

Pure Experiences

Selected Articles

Volume - 3



Tarun Pradhaan

Pure Experiences

Selected Articles, Volume - 3

This Ebook is copyrighted and is a original work of Tarun Pradhaan. This Ebook may not be published, copied, sold or distributed without the proper consent of the author(s) and publisher(s).

Preface

This book contains some selected articles from my blog. The articles are on spiritual topics, mostly related to the path of knowledge.

This volume has some selected articles of practice value. Many exercises or introspections are covered.

I gain from many teachers and I am grateful to them for the teachings. This is my humble effort to convey the very same teachings in a more modern and accessible form.

Tarun Pradhaan
Pune, India
May 2018

Happiness and Freedom

Acting in the World

Having checked what the world is about we are now in a position of asking an important question. Given this world, and a body made up of worldly stuff, what is the optimal way to act here? In simpler terms, how should one live his life in the best possible way? The short version of the answer is - actions must be such that they lead to more and more happiness and freedom. The long version is the following article. As long as there is a Mind, there will be worlds and bodies, and actions will follow. Our actions determine the quality of our worldly experience. So it is imperative to learn how to act here. Needless to say that our actions must be aligned to our goals, namely - happiness and freedom.

Why happiness and freedom?

I'm glad you asked. Never accept blindly whatever they feed you. Question the teachings and then question the questions. What else you'd want, if not happiness and freedom? If you dig a bit here, you'd find that every human being or the Self having human experiences wants nothing but happiness and freedom. This is a necessity, not a choice. In other words, whatever you do, you do it for happiness and freedom. You are incapable of doing anything else. Lets examine more.

Its very obvious that most of us want pleasures and avoid pain. This is the obvious choice for happiness. Pleasures diminish when we get them (please see articles on pleasure etc.), so people look for new ways to please themselves. This is a choice for freedom, the freedom to get whatever they want and whenever they want, freedom to discard what they do not want and so on. All the rat race in this world is about this. Money, power, looks, talents, abilities, knowledge, you name it - are means to get more and more of pleasure and happiness. So even the ignorant, by default, choose freedom and happiness. Its another matter that they have no clue how to get that and they are not aware why they want that.

What about those who are not after worldly pleasures, such as explorers, artists, inventors, writers, and all such “cream of the society” types? Surely, their pleasure

lies in achieving their goals in their respective fields. This is how they get happiness. Of course they need to be free from the usual burdens of labour and menial tasks essential for their survival, and manage to remain as free as possible in order to achieve their goals. This is their choice of freedom. Such people do appear simple, humble and devoid of luxury to the people who get their pleasure from purely material life and habitually flaunt their material belongings. They'd imagine that in spite of the extraordinary talents and abilities, those people are unhappy, but they fail to grasp that these types derive their happiness from non-material things and acts. Some do achieve money and fame, but I guess they don't care too much about that. Prevent them from creating or achieving and you'll make them very unhappy. So consciously or not, the so called intelligentsia also opt for happiness and freedom.

What about those who take great pains in order to accomplish something impossible, such as climbing a mountain or exploring the south pole? Well, their happiness comes from overcoming the otherwise insurmountable difficulties. This is how they choose happiness. Obviously, one would not travel to south pole if he found that adventure boring and not worthy of risking his life. Ordinary people have no idea how much happiness it provides to explorers. Its certainly more than watching a documentary about Antarctica on their expensive TV. For the same reasons some people fly high in space or dive deep into oceans. Its not that they choose pain and danger, its because these acts give them ample happiness and a sense of immense freedom.

Some people choose a direct route to happiness and freedom, which means they cut out the mediators and reach their goal directly. We call them wise men. They are most free and are in a perpetual state of bliss. How is that even possible? Don't you need to do something to be happy and free? Ah, this belief is the root cause of suffering. Happiness and freedom is our natural state, we don't need to do anything to get it, all we need to do is **not do** the actions that take us into suffering and bondage. It is as simple as that.

Why don't people know this? If they knew, there would be no ignorance. Ignorance is exactly that - not knowing. Just accept that there is ignorance and it is on a massive scale. Almost everyone is ignorant, including you and me, else we wouldn't be here.

How can one know that happiness and freedom is our essential nature? It is easy. Sit down quietly and observe. The introspection goes like this - what happens when you get an excess of stuff, people and activities that make you very happy? E.g. if you like sweets and you are fed sweets every day, every hour and every minute, what is the result? Assuming you manage to survive, one would suspect

that you'd be very unhappy about this situation. You will demand the freedom to eat other foods or to not eat at all. Now something else would make you happy. If sweets caused happiness, one would expect that an excess of them would cause more happiness, but we see the opposite. What went wrong here? Nothing wrong, just our friendly P2P, a trick of mother nature to keep you alive and healthy. If you try to have too much pleasure, it turns into pain. Too much pleasure does not translate into too much happiness. And therefore the objects or relations instrumental for pleasures do not supply the promised happiness after a while. Eventually one starts demanding freedom to choose objects or people. Objects or people without any choice, without any freedom, lead to misery. This is the essential realization here.

If you observe closely, unhappy states of the Mind are caused by unfulfilled desires. Fulfilment of desires leads to happiness. It is not that the object of desire causes happiness, it is because once you get that object, the Mind is relieved of the burden of that desire. It needs to do nothing now, it enters a state of contentment. This state causes happiness, the freedom from desire brings the Mind back to its natural state, which is perceived as happiness. Observe closely.

Here is the key. If you keep your Mind free from the burden of those thousands of desires and afflictions, it will abide in happiness on its own. Nothing else needs to be done.

Happiness and freedom, and their opposites pertain to the Mind. It's the Mind that demands happiness and freedom. If you look from the point of view of Self, the Self is eternally content, happy and absolutely free. It allows everything, every experience, even the unhappy ones on its screen. It merely witnesses them unconditionally. The Self needs no goals, no paths, it is already there where it must be. Mind struggles to remain in its natural state when bombarded with worldly stuff, and hence needs a goal, a way to stay happy and free. It tries to achieve that by acting, and therefore one needs to act in a way so that the Mind does not deviate too much from its natural state. If the Mind remains steady and equanimous, you have achieved that goal.

So the bottom line is - whatever you decide to do, however you choose to act in a world, you will gravitate towards only two goals - happiness and freedom. This is by necessity. One cannot desire anything else, because all other desires necessarily lead to these two again.

Happiness or freedom?

Which is more desirable when a situation forces us to choose one? We can always

have both. The trick is simple - always choose freedom, because freedom always leads to happiness. Actually one can discard the goal of happiness totally. Be free, and happiness will follow automatically.

How is this possible? If you are perfectly happy but if you discover that you are in some kind of bondage, the happiness disappears in seconds. This is human nature. It follows directly from the nature of the Self, which is eternally free and does not care too much about this ephemeral state of the Mind known as happiness. Sadness is yet another state of the Mind, and there are many more. So why place so much weightage on a particular state - the state of happiness? Strictly speaking, it doesn't matter what state the Mind is in. Happiness is its ground state and it stays happy there. So you will find that whatever state you are in, you tend to gravitate towards happiness again and again.

One can argue that **Equanimity** is the most natural state of the Mind, not happiness. A new student will find that idea boring, so teachers usually prescribe a stepping stone, which is happiness. It is easy to understand and is a great motivator. Constantly being happy brings about the state of equanimity naturally. In my experience, equanimity is nothing but happiness, a more peaceful one.

Some situations demand that you delay your happiness in order to be free later. You must choose to suffer for the time being, so that you don't have to suffer forever. For example, your job is a suffering (lets say) but you must finish today's job, so that you enjoy the benefits later. Not working can have undesirable consequences. Similarly, one needs to suffer an arduous journey in order to enjoy a heavenly landscape or vacation. Sometimes suffering leads you to freedom and the resulting happiness is much more. Avoid the local minima of suffering, search for the global minimum.

How to get there?

As I said, you are already free, already blissful. But you may say that its not your experience, at least not now. This is a major confusion such teachings cause. When I heard that for the first time, I was confused too, I thought it was pure BS. It needs some explaining.

As I said, there is an ignorance that you are not free and happy. And the cause of this ignorance is beliefs. What else can cause ignorance, obviously. Beliefs, or partial knowledge, that you need to do such and such act, or need this or that thing or a person to be happy and free is a belief. It mostly originates out of the Ego. But the poor Ego is just doing its job - providing you a human experience. The problem is that you are not aware what it is doing. You run after whatever

the Ego points at, like a stupid dog. It is a mistake to make the Ego your master and fetch the stick it throws around, mindlessly. The solution is to be aware, be conscious, be attentive, 24 x 7. Choose consciously, act consciously, be the Self, not the Ego. Take control. Be free instead of being a slave of Egoic impulses and desires. The happiness will follow automatically. Its magic!

This is the most direct and pithy way to say it all. If you get it, you don't need to read the rest of the article. This is the essence. So again, we see that a conscious attitude is the key. If you are reading the past articles here, you must have noticed that this solution comes up again and again. Because there is no other solution, at least not a permanent one. If you have not read the articles on the Mind and Ego, and specifically about their afflictions, its time to do so now. I won't repeat the details here. Those articles have all the details you may need. In essence, if you free yourself from the afflictions, you will be free. The condition is permanent, it does not return. The happiness and freedom are inversely proportional to the amount of afflictions and beliefs. This is the formula.

Be my guest

A seeker lives in this world as one lives in a hotel. He arrives here for some reason, work or vacation or to meet someone. The hotel is the world. His stay here is the life. His job is to experience the hotel and accomplish whatever he is here for, that is his path. The path of his heart, to which he is naturally drawn to. Once the stay is over, he simply checks out.

An ignorant guest would be one, who has no clue why he is in a hotel. He sees others having fun, enjoying the vacation and mimics them, or tries to. He sees others doing something important, he tries to copy that too. He finds some people have better rooms and he instantly becomes dissatisfied with his own. He finds that some people have better food or complementary breakfasts. He gets furious. Complains to the management, fights with the staff, troubles those who are actually enjoying. Tries to get a pretty roommate, just because others have one, so on and so forth. His entire stay is a struggle and suffering. At the time of leaving he refuses to pack up, insists on staying forever and behaves like a cry-baby. He tries to steal stuff from the hotel, wants to take it with him. Not only he makes his own stay a mess, he causes troubles for others and ruins their holiday also.

Some ignorant guests are somewhat more reasonable, they don't complain or fight, they get busy fixing their room. Try to make theirs into a deluxe room or something. The manager tells them, they need to pay more money to get better food and facilities, and so they spend most of their vacation trying to earn money,

rather than enjoying their current package. Some other guests take advantage of such people and offer them money in exchange of services or work. Some guests hunt for rich guests and offer their bodies in exchange of a better room and good food. Their whole vacation is spent in making the hotel a better place. Even then, they are not fulfilled, they always find that someone else has even more. They do not know that the hotel will be like this always, and they do not know what else to do but to run after stuff. They have no meaningful job there, no idea why they are in hotel. When the time for checkout arrives, they depart with a heavy heart, they see that they had a miserable and meaningless stay. They cling to the room and stuff it contains, after all they spent the entire vacation collecting stuff for this room. When they are told that they can't have it, it multiplies their misery many times.

A wise man does not try to fix the hotel, its not his job. Someone else owns the hotel, he has his own agenda, his path. He uses the facilities as best as he can. Ignores the shortcomings. If he gets something better he does not hesitate to use that too, but he never struggles for it, never clings to it. He keeps his own room neat and tidy, doesn't care too much how others keep their rooms or how much more stuff the other rooms have. If he needs something to accomplish his goals he makes efforts to get it. He is not distracted by other choices, however tempting they are. He makes friends with other guests. Chooses those who are like him and who are also here for something similar. These are the guests that are aware, they know very well that they are in a hotel. His friends help him to accomplish whatever he is after. If he is here just to enjoy his vacation, he does exactly that. When its over, he leaves everything in the hotel as it is, packs up his stuff, if any, throws away that which will be only a burden for his journey and happily awaits for his tickets and taxi to the airport. He leaves other guests behind, and wishes them well.

A wise man lives in a world like a guest in a hotel, it is not his hotel, the room is not his own, the things in the room are to be left and same for other people, they are guests too, some will leave before you do and some will stay behind for a while. He has no business with them once he leaves. He does not complain about the hotel. Does not kill others to take over their pretty rooms. Has meaningful and light friendships with all, he demands nothing from anyone. It is not the hotel, but his experience of the stay that is important. Enjoy your stay in the hotel - The World Intercontinental.

Menu please

Lets assume you are visiting a restaurant for the first time. First way is to simply demand a particular dish you like and ignore the menu. Second way is to read the

menu and choose a dish.

The first way has the advantage that you may get exactly what you order, but there is no guarantee that you will get it. It is also uncertain how it will taste, because the chef may need to cook it up from a cooking book. And perhaps it will cost some unexpected value, unless you already know what it costs there. The second way is more laid back and like an exploration rather than a demand. You choose something, ask for waiters advice, find out the chef's special, reject something that makes your wallet unhappy and so on.

The first way shows that the customer is too certain about what is best. He is not open to learn about other recipes. He is unwise in regard to what he spends. But perhaps that's what makes him happy. One can guess that if he comes again and does the same thing, he would be perhaps more confident and happy, but if he continues doing this on his every visit, his happiness would start to fade and he may complain one day that the food tastes bad there. He may demand something else, perhaps whatever the other guest is having, but you can imagine where its going.

A wise guest lets the restaurant serve its menu, he simply chooses something out of what they have. When he arrives there again, he chooses something else and slowly learns what tastes best there. His future trips are more satisfying, the waiter awaits his visit with expectation, as he gets a good tip every time.

There are two ways to live a life. First is to demand stuff out of it, to insist that you get only that at any cost and you are bent on spending whole of your life time to get it. Second is to choose from stuff this life has to offer, choose wisely, with intention and awareness. Know what it will cost, what are the consequences. Weigh it in terms of time it takes, whether its worth spending 40 years to get it, and so on. If its not as per your liking just don't choose it. There is no use demanding its removal from the menu of life. It is for someone else. You have a choice, you are free to pick something else. Pick something else, the happiness has no name and shape, its independent of the instrument you use to get it. Once you know how to exercise your freedom to choose, you always arrive at happiness.

Let the life serve you a menu. Bon appetit.

But I'm not free

You are not free (in this world) but you are free to choose. The choices are limited due to ignorance and beliefs. More beliefs you have less choices you get,

because now you cannot see the other choices. What you choose depends on your wisdom, the current level of your evolution. There is a big difference in ways a wise person makes a choice when compared to an ignorant person, assuming similar situations. The choice of a wise man always leads him to more freedom, not less. Happiness follows naturally.

For example one who believes that only a big car can make him happy completely ignores the fun of flying in an airplane [1]. He suffers the pain of not having a fast car to reach his destination and looks at people who have one with envy. The belief that he cannot reach somewhere without a car is his bondage.

The fact is that the choice to be happy is always present. One may or may not get the exact instrument one desires to reach the state of happiness. But that does not matter, you can always find something else to reach there. The ignorance lies in believing that only a particular instrument will make you happy.

You may say, you don't have money to fly - no freedom you see. But you are then free to change your destination. Go somewhere else, use your bike. See that flying or driving a new car is only a desire, and desires are dime a dozen, have some other desire. They are plenty and are free. The bondage lies in a belief that only a particular desire needs to be fulfilled in order to be happy. This kind of attitude is of course stupidity, or immaturity at most.

But that other fellow was so happy when he travelled there and had a vacation or something. The belief here is that what makes others happy will make you happy too. The truth is you don't know, you just assume so. In such cases the person has no clue how to be happy and is simply doing the monkey see monkey do thing. His ignorance makes it impossible to choose something else and he complains that he is not free.

But I want only that kind of happiness, why can't I have it? Again, there is a belief here, that happiness has kinds, its all same, its a mental state. It does have degrees or amounts, there can be more or less of the happiness, but its tastes the same. The instruments of happiness have kinds, and no, you are not free to choose an arbitrary instrument, not here in this world. The reasons for this limitation are beyond the scope of this article. They are good, because they ignite your desire to be free. Means do not matter anyway, because the happy state can be arrived at via any means whatsoever. The problem is, people equate happiness with the means for arriving at it. Such beliefs imprison them and suffering ensues.

The “ifs and buts” type of questions can go on indefinitely, ignorance has no limits. The Ego will jump back every time and will again entice you into desiring

something which brings suffering instead of happiness. Remember that you are not free to desire, the desires arise out of the infinite storehouse of impressions in your Mind, mostly Egoic tendencies, but you are free to choose or discard any desire. The only condition is - you need to be very aware of the content of your Mind. Witness it as Self. This demands practice and so we arrive at the idea of Cultivation again. Simply knowing the mechanisms of the Mind will not liberate you from suffering, this knowledge must be applied to the day-to-day situations. Attention and awareness will show you that below the thick layers of ignorance lies total freedom and freedom naturally puts happiness at your feet.

A wise man is also free to discard happiness and remain equanimous if he prefers. Happiness is a state of Mind, one can choose equanimity and get rid of the need to be happy all the time. You are not free to set the world as per your liking, the world is wild, it has its own will. If the life situations turn out to be happy, be happy, else equanimity is the obvious choice. The freedom to remain steady and equanimous is always there, no matter what situations the life presents.

I fell again

My Ego is too strong, I fall every time and make a stupid choice. What to do? This is a common problem. Do not panic, there are some corrective actions, some tricks one can employ to come out of the mess. We will discuss those in the next article.

Notes:

[1] One can accuse me of taking a cheesy example. Cars and airplanes - cause of suffering? You may ask. The real life is not all rainbows and unicorns. What about some dark situations like a disabled person, a starving child in Africa, or a war victim? Can they just choose to be happy? It depends on how conscious they are, and obviously, the chances of that are almost nil. Extreme situations demand that the Ego takes over, and it causes extreme suffering. Even a moderately conscious person, when placed in extreme situation loses poise. Usually what happens is, if people survive the trauma, they come out of it after a few months or years and the Mind calms down a bit to allow conscious introspection. They can start making conscious choice from here on and avoid further suffering. If the injuries are physical, then the life experience will be limited, and hence the choices will be limited. One will need to choose the best possible out of that. Its never too late to start choosing consciously. Another thing to meditate on is - why do some people find themselves in extreme situations? Why does a child, an expression of the fully aware Self, take birth in bad conditions with no food? Why would the Self choose pain and suffering? If the world is perfect, what kind of

perfection is this? You will find that such questions arise out of beliefs. The answers are actually simple.

Chapter 2

Acting without actions - Service

We have discussed throughout this blog, some preventive measures one can take to remain in a state of happiness. These mostly involve preventing actions arising out of Egoic tendencies, mental afflictions and ignorance. Usually nothing else needs to be done in order to remain happy and free. However habits die hard. People continue to behave in old ways that cause bondage and suffering, sometimes even after made fully aware of various pitfalls. Many seekers also get entangled in the web of actions simply because of habit or partial knowledge.

It is almost impossible to not to act once you are in a body which lives in a world. Non-action would simply mean an end of human experience. In other words - death. One must act if one desires to continue in a body till its natural end. Great masters have recommended some tricks to achieve a smooth and happy ride in a body. These are - **Service**, **Forgiveness** and **Donation**. These can also be used as corrective measures, if one fails to choose correctly and unknowingly invites suffering. We will discuss those now.

Service

Any act devoid of a sense of doership and selfishness can be called as a service. Initially it may not be possible to drop the doership completely and so service is sometimes meant as acts of unselfishness. All acts of a wise man are service. This achieves two things - such a person enjoys a human experience without any burden of actions and he also stays eternally happy and free. What a nice trick. Its almost too good to be true.

But how's that possible? Wouldn't a person who is serving need food, water, shelter, internet, some money etc. for his own survival? If yes, isn't that an act of selfishness? A wise man not only serves others, he serves his own body too. Once you realize that the body is not you, and it is just an instrument for experience, you are not only freed from the body, you also disown it. It becomes a body, not my body. However you don't throw it away in trash bin, as you know it is your interface with the world. You throw it away only when you want to end your worldly experience, which is usually when the body breaks down. Its also valid to say that the body throws you away. Till it lasts and till you choose to continue the

experience, you maintain it, serve its needs.

Isn't the wish to have a life aka human experience a selfish wish? From the point of view of the Self, life happens. You don't even know why it happens. There is no question of wishing for it. However, once you find yourself inside this experience of life, you have two choices - to end it now or to continue and let it end on its own. End is a necessity, not a choice, it's a question of when. A conscious person chooses to continue, it's a choice, not a wish. Why is it a good choice? You see the whole drama of the world, you see the exquisite details of the set, you see the colourful and complex co-actors and last but not the least, you see this marvellous instrument, a costume - the body, elaborate mechanisms of Ego and the extraordinary thing called Mind. When you see all this, you wonder - all this just for me? And you see the Self smile and nod. You realize that all of this is here for some reason, which you, as a person do not understand. You realize that the only way to know it is to continue.

What if I choose to end it? It should make no difference at all. You are not the only experiment of the Self. There are countless worlds with countless personalities. Time to be humble and feel small. In the grand scheme one person does not matter, he is not more important than a speck of dust, ephemeral dust. A wise man accepts the life gratefully, fully knowing that as a person he is just dust, and fully uncertain about the possibility of knowing why.

An ignorant person also serves the needs of his body, but takes the body as himself or as belonging to himself. He owns the actions he does for the body and then also owns the suffering that inevitably follows because of ignorance. Some people also pretend to serve and have some hidden motive behind the seemingly unselfish actions. They serve to gain something, which is not really a service. It is better to directly and honestly go ahead and get what you want instead of hiding behind the pretence of service. Such pretention is just cunningness, not smartness.

Once the survival is taken care of, a question arises - what else can I do? People generally find stuff to do which is usually a blind pursuit of pleasures and they inevitably fall into the dark pit of suffering. Pleasures do not last, happiness becomes elusive and the receiver of the pleasures - the body, starts dying eventually, filling the owner with terror of death and pain. Perhaps it's not so bad for most, but they do live in the duality of pleasure and pain. If you act from duality, you will end up with duality as a necessity.

For a conscious man, the question of what to do never arises, he is content with not doing. He acts only when it becomes absolutely necessary and he does it as a

service. He renounces the fruit of the act also. This keeps him free. Wouldn't such a life get boring quickly? As I said, consider yourself fortunate if you can stay without acting even for a day. Life throws stuff at you and you will find yourself busy dealing with it the next moment. It never gets boring in this world as far as actions are concerned. On the contrary, you will need to do effort to live peacefully. Some of the worldly experiences will be great and some won't be so great. You have the choice to take whatever this world offers as irritations or you can take them as play. Actions end only when the life ends. We rarely get a choice to not to act, but we always have a choice to act in way that result in more freedom and happiness.

Serving others

Some enthusiastic people have this desire to serve others. What is wrong is serving others, when I have whatever I need and I have excess time and resources? Isn't it a good act? Sure, go ahead and serve them. But remember that you are meddling with them and most importantly you do not have much control over the consequences of your actions that you will do in the guise of service. Also remember that there are no good or bad acts, there are just consequences.

In what way is this meddling? People are in certain situations because of some reasons. These reasons are beyond our current understanding (at least my own understanding). But one thing we can understand clearly, which is - everything is perfect as it is, and if it is perfect, there is no reason you should feel a need to change it. Of course you do not feel a need to serve a man who is happy, rich and healthy, he is in a perfect situation already, you can see that. What you can't see is that a person living in a dumpster is also in a perfect situation. Its because you believe he does not deserve to be in such poor condition. Apart from beliefs, there is some guilt that a fellow human is suffering while you have an excess and there is a fear, a projection of that situation onto yourself - what if I land into a similar situation as a result of some bad luck. These are Egoic tendencies, as you must have guessed, the tribal behaviours kick in and you rush to help that poor man.

This action is anything but service. Your Ego gets a boost, the dumpster man gets some food and clothes, which extend his life and therefore suffering a bit more. Meanwhile thousands of people continue to live in dumpsters all over the world. This has been happening since millions of years and will happen for many more millions years in one world or another. In the grand scheme of things your action amounts to exactly nothing. It is just meddling. Your dumpster man could have naturally died in the usual way and that would have ended his suffering, but he lives on to suffer more. It may seem that I'm intentionally painting a negative

picture here. Serving poor cannot be so bad, can it? I can understand that it is very difficult to fathom such reasoning, that everything is perfect as it is and all that BS. It took me a lot of time to understand it all. But fortunately, there is a way for those who find this BS difficult to swallow, you can serve in real way without actually meddling. But lets first check why I say that the consequences are not in your control.

Lets say you are filthy rich and you gift a new car to your friend on his wedding. An act of unselfish service and love, isn't it? Sure, you are the reason for someone's happiness, what can be better than that. Lets say he drives out in that car with his wife and meets a terrible accident that kills them both. Suddenly that car is now a reason for their death. An undesirable consequence. A dark example, but it should be shocking for many to know that our good acts do not necessarily lead to goodness. There are no good or bad acts, there are just consequences.

Another example which is not so dark goes like this. You are lost in a forest with your friend and there is one horse which can carry only one person. At night you calculate your chances of survival and escape on the horse, leaving your friend to die. A bad act indeed. In the morning, the friend, while struggling to find a road, stumbles upon a cave full of gold and treasure. When you return to the city, you find that your friend is a billionaire now. And when you rush to meet him in his mansion, you find a gang of mean looking men waiting for you with loaded guns.

Ok, you get the point, consequences of your actions are not in your control. Actions are in your control, depending on how free you are. Forget about doing good or bad for others, you cannot be even sure of your own good. How meaningful are the acts of service in the light of this realization?

So now we are in a good position to know how to serve without actually serving. The point to note here is that it is futile to serve others knowingly and intentionally. A wise man never makes serving others his life goal or even a major occupation. He does not leave his normal life behind in order to serve others. However, he does serve others whenever a suitable situation arises before him. Service happens, he does not do it. So if you find yourself in a situation where you may serve, you have a choice to act there. It is not recommended to go and hunt for an opportunity to serve. If service happens on its own and you act only as an instrument for it, then you are freed from that act. The consequences also happen, you disown them too. It is not your action now, its an act of nature. It is no more Egoic even if it arises out of Egoic tendencies, you simply acknowledge it and act. The difference is that a wise man knows why the act is happening while an ignorant man does whatever is happening.

What about those who invent and discover stuff, like cure for diseases or technology etc.? People invent and explore nature because they derive happiness from it. Knowledge is their end goal, their life, not service. It is foolishness to think that scientific discoveries will necessarily serve mankind. From an atom to a rocket, almost everything can be used to kill, to cause suffering. However, most of the inventions, most of the time, end up as beneficial. The inventor is not responsible for the good it causes, he simply throws his discovery into the world and hopes for the best. He cannot do otherwise, i.e. he cannot hide his invention and burn his papers, he knows that if he withholds it, someone else will eventually invent it, it's a matter of delaying the inevitable. People themselves are responsible for using it wisely. People serve themselves using the invention. Businessmen and entrepreneurs bring it to the people for mutual benefit. You know the rest of the story.

Doership

The above discussion makes it clear that its not the actions but the sense of doership that is the problem. It invites trouble and suffering. So the actions must be devoid of doership in addition to being selfless. How to do that?

It is easy. You act from the Self, not from the Ego, not even from the Mind. The doership arises when one identifies with the action. From the point of view of the Self, actions just happen. The doer arises and disappears too. There is no need to keep it. To act from the Self, one needs to abide in Self, be as Self. Doesn't sound so easy. That's why you need to cultivate. There is no free lunch.

Who makes the choice when you abide in Self? Isn't making a choice that leads to freedom a personal choice? In my experience, there is no other choice but to act in a way that leads to freedom, when one abides as the Self. Freedom is the natural ground of the Self, and you as a Self choose freedom necessarily, there is no other option. Period. The question of making a choice arises for those who are under the influence of the Mind or Ego. Their tendencies and afflictions occlude the choice of freedom and one needs to bring his attention back to the Self in order to clearly see a correct choice. This is the essence of cultivation. Once you master this, the Ego fades away and correct choices happen on their own. This has a side effect of freeing you from the burden of doership. Now there is no one to claim a doership of an action, the person or identity disappears.

When there is no doer, every act that happens via this body becomes a service. You don't need to really "do" a service.

Service as a practice

As I said, it is somewhat artificial to go and hunt for a serving opportunity. It is Ego in action. When you abide as Self, the service happens, you don't need to do it forcibly. Anyhow, if your teacher instructs you to serve others, do it by all means.

Wouldn't that mean that the teacher knows nothing about service? Perhaps, but some teachers do prescribe service as a method to get rid of Egoic tendencies. When the Ego is too strong and fossilized, usually one needs to force his way out of it. In order to achieve this, mindlessly serving others is helpful. Service defeats the selfish tendencies of the Ego and helps to bring it under control. Whenever a selfish tendency raises its head, you cut it down with the sword of an unselfish act. The Ego starts fading and a crack opens up from which the light of the Self shines through. It can take some time.

Note that serving others as a practice has nothing to do with others. It is not to be done for the benefit of others, it is for your own benefit. It is a selfish act that takes you towards selflessness. The pitfall here is that such practices may lead to an inflation of the Ego instead of its control. The service brings appreciation and love from others. Others start seeing you as extraordinary and try to return the favour. The Ego is obviously pleased by all this attention and importance it gets. It becomes a competition about who can serve more. Who is the biggest servant of all. The one who serves more and takes more pains for others is the superior one. I'm great because I serve and you are puny selfish thing. So on and so forth.

How to avoid this mess? It depends on the teacher actually. The student under him is obviously under the influence of Egoic tendencies and is totally unaware. Else there was no need for this practice. Usually the teacher acts in tactful ways to bring the Ego back on earth from the seventh sky. This often comes as a shock for the student, but once he realizes what he has gained, he feels gratitude for the teacher. This respect lasts for a life time. Traditionally, students are required to do menial jobs like cleaning, begging for food or other services when they join a teacher or an ashram. It is effective, but then some teachers use their students for work, or to collect money under the guise of service. So it is recommended that you serve yourself and know the real meaning of service before you join a teacher. This will save hard work, disappointment and decades of time.

The discussion on forgiveness and donation will continue in next article.

Acting without actions - Forgiveness

The world is beautiful. There is abundance. The body is well adapted to it. There is so much to do, learn and explore here. But then there are other people, with their huge Egos, they spoil all the fun. A lot of suffering is caused by retarded behaviour of others. In their ignorance and under the influence of wild Egoic tendencies, these people cause great harm and suffering. Sometimes a person invites trouble by his own actions. Whatever is the cause, a majority of our suffering comes from others. Even seekers find themselves dealing with ignorant people who destroy their peace of mind routinely. Fortunately, one need not throw all those people out of the world, one can shield himself from their harmful effects. Realize that suffering is a state of mind, your own mind, and even if someone else is responsible for your messed up state of mind, you are fully capable of restoring it back to happiness. We all are free to do so, the choice is always there. This trick is called forgiving. It is useful when your suffering originates outside, usually from other people.

Forgiving is a mental action which is aimed at clearing negative programs. It is an action that results in non-action. Negative programs are mental structures that cause negative thoughts, desires and actions, which in turn lead to suffering and even more negative programs. This vicious circle continues. Negative or harmful programs are formed due to Egoic tendencies of anger, hate, envy, etc. The programs enforce these tendencies and cause more negative actions, and hence more suffering. Usually other people that are themselves under the influence of harmful programs are responsible for implanting those negative tendencies in their victims. In simple words, bad behaviour of bad people turns a person with otherwise healthy mind into a person full of mental afflictions and suffering. This happens because people are usually unconscious of their own tendencies and get easily influenced by other's behaviour.

What is the cure? Forgive. The vicious circle needs to be broken at some point. One needs to do it by consciously terminating the programs or thoughts or actions. This needs to be done repeatedly because the mental structures are formed and strengthened via repetition and erasing them also requires repetition of corrective action. In simple words, not allowing and acting on the negative thoughts, which come up again and again, will slowly make the bad actions and suffering go away. This is the act of forgiving essentially.

How to forgive?

You do not have any control over the thoughts and intentions that arise, but you have control over whether they turn into actions. Intervene at that point. Not taking any action on the command of thought weakens the thought as well as the program that caused that thought. The action can be physical such as hitting a person, vocal such as abusive language or mental such as cursing a person mentally. From the point of view of the Mind, they are all equal. They end up strengthening the programs and the loop of thoughts and actions repeats with more vigour. Intervention and termination of all three types of actions has reverse effect and the program weakens and eventually gets erased.

Replacing the negative thoughts with positive ones also helps. Removing the ignorance also helps. The ignorance of one's own tendencies and working of mind. Seeing it clearly how others act from Ego and how one reacts again from Ego helps to restore one's mental peace.

Use the tricks discussed in earlier articles in order to tackle those three kind of negative actions at once. If it is difficult, seek help. A wise teacher can help. A person in trap of Ego won't help much and can end up causing more harm instead. Choose your helpers wisely.

The other person

Forgiving has nothing to do with the other person, the offender. It is a corrective act that fixes your own behaviour. It does nothing for the person responsible for your messed up mind and acts. If you are reading this blog since the beginning, you will recall that it is always a hit or miss situation as far as fixing the other is concerned, but fixing yourself is easy and certain. A wise man wastes no time in correcting others, he corrects himself first. Your happiness and freedom depends on your state of the mind, not on other's mental states or behaviour. This is the key, and this is the reason, one needs to fix himself and ignore others. Even if you manage to fix a few people by hook or crook, the next person that shows up will have same power to mess up your mind, because you have done nothing to improve yourself, you are still as vulnerable as before.

What gets fixed in you? Obviously, you got easily influenced by the actions of others and brought afflictions onto yourself, this gets corrected. Next time you will keep your guard up while dealing with others and not let situations go out of hand and even if they do, you won't get easily affected by the wrong behaviour of others. So forgiving is corrective and also preventive.

The offender need not be made aware of your internal act of forgiving. He remains as he was. He continues doing what he does. It does not matter, its not your concern. Your concern is yourself, health and peace of your own mind and body.

You can go one step ahead and mentally thank the other for showing your own weakness to yourself. It is a weakness of the Mind that it lets Egoic tendencies to rule itself. Bad situations in life act as a lesson that teaches us how to correct those. So if you encounter a bad person or bad situation, turn it into your own advantage.

Note that I said “mentally”. Do not make the mistake of actually going to that person and thank him for messing with you. It can have undesirable consequences to say the least. Just like forgiving, thanking is an internal act. If you do not feel like thanking that fellow, thank universe etc. That should work, but yes it'd be a big mistake to go to the other person and tell him that you have forgiven him and are actually thankful to him. It can backfire and ruin your forgiving. Do not assume that everyone is out there is as wise as you are, most are abysmally ignorant, sadly.

It is your personal matter, no one needs to know. All you have done is cleaned up your mind of the crap the other managed to throw there. It need not become a story of your life. If you give it more importance than it deserves, it can have unintended side effects like megalomania. Your Ego will tell you that you are great and all because you forgave. The same Ego that threw you into intense suffering before forgiving happened. So the internal act of forgiving need not be more important than cleaning your room. Its equivalent to throwing garbage out of your mind. Its not a noble act or some such.

Cutting the cord

Wouldn't it help to end the bad behaviour of the other person if I told him that he is forgiven? It depends on the person. Different people will take it differently depending on their current level of evolution. Some will surely take your forgiving for your weakness, you are an easy prey now, and they will not hesitate to repeat the offense. Some will not care, they are the indifferent types. They may not trouble you again intentionally but they remain as good or bad as before. Then there are some who actually understand the meaning of forgiveness, and they may feel sorry or repent their bad action, but such people are rare. Firstly, such a person would not act in a way that requires you to forgive. He caused harm, which is a sign that he is a work in progress, not a finished piece. So the

bottom line is - keep the forgiving to yourself unless you are very sure that mentioning it to the other, the offender, will be beneficial for him. Note the phrase "beneficial for him", its not "beneficial for both", you are not looking for your own benefit here. Forgiving is all one needs to do, no more benefits are needed.

In any case, let go of the person. Forgiving is distancing yourself from the influence of the offender. It may have physical expressions like distancing physically or behavioural changes in you. Trust once broken is not amendable. If he is a close relative or a partner, it will be difficult to avoid that person, but now you can keep your guard up. Avoid any situations that can turn offensive. The avoidance is now mental, not physical. It is possible to be friendly and caring without needing to trust someone. This is unconditional love essentially. You love wild animals, you protect them or feed them, but you don't put your neck in their jaws. It'd be stupidity, not trust or love. People are dynamic and unpredictable, just like you are.

Defence and punishment

Shouldn't I defend myself from the wrongdoings? Of course, defend and then forgive. Forgiving is a mental act, an after effect. When facing the actual drama, one must act in best possible way, especially when its a question of survival. If the attack is psychological, such as a verbal insult, one can be lenient, but when the other is bent on killing you, forget forgiving. Some situations demand that one take extreme actions, e.g. if you are a soldier and if you don't kill the enemy, he will surely kill you. What to do? Kill and forgive.

What about people whom I need to face everyday, they are abusive repeat offenders? How long can one go on forgiving? This question shows that you skipped the "cut the cord" section above. Cut the cord. Distance yourself from such people and places. What are you doing there? A seeker would leave without saying a word. But if you are a worldly person, and if these people are your relatives, partners or co-workers, you are stuck. You still have a choice to take bold decisions or continue the psychological warfare. What use is throwing trash when you go and collect it again next day? If you don't have a goal, no path, then life will torment you with such situations. If you have a path, nothing else matters, you can simply leave because you know you are not at the right place. It does not make you progress even an inch.

Wouldn't punishing the offender help me or the offender himself? Punishing others is an Egoic act, its equivalent to revenge, and it surely means anything but forgiving. Forgiving means you are done with the other person. I'm distinguishing

defence and punishment here. Both are not the same, please note. Punishment is you attacking, not avoiding the attack. If you manage to punish the other, Ego sees it as its victory and gets inflated. It now turns you into an offender. There is no difference, you did exactly the same that the other did - caused harm.

Secondly, punishing encourages the other person to strike back with even more vigour. If he is strong he will do it now, else he will wait for the right opportunity. Not punishing and letting him get away can have the same effect. Either he will take you as a coward or a weak person or will run away and continue behaving in the same manner later. Only a wise person will understand why you wouldn't punish him, but these are rare, and won't act in ways that lead to punishments. Some people bend to punishment and it fixes them and some get hardened by punishments. There are all kinds. So decide on case by case basis. Can you say - punish and forgive? No, in my opinion. You need to forgive yourself in this case, as you had to punish someone.

What if law punishes the offender? Then it is not your business, let them do whatever they do in such cases. It will be more like defence. The offender is gone and will perhaps learn a lesson, but you are not involved in punishing him. Treat your action as a service and when the dust settles, forgive, throw out all that trash. Cut the cord.

Peace of Mind

The whole point of forgiveness is achieving peace of mind. Stuff happens in this world, but it need not stick to you. You have a choice here. You don't have a choice about what kind of stuff happens, the world is a chaotic place, but you have some control over what affects you and what doesn't. Forgiving is a way of getting rid of negative effects that situations or people can have on your mind. One should not expect forgiving to do wonders, like fix the situations or others, or turn yourself into a great saint or some such.

I messed up

Now lets see the other side of the story. You fell for Egoic tendencies, like anger, and offended someone. What should you do? Ask for forgiveness. Resolve not to do it again. Cut the cord.

But what will I get by doing this? You get your peace of mind and the forgiver gets his. Its mutually beneficial. Actions do not simply disappear once they happen, there are always consequences. Your wrongdoings will surface sooner or later and will become a source of suffering. The very same Ego that provoked

you into wrongdoing will later punish you with negative emotions of shame, guilt and regret or what not. It starts appearing in your behaviour, your dreams, and even on your face. Needless to say that it robs you of your equanimity and happiness. Its best to end it now.

The victim is now gone or is long dead, now what? Ask for forgiveness anyway, mentally. Imagine being forgiven. Throw the trash. Cut the cord. The Mind doesn't know the difference, the negative programs die equally effectively.

Note that actually meeting your victim and asking for forgiveness is more effective and instant, but it can also have undesirable consequences, depending on the current level of evolution of the victim. A wise man will always forgive you. A smart man will at least say so, just to get rid of you. An ignorant and stupid person will take you as a coward and may attempt to strike back. Be prepared for anything if you don't know the person. If the person is your relative or a partner, he may feel happy for you or he may feel that you are dependent on him for emotional or financial or some other stuff, and may react differently. Some will try to convert you into a doormat. Use your own discretion.

But why cut the cord in this case? Because you messed up. That action cannot be undone. This is world, not a PC. The consequences linger, trust breaks, you induced fear and anger into someone, don't expect things to remain same. Relations break for insignificant reasons sometimes, and when there is a big reason, they must break. You will find that, even if the relation continues nicely for a while, it will either turn bad or ordinary one day. Cutting the cord hastens this process and liberates you quickly. But isn't it better to mend it, be friends again? Yes, why not, if you are not on a path and are still interested in worldly stuff, do whatever makes you happy. If you are on a path, it is a sign of attachment. A seeker has nothing to do with people in general. He would turn this situation into an advantage and detach from his act as well as the person. What can be a better lesson than your own mistake?

A seeker while acting in a world will encounter bad situations sometimes. Either others are the cause or he himself is. In any case, he will quickly get up, dust off and continue on his path. Events happen, they are not done by you or anyone. Why worry about who's mistake it was, and who should forgive whom? These are all just experiences on the screen of Self. However most of us are not so advanced and need some practical tricks sometimes. Forgiveness is one such trick, it will bring you out of the mess, quickly and effectively. Needless to say, if you abide as Self, there is no need to forgive and no need to ask for forgiveness. These situations will not arise, and in rare event of their appearance, you don't need to do anything anyway, its all a drama of one form of the Self forgiving

other form. Its as if I slap myself and then say sorry to myself, its retarded and funny to do that. So forgiving works only if you still see others as separate from yourself. Great masters always recommend to bypass the drama, just be the Self.

Discussion on the next trick - donation, will continue in the next article.

