

THE ESSENTIAL SELF

Three Meditations

Rupert Spira



SAHAJA

THE SIMPLE RECOGNITION OF OURSELF

Allow your experience to appear exactly as it is from moment to moment, without trying to change it in any way. Thoughts, images, memories, feelings, sensations of the body and perceptions of the world – that is, sights, sounds, tastes, textures, smells – simply allow the flow of experience to present itself to you without any impulse to change it.

Notice that knowing, being aware or awareness itself accompanies all experience. If awareness were not present, there would be no experience. However, most of us are so exclusively focused on the objective content of our experience – our thoughts, images, feelings, activities and relationships – that we overlook or ignore this knowing, or being aware, or awareness itself.

Why do we overlook or ignore the experience of being aware or awareness itself? Because the experience of being aware or awareness itself always lies in the background of experience. It never appears as an object in the foreground of experience, such as a thought, a feeling or a perception.

So the first thing we do here is to relax the focus of our attention from the objective content of our experience and become aware of the experience of simply being aware.

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We don't have to do anything to the objective content of our experience – to our thoughts, feelings, activities, and so on. We don't have to discipline them, quiet them, still them, change them, get rid of them. We just cease being exclusively focused on or interested in them and instead become aware of the background of experience: being aware or awareness itself.

It's a bit like ceasing to focus on the objects and people in a room and, as the focus of our attention softens, becoming aware of the space in which all the people and the objects appear. We were, in fact, always experiencing the space, but we were not aware of it because of the exclusive focus of our attention on the people and the objects within it.

Or it's like watching a boring film and losing interest in it. As soon as we cease to be exclusively focused on the content of the movie, we realise we are seeing a screen. We don't suddenly start seeing the screen at that moment; we were always seeing the screen, but we were not aware of it because of the exclusive focus of our attention on the content of the movie.

Likewise, the experience of being aware or awareness itself is always present. It doesn't suddenly begin when it is noticed.

Being aware or awareness itself accompanies all experience, irrespective of its content. But because, like empty space, it is transparent and has no objective qualities or features, it cannot compete, as it were, with the colourful objects of

experience, and thus it tends to recede into the background. It lies, in most cases, unnoticed in the background of experience.

So here we bring it into the foreground of our experience. We become more interested in the experience of being aware, or awareness itself, than we are in the content of our thoughts and perceptions.

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The common name for this knowing, being aware or awareness itself is 'I': I know my thoughts; I am aware of feelings, sensations and perceptions. As such, 'I' is the name that we give to the knowing element in all experience, the aware element of experience. So when we overlook the experience of being aware, we are really overlooking our essential self.

No thought, image, feeling, activity or relationship is essential to us. What is essential to a thing is that aspect of the thing that cannot be removed or separated from it. No thought is essential to us; indeed, our thoughts are continuously appearing and vanishing, but we don't appear and vanish with them. Likewise, no feeling, sensation or perception is essential to us; all of these are coming and going in our experience.

The only element of our experience that is *not* continuously coming and going – in other words, the only element of our experience that remains consistently present throughout all changing experience – is knowing, being aware or awareness itself.

That is our essential, irreducible nature or essence, that part of ourself that cannot be removed from us, that part of ourself that remains behind, as it were, when all thoughts,

images, feelings, sensations, perceptions, activities and relationships have ceased. The only element of ourself that cannot be removed from us – only that qualifies as ‘I’, myself.

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We have been calling ourself ‘I’ for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years, always referring to the same ‘I’. Do you not feel now that you are essentially the same ‘I’ or the same self that you were yesterday, and last year, and ten years ago, and twenty, thirty, forty years ago?

When you said ‘I’ as a five-year-old child, were you not referring to the same self that you refer to when you say ‘I’ now? What is the same? What is the common element in your experience of yourself now and yourself as a five-year-old child?

Your thoughts, images, feelings, activities, relationships and perceptions have changed innumerable times since then. None of these have remained the same. Only the experience of being aware or awareness itself has remained consistently present throughout all changing experience, and thus only the experience of being aware or awareness itself qualifies for the name ‘I’.

I am aware of my thoughts and images, but I am not myself a thought or an image. I am aware of feelings and sensations, but I am not myself a feeling or a sensation. I am aware of perceptions, activities and relationships, but I am not myself a perception, an activity or a relationship.

What am I when all of these have been removed from me? What remains of myself when all of these have been removed? Only the experience of being aware, only awareness

itself. As such, awareness is the knowing element in all experience but is not itself a particular experience.

This knowing is intimately one with all experience, but it is not identical to any particular experience. Being the common factor in all experience, it doesn't share the limitations of any particular experience, and therefore it has no limits.

Being the knowing element in all experience, it has no objective features or qualities. Any objective feature or quality would belong to a thought, feeling, sensation or perception. It is, as it were, transparent, empty of objective content, silent.

And yet, at the same time, all experience is pervaded by this knowing, illuminated by this knowing. It is this knowing, being aware or awareness itself that renders experience knowable.

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The experience of being aware or awareness itself is not just the knowing or illuminating element in all experience; it is the field within which, or the medium upon which, all experience takes place.

Anything that appears and disappears must appear and disappear in something or on something. What is the medium within which our experience takes place?

When a thought appears, it arises in something. In what? In what do the sounds and sights that are taking place appear? Sounds and sights are perceptions. All perceptions appear and disappear. In what?

Anything that appears and disappears must exist in and vanish into some kind of medium or field. You can't have an