanding that the peace and happiness for which all people long can never be delivered via objective experience. It can only be found in our self, in the depths of our being.

* * *

The separate self or ego is the apparent entity that arises from the intermingling of our self with the limitations of experience. The divesting of our being of the qualities it seems to have acquired from experience is

referred to as 'enlightenment' in the traditional literature. Our being sheds the limitations of experience that seemed to obscure or 'endarken' it.

Enlightenment is, as such, not a new or extraordinary experience to be attained or acquired; it is simply the revelation of the original nature of our self or being. Nothing could be more intimate and familiar than our being, which is why it feels like coming home. In the Zen tradition it is referred to as the recognition of our original face.

There is nothing exotic or mystical about enlightenment. It is simply the recognition of something that was always known, indeed *is* always known, before it is clouded by experience.

No one *becomes* enlightened. Our being is simply relieved of an imaginary limitation and, as a result, its natural condition of peace and happiness shines.

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All thoughts and feelings, irrespective of their content, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, arise and pass away. Even our most intimate and treasured feelings are not always present, and something that is not always with us cannot be essential to us.

For this reason, there is never any need to manipulate or get rid of any thought or feeling, but only to see clearly that our essential self or being is prior to and independent of thoughts and feelings. Our essential self has no need to be *made* independent through effort or practice. It is always and already inherently free. It is only necessary to recognise it as such.

Whatever the character of any bodily sensation, none are present continuously; sensations are always appearing, evolving and disappearing in our experience. We do not therefore need to manipulate our experience of the body in any way. It is only necessary to recognise that our being is prior to and independent of the condition of the body.

The same is true of our perceptions of the world: sights, sounds, tastes, textures and smells. All of these appear, exist, evolve and vanish. None are essential to us.

Furthermore, no relationship is essential to us. No matter how intimate, none are indispensable. In fact, without reference to thought in this moment, one would have no knowledge of having or being in a relationship. This does not imply that relationship is not valid or desirable but simply that our essential self or being is prior to and independent of it.

Nor is any activity essential to us. Everything we do is pervaded by the sense of 'being myself'. As we engage in an activity we may become completely absorbed in or identified with it, but when it stops, our self or being simply remains as it always is.

Nothing ever happens to pure being.

* * *

What remains when we have let go of all thoughts, images, memories, feelings, sensations, perceptions, activities and relationships?

Our self alone remains: not an enlightened, higher, spiritual, special self or a self that we have *become* through effort, practice or discipline, but just