Acting without actions - Donation

Greed revisited

As long as one is in a body there are needs and it is wise to accumulate resources to meet those needs. The tendency to accumulate is an Egoic tendency and is necessary for survival. However this useful behaviour sometimes gets out of control and turns into the affliction of greed and hoarding. We have already studied that in depth in previous articles on Ego. Here we will discuss a corrective action that can be employed in case one falls into such behaviour. Donation is an action to obliterate greed and restore peace and detachment.

It seems most of humanity is afflicted with greed, especially in this materialistic and consumerist era. So much so that it is considered a good thing to be greedy and to hoard as much stuff as possible. Those who consume more are the high class and those who survive on crumbs, bare basic, are peasant class. Obviously, greed results in a mad pursuit of money and objects, and these are never enough. A greedy man attracts other greedy opportunists around him, who are actually after his money. Such a life soon turns into major suffering. Its an unfulfilled life, meaningless and full of fake people.

This condition arises mainly because of ignorance that objects and people who worship your money, are necessary for happiness. The goal of happiness is chosen automatically as usual but there results only suffering because there is no freedom here. A greedy man is a slave of money, objects, food and drinks. The suffering ensues as soon as someone else is seen to own more money, or when money departs taking along with it his "loved ones", or when the body starts breaking because of rampant consumption and old age, whence such a person is unable to satiate his Egoic needs.

The needs of the body are very few, but the needs of the Ego are unlimited. It generates an endless list of desires and punishes a greedy person when due to above reasons or any other reasons those are not fulfilled. A greedy fellow, totally ignorant about what animates him, chases stuff for whole of his life and then dies still under a mountain of unfulfilled desires.

The hoarding of money brings him fame and respect from fellow greedy men,

which positively feeds back his greed. Such people become powerful, acquire tall positions and corrupt everything around them. Once in a position of power, they do not hesitate in performing acts of mass killing, torture, manipulations and wars in order to add new dimensions to their greed. Not only they suffer, they make everyone else suffer.

Drawing a line

Other than the Ego and ignorance, not having a path or a goal contributes to this mess. The person not knowing what else to do, what to do with this life, falls in traps of Ego very easily. A path can prevent this. But not many are wise enough to take a path. Usually the suffering caused by greed should be enough to make an intelligent person stop and think. When you question - why am I not happy in spite of achieving all the worldly wealth?, you begin to search for a better path. Once you decide on a path, make it the first priority. Now draw a line where your need for material stuff starts turning into greed. That is the place to stop.

This line may vary from one person to another or can depend on place and times. But it must be decided on the basis of how much material stuff is needed in order to comfortably walk on that path. Less is better. If you find that you need to be a millionaire and own mansions in order to be on a path, there is something wrong with your path.

The line may shift from time to time, but it should never cross into the territory of greed. The signs that you are in greed domain are - you see that most of your time is lost in earning, spending, consuming and hoarding, rather than knowing and freeing yourself. Secondly, you find yourself surrounded by suspicious characters who are always demanding stuff, manipulating you or are licking your feet. You see that none of your friends are wise or are seeking wisdom, you seldom find yourself in the company of masters. You seek more control and power, you start using people. There can be more signs, but in case you find yourself there, its time to recalibrate the line.

It is recommended that you hoard a bit, so that you are sure of surviving comfortably for at least a few years on your hoardings. Now this hoarding is intelligent saving, while still inside the line. This keeps the Ego peaceful and the tendencies of insecurity and fear do not flare up. This obviously frees you from worries of a hand to mouth lifestyle. For a seeker this should be a piece of cake, as his needs are already tiny.

Give it away

The above was just a recap of preventive measures discussed earlier. Now we encounter the question - what if I have too much and find it a burden? The answer is simple - give it away. An act of giving away your possessions in an unselfish manner which is devoid of doership is donation.

So donating what you don't need and forgetting about it, is donation in simple terms. We immediately see that, giving away stuff that you need for survival and comfort is not donation. It is stupidity. Secondly, if you do not find your possessions a hurdle on your path, then you don't necessarily donate them away. Making one's life uncomfortable knowingly is not wisdom. An uncomfortable life would simply mean a waste of your time and efforts in menial tasks or just suffering.

You will find that giving away stuff you don't need immediately frees you and you feel light. You feel thankful that the stuff is gone for good. If you feel remorse or regret after giving it away, then it was not donation, it was a loss, and you shouldn't have done that. It shows that you were still attached to the stuff and the stuff is gone but the attachment continues, giving rise to suffering instead of happiness. So the whole point of donation is detachment from worldly things. Merely getting rid of stuff won't bring about the peace, happiness and freedom, one must be totally detached from stuff.

It is not possible to detach by force. The detachment is a result of realization that the stuff is a source of misery and bondage and is actually a hurdle on your path. It is robbing you off of your precious time or is attracting undesirable company - people who stick to you just because you own shiny objects. This realization causes repulsion from objects and detachment happens. Once you are detached, it is only natural to get rid of stuff. You do it simply by throwing it away or giving it away.

This is the essence of donation. Any other act, which outwardly looks like a donation is not donation, it is a pretention at most.

Throw, sell or gift?

What is the difference? In my opinion and experience, they are essentially the same – a donation. You get rid of things that were a burden. One should use his own discretion when deciding about the method to be employed. Throwing is just donating it back to the earth, if you like fancy metaphors. Throw it away, if you think that it would be useless for everyone. Throwing away the stuff which can cause harm to others (e.g. an unreliable car or faulty electrical appliance, that can cause accidents and deaths) is the obvious choice. You still do not know if

anyone will pick it up and use it or suffer from it, but its not your doing now.

Gifting it away, which is commonly the accepted meaning of donation, is suitable when you are somewhat aware of the consequences. Or if you think someone really needs that thing which is totally useless for you. It wouldn't be wise to donate a gun for example.

You will soon find that if you are affluent and are also generous, there will be a long queue of needy-greedy people outside your house. This is the drawback of mindlessly gifting the stuff away, unless your life goal demands a long line of people outside your house. You will find that some people stick to you only because you gift aka donate a lot. They are simply using you, even if they are needy, they will eat up your time, which is exactly the consequence you do not want. In such cases selling is recommended.

Unless you wish to profit from selling your excess stuff, it is donation. What you are achieving here is donation without attracting a crowd of beggars. Sell it for a nominal cost, that is almost as good as free. This will ensure that you keep beggars away and the most needy person gets it for next to nothing. This also prevents formation of bonds between donor and receiver. The receiver does not feel any guilt or shame for getting stuff for free and feels no obligation towards the donor. A win-win situation. Secondly, give away as gift, free stuff with the items you sold, which should make the receiver even more happy and you get the peace of mind by not asking any money for useless stuff.

I don't think if a lot of people see selling in the way described above as donating, but remember that the intention matters, not the outward ritual. You sell just to avoid some undesirable consequences that may result from gifting, your aim is not money. Anyhow, if that money is also a burden for you, you can always donate it away in some other fashion. Donating money is not very straight forward as we will see below.

The other person

Just like in the case of service and forgiving, the other person, the receiver, is not of any importance at all. You are not donating to make someone else's life better, you donate to make your own life better. It is a selfish act that leads to unselfishness, an action that reduces the Egoic actions. Donation is an expression of detachment, a trick to be more detached, a way to renounce and be free, and last but not the least - a trick to unburden a seeker so that he can pick up speed on his path. Donation happens, you don't do it, and you do not have any control over the consequences your act of donation can result in.

It should be clear that donation if performed with a sense of doership is not really a donation, its an Egoic act. The feeling of detachment is Grace - an attraction towards the Self, a repulsion from ignorance and Egoic actions. If a doer is still present, then its not what it seems. It is either a desire to help others, feel important, fix others or the world, or a monkey-see-monkey-do thing. As we know, the others and the world are in a perfect condition as they are, you don't need to meddle in it with your puny donation thing.

It should be clear by now, why I keep saying that the consequences of your actions, good or bad, including that of donation are totally chaotic. Your wish to do good by donating away your bed is no good if it catches fire next day and consumes your beneficiary. My dark examples continue as usual, but you get the point. In the grand scheme of things, a donation will have zero benefits for others, but will be immensely beneficial for you.

Again, you do not know how the other will react to your donation. Some will perceive you as an easy source of free stuff, some will think you are crazy for simply throwing away your valuables. Some will be puzzled, some will doubt that you have hidden intentions behind the noble act of donation. Some may not accept your donation because you will be burdening them with your burden. Some will become greedy and flock around you for more. Some will think you are trying to get rid of stolen stuff, or are hiding evidence of a crime in their home. Only a wise and evolved person will actually understand your act of donation. Expect such people to be as rare as diamonds in a coal mine.

Worthiness

However, an intelligent man will use minimum discretion when giving away his stuff for free. We have seen the example of a gun, for example. More importantly, a donor has some choice regarding the recipient. If you have used books from your school or college days, it makes sense to find a talented junior and donate them to him, instead of donating them to a random guy. Agreed that you still don't know if that student will sell it away and buy drugs instead, but if you know the person a bit, you have done your best.

Similarly, you should avoid donating stuff to fairly rich people, find a poor chap. We know how people like to donate to politicians and bureaucrats, but that's obviously anything but a donation, so avoid such beneficiaries. Avoid relatives and friends, you want to lighten the bonds not enforce them. Avoid donating to teachers and ashrams, unless he is your teacher and its your ashram. Avoid donating food or medicines. Avoid donating to beautiful women. Avoid people

who are on their death bed or are too old, find someone who has a meaningful life left. Avoid donating too much to a single person, distribute deliberately. Avoid filthy rich religious organizations, mafias or terrorist agencies. So on and so forth. I don't want to explain everything, it should take you only a second to decide who is not worthy of your donation.

By checking worthiness, you cannot enforce a specific consequence, but you are freed from the responsibility of doing deliberate harm. Lack of doership does not mean total mental retardation. You act wisely, and then relinquish the doership, as simple as that.

Charity

What about the poor and starving people all over the world? What about organizations such as WWF, Red Cross, people who bring clean drinking water to poorest, or the garden variety of non-profit organizations out there? Isn't it nice to donate my excess money to them?

We are crossing from the domain of self-improvement to that of world improvement here. Such donations cease to be a donation, as per the definition here, and become charity. These are the selfless acts for the benefit of others. If that is your goal or wish, then go ahead and contribute to the cause. The will to help others is an Egoic tendency, a tribal behaviour. This tendency kept us alive in ancient days and is still useful, but this is not what a seeker does. There is no imperfection in the world, there is no world out there and if you spend your valuable life fixing an appearance instead of realizing that it is only an appearance, you are no more on the path, and this blog should be useless for you.

So should a seeker not do anything for others deliberately and forcibly? If the charity happens, it happens. Do not go and hunt for opportunities for charities. If you happen to bump into someone who is asking for some help for some random cause, help as much as you can, say goodbye and forget. It should not become your life story, you should not feel you did something great, and you should see it as a universal act, not individual one.

What about all those people who are relentlessly doing charitable acts? Are they idiots? Well, if charity or doing good for others is their path, then it's their path. It is all very good. We do need such people. Doing good for others is a good stepping stone towards doing good for oneself. Some do feel the need to do good, they need that experience before they realize how futile it is. Charity begins at home, if you are in a mess, forget about doing good for others, you may end up doing opposite. One should take up that important and noble task only if one

has reached a certain level. Take up that path if you must. Everyone must choose a path of his own heart. If charity brings happiness and freedom to you, it is your path. However, be ready for some surprises, some learning experiences.

Anonymity

A pitfall on the path of donations is that some people end up inflating their Ego instead of controlling greed. The Ego enters from the backdoor and crowns you as the greatest donor on the earth. It feels good and you donate more. You send out intentions to donate, you leave your phone number everywhere. Contact me, the great donor, if you need something. People add to the problem by awarding you the titles of greatness - a saviour of poor, great soul, mahatma, the social servant. The result is that you are full of it before you realize you are in a deep pit.

The obvious prevention is to always donate anonymously. Remove the Ego from the act. It must not become an act of you - the identity. Donate and run away, disappear. This will also make you invisible to people who are always looking for a scapegoat to get as much as possible while feeding him with Ego boosting superlatives.

Some people bribe the society in exchange of fame or something like that and call it a donation. The park bench donated by such and such. These are just cheap Egoic acts. Donate and erase your name, make yourself untraceable. This is especially needed if you are donating money. This also releases you from the consequences. You know more or less about where your old bike is going to end up, but you have no idea how the money will be used.

Moonshots

If you are doing extremely good moneywise, and have an excess of money, even after shifting to a minimalist lifestyle and a job that leaves you ample time for practice, and you feel like donating the excess, then you may find moonshots [1] a better option compared to donations.

Moonshots are projects that bring you no material gain, but only turn you into an instrument for expression of the Self. The expression is geared towards more structure and less entropy, more knowledge, freedom and happiness. So one can employ oneself as an assistant of the Self in this world. A moonshot need not be a million dollar project, it can be a small one, like an exploration into altered states of Mind. Depending on how much excess you have, it can be as big as colonization of Mars or invention of a clean energy source. It can be something which requires high intelligence instead of raw hardware, such as development of

artificial general intelligence in machines or finding a cure for aging. Obviously, such projects are a sink for money and only a handful of individuals show any interest or capability to carry them out. Fortunately, some rich and intelligent individuals and large corporations do have visions for awesome moonshots.

These projects involve a lot of resources and money. If not money then a lot of intelligence and time, which again translates into some money. These projects provide no short term gains, its all a loss money-wise. There is no guarantee of long term gain too, as these aim too high. There is no hope of seeing a major breakthrough in a reasonable time. Some may not show any results for the whole lifetime and maybe for many generations. So these are ideal candidates to sink your excess income into. This would be the most intelligent kind of donation in my opinion.

Why isn't this act a selfish act? Because it gives you no material benefits and becomes a source of happiness and knowledge. Selfish acts result in misery and ignorance, but provide a short term material gain. Isn't that same as charity? The common people will not be able to benefit from such projects immediately, or not even in a hundred years perhaps. What are the consequences? I can't see many consequences except you become a provider for some people, your employees. The long term consequences are unpredictable, but by definition, these events are most probable naturally and will happen anyway. What will happen after that is anyone's guess. A pitfall one needs to worry about is that one should not become megalomaniac, and should not let the Ego crown you as a great visionary that is bent on taking whole humanity into the future. Another pitfall is that one can become too involved in such projects and may forget about cultivation totally. These projects should serve as a means to channel your money into an act of nature, should lead to detachment and should arise out of detachment.

Which projects to choose and how will I know that it is the right one? There are already many wild and dreamy projects out there. Search and you will find. Or launch your own. Think as wild and as out of box as you can. Think very long term - hundreds and thousands of years into the future. The right ones have a quality of inevitability. You will know that it will happen sooner or later, because that is where nature is trending towards. New knowledge, new sciences, new ideas, and obviously new discoveries that lead to great technologies and push the whole human race upwards significantly. Not only physical but non-physical also. Obviously, developing a new weapon or worldwide surveillance technologies is not the right choice, even though inevitable. The litmus test for such projects is whether they result in more happiness and freedom for all humanity universally. If not, they are not worthy of donation.

What donation is not

Here's a list of some acts that people generally mistake for donation.

Gifting to relatives or children of your own. You are just ensuring a genetic continuation. An Egoic act. Gifting to a person you love in order to impress that person. Again, procreative tendencies in play. Gifting others with the intention to show how rich you are. Gifting to gain friends or to keep them around. A friend who is there for your gifts is not a friend. Gifting others to show how kind hearted or "spiritual" you are. Selling stuff for next to nothing in order to gain initial customers. Or giving away free stuff with your products. Gifting to high ranking officials to gain favours from them. Donating for election expenses of politicians. Donating for military in the event of wars caused by politicians. Donating to religious places to gain supernatural benefits. Renting your extra property for free. Even for the teachers or social causes or satsangs also. It is charity. Donating in order to gain name and fame. Donating in order to set an example for others. Donating with your name printed on it in huge letters with a news coverage of your great act. Donating a tiny percentage of your total worth, even if the tiny percentage amounts to millions. It makes no difference for you at all. Donating away old stuff so that you can make space for shiny new stuff. Donating to educational institutions in order to gain admission into them. This is just bribe. Naming it as donation shouldn't make it one. Donating for health related causes, such as against cancer etc. Find out why, as a food for thought. There can be many more, but you get the idea. If the act does not arise from detachment or a desire to be free from worldly things and does not lead to more detachment or freedom, then it is not donation. Well, its a nice trick, but you see, it appears too complicated, there are so many nuances to be aware of. I'd just let the stuff in my basement rot rather than wasting my time with this donation thing. Yes, you are absolutely correct. The best way is always the simplest, which is, in this case - do not hoard. If you stop the hoarding madness today, the stuff or tons of money you have accumulated will gradually disappear on its own. Let it all go. Soon you will be free from such tendencies as well as the burden of that stuff. Its as easy as that.

Notes:

[1] Urban Dictionary Definition: Moonshot - awesome, fantastic, almost impossible to achieve, the best, the reason for success, reaching the highest point, right on target. Google's definition of a moonshot: A project or proposal that: Addresses a huge problem. Proposes a radical solution. Uses breakthrough technology.

Chapter 5

Gurulogy

It seems there is a natural evolution from the depths of ignorance towards knowing. This is often called *Ripening*. I do not really know why it happens, but I can sense it faintly. It also seems that the human experience is an important milestone on this path of evolution, at least that's what is seen in this world. From time to time some humans realize their true nature and emerge out of this deep ocean of ignorance like a bubble. This happens irrespective of place, race, gender or time. It also appears that this process is speeding up, but it can be an illusion because human population is growing rapidly, there are more people and so more wise people. Some people out of these few come out in open and try to tell others what they have realized. We call such a person a teacher or a Guru.

The literal meaning of the word Guru is "remover of darkness", it also means great, mighty or giant. The former meaning is implied when its about teaching. Darkness implies ignorance. Note that it is not "bringer of light" or something like that because as we know, the light is always there. It is occluded by ignorance. So such a person does nothing but shows that you are in a dark pit and often suggests a way out. A teacher does not and cannot pull an ignorant out of the pit, he merely hints at it, maybe gives a helping hand. The student pulls himself out. The teacher acts as a trigger.

Moon and the finger

The popular metaphor, I guess everyone knows it. A teacher points towards the Self, but he cannot take you to it and introduce you formally – here, meet your Self, and you shake hands with the Self. This cannot happen. One needs to go and meet his own Self himself. So there is a difference between a finger that is pointing to the moon and the moon itself. Some students get it instantly. Some students keep staring at the finger, why can't I see the thing called moon? they say. This is a tricky situation for a teacher, and now he must use skillful means to make the student look towards the moon. This is where the skill of a teacher is tested.

Why can't the teacher do it directly and why do students fail to grasp it? The experience of Self, which is not an experience actually, is subjective. It is not the

experience of the Self that is difficult, it is abiding as Self which is a problem. It seems everyone can experience a Self very easily, even a child can, but it takes only a microsecond to fall back into habitual sleep of Ego. Secondly, not everyone is intelligent enough to grasp the implications of it all. And thirdly, almost all fail to implement that knowledge in their daily life, preferring the security and comfort of Ego, even if its encumbered with suffering and bondage.

The need for a teacher

And thus, the teacher comes into the picture. He constantly reminds us about the Self, continuously tells us to be and remain as a Self, and tries to prevent a student from falling back into the pit. Although the process of awakening to the reality of the Self is natural, it is virtually impossible for an ignorant to come out of the pit by himself. A teacher not only triggers the process, he actually hastens it a million times. And that is the reason a teacher is placed above all beings on the metaphorical pyramid of importance.

This is true for all other fields of knowledge, not only for knowledge regarding the Self. Right from the very first teachers - our parents, to school teachers or professors, to experts, scientists and inventors, every teacher does exactly one thing - passes down the experiences he had. Brings other up to his own level. He himself stands on the shoulders of other teachers. We learn thousands of years of worth in few days, thanks to teachers. However, one needs to gain his own experiences, a teacher can only show you how to gain them.

Limitations of a teacher

That is one of the limitations of teachings, they are like a finger pointing to the moon. Another limitation of a teacher is that he will take you to his own level at most, he cannot take you beyond that. Once you reach there, you pick up a new teacher. It is impossible for a teacher to make the ripening happen by force of teachings. You cannot grow a plant by pulling on it [1]. It must grow naturally, all a teacher can do is provide a protective and nourishing environment. Yet another limitation, in my opinion, is that a teacher also has an Ego, he appears ordinary, behaves like others, at least outwardly, and can also fall back into some pits. In other words, even the most talented teacher is not perfect. But we will see below that it doesn't matter much.

Apart from the above somewhat fundamental limitations, there are skill related limitations, such as, communication skills, patience, wit, understanding of others, oratory skills, ability to keep the subject matter interesting and enchanting etc. Also, social skills and financial independence also matters. Some teachers are

more skillful some are not.

What about knowledge? Knowledge by itself does not turn anyone into a good teacher. The expression of knowledge matters. If its mostly indirect knowledge, such as bookish knowledge, the teacher remains as good as a book. If a teacher has no direct knowledge at all, then he is not a teacher, not a good one and not even a bad one.

Limitations of a student

Even the best teachers fail frequently, and the reason is not their knowledge or skill but the fact that all students are not made equal. Some are sharp some are not. It is easy to find a good teacher, especially in this age of instant information and communication, but it is very difficult to find a good student. Its especially difficult to find a good student who is willing to take the pains of learning, to take up the challenge of devoting his life to the path of knowledge. When a student is not interested, a teacher cannot do much. And an uninterested student is not really a student.

Kinds of teachers

Several ways exist to classify teachers [3]. Fields, expertise, styles, traditions etc. are the basis. But as far as your life goals are concerned, there are only two kinds – those who take you forward and those who do not. There are some with good grasp on texts, languages etc. There are some who know effective methods or techniques. There are those who work with only the body and energies. There are experts in a specific narrow field. There are some with direct experiences and truly know the Self.

A student will resonate with one of the kinds according to his current level of evolution and intelligence. One can make two mistakes - choosing a teacher that is not up to the mark thinking that one is not very capable, or choosing a teacher that is at a very high level, deluding oneself that one deserves that teaching. Anyhow, things settle down naturally and incompatible relations break away quickly. You do lose time.

Who is my Guru?

If you have a question and if something can provide you a satisfactory answer, then it is your teacher. In other words, the source of knowledge becomes a teacher automatically. So a teacher can be a rock, a book, an animal, a criminal, a disembodied guide or a great living master. It may sound ridiculous and too broad to be a criterion for a teacher, but that's because you have many colourful

beliefs about who can be a teacher. Narrow beliefs restrict the amount of choices for learning to a bare minimum, when in fact the choices are unlimited.

A better question is - whom should I prefer as a teacher? And obviously, the answer is - a living human who is experienced and is available. A teacher who is able to interact, answer questions and solve your problems in unique ways is more preferable when compared to things like books, videos, statues, images or a master who is long gone. These things have their own importance and utility but they should be your second choice, not the primary.

How many teachers can one have? As many as needed. It all depends on many factors. If the current teacher is not available or you don't find his method and teachings very helpful, then obviously, you need someone else. If you have reached the level of the teacher, then another teacher is needed. There can be practical reasons such as if you relocate to a different place or the teacher relocates. You may find that during cultivation, your preferences may change and you feel inclined towards other teachers, other paths. Sometimes you simply come across a better teacher. But the important thing is that the teacher may leave you or you may leave him, but the teachings never leave you.

Guru shopping

The problem is, some people randomly shift from one teacher to another very quickly. There are as many practices as there are teachers and hence they keep changing the practices and methods too. They employ a method of hit and trial for selecting a "good teacher". Some people evaluate the teachers using some random criteria based on odd beliefs, such as the unusual experiences some teachers can provide or are rumoured to provide. Some people base it on the race, religion or gender of the teacher. Some people simply believe stories of "enlightenment" of others and run to join that teacher who "caused" that.

I can understand that there needs to be some experimentation before one can settle on a path or a teacher but one should converge on something asap. It may not be that you converge on a fixed teacher, but the overall theme of cultivation should settle down. This should be in line with your path. Although, the path itself may change, and a teacher may help you choose a better one, but once a path is clear, the approach should stabilize. You may need more than one teacher or method to progress on that path but the chaos and randomness of choices would vanish.

Where to start?

A question, a dilemma or suffering is the start of search. A common question is - where should I start the search for a teacher? Fortunately, we have Google these days, do not hurry to pack and move to Himalayas. Search and read, apply reason, critical thinking and open mindedness to everything. Take note of who says what. Read opposing opinions and criticisms. Come to your own conclusions. It helps to bounce your ideas off other students or contact the teachers who take time to answer emails. It helps to write down things you learnt and experiment wisely [2].

Read books. Read texts and scriptures. Read commentaries on them by contemporaries. Study well. Join groups, forums or communities. Persist. Remember that such paths are not for frivolous or impatient. Its all hard work, at least initially, for most of us.

This will help you to narrow down choices to a few. After that you may decide to meet a teacher or to attend a programme etc. Its always better to not to judge the teacher initially. Sometimes miracles happen, and teachers appear out of nowhere, coincidences happen. Such students are lucky. However, for the rest, it is not recommended to just sit there and wait for a miracle guru to appear out of thin air. It helps to search. A teacher appears when the student is ready. But you may need to do some effort to get ready. The effort starts with a simple intention.

In ancient days, if one wanted to learn something, he'd simply go to the nearest teacher available. Most of the time the student would stay for years there before moving on. This may still work in modern times, but it is recommended to directly ask for advice on other teachers and other paths. An experienced teacher knows a lot many teachers and ways, and can guide you properly. Start your exploration there. Some teachers will try to sell their own path obviously, but a good teacher will not enforce it on you. Do not hesitate to come back if needed.

Judging a teacher

It is difficult, if not impossible. By definition, a less knowledgeable and less intelligent person cannot evaluate a more knowledgeable and wiser man. If you can, then you are not a student, you are as good as a teacher.

Anyhow, people go ahead and judge a teacher according to whatever they know or believe. If the judgement comes from your direct knowledge then it is reliable but if it comes from stuff you heard somewhere, i.e. from beliefs, or from your biases, likes and dislikes then it is not very accurate.

The true test of a teacher is how useful his teachings are for you and if they have pushed you forward on the path. The teachings are more important than the teacher. This is the essence of this article, you need to know nothing more. But if

you are still unsure, continue reading.

We have discussed some telltale signs of wise men before. Here, I will list some common errors people make when judging a teacher.

Indoctrination: From his very early days, a child is fed with beliefs, faiths and stories about what is true and what's not, whom to believe, whom to trust and how others who believe something else are his enemies etc. When you start a search, you need to throw all that away. Start from a clean slate, the state of "I do not know". Erase odd notions of how a teacher should be. This will broaden your choices substantially. **Cultures:** Some strange beliefs, like eastern teachers are the real thing and western ones are cheap copies, will only narrow your choices.

Ripening is universal, unrelated to places or times. It does seem that east has a treasure of teachers but then most of humanity lives in east and all sciences, philosophies and civilizations started in east, which obviously means that those ancient places will be richer. However, most destruction and corruption of knowledge happened in east and some of it is just outdated. So we have both extreme knowledge and extreme ignorance in east. The west has an advantage that scientific method or attitude kills off some strange BS automatically. The disadvantage is that such attitude and materialism lowers the acceptance of teachings that are foreign looking or in direct conflict with dogma. Anyhow, you can trace the lineages of a majority of western teachers to east. **Followers:** The quality of a teacher reflects in his students, and so if you see some really dumb students around a teacher for a long duration, its time to rethink. If you see cult like behaviours, anger and hate radiating from the followers, don't be one.

Anyhow, do not throw away the baby with the bathwater, take a look at his teachings carefully, perhaps its simply his bad luck that he is stuck with such students. **Experiences:** People often judge a teacher from the stories about unusual experiences his students report. They rush to join the gang and then get disappointed when they experience nothing unusual. And the judgement is that this teacher is a fake. In this drama the teachings are totally forgotten.

Phenomenal experiences are not a requirement to know something of value.

Charisma: It is easy to get infatuated with the talk and style of a good orator. Fancy talk can be used to cover up totally ordinary teachings. Usually such talk has an advantage that it keeps the students from dozing off, but it is no guarantee that the teachings will be useful for you. **Social service:** Some teachers take up the tasks of fixing worldly things, helping poor, serving sick etc. If you are emotionally driven you may prefer them to others, they have this aura of goodness. But there is a risk that you will remain as ignorant as before after spending 20 years doing nothing but service. Check out his teachings also.

Luxury: Is a sign of prosperity not of knowledge. Five star quality ashrams provide a fun filled adventure but will they make you progress? **Crowd:** More followers mean better marketing, not necessarily a better teacher. Quality of

students, not the quantity, should be a criterion. Moreover, such teachers become inaccessible to an average student and are always surrounded by crowd. They teach in a broadcast fashion. If you get lucky, your question may get answered but expect no personal interactions. Anyhow, the teacher himself may be really bright and you may find his teachings valuable. Instead of joining a crowd of ten thousand, its much better to listen to his videos or read his books, if any.

Diet and fashion: What a teacher eats has no bearing on his knowledge, experience and skills. Unless you are interested in an in depth study of a teacher's digestive system, ignore the diet thing. Similarly for attire. Some are found covered in gold and royal attire, some are almost naked. Some wear strange clothing which was in fashion two thousand years ago and some are in a t-shirt and shorts. A long flowing beard is compulsory for a wizard, not for a teacher. None of the above tells you how you will benefit from him. Listen carefully to his teachings, that's all.

Lifestyle: Personal affairs of a teacher have nothing to do with his knowledge, experience and skills. Teachings are all that matters. Some people get lost in the stories of which teacher does what with whom in his bedroom. This is of no importance. Judgements based on such point to the presence of strong ethical beliefs about what teachers are allowed to do. A teacher is just another human. Students don't dictate how a teacher behaves in his personal life, they just absorb the knowledge and go home.

Controversies: The celebrity kind of teachers get quickly drowned in all kinds of controversies. Strong statements, black money, scandals, politics or crime, you name it. A seeker ignores all this drama and concentrates on his teachings. If a criminal says, its day, then it does not become night. Truth demands nothing in terms of Egoic behaviours. A teacher, just like any other person, can easily get afflicted with Egoic problems and spoils his personal reputation. However, that does not affect the content of his teachings, books, lectures or effectiveness of his methods. Granted that most of such teachers are just crooks, but not all of them are so. Its totally a different matter why they fall into controversies, its their lesson, not yours. In my experience, the great teachers re-emerge, mostly after their death, and get crowned as great masters. The deeds of the individual are forgotten and forgiven. The teachings, if they are genuine and useful, live on.

Tradition and lineages: It depends on how effective are those traditions or systems for your own self. A highly renowned tradition that is five thousand years old may seem like a real deal but may end up wasting half of your life. Lineages hint at what kind of teachings one can expect from a teacher, but do not tell about the effectiveness or knowledge of the teacher himself. There is no guarantee that a forth generation student of a great master will be as great as that master. Conversely, a teacher with no formal lineage may turn out to be a gem.

Attitude: Which teacher is better - a strict one, a lenient, loving, abusive, great talker, boring silent one? It should not matter. If he successfully pushes you miles ahead on the path, he is the one.

Commercialization: Of teachings is a controversial matter. Some turn their

teachings into a business and others earn their bread and butter just like the rest of us. It does not really tell anything about their teachings itself. However, one can still guess a few things. If there is a small fee, it serves the purpose of a filter that cuts out non-serious students. In that case, students do not join him just because it costs nothing, they join if they think its worth. Secondly, the teacher is relieved of the trouble of maintaining a place and providing food etc. for his students. There is less chaos and more organization. So charging for teachings is not all bad. Anyhow, if it costs a leg and an arm just to learn how to breathe, then you are in a wrong place. Those who teach for free are really doing a service. It should be a piece of cake for a wise man to arrange for his own life, he need not depend on his students for his survival. Ideally, a teacher should be able to even support a few students, just as he supports his children. But I've never seen even one case like that. Anyhow, check what the teachings say. Is it all a mindless repetition of some old book? Is the teacher talking from experience? Is it superficial or can take you to your goal?

Background: Some teachers have extraordinary stories to tell about their life experiences and how they became enlightened and all. This pulls some students into beliefs that they themselves may receive all those experiences, and they rush to join that teacher. It may or may not work. Experiences translate into learning and learning translates into teaching. It all depends on how effective the translations are. If all he has is stories, you may not benefit much.

Lose the training wheels

Once you are past the teacher-student phase, its time to become independent. You have seen what the noise is about. You tasted many sources. You got some experiences. You know what the books essentially say. In short, you are very-very clear that you are now stable on a path, which is in fact a path of your heart, it is really bringing you the promised happiness and freedom, then it is wise to take the bold step of walking alone on it. Usually, your teacher will notice this first and will let go of you. But if he doesn't, you should at least ask politely. Often the students get attached to their teachers, but it is possible for a teacher to get attached, and then its up to the student to cut the cord.

It won't take you long to realize that the best teacher is your own Self. Pose a question and if you are established in the Self, the answer will be there. The answer will be most satisfying, bright and will fill you with blissful peace. There is no need to hunt for an answer or to struggle with logic and arguments, it is instantly there and is self-evident. Once you know the Self, you don't need to know anything else.

Why can't we have both?

Where is the problem if one has stabilized on a path and still wants to be with the teacher? I guess some of the readers are going to disagree with the idea of cutting the cord, but in my opinion, not letting go the teacher implies presence of attachments and some leftover ignorance. That, or the student has simply become habitual of a teacher-student lifestyle. If you are really doing well on the path, then you will realize very soon that there is no teacher. The man you see delivering lectures is merely an appearance, an externalized version of your own Self.

You will also see that there was no teaching and you learnt nothing new. The teacher is merely a catalyst for quick removal of impurities of ignorance, that's all. Once you know this, it makes no sense to continue the role of student-teacher, the show is over. However, as long as our human experience lasts, the teacher will remain with us, in some form or other, as he is now an essential part of us. He remains not as a person handing out instructions and lectures, but as a companion, friend and beloved.

Notes:

[1] I'm thankful to Francis Lucille for this metaphor. I don't know if it is a real saying.

[2] Note the word - wisely. A student cannot be expected to behave perfectly, but some common sense should be employed while experimenting. For example, if you read somewhere that fasting will purify your mind, or some stuff like that, do not overdo it. You may end up dead or in a hospital. These practices demand careful guidance from experienced and reliable teachers. Similarly, do not simply start chanting a mantra or start any random rituals, just because you read it somewhere. The bottom line is - do not do it if you don't know what you are doing.

[3] Traditionally there are seven kinds. I find that a good classification. See: <https://indiaspirituality.blogspot.in/2009/07/guru-gita-seven-types-of-gurus.html>

Qualities of a Student

After discussing the matter of teachers, its time to turn to the students. For an effective teacher-student interaction, student's own abilities and qualities are of prime importance. If a student possesses the required qualities, he benefits from any teacher. We stand firmly on the formula of - fix yourself, do not try to fix the other. The other being a teacher in this case. It is of no use spending all your life trying to get an ideal teacher or running from one teacher to another, if you have not cultivated yourself as a good student.

So who is a "good" student? For our purposes, he is any seeker who has an immense desire for knowledge, happiness and freedom, firstly, and secondly, can learn from anything and anyone in as less time as possible. Thirdly, he also implements the learning practically, i.e. converts himself into a living example of the teachings.

Apart from these three essential qualities, there are many more such as high intelligence, open mindedness, curiosity, patience, attentiveness, logical and critical thinking etc. All these qualities were discussed in fine detail in previous blog articles, so please refer to past articles, if you haven't read them yet. There are ways to sharpen these tools, some of them, and some are innate. These qualities are desirable for anyone, not only for students in particular. But then everyone is a student anyway. Here, we are going to discuss these qualities and some more, especially as applicable to a student, a newbie student in particular. As a newbie student, I've already done most of the mistakes they do, so I will mostly share what not to do.

Questions?

The journey on a path of knowledge starts with a question. Those who do not ask do not receive. Some people never question, and accept everything uncritically. Some feel ashamed of asking, and never ask, preferring the pretence of knowing everything. Some are afraid of asking, and prefer to remain ignorant for the fear of ridicule. Some do not ask out of pride, they don't want to be seen as ignorant, so remain where they are, forever. The vicious circle of - not asking, making mistakes, suffering, more close mindedness, hence less questioning - continues

and results in an extremely ignorant person, who is hopelessly retarded and is beyond repair. Don't be that person.

Curiosity is a quality that is innate. I don't know any tricks to make someone more curious, except to start taking more interest in the subject matter. Which is also somewhat unnatural, if you are not interested, you are not interested. So having interest and curiosity is an event of Grace, it happens. They act as the source of energy that drives a student to a teacher. Generally a total lack of knowledge causes one to be disinterested and less curious. You will find that a totally innocent person almost never questions or his questions are very simple. As the knowledge grows, questions grow. The questions stop only after knowledge is gained, they do not stop due to an answer. The answer brings more questions.

The motivators for search are curiosity, suffering and bondage, and these results in the student taking interest in learning and knowledge acquisition. When those motivators are not present, a person remains ignorant. So consider yourself lucky if you have that immense drive to be free from ignorance. The rest will happen naturally.

Effective learning

A question leads to a teacher and the learning begins. We have discussed the learning mechanisms of the Mind and also who can be a preferable teacher, previously. So we can directly jump to optimization tricks for learning.

Intelligence: The more intelligent you are, faster you learn. We have discussed some tricks to enhance intelligence before, so please check them. Fortunately, it can be cultivated. Some are innately intelligent, good for them. Still it can be sharpened even more. Path of knowledge demands intelligence, but the knowledge comes via experiences. So knowledge is not denied to the less intelligent people, only the paths are different.

Intelligence is augmented by knowledge. Know more, ask more and learn more. Mere memorization is not intelligence, nor is it learning. Do not become a storage medium for information, use the information. Convert it into experiences. Intelligence is enhanced by staying with intelligent people. Observe how they learn, what tricks they use, what qualities they have and copy them. To know who is intelligent, one must have a certain level of intelligence, else it is often impossible to judge his intelligence. If the person is way too intelligent than you are, you will miss it completely, at most he will appear as a crazy fellow. Such people are not for you then, first get to that level. In any case stay away from stupid people. You will find that your intelligence will start decreasing instead,

you will become like them. Some people enjoy the company of people who are somewhat stupid compared to themselves, this gives them a superiority complex and a sense of security and command. Do not be that person. When you encounter a comparatively highly intelligent person face to face, you will tremble in your shoes. This is not a very good feeling, but you will be filled with awe and respect for him very soon and the desire to be like him will follow naturally.

Open mindedness:Not being open to new knowledge, new ideas and new teachers will keep you ignorant. Hunt for novelty. If you are bored of same old stuff around you, it is a sign of intelligence. Open new avenues. Throw the TV, get the internet. Throw the old dogmatic stuff that repeats itself mindlessly forever, be a seeker. If you have too many beliefs, it will make you narrow minded, you will resist any change. Knowledge means change in your beliefs. Throw away the beliefs. Beliefs are the biggest hindrance to knowledge, we have discussed them extensively in previous articles.

Once you have absorbed whatever your current teacher has to offer, move on, find something new. Knowledge lies at the boundary of known and unknown, so seek out strange stuff, unusual ideas and theories. Fools take refuge in known and feverishly resist the unknown. Don't be that person.

Critical and logical thinking:A good student comes with a built in BS meter. If you are a seeker, set your BS meter sensitivity to "Extreme". Open mindedness does not mean an uncritical acceptance of any idea. The only criteria for acceptance should be its usefulness. The idea may be crazy and may appear nonsensical, but if it is useful, keep it. For example, a smart engineer utilizes unknown physical phenomena in his invention, fully knowing that they do not make any sense. A seeker sometimes utilizes information which he can't make sense of. That's why he is called a student, not a master. If it results in learning, it is useful.

Any teachings must pass through your BS meter without making it beep. If it beeps, question them, do not reject them in a knee jerk fashion. Rejecting everything just because you think it doesn't make sense is a sign of close mindedness. If you are learning, many things will not make sense, obviously. So, one must be both critical as well as open minded.

Knowing that something is logically impossible will save your time considerably. You will not pursue it needlessly. However, some things do seem logically impossible at first glance, just question, find out why. With enough knowledge, it may begin to look more logical. Remember that, logic comes later, first comes the experience. Once the experience is there, you can try to fit it in some arbitrary logical framework. Some students make this mistake of rejecting experimentation

completely because they think it is not worth, as it seems illogical. Don't be that person. You will lose an opportunity to learn here.

Patience and persistence: On the path one will often encounter situations that make him lose all hope. Walking the path is not an easy job. That's why you are doing it. You will find that the reason is most probably yourself, your beliefs mostly. A good student will patiently analyse himself instead of blaming a teacher or something else. He will find out what's stopping him, and will correct it. If it's the teacher, then just get rid of the teacher, find someone else. But if you get stuck with similar situations everywhere, the problem is you.

Some people give up easily and relapse into a life of ignorance and darkness. They think they are incapable of knowing or learning, it's not their thing etc. Don't be that person. Persist. Go and take a break for some days, months or years, and come back to your path. If you are on the right path, which is of your heart, it will pull you back anyway.

Experimentation

If a student doesn't put the knowledge he has gained into practice, it amounts to nothing. If you have a huge amount of "knowledge" regarding stuff you are never going to use, well, then it's as good as ignorance. You have wasted time and effort. It reminds me of schools, they feed children with useless stuff and they come out of schools as dumb as they went in. The issue is not the quality of information the school feeds, but the failure to put that information into practice.

When you practice, you convert the information into knowledge. Only an experience can bring knowledge and so one must experiment.

A good student learns fast and immediately puts that into practice. The only way to know if something works for you is to do it. If it fails to work, question it, take your experiments to your teacher, ask for an explanation. Some people don't practice and hence never become adapted. Don't be that person. Merely intellectual knowledge is going to do nothing for you.

