



# Experience and Knowledge

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## INTRODUCTION

Except for a few excerpts from James' oral teaching, this booklet is an edited collection of his written responses to questions raised by Vedanta students and later presented as eSatsangs on the [shiningworld.com](http://shiningworld.com) website. The material is direct and shines brightly with the immediacy of students' concerns and the teacher's compassionate exposition. There is repetition in this material, as any living encounter would entail. That is necessary to help the student become established in the teaching. As James once said, students of Vedanta are swimming up the stream. The hypnotic concepts of the world seem to contradict the teachings of Vedanta. Hearing the teachings once is rarely enough. Much like looking closely at various facets of a diamond, we hear the words and recognize the truth from yet one more angle until we develop unshakable confidence in their veracity. These brief expositions are best read with the attitude of inquisitive appreciation, savored slowly, allowing their meaning to percolate up and release us into the realization that I am whole, complete, actionless, ordinary awareness. Where would we want to move from that? Just what could offer us something better?

Discernment of experience and knowledge is the golden key in Vedanta. I'd like to give a brief story of my personal journey, which includes a seventeen-year discipleship with an Indian Bhakti guru. That path entailed strict daily discipline, a monastic-like lifestyle, and frequent periods of meditation, lasting hours. As students, we were taught that "God realization", a direct experience of the Supreme, requires arduous efforts of many lifetimes. We were struggling to maintain perfect discipline and to conform to the various strict precepts of living. The necessity of effort to reach *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, the experience of no self and no objects, did not seem at all strange and fit perfectly with the conditioning I received in my childhood. One has to work to get anything of value, I thought.

As Grace would have it, I was finally released from that path by being thrown out, a fact that took me some years to appreciate, but which I now see as a great gift. At that time the laborious work on "spiritual development" seemed harder than ever. A number of wonderful teachings and teachers followed. Many have given me pieces of truth, but it wasn't until listening to James' teaching on the rooftop in Tiruvannamalai, India, with the sacred mountain Arunachala and the screeching noises of Indian traffic in the background, that I got that *moksa*, liberation, is not an experience. The problem has never been my separation from Brahman. Brahman is nondual and therefore separation could never take place. What I experience is not separate from awareness. The problem has been my ignorance of reality and a misunderstanding of who I am. Knowing does not require doing. Nor does it require any special experience. As ignorance was the problem, so knowledge is the solution. And that knowledge appears when scripture or a skillful teacher reflects back, as if in a mirror, what requires no doing, no effort, no special mental state. Means of knowledge, knowledge, liberation, and ultimately even experience are no longer

separate. These short teachings, like rough diamonds, will sparkle for you if you hold them up to the light and then the self, the teaching and the teacher will be one.

Paul Bahder

## Experience and Knowledge

### Enlightenment Not Happening? Here's Why.

When you clearly investigate the experiencer and the field of experience with the help of Vedanta's elegant methodology, an inevitable transpersonal logic is revealed. It is a logic that will lead you directly to liberation. It is not possible for an individual to derive the total logic of reality in a single lifetime because it is beyond the scope of an individual mind. Vedanta is a time tested means for enlightenment.

This challenging group of email discussions on the nature of Consciousness relates to the most important confusion in the spiritual world concerning the nature of enlightenment: the apparent contradiction between experience and knowledge. Lack of clarity on this topic prevents thousands of otherwise qualified seekers from realizing their Heart's desire.

## Chapter 1 - Two Views of Enlightenment

*Because we believe in experiential reality, we look for an experiential enlightenment.*

### Vedanta asserts that reality is non-dual

People suffer because they continually find themselves at odds with the nature of reality. Vedanta is a means of knowledge that removes existential suffering by teaching us how to investigate reality in such a way that we discover our non-separation from it. Non-separation from reality is tantamount to lasting happiness, the diamond in the dust of experience. Happiness is constant when, though Vedanta's profound inquiries, we see clearly that we need nothing from the world to complete us.

It's first inquiry convinces us that the joy we seek in objects does not come from the object but from within ourselves. This understanding frees us of the need to pursue objects. An object is anything other than myself. But what is the nature of this joy, this freedom that is in me, that is me? Is it in the form of some special *experience* or is it accessible only through *Self knowledge*?

The experiential view...that enlightenment is a special experience other than what I am experiencing right now...is based on the idea that reality is a duality.

Vedanta disagrees. It says reality is non-dual Awareness. This presents a real problem because we seem to experience reality as a duality. Duality means that I take the distinction between me and the world in which I live to be a real, not an apparent distinction. When we inquire properly using Vedanta's proven methodology we discover that duality is the result of false perception and that reality...life...is actually non-dual. Nothing is separate from me.

Because we are caught up in a false perception of reality we are prone to accept the experiential notion of enlightenment. According to this theory, a permanent non-dual experience that erases the separation between me and the objects in my inner and outer worlds can be obtained in various ways.

We accept this view because those from who we take our cues about the nature of enlightenment, those who have had so called experiences of non-duality, did not examine their experiences properly. They took the appearance of their experiences as the truth because they did not understand the fundamental nature of the experiencing entity and the nature of experience itself.

When you take yourself to be an experiencing entity and have epiphanies, *samadhis*, *satoris*, *NDEs*, etc., you feel happy, limitless, free, transcendent and one with everything. There is a sense of merging and melting in into something beautiful and transcendent, a feeling of unconditional love, a sense of permanence and lightness, a

feeling of oneness and wholeness. Most everyone in the spiritual world has had such experiences at one time or another. A huge body of literature chronicles them from the famous experiment of Ramana Maharshi's to the bizarre and beautifully told account of Wren-Lewis.

The problem with the experiential theory of enlightenment is that while experience itself is constant, specific experiences are not, nor are they under the control of individuals. They are produced by the myriad ever-changing factors in the vast field of existence. We want to be in control of what we experience but we are not in control. The force behind the field is in charge.

A non-dual experience is brought about when the mind becomes particularly still and Awareness reflects in it. Why the mind goes into the non-dual mode nobody knows. Just as you cannot generate anger at will when you are happy, you can't generate an epiphany at will. Even accomplished meditators can't generate them, although they tend to happen more frequently for those who do spiritual practice...but not always. Experience happens.

#### **The experiential view of enlightenment is based on the idea that reality is a duality**

What is the problem with the experiential view? If reality is non-dual Awareness as Vedanta claims, then the distinction between you and what you experience does not obtain. If that is true and fullness is the nature of Awareness, the Self, then everything you're experiencing right now is you. The chair you are sitting on is you. The light in the room is you. The thoughts in your mind are you. The man walking across the street is you. The silent peace you feel in meditation is you.

If this is true, why do I want a special experience? I want the special experience of oneness because I don't know what the Self is...or to use more popular terminology I don't know who I am. Therefore, if I want to be free of the apparent limitations imposed on me by the ever changing matrix of experience I should seek to understand the nature of reality, which is in fact eternal, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, and which is my innermost nature.

When are you not experiencing yourself? You are never not experiencing yourself because the Self is Consciousness and Consciousness is all there is. Therefore, if I want enlightenment...freedom from the sense of limitation imposed on me by the belief that I am separate from the objects I experience...I don't have an experience problem. I have a knowledge problem.

Most teachers sell the experiential notion of enlightenment. *Kundalini Yoga* is a good example. According to this notion you are meant to generate a big cosmic non-dual experiential union with Consciousness by performing certain actions. But if I am already Consciousness then I can't do anything to get what I've already got.

Actions are only useful for obtaining something I don't have or getting rid of something I do have.

How can I get myself?

I was talking to God the other day. We have a long relationship that goes way back. I said, "I know something you can't do." God looked at me and said, "Hey, don't you know who you're talking to?"

"Yes", I said, "but I am going to cut you down to size because you are not all powerful as you claim."

Because God is dispassionate, It didn't get upset. It said, "OK, let's hear what you have to say."

I said, "Give me a head on my shoulders."

God was flummoxed and said, "I can shrink your head to the size of a pea. I can blow it up to size of a huge balloon. I can flatten it like a pancake or twist it like a pretzel but, by golly, it seems I can't give you a head on your shoulders because you already have a head on your shoulders!"

So the wholeness problem, the completeness problem, the happiness problem is going to be solved only by understanding. Actions are not going to produce enlightenment.

Vedanta says you are already and always free and you are experiencing yourself 24/7. So if you are chasing this thing called the Self, how can you find it? Normal people do not seek themselves because they believe they know who they are. Unfortunately the Self they think they are is not a real Self. But spiritual types know they aren't who they think they are. They seek to know who they really are.

**You cannot attain freedom because you are already free**

You said that when you sleep at night you feel limitless but when you wake up you discover you are stuck inside the meaty waste tube.

Vedanta contends...and it is my experience too...that the one who is aware of the limitlessness of sleep is the same one who is aware of the sense of bodily limitation in the waking state...and is other than both. In other words the 'you' that is supposedly limited by the body is only a thought of limitation. If you actually are limited it may be possible to attain limitlessness, but if the 'you' that you think is limited is only a thought, 'you' cannot become limitless although during sleep and certain rare experiences it does seem so. Furthermore, what is limitless never becomes limited, although it too occasionally seems to.

The apparent contradiction between the feeling of limitlessness and the feeling of limitation is brought about by a failure to discriminate the 'real' self from the 'apparent' self. The ego, the experiencing entity, has both feelings, although its basic feeling is one of limitation because it is confused about its nature. But the real you is the Awareness of these apparently contradictory thoughts, or 'yous' if you prefer. It is neither limitless nor is it limited. It neither changes nor is it eternal. It is neither in the body nor is it out of the body. It is the knower of both 'in' and 'out.' The knower is always free of the known, in this case limitation and freedom from limitation. It knows that you can't have freedom from limitation without limitation. Both limitation and freedom, *moksha*, are unreal. In *Nirvana Shatakam* Shankara speaking as the Self says, "I am neither bondage nor liberation."

### The myth of freedom

The mind/ego, owing to lack of Self knowledge, wants an experiential resolution to a non-experiential problem. It wants to be free of bodily suffering, for example, but it cannot get free of the body because it is already free of the body. This needs to be understood. The desire to be free is very difficult to give up, because what we are trying to free ourselves from seems to be real. But it is not real. Therefore the need for experiential freedom is illegitimate.

When you sleep at night you experience bodiless limitlessness. When you wake up in the morning, you feel limited. How is that feeling known? The body does not tell you because it is just meat. You, Awareness, know both limitlessness and limitation.

No particular experience of bliss or happiness comes with enlightenment, although enlightened people tend to be blissful. Enlightenment means that you know that you are the knower of every conceivable experience. It means that you never confuse what you are experiencing.

Ramana Maharshi, for example, was a person who understood that he was the Self, pure Consciousness/Awareness. There is a belief, and it is a belief with only a tiny bit of truth to back it up, that if you are the Self you will 'feel' a certain way and conversely, if you don't, you aren't the Self. But Ramana suffered terribly from cancer. How does this happen to an enlightened person? It does not happen to the Self. It happens to the body, the 'aggregate.' The aggregate is subject to past actions and belongs to the field of existence, not to the Self.

To summarize, the cause of this confusion is identification with experience, the experiencer and the instruments of experience, brought on by lack of Self knowledge. When it is clear that you are the knower of the experiencer, the craving for pleasant experience and the aversion for unpleasant experience disappears.

## The value of values

No experience is needed for enlightenment, but experience is necessary to create the kind of mind that can appreciate one's innate freedom. For the realization that one is whole and complete, pure and perfect Consciousness, it is helpful to have positive experiences. This is why values are so important for someone seeking to be free; the right values produce the kind of positive experiences that bring about a peaceful mind and produce confident well-adjusted people. Only mature well-adjusted people are qualified for enlightenment.

When the mind is agitated and/or dull it produces negative experiences (frustration, anger, greed, sloth) and when experience is unpleasant, you can easily conclude that there is something 'wrong' with you. Actually there is nothing wrong with you; there is something wrong with your values.

Not only is it hard to accept that there is something wrong with you, it is very difficult to change your apparent self. So most seekers chase an enlightenment experience that they believe will put them in a 'state' beyond their apparent self or that will dissolve the 'you' that doesn't enjoy life as it is. This is a mistake because there is nothing wrong with you.

## Liberation is for the mind. You are already free

*"How can this teaching help a mind that doesn't even exist?"*

Your mind certainly does exist. Who is asking this question if it is not the mind? Are you saying that the question doesn't exist? If it doesn't exist how can you ask it? You definitely have a mind but it does not know what it is or what you are. Enlightenment is for the mind. It resolves the doubts the mind has about its nature. The mind has beliefs and opinions which you take as knowledge and these beliefs and opinions keep you from appreciating yourself as free Being. Vedanta shows you how to examine your mind and educate it properly about the nature of experience and the experiencer. Then the mind no longer stands in the way of your happiness.

## That the mind does not exist is a silly teaching

You say you got enlightened when your mind disappeared. Then you say you 'lost' your enlightenment. If your mind does not exist, then where did your attention go when it left the Self? It went to the mind. The mind is not real, but it certainly does exist. 'The mind doesn't exist', is a very silly and misleading teaching. You can't even call it a teaching because it is total ignorance. As long as you believe it, there is no hope. The mind does not stand in the way of enlightenment. Only ignorance ...taking the mind to be the Self... stands in the way of freedom.

### The mind is the instrument in which knowledge takes place

Thinking it is knowledge, the mind allows ignorance of the Self to inform its decisions and guide it through life. This same mind can expose itself to the teachings of Vedanta, have its Self ignorance removed and live perfectly free of limiting concepts. So the state of the mind, experience, is crucial for anyone seeking freedom, i.e. enlightenment. Enlightenment is for the mind. The Self is already enlightened, meaning that it is the 'light' of Awareness.

When the mind is depressed, for example, the emotional cloud is so heavy that the Self is completely unknown. When you experience craving, the mind is so extroverted it cannot look into the 'Heart' and see the Self shining there. If the mind is pure and still, you are much more likely to see yourself as you are and you will not abandon this knowledge even if the mind occasionally becomes negative...because who you are is beautiful.

### Who interprets experience is the essence of experience

But experience is only a part of life's equation. Who interprets and how experience is interpreted is the essence of experience. There are people with awful lives that have beautiful personalities and conversely there are those with excellent lives who have miserable personalities. The personality is just your interpretation of your life's experiences. Your interpretation depends on your values, which in turn depends on what you know or don't know, which in turn depends on who you are.

Enlightenment is freedom from the personality. The view from the non-interpreting Self allows you observe the interpreting personality as a programmed construct. If you know what it means to be the Self you will see with the Self's eye and you will not be bothered by or enthralled by your personality or the personality of others.

### Experience happens when Awareness illumines unconscious content

The Self is the ultimate 'experienceless experiencer,' the one to whom experience is presented. It does not generate experience...because it lacks nothing...except indirectly by its presence. But when it illumines unconscious content, which is constantly, experience is produced. This is why life is an unbroken stream of experience. The ego/personality is little more than the values that cause the Self under the spell of ignorance to interpret experience. If values are based on what is...if they are in harmony with the non-dual nature of life, the quest for Self realization will be successful. But if they are not, it won't, because bad values cause so much inner conflict that the mind cannot effectively seek to know the truth.

### Epiphany can be helpful or it can lead to a misunderstanding of enlightenment

Epiphanies, peak experiences, can be very helpful because they reveal the Self to be a desirable object. Or to put it more accurately, they show that the Self is whole and complete and that nothing is separate from it. This knowledge keeps one seeking because the quest for wholeness is behind every pursuit. But if epiphanies cause you to conceive of enlightenment as a permanent epiphany, a constant experience of the Self, you are swimming in shark-infested waters because freedom is not gained through a particular spiritual experience. This is so because the Self is already free; it only seems not to be. And secondly, if this is a non-dual reality as scripture and our epiphanies suggest, then each and every experience is the Self already, so no striving for experience is necessary. If any striving is to be done one should strive for understanding, since the problem that causes me to seek happiness in the first place is the misunderstanding that I am bound.

### Enlightening experiences are not enough

'Mystical enlightening experiences' do not solve the problem of limitation. The spiritual world is little more than millions of people who have had extraordinary non-dual experiences yet who still feel limited, inadequate, and incomplete. So experience itself is not enough. Even the great sage Ramana Maharshi sat in caves for years after his Self experience before he was ready to live a normal life in the world. He must have done a lot of inner work, applying the knowledge of who he was to his mind. If the experience was all that was required he may just as well have gone back home to his mom's cooking, married, and raised a family...or whatever.

### Non-dual experiences happen during Vedanta inquiry as a result of assimilating knowledge

People want experiences and worry that there is no experiential component to Vedanta. They wrongly believe that it is like going to school; you sit and take notes while the teacher gives you 'only' intellectual knowledge.

But this is not true. The teaching situation itself is a powerful experience and, while no mystical or spiritual experience is required for liberation, most who subject themselves to the teaching have deep and abiding non-dual experiences, insights and realizations.

When I was with my guru I was in a teaching environment for two years constantly and I was not in *Samadhi* for maybe a few days total. The experience of Vedanta is intense and uplifting. Quite a few stumble on the teaching, are attracted by the energy and discover that experience and knowledge are not enemies, but go hand in hand. Those who needlessly throw the knowledge baby out with the bath because they want mystical experience and have heard that Vedanta is only 'conceptual' are cheating themselves.

Furthermore, as you contemplate the meaning of the teachings on your own you will notice your life transforming in a very positive way as a result of the assimilation of the knowledge. An epiphany is one thing...it may effect a temporary change...but the changes that come from assimilated Self knowledge are permanent and are always for the better.

#### A non-dual experience is the experience of the reflection of the Self in the pure mind

When you have a non-dual experience you're not experiencing the Self directly because you can't experience the Self directly. A non-dual experience is the experience of the reflection of the Self in a pure but changing mind.

#### What is the cause of non-dual experiences?

Why would you get a non-dual experience? Because your mind became momentarily pure (*sattvic*), Awareness revealed it, your attention was drawn to it and the feeling of oneness and completeness ensued. But what happens when agitation (*rajas*) and dullness (*tamas*) come into the mind? When mind becomes cloudy and dull it no longer reflects Awareness...it absorbs it...and the experience of non-duality disappears. Or the mind is disturbed and concentration on the experience is lost, attention goes to the string of thoughts that ensue and the epiphany stops. The three unconscious forces, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* control the mind. Until they are brought under control experience is not in the hands of the experiencer.

Furthermore, when you have an experience, the experience changes the 'you' that you imagine you are...the experiencer. He or she is no longer the same. Is it reasonable that a transaction between a constantly changing subject and a constantly changing object is going to produce a permanent experience of happiness? This is why we have to attack the idea of experiential enlightenment.

Even if you argue that the Self doesn't change...which is true...you will change as a result of your contact with the Self. This is why you can grow as an experiencer, a doer, through yoga which puts you in contact with the Self as it reflects in the mind. But no matter how pure and perfect you become as a result of the association of your mind with the Self, there will always be a sense of limitation and attachment. And when the contact is broken the pain is intense.

#### What would be the right conclusion to draw from a non-dual experience?

The right conclusion to draw from a non-dual experience is that reality is non-dual and that I'm not separate from anything, irrespective of what I experience. This is what scripture says. Scripture is just the non-dual knowledge that comes from the non-dual experience of hundreds of thousands of people over millennia. Knowledge is what should be left over after you have a non-dual experience...or any experience for that matter.

For example, Ramana's famous experience is a typical epiphany. It is what they now call an NDE, near-death experience. What's particularly interesting about that experience is what Ramana took away from it. He took away the knowledge 'I am the Self.' The experience only lasted a short time. That particular experience occurred in a state of mind called *savikalpa Samadhi*. It was an experience of the reflection of the Self in a pure, yet thinking, mind. To his credit, he extracted the knowledge. Experience is a container and knowledge is the content. Knowledge, the Self, is the essence or the content of every experience. Whether it's dual or non-dual, the essence of every experience is Awareness because every experience is manufactured out of me, Awareness.

### All experience takes place in Awareness

Experience isn't taking place outside of you. It is taking place in your Awareness and you are Awareness so the essence, the content, of every experience is you. Ramana extracted that knowledge and became free, not as Ramana, unless the name Ramana refers to the Self, which it does, but as the Awareness he was before he had the experience.

His experience changed in time like everyone's experience. The 'experience people' don't believe this. They think he just *stayed in that state* forever because they define enlightenment as a state of experience. The ego has a fantasy that it should feel positive and happy ...a state of endless bliss... all the time. It's hard to get away from this belief because everything that the ego does is based on feelings. "I don't feel good. I do feel good. I feel this. I feel that."

### What is the meaning of experience in non-duality?

If I have a mystic experience, a non-dual epiphany, it is unlikely that I will think about its meaning as it unfolds. The experience itself will be so strange, welcome and exhilarating that I will just get into it and enjoy. In my case it happened unexpectedly...I was just walking to the post office with many mundane things in my mind...and the cause was unknown to me. If I take LSD and my mind is blown, the cause is obvious. But non-dual experiences, melting into everything in love for example, come unsolicited. They can only be chalked up to the grace of God. And in the absence of the knowledge of the nature of reality, I have no way to evaluate their overall meaning. Even if they tend to come with regularity, each one is unique, making it difficult to divine the essential meaning.

Experience usually needs to repeat itself over and over in the presence of an inquiring mind, before its secrets are revealed. Epiphanies may temporarily motivate me to change, which oddly enough is not necessarily desirable, or they may make me think I am quite exceptional, perhaps enlightened, but usually they simply produce a strong craving for more. The attempt to re-experience the Self is futile because the experiencer thinks the Self is not presently experienced. But ironically it

is present when I want to experience it because it exists prior to the experiencer. It is not prior to the experiencer in time, in which case it would not be present. It is prior in terms of understanding. It is present and apparently hidden.

### The Self doesn't care what the ego is feeling

Feeling means experiencing. But if you're the Self, it doesn't matter what the ego is feeling. If it's feeling good, that's good, if it's feeling bad, that's good. You know very well that the experiencing entity is in the apparent reality that it is subject to the three unconscious factors that govern experience and you're not bothered. You don't get elated when the experience is good and you don't get depressed when the experience is bad because you are Awareness. So if you draw the right conclusion from a non-dual experience, then non-dual experience is great, but if you draw a wrong conclusion from it, then non-dual experience is not great. Which goes to show that experience is how you interpret what happens, not what actually happens.

When I had my first non-dual epiphany, I understood that I needed to find out what it was. I didn't draw any conclusions about making it permanent or anything like that, but I did know that I needed to know what this was because it suddenly released me from amazing amount of suffering and pain. It destroyed many binding habits. I quit drinking, smoking, adulterous behavior, sold my business and lost 50 pounds. It had a huge impact within a very, very short time. I experienced who I was but I didn't know who I was. I knew one thing for sure: I needed to find out who I was. That is a correct interpretation.

The reason Vedanta makes such a strong argument against experiential enlightenment is simply to counteract this tendency of the ego to chase experience. Unless you can get past this experience idea, you're just not in the ballpark for enlightenment.

### We seek experience to erase a sense of limitation

Experience is any transaction between a subject and an object or objects. An object is anything other than you. There is only one Self, with apparent knowledge or ignorance of who or what it is. When it doesn't know who it is...when it thinks it's a person, a body/mind/ego individual... it is caught up in a state of continuous experience. When I say 'caught up' I mean that it approaches life with a sense of incompleteness and separation and usually believes that certain experiences, or the 'big' experience (enlightenment), will erase its sense of limitation.

### You can certainly realize the Self without one mystical experience

Another point to consider is that reality is perfect as it is. Why do some people get mystical enlightening experiences and others don't? Because the giver of experience, the Self, knows exactly what you need at any time and only gives you what you need.

You can certainly realize the Self without one mystical experience. And, on the other hand, you can have hundreds of mystical experiences and build an ego on them bigger than Mt. Everest. Why do some people who have had epiphanies behave in the worst possible way and others that haven't behave like saints?

Or you can interpret spiritual experiences in such a way that you avoid the truly important spiritual issues...how you are living everyday. I know people who consider themselves enlightened based on their mystic experiences who can't handle the practical details of life and who regularly find themselves in conflicts with others.

### Experience does not remove conditioned mind

Non-dual experiences temporarily suspend the normal functioning of the mind but when they end the mind takes up its old programs once more. While my guru did not discourage spiritual experience, and in fact his teaching and his presence generated the most sublime experiences, experience does not remove the conditioned mind, attachment to which is the cause of suffering. Only consistent application of the understanding derived from rigorous Self investigation (based on the teachings of Vedanta) will free the mind of its erroneous notions.

### The danger of following your feelings, spiritual or worldly

The danger of following your feelings is that not only are they an unreliable guide for enlightenment and most other things, but how you 'feel' can be used to justify all manner of things, particularly as an excuse for not working on yourself. Wait for the mystical experience that you feel will set you free if you like, but in the meantime you should work on the obstacles preventing you understanding who you are. Many self-declared enlightened people fit in the category. Would Rajneesh, the infamous 93 Rolls Royce guru have suffered such unfortunate *karma* if he had purified his mind before, during or after his epiphanies? Instead he evidently 'felt' that he had to enlighten the world. See the results...hopelessly confused teachings and a spiritual 'movement' that collapsed in veniality, criminality and disillusionment for tens of thousands of people. What you 'feel' is just code for what you like or dislike.

You are absolutely right not to follow 'gut feelings' mindlessly because they can cut both ways. You can feel just as strongly about x as you can about not-x from one moment to the next. This is why I'm arguing for following the *dharma* of an inquirer

irrespective of what you feel. What is that dharma? To practice *karma yoga*, meditate, pray, study scripture...in short, work on yourself patiently and consistently irrespective of what you feel.

### Let principle not passion rule your life

If you follow *dharma* you don't have to agonize about what you feel. What you feel is irrelevant. In the Hindu tradition, Sri Ram had his heart set on ruling the kingdom. The coronation ceremony had been planned and the whole kingdom wanted him to be king. His stepmother had saved the life of his father, the king, in battle and he granted her any boon. Just before the coronation she called in the boon and asked that her son, Bharata, be made king. When told of the decision, (which involved him leaving the good life and going to live in the jungle and giving up his dream) Sri Ram smiled and said, "Fine. It is the duty of the son to honor the wishes of his father." And he went off to live in the forest. The father too, although his whole life had been dedicated to seeing that Ram rule the kingdom, did not flinch in granting his wife the boon. In both cases the 'gut feeling' was not the basis of the decision. And these men were quite happy to follow *dharma* since they knew that *dharma* leads to the highest good.

*Dharma* means that principle, not passion, rules your life. Following 'gut feelings' is just another way of saying 'what I want or what I don't want.' But is what you want or don't want what you actually need spiritually? Take the relationship issue, which in a way is a kind of symbol of your whole existential confusion. You're a vivacious, intelligent, attractive woman. There should be no problem getting a guy...which some part of you seems to really want. Yet, you never seem to find Mr. Right. Why?

I think it is because some other part of you...the higher part, the *dharmic* part...knows very well that relationship is not what you need. It knows you need peace. So it prevents you from relationship since relationship does not lead to peace for you. I have been suggesting for a long time that you pursue peace and see if relationship doesn't fall into your lap. Or, you might even discover that peace is a lot more meaningful than a relationship, particularly one with someone who doesn't know who they are. Perhaps you want relationship because you are not peaceful. Perhaps you think that if you have Mr. Right you will just settle down and be happy. What is wrong with this picture?

### *Dharma* means that feelings don't determine what you do unless they are in harmony with *dharma*

As I see it the highest *dharma* is a clear peaceful mind. If you don't have that how can anything, particularly a relationship, really work in life? Sometimes your gut tells you what to do and this is completely in harmony with *dharma* and leads to a state of peace. But sometimes your gut tells you to choose something that leads to misery. What good is the gut then? Let the gut speak, but don't let it rule the roost.

The problem with Western society is that it is based on the principle of passionate small self satisfaction. Your supreme duty, according to the Gospel of the American Way, is to get what you want, do what you feel. Yes, you should follow *dharma* wherever possible, but when *dharma* gets in the way, screw *dharma* and go for it! It's all about me and what I want. It's all about my feelings. This approach will not get you anything but suffering. You need to honor the higher part, the part that wants to know.

### You know what to do

You know what you need to do spiritually. If you sit around waiting for a gut feeling to motivate you, you will wait a very long time. And even if you get a gut feeling that tells you to get to work spiritually, it will only be minutes before the opposite gut feeling, the one that causes you to mindlessly doubt everything, arises and paralyzes you.

### When your thinking is in harmony with truth your feelings are unambiguously good

With the help of proven teachings you can either use the mind to think your way out of this existential predicament or to further enmesh yourself in it. Trying to kill the mind or discard it, or move away from it into a 'feeling' dimension will not work. Use it to think differently. When your thinking is in harmony with truth your feelings are unambiguously good. This is so because the mind is much more powerful than the emotions. Unfortunately, since the Sixties it has been fashionable in spiritual circles to abandon the intellect in favor of feelings. I remember one of the slogans from those days, "If it feels good do it!" Vedanta says, "If it feels good try to figure out why it feels good." It is all about the 'why.'

### Experience-focused approach

OK. Let's say that you reject my argument completely and want to do it the feeling way. Your guru du jour, Eckhart Tolle, tells you how. He says:

"Focus attention on the feeling inside you. Know that it is the pain-body. Accept that it is there. Don't *think* about it – don't let the feeling turn into thinking. Don't judge or analyze. Don't make an identity for yourself out of it. Stay present and continue to be the observer of what is happening inside you. Become aware not only of the emotional pain but also of 'the one who observes,' the silent watcher. This is the power of the Now, the power of your own conscious presence. Then see what happens."

But wait a minute! Know that the feeling inside you is the pain body? Right off he is telling us how to think about (certain) feelings. They are painful. He continues: 'Accept that,' he says, 'Don't think about it.' Don't think about it? He is saying 'think not to think.' Who but the thinker is there not thinking? During this whole process

he is telling you how to think. It is a very cerebral process. It has a specific goal, 'to become aware... of the silent watcher.' There is a lot to commend this idea and there is a lot to criticize too, but the important point as I see it in this context is that he is not telling you to wait for some 'gut feeling' to start your *sadhana*. He is saying it is an analytical process and 'just do it.'

Much as it has been said for centuries, you cannot just permanently switch off your mind (if that is actually what is required for enlightenment...which it isn't) without a very long and arduous *sadhana*, if then. The mind thinks for a reason. It is the reason and the type of thinking that is important, not the thinking itself.

Notice that Eckhart is not telling you how hard it is to do this. He is not saying that this is the end of it either. He puts it this way, 'Then see what happens.' Aside from the seductiveness of it all...presenting enlightenment as some kind of happening once you have confronted your bad feelings...I think he means that this is just the very first step in spiritual life. He is just trying to give you a technique to get you to see that there is a Self, 'a conscious presence' he calls it. Once you see it, your problems just begin but at least you have an idea what you are seeking. Eckhart is entry level spirituality to be sure but you should capitalize on the devotion you have for him and start somewhere.

So here's a practice put forth by Eckhart. It may not be the last word in Self inquiry, but why not do it? Or take Byron Katie. She doesn't seem to have a very good understanding of the big picture but she has an excellent technique for cleansing the mind. Are you waiting for a 'gut feeling' to get to work? You are not even sure if you are interested in doing what it takes to realize the Self.

When you know what you want... this applies to any field... you simply do not have doubts about what to do in life. You just go for it. Did Bill Gates trouble himself about whether or not he wanted to get rich? Did George Bush trouble himself about whether or not he wanted to be President?

