

PRESENCE, VOLUME II

The Intimacy of All Experience

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Introduction: The Seamless Intimacy of Experience

In 1998 I was staying with my friend and teacher, Francis Lucille, and we were talking about the nature of experience. At one point a dog started to bark in the distance and I observed that it seemed a fact of experience that the dog was outside, separate and at a distance from myself.

Francis said to me, 'Shut your eyes and place your hands on the carpet.' I placed my hands on the carpet and he asked, 'Now, where does that sensation take place?' That was all he said.

At that moment it suddenly became clear that the sensation of the carpet was inside me, that is, inside this perceiving Consciousness, appearing in exactly the same place as my thoughts and bodily sensations.

When I opened my eyes the carpet appeared to be outside again. However, I reasoned that the carpet was only one thing. As a sensation it seemed to be inside but as a visual perception it seemed to be outside. Well, which was it? It couldn't be both.

In this way I explored and experimented with my experience, always with the same question in mind, 'What is the real nature of this experience?' I didn't want a rational response, couched in the non-dual terms that had become so familiar over two decades of seeking. I wanted direct experience.

I would sit for hours refusing the conventional labels that thinking superimposes on experience, allowing experience to reveal itself as it is. As time went on it became more and more obvious that all experience takes place inside Consciousness, that is, inside myself, whatever that is.

In due course I came to see in an experiential way that if there is nothing outside experience there can be nothing inside, for inside and outside are two sides of the same coin. One cannot stand without the other. Experiencing simply remains, neither inside nor outside, and the totality of this experiencing is permeated with, inseparable from and ultimately made out of Consciousness, our self. In fact, it is misleading to have three words, experiencing, Consciousness and our self, for that which is always one.

Nothing extraordinary happened except the falling away of the concepts with which we normally describe our experience and with which we artificially fragment experience into a perceiving subject on the inside and a perceived object, other or world on the outside.

Over a period of time there were many revelations about the nature of experience, each one seeming to penetrate more deeply to its core. As a result, the old belief systems with which experience had been shrouded for so long were slowly dismantled.

During this time the fabric of the separate, inside self became clear and with it the so-called separate, outside world. The separate self was revealed as a dense and intricate network of resisting, fearing, avoiding, seeking and conceptualising. In other words, it became clear that the separate self is not in fact an *entity* but rather an *activity* that appears in Consciousness.

As a natural corollary to this understanding, it became clear that all we know of an outside world is sensing and perceiving, which, although seeming to take place outside, in fact take place within Consciousness, in exactly the same place as the resisting and seeking that characterise the separate self. In both cases, whether I looked inside or outside, it became clear that there is only the seamless intimacy of pure experiencing itself.

It was clearly seen that Consciousness pervades all experience equally. No part of experience is any closer to or farther from Consciousness than any other part. In fact, there are no parts to experience. It is one seamless, intimate whole, permeated by and ultimately made out of Consciousness.

All that changed was that a centre or location, where thinking, sensing, perceiving, feeling, loving, acting and so on take place, was no longer imagined. The continual reference to a personal self fell away and with it the imaginary distance, objectivity and otherness of the world. Only experiencing remains...direct, intimate, vibrant and friendly.

The title of my first book, *The Transparency of Things*, came to me as a way of trying to indicate that all our so-called objective experience – the body, the world, things and others – is made out of the same transparent, open, empty, luminous substance as the Consciousness in which it appears.

The current title, *Presence*, goes a step further. There are no ‘things’ there in the first place to be transparent or otherwise. There is simply aware Presence, ever-present, knowing, being and loving itself, sometimes resting, as it were, in the knowing of its own being and sometimes simultaneously knowing, being and loving itself in and as every minute gesture of the apparent mind, body and world.

* * *

In trying to share or communicate this experiential understanding, it is legitimate and in most cases necessary to have the freedom, sensitivity and flexibility to begin at any point along the apparent paths of understanding or love, depending on the perspective of the question, and to explore the nature of experience from there, taking the presumption that is concealed in the question as a starting point.

In Volume II this flexibility is reflected in a more freely flowing, less structured presentation of the teaching than in Volume I. Most of what is said in this book has been prompted by questions, because without a question there is little impulse to formulate what cannot truly be formulated. Starting, in most cases, from the underlying presumption in a question, the essays go on to express as direct a formulation of the nature of experience as is possible in the given circumstance.

However, it may not go there in one leap. It may involve an apparent process in time in which we move slowly, intimately and carefully from our presumptions, whether they be in the form of beliefs or feelings, to our direct experience. How long we take and how directly we go depends on the nature of the resistance of the dualising mind that is being engaged in this conversation. We may go straight to the reality of our experience in the shortest and most direct way, or we may proceed slowly and not quite make the full exploration, leaving that to be completed by the one who is asking the question.

Thus the reality of our experience is refracted into as many formulations as there are questions, none of them being absolutely true but each one tailored with love and understanding to the presumptions that are concealed and expressed in the question. So our conversations are like a dance, intimately, subtly and lovingly following the dualising mind in all its abstract, convoluted and erroneous beliefs, dancing with it for as long as it wishes to dance, never trying to replace one concept with another that is deemed to be absolutely true, but all the time using concepts to dissolve the hardened shell of abstract thinking in which our experience seems to have been imprisoned, thereby leaving the raw reality of experience naked, as it were, shining in and by itself.