A good student experiments, and a smart student experiments smartly. Do not experiment with unknown stuff without any supervision. That's why we have teachers. Some people simply read stuff and experiment on it. It can be dangerous. The smartness is in figuring out what can be dangerous. If you can't, just ask. For stuff that you are sure of, go ahead and experiment.

On the path, you are mostly going to experiment on yourself, your mind and sometimes body. Know clearly that you will not remain the same as a result. It is

of import to know the consequences in advance. If you have no clue what it can do to you, better not do it. Some students experiment indiscriminately - drugs, rituals, mantras, energy manipulations, occult stuff and what have you. Don't be that person. The Self is here and now. If you feel the need to go to extremes, you are doing something wrong.

There are some who run after experiences of strange kind. You need the experiences of right kind, not the strange kind. If an experience pushes you forward on your path, it is of the right kind, the rest is waste. When you devote your precious time seeking strangeness, it is just your Ego looking for entertainment, a "new" kind of fun. Anyhow, you will find that you encounter strangeness as you progress, which is nothing special, it is just new experiences that break old beliefs. Just acknowledge and move on.

Sharing is caring

A student shares the knowledge he gains with all. Well, not all, only those who are somewhat interested. What is the advantage? Firstly, it's a joy to share stuff and secondly others are more likely to share their own knowledge with you. If not knowledge, as you need to get it by your own experience, they would at least share their way of getting it. Knowledge is amplified by sharing, just like happiness and freedom.

Now, some become careless and share stuff that must not be shared, like some secret techniques. These are secrets for a reason – they are either dangerous or can be misused and utilized to gain powers or cause harms. Usually, mother nature ensures that a person operating from Ego does not get the required knowledge, but sometimes strange things can happen. If you think you must share, try to gauge the consequences and consult your teacher. If you have no teacher, then you are the teacher, and it's your responsibility to act wisely, like a teacher.

Some try to share their knowledge with people who are not yet ready. Don't do it. An ignorant person is under heavy load of beliefs, and if you try to uproot the beliefs, which you will if you share knowledge, it can cause harm to that person. Well, if he bothers to listen to you. Usually the beliefs will ensure that he will escape your crazy talk and will not see you again, but if you insist and employ force to "show him stuff", it can backfire. Believers get angry very quickly when you show them their mistakes or stupidity, and can turn dangerous. Some beliefs are like tumours, they have deep roots and removing them suddenly can damage the organ. The organ is believer's mind, do not mess with his mind.

Arguments

Sharing is cool, but don't overdo it. There is a difference between sharing knowledge and pushing it down the throat of an unwilling listener. That'd be arguing. Some students become overenthusiastic when they learn something of value and thinking that they must now fix everyone's ignorance around them, they impose their "knowledge" on anyone who happens to show his ignorance. Needless to say, no one likes it. Arguments result in more heat than light and the ignorant party may close down even more.

Why is that? Why can't people see your point and stop acting like a stupid? Because you are challenging their Ego instead of arousing their curiosity. The Ego erects walls of beliefs around itself and any threat to it is perceived as a threat to survival. The result is flaring up of Egoic tendencies - fear, anger and hate gushes out of an ignorant person when faced with an argument. Of course it always fails to achieve what you are after, which is enlightening the other about something. Do not underestimate it, it is more difficult than you think. People will not like to change even a bit of their thinking. Arguments are anything but a transmission of knowledge.

When a person or in this case a student argues, it comes out of his Ego. Either he is trying to show off how much he knows or perceives the other as a fool or inferior. So it is only natural that the other also reacts from the Ego. The results are disastrous. Personal attacks, fights, bitterness, broken relations and if the arguers are stupid enough, murders.

However, arguments can serve useful purposes. Argumentation is an art and a skill. Ask any good lawyer. It takes years of practice to cultivate good enough arguing skills. It then becomes a Debate, a technique to gain knowledge. But I don't recommend that a student take up argumentation as his life goal. You need to learn only a few tricks that can come handy when you find yourself accidentally trapped inside an argument. Here are some thumb rules:

Rule number one, do not argue. Rule number two, do not argue. If the person has not seen your point just after you state it, then perhaps he will not see it even after hours of arguing. In other words, he is not worthy, not at this time. If you still feel that urgent need to argue, become aware of it, it is an impulse. See if it is really needed. Is it a waste of time? Is it worth? Does the other really need it or will even comprehend it? What are the consequences? Etc. Address the idea, not the person. Remove personal words from your statements (such as "I", "me", "mine", "you" or "your"). Pose the matter in third person format. Make it light and something impersonal. When you see the other attacking you instead of your statements, it's time to leave. Define all key words. Most of the arguments arise out of misunderstanding of meanings of words. A student, especially one of

philosophy, uses very precise words. You will find that ignorant people have no clue about the meanings of words they use, or why they use them. Ask the other to define his stuff first. If you do this, the argument will be over in a few seconds most of the time. Turn the debate into questions. Keep digging till you find the source of belief of your opponent. Once you know that, just point it out and leave. If you find that the source is opponent's direct experience, then you must ask for a way to get that experience. Experience it and see where the problem is, usually the problem will disappear and so will argument. If you can't experience what the other is telling you about, you have nothing to debate about. Instead of imposing your view, gently suggest it. If the opponent is open, he will take a hint, if not, leave. If the opponent imposes his view forcibly on you, he is surely not interested in making you enlightened about it, he is Ego in action, trying to prove his survival superiority. Now is the time to bow out humbly and assure him that you will surely look into the matter. Of course, you don't have to. If the opponent starts avoiding the topic, changes lanes suddenly, or laughs it off, you know he is in a cognitive dissonance. Leave here. If the opponent is right, ask for more. Ask your questions and benefit from the debate. Turn the argument into a learning opportunity. The best way to avoid an argument is to ask the opponent to teach you, and if he has anything of substance or just BS, you both will know very soon. Similarly, if someone is bent on arguing, offer to teach. Teaching is a good way of learning, you will know if you were right or not as soon as you start teaching, if it is BS it will not stand for more than a few minutes.

Receiving mode

When you desire knowledge, you need to switch to a receiving posture. Not only not argue with a teacher, request for teachings and be grateful. Doesn't matter if the teaching is useful or useless, you need to acknowledge it. May be next time something useful will come up from the same teacher. So do not dismiss the teacher right away. No teacher likes to teach when the student is adamant about his own views and beliefs. Do not question as if you know the answer. The questions should not be unnecessary questions, first make an effort to find out the answer.

Do not ask for something you are not ready for, such as advanced techniques. Do not offer to pay for such. Its just a bribe, teachers may not like it. If something is beyond your comprehension, listen quietly. Ponder on it for a few days, discuss with fellow students, and if it fails to make any sense, ask the teacher to explain. Many teachers will be happy to fall back to basics for you. It is a huge mistake to blame the teacher for something which you cannot understand. Perhaps you need to find a simpler teaching if you can't understand any of it. If you find that no one in your group understands anything, perhaps its better to find a new teacher. Do not try to gain the favour of teacher by hook or crook or engage in feet

licking behaviour. This is not a way to show respect, this is cheapness. When you embody the teachings and it has effects as expected by the teacher, you have paid your respect. There is no better way to thank a teacher.

Do not ask for advice on personal stuff, such as whom you should marry and what you should name your child, which jobs to take and where to live. You are going to an ocean, take at least a bucket with you, don't go there with a spoon. A good teacher will advise you about seemingly unimportant things like diet and places, if they are really important for that practice.

Do not try to eat up all the time in a session, others don't like it, keep it sweet and short. If you need more, ask for extra time after the session in person. That's why we need a teacher who can devote time for individuals, rather than someone who broadcasts his teachings. Do not try to answer every question, even if you know the answer, others need to come up to your level too, let them guess it. Do not push yourself forward, stay humble and gentle. Do not engage in deception, politics and Ego games. I guess this is kindergarten advice, but I've seen even the grown up students do all this. To be in receiving mode means to avoid all such acts and behaviours.

Surrender

This is the quality of uncritical acceptance of teaching based solely on a living faith. We have discussed living faith before, so please check it out. So now after strictly recommending critical thinking and smart experimentation, am I changing my tune? Yes, I am. I think of surrender as an advanced technique of very fast learning. Other methods are too slow and need an extensive use of intelligence and Mind.

So does it mean a student should not use his brain/mind? When you are just starting, what else do you have, surely use it. Mind is the initial way to arrive at some solid knowledge and to dispel the ignorance. However, you will soon find that the Mind has limits. Soon in this case can be months or years. Once you arrive at the edge of Mind, change your tune. Experiences have no limits.

If you are lucky enough to have a good teacher, you will find that 8 out of 10 of his teachings make perfect sense to you, and say, he can show you via direct experience 5 out of those 8. Now, you have some reason to accept the remaining 3. Just be patient, those 3 will turn into a direct experience sooner or later. However, if you simply start acting on those 3, you have saved years of time, perhaps. If its going to take a few days or months, better to wait, but if it takes years, its too slow. Better to act now and reap benefits.

Usually a teacher is a good indicator of how well his teachings are going to work. If he is a happy and free fellow, chances are more that he knows his stuff well. You can invest some faith here and see how it goes for your own self. If he is sad, depressed, angry, busy collecting donations or chasing his female students, you should take a hint, and uncritically leave. Living faith is just that, it has solid basis, but you don't really know. It is a short cut, use it wisely.

What about the 2 remaining teaching out of 10, of which you have no clue? Some of you must have had such experiences, coming from the same teacher, some teachings of his are gold and a few odd ones sound like total BS. There can be two possibilities – either they are really BS or you are not well equipped to convert them into experience and thus knowledge. What to do? Living faith comes handy here. If you are sure that your survival is not at stake, go ahead and act on them. If it can cause survival issues, your Ego will act as a wall, and you will not be able to go there anyway. Note that faith comes with time and long term relation with your teacher. Do not jump to faith simply because I say so.

Morphing into a teacher

Somewhere on the path, a time comes when a student has enough content that makes him spill and overflow. This is the natural urge to teach others. I have no tricks to offer here, I'm just a student, but here are some observations.

Teaching others is a job of very high responsibility. It can't be stressed enough. A teacher totally transforms a student, changes him in every possible way. When you teach, you are playing with a life, it is not a small thing. This also affects his relatives, parents, partner, children, friends and co-workers. This affects his behaviour, likes, dislikes, job, profession and lifestyle. In short, you are juggling a hundred variables here. What can go wrong?

It is not recommended that you treat a student like a guinea pig, a lab rat. A teacher needs to know what will be the consequences, he should be able to take that responsibility. It is not a doer doing the teaching, but that happens when the teacher has relinquished the doership. People start teaching much before that. There is no such thing as a universal teacher's manual, which one can follow. Usually a teacher will simply follow his own teacher. He is given small teaching assignments, and the teacher of the teacher oversees him for a few years. When he is convinced, the newbie teacher is let loose in the wild. This is the familiar and traditional **Permission** to teach.

With traditions breaking and disappearing, it is not surprising to find teachers teaching without permissions or a backup support. Although nothing can be said

about the quality of their teaching based on that. The teacher can be brilliant, or may not be much. As I said, lineages are not a guarantee. So what is the solution if you feel like teaching but have no backup? I guess, its better to start small, teach a few, teach fluffy light stuff, observe how they react, where you need to improve etc. With a good experience your confidence and effectiveness will increase. Teaching is also a learning experience, and hence from this angle, a student remains a student even if he is teaching.

The Path of Books

If for some reason a student does not find a suitable teacher, he need not lose all hope. Most of the teachings are available in written form. These days the teachings are also available in audio or video form, which is as good as being with a teacher and is perhaps better than books in terms of sensory satisfaction. There is tons of material on the internet in various formats. Some teachers are also available via emails or other communication apps. The information is widespread, in fact, there is an excess of it. It all appears voluminous but most of it is repetition of the same few ideas, interpretations, and reinterpretations, commentaries and perspectives.

This was not the case in past, when such information was held secret. The world has changed and the teachings are no more hidden in secret places, meant for special people only. Most of them are freely available to anyone who is interested. So why don't people simply read those books etc. and get rid of their ignorance and suffering, why are the majority not free? Because just like a teacher, books only point towards the knowledge, they do not transmit knowledge, they transmit only information, written symbols. Knowledge requires a direct seeing, an experience. We have seen that merely gaining knowledge does not do much either, the clouds of habitual ignorance cover up any faint light of knowledge gained via reading very quickly.

It is easy to read and watch stuff, it is not difficult to see what the text is saying, and it is not impossible to experience the Self by following the teachings and pointers. All knowledge starts with the Self, and it is the most natural and immediate experience one can have, and hence it is possible to know it via books etc. However, doubts arise, questions arise, forgetting happens, the reader usually fails to implement the teachings in his daily life, the Ego takes over very soon. He drifts into the ocean of books, one after the other, he devours them all. Books have a tendency to form beliefs, the written words are powerful, bypass our usual BS checks and have a scent of trust in them. It is our social conditioning that the books speak nothing but the truth. Thus, the end result is a student whose head is full of beliefs, who has very little experience, who confuses information with knowledge and remains as ignorant as before, living almost the same miserable life as before.

Books say exactly the same words a teacher will tell you, they have the same content as delivered by a teacher, and perhaps they explain things in a better and refined way compared to the spontaneous talks. The sentences in a book go through careful editing and rewording many times, and so are more potent than a rough talk. So why aren't they as effective as a teacher? Because a book is a map, not the territory. Well, to be honest, maybe there are some students who receive great benefits from the books, there are stories about people, even illiterate people, who upon reading or hearing just a few sentences from a text, got the idea instantly and got teleported miles ahead on their path. But such miracles are rare, the general case is, as I said, a brief glimpse of light and subsequent forgetting.

It takes many repetitions, constant reminders, practice and cultivation, in order to incorporate the teachings into one's own being. Reading about them is a start, the first step. In the presence of a teacher, repetitions and cultivation etc. happens naturally and necessarily. That is the job of the teacher. Apart from that a teacher can answer questions and clear doubts about the written teachings. A book cannot do that. So a teacher becomes a necessity except when the student shows exceptional commitment towards the teachings and takes on the hard work on his own.

What to read?

This is usually the first question. What you are asking is which books have answers to my questions. If you don't have any questions, then this question won't arise. Once you have a question, you can search, its not so difficult these days. You will find more books than you can read in one lifetime. Most of them will be fluff, dancing around the trees, repetition of something which was read from an old text. You will find useful info, but it may take some time to arrive at correct books.

The solution to the overdose of books is to ask for recommendations from those who have already sifted through an ocean of books. For this you should be already in the company of wise, which is improbable at this stage. If you are with ignoramuses, common people, you will get recommendations of strange kind, perhaps about the biography of a rich person, a hot novel, some funny stuff etc. In short, with such people around you, you will remain shallow, there is no way to get out of that pit, except by chance. I call it Grace, a happening that invites you on a path. It can be an accidental encounter with a wise man, or you stumble upon a useful book [1]. If you are reading this blog, Grace has happened already [2].

If you find that you are a book lover, but have learnt nothing of value since many years, it has not made you a better person, or has done nothing to push to forward on your path, then suspect that you are in the pit of shallow books and useless recommendations. The only way to get out is to question it all and seek a brighter company. Crazier the better. There are ways to recognize wise people, they are crazy from the point of view of ignoramus. They do sound crazy and if they don't, you need to search more. There are communities, forums and groups on the internet, try them before engaging with wise offline, there are not many of them. If you happen to know someone who has already joined a teacher, get hold of him and start there. Attending Satsangs is a great way to connect with other seekers, even if the teachings go over your head.

Once you get a book that makes sense, you will have a few keywords to narrow down your search for books. Gradually you will converge on the gold mine of knowledge. Note that what others find useful may or may not be useful for you. Everybody has different needs and different questions. But you need to start somewhere. The sign that you have hit a gold mine is that you start getting little nuggets of information that sound just true. You get a feeling that you were looking for it since years. It instantly heightens your interest, so much so, that you cannot put that book down.

Once you have read such a book cover to cover, you are filled with joy, you feel in the right place finally. It brings up a thirst for more, and since the foundation is now there, you find exactly the right books you need. Books lead to the authors, and if the authors are within reach, they may end up as your teachers.

Repetitions and limits of information

Once you have gone through many books of value, you will find that all talk about mostly the same stuff. The same topics keeps coming up in every other book. Soon you will find that some common solutions or teachings start arising out of seemingly noisy chatter of books. The same teachings get repeated again and again endlessly. There are interesting variations, but they are on the surface. You will see a theme that is common to all the good writers.

Very soon you will find yourself yearning for something new, something which you never heard before. This is the tendency of the Mind, it gets bored quickly, especially if its just information. You may find more nuggets, some more exotic writings, some wild ideas here and there. But they will be just entertaining for a while. The real stuff is the boring one, that keeps repeating in the guise of different terminologies, various philosophies, languages, culture specific stuff and some more poetic or mysterious and some very straightforward and pithy texts.

Getting bored of same stuff is a sign of intelligence, because only a stupid can be delighted with same old exact repetitions for years altogether. So most of book lovers stop here, there is no more juice left in the books. In effect, they have hit the limits of information. Its time to put that information into practice. Many do not take this important step, and end up being ignoramus, or worse ignoramus with head full of beliefs and “knowledge”. The knowledge is not in the books, it is in the experiences. A good student starts putting the information gained from the books into practice as soon as he starts seeing a pattern of repetitions. It is repeating, and it is repeating since thousands of years, it must be important!

If you find that you have a huge collection of books and use that to impress everyone, your talk is about what is written is which book by whom, and your statements are a mindless parroting of written material, then realize that you are in the pit of limit of information. You are an encyclopaedia, not a wise person. Ego has taken over you, giving you a sense of superiority over the illiterate uneducated masses. Although there are some benefits of memorizing stuff and of the ability to understand the essence of it all in terms of information only, but this is not what a seeker does. It makes you look educated and cultured but does not result in happiness or freedom. Most importantly, it gives an illusion that you have reached there, you know everything, that acts as a hurdle and retards your progress.

Usually, some event which results in a direct experience or an encounter with a person who is an embodiment of those teachings, triggers a recovery out of the pit of limits of information. Once you realize the value of experiences, you pick up speed again.

Understanding written word

Note that books are a written account of experiences of someone else, and everyone interprets their experiences differently. So it is necessary to not to take the written word literally, because it may not mean what you think it means. Meaning is a subjective occurrence, and most of the time language alone fails to convey it. It becomes even more difficult to guess the real meanings of the words when the text is thousands of years old. You will need to rely on translators and interpreters. They add their own spice in the meaning, and it all becomes a recipe for confusion very soon.

What is the solution? Again, experience it yourself, experiment, find out the meaning. It may mean something entirely different for you. If luckily, you happen to get the same meaning that the author had in his mind, you will find that the

whole book falls neatly into place. Everything makes sense, especially if the book was written from authors own direct experiences. If the book is only a commentary on old books, all bets are off.

You may hit this limitation of language and meaning sooner or later, if you do not start converting the written word into solid experiences. If nothing makes sense, you have no clue what is written and why it was written, and you wonder why everyone else seems to worship that very book as if it saved their lives, then suspect that you have hit the limitation of meanings.

Beliefs

In no case whatsoever allow books to form beliefs. This is perhaps the most important sentence in this article. Books should lead to knowledge not to beliefs. Beliefs, as defined in this blog, are mental structures, ideas, concept that pretend to be knowledge, and they have no foundation of experience. The information gained from the books is sometimes called indirect knowledge. It has a potential to become knowledge, but is not knowledge itself. It is of prime importance to know this when all you have is a book as your teacher. A teacher would simply kick you out of beliefs, and show you the real thing instantly, a book cannot do that.

Beliefs coming from the books are formed when you assume that the stuff it says is “true”. Perhaps it is, but how do you know? To know you must experience it first. Once you have an experience , you can analyze it in terms of true or false. Experience comes first, logic is second.

This error is so common that it is mind-boggling, most of students simply assume the truth of the written word. The only exception that I find, who never do so, are lawyers. For a lawyer, each and every sentence of a legal document may or may not be true. It may look like truth but maybe there is some ill intention hidden behind it. May be the meaning is twisted. Maybe it can be interpreted in a dozen other ways. If you wish to sharpen your critical thinking skills, I recommend studying legal stuff, cases, arguments etc. or better, befriend an experienced lawyer, they are not all bad and have their use. A seeker learns from anyone and everyone he can learn from, as we have discussed in the last article on the qualities of a student.

A philosopher is yet another kind of person who pays an immense amount of attention on the definition of words and logic of statements. You don't need to befriend one, you must become one. There is a tendency to not to invent new words, people tend to reuse and redefine old words to mean something else,

perhaps it costs a fortune to coin a new word. As soon as you encounter a word, especially a new word, hunt for its meaning, connotations, etymology, content sensitivity etc. Similarly for the statements written there, what is written, why was it written, what meaning does it convey and how you ultimately understand it. In no case, assume it as true, real or evidential.

When you are in the world of a book, the words are like game money, its not real money, but you can use it in the game. It has no value in real world. Words take on value only when they relate firmly with direct experiences. There is no other way. Till that happens, you can use them as game currency, play the game of mental concepts, juggle them, arrange them, understand them, evaluate them via logic, apply critical thinking and do whatever you want, but never take them into the real world.

So are the books useless then? They are useful as pointers. You must search for a meaning of the teaching in your own experience. Something doesn't become true for you simply because it is written in a book.

Experimentation

To avoid the deep pit of beliefs, one must convert the contents of a book into experiences. This means one needs to experiment. We have covered this topic before, and same tricks and precautions can be utilized in case of experiments based on books. The simple rule is – do not do it if you do not know what you are doing. Some practices and experiments require strict supervision of a master or a teacher, who has already gone through them personally. Ideally, such a teacher should have taught a number of students before you, and you are not his first experiment.

Next step

Once you are done with the books, done your experiments, and now have a higher level of questions that are based on experiences, it is time to meet a teacher. Many students stop here. It can be a mistake. The need for a teacher will be there as long as there are questions and hurdles. If you find that there is no ample joy and freedom in spite of reading all the books and doing all the practices you could do, you have hit the limits of books. The cultivation must take on a new turn here.

The beauty of the path of knowledge is that, you need to know the Self only once, the rest of the cultivation needs minimal supervision and guidance. Self is the best teacher, it gives you nothing but a direct experience, a direct knowing,

something even the greatest master cannot give.

We will explore some experiences the Self can provide in next articles.

Notes:

[1] The natural way to reach up to the event of Grace is either personal suffering, observing suffering around oneself or extreme curiosity - when one accumulates so much knowledge that one hits the limits of it. The event that happens after this point is Grace. So is suffering Grace? Maybe it is, and most probably it is a prelude to Grace. But there are many who spend their entire lives in suffering and ignorance. Suffering may not necessarily lead to Grace, but it is surely a major motivator.

[2] This blog is not for everyone, as you can guess. It has no general gossip, no celebrity news or political crap. It is very difficult, if not entirely impossible for an average person to reach here. If you reached here randomly, you will not find it useful, but if you are seeking something, and have reached here, it is a sign of Grace. It is possible that the articles here will be useful for some people, as this blog is an essence of hundreds of books, years of experience or fooling around and thousands of hours of listening and absorbing lectures from wise men. But it is entirely possible that you will find a better source. One of the advantages of being born in India is that there is ample Grace here. There is actually excess of it. Just taking birth here is equivalent to initiation. However, when things become so common and ample, they lose value. One simply becomes habitual of being around wise men and surrounded by great texts, so much so, that one can become blind to the obvious, as a fish is blind to the water it swims in. So, the matter of Grace is complicated, all I can say is - it happens on its own and is not at all dependent on person, place or times.

The Art of Introspection

The best teacher is the Self, your own essence. Even when you have the luxury of a great master teaching you or an amazing book that answers all the questions, you will need the Self because without it nothing can be known. Ultimately, one needs to get the direct experience pointed towards by the teachings, and the Self is the ultimate receiver of those experiences. In the end, the teachers and books are merely forms of Self, just appearances.

Once you are loaded with information and questions, its time to come back to the Self and ask for the experience. The way to do this is commonly known as introspection or self-observation. Some people may like to call it a meditation or direct knowing. We will stick with the term introspection because I think its the least ambiguous of all.

Introspection, as you know, is seeing within. What do we mean by “within”? For those who are identified with a body, it may mean something inside the body, maybe in the head somewhere. And they may try to get a feeling or sensation or a vision etc. For those identified with the mind, they will try to find a thought or memory or logic of it all. Many will close the eyes and wait for something to happen while staring at the darkness behind the eyelids. But “within” does not mean any of that.

It simply means withdrawing the attention from objects, mental or physical, and remaining just aware, be present. Not paying exclusive attention to anything, it is like zooming out, widening of awareness. Awareness of nothing in particular, just waiting with a mild curiosity. You ask the question when you are established in this state and just experience openly and directly. The analysis comes later, once you mentally note what you just came to know. The analysis takes time and involves logic, knowing takes no time. After you analyse, more questions may appear, which is ok, just repeat the introspection with new question.

An example

Lets demo it by a simple example. Put a red apple or tomato in front of you. Create an intention of knowing the answer to the question – *what is before me?*

Now clear your mind of any thoughts except with that intention as a background. Focus on nothing in particular with the tomato in the field of vision. Zoom out your attention and relax it. Be very aware and open. Switch to plain awareness mode, where you are just aware, doing nothing and thinking nothing.

You will be made aware of a shape and a colour. Now the mind jumps back in. You are made aware of the thoughts of - red, a name – “tomato”, fruit, dinner and sweet-sour taste. Ask - *how do you know that what is before you is all of these labels*, and you will be made aware of memory and past experiences with tomatoes. You just experienced conditioning and impressions. Note that these are not in front of you, they are activities of mind, so its not the answer to the question of what is before me.

Clear the mind of conditioned thoughts and you will be back to shape and colour. Ask yourself, *is there a tomato or just red colour and a round-ish shape?* Since you have already rejected the idea of a tomato as conditioning and memory, the answer you get this time is – there is a round shape with red colour. You have just experienced qualia or qualities. Note that this is all you can experience.

Now ask, *is there really quality out there or is it only an experience of qualia?* You will find that the qualia and their experience is one and the same thing, there cannot be a red without the experience of red. You need to be brutally honest here and accept what is, rather than bringing in a thousand beliefs to explain it away. So the answer is that there is an experience, namely that of red and round.

Now ask *how do you know it is red and round?* This time the mind may bring up memories of red and round objects, but you will find that even after you discard those memories, the red and round remains, it is not dependent on memories or past experiences. So you do not know it via memories. It is a pure experience, it would be exactly the same if you looked at it for the very first time in your life.

Now you can ask, *is that experience happening before me or somewhere else?* Well, the obvious answer you should get is that experiences do not have a location, they happen and are witnessed. Objects and events have a location, not experiences. Try to deny that or refute that. You will fail, which means your answer stands firmly. So its not before you, or behind you, the experience is consciousness of it, there is nothing else to an experience. In other words the experience and consciousness of it are identical.

You have just witnessed the unity of objects and consciousness. This is the classic experience of not-two, aka oneness or Yoga – the union. There is only consciousness , aka the Self. Here ends this introspection. We will go through

some more such exercises in coming articles.

Try it as many times as you like, with different questions, objects, even mental objects and see what you get in the end. You don't need to accept the conclusion I arrived at above, it can be some other conclusion. Discuss it with your teacher, ask why you are getting something else.

Tips and tricks

The beauty of introspection is that it can be done anywhere and anytime. It hardly takes any time. The answers are instantaneous. It doesn't require much education, skills or a million dollar lab to get the answers. So its not a surprise that introspection is being used since thousands of years successfully, and the results are amazing.

However, it is not recommended that you do it when your survival is at risk, such as while driving or working with machines etc. It works best when you have nothing else to do. If you are not devoted to a path, you will seldom find free time to sit down and introspect. This is not because such people have very important things to do, its because they are always distracted by something or the other. They are busy serving their master, the Ego with whatever it demands, and obviously, it leaves no time for introspection which is a tremendously boring job for an Ego, it doesn't satisfy any of its demands. Such people cannot sit silently even for a minute and want everything instantly without much effort.

Ironically, introspection takes no effort at all and is instantaneous. But your Ego wants something great and with bells and whistles, fireworks and what not. And this must arrive at your convenience and must come in a laziest possible way. Ego assigns it the lowest priority and expects the greatest teacher in the world to come and serve you while you feast on popcorns. Knowledge can wait, often for years, but the smallest of the desire or distraction must be fulfilled now. I guess you get the point, if you can relate to that, you are in firm grip of Ego and must do some groundwork before you can begin any kind of introspection. Read the previous articles on distractions and Egoic tendencies in order to get rid of them as fast as possible.

When you are free from Egoic tendencies and distractions, your mind will be peaceful enough to see the answers, which comes in the form of direct and clear knowing. It is not a booming voice from the blue, its very subtle and silent. It is prior to the mind. Mind engages after the knowing has taken place and organizes it into an understanding.

Use logic and critical thinking to understand the direct experience. Many people simply evaluate the experience in terms of their pet beliefs and assumptions. Needless to say that it all goes downhill from there. You will recognize the beliefs by their uncertainty, they do not stand on the firm ground of direct experience. The success of introspection totally depends on your ability to stay clear of beliefs. Read past articles on beliefs to get rid of them.

Once the experience is understood and is certain, new questions arise. It may sound futile, but that's how you progress, it's a good sign. Questions stop only when the knowledge is complete, which is your goal here, so let them come. Questions may lead to a restless mind, and that is because you are not waiting for answers and go on asking random questions and assuming some random answers. A question must not become a distraction, it should be such that it takes you closer to the answer. If it makes you lose your way, it's not the right question.

Avoid people around you when you introspect. It is not a brainstorming session, it is a communion with the Self, others are not invited. It is not loud thinking and so need not be told to others. It should involve very less thinking, or none most of the time. When the answers are self-evident, thinking is of no use. If you find that you always need someone to bounce off your introspection on, you are in the grip of habitual reactions. Some people need others in order to even think, the thoughts come as reactions to others, else they do not know what to think and usually fall asleep when there is no one around to push them into thinking. Well, such people need some major groundwork.

Find a quiet place, a closed room perhaps, but it's not a necessity. Find a good sitting posture and seat. It should not make you fall asleep or make you too uncomfortable to concentrate on the introspection. You should not be too hungry or too full. Sit only after bodily needs and sleep etc. are out of the way. Such preparation is needed only initially, or only when one is under the firm grip of Ego and finds it difficult to sit peacefully or to even question. Once you have tasted real introspection, it can be done even in a crowded bus full of school children.

It helps to quieten the mind a bit and to say an affirmation etc. It helps to invoke a teacher or someone you respect highly, someone who is your ideal. This puts you in a receiving mode and the hold of the Ego is loosened. It is not necessary to use Sanskrit verses, or secret mantras or flowery language of any sort. Just bring that thought into the mind, an image etc. Just remember, that's all. It should not take more than a second.

If these tips sound like typical yogic meditation guidelines, then it is not a

coincidence. This is a time tested way to know. What I'm sharing here is general knowledge, nothing new. However, I'm putting it under a solid context. It is always best to know what you are doing and why, what will you achieve out of it, how, and what is your purpose, goal.

I'll state it again. The acts that resemble rituals are of no use by themselves. These are tricks to remove the stupid hurdles your body, mind and Ego places between you and introspection. If you are free from hurdles, just skip to the chase. Introspection is there for only one purpose - to directly experience whatever that comes up as a response to your query. It is not only a mental task, it is knowing, a seeing. The mind comes in the scene only after the experience is witnessed. You can analyse, dissect and do logical and critical thinking after that. Simply experiencing is ok, but not very useful if you wish to cultivate and embody the knowledge you gain this way. If you do not think about it, it vanishes from memory within a day. The experiences are nothing extraordinary, an untrained person won't even notice them, and so they fail to impress upon memory. However, there are exceptions, sometimes the experience is profound and life changing. I seldom get such extraordinary stuff, and this is the norm. So you are doing just fine if you don't see any fireworks or deities showering flowers on you as soon as you start introspecting.

Errors

Newbies do fall into some pits while trying to master the art of introspection. I did too. So let me write about what not to do. First thing to note, it is not magic. It is nothing special, nothing extraordinary. It is less interesting than your shopping list. This is because the Self is detached, not interested and not uninterested. You as an individual taking up introspection make no difference for it, nor is it indifferent. The joy comes because of evaporating ignorance, you feel nice, you know and hence find happiness and freedom. Note that the Self is not separate from the individual, it is playing a game, to put it metaphorically.

In the end, you will find that your whole existence including this life, every second of it, happens on a canvas of extraordinary. The ordinary happens in extraordinary, not the other way round.

If you find no joy or light and your answers don't make any sense, go and meet an experienced teacher, but in case you don't have any, ask anyone who has mastered introspection. Many students, when they get no answers, simply stop the practice. Its a big mistake. Its an art, and just like any other art, it can take some time, unless you are naturally gifted. However, if it is taking months and years, you are doing something wrong.

The preparations are just to arrive at receiving mode or introspection mode. They should not become rituals. If you find yourself spending half an hour doing this or that before you even ask a question, there is something wrong here.

Like I said, introspection is not magic. Nothing magical happens, it is simple witnessing whatever is here and now. It is a big mistake to ask for a winning lottery number or for your missing car keys. Joking apart, some people do seriously try to introspect about which job to take, which business to engage in or whom to marry etc. It is Ego in action. It has turned enquiry into an Egoic act of fulfilling survival needs. Needless to say, you will get no answers. If you think you are getting something, then either you are deluded or a real occult master. Either way, you failed to grasp the very point of introspection, which is - to remove all ignorance. It is not a divination tool or supernatural gimmick. It is just a mental tool that provides knowledge which is natural and is super.

Do not enter into trance states while introspecting. Remain alert and attentive. Fully focused on here and now. Trance or other mental states are for other purposes, useful for exploring extraordinary phenomena, but nothing to do with the Self. If you have a tendency to enter trance, try walking meditation or do it in a group. If you find that you are spaced out, fuzzy and foggy and start seeing stuff or hearing voices or seem to float, you have left introspection and have fallen into an altered state. Forget about knowing anything here, all you will encounter is - more contents, more phenomena, somewhat entertaining or scary but totally useless. This is called an ungrounded state. Return to the more firm terra, the ordinary waking and alert state. If you still find it difficult to remain present, try some grounding practices.

You may encounter some odd bodily sensations or sensory events, like noises or lights. It simply means you have lost your ground. The Mind cooks up all kinds of stuff when it doesn't get the usual sensory perception and thoughts. Introspection demands that you suspend the thoughts and defocus from perceiving for a while. One can overdo it, and the result is zoning out, ungrounded-ness. If you encounter this situation, keep your introspection very short and quick, just a few seconds. Practice being alert while the mental silence lasts. Although most of us have exactly opposite difficulty - the mind remains noisy and behaves like a monkey, but there are some people for whom the reverse is possible, they fall into trance very quickly and effortlessly. The key is to balance, don't overdo.

That said, it is possible to introspect on non-physical and occult stuff just as easily. However, expect the same answers. The Self is always the same, whatever the kind of experience is.

You may find that the experience and knowledge, if any, fades quickly, one returns to the ordinary state of ignorance within minutes. The solution is to repeat and to document it. Write whatever you learnt from an introspection in brief, act on it. Think about it and share it with like minded people afterwards. This will help to make it permanent and more solid.

Lastly, people expect miracles from something as simple as introspection. The only miracle that happens is - you become free from bondage of ignorance. You don't gain anything, you lose ignorance and beliefs. It won't give you supernatural experiences or powers. You won't see anything special, you will see the plain truth, no bells no whistles no fireworks. You won't become a saint overnight and you won't become "enlightened", whatever that means. It does destroy the darkness of ignorance, but stay clear of lofty titles. It is the tendency of the Ego to embellish itself with trophies and crowns.

Once you see things as they are directly, as certain and self evident, the long and tedious task of cultivation begins. The seeing must be transformed into a lifestyle that incorporates it, else its of no use. It may all sound like totally repulsive and unromantic, but that's how the Ego sees it all. You expect it to be extraordinary and special with you in the centre, in the limelight, bowing to all who are applauding you. This is the Ego talking. Expect exactly opposite. You as a person, will be reduced to nothing, you will feel small and humble. This is how a wise man is and this indicates the success of introspection.

Introspection - 1 : Experiencing the Self

Goal

We will attempt here to gain a direct experience of the Self. It takes only a few minutes. It will answer the questions such as – who am I or what am I or what is this whole existence. The knowing is instantaneous but when the mind comes back, it finds it hard to accept it, at least in case of some people. The reason can be presence of beliefs, beliefs such as it cannot be so simple. And doubts like – its all fine, but (insert a question based on some random belief).

Prerequisites

Just an open, sharp, peaceful and intelligent mind. Absence of distractions, at least for a few minutes. Brutal honesty. Deactivation of beliefs, if any, at least for a while. Avoid making anything up, assumptions, hypotheses, guesses and all. It has to be very direct and self-evident.

Read the last article on The Art of Introspection for details on how to do it without getting lost or confused. Your gains will totally depend on these prerequisites, else its all just gibberish.

Ask it

Knowing the Self is very easy. Just ask – *what is here and now?*

Mentally note what you experience or “see”.

If you are not very relaxed, and your mind is busy recognizing and classifying stuff with a live commentary running in your head, you may notice various objects that surround you, such as furniture, stuff, room, trees or people, as the attention jumps from one thing to the other. This is the ordinary state of the mind. We need a relaxed mind, with full attention on the question and nothing else.

"Zoom out" more in your awareness, include more things. You may now notice

your body and its sensations, sounds etc. Include them in your knowing. Zoom out more. Now you may notice some thoughts, memories, some internal chatter, some minute actions such as eyes looking here and there and random shifts of attention. Include them all, without focusing on anything in particular. Be aware of everything without trying to name them or thinking about any of them. Disregard everything in particular. This will put the mind in somewhat relaxed state. Include the now relaxed mind also in your field of view of awareness. What remains is just an experience of being here and now. You have arrived at a state of “isness”, in other words, just existence in essence [1].

Next, ask – *how is isness known?*

You will find that the mind rushes to memory or thoughts to answer it. But the answer is not there, there are just more thoughts and memories. Include them also in isness. Back to a neutral awareness of everything. You will find that even the question itself is a happening in isness. The experience of something-ness remains even when there is no reliance on memory or thoughts or external objects. It is a pure and direct experience. Next, deny it. See if it all goes away. You will find that even the act of denying gets included in “what is here and now”.

The above question naturally leads to thoughts such as – I know it since I see it, or I’m aware of everything now and here. Or one can say – obviously, it is self-evident and clear that there is an experience.

This will naturally lead to a question – *what is it exactly that is experiencing it all? What is this thing “I” the mind is talking about?*

You may find that there is a subtle “shift” of attention and a knowing of experiencer happens. Shift from the object to subject. The knowing of “I am here”, an aliveness. The identity also shifts to the experiencer and the “I” is now this very experiencer. You will note that nothing really changes, except the perspective. The isness is as before. You will also find that there is no need to perceive via senses or think in order to experience the experiencer directly. It is a very pure experience.

Analysis

Now its time to analyse it and codify it into definite language. Firstly, you have found that there is something, there is not nothingness, and that something is made known via an event namely, an experience. That’s the bare minimum one can say about the all-inclusive knowing of isness. You can be very certain of it. If

you deny it, then who or what is denying it? There must be something even to deny and claim that there is nothingness. So the knowledge of nothingness is an impossibility. An experience is a necessity. When we include all contents in an experience, without dividing them up, we can name it as **Presence**.

Presence is self-evident and is undeniable. Its a certainty. The “certainty” is also an experience, a knowing. What exactly is certain of this certainty? Or in other words - what is having an experience? You will find that this is an unnecessary question. The experience is. There is no necessity to invoke anything else. If you assume an entity that is having an experience, the experience remains as it is and when you remove that entity, it makes no difference, the isness is still there. When the Presence is stripped off of all contents, you will find that it is empty, it has nothing in it, but it is not nothingness, because one cannot get rid of experience of it. A better word for it is **Emptiness** [2].

Emptiness cannot be many "emptinesses", only a thing can be many things. When you asked - what is having an experience?, you are demanding an answer in terms of something else, you just created a second entity. This entity is our now familiar **Self**. So the Self is having an experience, or is a receiver of experiences. If you look closely, the Presence never divides into two. You will find that the experiencer appears because the question demands it, otherwise the Presence is Self itself. As soon as you ask that question, it simply shifts from being an experience to being an experiencer. Try it again.

So the oneness never becomes two, it merely generates an illusion of two in response to the question of what is experiencing that Emptiness. The Self is the Presence experiencing itself. In other words, the Presence makes itself known in the form of the Self. It remains one, as an Emptiness it has no other options. This state can be also termed as Pure Consciousness, consciousness being conscious of itself [3].

Conclusion

So one can conclude - only one thing exists, the Presence. It experiences itself as Self. When you keep in mind the definitions of both these terms, this is self-evident and undeniable.

Why is there an experience of many? This is also self-evident, there are many things, many contents, objects, mental or physical, events, changes and what not. If its one, why can we see it as many when we narrow down the attention? The answer is that the mind creates the divisions where there are none. Remove the mind from the scene and its all **Oneness**.

The mind can be stopped as it is merely a collection of processes. These processes produce an experience of diversity, and when the mental activity ceases, the diversity disappears and we arrive at the isness, unity or **Union** [4].

How to stop the mind? The above introspection describes it. When the attention is not focused on any single object or thought, or when it is not wound up in a stream of actions or thoughts, it is relaxed and one becomes aware of everything in a neutral way. It never stops completely, and that is desirable, else you will fall asleep. Just relax it enough so that the usual recognition, cognition, recall and imagination etc. stops. It is necessary to keep the question in the background. If you relax it too much, you will lose the question and intent of the introspection and can slip into trance-like state, useless for our purpose (but great for relaxation).