**Catch your mind fooling you. Pay attention to this "I want." See if you don't already have everything you could ever want... you.**

I'm not saying you should go for enlightenment, although it can't hurt. I'm saying use your mind to catch your mind fooling you. Stop just accepting these tired beliefs you have about yourself. Take astrology, for instance, one of your pet hobbies. Astrology is fine up to a point but it is only as good as your use of it. If you use it to convince yourself that you are the way you are because the stars have decreed it...that you have to be this way because Venus is squared Mars or whatever, then your mind is playing tricks on you. No Tarot reading or mystical experience is going to stop the mind playing its tricks. Pay attention to this 'I want' mantra that the mind loves to chant. Look into this notion that 'relationship' is the 'be all and the end all.' See if you don't already have everything you could ever want... you.

### Think from the Self's point of view

Enlightenment is not getting an experience of a 'conscious presence,' contrary to Neo-Advaitic conventional wisdom. You are the conscious presence. There is nothing to be done about 'presence.' You don't appreciate yourself as 'presence' because you think of yourself in other ways. So, contrary to all the non-thinking advice you hear nowadays, I say, think clearly. Think from the Self's point of view. This is not to say that you can't also practice do any practice you are attracted to.

### There is no contradiction between thinking and feeling, between knowledge and experience

Contradictions arise when you use the mind in the wrong way. Look at Ramana. You will rarely find someone with a more clear mind. His knowledge was vast and his ability to express it shows that he carefully trained and cultivated his mind. I say pay attention to your feelings, pay attention to your thoughts and use discernment, other than how you 'feel', to determine if they have any effect on what you actually are.

### If you are experience-oriented it pays to ferret out the knowledge, the hidden logic of your experience

Existence is Consciousness. From the human point of view it is experienced as three states: waking, dream and deep sleep. Sleep is the absence of differentiated experience. Dream is similar to waking in that the subject-object distinction obtains. Waking state Consciousness can be divided into two sub-states: *samsara* and *nirvana*, to use two Sanskrit terms.

### Samsara

*Samsara* describes the experience of life as we know it. It is conceived of as a whirlpool or a wheel, a state of mind that goes around and around more or less forever. A whirlpool is difficult, if not impossible, to escape. Desires and fears emerge from an unknown source, disturb the mind for a while and disappear, only to reappear and disturb it again. We do actions intended to remove them but the actions only serve to reinforce them. As the wheel of life goes around and around we go up and down, elated one minute and depressed the next. *Samsara* is an entropic perpetual motion machine that never takes us anywhere, slowly wears us out and eventually sends us on.

### Nirvana

Sometimes, however, we are granted a reprieve and lifted out of the *samsaric* state of mind. One is never sure how or why it happens. Grace is the only word that seems applicable. During these episodes we feel open, expansive and free. Typically, we observe our minds and bodies as objects. Perhaps we feel connected to everything.

Maybe we melt into the world or experience a radiant inner light or the peace that passes understanding. It may feel as if we are not there because the ego has temporarily dissolved. Fear and desire, our more or less constant companions, are conspicuous by their absence. Hence, this transcendent otherworldly state is called *nirvana*. *Nirvana* literally means without flame or extinct and symbolizes a desireless, fearless state of mind or the extinction of the sense of separateness. This state is invariably accompanied by wonder and bliss. These epiphanies vary from a few seconds to minutes, days and occasionally weeks or even months. Eventually we come back to *samsara*, the everyday state of mind.

### Longing for epiphany

When we get back to *samsara*, we long to return to *nirvana* because a vacation from the monotonous uncertainties of life is a great relief. A few serious epiphanies and we are tempted to drop out and head for India. Epiphanies are the basis of all religions and give their doctrines of divinity an experiential foundation. They are sometimes called visions of God or revelations and are highly valued. Many ardent prayers are offered to invoke them.

These experiences, large and small, happen infrequently but are so compelling they cannot be discounted. At a certain point in an individual's evolution they become intense and frequent. Over the course of human history they have been catalogued, discussed and analyzed and constitute a large body of literature. In due course a science of meditation evolved from them. Meditation makes it possible to experience *nirvana*, the transcendental state or God Consciousness, with enough certainty to give it a scientific basis.

### Meditation

Meditation is often conceived of as a flight, a journey to the beyond. It takes considerable practice to master, but eventually the meditator is able to transcend the *samsaric* mind more or less at will. As the practice becomes routine, the meditator spends increasingly longer periods in the *nirvanic* state where there is no suffering and less time in the *samsaric* state where there is. Eventually the state is meant to become effortless and continuous so that the individual can even go about daily life in *nirvanic* Consciousness i.e. fulfilled and happy.

### Nirvikalpa samadhi

The last word in terms of experiential freedom from *samsara* is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*, a state of absorption that erases duality. The subject and the objects merge into one experience that lasts for some time. It is the opposite of deep sleep because the mind is awake. In deep sleep duality is erased because the knower-known-knowledge division is gone. When the duality of subject and object does not obtain, freedom obtains. This state does not destroy the ignorance that causes the *samsaric*

state of mind because the one who has the ignorance has been absorbed into Awareness where no duality obtains. If you achieve this *samadhi* it indicates a high degree of mastery of the mind, which may be useful once you are back in *samsara*.

It comes up short in terms of lasting freedom, however, because when the *samadhi* ends and *samsaric* consciousness returns the inbuilt dualistic orientation, the subject-object distinction returns. Unconscious tendencies begin interpreting experience and the same old problems resurface. And one important fact needs to be taken into account when we are considering the pursuit of this kind of enlightenment: all experiences are in time so *nirvana* or *samadhi* can never become a permanent or continuous experience.

#### Experience cannot solve your problem

It is very important to realize the distinction between knowledge and experience because as long as you're waiting for a non-dual experience to solve your existential problem, you are barking up the wrong tree. Believing that experience is going to solve your problem is based on the idea that you're not OK as you are. Vedanta says you are OK. Vedanta says you don't need anything. It can prove that you are OK.

When you have one of these non-dual experiences they can be very good or they can be not so good. Any experience is going to have an upside and downside because it takes place in duality. We're not against any experience, spiritual or worldly. We just insist on understanding the meaning of any experience with reference to yourself as Awareness and with reference to yourself as an individual operating in an apparently dual reality.

#### An experience is only as good as your understanding of it

With any experience, what is left over is either knowledge or ignorance or confusion. You're either going to understand the proper meaning and interpret it according to what it really means, or you will misinterpret it and assume that it means something other than what it actually means. In our case we are seeking Self knowledge so we need to know what the Self is and what enlightenment is before we set out to interpret our spiritual experiences.

#### An experience depends upon a subject and an object

So if I have one a non-dual experience, what would be an incorrect interpretation of that experience? First, how would ignorance interpret such experience? It would say that I should experience non-duality all the time because it feels so good. "I want to feel like I'm one with everything all the time." This would be an incorrect understanding.

Why? Because an experience is a transaction between a subject and an object. Yet another non-dual experience does not solve the duality issue, the apparent separation of the experiencer and the experienced object. You will always be unsettled because both the experiencer and the experienced object change.

But if the experience reveals that you are the Awareness of the experiencing entity, the duality problem is solved. It does not matter what the experiencing entity experiences because you are not it.

#### Knowledge, not experience cooks the goose

*“My experience reading your book proved that ‘knowledge,’ not experience is what cooks the goose. I can see how a teacher wanting to keep power would keep talking about experience, keeping students chasing their tail. I also know now why so many of the ‘Neo’ teachers were of no benefit to me. I couldn’t get the knowledge from them.”*

Yes, the experience teaching is the perfect con, but probably most its promoters don’t realize it although it works to their advantage. Experience hungry people are not always the sharpest knives in the drawer. They have a kind of vanity, a sense of superiority because they believe they are beyond ‘thought.’ They aren’t. They are just ignorant. I think most of them believe that they are actually experiencing something special but there is absolutely nothing special about the Self because there is nothing to compare it to. The only thing special about them is their attitude of specialness, which is nothing special either since so many of them have it.

Self knowledge is no different from relative worldly knowledge in the sense that what you know affects your experience. For example, a person was told that his son was killed in an automobile accident in a foreign country but it was not true. The father had no way of verifying this information immediately so he immediately began to grieve. Self knowledge changes your experience in that that the mind becomes more and more peaceful.

A reasonable person cannot argue with Vedanta. It was worked out a long time ago. The Neo teaching, such as it is, is just bits and pieces of remembered knowledge and beliefs floating around in the Western spiritual world picked up in a completely happenstance way and cobbled together by eager ambitious people with virtually no discrimination. While most teachers are well meaning, these teachings are actually insulting to the great tradition of Vedanta because they have not been properly vetted...which takes centuries. It is rather like trying to invent the wheel. The wheel has been invented. Nobody can improve on it. You can change it, but you will not get a better wheel. Neo-Advaita is not a better wheel. It is a flat tire. You cannot actually compare Neo-Advaita to Vedanta because Vedanta is in a class of its own.

### There is no experience that can either add or subtract happiness from you

*“Why do I lack full conviction? Why don't I feel that I am the Self?”*

Perhaps the problem is that you still believe that the pursuit of certain experiences and/or the cultivation of certain thoughts and feelings will not bring lasting happiness. You need to come to a point where it is completely clear that there is nothing anywhere, inwardly or outwardly, that can either add or subtract happiness from you. Vedanta calls this dispassion, and it is based on discrimination. Such a person has lived enough to know that whatever experience brings is limited and will therefore not set one free. So he or she stops chasing experience in any form...including the so-called spiritual experiences.

### Dispassionate relationship with experience sets you free

In Vivekacudamani and elsewhere Shankara says that dispassion is one of the most important qualifications of enlightenment. That means you do not care one way or the other what experience brings, or as one text says, you are ‘indifferent to the results of your actions.’ You are happy when you feel good and you are happy when you feel bad. It does not matter what you feel because feelings always change...irrespective of your wishes. You are not in control of them.

To accept the impersonality of the mind is a great blessing because it allows you to change your relationship to the mind, not the mind itself. When you have shifted from someone who is dissatisfied with the mind and wants to change it, to a whole hearted acceptance of the mind as it is, you feel confident to deal with the experiences it generates and your reactions to them. It is no longer an enemy. You don't move toward anything, nor do you run away from anything.

### You cannot become whole and complete because you already are

When dispassion happens understanding is possible. But until it is there, the unfulfilled part of you will not be able to accept the fact that you are whole and complete. Vedanta is not saying that you will ‘become’ whole and complete. It says that you are whole and complete already, even when you think you aren't, and that all that is required is the removal of the belief that you are limited and incomplete. This is why it often says in the scriptures that enlightenment is very easy. But it also says that it is very difficult... if you have not developed dispassion.

### Looking for completion in the world results in lack of conviction in the Self

I think the absence of this feeling of confidence is what you mean when you suggest that the ‘full conviction’ is not there. If this is so, then on the other side of the mind there is a belief that something might happen in this world that would make you

supremely happy or set you free. So you keep hoping, paying attention to what's happening in your life looking for the magic...usually love...to appear.

### No matter how much you identify with your thoughts, thoughts will never become you

Let's look at it on a more subtle level. You say 'I would not indulge in any thoughts anymore.' Why? What power do the thoughts have to compromise your happiness? The thoughts don't think you. You are the thinker of the thoughts. So they depend on you, not you on them. Therefore you are free of them. If you feel that you need to be free of the thoughts before you will be happy, I think the only way you are going to attain that state is to physically die. I've met many enlightened people and I never met one who didn't think. The Self, the I, is the watcher of the thoughts. It is always beyond them.

### You are not your thoughts

So there is a built in gap between you and the thoughts. You can journey across it from your side and identify with the thought if you wish, but no thought ever made the journey across the gap to visit you. If you inquire in this way you will see that you are already thought free.

### Enlightenment changes your relationship to experience not experience itself

Maybe you have been seduced by the view that enlightenment transforms your experience radically. You will keep right on experiencing things the way you have always experienced them. But your relationship to experience changes. You just let it unfold, as it will, without worrying about what it will bring. You will be free of existential anxiety. Yes, this is a change in experience, but it does not change the way your *vasanas* outpicture and the experience of everyday reality.

Or perhaps you believe that enlightenment puts you in some special 'state' where you no longer see the world and have to deal with it? But when you are enlightened you continue to experience the same things you are experiencing now. You have to feed the dog, love your wife and kids and pay the bills. But... and this is the important part... because you know that it is all you, you are not dissatisfied with it.

Self knowledge has tremendous implications experience-wise if the value of the knowledge is appreciated and is steady. But even if it is subject to change and the intellect slips back into *samsaric* thinking, it can be regained in the time of a thought. However, inquiry and a simple *dharmic* lifestyle is recommended after enlightenment... to remove distractions that prevent the firming up of the knowledge. When the understanding 'I am Awareness' is no longer subject to change there is a sea change experience-wise. The whole weight of habitual patterns is lifted and endless possibilities appear... along with unbridled confidence.

## Knowing, Self, and experience are the same

*“What exactly do you experience, the knowing or the Self?”*

They are the same. You are always experiencing the Self. It is not possible not to experience the Self because Awareness is all there is and you are Awareness. The knowing comes right along with it because Awareness is the essence of knowledge. When you experience a tree you know the tree. The knowledge arises simultaneously with the experience.

## Experience is universal

*“How do you get there from where I am? How can I definitely know something I cannot experience?”*

You can't 'get there.' You are experiencing the Self all the time. It is you. You cannot say that you are not experiencing you. Who is writing this letter? Who is asking the questions? Who is thinking and feeling? It is you, the Self. There is no 'Bettina' experiencing anything. What you call 'Bettina' is just the Self. You think 'Bettina' is somebody and the Self is something else. Is your body made of different elements from mine? Does your body operate on different rules from other bodies? Does your mind think and feel in some totally unique way? Are the *vasanas* you experience experienced by only you? Is the life in you different from the life in everything else?

What you call 'Bettina's' body/mind is just the Self functioning through itself in the form of energy, nature. Experience is universal because it is the Self experiencing itself through the not-Self.

If you are experiencing it all the time then you can know it. In fact you do know it but you don't know it for what it is. You think or believe it is something other than what it is. This is why when you get it you have a big laugh. You realize the joke is on you. You may even feel ashamed because it is so obvious...and you overlooked it for such a long time.

## Experience backed by realization

*“I'm still unclear on the repeatedly emphasized point that experience is not necessary, only understanding is required. But then you talk about knowledge 'backed up by experience' every now and again. What does that mean?”*

If you are fortunate enough to experience the reflection of the Self in a pure mind and you realize that you are the Self then experience is very useful. The reason I put so much emphasis on knowledge is to get people to think clearly about the

impermanent nature of experience. Here's a quote from Nisargadatta, "All experience is illusory, limited and temporal. Expect nothing from experience. Realization by itself is not an experience, though it may lead to a new dimension of experiences. Yet the new experiences, however interesting, are not more real than the old. Definitely, realization is not a new experience. It is the discovery of the timeless factor in every experience. It is Awareness, which makes experience possible. As in all colors light is the colorless factor, so in every experience, Awareness is present, yet it is not an experience."

*"Are you really saying that there are enlightened masters who have never had a dualistic experience of nirvikalpa Samadhi?"*

Certainly. It is completely possible to realize the Self without a single experience of *nirvikalpa Samadhi*. Or any other special state. No experience is necessary for realization. How you evaluate life's experiences determines your qualifications for Self realization. In fact there is no duality in *nirvikalpa Samadhi* because the experiencing entity...the *vikalpa* that makes experience possible...is not there. But the absence of that *vikalpa* that means that there no question of liberation because the one who needs liberation is not there. He or she appears once the *Samadhi* ends along with his or her ignorance.

Even if you do inquiry on "Arun" in the waking state you won't find anyone there... except Awareness. But the realization that there is no-Arun happens to someone and that someone...which is not a someone... is Awareness.

All *nirvikalpa Samadhi* proves is that the experiencer, the individual entity, is not necessary for you to exist. If you understand this it may lead to the realization "I am Awareness...that to which experience, or in the case of *nirvikalpa Samadhi*, non-experience, presents itself." Or, "I am the knower of the experiencer."

It is important to know that in all the discussions of qualifications for enlightenment in the Vedanta scriptures, not one experiential qualification is mentioned. In many ways you are much better off without special states, although they can be helpful if they are evaluated properly.

### Savikalpa Samadhi

*Savikalpa Samadhi*, however, is excellent for Self realization because the experiencer, the *vikalpa* that makes experience possible, is there and the Self, which is *nirvikalpa*, free of thought... is there appearing as an object reflected in the Subtle Body so you can inquire into it and gain the knowledge of it as you.

To be fair you can't experience the Self directly... it is the ultimate 'experiencer' and as such it is beyond experience altogether. By that I mean that experience presents itself to Awareness but Awareness doesn't chase or evaluate experience...as the experiencer, which is controlled by its conditioning. You can experience the

reflection of Awareness in a pure mind... which is adequate for the purposes of realization. Yoga is valuable because it can help you gain a pure mind. And a yogi can realize if he realizes that the Self is not a *Samadhi*. Unfortunately most yogis define *Samadhi* as enlightenment.

#### It is the apparent person that needs the knowledge

*Nirvikalpa Samadhi* is just an experience, an exalted one, no doubt, but just another experience. Your wife calls you to dinner when the *Samadhi* is happening and it ends. Any thing that begins and ends is not you. It is possible to gain inferential knowledge from this *Samadhi* but only... as I said above...the knowledge that the person I think I am doesn't exist. The knowledge of the non-existence of the individual is indirect and can lead to Self realization but it is only 'negative' knowledge. It negates the individual but it does not necessarily reveal the nature of the Self, except by implication.

#### Self is always present

You can get depressed from this knowledge if you don't take the next logical step and realize that even though "Arun" was not there he was there...as the Self...or he couldn't have survived the *Samadhi*. But this knowledge is also available through an analysis of deep sleep, which is more or less equivalent to *nirvikalpa Samadhi*. It is also available through waking state inquiry. When you try to put a finger on "Arun"... to come up with something substantial... you can't do it. Because it is just a name referring to an endless stream of discrete, insubstantial experiences which appear in Awareness and then disappear.

Any *Samadhi* or non-dual epiphany...which almost everyone has experienced at some time...can be useful but is definitely not essential for liberation... as you suggest. Any person in a completely normal state of mind can, through Vedanta teaching, for example, or through a serious life trauma or in ways too numerous to mention realize the Self.

Knowledge transcends experience. It is always good, irrespective of what one is experiencing at the moment. When they shoot a rocket at Mars, they don't even aim it experientially at Mars. They send it off to a different planet, in a different direction, and use the gravitational field to increase its velocity and shoot it off where Mars isn't, toward a third planet, to further increase its speed and even then it does not head straight toward the place where Mars is experientially, but at some future place where Mars will be in four years. It eventually gets there in spite of the fact that it always seems to be going to someplace else. If they went by experience, they would never get to Mars. What worked was knowledge of the movement of the planets. If you stand on the equator, the sun experientially rises in the east and sets in the West. At the North Pole at a certain time the sun experientially goes in a circle around the earth. From the sun's position, the earth goes around it. Viewed from

outer space, the sun seems to be just one of billions of stars. Which is true? All are true and none are true. You can't count on experience to deliver true knowledge. But it can be helpful if you have the big picture, which helps you evaluate it and lay it to rest... as I've said.

### Samadhi

To understand what is meant by *Samadhi* one needs to know the meaning of the words, 'sama' and 'dhi.' 'Sama' means equal and 'dhi' means *buddhi* or intellect. It is a *Samadhi* that takes place in the intellect or Subtle Body. So what is equal to what in this state? All perceived objects have the same value to the perceiver. "A yogi in *samadhi* sees no difference between a lump of gold and the excreta of a crow." To be sure, you know that one is valuable in the world and the other isn't, but you see that, essentially, they are the same. That is, they are only Awareness in two apparently different forms.

The Self is *nirvikalpa*. And as the Self you don't have to maintain a particular experience to be *nirvikalpa*...thought free. So if you realize the Self through inquiry, which should be guided by scripture because it gives you the big picture, which in turn allows you to negate the *samadhi*, you get *nirvikalpa* without having to achieve it or 'maintain' it as a special state of consciousness.

### See the Self in every experience

*"There was another contradiction in your writing. You wrote a whole paragraph on experience. To summarize, as I understand it, is that the small Self is the experiencing entity, not the big Self. (I know they are the same but, for the sake of clarity I am putting small Self). Nevertheless you agreed that everything is always experienced. However, you were at great pains in your satsangs in India to point out that one cannot 'experience' the Self. One knows the Self. Or it is knowledge that reveals it, rather than experience. And that the Self is not an experiencing entity - it just is. Now you are saying that there is no distinction?"*

Apparent contradiction. First, there is one Self and it thinks it is limited (small) because it does not know its nature. The experiencing entity, the body/mind, can't experience Awareness, because they are gross instruments. They can only experience their respective objects. The key point is that knowledge reveals the Self. The intellect needs to develop the discrimination to see the Self in every experience.

## Vedanta employs a certain methodology

From the point of view of a person who thinks enlightenment is an experience, we first need to show that enlightenment is not an experience by using Vedanta's experience-based logic. Then once the seeker has realized that he or she is barking up the wrong tree by chasing experience, he or she is ready to accept the non-duality of experience and knowledge. Unless you understand the context of a particular teaching, it seems to contradict other teachings.

*"I see a delicate distinction of language between knowledge and experience. You say:*

*"You are suddenly released from the perspective of the experiencing entity and you 'go back' to your natural 'state,' the Self's point of view. And the knowledge that goes with this should be 'I am the seer, the witness, etc.'" The witnessing is going on in 'normal' states too, it is just not as obvious."*

*"The last sentence is kind of my stumbling block. Does this mean that one 'knows' this all the time, even if one is not 'aware' of it or is not experiencing it consciously? But if the knowledge is not hard and fast - I guess this is the problem? The point is to always know yourself as the witness, right?"*

That's correct. The whole problem is a lack of Self knowledge. You are always the witness but you think the witness is the experiencer i.e. limited. Hard and fast knowledge means that you don't re-identify with the body/mind.

There is one subtle doubt expressed here, in the second sentence, where you say, "even if one is not experiencing it consciously." In this case knowing is an experience, so you are right. This is where knowledge and experience meet. Knowing is a kind of experience. For awareness, you, there is no knowing as an experience. It is just your nature. It is like sugar. Sugar does not taste 'sweet.' It is sweetness. You do not have knowledge. You are Knowledge, meaning Awareness, since the essence of any knowledge is Awareness.

*As an experiencing entity you are constantly trying to manipulate your experience*

*"You said that the gunas naturally balance when we have Self-knowledge. But, my understanding is that the Self is above the gunas. And surely, even with realization, the gunas still play and change - but one is just not affected by them."*

Again we are in very subtle territory. To have Self knowledge means that you are the Self. So if you are the Self, the *gunas* take care of themselves. Even though you are never not the Self, when *Maya* is operating you become an experiencing entity and may interfere with the natural action of the *gunas* which are governed by the

Self as *Ishvara*, the body and the rules that operate the body. As an experiencer you are prone to making adjustments and corrections, 'manipulations' to use a term that I am partial to. Sometimes your efforts bring pleasure and sometimes suffering. But if you stay out of it and let *Ishvara* do the work, your life will be more or less pain free.

Yoga is conscious manipulation that takes place with knowledge of the *gunas*. You can more or less beat the system with *yoga*. Well, let's say you can manage life pretty successfully by using knowledge to balance the *gunas*.

#### **Karma is just the impersonal operation of the cosmic machine**

*"You might still get ill, for example, because of the gunas. And if you did get ill - how is this not karmic? Like when you got filaria, for example. Are you saying that because you know this isn't real, and you are not identifying with anything in Maya, and therefore it cannot be karma, because you are not taking action in it?"*

It depends on what you mean by karma. Everything is karmic. The question is how do you relate to it? What does it mean to you? What is interpreting it for you? If you are interpreting it, you are ignorant of who you are because it just is what it is. There is nothing you can do about it. It can't be any other way.

I think you are implying that karma is bad or good. But it isn't. It is just the impersonal operation of the vast cosmic machine that is constructed by Ignorance. Thinking it is bad or good is the problem. It is bad when it seems to deny you what you want, and it is good when it gives you what you want. But karma does not know what you want. It impersonally delivers results on the basis of your gross and subtle actions, which are in turn the result of other gross and subtle actions, which are in turn the result... It goes on mindlessly ad infinitum.

Sickness and health are the result of karma. Is health good and sickness bad? Maybe. Maybe not. How do you evaluate things in the karma world, in Maya? Krishna says, 'About the topic of karma even sages are perplexed.' There is no karma for animals because they do not evaluate what happens to them. This is why the scriptures unequivocally say there is no karma for the wise.

#### **Illness belongs to the body, not to me**

The problem with your statement above is that it assumes I had filaria. I did not have filaria. My body, which is *Ishvara's* body, was host to some parasites that were also *Ishvara*. Illness belongs to the body, not to me.

### You cannot experience Awareness with the body-mind

*“Awareness is watching itself from these eyes, but these eyes particularly in the example of this body and mind. Without this body-mind I couldn’t experience Awareness. Even though Awareness is all there is and I am it. My goodness this is confusing.”*

Your statement that you can’t experience Awareness without the body-mind is not correct. You cannot experience Awareness with the body-mind. You, Awareness, know the body-mind. Can you say that you do not exist? You do exist because you experience yourself to exist. When you sleep at night you do not cease to exist. The body-mind does not exist then, but you certainly do. You enjoy yourself as bliss and limitlessness.

### The world that you see as something separate is brought about because your point of reference is the body

*“If the world isn’t ‘out there’ but a projection of myself, in myself, like a dream, then there could be unity, with no real separation between subject and object. I think this is true, but it is not actually my own experience.”*

You are right that the world appears in you, like a dream. But this is not duality, although it seems to be. I think you believe that the world is supposed to ‘disappear’ when you realize non-duality, like a snake disappears when it is known to be a rope? But this is not the meaning of non-duality. Non-duality is just knowledge. It is the knowledge that what appears to be separate is not separate at all. A mirage appears to be water but it is not water at all. It is just an image created by perception under certain conditions. So duality is just a perception brought about by ignorance that makes something that is non-dual appear to be dual. The world that you see as something separate is brought about because your point of reference is the body. From its point of view, the world is definitely something other than the body. But when you understand that the world is made out of your perception, and your perception is made out of you, you can see that it is non-separate from you, Awareness. But the experience of duality is going to remain as long as you live. Non-duality means that you know that duality is a false projection...and you find it funny.

Everything is ‘in’ Consciousness because Consciousness is necessary for anything to exist. Nothing exists apart from Consciousness, the knowing principle. Nothing is actually inside Consciousness like things are inside the body, but everything that is, appears in you, in Awareness. You cannot find anything outside of Awareness. To do so Awareness would have to be there.

## Awareness that animates others is the same Awareness that animates you

*“Although I can understand myself as the witness, it’s hard to see others as that same Awareness, though I know, logically, objectless Awareness can only be one in number. Apparently, it’s an egoic witness! How does one bridge this gap?”*

The problem is caused because you are associating Awareness, the witness, with the body-mind entity. The Awareness that animates others is the same Awareness that animates you. It might help to think of Awareness as similar to life. You are alive. I am alive. Is the life in me different from the life in you? Or think of electricity. When it functions through a light bulb it comes out as light, through a heater it manifests as heat, through a radio it appears as sound. Each of us has a different instrument but the Awareness-life animating every one of us, including the plants and animals, is the same. What applies to one body-mind entity does not apply to another, however, because each one is unique, in so far as we are the product of different choices made at different times in differing situations. So, on the body-mind level we are completely different. But on the level of the Self, Awareness, that because of which we know what we know, we are one.

*“Also, I’m not sure how pure limitless Awareness associates with a particular body-mind?”*

There is no actual association. There is a seeming association created by ignorance.

*“... but somehow subtle and causal bodies are introduced here with their attachments and tendencies. The connection to the Self makes sense in terms of the causal body somehow arising from the Self, the subtle from the causal, and the gross from the subtle. But what about matter with no apparent Consciousness, like rocks - do they have the additional bodies?”*

No. They are just gross elements. They are completely insentient. When we move to the plant kingdom we start to see sentiency, a mixture of sentient and insentient Consciousness. The mixture gets more complex in animals and becomes very sophisticated in humans. Mind you, there is no actual mixture, although it certainly seems so.

## The gross body is just five gross elements

*“If matter is originating in these finer planes, how, when an individual dies, can the gross body (now a corpse) continue when the causal and subtle associations have ceased, if the gross body is existentially supported by these prior conditions?”*

The gross body is just the five gross elements. It is always available. It is *Isvara's* creation. So when the Subtle Body propelled by the Causal Body takes up residence in a fertilized egg attached to the uterine wall, it has access to all the elements and slowly draws them to itself to shape the kind of body it needs for the present birth in order to work out the karma that was unfulfilled in the last birth. There is no actual distinction between experience and knowledge

### Experience is the container and knowledge the contents

*"You mention that in certain cases like extreme fear... then we know the Self."*

People almost exclusively focus on what happens and not what the happening means in terms of liberation. In fact life is one. There is no actual distinction between experience and knowledge. They go together. Experience is the container and knowledge the contents, the essence. When you experience a tree, you know the tree. In the case of the transcendence that comes from fear, you are suddenly released from the perspective of the experiencing entity, and you 'go back' to your natural 'state,' the Self's point of view. And the knowledge that goes with this should be 'I am the seer, the witness, etc.'

The witnessing is going on in 'normal' states too, it is just not as obvious. So when you know you are the witness, you are aware of everything as an object irrespective of your 'state,' meaning what 'you' are experiencing. You are also aware that the experiencing entity is an object. Ignorance is the belief that you are the experiencing entity and not the light in which the experiencing entity experiences.

### Objects are the Self but the Self is not objects

Non-duality is the understanding that the witnessed objects are the Self but the Self is not the witnessed objects. The witnessed objects depend on the Self, they are made of your thoughts, which are made of Consciousness... which is you. But you, the Self, Awareness, do not depend on them for your existence. You are always free of them. This is why Self knowledge is liberation.

### Peace ensues when you see that you are free of all objects

It is a positive realization, not a negative realization. 'Nothing is real' is not the same as "Everything is me but I am free of everything." Lack of peace is the result of the belief that the subject somehow depends on the objects, but without the realization of the fullness of the Self, the understanding that the objects are not real only produces dispassion.

### You are Awareness and Awareness has no limits

This means that it is always present and does not change. See if it is true. Think about your experience. You are not limited by the objects appearing in you. You are not limited by what happens in you. If you were, you would not be the same from one day to the next. But you are always the same every day: ordinary Awareness. Nothing sticks to you. Nothing touches you. Yes, the body and mind change, but not really, and even if they do, so what? You witness the changes.

### You are always 'beyond' your thoughts and your experiences

*"I know that my only reality is what I am thinking at the current time."*

How do you know what you are thinking at any moment? You know it because you witness it. It is exactly the same 'you' that witnesses the emptiness of objects, your 'empty people,' that witnesses the present thought. No difference. You seem to be still in the thrall of the view that liberation is some kind of experience.

Epiphanies that involve the feeling of transcendence make the separation of the subject and the object more obvious; that is all. But this 'separation' is already and always accomplished. You do not have to wait for transcendence to happen. Even when it appears as an experiential happening, it has not changed your fundamental understanding of yourself. You are always 'beyond' your thoughts and your experiences. See if it isn't true. And don't say you understand it 'academically.' Knowledge is not academic. Knowledge is based on experience. Have a look at your experience.

