

BEING AWARE OF BEING AWARE

## INTRODUCTION

### THE INTUITION OF HAPPINESS

**E**verybody loves happiness above all else. Even if we deny ourselves happiness for the sake of another person or an impersonal cause, we do so ultimately because it makes us happy.

In order to fulfil the desire for happiness, most people engage in a relentless search in the realm of objects, substances, activities, states of mind and relationships. This search also takes the form of resistance to whomever or whatever is perceived to jeopardize our happiness. Thus, seeking and resistance are the two main impulses that govern the thoughts and feelings, and the subsequent activities and relationships, of most people.

The activities of seeking and resisting are an inevitable expression of the sense of lack or suffering that underlies them. However, most of us never question the origin of our suffering,

so busy are we escaping the discomfort of it through the acquisition of objects, substances, activities, states of mind and relationships. If we do question it, we usually attribute it to the absence of the object or experience that we seek or the presence of the situation we are attempting to avoid and, as a result, never fully trace it back to its original cause.

Our belief that happiness is dependent on objective experience is not altogether without foundation, and hence its almost universal allure, for every time a desired object is acquired or an unpleasant situation successfully avoided, happiness is indeed briefly experienced.

However, although the acquisition or avoidance of the object or situation puts a temporary end to the suffering that underlies it and, as a result, brings about a brief moment of happiness, it does not uproot it or bring it to a permanent end. It simply masks it.

No sooner does the object, substance, activity, state of mind or relationship diminish or disappear, or the situation we sought to avoid reappear, than the happiness vanishes and the underlying suffering returns.

As a result, most people set out again in pursuit or rejection of some form of objective experience in the hopes of repeating

the experience of happiness. In this way we become addicted to the endless cycle of lack, seeking and temporary fulfilment that characterises most people's lives, and to which Henry David Thoreau referred when he said that most people 'lead lives of quiet desperation'.

Many people spend their lives managing this despair more or less successfully, medicating it with substances, numbing it through the acquisition of objects, avoiding it through exotic or meditative states of mind, or simply distracting themselves from it with activities and relationships.

However, at some point, either spontaneously or, in most cases, as a result of reading a book or having a conversation with a friend, some people begin to question whether or not objective experience can ever really be the source of the lasting peace and happiness for which they long. Others reach a point of desperation or hopelessness before this intuition dawns.

Most people who are reading these words are doing so precisely because they have understood, or at least intuited, that their desire for peace and happiness can never be found in objective experience. In other words, if you are reading this book it is most likely because objective experience has

failed to provide peace and fulfilment sufficiently often that the impulse to invest your identity, security and happiness in it is beginning to wane.

This understanding or intuition is one of the most profound and disturbing recognitions that one may have, and it initiates a crisis whose exploration and resolution are the subject matter of this book.

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Once this recognition has taken place it is never possible to invest our desire for lasting peace and happiness in objective experience with quite the same conviction again. Although we may forget or ignore it and, as a result, repeatedly return to objective experience seeking fulfilment, our understanding will impress itself upon us with greater frequency and power, asserting its undeniable and unavoidable truth with ever-increasing clarity, demanding to be heard. We turn away from this intuition at our peril.

When objective experience – including any conventional religious or spiritual practices that involve directing attention towards some more or less subtle object, such as an external god, a teacher, a mantra or the breath – has been exhausted as a possible means by which peace and happiness

may be obtained, only one possibility remains: to turn the mind around upon itself and investigate its essential nature.

The turning of the mind away from the objective content of experience towards the source or essence from which it has arisen is the essence of meditation or prayer. It is the ‘inward-facing path’ – sometimes referred to as self-remembering, self-enquiry, self-abidance or the way of surrender – of which the Direct Path that is explored in this book is the culmination.

It is the process that is described in the story of the Prodigal Son, in which the son leaves the security and comfort of his father’s kingdom, explores all the possibilities that the world, or objective experience, has to offer in terms of pleasure and satisfaction, and eventually realises the futility of his search. Finally he turns around towards the source of happiness – symbolised here by his father – which was, in fact, always available to him but seemingly out of reach due to his exclusive fascination with the drama of experience.

In this giving up or turning around, we cease being obsessed with our suffering and become interested in the nature of the one who suffers. We turn away from the objects of experience and investigate the nature of the one who experiences.

In this investigation, as the mind turns the light of its knowing away from the objects of experience towards its own essence, it is gradually, or occasionally suddenly, divested of its limitations and stands revealed as the very peace and happiness which it previously sought in objective experience.

Peace and happiness are not, as such, objective experiences that the mind *has* from time to time; they are the very *nature* of the mind itself. Happiness is our essential nature, apparently obscured or eclipsed much of the time by the clamour of objective experience but never completely extinguished by it.

It is for this reason that all the great religious and spiritual traditions indicate, in one way or another, that the ultimate goal of life – lasting peace and happiness – resides within us and is equally available to all people, at all times and in all circumstances.

