

## FOREWORD

How strange.

We can burn.

How strange and stunning: we can burn from top to bottom and yet find ourselves in fullness.

Each stanza in this book is a blazing firebrand. To really come close, trusting and open, is to torch the jumble of beliefs and delusions that sustained us in quiet desperation, which we had finally considered inevitable. Each stanza in this book burns what we are not and reveals what we are.

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We are freedom itself, joy without a cause and peace without an enemy. Furthermore, how striking: never ever have we been limited in the first place.

This book is a distillation of penetrating statements gleaned from the numerous teachings of Rupert Spira: at times borrowing the musicality of a haiku, the terseness of a pith instruction or the persuasive power of an oration. But no matter its shape, each one bears the treasure of a full teaching.

We can only marvel at the simple and effortless nature of this rediscovery of the truth within ourselves. For there is nothing to do; it is done without us, in the simple releasing of all that can be released. In fact, we see that the greatest effort lies in the ceaseless creation

and maintenance of an illusion, the illusion of believing oneself to be a separate entity in the face of our actual experience of undivided and universal identity.

In this way, the baseless ideas and beliefs we took on, unquestioningly, are burnt to a cinder, and their cremation is felt as a dissolution. Without our really noticing, the understanding spreads through us and takes full possession of the territory in a broad sweep that is not a movement of the mind but a wave of love.

For love is fully present here. Love is the main character in this book, because it is love that is the core of what we are.

Rupert Spira is an artist. He sculpts words into condensed forms of pure intelligence to which there is nothing to be added or removed. He sculpts our understanding until it becomes pure light, pure flame.

Truth seekers familiar with his teaching will find its essence here: concise, sharp as a diamond, overwhelming with its awesome higher reasoning, whilst bathing us in unconditional love. Others will be struck by the clarity and profundity of Reality as conveyed by this master of Advaita, and illumined by the glimpse of an inner revolution.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Awareness and the Light of Pure Knowing*

In *The Ashes of Love*, either the word ‘Awareness’ or the phrase ‘the light of pure Knowing’ is used to denote our true nature. Although these both relate to the same non-objective experience – the knowing of our own Being as it essentially is – and are therefore identical, they are used in two different contexts to indicate different stages of understanding. Below is a description of these two stages, clarifying the context in which the words appear in this book.

From the conventional point of view, experience is believed to consist of two essential elements: (1) a subject – the body/mind – and (2) an object – things, others and the world. For this reason, we could call this view of experience Conventional Duality, in which the subject-object relationship is implicit.

In Conventional Duality, the body/mind – the subject of experience – is believed to be joined to things, others and the world – the objects of experience – by an act of knowing, feeling or perceiving. As such, the body/mind is considered to be *aware*, and ‘things, others and the world’ are considered to be what ‘I’, the body/mind, am *aware of*.

This belief is the fundamental presumption upon which our world culture is based, and it is enshrined in our language in phrases such as, ‘I know such and such’, ‘I love you’, ‘I see the tree’. In each case, there is

a subject – ‘I’ – knowing, feeling or perceiving an object – ‘you’ or ‘it’. In fact, so embedded is this belief into the fabric of our culture, that most people do not consider it a belief at all and take it, instead, unquestioningly, as a fact of absolute truth.

As a first step towards an understanding of the true nature of our experience, the non-dual teaching points out that it is not ‘I’, *the body/mind*, that is aware of things, others and the world, but rather ‘I’, *Awareness*, that is aware of the body and mind, as well as things, others and the world. As such, the body and mind are understood to be *objects* of experience, not the *subject*.

In this case, it is understood that the subject or knower of experience is not made of anything objective, such as a thought, image, feeling, sensation or perception. It is simply present and aware, and is therefore referred to as ‘Awareness’. In the word ‘Awareness’, the suffix ‘-ness’ means ‘the state, being or presence of’. Thus, ‘Awareness’ means ‘the state of being aware’, or simply ‘being aware’ or ‘aware Being’.

Being devoid of all objective characteristics, the subject of experience – pure Awareness – is said to be inherently empty: empty of thoughts, images, feelings, sensations and perceptions; transparent, colourless, formless, imperceptible and, ultimately, inconceivable; although if we are to speak or write of the ultimate nature of experience, we have to consent to conceive of it provisionally.

The process through which we discover that it is not ‘I’, *the body/mind*, that is aware of things, others and the world, but ‘I’, *Awareness*, that is aware of the body

and mind, as well as things, others and the world, is sometimes referred to as *neti neti*: I am not this, not this. I am not my thoughts; I am *aware* of my thoughts. I am not my feelings; I am *aware* of my feelings. I am not my bodily sensations; I am *aware* of my bodily sensations. I am not my perceptions – sights, sounds, tastes, textures and smells – I am *aware* of these.

As such, *neti neti* is a process of discrimination or exclusion, through which we move from the belief that I am ‘something’ – a mixture of a body and a mind – to the understanding that I am ‘nothing’ (not-a-thing) – not a thought, image, feeling, sensation or perception.