Your inquiry will eventually convert the ignorance into knowledge

### Our mistaken interpretation of experience, not experience itself, is the problem

*"You clear up the whole confusion between experience and understanding. To clarify, we experience the sky to be blue, yet we can investigate into it and we will find out that it is technically not blue, even though we do definitely experience it as blue. In the same way, we do not experience the Self because we have the false belief that we are not the Self. Therefore it is not the experiencing that is at fault, but rather our false belief that we are not the Self."*

Yes, absolutely. You are whole and complete. Nothing is missing. If you see it any other way, it is just a belief.

*“Therefore we need to deeply affirm, that ‘I am the Self’, pure eternal untouched Awareness that is unaffected by anything and is ever the same. This must become a steadfast and firm belief in the mind, and then this is Self realization?”*

Close. It will be a belief at first because your experience in life so far does not confirm it. It seems like you are small, inadequate, incomplete and separate. So you have to investigate to see if the way you think of yourself is true or the way scripture sees you is true. Your investigation will eventually convert the belief into hard and fast knowledge.

#### Experience does not have to confirm knowledge

*“So a belief that is congruent with reality is more like an accurate assessment of reality. It is an accurate interpretation of what is true, rather than the belief that I am not Self. Is this like having a conviction that something is true, even though we cannot know it by experience? Just like I experience the sky as blue, yet I know that it is not really blue?”*

Yes, precisely. When the magician saws the lady in half it definitely seems like she is cut in two, and you may even feel some kind of emotions, but you know very well that it is not true. A mirage looks like water even when you know it isn't water. Experience does not have to confirm knowledge.

#### There are more benefits to seeing yourself as complete than embracing the opposite view

*“I can say to myself that I am a wonderful person, or I can convince myself that I am a bad person. Both beliefs would be false, because they are not eternal truth. I can try to convince myself that I am the Self, ordinary actionless unchanging ever present Awareness, and is this good, because it is the truth?”*

How do you convince yourself? You need to think about who you are until it becomes clear that you are neither a wonderful nor a bad person. You can only be the one who knows the good or bad person. When you look into the one who knows, i.e. Awareness, you cannot find a good or a bad person.

Even if you cannot see that you are not a person, it pays to see yourself as Awareness, because the thought of Awareness is not separate from Awareness so when you contemplate on Awareness, you 'go to' Awareness. You see that is you. You see that you have no limits. The thought that you are "Luke" does not set you free. It 'means' something. That meaning limits you. You may think you are "Luke" because of some thoughts that are in your mind, based on some events that

happened to the body that you have observed and interpreted, but when a stranger looks at you, he does not see "Luke". He sees Awareness and a body.

I am not sure what the word 'convince' means to you. We will not brainwash you. Vedanta is not religion. It is just good psychology to take the most generous view of yourself that you can. They have found that people who believe in God without having a clue whether or not such a being exists, are actually happier than those who don't. When you think about it, irrespective of the truth, you have no actual evidence that you are small, inadequate and incomplete either. If there is no evidence that you are not the light and there is no evidence that you are the light, it is wise to think of yourself as the light, since there are more benefits to this view than its opposite.

*"It appears that Vedanta is simply being told about the truth, that you are the Self. Then surely after hearing this truth, and one accepts it, that is all that needs to be done?"*

Yes, assuming that it cancels your sense of doership and renders any binding *vasanas* non-binding.

**Inquiry is seeing if what the scripture says is true**

"You mention about inquiry? How does one inquire?"

You are inquiring now.

"And what is the inquiry? Is it the question, who am I?"

It is not a question. You know the answer. It is seeing if what the scripture says is true.

*"The answer is the pure, unchanging Self that is beyond the body and the mind, and not affected by anything, and ever the same, and it is all that is. I do believe this to be true. I still see this as intellectual, rather like hearing what ice cream tastes like without actually tasting it?"*

Tell me what Awareness tastes like. There is not a human being at any time or place that can tell you what it tastes like, because it is you. What do you taste like? You don't taste like anything because you are not an experience. You are not a body with senses. You are Awareness. It has no qualities to taste or feel. It can only be known as your Self. Do not say that because it cannot be experienced, it does not exist. If you exist, it exists. It is the knower, not what is known. It sees "Luke" tasting life.

## There is no contradiction between thinking and being

*"I have a question about Zen. I've recently been reading a lot about Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn. He told his students correct practice was to 'only don't know'. This 'don't know' is meaningful to me and means the same thing as the Ramana quote: Do not meditate - be! Do not think that you are - be! Don't think about being - you are!"*

*I have a doubt as to whether this 'don't know' Zen can take me all the way, which Seung Sahn implied, so I sought your advice."*

Here is a quote from the Zen guy. Let's analyze it:

*"When you are thinking, your mind and my mind are different. When you cut off all thinking, then your mind and my mind are the same. If you keep 'don't know' mind one hundred percent - don't know - at that time, your 'don't know' mind, my 'don't know' mind, everybody's 'don't know' mind are the same. 'Don't know' mind has already stopped thinking. Stopped thinking means no thinking. No thinking means empty mind. Empty mind means before thinking. Your before thinking is your substance. My before thinking is my substance (hits his chest). This stick's substance, universal substance, everything's substance, is the same substance."*

*"So, when you keep "don't know" mind one hundred percent - don't know - at that time you are the universe, the universe is you. You and everything have become one. That is, as we say, primary point. So, 'don't know' is not don't know, 'don't know' is primary point. Primary point's name is "don't know." Some people say primary point's name is mind, or Buddha, or God, or nature, or substance, or absolute, or energy, or holy, or Consciousness, or everything. But true primary point has no name, no form, no speech, no word, because it is before thinking. Only when you keep a 'don't know' mind one hundred percent - don't know - at that time you and everything have already become one. So I ask you, when you keep 'don't know,' at that time, are this stick and you the same or different?"*

In this quote you see what he means by 'don't know.' He means to have an open mind so that Self knowledge can happen. In fact, he is trying to give the person Self knowledge. He is telling him about the Self.. the primary point. He may know who he is but he is not a skillful teacher because he is using experiential language and exhorting the seeker. He does not tell the person that he is the primary point. He is giving indirect knowledge. It may be that he is doing this because the person has a very agitated worldly mind that is full of desire, and doings (in which case he should probably tell him or her to do *karma yoga*) and this is the only kind of knowledge that he will understand but it is probably because the teacher has had some kind of epiphany and thinks the disciple needs to get rid of his mind to experience it. The basic idea in Zen, I believe, is transmission of experience and not transmission of

knowledge. If it was about knowledge, why call it transmission? You transmit energy. You teach knowledge. This approach to teaching is typical of the experiential view of enlightenment.

#### **Inquiry is seeing if what the scripture says is true**

This teaching is quite misleading and unskillful, because the mind and the Self, Awareness, are not equal. The mind is a lower order of reality, a dependent order of reality, and you, the Self, are not cancelled by the thoughts in your mind. You exist and you think. There is no contradiction between thinking and being. If you do not have a proper means of knowledge like Vedanta, you have to teach in this way

#### **The mind itself is never the problem**

Enlightened people have minds. The problem is the mind's understanding or lack of it. In this case the Self...what he calls the primary point...is identified with the mind because it is suffering apparent ignorance. You need to have a means of knowledge to remove ignorance. You cannot simply tell a person what the problem is. You have to show them what ignorance is. He is not doing it because he does not know that while what he is saying is partially true, it is not the truth because it relies on getting the mind out of the picture. The mind should stay and get Self knowledge.

If you look at the words for the Self...the primary point...you can see that they are unskillful. Yes, you can figure out by implication that there is something other than the mind. You can believe it. Notice in that teaching that he also uses the word 'believe.' Belief is also helpful, but without a proper means of Self knowledge that can reveal the 'primary point', you have to ask the student to believe.

But if you have a skillful teaching you can show the student the primary point directly. Anyway, the words 'primary point' are experiential. They are based on two ideas...that time and space are real...and they give the seeker the idea that the Self is situated somewhere in time and space. 'Primary' means 'before' which implies time and 'point' means space or in psychological space. And he leaves the seeker where he is, contemplating this 'point' that is not present.

Another problem with this language is that there is no sense that the primary point is conscious. The Self is Consciousness and it is conscious. This is something that the student knows about himself. He knows that he is conscious. So there is an opportunity for the teacher to directly point to the nature of the Self. If a teaching does not do this, the student can only conclude that he or she must do something to close the gap between the primary point and his or her present existential position. If you use this kind of language, you have to make it clear that the 'gap' is ignorance and that it can only be 'closed' by knowledge. If the teacher says, 'you are Consciousness' and makes it clear what Consciousness is, the student has direct

access to his or her Self. Simply by contemplating the meaning of the words, his or her mind will realize the Self.

#### Is the teaching addressing the “doer” and encouraging action?

Now let's look at the quote:

*Do not meditate - be! Do not think that you are - be! Don't think about being - you are!*

These words have a certain degree of truth but they do not constitute a skillful teaching because they are addressed to a doer. You will be left with the notion that what you have to do is not to do, not to think. But this is ridiculous because enlightenment is freedom from the notion of doership. There is absolutely nothing unspiritual about thinking, or meditating, or any other activity or even feeling like a doer. These activities may become unspiritual if you lack Self knowledge, however. At best these are very blunt entry level teachings for unqualified people. They serve a certain purpose but they are misleading.

#### Yoga vs. Vedanta / Experience vs. Knowledge

The theory of experiential enlightenment does not explain why we are caught up in *samsara*. It takes for granted that the solution to *samsara* is exclusively experiential and offers to convert *samsara* into *nirvana* by following certain disciplines. The Bible for the proponents of this view of enlightenment is Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, written a few hundred years before the Christian era. It informs us that our conditioning stands in the way of the experience of *nirvana* and instructs us how to remove it so that we can experience freedom, not to put too fine a point on it.

It is a dualistic doctrine based on the apparent reality of subject and object. I, the subject, am limited by my state of mind. Because limitation is not acceptable to me I would like to free myself of it. I practice some form of meditation and gain mastery of my mind by removing the thoughts that obstruct the experience of limitlessness. My experience of limitlessness is the object. Buddha's Eightfold Path and *Ashtanga Yoga* are the traditional methods for supposedly gaining experiential freedom. Buddha did not bring God into it but Patanjali did, saying that surrender to God is an indirect aid for attaining freedom.

#### Yoga is experience driven

Yoga, in our tradition, is encouraged as a means for the purification of the mind only, not as a means of Self knowledge. With Yoga, you do certain practices and you get certain results. It is for the body and the mind. You can develop and purify your apparent self effectively with Yoga. It is experience driven and it is couched in the language of experience. It is for doers. It does not expose the doer for what it is.

Consequently, it is not suitable for liberation...which is freedom from doership. Freedom from the doer and doership does not mean that there is no doer or a sense of doership, only that both are known for what they are in light of one's true nature as actionless Awareness. Yoga will transform an extroverted mind into a contemplative mind if it is used properly.

### Vedanta is a means of knowledge

Our tradition views Vedanta as a pramana, a means of knowledge, not a means of experience or a philosophy. Vedanta's teachings are presented in both the language of experience and action and in the language of identity. We teach how to distinguish one from the other so that inquiry is not compromised. Failure to distinguish the language of experience from the language of identity will prevent liberation. Gaining liberation, which is not a gain but a loss of ignorance, is easy if you are qualified because you will not try to attain the Self by any other means than knowledge. We do not look down on Yoga. We encourage it. If your mind is not prepared by Yoga consciously or unconsciously the teachings of Vedanta will make no sense. We do not chase spiritual experience. We seek to understand.

### Vedanta is for Knowers

Vedanta is all about words because they are the vehicle that carries ideas. When I work with someone spiritually, the first thing we do is set up a common vocabulary. Today I had a discussion with a woman and it took an hour for her to figure out what I meant by 'knowledge.' When she got the meaning it added a whole new dimension to her inquiry at a critical stage, making the transition from experience and action words, to identity words. Aside from its scientific basis, proven track record and its comprehensiveness, Vedanta is an excellent means of Self knowledge because it uses Sanskrit words that have specific meanings signifying certain important existential facts for which materialistic cultures have no words. There are only a handful of words to learn but once they are understood they make it possible to communicate with the teacher and they take you right to the Wordless.

### Yoga is for doers

In the Yoga tradition enlightenment is conceived of as an attainment. It promises the doer, the apparent Self, something that it believes it does not have, union...yoga means to join or to yoke...with the Self. So yogis strive to gain the Self in the form of a certain state of Consciousness as mentioned above. Yoga does not seem to understand that Consciousness is not a state and that all states of Consciousness are in the apparent reality. Even though there are *samadhi* states which produce great bliss and insight, attaining them does not end one's search. The search continues in the form of a need to make the state 'permanent.' It is a futile quest because no state of Consciousness is permanent. Only Consciousness, the Self of the yogi, is permanent.

Is enlightenment a special kind of experiential knowledge?

**The confusion about knowledge and experience and the nature of Self knowledge is the one universal impediment to enlightenment**

I make the distinction between the language of experience and the language of identity because most people I meet have Yoga-based notions that prevent them from enlightenment. There is a crying need for an identity-based language. Seekers are not well served because so-called enlightened people and authorities on enlightenment are confused about the relationship between knowledge and experience. This misunderstanding pervades the literature of all spiritual paths.

The confusion is no more evident in the idea that there is a special kind of experiential knowledge. But knowledge is not experiential, except that it is true to its object and therefore always good. For example, fire is always hot. That is knowledge. How special and experiential is that? It is just a fact.

Most spiritual types already know who they are. Their epiphanies usually inform them and if they have any doubt, spiritual literature...and even the ill-considered teachings of many of the modern gurus...inform that there is one Self and it is Awareness. The real issue is simply lack of confidence in the knowledge. So if you want to think in terms of experiential knowledge think in terms of confidence in the fact that you are whole and complete actionless ordinary unconcerned Awareness.

And how do you gain confidence? You gain it by taking a stand in Awareness, meaning that when fears and desires surface you dismiss them with reference to the knowledge that you cannot gain or lose anything by acting them out so you stand fast as you are. Successfully resisting them with this knowledge weakens them and increases your confidence in the truth of who you are.

**You need to expose yourself to the teachings for a long time until your understanding becomes perfect**

You can read my book or you can order the Self Inquiry videos and watch them slowly over and over. It will all make sense. You can also come to my seminars. It is best to be nearly fanatical when you realize the value of Self knowledge and keep your mind occupied with the teachings all the time. Ignorance is hard wired and very intelligent. Eternal vigilance is required until Self knowledge is rock solid.

**The search for the experience of freedom is grounded in duality**

Success in yoga does not destroy the duality of subject and object. Duality is a belief, not a fact. When I experience the reflected self in my heart I do not suddenly stop being an experiencer; I experience a state of 'freedom.' Patanjali does not put it

exactly this way. He says that once the mind is brought under control, 'the seer dwells in its own nature' and 'the indweller shines forth as pure Consciousness,' words that amount to freedom but do not take into account the fact that the seer, Awareness, dwells in his own nature and shines forth irrespective of the condition of the mind. Nor does it take into account the fact that the meditator is Consciousness i.e. free already.

In any case, enlightened or not, a mind relatively free of worldly desire is certainly not undesirable for anyone seeking happiness, so Patanjali's yoga should not be rejected because it is an adequate means for preparing the mind for Self knowledge. The Buddha's Eightfold Path is also an experiential journey that is said to end with enlightenment but it suffers the same as yoga.

## Chapter 2 - Vedanta

### Why Vedanta?

#### Because...

##### You realize the world is empty of meaning

If you study scripture, Buddhism or Hinduism, you will find that the idea that this world is empty of meaning occupies a prominent place in their analyses of life. And if you really pay attention, there always comes a point when you realize that no matter how much experience you've had, you actually don't have anything tangible to show for it. You still find yourself looking for a new experience to give you meaning. If someone has reached middle age and is still expecting something, like financial security or emotional security, to fulfill them it means that this person has not actually understood the nature of reality.

There is no Self nature in objects. Objects are any situation, person, place, physical thing, idea, emotion, or experience... anything that can be experienced. Buddhism calls this world *anitya*, impermanent. Vedanta calls it *samsara*, that which never remains the same. The reason the impermanent nature of empirical reality is stressed is to warn people that, if they think that they can get lasting happiness from some objective situation, they are asking for disappointment.

##### You know there is no permanent happiness in anything in this world

Many people live hard, garnering all sorts of experience, yet at the end of the day they are left with the feeling: I am limited, incomplete, and inadequate. Without looking into this feeling, they assume that they haven't been fortunate enough to get what they are looking for... so they stubbornly keep trying. They don't realize that the search is misguided and they are looking in the wrong place. They somehow

believe that just around the corner is the object that will complete them, make them feel secure, whole, and comfortable... a relationship, for example. But it never happens for a good reason: there is no permanent happiness in anything in this world. This is a sad fact, but a fact nonetheless. The joy is not in the object.

#### You know the world is devoid of Self... unless you see it as the Self

In fact, if you look at relationship with a clear, honest mind the very idea of a relationship is not satisfying. You always express serious doubts about the guy and about the relationship. You do his chart and the chart confirms your observation; he has a downside. And this knowledge causes doubts. It means along with the good stuff, you're going to have to manage your critical mind, usually by getting him to 'change.' These doubts are not something to be swept under the carpet because they are just your higher Self reminding you that pleasure equals pain, that you are not going to ultimately benefit by a relationship.

Trying to find meaning in life is essentially self defeating because there is no meaning there...unless you see it as the Self. The refusal to see that the world is devoid of Self nature is a kind of existential denial. Its proof is a persistent feeling of frustration and an unexamined passion for life.

#### Because your passion for life has led to an agitated mind

*"I still feel that I have much to experience, and get in touch with, and feel passionate about, life..."*

I'm suggesting that there is a connection between this passion you have for something that can't deliver lasting happiness and your frustrating agitated mind. Some part of you, the Self, knows that you are not going to find what you are seeking in this world, and it is sabotaging your efforts. Not out of perversity, but to get you to look in the right place. Think about it rationally, without trying to defend your passion. You've been passionate all your life, and yet you still feel frustrated, agitated, and incomplete, well into middle age. Your work agitates you, and your longing for love agitates you. Perhaps there are other things too. The spiritual teachings such as 'I am not the doer/enjoyer' and the fact that there is no lasting joy in people, objects, and situations don't seem to make an impact on you. Why? It is because you are blindly committed to your passions. But you are not going to be the one to prove the scriptures and the realizations of the saints and sages wrong. You will eventually have to face the fact that you are looking in the wrong place. I'm not saying don't live fully or don't do what you want. Go right ahead. But be prepared to take the bitter with the sweet because that is the way reality is set up. Nobody ever beat the system.

## Because you have realized that passion for the impermanent will only yield impermanent results

I've found that people, particularly Westerners, do not like to be told that there is a downside to passion. It has become a kind of God in the West. The sages say passion is essentially unworkable if you want peace and this is certainly my experience but please... be my guest... go for it. If it works get back to me and I'll mention it at the next Congress of Saints and Sages and they can set up a commission to look into amending the scriptures.

## Qualifications Necessary?

*You are not qualified if:*

**You view experience as the your primary source of gratification**

When passion is king and instant gratification is queen, the mind becomes agitated if more than a few minutes are required to satisfy its desires. Fortunately, the *samsaric* state of mind is its own worst enemy because it produces so much suffering and sensitive individuals seek a way out.

Invariably, the first enlightenment view that presents itself to them is the experiential view. From womb to tomb, life is one long series of experiences, so it is natural to become attached to experience and define ourselves by our experiences. Who would I be without them? The idea that we do not need experience to be happy never occurs to us. Although it is a natural and inevitable experience, death terrifies us, as it seemingly spells the end of experience.

**You strive to set up positive experiences and avoid negative**

Experience obviously takes place in time. It is clear that experienced objects change but what about the experiencer – me? I change too. Can I honestly say that I have not changed since the day I was born? Absolutely everything about me changes: my body, my feelings, my thoughts and ideas. I am never the same from one day to the next. Time is having its way with me and there is nothing I can do about it. If experience did not modify me, what would be the point of experience? And because experience is dualistic it is sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Positive is fine, but negative is not fine, so I am open to suggestions that might free me of the negative and generate the positive. In fact, a significant fraction of my energy goes into calculating which course of action will make me feel good and which will make

me feel bad. As I cannot know for sure what the results of my actions will be, I often find myself hopelessly confused and unable to do anything at all.

#### You want to feel good all the time

If somebody says that there is a special kind of experience that feels good and never ends, I am ready to sign up. If I have an experience of uncaused bliss, one that is not dependent on an outside event, I may be even more inclined to accept the idea of experiential enlightenment. Perhaps I reason that I can make the experience permanent, even though every time it happens, it ends. When the great sage Patanjali says that all I have to do to make it permanent is to remove my thoughts, I am ready to become a *yogi*. How hard can it be?

#### You cannot accept the fact that no experience lasts forever

The desire to endlessly feel good is a fantasy because *samsara*, the world of experience, is change. There is no special experience in *samsara* that does not change. The experiencer, me, is in time and the objects of experience are in time, including all states of mind. How is it possible for two things that are constantly changing to produce a state of mind that does not change?

#### Can't see that the need to love and be loved is the source of all misery

Take your own case, for instance. You have a deep need for someone to love and to be loved by someone. There is a text that says, "The need to love and be loved is the source of all misery." Why? Because need-based love is exceptionally volatile, causes tremendous anxiety, and in the fullness of time does not solve the problem of emotional insecurity. This is so because the need for love from outside is a symptom of a lack of self love. Even if you are lucky enough to find love in relationship, the problem of self love remains and makes itself felt within the relationship, usually by creating unreasonable emotional demands on one's partner. This causes a good deal of stress and can very easily sink the relationship.

#### Believe that experience is real

People who do not know the Self believe that what they experience is real. So they get attached to it. But it comes and goes so it cannot be real. So they suffer. Enlightenment is just knowing what is real and what is apparently real. When you know the difference you will not confuse yourself with objects and will not suffer on account of it. In any case all objects exist but they are not real. Only you are real. This is why you do not need to fear death when you know who you are. And this is why you are happy when you know you are Consciousness. You know that nothing can change you. Something that is real does not change.

In the spiritual world there are many foolish teachers who say that the world does not exist. This creates a problem because it is very clear that the world, including your body and mind, do exist. If you do not know what is real, then you will believe that if you are seeing the world, you are not enlightened. But this is not true. The world exists for enlightened people in the same way that it exists for everyone else. They just know that it is not real, meaning that nothing in it lasts. So they do not invest energy in getting things and keeping things.

**You do not believe that where there is no change, there is no experience**

The experiencer changes because he or she is limited. Even deep sleep changes the experiencer because he or she wakes up rested. The experience of oneness also changes the experiencer because he or she wants to experience it again when the effects wear off. If it had no effect, the desire to regain it would not occur. To experience changelessness, there would have to be an unchanging experiencer outside of *samsara* that could experience it, assuming there is something beyond *samsara*. But where there is no change there is no experience, so what is the point of trying to become another experiencer even if it is possible?

If you believe that through a yogic technique or willpower or some other way, the experience of limitless freedom could be made permanent, who would make it permanent? The experiencer could not do it because he or she does not even know what his or her next state of mind will be. No state of mind is under the conscious control of the experiencer. Even if the experiencer could control its state of mind or the thoughts in it, what happens when he or she loses control? To maintain control, concentration is necessary. What happens to the experience of limitlessness when I get sick and lose my concentration? It seems that my enlightenment is going to disappear along with my health.

**You cannot see that action being limited cannot produce an unlimited result**

Furthermore, the experiencer would have to be limitless to keep the mind permanently under control. But I am definitely limited. If I were limitless I would not be concerned about enlightenment, as I would not be limited by suffering. It is precisely because I feel limited that I am interested in freedom. How can an action... concentration, meditation, or any other doing... by a limited entity produce a limitless result? Freedom is limitless and cannot be the result of any action

***You are qualified if you have:***

**Burning desire for freedom**

When you are result oriented, anxiety becomes a way of life because you are never sure how things are going to turn out and whether or not you will be able to deal with what happens. This situation should cause you to think of your ultimate goal in

life. Is it to achieve a particular worldly result? Is it to be materially comfortable? Or is it to be free? If it is to be free then you have to know what freedom is. So once you are clear about your life's purpose you face life with a different orientation: the need to understand yourself. If you have this mindset everything that happens teaches you this lesson. So it doesn't matter if people like you or not, if you have a certain standard of living or not.

Everyone pays lip service to the idea of freedom but to realize that freedom is your nature, your desire for it should be all-consuming.

#### **Don't give your power to foolish concepts**

See how the mind works: it wants to have its cake and eat it too. I dropped out of society a long time ago and life couldn't be better. Why care about something as silly as 'society'? It is not even clear what the word 'society' means. It can be whatever you want it to be. I'm proud of the fact that I'm different. I think it is a sign of good mental health. I think there is something wrong with society, not me. You shouldn't give away your power to a foolish concept.

You asked why I dropped out. I dropped out because I realized that life as the masses conceive of it is a zero-sum game. You cannot win here. For every upside there is a downside. I wanted more so I went for freedom.

#### **Are willing to admit you have dumb ideas about yourself and the world**

Many years ago I had an ashram in San Francisco and there was a young boy, who was eight at the time who used to come in for the chants and the meditations and who listened to my talks very carefully. He was a very nice kid, very bright and innocent as boys and girls of that age can be. And one day, it was a Saturday afternoon, I was sitting in the back yard reading the paper and he came over (he lived next door) and sat down. So I asked him what was happening and he said, "Now tell about this Self. I want to know what it is." And so I spoke for about five minutes and he woke up. The reason he got it... and he still had it fifteen years later when I last saw him... was because he was the Self and he didn't have any idea that he wasn't the Self... unlike most adults who have built up this false identity over many years and who don't feel comfortable without it. It made perfect sense to him because my words directed his mind to something that was right there... something that had always been there in his experience and something that would always be there. So he didn't forget.

There were people there who had been seeking for years but who had lost the simple innocence that would have allowed them to understand.

### See the value in surrendering your mind to the way Vedanta sees reality

Why not surrender to life and communicate patiently with the mind, help it to see things the way Vedanta sees them. People spend many years trying to get a professional education but when they are asked to take a few years to get their own minds sorted out they say it is too much work. The mind is a muscle. A onetime surrender or a mind-blowing cosmic experience is not going to change the thinking patterns. They will continue. And so you will be forced to continue 'surrendering' to cope with the negative thoughts. Remember, it is the mind that is surrendering. You have to condition it to surrender.

In any case surrender is not something you can do. It is something that happens naturally when you understand the nature of reality.

### Stop trying to fix yourself and/or change the world

*"You said that for Vedanta you need a healthy mind, basically being a happy person, when starting out. I'm definitely obsessed with fixing myself and others. I wonder why would a healthy, happy person have a 'burning desire for freedom'?"*

Because happiness gets boring after a while. There is more to life than just being happy but I am sure you will settle for happiness first. Most everyone who writes me is already reasonably happy but wants to solve the "Who am I?" question. Vedanta really only works when you are basically happy. It is not meant to fix your psychologically or to grow you up.

You were an alcoholic. You went to AA and got clean and sober but that was just getting back to where you were before. It is not progress. The next stage is sorting your psychology. I am going to go out on a limb here and say something that may be difficult to hear but I think you should stop trying to fix yourself.

See if you can find a way to accept your suffering, even love it. You are not messed up. You are very fine. There is just some pain and suffering. I think all the energy you are investing in it is making it into an obsession, a story, and adding another layer of stuff on top of the original stuff. It is too much about "Martin". AA's solution is not valid either because by helping others you do not remove the helper, "Martin". See if you can't look behind it to your Self.

We have a saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." You are fine. You are trying to solve a problem that is not there. And if it is, it is there because of your past actions and it

will stay until Bhagavan sees fit to remove it. So put your attention elsewhere. You won't regret it. It will be hard because you have a strong 'fix it' tendency. But you will prevail. Good luck.

### Are willing to let go of the idea you are the body

*"Do you think that we leave the body when we have done everything that we have come here to do?"*

Yes and no. You leave the body whether or not you have completed your work. I think the way to understand the 'leave the body' idea is as a statement of maturity, of renunciation. When you see clearly what the body is, that it is only matter, you leave it. You don't physically leave it as you might in astral travel, but you see that it isn't you. So you leave it in your understanding. You know that no matter what is going on with it, you are free of it. Once you are ready to leave it you are qualified for enlightenment.

### Guru Necessary?

#### The real teacher serves the real student

If somebody has desire to know the truth, I'm their slave. Nothing satisfies me more than sharing this great wisdom. The point is that the words (on the topic of the Self) of people like me can be trusted. The spiritual power lives in the words, and when they are taken in wholeheartedly, your life is transformed.

I talk a lot of silliness too but it is up to you to figure out when I am acting like a fool and when I have my guru hat on. The behavior of people like me can sometimes be disconcerting because seekers often have an idealized notion of what an enlightened person should look like. But the apparent reality and the reality sit side by side. What is true in one is not necessarily true in the other. I act like a fool just for fun. I know very well who I am. To me life is just a silly game. Even my teaching is just a hobby.

You are stuck because you want to have it your way. You think you know best. If you value me as a spiritual teacher you need to be willing to see it the way I see it. When I say you should see it my way I'm not talking about a personal way of seeing. I have accepted the spiritual vision as my own, so my view of life is in harmony with truth. Therefore you needn't worry that my big, powerful ego is brainwashing you. I got rid of my personal stuff and took the spiritual view on board because it delivers peace, joy, and understanding. This is what we are after here, not hanging on to the 'rightness' of our experience.

Of course you will get there eventually, but the problem with staying within oneself and negotiating with oneself on every issue is that the transformational energy that comes with the truth never gets activated. The mind pisses away its power considering the pros and cons of every issue, and when it's time to actually make the right moves, there is no energy for it...so you just run off old patterns and life becomes monotonous.

Even if the egoic approach were sensible, the ego is not the one to make decisions because it is unduly influenced by fears and desires and cannot therefore make disinterested choices. When you open up to the word, you get yourself off the hot seat. You hear the truth and you take it in and it makes the changes. There is no deciding involved. All this dealing with issues, making decisions in the relative world, wears out the mind. And on top of it a 'responsible' obligated ego gets formed, and one finds oneself feeling virtuous for being so concerned and caring and conscientious, but an important something is missed: that free, joyful feeling that distinguishes a truly spiritual life from the life of an ordinary person.

#### The teacher helps you get your thinking straight

Look at this differently... from the Self's perspective. You are the Self. This is a fact. But the mind does not seem to want to be it. So the understanding that lies behind the mind has to be changed. Ideas not in harmony with the truth of oneself need to be changed. Incorrect notions about oneself and the world create dissatisfaction with what is. The guru is just someone who helps get your thinking straight. He or she is the Self and knows it, so his or her mind 'thinks from the Self.' By communicating with such a person you learn how to think about yourself correctly. You learn to identify erroneous beliefs and opinions and, most importantly you learn that you can live happily without them. You see in front of you someone who thinks clearly and hangs on to nothing. So you get the full conviction, that you can also do this.

Realizing your true nature is generally more difficult the longer one has been in the spiritual world because one picks up a lot of 'spiritual' ideas. So the person develops a kind of 'spiritual' identity. But this identity is just an overlay, another 'better' ego on top of the existing ego. The Buddha's Diamond Sutra was addressed to monks who had been on the path for a long time and who had picked up a lot of erroneous notions. The 'diamond' was the teachings meant to cut through these spiritual myths.

