

THE DIRECT PATH:
A User Guide

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THE DIRECT PATH

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Greg Goode

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION	1
PART 1 – WORLD	15
PART 2 – BODY	68
PART 3 – MIND	118
PART 4 – WITNESSING AWARENESS	186
PART 5 – NONDUAL REALIZATION.....	216
INDEX	228

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
How To Use This Book.....	1
Who Is This Book For?.....	3
Love	3
Nondual Inquiry And Conventional Therapies	4
The Main Problem	5
The Direct Path’s Solution	6
How Does The Direct Path Work?	7
What Is “Direct” About The Direct Path?	8
The Approach Taken Here.....	9
Separation – The False Claim Of Objectivity	11
Freedom From Objectivity AND Subjectivity	11
A Note About Terminology	13
Who Realizes? Who Is Writing This?	13
PART 1 – WORLD	15
Physical Objects	16
Our Strategy – Trying To Validate Objectivity	17
Naïve Realism	17
The Perceptual Relativity Critique	19
Representative Realism And The “Veil Of Perception”	20
The Reality Effect	22

EXPERIMENTS	23
The Source of the Experiments	24
Setup For The Experiments	24
Before You Begin	25
Being Awareness – The Heart Opener	25
HEARING	26
Experiment 1 – Hearing The Bell	26
Review Of Hearing	29
SEEING	31
Experiment 2 – Seeing The Orange	31
Review Of Seeing	36
SMELLING	37
Experiment 3 – Smelling The Orange	38
Review Of Smelling	41
TOUCHING	42
Experiment 4 – Touching The Table	44
Experiment 4a – Touch And Roughness/Smoothness	46
Experiment 4b – Touch And Wetness/Dryness	46
Experiment 4c – Touch And Temperature	47
Experiment 4d – Touch And Hardness/Softness	47
Experiment 4e – Touch And Extension	48
Review Of Touching	49
To Do On Your Own	50
TASTING	50
Experiment 5 – Tasting The Orange	51
Review Of Tasting	53
INTENSITY	54
MOVEMENT	56
Review Of Movement	59
To Do On Your Own	59
SUBTLE REALITY EFFECT – AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SENSES?	60
Common Sensibles – The Perceptual Source Of Objectivity?	61
Falsifying Interaction – Two Ways	62
The Molyneux Problem And The Reality Effect	64
Empirical Results	65
THE WORLD – CONCLUSION	66

PART 2 – BODY 68

 As An Object 69

 As A Feeler 69

 As A Container Of Awareness 70

THE BODY AS OBJECT 70

 Seeing The Body 71

 Experiment 6 – Seeing The Body 71

 To Do On Your Own 73

 Touching The Body 73

 Experiment 7 – Touching The Body 74

 Touching 75

 Being Touched 76

 To Do On Your Own 78

 Hearing, Smelling And Tasting The Body 78

 Experiment 8 – Hearing, Smelling And Tasting The Body 79

 The Body As Object – Conclusion 81

THE BODY AS FEELER 83

 In The Everyday Sense 83

 And In Direct Experience 84

WHAT DOES THE BODY FEEL? 85

SENSING 85

 Experiment 9 – Is The Body An Object That Senses? 85

PAIN 87

 Experiment 10 – Pain 88

 Conclusion To Sensing And Pain – And Pleasure 91

 Positionality 92

 Experiment 11 – Is Your Arm In A Certain Position? 93

 To Do On Your Own 94

 Movement 95

 Experiment 12a – Is Your Body Moving With The Chair? 95

 Experiment 12b – Is Your Body Moving With The Car? 97

CONCLUSION TO THE BODY AS FEELER 98

THE BODY AS CONTAINER 98

THE CONTAINER METAPHOR IN WESTERN CULTURE 100

 A Ghost In A Machine 101

 Cartesian Anxiety 102

 Anxiety And Nonduality 103

Seeing Through The Metaphor	103
Looking For Containment.....	104
Experiment 13 – The Tent	104
Experiment 14 – Are You A Tent?	105
Conclusion To The Container Experiments.....	107
DOES AWARENESS ARISE FROM THE BRAIN?.....	107
The Brain.....	107
Awareness Vs. Sentience.....	109
The Brain And Sentience.....	110
Experiment 15 – Does Awareness Arise From The Brain?	110
CONCLUSION TO THE BODY AS CONTAINER.....	112
No Internal, No External.....	112
AWARENESS CAN'T BE PERSONAL.....	113
THE BODY: SUMMARY EXPERIMENTS.....	114
Experiment 16 – A Walk In The Park.....	114
Conclusion To A Walk In The Park.....	117
PART 3 – MIND	118
Why Is The Mind Important?	118
Why Investigate The Mind?	119
Getting Past The Mind.....	119
Cultural Interlude	120
A Ghost In The Machine: Alienating Metaphors	121
The Container Metaphor	122
The Mirror Metaphor.....	123
The East Has Them Too.....	123
What Is Our Direct Experience?	124
Pieces And Parts Of The Mind	124
MENTAL OBJECTS.....	125
Kinds Of Mental Objects.....	125
Suffering	126
The Structure Of Thought	127
The Collapse Of Structure.....	128
Experiment 17 – Thinking About An Orange	129
Review Of Experiment 17.....	131
To Do On Your Own	131
Experiment 18 – A Purely Conceptual Thought.....	132

Review Of Experiment 18.....	135
Thoughts Have No Binary Truth Value	136
But Thought Is Made Of Truth	136
Thoughts Have No Referents	137
Thought Exercises To Do On Your Own	137
About Belief.....	139
About Memory Thoughts	140
Experiment 19 – Remembering Breakfast.....	141
Review Of Experiment 19.....	142
Memory Experiments To Do On Your Own	142
What About The Other Mental Objects?	143
Experiment 20 – Finding The Difference Between Mental Objects.....	144
Conclusion To “Finding The Difference”	146
TWO EXPERIENCES AT THE SAME TIME?.....	147
Background	148
Mental Objects: Summary Experiment	152
Experiment 21 – Fireworks	152
Fireworks Display!	155
Conclusion To Mental Objects.....	156
MENTAL STRUCTURES	157
Spiritual Teachings Also Propose Structures	158
The Reality Effect	159
But Do We Experience Structures?	159
Experiment 22 – Finding The Subconscious	159
Inquiry.....	160
What Right Have We To Say That Anything Comes From Witnessing Awareness?.....	162
The Sense That I Am The Seer	162
Conclusion To Mental Structures	163
MENTAL FUNCTIONS.....	163
Choosing, Doing	164
Experiment 23 – Finding The Choosing Function	165
Inquiry.....	166
To Do On Your Own	166
Why You Can’t Directly Experience The Choosing Function ..	167
Freedom From Choice	168

