

Interview with Non-duality Magazine

Question 1. When you met your guru Swami Chinmayananda, how much of a vasana load did you have at that time and how much were you able to shake off and how long did this take after your realization of the self?

James: My *vasana* load was quite light. That is why I was able to assimilate the teachings. I worked out my worldly desires...sex, money and power...by my late Twenties. The tendencies were there but they were non-binding.

Once I realized that I was the Self...it is not actually correct to say that I realized the self...the purification took place automatically as a result of the knowledge, so it would not be completely accurate to say that "I" was shaking off anything. If the knowledge "I am awareness" is firm it does the work. The Bhagavad Gita says, "There is no purifier like (self) knowledge." In so far as there was a functional ego there...a James...I directed him to make certain choices that resulted in the further attenuation of the remaining non-binding *vasanas*...as a kind of hobby. There is nothing to be gained by being *vasana* free.

Saying "I realized the self" is indirect knowledge. It is not *moksa*. "I am the self" is direct knowledge. It is *moksa*. It seems like nit-picking but there is a world of difference.

Question: 2. I ask this next question because you often hear stories of people in new age or neo post Advaita circles saying they are liberated/enlightened but are still obviously filled to the brim with samskaras and vasanas and acting them out in all sorts of ways.

Do you believe it's possible for someone to drop their entire vasana load immediately and all their life times of samskaras, karmic debt, conditioning and so on with realizing the self. Or is shaking off and unwinding these vasanas, samskaras usually a gradual process that takes time, work and additional self-enquiry after one has realized the self?

James: The complete dropping of the *vasana* load at one time is a Neo-Advaitic fantasy. There is no reason for *vasanas* to be a problem when you know that you are awareness. You can easily live with them. The presence or absence of *vasanas* is not enlightenment because the karmic mind/ego entity is not opposed to awareness. It is merely an appearance in awareness. Those making this claim are fame seekers who equate enlightenment with purity. It is just big talk.

Additionally, nothing like this happens in nature. Everything in nature is a gradual process, some call it evolution.

Question 3: What was it that qualified you to receive Swami Chinmayananda's Vedanta teachings?

James: The hard and fast realization that there was not one thing in *samsara* that could make me happy. I would have preferred to die to living another day chasing the things I chased with such a passion before. There are so many seekers and so few finders because most seekers still have hope that *samsara* will work for them one day. I was one hundred percent convinced that the world was empty.

Question 4: What are the odds that a typical westerner would be qualified, have the right disposition, temperament, intelligence and the other factors to study vedanta with a satguru?

James: About the same as winning the lottery. It is particularly difficult for Westerners because the culture presents no alternative to *samsara*. It is in love with *samsara*. It **is** total *samsara*. It tells everyone that they are inadequate incomplete consumers and it offers enticing sexy solutions. It is unlikely in India too, but there is visible culture there that will respond to the deeper needs of the soul.

Question 5: Do you believe it's a result of one's karma, action in prior lives that someone would even begin seeking, or come across a satguru?

James: Probably, although everything prior to right now is a 'past life.' No one really knows the answer to this. It is best to think of it as the self throwing off the shackles of ignorance.

Question 6: If someone would like to study Vedanta with a guru. How does one go about finding a legitimate qualified traditional Vedanta teacher outside of the contaminated modern day satsang market without traveling to India like you did?

James: It is not really advisable to seek a guru. If you are ready, it does not matter where you are, the guru will appear. So the best thing is to do your very best spiritually according to your own understanding, live as pure a life and possible and ask God...however you see it...for freedom. It will happen. The reason the Neo-Advaita scene is so dangerous is because it has only a (half-baked) understanding of the teachings of non-duality and, more important, no road

map out of *samsara*. It denies *samsara* altogether so it does not deal with karma and dharma and all the other essential knowledge and practice that prepares one for the dialogue with a proper mahatma. Having said that, there are Western people who are realized and who are good teachers, but they have the good sense to keep their heads down and work quietly out of the limelight. Seeking has become just another lifestyle these days. I know several. Please don't ask me their names.

Question 7: What is the difference with going to a satsang and getting Vedanta instruction with a guru?