### Don't trust me, for God's sake

It is not about trusting me. It is about trusting the ideas I'm passing on. I'm the messenger, not the message. Well, I am the message too but not in the way you might think. The Buddha is reported to have said, "Believe nothing you have read or anything you have heard... even if I have said it... unless it corresponds with common sense and reason." Vedanta is eminently reasonable and logical. If you trust me, you give me power that you should be giving yourself. If you trust me and I accept your trust, then I have a problem; I have to always be concerned about keeping your trust. The first time I tell you something you don't want to hear you will have a 'trust' issue and our relationship will break down.

Trust means that there is distrust. This is why Vedanta is about inquiry. Inquiry means that you are looking for understanding. When you understand something you do not have to trust it. You know what it is and what it will do. Yes, it is certainly useful to trust the words of Vedanta until you have verified them in your own experience, but if you understand that you can discover the answer yourself you will not be burdened by the trust idea. I'm just offering you a toolkit of inquiries to help your investigation.

You've been using psychology, but psychology is not working. If it was working, you would not be suffering anxiety. Psychology doesn't work because the ego is taken to be the Self, the issue of desire is not adequately addressed, values are devalued and there seems to be little comprehension that the fruits of one's actions are not up to the doer. There are probably other limitations but I am not an expert so I can't say.

### The whole spiritual path boils down to getting oneself ready to hear the truth

I know that you have been suspicious of what I have to say. In a way it is pointless for the object of someone's suspicions to try to convince them to trust. But I ask you to trust what I have to say because sometimes you don't think very clearly, and this lack of clarity causes you to put yourself through more than you need to. So I offer what I offer, not because I get any ego satisfaction in seeing you take 'my' advice, but just to make your path easier. It is quite amazing how things work when you trust the words of non-attached people. By non-attached I mean someone who is satisfied in his or her Self alone and who is therefore not pursuing an agenda. You don't lose anything by taking my words on board and I don't gain anything. Therefore, there is no need to be reluctant.

I should probably clear up a doubt about the role of a guru. A guru who gives 'advice' is not a proper guru. This is why I put 'my' in quotes above. The scripture gives advice and the guru supports the scripture. The guru's sole role is to teach the Self...to remove Self ignorance. Once the disciple 'gets it' he or she becomes the guru and takes care of his or her life alone.

## What Vedanta Is

*Vedanta is the proven knowledge about the nature of all the factors in reality and their relationship to each other*

### Right words set you free from ignorance

Words are everything. They can take you from Awareness to the world or from the world to Awareness. Ignorance is just the wrong words and knowledge is the right words. The right words set Awareness free from apparent ignorance. The wrong words confuse it. Well, it is not the words themselves but their meaning. Vedanta is a word means of knowledge.

### Vedanta reveals the unexamined logic of existence

*"I always thought enlightenment would be something of absolute certitude we are supposed to arrive at through a logical inquiry. So it must ultimately be a belief. The trouble I have with a belief is that I seem to arrive at the same place as the people who believe in a bearded man on a cloud. Though their model is different it is still grounded in believing. It is tough to just believe rather than experience. I think people seek the experiential as they want something rock solid that alters them for life.*

Belief and experience are not the only options. There is knowledge.

Enlightenment is absolute certitude in your identity as Awareness. Whether it is arrived at by direct experience or logical reasoning or some combination of the two is not important. There is an upside and downside to both experience and logic.

For example, if you have a profound and direct experience of the reflection of Awareness in your mind and the knowledge "I am Awareness" does not stick once the experience ends, what use is the experience? It is best if you arrive at it through the logic that the experience generates. But this rarely happens. So the mind remains in doubt about its nature. Belief is not an option, except in the beginning of inquiry. But it will no longer stand once the inquiry has been concluded successfully.

When you clearly investigate the experiencer and the field of experience with the help of Vedanta's elegant methodology, an inevitable transpersonal logic is revealed. It is a logic that will lead you directly to liberation. It is not possible for an individual to derive the total logic of reality in a single lifetime because it is beyond the scope of an individual mind. Vedanta is a proven means for enlightenment.

## Vedanta is the knowledge of Self, God, and the world

It is also a 'science.' You can say, for example, that Einstein was a genius, but he did not invent physics. You can say Buddha was a mystic but he was not a Buddhist. It took many, many centuries of collective thinking to evolve Buddhism as it is today. The collective mind, directed by Consciousness weaned out personal views and evolved Vedanta.

The difference between Vedanta and Western science is that Western science is fixated on one small part of reality whereas Vedanta covers it all. It has a cosmology, a psychology, and a 'theology,' although this is not the right word. By 'theology' I mean knowledge of Consciousness, not a set of beliefs about the origin of the universe i.e. the Creator. Vedanta does posit two creation 'theories' but they are not meant to become objects of belief. They just offer two different ways to explain the presence of the objects of our experience. Vedanta is a time tested proven knowledge about the nature of all the factors in reality and their relationship to each other.

## Basic Teachings

### The Real and the Apparently Real

#### Confusing Yourself

*"I worry that the overwhelming feeling of something about to be realized is just another experience."*

Even if it is, why worry about it? You have no control of it one way or the other. But you can choose not to worry. And you will not worry if you understand that the result is out of your hands. So do what you feel is right and don't worry.

*"I don't really understand, but things are changing and I don't really know what is going on."*

Nobody knows what is going on because nothing is in fact going on apart from the idea that something is going on. You are you, Awareness, and thoughts and their corresponding worries appear in you and that is all there ever is, was or will be. None of the changes mean anything, apart from what you project on them. You are the unchanging presence in the midst of changing phenomena.

*"I know that enlightenment is not an experience. I am fully confident I am the Self and there is no longer an identity to claim anything."*

Even if there is, and it is known to you, what does it have to do with you in so far as you are other than what you know. So if there is identification, so what? Let it be. Just keep the subject-object distinction in mind all the time and dismiss the objects as 'not me.'

The absence of a claiming ego is not enlightenment although it passes for enlightenment these days. The Self stands apart from the ego. It isn't bothered by the claims.

### Confusing the Apparent and the Real

*"There is something I have been musing about vis à vis the Mandukya Upanishad. When I am in deep sleep this is the nearest I have to bliss, my own true Self, but I am also in ignorance of this as I am not Self-aware.*

Which 'I' are you talking about?

*"But I don't need the mind to be Self-aware - and sleep is really only for the mind. I am Self-luminous. However, when I die, by which I mean the body/mind, will I continue to be Self-aware, or will I be in ignorance of my nature as I appear to be in deep sleep?"*

Again, which 'I' are you talking about? In your sentence you say, 'I am Self luminous' which is true. Then in the very next sentence you associate the 'I' with the body and mind.

The mind cannot be Self aware, whether you need it to be or not. The body/mind is not aware or Self aware even when you are alive. It only seems to be aware because Awareness pervades every particle of these two sheaths. They are just inert matter vestures that reflect Awareness and illumine objects.

You are confusing Awareness and reflected awareness. Nothing belongs to the 'I.'

The body does not die either because it was never born. How can matter be born or die? Matter is just you appearing in different forms. First a carrot thought or a potato thought, then as some portion of the body, then back to the ground. Likewise with the Subtle Body. The body is just a lifelike hologram manufactured by *Maya* out of you, Awareness. It does not stand alone.

Both the body and mind are the Creator's projection. On their own they have no actual reality. Whatever substantiality they enjoy is borrowed from the Self. The rope is an ophidian illusion. Whatever reality the snake enjoys belongs to the rope.

If you are aware now...which you are...you are the Self and the Self alone. There is no actual "Marty". She is an abstraction from an interpretation done by the Self in ignorance of its nature that is meant to solve the identity problem as she negotiates her way through an ever-shifting reality. She is not there in deep sleep and you are. She is an object of your perception, so she cannot be you.

#### Do not confuse the 'I's

You pervade the Marty thought but believe that Marty is aware. It is an honest mistake. To get free you have to separate Awareness from the thought. This is difficult because the thought is you but you are not the thought. Confusing the two is called superimposition. Discriminating them is liberation.

Your question "When I die, will I continue to be Self aware?" shows that you lack discrimination. The "I" that dies is never aware and the "I" that is aware never dies because it was never born.

If you knew that you were Awareness now, you would not have to wait until you die to see if you will be aware.

#### Examine yourself and see if you are capable of non-existence

To say that you die means that you would have to have knowledge of your death but you would have to be there to observe your non-existence... which is impossible. There is no evidence that you die. It is merely a belief based on the idea that you are the body. This may take some contemplation.

*Are objects 'Out There'?*

#### Objects (*mithya*) are projections in Awareness (*satya*) brought on by ignorance

*(this email was occasioned by a teaching in which James analyzes the location of objects by holding a pair of glasses in his hand)*

*"My question is about the example of the glasses being in the Awareness. I am convinced that they are, but there are objections that I find hard to answer. It is easy to see that the glasses are in your Awareness. If they were not, you would not be aware of them, right?"*

Right.

*"However, it may be said that what makes you aware of the glasses is that you have an image (or if you prefer a copy) of the glasses in the Awareness, but that the actual glasses are 'out*

*there'. I would say that the glasses don't have to be out there at all for them to appear in the Awareness, because that is exactly what is happening in a dream. Then you experience the glasses in the same way as you would have done if you were awake, but they are definitely not "out there".*

The teaching that takes care of this problem is called *Jiva/Isvara srusti*. When we say 'out there,' what is our reference point? If the body is our point of reference, then the glasses are definitely 'out there.' They are objectified when we use the body as our means of knowledge. If the Self is our point of reference, then the glasses are 'in' Awareness. This does not mean that they are 'in' Awareness physically. Nothing is in Awareness. It is non-dual and free of objects. When we say 'in' we mean 'within the scope of Awareness' which means they appear as projections in Awareness. *Maya* makes Awareness jump off itself so to speak, like a hologram, and appear to be something that it isn't located away from itself.

When you go to sleep the glasses are 'not there' for you, the waking *jiva*. But they still exist as objects for the dreamer, which is also a *jiva*. The dreamer sees them as sitting on his nose or on a nearby table in its dream. And they exist as objects in *Isvara's* creation whether you are dreaming about them or not. And both the waker and the dreamer are objects in *Isvara's* creation. So they seem to be 'out there' with reference to you, Awareness, but in fact they are just Awareness because you cannot separate the glasses from the knowledge of the glasses. The glasses are actually just knowledge. And knowledge is just Awareness in the form of a thought so the glasses are just Awareness. This is how knowledge and experience are one.

*"You may also say that this is a dualistic view, and then the question arises as to where the Awareness is, where it begins and where it ends."*

If it is just a 'view,' a belief or an opinion, there is no way to resolve it. We don't care if anyone believes it or not. We use this distinction to illumine the relationship between the individual and the total and Awareness.

#### **Accept non-duality on faith if you cannot demonstrate what non-duality means**

The whole point of the 'location of objects' teaching is to attack the view that non-duality implies some kind of change in one's experience. It doesn't because you are always one with everything. It involves a different way of seeing reality. If a person is qualified and has faith in the teaching, you can work the means of knowledge on them and the vision of non-duality will happen. If they think Vedanta is just a belief system, a philosophy, nothing will happen.

There is nothing spiritually wrong with perception, which is based on duality. But if you don't inquire into it, you will find that relying on perception for your happiness

is not the way to go because nobody's perception is free of conditioning. It will distort it how you see things and you will suffer.

Everyone thinks what they experience is real. If they didn't they wouldn't have problems. Accepting non-duality on faith is necessary to motivate the inquirer to make the tests required to verify or falsify it. And Vedanta provides the means for making the necessary tests even though it may take some time! If you are qualified and expose your mind to Vedanta, the vision of non-duality will become your vision.

#### **You are not Self actualized until you grasp the relationship between the Self and life**

*"My understanding of svadharma (the duty of an individual to respond to life appropriately) in your sentence 'I define my svadharma as Isvara's will' is precisely what I was trying to express and what I meant by not wanting anything for me, except what the total wants for me. Am I seeing it correctly?"*

Yes, indeed. Everything is God's will, including the way you see it. Even if you are deluded and you know it, are you deluded? Even if you have a doubt about whether or not you are deluded, are you deluded if you know it? Even if you are not deluded are you not deluded if you know it?

*"In my mind there is Self knowledge, the hard and fast knowledge of who I am, and the knowledge of the relationship of the individual to life (the knowledge behind the karma yoga approach). Is this correct?"*

Yes. That is how it is. What you just expressed is Self knowledge, i.e. *moksha*. It is knowledge of the real, *satya*, and the apparently real, *mithya*, and the relationship between them. *Satya* means pure Awareness and *mithya* refers to the status of the objects appearing in it. It is a shame that the custodians of enlightenment these days are quick to dismiss the world as non-existent and (supposedly) content themselves to revel in the Self alone, as if life was something apart from the Self. Life exists and it is the Self, although the Self is not life. Just knowing I am Awareness is not enough, although it passes for *moksha* these days along with the silly notion that the absence of ego is enlightenment. I know a number of 'enlightened' people whose lives are far from satisfying simply because they have dismissed the world as a void or the emptiness. You may be Self realized when you know that you are the Self but you are not Self actualized until you grasp the relationship between the Self and life. Doing so allows you to live fully and dynamically here, not just sit in your ivory tower and imagine that you are above it all.

## The relationship between *satya* and *mithya*

I shared this email with my wife, disciple and companion, Sundari, and this is her excellent reply.

I have found the relationship between *satya* and *mithya* very easy to get since we have been friends. These two aspects of Vedanta... *svadharma/dharma* and *karma yoga*...are for me most crucial in really getting Vedanta and therefore, freedom. It is all very well and most essential to meditate on the Self, but if one does not 'do' the work, freedom isn't going to be that free. There is no other way to negate the doer and its likes and dislikes... and no other way to understand one's psychology and what runs it.

It is important to really get the connection between the real and the apparent, as the Self, *satya*, apart from experience, and as the Self apparently experiencing all of it, *mithya*. I was feeling disconnected from the experience of life because I had not fully recognized myself as Self... and the understanding of *svadharma*, *dharma*, and *karma yoga* were not firm, although I was, for the most part, living them.

When I got it, the emptiness evaporated, like smoke on the horizon; it was never really there. It is just a concept. There is no emptiness. The mistake is thinking that an absence of "things", or even the absence of wanting them, equals emptiness. It does not. One can be totally empty and totally full with all the things one could imagine, and one could also be more hung up on things while apparently renouncing all of it, or even, not wanting it. To my understanding, there is no such thing as emptiness because both sides of the canvas are painted and they are one."

**The world depends on Awareness for its existence. The Subtle Body depends on Awareness for its existence. You are Awareness.**

*"There is a source and there is water. The source is different from water. The source is like a door between the unmanifest and the manifest. Out of the source water is flowing into the world. So let's say the source is the potential that gives form. The source pours out the world, which reflects the source in its limitless potential. Can one assume the womb to be the substance/essence, the source to be the potential of manifestation and the permanent flow of life (ever changing birth-death-pattern) to be the reflected manifestations of the substance?"*

## Cause and effect teaching

The idea is almost correct. It is an attempt to explain the relationship between the Self and its manifestations as cause and effect. Ponder on Awareness and reflected

Awareness. In that case Awareness would be the source of the light and the world would be the reflector of the light. The important teaching here is that the world does not stand alone. It depends on Awareness for its existence. So if you think you are the Subtle Body (the mind, intellect, ego entity) you are not free...you depend on something else for your knowing. You do not see yourself as the source. Remember, we are going for freedom. Freedom means that you do not depend on anything.

#### Ajativada teaching: there has never been creation

But while this cause and effect teaching is satisfying to the mind, it is not the 'highest' teaching. Let me explain the highest teaching. It may take some serious thinking to understand it.

The world is not different from its source, the Self. It is apparently different, that is, it seems to be different until it is investigated. Source is a dualistic word. It implies something else, in this case a world. But there actually is no world. There is only the Self appearing as a 'world.' Why does it appear as a world? Because we are looking at the Self through a mind that is caught in time. It thinks in terms of cause and effect. So by investigation you discover that the light, Awareness, is not a source, and the world does not reflect the light. This frees you of the Self/world duality.

This idea of no source is called *ajativada*, the idea of non-creation. So if there is no world, there is no bondage, and therefore there is no suffering. If there is no bondage, there is also no liberation, because the idea that I am not free depends on the notion that I and the things that I am attached to are real.

This teaching explains why Neo-Advaita is an unskillful means of enlightenment. It is the cornerstone of the Neos. But if it is true then there is no one to teach and no teacher to teach anything. Yet these fools continue to prattle their half-baked notions confusing many in the bargain.

#### Awareness is absolute because there is nothing other than Awareness.

Awareness and 'the Absolute' are synonyms. Awareness is absolute because there is nothing other than Awareness. Absolute is another problem word because it implies 'relative.' From a dualistic perspective Awareness is 'absolute' because everything depends on it. All these word problems come because speech is in *Maya*.

I regularly get emails from people around the world who read Nisargadatta's statement that the Absolute is prior to Consciousness.

#### Absolute Not Prior to Consciousness

*"As discussed in my previous email, I recently had my first awakening experience which made realize that the "I" is actually the observer and the observed. I have stabilized in the*

*I AM and this state is present without effort. I also get that chasing mystical experiences is waste of time. In one sense I see that the search is over but other times I have doubts because when you look at Maharaj he categorically says that the Absolute is Prior to Consciousness or Prior to the I AM."*

Well, if this is a non-dual reality which scripture says it is, then there is only Consciousness. This means that there is nothing 'prior' to Consciousness. Consciousness is the absolute. It is the I AM in the sense that it is what is i.e. Consciousness. He was probably referring to the Subtle Body when he said 'Consciousness.' It is reflected Consciousness and pure Consciousness is 'prior' to it, in other words the source of its reflection.

Nisargadatta was not a teacher. He just made statements from his own experience. One would have had to be there to understand the statements by the context or to question him. It may very well have been a translator's error too. It is easy to lose a lot when you move from one language to another particularly if you do not know who you are.

This statement implies that merely the realization of Consciousness is not enough, that one has to 'go beyond' it to get to some kind of 'state' prior to Consciousness. In fact in your introductory paragraph you use action language and say that you are stabilized in a particular state. It may be true but being in some state does not remove doubt about who you are because there is only one Consciousness and you are it and if that is true then the I AM state is in you. You are not in it. Consciousness is not in any state. As Krishna, speaking as Consciousness in the Gita says, "They (all objects...states are objects) are in me. I am not in them."

*"I understand that the knowledge leads to freedom and is the only important thing but if you look at what Maharaj says, he is also talking about an experiential experience."*

He may be talking about it but who is the knower of the experience? The knower of the experience is Consciousness and is not in any way affected by the experience, including all the so-called mystical experiences.

Rather than imagine that there is some experience that you have not had that will make you happy, why not look into why whatever you are experiencing right now does not make you happy. Why? Because what you are experiencing right now is Consciousness...the absolute...and there is nothing to experience beyond Consciousness because there is only Consciousness.

You have been infected with the experiential notion of enlightenment. Go ahead and keep trying to experience something beyond or prior to Consciousness if you want. It will not solve your problem because the fact that you think you are an experiencer is the problem. *Moksha* is freedom from the experiencer, the Subtle Body. The only way this happens is by understanding that you are not the Subtle Body i.e. that you are non-dual actionless ORDINARY Awareness. Notice the word ordinary.

Consciousness is not 'absolute' except in the sense that everything depends on it but it depends on nothing. It is totally ordinary, simple and ever present. There is nothing special about it at all. This is why so few realize it. They have read all this experiential nonsense about it and they imagine that it is some sort of incredible mind-blowing thing. It is all fantasy.

## The "Not-Self" Teaching

### All manifestations are 'not-Self'

*"I was always wondering whether Absolute and Awareness are synonyms, or not, and Sri Nisargadatta said something about this issue that has left the vague idea of a distinction. From this perspective one can conclude all manifestations are not-Self, reflections of the Absolute by means of the Self. The wave is not the ocean but the ocean is within the wave by means of water so wave and ocean is one. The 'I' doesn't look like the Self but the Self is within the I by means of Awareness, so I and Self as well must be one."*

Yes, all manifestations are 'not-Self.' The wave/ocean is an important teaching. The purpose of the teaching is to show that the manifestations of Awareness are not fundamentally different from Awareness. The ocean is salt water and the wave is salt water. They are both the same. The only thing that differs are the names. The wave is salt water in a form and the ocean is formless salt water. If you take away the names and forms, they are exactly the same. The Self is formless Awareness, and the world is Awareness in a form. Self realization is called *viveka*, which is simply the power to see that everything is Awareness, in spite of the appearance of things to the contrary.

Another good analogy that might help to understand non-duality is the 'gold and ornaments' teaching. You have a gold ring. How much of the ring is a ring and, how much is gold? There is no ring apart from the gold. If you melt the gold the ring disappears but the gold does not disappear. So the ring is totally dependent on the gold but the gold is completely free of the ring. The gold is so free that it can 'become' a necklace, ring, a tooth or anything, without sacrificing anything.

"Claudia" is the ring and you are the gold, Awareness. "Claudia" is you, but you are not "Claudia".

### When the Self is realized one realizes that the Self is non-dual and that the 'not-Self' is also the Self

*"The term 'not-Self' suddenly triggered some irritation. It is probably used to distinguish the objects in their separated, independent appearances as not-Self, and when you put in the*

*knowledge, you realize the object as not separated from their cause, the Self?"*

Yes. This is correct. Good thinking. When a person starts the path of Self realization, he or she is identified with the thoughts and feelings in his or her own mind. These ideas are so important they are actually taken to be one's Self. If a feeling is hurt or a thought is challenged the person thinks he or she is hurt or attacked. Obviously, this is not a situation that is conducive to freedom.

First we are taught to objectify our thoughts and feelings as not-Self in order to develop dispassion. Then we are taught to reflect on the Self so we can realize the not-Self as the Self. We are taught what the Self is, and told that the Self is real, and are encouraged to think about the nature of the Self. It is not good psychology to give the mind exclusively negative instructions. It should also be given a positive direction in which to turn. When the Self is realized, one realizes that the Self is non-dual, and that the 'not-Self' is also the Self.

#### **The Self reveals itself; it does not need a world**

We can't discriminate without the idea of a Self and its expressions or forms. So if you see a world then you need discriminating wisdom to neutralize your attachment to the belief in the world as the giver of happiness.

But the Self does not need a world to reveal itself. It seems to be hidden and unseen, and it looks like it only comes into being when there is a mirror to reflect its light. But this is not true. Do you need a body and a mind to exist? You do not. Your body and mind are gone in deep sleep, but you continue to exist. The problem in this case, as in every other case, is words. The word 'reveal' is dualistic. It means that there is something that is hidden and something that reveals what it hidden. The teachings of Vedanta reveal the Self, which is 'hidden' behind a cloud of ignorance, for example.

But this teaching says that the Self is 'Self-revealing.' What does this mean? It means that nothing else is required to reveal it. This is called 'non-discriminating' wisdom. Don't feel bad if you can't understand it.

Discriminating wisdom is just as good as non-discriminating wisdom because both free you of dependence to objects. The classic illustration of this teaching is the mirage. You are on the desert and you see water. You do not try to drink the water because you know that it is not water. You understand that the mind is creating water where there is no water.

### Inquiry eliminates the “doer”

Maya causes *upadhis*. An *upadhi* is a limiting adjunct. It is something that makes something appear to be different from what it is. For example, if you put a clear crystal near a red rose, the crystal will appear to be red. The rose acts as an *upadhi*. The three bodies, which are caused by Maya, make the Self appear to be a doer, thinker, feeler, etc.

In *Mandukya Upanishad* the waker and the dreamer, which are just different ways of discussing a Self-ignorant person, are fractured into many sub-identities, *upadhis* within an *upadhi*, so that most of us are dealing with a confusing array of selves, none of which are real. Remember, ‘real’ in metaphysics means enduring, unchanging, unlimited. Because something is experienced does not make it real, the snake in the rope, the blue sky, and the rising sun, for example.”

Feelings and thoughts are ‘mini’ *upadhis* within the Subtle Body...which is the most important *upadhi* because this is where inquiry takes place. An *upadhi*...which is an effect of Maya...makes it seem as if the Self feels and thinks. It does not. *Moksa* won’t happen until you break the association of Awareness with thoughts and emotions. People say, ‘I am angry, I am happy, I think, I feel etc.’ without the slightest hesitation. It is not true. The ‘I’ is not a doer.

Inquiry dissolves the wrong idea that is producing negative emotions and the emotions resolve into Awareness.

*Upadhis* are not *vasanas* although a *vasana* can act as an *upadhi*. A binding *vasana* causes repetitive unconscious behavior. Addictions are an example of binding *vasanas*. *Upadhis* are the fundamental structure of the human being, the three bodies. The *vasanas* are located in the Causal Body, the primary *upadhi*.

Actually inquiry is unconsciously going on all the time. But when it becomes conscious, which implies a doer, it is speeded up. And, if you do inquiry right, it will remove the doer, unlike other kinds of thinking, which reinforce doership.

But inquiry is more than looking into ignorance; it is applying the knowledge of *satya* and *mithya* (what is real and what is apparent) to your own mind on a moment-to-moment basis. Inquiry will not bear fruit until this discrimination is understood. If it is, you won’t give undue importance to what you think and feel. You will think it and feel it but it will be a big ‘so what.’

### You are not the experiencer, you are the one to whom experience presents itself

*“I’m unable to feel the reality of myself... I can’t feel the ‘me’ inside me. I was diagnosed with ‘depersonalization’. I also have ‘de-realization’, where the world seems to be behind a kind of*

*haze... it's a little hard to explain. There are many people suffering from this, but since medical science doesn't really understand the cause, it doesn't know how to cure it. It is something that I'd describe as a 'Negative Nirvana'.*

I understand exactly what you are talking about. There is a solution. It is a spiritual issue that has become a psychological problem for want of resolution. The psychological explanation is quite reasonable but it obviously only considers the situation from the position of the body/mind. The spiritual explanation includes another factor, the Self, which is unknown to the psychological people.

When you say, "I'm trapped in this state and can't get out." That is true but it is not true. If you identify with the mind, the Subtle Body, the person you call "Perry", it is true. It is a state of mind between the world and the real you, the Self or Awareness. It is not true because you are already out of the trap but you don't know it.

The crux of this problem relates to your idea of yourself. When you say you are trapped in this state, you are thinking of yourself as an ego, the experiencing entity, the doer/enjoyer. This is not actually who you are. It is just an association of the 'I' Consciousness, the real you, with a particular state of mind. This is why you cannot feel 'the reality of myself.' The self you are talking about does not have much reality. It has a bit of reality in so far as you experience it, but fundamentally it is empty of meaning. Identifying with it causes a 'negative *nirvana*.'

#### Self knowledge is the solution

The factor that is left out of your description is the one who is aware of this condition. Who is that? This is where the solution comes in. The solution is Self knowledge. It is interesting that you wrote me because there was a woman in a seminar I did in India recently who had been suffering from depersonalization for thirty years and had tried all the medical and psychological and quasi-spiritual solutions. Nothing worked until she heard the teachings. When the Self was revealed to her, there was a great relief because she realized her mistake: identifying with the experiencer, not with the one to whom experience presents itself, the one who is always present and free of all states of mind. It will take time to break the identification with the experiencer, but there is now a way out.

#### You are not what you experience

You are not what you see. You are not what you experience. The lady told me that she was dissociative as if it was a problem. In fact you are always disassociated. Your body and mind are simply objects appearing in you. The ignorant worldly part of you only knows the world of objects and wants to find meaning in that world by negotiating its way through it. But there is nothing to get there. The Buddha called the psychological condition that comes from the realization that the world is devoid

of Self nature, *dukkha*. The word is generally translated as 'suffering.' This is correct. This is your condition.

### To whom is this experience occurring?

Discreet experiences of the Self do occur occasionally, but we have to be able to inquire about the nature of the one who is experiencing in order to 'get it'. That you like to meditate and get into the silence and peace that it provides is a good practice. But you need to bring this practice further and inquire into who or what is having this experience. It is not a question of denying experience but of seeing to whom experience is occurring: ordinary Awareness.

When you say, for example, that you are not the body, you could see that actually '*the body is (in) me, but I am not the body*'. So what you really mean is not so much that the body is "not mine", but that it is "not Self", i.e. Awareness. The body's apparent existence is happening in you, Awareness. On the one hand, then, it is important to continue the practice of Self-inquiry by the negation "I am not the (gross) body; I am not the mind (subtle body)". On the other hand, it is good to inquire about how you know this... because it is appearing in you, Awareness.

*"It is so very easy to slip back, or to 'slip into' this bag of matter and say 'this is me'. My mind seems hell bent on keeping it that way, and not just consciously, but unconsciously. Increasingly, I am able to remove my Self perspective away from the body, to turn within and remove my identification with the body/mind, but it is usually when I am quiet, sitting meditating, or make a conscious effort to be Awareness and not get caught up in the mind stuff."*

Maybe you are trying to get ahead of yourself. Self inquiry is sometimes difficult because you have spent your whole life asserting - through various beliefs and conditioning - that you are the body/mind. Even though you now know better, you have to allow some time before these identifications dissolve. But don't be hard on yourself. Adopt the *karma yoga* attitude and, every morning as you wake up, consecrate your practice to life, God or whatever representation of the larger perspective you prefer. Having done so, diligently resume Self-inquiry with the knowledge that the results aren't up to you. Knowing this, *relax*. If you are doing all that possibly can be asked of you through Self- inquiry... then hand over the anxiety, tension and stress to the Creator of the field of existence. It is the instigator of all that is apparently happening, not you. So no need to worry. The result will happen in its own time. Hasten slowly.

However, some of your difficulty may come from trying to get rid of something that may not be in need of getting rid of. Though it is good to continue turning everything back into the arms of what you truly are, understand that "this bag of material

matter” is also part of who you are. In reality there is no *inner* and *outer* since these concepts or notions exist within Awareness. The spider’s web is the spider...but the spider is not the web. It is free of the web. Although the meat tube and the mind stuff are not Self, trying to rid yourself of them is not helpful. Recognize them for what they are...part of the web appearing in Awareness, appreciate them as Awareness and let them be.

*“Even though I am intellectually convinced that I am not the body/mind, it seems so hard to stay where ‘I am’. Hope you know what I am talking about here; it’s a little hard to articulate. What I am trying to say is that I can increasingly feel a move towards the Self and at times it feels so free and peaceful (albeit brief). What can I do to increase this, can I use this ability to get beyond the body to my advantage? I do inquire when I am able...but the answer seems obvious”.*

Your comprehension is good but it needs a bit of fine tuning. Your use of language reveals that you are still looking at Awareness through the lens of experience. It seems hard to stay in the *I am* because you can't stay in the *I am*. You can't stay in Awareness because no action you can take will get you there. Knowledge (*jnana*) *yoga* and *karma yoga* help you clear the mind in order for you to see that you are already and have always been Awareness. These practices are tools, but no action can lead to understanding since the latter is in the field of Self knowledge, not in the domain of experience.

In saying that you “feel a move towards the Self and *at times* it feels so free and peaceful (albeit *brief*)” you are saying that what you want to understand can't be experienced... except temporarily. That is only normal because the nature of experience is transient. But even a Nisargadatta or Ramana (who unfortunately confused a lot of people with this notion of *staying in* or *holding on* to the I am without revealing the bigger picture) said that what comes, goes. What comes and goes is experience. In the same vein, to think that you can increase your feeling of Awareness would be only to mislead yourself. A feeling of Awareness is an experience and therefore subject to change. That which doesn't change is the Awareness of any feeling. But Awareness doesn't feel like anything. Only the feeling of *sattva* - Awareness shining through a clear or pure mind - feels good. Again, a *sattvic* mind appears in who or what? So if you feel bliss the next time you meditate, inquire into whom the bliss occurs.