The Attention	168
Conclusion To Mental Functions	170
MENTAL STATES	171
That Sounds TIRING! What Is Our Direct Experience?	172
Experiment 24 – Looking For The State Of An Active Mind.....	172
Inquiry.....	173
Experiment 25 – Looking For A Bad Mood	174
Inquiry.....	175
Conclusion To Looking For A Bad Mood.....	177
Conclusion To Mental States	177
To Do On Your Own	178
Note About Deep Sleep	178
Deep Sleep In The Direct Path	179
The Goal Of The Teachings On Deep Sleep.....	181
Experiment 26 – The Happiness Of Deep Sleep	182
The Mind – Conclusion	184
WHERE WE ARE NOW	184
 PART 4 – WITNESSING AWARENESS.....	 186
Two Kinds Of Witness.....	187
The Opaque Witness	187
Investigating The Opaque Witness	191
Desire, Will And Choice	191
Experiment 27 – Is Desire Built Into The Witness?.....	191
Further Inquiry	192
Creation And Causality	192
Experiment 28a – Does Awareness Have A Cause?	193
Experiment 28b – Does Awareness Cause Arisings?	194
Experiment 28c – Does An Arising Cause An Arising?	195
Patterns	197
Experiment 29 – Is There A Pattern To Arisings?.....	197
Inquiry.....	198
LEVELS OF AWARENESS?	199
TIME AND SPACE	201
Space	201
Time.....	202

Experiment 30 – Is There Time In Awareness?	203
Conclusion To The Investigation On Time	204
TRUTH	204
Truth And Knowledge In The Direct Path.....	205
Conclusion To The Opaque Witness.....	206
THE TRANSPARENT WITNESS – THE END OF SUFFERING	206
Unconditional Love And Sweetness	208
You Can Close The Book Now	208
The Subtle Duality Of The Witness.....	209
Inquiring Into The Witness.....	210
Actually Doing The Inquiry	212
Experiment 31 – Can You Find An Arising?.....	212
Experiment 32 – No Presence Or Absence To Arisings	214
The Collapse Of The Witness	215
PART 5 – NONDUAL REALIZATION.....	216
OK, SO WHAT’S LEFT?.....	217
Stabilization.....	218
Can There Be Inquiry After Nondual Realization?.....	218
FREEDOM FROM THE PATH.....	220
JOYFUL IRONY	221
JOYFUL IRONY AND LANGUAGE.....	222
TEACHING IN THE DIRECT PATH	223
ENDNOTES	226
INDEX	228

EXPERIMENTS

Experiment 1	Hearing The Bell	26
Experiment 2	Seeing The Orange	31
Experiment 3	Smelling The Orange	38
Experiment 4	Touching The Table.....	44
Experiment 4a	Touch And Roughness/Smoothness	46
Experiment 4b	Touch And Wetness/Dryness	46
Experiment 4c	Touch And Temperature.....	47
Experiment 4d	Touch And Hardness/Softness.....	47
Experiment 4e	Touch And Extension.....	48
Experiment 5	Tasting The Orange	51
Experiment 6	Seeing The Body	71
Experiment 7	Touching The Body	74
Experiment 8	Hearing, Smelling And Tasting The Body	79
Experiment 9	Is The Body An Object That Senses?	85
Experiment 10	Pain	88
Experiment 11	Is Your Arm In A Certain Position?.....	93
Experiment 12a	Is Your Body Moving With The Chair?	95
Experiment 12b	Is Your Body Moving With The Car?	97
Experiment 13	The Tent	104
Experiment 14	Are You A Tent?	105
Experiment 15	Does Awareness Arise From The Brain?	110
Experiment 16	A Walk In The Park	114
Experiment 17	Thinking About An Orange	129
Experiment 18	A Purely Conceptual Thought.....	132
Experiment 19	Remembering Breakfast.....	141
Experiment 20	Finding The Difference Between Mental Objects..	144
Experiment 21	Fireworks.....	152
Experiment 22	Finding The Subconscious	159
Experiment 23	Finding The Choosing Function	165
Experiment 24	Looking For The State Of An Active Mind	172
Experiment 25	Looking For A Bad Mood	174
Experiment 26	The Happiness Of Deep Sleep	182
Experiment 27	Is Desire Built Into The Witness?	191
Experiment 28a	Does Awareness Have A Cause?	193
Experiment 28b	Does Awareness Cause Arisings?	194

Experiment 28c Does An Arising Cause An Arising? 195
Experiment 29 Is There A Pattern To Arisings? 197
Experiment 30 Is There Time In Awareness? 203
Experiment 31 Can You Find An Arising? 212
Experiment 32 No Presence Or Absence To Arisings 214

INTRODUCTION

This is a set of experiential tips and experiments for the Direct Path. What I mean by the “Direct Path” is the set of self-inquiry teachings attributed by Nitya Tripta to Shri Atmananda Krishna Menon and later elaborated upon by Jean Klein, John Levy, Alexander Smit, Philip Renard, Francis Lucille and Rupert Spira. This book can also be considered a user guide or “missing manual” to my own **Standing as Awareness**.

This book consists of a set of experiments, with explanatory text. The book’s purpose is to deeply investigate many different aspects of experience, including sensation, perception, bodily feeling and motion, waking and sleeping, emotion, attention, thought, rationality, and the sense of being a single, global, unlimited witness of all that arises. What we discover in every case is that there are actually no independent objects experienced at any time. There is never any separation or otherness, but simply love, openness, clarity, sweetness, awareness – in short, your true nature itself. This approach is often called a “tattvopadesha,” a sequential, logically connected presentation of the teaching from beginning to end.

How To Use This Book

There are several ways to use this book, and you can mix and match as you please.

- You can read through from the beginning to the end, the same way you would read any other book on nonduality. You can include the experiments or skip them.

- You can do a “slow read.” This is akin to the classic contemplative reading or “lectio divina” of the mystics. It is when you savor the flavor of the words and passages, immersing yourself in the sweetness, as awareness speaks to you. Here, too, you can include the experiments or skip them.
- You can focus on the experiments, starting at the beginning and working your way through. The experiments have been organized from the concrete to the abstract. They all represent identifiable barriers that come up for people as they do self-inquiry.
- You can pick and choose the experiments. You would do this by using the Table of Contents and Index to find topics and issues you are interested in.

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Who Is This Book For?

This book is for anyone who encounters a sticking point in their inquiry. That topic may well be covered here. In fact, most of the topics were included because they have been questions raised in people's inquiry. This book is also for anyone who:

- Wishes to further explore the sweetness of having fallen in love with awareness.
- Feels drawn to know the truth of their being and the nature of the world.
- Wishes to explore the world of their experience to discover what lies at its core.