James: The way the *satsang* scene has evolved here is a joke. I was recently given a copy of a book by Mooji who as you probably know is one of the big luminaries in the Neo-Advaitic world. One of his followers wanted me to debate him although I am sure it was not Mooji's idea. I said "OK, if he wants to debate it is fine with me but I have no idea what he is saying" so the person gave me a copy of his book *Breath of the Absolute*. On the very first page he goes into the theory of *Advaita* quite correctly. Mind you I am not saying that I think Mooji is enlightened or not. He gives five or six sentences...all the usual no this and no that...and then he says, "Here you are not being told that you must be fit for this journey." He may be the Avatar of Avatars but this is just nonsense. Presumably Ramana's famous enlightened cow's offspring could wander into one of Mooji's Tiruvannamalai satangs...which takes place in an area where cows wander freely...and 'get it.' You cannot make it to the feet of a proper Vedanta teacher unless you are qualified. The *sampradaya* keeps those that are unqualified out.

I know that some will say that I have an ax to grind but one day I was channel surfing and I came across Gangaji in *satsang* on a public access channel. I do have an ax to grind with Neo-*Advaita* but I have no problem with any person doing what they are inspired to do, enlightened or not, as long as they follow dharma. Anyway, this woman came up to sit in the 'hot seat.' She was an emotional wreck and broke into tears within minutes. Her life was so difficult and enlightenment was so hard and...boo hoo...it was all so tawdry like the 'reality' shows on TV. And Gangaji...of course...was so 'supportive,' so kind and compassionate...like enlightened people are supposed to be. She took her hand and lovingly stroked her hair and said, 'There, there you poor dear' or some sort of equally sappy nonsense. I switched channels quickly before I was overcome with nausea but I suppose what happened next...as it does in these Neo-*Advaita* *satsangs*...the guru dishes up some terribly clever vague 'advaitic' psychobabble and the grateful recipient wanders off 'fully' enlightened.

Secondly, because the *satsang* here is white bread, meaning it has very little food value, people wander from one guru to another. I never met any of these teachers but sooner or later some of them show up at my doorstep and I hear the list of names...it is always the same. And what I discover is that these people are completely confused by what they have heard. So and so said this and so and so said that etc. But Vedanta has not changed since the beginning. There is only one teaching and it is very refined and sophisticated. All the apparent contradictions have been handled, not denied. It works and it will continue to work forever. Just as nobody is going to invent a new wheel, nobody is going to invent a new Vedanta. It crystallized into its perfect form in the Eighth Century.

Finally, Ignorance is hard wired, persistent and very pervasive. You need many tools to attack it. Vedanta is the complete tool kit. Neo-*Advaita* is more or less in the same category as religion because without a valid means of self knowledge you can only believe that everything is non-separate from you.

Question 8: Have you ever experienced nirvikalpa Samadhi or other types of Samadhi and can you explain how does Samadhi help one to realize the true self.

James: Yes. I have experienced every conceivable *Samadhi*. *Samadhi* can be a great help, a 'raincloud of dharma' to quote Panchadasi or it can be a complete hindrance. It is useful for purifying the mind and preparing it for self knowledge. If you equate *nirvikalpa Samadhi* with liberation, you are really shooting yourself in the foot. It is a technical discussion and there is not time to go into it here. I go into it in my book, *How to Attain Enlightenment*. Second to the last chapter, I believe.

Question 9: In chapter one of your book, you talk about people chasing objects. Other people, love and so on and how this cannot bring lasting happiness. That human beings are essentially controlled, or governed as a result of their samskaras vasanas, karma, habits, conditioning and so on. If there are all these pre-existing conditions, how much true free will does a person who is not liberated have if almost everything they do or say is done on auto pilot or in a state of sleep walking?

James: You have apparent choices in *samsara* and since you believe that *samsara* is real, they seem like real choices for you. In this case, if you feel a spiritual inclination, you should chose to follow it instead of worldly impulses. But you really don't have the choice to choose to be out of *samsara* altogether because you do not there is another alternative.