In this way we avoid the pitfall of non-dual perfectionism, or responding to all questions with the same absolute truth (as if the absolute truth could be accurately expressed by any formulation). Although seemingly unassailable, such a formulation may be just another refuge for the sense of a separate self. If we remain free from the new convention of non-dual perfectionism it becomes abundantly clear that the reality of experience cannot be adequately formulated by the mind. The little imperfections in every phrase of the responses are repeated reminders of this.

In fact, words are the least part of what is being communicated here, although they may temporarily assume more importance than they deserve because we are confined here to the written word. It is the experiential understanding from which the words arise that is their true import, and this leaves open the possibility of a wide variety of expressions and formulations, including even those that may seem to condone a belief in the independent existence of objects, entities, things and the world.

Any teaching that mechanically asserts and reasserts the same absolute truth as a blanket answer to all questions is at best dogmatic and at worst dubious. The true non-dual understanding is like an explosion – it cannot be contained in any form. It is always uprooting any attempt of the mind to catch it, tie it down, package it or control it. This explosion may be fierce, but it may just as well be a gentle, almost imperceptible dissolving.

My hope is that these words will be like drinking a delicious old wine. We take small sips with long pauses in between, and the wine percolates into the mind and body, pervading and dissolving them as it goes. Such are the words of the teaching. It is the aftertaste that truly matters. Long after the words have gone, the silence from which they originate and with which they are saturated resonates in the mind and body, drawing them into itself.

THE PRIMACY OF PRESENCE

Experience is all that is known or could be known. So let us start here. Where else could we start? What is the reality of this current experience?

There are these words and all the other apparent objects of the mind, body and world, that is, thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions. And there is ‘something’ present which is seeing these words and experiencing whatever else is being experienced in this moment. This ‘something’ is experiencing the tingling sensation we call our feet; it is hearing the sound of rain; it is knowing our thoughts.

Whatever it is that is experiencing the current amalgam of thoughts, sensations and perceptions is undoubtedly present and is therefore sometimes referred to as being. It is undoubtedly knowing, experiencing or aware, and is therefore sometimes referred to as Consciousness or Awareness. Above all, it is what we know and experience our self to be and is therefore known as ‘I’.

Every experience is, as it were, lit up and simultaneously known by our self, this aware Presence. Without it no experience is possible. Our self is the knowing or experiencing aspect in every experience. It is also the being or existence aspect of all experience – the ‘amness’ of the self and the ‘isness’ of all seeming things.

Experiences are changing all the time, but *experiencing* is present throughout these changes. Would it be possible to experience the absence of this experiencing? No! In order to claim legitimately that experiencing was absent, we would have to experience its absence, so by definition experiencing would be present.

Would it be possible to experience the beginning or end of experiencing? If we claim that experiencing begins or ends, something must be present there to experience its beginning or ending. If we stay close to experiencing, which is always now, we see that it is only abstract thought that claims that experiencing begins and ends. It is, in fact, ever-present.

Does experiencing change when the particular characteristics of experiences change? No! It is present consistently throughout all changes. Therefore, experiencing itself cannot be made out of something that changes, such as a thought, sensation or perception.

* * *

Everything that is known or experienced is known by or through our self, aware Presence. In time, this Presence is understood to be the *only* substance present in experiencing.

Our self, Presence, is the most intimate fact of experience. It pervades all experience. It is what we refer to as ‘I’. It is what we intimately know ourself to be or, more simply, it is the knowing of our being. Our being is not known by something or someone other than itself. It is known by itself. The ‘I’ that I *am* is also the ‘I’ that *knows* that I am. However, ‘I’ does not know itself as *something*, as an object. It is the knowing of itself. It knows itself simply by being itself.

Presence, Consciousness, Awareness, our own being, is the primal and essential ingredient of experience. It is that which makes all experience possible and knowable. In time we discover that this Presence is the only ingredient of experience; it is not itself an ingredient, something that experience is made of, but rather it simply *is* experience, all alone.

Is our self, our own being, ever not present? Prior to the arising of thought, there is no experience of time, in which our self is either present or not. Even during the appearance of thought there is no experience of time but only the *appearance* of time. And even now our self is not present *in* the present moment. It is the present – not ‘now’ a moment in time but eternally, timelessly ever-present now.

Would it be possible to experience the absence of our self? What would know or experience such an absence? That one would have to be both present and aware. It would be our self, aware Presence. Would it be possible to have an experience without our self? Is any part of experience not utterly permeated with that which knows it? Do we know of anything that exists apart, separate or independent from our self? No!

* * *

All experience is pervaded by experiencing or knowing. This knowingness is present throughout all thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions irrespective of their particular characteristics. Presence, our self, is this transparent, unchanging knowingness in all experience.

If we remove all that is perceivable from the perceived, all that remains is our self. That one, which is the intimacy of our being, is eternally present throughout all experience, lending its own reality to all things. In fact, the apparent reality of all things, all experience, belongs to our self alone. All that we love in objects, others and the world is their reality, and *their* reality is *our* reality. We love our self alone. It is not a personal self, a ‘me’, that loves this being. It loves its own impersonal being. All experience is only that.