*“Am I just going to have to continually and persistently apply Vedanta to everything that comes up within me and thus, whittle away at this entrenched idea of being limited?”*

Yes, but refer to the first few paragraphs above for the details. As you imply, you already know what to do. Minus the preoccupation and anxiety of trying to “get it.”

You can't get it because you are it. It is not the experience of something obtained, it is the re-cognition of the locus of experience. Read over Chapter 2 of *How to Attain Enlightenment* and it will help you get clear about the nature of enlightenment. Relax, do what needs to be done and leave the results of how things will work out to God. You are doing great. Add a little patience and eventually things will be seen for what they always were.

#### **“Nearer than near”**

*“I'm sitting here cracking up. So this is what I searched high and low for? Right under my nose the whole time! I guess I should just forget it and appreciate the new perspective, but a morbid curiosity has me wondering why this could not be seen before. It's kind of like Awareness was so intertwined with mind there was no getting them apart. But once the mind notices Awareness, its source, aware of it, the mind processes this revelation and is more than happy to submit to it. Until then I guess the ignorant mind thought it was Self-aware all along.”*

We call it the ‘Royal Secret.’ It is the most valuable thing in the world yet you can let it sit out on the coffee table and no one will take it because its value is not known. It is, to quote the *Upanishad*, ‘nearer than the near.’ All that is required is the means to separate it from the mind.

And yes, the joke is that the mind thought *it* was Self aware.

I am happy for you.

#### **The problem is that you are concentrating on getting rid of the *vasanas* rather than meditating on the Self**

*“I'm afraid I am still in firefly mode. Everything is clear, yet there is something that doesn't stick...”*

Keep the *karma yoga* attitude toward the *vasanas* but keep your mind on the Self. Here is something to meditate on. Your first sentence in this email is: “I'm afraid I am still in firefly mode.” And I say, “Are you in the firefly mode if you know you are in the firefly mode?”

This is a very subtle teaching but if you can get it, it will free you of the ‘I’ that thinks it is in some mode. Or here is another statement for contemplation, “Are you in the firefly mode or is the firefly mode in you?”

The problem is that “Tammy” thinks she needs to be in one mode or another. She apparently switches from one mode to another, meaning sometimes she

experiences one thing and sometimes something else. But, do *you* switch from one mode to the other?

Freedom is not experiential freedom for “Tammy” by getting her into the enlightenment mode. It is freedom from “Tammy”, the experiencer, no matter what mode she is in. In other words there is a thought in you, Awareness, that “Tammy” should experience the same thing all the time i.e. a switched on light. But when the “Tammy” light bulb is switched off, do you cease to exist? Look for what is unaffected by the switching.

The ‘I’ in your first statement is not you. It is a thought appearing in you. As such it is not even capable of changing modes because it is not conscious. It seems as if it is you, but is it? You are the knower, the one that knows the switching thought.

If this is true... and you need to see if it is... then it does not matter if you retreat or you don’t retreat. You are not the retreator. The body goes here and it goes there, but you go nowhere. The obstructions rise and fall but you do not change. When the light is off, you know it is off. When it is on, you know it is on. It has nothing to do with you. It is just you, Awareness, reflecting in a dull (*tamasic*) or agitated (*rajasic*) Subtle Body...which unfortunately you take to be you.

Think about this. If you can understand it, it will free you of the seeking, the Self inquiry doer, the experiencer, etc.

### When is ego satisfied?

Every solution that the ego seeks in *samsara* only gives temporary happiness. You’ll get what you want and feel fine for a while. But what happens? As soon as that homeostatic effect kicks in, you start wanting something else. You’ve got your wife and your kids and your job, and your nice little car. Is that it? No. Now you need a vacation home. Every time there is one more thing. It’s like the Swami who only had one cloth. So when he washed it, he was naked. His disciples said, “Swami it’s disgusting, you standing there naked. You need another cloth so you can have a clean one when you can wash the dirty one. Then you won’t stand naked in public washing your clothes.” Reluctantly the Swami agreed to an extra pair of underwear.

Then the disciple said, “Swami, you’re a renunciate, you have renounced all actions. You can’t wash underwear. You need a wife to wash your underwear.” So the Swami agreed. Then the wife said, “Swami, I’m not here to just wash your underwear. I want my dreams to be fulfilled. I want a child. You got to give me a baby.” Swami gave her the baby which made the Swami happy for about five minutes. It made his wife happy too. Then they needed a place to stay, so they bought a house on credit. Then the Swami needed a job to pay for the house. Pretty soon the Swami was not a Swami any more. Just that initial want brought him to this situation.

### The day you're ninety, you'll still want something more if you keep listening to that needy little voice

So it is with you. The day you're ninety years old, you'll still want something more, if you keep letting that little voice in. And at the end you are going to have to let go of all the objective and subjective stuff you have accumulated during your brief sojourn here. Why would you go to all this trouble to amass it if you'll have to let it go one day? How do you win? The ego keeps thinking, "I'm going to win", "I need one more thing". It's always one more thing. You never just say, "OK, party is over. I quit."

### The wheel of suffering

Think about this: if you get what you want your wants continue. This is called the *samsara chakra*. *Vasana – kama – karma*. I have the *vasana*, then the desire, *kama*, arises, and next the *karma* connected to the desire happens. When you get the *karma*, what do you get? A new *vasana*! Now I have another desire leading to another action, and to another desire, and it just keeps going. This is not a mystical issue. This is just practical knowledge.

### Although suffering exists, it is apparent and not real

The operative word in this discussion is 'apparent.' This means that although the suffering exists, it is not real. It is experienceable... people, Subtle Bodies... take experience to be real, but it is not real viewed from the platform of Awareness. 'Not real' means not always present. The Self is the only 'thing' that is always present.

### Suffering results when Awareness illumines a Subtle Body in a state of disequilibrium

Suffering is a temporary condition that results when Awareness illumines a Subtle Body that is in a state of disequilibrium. It does not actually belong to any Body or the Self. In any case, the point of this teaching is not to explain suffering, which it does, but to be an aid in identifying the Self, by separating it from the three bodies and any conditions that the bodies are subject to.

### When you look at the world it seems empty, when you look at the Self the world becomes full

But it is important to understand why the suffering happens. It happens because you expect something different. *Dukkha* is a compound word. *Du* means suffering and *kha* means hollow or insubstantial. The traditional example is bamboo. It looks very solid and substantial from the outside but it is hollow or empty within. When you come into this world you take the world to be real. But at some point you realize it is empty. This puts you into an existential funk. You feel trapped. But there is no place to go because your attention is riveted on your body/mind and the world around. You cannot engage because you know there is nothing there. It is a kind of

existential limbo. The problem is not that the world is empty, because it isn't. The problem is that you can't see that you are full. You are unable to turn your attention away from the body and mind and the world and look at the one who knows that the world is a dream. When you do this, you see that the emptiness is actually a fullness, that everything is meaningful and beautiful and that there is no need to connect with it because it is already connected to you. So, this is a knowledge problem.

**The problem is that you believe you can get into a "state" where suffering stops**

More knowledge as you conceive of knowledge is not the answer. Self knowledge is the answer. It is not ordinary knowledge. The 'shift' from the experiencer to the Self takes place when Self knowledge happens. It is a consequence of Self knowledge. The problem is that you think 'you' can make the jump and get into a 'state' where the suffering stops. But it does not work like that because the doer, the jumper, cannot make a limitless jump. Wherever you jump you will always land in back in your silly little life. When you understand that you are Awareness, the doer, the jumper, is neutralized. The dizziness from your depersonalization/disassociation 'disorder' is due to too much *sattva* and *rajas*. The *gunas*, not the trauma you experienced when your husband died, are the cause.

To make the 'shift' you have to see that you have already shifted, meaning that you are Awareness, not the doer, the sufferer/enjoyer entity. Adding to your problem is the fact that you have learned Vedanta intellectually but you have never been taught Vedanta properly. So the one thing that can actually help is not useful.

Enlightenment is not a special state. You ask me what state am I in but I am not in any state. All states are in me. If anyone says they are in some kind of special state they are not enlightened. Enlightenment is simply the knowledge 'I am Awareness' and a practical understanding of what it means to be Awareness to the part of you that appears in the world.

Vedanta is not intellectual at all. It is a means of knowledge that needs to be wielded on you. It is a very successful means but you have to expose your mind to the teacher and the teaching in a systematic way because the identification with the doer is hard wired. At some point during the teaching Self knowledge takes place and identification with the doer ceases.

Here is something to think about: if you know "Perry", are you "Perry"? Why bother about that 'me?' It is not you. If you can lose something, it is not real. It is not you. You cannot be lost. And if you are referring to the Self, you did not lose it. It is the Self that is writing this letter to me now. It wants clarity.

**As long as you hope that maybe life will work for you one day, you will not realize who you are**

Even though spiritual people may know this intellectually, there's still this belief that somehow the world can fulfill them. Most never let go of the idea that maybe life will work one day. Well, life's not set up to work for you. It's set up to work for life. It works for you when you work for you.

There is no solution in the apparent reality. Once you're clear on this score enlightenment is no problem. But as long as you keep hanging on to this belief that somehow you will get happiness from this world, keep knocking around until you grow up. You cannot have your cake and eat it too.

**Most teachers will not tell you there is no permanently satisfying experience**

Either they don't know it or they don't want you to know because if you knew it they would have no one to teach, their fancy lifestyles would disappear and they would have to get honest jobs. The gurus great and small love to promise an experiential solution. The Scripture does not agree. Experience is great, *yoga* is great for purifying your mind, fair enough, but for liberation it doesn't work.

You can't avoid experience, no doubt, but if you are chasing experience you should know what it can and cannot give. It can deliver a lot of misery or a pure mind and a good life, but it won't set you free. We want freedom from experience.

**Experience is changeable, knowledge is permanent**

Knowledge cannot be dismissed or negated. Experience is subject to negation and can be shown to be illusory by understanding. For example, when scientists want to send a spaceship to Mars, they do not aim it at Mars but send it toward another planet in the opposite direction. You say, "Hey, Mars is over there!" But they do not listen. When it arrives it circles around planet X, picks up momentum and is shot off into the depths of space where there is nothing for a zillion light years. You cannot believe what they are doing because Mars is presently a bit to the left of planet X. You politely mention it but they do not care. A few months later it enters the orbit of planet Y, picks up more momentum and is again shot off in a direction that has nothing to do with the present position of Mars. After a year or two it meets up with Mars right on schedule. You cannot count on personal experience, as it is conditional and can be dismissed. If you relied on personal experience you would never get to Mars. The odds of stumbling upon enlightenment are a million to one if you rely solely on your personal experience and the knowledge you extract from it.

### Knowledge is independent of how you feel

Knowledge is object dependent, not subject dependent. Truth doesn't depend on how you feel about it. Two plus two is four, no matter how you personally see it. Objects drop at thirty two feet per second whether you are a Christian, Muslim or an Australian Aborigine. It has nothing to do with you. It is like sleep; a king sleeping on his silk sheets in the palace has the same experience as a drunk sleeping in his vomit in the gutter. When you realize the truth, you realize what everyone else realized.

### Understanding validates itself; experience needs knowledge to validate it

The idea that there is my truth and your truth does not work because knowledge is object-dependent and there is only one Self. Knowledge is valuable because nothing in this world is what it seems to be. The world of time, experience, is a world of appearances. If you take it to be real you will suffer. It does not exist apart from Awareness. It seems to be real because you do not know who you are.

### Awareness is the only, always present common denominator of all experience

You are always the same. You are what is real. You are the truth. Without you the world of appearances does not exist. Self knowledge...I am Awareness...is always good because the Self is always free; and it is most desirable because freedom is our most cherished value. You can count on it because it never changes. You cannot dismiss it because you, the 'object' of knowledge, are always present and cannot dismiss yourself. If this knowledge 'stands under' you, you are free. Hence, the path of understanding.

### In Awareness, understanding and experience are one – for a seeker knowledge and experience seem separate

From the point of view of Consciousness there is no difference between knowledge and experience. Knowledge is experience and experience is knowledge. What you see you know and what you know you see, because Consciousness is all there is. But from the point of view of an individual seeking freedom, experience and knowledge are quite different. This is so because the individual experiences objects through the mind, which makes them seem to be something other than the mind, and the mind, based on past experiences, interprets what it sees as 'knowledge' whether or not the knowledge is actually true to the object.

### With knowledge no special experience is required

If we look at the claim of the proponents of the experiential view of enlightenment from the non-dual point of view, the attempt to gain the experience of Consciousness, however I formulate it, is unnecessary. Why? Because, if there is only one Self and it is everything that is, then everything I experience at any time or place

can only be the Self, including me, the experiencer. In short, I am experiencing Awareness because I am Awareness. And because Awareness is limitless it is always free. And because there is only Awareness, I am already free. I do not need an experience to set me free. Therefore, the attempt to get a discrete experience of the Self is gratuitous, like going out for a hamburger when you have a filet mignon in the refrigerator.

**Understanding that I am whole, complete, ordinary, actionless Awareness, and not the body, is enlightenment**

So what is the knowledge that constitutes enlightenment? It is the hard and fast conviction based on inquiry that I am ever-free Awareness and not the body mind. It is the understanding that I am everything that is. It is the rock solid conviction that no matter what happens, good or bad, I am completely OK. This knowledge frees the Self from the belief that it is an individual, limited being and destroys its attachment to objects.

**Enlightenment releases the Self from the pursuit of security, pleasure and virtue**

The words 'hard' and 'fast' used above mean that binding fears and desires have been neutralized by the knowledge and that the pursuit of security, pleasure and virtue, is no longer active. If you say you are enlightened but continue to chase and cling to objects, you are not enlightened. You may know who you are intellectually but you do not actually know who you are.

**Spiritual Experience is not a means of knowledge**

If you are in the middle of a non-dual epiphany, the Self does not suddenly appear and say:

“Yo! Seeker! Pay attention. What you are experiencing is you, although it seems to be an object. I am telling you this so you will not try to repeat this experience once it ends. If you are wondering what to make of this experience I will tell you now. It means that you are whole and complete actionless unconcerned ordinary Awareness, just like me. It means that henceforth you will not desire or fear anything because nothing can be added to you or taken away from you. If, when this experience wears off, you set out to get it back or do something with it, you have not properly assimilated the meaning of my words. Good luck.”

The Self will not say this because it sees you as whole and complete Consciousness. The beliefs and opinions you picked up in life will not help interpret your epiphanies either, because you picked them up when you were ignorant of what you are. You will see them as you want to see them, not as they are. Knowledge is seeing things as

they are, not how they appear to you. So to gain enlightenment you need to shed Self ignorance and to do that, you need a proven means of Self knowledge. It will help you make sense of what happens to you spiritually and otherwise.

#### **Self inquiry does not mean asking 'who am I?'**

Because the answer is known. If you have a doubt, a glance at scripture will set your mind at rest. You are Awareness, not the person you have been led to believe you are. Self Inquiry is a systematic body of proven knowledge that looks at experience and knowledge, from the point of view of Consciousness and from all the basic *samsaric* reference points. It does not summarily dismiss experience and knowledge as illusion. It shows you that you are the big picture and if you cannot see yourself that way, it shows you how the you you think you are fits into the big picture. You need an impartial guide, not your own interpretation of experience, because ignorance can make what is false seem to be real. You are the last person who should be an expert on who you are.

#### **With knowledge no special experience is required**

When you have Self knowledge you no longer feel like you are an experiencer, a doer. You fall back onto your default identity as the Seer, pure Awareness. It is like being a witness to experience. You see a part of yourself involved with experience but you know that you are insulated from experience and its effects. It is like watching a movie. You know it isn't real, nonetheless you enjoy it. This is what is meant by Self knowledge. It's not like knowledge of a situation, a person, or a fact, which may change. It's a lasting sense of wholeness because the Seer, your Self, is full. Full means complete. There is the very real sense that nothing is missing, that everything is perfect as it is.

#### **Experiencing only produces relative knowledge subject to negation**

Sugar is always sweet. Fire is always hot. Water is always wet to use worldly examples. The Self is always whole and complete actionless Awareness. Information, what Vedanta calls relative knowledge, is subject to correction because it is conditioned by various changing factors... so you can never count on it to make you happy or to remove suffering. Experience only produces relative knowledge because it is subject to continuous change. You may know that your girlfriend loves you when you leave for work in the morning but when you come home in the evening this knowledge may not be correct.

#### **You are that which is always present**

Self inquiry means that you think constantly about what is permanent, what is always present, what is constant. No experience or state of mind, no thought or feeling is always present. So what is always present? The answer is very simple...

you. Try to discover a time when you did not exist. Even when the body is sleeping and “Michael” is gone, you are not gone. You are there enjoying your sleep. When you are dreaming you are the light that watches your dream ego play in the dream. When you realize this you relax. You know that nothing can touch you. It’s a great discovery. It’s a strange discovery too because it is so simple and obvious... but you didn’t notice it. Why didn’t you notice it? Because you weren’t looking for it. You were looking outside in the world of experience, your own subjective reaction to life, and not at the one to whom experience presents itself.

#### Relative and even absolute knowledge is actually a form of ignorance

Absolute knowledge is only absolute with reference to what is relative. But there is nothing ‘relative’ in our non-dual reality so the idea of absolute and relative knowledge is actually a form of ignorance. Nonetheless, absolute or Self knowledge is absolutely necessary if the individual, the Self under the spell of *Maya/avidya*, is going to get free of its notion of incompleteness and separation.

#### The whole point of Self inquiry is to remove one’s dependence on experience

Self knowledge doesn’t stop experience, it just stops the identification with the experiencer. Therefore it is called ‘*moksha*, freedom (from the doer/experiencer and from experience itself). A person who does not know what a mirage is will chase the experienced water on the desert, assuming he or she is thirsty (and who in this world is not experience hungry/thirsty?) But someone who knows what a mirage is will not waste time chasing an experience that will not solve the thirst problem.

This is why it is important for people to understand the relative values of knowledge and experience. Vedanta is not against mystic experience at all. It just says that there is always another factor involved and that knowledge of that factor is very useful...if you want to be happy. My intention in writing and speaking on this topic is not to discourage spiritual practice or downplay the value of mystic experience, only to draw attention to the issue of the relationship between what is experienced and what is known... and the one who knows.

#### Awareness seems to be limited by the instruments of experience

*“If I am actionless Awareness and that Awareness is everywhere and illumining all things, why is my Awareness limited by what I see and experience in my immediate field?”*

It isn’t limited. It is apparently limited by the instrument of experience, the body/mind entity. Electricity is limitless in this world but it seems to be limited by the appliance through which it flows. It seems to be heat when it passes through a heater, light when it passes through a bulb, sound when it passes through a radio. The three bodies are called *upadhis*, limiting adjuncts, because they make

Awareness seem limited. When it expresses through “Mary” you see an artist, through “David Beckham” a footballer, etc.

*“Is it that Awareness wants to experience itself somehow but can only do so in this limited way?”*

Awareness has no desire so it does not want to express itself. But owing to *Maya*, Ignorance, it seems to forget what/who it is and then it evolves instruments...bodies, gross and subtle...so that it can experience itself in the apparent reality.

**‘Waking up’ does not automatically take care of your *karma***

Enlightened people do not want what they don’t have. If they want anything, they want what they have which is to say that they are free of want. If you really are the Self, then you will not be agitated by the lack of money or the type of job you do. If you are enlightened you are satisfied with ‘bad’ jobs and no money because there is no good and bad because your likes and dislikes have been neutralized by the knowledge of who you are.

Happiness does not come from a particular activity like a job. If you have the right job you will be unhappy for some other reason...if you don’t know who you are. The wrong job just brings out the unhappiness in you. You cannot expect the world to give you what will make you happy. It gives you what you need and you have to find the happiness in yourself.

Your likes and dislikes confuse the mind. Spiritual life is about managing your likes and dislikes. If Self knowledge doesn’t manage them, then you have to manage them yourself. Or suffer.

If you know you are the Self there are no ‘other people.’ The ‘other people’ are you. So you are serving yourself and getting no *karma* when you serve them. In fact you are getting rid of *karma* by doing it.

Waking up does not solve all problems. It is only a beginning. It makes you aware of the unreality of the world and it makes you understand that there is something more but it does not take care of your *karma* here. You have to do that on your own.

Maybe you thought that when you woke up everything would just flow along smoothly, money would come, interesting things to do, nice people, no problems, etc. But that is not how it is. Your *karma*, your *vasanas*, do not know you are enlightened. *Karma* is impersonal. It does not care. So you have to face it and work it out. If you are spiritual, you remain cheerful and you do your *karma* with the *karma yoga* attitude and you become peaceful. If you resist your *karma* it will be much more difficult to bear. It is up to you.

### Is it human to be depressed?

*“Is it just human to have a mild form of depression when there is stormy and rainy weather in life?”*

It is human, but are you human?

*“Whether someone knows who he really is or does not know, does not matter for the habits to be.”*

It matters and it doesn't matter. If you know who you are, your identification with the feeling/thinking/experiencing entity will become almost completely non-existent over time as Self knowledge neutralizes the binding *vasanas*. So, if after some time, there is still an unacknowledged identification with the human part of the Self, it means that Self knowledge has not taken place, or if it has, it is not steady.

*“The weather of life will make its mark and sadness or joy will just appear and disappear.”*

Yes, on whom will it make its mark on?

*“I am who I am. Freedom. Love. That will be always. The rest will wither away to be reborn somewhere, sometime and in some form.”*

True, but it seems this knowledge has not rooted out all your doubts.

*What is my Destiny?*

### It is through the pursuit of your true nature that you attain radiant happiness

Human beings have a 'higher' and a 'lower' nature although in reality nothing is high or low. The feeling that is sometimes awakened by a picture of a spiritual master, by reading scripture, by a glance of an enlightened soul can invoke your higher nature as Awareness. It can stay with you until it is realized. This Self is your true nature, your 'higher' nature, and it is your *dharma*, duty, to pursue it. The pursuit of this Self is called *Svadharmā*, with a capital S.

Your relative or 'lower' nature is “Frank” and his 'life' constitutes a number of roles played by you, Awareness. Frank is your *svadharmā*, your 'lower' nature, with a regular 's.' It is your duty to act out Frank's program and take care of his needs in such a way that the deeper longing for the Self has the opportunity to realize and actualize itself. A life without an active pursuit of the Self is a life postponed and unfulfilled.

It is through the pursuit of your true nature that you attain radiant happiness and unconditional love. That is your destiny.

### The Self seems like an object because we identify with the body

If you look at your experience you only need to consider two basic factors: you and the objects that appear to you or in you, including your body and mind. 'Objects' does not mean physical objects exclusively. It includes subjective experience as well. Most people identify with the body/mind. They think it is the subject, "me." When they are seeking the Self, it seems like the Self is an object located elsewhere. When through teaching it becomes clear what the Self is, the situation is reversed. The Self does not appear as an object any more. The body-mind, which heretofore seemed to the Self...the subject...becomes the object.

*"The other day, waiting for the bus and watching cars passing, I thought that maya means the cars do not really exist. But then I understood that is not the case. Can you explain again what is it, exactly, that is maya?"*

The cars exist. There is no doubt about it. You cannot experience something that does not exist. But they are not real. That means that they only appear for a short time in you, Consciousness, and then they are gone. You exist and you are real because you never cease to exist.

Anything that begins will end. But the one to whom the particular experience presents itself is not 'back in time.' It...you...were never in time in the first place. Enlightenment is not some kind of special experience. It is Self knowledge. It is knowledge of the real you, not the person, the apparent you.

Knowledge that takes place during the 'honeymoon' phase of your spiritual life, the phase of epiphanies, is usually not firm. When the experience ends, the dormant *vasanas* sprout and your attention goes from the Self to the mind.

Most of your modern gurus are experience-oriented people who had a few non-dual epiphanies and hung out a shingle declaring their enlightenment. Once they collected a few followers they found themselves in a pickle because...owing to unpurified *vasanas*...their behavior and confused teachings contradicted their claims of enlightenment. Enlightenment is as enlightenment does. Even if such a self declared enlightened person does realize that he or she jumped the gun, it is almost impossible to admit it for fear of looking foolish. Consequently, they stop growing.

One big problem with the experiential view is the belief that everything on the relative plane, the plane of the apparent self, stops and enters a kind of state of suspended animation. But the ego self keeps on changing, hopefully growing. But when you declare yourself 'cooked' there is nowhere for you to go. You get stuck in

a belief brought about by superimposing the changeless nature of the self on the changing nature of the apparent self.

#### The 'not-Self' is the Self operating as duality

*"Or do I just register it and let it be there together with all the beauty I see around me and everything else, that is going on in my mind?"*

This is best. You understand that it is the Self operating in duality and you you accept it, appreciate it, enjoy the ironies and contradictions it suggests. I'm always having a nice laugh at my mind.

#### Know it as 'not me' and leave it alone

*"And wait for it to change - or not even that! Know it as 'not me' and leave it alone? Yes, when I think about it, this seems a good and wise approach."*

I say, yes! Now, you're thinking! This is the value of the 'not Self' teaching. The agitation is the Self but it is non-essential Self, so it can be safely ignored or dismissed or happily endured.

#### When you get to the realization that it is all the Self you don't need to discriminate the Self from the not-Self

*"I am irritated by the discussion about Self and not-Self: I know, that it's just a pedagogic approach but whenever I read things like: 'what changes is not me, what doesn't change is.' or '...if IT (the Silence) is the absence of thought, it is the Self.' I think: The Self is everything: It is the unchanging and the changing. It is the unmanifest and the manifest. It is the silence and the sound. It is the Silence and the thought. It is unmoving and ever unaffected and it is the suffering and the pain and the joy and bliss... It is everything and beyond of everything, isn't it?"*

Yes, this is correct. As I pointed out above, when you get to the realization that it is all the Self, you don't need to discriminate the Self from the not-Self. The teaching does not apply.

#### You can know it because it is you

*"And in fact its not graspable anyway, is it? So, how can I know it? It's beyond knowledge, isn't it?"*

What is all this about, if it's not about Self knowledge? You can know it because it is you. Do you exist? Do you know that you exist? How do you know? Because you exist. The knowledge and the existence are the same. To 'grasp' means to know or understand. There is a strange notion that there are two kinds of knowledge, 'intellectual' and 'experiential' and that Self knowledge is 'experiential.' This is not true because you are experiencing the Self all the time. So you do not need a special kind of experiential knowing to experience it. You know it the same way you know anything in physical or psychological reality.

#### Vedanta reminds you that you are already free

*"If Vedanta is the means to reveal the Self, because it is 'not available for the means of knowledge at your disposal, but is available for Vedanta,' how are the words going to do the revealing?"*

The Self can't be revealed directly by words because the Self is there before the words come into Awareness. And the Self already knows what it is; there is just a lack of clarity about it owing to ignorance. The words work by removing ignorance. So the words of Vedanta get you to look at the way you think about yourself... which you can see... and see if it stacks up against what you actually are.

For example, Vedanta says you lack nothing. But you ignorantly believe that something is missing. When you realize that all the things that you believe can complete you do not complete you, you let go of that bit of ignorance.

Here is the logic. You think something, 'X,' will complete you. But, using the common sense knowledge that the subject cannot be the object you understand that whether 'X' is present or absent the Self is unaffected. The presence of 'X' never adds anything to you, nor does its absence ever subtract anything from you.

If you can't see it, you may need more experience-based knowledge. For instance, when you go to sleep the object is not there, but you are there. By reasoning, you understand that you are free of the object. Even if your 'X' is the person you believe you are, the waking state entity, you understand it is not you for the same reason: "Kirby" is gone but you are not gone.

#### See that the object, 'X', is actually just the idea of 'X' in your mind and it is made out of you, Consciousness

Or, if this is not clear, then the words show you that the 'X' is you already... but you are not the 'X'... by getting you to analyze perception carefully. When you observe the stages of perception, you see that the object, 'X', is actually just the idea of 'X' in your mind and that the idea is made out of you, Consciousness. The 'X' is you. If it is

already you, you will see that the desire for it is unnecessary and you will stop seeking it. It is the seeking that is apparently separating you from your Self.

Or, if that does not work, you can reason further that you are not the 'X' because it lacks the one thing that makes you what you are: sentiency. So you let go of the belief that you are incomplete with reference to 'X', which is the basis of your seeking. When you stop seeking you have not become someone else, nor have you gained anything. You are still the same being you were when you were seeking... minus the ignorance. The ignorance made you think you are something other than what you are.

#### Self does not 'enter' material world; it 'projects' the material world

*"The Self is unborn and unmodified. The Self does enter into material world. It is always itself, unconditioned. In the material world there exist physical laws and order. For example, fire is always hot, water always wet. This order – is it an expression of God /Self? Is it not the Self appearing as?"*

The only mistake in your knowledge is the idea that the Self 'enters' the material world. With the aid of ignorance, it 'projects' the material world but it does not enter it because it is non-dual. There is nothing other than it for it to enter into. But it seems to enter it because it is so subtle you cannot physically separate it from the bodies just as you cannot separate a pot from clay. The clay pervades every atom of the pot, yet it exists independently of the pot. When the pot is destroyed, the clay is not destroyed. So the answer is yes; the clay appears as a pot. This seeming association of Awareness with the bodies can only be removed by knowledge. Knowledge can do the job because the association is not actual.

Liberation is the knowledge 'I am Awareness' as long as it renders your *vasanas* non-binding and cancels the "doer."

*There is no way something 'real' could have waked up with me if it had not been already present during deep sleep. I suppose this is a humble version of Ramana's statement, discover what you were before your parents were born. So I compared the three states and realized that the only thing that resists the fire of the 'deep sleep state' is simply Being, untouched by and independent of experience. There's 'Being' in the three states, but since there are not objects or subjects whatsoever during deep sleep, we can discard them all as absolutely real. Yes, these subjects or objects are the shape Awareness "takes" during the waking state or dreams, but they can only be real as 'Being', that is, they are real inasmuch as they are made of Awareness, but not as objects or subjects on their own. A tree is real as a*

*form Awareness has taken in the waking state, but not as a 'tree', which is a relative form that only appears when the mind is functioning. And, considering that Being did not need a mind to know itself during deep sleep, we could say that It is aware of Itself without an object. That is, it's not tied to space and time. It has no beginning, no end and no form. But that also implies a shocking truth: it means that all (I mean all) of the spiritual notions, practices, explanations, enlightenments, 'unenlightenments', (such as Suzanne Segal's), traditions, paths, Gods, mysticism, visions, yogas, religions, etc., not only imply the existence of a separate 'I' that in fact does not exist, but all of them belong to the waking state only!! They cannot be absolutely real. They are only real as relative expressions of the Unmanifest Absolute. It is the mind... not present when there's no space and time... that superimposes spiritual ideas onto the Unmanifest, where by definition there's no mind at all, that is, no spiritual object or subject.*

*I felt relieved, but also cheated in some way, because, why in the hell don't those traditions start with the obvious truth that our true nature must be present in the three states? That immediately would free the pupils of the expectation of trying to get somewhere, of the need of practice, of the idea of an 'I' who has to evolve, of drama, of the horrible suffering Suzanne felt when her 'enlightened state' disappeared... (I think she was somehow identified with a new state of Consciousness, with her 'waking-state enlightenment', not with That which allowed her new state to be experienced i.e. Being... something she could never lose.)*

*Where are the out of body experiences, the NDE's, the bardo lights, the kundalini energies, the gurus, etc., during deep sleep? Who meditates? Where to go? I realized that just effortless 'Being' is, that there's not anything to do or think, and also that any experience, no matter how profound, is only a play of Awareness (even the most angelic visions) that lead to the suicide of the world of name and form. Does this make any sense? Can it be so easy or am I going too far, too soon? I mean, I know you come from the tradition that has the manifest in the highest regard. I'm not denying the manifest. I'm just implying that, not being present during the three states, I should focus on that which pervades them all. In fact, even me writing you this email seems like an insubstantial dream. Thanks in advance. As always, any opinion or advice would be really appreciated."*

It makes perfect sense. What you are doing here is called *manana*, establishing the existence of the Self through reason. It is completely in harmony with scripture i.e. the Mandukya Upanishad. It is the essence of Vedanta. All that is left is to identify yourself as Awareness. Perhaps you have done this although the last statement 'I should focus on that, which pervades them all' makes me understand that you have another step to make. Your conclusion is correct. You should focus on 'that which pervades them all'. But what is that? That is you, Awareness. Ramana defines Self inquiry as 'holding the mind on Awareness,' i.e. that which pervades them all. This is also called *yoga*. One's attention should remain with the Self. For what purpose? For the purpose of contemplation. Why contemplate? For understanding.