Love

1. *You do not know anything but yourself.*
 2. *You do not love anything but yourself.*
- So both knowledge and love have yourself as their object. Therefore, you are pure Knowledge and Love.*

Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shri Atmananda,
Vol. 1, p. 47, Note #80. ¹

In everyday terms, the goal of inquiry in the Direct Path is to integrate the head and the heart in unity. In this unity, knowledge and love are flipsides on a 45 rpm record of infinite thinness. Knowledge is love distilled by clarity. Love is knowledge pervaded by sweetness. In this clarity there is no cold intellectualizing or blind sentimentality.

Love itself is transformational. If one doesn't fall in love with anything along the way, not even a little bit, then it will be hard for experience to feel sweet. What kinds of things can one fall in love with? Candidates include awareness, the teaching, the teacher, a book, Being, the universe, God, Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, or anything that represents the goal of your inquiry.

In practical terms, love and knowledge enhance each other. Love provides sweetness and ease to knowledge. Knowledge accelerates and broadens the focus of love. They meet in reality.

Love helps your understanding like this: when you do devotional or bhakti-yoga activities, your heart opens and the realizations in your inquiry are smoother and easier. There are fewer sticking points along the way, and it seems like less “work.” All experience becomes more savory and fragrant.

Inquiry opens your heart and broadens your love like this: when you do inquiry, something uncanny happens to the object of your love. It stops seeming like a distinct object whether gross or subtle. It is not experienced as different from you, and it begins to spread out and become everything. You no longer have to look in one particular direction to find your beloved. Your beloved and its sweetness are everywhere you turn.

Nondual Inquiry And Conventional Therapies

The Direct Path is a route of nondual inquiry that leads to the recognition of yourself as awareness, beauty and love. It is not a goal of the Direct Path to transform you into a person to whom only pleasant things happen. Instead of this phenomenal goal, the Direct Path has a deeper, more radical goal. The Direct Path reveals awareness to be the very nature of the person. Awareness is prior to the person, so it can't be possessed by the person. Nondual inquiry seeks to discover and clarify this nature. In doing so, it subjects the very perspective of the person to deep and radical scrutiny.

Sometimes nondual paths are described as freeing one from suffering. They succeed admirably at this, but not by giving you more favorable experiences. Nondual inquiry does not work by retaining the person but eradicating the suffering. It is much more thorough than that. What happens through nondual inquiry is that you come experientially to realize the truth of yourself as awareness, brilliant clarity and global love, in which there is neither suffering nor personhood.

People often wonder whether there is any contradiction between nondual inquiry and conventional therapies. Because nondual inquiry does not seek to improve the person, it has no quarrel with conventional therapies. The goals are different. Modalities such as psychiatry

and psychotherapy seek to improve the person through techniques that engender a healthy, flourishing person. Psychiatry may even prescribe medicine. Improving the person is a broad goal also shared by medicine, dentistry, physical fitness, exercise and education. Because a person can participate in more than one activity in life, nondual inquiry does not see itself as having an either/or relationship with these other activities. One can combine nondual inquiry with any of these activities. Of course, nondualism submits the notion of the “person” to radical scrutiny, but this does not mean that one must stop going to the dentist. One can very well participate in these other activities without taking their goals and models as literal, objective truths. In many cases, each activity helps the other.

The various therapies have various goals, corresponding with the needs of the person. A person may want to do nondual inquiry, but may be blocked by severe physical or mental pain. In such a case, the “direct path” to the relief from that pain is not nondual inquiry at all, but physical or mental therapy. And just as a person does not expect nondual inquiry to alleviate a toothache, one would not expect dental therapy to be the key to realizing the truth of the self. It is much more “direct” to follow the most efficient route to the goal at hand, while allowing the goals to assist each other.

The Main Problem

The main problem that self-inquiry addresses is what Nitya Tripta’s *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shri Atmananda* calls “wrong identification.” In other words, we take ourselves to be something we’re not. We think, feel and act as though we are a body or a mind or a combination of both, whereas the truth is that we are awareness. It normally seems as though we are some sort of particular object, whereas we are actually the witnessing awareness to which these objects appear. We are not the objects seen, but the seeingness itself.

Traditional Advaita-Vedanta gives this wrong identification the unwieldy name, “mutual superimposition of the self and the non-self.” In mutual superimposition, we mix up the subject and objects. We take one thing as another. Awareness is the *subject* but we treat it as an *object*, such as when we think that awareness can be seen or localized or

personalized. On the other hand, we treat (some) *objects* as though they are the *subject*, such as when we think that a body or mind can see or apprehend.

It is inevitable that this mix-up leads to suffering. Even though we are awareness, if we take ourselves as some kind of object like a body or mind, then we feel limited, impermanent and vulnerable. We feel we can disappear like other objects. Our pleasures, passions and possessions are temporary and doomed to vanish or fade away. Our lives as humans seem all too short. We seem bound to suffer bad fortune, guilt, shame, cruelty, pain, poverty, disease and death. These things are naturally expected to happen to objects. So if we are an object, it is inevitable to think that these things will happen to us.

But awareness, our true nature, isn't limited, personal, impermanent or temporary. It is THAT to which objects (even universes) appear. It is THAT in which they arise and fall. The person is an object, so the person comes and goes. Awareness can't come and go since it is THAT to which coming-and-going appears! There is no fear or suffering here.

Your investigation into your direct experience will reveal that all these objects aren't really objects anyway, but that they have been awareness all along. Thus, all the issues of identification and all the issues of the subject vs. objects – all of it will collapse into sweetness and clarity.

The Direct Path's Solution

The solution to wrong identification is "right identification."² Right identification is basically "no identification." As awareness we don't need to think that we are anything at all. The very need for thinking we are something drops away. The result is just *being*, as opposed to *being something*.

Of course, when one begins nondual inquiry, one usually goes through a stage in which one does explicitly identify with awareness. It seems like a new identification in place of the old one. This is quite natural, and it can even seem like putting on a new and strange new suit of clothes. But this sense of strangeness diminishes; nondual teachings give us lots of different kinds of pointers that allow us to discover how being awareness is not new or strange at all, but perfectly natural. You get to the point where there is direct, intuitive, nonconceptual experience of

being awareness. When this is deeply and directly seen, it cuts through identification with objects. It short-circuits the mutual superimposition and wrong identifications.

Once you know yourself as awareness, there is no need to take yourself as anything else. The sense of explicitly identifying with anything, *even with awareness*, drops away. Standing as awareness, being awareness will be your reality. Even if it seemed odd when you first encountered nondual teachings, it's perfectly natural. Standing as awareness isn't even anything you *do*. It is your natural state, and when this is directly seen, the world of experience will lovingly and smilingly confirm your stand at every moment.