All apparently objective qualities of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell are known or experienced by our self. Although it is undeniably present, our self cannot *itself* have any objective qualities. All objective qualities are known by our self, but our self is not made out of an object. If our self has no objective qualities, how do we know that it is limited, located or personal? If it cannot be known, seen or felt objectively, how do we know that it resides in the body or mind? We do not.

The mind, body and world are constantly changing in our experience and are often not present, but our self is ever-present throughout all experience. It is the experiencing element that runs throughout all experience. It can never be known as an object because it is the knower of all apparent objects. However, it never ceases to know itself.

Nothing new needs to be added to experience for us to become aware that our self is always being and knowing itself alone, not always in time but eternally now. Knowing or experiencing is its nature. Knowing or experiencing is not what it *does*; it is what it *is*. Simply being itself is the knowing of itself. And as our self is ever-present, it is always knowing itself. It knows nothing other than itself.

The appearances of the mind, body and world are known by it, but our self does not need any of these in order to know or be itself. It knows itself without the need of any light other than its own. In fact, there is no light other than itself. Our self needs the mind, body and world like a screen needs a film: not at all! But unlike the screen, which is simply present, our self is a knowing or aware Presence. Just by being itself it knows itself. It knows itself in all experience. It never ceases to experience itself.

Whatever is known or experienced in every experience *is* its knowing or experiencing of itself. This absolute intimacy of itself with all apparent objects and others is known as love. So experience is made of not only Awareness and Presence but also love. These three are one.

All we have ever longed for resides in simply abiding knowingly as this aware Presence.

KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE ARE ONE

In this investigation into the nature of experience we simply take our stand knowingly as our true self of aware Presence, irrespective of the particular characteristics of experience. We remain knowingly what we always already are. We always are only this Presence, though we sometimes fail to notice that this is so.

What is it that fails to notice this? Our self cannot fail to know itself, just as the sun cannot fail to illumine itself. It is only a thought that imagines that our self is *not* known and that something else – like a body, mind or world – *is* known. With this thought alone, our self seems to contract inside the body and mind, and objects, others and the world seem to be projected outside. As a result, intimacy is veiled, love is lost and seeking begins.

However, all this is only for thought. Our self knows only the intimacy of its own being, and all experience is that. The apparent veiling of our self and the corresponding disappearance of peace, happiness and love is always for thought, that is, always for the imaginary inside self, and never for the real and only self there is.

First we notice our self, then we stand knowingly as that self, then we see that there is only our self. And what is it that sees this? Our self. Our own being abides in its eternal nature of peace, happiness and love and no longer loses itself to the apparent objects of the body, mind and world.

The more we notice our self, the more its qualities are revealed in our experience. The mind, body and world, which once seemed to veil it, are now seen to shine with its light. We give to our self the attention we used to give to the world, and the objects that once seemed to limit or obscure it are now seen only to reveal or express it.

Just as in a physical object, at a relative level, all we see is the reflected light of the sun, so in reality all that is experienced is made only of our self, aware Presence. The only difference is that the sun's light is seen by something other than itself whilst it is our self that experiences itself in all experience. It is not known by any other light.

Nothing objective can touch, change, affect, move, alter, destroy or manipulate our self, aware Presence, in any way, just as the image in a mirror cannot affect the mirror. Our self is intimately one with all experience, just as the mirror is one with the image when it appears, and yet we are entirely independent of all appearances, just as the mirror is independent of the image. In fact, we are not 'intimately one with' experience, for there are not two things there in the first place – our self and experience – to be intimate with each other. There is just pure, seamless intimacy – no inside self and no outside object, world or other.

To begin with, as we take our stand knowingly as aware Presence, the mind, body and world recede into the background. When the presence and primacy of our self has been established, objects come close again, closer than close. They dissolve into our self and reveal themselves as none other than the shape that our self is taking from moment to moment. In fact, to know an apparent object of the mind, body or world, that apparent object has to dissolve into our self, Awareness. For anything to be known, its apparent 'thingness' must dissolve in Awareness and become pure knowing.

It is not that an object that was once real in its own right dissolves into Awareness, but rather that the object is understood to be only the *knowing* of the object – it was never anything other than that in our experience in the first place. The only substance present in knowing is Awareness, our self, so it is just the apparent ‘objectness’ of an object – its ‘outsideness’, its ‘not-me-ness’, its ‘somethingness’ – that dissolves.

This dissolution is known as the experience of love. It is the falling away of the *apparent* boundaries that seem to keep an object, other, person or world at a distance or separate. Love and knowledge are thus one and the same.

THE INNOCENCE OF EXPERIENCE

Whatever it is that is seeing these words is the substance of these words. Whatever it is that is seeing the carpet is the substance of the carpet. Whatever it is that is feeling the chair is the substance of the chair. Conventional wisdom suggests that whatever it is that *knows* any experience is distinct from the existence of whatever it is that is *known*. It postulates a separate 'I' that knows and a separate object, other or world that is known.

In reality, there is no separate, inside 'I' and no separate, outside object, other or world. There is no experience of a world, person, object or other, as such, as an entity in its own right, independent and separate from our self, Awareness. This separation of the knowing subject from the existence of the object is a concept made only of the thought that thinks it.