#### The last step: identification not as the one who is focusing but as that which you focus on

The last step, once the mind is focused on 'the unmanifest,' which is just a fancy word for you, is to identify yourself, not as the one who is focusing, but as that which you are focused on. Liberation is the hard and fast knowledge 'I am Awareness' as long as it renders your *vasanas* non-binding and cancels the doer, the one who 'focuses.'

Susan Segal was caught up in the experiential view of enlightenment, meaning she thought enlightenment was some kind of experience. She had an epiphany and identified with the bliss and felt unhappy when the experience ended.

This teaching will only make sense for advanced spiritual seekers. It is not something you can teach to entry level people caught up in waking state experience.

I suggest that you get my new book, *How to Attain Enlightenment, the Vision of Non-Duality*. It is traditional Vedanta in clear modern English. It will give you the big picture. It will explain the difference between *satya* and *mithya*, what you call the manifest and the unmanifest, the nature of enlightenment and the qualifications necessary for enlightenment. This will make it clear to you the limitations of spiritual traditions, apart from Vedanta. There is also a formal analysis of the three states in Chapter 12 of my book, *How To Attain Enlightenment*.

#### Inquiry into meaning removes ignorance

It is the actual experience of everyone that they are not the things they experience. Nor are you experience itself because experience is known to you. It is always an object. But this is not how it seems to someone who does not know the truth. It is not actually the words that remove the ignorance; it is the meaning of the words. Since the Self cannot be objectified, words cannot describe it directly so one needs to resort to the implied meaning. Inquiry actually removes the ignorance. You, the Self, believing you are something other than what you are, need to investigate to see if the meaning of the words is true.

Anyway, it is not an essential point, unless you have a doubt that knowledge is the solution. If you accept the fundamental premise of Vedanta that reality is non-dual, you will see that the solution to the sense of separation/limitation can only be Self knowledge, and you will have no other choice but to subject your mind to the means of knowledge, and let it work its magic on you.

### Almost Enlightened

I understand your problem very well. It is perhaps the most universal problem that spiritually awakened people suffer. Before I explain the problem and reveal the solution, I need to tell you that it may be difficult to accept.

You have an incorrect view of enlightenment. Well, it is not totally incorrect, but it is wrong enough to put you in a frustrating loop. The problem came about because you started to practice a method without actually understanding what enlightenment is. Both Ramana and Nisargadatta were enlightened people but they were not actually teachers and all we have are their words interpreted by translators and filtered through our own beliefs about enlightenment. So bear with me and let us see if I can unravel this mystery.

*"I've been following the practice Ramana and Nisargadatta taught, you know, abiding in the 'I Am', the pure feeling of existence that arises in the morning and disappears at night. And nowadays I'm having a similar experience to the one I had when I was a child and intuitively watched this 'feeling of Being' without knowing this was a practice, of course."*

This statement shows that you have the experiential notion of enlightenment. You cannot capture a particular experience and make it permanent. Any experience that arises at one time and disappears at another is not real and it cannot be you. **You** do not arise in the morning and disappear at night. It is true that "Martinez" does, but you, Consciousness, do not. You are the one who watches this 'feeling of Being.' You cannot actually 'feel' i.e. experience Being. Being is you and it does not 'feel' like something as opposed to something else. Being is the knower of any and all feelings. It knows the feeling of sunshine and the feeling of 'Being.' It has nothing to do with any feeling.

### You are not alive. You are the impersonal Awareness that knows life

*"When I was a kid, I felt terrified when I went to bed and started 'looking' at the feeling of being. Why? Because when I paid attention to that subtle feeling, all I could say was 'Is being just this sensation?' I felt something was very wrong, as if that*

*subtle 'sensation of being' could not be me, but that it was just a feeling that could be lost in any moment. Of course I hadn't the tools to explain it to my mom and I felt horrified."*

The feeling you had and still have is the feeling of being alive. This is correct. But you are not alive. You are the impersonal Awareness that knows life. You live without breathing. Life is not conscious. It does not know. It happens when Consciousness... you... illumine a given body-mind entity.

**Life is not conscious. It does not know. It happens when Consciousness... you...illumine a given body-mind entity**

*"And now I am 36 years old, but when I abide in that same feeling of existence, the conclusions are similar."*

You cannot 'abide' in that feeling of existence. That feeling abides in you. It is an object to you. You cannot turn yourself into an object and climb inside of that feeling and experience it. The idea here is that your life will be different if you can feel something other than what you feel normally every day. You cannot. You can have these temporary experiences and insights, but they are presented to you by the macrocosmic mind and then disappear. You cannot control them.

## **Chapter 3 - Spiritual Practice**

### **Educate, don't kill the ego**

You can't eliminate experience, so you should use your experience as the raw material for your spiritual work. Spirituality is not about transcending experience...because you are always beyond experience...but about removing the obstacles to your appreciation of yourself as the Self, which always show up in the form of experiences.

When you talk about eliminating experience, you are obviously referring to unacceptable experiences. If you are practicing Self inquiry, you try to figure out why you cannot accept the experience. The resistance to a particular experience is rooted in some kind of expectation for a different result. But the result of one's actions... which is what your experiences are...is not up to you. So the cause of the resistance is sourced in a misunderstanding of the nature of reality.

Or the experience is teaching you how certain actions that flow from ignorance of the nature of the *dharma* field and/or your own nature, produce unwanted results and by extension how to avoid those actions in the future.

*Looking at my everyday experience, I notice I still don't feel happy or free, even though I have told you that most of my worries and anxieties were gone. I have realized a problem in my use and application of Vedanta. I have been listening to your videos and reading your book daily and obsessively for a year, agreeing on all counts to what you are saying (it just makes so much sense). But I seem to fail to apply the tools in my personal life. I think I have understood that I need to reflect/contemplate and prove the logic of what you are saying in my own head, instead of simply creating a belief in Vedanta."*

That's correct. Vedanta is not a bunch of ideas to be believed in. It is not a religion. First you have to hear the truth and then you need to look at your mind moment to moment and apply the *truth* to what appears in it as it appears. The practice of Vedanta is called *jnana abhyasa*, which means 'the practice or application of knowledge.' You know from the teaching, and perhaps from some epiphanies, that you are whole and complete actionless Awareness. And you look at your mind/ego and you see that it does not seem to appreciate this fact. So it needs to be educated. If you let it think and act from its own idea, it will continue to produce unwanted karma. So you correct it and then act out of the right idea. The mind's thinking patterns are sourced in ignorance so they are going to be more or less the mirror opposite of the truth. When it wants something that will not serve you spiritually, you need to say no to it and give it the reason why. This is where Vedanta comes in. It gives you the spiritual logic you need to teach yourself to conduct your life from the standpoint of your true nature. It is not easy. Ignorance is persistent. It will not just tuck its tail between its legs and slink off into the night when it is confronted with the light of Vedanta. It will show its fangs and fight.

Every little action should be consecrated. *Karma Yoga* is actually just knowledge, in so far as when you really understand that the results are not up to you and you are very clear that you only want freedom, it does not need to be 'practiced.' It automatically defines your relationship to the doer and to action and what happens does not disturb or elate you.

Inquiry should accompany *karma yoga*. If you find yourself in an undesirable situation then the only way out is by accommodating yourself to it. *Karma yoga* is the best way to do it because you get relief from a dissatisfied mind. I would say, however, that since you have found that it works and you know you have been inconsistent that you stick with it and apply it more diligently on a thought-by-thought basis as you go about the business of life.

**Karma Yoga is working out the implications of knowledge in terms of one's daily life**

*Karma yoga* is a devotional non-attached attitude that is there when you understand that the doer is not responsible for the results...assuming you have done the actions

connected with a given situation in an appropriate and timely fashion. If you are trying to maintain a certain attitude without this understanding, it becomes a struggle.

Everything is an object in Consciousness, but “I am Self” is the essence of Vedanta. The next step is to work out the implications of this knowledge in terms of daily life. What are the implications of Self knowledge? Knowing who you are does not mean that “Cedric” and “Cedric’s” *vasanas* need to be in total harmony with who you are. It takes time for “Cedric” to catch up with who you are. And he will never become a perfect saint. There are no perfect saints. There are sane people. That is the best you can hope for. Forget sainthood.

### The experiencer and the experience go together and both arise in Awareness

One of the last obstacles to freedom is the idea that “Cedric”, the experiencer, should experience things differently when he knows who he is. But it is not “Cedric” that knows. It is you, the Self, that knows. And the Self is always non-attached. You are the Awareness of “Cedric” and what he experiences. The experiences...subjective and objective...are the result of actions done before you knew who you are, actions that will eventually fructify.

Every situation, even the most apparently conducive, produces friction. I have sympathy for my ego and the slings and arrows that it sometimes has to suffer owing to this particular role that it plays. It is just part of having an apparent presence in a flawed and apparent reality.

*“I can also use the so called ‘Awareness watching Awareness’ approach and this can trigger experiential insights, mini epiphanies, but I don't trust it, it's kind of mechanical.”*

Experience is not to be trusted. It is to be examined. It never remains the same. Only you remain the same in every experience, spiritual or otherwise.

*“On the other hand, seeing thoughts and feelings as objects in Consciousness can lead to a kind of spaciousness which seems more genuine and there is a realization that everything plays out as a game and it kind of feels that this approximates the Self's ‘view’, so to speak. But is this going to solidify into knowledge?”*

This is the knowledge. You are the ‘space’ in which thoughts and feeling appear. You, the seer, accommodate them. This is why I say you are free, but you haven’t quite accepted it. The knowledge that you express in the paragraph above is Self knowledge. There are other ways to formulate it but this is as good as any other way because the teaching boils down to the distinction between the subject and the objects coupled with the understanding that the subject contains the objects...in this

case 'Cedric' and his subjective world...and not the other way around. 'Cedric' and Cedric's mind cannot fit you, Awareness, into it except as an idea. It does not work.

*"Even with the 'I am Awareness' approach, isn't that type of thought ultimately a rarefied object in the mind and something that will have to dissipate in order for pure knowledge/Awareness to actuate?"*

Yes and no. Your attachment to the idea will dissipate but the idea will stay as a reflection of the truth in your intellect. Or not. It will not be there all the time, maintained by effort, but it will be there like your name is there, in the background but readily available should you need it for a particular situation.

**You don't have to kill the ego; it is already dead**

The spiritual search has or is ending for you. Here is something to think about. If you know you are ignorant, are you ignorant?

*"I don't know what else to do. Self inquiry confers a kind of ineffable, subtle knowing, and a significant level of peace and smoothens the average day, but I feel like someone with a rifle shooting at an armored tank and you know that the tank ain't gonna be inconvenienced by a rifle."*

You don't have to kill the ego. It is already dead. It is known by you. You are free of it. Let it be. Your spiritual seeking is over. This email may just tidy up the last bits in your understanding. Don't do anything about anything. You are quite fine as you are. Let the spiritual thing be. It is over.

**You have to create the conditions that allow grace to operate**

*"Do I just wait for Grace to arise when it does?"*

Grace is earned. You can wait as long as you want, but the likelihood of Self knowledge dawning in your mind is about the same as winning the lottery. You need to create the conditions that allow grace to operate. This means that you need to give up the experiential notion and dedicate yourself to Self inquiry. Self inquiry, if done properly, leads to Self knowledge which sets you free.

You are the last one to be an expert on yourself. You need a teacher. You know grace is operating when the Self sends you a proper teacher. If you were capable of removing Self ignorance by yourself, you would have done so by now, considering how badly you want to be free. It is important not to seek a teacher, however. The teacher should come to you. If you seek a teacher, your unpreparedness will cause

you to choose the teacher for the wrong reason and you will find yourself in a relationship based on some need other than the need for freedom.

### **I started looking for happiness within myself**

When I was twenty-five I realized that there was nothing here, and I started looking for happiness within myself. With the help of the scripture and my guru and a lot of serious Self inquiry, I discovered that I was the source of all happiness. And I have been deeply satisfied ever since. However, there was a part of me, the ego, that was still programmed with the old belief that there was something in the world worth working for. So I set out to get rid of that voice. Mind you, it was not actually interfering with the constant joy that filled me up from within. But it was a minor irritant, like an insect bite.

### **“Spiritual” or purification stage**

So I committed myself to a life of renunciation and introspection, and gradually cut back on the ego’s programs and plans. I didn’t really need to do this but I felt that cleaning the mind was righteous work. I quit chasing money and women and responsibilities in the world. And little by little the voice that said, “I want/I don’t want” started to disappear.

### **Dispassion releases you from imposing pleasure and pain on experiences and leaves you free in the fullness of Self**

The interesting part was that the more I refused to listen to that voice, the more life threw its offerings in my face. I was never short of things to do, good friends, love relationships, money, or anything. So, on the surface it looked like nothing had changed. But these things came unsolicited and so I was free of them. That doesn’t mean I didn’t enjoy them. I enjoyed them fully. This is the state of dispassion and renunciation. I could be in that state and still enjoy the world, because I knew the happiness they seemed to have was coming from me. They had no hold on me. I think that perhaps you feel that a life of dispassion and renunciation is very stodgy, unexciting, and perhaps boring. But it isn’t. You still ‘have it all’ but you are not bound to it. Renunciation and dispassion are states of mind; they have nothing to do with one’s situations in the outer world.

### **The first stage: purification**

When I was younger, I suffered a lot because I was seriously out of touch with myself. When I was twenty-six, I had an epiphany during which I saw both what was wrong with me and what I could become. Shortly thereafter I met the Swami and he showed me who I really was and introduced me to a way of life that could clean up

the mess that I had created. It was a life of principle, not passion. I stuck with it diligently and it slowly ironed out the crookedness in my personality. Little by little over the years, less and less discipline was required and one day it became natural and automatic. I am quite fastidious by nature and even though I could have reasonably relaxed my vigilance, I continued to monitor myself, and transformed the small things that I felt needed to be transformed.

**And little by little the voice that said, “I want/I don’t want” started to disappear**

The long and the short of it was that, the work stopped. I didn’t stop it. It just stopped. It stopped because there was nothing more to do. I understand the view that one should never say never because the paradoxical nature of life may cause one to eat one’s words, but this event, or non-event if you will, had nothing to do with my ego, and nothing to do with the quixotic nature of life. It was just something that I observed. It’s not a big deal, but it has stripped all the symbols of my ‘spiritual’ life of meaning.

### **Three stages**

There are many Buddhist haikus dealing with this. I wish I could remember the exact wording, but one goes something like this. “When I first began, mountains were mountains and rivers were rivers. After some time, mountains were no longer mountains and rivers were no longer rivers. Then, mountains became mountains and rivers were rivers.” It means that, when one first comes into the world, one sees things without questioning them. A river is just a river, completely self-referential. In the second stage, what might be called awakening, one realizes that there is something beyond the little self and the world of the senses. The river may function as a symbol of life, for example. And, although one does not understand that clearly, one sees that everything here is a reflection, a symbol of that, and strives for what is symbolized. In the third stage, what might be called enlightenment or illumination, there is no longer a separation between the symbol and the things symbolized, so things go back to normal, but it’s not the normal of the first stage because you’ve been through a process that leaves you with a true appreciation of who you are and the nature of the world.

### **The second stage: correction**

The second stage is what I would call ‘spiritual’ life, the correction. When you first come in, you are not spiritual at all. You are what you are. You know nothing. And then, because you are born into a world that feels compelled to educate you, you are taught that there is something wrong with you. This causes suffering, which is where the Buddha comes in. He has to show you how to live so that you can see what is beyond. Ergo, the Eightfold Path. Then, when you are clear about who you are the koan says, “When you meet the Buddha in the path, slay him.” This means that you need to kill your spirituality.

Perhaps you've seen this picture that shows Kali, adorned with a necklace of skulls, wearing a skirt of severed hands, brandishing a bloody sword, as she stands victoriously on the chest of a slain Shiva. People love this image, particularly women, but so far I've found no one who knows what it means. Women seem to get a thrill out of the apparent gender implications, but it has nothing to do with gender. It is a symbol of the death of spirituality, Shiva being a symbol of the spiritual life. It is achieved by cutting off the limited thoughts of Self, symbolized by the severed heads, and by realizing that one is not a doer, symbolized by the severed hands. The sword is the knowledge that allows one to discriminate between the symbols of oneself and one's Self.

**As a seeker of the Self you have made a vow that you are not going to put energy into what is not real**

*"OK, when I believe that I am the Self, how do I deal with the contents of my mind, being grumpy, for instance?"*

This is where inquiry comes in. As a seeker of the Self you have made a vow that you are not going to put energy into unreality, so you simply dismiss the agitation as not-Self and let the mind clear of it.

Now, you're a clever one and I can feel you thinking, "But you just said that everything is the Self, so my agitation must be the Self too, so why is it a problem?" And the answer is that it isn't a problem if you know you are the Self. But when you don't, when you are trying to realize it, you need to separate the Self in its formless essence from its changing forms, i.e. the agitations in the mind, the 'not Self.'

The not-Self teaching is only an intermediate teaching that allows you to negate your dualistic views, which will cause you to cease identifying with the mind/body/ego bundle. Once you have discounted these things as 'you', you realize that you are you, Awareness. In the end, then, the not-self is also known to be the Self.

**Who is it that experiences negative emotions?**

*"Should I in any way give attention to not-Self by asking myself, why I am grumpy, what I am missing, what could I change?"*

This is helpful if you come to the right conclusion. If you think it through you will realize that you have gone with it so many times and it has not produced happiness, or has produced only temporary happiness, so you understand that following it is a dead end street. It won't get you anywhere. So you just dismiss it.

Or you go right to the heart and ask, “Who is this ‘I’ that is having a problem with this? And then you see that it is ‘Bettina’ and you just dismiss her, since she is just an idea.

Or you see that the ‘I,’ the experiencer, is the Self and you ‘abide’ in that, meaning you realize beyond a doubt your limitless nature.

Unexamined knowledge is actually just belief. You have heard about something but you haven’t experienced it so you believe that it exists. When you experience it, then it becomes knowledge.

### Negation is only the beginning of Self inquiry

In the beginning it may sound like Vedanta is only a bunch of negative teachings – there is nothing to do, no path, no teacher, no scripture, no this, no that. The view from the Self does temporarily negate everything, but negation is only the preliminary portion of the Self inquiry story, as we will see. Neo-Advaita, the latest iteration of the instant enlightenment idea, makes it the whole story because the teachers, all Westerners, never actually exposed their minds to the teaching tradition of Vedanta in a disciplined way. They kept a Western orientation and picked the easiest, most Self serving teaching – not this, not this – from a guru who neglected to teach the complete science of Consciousness, if he knew it at all, passing it off as the whole loaf. In fact the guru explicitly stated that he did not give the whole teaching, as his disciples were not qualified. The negation of everything, however, equals the void and not the fullness of Awareness so Vedanta teaches fullness by way a number of very sophisticated inquiries.

### Look into what’s clouding your understanding

*“My understanding is clouded by all the negative things that seem to keep happening.”*

Where are the negative things happening? Do you mean external events? Or are you talking about your interpretation of things that happen in your relationships with people? It might be helpful to figure out what is causing these unwanted happenings. If they are occasional, then the cause probably lies with the world. But if there is a consistent pattern, then it probably has to do with some lack of dispassion on your part.

### Catch the fear thought, dismiss it and assert the opposite

*"I've been fighting with my fearful mind for a long time now and the progress is very slow. Do you have any suggestions to help me?"*

One needs to apply the opposite thought all the time, until the ego's back is broken. Opposite what? Opposite the belief that you are vulnerable and that life is essentially hostile. So the opposite thought is: I am indestructible. Life is benign. This is the message that Krishna gave Arjuna when he was about to go to war. Only by carefully monitoring your mind will you be able to catch the fear thought, dismiss it and assert the opposite. Having said that, fear is the most intractable foe, difficult to defeat.

### The startlingly smooth experience of knowing

*"I feel like I have been having little glimpses of something in the past few days...these are not mind blowing ecstasies at all, they are almost not noticeable. These little glimpses have to do with the distinction you describe between doing and knowledge. The experience (the experience of knowledge??) is almost startling, except that the 'feeling' is very smooth, like a person who makes no sound walking across a wood floor. It is sort of like hearing the nada sound in sitting. The 'experience of knowledge' glimpses I refer to are 'I', my identity, who I think I am, not something I am seeing or hearing or sensing. Almost unsettling."*

I particularly liked your phrase 'the experience of knowing,' and your description of it as feeling startling but very smooth like a person walking barefoot across a wooden floor. Beautiful! That is how it is: the sound of silence, one hand clapping or stillness speaking. Yes, these are glimpses of your identity. It is coming to the forefront after being hidden for so long. It is God's grace, the result of excellent merit. It is nice to be 'unsettled' in this way. Make the *karma yoga* attitude steady and the unhelpful *vasanas* will burn up quickly. The silence will then roar like it does on the great plains in the dead of night.

### The 'experience' of enlightenment

#### Just let the *vasanas* pass as you hold your mind on the Self

*"In your book you repeatedly talk about the experience of the Self. For instance you say: 'Eventually even the idea I am limitless Awareness dissolves into permanent knowing*

*experience of oneself as the Self. How does that work? What exactly do you experience?"*

It just happens. When unhelpful *vasanas* come up, you don't act on them, letting them pass. As you hold the mind on the Self, you are always thinking about it...as you are doing. And then, at a certain point, you understand that 'the Self', which up to this time has been perceived as an object, is 'me,' the subject. It doesn't 'feel' like anything. Well, that is not exactly true. It feels like a resolution, a relief. It is an understanding that results in the feeling that you don't need to do anything ever again to get something that you don't have. Up until this point you have thought of yourself as incomplete. But now you realize that this is not true. So you let go of all aspirations.

It sounds like that is what is happening with you. You are completely happy. Your doubt is that the happiness is coming from the objective situation but it isn't. It's coming from you...for no reason. It is uncaused. What's keeping you from fully appreciating it is the belief that circumstances have come together to make you happy. When you remove this notion, a 'shift' happens and you will see that you are the happiness.

Here is an email I got recently that may help you understand.

"I've thought about writing you on a number of occasions. The 'shift' you talk about happened about a month ago and took a bit of time to settle in, so to speak and I knew it was finally was time to write.

Thank you very, very much for what you freely offer, Ram. ♥ You are the Living, Embodied, English-is-my-first-language Light that I desired but was beginning to wonder if I'd ever find. :)

I was introduced to non-duality teachings a couple of years ago. After reading some Tolle material, I explored further and discovered Ramana and Nisargadatta. I was definitely attracted to what they presented, and I learned quite a bit, but simultaneously something seemed missing to me--certain things weren't clear and left confusion. (BTW, please pardon the lingo as I write from the "doer's" perspective. It seems terribly awkward to communicate all of this otherwise!) After somewhat of a break from all the reading, I returned to the subject maybe late last November/early December, but this time I ended up really "connecting" with Ramana's teachings and stayed with that. Occasionally I yearned for someone who was "realized" who spoke English as his/her primary language AND who seemed to have genuine teaching attributes, but in my dabblings online, I did not find satisfaction.

Anyway, one night in late January I was trying to settle into quiet sitting meditation, when a "shift" occurred and it was crystal clear: "Wait! There aren't two selves, one trying to find the other. I'M what I have been looking for!" I laughed and felt a bit of

wonder, and then noticed the most profound peace ensue. The search was over. With the lack of identity conflict, there was no more tension...only peace, acceptance, happiness, and a new-found quiet yet bold confidence.

The next day, "Mary" walked around a bit out of sorts, not knowing what to do, because suddenly there was no need to "practice" anymore. It was clear as could be: there was nothing left "to do." But it didn't matter in light of the profound peace and happiness, the fulfillment.

Cutting to the chase, here... It got to the point that I (as the apparent Self) needed some clarification about what had happened, what that "shift" truly indicated. On one hand, I was as content as could be. Nothing bothered me. I was peaceful and undisturbed in relationship and worldly situations that previously ruffled me emotionally. The mind could be zinging with thoughts and they didn't touch me. It didn't matter. I was content in myself. I knew I was happiness itself. But simultaneously there still seemed to be an ego operating at some level, or some aspect of the Subtle Body that wasn't "cleaned up"-- and I didn't understand that. Neither Ramana's nor Nisargadatta's teachings helped me in that regard. So I went searching online again for some gem of an enlightened being who spoke English fluently. As you know, there are scads of English-speaking folks online who offer up all sorts of "wisdom" and advice. But nothing clicked with me until a few weeks ago when I found His Holiness Ramji the Great. :)

You and your website...your elucidation of Vedanta...is just what I wanted and needed. I am incredibly grateful and appreciative! Thank you very, very much for appearing to teach me, Ram! ♥

#### **When you lack self confidence, assume that you are the Self and let experience back you up**

The spiritual world is nothing but tens of thousands of people who know they are the Self but who lack confidence in it, because they believe they are not experiencing it every minute. They believe this because they have been seduced by the stories of amazing epiphanies that supposedly set people free, epiphanies which associate freedom with a particular 'transcendental' or 'non-dual' experience. One interesting fact about epiphanies is that you always feel terribly free when they are happening and you think the feeling should last forever, but it doesn't. The feeling of permanence is simply the mind's interpretation of its contact with the reflection of the Self in the mind. The knowledge is true, but confidence in it is lacking. If this is the case with you, Vedanta recommends that you assume that it is true and live as if it was true and experience will back you up...what happens or doesn't happen will convince you that what you know is true. So in this sense you may need some kind of experiential validation.

#### **All sensations are ghostlike and changeable**

*"I feel that this waking state sensation is like a floating ghost. I don't feel I am inside of it. The sensation is impersonal, so to*

*Speak. Even when I say 'OK, I'm going to watch the I Am', the 'I' that decides to do it is just a perception, with no solidity."*

Yes, that 'I' is just an idea. They call it the ego. It is not you. It is an idea of you. All sensations are ghostlike. They have no substance. They are changing every millisecond.

**You are not in any experience, you are always 'outside' of experience**

*"In other words, the appearances 'inside' of Consciousness (thoughts, perceptions, even the thoughts related to my body/mind) look like they are simply light flashes that come and go, and even 'beingness' itself looks like it has no solidity."*

How close you are to enlightenment! What you say here is true, but the mistake is that you think Consciousness is not you. If you had said, 'appearances inside of me' that would solve the problem. All experience is in you. You are not in any experience. You are always 'outside' of experience.

**You cannot feel yourself because you are yourself**

*"I don't feel an 'I' outside witnessing 'beingness' so I think I know what I am not, but I don't know exactly what I really am. This 'I Am' is appearing on its own accord, but in front of 'nobody'."*

You don't feel it because you are already outside witnessing 'beingness.' You are the witness, Consciousness. You cannot feel yourself because you are yourself. You can only feel objects. But you are not an object. You are the subject. You... Consciousness...have the incorrect idea that you are an experiencing entity and you picked up the belief that you can experience Consciousness but it is not possible for Martinez to experience Consciousness.

This is not to say that experience is not Consciousness, only that Consciousness is free of experience. In this case, the experience of 'beingness' appears in it. You are just ordinary Awareness/Consciousness. The word 'Consciousness' should not actually be capitalized although I do to distinguish it from reflected consciousness. It means that you think of it as something different from your everyday consciousness, the consciousness that knows eating or walking or talking. It is not different. It is very simple and ordinary.

*"I could say that I Am that which is aware of the 'I Am feeling' and of its disappearance in deep sleep, but those are just words, they don't clearly explain what I really am, since my experience is more like I don't exist at all, and Consciousness is*

*like a light that turns on and off, but a light that does not illuminate 'me'. All I find are arisings and an impersonal void where all this takes place."*

This is where you are almost enlightened. You ARE that which is aware of the I AM feeling. But you go off the track immediately. They are 'just' words, but if you knew the meaning, the implication, of the words you would be free.

The 'you' that does not exist at all is "Martinez". You are right about it. Well, it is not exactly correct to say that "Martinez" does not exist. As long as you think he exists, he exists for you, but when you stop identifying with the idea of a "Martinez", he does not exist. There is no evidence that Martinez exists as you believe he exists. There is a lot of evidence that Consciousness exists, so much in fact that we do not even have to prove it.

Your statement "Consciousness is like a light that turns on and off, but (it is) a light that does not illuminate me" means that you have confused reflected Consciousness, the Subtle Body, with you, pure Consciousness. You have identified with your reflection in the mirror of the mind.

**You are not a person. You are impersonal, non-dual, ordinary, actionless, 'unfeeling' Awareness**

Now, this will be a shock to you although I think you can assimilate it. That 'impersonal void where all this takes place' is you. The problem is that you have identified it incorrectly. The word void is very misleading because it is partially true. You, Consciousness, are free of objects but you are not non-existent. You cannot accept yourself as a void because it does not correspond to your actual experience. You experience yourself as very much existent. But you are not 'a void.' You are 'void' of objects, i.e. the experiencer and the objects of experience.

You are actually whole and complete and a very 'positive' thing. You do not live and you do not die. You are not a person. This may be hard for you to accept. All along you take yourself to be a person and you want the experience of enlightenment for that person, but you are not a person. You are impersonal, non-dual ordinary actionless 'unfeeling' Awareness. Contemplate on this. This is not my opinion. It is my experience and it corresponds with scripture i.e. the teachings of Vedanta. You need to discriminate yourself from what you feel, i.e. "Martinez" and his life.

*"Does it make any sense to you? Have you been there, too?"*

Oh, yes, Martinez. I was there. I got caught up in this problem for three or four years. I gave up on enlightenment because I could not sort it out. Then I met a person who sorted it out for me.

*“All this impersonality is making me lose all the delight I felt with movies, books, music, night life, etc.*

Yes, this is natural. Don't get stuck in the feeling of loss. Look on the other side. See the freedom in it. It is a great relief to be free of the person you thought you were. It is a great relief to be free of distractions.

That's a lot of advice, Martinez. ☺ It's not advice, actually. It is just Vedanta, the truth. I think you should read my book. I think you need to go back to the basics and get the big picture. The book lays the whole thing out in a very straightforward way.

