

Chapter 13

Five Steps to a New Perspective of Being



Seeing the world with a completely fresh perspective is not easy. From the moment we are born, each of us spends our entire life integrating all of the phenomena we experience on a daily basis into a coherent world picture. While some of this is done on our own, we are also influenced by the people around us. Observe parents interacting with a child and you will see many ways in which the words and actions of the parents limit the child into forming a myriad of world possibilities into one world view. So our experience of reality is heavily influenced by our parents and other significant adults, who were influenced by their parents – and so it goes. But we can also ask ourselves the question: is it possible to consciously rebuild our worldview? Is it possible to truly overcome an object-based world conception - a world of fixed thought forms - and instead see the world as an expression of relationship or betweenness?

The following exercise, the last in the book, offers a daily practice that points us toward a new way of being. Recently, I practiced the exercise daily with a small group of people, for many weeks. While the progress day to day was generally very small, occasional breakthroughs occurred. These breakthroughs tend to occur at unpredictable times, so one should not be discouraged if, as one participant experienced, “still nothing is happening” after weeks of working at it. Toward the end of our time, over a two day period, many different aspects of the exercise came together for this participant and she “got it!”

Begin with an everyday object. In the case of our small group, we chose a silver soup spoon. There was nothing particularly fancy about the spoon. In fact, the simplicity of the chosen object is important, and also the fact that it has complex and curved surfaces rather than simply flat surfaces. The object is placed on a table and the following five steps are worked through, one at a time, for an approximate total time of 20 minutes. It is important to spend more time at the beginning, in order to master the first two steps. As the first steps become stronger, more attention can be given to the remaining steps.

Step 1

To begin, simply place the object on a table in front of you and observe. In the case of the spoon, you can simply look (but can also use the other senses), and say “spoon.” It is as simple as that! Step one is to simply acknowledge the everyday experience we have, when we look at an image and simply say what “it” is.

Step 2

Continue to look at the image of the spoon. What are the key observations that tell you this is a spoon? If the handle was shorter would it still be a spoon? How wide could the handle be and you would still say, “I have a spoon?” Is the bowl shape necessary? Could you call a fork with the tines almost touching each other a spoon? An almost spoon?

At this level, what we are trying to do is to identify how the concept of spoon is actually made up of many different elements. The handle, bowl, their juxtaposition, the way it needs to be held in the hand, perhaps even certain types of material, all bring to us the idea of *spoon*. This process is an important one, for unless we make this conscious, we will simply keep thinking that the spoon is simply obvious. Instead, we become aware that *spoon* is a concept we produce from other functional elements.

At this point it can be interesting to think of different types of spoons we have seen. What about primitive spoons we may have seen in museums as artifacts of early man? Perhaps we can think of a spoon we once tried to carve out of a solid piece of wood. What about a soup ladle, is that a spoon? When does it become a bowl? Can spoons be made from different materials? Wood, steel, plastic, silver, porcelain? What about a clam shell on a stick, is that a spoon?

Again, the key intention of step 2 is to wake us up to the fact that what we call a spoon is actually much more flexible and less fixed than we may initially comprehend. Flexibility of thought is one of the key elements we will need to build on for later stages of this exercise.

Step 3

During Step 3, the choosing of a silver spoon was revealed to have been beneficial to the activity. In Step 3, we take some attribute of the object, for example color, and focus on the origin of that perception in the context of what we experience in the present. Upon closer examination, we begin to see that there is no color associated with the silver spoon. Silver takes on the colors of the surrounding images.

As we continued doing this exercise over a few weeks, participants became fascinated with all the differing attributes of the color of the spoon. Depending on where you were sitting, you might see colors associated with the sky outside the windows. Was the day sunny, cloudy or clear? As the season began to change, the colors changed each morning, even though we were doing the observation at the same time each day. Were the overhead lights on and what other objects were on the table? Was someone wearing a particularly unusual piece of clothing and that changed the color of the spoon? We also noted that the positioning of the spoon had a profound effect on the color seen.

Other conditions also affect the particular quality of spoonness. For example, what happens to the spoon if it is left in a warm, humid environment? It begins to turn dull in color and take on a brownish/black hue (it tarnishes). What happens if we were to warm it with a torch? Until it glows red? Until it melts? What happens if we place a red tablecloth under the spoon?

As you can see, Step 3 is to really begin to recognize that:

- 1) It's a spoon
- 2) We can only call it a spoon because we integrate certain attributes into the concept spoon.
- 3) Each of the qualities of the spoon is changeable given a changing set of conditions.