In reality our self, Awareness, and the existence or being of an apparent object or other are not two. They are seamlessly one. The knowing of a tree and the existence of the tree are made out of the same stuff. This understanding is a common experience. In fact, it is not *an* experience; it is all that is ever experienced. It is experience itself. Experience is not a collection of objects known by an inside self. 'Experience' is just another name for our self, Awareness. All seeming things are only our own infinite being.

In the experience of an apparent object, other or world, the dualising mind (which is the thought that seems to separate the knowing subject from the known object) is not present. The mind appears as a thought after the event to which it refers. Take any experience. By the time thought has risen to name it, the experience that is being named has vanished. Therefore, thought can never touch experience itself, although it is made out of it. Experience itself is always pristine, free, untouchable, unknowable by thought, pure intimacy, vibrant, alive.

The world that thought imagines is not the real world of experience but an abstraction that masquerades as the real thing. The real nature of experience can never be found by the mind, and yet it is all that is ever known. This and every experience is shining with that reality alone.

Thought misinterprets this seamless intimacy of experience and creates a knower, owner or 'haver' of the experience – the separate, inside self – and a known, owned or 'had' object of experience – the outside object, other or world. But the utter intimacy of the knower and the known is a well-known and familiar experience. It is what is referred to as peace, happiness, love or beauty. In fact, it is all that is ever happening, though it seems to be veiled by dualising thought.

Peace, happiness and love are simply the names we give to the dissolution of the apparent distinction between the knower and the known, between the subject and the object. We all know this from our relationships. Love is the dissolution of everything we conceive and perceive ourself and the other to be. It is an experience of the absolute oneness of our shared identity. In fact, our identity is not even shared – there are not two entities there in the first place to share it. It is, I am, all alone.

When we say, 'I fell in love', we literally mean that we fell out of the conceptual straightjacket in which we had previously resided, into love. We never actually fall *out* of anything because we were never truly located as a separate, inside self or entity *in* something, such as a body, in the first place. The separate entity is simply the prisoner of thought.

When we fall in love, or indeed when we love, we simply recognise our self to be and to have always been this transparent Presence in which there is no room for an object or other. Of course, when the dualising mind reemerges from this non-subject-object experience of love, in which it was not present, it recreates the apparently loving subject and the apparently loved object and says, 'I love you.' However, the apparent 'I' and the apparent 'you' are fabrications of the mind, made only of the thought that thinks them.

* * *

With the appearance of two apparent things (a knowing subject and a known object) our natural identity of ever-present, transparent, infinite Presence is veiled and the innocence and intimacy of all experience, which is known as peace, happiness or love, is lost. We seem instead to become a separate, limited, inside self, searching in a world that is now believed and felt to be outside, separate and 'other', that is, searching in the realm of situations, objects and relationships for the peace, happiness and love that have been lost.

At some point our search collapses and we turn round, as it were, and look towards this one who is in search. However, it is never found. All that is found is the only self there ever is, aware Presence, the simple knowing of our own being, unqualified by any of the limitations that thinking seemingly superimposes upon it.

And what is it that recognises this aware Presence? Only that which is aware and present could do so. In that simple recognition, aware Presence or Awareness knows itself and, by the same token, is realised to be always only knowing itself. When we return to our self in this way, the apparent entities of the person and the world dissolve, leaving only the innocence and intimacy of experience, which is known as peace, happiness or love.

If we now take our stand as this love and look again at the apparent objects of the mind, body and world, we find that there is no substance present there other than the love we intimately know our self to be, that knows itself to be. We drop out of the world as a separate entity and reenter it as love, this utter innocence and intimacy of experience.

The experience of beauty is the same. It is the dissolution of the apparent separation between the object or world and our self, or rather the recognition that there has never been any such separation. When we walk out into a landscape and are melted by its beauty, this is what is happening. Thinking comes to an end and our own being tastes itself as it is, as the experience of beauty. It is never an object that is beautiful. It is rather that all objects shine with the light of our own being.

Likewise, 'understanding' is the name that is given to this realisation when it is revealed through the dissolution of a line of reasoning, and 'love' is the name we give to it when it is revealed through the dissolution of feeling or emotion. All these words refer to the death of the separate, inside self and the dissolution of its corollary, the outside object, other or world. Peace, happiness, love, beauty and understanding all refer to the same transparent, ever-present, infinite reality of experience.

THE PURE 'I' OF AWARENESS

Awareness is our primary, ever-present experience. Before we know anything else, we know 'I am'. And what is it that is aware of 'I am'? Only that which is both present and aware could be aware of anything. It is this presence of Awareness that I am that knows itself. That is our most ordinary and intimate experience. It is never not known.

The idea that there is a mind independent of thinking, a body independent of sensing or a world independent of perceiving is only a belief. The mind itself is limited, so it can never know whether or not such a belief is true. The mind, body and world are never experienced as they are normally conceived to be; our only experience of them is thinking, sensing and perceiving. Thinking, sensing and perceiving are modes of knowing or experiencing, and the only substance present in knowing or experiencing is our self, Awareness.

Awareness is simultaneously their substance and their knowing, the being of them and the knowing of them. The pure light of our own self, Awareness, takes the shape of thinking and seems to become a mind, which takes the shape of sensing and seems to become a body, and takes the shape of perceiving and seems to become an object, other or world.