At a certain time in the lives of certain people, however, you get a glimpse of another possibility, usually as a result of some kind of existential trauma. At this point you know there is another way to see things and at this point free will becomes real for you. But you still have to exercise it to work your way out of *samsara*. Because of lack of real knowledge many of the Neo-Advaita teachers...I won't name names...present the idea of determinism in such a way that a seeker can draw the conclusion that even the decision to do *sadhana* is predetermined and so the seeker conveniently uses the no-free will teaching as an excuse not to do anything for his or her enlightenment. If you do not exercise the free will you have to get out of *samsara*, according to the knowledge you have at any stage, 'grace' will not descend because the self, being non-coercive, will assume that the choice you exercised not to use your free will was your exercise of free will and it will leave you as you are suffering under the tyranny of your *vasanas*.

Question 10: How much free will does a person who is liberated have and what is the difference between a liberated persons free will and a non-liberated persons free will?

James: The problem with this question is the idea that there is a liberated person. Liberation means liberation from the person. This means that you know you are awareness. Awareness is always free of everything. So the idea of free will is not an issue for you.

But if you want to assume that liberation is something that some people have and other's don't, then a liberated person's free will is exercised without the belief that he or she will be changed as a consequence of the results flowing from the choices he or she makes. In other words, he or she will not be attached to the fruits of his or her actions, whereas an enlightened person will be happy when the results are favorable and unhappy when they aren't. An enlightened person is happy with the self alone.

Question 10. When did you first experience nirvana and what was this like for you?

James: It depends on what you mean by *nirvana*. We experience thousands of mini *nirvanas* through the year when our minds become resolved. So probably the day I popped out of the womb and suckled on my mother's breast. There is a very nice sub-heading in the third section of Tripura Rahasya "On the uselessness of fleeting *Samadhis* and the way to wisdom."

If you mean the 'big spiritual *nirvana*' again I can't recall, although the first time I had an orgasm probably qualifies.

Sorry for being purposely obtuse, but if you mean *nirvikapa Samadhi*, it was in my thirtieth year. But then it would not be accurate to say that I experienced it, if you think I am a person, an experiencing entity, because in that *nirvana* you are not there to experience it as a person.

If you mean *savikalpa Samadhi* I experienced it unconsciously on and off for about three years from twenty six to about twenty eight. By unconsciously I mean I did not know what it was then but now that I do I can look back and see that did experience it. For the next two years I experienced it about 95% of the time. Since my guru erased the veil I am in *savikalpa Samadhi* all the time. It means nothing however, except continuous peace, because I am not actually 'in' *Samadhi*. *Samadhi* is 'in' me. In other words, it is an experience that appears in me, because the mind that I formerly thought was 'mine' is locked permanently on me.

Question 11. Can you please tell me about an epiphany that helped you to realize the self and do you believe it's possible to realize the self without some kind of an epiphany?

Here is the passage from my autobiography, *Mystic by Default*, that describes it in detail.

"Since I am not an accomplished writer and cannot describe my feeling of self-loathing well, you will have to take it on faith that I finally hit bottom, my consciousness peppered with thoughts of suicide. Then, on a lovely tropical morning, after a drunken and debauched night with a woman whose husband was out of town, I` was sluggishly lumbering through the International Market Place on my way to the Post Office, the pavement glistening from a light morning shower, the sun playing hide and seek with big billowy clouds as the plumerias sprayed their erotic fragrance and gentle trade winds rattled the palm fronds. I noticed a jaunty old man, a vacationer or pensioner come to Hawaii to idly pass the sunset years, appropriately attired in Bermuda shorts, aloha shirt, tennies and a straw hat, perusing his mail as he ambled my way. As he got closer I realized we were on a collision course and sent a message to my feet to move left, but nothing happened! Panic stricken, I tried to move out of the way a second time but the body wouldn't respond!

I had completely lost control. A couple of seconds before impact the bodies stopped face to face and I heard a sweet voice speaking through me.

"Excuse me, sir, may I ask you a question?" it said.

Someone else had taken over!

Since I had no idea what the voice was about to say, I tried to apologize but the words wouldn't come.

I wasn't connected at the mouth either!