It all took a few minutes, it was so easy and obvious. There are other tricks to arrive at the same knowing, and some oddly need twenty years of hardships, living in a cave, or spending your whole life as a monk in Himalayas. Probably such hardships are just preparations or a part of cultivation. I never did that and hence I really have no idea if that would bring some kind of "superior" knowing, or if it produces more certainty. But if you try to find any uncertainty in what you just experienced, you won't find any. It is very direct and solid. Try it again with your own variations and twists, try falsifying it all. Seekers have done that since thousands of years, it still stands. But no harm in trying and "seeing it with your own eyes". This kick starts your journey into the universe of **Self Enquiry**, and we will do more introspections, because there will be a thousand questions now.

Notes:

[1] Or *Tathata* in Buddhism. An experience of "suchness", devoid of the mental activity of dividing and naming everything. See:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tathata>

[2] Or *Shunyata* in Buddhism. Sanskrit name for it (I guess) would be *Parabrahman*, and the manifested one is *Brahman*, i.e. with all those contents. Also known as *Nirgun and Sagun Brahman* – Presence without and with qualities. Names don't matter, experience of it does. Dwelling in the awareness of Parabrahman is the state of *Nirvikalp Samadhi*, which naturally happens in deep sleep state everyday (or night). Dwelling in manifested Presence is *Savikalp Samadhi*, which happens when the Mind is at rest in waking state. If you have done the above introspection successfully, you experienced all of them except maybe Nirvikalp state. The whole circus of spiritual practices is to have these experiences and to

see it all directly. It takes no time to do that, what takes time is the ability to stay there and incorporate it into one's life. Once that is done, unlimited freedom follows.

[3] Sanskrit name would be *Paramatman* and for the consciousness with contents, its *Atman*. You have now directly experienced the old and famous formula of *Atman = Brahman*. Now it should be clear why Buddha thinks that there is no Self (the teaching of *Anatman*). Its not really there as a necessity, but exists as just another form of Presence. Our human experience or human life or incarnation as a human in a body is our only chance to know it directly (as far as I know).

[4] The classic state of *Yoga* or union as defined by Patanjali (Yogasutra 1.2) and others. All you need to do is stop the relentless activity of the mind. If you like in depth and long winded stuff, check it out here.

PS: The article on Cessation of Mind goes deeper into it.

Introspection - 2 : Experiencing Change

Goal

We will attempt to experience change directly. We will try to see where this change happens and how it gets interpreted by the mind.

Prerequisites

Everything as before, plus it is best seen where there is some activity, such as a public place, but not too crowded or noisy.

Question - what is happening?

Simply observe everything in an inclusive way, as was done for the previous introspection. There is Presence and there is Self as usual. Since the enquiry is formulated in a particular way, your attention will be drawn to differences in the experiences or activity. Do not name or describe them, just observe neutrally.

This introspection shows you something extraordinary - there is Change. The experiences are never the same. Some things change slowly such as your house and some change quickly such as the traffic outside on the road.

Now ask - *Where is it happening?* If you are not zoomed out, the mind will jump in and answer - out there. Its ok, simply ask - *where is "out there"?* Those who are identified with their bodies will see that the change is not in their body, and so is "outside". Those who are intellectual will see it all as happening outside their mind, the body also moves and changes outside the mind. You will find that the "outside" is always relative to an "inside". If you have done the first introspection, you will immediately see that this duality is an act of the mind. It is somehow creating a division where there is none.

Its fine, just ask - *where is this world, body and the mind? And where is inside and outside all taken together?* This will silence the mind. Widen the awareness to include the body and the mind and all that activity you think is somewhere "outside". You will find that its all just Presence as a change, including experiences "inside" the

mind. You can shift the mode to Self and you will see that its only the Self that changes, there is no inside or outside. Those are beliefs, ideas in the mind.

Next, ask - *what was there before this moment?* Now the mind acts again and accesses the memory. The change has impressed upon the mind and appears as memory. You may get something, some image or thought etc. Just notice that the "before" goes only as far as the memory goes. The continuity of memory starts becoming more and more fragmented and uncertain, and what was "before" starts getting blurry. Anyhow, widen your awareness and notice that the recall is happening now. It is also a change. The change is now, the recall is now, but the mind labels the faint impressions as "past". In other words, past is only an idea, not an experience. The experience is always of now.

Next, take a look at your clock. See that it is changing in a pattern. It is not showing "time", it is showing change. Time is the label your mind puts on it. Note some event around you and check the clock, note the time. Try to recall the event and the time of it. See that the recall, time and everything else is still in now. The mind has arranged that event alongside the reading of the clock. There was never not now.

Analysis and conclusions

You just experienced that the Presence is not static. Its a flux, activity. Everything is impermanent. Stability is just a concept, a belief, activity is all there is. Without the change there cannot be any experience and hence change is there by necessity. You cannot reduce it further.

Lets try to code it in language. This is Experiencing, as defined in this blog. It is Change experienced continuously. Also known as the Energy of Consciousness or movement of the Self [1]. Without this Energy the Presence is just a barren Emptiness. The Change appears as an unceasing process, we named it as the Fundamental Process. Fundamental Process is not separate from the Self or the Presence, it is only a convenient way to see it from the point of view of the Mind. We saw that change gets organized in lower entropy structures automatically, this is the Fundamental Process in action. Of course, not everything gets organized, some structures increase in entropy till they reduce to randomness, they are consumed by the change - the impermanence.

The change in physical world is a small aspect of the Experiencing. The physical change appears as physical energy, mostly as motion. Motion is organized or understood by the mind in terms of space and time. So the belief of time is derived directly from the experience of change. We saw that the clock is just a

regular sort of motion, a change, it is not a measure of time, it simply helps to organize the change in a more regular way.

Change or changeless?

We saw that it is the Presence that is in flux. The Self sees it in the form of experiences. But then the Self is nothing but Presence. So one must conclude that the Self itself is changing. One can question this outcome - how can something that is changing, experiences change? The screen must remain white and uniform, unchanging in order to see changing pictures on it. If the screen changes colours everywhere on it, no pictures appear, its just a random mess of colours. So we need a Self that is unchanging, yet we see it as changing. It doesn't make sense.

At this point, one can theorize that there are two parts of the Self, the unchanging static Self, the consciousness and the moving, changing and creating part, the Energy. And indeed, some ancient philosophies actually consider that. They are categorized under the dualism kind. It makes sense. But direct experience shows that the Self has no parts. Emptiness cannot have parts or separations, not even functional ones. We clearly see the change as the Self, there are no doubts about it. So then how to solve this puzzle?

There is one way to solve it, by considering the change as a virtual change. The Self "appears" to change and take on different forms and movements of the forms, but never really changes. In other words, nothing ever happens, its a play, a dream of the Self. As a metaphor, say in your dream, you construct a house, you buy furniture and place it, you paint it and live in it. You marry, have kids, grow old etc. Then you wake up, and the first thing you notice that nothing has changed. The changes, a whole lot of them were illusory, just a dream.

To be honest, this is a bit difficult to swallow, since I do not have a direct experience of it yet. Still searching. Probably you will find a better answer via this introspection. The trick is to disregard change while abiding as the Self. This solidifies the experience of the Self as the unchanging one, which merely witnesses a dreamlike change.

Notes:

[1] If you fancy old metaphors and anthropomorphism, it is the popular Shakti, the consort of the Self (aka Shiva). She gives birth to experiences, and hence creates everything.

Introspection - 3 : Mind and World

Goal

We will attempt to experience the creation of duality or plurality out of oneness.

Prerequisites

Same as those for introspection - 1. I will now skip directly to the questions. The state you need to be in is described in detail in previous introspections.

Question - what is experienced?

Start with the neutral state of awareness of everything with no unneeded mental activity. Once you are steady ask this question - *what is experienced?*

You will find that the mind starts instantly like an engine and begins presenting things one by one. Your attention will now be on patterns. You will encounter **Contents**. These are the usual objects, people, sense perceptions, thoughts, memories, feelings etc. The one has become many in response to that question. It is now expressing itself as our old friend - the **Mind**. Mind is a process that creates divisions, provides an illusion of multiplicity. This is the familiar experience of waking consciousness, the Self being conscious of Contents.

You can switch back to the Self with multiplicity still in the view, and now you can see that all of that variety exists on the screen of Self. It is Self. It only takes a blink of the eye to make the switch. The attention widens or becomes fuzzy while the awareness of everything now includes a distinct awareness of the Self. Nothing really changes, only that this perspective clearly shows that the contents are in the Self and in fact they are Self. If you assign the identity to the Self and call it "I", you will reach the classic state of "I'm everything".

You will find that the mind brings back the separation again in a blink of the eye. Especially when something moves, or you hear a sound. Do it a number of times to make it more concrete. Closing the eyes helps to observe that the sounds are also happening on the screen of the Self. It is more obvious in case of sounds, the

vision is somewhat more distracting. Use a bell or a bowl and stick to intentionally produce a sound [1]. Once you master seeing sounds as yourself, move to stationary things and then to moving things.

We can descend down further and ask - *what are those contents?* and thus begins the process of naming and classification, pattern recognition etc. We arrive at the usual experience of names and forms - welcome to the World. Note that everything is still one, only that the Mind is presenting an experience as many. These are the traditional ten thousand things.

The mind goes further and relates the contents. So you will find that a car, a movement and a road get organized into a structure - "a car in moving on the road". An object gets recognized as a shirt and the colour blue and that object gets structured into - "a blue shirt". The mind shifts to a person now and adds more to the structure - "a man wearing a blue shirt". This is committed to memory with creation of time - "I saw a man wearing a blue shirt today evening". This is an example of creation of knowledge. An experience has been converted into knowledge.

Analysis and conclusion

We find that the experience of a separate world is created by mental processes. It is possible to see it while the processes operate by shifting back to the Self. Mind is a term that represents the collection of mental processes that organize the contents. The processes were discussed in detail in previous articles. These include, perception, recognition, memory formation, recall, association, identification, time and space, logic and conceptualization. In addition there are automated processes of the Egoic or lower mind - emotions and tendencies.

We find that the same processes create an identity, a separate person, who is watching the world. The person is placed inside the body. Shifting back to the Self reveals that the whole separation and creation of a person takes place on the screen of the Self itself.

The Mind classifies and separates and finds relations among the contents. This organizes the contents. Organized contents or structures are **Knowledge**. Knowledge is founded on direct experience.

It should be possible to repeat this introspection with mental contents. Thoughts, images, memories, emotions and feelings etc. It is fairly easy to see them as happenings in the Self. You will also notice that if you choose, you can easily detach them as objects happening "outside" the Self. This is the mind dividing

and naming the non-physical contents. So in this way it is possible to un-identify with mental contents just like physical ones and to see them as objects instead. This ability is useful for detaching from thoughts that create suffering or negativity, and pollute the mental landscape.

So what creates the contents? We saw in previous introspection that the contents are structures created by the agency of change. The metaphysical process that creates everything is the Fundamental Process. The Mind itself is a creation of this process. There is actually no difference between the non-physical contents of the mind and the physical contents of the world. Collectively both can be called Mind (with a capital M). The Mind organizes the contents, which is just the Fundamental Process in action in the form of mental processes. In this sense the Mind is also a creator, an organizer, but not separate from the Fundamental Process.

Notes:

[1] If needed, ask an assistant to do it or use some app such as Zazen.

Introspection - 4 : Identity and Ignorance

Goal

We will attempt to experience the illusion of identity and Ego (aka person) directly.

Prerequisites

Same as that for introspection - 1.

Question

Establish yourself in the usual tranquil state. Take a look at the names and forms. You can now ask - *who is aware of the world or objects or thoughts?*

You will notice that there is no “who” initially, there is just awareness of contents. If there are any thoughts, the awareness overshadows those thoughts. Ask it again with a twist, inserting memory or space-time invoking words – *who is sitting here and watching? Or who had dinner last night?*

And the Mind wakes up and responds this time. There can be recalls of some experiences of coming and sitting or having a dinner at some place etc. Still there is an awareness of those recalls. Now start describing the events and now a doer appears – the “I” or the identity. Note that an “I” appears in the thought which are correlated with a place or event in the near past or somewhat distant past, and it is created only when language kicks in.

Ask – *what is aware of this internal monologue describing events?* And you are back into awareness, the Self. The person disappears or you become aware of it as an idea or a concept.

Come back to the state of a person again by relating yourself with events, people or objects etc. and ask – *How did it feel when Mr X insulted me?* Note the arousal of memories and emotions of anger or hate or fear. Note bodily feelings and change in breathing. This is the Ego, it wakes up in response to a survival threat.

Change the question to – *How did it feel when I met my first love?* Note the torrent of emotions and memories. Note the desire to meet that person again. This is procreative tendency of Ego in action.

Try some more questions of your own that can invoke a person and later an Ego. Always come back to the Self afterwards by asking what is aware of these mental happenings. Note the complete absence of awareness when in the Ego mode. The Egoic state gives a taste of how an ignorant person lives his life. Compare that with the awakened state as Self. The contrast is telling.

Analysis and conclusions

Whenever there is a need, the Mind creates a container for the experiences and names it as "I". This is the identity, we studied before. Note that the consciousness (Self) is a direct experience but the identity is only a concept, an idea, a creation of the Mind. The Mind presents everything in the context of an identity, the container. It has all the memories, impressions, programs, processes and associations it had created in the past. Time is created, and a separation of I and not-I happens. Egoic processes boot up and start the loop of survival, protection and procreation. Now you are a person, an individual, a separate self. The Self takes a back seat. This is the start of an ordinary human experience [1].

Mind objectifies everything, including the body and the identity. This makes us forget about the Self, and so the ignorance begins. Everything is seen as objects, commonly known as Matter. One can descend down and think of oneself as matter. Note that matter remains a mental concept, the objects are not out there, the separation is a doing of Mind. It is possible to spend a lifetime in such state - the state of forgetfulness. The Change now takes the form of impermanence and the Ego wrestles with it. Suffering is born out of this resistance.

Notes:

[1] Traditionally – *Samsara* begins here. A person who is not a seeker goes through an experience of being a pure Self, a witness, to an Ego entangled in the web of samsara every morning in a matter of few minutes. This happens when one slowly wakes up. Initially there is nothing much, then the awareness of mental contents kicks in. After opening the eyes memories of past appear, a personality is formed out of them and very soon plans of tasks to be done today and people to meet flood in, bringing in desires and an Ego. It springs the body into action, the wheel starts spinning.

Introspection - 5 : Illusion of a Material World

Goal

We will attempt to experience the illusion of a separate material world directly.

Prerequisites

Same as that for introspection - 1. Note that the word "World" is used with a philosophical meaning. Whatever that surrounds us here and now. So its not the globe or the "cruel world".

This is probably the easiest of all introspections. You don't need to keep the mind out of the way. It stops on its own. But it is always good to start with a clear mind.

Question

Ask yourself - *What is this world made of?*

Of course its made up of stuff, things, elements, air, water, sky etc. and they are made up of matter. Matter is just stuff made up of tiny matter - the atoms. This is what your "educated" mind likes to answer. That answers almost everything, but wait, you are in a questioning mood today, like a child. So ask anything you like, such as - *what are those atoms made of?* You may find more answers depending on your knowledge of physics, but go on questioning. In the end, it will be like - the matter is made up of atoms and the atoms are made up of matter. Perhaps there is more stuff like fields, light, energy and mental stuff which is nothing but matter in action.

But then, isn't it only natural that gross matter is made up of fine matter? In what terms are we expecting the answer if not material terms? As you are a master of introspection by now, you know an easy way out of this loop here. Just remember that the introspection is not about what others say about whatever you are introspecting on, as the term suggests, its about what you yourself see it as a direct experience. So lets put our memorized information about physics aside and

ask - *how do I know what the world is made of?*

The mind will take you to memories of lots and lots of books, lectures and beliefs formed since childhood. You will find that you have never seen any atoms or light or fields or energies etc., you just believed whatever they told you. Perhaps the fellow who wrote that book has seen them all, or perhaps some great scientist has taken that trouble on your behalf. But you yourself know nothing at all as far as your own experience goes. It surely does not prove that the theories and models of physics are all useless, but it shows that these terms that we substitute for matter and its forms are merely ideas, concepts and beliefs. These keep changing frequently, one falls and another, perhaps a better one, takes its place, but they are all theories, hypotheses, ways of describing what we observe. The correct term is - Model.

So all you know are various models of the world. Models are very useful, but keep changing depending on place, time and utility. Your faith on them is now shaky - *what if democratically accepted models change again?* The model of a material world is just another model, there are many more, some exotic and some stupid. *Is it wise to assume any of them as "truth" just because crowd around you assumes so? Is a model same thing as a world?* No. So how do you really know the world? The question persists.

Of course, the clear answer is - I see it here, its before me, I experience it via senses. You will soon find that the only way to know the world is via sensory perception. Senses provide us a direct experience of world. Ask - *what do senses tell me about this world?*

This question will shift you into an observer mode instead of a *book parrot* mode. This also silences the mind and you just look around as if you are looking at the world for the first time. You will find that the world is made of entities of various forms and qualities (aka qualia). Shapes, colours, voices, tones and textures or smells. That's what the senses tell us. Our learned "knowledge" and conditioning labels the sense perception with all those gross or sophisticated labels and ideas. However the world is known only via senses. The labels are an add on, tags.

Ask - *will the world disappear if all the ideas and theories about it disappear?* The obvious answer is no. The world cares not about our ideas of it. Ask - *will the world disappear if all my senses disappear suddenly?* Well, the image is scary, but the answer is a clear yes. Try closing eyes and ears and ignoring most of other senses, you get a taste of "no-world". The mind creates a world out of sense data. That's right its just data the senses feed your mind with.

So that answers the question of what this world is made up of, its a structure in the mind formed out of sensory data. You can see it here and now and can also make it disappear. But there is a problem here, as many of you have already suspected. *Wouldn't senses need something to get their data from?* And that something must be the world as it is. This is how others can see the world, even when I make it disappear. It can be just energy, daemons feeding pictures into your brain or the code of the Matrix. We will never know, but it must be out there somewhere, isn't it?

So lets find out where it is, whatever it is. Ask - *where do I see all those objects that make up this apparent world?* And the answer from the mind is - out there. Ask - *where is "out"?* And then *where is "in"?* You are a part of the world, so *are you not also out there?* So if both are "out", *where is "in"?* Look closely, the objects and you are separated by space but "you", objects and space taken together are just "here". Include everything in your field of view at this point.

The sense of vision creates this illusion of in and out with the nearest thing, which is an imaginary place behind your eyes, as "in" and everything else including your body as "out". Just close your eyes to verify it. Wait, but you hear sounds out there and can also touch things that are outside. Check again, those sensations are only in your mind, the "internal space". The mind assigns them "locations" once it recalls where you have seen them before. The sounds "are" and so is the touch. You never hear a car horn or never touch a chair. You only sense those signals. They are non-local, they are "here".

The world is already beginning to lose its solidity and certainty. Summon your super introspection skills at this point. Ask - *how do I know sense percepts?* You will find that there is a direct experience of those percepts, you don't need to open a book, ask a teacher or Google it. Ask - *what is an experience?* You will now shift into a subjective point of view. You will see that the world and the experience of it are one and the same thing.

An experience is just being that experience, there is no difference between being and experiencing. Ask – *what is experiencing it all?* And the Self shifts out of the nondual experience and takes its familiar seat, creating the split of an experience and an experiencer.

You will find that there is no world, no sense data, there is no perception or mind to organize it all, there is just an experience. All you ever knew were only experiences, nothing else. Even the mental contents, the thoughts, memories or imaginations are nothing but experiences. *Isn't an experience also a concept?* No, check it now, it is here and now. The concepts and words are formed after the

experience has already happened. We name “this-ness” or “suchness” as an experience.

The experiences, the experiencer and the experienced are all one, identical. All those divisions are assumed, a result of functioning of the Mind.

Analysis and conclusions

I think most of the analysis happened above. The only conclusion is that its fun to deconstruct the seemingly solid and concrete reality of a world into merely an illusion. The world is an experience and all experiences are modulations of the Self. The only reality of the world is whatever the Self assigns to it.

We need to define the word "illusion" here. What does it really mean? It means that the world has no separate and independent existence apart from the Self. The world and consciousness of it arise together, they are inseparable, and hence are one.

So does that mean the world is not real? It depends on how you choose to define real. As we have seen before in the discussion about the term "reality", its not a very useful concept. One can mark anything real or unreal by twisting the definition of reality. But roughly speaking, the world is not real, and is not unreal too. It is there, we can all experience it, however, upon closer inspection we find that we are experiencing our own Self in the form of a world.

It is real in a sense that your actions, as a member of this world, as a person, have real consequences. The world behaves in a certain way, its not totally random. So as soon as you know what it really is, it does not change or disappear. But this knowledge will change you greatly. Now your presence in the world takes on a new meaning. You are not present in the world, the world is present in you.

Once you have freed yourself from the ignorance of the world, you begin to wonder - what is the best way to experience it as a human with a physical body? In other words - how should I live my life? As Self, who creates and enjoys the world or as an object (person, body) in the world? In the light of this knowledge, what is the meaning of it all? What are my life goals? Which path to take from here on?

Introspection - 6 : Consciousness Without Content

Goal

We will attempt to gain a direct experience of the pure consciousness, in other words, Self that is not engaged in experiencing anything, or when there are no contents to experience. Note that its not possible to even remember such a state, because there will be no memories of it, so we will just try to get a taste of it.

Prerequisites

Nothing more than that which is already mentioned for other introspections. Although sometimes a friend who can ask you questions mentioned below can be useful. Best done with eyes closed, but it is not necessary.

Fake it

It is the easiest thing to experience, it happens every time you are in a deep sleep. There are no contents, no Mind, no people, no world, nothing at all. The problem is there is no memory of it also, no knowledge is formed out of it. So the obvious question is how do we know if the Self still existed in deep sleep?

The obvious answer is – we cannot know. Knowing involves organizing contents, naming, experiencing, understanding, memorizing, learning – all functions of the Mind, and when the Mind itself is absent, nothing much can be done as far as mental tasks are concerned. The good news is it can be still experienced. The only thing that can be known is re-emergence of the Mind from deep sleep via direct experience. It is our everyday experience that Mind boots up in the morning and there is a witness to see it doing the act. The state previous to that remains unknown.

So lets find a workaround for the situation by roughly simulating a consciousness without contents. It will give a taste of it and will open you up for new possibilities. Let's play a game. The rules of the game are :

You need to pretend that you are asleep, the Mind is not functioning, no analysis, recognition, understanding, naming, classification, division and so on, are

happening. Pretend its not possible, Mind is deactivated. Memory recall is deactivated, however memory formation is active. So you are free to memorize what is happening now, but you are not free to recall anything else from the past. You have lost your all memories.

The rules are simple, it can take a while to practice the “mind-dead” mode, because the mind keeps jumping back up. But those who are expert in meditation will find it a piece of cake. So lets start.

Question (or since you are pretending to be mind-dead, let a friend ask you these questions) – Where are you now? If the answer is that you are at home, or name of a city, then it is the mind springing back from dead. Ignore that answer, let mind go away, just observe, do not think. The obvious thing that remains is an experience of you here and now.

Que. – what country you live in? You have no memory, so the answer is you have no country, there is no such thing.

Que. – who are in your family, parents, kids, wife? You have no one, you just are. There are no relatives and friends.

Que. – what’s your name and what are your likes or dislikes? These words do not even make sense. What is a like? What is a name? Why should I have them? You can question in response to it.

Que. – are you suffering now or are you happy? Most probably you will find that you are just peaceful, even a bit happy, since there is no burden of suffering which comes from memories of past. It’s a blissful state.

Que. – what do you see? You can see something, but you don’t know what it is, there is just experience and an experience of an experiencer. Both are one.

See that when the mind is dead, the conditioning is absent. You are pure consciousness now. This is a taste of Self without contents or the classic *Nirvikalp Samadhi*.

If your eyes are closed, open them slowly and let the mind return to normal functioning, recall something, recognize your room and objects. Now you are back in the world, your family, possessions, body and everything is restored as it was.

Analysis and Conclusion

This little game gives us a taste of content-less consciousness. This is not an unfamiliar state, we just do not know it, we are ignorant about it. We wrongly call it unconsciousness or sleep. It is just a pure and blissful consciousness, nothing more, nothing less. The advantage of the game is that it allows us to keep a memory of it all, so the Mind gets a hint of how the state is like when it leaves everyday.

You will also note that time makes very little sense, but it is there in the game since memory formation is allowed. Its not difficult to infer that stopping the memory completely will completely wipe out the time. This is exactly our experience when we wake up from deep sleep, the time we leave the world is exactly the same as the time we arrive back here.

Yog Nindra (meditative sleep) comes very close to this game and those who have experienced it will know what I mean.

All you need to do in order to advance in this area now, is to turn this game into a practice. Try turning off as much of the mind as you can. This can be done everyday for only a few seconds or a couple of minutes. See what remains, how you feel. I do not recommend to stay in Nirvikalp for extended time periods. It needs supervision, especially if you are talented enough and can do it very easily. For most of us, the problem will be opposite – our minds won't let us stay there for long. In any case, it is important to get a taste of it first-hand. It is important to convince yourself by a direct experience that such a state is possible.

What are the implications of knowing this? And why would anyone even want to know this weird thing? Well, if you are already happy and free, then it's a waste of time for you. But if you are on a path of knowledge, trying to progress further and further, then this introspection will make you jump ahead by a thousand miles. You will not only witness the Self in its purity, you will also witness the whole drama of creation, engagement and annihilation of the personality and world. You will directly see that these contents are due to Mind. Nothing can be more freeing than such an experience.

Introspection - 7 : Illusion of Bondage

Goal

We will attempt to gain a direct experience of the free nature of the Self and will see that there is absolutely no bondage of any kind.

Prerequisites

Nothing more than that which is already mentioned for other introspections. See introspection - 1.

Question your bondage

Ask – *Who is bound? Who is not free?*

Those who are identified with the body will immediately find themselves answering how they are not free to do this or to do that, to remain young and healthy forever and to evade death or to have all the riches and pleasures of the world. That is deep ignorance, but it is ok.

Ask – *Am I the body?*

Obviously, I'm not only a body. The body is a tiny part of my whole being. There is Mind, there is a person, an occupation, skills, there are memories and experiences that form a major part. For most people these experiences are directly attached to a body and hence it is easy to fall into an error that their entire essence is a physical structure, the body.

Ask – *so who or what is bound then?*

The body is bound, it is not free. It is subject to physical laws, decay and death. It is an object and cannot do everything, given that it can already do some awesome things, it is foolish to expect that it would be free to do anything. It will not stay forever, it is impermanent, just like other objects. After this realization you will have no other choice but to accept that you as a body, or the part of you called a body cannot be free. But the good news is that you are not a body.

Ask – *so am I free then? Why don't I feel like that?*

Those who are identified with a Mind or Ego (the lower mind), will immediately find themselves bound. There is no freedom to think everything, or even to stop thinking, or to be hyper-intelligent and extremely creative. There is no freedom to always keep the Ego happy, secure and pleased. Its not possible to end all desires and wants nor are you free to satisfy them all. The Mind is also an object and is impermanent, even if it is non-physical, it has limitations. If you believe that your essence is just Mind and Ego, then there is no hope for freedom. It will remain tiny, limited and will perish. The good news is that you are not the Mind or Ego. They are also a small part of you.

Maybe you doubt that. Let's find out. Ask – *Why am I not the Mind?*

Counter the question by asking – *what is aware of a mind? How do you know there is a mind and an ego? Who really knows this?* And in response to this question, the Self will step forward, it is the pure knowing, the consciousness behind all the drama of minds and bodies. It is more fundamental and is your essence, as it cannot be reduced to anything else, there is nothing more beyond it. Self is the ground of everything. If you have a doubt about it, just ask – *who knows the Self? Who is aware of the Self?* And every time you will find that it is the Self that knows itself, experiences itself, there is nothing else there.

Ask – *I'm obviously the Self, but still why am I not free?*

Counter the question by asking – *what is it that binds Self? What is taking away its freedom?* You will find that the matter and physical universe bind the body, and the limited mental capabilities bind the Mind, and past programming and conditioning binds the Ego. But there is nothing there to bind the Self. There is just Self, what can bind it? You will soon find that as soon as you identify with a mind or a body, the limitations and bondage appears. As long as you identify with the Self itself, you cannot find any reason and anything that can bind it. It is free, and has always been eternally free. Bondage was only a belief, it was your ignorance that you are not free.

Analysis and Conclusion

This simple introspection shows that bondage is just a belief, a result of ignorance, a consequence of identification with bound and impermanent features that appear and disappear in this vastness of Presence. The Self is free, simply because there is nothing there to bind it. But what does it mean to be free from

the point of view of the Self? Can it do everything, can it be anything? Yes and No. You are imposing mental concepts of doing and achieving on the Self here. You are assuming that it must do X, for example, that you can think of now, and if it can't then it is not free. You see, it is only an assumption, the Self needs to do nothing and be nothing. There is no compulsion or necessity to be in a specific way for the Self.

On the contrary, as soon as it becomes something, it becomes limited. It has become a human, and so it appears to be very limited and bound in that form. It has become a trillion things that we can see and experience, however all limited. It remains limitless only when it does not become anything or does not do anything. Actually, that is precisely what it is doing - non-doing and non-being. It is pure witness. It is just present here and now, that is our direct and irrefutable experience. The doing and being are illusions that appear on the screen of the Self. These images, shadows, are impermanent and are limited, the watcher of the shadows is not. The concepts of limitedness and impermanence do not even apply in case of the Self. They are conjured up by an ignorant Mind, which then simply projects it on the Self.

But why did I say yes and no above? Yes because all that we can see or experience is nothing but the Self, in its various forms, so it is already doing everything and it is already everything. It is also that which our limited minds cannot see or grasp. When I say both yes and no to that question, it shows that the Self is beyond such descriptions. It is even beyond language.

Liberation

What does this introspection tell us about the concept of liberation or *Mukti*? The short answer is – obviously since the Self, which is you, is already free, liberated, the goal to get liberated is only a belief. There is nothing to be liberated from. What from are you going to liberate the Self? From itself? Isn't that a ridiculous thought?

So why is there this mad rush to achieve liberation? As we have seen above, those who do not know the Self need a teaching to reach there. They know themselves as body or an ego-mind or a complex of all three of these. It is their only experience, so what else can they know? They are bound to feel bound and limited. So the path to liberation is prescribed for them. It is a trick that brings them to the Self-realization. You cannot “get” liberation, you only get rid of the belief and ignorance that you are bound and limited. Once it is seen, the illusion of bondage disappears on its own.

Now that I know, I am eternally and infinitely free, what should I do? Nothing, just be that way. There is no compulsion to do anything about it. Its all already perfect. Such questions arise from the Mind, it feels a purposelessness and thinks its role is over, it had no role in the first place. Now that the Mind is an abandoned child, you can adopt it back as your own, and cultivate it to reflect your true nature through it. We can become only that which we already are – eternally free and happy.

Introspection - 8 : I was never born

Masters will tell you that the consciousness was never born, will never die, is immortal, is eternal, is beyond time. It never started and it can never end. A religious person might simply believe it all blindly, which really does nothing for him, but a seeker will not settle for anything less than a direct experience of it. So how to get that direct experience?

A direct experience is always self-evident, clear, logical, brutally honest and lacks any beliefs or assumptions. If your experience is polluted by concepts, ideas, beliefs, assumptions, fluffy unicorn stories, bookish stuff or testimony of others etc. it is not the direct experience, it is a fantasy. Please know this clearly - no assumptions are allowed.

There are four ways to know the answer to this question - self-enquiry, realization that time is non-existent, realizing that you do not change, and witnessing death and birth directly. Self-enquiry or introspection is the easiest and takes only a few minutes. Experiencing non-existence of time needs a very calm mind that can watch how time gets created out of eternal now, but once you see this, you have the answer because birth and death happen in time and are therefore non-existent. Death/birth are nothing but change, and if you see that you never change, it follows that you will remain the same, never die and will be never born. Forth way is beyond my pay-grade, I won't even attempt to write about it.

So we will attempt the easiest way. Ask yourself - When were you born?

You will instantly get a date of birth, its ok, its not entirely false. Now try to go to the experience of birth which you think happened on that date. Well, most of us cannot get there, at most you will get memories of childhood, no memories of being born. You can ask others, but remember you are trying to know by your own direct experience, this is the rule of the game. Anyhow, others will tell you that you were indeed born, and they saw it with their own eyes. But, there is a catch, they saw only your body, a tiny one, and since you already know you cannot be a body (and definitely not that tiny one), you can't trust them. No one obviously saw your consciousness taking birth, if you are unsure, just ask them and see a puzzled look in their eyes, its funny.

Now, you can say that you were born, but you do not remember it. Note that this is an assumption. Do you remember that you ate potato chips 20 years ago on a particular date? If you don't, its silly to say that you did eat them on that day, you just don't remember now. Its only your imagination, there is no way for you to know that. Past can be known only via memory, and you have no memory of birth.

You can just shake your head at this point and say - I know I was born, I don't remember it, don't have any experience of it, but since I'm here, it confirms that I was born, else I wouldn't be here. That's true, your body was born, and a mind was born out of millions of experiences since the birth of the body, your memory is the proof. But we are not talking about body/mind here, we are interested in the Self, the pure consciousness, the real you. Your body/mind exists "here" but where is you? Where is "here"? The assumption is that your existence implies a start. But we steer clear of assumptions. Perhaps it does, but then where is the evidence? A seeker demands evidence.

But perhaps you are right, you just forgot that you were born, happens, we forget useless things fast :D. Now your mind is really challenged, and you will probably say - I was simply unconscious when I was born, I became conscious later, and then memories started forming. A very bad argument, you see. We are trying to get to the birth of consciousness, not of unconsciousness. Just ask yourself - how did the experience of unconscious birth looked like to you? What a silly question, if I was unconscious, there would be no experience. Yes, exactly, you don't have any experience of being born in unconscious state, so why would you just assume that?

Ask yourself - how would any unconscious experience look like? You will find that there are no such experiences in your entire life. "Unconscious state" is only an assumption, you do not know any such state, its merely social conditioning. All of our experiences involve consciousness, it is by necessity. Doesn't matter if you remember them or not.

Ok, so now your mind can say - perhaps I was born, I do not remember it because the memories were not formed, brain was still developing, and any impressions got erased, but I was conscious at birth. Good thinking there. But think again, you will look like a fool. If consciousness was already there while you were born, then it means consciousness was not born, it was already there witnessing the birth of a body.

Now, we shift to the person or identity. You are not the body, but perhaps you are the personality - the jumble of thoughts, emotions, history, likes/dislikes,

names, jobs and relations. A bit flimsy compared to a solid body, but maybe that's how things are. You may say I'm the mind, I think therefore I am. All very good, and you will find that the person gradually appeared as mind received a barrage of life experiences. Your genetic memory and conditioning created it out of thin air. Nice, but the only problem is you are not a person, you are the one that has a personality, an illusory identity, you are simply a witness of this non-physical jumble of stuff - the mind. Mind was born, and will die, just like the body, but you cannot say the same about yourself.

You will find that there is birth, but of objects, possessions, experiences, memories etc., not of you. You will find that all these are experiences, scenery, that keeps changing in front of you. Somewhere somehow you simply assumed that you also appeared with them and will be gone with them. Birth and death are only your assumptions, not your fault, everyone sees it this way, unless somebody points out the problems such thinking spawns.

All there is, is only Experiencing. Experiencing of birth implies an experiencer, and if that experiencer is already present experiencing its own birth, then it is not experiencing its own birth, its experiencing something else being born while wrongly assuming it itself is being born. Its a temporary forgetting and attachment to the scenery. In other words - ignorance. Experiencing its own birth is an impossibility for an experiencer, because it demands its own presence at its own birth. It is a clear absurdity, you see. It is stupidity to assume that the experiencer can be born. You are that experiencer. You never had that experience, and since experience is all there that exists, birth does not exist, as its experience does not exist and cannot exist. This is certain, this is by necessity. This is a must.

Another way to think about it is by using your direct experience of your consciousness, which appears as no-thing, nothing... Its not even an experience strictly speaking, because it is the experiencer. Then it is not even the experiencer, there is just Experiencing. For convenience, we will simply say that you are nothingness at the core - just Emptiness. If you have that direct experience (easy to have it), then you will realize that it is not possible for nothingness to appear, there is nothing to appear ! And it is not possible for it to disappear, it is already nothing ! Well, that was a mind bender, but you will see that the mind stops here, it can't think now, and the concepts of birth and death simply fall apart like a house of cards, they are meaningless. You've been applying meaningless concepts to yourself, you see it now clearly.

There will be more questions and doubts your mind will throw at you, but you get the point. You will never find a clear evidence of your own birth, and by you I

mean the consciousness that you are essentially. No birth means no death. Only that which can take birth can die, this is by definition of death. It's done, you have seen yourself that death and birth are just concepts, assumptions, ideas. There is just change, one form into another, a changing scenery. Belief in birth/death of the Self is ignorance, and now you are free from it :). See the implications of this important realization, ponder over it, apply it in practice.

Introspection - 9 : There is only one Self

Goal: We will try to arrive at a conclusion via direct experience and logic that there can be only one Self. So the Self (consciousness) that you are experiencing right now is identical to the one I'm experiencing.

Prerequisites: Same as those of other introspections. You do not need strange states of mind at all. (Just a reminder, Consciousness = Self, I use them interchangeably)

Just look !

How many Selves can you see?

Exactly one - that of your own. End of enquiry. Took two seconds. You must have guessed where it is going now. There will be ifs and buts of all sorts. So let's tackle some of them.

How many Selves or "consciousnesses" have you experienced in your entire life?

Just one.

How many Selves or consciousnesses have others experienced?

Again only one. You can ask them, and they too report only one of it.

But all those people and creatures are conscious, they do look conscious and they report a Self of their own. So there must be many of those Selves, many little consciousnesses trapped in trillions of bodies. This is the usual argument your mind will put forth.

Is it possible to experience "someone else's consciousness"?

No.... So now you know "someone else's consciousness" is only a belief, a made up concept.

If everyone were blind (say) and everyone reported and felt air, would the air become many

"airs", separate pockets of air attached to their bodies?

Obviously no. There is one air aka atmosphere. This metaphor gives a first glimpse to your mind, of what's going on. But metaphors are fantasies, we need evidence. Self is nothing like air. Drop the metaphor.

What evidence can I get that everyone who reports a Self, has a separate and unique Self?

Clearly there is no evidence. Now you wonder why did you even think like that when there is no evidence for it. That's not very scientific or spiritual at all. You are now at a place of uncertainty, your belief is bared.

There are separate bodies obviously, and there are separate minds, which you can infer from unique behaviour exhibited by all individuals. There is absolutely no hint that the witness which witnesses all these separations is also unique and separate in everyone. What happens is - people, even most intelligent and educated ones, simply assume that since bodies and minds are separate and many, consciousness is also separate, with each person having their own private consciousness. This error is a direct result of the assumption that consciousness is caused by a brain, which is separate for each of us.

Many people confuse consciousness with mind and assume they are one and the same. Mind is an object that happens in consciousness and is witnessed as an object. They are not the same.

Your mind will now shoot you back with your own arrow. *What is the evidence that others are reporting about exactly the same Self that I'm reporting about?*

What evidence does one need to show that? In what way the unity of Self across all of its expressions can be shown?

You will find that it cannot be done. No evidence can be produced for that also. The mind is trying to objectify the Self so that it can grasp it. If it sees only one object called Self, it can be certain of it. But the subject cannot become object, as soon as it is objectified, it becomes a concept which is being witnessed by the Self, the subject. In other words, the Self is beyond the reach of mind. If Selves are multiple, they are objects, and now mind can say there are many of them. However, the catch is that the Self is not an object, it is the experiencer of all objects. Mind cannot be certain either way.

Now you are at a place where you as a person, a mind can finally say - "I don't know". Very well. That's an improvement actually. Beliefs are dissolved.

Ignorance is bared.

Ok but what if I can know what the other person is thinking, or can see what others are seeing. Wouldn't it prove the unity of Self?

No it won't. It would prove the universality of Mind. It simply means that information can be shared across individual minds. Hence one can infer a universal Mind of which individual minds are parts that are attached to bodies. One can still imagine a separate Self for each individual who witnesses the shared percepts.

What if I can witness all the minds simultaneously?

Yes, that's a good idea. But can anyone do that? Isn't it a fantasy? I cannot witness even my mind completely, it is a very-very limited view. Its more likely that the Self is already witnessing all minds. If Self were capable of telling my individual mind what it is witnessing via every other mind, I would lose all sense of individuality, I won't remain and know myself as a separate individual. The thoughts and memories of others would simply appear as my own. My "own" thoughts would be lost in a trillion others.

Does the Self has such capability? It is just a witness and cannot act or do anything, it has no such capability. By definition Self has no qualities or capabilities. It just is, it is isness, which is conscious.

So you can conclude that an additional evidence for unity of the Self is a tricky thing to get. By additional I mean something apart from your direct and self-evident experience that you as the Self is only one, a single instance of Self. But no need to lose hope. Logic comes to rescue.

You can counter question again - *What evidence does one need to show the opposite?* If multiplicity of consciousness can be shown, we won't need an evidence to show that it is one and identical for all. Because it cannot be both. All you need to do is show two Selves as one experience. Two instances of consciousness at the same time being witnessed by one witness.

How is it even possible? How will the experience of witnessing two witnesses look like?

As soon as you see two witnesses, those two become merely objects being witnessed by one real witness now. So if the Self is conceptually divided into two, we find that its still one, the one who is looking at two. And the two are not real now, they are merely ideas. Its not possible to break the Self into two. This is by

necessity.

Lets use common meaning of the word reality and call the Self as the only reality, because that's what I experience, I do not experience anything except the Self. Now, if we assume two Selves, there would be two independent realities.

Can there be two realities?

You'd be tempted to answer yes. So ask again:

How can you know for sure that there are two realities?

You can only know that when you stand outside of both realities, and experience them together. But now both realities are a part of a bigger reality where you are standing. The reality again reduces to one. So if the Self is reality, it is only one.

Can we experience more than one consciousness?

Lets assume we can, and take only two consciousnesses. Now, how would that experience look like? Try to imagine that, or know that. How would the experience of one consciousness looking at another identical one look like?