How Does The Direct Path Work?

There are many ways that Direct Path teachers point to your nature as awareness. The primary tool is direct investigation into your experience. This is a general category which can have many entry points. Besides standing as awareness, they include:

- Investigating the world, body and mind; the result is that they are revealed as awareness and not as objects at all.
- Investigating deep sleep and sleeping knowingly.³
- Investigating the witness aspect of experience.
- Cultivating the intense feeling that you are not the doer or enjoyer.
- Cultivating the conviction that knowledge and happiness are your nature.

Western Direct-Path teachers place more emphasis on the body, science, love and psychological factors than one finds in traditional Advaita-Vedanta teachings. This is a natural consequence of the teaching making its way from one culture to another. In Western gatherings and teaching sessions you will see activities such as yoga, perceptual exercises, body-sensing – all of which help one realize that the body is not the container

of awareness or the source of sentience, but a set of objects like any other objects appearing in awareness. And in Western gatherings you'll hear questions on what realization is like, how to gauge one's progress, the place of emotions such as jealousy and anger, free will versus determinism, realization and how to live life, knowing versus feeling, and how realization affects romantic, professional and family relationships.

All of these issues and questions are entry-ways into knowing your own nature and finding fulfillment.

What Is "Direct" About The Direct Path?

"Direct" is usually interpreted to mean "not progressive." In other words, you don't have to perfect anything or become anything new. You already are whatever you would seek to become.

Of course, this isn't different from many other types of nondual teaching. Most nondual teachings agree that "the seeker is the sought" and that there's no need and no possibility to become something else. But the Direct Path means something else by "direct" as well. "Direct" means "unmediated" and refers to the direct presence and clarity of your experience, which is not interpreted through intellectual or emotional filters. What seems to be a filtering or mediating process isn't that way at all. Instead, what seems to filter or operate on experience is actually already direct experience itself, direct experience masquerading as something else.

What is direct experience? Let's start with **indirect experience**. This is experience in which one thing is experienced by means of another thing. Examples would be experiencing Bali via reading the National Geographic, experiencing Las Vegas via seeing James Bond in **Diamonds are Forever**, experiencing fire through smoke, or experiencing an apple via our perceptions of it, such as taste, smell, texture, etc.

Direct experience, on the other hand, is the experience of something that is **not** interpreted or mediated by something else. In experiencing the "apple," we directly experience a red color, a crisp texture, a tangy flavor, etc. The experience of Bali is the same – what is given directly to experience is sensations, thoughts and feelings. We call them "Bali." The label is an interpretation. And yet we'll come to find out that direct experience is actually simpler than this. We discover that in direct experience

rience there are actually no objects at all, and nothing pointing to any objects. This is beautifully simple. And just how we make this discovery is the purpose of this book.

All the various experiments, contemplations and visualizations that you'll encounter here are not ways to become awareness, or to gain an intellectual understanding that you are awareness. Rather, they are simply ways to explore the consequences of being awareness. You can think of these activities not so much as goal-oriented, but as exploration, celebration or beautiful music.

The Approach Taken Here

This book involves several different approaches.

- Standing as awareness, knowingly occupying and inhabiting your true identity, and experiencing the resulting confirmation of your stand.
- Simple remembrance that the body, mind and world are awareness as well. When we conceptualize them as independent objects, of course, they seem to come and go. And even then, if they come and go, the coming and going is taking place within awareness, which is the common factor. Body, mind and world are inseparable from awareness and are never experiences without awareness already being front and center in the picture. This can be experienced at any time if you just stop and try to find an object, any object that is apart from awareness.
- Abiding in the simple sweetness of being awareness, which is limitless and borderless. This is also something that is available at any time if you stop and notice. The stopping and noticing, of course, won't be there all the time, but the beautiful truth they indicate is always the case.
- But mostly, this book will proceed as what Advaita-Vedanta calls "tattvopadesha."

Tattvopadesha is an experiential, logically-connected presentation of the teaching from beginning to end. It proceeds from the very concrete to the very subtle. It starts with the simplest and most seemingly obvious experience of separation, e.g., the experience of objects in the world that seem to be other than your self. You will see how these objects are nothing other than awareness. The tattvopadesha continues with more and more subtle elements of experience until we arrive at pure consciousness. Items we will examine include a vast range of experience, and we will proceed in order from the more concrete to the more abstract. You don't have to memorize this list and may not even need to explore everything on it. But the sorts of experiences we'll look into include the following:

- **Physical objects**, which are usually taken to be the textbook definition of reality.
- **The senses**, which are thought to be the neutral and transparent gateways to the world of physical reality.
- **The body**, including the brain, which is usually thought to be the container of the mind.
- **The mind**, which is usually thought to be the container of consciousness.
- **Events**, which are sort of like states of affairs, but with change and movement.
- **Mental states**, including emotional and meditative states, which all too often are experienced as more real than the ground we walk on.
- **Subtle abstract objects** such as cause and effect, identity and difference, time and space, subject and object. These subtle objects are often thought to provide a structure or organization to consciousness. We will see how consciousness cannot possibly be structured or organized by anything.

- **Witnessing awareness**, which starts out seeming like a big mind, complete with individuality, memory and psychological reactivity. But as our investigation continues, witnessing awareness comes to be understood as not possessing any personal, mental or psychological characteristics at all. Instead, it is realized that witnessing awareness is global clarity, and is what all characteristics appear to.
- **Pure consciousness**, which is consciousness without the witnessing aspect.

At each stage, we will have the chance to try experiments that make clear what we already know: what seems to be something other than awareness is awareness all the way and all the time. This is your happiness.

Separation – The False Claim Of Objectivity

Things seem to exist on their own, without depending on awareness in any way. Things seem to exist *objectively*. No matter how concrete or abstract something is, it seems to exist in this way. The Great Wall of China, differential calculus and moral correctness may not all be physical, but they seem to really exist independently from the mind and independently from awareness.

We think of the “objective” as that which exists on its own and which can be discovered and verified by separate “subjective” perceivers. The very notion of objectivity brings in several dualisms at once, such as between subjective and objective, between awareness and object, between separate containers of awareness, between inside and outside the container, and between “right” and “wrong” or “accurate” and “inaccurate.” Many other dualisms also depend on the notion of objectivity.

Freedom From Objectivity AND Subjectivity

When we investigate objectivity and discover that it is not to be found, we do not fall into its opposite. We do not fall into subjectivity or solipsism. Instead, we become free from this pair of opposites. Nondual experience is neither objective nor subjective. Rather, what happens is freedom from the very structures that permit this distinction. We become free of its network

of limiting assumptions, perceptions and feelings, along with the images of entrapment, containment and separation from people and objects.

