

Enlightenment a Special Kind of Experiential Knowledge?

Dear James,

Thanks for your reply.

After reading your book I have been trying to put as much as I can what is talked about into practice. To have a look into things in a way I didn't before. The *karma yoga* attitude really greases the wheels. I don't get as stuck in identifying with the 'ego' and the *vasanas* aren't as strong when the attitude is present. I have done a reasonable amount of enquiry before a la Ramana and Nisargadatta and some reading of more traditional *advaita*. I was always disturbed by the *gunas* as well (obviously).

James: Yes, the *karma yoga* attitude is the key to success. It eventually destroys the power of the *vasanas* and makes the mind peaceful.

Sean: The way you have presented it in your book has made all the difference. Of course the clarification of enlightenment vs experience was of great help. I spent a lot of time studying and practicing Tibetan and Dzogchen teachings. In Dzogchen I found the same things that you say. But they place it in the context of experience and it wasn't clear that when they said I should gain the knowledge of my true nature that they literally meant a subtle intellectual knowledge. I thought they were pointing to some kind of knowledge of how things were via epiphany (because it is couched in Buddhist experience-oriented trappings). Maybe it was a language barrier. But without the clarification of karma you gave me I can now see why.

James: This confusion about knowledge and experience and the nature of self knowledge is the one universal impediment to enlightenment. I don't think it was a language problem necessarily. Most people, and many so-called enlightened people and authorities on enlightenment too, are confused about this. It pervades the literature of all spiritual paths. Ignorance resides in the intellect. It is the intellect that thinks is it not awareness. Enlightenment is just getting the intellect's idea of who it is in harmony with its true nature. In a non-dual reality the intellect is actually the self because there is only one self. In an unenlightened person the intellect plans the ego's pursuits for pleasant experiences. In the enlightened it cautions restraint in light of the knowledge of non-duality, meaning it knows that nothing outside is going to fulfill it because it is already full. Often this kind of knowledge is called experiential knowledge, but what it is is never elucidated, so one is free to imagine that it is a special kind of knowledge. What is usually meant by that is that it is not theoretical knowledge, i.e. a belief (and that is true) but what it really means is that knowledge is true to its object and is therefore always good (with reference to the object). For example, fire is always hot. That is knowledge. How special is that? Nor is it experiential. It is just a fact. In addition, most spiritual types already know who they are. It is hardly a secret. Their epiphanies usually inform them and if they have any doubt spiritual literature...and even the teachings of the modern gurus...tell them that there is one self and it is awareness. The real issue is simply lack of confidence in the knowledge.

Sean: I was hearing this from my ego and relating it to my ego. With the different orientation that starts to happen after being earnest about taking the accepting karma gratefully attitude into my life. I can see these things from a different perspective (more Self oriented for want of a better description) now. Anyway what I am rambling about here is that I seem to be finally finding an approach to this whole shebang which is actually really making things click into place and I don't want to blow it. How do I make sure I can be guided through this procedure? Do I need a guide? In the book you say a teacher is important.

Can you help via email or something? I noticed a few *satsangs* like that on the website.

James: It is very difficult to work out on your own. I am happy to be of service. Write or call me if you have some doubts about how to proceed. Vedanta really works. You are on the right track. The fact that you recognized the value of the two key issues...karma yoga and the nature of enlightenment...means that we will not have to argue about the basics and can get on with the refinements.

Thanks again for taking time for me,
Sean

Ps. I read your autobiography (rather amusing and enjoyable read) and that was real helpful to me in relation to some of my earlier experiences with wierd stuff happening to me quite by default too.

James: Aside from the fact that it is an colorful story, I wrote it (1) to show that the self will lead you home if the desire is there and (2) that spiritual experience, as valuable as it can be, can also be a major impediment. And then, of course, that you need help.