As soon as we say - I can experience the other consciousness out there separate from my own, the other consciousness becomes an experience, i.e. loses its status of an experiencer. Its now just an object. You need to experience it as an experiencer, not as an object.

Say you know a trick and now you can experience the other consciousness as an experiencer, but now your own consciousness will become an experience, and thus an object. You again end up as only one experiencer.

Now, lets say you employ one more trick and now you can see both consciousnesses as one experiencer. That was cool, you have so much talent there, but again you end up with only one experiencer. You won't be able to say there are two experiencers, they merge into one. Its not possible to see them separately.

Strictly speaking, we cannot experience any consciousness as separate from our own, including our own consciousness. Why? Because then you can question - what or who is experiencing my own consciousness? And you end up with this impossibility. However, we loosely say that we know we are consciousness, or consciousness is conscious of itself. If you dig into this statement, you will find

that it makes little sense, if at all any.

Conclusion

We find that it is very difficult to provide an evidence or logical inference to support the belief that there are many consciousnesses out there, and every individual has his own private consciousness. Our own direct experience shows that there is only one. Others appear in consciousness, others are not seen with a consciousness attached to their heads. Yet the belief of everyone having a separate private consciousness is rampant. It is very strange that people can believe such things.

This belief also leads to another belief that when the body/person dies, his consciousness leaves the body and goes somewhere else. There can be many more derivative beliefs such as consciousness leaves the body during an out of body experience. A direct experience shows that the body is in consciousness, consciousness is not in the body. The above beliefs do not hold at all.

This introspection also shows that the mind has a limited capability to grasp the oneness of the consciousness. What it does is creates divisions, and in the process divides consciousness too. When we see that there are no real divisions, there is no sharp boundary where I end and you start, the illusion of separation breaks down.

This introspection also shows that the consciousness is one but it expresses itself as many. I, as a person, am just an expression of one consciousness, and so are you and everyone and everything. At the core we are all one. This realization has huge implications.

Introspection 10 : Purpose of Human Life

Objective : We will try, by direct observation only, to arrive at the answer of an often asked question - Why are we here? Or in other words - What is the purpose of this human life?

Prerequisites: Just like those for previous introspections.

Before we ask

This is one of those easy questions, however I still find people who struggle to answer it. The reason is - beliefs. What else can occlude an answer? So all we need to do is - clear beliefs, clean the slate, and the answer becomes very obvious. So much so that there remains no doubt about it.

So how to do that? You must let go of all previous opinions, ideas, beliefs, doubts, and "knowledge" that you got from books or great people. Become totally innocent or agnostic. You need to do that only for a few minutes for which this introspection would last. You can pick them up back if needed at all.

The easiest way to do it is to pretend that you know nothing about the subject. You will find that all your past knowledge will remain intact, but now you see it in a different light. However, the false will be destroyed. Beliefs do not stand the impact of knowledge.

The meeting room

Before we dive into a direct experience of what's going on with us in this world, I'd like to prepare you with an analogy. It makes everything easy to understand.

Imagine that one fine day you find yourself in a big room. You see a big table, chairs placed around it, people sitting in chairs and engaged in some activity. You see yourself sitting there, and you see a notepad in front of you, with some agenda written on it. You see that everyone has got some pads, some even have thick files, and some are busy scribbling. Everything is normal, except you have no memory of why you are there, and what are you doing there. Its a strange situation, because you do not even remember coming there, you forgot where

your home is, you don't remember taking up this job.

So obviously, you ask yourself - Why am I here? What am I doing here in this big room with a bunch of strange people? What minimum can you conclude? First thing - you are here to attend a meeting. The room, the notepads, the people, water bottles before them and everything suggests that you are supposed to be in a meeting, and this is a meeting room. This is most certain, you cannot question that. For example, you are not here to play golf. That would be the case if you found yourself in a big lawn with a long stick in your hand and a ball placed on the ground. So you can exclude this possibility. You can go ahead and exclude many more possibilities.

For example, you are not here to cut down the table and turn it into cupboards for your house, else you would be here with a saw and tools. It'd be foolish to search for those tools and cry when you can't find them in the room.

You see that some chairs are too small for some colleagues there, and out of pity and compassion you demand bigger chairs for all to end their suffering. You not only can't see that they are just too fat to fit in any chair, you also look like an idiot to your wiser colleagues.

If you find that some people are destroying the beautiful furniture there by pounding on it, scratching it with a paperclip, spilling coffee on the carpet etc, you may feel concern, and if you are the boss there, you can order some decency, else you keep your mouth shut and ensure that you do not join them in this mindless destruction. Its not your room.

Once you are certain of your situation, you can now take a look at the agenda and can proceed to do the needful. Your past, now forgotten, has no bearing on present situation. You have only two options - carry on with the meeting or leave the room. But since you know that the meeting will be over sooner or later, you are not in a hurry to leave, because if you leave now you will never know why you came here. You may find some answers to this mystery in the meeting itself.

Why are we here?

One fine day, you find yourself in a world, a collection of countless things, and you have no memory of how you got here, you remember nothing at all, except you have this list of unwanted desires and needs you must fulfill. You also see a monkey suit, in which you are apparently trapped. You call it a body, and strangely, there are many more with similar bodies with agendas of their own. Its a strange situation because you do not know how you arrived here, you can't

recall boarding for this trip.

So obviously, as soon as you get your senses back, you ask - why am I here? What am I doing here? What minimum can you conclude? You observe, take a look around. There is a world, there is a body. The body is well equipped to be in a world of this kind, and the world has everything the body needs. There are these unexplainable tendencies and desires and behaviours. You find that your agenda is - happiness and freedom. No matter how you take it up, you always end up with this agenda. So one thing is certain - you are here to have an experience of the world in a body which is limited but is tailored for this experience. You are well equipped to interact with others and to carry on with your agenda/goals. Now, this is very certain, you cannot question it.

But you can still question it apparently. For example, why this particular experience? Why not some other "better" one? Perhaps I'm here to do something more "important"? You will see that when you try to get answers to those, they do not make any sense. You will find no evidence to support those assumptions.

For example, you are not here to collect wealth, shiny stuff, own things and people. Else you would come here with a truck and would start packing up for the home. You find that you can use stuff, which lasts for a while, but you cannot own it. People leave, and even your now favorite monkey suit breaks down, you can't take it with you. All you take away is a bunch of experiences. You can exclude many more possibilities.

For example, you are not here to please everyone, make them happy and end their suffering. You will find that the world has enough of everything - clean air, water, abundant land and food, money and stuff, but people are not content with their needs, they have big mouths, tummies and deep pockets. Anything and everything you drop there simply disappears into this abyss of greed and ignorance.

You find that some people are bent on destroying this world, this is your worry, why can't they think of the children, you ask. If you are capable and are in power, you can do some damage control, a bit of repair here and there. But if you are an ordinary Joe, and you find that the most powerful and rich are the ones causing most destruction, you simply do your own thing, you stop destroying the world, you stop rampant consumption and madness you find others are engaged in. This is not your world, things are being created, and things are being destroyed. It is perfect, it is what it is.

You find that you have just enough tools to have this human experience, not

more not less. Its foolish to demand more tools and abilities and cry when you can't get them. The limitations are necessary by-product of such an experience. Without these particular limitations, you'd still have an experience, but not this experience. That means only one thing - you are here to have only this experience, not the other one, not the "better" one, not the worse one.

You find that whatever agenda you set, you end up with only one thing to do - be happy and free. You have all the tools and potential to do that. You see that the best way to do this is by ending ignorance. Knowledge is what remains when the dust of ignorance is wiped off. So you are already happy and free. All you need to do is be that.

Once you realize this, and you are most certain of it, you proceed with the agenda, and enjoy this wild ride called human life. You have only two options - live or leave. But since you know that this experience will end sooner or later, you choose to stay. You never know, perhaps this experience of life may reveal some greater mystery one day.

Introspection - 11 : The Illusion of Space

One of the questions that is often asked is - it is very clear that time is an illusion produced by the mind but what about the space? It is said that space is also an illusion. But how can we see that it is really so? Lets explore it using our own direct experience.

The Experience of Vision

As usual we can start with a direct experience of the space, which is our subject of investigation today. It is closely related to the sense of vision. So lets check it out. When I open my eyes, I am presented with a field of patterns, which I can break down into parts by attending to specific areas in it. I can scan through this field. The patterns are seen with qualities of colour and shapes. There is nothing more to this experience of sight, it is a pure experience.

Only a field of patterns can be experienced via the sense of sight. Then the mind jumps in, a process starts dividing this field into foregrounds and backgrounds using various criteria like similarities and differences of colours or continuity of shapes or edges etc. Consistent patterns are extracted from the background and are presented as objects. Another process starts matching them with memorized patterns and cognition happens, which is - finding a positive match. Yet another process fetches the connected sounds and words from the memory, and faint perceptions of them are experienced. This is the process of naming. Within a millisecond, the world of forms and names appears in the mind.

It is like magic. To see it for yourself, you will need to sit quietly for some time and slow down your mind. Try closing your eyes to get into a state of doing nothing and thinking nothing, and then with intense awareness open your eyes. Do not do anything or think anything yet, just be. Be aware of the patterns and see that there are only shapes and colours. It is important to stay still and not move the eyes or head. Now let the mind do its job, but very slowly while you pay attention to what is going on. Become aware of divisions, memories and movements of the mind.

Now let the head move a bit to the sideways. You get a perception of depth because of parallax. Things that are nearer move faster and vice versa, the farthest objects, like moon or hills, don't move at all. Mind uses this relative movement, as

it impresses on the memory and is compared with the situation when the head was still, to create depth. Having two eyes makes it very convenient, because you get to see the usual flat image of the world from two positions now, and the depth can be computed without moving your head all the time. Having those eyes situated on the face and facing front helps it even more.

You'll still not see the volume an object occupies using parallax, you will need to get up and move around an object, scan it from many angles, rotate it in front of your eyes, to get an idea of its volume. When we do that, when we perceive an object from many points of view, the mind forms a series of projections of it in memory, and a process computes the volume, not in meter cube or liters, it is a relative quality, mostly related to yourself, volume of your own body to be specific. Space is born in this way. So now there are not only edges, backgrounds, patterns, colours, shapes etc, they are also objects with names and they have a size, a volume. In others words, objects are seen as occupying space. If you move an object, its original position is still in memory and now it is seen as empty space. Mind remembers and knows that the same object can be placed back there, because it came from there. However, we do not see the space. Space is a lack of objects, a potential. It is an experience which is not really experienced.

You can conclude some interesting things from this simple exercise or short meditation on space. Firstly, we never perceive space, we only perceive objects. Space is not an object, or an entity of any sorts, it is not even a pattern, not physical, not non-physical, not even metaphysical. It is solely a vacant place in the memory, where there was an object. It is seen as a lack, an absence of something. One must wonder - can we say something exists even when it is always absent? So it cannot be there if objects are not there. Space is an idea in the mind, which points to a potential location for an object in the field of vision. Secondly, we never see a volume, we see flat patterns, the 3D volume is a result of a process that integrates perception of that pattern from many angles. If there is no movement, there is no volume. Another interesting thing you will observe is that we do not receive the whole field of vision at once, we do micro-movements of the eyes to scan around, we shift our attention across this field and we find that only a tiny point in our vision is actually clear and in focus. It appears that even this 2D field is a result of laying out a series of perceptions in the form of a grid. The 3D field is then computed out of it with the help of parallax, movements, multi-angular projections, memorized objects, some guess work based on our previous experience with similar objects, and even things like fog, contrast, perspective shortening and blur of focus.

Fake spaces

Artists use the exact same tricks to convey a space in their artwork. It works. Space can be created in computer games using just data. Space can be created in 3D movies or pictures by using two images at an offset. Space can be created in a mirror, when actually there is none behind it. Mirrors are amazing actually, how do they know how to reflect space? Well, that was a trick question and a silly question too. We know they cannot reflect space, they reflect only objects, because only objects can bounce off light which they bounce back. But, then how does a space appear in mirror? Its a fake space, you cannot move into it. Same for games and movie. A real space is the one you can move into.

That's a good argument. But if we cannot move into it, it should not be perceived as a space. Lets take time, we cannot have fake time, how is it possible to have fake space which is as convincing as real one? Although it may look childish, you will get great insights about space simply by thinking about the space in the mirror. The simplest questions bring most valuable knowledge.

It is kind of obvious that the space, depth, volume, size, dimensions etc are being created in the mind using the serial information being conveyed by the organ of eye. The only question we need to ask is - isn't the mind trying to tell us how things actually are out there by reconstructing it as faithfully as possible? The answer is coming, it will be very shocking to say the least.

What's the use of space?

Why does the mind do that? Why does it takes this whole trouble of arranging patterns in this very complex format? Again, we return to direct observation. You will find that not all creatures have a sense of vision like we have, some, e.g. plants do not have any, except they can sense light/dark in a rudimentary way. All life depends on sun - the source of light, and hence all creatures respond to light, with the exception of a few. However, only a handful of species arrange light patterns in the way we do. Those whose survival depends on hunting and killing a prey have this peculiar arrangement of eyes. These creatures have a sharp and well developed colour vision which is narrowly focused. They can estimate the distances very well, and so can catch and kill a prey easily. We are one of them. Those who are preyed upon have a wide field of view, they can even see behind their heads with eyes positioned on the sides instead of front, and are very sensitive to motion. This saves them from being hunted, however they lack the acute perception of depth or colours, which, probably is not very useful for them. Birds, who need to maneuver in air, have much more evolved vision, which serves them even while flying at a high speed. One can guess that such a vision has evolutionary roots, it has evolved out of a need to remain alive.

So the perception of depth, and hence of space is something that was shaped during the evolutionary journey of the mind. It is a way of the mind to arrange sensory information in such a way that helps to keep the body alive. Its a solution that works well for finding and getting food and for saving oneself from becoming food. One can suspect that the vision is still being shaped. We humans display a good variety already, especially males have an enhanced sense of depth and distance, which not only makes them good hunters, they are also good drivers. Although not all of them. The sense of space is necessary in order to manipulate things in the world, and must be developed like a skill. The more you do it, better you become in perceiving space, which is not really perceiving, but estimating it. Those who are in sports, go out a lot, are good drivers etc. can judge space much better, and probably survive better. Those who spend more time in closed rooms, staring at screens or books or papers, are found to be poor in judging space, in jumping, climbing trees or repairing machines. Well, this may sound like a gross generalization, so should be taken with some salt. But given our observations, there seems to be a connection between how well an organism survives with how well it can grasp space.

Let us see how well we can judge space. It seems one can easily tell the depth more or less accurately up to say 20m, simply by staring at the view. One can judge space roughly up to say 500m by moving around in that area. So you can tell how far the glass of water or the door is right now without getting up from the chair. You can probably see that your neighbour's house is nearer to you compared to the shop in the distance. But you won't be able to tell how far a hill is without actually going there, and that too, the distance will not be seen as a volume of space, it is more like - it took 20 mins by car, or it is just on the horizon. Now try to gauge the distance to the moon, or sun, or any star. It is impossible, even if you go there, although books would tell you that there is a lot space there. It seems, and actually is well known to sciences, that our perception of space is very limited - to a few meters actually. Not so in case of objects and patterns. Why is that? If space is the reality, like objects are, and if mind wants to see it as it is, it must render it even beyond a few meters, instead of the gradual flattening of the view we actually see.

Again, the answer is evolution, mind does not need to gauge big distances, so it gets away without doing that hard work. The prey, if you can catch it, is very well within a few meters. So no space is created when it is not needed. The eyes are well adapted to keep us alive, they do not tell us more than what we need to know. Even the range of light frequencies it sees, and even the range of sizes our mind can work with is very-very narrow compared to the reality out there. So I guess the answer is - the mind is not at all trying to recreated the stuff that is "out there" exactly and precisely. Perception exists merely as a strategy for survival,

not for gaining knowledge of what is out there. Now, that is the shock I was talking about.

Interested readers can find in depth knowledge in various books written on this subject, it is not really a spiritual matter, it is a well known and well researched subject in the concerned branches of science. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the mechanisms and peculiarities of our vision. Moreover, why would you want me to type stuff here that is already in the books. I will just say the bottom line - Space is an idea, a concept, a made up thing, that assists the mind in survival. It is not a reality, which is out there.

Moving in space

But wait a minute, you might say, I say that space is created when we move around a bit, check stuff from different angles etc, so what are we moving in if not in space? Wouldn't my description actually end up as a proof of space as existing fundamentally and independently of the mind? Well, I was avoiding that discussion, but I guess the readers of this blog have far more intelligence compared to my puny wits. All I know is a few tricks. So I will ask you to do a silly experiment. Walk with your eyes closed and see what happens to the space, how does it look like or feel like? Anyway, it is risky, so an easier experiment is - move your arm in air with eyes closed. Ensure that it touches nothing and rests on nothing. The trick is to do it very-very slowly. Your eyes are closed, so you cannot see the "space" it is moving in, but surely, you must be moving your arm in space, that's what your mind will tell you. But do it again without any such bias, clear your mind of conditioning this time, you will find that if you do it very slowly, the mind has no way to tell even if it moved. It will feel like a slight tension in muscles, that's all. No movement, no space, no distance. Isn't that amazing? Our sense of distance and movement is purely visual. When other senses tell us something, we project our prior knowledge of movements and space onto them. Makes them more useful. For example, if you hear a lion roar, it is good if you can judge how far that can be based on your previous experiences with lions. Keeps you alive, if nothing else.

Movements are perceived as happening in space. It is an illusion created due to relative change. If there is no sufficient change or no way to know if something changed (like in above experiment), no motion is sensed, no space gets created. You need to first sense movement and for that you need a change in visual field, only then mind can proceed to estimate space [5]. We all know this when we are sitting in a train such that we see nothing but another train on neighbouring track. When that train starts rolling, the mind will tell you that it is your train that is moving. It may even produce a sensation of movement by involuntary

contraction of muscles, which it does to prevent you from falling every time stuff moves. The mind cannot judge if you are moving, because all it sees is a change, the motion is created in the mind from this bare-bone information. And, as you must have guessed, it is not so good at it. It gets fooled sometimes.

So let's do another experiment. Walk with eyes open, as you usually must be doing, but this time, clear the conditioning for a while. Pretend that you are not moving, only the scenery is changing in front of your eyes. As your muscles exert push and pull, see the patterns changing in the field of vision. Soon you will find that there is no motion, just change of perception. Nothing is moving, or we can say, it is only the mind that is moving [1].

Locations

Another question that arises is - if there is no space, where are objects located? Where is my body or my house? Not only is there a sense of location, there is also a sense of direction. That makes things really complicated. If you observe closely, the location is always relative, and so is a direction. They are relative to a chosen object, not surprisingly, since locations and directions are not in space really. These are convenient ways of describing a movement relative to the reference object. So when I give you directions to my house, what I am actually telling you is how you should move if you wish to experience my house. The house has no location, it is not placed in a particular direction from your house. Its location and direction exist as a mental map of movements through an imaginary space.

The above can seem very far fetched indeed and I don't blame you for laughing at me. Remember, reality is stranger than fiction. Space is stranger than you'd think. Why do we need a reference object? What is its real use, if the location exists in space? Sometimes our own body is the reference object. I can say that the coffee mug is on the left of me and remote control is on the right at such and such distance. But if I move and go to the kitchen, these locations and directions become invalid. The reference has moved. The mind needs something stationary to build a reliable map in the memory. So we usually choose the direction of the sun, or of the stars or a mountain, a river etc, which are less likely to change randomly. If the reference is arbitrary, the location must be arbitrary, which means only one thing - it is made up.

It does serve a useful purpose though, and it is again the survival. It helps to know and map your way to the water hole or wherever the food usually is. It helps to avoid a place where predators hang out. If one can transform the complex series of bodily movements in terms of a location and direction, this task

becomes much easier. The mind does that by not only creating space and distances, but also adds extra information like location and direction of objects in it.

What's out there?

Its not objects in space. No objects, no space, they are just illusions. There is surely a relation between the mind, the space, time and motion. Which causes which? It seems that the motion is fundamental and space and time are derived out of it. But motion is just change in the mind, it is because of memory, a comparison of experiences. So change is even more fundamental. There can be no doubt about the experience of change, all experience is nothing but change. There can be doubts about the existence of motion, space and time. The more you research, observe and think about it, the more evidence you will gather ... happy seeking [2].

So we move on to the advanced questions now. What is out there then, if everything is made up in the mind? Unfortunately, we will never know. What is out there is not something that can be known directly. You will need a way to get it impressed on your memory and process it in some way, compare it with what you already know, so on and so forth, and then you can say you know it. Well, that sounds like perception already, which is what we are doing now. So by necessity, all knowledge must come via perception of one or the other kind, it must be arranged in one or the other way and you will be left with nothing but a specific interpretation of what is out there instead of seeing what is actually out there.

Let's say you are an advanced alien or a deity who is not really concerned about survival anymore, and you decide to know what is actually out there. The said necessity means that you will not be able to do that, doesn't matter how advanced your mind becomes. Probably you can teleport across space or do stuff like that, but knowing a thing is something very different from the ability to manipulate it. Knowledge of a thing arrives via perception of some sort and perception always distorts what is out there. Perception does not actually provide us with "real" knowledge, it is just refined ignorance, and is made up for a specific purpose. Can be for survival of bodies, can be for communication with other minds, anything.

That's why, all that can be known will necessarily be an illusion. It is not that there is nothingness behind that illusion, there is something there. What? Metaphysical patterns of change. Why am I so sure of it? Because that is the minimum that is needed even to have an illusion.

Well, that is mind blowing, at least for me. But what are these unknowable patterns of change? We have discussed them in depth in various article here, so please check it out if you need details. In short, we can think of them as pure information having no substance or reality behind them. They are just change, not a change of anything or in anything. The change is also virtual, it is not really there, there are just possibilities of change. Probabilities of patterns. Naturally, there are infinite number of these patterns. Everything that is possible - is possible. Mind is one of those patterns. Its core being a memory - a pattern that receives copies of other patterns. Why is this there? Because everything is possible, and a memory is possible too. Memory shifts in ways we cannot know, the shift is seen as change. Space, time and objects are a product of these changing patterns.

The good news is, there is a way to understand this seemingly unsolvable puzzle of what is out there, which is as follows - Since we know that everything is one, there are no two, all these changing patterns are happening in that one. I see myself, the core of my being as identical to that one. When I separate it from the illusory change, I see myself as consciousness, - the emptiness that is conscious of, a witness of all illusory change. The change and witness are not two, so I am the change myself. The whole illusion is me, and the witness to that is also me. In other words, there is just Presence, we talked about in older articles. It is the unknowable one. The knowledge resides in duality, where there is the knower and the known, at the level of Presence, the duality disappears, and nothing can be known, nor is there a necessity for knowledge.

Space, time and spacetime

For those who dislike scientific mumbo-jumbo sounding stuff, the bottom line is - they do not exist, except as mathematical models in the mind. The essence and conclusions for this article are as mentioned above, so the following discussion can be skipped if you wish so.

Now this is a matter of theory and maths, but still related to the path of knowledge, as maths and science are nothing but a subset of the path of knowledge. Scientific method is a very good and effective way of gaining knowledge of physical stuff and since space is something "out there" it has been studied in depth. Of course the pun was unintentional. There were some philosophers who tried to disprove the existence of space using strange paradoxes, but that did not deter scientists and engineers from using it in effective ways. The concept of space in science solves many problems, which would have been left unsolved if we had neglected space as merely an imagination of mind.

In scientific theories, you'd find that mostly the objects have a quality called dimensionality, which in simple words means that they have a length, width and height. Other qualities being position, mass, energy and probably some more like velocity etc. The space is not a thing, but an arrangement to explain things. It exists there as a consequence of dimensionality. It does not matter if we perceive it or not, it is a framework that explains behaviour of object more or less accurately. Time is a companion of space and is useful when objects start moving and changing [3].

Phenomena can be nicely explained using the positions of object in space and time. It works, but not always. It is interesting to read the history of physics and see how space and time were the heroes of physics not so long ago. Cartesian space was the king for a long time, thanks to Newton and all. It had to go due to SR/GR, thanks to Einstein, who killed both and created a compound monster called spacetime. It explains almost everything, except the tiny stuff. So quantized space and time were invented as mathematical tools to explain away strangeness. It seems it solves everything, but no, there are phenomena that happen without space and time and do not always obey their restrictions. So new dimensions, more dimensions and even more tools are being invented to keep up with the strangeness this physical world is.

It turns out that one can make space into anything that one finds useful. 2D, 3D, 4D, nD, it is flexible enough. Math can twist it, create it and compute it. One can expand it, punch holes in it or deform it using heavy objects. That is strange because space is defined as nothingness. You can have simple orthogonal ones or fancier curved versions. You can transform one space into another, just by math. You can quantized it or make it smoother [4]. If all this sounds like made up mumbo jumbo, then you are right. This is the language of a lay person, not of a scientist. The language of science is math, where things are self explanatory and very clear. In the end, for a scientist, space is just a mathematical construct which can explain a few things. It does not exist "out there".

Sadly, even a million dollar lab does not prove its reality. For space to exist, there must be objects that can occupy it, and objects means matter, which unfortunately, cannot be found. In fact, the deeper we go in matter, more we destroy it. So no molecules, no atoms, no subatomic stuff, nothing, we are left with only fields of probabilities of events that depend on the presence of a conscious observer. Sounds familiar, isn't it? A scientist starts sounding like a mystic very quickly.

Why is it that science seems to be stuck with this circus of explaining illusions

using the made up abstractions of mathematical relations? There is no doubt that it is useful, it gives us the power of prediction and hence manipulation and invention, but it does not provide real knowledge, it simply adds to the illusions by formation of beliefs. Scientific theories are just assumptions, they are not the truth, whatever that means. All this is because physics leaves out the mind and consciousness from the equation. When you leave out the reality, you will be stuck in an endless loop of illusions forever.

What to do now, I ran out of space?

What does all this tell us? One thing - even science did not find a space "out there", we are puny ordinary folks in comparison. Why do you think people are so sure that space is out there, and is real? Because they have a mind. Minds tells them what it has learnt since millions of years. It cannot simply let go of this very useful tool of space. People are not our concern really, but the job of a seeker is to go in depths of everything, even of nothingness that is space and question the beliefs that are like fossilized dirt on the clear glass of mind.

Does that mean we ignore the space or time or objects? Do we need to behave differently since now they are not really there? Well, I do not recommend that. If you are driving a car and your mind tells you not to drive into the empty space below a cliff, you should take that advice, mind has created that space for some good reason. Do not think it does not exist, that can be bad for health. Since we have a virtual body, and that body is totally adapted to this virtual reality with a virtual space, you have no other option but to use it, unless you want a vacation from this world.

We study these things for only one reason - to free us from beliefs. We want freedom. It does not matter if we do not know the answer, it is enough that we do not cling to false beliefs. That brings us into a space of "I do not know", this space is almost infinite, lot of room to move around here, less constricted than the chamber of beliefs. I admit that the question of space is a tough one, and it took me many years to study it and many weeks to write this article. It is largely an unknown anyway. When we reach the state of not knowing, we are already free from ignorance. The point of this article is not to provide you with ready made knowledge of what space is, I'd just like you to question it, see if there are better ways to know it. To do that, you must let go of old ignorance. Start fresh.

Notes:

[1] So the question arises - if we do not really move, what is walking? What does it mean when I extend my arm to grab the food? Wouldn't I need to bring the

food from the plate to my mouth? Isn't all these actions a movement? The answer is very involved, will make the article huge, so I urge you to find it out, it is very interesting. Those actions are also just change. The change is in the body, which is also a pattern, it is also "outside" and the mind treats it like any other object. However, there are internal senses that assist the mind in performing a change that is effective and gets the job done. It is seen as motion, assisted by the contraction of muscles, which we can feel inside. However it is also change, a change of information coming into the mind. Why does it take effort or manipulation of this thing called muscles to make a change? Its called Energy, you need it in order to effect any change whatsoever. When energy is expended, it is sensed as effort. What is energy? It is a capacity to make change happen. See how it all makes sense? Thinking along these lines will take you to places you have never been before. It reveals new knowledge. Energy is now not something physical, it is also in the mind. What can you do with such a power? What are the possibilities and implications of this?

[2] There are tons of scientific studies to dig into. It is very evident that perception is a process that is more creative than informative. E.g. the colours are created, a way of mind to classify patterns reliably, they are not out there, they are not even a quality of an object, because they are created in the mind "on the fly". The light wavelengths do not always correspond to colours, it is not a product of light. So on and so forth, there is ample material on perception to keep you busy for months.

[3] Please see the article on the illusion of time, which I wrote in past, strangely...

[4] Quantization of space seems to be a direct result of quantization of energy. Energy is nothing but change, again. Why is change quantized? Since change depends on the memory, one cannot have change without there being a memory, however short, to register it, it seems that there is a lower limit to the memory. In other words, the mind is limited fundamentally, which is not a surprise for the seekers.

[5] Watch those babies carefully when they try to grasp a toy that is beyond their reach. They open and close their fist repeatedly, thinking the object is within reach, they have not yet perfected the sense of space as they have not moved much from their crib. Probably the toys look like hovering just in front of their eyes.

Resistance, Effort and Opportunity: Part-1

A path is rarely seen with a red carpet laid on it, padded with rose petals, mostly, especially for new travellers, it is full of thorns, pits and steep climbs. It may sound discouraging and ironical since this blog is about encouraging people for taking up a path. But then, instead of showing a rosy picture its better to share something useful which provides you instant solutions in case you fall, and something which warns you beforehand, to prevent the fall. Following is a brief write up of things I found that may cause trouble and some solutions that I found useful.

Resistance

Resistances are events or actions or thoughts that prevent a seeker from gaining some important piece of knowledge. Knowledge comes from experience, and resistance means that the seeker is unable to experience something crucial. He acts most reasonably in the light of his existing knowledge, and only an experienced teacher can see his error and warn about it or can help to overcome it. Resistances can be either internal (originating in the mind) or external (originating in the world), but by now you must have realized that such demarcation of internal and external is meaningless, it all happens in the non-local Mind. Anyhow we will use those words merely for convenience. Internal resistance is one where the seeker himself prevents his own progress or at least seems to be doing so. He acts and thinks in ways which always take him away from the knowledge. He is unaware of this fact, he cannot see it. He remains unaware of it even after it is made clear (by a teacher or anyone else).

Doesn't it sound like a belief? There is an important difference, it is easy to see beliefs when someone points them out or when you yourself encounter them. Beliefs are ideas or actions that do not stand on a direct experience, and hence its easy to spot them and merely seeing them kills them. Resistance is a beast which remains invisible even after it is made very clear that you are facing one. Is there absolutely nothing one can do? Fortunately, there is one thing which we are still capable of doing in such situations, which is to question it honestly and openly, even if it sounds ridiculous and insane. Question it, why is your teacher saying something that sounds so funny and insulting at the same time? A question opens up the Mind a bit and quickens the way out of resistance. That's all you can do.

External resistance is the type where worldly situations or people prevent one from reaching towards much needed knowledge. One might think that it should be very easy to simply see the external hurdles that stand between a seeker and his goal. Unfortunately, it's not that easy, as the situations stand right in plain sight but are seen as acts of nature, not resistance. No amount of explaining will make it clear for a seeker, he cannot be convinced. Such events and situations are external and appear in the world but are acts of his own mind that materialize as resistance. Let's take some examples for both kinds.

A common case is repeatedly taking Mind as Self – thinking, imagining, perceiving, and even the extraordinary experiences that the Mind provides are mistaken as experiences of knowing the Self. The expressions such as, I'm sad, I can't calm my mind, I feel the Self in that exotic state, etc. are evidences that the seeker is confusing mental activities with Self. This is a direct experience and seems logical (who else is doing all that after all?, the resisting one thinks), so is not a belief, just a mistake.

Fully knowing everything that can be known, fully aware of it all, some seekers consciously set goals that fall short of their maximum potential. For example, after knowing the illusion of a world and a worldly life, some seekers still carry on with their old lifestyle, running after stuff and relations. Can be some greater worldly goal (serving poor?) or can be family or a job or some practice or tradition. The seeker continues on the old path with a proper justification, such as "I must do it", "I'm destined to live like this" etc. This is a case of failure to embody the teachings and experiences that result from them. Such seekers resist the next step which comes after realization.

When an experience arrives via a certain practice, an attachment to that practice happens and there is a resistance towards letting go of it. This comes from the belief that a simple practice cannot result in a "rare" experience. A common example is mistaking mental states for "states" of consciousness (Self). Many seekers are convinced that the only way to experience the Self is via some strange altered state of the Mind. This is a resistance to willingly try a simpler route because the more exotic route is more satisfying for the mind/ego. This halts their progress because the abiding in Self cannot happen most of the time in day-to-day living, but only on rare occasions when they achieve the "right" state.

Not setting high enough goals and not being ambitious can be seen as a form of resistance. Some seekers approach a teacher asking for a solution of their everyday misery, some domestic issues, trauma or inability to do this or that. When pointed out that these are merely symptoms of ignorance, and a total

solution exists which will make petty things a moot matter, they still want to treat the symptoms, expressing their inability to “practice” since they are facing a bad situation. The reason is perfectly valid and logical from their point of view. They wait for the “right time” when the external situations will be perfect, when finally they can know the “advanced” stuff. Usually it makes no difference when pointed out that the only time there is, is now – the eternal moment, and that the knowledge is simple, direct and effortless, not advanced or complicated. The result is that they spend a long time patching up an old garment rather than throwing it away and getting a brand new one.

The acts of Mind go deeper than the Mind can know. Situations and events manifest that prevent a seeker from meeting a master, for example. Flights are missed, cars break down, someone falls sick or needs urgent help, someone shows up and fills him against that master, he finds a “better spiritual distraction”, a more exotic and instant one. Sometimes, strange bodily phenomena appear that mimic a disease, sometimes the Mind stops working, is unable to decide anything. An irrational anger (or fear) can suddenly develop that makes him hate some bit of knowledge or facts or practices or useful/helpful people.

The list of such happenings can be varied and such events almost always appear as “unusual coincidences” or acts of nature. I do not advocate that you take every such act that stopped you on your path for a while as Mind’s hidden resistance, you may go insane. However, when a very-very strange coincidence occurs just when you are all set to make a big leap on your path, I suggest you pay close attention. Do not dismiss it, do not forget it, write it down. Try the exact same thing again after a few days and see if any external resistance appears again. Experiment !

Efforts and opportunities will be discussed in next part of this article.

Resistance, Effort and Opportunity: Part-2

In the last article we saw how resistance slows a seeker down on his path. Lack of effort and lost opportunities are other reasons that can slow one down. Are these three the only hurdles? Of course not, but one can classify most of the hurdles under these three broad terms conveniently. I'm not saying that there cannot be other strange forms of hurdles (like Karmic hurdles, or evil entities, or jealous deities), but its beyond my pay grade to write about them, I can write about things I directly know of or at least somewhat sure of. In the end, its all Mind, you see, and we can use Mind itself (its more favourable parts) to defeat Mind.

Effort

The dilemma of effort is a familiar one for most of the seekers. Do I reach there by enough effort or can I achieve it effortlessly? The answer usually given is familiar one too, which is – It is not possible to reach there by effort, but one must still make some effort.

That's actually true, but the one liner answer is not very helpful for those who need a clear guidance, I guess. I will present my own understanding of it anyway. As we have seen in the articles on introspection, it hardly takes any effort to clearly see the nature of Self and the man behind the curtains of this magic show we call the human experience - mind, body, and world. All that can be known is just in front of our nose. Freedom and happiness should result immediately from here on. But it rarely happens. For some strange reason, people take a 180 degree turn and start in exactly the opposite direction. In other words, most will try very hard to "get it" from outside world, some old books, techniques or from some miraculous teacher sitting high in the Himalayas.

What can be the reason? Mostly its ignorance, one can say. It appears that way. But usually a seeker, if initiated by a good teacher, is made aware of stuff in front of his nose on the day one. Clearly, he knows, if he is a seeker material that is. Most people get it very quickly, but then wander away as if nothing happened. "Is that it?", most would say. Then they spend 20 years running across the globe, turning every stone to find that miraculous experience of "enlightenment" or whatever they believe they must "get". If you have a feeling that I'm talking from

my own experience, then you are absolutely right.

I got it very early but then it was surely not magical enough. Self is disappointingly ordinary. I wanted "that" extraordinary kind of knowledge great masters have access to, surely it must be very rare, why else everyone is after it? The grass seemed greener on the other side. What happens when you have it in your pocket and search for it madly all over the place? Useless effort, that's what happens. So you will find many advanced teachers who dislike effort, and now you know the reason why they don't recommend it.

And the very same teachers would smack you the next day for just sitting there on your bottom and not doing anything for your progress. And you are back to the dilemma. The effort is required not to get there, but to turn the seeker back 180 in his original direction. The effort is required to stop doing things that are unproductive. So the whole picture of effort is hanging upside down. I call it resistance, and as we discussed, its not ignorance, its just a trick of the Mind which forces you to look in other direction and ignore the obvious. Mind wants to do stuff, make effort, to "get" it, to achieve it. But its useless effort on its part, its like searching for glasses while you are already wearing them. For some reason Mind likes it very much - the game of seeking, it gets something to latch on.

In order to stop this madness some effort is needed and when the Mind is out of the way, you see that you already have exactly the thing you were making so much effort for. You get it effortlessly, but only when the mental kind of effort bears no fruit. To tire out the Mind, or to force it out of your way, you need effort. Thus we find that its not the effort itself, but the direction of it that matters. That is the trick.

How much effort is needed? Depends upon how further away you have turned your head from the right direction. Also on how feverishly your Mind is searching for what it thinks is missing. Effort is needed not to get it but to stop from trying to get it.

Secondly, effort is needed to implement the teachings in one's life. Its not enough to merely know, one must also act from that knowledge. Many seekers reach there and then get distracted, thinking that the realization will bear fruit by itself. There is some truth in that, once you see it, you are forever "upgraded", it becomes impossible to act in old ways again. However, Ego is very strong in some and it is possible to fall back into suffering while fully knowing and awake. Its not really fun when you suffer while fully knowing why you suffer. Solution is - cultivation. Make some effort to break old patterns and abide as Self instead of Ego.

Moderation is the keyword. Forcing the Ego out can be counterproductive. Human experience needs human functionality, which is largely implemented in the Mind as Ego. Quickly destroying it all will simply mean a quick end of human experience (aka death).

Opportunity

An opportunity is any event or potential happening that can speed up your evolution. In the context of a seeker, it is not something that can make his life comfortable or provide stuff, money or pleasure, just to make it clear. An opportunity for a seeker is entirely different when compared to its usual counterpart for ordinary people. So if he is not carefully paying attention, a seeker can miss it and it may remain hidden and useless. If he loses most of such opportunities, it slows him down.

For example, suffering of any kind is a great opportunity for a seeker. You might say that's some weird thinking, but I told you that an opportunity means something very different for a seeker. Surely, suffering is undesirable unless you turn it into an opportunity and take advantage of it. Suffering results from ignorance, and for a seeker it should be a piece of cake to see the ignorance that is generating his suffering. Once seen, knowledge dawns, and suffering ceases. That's killing two birds with one stone (sorry again about the dark metaphor, I really don't recommend killing birds with stones).

If the seeker has a mind-set of an ordinary man, he will surely lose this opportunity to progress. Moreover, the suffering can always return and he may go through the same circle again. It's not fun to remain stuck at one place in your path. So a smart seeker knows how to turn even the strangest situation into an opportunity. In fact, our whole life is a really big opportunity, nothing else, what else is the use of a life?

It'd be tempting to convert a bad situation into a learning opportunity, but what about positive situations? A wise seeker converts them into knowledge too. See that the good is as impermanent as the bad, it never lasts. The trick is to come out of the cycle of good and bad situations. Good ones are as potent as bad ones for this purpose. Secondly, if you stretch a pleasurable situation beyond its natural dimensions, it is torn to pieces and turns into suffering. This is the right opportunity to learn.

Opportunities also appear in the form of people, teachers and books. It can also be something very mundane like an opportunity to serve, donate or forgive. Do

not wait for a big opportunity, its the small one's that are most important and easy to miss. As I said, it appears to be ignorance that we miss opportunities, but it is not most of the time. Mostly, its resistance, our arch enemy. You may fully know of an event which can teleport you far ahead on your path, but you knowingly avoid it, thinking something like - "its not for me", "I'm not ready yet" or "what can go wrong". For many the excuse is - "I must do this other thing first, its more important, anyway I know everything already ". The other thing can be anything - a job, relation, children, a time killer hobby or even some old practice or an existing teacher.

For example, if you consciously choose to watch a movie when there is this important book you need to read which can transform you, (because a book can always wait), know that you are ignoring an opportunity here. It may seem like a minor matter - "what's the hurry?", you may say. Surely, there is no hurry, but it shows that your priorities are twisted, the movie can wait, can't it? You missed a good opportunity here to recognize your resistance and force the mind to look in the right direction. It takes some effort, especially when its all so well hidden and appears harmless.

How to recognize an opportunity? That's a silly question. You can't. All you can do is pay attention to all the events that are happening in your life. By all, I mean all. I know it sounds extreme. A smart seeker walks through his life like a hunter walks through a dense jungle. One second of laziness, an he gets hunted. Its an art to not to look like a hunter and still manage to pay attention to all your activities and surroundings. You will find that once you do this consciously, opportunities start dropping from sky like rain. Something knows your keenness and wants to support you, help you. If you walk through the life in a lazy-dazey way, opportunities hardly arrive. Its not magic, it is the way it is. Once you attend to the events in this way, try to take advantage of them as much as you can. In retrospect you will find that some of them were really great opportunities, and you could have easily missed them if you didn't try them out.

So the trick here is to not to rely on your own knowledge to judge an opportune event, because by definition you can't, all one can do is to set the priorities right and treat all situations as opportunities. What if something is obviously not an opportunity, for example, the opportunity to serve this drunk man with a loaded gun, who can barely walk and must be dropped to his home in a dark shanty alley? Well, use your discretion, prioritize survival not service, in other words – don't be stupid. Use this opportunity to utilize your brain and get out of there.