Thus, the culmination of the path of *neti neti* – the Path of Exclusion – is to know our Self as pure Awareness. However, this process has not, as yet, told us anything about the *nature* of Awareness, other than that it is simply present and aware. As such, it is not what is traditionally referred to as awakening or enlightenment. Awakening or enlightenment is not just the revelation of the *presence* of Awareness – although that is a first step – but of its *nature*.

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To move from the understanding that Awareness is present and aware to the realisation of its true nature requires, in most cases, some exploration. However, who or what could explore or know Awareness? Only Awareness is aware and, therefore, only Awareness can know anything about itself. Thus, to explore Awareness means to be aware of Awareness. However, in order to

be aware of itself, Awareness doesn't need to know something new. Just by being itself, Awareness is already and always naturally, effortlessly aware of itself, just as the sun naturally and effortlessly illuminates itself simply by being itself.

Thus, truly to enquire into our essential nature, although almost always initiated by a process of thinking and questioning, is, ultimately, simply to abide knowingly as our essential Being of pure Awareness. In this process, the outward- or object-facing mind is divested of its object and, having nothing to focus on or attach itself to, flows back naturally, effortlessly and spontaneously to its source as pure Awareness, and abides as that knowingly.

It is in this abidance as our essential nature of pure Awareness that the memory of our ever-present and unlimited nature dawns – the memory of our eternal, infinite Being. Of course, this is not a memory 'of something'. However, the word 'memory' is appropriate because this knowing of our own Being – its knowing of itself as it essentially is – has always been with us and, therefore, is not something that is known anew. It was just *apparently* lost, veiled, overlooked or forgotten.

This memory of our ever-present, unlimited nature is referred to variously in the spiritual traditions as awakening, enlightenment, satori, liberation, illumination, nirvana, resurrection, moksha, bodhi, rigpa, kensho, etc. In all these examples, the same experience is being referred to: the relinquishing of the identification with everything that we previously considered inherent in and essential to our Self. It is

referred to in the Zen tradition as *The Great Death*, and is depicted in the Christian religion as the Crucifixion and Resurrection – the dissolution of the limits that thought superimposed upon our Self, and the revelation of its eternal, unlimited nature.

This awakening to our essential nature of ever-present, unlimited Awareness may or may not have an immediate and dramatic effect on the body and mind. In fact, in many cases, this recognition can take place so quietly that the mind may not even notice it to begin with.

I once heard a story in which a student of a well-known Zen master asked him, ‘Why don’t you ever speak of your enlightenment experience?’ At this point the Zen master’s wife stood up at the back of the hall and called out, ‘Because he never had one!’ Others relate becoming so disorientated by the simple recognition of their own essential Being that, for instance, they spend the next two years sitting on a park bench acclimatising!

Either way, the recognition of our true nature is only a halfway stage: the true nature of our Self – pure Awareness – has been recognised as the eternal, infinite subject of all experience, but the objects of the body, mind and world have yet to be incorporated into our new understanding.

At this stage, our true nature has been realised as transcendent Awareness; the witnessing presence of Awareness in the background of all experience; the ever-present, limitless space in which the temporary, limited objects of the body, mind and world appear,

and with which they are known; the emptiness in which the fullness of experience arises.

However, from this point of view, experience still consists of a subject – albeit an enlightened one – and an object. The subject – eternal, infinite Awareness – is sometimes likened to an open, empty space like the sky, in which the objects of experience – thoughts, images, feelings, bodily sensations, and perceptions – appear and disappear like clouds. As such, Awareness is still ‘something’, albeit a transparent, empty ‘something’. We are still in the realm of duality – which we might call Enlightened Duality – in which an eternal, infinite subject seems to know a temporary, finite object.

It is in this context that the word ‘Awareness’ is used in *The Ashes of Love*.

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For the peace and happiness that are inherent in the knowing of our own Being – its knowing of itself – to be fully felt and lived in all aspects of life, our enlightened understanding needs to be incorporated into all realms of experience, that is, into the way we think, feel, act, perceive and relate.

Hence, there is a second path – the Path of Inclusion or the Tantric Path – in which the way we think, feel, act, perceive and relate is gradually realigned with our new understanding. In this Path of Inclusion – or, as it is referred to in the Zen tradition, *The Great Rebirth*, and in the Christian tradition, the transfiguration – we discover that our essential nature of pure



Awareness is not just present as the *witness* of all experience, but is the very *substance* or *reality* of all experience. As such, it is not just the *background* of experience, but also the *foreground*; not just *transcendent*, but also *immanent*.

In this realisation, duality, that is, the distinction between the subject – pure Awareness – and the objects of the body, mind and world, has collapsed. In fact, it has not collapsed, for it was never really there to begin with. Rather, it has been seen clearly that duality is and has always been utterly non-existent: in reality, there is no self – neither temporary and limited, nor ever-present and unlimited – that *knows*, nor any finite object, other or world that is *known*. There is just pure *Knowing* – one intimate, seamless, indivisible, ever-present, unlimited whole.

