

Dear James,

I just started reading your book *How to Attain Enlightenment*, and so far it's really speaking to me. I have a question. There are times when I think all of us "lose ourselves" in something, whether it be meditation, a painting or our work. Just a few minutes ago I lost myself while reading something on a website. There was no sense of "me" or of an "object." There is just whatever happens to be going on at the time.

How is this different from what is usually considered "self-absorption" or Samadhi, especially in light of the fact that everything is the self? I ask this only so I can recognize Samadhi when it happens. It may have already happened. I don't want to go looking for something "spectacular" if Samadhi is right in front of my face.

Thanks for your wonderful book!

Joe Thompson

Hi Joe,

Your suspicion is justified. It is no different. The spiritual world is unfortunately rife with what I call the language of hyperbole. Since time immemorial people have been making a big deal about something that is very simple and practical, something that is always available and is in fact known in some way by everyone. Samadhi is a very nice state of mind but it is only a state of mind. The value of Samadhi is that it provides a practical proof that you are not a separate entity, a subject to all the objects. When you and the objects are gone, the real you, awareness, is left over. If you can appreciate this very important knowledge and own it completely it will set the mind free of its dualistic orientation. People get easily hung up on Samadhi because they do not get the message that sets them free. They get hung up on the good feeling of not 'being there' and try to reproduce it. It is just a feeling that is produced by absorption in the object. It depends on your concentration and is totally dependent on the doer, the one who concentrates. As awareness you are Samadhi, meaning you are free of the subject-object duality, so you do not have to keep the ego busy concentrating.

James

Hi James!

Aha! This is immensely helpful!!!

So then the "spiritual life" is just taking the wandering mind out of the picture long enough so that we can clearly see the self, or what is "left over" as you put it!!! There's nothing magical or mystical about any of the practices because, whether it be devotion or inquiry or something else, it's all about the single-pointed concentration to take out the mind long enough to see the self! The mind hides it, so these "methods" keep it occupied, so to speak, and then when concentration is perfect, BAM! We see it! Is that right?

James: Got it in one, Joe. Good for you.

Joe: Perhaps you could also talk to me about sleep. Is there a way to sleep consciously or have something other than the blank state? Sleep is probably the state that "bothers" me the most because it does seem like a lack of continuity of awareness. I have heard it said that awareness is constant, but if it's not experienced (i.e. it's unconscious), then how is that of any benefit? That seems to me to be the definition of death.

Sorry for so many questions, but you really opened my eyes with your response, so I figured I'd throw in the most difficult question for me -- sleep! :)

James: Your understanding of the value of the sleep state is not correct. Rather than answer your question directly I am going to paste in an email that I just got on the sleep state from a person who worked it out with reference to the self. It includes my reply to it. Study it carefully and get back to me. See if your doubt does not disappear. If it doesn't, I will explain it another way.

Here it is:

"I'm writing to see whether you share my recent thoughts or I've gone completely nuts. They relate to the "waking state spirituality" versus deep sleep, and they're so simple that I'm afraid that I could have missed the point somewhere. I think that reading some interviews and articles on Suzanne Segal and getting to a point of complete mental exhaustion regarding "spirituality" has triggered all this.

The last time I wrote to you, I explained that "objects" (thoughts, sensations and, even more important, the sense of a personal "I" with all its notions and convictions, even the sense of subtle witness) had all started looking like floating ghosts. But one day I woke up and stayed in bed for a few minutes, and examined this gap between deep sleep and waking and suddenly I realized something very obvious (but usually overlooked in spiritual teachings). It was this: something that is present during the waking state, but not during deep sleep or dream state, cannot be completely real, cannot be my nature.

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 from by 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 his "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 I'm going too far, too soon? I mean, I know you come from the a 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 in 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"

Well, that was my e-mail. It'd be very important for me to read your opinion and have a comparison between yours and his. Nothing else, James. Thanks in advance for any word you could say and for your website.

Dear Matthew,

Have you been taught the Mandukya Upanishad by a proper jnani or did you work this out on your own? It does not matter, because you are completely correct. It is much more clear than anything Ramana said, although he said the same thing. This is called *manana* in Vedanta, establishing the existence of the Self through reason. It is completely in harmony with scripture i.e. the Mandukya Upanishad which is the 'king' of the Upanishads. 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 in 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 the self. For what purpose? For the purpose of contemplation. 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. Moksa 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 Seigal was caught up in the experiential view of enlightenment, meaning she thought enlightenment was some kind of experience. She just 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. It is available on Amazon.

All the best,

James