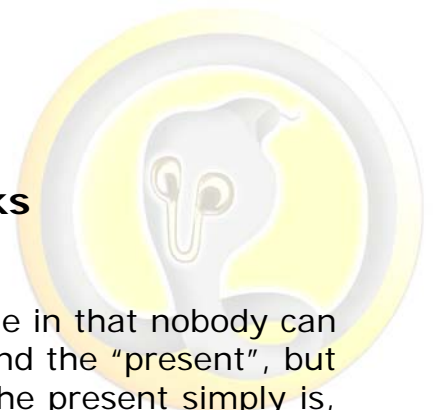


Patañjali's two tricks



The experience of the present is very strange in that nobody can take control of it; it seems as if you can apprehend the “present”, but when this happens it has already become lost. The present simply is, there is no one who can know it or know about it.

Owing to this peculiarity, it is difficult to find a method that makes possible the living experience of the present, or one that enables you to install yourself within it; however some existing religious or philosophic sources have their own methods of doing it and the Advaita Vedanta system is one of them.

The Advaita Vedanta goes about its analytic method of investigating reality according to the relationship that exists between *subject* and *object*. Our day to day experience shows us that the subject always feels itself to be different from the objects it is knowing. To establish the basis of differentiation between them both, that is, where their limits begin and end, we need to establish the limits of reality. It is complicated to lay down sufficiently stable boundaries that will serve to delimit this cognitive relationship between subject and object. Patañjali was the first to offer a theory to solve this cognitive dilemma in a way which is truly very interesting.

Patañjali had it that all the information in everyday life that can be interpreted with the senses stems from external objects and the outer world; In contrast, all the information that can be interpreted without representation or without sensory intervention derives/comes from the subject and its inner world.

There is always subject and object in cognition. When events are experienced whether they be real or material (outer), or inner (perfect/ideal), the object-subject duality always appears as an effective part of cognition. Patañjali's great contribution is to conclude that attention is exclusively fixed upon outer material objects and not upon the one who detects them, and also that attention is fixed on the perfect self-witnessing capacity of the subject when it experiences its inner world. Patañjali introduces two great tricks, affirming that in the inner world the subject should be given attention exclusively and, on the other hand, in the outer world attention should be given solely to the object. And this is precisely what meditation practice consists of.

It is difficult for people to be attentive to outer objects for a long time without being aware of themselves in the process. The condition of being out of themselves, submerged in objects as if it were the

first time they had seen them, is not habitual in adults, whereas it is in children. Everytime children experience an object they transform it into a universe on its own forgetting about everything else that surrounds it, just as they forget the pain induced by a bruising when they are offered a sweet.

This is how an adult should see the world: with everything anew, with intensity and brightness; however, in practice most adults see the world as being second hand, used, lifeless. And if at any given moment something surprising should happen which provokes awe in them, such perception only lasts a very short time, perhaps only instants, to dissappear once more hidden amongst the new and countless inrush of thoughts brought on by memory.

Something similar happens in the inner world when individuals go about meditative practice: they seek to be attentive to the observer, aware of themselves, to self-witness themselves, without any distraction from the thoughts that come to light in the form of mental objects. This excessive activity of giving attention to thoughts prevents being aware of the presence of the observer's condition, the subject. Such incredibly long chains of thought can appear in the inner world that they transform inner meditation practice into a shambles; despite the fact that the meditator wishes to centre attention on subject, and not on inner thoughts, their mind just slips back to the past and memories appear again and again.

These problems are caused by the human mind's lack of training in being in the "present". It is hard for human beings to continuously pay attention to external objects when their senses are active or, even more so, when they attend their inner world, to situate themselves as the observer while their senses are disconnected.

And so, what must be done to continuously perceive external information that forms part the present? You should focus attention upon any part of the outer world, any part you wish, and be sensorily attentive on it as if it were the first time it had been experienced, full of surprise, feeling alive as you have never felt before. It is not necessary to isolate yourself from the world, on the contrary, what is entailed here is completely infusing yourself in daily events paying attention with your five senses to any of the umpteen day-to-day possibilities, attentive on listening, touching, tasting, smelling and seeing alternatively forms and colours.