It is in this sense that the term ‘Knowing’ or ‘the light of pure Knowing’ is used in *The Ashes of Love*: to describe the feeling-understanding that all distinction between an apparent subject and an apparent object, other or world has dissolved, in contrast to the term ‘Awareness’ or ‘pure Awareness’, in which there is still an apparent subject and object.

And just as the open, empty sky, in which the objects of the body, mind and world float like clouds, is used as a metaphor for Awareness’s relationship to experience, so the metaphor of a screen and an image or movie is used as a metaphor for pure Knowing, in which there is no subject or object.

However, the screen in this metaphor is an aware screen: it is viewing or knowing the images that appear

on it, *and* is simultaneously the substance out of which they are made. As such, it knows them as itself, not as objects or others.

In this case, there is no actual, independently existing object on the screen called ‘an image’. There are not two things – ‘A-dvaita’, not-two – screen and image; there is *just* the screen. It is the screen that, vibrating within itself, appears as the image but never becomes or knows anything other than itself.

In the same way pure Knowing, vibrating within itself, takes the shape of thinking, feeling, sensing, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling, and *seems* to become a mind, body and world, but never truly becomes or knows anything other than itself.

Thus, there are no ‘objects’ from the point of view of pure Knowing. There are only objects and selves from the illusory point of view of one of the characters in the movie.

The common name for the absence of any distinction between a subject that knows and an object, other or world that is known, is love or beauty. Love is the experience that there are no others; beauty is the experience that there are no objects.

In fact, no word can legitimately be used to describe the reality of experience, which remains unnameable, forever beyond the reach of thought, and yet utterly intimate. It is for this reason that either no words at all or a great many words are used in the attempt to convey this Reality!

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The Path of Exclusion – I am *not* this, *not* this – takes us from the belief ‘I am something’ to the understanding ‘I am nothing’. The Path of Inclusion – I *am* this, I *am* this – takes us from the understanding ‘I am nothing’ to the feeling-understanding ‘I am everything’.

The Path of Exclusion is a path of discrimination, in which we make a distinction between what is essential to our Self and what is not. The Path of Inclusion is a path of love, in which all such distinctions are seen to be non-existent, and we discover our innate intimacy with all seeming objects and others. This path of love leads to what could be called Embodied Enlightenment, in which the understanding of the true nature of ever-present, unlimited Awareness gradually percolates into all realms of life, permeating and saturating the body, the mind and the world with its light. It is a never-ending process.

From Conventional Duality to Enlightened Duality, we take the Path of Exclusion, the Path of Discrimination; from Enlightened Duality to Embodied Enlightenment, we take the Tantric Path of Inclusion, the Path of Love and Beauty.

These three stages – Conventional Duality, Enlightened Duality and Embodied Enlightenment – are found in all the great spiritual and religious traditions: in Christianity, the crucifixion, resurrection and transfiguration; in the alchemical tradition, discrimination, illumination and transformation; in the Buddhist tradition, samsara, then nirvana, then samsara equals nirvana: first form, then emptiness,

then emptiness is form and form is emptiness. As Ramana Maharshi said, ‘The world is unreal; only Brahman is real; Brahman is the world.’

First, we discover that all experience appears *in* and is known *by* the open, empty space of Awareness. Then, we discover that Awareness is not just the container and knower but the very *substance* or *reality* of all experience.

As the distinction between Awareness and the apparent objects of the body, mind and world collapses or, more accurately, is seen to be utterly non-existent, it is realised that all we ever know or come in contact with is the knowing of experience. In fact, it is not the *knowing* ‘of experience’, because experience, independent of Knowing, is never found.

We just know Knowing. However, the ‘we’ or the ‘I’ that knows Knowing is not separate or distinct from it. Knowing is not known by something other than itself.

All that is ever known is Knowing, and it is Knowing that knows itself.

There is only the light of pure Knowing.

Rupert Spira

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From the viewpoint of the earth, the sun comes and goes, whereas it is, in fact, always present. Likewise, from the viewpoint of the body and mind, our essential nature of pure Awareness comes and goes, but in its own experience of itself, it is ever-present.

All experience is illuminated, or made knowable, by the light of pure Knowing. This Knowing pervades all thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions, irrespective of their particular characteristics. We *are* this transparent, unchanging Knowing.

Our Self – luminous, open, empty Awareness – cannot be enlightened. It is already the light that illuminates all experience. Nor can a separate self be enlightened, for when the separate self faces the light of Awareness, it vanishes, just as a shadow does when exposed to the sun.

To invest one's identity and security in something that appears, moves, changes and disappears is the cause of unhappiness.



The separate self is not an entity; it is an activity: the activity of thinking and feeling that our essential nature of pure Awareness shares the limits and the destiny of the body and mind.

Just as a screen is intimately one with all images and, at the same time, free of them, so our true nature of luminous, empty Knowing is one with all experiences and yet, at the same time, inherently free of them.

We are the open, empty, allowing presence of Awareness, in which the objects of the body, mind and world appear and disappear, with which they are known and, ultimately, out of which they are made. Just notice that and be that, knowingly.

When everything that can be let go of is let go of, what remains is what we desire above all else.

In ignorance, I am something; in understanding, I am nothing; in love, I am everything.