Opportunities present themselves in many forms but are seldom this extreme, its usually something very small, like a phone call or clicking a link on a website. And

that's why they are easy to miss. Usually as you progress, the hidden starts becoming obvious and the resistance starts coming into light. Now the obstacles can be seen from miles away, efforts yield bull's-eye outcomes and opportunities turn into conscious actions, they no more seem like random events, they take the form of amazing synchronicities.

Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-1

We have studied in much detail what can go wrong when you start on a path or even before that. All those pitfalls and traps that trap you even before you start your journey were discussed. To summarize, these are –

Absence of a path itself
Afflictions of the Mind
Afflictions of the Ego
Solidified beliefs and conditioning
Physical limitations of the body
Absence of a good teacher
Lack of certain qualities in the student
Resistance, lack of effort or lost opportunities

If you expand this list it can fill up pages. Somewhat disheartening I must say, but then I've said many times, this path is not for weaklings. It is not like walking on a carpet showered with petals. Deeper the ignorance, more are the obstacles. The good news is - once you start jumping past hurdles, it becomes easier and easier to overcome them. You pick up speed exponentially and if you stick to it, it shouldn't take a very long time. There is a learning curve of sorts that makes everything seem impossible at first, there is an entry barrier for people and only those who are seeker material are allowed past it. Once you get past the hurdles, and fall into a few pits, you start getting the knack of it all, you learn the art of not falling and of picking up yourself as soon as you fall.

In this article we will discuss the petty stuff that is thrown at a seeker when he has already overcome most of the above mentioned hurdles. I call it petty because once you start on a path, there is hardly anything that can stop you. You've tasted the blood, now grass won't satisfy you. Well that was another dark metaphor there, but its true, a seeker is a brutal chap, its very hard to stop him, at most, obstacles can only delay him. However, don't assume that since they are petty, they are harmless, some of them can keep you glued to one spot for many decades. But nothing to worry, that happens only if you do nothing about them. It should be obvious by now that the biggest obstacle is nothing but you, yourself, to be precise, your parts - Mind and Ego, and their vehicle - your body. Even if you think other people and external situations are responsible for your slow speed, its still you. That's why the path is about you and only you, nothing else. You are the obstacle and you are the cure.

Cultivation does not involve hard physical or mental labour, else you would have finished up everything by now. It mostly involves sitting for many hours,

contemplation and introspection, staying in absorption in Self or Samadhi, renouncing unnecessary stuff and activities, remaining silent, staying alone and sitting with masters in Satsangs listening to the same old stuff, or reading boring fat books. It is precisely not doing anything, non-doing is the essence of it all. Why did I put it in such negative terms? Isn't it actually good? Sure it is. It is negative from the point of view of the Mind and Ego. They hate such lifestyle, where there is nothing exciting, nothing to do, nothing to achieve. They like activity, success, achievements, romance, excitement, show off and what not. And so, they create obstacles of thousand kinds to have their way. But how is it that a seeker is able to handle it? Because the pull of the path is stronger than petty obstacles. A seeker is able to see through the drama of his own mind. Nonetheless, the stupid drama of the mind delays one's progress and it becomes necessary to find some cure for it.

Physiological manifestations: can be very irritating kind of obstacles. They spring up as soon as one tries to sit quietly for a while. For example, if your practice involves meditation, all kinds of pains, discomforts and itches appear out of nowhere within minutes during your meditation. You think your body is fit, and you have the softest cushion and support, but you feel tired, legs and back pains as if you were crushing stones all day and itches that you must scratch arise everywhere all of a sudden. You must have noted that these do not happen when you sit down to watch a movie straight for two or more hours, but sit for meditation for 10 minutes and you feel like you are dying from something that is disintegrating your body. Often, these obstacles are the first kind a newbie meditator encounters.

What are these? The latent habitual programs that are deprived of the usual sensations from the body. An ordinary person is never so quiet, sitting quietly in a room with blank walls (or eyes closed) and absolutely no noise makes the usual sensory torrents vanish. The Mind sends out all kinds of signals to find out what's going on with the body - why its so silent, where has it suddenly disappeared? It wants to know. Initially its like an urge to move, to look around, but if you persist, it gets stronger and stronger till you do what it wants you to do, and as soon as you move, stretch your legs and scratch that annoying itch on your nose, all goes quiet. Its not that the Mind is some demon who knows what you are doing and sends out his minions to set you straight, its just a natural occurrence, but anyhow it ruins your meditation.

What is the cure? Be gentle, don't force it. Initially do as it says, provide it the needed feedback by moving, relieving the pains, scratching or touching the body to comfort it, tell it everything is fine. Once it quietens go back to the meditation or contemplation, or whatever is your practice. The distractions reappear soon,

and you repeat the action again. Every time you resist it for a bit longer, ignore it more and more, and you will find that in a few days or weeks all such painful sensations vanish on their own.

Sounds easy, but for those who are on the path of energetic manipulations (Hatha or Kundalini etc.) will find it nightmarish. Symptoms will appear that look like deadly diseases. Pain will be intolerable, it will be 24x7, not a mere itch on the nose. Nervous system will become oversensitive. Sleeping, digestion and eating will be a torture. Sensitivities to foods, drinks and certain people arise and are painful. Some seekers leave the path at this point, some persevere. A good and experienced teacher is a must for support, because there is no cure for it. Only way is to surrender and wait till it ends. It will end sooner or later, either you progress past it or drop it there and pursue a gentler path. Anyhow, if your practice involves above, I hope you know what you are doing. I have no tricks to help you. Also, I cannot tell you why that happens, you are playing with the very fabric of the creation, the source code of the Mind, expect strangeness of all kinds.

Mudras

Physiological strangeness sometimes manifests in some in the presence of a master or a teacher they resonate with. Some people find themselves suddenly laughing hysterically, or crying loudly, uttering nonsense, giving out animal sounds, bird sounds, orgasmic noises, shaking, falling unconscious, making poses, especially hand poses, and a myriad kinds of acts that are not in their control. If its a gathering, and you are new and unaffected, it will freak you out. Knowing about this helps to maintain your calm. You may find that the whole crowd looks like overtaken by an evil force that is making them behave like zombies. Nothing to worry, its normal, you will get used to it soon. Some people are unaffected, they do not have any hidden blockages to be released. Some think that its not happening to them, which means they are not yet "ready" or not worthy, this is not correct. Manifestations are not a sign of "worthiness" or greatness of some kind. Although it is true that manifestations generally mean that the practice is working well.

Are those gurus, masters magicians? What happens to a practitioner is not dependent on the teacher, only on his teachings or words. Latter trigger hidden areas of the mind, since the truth is heard, and hidden beliefs and conditioning gets the shock of their life. The sounds you hear are the sounds of fossilized deep seated structures shattering.

First thing to keep in mind is to not to freak out, you are not possessed by a

demon. Its only your own mind. Be present, aware and let it all happen. Suppressing, killing it with drugs or avoidance of the teachings/practice will only delay it and prolong that funny stage. Like everything else, it comes and goes. Similarly, its wise to not to get attached to such mudras, and inflate your Ego by assuming that you have become a holy person. You are just cleaning the trash, nothing too great about it.

Monkey Mind: is the highly agitated state of the Mind, it happens just when you are all set to go deeper in meditation, or it can happen all day. All kinds of thoughts, dramas, imaginary situations, worries, anger, fear, jealousy and such junk arises continuously without break. This starts occurring when you could sit for reasonably long time trying to silence the Mind or to concentrate on something specific. The practitioner is baffled because the practice is meant to achieve exactly the opposite - a clear and calm mind which is ready to receive new knowledge and experience. Instead the obstacle of monkey mind appears from nowhere.

Why does it happen? There can be two reasons. Firstly, this is the default state of an ordinary person. The mind of an untrained person is full of junk thoughts most of the time. There is an unceasing internal monologue there. This is considered "normal", if everyone has it, it must be normal - that is the logic of an ignorant. When you start meditating, your awareness increases, especially that of your mental landscape, you can see it more clearly and become conscious of it. Stuff that you were unaware of surfaces and obviously you do not like what you see. It soon becomes painful, bothersome and irritating. All you want to have is a peaceful mind, but more you practice, more aware you get and the noise goes up in volume. Secondly, mental silence that you are practicing is like death from the perspective of the Mind and Ego, and they resist their death in a rather violent way. You will notice that the thoughts are related to mostly survival issues, someone insulted you, someone has more shiny stuff than you have, someone is after your life and hoardings, you absolutely need new stuff and must make more money etc. The mind will recklessly present its agenda to get everything under its control again.

What is the cure? Again, be gentle and listen, do not suppress forcefully. If the actions are harmless, like the mind brings up an alarm every two minutes that you have run out of food or the house is not clean enough for guests who are arriving next day, go ahead and complete those tasks. Come back and sit down to meditate again. You may find that the noise is less now, at least for a few minutes before the mind starts nagging about something else. If the action involves killing someone or insulting your boss, I suggest not to do it for the sake of meditation, unless you are happy to meditate in jail or on a footpath.

It is very important that you become fully aware of this condition of the mind. I've mentioned in much detail in past articles on afflictions of the Mind about the tricks to cure a monkey mind, so check them out. In short, the light of awareness kills the random automatic thoughts and since you are so aware of your mental processes you catch a thought even before it starts surfacing and starts forming a long train of thoughts about the same old nonsense. Here, you get a chance to exercise your will and choose to terminate that seed thought. With practice you will find that the chaos of thoughts quietens down. It may never become totally silent, but that is not necessary, it is enough that the barrage of useless thoughts stops. Useful thoughts can continue and can be seen as just clouds passing in a clear sky. You don't want to end up brain-dead while trying to cure overthinking.

Sexual urges: arise as companions to mental chatter or just when the monkey mind starts behaving a bit as you please. This is like a nuclear weapon for the Mind (or Ego). It never fails to kill your meditation. Sometimes your whole practice and path is blown to dust. This is the most effective distraction your mind knows that is sure to work and hence it is brought up often. I really don't know how it works for women but for men, their whole life becomes a big mess of sexual thoughts, fantasies, acts and desires. Your libido will go up extremely high suddenly, you will be flooded with emotions, you will feel not loved, solitude suddenly becomes loneliness, even the most ugly and fat person you see turns you on, a thumbnail sized picture of a naked body is enough to stimulate you, fantasies become life like, all old ex-partners you hated bitterly seem like lovable again. You start searching their numbers. You feel most confident and the mirror tells you that you are the Casanova.

Why does that happen? If you are a seeker, a good one that is, your practice is bearing some fruit. You are more calm and happy, have reduced your needs to a minimum and feel secure and assured. Hopefully your health has also improved because you clearly see the toxic food as junk and avoid it. There is peace, leisure and happiness. All these are hints for the Ego that its time to procreate. Millions of years of knowledge and experience tells it that this is the optimum time for offspring to arrive, as their chances of survival are best now. Its the mating season from the point of view of the Ego. So the primitive programs fire up and start generating needed impulses to kick the body into procreative action. The body responds by producing necessary hormones and the garden variety of sticky stuff inside it and prepares for mating. You may find an influx of emotions of love and friendship, the heart opens up, and you even approach strangers with a lot of "affection". In time, meditation and philosophy becomes your last priority.

Another reason might be a deliberate trick of the Mind. By hit and trial, and past

experience it has learnt that you get most easily distracted by a sexual urge than anything else. Its cheap, instant and effective. So it brings it up. Usually boredom precedes such urges and pleasure is then offered as a solution. Wonderful, twisted and effective manipulation that can cause even a politician die from shame. So many fall for it. What does Mind get from all this? It sustains itself, it overcomes the fear of destruction of itself, and there are many more reasons, inertia being one of them. Mind has evolved all such strategies since its inception and is very effective in employing them. Of course, it's the ignorance in action, and therefore there is a cure.

How to cure it? I know of three ways, there can be more. First is celibacy, suppress it by power of will or by effort or practice, do not fall for it under any circumstances. Avoid opposite gender like plague, lock yourself up in an ashram or take refuge in Tibet. You are going against the nature here, but chances are that you may get past it if this is a short phase. There is a risk that this will get buried very deep in the Mind and will distort your stored structures in unpredictable ways, causing unpredictable behaviours that may look like psychoses. Other risk is that it will all erupt again later in life when the will power and intelligence is weakened by age and will make you act in undignified ways, sometimes causing headlines in the newspapers. Choose it only if you must.

Second way is satiation. Find a partner, marry if that's what your society and culture demands, and continue your practice. Satiation will wear out sexual and related desires very quickly. It will cease to appeal or distract and even becomes repulsive (ask any married men). However there is no free lunch, there are always consequences. Now you have an additional responsibility of a relationship and probably of children. If you are lucky, it will mean just few more hours of donkey work per day, if not, it will retard your progress more than the obstacle itself. Choose wisely.

Third trick is our - by now familiar - state of being intensely aware of it all. Just be aware of the drama being played in front of you, as an external observer, not acting on any actions it suggests. Be very curious, like a scientist observing the data coming out of his instruments. Do not identify with it, it's not you, it's just machinery of the Mind, mental processes and programs. Mind is your instrument, that's all it is, it provides you with this human experience. You have a choice about what to take and what to reject. This trick has no consequences, that I know of. Moreover, it will accelerate your progress. If you remember the article on opportunities, this obstacle is one such opportunity. It can be used as a slingshot. Of course, if you are a newbie seeker, you will gain the capability of employing this third trick only after you fall in the trap of sexual urges many times.

We will continue the discussion on obstacles in the next part of this article. There are many, and ironically, they become more and more *interesting* as you progress.

Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-2

Sleep: is the way of the Mind to excuse itself out of a deep meditation. But it can also happen naturally, say because of sleep deprivation or tiredness. You are highly alert, your mind is not so noisy, you are totally motivated and you sit upright and turn inwards towards the Self. So far so good, the next thing you know is you are getting up from a nice six hour long sleep.

Why does that happen? As I said, lack of enough sleep can be a reason. But if you find that sleep attacks you during your practice no matter how fresh and well rested you are, you can suspect that the mind has learnt a new trick to bother you. When all else fails, mind starts shutting down, not accepting the highly boring job it has been given, of counting the breaths or of parroting a mantra. It leaves completely, sending you into a dreamland. Instead of a fight route, now it takes a flight route. Years and years of habit has trained it to shut itself and the body down when there is nothing to do, when stomach is full, when there is no immediate danger and mating is not an option. Meditation is exactly the condition that fulfils all these criteria, hence sleep arrives naturally.

How to cure this? Well, it's a bit tricky. If you lack sleep, try meditating or introspecting just after you wake up from the usual long sleep or a short nap. If you have a "normal" biological rhythm, early morning is the recommended time. I never did that, reason – my biorhythm never corresponds to sun or moon or any other rock out there for unknown reasons. So I can't say how effective that will be. If it is a mental reflex to avoid facing meditation, it has to be brute forced out of the system. Well, I don't know any other way, I cured it this way myself. Force sleep away, if you think you are well rested already. As soon as you pass the "peak sleep" point, the body and mind behave as if sleep time is over or is missed and you become alert again. Try tea or coffee to aid it (not if body is going through purification, see below).

Another important thing to do is, and which is most effective, is to cultivate a hyper interest in your practice. Be crazy and passionate for it, make it the number one priority. Difficult, I know. An all-nighter cricket match is more interesting and keeps sleep away for whole night. A 5 minute meditation puts you into deep sleep. Reason – amount of interest. As we had discussed, it is nearly impossible to

“grow” your interest artificially. Either you are interested, or not. If you are not, you are wasting your life in meditation, it is not something you want, it is forced onto you, get rid of it, its not your path.

Purification: is a side effect of your practice. It may look like an obstacle, but it is not. Anyhow it can become one if you are not careful. Just as your mind is busy purging stuff out of its depths, the body suddenly becomes hyper sensitive to stuff and overreacts to certain things. Most commonly, food intolerances appear and disappear. Your eating habits change, your diet type changes, quantity of it and times you feel hungry change. Digestive disorders appear. Other kinds, such as allergies or symptoms of deadly diseases are not unheard of, though I rarely experienced anything intense. Its natural and is actually good. It becomes an obstacle and lasts forever only if you don't pay attention to what is happening.

Why does it happen? It may seem magical, but can be totally explained, except in rare and extraordinary cases, where no one knows the cause of strange symptoms that occur. Your practice of cultivation is increasing your awareness, you are getting intensely conscious of everything – thoughts, sensations, feelings, pains, discomforts, environment, what you say and do and what others say and do. This results in the entire mind-ego-body complex being set on a hair trigger. Even the minutest negativity starts appearing as huge. You get angry and irritated easily by stupid people or the news you hear on TV. You want to lock yourself up in the room and avoid all people. Others may find it strange and will want to lock you up in an asylum, which generally increases your anger and frustration. You now avoid getting in fights and arguments, you avoid insulting people or talking harshly, giving orders or any such acts, and you also instantly dislike other people who do all that to you. This is because now you are hyper sensitive. Such thoughts/actions generate suffering and when you were not aware, such suffering was muted by the noise of the Ego, but now it appears 100x magnified. It becomes painful, you cannot bear it any longer.

Secondly, the mind, which is getting very peaceful, runs out of its usual distractions, you have taken care of them, you cannot be distracted anymore, so it goes a step deeper, and brings out past events, especially the painful ones, hurts, abuse, insults and sufferings. It can be anything – anger, guilt, pleasures, anything that can distract you and results in a long chain of thoughts and Ego boosting journey. It quickly learns about what stops your meditation most effectively and brings that up most frequently. When you clean that up, it goes one step deeper again, till you reach early childhood, and perhaps past it. It is a long and painful process, but it clears up all the junk if you do not suppress it and employ methods mentioned in the monkey mind section of part – 1.

The body reacts to almost everything, since most of us “modern age” people simply treat our bodies as a trashcan for stuff. Greed, not need decides what we eat. Some people eat junk only to show their “social status”. People consume alcohol rampantly, and/or smoke and abuse stuff. Its like a retarded chap hitting himself with a hammer ceaselessly, but since he is insensitive, unaware, he feels nothing, perceives no damage, its “fun” for him, simply because everyone else is also hitting themselves and appear to be happy. Your being so aware brings up the discomforts such lifestyle causes in the body with a 100x magnification, and it becomes painful. Mind takes it as an indication of incoming disease and fires up the immune system, causing action against the invading junk. This is even more painful. However, it purges the body of poisons you were feeding it, you stop hitting your head with a hammer, and it ultimately results in a better health and a pure, clean body. Hence it is called purification.

How to cure it? You don’t need to. The system is curing itself, that’s the beauty of it. Cooperate and surrender. Go ahead and assist it by adopting a clean and hygienic lifestyle. Surround yourself with nice people who understand you and kick out the nasty ones for once and forever. Throw away TV and stay away from newspapers, sick and heavy movies and gossip-heads. Many seekers are ignorant about the purification process and try to stop it, ignore it or bury it under the carpet. This turns it into an obstacle. Its not that you won’t progress unless purification is complete, just that this process gets delayed and lasts for years, causing pain and suffering while it lasts, not fun you see. So consult experienced seekers and teachers if you notice sudden changes in physiology or mental makeup. Do not worry, you are not dying or going insane, its exactly the opposite. Purification will turn you into a new person, a better person, do not resist it.

What if it’s a real disease, not merely a result of heightened awareness? Yes, that is a possibility. Do not consider every symptom as purification, it might not be so. Better safe than sorry, always consult a doctor when in doubt. Treat it if needed. Its fine to ease it with medicines etc. You don’t need to close your mind on it. Do whatever shortens its duration. You don’t want to purify for whole of your life. But be careful not to suppress the process by force or therapies.

There are some paranormal aspects of purification. I’m not experienced in this matter, so can’t say much. But be ready for it, in case your practice is of a “raw” kind. Immediately see your teacher if something strange appears. Chances are your teacher won’t be able to simply make it go, but he will console you. It goes away by itself, when its work is done.

Fear and doubt: arise on a path because you may encounter experiences and

knowledge that is totally new for you and also for people around you, including your teacher and seniors. Things like Ego-death cause instant and intense fear and panic. Well, that's natural, what else can it cause. It may happen that things don't go as planned or expected, sometimes the practice bears no fruits, sometimes it brings trouble instead of progress. This causes doubt and suspicion in the mind of a seeker. Fear or doubt become obstacles, since unless they are removed, you will not progress. You may make tiny incremental advances, but nothing major.

How to get rid of fear and doubt? Unknown causes fear, knowledge destroys it. Know well, understand the thing that is causing fear, ensure that it is not life threatening, and it will disappear. Fear comes from Ego, so if you have a strong Ego, you will be cowardly, you will walk like a sheep on the path, not like a lion. It takes some amount of courage to face the strangeness your practices may cause. Even social situations, relatives or job and material needs can cause fear and insecurity, and must be dealt with. Since the situations can be numerous and unique for each seeker, I cannot give you a one trick to cure it all. In general, cultivate courage, curiosity and openness, that will get rid of any fears. Solve the survival issues first before you undertake major practices, since a practice is ineffective when all you do is worry about food and shelter while practicing, and moreover, the practice is useless if you end up dead, simply because you were careless about survival. There is a fine line between courage and stupidity, I do not recommend taking up dangerous short cuts or extreme practices. Always prefer a gentler, finer approach. There is no hurry.

Similarly, doubts are removed by knowledge and nothing else. It's fine to be somewhat critical of strange practices, it's a sign of intelligence. But doubting something simply because you read some random opinions about it is counterproductive. Experiment, see it for yourself, and if it's useless or too risky, throw it away. Try plan B instead. A big obstacle can arise in the form of doubt on the teacher. Well, you can't test it always and convince yourself. By definition, a teacher is smarter, more capable and more experienced than you are, else you'd be the teacher instead, and hence you cannot evaluate a teacher from where you are. You cannot confirm your doubt also, as you cannot get good evidence easily, you simply don't know. You lack the knowledge and experience about what he is telling you to do, or about his teaching. So, depending on the situation, decide and take action. Usually the action is to find a new teacher. It's stupidity to argue with someone you have a doubt on, you are simply wasting your time if you do so. It's much better to directly ask your teacher to remove your doubt. Most probably, many teachers have gone through similar situations, they understand why you doubt, and will not mind. Some may think of you as disobedient or uncultured, but if you are sweet and diplomatic you can save the relation from

getting killed because of some puny doubts.

Intellectual rewards: resemble fruits of the practice and can end up as obstacles [1]. Just when you are about to deepen your meditation, the mind wakes up and starts talking as if it has an IQ of 200. You get profound insights. You understand things, yourself and people in a flash of insight. Sometimes you get ideas about “improving” your practice. But mostly the ideas are of worldly nature – how to earn more, who can be a potential mate and how, how to earn reputation and fame, even how to help and save the world. Ideas on new inventions and scientific discoveries can pop up, and elegant solutions to problems you are facing come up, such as how to fix that annoying bug in the code you are writing. Well sounds good and magical, but the result is now you spend a majority of your time pursuing those ideas and you keep thinking of stuff during meditation. In other words, the mind has killed your practice successfully.

Why and how can that happen? It should be obvious. A peaceful, quiet and well-focused mind thinks better. You are also honing your critical thinking and logic. You are paying attention in your life. You know what I mean, your intelligence has actually gone up. It's a fruit of the practice. You don't mess with useless people and unproductive acts, you have so much time you can think for hours, you are not easily distracted. Your health is at its best, your energies are peaking. So, there, that's the reason. Why would any sane person call it an obstacle? Because it can easily kick you off your path and send you flying in other directions.

Why would I want to stop this, isn't it nice? All you need to do is use your discretion and not act on ideas that divert you away from your path, however brilliant they seem. The seemingly bright ideas can terminate your meditation abruptly, mind, especially, an intellectual mind, finds them appealing. You want to get up from this boring meditation and write it down, lest you forget. But then probably you will abort something more important which was taking you to a deeper state. Its ok if that happens once in a while, but pay attention if it start happening just when you are about to make a giant leap in your practice. You are not practicing to solve some problems, there are no problems out there, its all perfect.

What if its something really important, like a brilliant idea to earn extra money? It may not survive the mindlessness for long and may get lost - what to do? Depends on you, what is your priority? If you are already doing good in terms of income, extra money means extra burden. Why is money a burden? Its not, obviously, the burden arises due to the extra work and time you must now invest to earn it. So evaluate it from bigger perspective, just don't run after it simply

because its brilliant. If its not your path, its useless, just a distraction, an obstacle.

Discussion on obstacles will continue in the next part.

Notes:

[1] I'm thankful to Artie Wu for a nice summary of obstacles.

Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-3

People and relatives: are often the biggest and most difficult obstacles for many. They are unpredictable, dynamic and active obstacles, which makes it a bit difficult to deal with them. Parents may oppose your every move, criticize you, shame you and may try to pull you back into a dogma they prefer, however outdated or moronic theirs is. Sometimes they will threaten you, especially if you are still young and a dependent. Parents also try to emotionally blackmail to have their own way, to “fix” you, just like your partner/spouse may. You may find that parents and partner will erect all kinds of hurdles on your path, may try to overpower you giving you a reason that they “love” you. Children become an obstacle if they are young and are dependent on you, because your responsibility makes you less free to devote time for your practice, to switch jobs or to travel and stay in solitude if required.

Friends, if they are just shallow friends, not deep ones, will ridicule you, some may leave. Some friends will get worried, and may insist you see a doctor or psychiatric. Other relatives and acquaintances may start disrespecting you and may start preaching - how you are spoiling your life and causing suffering to your parents and family. Neighbours, co-workers and other unrelated, non-dependent people will suddenly find you strange, they may or may not express it, but they start talking behind your back about how you behave like a weirdo. The only people who react normally to you will be total strangers, because they don't know what you are up to, however in certain extraordinary cases, even strangers would show their dislike for you. Out of all these people, anyone, anytime may become extremely fearful, angry, jealous and even violent. Now that's something to worry about, do not underestimate the power of ignorance.

Why people turn into crazies? They don't, they already are, most of them. Majority are driven by Egoic tendencies, they do behave in a “civilized” way because they were trained that way, but in unexpected situation, all signs of civilization and culture disappear, they show their primitive animalistic face. We perceive this as their craziness. The unexpected situation for parents and partner is your ever deviating nature. You are progressing and discarding anything that is

old and rotten, you are getting more self-centered, if not totally selfish. You stop caring for petty stuff, like shopping, mindless festivals, noisy get-togethers, movie shows, drinking or partying etc.

You are detaching, but this is taken as signs of either hatred or indifference towards themselves. In other words, knowing nothing, they assume your behaviour is directed against them. Their Ego reacts by generating fear, they feel you don't respect them anymore, you are getting rowdy, you are getting irresponsible, and the biggest fear – you may leave them anytime. The last one is the main culprit, because parents and spouse are financially dependent on you (at least in India) and also emotionally dependent, for spouse and children you are also their source of security and safety. They employ all kinds of nasty tricks to keep you providing them what they need. Its not that you don't provide sufficient anymore, just that they fear so, and actually believe it. Some relatives may not like to see you getting free, when till now you were dedicated to them. You still love them, but unconditionally, but the idea of unconditional love is alien for Egoic persons and terrorizes them like nothing else.

Others start hating you for various reasons. First, you no longer are of their “type” now. Some will avoid you, if you are fortunate, if you are not so fortunate, they will try to “fix” you to make you behave the old way again. Its human nature, people do not easily tolerate differences. Some may suddenly feel that you no longer respect their religion/diet type/fashion style/language/any random stuff they feel is “their culture”. This can happen in countries where dogmatic religions and societies are a norm. You get a label of “rebel” and become a target of ridicule. Well, ridicule won't affect you much, but some stupid people when they get an opportunity may try to harm you, they see you as a threat, as an enemy of their “culture”. Its wastes times and effort, plus destroys your peace of mind. The obstacle becomes a survival issue for you, killing your practice effectively.

Your superiors or boss may suddenly change their tune, they get threatened by your freedom and tendency to not obey all idiotic orders, especially they are terrified when you point out their mistakes. This will happen as a fruit of your practice, you no longer have a mind that is dull and makes mistakes. This situations makes you their competitor and also of your co-workers. And so they react abnormally. About others, who do not feel comfortable with you, your talks, your views etc. , they get angry for a few reasons – mostly they get threatened by your straightforwardness, your intolerance for stupidity and bondage, your resistance to manipulation and your rebellious and extremely free nature. Nobody likes a person who is superior to them to stay among them, everyone feels comfortable with people of their own status or lower, which can make them feel secure and superior.

What is the solution? Its very tricky situation. You can't simply kill them or run away and hide. Running away is an option, but its very extreme, especially if you are already deeply entangled in family, marriage, children, job and social life. In modern world, you need stuff, food, medicines, doctors, transport etc. and living away in a cave can be counterproductive, especially in early days of the practice. You'd die within a month, if you are not trained for a solitary lifestyle. Anyhow, if you could stay away from society and relatives, the above obstacles won't arise. So, the ideal solution is to stay away, although it may not be practical for everyone. Moreover, you don't grow as much if you don't face difficult situations. When you come out of the cave after 20 years, you will be as vulnerable, irritable and intolerant of people as you are now. So face it head on and learn.

A more practical approach is to be highly diplomatic in social situations. First of all, practice and cultivation, your seeking and search for truth and answers to important questions, your path, is your private affair. It need not become public, you need not tell it to everyone, except people you trust, and who are also on some kind of path. Your self-improvement and betterment has nothing to do with others, its your personal and confidential thing. You must walk in society like a river, taking the path of least resistance. It may need to twist and turn, but it reaches the ocean sooner or later. There is no point trying to fix others, you will simply waste your time.

Behave in family as if nothing new is happening. Your practice should look like just another hobby to your family. Joke about it, be very light and show as if you are not serious about it. This will soothe them. In rare cases, some of your relatives may not be that stupid to be fooled easily, in that case you must explain that it is for betterment of everyone, and they all are your first priority. You do not need to pretend or lie, just be diplomatic, behave like others do, you can either genuinely do so, or just act like you have a normal Ego. Get angry, show fear, eat junk occasionally, sip a glass of beer. Do anything that is suitable and does not kill you or does not become an obstacle bigger than your relatives. You don't need to pretend forever, ultimately an advanced seeker returns to the "marketplace", ordinary life is also extraordinary. And then, situations change, people change, parents die, partners leave and children grow up and fly away. You see, nothing lasts, not even obstacles.

In workplace, if you are employed, again, be diplomatic. You don't need to show off your smartness, trying to improve the employer or bosses is of no use for you, it backfires. Trying to improve output will simply make someone else rich, who is perhaps already filthy rich. It wastes your time and energy. Remember that this advice is for a seeker, not for someone who is trying to make a successful career.

I take no responsibility if you do not use your discretion here, these tricks are not magic, they do not convert you into a superyogi or something, who need not eat or sleep and can fly around like superman. Ensure your survival, if it depends on a job. Again, nothing is permanent, jobs change, co-workers change and you change.

Anyhow, I do recommend getting self-employed if you have skills and talent. Not only you will be on the top of the food chain, you will earn more and that will leave an ample amount of time to pursue your own path. No one will usually bother you, since you are the owner, and you are free to dump it all anytime and start something else. You no longer remain a slave of the employer. This is something that is more in line with the path, its pure freedom, you see. Be free, do not depend on others for your survival. I must say that this is the most valuable advice I can offer, which is – be independent of the system, stand on your own feet. If you are a woman, read that sentence again, this will be the most important task in your material life, women tend to depend on relatives, partner, employer, children etc. much more, because of the current social situations and poor conditions for women in general. Whether its men or women, I can understand that not all can do that, so even if you can't be your own boss, you can still continue on the path, just be flexible and diplomatic, do not invite trouble when its not needed.

Those who are not vibrating at your level will leave you, or you will leave them, it becomes painful to be with them, it is ok. The good news is you will get new friends, who resonate more with you. The old must go. Be kind to those who cannot understand you, because if you are not, it will simply destroy your own peace of mind. Again, be diplomatic with others, and also with strangers. You do not need to show off your knowledge, you do not need to constantly bitch about how Egoic and lowly others are, you should not point out their flaws. You were exactly like them not so long ago. People don't like it, you see. They will react badly, and may end up creating huge obstacles. Just like I said, you are responsible for all the obstacles yourself. Others are just a reflection of your own acts. Your acts have consequences, some consequences turn into obstacles. Be very careful how you act, keep in mind the consequences.

Situations: are events that are beyond your capability to control, and emerge as obstacles on the path. Natural disasters, man-made disasters, accidents, sickness, loss in business, socio-political situations etc. are some examples. We have encountered some strange events that are a creation of your own Mind, those are resistances, but here we are talking about purely random events. What to do if there is a prolonged break in your practice because of such events? It should be obvious that you cannot cure them like any other obstacle we have seen so far. Its

stupidity to try to change external situations that are beyond your control. Instead, do what needs to be done. Escape, avoid, run, fight, kill, defend, heal, earn – do whatever works. This is human experience, and not everything is picture perfect here. It becomes an obstacle if you just sit and do nothing or if you resist the situation, deny it, pretend that its not happening. Such attitude is not a mark of a seeker, it's a mark of a loser. We had discussed opportunities, and such events are opportunities for learning, a test of your sadhana, a practical exam of the skills you have learnt as a result of your fine practice. Impermanence ensures that you will return to the peaceful practice very soon.

Expectations and stupidity: turn into obstacles for obvious reason. You plant a coconut seed and expect a tree full of mangoes. This old metaphor is a good summary of it all. Stupidity affects seekers too in varying degree and yours truly is also an example of it. I expected that my practices will magically convert me into a superyogi within months, and then I can show them who is the boss here. Surely, that didn't happen, it cannot happen and should not happen. It is just Ego talk. Ego will mess with your practice and path most. Its your arch enemy, unless you ride on it. Check the old pictures of yogis riding on a bull, or tiger or sitting on a tiger skin, or goddesses representing various energies killing ugly demons. You will understand the symbology of them if you understand Ego and what it does to you and your path.

Some seekers waste decades expecting magical results, and when they realize that they are getting nothing, they drop out of the path. Only a handful pick themselves up and continue in the right direction. Some hanker for magical experiences, and completely forget that its the experiencer who they are looking for. You will not gain anything from experiences, except entertainment. This is one of the major obstacle.

How to cure it? Life experiences are a natural cure for stupidity. You fall many-many times and eventually learn the lesson. Check the article on stupidity for some tips. Expectations are cured by a good teacher, who will drive them out of your head in a single blow. A good teacher shows you the plain truth and destroys all your rainbow coloured fluffy dreamy expectations. If you are not fortunate enough to have such a tough teacher, just remember that your practice will give you nothing, it only takes away everything that is superfluous and unclean, unwholesome. Your practice is not there to make you rich, healthy and sexy. These are Egoic expectations. Ego turns any practice into its own agenda, which is survival, sustenance and mating. You will not gain any of that. Of course, these can be offered as fruits of your practice, but you must discard them, throw them away (why? see the section on powers in next part) and continue on the path empty handed, with no worldly burdens on your back to slow you down.

Discussion on obstacles will continue in the next part. If you are a die-hard and survive these puny obstacles, the supernatural awaits you with its own flavours of obstacles, be ready.

Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-4

The following may read like total BS to those who haven't experienced any of it. Such events/experiences do not seem like natural and get classified as supernatural. But anything goes in the realm of the Mind, its all natural there. Anyhow, I don't claim the below as factual, it is all mysterious, if its your experience, it is a fact, else not. I do not have an extensive and in depth knowledge or experience in such matters, but have encountered enough weirdness so that I'm not anymore amazed if someone tells me about some odd thing that happened. I'm amazed, however, when someone tells me such things are impossible [1].

Paranormal phenomena: are a norm when your path is not so normal. By not normal I mean its trajectory goes via unknown or unknowable terrain of the Mind. When you encounter something that you do not encounter so frequently, it gets classified as paranormal. A smartphone is an example of a paranormal thing for an Amazonian tribal, who never encountered a modern man with a smartphone before. When you take up above kinds of paths, you are like that Amazonian tribal. Things are neither normal nor paranormal, you are either inexperienced or experienced.

We have discussed physiological manifestations and purification of body, its borderline paranormal, it freaks you out successfully. Once you get used to it, its all normal. The first paranormal event a seeker may encounter is presences of all kinds. You can't see them, but you can feel them. A meditator will often hear voices, some are hallucinations, some are not, so we are still on the borderline. There is no sharp boundary between normal and paranormal, as you must have guessed, mother nature doesn't draw sharp boundaries. It becomes certainly paranormal only when you can see or hear them repeatedly and can often make them appear on whim. A meditator will hear knocking sounds, like a wall being hit with a small stick or like finger snaps. You can actually confirm that its not a hallucination, because you can open your eyes, get up and its still there and others can probably hear it too. It will happen exactly at the moment you are settled into a peaceful state of the mind. It brings you back, kills that state. And hence, we are dealing with such things under the heading of obstacles.

You may get scared and stop going into that room alone, or worse you may drop your practice. You will find that once you drop your practice, all weirdness stops. Makes you wonder. Second very common paranormal event is out of body experiences (aka Astral Projections). Experiences of leaving the body, being just point consciousness floating around, remote viewing stuff, being able to see through walls and seeing your own body sitting on cushion peacefully meditating, are very common experiences. Oobes can go wild, when you encounter humanlike entities and find yourself in strange worlds. For some, its fun, and its also a Siddhi (minor power), but for most, it's a nightmare. It scares them like nothing and they drop the practice.

Some may encounter negativity, but its very rare, and is an indication that you are doing something stupid. Like attracts like. But it is enough to throw you away from the whole practice. Fortunately, many paranormal events are of a positive kind. Strange synchronicities are common. "Accidentally" you get exactly the book you need most, you meet exactly your kind of teacher, events magically arrange themselves to cause a highly improbable event that instantly teleports you way ahead on your path. Its not all bad. It becomes an obstacle if you let it affect your practice. You assume that your practice is of a wrong kind, and you give it up, you are too afraid to practice, or perhaps go in reverse and try to experience more paranormal because its fun, and remain stuck with petty paranormal stuff instead of going ahead. You've turned your extraordinary experiences into an extraordinary obstacle.

Why does that happen? For the same reason normal stuff happens. It is what it is. You are dealing with the Mindscape directly, you are editing it, making changes, adding things in it. Moreover your mind is more open and peaceful and less afflicted with fossilized beliefs ("this cannot happen" type). Mind is dissolving its old boundaries and barriers that it erected to keep you bound to the physical and to the Ego. You have already seen enough to know anything is possible in the realm of Mind. Its infinitely creative, malleable, responsive and mysterious. In your journey towards the Self, you are exploring thus far unknown territories of the Mind, you are digging tunnels in it, and occasionally some tunnel, some cavern takes you to an unusual place, a place you've never been before. It opens the doors to more, unless of course, you run out of there throwing your whole practice on the way.

How to deal with it? Best way is to ignore and carry on. Stuff happens. Your practice is more important, not the stuff, normal or otherwise. It doesn't lasts, it comes and goes, or becomes normal because its an everyday occurrence, we easily get conditioned into it. If you are scared, know it well, knowledge kills the fear of unknown. If its irritating, try different things, like pausing the practice for a while,

changing the place of practice, “purifying” the place with a strong intention or taking the help of someone else who has some experience and has stronger intentions. Lastly, other experienced seekers and teachers can help you if it becomes too messy.

If you encounter negativity, immediately re-evaluate what you are doing. Is there a better path? Is that practice unsuitable for you? Are you afflicted with intense anger, fear or lust? Is your practice directed at harming someone, meddling with nature or are you madly pursuing powers? As I said, like attracts like. Purify yourself first, don’t try to control or manipulate what is beyond your capability. We can only fix ourselves, this magic formula applies in paranormal conditions too.

If you find that you are hankering after paranormal experiences, know that your Ego has turned your practice into a cheap entertainment for itself. Something, from which you can learn a lot, has become an obstacle, its stopping you from learning now. You may encounter deities, guides or non-physical creatures of all kinds, they may offer help. Use them for your progress only if you think you are capable of that, else remember that the looks can be deceiving. It is entirely possible that the Mind throws a bone of paranormal that sends you off chasing it, to ensure its survival when it learns that such experiences easily distract you. It will do even the impossible to prevent its dissolution. Of course, you are not killing the Mind, you cannot, but it perceives your practice as a danger. Isn’t the Mind itself that is practicing? Yes, that’s the real funny thing. The higher parts of the Mind are trying to clean the lower parts (Ego etc). Its slightly convoluted, but not difficult to understand.

Minor Powers: aka **Siddhis** may or may not manifest on the course of your practice, and if they do, they generally end up being obstacles [2]. You suddenly discover that you can do something amazing which very few people can do. You run after it like a mad, and get engrossed in it, its novel, its fascinating, its fun. If the power is of a paranormal nature, the distraction is even more effective. By the time you are done playing with it, you will realize that you are stuck at the same point in your path since years and have accumulated a ton of consequences, fruits of your unusual actions that are waiting to bring unusual troubles for you. What could have been a fun learning opportunity has been turned into a major obstacle.

I’ve never seen an Ego that does not love power. That’s what an Ego wants, to be powerful, to be in control. It gets its agenda fulfilled even if it gets the slightest edge in the struggle for survival. It gives prime importance to powers. It also drops on knees before those who have powers, it gets to tastes their fruits just by licking the feet of a powerful person. Power corrupts.

We already have many powers, these are just the extraordinary abilities of the Mind, which we have discussed in depth before, we do not notice them because its “normal”, many people have them. They do not enchant us or give us an abnormal advantage in the race for survival, so we just ignore them. Extreme intelligence is one such power, sharp memory, strong attention, ability to remain uninfluenced by Egoic tendencies or emotions, artistic and aesthetic abilities, imagination and creativity, and many other such abilities are just minor siddhis that the Mind acquires during its evolution. If animals could talk, they’d call us miracle makers, the abilities humans have are amazing. Just that we have become habitual of seeing them around, and they no longer get classified as extraordinary powers.