The old man looked up, unaware of my distress, a kind smile on his wrinkled face. "Yeah, sure, sonny, shoot."

Then the voice, flowing like nectar from a deep place within, resumed, "Out of curiosity, sir, how old do you think I am?"

Since I already knew the answer and didn't have the slightest interest in the opinion of the doddering old codger, I was completely flabbergasted.

Certain that I was going mad, I ran frantically around inside my mind looking for the control panel but reality, which had a mind of its own, was completely uninterested.

The old man stepped back, pulled on his pipe, gave me the once-over, and judiciously replied, "Well, sonny, I'd say you're forty-three."

A long history of untruth meant I could spot a lie a mile away; he was deliberately underestimating my age to spare my feelings.

"Well, yes, thank you very much," the voice said sweetly.

"Don't mention it, sonny," he said, proceeding on his way.

I seriously considered the possibility I was losing my mind, but the experience was permeated with such a sense of clarity, I didn't indulge my fear. And then I regained control and proceeded toward my mailbox, the mind settling on the concerns of the day.

But as I entered the foyer I lost it again! Instead of proceeding into the Post Office proper as programmed, the body confidently turned left, entered the men's room and parked itself in front of a big mirror over the wash basins, eyes glued straight ahead, feet welded to the floor.

"Oh no, not again! Am I flipping out?" I thought anxiously.

But I wasn't going mad. I was having a good look, courtesy of God, at what I had become. I don't know how long I stood there, unable to move a muscle - perhaps a full five minutes - aware but unaware of the stares of the men coming and going, the flushing toilets and the irritating flicker of the neon light over the mirror. But it didn't matter because a brand new world had miraculously opened up, an inner world illumined by a powerful light in whose presence I saw

every last bit of the sin and corruption that I was.

The moment of truth in the post office lifted a monstrous weight, like Saul on the road to Damascus. Though I still looked a wreck, overweight and run-down, my face etched with deep pain lines, I felt young again, inspired by the conviction that I might find an exit from my dark labyrinth. And for the first time in my twenty-six years I realized there was a compassionate God.”

Is it possible to realize the self without an epiphany? Oh yes, definitely. Epiphanies can be very useful or they can be a complete impediment. In my experience about half the people who get *moksa* through Vedanta have not had an epiphany.

It is what kind of experiences you have had in life that matter. It is how you assimilate them, what they mean to you.

Question 12. Do you think there is a neurological aspect to enlightenment? For example some neuroscientists believe that there are changes in the right amygdala and the left hippocampus and other regions of the brain, such as the anterior commissure, a bundle of nerves connecting the two cerebral hemispheres.

James: I don't know what they are trying to prove, but I bet that they are in the 'chemistry is destiny' camp. So the answer is no. However, the state of your mind, which is the result of your knowledge or ignorance, does have an impact on your cells.

Vedanta says that these people, who are materialists with a dualistic mentality, have got the cart before the horse. Consciousness causes matter, not the other way around, although as I suggested, there is a connection. But they are not equal principles. Matter is a subset of consciousness. Their view, which purposely ignores common sense, is that consciousness is a subset of matter.

Question 12. Do you believe there is there such a thing as a third eye and is this connected to the pineal gland?

James: I suppose you mean a physical third eye? You have to read Lobsang Rampa to find about

about that☺ There is a chakra in the third eye location between and slightly above the eyebrows, but what it is meant to do I am not sure. In Vedanta we say that the scripture is the third eye. It is knowledge that cures the disease of ignorance that is the result of looking at the world with two eyes.

Question 13. What is your take on the chakra system and can one be enlightened if there are blockages or ethereal knots of some kind in the chakras? Such as Brahma Granthi, Vishnu Granthi, Rudra Granthi?

Here is an email and my reply that deals with this question.

“Swami Muktananda talks much about the Kundalini and the process of awakening that snake energy so it can get up through your chakra's. He is supposing that it is necessary to awaken the kundalini for getting enlightenment. I searched your Vedanta-CD and found little about it. Just in one of your sstsangs you pointed something out which gave me some more insight. But while I already had the idea of laying the question at your feet, I still want to do. It might still help give me more stable view at the topic. On the CD you said, "The Self is everything and everything is the Self, so why bother working on kundalini ? It will happen when it needs to happen, and when it doesn't happen it doesn't need to happen." Is that your answer? What use is it anyway?