It is not sensing and perceiving that make up the body and world. It is thought that superimposes 'body' and 'world' on the pure intimacy of sensing and perceiving. Experience itself is too intimate and seamless ever to become a mental object (sensing and perceiving) or a physical one (body and world) known by a separate subject. All these labels are for the separate self that thinking imagines us to be, never for our true and only self, which always is and knows only itself.

The projection of an outside world always remains within our self, although such is its nature that the world seems to take place outside. As a result of the apparent division of experience into an inside and an outside, our self, Awareness, is imagined to remain on the inside as a separate, limited, located 'me' and everything that seems to be on the other side, the outside, becomes an object, other or world, 'not me'.

At first, Awareness seems to become the pure subject of experience, the witness, which knows or experiences the object – the mind, body and world. Witnessing can be seen, therefore, as a subtle superimposition that is conferred upon Awareness by the primary division of experience in two, into a subject and an object. With a further act of imagination, this witnessing Awareness is believed to reside inside the body, and with this belief another, denser superimposition is conferred upon Awareness by thinking.

First, the pure 'I' of Awareness, which pervades all experience intimately and equally, is subtly contracted into the witnessing 'I', which is conceived to be at a distance and separate from the mind, body and world. This witnessing 'I' is then further reduced in the imagination into the thinker, apparently located in a mind. That is, it is conceived as 'I, the thinker', 'I, the mind'. Finally it is imagined that the mind is located inside the body, and with this belief Awareness is imagined to reside inside, in fact to *become* the body, 'I, the feeler', 'I, the doer'.

Thus the pure 'I' of Awareness is seemingly reduced into 'I, the witness' and then

further reduced into 'I, the separate, inside self'. Everything that is left over, with which Awareness has not been identified, is conceived as the object, other or world.

In this way the intimacy and seamlessness of experiencing is divided into two apparent things – an experiencer and an experienced, a subject and an object. The subject becomes a witness, then a mind, then a body. The object becomes the world and all others. Awareness seems to become located, limited and personal, and the object, other or world seems, simultaneously, to become separate, outside and distant.

This separation between the knower and the known, the experiencer and the experienced, the thinker and the thought, the feeler and the felt, the doer and the deed, never actually occurs. It is imagined with the thought that thinks it.

* * *

What is sometimes known as self-enquiry proceeds in the opposite direction. It starts with the apparently separate self that we think and feel ourself to be and simply stays with it. In this way the self is gradually, in most cases, relieved of all the progressive layers of superimposition with which the mind has seemingly wrapped it.

To begin with, the separate self that thinking imagines us to be is realised as the *witness* of the separate self. That is, even when we think and feel that we are a separate self inside a mind and body, we are always only the witness of the mind and body. Now we stand as that knowingly, whereas before, when we mistook our self for a separate, inside self, we stood as that without realising it.

As we remain as this witnessing self it loses its sense of limitation and locality, for all limits and locations are witnessed by our self. It loses its 'witnessing from a distance' quality. The witnessing self and the witnessed objects of the body, mind and world dissolve into each other and only one seamless substance remains. What we call that substance no longer matters because there is nothing left to compare it with. The witness cannot stand alone.

If we truly take our stand as the witnessing presence of Awareness and look at the objects of the mind, body and world, we do not find any distance or separation between our self, this witnessing Presence, and the objects of the mind, body or world that it witnesses. In fact, we do not find two entities there, a witnessing Awareness and a body, mind or world. We find only the seamlessness of experiencing, utterly one with or pervaded by the intimacy of our own being. It only finds itself.

Awareness now no longer knows itself as the *witness* of all seeming things. It knows itself as their *substance*. But it is not the substance *of* something. Our only knowledge of an object, other or world is made of knowing or experiencing. We only know knowing, we only experience experiencing, and the only substance present in knowing or experiencing is our self, Awareness. There is *just* our self knowing itself.

Experience is seamless, made out of our own pure self alone. It is only thinking that superimposes successive layers of limitation on our self. However, Awareness does not *become* pure as a result of this process of returning to our self. The process is only for the mind, just as the apparent limitation of our self is for the mind alone. Our self is always only ever pure aware Presence, seemingly limited, obscured or sullied by imagination alone.

We do not cease to be a separate self and become the witness, and likewise we do not cease to be the witness and become pure Awareness. It is only thinking which seemingly reduces pure Awareness to these apparently successive stages of limitation and localisation, and it is only for thinking that these layers of ignorance, or the ignoring of the true nature of experience, are removed. For our self, Awareness, no such

thing ever happens.

Awareness is always only ever knowing, being and loving itself. It simply now stands revealed to itself as it is. It is always the same self.

So, as we proceed back along this projected path, in the opposite direction from which it arose, it is understood that our only knowledge of the mind, body and world is thinking, sensing and perceiving. And if we look more closely at the nature of thinking, sensing and perceiving, we find that there is no substance present there other than our self, Awareness.

The mind, body and world do not *become* Awareness as a result of this. They have always only ever been what they eternally are. But now they are known and felt as such. They are reclaimed.

As William Blake said, 'When the doors of perception are cleansed, everything will appear as it truly is, infinite.'

Aware Presence realises itself as the totality. Only Presence truly is.