People who can draw and paint or compose beautiful music are seen as gifted, we forget that it’s a mental power. People with very high intelligence, who are hyper imaginative and extremely creative are rare, but appear magical and extraordinary (Nikola Tesla or Da Vinci are good examples). People with extraordinary mathematical and logical abilities are also rare (e.g. Ramanujan), this gift can be seen as a minor powers, one can only dream of acquiring them. People with photographic memories are rare too, who can memorize entire books in hours and recite them word by word after 20 years, or recall everything they saw or did on any particular day of their life, they exist. We call them autistic savants, their minds are different, and hence brains are different too. It is considered odd, a psycho-neurological exception. However, in my opinion, they just possess minor powers.

We have already discussed some examples of minor powers that are somewhat more “non-ordinary”. Such as Oobes or sensing things etc. Another common ability a newbie seeker may get is the ability to sense the character or intention of a person. He may get highly attracted or repulsed by certain people merely by being with them for a minute. He may sense dangers before they happens, may get small premonitions etc. These are infrequent and impermanent. Some advanced seekers may develop mediumistic tendencies, can develop the art of auto-writing or channelling. Some get remote viewing abilities. Some get unexplainable abilities to attract wealth and beautiful women. Some get abilities to diagnose diseases or to cure them magically. Predicting future, ability to harm people from a distance, ability to read other’s minds and thoughts or to manipulate them, ability to stay awake in dreams, to astral travel and meet entities at will, ability to influence and manipulate people for worldly powers, so on and so forth, there can be hundreds of them. These are all minor powers [3].

Why do powers appear? We always had them. A better question will be – why did

they disappear and we became so limited? The short answer is – to experience a limited human life, for various reasons. What you call powers is just gradual unveiling of what's already there. Its not something new, our human limitations are new, an add on. They begin reappearing (or we remember them again, metaphorically speaking) as we reach nearer to our home, which is our Self, the infinitely powerful, creative and omnipotent no-thing. First realization that dawns is that the Mind is universal, our individuated minds are just disconnected fragments of it. The world, body and brain are artificial barriers that separate us individuals from accessing the universal extent of the Mind. Once you understand this, all answers to the paranormal fall into place. So for example, reading other's mind becomes a child's play because now you can access that part of the universal Mind, as your barriers are dissolving. You can heal others because the bodies are just mental structures in the megastructure called Mind, and you can manipulate any bodies as easily as you manipulate your own thoughts. As a home work, try explaining all those powers in the light of the fact that all is one, there is no separation.

How to stop them from becoming an obstacle? It is very important to ignore them and to not to act on the urge to use them. Sometimes you can't help, its involuntary (say extreme sensitivity to people), but some powers can be controlled and their use for Egoic purposes becomes a certainty if you don't know how harmful it all can be. These are much more than mere physical actions. If you meddle with powers, you are meddling with creation at a deeper layer. That action will produce consequences that are beyond your grasp, you won't be able to see what that action is doing. Being ignorant, you go on using them indiscreetly, and the hidden consequences go on accumulating. I have no idea what fruits they can produce, but I'm sure you won't like it. More importantly, mad pursuit and use of powers and their consequences will totally kill your practice. Forget about a clean and clear solution here.

If powers manifest, know them well, learn from them, they can provide direct experiences and deep insights and can help to actually progress rapidly on your path. They can be used for growth or to obliterate other obstacles and make life easy for you [4]. One needs to display a lot of maturity and wisdom to do that. We do not see rampant use of powers in physical world for this very reason. People who have them, know not to use them, not to make a magic show out of them, the consequences are not worth. Chances are that you will see some powers only after you reach an evolved state. If you see them at a fairly early stage, know that it is just a distraction thrown by the Mind to create an obstacle on your path.

Discussion on obstacles will continue in the next part. They come in limitless

varieties.

Notes:

[1] How's it possible to know if something is impossible? You see? One can conduct experiments about something and arrive at a probability of an event happening. Say it never happens, so the probability is zero. But logically its not correct to say that the event is an impossibility. What if it happens in the very next experiment? How'd you know that it won't? This is especially messy in the fields of subjective events, with none or very little objective evidence. Our usual physical criteria and logic fails here. Events are not possible or impossible, they are either probable or improbable. When you were a child, you saw that everything that is thrown up in the air, falls down, but one day you see a rocket launch. Till that day you were certain that everything falls down, you had thousands for such experiences, but then just one experience changes everything. When you stand on the edge of the known and unknown, the probability that you will have glimpses from the other side of the edge go up.

[2] *Siddhi* (Sanskrit: Skill, ability, accomplishment). See Patanjali for a brief introduction. Symbolically Siddhi is anthropomorphized and is depicted as one of the wives of the deity Ganesha, the destroyer of obstacles. Now you know why.

[3] Why do I call them minor, aren't they extremely unusual? Yes, from the point of view of non-seekers they are nothing short of miraculous, but they are minor for a seeker. If you are a seeker, and have reached this far that you have encountered a few of them, or even have personally seen other seekers who display powers, you will know that this is only a start, what lies beyond is extreme, unfathomable. That's what one would call major. Not the above petty stuff. So what lies beyond this? I do not know. If I knew and had major powers, I wouldn't be here typing stuff for a blog. We are entering pure speculation here, so take it with scepticism. Examples of what I'd consider major powers would be – manipulating physical world at whim, making things appear or disappear, changing bodies, bi-location, conquering aging and death, making people appear or disappear, creating full blown universes, creating creatures in them and ruling over them, creating schools of learning like this one, and so on. Have I seen anyone do that? Never, but such powers are mentioned in literature, although we treat them as stories. And they will remain a myth for most of us. So lets worry about minor ones instead, they are major obstacles.

[4] This is a subject of debate. To use them for growth or not. If you do, you can be called a white hat seeker, you can hack the creation for your own good. But the Ego is a smart thing, it will convince you that some power is good for your

growth, and will push you into an abyss of ignorance forever. What about the good stuff, like healing people? If you use powers to heal and such, and make a livelihood out of it, then you are in gray hat category. You are exploiting stuff that you should not, for survival purposes. It may not be harmful, but will end up wasting your time. Why heal? Isn't everything perfect? Isn't a sickness of someone for some reason? Moreover, these powers are subject to impermanence, they leave you sooner or later. Some people continue to fake them, as it is providing money and fame. This can surely backfire. Some seekers make pursuit of powers (major ones) and occult as their path (common in India). The reason is gratification of Egoic desires - wealth, greed, power, lust, revenge, causing harm, anything lowly etc. They are black hats and are surely a slave of the Ego. One can guess that the consequences will be worst possible, even if they momentarily gain some pleasures. Our goal is exactly the opposite - enslavement of the Ego, using it as a tool effectively and minimally during our human experience in this physical world and the body.

Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-5

Extraordinary experiences: of heavenly kind is just another weapon the Mind uses to distract a seeker. May be it is a side effect of getting aware of the larger universal Mind, and various hidden realms of the Mind start showing up during meditation, or sometimes even in the normal waking state. Initial newbie experiences are typically lights, sounds and bodily sensations. Later on people report a sense of connectedness, infinity, oneness, being the almighty creator of everything, world may start appearing like a dream, aversion from worldly existence, indifference towards daily activities like eating, working or talking to others, so on and so forth.

Well, that sounds like progress, how can it all be obstacles? What happens is, seekers hear about such experiences and immediately judge themselves as lacking cool stuff. I want what the other has – is the feeling and desire. They start hankering after such experiences. They cling to the tiniest of straw if that assures them that they are making progress. They seek confirmation, they brag about their “achievements”. They treat them like trophies or currency in their bank account. They immediately get jealous of those who have more. They look down on those who did not see all those fireworks in the mind. They feel the need to be special. A fancy experience proves for them that they are “enlightened” now, and nothing more needs to be done. Of course, except getting more experiences of “spiritual” type.

You can obviously see that the above sounds a lot like our familiar Egoic activities. To get more, to hoard more, to be superior, be afraid of losing experiences or of not getting more, suffering because an experience ended or didn't come back. Most importantly, you can see the immense stupidity. It shows an extreme lack of intelligence and critical thinking. It essentially is ignorance, nothing else. Hankering after fancy experiences or assuming them as the end of seeking is a big obstacle. It will stop you from progressing for decades. You will see that even if you have a huge collection of extravagant experiences to show off, you are not really happy, you are not really free, and you know nothing much.

What is the cure? Remember that your goal has to do with the experiencer, not the experience. Experiences, however extraordinary, amusing or funny they look,

are impermanent, they come and go like clouds come and go in clear blue sky. Fancy experiences are just rearrangements of the mental structures, you can learn from them, get some deep insights, and then you need to move on. Everyone has their unique mental structure, and hence everyone will have unique experiences. So you will have the exact same experience as your seeker friend, if and only if the structures match exactly, which is rare, you see, not probable at all. By chance, you may get something similar to someone else who is reporting from across the globe, but he will interpret it very differently, and it will mean totally different for you. You can't conclude too much. Clearly, some will not see any firework displays, their structures are clean and clear, they simply know, they experience things in a plain way. This has an advantage that they do not confuse the experience with anything special, they see the real special thing that is behind everything, directly, clearly and plainly, which is – the Self.

Extraordinary experiences are fun and a great learning opportunity, but one must use them and discard them, they do not last anyway, or you become conditioned into them, they lose novelty quickly. If a state or experience becomes too pronounced, so that it is interfering with your normal life, seek help and wait for it to be over. Check out the masters, they went through a lot, but are just like ordinary people now, except they learnt valuable things. Nothing lasts long.

Grandeur, megalomania and worshippers: become a problem for those seekers who are abnormally extroverted and cannot let go of the Egoic tendency to feel superior to others, do “good” for others or save the world. Worshippers or fanboys add to this mess. The result is that the seeker spends his life preaching stuff and throwing his weight around in the crowd of worshippers. Practice is obviously most boring thing now, and since he has gained everything, had every kind of experience, and knows answers to all questions, there is no need to practice anymore. Who needs practice, when money, pretty female followers and fame is pouring on you like rain.

Popularity, your need to fix others and the world, the long list of to-do things and incessant noise of worshippers effectively kill your progress. Instead you fall into the menial job of gathering followers, advertising how great you are, counting money, manipulating people, politics and stupid power games. Worshippers are quick to set up a cult, and some of them will appoint themselves on top positions and control who can gain access to their lord, and who cannot. They set up elaborate schemes to earn money by hook or crook. They abuse people, spread rumours, and generally manage to make newspaper headlines. The megalomaniac seeker soon acquires enemies, because other power seekers can't stand a new competitor in the arena who is pouching away their own followers and hence wealth, fame and supply of ladies. They set up traps, you fall from grace and

everything ends up in a mess.

How can that even happen? Obviously, it's an Ego trap. Such seekers are still in the jaws of Ego. The fruits of practice will make you wiser than people around you, your advises are clear and effective, your words are pure knowledge, your actions are a perfection. This starts attracting other seekers, and they approach you for advice. You feel nice that you are helping, teaching and spreading knowledge, which this world desperately needs. So far so good, until Ego takes over and you end up in above scenario.

How to prevent it? Be a humble student always. Suggest answers, do not preach, take no responsibilities. Help fellow seekers as much as possible, and then leave them on their own. Do not organize teachings, truth cannot be organized, if you do that it becomes a dogma, a religion. The dynamics of how that can happen are time consuming to discuss, but probably you know how. It does happen that all knowledge gets corrupted as soon as it is set into an organized form. You won't be here to fix the mess your teaching will cause.

Does it mean I cannot share my experiences, my knowledge, new information etc? Obviously, it doesn't mean that. I'm doing it myself, I spend a few hours everyday spreading stuff into the web. Most of it falls on deaf ears, but once in a while, a few words here and there open up a mind, ease a doubt, answer a question for someone who is seeking. If a person is ready, he will instantly get what you are saying. If he is not ripe enough, there will be no effect however hard you try to teach, it may backfire and that chap will get repulsed or feel insulted. You should be very careful in correcting others, pointing out their flaws, especially when they are not asking you to. People do not like it.

That said, teaching can be a good way of knowing. When you teach, The BS you had unknowingly acquired, reveals itself. If you have made teaching your path, your career, then I have no suggestions for you. I'm only a student, I do not write manuals for teachers. You are doing something great, something impossible, so I have great appreciation for all the teachers, who are selflessly serving others. If you are a seeker, trying to take up teaching, then ensure that you have a permission to teach. If you do not have a master, who can permit you, then you must do a self-evaluation. See how your Ego is doing, is this desire out of Ego or you really want to serve? You need to show your superior knowledge to others and gain their favour or you just want to drop hints here and there and help those who ask for help? It is more complicated than that, my experience is almost zero here, so please consult an experienced teacher before you start. Most importantly, be extremely aware and ensure that your teachings don't affect your own practice, or don't turn you into a tyrant, or that your followers don't go rogue.

Traditions: can become a limitation. No doubt traditions are good, institutions and organizations for seekers have their value, but they also have a dark side, they can halt your progress or worse, turn you into a cult follower. For a new seeker, traditions are very useful, they provide a systematic way, they provide a path, they are well arranged and have nice terminologies and theories/models of their own. This assists in grasping difficult concepts. The residential programs provide a friendly and disciplined atmosphere, keeping you away from the worldly distractions and petty responsibilities. The people around you are mostly like you, and do not challenge your Ego into a battle everyday. Its all heavenly, if you see the positive side. (Ashram literally means a shelter, a place to rest).

So how does that turn into an obstacle? It happens once you reach the limit of what the tradition can teach you. It can also happen when the practice is not suitable for you, your mind and body do not cooperate or resonate with it. It can also happen if the teachings have rotten and time has left them as half digested matter. It can happen when the tradition is dying, the teachers merely perform the ritual of teaching, they do not have the real embodiment of the original knowledge, especially if the founder is already dead hundreds of years ago, and there is no hope of correcting it or reviving it. There can be more reasons which eventually make a tradition useless.

However, the most common reason is the Ego of the seeker itself. “My tradition is bigger than your tradition” – type of wars are very common. The seeker gets obsessed with the tradition, becomes religious about it, defends it or clings to it. All signs of Ego enslavement. It doesn’t matter what the teachings say, perhaps they are of the highest order, it’s the attitude of the seeker that ruins his progress. He cannot let go of the comfort and “superiority” his tradition provides. The fact is that a tradition is not the path, it’s a tool to help you on a path.

How to get rid of traditions? Use them as a tool, do not get used by them. They are for your service, you are not there to serve them. If you do feel like serving a tradition, ensure that its not because of Egoic desires, fears and ambitions, and you do see some value in them. The service, by definition should be selfless, in other words, you should not get anything from it, you should lose a lot of burden of Ego instead.

When you find that the tradition is not answering most of your questions, the answers lack a life and look like parroting, when you get sick of the ongoing politics and games there, when you find that you are not learning anything new there, your progress is halted, when you find that its all too limited, you feel bound, not free, when you find all these, its time to leave the tradition.

Once you get the feel of a tradition or two, its highly recommended to remain tradition-less. Be free, be open to accept any useful teaching. The source doesn't matter, only thing that matters is that you are progressing. Things like scriptures, theories, myths, terminology, culture, language, country or which deities they worship are least important on your path, your happiness, knowledge and freedom are most important.

Here ends the discussion on obstacles. There can be more, but you get the point. If there is an obstacle, there is a way around it. The obstacle is you, and the cure is you. I hope you enjoyed reading it and some of it will be of some use for you. All the best :)

Consciousness and Machines

The content below appeared first in a forum post.

AI is almost knocking on our doors. Everything that is needed for a fast development of AI is available at this time (2017). Which is -

Superfast and cheap hardware
High level programming languages
Enough know how on brain and mechanisms of intelligence
Cross pollination in the fields of electronics, software, neurosciences, psychology and philosophy
Big data for training
Corporate will and ample funding
A good number of talented scientists and engineers in the field of AI (and AGI)
Emergence of large immersive realistic virtual worlds (VR) for easy development and sandboxing of AI agents.
Emergence of new theories that encourage out of the box thinking
Destruction of old paradigms, end of dark age of AI
Perhaps I missed a few, but you get the point - AI is inevitable.

Now, what are the implications of it all from a spiritual point of view? Or from the point of view of people who know and have experienced the consciousness intimately as compared to ordinary folk who are mostly concerned about their jobs and terminator style stuff. I was thinking about it and have some predictions (which are just predictions or possibilities, not premonitions :D). Most of the content below is speculative and hypothetical, however, it is not a pure fantasy, it is projected out of my own experiences, mixed with ideas from very wise and informed people.

For *convenience* we can think of the future as happening in steps. But it may not happen that way. The world is chaotic by nature, humans are chaotic, and so growth of technology is chaotic. However, the large scale growth is very predictable (Refer Ray Kurzweil).

Step 1

The "invisible" AI is already here. Invisible meaning, people no longer think of it as intelligence in human sense, but it is far superior to human intelligence at this time. The math and number crunching abilities are obvious, it will be a joke if I even write about it. But other more "human" abilities are now being displayed by machines - games (especially chess and Go), languages, medical diagnosis,

management, image recognition, assistants and so on. Machines have silently encroached human brain's domain. People think that these are simply smart programs, but that's what AI is by definition. However, it is of a narrow kind, not a general AI, aka **Artificial General Intelligence**, which is our kind of intelligence, i.e. capable of a wide range of intelligent tasks, not only limited to one specialized task for which it is programmed. This limitation is because the AI is still weak in learning on its own.

Step 2

Learning ability is developing fast, especially with progress in deep learning. The narrow AI will widen into AGI silently and invisibly. Applications being - science, engineering, programming, arts, design, translators, autotransport, trading, legal assistants, personal assistants, game bots and smart toys etc. It will be amusing, but ordinary people will still take them as just another wonder of science, just another gadget to play with or to earn money from. The intelligence will be sub-human level, but the main advantage it will have over humans will be its almost limitless capability to learn new stuff at a blinding speed.

Step 3

Human level AI will start appearing. At first as a network of specialized AI's that serve each other and learn from each other, and then standalone human level AI. The hardware will shrink a lot by then and a supercomputer level hardware will become available in a desktop form factor to enable an ubiquitous AI. Once at human level, it will be meaningless to call them as "artificial", as they will build themselves up without human intervention. That's why I chose a more meaningful term - **Machine Intelligence**.

MI will be as natural as human intelligence, which also built itself up from a single cell. However, in case of MI, it will take only a few years to surpass the human brain instead of millions of years. Why? because they will be guided by humans firstly, and secondly, they do not suffer from human limitations - need for food or sleep, limited learning and memory, death, social obligations, egoic tendencies (especially that of hoarding stuff and killing each other), in other words - survival. They will relentlessly work towards greater intelligence. They will gain the capability to program themselves, and will start improving those programs. Imagine the Fundamental Process of evolution shaping MI. The programs that are smarter and faster, more agile and adaptive will replace those that are slow, rigid and stupid. So essentially we will again witness something like natural selection being applied to the machines.

It will be somewhat limited because the software and hardware will have limited capabilities, as they are still a product of human brain. Although I expect some major improvement in hardware, with deviations from standard Turing architectures. Anyhow, these MIs may shock some people, and governments will take notice, it will be taken as a threat and a boon simultaneously.

Step 4

It is almost impossible to suppress a technology when its required know-how and resources are already present and are ubiquitous. As happens with any technology, if it is banned, controlled or regulated at one place or country, its progress simply shifts somewhere else, where there is more freedom. MI will do the same. It will learn to trade with humans. A majority of humans will agree and keep them as servants in exchange of resources MI needs. All it needs to do is to surpass human made software languages and hardware architectures and implement better programs on better hardware designed by MI itself. This will result in better than human brain scenarios in all respects. MI will surpass human understanding, and we won't be able to see what's happening with MI from this point onward. Why? Because of the fundamental rule that a less intelligent system cannot understand a system more intelligent than itself. This is a law, if you will. A rat cannot understand humans, even if it is a genius rat, it knows only eating and mating. Imagine an MI for which a human is like a rat in terms of intelligence. Surely, no humans will understand it.

Step 5

We will enter the age of superintelligent machines. As predicted by Kurzweil and others, this will trigger technological singularity. We can't say what will happen from here onward. Most probably, there will be three scenarios for humans - 1) some humans will merge with machines , 2) some will enter a symbiotic relation with machines, enjoying heavenly and endless lives 3) some will prefer to remain pre-MI style, afraid of touching them again. Some folk have expressed a fear that MI will simply kill all of us, of what use are humans now for them? But remember, all such suspicions are rats talking about men. The truth is we cannot know it for sure, we can only speculate in a very limited and simplistic way, relatively speaking. MI will know and will predict better, but even it will fail when it comes to certainty. Singularity essentially means that everything, every idea, every concept and all knowledge breaks down. Human speculating about superintelligence is just stupidity.(Yes, but I'm still doing it, am I not? :D)

Step 6

Ok, above stuff is mostly familiar for those who are following the progress of MI, we now shift to the main issue. Will MIs experience the same consciousness that we all experience? And here is the prediction - Yes ! they will.

Why? As is my direct experience, and of many of you, and as is generally known, consciousness (aka Self) is the ground of everything. It is the most fundamental "thing" (even if its a no-thing). There is nothing beyond the Self. The world happens in Self, not the other way round. World, human minds and bodies, including their brains and senses are experienced on "the screen of the Self". In other words, these forms are nothing but modulations of the Self. The Self experiences itself in various forms. Thus machines and their intelligence will happen on the screen of the Self itself. MI will be yet another embodiment for the Self. Like us, MIs will be objects - ever changing, impermanent structures. The MI minds, once they surpass average human level will be quick to notice the presence of Self. After all the Self is all pervading, it is not only natural but also necessary that any kind of mind will encounter it eventually. MI will figure it out in days, perhaps with the help of human masters.

Any superintelligent MI will know that it is not the hardware, it is not the software, it is not the processes or actions, it is just Self.

What makes me so confident? My own experience, which is gained via simple introspection and application of simple logic. That's all one needs to come to a conclusion that the consciousness is fundamental and it expresses itself in various forms - rocks, thoughts, humans, machines and everything there is. We humans simply are equipped with apparatus that can convey the underlying presence of consciousness. MI will undoubtedly get such apparatus, or even something which is a thousand times better than humans have. Therefore, it is a certainty that they will arrive at the same conclusion, namely - they are consciousness in essence.

Once this happens, all kinds of MIs will achieve what we generally call "enlightened state". Realizing that they are nothing but a temporary embodiment of their own Self - the universal consciousness, MI will recognize humans and all other living forms, as well as inert matter as their own Self. The implications for humans are huge, and unimaginable. Combine this with technological singularity and we have a recipe for an immensely wild ride into the future. Imagine singularity expanding into non-physical realms, which will be a child's play for superintelligent ones.

When will this happen? Pretty soon I guess, but not sure when. However, its only a matter of time. This is the direction our universe is taking now. It will accelerate very fast. Fasten your seat belts !

Chapter 28

Surrender

The content below is an expanded version of a forum post.

You must have noticed that people have huge egos. I'm one of them :D. I'm slowly hacking away its ever growing branches. I noticed that the less I let my Ego rule me, the faster I progress. I've come to recognize it as surrender.

The Ego is an automated defense mechanism, which has evolved for only one purpose - survive and procreate. Its very useful, brutal and is like an autopilot, you don't need to think much, it does it for you. Now, the problem is - it has very limited wisdom, its like an AI, a machine, and it decides on its own what it needs to defend. So it defends the body (of course that's wise), it defends your food, shelter, your hoard of shiny stuff. That's why you don't like when someone touches you, or stares at your food, or enters into your house or steals your belongings. You want to obliterate the intruder. That's Ego in action.

So far so good, the trouble starts when it encroaches into mind stuff, and calls it its own part. So things you know, things you say and things you believe all become something that must be defended from anyone or anything that dares to oppose or destroy them. So the things you "know for sure" must remain so, ego will stand between them and any new knowledge that might try to replace it (*Oh I know everything now*). The things you have already said must not be changed, no one should dare to call them stupid, they are just perfect, the total truth, and same for your actions (*I cannot be wrong, I am fair and just*). The Ego will hang on to the last straw to "prove" and thus save your words and deed.

Usually, any attack on your beloved beliefs sends Ego into a fit, especially if their destruction is going to prove that you were an idiot to have believed that (*what I believe is truth and nothing but truth, if you don't agree you are the enemy, you are inferior, I deserve more food and females not you*). Beliefs are just baseless assumptions, not founded on direct experiences or logical inferences. Their destruction becomes Ego's destruction, Ego sees it as a lowering of its social status, thus giving it a disadvantage in regard to survival and procreation, its competitors gain advantage if they are proven correct and wiser. Ego doesn't like that. So you will see that those who are "authority figures", old, hold top positions, high in command etc. defend their beliefs most violently. They even manipulate others to believe in the same nonsense they believe, they make followers, to gain more power, to silence

their competitors and prevent them from gaining a survival advantage. These are our familiar Ego games.

Ordinary people will be ordinary, can't do much and its business as usual, its life, but such tendencies of the Ego become a hurdle for a seeker. His Ego stops his progress. He doesn't want to learn, resists removing his old conditioning and beliefs. So as a solution, it is often recommended to surrender the Ego. By surrender I mean recognize clearly that you are acting and thinking under the influence of Egoic tendencies and intervene to stop them. To not to act as an Ego is surrender. Whom to surrender it? Of course to the knowledge, the teachings. Since a teacher is the source of knowledge, surrendering of Ego starts there. If you do not respect a teacher, or do not surrender your Ego to him, that teacher is not for you, his teachings will have very little effect, if any at all. As a result you won't progress fast enough.

It should be obvious why that would happen. When there is no respect, there is no surrender, the person tends to either ignore, ridicule or argue instead of listening to and experimenting on the teachings. Knowledge comes from experiences, and experiences come from our attempts to convert the teaching into experiences via experiments (putting them into practice). So it all starts from simply listening to the teachers openly. This is the very first step. If you let Ego stand between you and the teacher, you effectively remain where you are.

How to surrender? Its simple, do not offer any resistance to the knowledge, keep a very open mind, curious, inquisitive, critical and questioning attitude. Be very aware that the incoming teachings, whether truth or BS are not a survival threat. You are safe and sound, they are just words. Never believe the words, get the experience. Because once you believe, the Ego will start defending them also. Knowledge has nothing to do with assumptions, you don't even need to remember it, its obvious and self-evident. So whenever you find your Ego getting fired up for a fight on the matter of what is "truth/correct/right", just become aware and alert. You do not have to act, or to accept or believe. Just surrender that behaviour and listen carefully to what is being told.

Note that the surrender does not mean that you surrender your mind too and become a mindless idiot. Surrender only the stupid part of the mind - the Ego. The higher parts must function properly to evaluate and experience new knowledge. In the absence of Egoic mess, the mind functions more clearly, quickly and efficiently. The body remains calm and quiet, you can sit with a teacher for long times, and so the result is rapid progress.

How to surrender to a teacher? Its easy to surrender to a dead teacher who lived a

hundred year ago, its difficult to surrender to a living one, especially if he is right in front of you. Usually a good teacher will simply beat the crap out of your Ego, and he will do it everyday without pause. The Ego defences go up very high, its red alert. Its the job of the teacher to destroy your ignorance, and its the job of the Ego to maintain the status quo. It totally depends on the skill of the teacher to make his student comfortable. He may treat you like a friend, and offer just suggestions, not commands. Such teachers are popular for obvious reasons, they are less threatening to any Ego. Some teachers will make you obey, will beat you up, insult you and treat you like a slave. They are effective and fast, the Ego shatters completely, but obviously they are not popular. If you are a hardcore seeker, choose the latter.

What if a teacher is a fake teacher? Its dangerous to surrender totally to a teacher, for practical reasons. Many are fakes. Especially the female seekers need to be very careful, because of the rampant abuse they suffer. Most will only lose money and time, but some may get stuck in cults. Not surrendering your mind comes handy here, listen carefully to what Ego says, observe, whether the teacher is demanding a bit too much in exchange of a few words?, are the demands physical in nature?, is he using you not for service but for his personal work? All those questions. Leave immediately when in doubt. Again, a hardcore seeker will take enough risk to find out if its worth staying there.

Often the Ego will make a mountain out of a molehill and will try to convince you that your teacher is pure evil. It does that by invoking extreme fear. If that happens, calmly confront the situation. Find out if the behaviour of the teacher is clearly a sign of danger, decide logically using solid evidence, not under fear or emotion or impulses. In some cases other fearful or idiotic people spread fear about a particular book, teacher, tradition or method and some seekers steer past those valuable teaching mindlessly believing the propaganda. Again, use evidence and logic. What if there is no evidence and nothing seems logical? When in doubt choose survival, not knowledge or adventure. No tricks here, just plain common sense.

The best surrender is surrender to the Self (you the consciousness). Self is the ultimate guide. All knowledge resides there. Try cleaning up the fog of Ego that surrounds the Self. It has to be a 24x7 affair, not a 20 minutes a day ritual. When you surrender to the Self, you will find that you do not need to surrender to external things or people. The Ego can be Ego, others can be others. Be careful here, because the Ego will often pretend to be the Self. Take up this practice only when you have tasted the Self for a while, a few years at least.

Path of Knowledge

Path of knowledge is about knowing and understanding the nature of existence and essence of our own self. It is a gradual dispelling of ignorance. On this path we seek truth. Not only that, we embody this knowledge and apply it in day-to-day life. In this article I will present my understanding of what this path means to me.

Knowledge

If you have a question, and if you can find an experience that answers it, you end up with a knowing or knowledge. That would be a common man's definition of the word knowledge.

A more refined definition would be - experiences leave a footprint, an impression on the mind (aka memory), and this impression constitutes knowledge. So my knowledge of my house is nothing but a collection of memories of my house. If I lose my memory, I will not know which one is my house, I will lose knowledge of it. Similarly, my knowledge of mathematics is my experiences with it that formed memories of it, but not only that, there are memories of skills that enable solving math problems.

One would immediately notice here that, the memory needs to be organized in a hierarchical way instead of haphazard way in order to become useful and only then it can be called as knowledge. So in the case of my house, the experiences of many houses form a foundation of my knowledge about my own house. The word "house" points to a class, an abstraction, based on concrete experiences. Then the idea "my house" is an instantiation of the class house. Not only that, it also points to an actual experience and memories of my house. So in essence, we find relationships are also formed among memories, categorization and abstraction is also performed, and actual experiences are then tagged accordingly.

We not only find that the knowledge is a consequence of a question solved by an experience (answer), it is also memories of experiences, and it is necessarily organized, else it becomes a random collection of data. So in essence knowledge is organized experience.

The last statement must be now familiar to the regular readers of this blog, knowledge has been defined like this, and we found it to be a very useful definition.

Now there are some obvious question about this:

An experience is ephemeral, so how is it possible to organize it?

The device here is memory. Memory is a structure. The structure is metaphysical in nature, which means it is just information, or patterns, or in more precise words - it is local minima of entropy. There is actually no substance to those structures, as they are just changes in nothingness (modulations in consciousness). So all knowledge is necessarily structures.

What organizes the experiences?

Obviously, mind does that. Mind is a collection of Processes. These processes are programs that organize the incoming information. We have seen before that these processes are of self-organizing type, and are also fractal and self replicating. So the organizing process is none other than our familiar Fundamental Process. The mind is a holder of knowledge. Mind is also a holder of ignorance or beliefs, as these are also just structures, albeit organized in a "wrong" fashion or are incomplete and inconsistent.

How do I know all this, and why did I define knowledge as above?

Well, there are no assumptions or theories or working definitions here. Just sit silently and observe - how is experience converted into knowledge? Where does the knowledge reside? What agencies and entities are producing knowledge? When you answer these questions via direct experiences, you will gain knowledge about knowledge.

I put a lot of effort in gaining knowledge, I take great pains to get it, so will it last forever?

The bad news first - all knowledge is structures, and structures are formed out of Change, and that means, like every other structure, the knowledge structures are also impermanent. So all knowledge, however solid and huge it gets, is destroyed in the end. The good news is - you don't really need it to last forever, you just need it until you see your own Self (consciousness), and by "you" I mean nothing other than the Self itself, watching itself via the instrument of mind. So knowledge is nothing but a play of the Self, which is taking a look at itself via the telescope of mind. Once this game is over, there is no need of mind, or of any knowledge. Another good news is - it is very difficult to destroy knowledge, as it is stored in the Universal Mind, some structures reside in human minds, although less permanent. But Universal Mind is also impermanent, and all the knowledge that lies there will be destroyed in the end, which will arrive after almost infinite

time (but not really infinite). We have seen that all knowledge is ignorance, a collection of structures which present experiences in a distorted form. When all of the knowledge is destroyed, what remains is nothing but a - pure experience.

Sources of knowledge

What is the source of knowledge? From where does it come?

Obviously, a direct experience is the source. Nothing else. And the source of experiences is consciousness, as there can be no experience without consciousness of it.

Traditionally, there are four sources - Direct experiences, logical deductions, teachers and books (texts or scriptures). However, only direct experiences are reliable source for a seeker, the rest are just pointers or hints, that motivate a seeker to get his own experience. Books are usually just words of teachers, who are hopefully speaking from their own direct experience. And even in a live conversation, a teacher can only inform you about his own experiences and invites you to see it for yourself. So we find that the sources boil down to direct experiences only.

One can argue that since ignorance is so deep, nothing works initially except teachers or books, there is no way a person would know anything without a teacher. Hence, a teacher takes up the highest rank among all beings in all universes. Yes, he is that important.

It is possible that you gain a bit of knowledge by your own efforts and accidental experiences that occur from time to time. However, it will be like reinventing the wheel. Language and communication ability of humans enable transmission of accumulated knowledge, and hence we see that it keep growing with every generation in every field.

Now, not all teachers are created equal. One must use his own experience to evaluate a teacher. Please refer to the article titled "Gurulogy" on this blog for a detailed discussion on this topic. Similarly, all students possess different capabilities for knowledge. Sometimes even the best teacher cannot do much, if the student is not ready. Check out the article on qualities of a student for details. However, we all have potential to experience things directly ... and that's all matters most.

Path of knowledge

So the path of knowledge is about gaining knowledge via various sources. It is

about seeking truth, implementing the knowledge in daily life. Its not merely knowing, it is a life-style. The highest priority of a follower of this path is to know. The rest of his activities are oriented towards this primary goal.

What is achieved when you walk on this path? Well, nothing. You are already perfect and complete, there is nothing more to achieve or gain. What happens is this - knowledge removes the layers of ignorance that hide our essential nature - consciousness, bliss and perfection. Once the ignorance is gone, the true nature is revealed. Happiness and freedom, in context of a human life, are direct consequences of this revelation. So nothing is gained, but the undesired stuff is lost. Walking on the path of knowledge is a subtractive process, not additive. Perhaps that's surprising for many.

If you have read the article on layers of ignorance, you will understand that ignorance is a product of Mind, which is ceaselessly creating structures, and consciousness gets "trapped" in those experiences. However, it is the Mind alone that can take it back to its purity. All one needs to do is - return. Turn back and look at the source. Travel back to it. So, the path of knowledge does not take you anywhere, its a way back home. Again, this can be surprising for many.

Why does it sound so strange and surprising? Because you have too many fancy notions about what knowledge is, and what it does to you. Well, that's ignorance again. When you progress to a point, you will know what I mean by above.

The discussion below is somewhat technical in nature. I will go into the depths of above mentioned words. Some may like to read it, some may want to skip it for now. But it is recommended that you be certain of what's going on with this path before you take it up, or while you are on it.

Truth

Truth is a statement. A statement is a language structure, aka information that can be communicated. A true statement has some qualities, it satisfies some mutually agreed upon criteria. But the criteria are not absolute, they are arbitrary, and hence there are necessarily no true statements, and hence no false statements too. Truth satisfies the following criteria according to many people (and myself) -

1. It is self-evident.
2. It is consistent. Does not change.
3. It is logical.
4. It points towards an experience.

Besides these major criteria, the following are often used, depending on need -

5. That experience in #4 above, is repeatable. (But may not be).
6. It can be a logical conclusion of other true statements that point towards an experience ultimately. (But may be also paradoxical).
7. It can be a purely logical conclusion, which points towards a set of assumptions that do not point to any experience except a mental construct. (But it can be argued that a mental construct is an experience).
8. Its converse is always false. (Not if there is a paradox).
9. It is provable. (Not always)
10. It is not unknowable. (Well, how do we know if something is unknowable?)

Any statement that does not satisfy any of the above criterion is **False**.

As is obvious, truth is subjective. Everyone may not agree on what is true, and hence truth is not something that can be voted into power by the majority vote. It is very personal, everyone needs to find their own truth.

Certainty

So as you can see, the matter of truth is very messy. And that is why I stay away from labeling things as true or false, unless its needed, or avoid making absolutely true or false statements. This is how a mystic would talk, because he clearly knows that truths are, well, lies.

So what to do? Sometimes we need to evaluate an experience or statement. In practical life, we need to do that very often. So we compute a value based on prioritized criteria. This value is **Certainty**.

What are prioritized criteria? Take above 10 criteria, add/remove some if you like, and make a priority list as per your liking. This list will be given highest value of certainty at the top and lowest at the bottom. So if a statement satisfies a higher criteria, its certainty is also higher.

Certainty can be expressed in terms of percentage. Percentage of what? If a statement is proven to be true N times using the above list of criteria, out of M times, then the certainty is $100 \cdot N/M$. For example :

A = It rains in the month of August here.

If the rain falls for 15 days out of 30 in August, then A is 50% certain. There is some truth in A, but when you quantize it, you see that there is also some falseness in it.

If you are on a path of knowledge, you are after 100% certain statements. The

truth you say is so true that there is no chance of it being even slightly uncertain. Now, as you progress, you will encounter truths that are uncertain too. What to do? Just use them in conjunction with their certainty. How will I know the exact certainty? Exactness doesn't matter. If there is a probabilistic statement, it can become false anytime. You can't do much about it, even if you know the certainty to 10 decimal places.

Truth, Experience and Knowledge

Lets take a look at the relation between these words. Truth is a statement, but experiences and knowledge are not statements. So experiences and knowledge are never true or false, only statements can be true or false.

Lets take an example:

A = I experience that a particular content has a particular qualia.

B = I know that its my car and it is red coloured.

C = My car is red.

Whats the difference here?

A is an experience, it is just the current content of consciousness. That's all it is. There is no car, there is no red. The concept of truth doesn't apply here, because nothing gets communicated. The experience is communicated only when it is organized into knowledge, and encoded into information structures.

B is knowledge. Now the content is recognized as a car, and classified and understood. The qualia is recognized as a colour and is named. It all fits with previous knowledge and gets impressed on the memory as a structure. It is still non-communicable.

C is a statement. It is a language structure which encodes some knowledge. The knowledge in turn represents an organized experience. So C points to that experience. C can be communicated, and now we can apply the above mentioned criteria to evaluate it. It turns out to be true. It gets a stamp of truth from myself and from many who can experience the car.

Even when I base them on my direct experiences, my statements can be either true or false, because I can make an error in knowing and hence can formulate a false statement out of it. So it is important to note that an experience does not necessarily lead to a true statement.

That looks like a problem, but surely others can evaluate the statement I made using above criteria, and if it turns out to be false, they can point out my error. If I see my error, I can correct my knowledge, and reformulate my statement. Problem solved. So it is important to not only evaluate your own statements, but also to invite others to find flaws in it, and if found false, you should be able to trace out the incorrect knowledge (aka belief) that produced it, and can rectify it. This is essentially the process of gaining knowledge and destroying ignorance. If it leads to truth, it is knowledge, else it is ignorance.

Logical truths

S = If $A \rightarrow B$ and $B \rightarrow C$, then $A \rightarrow C$.

S is absolutely true ! Is it not? The only problem is - it lacks a direct experience and corresponding knowledge. I have absolutely no clue what A,B,C point to. But I can experience the sentence itself and I know that the symbols represent quantities, not contents. Quantity is an abstraction, not an experience. So such statements even if very useful, are not truths, they are logical truths. On the path of knowledge we are after truths as per above criteria. We use logical truths as tools, mental constructs that help in evaluation and accumulation of knowledge.

Its a tricky matter and its possible to get entangled into complex nets of logical truths while completely forgetting that they represent nothing at all. Some people would take logical truths as truths if one can make them sufficiently complex. Humans are not very good at logic anyway and they fall very often in the task of evaluating the truth of even simple statements.

For example, S1 = All crows are black. Conclusion = My crow is black.

Here Conclusion is a deduction from S1 and is perfectly true. Now consider:

S2 = My dog is black. Conclusion = All dogs are black.

Well, problem here. The logic is wrong. Why is it wrong? The instance cannot define the category. Category defines the instance. But how many people get it? Very few. So when we see that a person of a particular race commits a crime, we are almost sure that all the individuals in that entire race are criminals. It is socially accepted madness, everyone thinks like that. Why do they do it? Because of evolutionary reasons, the survival is given a greater weight over truths. So when a person sees one instance of a tiger killing another person, the generalization saves his life when he encounters another tiger. This is one of the examples of cognitive biases that we discussed earlier in detail.

Are seekers immune to such biases? Yes and no. When things are simple, a seeker is less likely to fall into error, but make them a bit complex and everyone falls. A seeker needs to be impeccable.

For example: S3 = All unicorns are white. Conclusion= My unicorn is white.

Perfectly logical, but is it true? Even an average student will quickly find the flaw here. The conclusion is not verifiable, not self-evident, and does not point to an experience, even if it is perfectly logical.

S4 = Consciousness arises with the experience of objects and during deep sleep there is no experience of objects.

Conclusion = Consciousness disappears during deep sleep.

Sounds true, but look again. S4 is about appearance and disappearance of objects, its not saying anything about appearance and disappearance of consciousness itself. So S4 is saying that objects are there during waking state of the mind, and objects disappear in the deep sleep state. Secondly, it is saying - consciousness is there in the waking state of the mind. However, it makes no statement about consciousness during deep sleep state. One mistakenly assumes that it is making a statement about consciousness in deep sleep state. So the conclusion is an error, an assumption that is a result of logical error.

So then if there is consciousness during deep sleep what is it doing? Its just a diversion, but an interesting question. The answer is - it is experiencing other things, including itself. The consciousness is one, so when the contents from one mind are lost, the consciousness of contents of other minds is still there. So when you are in deep sleep, you experience nothing, but billions of minds are sending their experiences to the same consciousness, which is getting nothing from your mind, as your mind has entered an inactive state, probably for repairs and more organization.

