

Almost Enlightened

Dear Martinez,

Yes, I understand your problem very well. It is perhaps the most universal problem that spiritually awakened people suffer. You have expressed it beautifully and this makes my job easier. Before I explain the problem and give the solution, I need to tell you that it may be difficult to accept. The problem is there because you have an incorrect view of enlightenment. Well, it is not totally incorrect, but it is wrong enough to put you in the frustrating loop that you find yourself. I will go through this letter and make comments on each of your ideas. If you have not read my book, *How to Attain Enlightenment*, I think you should, paying attention especially to the second chapter. You actually come up with the answer to your problem but you dismiss it. 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.

Hello, Mr. Swartz.

My name is Martinez, and I'm writing to you from Spain.

This is the second time that I search for your assistance. After having met your great website and read your personal and spiritual path I decided to make you a question regarding deep sleep and waking state spirituality in March and you gave me a very nice explanation and now, considering I think I'm stuck in a loop, I'd greatly appreciate any word or advice. Well, here I go:

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. I'll elaborate:

James: This statement shows that you have the experiential notion of enlightenment. Enlightenment is not experiential. 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 anything. 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.

Martinez: 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?" "Being alive is 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.

James: 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...illuminate a given body/mind entity.

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

James: 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.

Martinez: 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.

James: 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 *anitya*, changing every millisecond.

Martinez: 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.

James: 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.

Martinez: That's not the main problem. The big one is that I don't feel an "I" OUTSIDE witnessing "beingness," either, 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."

James: 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...Martinez...and you picked up the belief that

you can experience consciousness. It is not possible. This is not to say that consciousness is not experience. Experience is consciousness, but consciousness is free of experience. In this case the experience of 'beingness' appears in it. You are just ordinary awareness/consciousness. The world consciousness should not be capitalized. 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.

Martinez: 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.

James: 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. He appears to exist. As long as you think he exists, he exists, 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.

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.

Now, this will be a shock to you, Martinez, 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.

Martinez: Does it make any sense to you? Have you been there, too?

James: 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.

James: BTW, all this impersonality is even making me lose all the delight I felt with movies, books, music, night, etc.,

James: 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.

Martinez: Any advice will be very welcome.

James: 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. It is very reasonably priced and you can get it from Amazon.

Thank you , Mr. Swartz

You are most welcome, Martinez

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 keep 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. My best wishes to you!