Step 4

Now we take all of the activity, perception and conceptualization that we used on the spoon, and simply turn it on our own being, our own sense of self.

What makes us who we think we are? Are there different attributes of our own being that we identify as primary? Do we think we are sister or brother, mother or child, smart, beautiful, not good at math, artistic, mechanically inclined (or lacking thereof)?

In this case we begin to see all the elements or qualities of our own being as the raw material of how we put together a picture of own self. In Step 4, as in Step 3, we take one attribute and begin to see how it also changes with changing conditions. Are you artistic? If so, are you equally so with paint and clay? If only with paint, are there some types of paint you are good

with while others are challenging? Oils, versus watercolor or acrylics? Are there types of painting that are easy (e.g. landscapes), while others are difficult (e.g. painting hands on people in portraits?). Do you recall when this type of activity was hard? Is it always easy now? Are there still elements of this that now you find difficult and may soon become more understandable or easy?

When we take this type of investigation even deeper, we find that our picture of our self, like our picture of the spoon, is a habit that can change and be built and rebuilt continuously. If we can begin to move to this aspect of our experience of the world, our own experience of self, then we truly begin to experience our life as alive! We no longer define our self in a fixed manner, but begin to see how we can choose how, what and why we respond to some elements and not toward others. We begin to become a creator of our own sense of self. We begin to become a living dynamic being. We now become – a human – being!

Before we go too far with describing Step 5, it is important to remember that simply getting through Step 3 and Step 4 requires a large amount of effort and practice. We rarely see the so called “outer world” as flexible and changeable. Even more challenging is to accord the same level of freedom and flexibility to our own sense of self. It is also important to recognize that too much flexibility of being can be unhealthy. If we simply react to everything in whatever way suits our mood at the moment we are seriously missing the point. The key in Step 4 is not only to recognize the flexibility that we can embody, but also to begin to take up this flexibility and use it to create the human being we strive and desire to become. There are tremendous possibilities in Steps 3 and 4 – even more so when we can recognize and accord the same flexibility to another human being.

Step 5

So finally on to Step 5. In this final step, we continue to look at the spoon and see how it continually manifests as an expression of the conditions in which it is found. We also continue to observe our own being, and see it too as a continual manifestation of the conditions around us and our own level of flexibility. In Step 5, we simultaneously integrate the manifestation of the outer with the manifestation and flexibility of the inner, and, in holding the two of them simultaneously, we experience the incredible dynamic aspect of being we call life. In this experience, we no longer experience simply a body and an object. Instead, what begins to happen is that we experience the coming of our being into the being of all. This experience can sometimes be likened to the experience of young children out in nature on a beautiful day: all is full of happening, movement, and connectedness, and full of possibility. It is not that we lost this capacity as we grew, it is simply that as we got older we focused on the static and repeatable aspects of life rather than the dynamic living aspects. As stated in earlier chapters,

it is precisely humanity's static focus at one part of its evolving process that gives us the gift of self-consciousness. It is our task now to begin to add the living aspect of being.

We no longer ask who am I, what am I supposed to do? We now ask the question "how will I choose to be and what do I choose to bring about as conditions for others within this world of possibility?"

So now we have arrived at our goal in Step 5. The world is not simply "out there" with me "in here". After careful investigation of all the aspects of conceiving and perceiving, we realize that the liveliness of our younger life was not simply an ideal. It was one aspect of reality that we can work ourselves back into. Now that we have come back to that lively way of being through our own inner activity, we claim a certain level of freedom that would be impossible for a child to achieve. We take the gift of materialism and raise it back up to the openness of an earlier state of being. Only now we do it consciously. When the consciousness is combined with the openness, thinking and love become united within our own being. At this point, the phenomena of the outer and that of the inner are experienced as inseparable. The world becomes one being, and we see aspects of our being in our surroundings. Once we recognize this truth, we begin to care about our surroundings as much as we do for our own being. We arrive though thinking at the truthful reality of love! We have raised the materialistic world conception into the reality of relationship. We realize and experience that I too am a creator being.

And so we each go and create the truthful reality of relationship and love in every activity we choose to do and be. We have now overcome the object based world conception. Through the consciousness arrived at through an object-based world view, we reunite with the wholeness of world manifestation. But now, not as recipient, but as a conscious participant of the hierarchies of creation!

We have embraced materialism – now its time to let IT go!