AWARENESS AND ITS APPARENT OBJECTS

You comment that Awareness is observing appearances as though there are two things, Awareness and appearances. Does not this admit an element of duality, albeit one that is subtler than is conventionally the case?

The suggestion that there are two apparent things – one, Awareness, and two, appearances or objects – is made to one who believes him or herself to be a separate self, located in and as the body, looking out at a world of objects that are considered to be separate from and independent of their self, Awareness.

In this case, the terms in which the question is expressed (that is, the belief in a separate entity, object or world that has independent existence) are granted provisional credibility so that we may proceed from what seem to be the facts of experience. In this way an attempt is made to really connect with the questioner's felt experience rather than taking refuge in what may seem to some like an ivory tower of non-dual perfectionism.

So, we start with the conventional formulation that I, inside the body, am looking out at an objective and independent world of objects. This is a position of dualism: I, the body (the subject), am experiencing the world and others (the object). From here our attention is drawn to the fact that the body (sensations and perceptions) and the mind (thoughts and images) are, in fact, experienced in exactly the same way as is the world (perceptions). It is seen clearly that the body/mind is not the subject of experience and the world the object, but rather that the body, mind and world are *all* objects of experience.

We then ask what it is that knows or experiences the body/mind/world. Whatever it is, is what we call 'I'. And what is this 'I'? It is obviously not the body/mind, because at this stage the body/mind is understood to be *experienced* rather than the *experienter*.

What then can we say about this knowing or experiencing 'I'? It cannot have any objective qualities because any such qualities would, by definition, be appearances or objects and therefore known or experienced. However, this 'I' is undeniably present and aware. For this reason it is sometimes referred to as aware Presence or Awareness.

At this stage the Awareness that I am is said to be 'nothing', 'empty' or 'void' because it has no observable qualities. I am transparent, colourless Presence. I am nothing conceivable or perceivable. I am present and aware but am not-a-thing, nothing. From this point of view Awareness is sometimes described as the witness of the appearances of the mind, body and world. I, Awareness, know all appearances but am not made out of anything that appears.

This position is still dualistic for there is still a subject (my self, Awareness) and an object (the body/mind/world). It is, as it were, a halfway stage. It is one step closer to a truer formulation of the nature of experience than the previous one, in which the body/mind was considered to be the subject of experience and the world was considered the object. However, upon closer exploration, this idea of the witness is also seen to be a limitation superimposed on Awareness by a mind that still believes in the separate existence of objects.

It is valuable to make the distinction between Awareness (the knowing or experiencing subject) and the appearances of the mind, body and world for two reasons. One is that it establishes that there is something in our experience that is not an object and yet is undeniably present and aware – the presence of Awareness – and that this is what we are. The other reason is that it establishes not just the *presence* but the *primacy* of Awareness, that is, that for any object of the body, mind or world to come into apparent existence, our self, Awareness, must be present first, so to speak, as its background.

So the distinction establishes that first and foremost we stand as the objectless, transparent Presence or Awareness that illumines and knows all appearances of the body, mind and world. That is our ever-present experience whether we recognise it or not.

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Now we can go further than this. If we explore this Awareness that we intimately know our self to be, that knows itself to be, we discover that there is nothing in our experience to suggest that it is limited, located, personal, bound by time or space, or caused by or dependent upon anything other than itself.

What is it that could know that Awareness is not limited, located and so on? Only that which knows or is aware, and is at the same time present, could know this or indeed anything else. Therefore, it is Awareness alone that knows itself to be unlimited, unlocated, independent, uncaused. The recognition of our own impersonal, unlimited, ever-present being is sometimes called awakening or enlightenment. It is the simplest and most obvious and intimate fact of experience, but usually overlooked as a result of our imagining our self to be something other than Awareness, such as a thought, feeling or sensation.

Now we can look again at the relationship between Awareness and the apparent objects of the body/mind/world that appear to it. How close are the body, mind and world to this witnessing presence of Awareness? How close is the world to the knowing or experiencing of it? If we look simply and directly at our experience we find that whenever an object appears, there is no distance between our self, Awareness, and that apparent object. They are, so to speak, touching one another.

We can go still further. What is our experience of the border between them, the interface where they meet or touch? If there were such an interface, it would be the place where our self ended and the object began. However, we find no such interface in experience. There is no place where we end and our experience of the world begins. There is no border there. Therefore, we can now reformulate our experience in a way that is closer to our actual experience. We can say that objects do not just appear *to* this Awareness but *within* it.

At this stage Awareness is conceived more like a vast space in which all the objects of the body, mind and world appear and disappear. Previously we considered our self to witness all appearances from a distance, but now this distance has collapsed and everything is experienced as being intimate. It is no longer just our thoughts and feelings that are experienced inside our self but also sensations and perceptions.

However, this is still a position of dualism, in which this vast knowing space is the subject and the body, mind and world are objects that appear within it, rather as objects appear in a room. So we again go deeply into the experience of the objects of the body, mind and world and see if we can find in them a substance that is other than the Awareness that knows them or in which they appear. It is an exploration in which we come to see clearly that the body, mind and world are made of thoughts, sensations and perceptions; thoughts, sensations and perceptions are understood to be made of

thinking, sensing and perceiving; and the only substance present in thinking, sensing and perceiving is understood to be our self, Awareness.