Another dualism is the one between fact and value or intellect and emotion. The *first* member of each pair is usually accorded greater status than the *second* member, so the notion of objectivity often entails the dualism of ranking as well. When we try to “be objective” about something, we try to describe it as it is, impartially, grasped purely as it is in itself, without being swayed by emotion or evaluation. We feel we should see things from what is sometimes called the “View from Nowhere” or the “God’s-eye View.” Being able to perceive and judge this way is usually valued much more highly than letting any individual, personal, emotional or evaluative factors operate. The idea is that the object or situation pre-exists, and sentience or awareness is able to transparently and neutrally make contact with the object, thereby conveying true and accurate information about it. Any other way of grasping the object would be “subjective,” which is usually de-valued.

When we feel that things exist objectively, it almost feels as if things are self-powered, persisting under their own steam. When we perceive things, it seems that things are casting themselves toward us, meeting our perception. There seems to be a kind of magnetism drawing our perceptual and conceptual energies toward things, which seem to be *really there*, but on the other side of a gap. Things seem to be on the far side of the gap, and we seem to be on the near side. Things seem to be “out there,” and we seem to be “in here.” To bridge the gap (which is usually thought to coincide with the surface of the skin), we must rely on perception and cognition. And we suspect that we can be wrong about things. We know that we must depend on perception and cognition, which can always be mistaken.

Because we seem to be “in here,” we feel like we’re enclosed in separate bubbles of sentience, one per person. So we also feel separated from other people. To bridge this gap, we need communication, which can also be mistaken.

The strong sense of these gaps causes great anxiety and suffering. The feeling that we are cut off, along with the ever-present possibility of being wrong about everything and everyone, creates alienation from the world, from other people and even from ourselves.

But our investigation will reveal in the most direct way that objectivity

is false. We will see that no matter what kind of object is involved, *objectivity is simply never our experience.* The belief in objectivity and separation is simply unfounded. When this is deeply understood, partly due to the investigations we will undertake in this book, the misleading sense of objectivity will be understood as false and will eventually vanish. The entire structure that seems to keep us separate collapses, along with all suffering.

Without the sense of objectivity, there will be no sense of separation. All of the related dualisms and their attendant feelings of being split simply fall away. You will no longer seem to be separate from the world, other people or your own thoughts and feelings. You won't feel divided between thinking versus feeling. There will be no "out there" or "in here." You will not feel like a thinker or feeler or doer. You will realize your identity as the wholeness of all that is. This wholeness is experienced as love, peace and sweetness.

A Note About Terminology

Although some teachings distinguish awareness from consciousness, the Direct Path does not. In the Direct Path, the terms "awareness" and "consciousness" are synonyms. Neither one is more basic than the other, and there is nothing more basic or primordial that is "prior" to consciousness.⁴ The term "awareness" tends to be used when objects are being discussed, and "consciousness" tends to be used when the collapse of the witness is discussed. But these are stylistic matters only. Either term could be used in either context.

And what *is* awareness? Descriptive terms can be philosophical or poetic, including: the ground of all being, THAT which everything is appeared to, the witness, the unseen seer, love, beauty, sweetness, being, clarity, reality, self-luminosity and peace.

Who Realizes? Who Is Writing This?

These questions sometimes come up at the beginning of inquiry, and a person wants clarity: "Who is the realizer? If it is **someone**, then is that truly a nondual realization? If it is **no one**, then what's the use and how does that benefit me? Who do you mean by 'I'? Who is writing this

book? Is it being communicated from the absolute level or the relative level? If it is from the absolute level, then how can it say so many different things and actually recommend things to do? If it is from the relative level, then how do we know that what it says is true?"

Sometimes the nondual teacher's response to these sorts of questions mentions consciousness or no one. For example, these expressions are familiar, "It is consciousness talking to consciousness." Or "No one realizes that there is no one there."

I find that these can be helpful expressions in some cases. But in other cases, people can take them too literally. The listener can personify consciousness, thinking about it along the lines of a person who would be speaking or realizing. Or people can insert themselves into the term "no one." I had a friend who said, "You know, I want to be that 'no one' who realizes that there is no one there." In my friend's case, these expressions became retained and rehearsed as part of a new belief system that's given the label "nondual."

I talk more about language toward the end of the book, but here is a way to get started if these questions seem important. Feel free to begin this investigation without fixed answers to these questions. I am using the pronouns "you" and "I" in the everyday conversational sense, except where noted. You can begin by thinking of the realizer and the speaker the way you would normally think of these things if you were unacquainted with nondual theory. And then see what happens as you proceed. These issues will all receive intense scrutiny.

The only terms that I'm using in a special sense from the beginning are "awareness" and "consciousness." By these I mean "that to which appearances appear," or "the unseen seer." I don't use these terms to refer to a personally or biologically individuated sentience the way we would in the everyday sense.

If you do feel the "who realizes" question very strongly, you will probably feel its force diminish to zero as you go through the inquiry.

PART 1 – WORLD

After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the nonexistence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it – "I refute it thus."

James Boswell, **Life of Johnson**

Through the senses, you perceive only gross objects. As you transcend the first and reach the second stage, you perceive only subtle objects or ideas. In the last stage, everything appears as Consciousness.

Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shri Atmananda,

Vol. 2, p. 199, Note #1025.

The world is the collection of all objects. We feel that the world is *out there* and that we are *in here*. This is our basic sense of separation.

What is an object? For many people, the textbook example of an object would be something physical, such as a car, a tree or a rock. Feeling like we are inside a bag of skin looking out at objects is the paradigm case of a sense of separation. We feel cut off from the world because of this sense of separation.

In this chapter we will begin our examination of this sense of separation. We will begin to experience that the sense of separation is totally unsupported by our direct experience. When we realize that the sense of separation is not supported, we discover that it will not support suffering.

Physical Objects

When we hear someone say, “It is all the Self” or “Awareness is all there is,” we immediately think of those rocks and trees. Maybe bridges, skyscrapers and computers as well. How can these things be awareness? We often think of awareness as soft, penetrable and lighter than air. But physical objects seem to be hard, resistant, heavy and impenetrable – except with tools even harder than they are.

Rocks and the ground seem so different from awareness. If anything *isn't* awareness, these objects seem like the perfect candidates.

But what does our direct experience have to say about these things? We will investigate these things directly, and ask ourselves questions such as:

- Is awareness really something big and soft?
- Is a rock really something that possesses hardness within itself?
- Is a tree really something other than myself?

If something is really the case, then experience should be able to prove it. We will conduct experiments and investigations to discover what is proved by our direct experience.