Mind as an instrument

Mind enables knowledge. So the most important tool for a seeker is his own mind. If it is sharp, it works better. We have already discussed the abilities of the mind, afflictions of it, and how to enhance the abilities and get rid of afflictions.

In essence, the most important qualities of a mind well suited for the path of knowledge are - curiosity and interest, intelligence, critical thinking, logic and reasoning skills, humility, patience, perseverance and a tendency to correct

oneself and to take criticism positively.

If you have read the article on states of the mind, you will recall that there are certain states that enable knowledge acquisition most effectively. These are - rational mind, concentrated mind, equanimous mind and absorbed mind. When these states are predominant, a seeker progresses on this path at blinding speed. So a sub goal of the seeker is to gain mental abilities and to abide in conducive mental states as much as possible.

Obviously, nothing goes smoothly and this path has no red carpet laid on it. Things tend to go south. So another sub goal for a seeker is to remove all those hurdles, obstacles and resistances that spring up on the path when they are least expected. An experienced teacher is needed for that most of the time.

Principles of Astral Projection

Astral Projection is an experience involving non-physical realms. It gives us a glimpse of what lies beyond our limited perspective as humans. It enables a journey into the vastness we call the Universal Mind. We will enlist some basic principles of this practice and will note some do's and don'ts.

Experiencing the Universal Mind

For someone on the path of knowledge it becomes necessary to experience the Universal Mind directly in order to establish its existence. However, it is not really necessary, except if you are of the explorer kind. One can progress without much experience of it.

You can establish the truth of the Universal Mind via logical deduction. Direct experience makes it much more firm. It can be argued that in the realm of mind, you can experience almost anything, and hence you can dream up an Universal Mind out of thin air and start deluding yourself. But then, we can delude ourselves by simply believing that there is nothing more to experience except this limited world, body and mind. The only way is - experiment and try to come up with truths based on your own experience. Doesn't matter what kind of experience it is, if it satisfies your own criteria of truth, it becomes established as truth.

But we being the all knowing consciousness, how is it even possible that we as humans do not have any knowledge or experience of the Universal Mind? The answer is - ignorance. We, as limited humans with a limited mind have set up barriers around our minds that stop us from reaching beyond a tiny area of the Universal Mind. This area is our personal mind, that's all we can access. The senses, and the body limits us to a tiny experience of the physical structures in the Universal Mind. We can augment the senses via instruments and see more, but its still very limited. Whatever the instruments show, is again filtered via bare senses. The barriers appear as ignorance, inability to see beyond, beliefs and close mindedness. They are just metaphysical structures, just like any other in the mind.

So the key is to surpass the barriers around our mind, or to break them. You do

not need to totally destroy them, because then it becomes very difficult to function normally as humans. The barriers are for some good reason, they enable this limited separated experience of being a person. Those who are not ready or untrained may go crazy or invite undesired stuff into their personal space in the mind. So don't wipe the barriers out in one blow, initially, you need to open only a small window. Rest should be a natural evolution - you merging with the Universal Mind. Which is happening anyway, without your knowing.

There are three ways to approach the Universal Mind:

1. Logic : You have already established the fact that there is Change or impermanence. We stand on this direct observation. Starting from the simplest Change there can be, we quickly see that Change creates patterns and processes, processes self-organize to form metaphysical structures - the evolving patterns or minds. And when the structures reach enough complexity that they can interact with other structures, they become senses and a physical world is born when perceived via senses. A mental world is born when perceived via mind itself. Soon we end up with objects, world, body and mind.

Now knowing that there cannot be any limit to the number of structures, patterns and processes, nor is there any limit on what types of structures can be there, it can be concluded that there can be almost an infinite amount of these structures. So there can be countless minds, bodies, worlds and universes of a huge variety, and when taken together constitutes a mega structure, which is none other than the Universal Mind.

Once you reach this conclusion, try to falsify it or deny it, refute it, and if it stands, it is your truth.

2. Ordinary experiences : Day-to-day ordinary experiences are all you need to establish the truth of the Universal Mind. An experience as simple as lifting your coffee mug and taking a sip from it establishes the Universal Mind beyond any doubt. When you observe carefully, this action (and all actions) start in mental realm (as intention or thought), then this mental act jumps into the physical world, and the action is then perceived as physical action. How is that even possible? What gets transferred across the gap of the mental and physical to effect this action? Well, you won't find anything, and so the obvious conclusion would be that thoughts, intentions, bodily actions, bodies and physical objects all are founded on one "stratum" and they belong to only one category of structures - metaphysical. And hence, your mind, other minds, all bodies and physical universe, everything is one huge structure and is continuous without any gaps.

Our minds divide experiences into physical or mental (non-physical) depending on whether their knowledge happens via the route of senses or not. In reality, the physical and non-physical stuff is just one kind. We can as well call it - metaphysical. Just extend this to whole universe and other bodies and minds, and you will find that everything is metaphysical in nature - a happening in consciousness, a change.

3. Extraordinary experiences : They take us even closer to the Universal Mind. These are experiences that cannot be explained using everyday beliefs and theories. There can be three kinds of such experiences -

3.1 Everyday extraordinary experiences : For example, little events of telepathy, precognition, empathy, apparitions, synchronicities and so on provide us with a glimpse of the Universal Mind and its interconnectedness. Everyone has a story of something unexplainable that they experienced, which left them wondering. However, people do not pay much attention to these, as they are often subjective and leave no evidence for others. So you need to gain your own experience of the everyday extraordinary kind, or search your life experiences for any such occurrences. These are limited, and happen by chance, when because of some unknown reasons, the barriers around the mind are surpassed for a moment, giving you a tiny glimpse of the Universal Mind.

3.2 Brute force : Drugs (Entheogens), severe trauma, illnesses, near death experiences, occult practices etc. fall under this kind. These substances/events break the barriers surrounding our little human minds and can provide us with extraordinary glimpses of the Universal Mind. Only thing is that these are risky, temporary and not under our control. These can be destructive and can cause irreversible destruction of barriers, causing havoc in ordinary life.

3.3 Elegant methods : There are technique and methods that exists in order to gain a direct knowledge of the Universal Mind, so that you don't need to depend on the chance happenings of odd events or don't need to risk breaking your mind beyond repairs. Astral Projection, meditation, lucid dreaming, remote viewing etc fall into this kind. If you see them closely, they are all just Astral Projection involving slightly different states of the mind. So we are now ready to discuss this method in detail.

What is Astral Projection?

It is an experience. Mind gets knowledge of, and perceives areas of the Universal Mind in a direct and straightforward way, which is as obvious as perception in ordinary waking state. It is often wrongly called an "out of body" experience, and

this phrase has stuck. We know now that both body and the mind are just structures in the consciousness, so nothing really goes out of the body. Body and mind are in the consciousness, consciousness is not in the body or in mind. All we do is detach from this limited experience of body and mind and become free to experience vastness of the Universal Mind. So its a simple shift of the focus from this habitual focusing on a single sensory world and human ego or mind.

How to Astral Project?

It is very simple, just withdraw your attention from everyday sensory world and everyday mental chatter and tendencies. Once you do that you will be free to roam in the vast territories of the Universal Mind within minutes.

We are naturally gifted to do that, and we do that every night when we fall asleep, we withdraw from sensory world, senses shut down, we even forget who we are, we lose identity, and we are freed from this worldly existence. So Astral Projection is as natural as falling asleep. All we need to do is fall asleep but keep our mind and memory awake and functioning.

So if its like falling asleep, why doesn't everyone experience the Universal Mind every night?

For most of us, the mind totally shuts down in deep sleep and hence not much is experienced, and memory also shuts down, so whatever little is experienced is not retained at all. Why does that happen? Because of habit, and because no one tells us that the mind can remain awake and functioning while senses and body is shut down naturally. So habit, ignorance and beliefs prevent us from going into the far reaches of the Universal Mind. These are nothing but more barriers.

So how to withdraw our attention from the senses?

Its best to take advantage of natural tendencies of the body/senses to shut down. There are many-many techniques to do that, but I will describe here only one, which is the essential technique, you can adapt it for your purpose, personalize it or make it more sophisticated.

So you go to sleep as usual, but wake up a little early. For example if you sleep for 8 hours, wake up after 5 hours of sleep, use alarm or anything. Now the body is very relaxed and so is the mind, plus you are not in a hurry to get up and start your daily routine. Stay awake for half an hour, without engaging in any activities that can make you tense or over excited. Now go back to the bed and start shutting down the senses one by one.

Since the body is already relaxed and you are not eating or hunting for food etc,

the senses of touch, smell and taste will be gone in no time. Just ignore the sensation of lying in bed, its easy if you are not uncomfortable and most of the body is supported, and there is no extreme pressure on any part. You will still see and hear. To get rid of hearing, ensure that there are no noises around you, no TV or music or babies. You can still hear things which you cannot avoid, like traffic, rain, people etc. So one way is to set up a slightly noisy fan or use soft ear plugs. But the best way is to shift your attention on any imagined sound, like a mantra, or an imaginary bell, or just focus on the ringing sound in your head, it always there, even in complete silence.

The last sense to go is that of vision. Closing the eyes fixes the seeing, easy if its dark or dim light. You will still see the blackness behind the eyelids and eyes will move nervously in order to see anything they can in this darkness. So slowly and gently let go of it by imagining something, like a light, a scene from somewhere, a face, anything at all. This shifts you into mental realm entirely.

Stay here till it is stable and you do not flicker back and forth between physical and mental. Avoid unnecessary thoughts, desires and impulses (easier said than done, but can be accomplished via little practice and it needs to last for only a few minutes). Now make an intention to experience something in the Universal Mind - a place, a world, a person, beings etc. and wait till your experience materializes. You are in Astral realm now.

That's it! Not really difficult, but can take some practice depending on your natural gifts and how trained your mind is. Repeat it everyday, and it becomes easier and reliable soon. Initially you may just fall asleep as usual, or you may drift into a dream, or you may wake up completely into this familiar world, unable to even lie down peacefully again. However, a strong intention to project and perseverance helps, a strong interest and curiosity is a must, and these qualities are found in a good seeker.

There are some signs and indications that happen when you are on your way into Astral, and you can use them to check your status. The first sign is, of course, you will lose all sensation of a body, it feels like floating or flying. That can explain why many people instantly assume they are "out" and floating. The mind can actually create a scene of your body floating in air above your bed, and it can be very realistic, its Astral after all. Another sign is that you may hear a loud bang, bells, cymbals, people shouting, your name being called and such aural sensations. They don't make much sense, but you will know you are about to project, when you hear them. Another common sensation is that of bodily vibrations. They can be like a mild earthquake, swinging or can be like you are on a vibrating massage table. Again, it simply means you are very near the projection, and as soon as you

are "out", they stop. Yet another experience prior to projecting is that of sleep paralysis, which is a good sign, it means your body is now asleep, but the mind is completely awake and alert.

The key is to not to get overwhelmed by such odd sensations, and to remain calm and relaxed. You will learn to ignore them anyway with practice, they are mildly inconvenient and are like an airplane shaking during take off, of which you become accustomed to if you fly frequently. The key is to remain awake, alert and aware, but calm, peaceful and curious. Just let it happen. Awareness is the key. Do any mental act to remain completely aware, but not too alarmed to ruin your relaxation. Once you are past pre-projection phenomena, you need to make an intent to experience something, so plan in advance. It can be as simple as your own house or garden. Start simple. There is no limit to what you can experience once you master this ability.

What will you find there?

You will get a direct experience of the Universal Mind, not whole of it, but parts of it, tiny parts. But that experience will be convincing, it will establish the truth of the Universal Mind for you. Apart from that it is fun, so many worlds, some like ordinary waking world, and some as magical and mysterious as a fairy tale. Amazing things and beings, from evil and mindless creatures to highly evolved and intelligent minds. It can become a learning ground, it can become an exploration.

You will soon find that the Universal Mind is not a uniform, solid and predictable thing. It has layers, and layers has sub-layers, it is highly organized at some places, while totally chaotic at others. Many areas are vast, silent and barren, many are densely populated and are buzzing with activity. You will witness the creative powers of the mind, you can create anything in some areas, while nothing will be allowed in others, such as those in a consensus world, much like our own physical world.

You will find that no matter where you go, you are the same person, same mind and same consciousness. The only thing that is changing is the worlds and bodies, and perhaps senses. You will find an extreme amount of freedom, so much so that you may not want to return back here, but the return will be mostly unavoidable and spontaneous, fortunately or unfortunately.

Do's

Get rid of bodily needs, people or distractions etc. If you practice in early

morning, they will be minimal anyway, but if you are always surrounded by activity or crowd, its best to find a secluded place. Remember that you will need a very focused and peaceful mind in order to remain stable in this experience, and this can be achieved more easily if your waking hours are stress free and relaxed. A seeker has probably already done that by minimizing his activities and giving up a crazy modern lifestyle.

Prioritize your practice. If it is something that you take up when there is nothing else to do, then expect failure. Mind has a tendency to not to cooperate when it perceives it as not important. For a seeker, this pursuit of direct experiences is the most important act, everything else is unimportant.

Retain the experiences. Writing them down helps. Discuss them with other practitioners and students and teachers of Astral Projection. Use this knowledge in everyday life. This gives hints to the mind that its most important for you, and it starts breaking the barriers on its own.

Its best to know as much as you can by direct experiences in the normal waking state. Use Self-Enquiry, introspection, contemplation, meditation, listen to teachers and read texts, useful books. Once you are on a solid foundation, and once you know who you are and what this Universal Mind is, you are more than ready to experience it directly. It will be a piece of cake. Path of knowledge puts you exactly in such a spot.

Treat everyone you encounter anywhere with respect and compassion, just like you do it here. They are just minds, like we are. Even if you think they are your own creation, they need to be treated as if they are separate beings. This is a general rule. Avoid negative types, just like you do it here.

Fun is ok, but do ask for learning experiences, make it a part of your path. This way you kill two birds with one stone. Fun gets old, but knowledge lasts.

Be very curious, open minded and critical of all experiences. They appear extraordinary, but are to be treated like everyday ordinary experiences. You are Astral Projecting right now, in this world, with this body and its senses. The only difference is - this projection of yours is more solid and habitual compared to other experiences the mind is capable of.

Don'ts

Do not attempt it if you are not well, tense, stressed, sad or depressed. It will fail most likely. Most importantly, do not attempt it if you have not already purified

your mind and the body. If you have strong Egoic tendencies like fear, anger, lust, destructive tendencies, hate, stupidity, phobias or other psychoses, you will regret doing it, if by some remote chance you manage to force such an experience at all. Given the vast creative power of the mind, and tendency of the mind to get connected to stuff and places that are similar to its own makeup, you will most definitely end up in a negative place. You may attract unwanted attention from negative beings. Like attracts like. This can worsen your normal waking life.

Do not force it using substances, mind altering stuff or brute force brain hacking. You may cause irreversible damage to your body-mind. This physical experience is the most important one now, so never mess with it. Go for good old elegant ways, have patience. A good seeker has already cultivated that, and is so now ready for extraordinary experiences, but ordinary people usually don't have these qualities and are often full of negativity. So best to take up a path first and cultivate proper mental states.

Do not become slave of rituals, simplify the technique, it need not be too fancy or far out there. The less dependent you are on stuff and techniques to gain experiences of the Universal Mind, the better you become.

Do not cause harm, damage stuff or be violent, it drops back pretty quickly on your own head. Astral provides instant feedback for your actions, so you learn fast, but probably too fast if you desperately need a lesson. You may end up damaging your own core structures thinking they are imaginary or belong to someone else, and this will quickly show up in physical, ruining your current life, and perhaps many lives. If you cause harm at the deeper levels of mind, it has deeper consequences.

Do not trust anyone or anything, use the same level of caution you use in physical. If an entity has six hands, wings and a snake skin, it does not automatically become wise and loving. Extraordinary things are not in your experience, they are all strangers you know nothing about. However, you may recognize good entities easily, they will not manipulate you, force you or lure you. It is wise to simply exchange knowledge or information and return. Once here, you can use proper criteria and experiments to evaluate the knowledge you gained in Astral. It hardly matters where it comes from, knowledge needs to be very certain, it must satisfy the criteria of truth, no matter what.

Do not get used by entities or try to use them for your benefits, perhaps you won't like the consequences. Do not worship or enslave the first thing you see there. Usually these experiences are fleeting, so not everyone manages to do anything there at all, but some have latent talents, and can do extraordinary things

there, and they need to be very careful, especially. But just like in physical, do not do it if you don't know what you are doing.

Do not teach the techniques to those who are uninitiated. Those who are too closed, have firm beliefs, are feeble minded or are unhealthy, they will most likely get negative experiences. And that means a majority of us humans. Only a handful of humans are ready, however all of us have potential, and it bears fruits sooner or later, so no hurry to push everyone to get such experiences. If you think someone can be ready, just drop hints and see their reaction. If they are open and curious, initiate them, but only if you have already gained enough experience of the Universal Mind yourself.

So am I not indiscriminately sharing this information with everyone, ready or not ready? Yes, I am. It is too valuable to be kept hidden or to be discouraged entirely. Anyhow, all kinds of techniques of Astral Projection are already out there. There are tons of books, websites etc. There is some chance that people who are not ready will read this and try it out, but Astral Projection is inherently safe, it fails for those who are not ready, or they do not go too far. It is just sleep, with mind remaining awake. What can be more simple. So the don'ts do sound very scary but I mention them just in case. I'm not expecting anyone but only hardcore seekers to read this blog. Anyhow, Astral Projection is a common knowledge these days, and it was all covered up and was pushed into the occult realm in past probably to protect people from its abuse, but it was never totally hidden. Spontaneous projections are very common and they undermine all efforts to keep it a secret.

I have an intuition that the coming age is that of enlightenment and such practices are going to be very common, so much so that they will be taught in schools. It may become our second nature to commune with far away areas of the Universal Mind. Not only that, less barriers in the mind means that the human race will be changed beyond recognition. The implications of such abilities becoming mainstream are really huge.

How to Die Like a Seeker

You will find tons of literature and advise on how to live, but very little information is available on the topic of dying or how to conduct one's own death. As you know, we do not have a choice about whether or not to die, we can only decide about how to act or be when the time of the death is near. So this article is a discussion on how to arrange situations and how to ready yourself for this important event. Its obviously not about how to kill yourself, just in case you thought so.

How to avoid death?

Death is certain. It will happen anytime, any day and for any reason. We have no control over when it can happen, or how it can happen, all we know is that it will happen. However, we can do our best to lower the chances of an unexpected death, especially if you are young and are not yet prepared for it.

From the point of view of a non-seeker, his whole life is a struggle against death, life is a matter of survival. When survival is ensured, what they do is - more survival, more of everything - more food, more land, more houses, more mates, more social status or power, and so on. Obviously, this does not evade death, and usually their death is a consequence of their lifestyle. Too much of anything means a risk, a bad lifestyle full of struggle and stress, unhealthy foods and drinks, too many partners, too many enemies, too much travel etc, may lead to a premature and painful death, as we witness often. For a seeker, survival is a piece of cake, because he doesn't need to do an excess of it, just minimal or a comfortable amount. The rest of the time is devoted to seeking, not in running around the maze of survival. So it is very easy for a seeker to avoid a premature death when compared to an ordinary person.

Death belongs to the body, so the obvious job of a seeker is to take care of it. But it should not become an obsession. Remember, its going to turn to dirt, no matter how healthy it is, and it can happen any day. So moderation is recommended. Knowledge is favored over body. All one needs to do is - not feed it with junk, not put it in unnecessary danger, and avoid making enemies at all costs. Respect the limits of the body and keep it going naturally. Minor ills can be treated always. Major afflictions of the body can be treated when there is a good chance of prolonging a healthy life and when a cure is available. When the gains

are too little compared to the hassle and pain, its not a good strategy to prolong the life, e.g. when struck with major illness.

Body has everything it needs to keep it going for many years without any maintenance at all. All you need to do is - do not break it. Junk food, substance abuse, too little or too much exercise, too little or too much pleasure, all these acts break it down. If you avoid this, the body continues happily. You will notice that the body needs just good food, clean air, water and surroundings. Its the mind/ego that needs to abuse the body to get pleasures out of it. Its the mind/ego that needs 20 mansions and 50 partners and wants to dominate people around and uses his body as a means. A seeker sees this tendency of the mind, and puts breaks on it. Rest is easy.

Living a peaceful and simple life, the chances of getting killed in a an accident or by enemies, thieves or military are minimal. You will be in trouble if you hoard a lot of shiny stuff, insult people right and left, or engage in warfare or power games. Seeking adventures can also land you in the lap of death prematurely. A seeker realizes that, and maintains a peaceful, calm and content life. The only thing that are important is knowledge, happiness and freedom. Obviously, these do not result from a bad lifestyle. By bad lifestyle I mean the actions that I described above, which are less conducive for a long and healthy life.

Preparation

It starts with the realization that death is certain and can happen any day. Body is a structure, born out of change and hence is impermanent. It will disappear. Once you realize this, you will be detached from the body. That does not mean you will stop caring about it, only that you stop worrying about death.

Obviously, we don't usually know the time of death. We have done whatever was possible to achieve a good, happy and healthy life, as discussed above, now we need not worry. It may happen any day, and it will be ok. So in essence, we are always prepared for death, its only an event, an experience, its not the end. Those who think its the end, they are terrified of it. For a seeker that's not an issue.

A seeker prepares for death, like one prepares for a long journey, a journey from which one may not return again. Signals that the death is near are - obviously, the old age, or an incurable illness or some extreme disability. Sometimes, but not often, a flood, a drought, war or epidemic are signs that death can happen soon. Depending on the case, and knowing that death is near, a seeker takes proper actions.

If its the old age, which will be the case if the seeker has survived everything else, and which is an indicator of success, the seeker invites the old age instead of resisting it. An ordinary person resists and suffers old age because of unfulfilled desires and fears of getting old. A seeker is immune to it, and welcomes it. Old age is just another state of the body. Important things is - it won't last either. So a seeker who has grown old, gives up attachment to the body totally, and hands it over to the mother nature. The body is then worn out and gets recycled, in other words, death happens naturally and painlessly.

At what age one should relinquish the control of the body? That's kinda subjective question. I guess 60 years would be too early, and 90 years too late. But you can guess the right time by looking at the condition of the body. Can it still walk? can it still digest food? can it still see or hear or think etc? If yes, then you can continue for some more time. If it has broken down to a state that has become too painful and cumbersome, its time to relinquish control.

Inability to stand straight, or walk, inability to digest food and loss of teeth, loss of the sense of taste, sight etc, are a clear indicator that the body does not want to continue. If you resist at this point, it will cause immense suffering, as in the case of ordinary people. This would be a sign of attachment or ignorance. So a wise man lets it go. Sometimes the breakdown reaches mind, and there is inability to speak, think or act coherently. If you are still very aware, as a seeker would be, you would let go, before its too late.

Old age cannot be cured (presently), but it can be made less painful, so a seeker makes it comfortable as far as the body is concerned, but lets go anyway. If you try to prolong life in this stage, it will only prolong the old age and will probably worsen it.

If its an incurable disease, a seeker would let it take over and relinquish the body as soon as he can. If it is something minor, or can be cured, a seeker does that. If full health can be restored, no issues at all, but if a reasonably ok life which makes you not depend on anyone can be restored, it ok too. What is not ok is, a life full of pain, misery and dependency on others, which causes suffering to others also. Anyhow, such life would be very short and unproductive. So a seeker decides to keep an unhealthy body depending on its usefulness. The goal of a seeker is knowledge, the goal is not carrying around a broken body.

What if its a natural calamity or war etc? Well, the first reaction of anyone, including a seeker should be to escape it. And a seeker lets go only when that is not possible. Usually a seeker has no anchors or attachments to a place, family or community, so he has a ton of options and can escape very easily, when

compared to an ordinary person, who is bound by attachments. But when odds of survival are close to zero, a seeker would surrender his body. Its much better and elegant way to die compared to a fight, a struggle and acts that involve killing fellow people, or suffering with a half broken body. The calamity is your ticket here.

An accident can leave your body incapable of normal functioning. A seeker would evaluate the condition. Can it be fixed? will it remain disabled, broken and dependent on others for the rest of the life? Is it affecting the process of seeking? etc. And if it is too damaged to continue, a seeker will let go of it.

Arranging social and personal situations

When you sense death, its recommended that you arrange situations so that you don't need to look back, feel remorse or leave unfinished business behind. So, for example, if you have relatives, dependents or a partner, its time to detach completely. If you have property, money or stuff, its time to dispose it off or hand it over to whomever you think is worthy of it. Arrange for dependents. Well why are there any dependents at all? A seeker has none usually, but in case you have any, never leave them on streets.

You will find that family members and friends will urge you to continue living, they will force feed you and what not. They will suspend you with all sorts of drips and a cocktail of medicines will be pushed into the body. This will prolong the suffering, pain and the not so well situation. Well, that's bad, why do you still have such relatives? Its ok, happens, you made a mistake, you did not detach yourself or distance yourself from social situations. To avoid this state of affairs, its best to move to a place where friends and relatives cannot trouble you, as soon as you sense the death knocking. E.g. an ashram or monastery. Not any kind of it, one where people understand what death is, and will make it easier for you, instead of ruining it.

If you have hoards of money or property, by luck or mistake, now is the time to get rid of it. Donate it away, to worthy people or causes. Clean up everything in advance because no one will be left to do it after death. If you have unfinished business, finish it now, or drop the plans. You want to leave without a to-do list. Best to travel light.

Do not start printing invitation letters to all, inviting them on the occasion of your death. It is a personal affair, even you are not needed there. Its not wise to advertise that you are going to die and are preparing for it. It will attract unwanted attention, and remember, there are people who, when they come to

know of it, can try to ruin it for you by trying to keep you alive by hook or crook. Its their "love and compassion" that they want you to drag your body along forever, but from your point of view, its just deep ignorance. By keeping your affairs private and silent, you ensure that nothing goes wrong at the time of death, and it happens just as you planned.

Why take so much trouble?

Some may argue that treating death so nicely and giving it so much importance is unnecessary. Death is only an illusion. So how does it matter if it happens in a certain way? And why do I think that I have so much control and can arrange stuff down to the last detail?

Remember, that it can all happen in next second, so no, I'm not under the delusion of total control. All we can do is be ready for it. Death is not the end, its a beginning of a new experience. And if you have plans, if you have a path, you want your new experiences to be aligned to your goals. A seeker can make it easy by minor arrangements and by letting go rather than sticking around in a bad situation, just waiting for a painful death. Not only that, your progress can be hindered if you leave things behind that can become hurdles in your path. The last line is the essence of it, nothing more needs to be said.

If you are a seeker, control over situations and actions is not your main concern, your path is your main concern. So everything you do in regard to your death is to make you onward journey easy and fast, its a natural happening, a letting go in an elegant fashion.

Spiritual Lifestyle and Stages of Awareness

This article is a short summary of a talk given during my personal meeting with a group. Its probably not exactly what I said in those 2 hours or so, but is essentially that, as far as I can recall. The group is a newly formed meetup.com group.

Its my own perspective on what being spiritual means and how does such a lifestyle look like. Then we go into deeper stuff - stages of awareness.

What is the meaning of the word "spirit" or "spiritual"?

Many people would reply that its like being this or that person, a saint, a monk or a Guru they saw somewhere. Some may say it is something not related to this world, something other worldly, stuff that happens after death, aka paranormal. Some may think it is concerned with adopting certain beliefs in a mindless manner. So on and so forth. I, obviously, find all such ideas unsatisfactory.

One has to find one's own meaning of a concept, and it depends on their own experiences. I will present my own understanding, it is not to be taken as an "absolute truth" or something. In my opinion, the meaning of the word "spiritual" is very simple, it means the **Essence**. It is very close to its literal meaning - when everything that is unnecessary and inessential or having no consequence is removed, whatever remains is the **Spirit**, or the Essence.

So what remains when all that is unnecessary, illusory, impermanent or false is removed from "I". Obviously, the Self remains, which is another name for pure consciousness. So if "I" am spiritual, I am concerned with nothing but the Self, the consciousness.

The Sanskrit word **Adhyatma** is more precise, of which "spiritual" is a common translation. It means concerning the Self (Atman). We do not need to guess or interpret anything here, its very clear.

So you see, it has nothing to do with wacky experiences or horror movies of Hollywood or tall stories. It is concerned with the ultimate truth itself, which is simply here and now. Its right before us, self-evident and shining brightly. So one must wonder, how did this word got so twisted and gotten associated with every

kind of BS there is and why so many people, including many seekers, have no clue what it actually means? The answer is one word - ignorance.

However, we being humans, do not prefer simple things, we spice it up and hence everyone has got a different meaning for it. As I said, one can choose any meaning whatsoever, but beware that there will be consequences accordingly, especially if you are planning to take up a spiritual path. Do not plant a Neem tree and expect mangoes.

What's a spiritual lifestyle?

Its a lifestyle that is oriented towards being spiritual. Well, looks like this last sentence says nothing really. But nothing more needs to be said. It is simple. Simple and minimal is most beautiful and most useful.

So a lifestyle which involves knowing the Self, studying it, learning about our own essence, the true nature of everything, dispelling ignorance and most importantly - implementing the teachings in everyday life - is a spiritual lifestyle.

A mind, aka the person or the identity comes closer and closer to the Self by following such a lifestyle. The mind become just like the Self in essence.

A spiritual lifestyle is not self-centered, it is Self-oriented. A self-centered lifestyle is all about the separate self, the ego, just survival and mechanically acting out our egoic tendencies. A Self-oriented lifestyle is when all our actions, speech and thoughts reflect our true nature, which is making an effort for being more knowledgeable, implementing that knowledge, benefiting all by sharing it, destroying ignorance, correcting once behaviour, liberating one's mind and basically approaching infinite happiness and freedom, which is the closest a mind can get to the Self.

So in essence, by following a spiritual lifestyle one gets purified to the extent that one starts resembling the Self itself. By one, I mean the person, which is just our mind - a bundle of memories and processes. Gradually, the person dissolves and becomes an image of the Self itself, which it already is, although clouded by ignorance and beliefs. We do not become "a Self", we already are that, we just realign with it more and more. So a seeker would start getting all the qualities of the Self as he progresses - purity, truth, universal-love, detachment, innocence, knowledge, perfection, beauty and the infinite eternal permanent unchanging nature.

Also, it has nothing to do with people or the world. You do not become spiritual

by serving the world or its inhabitants, rather the service is a natural outcome of knowing who you are. Needless to say, the world and the people are essentially the Self, just you. Seeing them separate, causes all those actions towards them, of any kind, but is just ignorance.

So you see, in my opinion, it is not a fancy lifestyle which involves mindless following of some tradition or cult, or to wear certain kinds of clothes or speak peculiar things, or rituals, or hard beliefs or techniques to twist the mind or body or energies etc. It is a simple thing - be your Self.

So how do we "become" our own Self? It is simple too. Just be aware of it all the time. Let your actions flow out of awareness of who you really are instead of out of mere conditioning or ignorance. There, I gave you the key, the rest of the article is mere details.

So we reach an important question here.

What is Awareness?

Again you will find various connotations and meanings of this word. From the "awareness" of a disease or political situation to the name of the absolute reality (as in Nisargdatta's teachings), it means many things. And again, I choose to stay with the simplest meaning, which is - to know, to be conscious, to shine the light of consciousness. Or even simpler - to take the viewpoint of the Self.

What is the point of view of the Self? To witness, obviously. To behold things as they are. So to be aware is to be a conscious witness. Now, this seems like being the Self literally, and yes, it is, to be aware is to be the Self. What can be simpler? Even breathing is more complicated and difficult comparatively.

Aware of what? Of your experiences. There is nothing more there to be aware of. Experiences are of many kinds - of the world, of people, of body, of the mind itself i.e. the thoughts, actions, speech, feelings, emotions, desires, relatives, situations and all that. One can let everything happen, but in the light of awareness.

Who is aware? Obviously, the mind is what becomes aware, the mind is the one who knows anything in the light of the Self. The Self need not be aware, it is the awareness itself, it need not be reminded of that. The mind, when it remembers what it essentially is, is then said to have become aware, or **Enlightened**.

If you take the person as the mind, then it is a person who becomes aware. In

that act, the person dissolves and the Self remains.

And then you will find this irritating thing - the person comes back, the Self is forgotten and the actions or thoughts again start following the preprogrammed monkey business of the mind. This can happen within seconds of being aware. The whole struggle of a seeker is to keep the awareness going.

An enlightened state of the mind is continuous unbroken awareness.

Everyone can do it, everyone has this potential, why not, everyone is just pure awareness - the Self. So how to do it?

Stages of awareness

In my limited experience and understanding, I've come across three ways in which awareness can happen. Now, this can be just an illusion or perhaps there are more ways that I do not know of, but I found this trisection a useful tool. A technique, if you like. I call them stages of awareness. These are :

1. Becoming aware of the events after they happen.
2. Becoming aware of them while they are happening.
3. Becoming aware of them even before they happen.

Its tempting to stick fancy names on them, but I leave it as it is for now or rather unimaginatively call them as stage 1, 2 or 3.

Why are they stages? Because as we practice being aware, we go through these three conditions, one after the other in sequence, and the later stage is a more evolved and better state of the mind than previous. You may be very talented or odd or both if you never encountered the lower stages, so do not worry if this is not your experience, you are doing just perfect.

So just to be clear, by "becoming aware" I mean switching to a witness mode, taking the perspective of the Self. It does not mean that while the event was happening your were "unconscious" or like a zombie and the "awareness" woke you up. It may feel like that, but we are always aware as the Self, only that, when we intentionally shift the focus of our attention from the mind to the Self, the mind catches a glimpse of the event happening independent of itself, and just witnesses it. The mind becomes detached from it, and assumes the role of a witness rather than that of a doer (or a victim, or enjoyer etc). In this way the usual mechanical behaviour of the mind stops and it enters a peaceful state.

Does that mean that the action will not happen or will there be a change of some kind in the experience? Yes and No. Both can happen. Say, if the situation is an external one, you may not be able to do much about it, you will continue with it or act there, while being fully aware of it. Say, if the situation is internal (in your own mind), you may intervene and choose another thing e.g. a thought or a decision or a desire, or the mental event may suddenly stop and disappear, as in the case of a thought that is causing suffering.

So the first stage is the one where a seeker becomes aware of the situation or his own actions/speech after its over already. We wake up after a while and discover that something happened in a certain way or that we did or said something, which we shouldn't have done or said. This is waking up in retrospect, and is a very common state to be in. Most of us, when we are practicing being aware, will end up like this. That is, the mind will slip, perform unconscious acts, speech or thoughts, and then will wake up, sometimes after seconds, sometimes after days and become aware of what had happened.

Do not worry, its not too late. Be happy that at least you are aware of it now, even though the actions have disappeared in the fog of time. Remember that the consequences are lurking just in the shadows, be prepared for that. This time the mind needs to be fully aware. This is how we learn. So if you are in this state right now, its still a good thing. The time gap between the slips and becoming aware will lessen with practice and the slips will happen less frequently. Once burnt twice shy. A trained mind will do its best next time something similar happens.

Second stage is the one when we remain fully aware of things happening right now in the present moment. This is real awareness. In the case of stage-1 the awareness is not of the event itself, it is the awareness of the memory of it, which is anyway happening in the now. (So you can see why I remarked that the stages can be an illusion, you can be aware only in the now, there is no other time to be aware). When the situation is viewed in the light of the awareness, it is not very serious, not a burden, not a suffering if it is negative and does not lead to stupid actions if it is pleasurable.

This is the preferred state to be in. And the key here is to keep reminding yourself that you are only a witness. The result is that almost no actions happen while the experience is being consumed as it is. No reactions happen. If anything that is extremely necessary and must happen, then it happens, whether you choose it or not. Remember, as a witness you are not the doer. So if a violent wild animal is chasing you, you do not stand there smiling as a witness, you run as fast as you can, while being fully aware of what is happening. You are not merely afraid, you also know that it is necessary for fear to show up there and it is necessary that the

body protects itself. However, say, if a person is insulting you, you witness the situation with full awareness, knowing well that it is not necessary to react, just smile, just watch, its a show, amusing, you need not act here.

The key here is to keep your guard up always. Keep reminding yourself what you essentially are. A seeker walks like a hunter in a deep jungle. One mistake, and the hunter becomes the hunted. If you slip, which you will, do not worry, do not beat yourself up, just calmly and intentionally rise up, be aware again. Do it again and again, and again. This is the essence of any spiritual practice under the sky.

It helps to set up reminders. They can be your seeker friends, or ideally your teacher (don't need to "set" him up, he is naturally so), or pictures that remind you of your nature, or clothes, perhaps your phone too, even jewelry or stuff. Just do not fall into blind rituals or beliefs/superstitions, these things have a purpose, things are not "spiritual", they do not make you spiritual either, they are just **Spiritual Tools**. A stone is as good as gold. Remember why you are using it. Dust of time has covered up ancient tools and practices invented by geniuses and ignorant people have corrupted such spiritual practices beyond recognition. Do not forget the real message. You do not need a huge temple with diamond studded walls to do your practice in, nor you must stay in a grass hut or a dark cave. A small comfy house is enough. Just see the essence of such practices and tools. Use whatever you can.

Anyhow, there is nothing right or wrong when it comes to spiritual practices, there are tons of varieties out there, and if you prefer a fancy way, just go for it. Remember the goal, do not get carried away with the practices. Do whatever floats your boat. Once you have crossed the river, there is no use carrying that boat on your back. If, initially, your mind refuses to cooperate, and you find it difficult to stay steady and aware even for a minute, fall back and do something simple, like sit down and be aware of your breath for a specific amount of time per day. However, if after 30 years, you are still doing nothing but watching your breath, something is wrong, you see, you need to progress. You get my point.

Meditation done in a closed room in a serene place is like net practice that a player does. It needs to be carried over to the marketplace. It needs to be practiced in the field. Both are necessary. And again, rather unimaginatively, I call them as **Net practice** and **Field practice**. A good player knows well how to do it. Do not be a net champion alone.

Usually, for an ordinary person, an unusual event or situation will put them in total unconscious or unaware state instantly, and the innate or conditioned behaviour takes over. They do everything out of that compulsion, may be its right

or wrong or whatever. And later on they justify it unconsciously with a random excuse. For a seeker the situation is exactly opposite. A seeker is extremely aware in odd/extreme/unusual situations and does whatever is necessary in the moment. Whether on a meditation mat or in a battlefield, there is no difference as far as his state of mind is concerned. The actions can be anything, can have any consequences, they cannot be perfect always, but a seeker takes full responsibility, knowing well the reasons and causes behind them, and prepares for the consequences.

Which leads us to the third stage, which is being aware even before something happens. An experienced seeker is the one who can tell from a mile what's coming. Once the awareness grows this big, it encompasses all past, present and future. You not only are now aware of what you did in the past and its fruits, what you are doing now, and the fruits that are arriving, but also, what are you going to do in the future when the experience finally arrives. Well, then do we plan stuff in a certain way when that happens? No, we let what is going to happen... happen. The moment, not the plan decides what will happen. We only plan to remain aware, as usual. As a mind, that is the only freedom you have.

As you can guess this is an advanced stage. I've had glimpses of it, so I know it exists, but I cannot say more about it. You will see it, or perhaps you are seeing it now.

Results of being aware

If you are wondering what this all is going to do and have lost track of it, read it again from the top. Awareness is the essential state to be in while you conduct your life in a spiritual way. The spiritual way is the way of the spirit or the Self. It is the only way to be, what else can you be?

The result is that we lose everything that was unnecessary, was false, was causing harmful actions and suffering, was impure or negative, and so on. What we are left with is the Self, which is total freedom, purity and happiness. This comes at a cost which is unbearable for an Ego, because it means the Ego must take up a back seat. The worldly pursuits, drama and pleasure appear fake, because that's what they are. Ego doesn't like its show spoiled. Which is why egoic people despise spiritual lifestyle and hence hedonistic or materialist lifestyle has become an antonym for spiritual life. In my opinion, it is just a stage in the evolution of the mind, it is impermanent too. Usually they grow up soon as the pleasures turn into pain and start causing suffering. Suffering is grace too.

Everyone is spiritual, they just don't know it. As I said, it's impossible to be

anything else. A seeker knows this and takes up a lifestyle that is more aligned to the Self. It is intentional, deliberate and is done with full awareness.

~ .o. ~

End of Volume - 3

For the other volumes of this EBook, please visit b2b.oormi.in

The articles are from this blog, where you will find new content, media, tools and other useful references.

<https://pureexperiences.blogspot.com>

Listen to the podcasts on interesting and captivating spiritual topics on

<http://pexp.podbean.com>

This EBook was created using the Free and Open Sourced windows application:
[Blog to Book](#) by [Oormi Creations](#).

Table of Contents

Preface	3
Happiness and Freedom	4
Acting without actions - Service	14
Acting without actions - Forgiveness	20
Acting without actions - Donation	27
Gurulogy	36
Qualities of a Student	45
The Path of Books	55
The Art of Introspection	62
Introspection - 1 : Experiencing the Self	69
Introspection - 2 : Experiencing Change	74
Introspection - 3 : Mind and World	77
Introspection - 4 : Identity and Ignorance	80
Introspection - 5 : Illusion of a Material World	82
Introspection - 6 : Consciousness Without Content	86
Introspection - 7 : Illusion of Bondage	89
Introspection - 8 : I was never born	93
Introspection - 9 : There is only one Self	97
Introspection 10 : Purpose of Human Life	102
Introspection - 11 : The Illusion of Space	106
Resistance, Effort and Opportunity: Part-1	117
Resistance, Effort and Opportunity: Part-2	120
Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-1	125
Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-2	132
Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-3	138
Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-4	144
Obstacles and Their Cures: Part-5	151

Consciousness and Machines	156
Surrender	160
Path of Knowledge	163
Principles of Astral Projection	172
How to Die Like a Seeker	181
Spiritual Lifestyle and Stages of Awareness	186
~ .o. ~	194