There is nothing present in our experience of an object, other or world other than the knowing of it, and knowing is made only of Awareness, our self. In fact, we don't know our knowing of an object; we just know knowing. The body, mind and world don't just appear *within* Awareness but *as* Awareness, that is, they are known to be made out of that which knows them. They are experienced as being made out of our self, Awareness.

Even in this formulation, however, there is still a reference to objects, albeit simultaneously known by and made out of Awareness. If we look closely we find that Awareness, rather than objects, is our primary experience. So if we start from actual experience, that is, from Awareness, we find that it is Awareness that takes the shape, as it were, of the mind, body and world. Awareness takes the shape of thinking and appears as the mind; it takes the shape of sensing and appears as the body; it takes the shape of perceiving and appears as the world, but never for a moment does it actually become anything other than itself.

At this stage we not only know but *feel* that Presence or Awareness is all there is. That is, it knows itself as the totality of experience. This could be formulated as, 'I, Awareness, am everything', or simply 'Awareness is everything'. At the same time, we recognise that this has always been the case, although it seemed previously not to be known.

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So, we have moved from a position in which we thought and felt that I am *something* (a mind and body) to a position in which we recognised our true nature as aware Presence, which we expressed as 'I am *nothing*, not-a-thing'. Then we came to the experiential understanding that I am not just the witness, the knower or experiencer of all things, but also simultaneously their substance. In other words, we came to feel that I am *everything*.

However, even this is not quite right, although it may be a truer formulation of our actual experience than the ones we previously suggested, for what is this 'everything' that is being referred to? We have, by this stage, already realised that there are no objects, others, selves, entities or world that are ever actually experienced as such. So it does not now make sense to say that Awareness is the totality of all non-existent things. There simply are no things for Awareness to be the witness, substance or totality of.

How can we express this? We cannot! Language collapses here because understanding has burst out of the conceptual framework that it is designed to contain. However, it is still legitimate to try! Instead of saying that Awareness is everything, we could say just that Awareness is, or I am. But even then, what is this Awareness that is conceptualised as being present? To conceptualise Awareness as such is to make implicit reference to something else that is *not* Awareness. It is to ascribe to Awareness a name or form in contrast to other names and forms and thus to suggest a limitation. So we could just say, 'is' or 'am'. But such a word on its own is meaningless. Words can go no further. We fall silent.

If we were at a meeting now rather than writing and reading, there would probably be a long period of silence. In fact, as the meeting went on we might notice a subtle shift from experiencing periods of silence that punctuate the conversation to experiencing periods of conversation that punctuate the silence. In time it might be seen clearly that the words, whether spoken or written, do not punctuate or interrupt silence, but rather that this silence is ever-present and the words are simply a modulation of it.

In other words, we might discover that true silence is not simply an absence of sound and thought but rather the presence of Awareness that pervades and yet is prior to both sound and thought *and* their absence. Even that is not quite right, because in experience there is nothing prior. 'Prior' requires time, and time is only in thought. Experience is eternally now.

Such are the limitations of language, and if we are to speak about these matters we have to be willing to accommodate them. So we find ourselves again using the terms that have evolved to describe the abstract and conceptual conventions of dualistic thought. We find ourselves again speaking about that which cannot be truly spoken about and which, at the same time, is the one thing that truly deserves our words because it is all that truly is.

So, to summarise, we move from the formulation, 'I am something' to 'I am nothing', from 'I am nothing' to 'I am everything', from 'I am everything' to 'I am' or 'Awareness is', from there to simply 'I' and from 'I' to... we truly fall silent here.

* * *

What has just been described could be seen as series of stages in the progressive unfolding of understanding from the belief that experience consists of a succession of objects – the body, mind and world – to the understanding that experience is only Awareness eternally knowing and being itself alone.

However, it would be a mistake to think that an entity passes through these apparent stages or even that experience itself undergoes a series of transformations. Such a position would only be the case if our initial assumption of the separate and independent reality of entities, objects, others and the world were true. Rather, having arrived at the understanding that there is only Awareness or Presence, it becomes simultaneously clear that this has always been the case, even if it were not noticed.

So, looking now from this new perspective of Presence, we see that what seemed to be an apparent unfolding of understanding from the point of view the separate self was, in fact, a dissolution of ignorance from the point of view of the mind. Instead of starting with the apparent reality of entities, objects, selves, others and the world and looking towards Awareness, we now take our stand knowingly as Awareness and see how the mind, arising within Awareness, has built up a series of abstract and conceptual beliefs that confer apparent reality, solidity and independence on objects, others and the world.

As we abide knowingly as Awareness, that is, as it stands knowingly as itself, unseemingly-veiled by the abstract concepts of the dualising mind, we discover that it is not a void, an emptiness. It is not nothing. It is only referred to as 'nothing' at times in contrast to the belief in the reality of things. From that point of view it is nothing, not-a-thing, in contrast to 'something'.

However, from the point of view of experience, Awareness is fullness itself – full of itself alone. This fullness is known as love, for there is no room there for any other. We could say that love is the substance of all seeming things, and once it has become clear that there are no real things we could simply say that love is.