James: What does it mean to say that the *kundalini* is awakened? When most people think of *kundalini* they think of the incredible psycho-spiritual ‘mystical’ experiences that happen when the *kundalini* awakens and passes through the charkas on its way to union with Shiva. Additionally, people often believe that if these experiences do not happen in the way that they have read about them or heard about them from others that they will not get enlightened. So they take up certain practices that they believe should initiate the *shakti* and start this process in motion. As they are described these experiences are almost always incredible, fantastic, and exotic. Considering that most people feel sensation-starved the they are attracted by this kind of *shakti* sadhana.

But trying to wake up the *kundalini* is a little like the tail wagging the dog. If they happen...and it is not necessary that they do happen for enlightenment contrary to what Swami Muktananda says...they should be the result of the spontaneous awakening of the *kundalini* .

The *kundalini* does not awaken in the same way in every person. It often produces dramatic experiences but in most cases it does not. You can assume that your *kundalini* is awakened if you have an interest in religion, mysticism, meditation, etc. If you find yourself attracted to chanting, reading holy books, associating with spiritual people, going on pilgrimages, etc. then your *kundalini* is awakened. If you have experienced altered states of consciousness it means your *kundalini* is active.

What actually is the *kundalini*? It is the Self creating experiences that shake you up and cause you to seek answers to the basic existential questions: what is this world and who am I? The *kundalini* of everyone in the so-called 'spiritual' world is active to varying degrees; they all have had 'spiritual' or 'mystical' experiences that have caused them see the world and themselves in a different way. It is not giving you experiences just for the fun of it.

An awakened *kundalini* is not enlightenment. It just means that the mind has become somewhat subtle and can now experience 'inner' states, not just sense objects, emotions and thoughts. These inner experiences are of every imaginable type, positive and negative, gross and subtle. The type of experience that an individual has depends on the nature of his or her *vasanas* when the *kundalini* wakes up. What cause her to wake up? Usually the person has had enough worldly experience. They are fed up with the world, bored perhaps. They know there is nothing in it but they don't know where to go. The Self is awaiting for this to happen. When it does it illumines the latent *vasanas* for spiritual experience and something dramatic happens...one's life starts to flow in a different direction.

There is nothing mystical about the 'chakras.' They are just general categories of experience. For example sexual energy means that the *kundalini* is associated with the root charka and this causes creativity and sexual desire, is a gross desire for union. An experience of great power means that the *kundalini* is associated with the manipura charka. An experience of universal love means that the *kundalini* is associated with the heart chakra, the anahata. And so on. Spiritual literature is full of these experiences. You may have read "Mystic by Default," my autobiography. In it there are many '*kundalini*' experiences. In fact every experience that we have, inner or outer is *kundalini*, the Self in the form of matter and energy. It is important for a spiritual person not to turn the idea of *kundalini* into a big romantic fascination. Ninety nine percent of people, Eastern

and Western, who are practicing '*kundalini*' yoga are not qualified for *kundalini* sadhana and will not see it through to the end. In fact most of the '*kundalini*' sadhanas you find in the West are not proper *kundalini* sadhana at all. The *kundalini* symbolism is very beautiful and very dramatic and mysterious and so people are attracted to it. It has become a fashion now and almost completely corrupted by the Westerners.

Enlightenment is the knowledge "I am the Self, limitless awareness." It is the hard and fast knowledge that all my experiences are me but I am something more than my experiences, subtle and gross. *Kundalini* Yoga says the enlightenment is the union of *shakti* and shiva, the energy of Consciousness, the Self, with Pure Consciousness. So the next question is: what is this 'union?' Supposedly it is an experience in which the subject and the object 'become' one. This tempts us to ask: what is this 'becoming?' A 'becoming' means that something that was in one form before changes into another form. To use the yogic metaphor, the individual soul that 'merges' into the universal soul. In short, something limited inadequate and incomplete 'becomes' limitless adequate and whole. This is all very fine as an idea but it presents a very real problem: experience, 'becoming' is subject to change. It never stops changing. This means that there is no such thing as a 'permanent experience.'