*“What can I say, Mr. Swartz? I'm so grateful. Really, it's been an amazing help. No, it is not a shock. On the contrary, it's a tremendous relief, because it is not a matter of correcting things or searching until I find 'something else'. It is a matter of acceptance of the results I actually had in my inquiry. No matter how hard I tried, I haven't been able to find a crystalized and stable point that could be 'me', and I can tell you much energy has been spent in that search. The problem is I never accepted the results. I just run away from the evidence. Maybe the fear of 'annihilation', of not being 'something', and also the thought that I might have gone wrong somewhere in the way... What a relief, my God. I'll take your advice on your book. Thank you again.”*

**Experience does not belong to Awareness. It belongs to the body/mind.**

*“Why does it seem like I am the body and the mind?”*

You are identified with the body-mind, so this is what you experience. As a body-mind you can only experience the body-mind.

*“I know everything is me but I feel so different from everything, so apart, so much an individual, especially because I can only be aware of this mind and this body.”*

Not true. You are aware of the one who is aware. Think about it. You cannot be what you are aware of. You are the one who is aware of the body-mind. It appears in you, in Awareness. You are just so conditioned to take the object as the subject that you superimpose the idea of experience on Awareness. Experience does not belong to Awareness. It belongs to the body-mind.

### Awareness does not experience because it has no sense organs

There are only two factors in experience, the subject, Awareness, and the object, the body-mind. Your questions come because you are identified with the object, not the one who knows the object. The one who knows the object does not 'feel' like anything, nor does it 'feel' anything. You can't expect it to feel something because it is free of the body-mind. It is not an entity. It does not experience because it has no sense organs. This is who you are.

### The body-mind is only made out of your thoughts

*"Even when I experience the Self as sattvic energy, it is happening in Awareness, but it definitely feels like it's inside of this body."*

You cannot trust your feelings. They are not always right. Where in the body is it? Can you pinpoint it? Close your eyes and put your hand on a table. Now try to tell where the table begins and the hand ends. Your thoughts tell you that the table and the hand are two different things but you cannot find the boundary between them. It is the same with the Self and the body/mind. You think they are different but the body mind is only made out of your thoughts and your thoughts are made out of Awareness and there is no gap between you and Awareness. It is something to contemplate. You will see it.

### Awareness is too subtle for the mind-body to experience it

*"Why do I feel limited when Awareness is limitless? I know Awareness must incorporate limitedness as it is non-dual, but even if I feel unlimited, won't I feel unlimited from this mind and this body?"*

No, definitely not. You will feel limited if you identify with them because they are limited. Awareness is too subtle for the mind-body to experience it. It only experiences itself and illumines objects.

### Physical body is not the experiencer

*"I am the knower of the body, but the body does not know me, in the sense that the body itself is lifeless and without Consciousness. Yet, the body appears to know, in that it responds to states of mind. For example, resentment may*

*appear as a physical condition of the body, an illness. How to reconcile this? There appears to be an identity between mind and body, in that both seem the same, only perceived from two different perspectives.”*

The experiencing does appear to be in the physical body, but it takes place in the Subtle Body. Both the Subtle Body and the Physical Body are aggregates, meaning that they are made up of parts. As such, they are in a state of constant change, and are part of the whole field of existence, which is also made up of parts. This field is an apparent duality. The gross physical aspect is not subject to pleasure and pain, because it has no Subtle Body. You can break up a rock with a hammer, but it does not feel anything.

#### **Subtle Body appears as the experiencer because of its association with Consciousness**

The subtle aspect of existence is subject to pleasure and pain, attachment, joy, sorrow, etc. because of its association with Consciousness, which is not an enjoyer i.e. a sufferer of the dualities.

#### **You are Consciousness ever free of experience**

A Subtle Body (a person) who experiences pain in the waking state is pain free when he or she sleeps or is under the effect of pain killers or when the Subtle Body, the conscious mind, is distracted. This shows that the pain is not inherent in either the Self or the Subtle Body. He or she does not suffer because he or she is actually Consciousness which is free of the experiencing entity, the Subtle Body. In fact he or she enjoys the bliss of the Self...as the Self. The Self enjoys itself experientially when it is identified with the Causal Body, which is not an aggregate and subject to change like the Subtle and Gross Bodies.

#### **You cannot feel Awareness**

*“I want to ‘feel’ Awareness. I read about the non-dualistic mind and understand. Yet when I pray or meditate I want to really ‘feel’ Awareness besides intellectually knowing it.”*

I know what you mean but ‘feeling’ Awareness is not actually possible. Why? Because you can only ‘feel’ (experience) something that is other than yourself, the subject. Experience is the result of a transaction between a subject and an object. The subject, ‘I’ (sees, knows, feels hears, senses) something other than it and then the knowledge of the object arises in the mind.

What is the nature of the subject? It is Awareness. You, Ed, are Awareness, the subject. “Ed” is just a name for the subject, Awareness. It does not refer to a special unique person. There are no unique people. There is only one subject, one ‘person.’

So how is the subject going to experience itself? It is not going to experience itself because it is itself.

And even if Awareness was an experienceable object, you could not experience it because the instruments you have to experience things are too gross. For example, you have eyes but you cannot experience ultra violet light. You can only experience it by knowing that it exists, that it vibrates at a certain frequency, etc. Your knowledge will never be direct. It will always be indirect.

### Awareness is Self luminous, Self knowing

Yet it can be 'experienced' in this sense: it is Self-luminous, Self-aware, Self-knowing. Is there any doubt that you exist? There is not. You do not need something other than yourself to 'feel' you, to tell you that you exist. This problem of experiencing the Self, Awareness, the 'I', is rather like taking a flashlight out in the middle of the day to see if you can see the sun. The sun is already shining. It is shining on the flashlight and it is shining on you even before you try to see it.

Let's assume, however, that you can 'feel' Awareness. Of course this presupposes that you are not already feeling it. But is this true? If this is actually a non-dual reality then everything here is nothing but Awareness in some form. And because you are always experiencing something you are always experiencing Awareness. What is the problem then? The problem is that you do not know what Awareness is. So the right question is 'What is Awareness?'

It is strange that people have a desire to experience something that they are already experiencing. The problem with formulating the spiritual quest in terms of experience is that experience, by its very nature, is always changing. Even if you could experience Awareness, you would unexperience it at some point. Why? Because every experience takes place in time, it changes. Experience is permanent but there is no permanent experience. Furthermore, the experiencer, unless it is Awareness, is always changing as a result of the experiences it has. So the experiencer eventually becomes satisfied with a particular experience and loses interest in it and wants to experience something else. The experience of Awareness is only interesting until you know what Awareness, your own Self, is. Then it becomes boring because you have been you all along. And you have never changed.

Yes, it is nice to 'walk in the feeling of connectedness' as you say but why does the feeling of connectedness stop? You don't want it to stop. But you have no control over it. This is the way it is with experience. Nobody can control it. It is the result of impersonal subconscious forces that are conditioned by time, meaning they are in a state of constant flux. So all these wonderful spiritual feelings end. What is the use of wanting to experience something that is going to end unless you are indifferent to its eventual demise?

Finally, if you want to 'feel Awareness' understand that Awareness is everything that is and then you will see that you are feeling it all the time in the food you eat, the air you breathe and the thoughts you think.

#### The Self sees itself – no experiencer necessary

*"I'm struggling to understand something I've read in your How to Attain Enlightenment book that I've also seen stated in quite few other places by other writers. Why can we only see a reflection of Self? It would make more logical sense to me if we could see both the Self directly and the reflection, or neither. Can you please explain?"*

Because the Self is beyond perception. The person, "Randy", the Subtle Body, is reflected Awareness. It is not actually conscious. It is like the moon. It has no light of its own. It can only reflect the sun's light. The sun 'sees' it, but it does not see the sun. But this is not to say that the Self cannot be known. It knows itself without the aid of a body and mind.

It is funny when it tries to see itself through the body and mind, because it is already seeing itself. This attempt to see/know/experience yourself is the result of *Maya*, ignorance. So Vedanta removes the ignorance by getting you to look at yourself in a different way. Then the Self, which was seeing itself all along, but unaware that what it was seeing was itself, rediscovers itself and the seeking stops. I know it sounds completely crazy, but that is the way it is. Enlightenment is only the cessation of seeking that comes when you realize that you have always known who you are. The problem is that Self-ignorance causes the Self to apparently identify with the body and mind, and become an experiencer. You live for many years as an experiencer, chasing things in *samsara*, including enlightenment that you think will complete you, when you are complete already. This seeking completion experientially becomes a habit, and you think that the Self is another experience to be gained.

#### You are never not present

*"My understanding is that reality is non-dual, all-inclusive. I remind myself of this knowledge throughout the day."*

When you are clear what Awareness is, there is no longer a need to 'remain mindful' because the object of your knowledge is you. Since you are never not present, you cannot forget once you know. So no practice is necessary. For example, you do not have to remind yourself that you are Edward, because Edward is always present and known to you. It is hard and fast knowledge. Edward is not going to realize he is Awareness. Awareness is going to realize it is Awareness. Right now it thinks it is Edward.

Nonetheless, the habit of Edward thinking it is Awareness will help Awareness to realize itself. So the practice you are doing is the right one. Keep at it. Eventually, it will destroy the tendency to of Awareness to see itself as only Edward.

### Why I chase experience - Causal Body and Ignorance

Ignorance is the cause of the Causal Body. In Awareness there are no bodies. When Ignorance operates, it causes the Self to seek experience. It seeks experience to complete itself, which is not possible because it is already complete. The residue of experience is stored in the Causal Body. It programs the *karma*.

In reality Ignorance and the Causal Body are synonyms. I seek because I am ignorant of my nature as Awareness. The Causal Body, however, also serves as a location in Consciousness of the effects of ignorance, i.e. the *vasanas*, so in that sense it is different from Ignorance.

The purpose of the Three Bodies teaching is to put the individual in its place existentially, to give it an understanding of its smallness and helplessness, to get it to relax so that its mind empties, and to destroy its sense of doership. You, Awareness, are aware of what the Subtle Body knows and what it doesn't.

*“Although in the waking state there is a firm understanding that the perceiver, the perceived and the act of perception are all arising in Awareness, they have now collapsed and are simply seeing.”*

Notice in this statement that you say they are ‘arising in Awareness.’ That is true, but look at the perspective from which you are speaking. In this statement Awareness is an object and you, “Harry”, are the subject. An ‘enlightened’ person would identify his or herself as Awareness. Had you directly understood that you are Awareness you would have said “arising in me.” This is a statement of indirect Self knowledge, not direct Self knowledge. We aim for direct knowledge. Indirect knowledge is not the kiss of death as it can be converted to direct Self knowledge. However, it indicates identification with the perceiver/feeler/thinker entity.

Freedom, liberation, is seeing from the opposite point of view. In the *Gita* it says, ‘What is day for a worldly person (*samsara*) is night for a wise person (*jnani*).’ The ego, “Harry”, is the object and you, Awareness, are the subject. If you contemplate on this distinction, the shift in orientation should happen.

### Awareness, perception and objects

The waking state entity, the perceiver, does not exist in deep sleep. It morphs into a subtle thought called the sleeper (*prajna*). You, Awareness, exist in all three states.

You never change. You appear as the *waker (viswa)* in the waking state, the *dreamer (taijasa)* in the dream state and the *sleeper* in the deep sleep state.

*“The word Awareness is too close to the word perception for me. Being aware of means perceiving to me.”*

You need to separate Awareness from perception if you want to be free. The words don't matter. If you distinguish pure Awareness from reflected Awareness, you can't find a better word than Awareness/Consciousness.

There are difficulties with the words Awareness and Consciousness too because people immediately associate Awareness with the Subtle Body which seems to be aware and conscious but isn't. When you say you are alive you don't refer to Consciousness. It neither lives nor dies. You mean the Subtle Body, the experiencer/perceiver. It is not actually alive. It is reflected Awareness. As Awareness you, as Shankara says in *Atma Bodh*, 'live without breathing.' He could have added 'without thinking, perceiving, feeling, etc.' Irrespective of the word used, the distinction between the perceiver and Awareness needs to be crystal clear. It is liberation.

Liberation is clarity with reference to the subtle relationship between Awareness and objects appearing in it. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna, speaking as Awareness, says, "They (the objects) are all in me. I am not in them." Non-duality does not mean that the apparent and the real are the same, even though they are both Consciousness. The objects have the same relationship to Awareness that pots have to clay. The pot is clay but clay is not the pot. "Harry" exists, but he does not stand alone. He depends on you. He is in you, but you are not in him. To realize this may take some contemplation.

**The sleep state is called the Causal Body and contains the *vasanas* of every living being**

"Harry" is a name that is given to a complex of *vasanas* that arise out of the Causal Body. "Harry" is the pot and the *vasanas*, which are just inert Awareness vibrating in a certain way, are the clay.

**Awareness is the witness of the three states**

*“How can I be the witness of deep sleep/sleeper? It seems I can only gain indirect knowledge on this?”*

Who is the 'I' here? If you are "Harry" then the knowledge is inferential. Inference is a valid means of knowledge. But you have direct experience of sleep as the sleeper (*prajna*) because the sleeper is Awareness. Why do you hate to be waked up out of a deep sleep at one in the morning? Because you are directly experiencing limitlessness and bliss. If you were experiencing nothing you would not be bothered. For you to experience anything you have to be Awareness. However Awareness is not an experiencer. It does not feel or think, although it is capable of feeling and thinking...as the waker/perceiver. People think they are alive because they think and feel things but they are not alive for that reason. They are not actually alive; they apparently live. The aliveness can only be attributed to Awareness. You 'live' as Awareness, not as a thinking, feeling entity.

**The removal or negation of the three experiencing entities is accomplished by simply knowing they are unreal**

When you experience a mirage, for example, you do not try to drink it because you know that it is not actually there. When you contemplate the teaching of the three states and the three experiencing entities, you understand that you are not the waker, dreamer or deep sleeper. These three 'selves' do not go away in the wake of the knowledge that you are Awareness; they are just known to be unreal. So you do not identify with them. Experience and the experiencing entity are objects appearing in Awareness, just like a mirage appears on the desert. They are projections of the macrocosmic mind. What you see/know cannot be you. You are the seer/knower.

*"The waker and the dreamer are understood to be unreal, because I can be witness to those states, even in a dream and see that the waker and dreamer are arising. Or is the sleeper unreal simply because of the fact that he dissolves into the waker and the waker dissolves into the dreamer and the dreamer dissolves into the sleeper and so on and so on?"*

Now you are thinking! Yes. They are roles Awareness plays. Awareness is the actor; they are the roles it plays.

**Perception and the world**

Do I see the world because it is there or is the world there because I see it? From the individual's point of view I see the world because it is there. From the Self's point of view the world is there because I see it. But actually I am 'seeing' without a world of objects.

### I am not enlightened, nor I am unenlightened

I am beyond any concepts of the mind. The Self was never not Awareness so to say that it is enlightened implies that it was not Awareness at some time. It is a statement coming from the perceiver. The perceiver will not be enlightened because its 'light' is borrowed from Awareness. A mirror cannot see the reflections in it.

### The knowledge will root out the duality on its own

Knowledge, not the doer, the investigator, does the work. If there is a doubt, then you should continue Self inquiry, until there is no more doubt. The scripture is clear on this. To say you are not "Harry" is correct. But not being "Harry" does not necessarily mean that all the ramifications of being the Self are known to "Harry". When the word "Harry" refers to the Self alone, then the work is done.

### Dharma and Adharma

The Self is beyond relative *dharma*, i.e. *dharma* and *adharma*, which only applies to *Maya*. The brings into being a field of laws, the macrocosmic subtle and gross bodies. Know the laws and follow them and you will go straight to *sattva*. Ignore them at your peril. The other dimension to this discussion is the *dharma*, nature, of individuals. This is the imprint of *Isvara* on the psyche. Fail to understand your nature and you will suffer. Follow it and you will succeed.

## Chapter 4 - Love

### The experience of relationship

#### Forgive yourself for believing that you can only love yourself when someone loves you

Your experience of losing your husband had nothing to do with you. It was just *Isvara* taking back what it had given. He was not given to the world to make you happy. He came to work out his *karma*. When it was done, he left. You were very attached to him and you are still attached. He lives as an idea in your mind. You suffer because you believe that you need someone else to make you complete, not because he is gone. To heal you need to see that this is not true. You need to forgive yourself for believing that you can only love yourself when someone loves you. It is wonderful when someone loves us but only because it awakens the Self, which is love. He was only a catalyst to get you in touch with the love that you are. This kind of object dependent love is totally insecure because you have no control over the object and its *karma*. So to heal you have to find the love that you are. This is the 'shift' or the 'jump' that you want. But there is no easy way out of this, no experience you can have that will set you free of the need for a love object. To get free you need to investigate yourself and see if you really do need someone else to love you.

*"From a psychology point of view, I was so pained by the loss and not able to cope with it, that I just dissociated from myself. The pain could not be separated from my being and so I lost my being."*

If you know you lost your being, did you lose your being? You are just insecure. You believe you need someone else to be OK. It is not true. You have been torturing yourself with this thought for a long time. It is time to let it go. If you cannot see how you are creating this misery and love yourself, then at least find someone else to love. Your husband is not the only person who is lovable.

*"But where do I find this healing?"*

You can only find it by seeing that you are worthy of love. This is why Vedanta is the solution. It reveals your true nature to be love. Awareness, you, are *parama prema svarupa*, limitless non-dual love.

*"I don't see the connection between Awareness and love."*

Awareness flowing through your mind and body is attention. What you willingly pay attention to is what you love.

*"It's rather ironic that that 'me' is what I lost."*

Why bother about that 'me'? It is not you. If you can lose something it is not real. It is not you. You cannot be lost.

*"OK... then what do I do... how do I end my suffering?"*

You can't do anything to end it or you would have done it by now, meaning that there are no actions that you can do that will guarantee that the suffering will end. Having said that, if you are qualified for Self knowledge, approach a qualified teacher and expose your mind to the teachings of Vedanta you might discover yourself to be the Self, in which case your suffering will cease.

#### Take experience as a gift

Another option would be to accept it as if it was a physical disability that cannot be changed but only accepted. Then get on with your life. It is just a feeling, a sensation that comes and goes, is experienced in various degrees, is not real and is not subject to the control of the ego. The only way out in this case is to take it as a gift from God and not worry about it.

It will be almost impossible to get rid of this condition if you are looking for an external solution. You want to do something, not realizing that it is the doer that is creating this condition. Perhaps it has become your 'story,' your identity, and while it is not a particularly pleasant one, it has become a comfortable one and may be giving you a certain kind of perverse satisfaction. Ask yourself, "who you would I be without the idea that I have a depersonalization disorder?"

#### There is only love

It is good to have experiences in life, to suffer and enjoy, but when the passion wears off the eye of truth starts working.

It is always funny when reality appears to be something other than what is. I call the Self the fourth *guna*, the humor *guna*, because when you look at life from its point of view it is very funny.

The confusion that exists is simply this: if you are seeking *moksha*, you cannot make a relationship with an "other" your goal or it will prevent you from attaining freedom. Once you have attained freedom and you know who you are, you know there is nothing outside you, you can experience any and all of it without contamination.

In other words, “you” are no longer a “you”, a “doer”, and “you” are not an ego, experiencing the Self. You are the Self, experiencing the ego. It is a very big shift, although it seems like semantics.

Sundari says, “This love came to reside within us because we were not in its way. There was no gender, no identity, no doer, no seeking or wanting involved. We had both sought this all our lives and had both given up believing it existed. It is love that loves through us, as us. It does not belong to us; there is no difference between “us” and anyone or everyone. This love is as much everyone of you as it is us. There is only one principle, only one love.”

### Unobstructed love is impersonal

If binding *vasanas* are not exhausted you may be Self realized but you will never be completely Self actualized and fulfilled in love. Self actualization means that Awareness/love flows unobstructed into the world. Obstructed love is personal love, Awareness conditioned by the *vasanas* built up before Self realization.

Unobstructed love, *parabhakti*, is impersonal. It flows freely to any object that appears within it, including objects that the mind deems unacceptable. Likes and dislikes still appear but they do not affect the flow of love. A worldly person loves what is in harmony with the likes and does not love what is disliked. A Self realized person is aware of the operation of the likes and dislikes and will not create new ones but, owing to unexamined and therefore unexhausted karma, finds his or her love still conditioned by them to some degree. If you are Self realized you will not develop new obstructions but those still in the karmic pipeline will continue to play out.

Because it causes love to flow to some objects and not others personal love is an obstacle that prevents the easy flow of love to all objects i.e. people, events, activities, etc. I do not know exactly how your mind formulates it, but somehow your idea of how I should behave as your spiritual benefactor was called into question by my marriage and it made you angry. Anger is love conditioned by a dislike.

Self knowledge is such that if you don't clear up the unconscious stuff before you realize who you are, it will get cleared up later. There is no way that obstructing *vasanas* can stand the light of truth. It may take a long time for the obstructions to see the light of day but eventually some event will expose them. You can consciously expose them by asking why you feel the way you do when uncomfortable feelings arise. You may have to work your way through a maze of rationalizations but at bottom you always come back to the same point. If you are honest you will conclude, “I feel this way because I don't love myself properly. And why don't I love myself properly? Because I do not feel worthy of love. And why don't I feel worthy of

love? Because I have the wrong idea of who I am. I think I am not lovable.” But this is not true. You are lovable because your nature is love.

The most salient characteristic of a *tamasic* mind is denial-based avoidance. Denial is by nature unconscious. The ego does not know it is happening. It avoids what it does not like, rather than confronting it and working through it. Your marriage was very painful and you did not forgive yourself for marrying the ‘wrong’ man or for projecting the lion’s share of the blame for its failure on your husband. From the *samsaric* point of view, there are always apparently good reasons why a particular person is at fault.

But from the spiritual perspective, the blame lies closer to home because the husband or wife is only a thought in one’s Awareness... unless you are completely clear that you are never dealing with a real person ‘out there,’ which is only the case with very advanced souls. For most, the spouse is just one’s likes and dislikes associated with a human form.

Once your relationship ended you developed a strong spiritual *vasana*. Your focus was elsewhere and you realized who you really are...but the old pattern remained...until it was exposed by this event. It is like anger. You cannot just get angry. It requires an event to trigger it. Some karma is ongoing and some is like a dormant seed. It will not sprout without provocation.

I think what happened to your emotions when I got married is Isvara’s way of pointing out where your inquiry should be heading. To repeat, you already know you are Awareness but this knowledge will not deliver the freedom that is tantamount to pure love until the binding *vasanas* are purified.

The other things that you need to look are related to the love issue. If you are able to resolve it, they will fall away. It all goes back to your childhood and ultimately to the karma that brought you into this life. The long and the short of it is that the inner child needs to become an inner adult. You should not take it all this emotion personally. It is just the result of beginningless ignorance. No one would be what they are if they could help it.

It is my duty to reveal the Self using Vedanta. If a person is purified, this revelatory knowledge becomes firm almost immediately and there is a permanent shift in orientation. You no longer know the Self or meditate on the Self or experience the reflection of the Self in the mind. You ‘become’ the Self, not that you change. That is to say you experience the ego as an object and you are fully aware of its psychology. Had this happened with you, you would not have said those unkind things to me. If this had happened there would be no need for work, in your case the adjustment of apparently disturbing emotions. There are no disturbing emotions, apparent or otherwise, if you are the Self. There are no adjustments to be made. Everything is adjusted for good once this shift has happened and cannot be reversed. Who you are ‘adjusts’ everything automatically.

Your statement “*moment to moment is being observed and the mind adjusted as apparently disturbing emotions arise – only allowing ‘I am Awareness (Aham Brahmasmi)’ to prevail through all apparent fluctuations*” reveals your spiritual situation.

I am going to violate my rule and give you something to think about even though you didn’t ask. Please contemplate on this with reference to your statement above.

This is a classic case of denial. Why not look into the reason certain uncomfortable feelings arise? Just putting your attention elsewhere will not remove them. They need to be acknowledged, accepted and understood.

You are Brahman, meaning limitless Awareness. There is no knowledge that needs to prevail. *Aham Brahmasmi* simply means “I am free.” What does it mean to say you are free? It means that you are free of doership. In your case the doer writes me that she is ‘observing, adjusting’ and ‘allowing.’ *Brahman...* you... never does that. It does not observe. It is what makes observation possible. It does not adjust because everything is adjusted all the time. The doer adjusts. The doer ‘allows.’

These are not just words. These are statements of fact that need to be assimilated. *Brahman*, you, never ‘allow.’ Everything... in so far as there is something other than you... is already allowed, or as the scriptures say, ‘already accomplished.’ It is known not to be real. And finally, the doer, not you, is ‘richly rewarded.’ No karma comes to you. You are the reward.

To say you are the reward means you are love. You do not have love, or feel love nor do you love. Love is not a verb. You are love. Being love means that you see no difference between yourself and others.

*“I’m still skeptical about this unconditional love part. Only time will tell.”*

Time and circumstances are not involved. Only inquiry will reveal the truth. It has nothing to do with me personally. If life’s circumstances change everything that was said is still true.

You are skeptical because you do not have unconditional love for yourself and you do not have faith in me as a teacher. You do not have faith in me because you do not love yourself unconditionally. You still have unkind judgments about yourself. If you are the Self you will love your ego unconditionally. If you did love yourself unconditionally you would see that it was the Self, not “James”, that was speaking about marriage in that blog and that it is the Self appearing as James that has been your friend all along.

The blog you found so objectionable is a teaching on the value of non-dual love. It is not a justification. There is nothing to justify, just something to share. It sheds light

on us as the Self experiencing non-dual love and sharing it with the world. It is a gift, not an excuse. Why would you view it the way you did if it were not for the fact that there is negativity around your own unresolved emotional issues? The whole point of the article is to enlighten those who are confused about the nature of the teaching of Vedanta on relationship, those who think Vedanta is only intellectual. That blog makes it clear that the Self is love and Vedanta is love. It offers help to those who are confused about how to be in relationship and to pursue a genuine path to *moksha*. As I mentioned, only a handful of over one hundred readers that I heard from missed the point.

Unconditional love will come once you have resolved the wounds from the past. I am not asking you to trust me. I only ask that you think about my analysis of your statement above and the words of the blog. You are a lover of Vedanta. Those words are pure Vedanta. You need only have faith in scripture if you do not trust the teacher. Unfortunately, you need a teacher to get the import of the teachings. I am not advertising. This unfortunate letter shows that it is finished between us on that level. Without faith in the teacher you are at the mercy of your own mind. You will avoid teachings that are challenging and follow those that aren't.

I love the symbol of Jesus on the Cross. If you notice he is always portrayed with a wound in his side near the heart. This wound is directly connected to his realization of his nature as God, as Love. It is through this wound... the resolution of his unresolved stuff... that impersonal love comes. His love is impersonal. He has every reason to take personally what is happening to him. His guards are tormenting him. But he forgives them 'because they know not what they do.' This is how you would see my marriage if you had resolved the love issue. I did not know what I was doing because I was not doing anything. I was just me... Awareness... and this event happened. It was God's grace. I can be 'forgiven' because I did not choose it. The desire was there but the fulfillment of it was not up to me. I did not react to it. I embraced it without effort. This is how knowledge works. It neutralizes the reaction. Acceptance is automatic. This love will last because it has nothing to do with "James", the doer. James just gets to enjoy it. This is why Ramana says that there are only *bhoga* (enjoyment) *vasanas* for *jnanis*. I am not "James" or "Ram" or whatever. He is in me but I am not in him.

## Chapter 5 - God

### God is you but you are not God

*"I haven't grasped in my experience that I am God."*

I am God just means the hard and fast understanding that I am Awareness, full and complete, lacking nothing. It is not an experience.

*"I realized that Awareness is the background of everything and God lives in me as everything that changes. It is a dance of the form in the formless."*

Yes, indeed. This is the truth.

*Seeker: "I can see that I have to be God otherwise God could not appear in me, in Awareness."*

### Saying no to God is also God's will

This is close but not quite correct. God is you, but you are free of God. God is just what moves and changes and appears in you, Awareness. God depends on you, Awareness, but you do not depend on it.

*"By I still have a problem with the doer. Since my surrender six years ago I found it meaningful to give up my actions to God. You call it karma yoga. Now, my life has changed. I love nature and the silence. I only want to do and be in the simple things. But big business offered me an important, well paying job. This offer created a conflict. What is my dharma? Do I stay here and do what I want or do I see this offer as God's will and go back to the city and a job I don't want? Should I overcome my resistance?"*

It is fine to resist this job. Why is not the desire to live in the country God's will? Everything is God's will. Use your discrimination. If you don't need the money, stay in the country. God is happy with you whatever you do. It will find someone else to do the job and that will be God's will. Saying no to God is also God's will.

### Maya is what makes the impossible possible

One definition of Maya or Ignorance is this: Maya is what makes the impossible possible. It makes what is unreal to seem to be real. It makes what is real to seem unreal.

*“Whatever happens will happen from the standpoint of this mind and this body and I cannot escape that, even if I am everything around me.”*

As the body-mind you can't escape it, but there is no need to escape it because as Awareness you have already escaped.

#### **The Total and the Individual...a letter from 'Melinda.'**

“Self, Self-illuminating Consciousness, Awareness, limitless, eternal...illuminates an individual and the individual springs to life. In the same way, non-dual Awareness illuminates the macrocosm...God...and all things and beings come into being. Consciousness is ever present in the heart of all beings as a witness, a knower of the Soul. Born of God and hardwired into gross bodies the Soul accumulates and exhausts fears and desires through action. Its pure innate nature becomes distorted and corrupted when it is ignorant of what it is. This produces a heavy karmic load of extroverting tendencies.

All souls follow their natures and serve the creation in various ways. An apple tree reflecting the light and intelligence of Awareness grows elegantly from a seed into tree and bears fruit without "doing" anything. Its design simply unfolds. A Soul reflecting the light and intelligence of Awareness evolves as a thinking and feeling entity. The mind and intellect together are the limbs of the Soul's Subtle Body. The Subtle and Physical bodies cannot exist without Awareness. Awareness illuminates them both. The Self is ordinary actionless Awareness, the eternal knower that illumines the Creator who dreams the universe.

A baby opens its eyes, cries, wiggles, eats, and sleeps automatically without something or 'someone' controlling it. It is doing what it is designed to do, but there is no doer. Galaxies turn and flowers open automatically. Light enters the baby's eyes through the pupils and casts an inverted image on the retina, which is converted into bio-electrical signals that traverse a nerve path to the brain, a neurologically dense circuit for the unit. The brain rights the image and creates an image in the mind. The mind and intellect in the Subtle Body process the information as feelings and associated thoughts arise so the baby can function. The Soul honors its true nature and fulfills its role in the creation, like every creature.

The creation is a dazzling virtual reality produced by Macrocosmic Ignorance, which is very intelligent. So much information, sounds and feelings are processed. The baby body grows and the soul consumes all the experiences with intelligently designed sense instruments. Sounds and sights are associated with meaning; the intellect, ignorant of its nature as Awareness, builds meanings to make sense of the virtual world. One day the mother or father says a word that has been repeated so many times over the first few years that the meaning starts to stick... a name.

Pointing, gesturing, associating meanings with objects, the intellect starts to recognize this name/sound and sees associates it with the physical body and to the experiences feelings and thoughts arising by proximity to that body! In a few years it thinks "I am this name. I am this body." A spell is woven and Self ignorance strengthens. And so an ego identity is born.

This conceptualized identity is defended by the logic that created it. As life continues, the mind/intellect builds a story around the feelings and thoughts it associates with that identity. This identity now becomes a complete mental world, its total reality. In this way we are like *Ishvara*, but instead of dreaming the universe we dream a 'personal world' into existence.