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One might legitimately object to the statement that peace and happiness are the essential nature of oneself, asking why, if happiness is our essential nature, it is not always experienced. Do we not experience happiness intermittently, just as we do all other experiences? Are not happiness and

unhappiness both objective experiences that arise and alternate in awareness?

Imagine the sky as a uniform expanse of grey cloud on an overcast day. At some point a small patch of blue opens up, and soon numerous other small patches appear, each seemingly unconnected from the others and each appearing and disappearing in the expanse of grey cloud.

One could be forgiven for believing, at first sight, that the natural condition of the sky was the unlimited expanse of grey cloud and that the patches of blue were limited, temporary appearances within it. It is only when the blue patches are investigated that it becomes clear that they are, in fact, windows onto the ever-present expanse of blue sky *in which* the grey clouds temporarily appear and disappear.

Likewise, it may seem at first that moments of peace and happiness briefly punctuate our natural state, which for most people comprises a degree of lack or dissatisfaction from which they are always in flight. However, if we make a deep investigation of the nature of the mind,\* that is, if the mind investigates its own essential nature, travelling

\* 'Mind' in this context is used synonymously with 'experience' and includes all thinking, imagining, feeling, sensing and perceiving.



back through layers of thought, feeling, sensation and perception until it reaches its own essential, irreducible reality, it will always find peace and fulfilment there.

Happiness, like the patch of blue, appears at first to be a temporary experience that occurs from time to time, but when investigated turns out to be ever-present and always available in the background of experience.

As such, happiness is not a temporary experience that alternates with unhappiness. It is not the *opposite* of unhappiness, any more than the blue sky is the opposite of the clouds. Just as the clouds are the veiling of the blue sky, so unhappiness is the *veiling* of happiness.

Happiness is our very nature and lies at the source of the mind, or the heart of ourself, in all conditions and under all circumstances. It cannot be acquired; it can only be revealed.

We cannot *know* happiness as an objective experience; we can only *be* it. We cannot *be* unhappy; we can only *know* unhappiness as an objective experience.

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In the attempt to access the peace and happiness that lie at the source or essence of ourself, most approaches to

meditation recommend the controlling, focusing or watching of the mind. However, in this approach, meditation is not about changing experience in any way, but rather seeing clearly its essential nature.

The inward-facing path, or Direct Path, in which the mind turns its attention away from objective experience towards its own essence or reality, is, in my experience, best elaborated in the Vedantic tradition, which details with great precision both the philosophy and the practice of this investigation. In this way the Vedantic tradition provides direct means for accessing the essential, irreducible nature of one's mind and the source of lasting peace and happiness.

However, it is inevitable that over the centuries the Vedantic approach would have tailored itself to the level of understanding and the cultural conditioning of those to whom it was addressed and, as a result, become mixed with elements that are not essential to it.

The approach suggested in this book is, to the best of my ability, the distilled essence of the Vedantic approach, divested of the cultural packaging of the Eastern traditions in which I and many others first encountered it. Of course, this book is also subject to the cultural conditioning of its

time, but given that most readers will share that conditioning, there is little chance that it will obscure or mystify the understanding it conveys.

My first teacher, Dr. Francis Roles, once said to me, ‘The truth needs to be reformulated by every generation’. It is my hope that this book reformulates the Direct Path for those who travelled to the East, intellectually if not physically, but found it difficult to extricate the simplicity of the non-dual understanding from the wealth of exotic concepts in which it was shrouded, as well as for a new generation of truth seekers who are not burdened by previous religious and spiritual teachings.

However, it is important to recognise that the inward-facing path explored in this book is only half the journey. Once the essential, irreducible nature of the mind has been recognised, and its inherent peace and unconditional joy accessed, it is necessary to face ‘outwards’ again towards objective experience, realigning the way we think and feel, and subsequently act, perceive and relate, with our new understanding.

The culmination of the inward-facing path is the recognition of the presence, the primacy and the nature of awareness – or, in religious language, spirit or God’s infinite being –

which transcends all knowledge and experience. However, it is not yet the full experiential understanding in which awareness itself, or God's infinite being, is known and felt to *pervade and saturate* all knowledge and experience, and indeed to be its sole substance and reality. It is to recognise the transcendent nature of awareness but not its immanence.

If we do not reintegrate this understanding with our objective experience, then a fragile alliance will persist between our essential, irreducible nature of pure awareness and all objects and others. This often manifests as a denial or rejection of embodied life in the world and may readily become a refuge for any lingering sense of a separate self.

The process by which this reintegration or establishment takes place, although implicit in the inward-facing or Vedantic tradition, is, in my opinion, best elaborated in the Tantric tradition, and is an exploration that lies beyond the scope of this book.\*

\* I refer anyone who would like to make a deeper exploration of this realignment process to my collection of meditations, *Transparent Body, Luminous World – The Tantric Yoga of Sensation and Perception*, published by Sahaja Publications. For an expanded discussion of the place of the Tantric tradition in this approach, please see *The Nature of Consciousness – Essays on the Unity of Mind and Matter*, co-published by Sahaja Publications and New Harbinger Publications.