Most of our suffering is based on the presumption that the mind, body and world are all separate and independent from each other, and independent from being seen, witnessed and known. We are fearful, shocked, indignant and even outraged if one of these aspects of reality changes suddenly or comes to an end. We take our self to be independent from everything else, and feel that this separate self should somehow be immune to change, poverty, shame, insults, disease, old age and death. We feel fear, sadness, depression, indignation and anger with the

approach of any of these aspects. We want to be the separate enjoyer of everything, and we also want nothing to change. These desires are based on the presumption that things (including our own self) are objective. We feel that things exist independently, separately from awareness, and that they are really, truly *there*.

Our Strategy – Trying To Validate Objectivity

In order to tune in to our investigations, we will first examine the claims of objectivity and separation more closely. What exactly is being claimed? Then we will examine these supposedly separate objects in extreme close focus. We will investigate objects using the most direct and definitive evidence we have: our senses. We will examine the direct evidence proved by our senses, taking the senses individually, from easy to work with to more challenging. We will proceed in the order of Hearing, Seeing, Smelling, Tasting and Tasting.

The purpose of these experiments is this: by trying to validate objectivity, we will fail every time. We discover that we validate quite the opposite. We demonstrate experientially that what we *actually* experience is not objective, separate or alien, but actually limitlessness, inseparability and awareness.

So first, what is objectivity really saying?

Naïve Realism

Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.

Philip K. Dick

The primacy of existence (of reality) is the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of any consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an identity.

Ayn Rand, **The Metaphysical Versus the Man-Made**

In the West, however, the dominant notion of the real is largely based on disciplines such as physics and the psychology of perception. What is real, what really exists, is that which does not depend on the mind of the observer in order to exist. Reality is said to be mind-independent.

And, of course, physical objects seem to be the most obvious case of something real. The common-sense way we think about the world is that we perceive it directly. According to common sense, physical objects cause our perceptions of them. And on the other hand, our mental images resemble the physical objects. This is the view called “Naïve Realism,” and can be depicted by the diagram below.

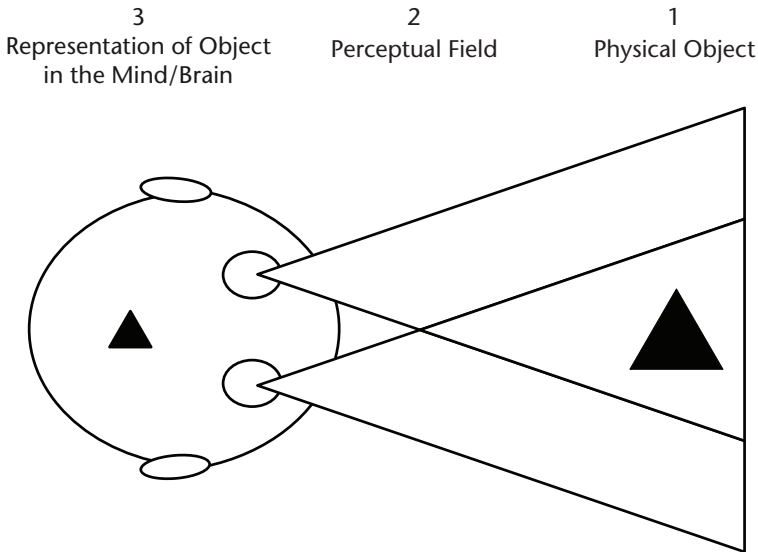


Figure 1 – Naïve Realism

You have probably seen variations of this diagram many times, even in school. It shows (1) the physical object, (2) the perceptual field and (3) the image of the object inside the head. Each component is separate from the others.

The important thing about this diagram is the claim of Naïve Realism: *the object exists regardless of whether anyone is seeing it*. The physical object does not depend on the perceptual field or the inner representation in order to exist. In fact, multiple observers are able to see the exact same object, because it exists before their observation and independently

of their observation. This is what it is said to mean for the physical object to *exist* or *be real*.

After seeing so many of these diagrams, we come to take them literally. We may even think that there is a triangular image inside our head/brain/mind which resembles the external physical triangle that we think caused it. We think the same way about the other senses, with varying degrees of clarity and distinctness. For most people, however, vision tends to be the dominant sense and is the one they think *about* and think *with* the most.

But the remarkable thing about diagrams like this is that they don't correspond to anyone's actual observations. No scientist observes a triangular visual field surrounding a physical object, and then an identical mental object inside the head which matches the physical object. Regardless of the type of measuring equipment used, the scientific observer does not observe an image of the external triangle nestled among the neurons.

Not only does the external observer not see a scenario like Figure 1, but the subject doesn't experience anything like it either. When you are seeing an external physical triangle, you never observe your own "visual field" or rays of vision emanating from your eyes. You also never witness a mental object that you observe to match the physical object.

Diagrams like Figure 1 are simplistic conceptual constructions.

Naïve Realism is also vulnerable to another kind of difficulty which is called "perceptual relativity."

The Perceptual Relativity Critique

The appearance of the external object is vulnerable to a wide range of "objective conditions" such as distance, angle of approach, lighting, and the presence or absence of other objects in the vicinity. The more one thinks about how this happens, the more the question arises, "Why do we think that the object in itself is fixed and invariable, when our perceptions vary so widely?"

For example, let's say the object we are observing is a top of a bur-nished oak wood table in our living room. The table is said to be "round." That is, from an angle of vision centered directly above the table, the table top looks round. But when we enter the living room and look at the table, it seems flattened. When we approach the table and walk around it,

the tabletop appears a little fuller than it did from the edge of the room, but certainly not round.

If the table is lying on its side, the ellipse is oriented a totally different way, now tall and thin rather than broad and flat.

In fact, the shape and proportions of the tabletop differ with almost every passing moment. We might never actually see the table from the angle in which it appears round. Yet we firmly believe that the table is actually round in and of itself, as though it has roundness **internal** to it as part of its nature.

And then there's color. When our grandparents gave us the table, they said it was "golden brown." Now it looks darker. It looks the most towards golden brown in the middle of a sunny day if we pull aside the curtains in the living room windows. At dusk it is grayish dark brown. And at night it appears a murky and blurry dark gray. Sometimes a dense black. Most of the time it does not appear to be brown. And let's say one evening we happen to be watching TV in the same room with our table. We see an advertisement from a furniture store for a brown table. The image will be intensely bright. The table depicted will have a brilliant, appealing golden brown color. Now we look at the physical table in our room, and it will look even darker and less brown than it looked before we saw the TV ad.

There are thousands of cases of perceptual relativity like these. We are so used to them that in order to maintain the belief in the constancy of the externally existent physical object, we have come up with a more complicated model than Naïve Realism gave us. This new model goes by many names, such as "Representative Realism" or "Indirect Realism" or "Common Sense Realism."

