

Nonduality: Unveiling the Clear Bead at the Center

By Munir Peter Reynolds

The nondual perspective, within all of the traditions such as Vendana, Shaivism, Tantra, Zen, Sufism, and mystical Christianity, derives from the fact that reality is One. Though reality appears to the finite mind as a multiplicity of events and objects in space and time, this appearance is due to the inherent limitations of the finite mind only. As reality is indivisible, so the consciousness that is aware of it is likewise a unity.

I'd like to talk about duality and the Direct Path today. Duality is sometimes used to refer to our tendency to be disturbed by apparent opposite extremes in life or reactive to what's around us, and even to what's within us because it is not to our liking. On the Sufi path, it's called Mental Purification to see that there really are no opposites. Hazrat Inayat Khan puts it this way: "To be able to see the right of the wrong and the wrong of the right, and the evil of the good and the good of the evil. It is a difficult task, but once one has accomplished this, one rises above good and evil. When one can recognize poison in nectar and nectar in the poison, that is the time when death and life become one too. Opposites no more remain opposites before one. That is called mental purification. And those who come to this stage are the living sages."

Wait a minute! Are we *supposed* to be outraged and upset when we see moral corruption in public officials, the earth degraded, and senseless wars raging? Well, doing that actually takes us away from our real self. But, in deference to the person we believe ourselves to be, even the Dalai Lama says, "I feel everything you do, just not for very long."

Bear with me. I'm going to sneak up on this topic. Listen to this from the teacher Shantanand Saraswati who passed away in 1985:

"If you begin to be what you are, you will realize everything, but to begin to be what you are, you must come out of what you are not. You are not those thoughts which are turning, turning in your mind; you are not those changing feelings; you are not the different decisions you make and the different wills you have; you are not the separate ego.

Well then, what are you? You will find when you have come out of what you are not, that the ripple on the water is whispering to you 'I am That', the birds in the trees are singing to you 'I am That', the moon and the stars are shining beacons to you 'I am That'. You are in everything in the world and everything in the world is reflected in you, and at the same time you are That - everything. His Holiness Shantanand Saraswati 1961-1985

Wow, that's big isn't it. It may sound very weird. What does it mean to be what you are? and even more importantly what does it mean to come out of what you are not?

Let's look at this from the perspective of Shiva. Shiva is the knower of all experience, and his consort Shakti is that experience. So, Shiva is the knowing factor and Shakti is all perceptions, sensations, thoughts and images of a "world" and a "universe". The two always go together.

Let's experience this directly. Focus on a point across the room, be very present behind your eyes and close your eyes. If I ask you the question "Are you aware?" take a look. You look to see and know, "Yes, I am aware!" What just happened? Open your eyes now. For a brief moment, you came out of being a person and were your real Self, the ultimate subject. The person does not do this. It's the real Self that knows it's aware. Like the sun, it is self-illuminated. It doesn't need anything else to know this.

So, being aware of being aware is the simplest thing in the world. It's in fact the only thing you can be aware of that is not an object. We're focused on objects all the time, including thoughts, perceptions, sensations and sense experience. The Shatanand Saraswati is saying you're none of these things.

As I have spoken about previously here at CSL, you are awareness. The nondual teacher Rupert Spira defines awareness or Consciousness as that by which everything is known, that in which everything arises, and that of which everything *is made*. If we take our seat as Shiva, the witness, we begin to come out of what we are not because the false starts shedding like a snake's skin. Our sense of "I am" which has become mixed with experiences, beliefs and concepts from the past, becomes stronger and more focused.

How does this work? In meditation, we simply relax attention on objects in awareness and sink or "fall back" into the space of awareness itself. This is called sinking the mind into the heart. In other words we just relax our focus and take a slight backward step from all experience. We simply witness experience as the knowing of our experience. We take that seat and stay there.

The key thing to understand here is that this "space" of awareness can never be an object in consciousness. Hazrat Inayat Khan said "The soul sees all but cannot see itself... This proves that it is the real self." As language requires subjects and objects we have to give it a name provisionally.

Rumi called it "the clear bead at the center". He said, "The clear bead at the center changes everything. There are no edges to my loving now." Buddhists call it, the "jewel in the heart of the lotus." Sufis call it the mirror of the heart. Taoists say simply it's "the heart", referring to the totality of experience as the heart, not just the emotive center we're familiar with.

This "clear bead" is who you really are. This experience is not appearing to a self that resides inside your head. Your knowing of this experience *is you*, and that is it. As we have previously explored, if you go looking for that self as an object, you won't find it as an object in

consciousness. However, you're there. You know you are. So what is it that knows your experience? Ah! Now there's the most interesting question anyone could ask.

Here's Balyani, a Persian Sufi master of Shiraz who died in 1287:

"You thought you were you,
But you are not you and never were.
For if you were you, you would be a lord And the second of two.
Stop what you were thinking.
Between His being and your being there is no difference.
He is no different from you nor
you from Him.
If you say in ignorance you are other,
you are stubborn,
But if your ignorance disappears, you are submissive.
For your union is separation, your separation union,
And your distance is closeness -
through that you become suitable.
Abandon the intellect and understand by the light of unveiling."

So Balyani is saying, "You are not you. Not only do you not exist, you never have existed. You, the knower of your experience, is actually IT and IT is unspeakable. We cannot speak about IT because IT is the ultimate subject of experience, which paradoxically cannot be an object in awareness.

Balyani is also saying that everything borrows its being from That. We seem to exist as separate entities. "Ex-ist" is from the Latin *existere*, "to stand out from". But if we look at our direct experience, nothing really stands out. Everything is implicated in the existence of everything else, because it is all one thing. Thich Nhat Hanh called it Interbeing. In reality, there are no separate persons, separate objects, there is just Being or God's Being. As we return to what we really are, this becomes more and more apparent. And, it's like having the weight of the world literally lifted from your shoulders.