So what happens is that the person who 'became' the Self, 'unbecomes' the Self after the experience of union has run its course. This is what one might call 'temporary' Self realization. These temporary Self realizations or epiphanies are useful in so far as they give the experiencer an idea that there is a Self (Shiva) and maybe some insight into its nature. But, if the person believes that enlightenment is the 'permanent experience of the Self' he or she will simply develop a *vasana* for Self experience by practicing a sadhana designed to produce Self experience. There are many *sadhanas* beside *kundalini* sadhana that give experience of the Self. In fact sports, accidents, sex, and many fear related activities produce Self experience. Any practice that you do with great faith, concentration, and devotion will awaken the *kundalini* and produce a 'spiritual' experience. But you should know that if something wakes up it will definitely go back to sleep. This is karmic law. This is why you have so many frustrated people in the spiritual world. However, if you pursue the *sadhana* that awakens *kundalini* with incredible intensity, day and night without a break, forgoing every worldly attachment and desire, the mind, which is what is waking up, will eventually become so energized with *shakti* that it will only fall back to sleep for very short periods. This is important because most of the time it is in direct

contact with the Self and this is desirable if you want Self knowledge. This is why the *yoga shastras* encourage the pursuit of a sattvic mind. Remember, the Self is not awake because it was never asleep. It is the awareness of waking and sleep. It is the knower of the mind. It is the knower of the *kundalini*. So as the Self you are already beyond the *kundalini*. It will not turn you into the Self...I think this is what people believe. They think they will be 'transformed' into the Self, like a larva becomes a butterfly...but this is just imagination.

Nonetheless, this *sadhana* is so severe that only one person in ten million can practice it successfully. The desire for liberation has to be one hundred percent. If you have even a small attachment to your body or to worldly things it will not work.

Vedanta questions the whole idea underlying yoga. It says that the problem with this 'union' idea is: anything that was caused by action, karma, will only last for a finite time. When the energy that generated the experience plays out the experience ends and one returns to a state of separation, limitation and incompleteness. *Kundalini* is a karmic force. It is the Self operating in time. It may lead you to the Self or it may lead you far away. It may even cause madness in people who are weak minded. Much of the mild insanity you see in spiritual people is caused by their inability to integrate their spiritual experiences into everyday life. So the *kundalini*, the energy of the Self, is a very mixed bag and not something to be sought after. If it comes, it comes and you must learn how to deal with it. But rather than cultivate it, it is better to cultivate devotion for God. Yes, *bhakti* is a dualistic path, just like *kundalini*, but cultivating love for the Self in some form is more natural than forcing the body and mind to do a lot of very complicated and potentially dangerous practices. Vedanta says that experiential *sadhanas* may purify the mind but they will not produce enlightenment. This is so because enlightenment is the removal of Self ignorance. Experience will not remove ignorance. Only the knowledge that arises with experience can do that. If you don't know this you can have all sorts of amazing mystical experience and be as Self ignorant as an animal.

Vedanta says that there are not two separate selves that must become one. It says that there is only one Self that has been misunderstood to be two or many. Now, who is it that misunderstands that he or she is separate from the Self? Is it the *kundalini*? It is not the *kundalini*, the *shakti*, because the *kundalini* is not conscious. Activated by the Self it moves, it changes and causes all sorts of things to happen but it does not know anything. It has (is) a strong

feeling that it is missing something and so it works its way through many experiences (the charkas) seeking for freedom from this sense of limitation. This is not a conscious seeking. It is trial and error. Sometimes it goes into a positive experience (Pingala nadi) and sometimes it goes into a negative experience (ida nadi) (I may have these names reversed). And it can get stuck in an experience which is very pleasurable or very painful. That it gets stuck indicates that it is ignorant, unconscious. It foolishly clings to pleasurable experiences because it doesn't realize that experience is changeable and that the pleasure will eventually disappear. When it gets stuck in a painful experience, this shows that it doesn't have discrimination or it would have avoided the experience in the first place. Discrimination is the most important function of consciousness. Without it you cannot function in this world nor can you separate the pure Self from the moving Self, the *kundalini shakti*. *Kundalini* is just a force, a power, an energy. It is not real. The Self alone is real. Yes, the *kundalini* is the Self but the Self is not (only) the *kundalini*.