The movement in understanding from 'I am something' to 'I am nothing' could be called the path of wisdom or discrimination. The movement in understanding from 'I am nothing' through 'I am everything' to simply 'I' could be called the path of love.

THE IMAGINARY CENTRE OF PERCEPTION

There is no distance between the body, mind and world and our self, aware Presence, in which they appear.

The sound of the wind or the sight of the moon is as close and intimate to our self, aware Presence, as the tingling of our face, the sensation of our breath, or our most private thought or feeling. No experience of the body, mind or world appears with a 'me' label attached to it. The thought 'This is me' or 'This is not me' is added to the experience of sensing and perceiving as an afterthought. It is not intrinsic to experience itself.

Take the sensation of your hands. Without reference to thinking, is there any knowledge that this sensation is 'me'? Does it come with a 'me' label attached to it? Does the sound of the wind come with a 'not me' label attached to it? Are they not both just raw experience, raw sensation and perception, not even 'hand' or 'wind', let alone 'me' or 'not me'?

It is with the thought 'I am this, I am not that' that the seamless intimacy of experience is apparently divided into 'me' and 'not me', into 'I' and 'other'. And even that thought is as impersonal as the sound of the wind. The sound of the wind is as intimate as that thought. Even the thought, 'I am this sensation, the body, but not that perception, the wind' is just a thought that bears no relation to our actual experience. It has no real power to divide the seamlessness of experience; it only seems to do so.

It is impossible to divide the seamlessness of experience. The thought that our self, this aware Presence that is seeing these words, is located in and limited to a separate body is itself simply a thought that appears in unlimited Presence, just like the sound of the wind.

* * *

Is there actually an experience of a border between what is considered to be the inside of our self and what is considered to be the outside?

The skin, which *seems* to house our self, Awareness, is in fact simply another sensation or perception that itself appears in Awareness along with all other sensations and perceptions. It is not the body that contains Awareness and separates it from the world, but rather our true body, Awareness, that contains the body, mind and world.

See clearly that the breath takes place in this vast open space of Awareness, not in an imagined, confined body. The breath and the body are both sensations. One sensation does not appear in another sensation, but rather both appear within Awareness, in the same 'place' that the wind appears, the placeless place of Awareness. It is only a concept that says the breath is 'me' and 'mine' and takes place on the inside, and the wind is 'not me' and 'not mine' and takes place on the outside.

The border between the 'me' and the 'not me' is imagined with the thought that thinks it. Without this concept there is no 'me', no 'not me', no inside and no outside. The limited physical body is simply one more appearance within Awareness.

* * *

Is there any experience of a centre or a location from which any experience is known? Where is the sound of the wind being heard? Where is the sensation of the breath being felt? Where is the sight of the moon being seen? If the answer is 'here' or 'there', see clearly that this so-called location is, in fact, not a location at all. It is simply another sensation or perception that is experienced in exactly the same 'place' as the sound of the wind, the sensation of the breath or the sight of the moon.

The sound of the wind, the sensation of the breath, the sight of the moon and the apparent location in which they are supposedly taking place do not in fact take place in any place. The sound, the sensation, the perception and the apparent location all take place in placeless Awareness.

Is there an experience of a centre or a location from which or in which our thoughts are being perceived? Is there any actual experience of a 'me', an entity, that is doing the thinking? Or is thinking just appearing in Awareness like the sound of the wind, the sensation of the breath and the sight of the moon?

If there seems to be a 'me' entity present, a centre of experience, is there a place from which *that* experience is being perceived, or is that experience not also simply appearing in unlocated Awareness? See clearly that thoughts, images, feelings, bodily sensations, sounds, sights, textures, tastes and smells are all appearing effortlessly in placeless Awareness.

In order to resist what is present and seek what is not present we must first imagine ourself to be a separate, limited centre of perception, located in and as the body. We must first take up a position from which to have a resistance. With this thought alone the separate, inside self is imagined. The apparently separate self *is* that imagined position. However, see if there is, in the seamlessness of experience, a separating line that divides it into a 'me' on one side of the line and a 'not me' on the other side.

If we think that we find such a line, is this apparent dividing line not itself simply another thought, image, sensation or perception appearing in Awareness? And if we do not find a real dividing line that separates experience into two fields, a 'me' field and a 'not me' field, then stay with the seamless intimacy of the current experience and see if it is possible to find a point, a centre, a single location where 'me', 'I', is located, a place from which the totality of experience is known or perceived.

See that if we find such a centre or location for our self, the experiencer, this centre is itself simply a seamless 'part' of this current experience. In fact, there are no parts to experience. Experience is pure, seamless intimacy. See that such a centre is appearing, like every other thought, image, sensation or perception, in our own intimate, impersonal, borderless Awareness. See that the 'me' is itself an expression of the seamless totality and that it has no independent reality of its own. It is the shape that this seamless totality takes from time to time, but it never actually divides anything from anything.

* * *

See whether anything truly changes if we stand up and move around. In fact, there is no entity that stands up and moves around. No one came into this room and no one sat down. That is just an interpretation of thought. Awareness is the only substance present and it never gets up or moves around. There is just sensing and perceiving, and they are utterly, intimately one with our self, Awareness.

It is thinking alone which abstracts parts, objects, entities, selves and others from the intimate seamlessness of experience and constructs an image of a person moving

image

not

available