

Observation to Discovery

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Discoveries don't lead to new things, as such—they reveal things that already exist as they really are. The journey of discovery renews or makes you new—free from the old so that you can see what is and has always been. If the adventure of discovery lacks this element of 'self-change' or transformation, one will continue to only see what the mind consents to. One of the dictionary meanings of the word 'reveal' is 'to make known'. This 'knowing' takes place quietly within us. Discoveries are experienced within us, so it stands to reason that the real revealing is not in the object but rather, in the individual seeking to know. Why is it that the true nature of what we are trying to discover is concealed so it cannot be known up front without all that discovery entails?

We usually don't even really look closely at the surface of things as that too would reveal the surface exactly as it is, prompting for continued or deeper observation. Though we see what is in front of us, we look at notions we have about what is seen—so much so that it does not make any difference if the person or thing in front of us is there or not.

These notions are either of ideas we have about them or how we hope they should be—we are looking at *our* ideas and hopes. The content of ideas and hopes is only a thought. The thinker of thought is personality, which is a collection of thoughts only. It is obvious why what is in front of us each moment is never seen—thought is seeing thought!—while the procession of things as they are marches on right past us every minute.

What makes taking refuge in thought so attractive that we see *it* instead of really looking at what is right in front of us? All conflict is about ideas and hopes—never about what really exists, which is real and there is no denying it. Thought springs from memory as when we think about things; and the content of memory is impressions of thought. Impressions harden by frequent visitation or use and thus they seem familiar. Familiarity gives the illusion of security as it is the known, and this seems to be a good antidote for fear. Fear springs from a refusal to see things as they are and a preference for how things should be instead. Fear is a child of ignorance, and thought is attractive because of fear—a readily available inner world one can turn to and continue to spurn reality—things just as they are from moment to moment.

You may not like stormy weather, but if it is the day's condition—it is here and no amount of liking or disliking is going to change the weather, so you adjust or endure. Adjusting is never painful, as you do what is needed—in stormy weather, you get a raincoat or umbrella. Enduring is suffering because things are a certain way, and the thoughts within wish they would be some other way. Perhaps enduring should be spelt in-during as the turmoil is experienced with-*in*

during the period we reject what really is. It is the bundle of thoughts that wishes and hopes for things to be some other way that itself suffers, because things are just what they are.

Desires are soil in which the seeds of ignorance produce a harvest of fear. In desires, we should include all hopes of how people, things and conditions should be—however subtle. Desire is a wanting and this takes seed early when in the name of some strange thing called 'unconditional love', our every want—whims and fancies are satisfied. When getting one's way is seen to bring joy, naturally one will continue to do so; and in pursuing something, someone or a condition is restless. After much pursuit, when one finds that things have worked out otherwise, one experiences sorrow or gets back in the chase with steelier resolve in which much can be compromised. When getting one's way seems untenable, one can then always find solace in the inner thought world by self-justification. Just how do you call seeds sown that will reap a harvest of sorrow, love? In contrast, learning to adjust oneself to changing conditions is a sure way to learn how to face what really is without taking refuge in the inner thought world.

There is nothing at all wrong with hard work or success, but the known can only lead to the known! Discovery, on the other hand, requires pure effort—intelligent effort without any predetermination so it can adjust on the fly as needed.

Ideas and hopes do not only bring suffering—they are suffering itself. This wall of thought rejects reality by abiding in unreality—if something like this is at all possible. The rejecter and abider or personality is a conglomeration of thought only. Thought entertains its offshoots and experiences tremendous sorrow.

