

A Caution Concerning Experiential Language

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2015-05-10

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2109>

Evan: I have more questions. I have read “In the Ballpark,” a *satsang* from June 2014 by James: “Hold off on Chinmayananda until you have assimilated Chapter II because he often gives the impression that enlightenment is experiential, which will only increase your confusion.”

1. Why did Chinmayananda teachings give us the impression that enlightenment is experiential?

Ted: He refers to self-realization as a “state” and also speaks of the self as though it were a destination at which one can finally arrive, neither of which the self is.

A state is a temporary condition that has a beginning and an end. The self is the awareness in which all states – and, moreover, all objects – appear. As such, the self, which is of the nature of pure awareness exists “prior to” or altogether “beyond” the parameters of time and space, which are actually the subtlest objects appearing within the “field” of pure awareness. Furthermore, because objects are only recognized as existent when they are known to be so, they are dependent on awareness (i.e. knowledge as such) for their existence. The existence of pure, limitless awareness, however, is entirely independent of objects. That is, awareness exists whether objects appear or do not appear within its scope of being.

The fundamental ramification of this circumstance is that the essential nature of reality is non-dual, for there exists no place outside of awareness where objects could exist and nothing other than awareness of which objects could be made. Moreover, since by definition there cannot be more than one reality, the awareness that is the *adhishtanam*, substratum, and the *nimitta karanam*, the “substanceless substance” that is the material cause of the manifestation, is the very same awareness that is the essential nature or self of the apparent individual. Thus the self is not a discrete state of experience to be attained or entity to be merged with, but is simply the eternally conscious existence that is one’s essential nature. In other words, the fundamental reality of the whole cosmos is available for recognition only as the essential nature of one’s very own self. This reality, however, is limitless (i.e. altogether beyond the parameters of time and space), and hence is not an object, either subtle or gross, and so cannot be defined in terms of physical attributes, emotional qualities or conceptual characteristics. In short, it cannot be experienced. It can only be “known” as the “light” in which all objects appear and all experiences occur.

Though Swami Chinmayananda was undoubtedly clear within his own understanding that self-realization is a matter of knowledge rather than experience, the language he uses is often in keeping with the experiential language that stands as a figurative expression of the recognition of one’s true nature as limitless awareness, the knowledge that is tantamount to *moksa*, freedom, from identification with all objective phenomena.

Evan: 2. What kind of books or sources say that Chinmayananda is talking about enlightenment as knowledge?

Ted: Chinmayananda makes it clear in his commentaries on scripture and other correlative Vedantic texts that “enlightenment” is a matter of knowledge. But unless one understands the implications of the logical discriminative analyses that provide the basis for the proper unfoldment of Vedantic wisdom, or non-dual vision, one can easily take the experiential language employed by Chinmayananda literally and misinterpret the intended meaning behind his words.

Evan: 3. What has James actually learned from Chinmayananda that he is using in teachings today? Or is James more influenced by Dayananda?

Ted: James realized the self under the tutelage of Chinmayananda. And since Swami Chinmayananda’s teachings align perfectly with scripture, the essential content of James’ teaching is entirely congruent with what he learned from Chinmayananda. His teaching style and the language he uses to unfold the teachings, however, are mainly influenced by Swami Dayananda.

Evan: Best regards.