So who is it that takes his or herself to be limited? Who is it that wants to erase this sense of limitation and is therefore open to the seductive message of *kundalini* yoga? The common answer is that it is the ego. But Vedanta says there are not two selves, a higher enlightened Self and a lower ignorant ego Self. There is only one Self.

Now we come to the most difficult thing to understand. If there is only one Self and this Self always knows who it is, i.e. that it is limitless and whole and therefore does not need any particular experience to erase its sense of limitation and make it whole, how can it forget who it is?

Vedanta says that it can't forget but that it can forget. Or to put it another way it says that there is only one Self, pure Awareness, and that this Self is capable of both knowledge and ignorance. It would not be limitless if it were unable to be ignorant. This capability of being two opposite things at once is called Maya. The definition of Maya is: that which is not. You can see the problem in the definition. How can something that is not, be? Well, strangely, it can.

Now the question that arises with reference to the process of experience, which we can call *kundalini*, is: does the experience of union with the Self erase ignorance and produce knowledge? Knowledge means that you understand that you are whole, complete, limitless and free. And the answer is that it may produce knowledge and it may not produce knowledge.

Whether it produces knowledge or not depends on what you think enlightenment is. If you think enlightenment is the permanent experience of the Self then you will not 'get enlightened.' You will experience oneness, wholeness, and limitlessness for a time and that experience will wear off and you will then experience duality, incompleteness and limitation once again. This is why *kundalini* yoga and all the other yogas rarely bring about enlightenment.

But it is possible for yogis to get enlightened if they develop inquiring minds as a result of their spiritual experiences. When the experience of oneness happens one needs to remain alert and try to determine what one is actually experiencing. This is what Vedanta calls inquiry. If you are trained to observe and draw the correct conclusions from your observations you will see that the 'oneness' that you are experiencing is you, not some incredible state of consciousness, unless you understand that incredible state of consciousness to be you, the seer, the experiencer. If you understand that what you are experiencing is you, you have freed yourself of experience. You never have to practice yoga again. Why? Because when are you not you? How far are you from you?

What kind of knowledge is it? It is immediate 'experiential' knowledge. This means that when ignorance tries to rise up and tell you that you are missing something and you see your desires being activated, you have a good laugh and can let the whole process of desire die before it produces karma. It means you are the master of your mind, not the other way around.

Is it possible to 'attain' enlightenment without an awakened *kundalini* as it is presented in the *kundalini* shastras? Yes, absolutely. Is it common. Enlightenment according to Vedanta is the removal of Self ignorance brought about by the understanding that the Self is limitless actionless awareness and that I am that Self. I have met perhaps twenty enlightened people whose *kundalini* was not active in that it was not producing mind altering inner experiences. I have also met at least one hundred people who were having intense *kundalini* experiences...sometimes for many years...and who were actively seeking ways to turn the experience off...since it completely disrupts one's life. You won't be able to accomplish anything solid or real in the world with this going on. It is too disturbing and it often has a strong negative impact on the people you come in contact with. You say and do things that make normal people think you are nuts. And in a way you are. The spiritual world is full of people who have had it going on for varying periods and it does not rise up and 'mate' with Shiva. It just bounces around in the chakras. *Shakti* sadhanas

can be very dangerous without the right teacher and the right karmic situation.

It is also important to know that *kundalini* does not generate the same experiences for everyone. It generates the experiences that are necessary to stimulate inquiry. Certain people have developed very subtle minds as a result of the way they have lived. So for these people the Self as *kundalini* awakens inquiry, leads them to a jnani, and their ignorance is removed by the non-dual teachings. Their enlightenment is in no way inferior to the people who have realized who they are during or after an intense *kundalini* sadhana. Enlightenment is enlightenment; it has nothing to do with the way it came about. Ramana, for example, did not practice *kundalini* sadhana although his *kundalini* was obviously active; it produced his 'death' experience. He is an example of a yogi who had an inquiring mind and practiced vichara, Self inquiry, not *kundalini* sadhana.