There is a wonderful story in the Yoga Vasisthaⁱ called, 'The Story of the Great Forest' in which the sage tells us of a great big forest, millions of miles across. In this dense forest lived one person with a thousand limbs who would repeat the strangest of acts. He would beat himself with his mace and then run in panic and pain from the beating he was subjecting himself to. When the sage inquired into this and tried to reason with this man—he abused the sage, called him his enemy, wept, and then laughing, he began abandoning the limbs of his body. He would then run and either jump into a blind well, run deeper into the forest or into a nearby banana grove. The sage uses this story to illustrate that this forest is not far away nor is the strange man—the world itself is the forest which is a great void only in the light of inquiry. The one inquiring or reasoning is the light of self-inquiry whose wisdom is rejected by most and accepted by a few who traverse beyond sorrow. The person with a thousand limbs is the mind with its countless manifestations. This same mind punishes itself by its own latent tendencies, wandering restlessly in the world. The blind well is the hell in the mind and the banana grove heaven or abidance in wisdom. The dense, thorny forest is the inner world of the man and the thorns are endless desires and attachments. This mind drifts like a log downstream—sometimes to the bank of hell and heaven—both in and of the same mind. When the light of wisdom shines in the ignorant one—it is rejected and it weeps and wails. Not till there is an

awakening does one become even receptive to reason and wisdom and begins to really see with clarity.

When every cell of your being observes what is actually happening in front of you and within you at the same time—that is, if all of you is alert and attentive—this is itself a turning away from the world of thought and its resulting turmoil. We do this in times of imminent danger when the whole being is roused, and not only is danger sensed for what it is, but the best response is made immediately clear and the energy required is made available.

Observing, decision and action are not three things but one continuous and smooth flow, and this can only happen if the ego with all its baggage is out of the way. Our ideas and hopes about things prevent clear perception, thwart response and stifle energy, to say the least. When one observes intently, clarity results from the falling away of the observer as an entity and there is only observation. This clarity or light on the path itself knows the best response and provides the energy towards it. Think for yourself, whenever you have been very clear about something, what is to be done was also immediately clear and effort was never a struggle.

All great discoveries have unfolded from total sincerity which is focus itself as well as inner discipline itself—neither of which will allow any interference. Sincerity is not rigid in the sense that it steamrolls things out of the way, but the inner intelligence which is empowered does its own work. There cannot be selectiveness in empowering the inner intelligence; either it does *its* work or we work with all the load of ideas and hopes like a heavily laden cart that barely creaks along.

Observation is intent looking (not looking intently or with some intention which is already colored) without the interference of thought. When this observation is sustained without remission, the observer and the observed melt into the fire of observation and one discovers, comes to know—not *about* something, but comes to know *directly*, without the 'about' business, the nature of the observed by entering into its very substance. As long as you know 'about', you know your own ideas or thought has a feeling about thought—about itself. When you 'know' on the other hand—there cannot be another to suggest 'about' what is known. To know something, you have to become one with it and then, what is the difference between the knower and the known—they are just terms in communication which become interchangeable.

Learning about things is not discovery. Whatever be the field of study, information can at best allude to someone else's discovery, but not your own. No amount of speaking about or affirming someone else's discovery will make it your own, as it will always stay outside and you will stay the same—perhaps a little less clear with the weight of someone else's experience—mere words.

There is a wonderful dialogue in the Chandogya Upanishad where a very learned sage went to a great master and told him that though he had accumulated tremendous learning, he had no

peace. The master inquired into his learning and sage rattled off a comprehensive list which, by today's standards, may have included post graduate studies in almost every discipline. The master told the sage that all of what he had learnt were mere words, nothing more, and gradually elevated the sage's understanding through their dialogue—taking him to the plenum or fullness that alone is reality and bliss.

Not only in words, but all expression points to something that is beyond them. Even when you greet a friend warmly, the verbal or physical expression is but a means of sharing what is beyond them. We even use words like, 'I have no words to really tell you...' or 'I just wish I could tell you...'. Why then do we stop at words, ideas, concepts and theory? If anything, these are the start just as in a warm greeting which devoid of feeling is empty—regardless of the dramatization.