If someone talks then it is normal for one to listen; if it is dinner time then we eat; if we have a moment of pleasure then we feel it... What is not viable given these premises is, if you have a moment of pleasure and think about something else which has nothing to do with

it, or when eating think about having pleasure, or while working think about resting, or when resting think about eating...

Human beings do not flow coherently with things that happen in the "here and now". They do not know or have any skill at being in the right place at the right time. They do not have discernment to be able to continually live in the "present" coherently.

The magic that there is in the "present" is immense, but individuals do not dare live it because they believe they must in constant control of the situations in their lives. If life teaches anything it is that nobody is in control of what is happening, the same as not being possible to control acidity in the blood, or the speed with which hair grows, or the quickness we digest something... None of these events can be controlled at will, and much less the happening of events that flow in the "present".

It simply is a question of living in a natural way without always having to be ready to control. The idea of life is to plunge into the stream of experiencing things and to live naturally, with fluidity. Human beings are terrified of suffering and this prevents them from experimenting the natural feeling of the "present". They would rather not act, not love even, because of their fear of suffering. But it is always better to dive into experience even though it brings about suffering and mistaken action, since action will at least leave with you what you have learnt in living.

And what must you do in your inner world to continuously detect information flowing in the inner "present"? The first and most important thing is that your senses must be disconnected. To succeed in this, you only have to be attentive to the inner world instead of the information that comes from your senses. It simply concerns waiting for inner information which appears in the form of thoughts without there being any outer interference received by your senses.

To be able to disconnect your senses there is no need to fight against them; the answer does not lie in battling with your hearing so you cannot hear or with your body so you cannot feel pain. There will probably appear noises from outside, but it does not matter: you must go back to waiting for the arrival of the inner world. And so it will be continuously, time after time, and the moment will arise when the outer world disappears.

The correct attitude of attention associated with the inner world is to wait for thoughts and avoid becoming them. You must await their constant arrival and departure while bearing in mind that whoever is observing this mental movement must be detached from it. With constant practice you will become aware of the feeling of

being situated physically behind while thoughts are mentally recognised in front coming and going, being born and dying.

To the extent that thoughts are distinguished at a distance as well as a living subject who observes them from behind, you will feel something extraordinary beginning to happen: the inner world will slow down and it will start to get quieter, and the intensity of what is known increases to an extreme extent. A great bonding of the act of being observer to the absence of thought occurs, one is the unalterable witness of a "nothingness" full of consciousness, full of life, where no thought whatsoever arises. Now there is only an observer without form left that detects at a distance its own absence of personal history. This intense process of inner perception where one is witness to the emptiness of one's own history, is known as inner Observation.

There is one additional problem with this type of inner Observation practice: the mind may get to create a thought of absence of history. That is, it is not easy for the mind to clearly differentiate between a "thought of emptiness", and what we are really seeking, which is "the emptiness of thought"; the two situations represent completely different things. One is observing yourself inwardly without history, without judgement whatsoever, and the other is recognising the memory of emptiness as a historical event, as a thought. The pure "present" that flows in the inner world is always empty of history, it is not a thought of historic emptiness.

But it is not inner Observation and the absence of history that we are ultimately searching for in inner practice, although experience might be very pleasant. There is a later step: when this observer of the inner world transforms into the object of their own attention. Finally what we are looking for is that the the subject's attention on knowing is placed on the very observer – in other words, to pay attention to attention.

When the observer is transformed into the object of observation, something magical happens in the inner world; now the observer is simultaneously subject and object of cognition. Simultaneousness arises in perception and this means the perceptor is the entire field of perception instead of a particular area of it, while in the same way, everything known becomes part of the observer.

This is an exquisite and inexplicable experience, since the observer is everywhere and nowhere specific in the inner field which is now established. Furthermore, the inner field does not differentiate itself from the observer who is doing the knowing: the observer and the observed become simultaneous. The inner perceptor has blended

into or merged with the inner mental atmosphere just as gas does in air. This new state is given the name of inner Concentration.

Later, the boundary which delimited the previous state disappears, and diffusion throughout the whole existing field beyond, integrating the outer information that existed independently before. This process is called Meditation.

The most intelligent solution we can possibly achieve in the face of action is to live intensely, without fear of any aspect of everyday living in the outer world. You have to learn to let yourself go, to feel without thinking about it. In this way you can feel free in your day to day living and free in the inner world.

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