Muktananda does say that enlightenment can only come through *kundalini* sadhana but he knew that this was not true. He was very smart about psychology and he was trying to build a big religion...Siddha Yoga...and it does not help to give people too eclectic a view of enlightenment...it just confuses them...so you say it is the only way. It is very much like the Christians who say Jesus is the only way. Well, Jesus may be 'a' way but the only way? I don't think so. The same with *Kundalini* . It may work...there is no sense putting it down...but I would bet my bottom dollar that of all the enlightenments that happened since the beginning of time not more than one or two percent were the result of a classic *kundalini* sadhana. Look at all the great enlightened people that have come out of Buddhism and other paths...and they are not talking *kundalini* .

The truth is that everyone is basically in love with experience and this is all we have to our credit when we awaken. But experience is only as good as one's ability to understand it. So when you begin consciously searching you are naturally drawn to yoga because it promises a spectacular experience that is supposed to solve all problems. In a way this is true but in another way it is not true.

What should happen when you take up an experiential *sadhana* like *kundalini* is that your mind should become subtle and inquiry should start to happen. But what usually happens is that you get addicted to experience. You want to meditate all day and go into trances and have transcendental experiences. You want to hang out with powerful gurus and get *shakti* pat, etc. And so you build up a *vasana* for experience and you fantasize the big

one...enlightenment...which you always imagine is just around the corner. It's like going to Las Vegas and pulling the long arm of one of those big slot machines. You pay and pull and pay and pull and in your mind every minute you are waiting for the big Ka-Ching! and a flood of money to bury you. It never happens. All that happens is that you get a big experience *vasana*.

Question: How do you see *kundalini* and trying to work with that in relation to Vedanta and Self-knowledge. "The Self is everything and everything is the Self, so why bother with working on *kundalini* ? It will happen when it needs to happen, and when it doesn't happen it doesn't need to happen". Is that your answer? But what is the use of it anyway?

Ram: I would not advise 'working on *kundalini* .' Vedanta says that *kundalini* is just another name for the Self. So everything is already *kundalini* . Every experience you have is *kundalini* , the *shakti* . Why limit it to a particular set of experiences or a particular process? You can have all sorts of amazing experiences and never learn anything about who you are and you can also have very boring ordinary experiences and suddenly understand who you are ... because you were thinking clearly. If you had a certain experience and you found yourself walking out of the house without saying goodbye to your family and getting on a plane that was going somewhere and when you got off you met a strange man in a café who invited you home and you started to spontaneously perform *kriyas* and have visions and felt amazing things taking place within yourself then that would be *kundalini* and you would be into it and there would be no question of 'working on it.' It is not something you work on. It is something that happens. And it is not something that needs to happen. So don't long for it and imagine that you are spiritually incomplete unless you have had it happen. I had it happen and it all stopped many years ago and I am very happy that it all stopped.

You - the Self - are the source of the energy. Without you there is no energy. You are not this little body/mind instrument that perks up with the influx of energy and wilts when the energy leaves. *Kundalini* is a very fickle bitch. She is completely unfaithful and inconstant. One minute she is seducing you and driving you wild with passion and the next minute she abandons you without so much as a by-your-leave and you end up angry and depressed. Aim for *shanti*, it beats *shakti* every time."

Question.15. Can someone be enlightened/liberated if their Sahasrāra (Crown Chakra) is not opened?

James: Yes, of course. This presupposes that enlightenment is some kind of special experience that depends on certain conditions. Enlightenment is the nature of the self, meaning it is the nature of everyone. The question of enlightenment can be solved very simply when you understand this. As I said above, it does not depend on your experience. It depends on how you assimilate or interpret your experience. If you understand the value of understanding and how ignorance works and you expose your mind to a valid means of knowledge like Vedanta, that is all that is required for *moksa*. Westerners have almost no idea of the great Vedanta *sampradaya* and of the many people that gain enlightenment through it.