To set off on the adventure of discovery, one has to be highly attentive, and this is not possible when thought interferes. Life is a journey of discovery that gradually unfolds self-discovery. We cannot discover the truth of things without knowing more about our own selves. Ultra marathoners run 100 mile races and one of them writes, "It is kind of sad when you finish a 100-miler because the incredible journey you just went through to get to this point is over ... so you start thinking about the next one."

You will and must learn a good many things about yourself in the freshness of the spirit of discovery. Accumulation of factual learning, on the other hand, will only dull the mind by weighing it down.

Observation is looking in clarity without any interference from thought within—intent looking in order to know. To know, one cannot start off from a known point, as that is purpose defeating. Applying the techniques of another will not go too far, as his technique worked for him. Technique is not something static that one adopts, as it will become mechanical, and discovery can never result from mechanical effort—only production. Technique is great skill and dexterity in movement—a series of moment to moment adjustments where the observer does not stand *outside* the observed.

Seasoned marathoners prepare a race routine and stay with it, making minimal changes to everything from their wake-up time, coffee, workout routine and diet—their goal is to learn the ways of the mind—knowing the blockage not to be in the body as much as in the mind. Through their training, they are actually training the mind or, shall we say, *untraining* the mind. They tweak their routine just enough to get to the mind which they know is the limitation. If you keep changing the technique, you will never see what is beneath the technique. If, on the other hand you stay rigid, you will forever be parked in technique cul-de-sac. Copying someone else's technique does not work either, as it follows another instead of exerting to remedy oneself.

Discoveries have to be your own, because the impediments to discovery are not only your own—they are you only! How is it that there are many equally trained scientists working in similar settings on the same project and one gets it while the others are still struggling at best? Albert Einstein once remarked, "It's not that I am particularly smart, I just stay with problems longer." This 'staying with problems longer' eliminates impediments if intelligence is staying or exerting. Energy is the power of inner intelligence, and when this inner intelligence itself acts— all things are possible.

Sincerity is total dedication which comes from the absence of the obstruction as well as relentless effort. Ego is another name for obstruction—and once this ego interferes, effort changes into struggle, as there must be competing agendas. The difference between struggle and effort is unwavering dedication or sincerity. Discovery requires sincerity—whole-souled attention, and as the flame of attention continues, the ego is revealed and gradually weakens due to energy deprivation, because now all the energy is utilized in observation.

There are no extraordinary people, just ordinary people with extraordinary commitments. The extraordinary is not so much in talent or ability but in enthusiastic willingness to change while pursuing discovery and self-realization. This willingness to give up or simply leave behind what is not needed is essential in seeking what is best. Every discovery involves letting go of something or much. There was much letting go when Euclidian geometry gave way to several other geometries as we know today, and classic physics gave way to quantum physics. Sincere seekers after any discovery must be prepared to reexamine everything afresh and move beyond existing horizons. Struggle is inevitable when one is not willing to give up what is not compatible with new directions, as discoveries are new directions.

The observation gets keener and one begins discovering the observed not because of proficiency in technique, but because of the radical transformation in the observer who has learnt how to stand with the observed. In this adventure, the observer discovers much about himself, too, as genuine discovery must at the same time involve self-discovery.

Observation is action of the undivided inner intelligence, and as observation persists—the fragmented mind melts into the indivisible mind or consciousness. One becomes more and more natural, and in this state of naturalness, one discovers the secrets of the observed *as it is* in its natural state and there is an affinity in the state of naturalness. This affinity must be there—like contacts like.

Observation, commitment, dedication and pure effort all amount to sincerity—to give oneself to the ideal or task. The giving is the giving up of all impediment along the way till its parent, the ego, is given up. Sincerity is the fuel and light on the path and the discovery or realization of the natural state as it comes naturally. Direct observation melts into direct realization—the giving is the getting.

ⁱ The Supreme Yoga (Ch III) by Swami Venkatesananda, published by the Chiltern Yoga Trust of Australia.