But, as soon as a voice inside me says about experience "I don't like it", a separate self has popped up and starts trying to control, trying to run the show. It believes it exists on its own. Here the trouble and the suffering begins. It believes it can find a better "Now" through some other experience in the future. So, time and space are also born. Resisting and seeking become the activity fueling the separate self.

In other words, the finite mind gives belief to a separate self, and to time and space, through resistance and seeking. Then that mind asks, "How do I become free of duality?" See, I told you I would sneak up on this subject.

Let's see that the mind is a wonderful tool. It enables us to know how to make a sandwich, or find our way home, or land on the moon. But, the mind cannot tell us what we are. Mind also colors the infinite and unlimited reality with its inherent limitations. If I put on green sunglasses and look at snow, it will appear green. Mind is simply an activity of awareness, but it is not the knowing of experience. That's You, and you are It.

Most importantly, Balyani says, "Abandon the intellect and understand by the light of unveiling."

Just look right now at your direct experience. There it is right under your nose. Your thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions and images arising seamlessly, in the infinite, no-place space of knowing. We have to use negative attributes to describe it because it has no objective qualities.

That is why the ancient sages wisely called it "Ad-vaita" "NOT TWO", so that it would never be confused as an object in consciousness.

Just "catch it". Revelation comes from the Latin, revalare "to lay bare." Look at your direct experience and let it be laid bare. The real you is IT, and that real self shines with happiness, peace and love.

This is actually the simplest thing in the world. The Direct Path is falling back into who you really are and allowing what you are not to drop away.

However, you can have a very clear understanding of the Direct Path and the process of doing it and living can be extremely intense at first. That is because you are reversing years and decades of habits, unintegrated material and samskaras that will present themselves. It takes tremendous dedication, consistency and sincerity to do this inner work. But, like learning to ride a bicycle, it gets easier over time

Remember when you were learning ride a bike and you fell down. You just kept going. And with each longer ride that you achieved the vision of "Yes, I can do it." takes hold.

That is exactly how it is when we start facing into the karma of our past and get flashes of the clear blue sky of the real self overhead. Vision of what's possible starts "pulling." In fact Michael Beckwith says of this process, "Pain pushes until vision pulls." So we have to get far enough into that to have the strength to keep going.

But as we proceed, more and more the energy that was tied up in dysfunction, identifications and trapped emotions is released. Our minds and hearts are increasingly flooded with undivided energy for life. The previous apparent dualities of life - wars, plagues, climate

change, political chaos - all take their proper context. Everything is arising in being, and it's all God's being.

Ultimately it is revealed that all duality was predicated on a delusion fed to us from the earliest age. That is that we live in a vast but lifeless universe made of something called matter which somehow gave rise to life which somehow gave rise to mind which somehow gave rise to something we call a self. We say to that self, "Go and actualize your life by pursuing happiness." Why should we be surprised that a setup like this would bring identification, conflict and sorrow?

It's because the error was made at the very beginning. Instead of starting with awareness - the only constant, unchanging experience that absolutely everyone knows by their direct experience, we start with a concept called "matter" which no one has ever seen. Then we try to reconcile the reality with the conceptual error.

There is no matter, no things, no persons in God's being. The world that we see and know is an emanation of being, not separate objects made of matter as we were taught. Just soften your focus a little, and it looks like this:

1. **"You're all sky: the rest, it's just the weather"** (Pema Chodron) Hold to that, no matter what. Make awareness your true body. Let the feeling of silence and stillness permeate your body and heart, which is aware presence.
2. **Be aware of being aware**, and notice if you start to resist anything. Your true self is awareness itself, which does not resist. Krishnamurti said, "My secret teaching is that I don't mind what happens." Find out what it means to practice this. If you catch yourself minding what is happening, offer that up to your pure awareness. Allow a tiny crack in the door for the possibility that your real self truly doesn't mind what is happening. Try it and see what happens next.
3. **Let people be who they are.** Until we grant others complete freedom to be who they are, we're in bondage too. "Love thy neighbor as thyself", because it is the literal truth. I have seen all souls as my soul, and realized my soul as the soul of all. And what bewilderment it was when I realized that I alone was, if there were anyone, that I am whatever and whoever exists, and that I shall be whoever there will be in the future." This may sound mysterious and even disturbing; but it is the honest truth as revealed in being. As you get used to it, it is a joyful truth.
4. **Gratefulness.** HIK: **"I thanked the darkness that brought me to the light**, and I valued this veil that prepared for me the vision in which I saw myself reflected, the **vision produced in the mirror of my soul.**" Gratefulness, Love, Happiness, Peace, felt even for the veils over our real self, help to activate true nature.
5. **Live as the unknown.** Your real self always knows how to meet every situation when we are not burdened with beliefs, identifications and demands. Have no expectations, and be happy.

6. **Make your own happiness uncaused and unconditional.** Say to your loved one, “I love you but I don’t need you”. Letting go of making demands on others frees us up to be who we are. In being all needs are already met.

Here’s Balyani again:

My essence is really His essence
without lack or imperfection.

There is no otherness between them
and my self is the place where
the invisible appears. (another reference to the clear bead at the center)

...

I received a gift overflowing
without any giving or intermingling.
*My self did not vanish in Him
nor does the one who vanished remain.*

Those last two lines are a stupendous expression of unveiling or revelation. One sees that the suffering and sorrow of the separate self was always just a case of mistaken identity. In hindsight there never was two, God and a separate self. The separate self was just a phantom shadow that vanished in the light of the sun.

“The clear bead at the center changes everything...” including beginning a life lived from the unlimited.