Representative Realism And The "Veil Of Perception"

Representative Realism tries to account for perceptual relativity by showing how the information coming from the external object is broken down and interpreted by the mind before the mental image arises. That is, the mind is said to play a more active role than it did in Naïve Realism.

In Representative Realism, perception happens in stages. The perceived object is still external, pre-existent and objective. But it sends us various signals, which we interpret so as to correctly and accurately

re-constitute the object in our minds. Even intuition, the “sixth sense,” can work this way. (In the West there are other more complex theories of realism as well. For the last several hundred years, realists have been arguing with idealists and nominalists and pragmatists and constructivists and, more recently, with postmodernists. A person can be a realist about one kind of thing, but not about another. But the various kinds of realism tend to agree that at least some things exist without depending on persons, minds, thoughts, languages, conventions or awareness.)

Representative Realism works like this. The object out in the world causes vibrations of different types. These vibrations are picked up by the senses and turn into sense data. The sense data are experienced as sensations and interpreted by the mind, after which the accurate mental image appears.

Representative Realism may be depicted in diagrams like this one:

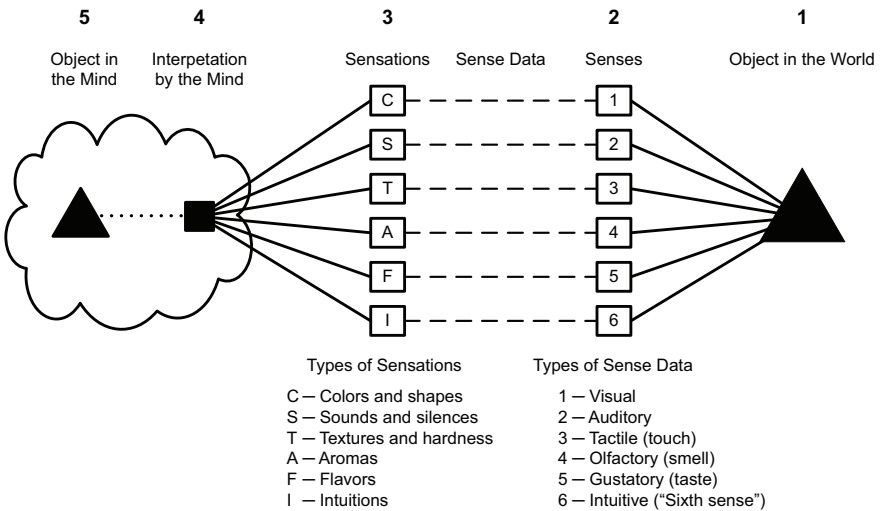


Figure 2 – Representative Realism

In Representative Realism, we do not experience the object directly, but through a veil of perception. There are actually several veils and gaps in the process, and each gap is designed to be able to account for perceptual problems. In addition to perceptual relativity, there are also other potential problems that the model needs to account for, such as illness

when our senses (2) are not functioning normally. There are also possible emotional and psychological influences that affect the interpretive stage (4), such as being in love in such a way that every person on the street looks like our romantic partner, and cases of education and conditioning, where the object won't look like a table until we have come to learn what a table is. (Actually, all these situations are reasons **not** to accept Representative Realism, so the model must work harder!)

But in spite of all these stages, Representative Realism makes the same two claims that Naïve Realism makes:

- (C) The external object (1) causes the mental object (5).
- (R) The mental object (5) represents and resembles the external object (1).

And because of the two veils, the veil of the senses and the veil of mental interpretation, the idea of verifying claims (C) and (R) makes even less sense than it does with Naïve Realism.

But this intellectual conclusion is not enough to overpower the strong belief that there are thoughts and images “on the inside” and a world “on the outside” which match. We still think and feel as though there is a match in which the object causes the idea, and the idea resembles the object. We need to experience directly that this set of “realist” assumptions is never verified.

The Reality Effect

By “reality effect” I mean the feeling that something is really real, in the way described by some variation of realism. The reality effect is not the reality intended by the realist, but the conviction or feeling about such a reality. Certain experiences can convey a greater or lesser reality effect. Certain experiences can make us feel that something must be “really real.” Certain experiences make us feel that there is something out there truly existing independently of thought and awareness.

For example, stubbing our toe in the dark has a greater reality effect most of the time than hearing a musical chime or seeing a pastel bedspread. The sense of touch usually has a greater reality effect than

the sense of vision. Intense experiences have a stronger reality effect than mild experiences. Pain has a greater reality effect than pleasure. When people say, "Let's get real," they usually mean to accept something unwelcome.

We will look at the reality effect while examining different aspects of our experience. What is interesting is that the reality effect does not prove reality as the realist would wish. The reality effect is more like a combination of strong beliefs and feelings that make us convinced that reality is objective. This conviction could be described as follows:

(T) Mild experiences may well be illusory, but I feel that the intense or painful experiences actually point to objective reality.

(T1) The more intense the experiences, the more I believe that they point to objective reality.

Notice that both the reality effect (T) and the intensity with which it is believed (T1) are simply arisings in witnessing awareness. They are just like other thoughts. They appear in awareness and subside back into awareness. The reality effect is nothing more than that.

This brings us to our experiments.

Experiments

We will investigate our experience directly. We'll hunt for objectivity. We'll try to discover the actual presence of veils, levels and layers in our experience that would indicate that we are actually separate from objects and cut off from the world. In other words, we will try to verify whether (C) and (R) are true. Items (1) and (5) refer to parts of Figure 2 above. Item (1) refers to "objects in the world," and (5) refers to "objects in the mind." When we feel the Realist attitude, we feel that there is an interaction between (1) and (5). Usually we feel that:

- (C) The external object (1) causes the mental object (5).
- (R) The mental object (5) represents and resembles the external object (1).

Our inquiry will go like this. We will try to verify (C) and (R) by looking into reality and objectivity very carefully. If anything is objectively “out there” or “in here” as an independently existing thing, then it ought to be easier to find the closer we look. We will look very closely and directly. But we will not find anything separate or objective to actually exist. We will not find independence, division or separation. Instead, when we look very closely and directly, we will find wholeness, clarity, completeness and indivisibility. These are the legacies of our nature as awareness.

We’ll proceed by experimenting with each sense separately. Later, we will experiment with combinations of senses in case there are any interaction effects which create a world through a process of senses working together.

The Source Of The Experiments

Where did these experiments come from? They actually have “street cred,” because they are designed in response to many years of questions I’ve received from people actually doing nondual inquiry. The questions usually represent people’s sticking points, places where inquiry has stalled for them. Some issues are more frequent than others, but each one turns up many times, according to my observations.

