

Why Don't We Get It?

by Bob Fergeson

What I suspect we need is not any kind of path or discipline, but a collection of tricks or devices for catching the Dark at the corner of the eye, as it were, and learning how to spot its just-waiting-to-be-seen presence, combined with strategies for stopping the hyperactive survival-programmes from immediately explaining the perception away. D.E. Harding's exercises for discovering one's own essential "headlessness" are the best ideas I've yet come across for the first half of this process, but, by his own admission, most people "get it but simply don't believe it."

- John Wren-Lewis

The above quote by John Wren-Lewis points out a common conundrum seen often nowadays in seekers of the Truth. Many of us can recall times when we were strangely indifferent to our usual pattern, and the world seemed new and alive, with the noise of the mind blessedly absent. Then, the thought-pattern of personality took back the reins and the world became once more known and dimmingly familiar. Even the startling effects of Douglas Harding's exercises can become relegated to memory, for in our everyday world the miracle of "seeing" is soon lost, replaced by the usual fog of "knowing." Why is this? Why doesn't something so startling as seeing without one's own head last? Why is the ego's hold on us so complete that its survival is the paramount fact of our very life, robbing us of seeing without warning?

We may think that the problem lies in emotion. That if we were just a bit more enthused about it all, we could retain the clarity through thick and thin. We come away from a seminar pumped up, making inner promises to never forget what we've seen, and to try harder at every turn. Here, we may be misled once more. The act of seeing is not one of emotion, anymore than it is of thought. The memory of seeing is not the act, any more than the memory of the emotional reaction is. I can remember once listening to an intense emotional sermon by a sincere preacher. Everyone in the church came under the same spell, convinced that they would go forth from that moment on and be a better person, worthy of the glory of eternal life. Then, an even stranger thing happened. While in the parking lot after the service, I realized I could not remember anything the preacher had said, not a word. I couldn't even remember what I had been so enthused about. By the time I got home, the mood was completely gone; the thoughts and business of the day had totally replaced it.

Now, there is nothing wrong with becoming inspired. It's a necessary part of the path. But, it is not the goal. Seeing is not a state of being in perpetual bliss about our seeing. This is again the trap of living in the reaction, not the state. This trap of reaction is a clue to why no matter how intense or startling a state is, we soon lose it. We are trying to get back to seeing by looking at the reaction. We forget to see, by trying to remember to see. We look at our previous emotional or mental reaction to seeing, while our seeing, always there in the moment, every second, is overlooked.

Let's back up a bit, and go back to the start of the problem. When we were first brought into the world, we were taught by people, well meaning but asleep, that we are a thing, an object, living in a world of things. We were taught that some of these things, our thoughts, were more real than our very being, meaning our seeing was secondary to our thinking about our seeing. This trick was played on us until we could do it ourselves. Once we were well trained in fooling ourselves, we *became* "thinking." The world of thought became our new home. We lost our innocence, as we slowly lost sight of our seeing. We traded it for knowing, the unquestioned belief that our thoughts were more real than our seeing of our thoughts. Soon enough, we could no longer see our very seeing, and began to believe we were our thoughts.

Here then, lies the problem. We have become a collection of thoughts, an entity which treats every new moment as if it were already a memory, basing each new moment on only the past and the reaction this past has to each moment. We are so wrapped up in this thought-collection, this "knowing," that we even treat a moment of seeing as if it were another memory, reacting to it as if we already know all about it. A reaction can never be in the moment, for only seeing happens now. This trap of living one step behind ourselves cannot be explained away with conceptual thinking or fought with reactionary emotional thrills. It cannot be gotten rid of by changing our behavior, such as going left instead of right. What then can be done?

Franz Hartmann gives us a clue when he says, " There is nothing more difficult to find than one's own self." There is also nothing more valuable. It is our own "self" that is the problem. Any plan of escape from the trap of thought-reaction is simply this self trying to survive, even if the plan is one of perpetual seeing. The self will see seeing as yet another tool to perpetuate its own continuity. This self is a collection of thoughts, an inventory of all reactions, which seeks only its own continuity as a thought-pattern. The only way to deal with such a thing, is to see it. *To observe it.*

Simple observation, unbiased and without reaction or judgment, i.e. *seeing*, will take us farther than any clever plan or emotional outburst. A return to innocence, the initial stage of not-knowing, will give us an edge, open a crack in the ego's armor, and return the value of our very existence to that of seeing, rather than to the reaction to seeing. By beginning to watch what we do, we start a pattern of return to the state of a free attention. Once we are able to watch our "selves" as we go about our daily tasks, we may soon see that we can watch our thoughts as well. We all have moments where seeing is spontaneous and personal. If we come to value these moments, we begin to switch our meaning from the world of thought back to that of awareness. We can take the tricks we learned at meetings and seminars and put them to use in every moment: while driving, working at our desk, and even while watching TV.

We may soon notice a strange thing happening in our head, while we watch our watching. We may see that as soon as a moment of seeing fades, a familiar mood or state has returned, which is in fact the reason for the cessation of the seeing itself. This vaguely familiar pattern is our own state of mind. The collection of thoughts we feel to be "us" has slipped back. The old pride in "knowing" as reactive thought, our personal dogma, will slide in like a fog bank, and then we are our old self again, and the seeing is now incorporated into this "self's" inventory. "It" has survived, and we are back asleep.

Only through the simple process of self-observation can this thing called the "self" be seen. We may need years of looking at it, seeing why it does what it does, thinks what it thinks, until we know it well enough to cease to believe in it. All of our energy, for all of our life, has been poured into this thing: our personality, the little self, the ego. A few moments of seeing, while of monumental importance, will not cause its complete demise. This demise is what we fear most; for it is seen by the thought-pattern we call "us" as death. At some point, the initial joy of seeing will turn to the pain of ego-death, as the Truth becomes known. It will not be pleasant. In fact, the pain and horror felt by the ego as it faces its own death, will be felt as yours. Hartmann's words again ring true: "Conquer the pains resulting therefrom." While all this may be just words to you for now, know that after you have gone beyond this realm of thought, beyond this self-surviving collection of reactions seeking nothing but its own continuity, "seeing" will still be there. You will then have no more need of thought or reaction to give you meaning and value, as the simple act of seeing will once again be enough. The world of thought will no longer be your home, having become a movie, a dream, as much a comedy as a drama, wherein the bit character you used to call your "self" is merely another player. Your interest will be only in a pure amazement at your own unknowable Being ... and perhaps the need to help another find freedom from the trap of reaction, the world of "self."