When we wake up spiritually, we wake up from the dream of our personal worlds into the true reality. Suffering happens when we believe the lie of our name, our story. No matter how entrancing the story, no matter what quests we are on, deep, deep down the Awareness under the spell of *Maya*, knows there is more and feels trapped. So while the roller coaster ego story continues and the push and pull of the tides of desires and fears steer the ego here and there, down in the heart a whispering and a longing for truth and freedom arises. The seeker is born.

Under ignorance the mind and intellect look towards objects in the world as a possible source of liberation. Like a starved creature the ego goes into the world of *Maya* seeking food imprisoned in the fortress of a false identity. Mirrors within mirrors, a complex of ideas and concepts that we take for who we are. "I am this or that. I like this. I don't like that".

The ego is like an avatar in a computer game. Moving through a virtual world it thinks is real, its likes and dislikes encapsulate it. In its programmed virtual reality it enjoys virtual relationships, virtual jobs, virtual spiritual quests and virtual happiness in a vain attempt to liberate itself.

The ego is ever-present Consciousness, under the spell of Ignorance. It finds itself in a virtual creation, a reflection of the Creator's mind containing billions of idea/designs. It looks in the mirror but does not see itself because there is nothing to see in it. It waits for feelings and thoughts to reveal itself but there is no one to objectify it so it can know who it is. It's true identity is formless, actionless, simple pure Awareness. It is futile for form to seek formlessness.

Waking up, it realizes I am not the mirror, I am not the body, I am not the myriad of identities the intellect cooks up, I am not the story, I am not the feelings that arise, nor the desires and fears. I am the one aware of all of these. They arise and fall in me. All depend on me to illuminate and animate them but I do not depend on them.

When you know who you are, the intellect begins to unravel the identities it formulated since it was born. It takes down the fortresses that defended its identities, leaving limitless space in which to be. Liberation is freedom from the

walls of the mind, walls built to define and protect false identities conceptualized by the ignorant mind.

Awareness as love, wholeness, peace shines forth, ever present presence. The mind finally begins to settle because it finds there is nowhere to go. Feelings arise and fall but are not taken personally and lose their *karmic* strength. The world empties of our projected stories about it and then fills again with the silent present of who we are. We continue our work, or rather the work continues, while the silent presence of being grows more Self-evident.

The burden of "doing" is laid at the feet of *Isvara*, and the ego is released of thousands of years of enslavement. The Self-shines forth into creation liberated by the complete knowing that it was always free. "Melinda" is a concept, this body works automatically, thoughts rise and fall in the silent present Self-illuminated space that is who I really am. Self-knowledge and a skilled teacher gave me the confidence to claim this Self-evident truth. A final shake of the tree of knowledge and the illusion fell away, vapors in the bliss of Awareness."

I can't find fault with any of it, Melinda. Your understanding is perfect. You are now qualified to purchase the official Sri Sri Ramji Vedanta Enlightenment Certificate, one per customer while supplies last.

## Chapter 6 - The Fruit of Self Knowledge

### Self knowledge changes experience

*“Since the last Vedanta seminar my confidence as Awareness got stronger and ‘standing as Awareness’ became easier. Contemplation has released some quite strong reactions/emotions that I would like to ask you about:*

*As perception: everything around becomes flat, small but somehow intimate and close; sometimes it seems like a movie, for example the walls are not solid but shimmering. I see myself in all people: everybody is a different ‘aspect of me’ (that perspective comes and goes, it is not steady). Together with this perspective, a feeling of smallness, almost like ‘limited dream’ arises, strong feeling/thought of ‘the end’ arises, loneliness arises, thought like ‘is that all?’ Maybe even fear arises... sometimes my head feels dizzy. I realize that all these feelings and thoughts are objects in me and with the knowledge I keep on purifying my mind. I just want to ask you what you think of that ‘state’ because to be honest, this is quite a surprise for me (if anything I expected bliss, limitlessness, fullness to arise...) Somehow it does not feel like limitless Awareness at all. And yet, once this perspective switches to ‘Lynn’, there is a feeling of ‘wanting it back’. I would appreciate a word of comment.”*

Contemplation on these teachings can definitely rearrange perception. This is because the knowledge brings about a shift in your orientation and instead of seeing from the perspective of ‘Lynn’, you see as Awareness. There is a difference between the way Awareness sees the world and a conditioned mind sees the world. For example, the world seems to be solid and substantial to the mind because the senses objectify it. But to Awareness the world is like a movie on a shimmering screen or like a dream. Awareness sees no difference between itself and the objects appearing in it but there appears to be a difference to the conditioned mind. This is confusing at first. You are in what I call the ‘firefly’ stage. You ‘blink on’ as Awareness and you ‘blink off’ when your perspective shifts back to the mind.

### Feeling of hiddenness

The feeling of ‘hiddenness’ is one of the perceptions that appears when you first start to experience as Awareness. The scriptures say Awareness is ‘the smallest of the small.’ It means you are very subtle, ‘subtler than the subtlest’ to quote the Upanishad. Swami Dayananda humorously compares it to the feeling of a Muslim woman in a burka. She looks out at the world but the world cannot see her.

It is so cool because you know everything that is happening and why it is happening but nobody knows who you are. People project their idea of who you are but it does not affect you because you know that their knowledge is not knowledge at all. It is not knowledge because it is not true to the object. It can cause difficulties at first because you might assume that they can see what you see...who you are. Only an enlightened person can see another enlightened person.

It is good to be a little careful at this point because you may be inclined to share what you see with someone who is not ready to see and you may confuse them or receive a less than positive response...not that it affects you because you are the Self. It may cause distress to them, however. I fell into this trap several times after my realization but quickly learned that only solicited information works.

### Feeling of the end

The feeling of 'the end' is the understanding that this perspective is the ultimate point of view, i.e. Awareness. There is nothing beyond it. It means that your seeking is basically over, although there may be some things to clear up. The most salient characteristic of enlightenment is that you stop seeking. It can be a bit disconcerting for the ego/doer since it is habituated to seeking. It will futilely wonder what to do with its life when it knows very well that there is nothing to do...except to just live.

### Feeling of loneliness

The feeling of loneliness is actually a feeling of aloneness, which is the nature of Awareness. Awareness is all there is. There is nothing else. The ego interprets the experience of the Self as loneliness because there are no others. It sees it as a kind of separation, a loss. It may take some time to get used to this feeling. Eventually, it will go away. You can get depressed if you identify with this feeling.

### "Is that all?"

The feeling 'is that all' is the ego's sense of disillusionment when it realizes that enlightenment is no big deal. It is quite a shock. You expect bells and whistles and amazing bliss and all you have is just you, naked and uncomplicated. Time stops and there is nowhere to go, nor anything to do.

### Fear

The fear is the ego not wanting to let go of its familiar orientation. It has become comfortable in ignorance and it is not sure that it wants freedom.

## Confusion

The dizziness is confusion. You are switching back and forth from one state to another and it is confusing.

## Feelings are objects and have nothing to do with you

The way you are seeing it is correct. All these feelings are just objects and have nothing to do with you.

Limitless Awareness does not 'feel' like anything. It is not an experience. Experiences, these strange sensations, appear in you, Awareness, but do not affect you. The perceiver/feeler entity's perception is just being purified by the knowledge. Don't worry about it. Don't resist it. Everything perceptively will go back to normal before long but your relationship to perception will be different. There is still a part of you that is identified with the old way of seeing so there is a kind of tug of war.

## *Jnani* is a role Awareness plays

*"What I am looking for is the Grace that flows from a jnani. I would hope if you question a jnani, he will answer based on his experience of the Self. He will not need to quote Vedantic texts. His experience of the Self should be sufficient to answer all spiritual problems. Are you a jnani?"*

I don't know why you think that the words of a *jnani* are any different from scripture. Vedanta is just the words of *janis*. They are called *rishis* or *mahatmas* or *janis*. In any case, I can understand your problem with scripture because if you do not know who you are, you will not be able to understand the true meaning of the words. You will interpret them according to your beliefs and opinions and they will not be helpful. Many people are in this predicament and they conclude that the scripture is useless.

But you are right in that you need to hear the scripture from the mouth of a living *mahatma*. But even then, just because a person is a *jnani*, it does not mean that he or she is a skillful communicator or that he or she is qualified to teach you. Sometimes the words of *janis* are just plain nonsense. You can listen to *janis* all you want but if their words do not correspond to scripture, they are not *janis*. There is this fantasy in the spiritual world that enlightenment somehow qualifies a person to enlighten someone else. It is not true. You can get just as confused from the words of enlightened people as you can from worldly people.

You ask if I am a *jnani*. Some say that I am. Some say I am not. I do not say that I am. I do not say that I am not. Only a *jnani* knows a *jnani*. So if you want to ask me a

question and you find that the answer is helpful, then I am a *jnani* for that question. *Jnani* is not a status. A *jnani* is only a *jnani* if there is some kind of doubt. Otherwise he or she is just Awareness. *Jnani* is just a role Awareness plays when it is asked a question. If there is no question, there is no *jnani*. If my answer is not helpful, you can ask someone else.

### Enlightenment is simply knowing the meaning of 'I'

'Self' or 'I' is a good word. Enlightenment is simply knowing the meaning of 'I' when you say or think it. If you say it and your concept is that 'I' is limited, inadequate, and incomplete then your understanding of the word does not match that to which it refers. Vedanta aims to get one's thinking in line with the truth of your nature.

**Do you exist? Do you know that you exist? How do you know? Because you exist. The knowledge and the existence are the same.**

*"In fact all we can really say about it is: It is! And yet we know it. How does that work?"*

You're thinking is excellent. Keep it up. To answer this question I'll repeat what I just said. You can know it because it is you. Do you exist? Do you know that you exist? How do you know? Because you exist. The knowledge and the existence are the same. To 'grasp' means to know or understand.

When you say, "It is." Is that known or unknown? It is known. It is knowledge. That you are, is known.

*"Because we are it?"*

See, you came to the same conclusion. If I had read to this point before replying, I would have saved myself writing it, and all I would have had to say was 'yes.'

### The Self is the Awareness of thought and no-thought

*"If it were true, that the Self was 'no thought' I would always be light years apart from It."*

That is correct. But the Self is the Awareness of thought and no-thought. It is the thoughts and it is the no-thoughts but it is free of thought and no-thought at the same time. Thought is the Self, at a secondary order of reality. It is the changing part of you. You, pure Awareness, do not change.

### Thoughts and emotions are also you

*"I am always thinking, almost always about the Self. And I feel mostly quite at ease with all these thoughts and emotions... I don't feel that any of these distance me from It."*

They don't. They are in harmony with It. But they couldn't distance you from it... because they are you. They come out of you, Consciousness, and subside back into you.

### Emotions belong to the small "I"

*"What about when I am grumpy?"*

Let's stop here. The 'I' is not grumpy. The 'I' is the Awareness of grumpy. If you understand this 'I' you don't need to worry about the grumpiness because the grumpiness belongs to the Subtle body, the reflected experiencing Self.

### Applying the Opposite Thought

*"And yet, when I am grumpy the thought: this is just a mind state, it's not me, can help."*

Yes. It's a valuable practice. It should become second nature, so that as soon as mind thinks 'I am grumpy', the next thought is the 'I' is not grumpy. This practice is called *pratipaksha bhavana*, 'applying the opposite thought.'

*"But at the same time it doesn't seem true. The thought: 'This is happening and because it is happening it is me!' seems more accurate. And in the end these are all just thoughts..."*

Yes, in the end they are, but they are very important thoughts. I'm very impressed with how your thinking has refined. Before long you will be able to remove all your own doubts. Remember, enlightenment is not getting some incredible state. If there is an incredible state it is you already. It is simply the removal of the doubts one has about oneself. You are incredible.

### First you negate the objects

You go through various experiences in your life until you realize that they are not fulfilling... money, sex, book learning, career, etc.; it can be anything. Or using logic and reason you can negate the objects... as long as you accept the conclusion and live by it. Or you can take it on faith that there is no happiness in the world and let the unhelpful *vasanas* burn out that way. The point is that you realize that your desire

for and fear of things isn't real and you quit taking your fears and desires to be real. You quit identifying with them.

This makes it possible to realize the Self. The Self... Awareness... is the default. You can't get rid of it. It's what's left over when the objects are negated. In the last stage you realize that, in so far as the objects have any reality, they borrow it from the Self. So you take them back but with the understanding that they are *mithya*, apparently real. Or that they are the Self. Either way. Take your pick.

#### There is nothing to experience, there is only something to understand

*"I just can't catch the feeling of 'I am'. Could you point out which passages in your book talk about the central practices?"*

The practices you can do are carefully described in my book... *karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga*, meditation and the *yoga* of the three *gunas*. They purify your mind so that you can understand the statement, I am whole and complete, non-dual actionless ever-present unconcerned ordinary Awareness. There is nothing to feel or experience. Read the second chapter of my book again...you missed the point. There is only something to understand.

#### Understanding that ego is actually the Self changes your relationship to objects

*"You said the experience of the Self is not enlightenment. But when the Self and the ego switch the position, isn't this an experience too?"*

Yes. The 'switch', however, is brought about by understanding that the ego is actually the Self. It is an effect, not the cause of enlightenment. It is important to know that this 'switch' does not miraculously alter your karma or your basic perception of objects. It permanently changes your relationship to your karma and objects. Many people believe that they are suddenly going to start experiencing endless bliss and be in some exceptional state, etc. This is not true.

#### Have a conversation with your mind

Constant practice of knowledge means taking the stand in Awareness, as Awareness. When your mind is cooking up things for you to do that will supposedly solve your existential problem, sit down and have a little conversation. Give it a little cookie and a glass of tea, and start the education process. Show it that it would be a happier if it sat still and learned to enjoy itself, rather than run away from something that's bothering it or chase something it wants. You can give it the logic, "You've already got what you think you need". The mind always thinks it needs something, but you say, "No, You already have it. You are the bliss. This should be a constant conversation as long as the mind feels that something outside will fulfill it.

### Look and see that everything is already taken care of

If you look at your life, you will see that everything is taken care of. You've got your three square meals a day, a roof over your head, and clothing on your body. Do you really need anything more to be happy? You just think that when you get x, y and z, then you'll reach happiness.

### Where does experience come from?

Appearing like waves, a field of experience bubbles up from the Causal Body. Life is a constant appearance and a disappearance of events. It's like a wheel. It's so consistent: things dissolving away and new things coming up. Nothing is substantial...except you. You can't stop the movie. You can't push the "pause" button. The movie stops when the body dies and it all goes back to the Unmanifest. But as long as you're alive, you are always waking, dreaming and deep sleeping. And within the waking and dream states there are a myriad of experiences generated by the *vasanas*.

The world of animate and inanimate objects is projected by imagination on the all-pervading substrate. The all-pervading substrate is you, Consciousness. In other words, this world, all the objects, all the beings, all that's moving, all the living beings, and all the objects, are projections. They are not actually there. They look like they are there, we take them to be solid but they are actually just projections.

The film is like *vasanas*. The film is passing in front of the light. The light shines. And then the *vasana* in play at the moment is projected out on the screen. When you try to go to the world and grab something, you can't grab it. Even when you touch it with your physical body and you get into the sensation, with your eyes closed, you can't tell where your hand ends and the object begins. Trying to find the spot where there is separation, you can't. There is no separation. There is just you experiencing yourself.

Consciousness is infinite and formless. It can become anything and it can take any shape or form. It really doesn't become the form. It appears as the form. It does not change and become the form like milk becomes cheese. It just appears as form.

What are the objects in you? Your thoughts and feelings. If you take away the objects, only you are left. That is why we make a distinction between pure Awareness and reflected Awareness. Reflected Awareness is just thoughts and feelings appearing in pure Awareness. If you subtract those, then only you remain.

Subtract means don't identify. Look for the substrate. It's just a matter of knowing the difference between me and my thoughts. Between me and my experiences. That's all. It's not profound. It's subtle. It's just seeing that those things are not me

and understanding that I am Awareness. Check your experience and see if it isn't true.

The Bhagavad Gita is a scripture on *dharma* and liberation. The story is just a dramatic device to illustrate the relationship between action and liberation. The idea is that if you do not take care of business here, you are not fit for liberation. It has nothing to do with killing or morality.

Everyone is presented with existential crises, which are difficult to face. So they are tempted to try to escape them either by denying them, the worldly route, or transcending them, the spiritual route. The Gita says that neither works. You have to face them and work them out according to your nature and this will prepare your mind to understand who you are because it will no longer be agitated and eventually become contemplative. Krishna tells Arjuna the direct solution, Self knowledge. Remember Arjuna did not solicit this war; it was thrust upon him. And when he does not understand Krishna instructs him in the right attitude toward (*karma yoga*) getting the kind of mind that is capable of enlightenment.

The war is a symbol of the conflict that takes place in every human heart between what is expedient and what is right. We appeared here one fine day at the behest of a much greater power than ourselves and we are expected to respond appropriately to what that power sends us. If we don't, we will suffer. Arjuna does not respond appropriately because he is sentimental.

The point of the Gita is that the results of your actions in the battlefield of your life are not up to you. If you understand that and act appropriately, you will attain success in your chosen field.

I read recently that at the behest of the Russian Orthodox Church a court in Siberia had banned the Bhagavad Gita because it advocated killing! The only killing that it espouses is the killing of ignorance.

## Chapter 7 – Enlightenment Myths

### Enlightenment Myths

We are going to examine a number of popular enlightenment teachings from the non-dual perspective. If they come up short as means of enlightenment, it does not mean that they have no value. Indeed, some may be useful as practices to prepare the mind for Self knowledge. If you find yourself attached to one or more of these beliefs this article will help you consider them from the non-dual perspective. Ultimately, you will have to determine the nature of reality through your own investigation, but if your inquiry is disinterested, you can only come to the conclusion: “I am and have always been ever free actionless ordinary non-dual Self-revealing Awareness.”

#### No Mind, Blank Mind, Empty Mind, Stopped Mind

As the Self is always enlightened, the idea that “no mind” is enlightenment implies a duality between the Awareness and thought. To say that the Self is not experienceable when the mind is functioning means that the mind and the Self enjoy the same order of reality, like a table and a chair. But experience shows that this is untrue. Do you cease to exist when you are thinking? Is there thought without Awareness? In fact, thoughts come from you but you are much more than a thought. They depend on you but you do not depend on them.

Does the mind hide the ‘I’ and prevent you from experiencing it? For you to know that the mind is empty or thinking you have to be aware. In both cases, with and without thought, I, Awareness, am present. If I am aware at both times, I am not hidden by thought nor am I revealed by no thought. Whether they are present or absent, I, the ever-free, ever-present Self, is always directly experienced.

Awareness is always present. There is nothing you can do about it except know what it is and what it means to be Awareness. It is ignorance of my nature as Awareness that causes me to believe I can gain my Self by stopping my mind or getting into a state of emptiness.

#### No Ego, Ego Death

This popular so-called teaching vies with the no-thought teaching for top spot on the list of enlightenment myths.

Ego is the “I” notion, the idea we have about who we are. The list of identities that humans concoct in ignorance of their true identity is virtually limitless. Aside from the fact that there is no evidence that such an “I” exists apart from the thought that it exists, the absence of a limited identity does not equal enlightenment. If it did, plants and

animals would be enlightened. And you would be enlightened in deep sleep because you have no identity there.

The teaching that the ego stands in the way of enlightenment is unworkable because the ego is the part of the Self that wants to enjoy the results of its actions. If killed itself it would not be there to enjoy the result i.e. enlightenment. And if the ego is not conscious, it can only be a thought and no thought prevents the Self from being and knowing itself.

If you believe this myth you are a sucker for the spiritual version of the Hollywood ending: the ego kills itself and somehow gets the permanent enlightenment experience and enjoys endless experiential bliss. If you accept the fact that there is only one Self and it is already enlightened and effortlessly and eternally enjoying itself, then understanding, not ego death is enlightenment.

### Nirvana

This idea is another negative formulation of enlightenment. Nirvana is a desireless state of mind. This view is based on the idea that desire is suffering, which it is. To say that you want something means that you are not happy with what you have. This teaching is unworkable because a desireless mind is a contradiction in terms. When, except during sleep, do you not want something? Even at the end of life you want to continue living if life is still good, or you want to die if it is not.

On the surface the logic makes sense, but what is the cause of desire? Is it Self-caused or is it the result of something else? If it is Self-caused, then eliminating desire should eliminate suffering. But what if desire is an effect of Self ignorance? It is an effect of Self ignorance because there is only one Self and it is a partless whole. It wants nothing. Will removing the effect remove the cause? Ignorance will not collapse when it is no longer supported by desire. It will just keep manufacturing more desires.

It also remains to be seen whether desire is always suffering. Desire is just Awareness functioning as the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. As long as my desires do not cause me to violate the physical and moral laws operating in the creation, why should I remove them? I am free to fulfill them. Enlightenment is the hard and fast knowledge that I am Awareness and as such I am already free of desires so their presence or absence has nothing to do with me. Realize your nature and let desire be desire.

And finally, if I accept the contention that desire is suffering, how will I remove my desires without the desire to remove them? Once they are removed who is doing to remove the desirer?

## The Now

Not to put too fine a point on it, the basic idea of the “now” teachings is: I am enlightened when I am present. Living in the past and the future means I am unenlightened. Aside from the fact that there is no time in a non-dual reality, let us inquire into this idea.

Does the word now refer to a period of time, which it certainly seems to, or is now a symbol for something else? If it refers to time, is there such a thing as objective time?

It is impossible to determine the nature of time because time is relative to the desires and fears of individuals and to the relative intervals between experiences. If my desires are being met and I am enjoying, time passes quickly. If I am suffering terribly, time passes slowly.

Are the past, present and future actual divisions in Consciousness or only conceptual divisions? If time is objective, then everyone would be able to determine just when the past ends and the now begins. Furthermore, when I am in the now, how long does the now remain the now? Is it one second? Two? One minute? More?

Assuming I am in the now and want to remain enlightened, I should know when the now begins and ends. I need to avoid falling back into the past and travelling into the future. Perhaps I should hop up out of the time continuum just before the end of the now and jump back into it just before the past appears, keeping in mind how much time passes until I have to hop out again. Even if I am sitting still in the now I need to worry about the past and the future creeping into it.

Let's assume that there is only 'now.' Am I ever out of it? Experience only takes place in the present. How can you experience the past if it is not here? You can experience a memory but the experience of memory does not take you to the past. The memory appears in Awareness and is experienced now. The experience takes as long as it takes and means whatever it is interpreted to mean. The same logic applies to the future. Nothing is ever experienced in the future. You may think about something that you imagine will take place at another time but if it happens, it only happens in the present when it appears in Awareness.

Time is not linear. Objects appear in you, Consciousness, last as long as they last with reference to how your desires and fears interpret them and then disappear back into Consciousness. When they appear in that part of Awareness called the mind, they seem to change, but in reality it is only the mind that changes.

If this is true, maybe *now* is a code word for the Self, Awareness. It is the humble opinion of the author that *now* is a misleading and inaccurate term for the Self and should be banned from the spiritual debate because it is not helpful to refer to something that is eternal and out of time with a word that conveys a sense of time.

### Experience of Oneness

To refute this idea let us try to pinpoint the location of objects. Do you experience them out there in the world or do you experience them in your mind? I experience them in my mind. How far is the object from your mind? Is it floating off the surface of the mind? No, it is not. Where is it then? It has merged into the mind and the mind has taken the shape of the object. The mind is formless, like water or air, and can take any form, just as gold can become any kind of object, a ring a bracelet or a necklace. How far are you from your mind? Is your mind floating above the surface of your Awareness? Is there a gap between you and your mind? Do you need a bridge to travel over the gap?

I do not. Why? Because my mind is me. It is Awareness. If this is true, then what you experience is not only in Awareness but it actually *is* Awareness. The objects in Awareness and the subject...Awareness...are one. If this is true, then why do I need to experience oneness? I am already experiencing oneness with everything.

I want to experience oneness with everything when I am already experiencing oneness because I have identified with the thought of separation, which causes suffering. Instead of trying to remove the want by gaining the experience of a particular object, I should inquire into the thought of separation. Is it true? Am I really separate from my Self? Or am I already the bliss that the object is meant to deliver?

### Transcendental State, Fourth State

This myth asks us to experience enlightenment as a state beyond the mind. The mind is an interface through which Awareness interacts with itself in the form of the gross elements. It is Awareness in a form called *chitta*. The *chitta* makes it possible for Awareness to apparently think, will, feel and remember. The mind is capable of a wide range of states, from the gross feelings associated with the physical body up to the most mystical and sublime *samadhis* of Yoga. All states are in the mind and all change because they are in the dream of duality.

The Self is non-dual and therefore it is out of time. It does not, nor can it, change. It is that because of which the mind's many states are known. It is conscious but states of mind are not conscious. They are subtle material energies only capable of reflecting Consciousness. The subtler the mind, the more ethereal and luminous the states become. When you get to the interface between the Self and the mind, the mind stuff is so refined and the Self so close, that radiant 'light' and intense bliss is experienced. It is very easy to mistake these higher states of mind for the Self and think enlightenment is

an amazing heavenly state or a state of endless experiential bliss. Experience belongs neither to the Self nor to the mind. It occurs when Awareness shines on the mind. Awareness and mind is the most fundamental duality.

Enlightenment is the nature of simple, unchanging Awareness. It cannot be directly experienced as an object because it is subtler than the mind, the instrument of experience. A subtle object can illumine a gross object but a gross object cannot illumine a subtle object so how is the ego/mind going to experience something that it is incapable of experiencing?

### **Enlightenment as Eternal Bliss**

When someone accustomed to identifying with the ever-changing content of the mind wakes up to non-duality, the awakening is interpreted as a very positive event. When the mind reasserts itself, agitation and dullness reappear; when agitation and dullness are no longer acceptable, the mind becomes a seeker. The feeling of peace and bliss, which is an interpretation of non-duality by the mind, is brought on by the absence of suffering and not because Awareness feels good. If you have been suffering a toothache for days and the tooth is extracted, it is the absence of pain that feels good, not the bliss of the extraction. You have actually just gone back to normal, not attained an exceptional state. Enlightenment does not feel like anything. It is simply the hard and fast knowledge that I am limitless, partless Awareness. When this knowledge is firm, it has a very positive effect on the mind but it does not convert the mind into an endless bliss machine.

However, it infuses the mind with a sense of authenticity, wholeness and rock solid confidence. Henceforth the individual knows that it can weather any existential storm. When you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are Awareness, you no longer desire to feel good because you know you are the source of goodness.

### **Enlightenment Is a Special Status**

Enlightenment is not a special status. It is the default, the nature of the Self. You are not getting something you do not have; you simply realize that what you sought so frantically you had all along. Enlightenment should be cause for embarrassment, not jubilation. When an obscenely obese person goes back to normal, he or she is lauded as a courageous super being for overcoming long odds. Is not condemnation more appropriate because he or she allowed his or her Self to get into such a miserable condition in the first place?

### **The Myth Behind the Myths**

Behind these and most enlightenment myths is the grand myth: enlightenment is a unique experiential state to be obtained through various methods. But enlightenment is

not experiential because reality is non-dual Awareness. Furthermore, in so far as experience is a reality, each and every experience is only Awareness/Consciousness, the Self, experiencing itself. Therefore, enlightenment can only be had and fast Self knowledge, only gained by the removal of Self ignorance.

All these myths are based on the seemingly justifiable assertion that the division between the subject, the experiencing entity, and the objects of experience are actually different. But the subject and the objects it experiences are not different. Reality is not the duality it seems. It is you, non-dual Awareness.

### Relax, You are on the Vedanta Bus. Enjoy the trip and trust the driver... the Self

*"It is usually when I am quiet, sitting meditating, or making a conscious effort to not get caught up in the mind stuff that my sense of separation comes with a vengeance. It seems so hard to stay where 'I am. I'm not getting it."*

Your statement reveals one of the most common problems seekers face. When you say it seems so hard to 'stay where 'I am', what kind of 'staying' are you talking about? Is it about keeping confidence in the knowledge that you are whole and complete non-dual actionless Awareness, or is it about feeling peaceful and relaxed in life? The two are not necessarily unconnected. If you are confident in the knowledge, you will be relaxed and feel good. And you will not keep a stressful lifestyle.

Both meditation and Self inquiry are difficult when you put too much on your karmic plate. A busy life focuses attention on objects, not on the Self, and robs your peace. If you have a typical middle class lifestyle and are responsible for doing a job, paying rent or mortgage and looking after kids, etc., the mind will not get peaceful unless you have the *karma yoga* attitude... and then it will be slow going... when you are doing your worldly stuff because the *vasanas* keeping you from peace will be continually reinforced extroverting your attention.

Another issue is about 'getting it.' When and if you 'get it' depends on factors beyond your immediate control. So the way to deal with this desire is to take the *karma yoga* attitude toward it. As long as you are doing your best, the result is out of your hands. Be happy that you are, as Ramana says, 'on the bus.' When you get on the bus you do not carry your suitcase. You set it down on the floor and let the bus carry it. The bus will get there eventually. All you need to do is look out the window and enjoy the scenery and trust that the driver... the Self... knows where it is going. So you can let that desire to 'get it' go. Maybe you have already 'got it' but lack confidence in the knowledge. If you have confidence you will remove the factors that are keeping you from peace because you cannot be Self realized and agitated. If you know who you are and the mind is agitated, the agitation is due to attachment to factors related to your lifestyle, love or security issues generally and you will not let them stand.

## No need to wait

### You are free here and now

*"I hope the vasanas really burn themselves out because of firm knowledge 'I am the Self', and there is nothing to work out, and the account can be closed by the time the meat suit drops off."*

No need to wait until the meat suit drops off. See that the *vasanas* belong to *Isvara* and you are free here and now.

### The right reason to be happy is 'I am'

*"Do you remember the quote on the back of The Path to the Pathless, "A person, who is happy for a reason, is not a happy person?" Maybe I am not a happy person, maybe I am just happy for reasons."*

Who makes the reasons? You. The right reason is 'I am.' When 'I am' is the reason every situation is perfect.



## About James Swartz

James Swartz was born in Butte, Montana in 1941. He grew up in Lewiston, Idaho and had a very happy childhood. At the age of seventeen, he felt the small world of Lewiston could not contain him and left for a military prep school in Minnesota. He attended Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin and the University of California at Berkeley before leaving college six months short of graduation and moving to Hawaii. He found his niche in the world of business and became a very successful businessman by the age of twenty-six. However, he knew something was terribly wrong; he describes himself as a “alcoholic, chain smoking, glutinous adulterer and life in every respect was not worth living.” In 1967 in a Post Office in Waikiki, he experienced a major epiphany that turned him away from that path. He traveled to India on a spiritual journey, searching for the path to enlightenment. It was here that he learned of the famous Indian sage Swami Chinmayananda, whose knowledge and teachings proved to be the means to set him free.

Now a disciple of the sage, James travels extensively to cities in almost every continent to hold seminars on Vedanta, the science of Self-inquiry. He provides resources for understanding non-duality through his website, [www.shiningworld.com](http://www.shiningworld.com). In addition he has several books. The most recent book called *How to Attain Enlightenment* has become a must read in understanding non-duality and Vedanta. James was married on September 29, 2011, to his beloved Isabella Vigletti whose spiritual name is Sundari meaning in Sanskrit “the beauty that makes beauty beautiful”.

He has become one of the most influential and highly respected Vedanta teachers today and is easily available through books, workshops and Internet access.