Each experiment is a potential way to see through one of these common issues. The issues all carry assumptions. The assumptions usually amount to regarding some aspect of experience as a truly existent object. What the experiments reveal is that all these objects have one thing in common. The objects cannot be found when looked for in direct experience. Only awareness is “found,” and yet awareness is not an object. It is the very nature of experience itself.

Setup For The Experiments

While you do the sensory experiments and most of the other investigations in this book, do them with care. Find a quiet, peaceful place where you won’t be in the way of anyone else. Some experiments might ask for the assistance of another person. Some of the experiments will require you to observe common objects such as a bell, a chair, an orange, etc.

To paraphrase the familiar product warnings, please don't do the experiments in this book while driving or operating machinery. These experiments can facilitate perceptual and gestalt shifts; you may experience feelings of disorientation at first. These experiments can upset the conventional ways you experience yourself and the world. Make sure to conduct the experiments in a safe place.

Before You Begin

Immediately before doing an experiment, take a few minutes to try what I call the "Heart Opener." It is akin to falling in love with awareness. It is akin to a reminder that awareness is the nature of you and all things. Experiencing this reminder opens the heart, and you'll find more ease and less resistance when doing the experiments themselves.

Being Awareness – The Heart Opener

1 Take a deep breath slowly. Exhale slowly, all the way. Take another deep breath. Exhale all the way. Now take three-quarters of a deep breath and exhale as you normally would.

2 Close your eyes. Notice that there might be sounds, sensations, feelings and thoughts arising, but that YOU, the witnessing awareness to which these things are arising, are always already present.

3 Notice that you are this clarity. You are present whether there are objects arising or not. **If there are objects**, you are already there as THAT which knows the **presence** of the objects. **If there are no objects**, you are already there as THAT which knows the absence of the objects. Regardless of the presence or absence of objects, you are there.

4 Notice that you are not an observed object at all, but the open, spacious, brilliant clarity in which objects arise. You cannot grasp or hold this clarity, for it is the very spaciousness in which grasping arises.

5 Notice that there are no walls to this clarity, no edges to YOU. You are borderless. You are not contained by anything. You are limitless.

This doesn't have to take long. You can do it just until you get a taste of yourself as this limitless awareness. There is a sweetness to this taste, which will cause you to fall in love with awareness all over again. And then when you do the experiments, it will guide you home.

Hearing

We will begin with hearing. For most people, hearing is not the dominant sense. For this very reason, it may be easier to work with, and the steps of the exercise can be understood more easily.

In the following exercise, we will investigate a *bell* through hearing. What direct evidence does hearing provide about the bell? We are focusing only on hearing, not on seeing or touching. Hearing is one source of direct experience and we will investigate it carefully. If any "evidence" seems to appear through other channels such as memory, thinking, feeling or touch, simply set it aside and return to hearing. Later, we will investigate the other channels directly as well.

Experiment 1 – Hearing The Bell

Purpose – Discovering what you really hear.

Objects needed – A bell or bowl of some kind. A wooden spoon or chopstick as a striker.

Setup – The bell can be a Zen-style temple bell, a gong or a single "jingle" bell. If none of these are around, you can use something from the kitchen, such as a metal serving tray, a mixing bowl or a coffee cup. For the striker, you can use a wooden chopstick or a spoon. If you can find a friend to strike the "bell" for you, this will make it easier for you to focus on **hearing** without moving your body or involving other senses. But you can do it by yourself if you cannot conveniently find someone to assist. The experiment can still work.

The Experiment – Begin with the Heart Opener so that you get a taste of being the open clear spaciousness of awareness.

- 1 Close your eyes. Have your assistant strike the bell (or if need be, do it yourself with your eyes closed). Let the sound subside.
- 2 Wait 5 seconds. Strike the bell again. Let the sound subside.
- 3 Repeat step (2) for a total of 3 strikes of the bell.

Inquiry – Inquire into what you have experienced directly. During the following inquiries, strike the bell again if you need to, in order to clarify and verify what you have experienced. Beginning with the experiment itself, whatever comes through hearing has been part of your direct experience. It may seem as though you “heard the bell.” We will investigate it as it is done in the Direct Path. We are basically taking a very close and detailed look at what is directly experienced.

- **Do you experience a separate or independent perceiver?** One of the most common assumptions regarding perception is that there is an independent perceiver who is on the ultimate receiving end of incoming sense data. See item 5 in Figure 2 for a schematic image of this perceiver. But going by the sounds themselves and not by thought, inference or imagination, do you actually experience a separate hearer or perceiver? What would the hearer sound like?
- **Do you experience a bell to be independent of sound?** We usually think that the object (i.e., the bell) is a truly existing object which causes the impressions we have of it. This is the object that we think exists outside the “veil of perception.” Let’s see if this idea is verified in direct experience. *Don’t go by what you think must be true in order to explain perception. Instead, go by your direct experience.* You do seem to experience the bell-sound. But *do you also experience a bell making the sound?* In other words, do you experience a bell in addition to the sound? If you do experience a bell making the sound, this would help verify the notion that the bell exists objectively. You would be directly experiencing an independent bell. You would be experiencing a bell existing outside your experience. But do you? Going by hearing alone, is there anything directly experienced about the bell other than a bell-sound?

- **Do you experience a sound to be independent of hearing?** We may think that not only the bell, **but the sounds themselves** are objective. This is because we think the objective bell is causing sounds to exist, which we then pick up and which becomes sensory information. We often think that the sounds are actually present, waiting for us to come along and hear them. But let's look into it more closely: *Do you experience a sound waiting to be heard, a sound outside the scope of your hearing?* In other words, do you directly experience a sound already present which you then proceed to hear? Yet another way of looking at this question would be: *Do you experience an unheard sound?* Also check: do you experience the sound as separate from you? Do you experience it to be at any distance from you?

- **Do you experience hearing to be independent of awareness?** We often think of hearing and seeing as actual objectively existing faculties or abilities. We consider them to be pre-existent tools that awareness makes use of. It seems that we can use these tools to pick up information about the "outside world." Let's look into that. *Do you experience hearing itself as something existing outside of witnessing awareness?* Do you experience hearing being already present in a pre-existent way, waiting to be taken up by awareness and used? Do you hear hearing? Now think about the other senses for a moment. Do you see hearing? Do you taste or smell hearing?

- **Witnessing awareness** – Try to scan your direct experience: *Do you directly experience a moment when awareness is absent?* Whether there are bell-sounds or not, do you experience a moment in which awareness is not there?

- **The claims of realism** – Remember the two claims of realism, (C) and (R)?

(C) The external object causes the mental object.

(R) The mental object represents and resembles the external object.

Did you directly experience anything that could support either claim? In order to substantiate claim (C), you would need to isolate