

A Chink in His Armor

Ram (James Swartz)

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James: Note: I had no idea who the writer of these statements was when I wrote this *satsang*. I was only asked to comment on the ideas. Later I was told it was Adhyshanti, who is a famous “teacher.” No disrespect is meant by this analysis. However enlightened the speaker is, an analysis of his statements makes it clear that he is not a proper teacher. While these words may be helpful to beginning inquirers, they create confusion about the nature of consciousness and the nature of liberation for someone with a discriminating mind. This kind of “teaching” is dangerous because it is ninety-nine percent true. But, ninety-nine percent is not good enough for *moksa*. Vedanta is a proper means of knowledge because there is no chink in its armor. It is in light of the teachings of Vedanta that these statements are shown to be inadequate as a means of knowledge. It is doubly dangerous because the words imply that *moksa* is experiential and because the discrimination between knowledge and experience is noticeable by its absence. This kind of “teaching” is called “*smriti*” in Vedanta. It is the result of an individual’s analysis of his own experience, which is enough to set him free. However, it does not qualify as teaching, because it does not jibe with scripture. It was not easy to analyze these statements, because they are basically correct from the experiential point of view. But at the end it becomes clear that that speaker is confused about the relationship between awareness, being and knowledge.

Vivek: Dear James, could you clarify the commentary below? I understand the first part but I am not clear about the second part. Also, these days when I meditate I can feel three distinct energy centers in the body: (a) head, (b) heart, (c) *hara*, or abdomen.

I agree that all of these are witnessed by the Seer, but some traditions that I have been reading about, like Sufism, Dzogchen and Tantra, talk about the three aspects of the body-energy-mind nexus. Is there a corollary in Vedanta that you can refer me to?

The reason I ask is that I can distinctly feel the energetic transformations in my body. Knowing that everything happens in awareness does not negate the body-energy-mind nexus. I cannot call it a *vasana*, because it is not related to the causal body or the mind. It’s odd.

James: It’s *Isvara’s vasana*. *Isvara*, the *shakti*, controls the body. You will eventually tire of paying attention to the energy.

“So there are two qualities or two aspects to awakening... One of the aspects of awakening is the realization of your own nothingness, your own no-thingness. It’s the direct realization that there is no separate individual being called me. It’s the realization that what you are is much more akin to simple and pure awareness without form, without attributes. This is one aspect of realization. It is the most common aspect of realization. The second aspect of realization is the realization of Pure Being. It’s the realization of true Oneness. Whereas to realize your own nothingness is, in a manner of speaking, to go from somebody in particular to being the transcendent witness... One can have that realization without having the realization of being.

Being is... not caught in the realization of emptiness. It's not caught in the witness. It is that realization where we see that the "I" is universal... Everything is actually of exactly the same essence, and that essence is, that substance is, what you are... Some people get the realization of nothingness without the realization of Oneness really, of pure Being. That will maybe come weeks, months or years later... And often the doorway to Oneness, to pure Being, is through the doorway of pure awareness, of no-thing-ness. That's why it's often talked about. It's often the doorway. To dislodge the identity from its false image and to realize that you are not the image but the awareness of the image is a much easier step, in one manner of speaking, than to realize that everything is one being, one spirit."

James: This is a very insidious statement because it is almost completely true, but is still in the realm of ignorance. The problem is that the person has the experiential notion of enlightenment. He thinks that *moksa* is experiential, a series of realizations. It may be, from the *jiva*'s point of view, but it isn't from the self's point of view. It is the *jiva*, not the self, writing these statements. It is a *jiva* that probably knows who it is, but it is not a *jiva* that is capable of teaching properly, because the statements come from its own experience and do not consistently jibe with scripture.

It is not the self speaking here, because the self-knowledge is not clear. Why? First, because it gives the impression that there is a logical progression from one realization to the other and that it only happens in this way. It is very common that realized people think that the way it happens for them is the only way it can happen.

Second, he uses the word "realization," which is an experiential term. If he had used "knowledge" we would have to look more closely. Perhaps he means knowledge when he uses the word realization, but if you look at the way he uses other words and the subsequent confusion he has about *moksa*, you can infer that he thinks it is experiential. This is not to say that there is no experiential component to liberation, only that the relationship between experience and knowledge is unclear.

Furthermore, he is talking about "aspects" of "awakening," not about the nature of the self. It is clear that he is not clear about the self. Awakening is not *moksa*. It may or may not lead to *moksa*. There are aspects of awakening, but *moksa* is free of aspects. It is just knowledge of the nature of the self as awareness.

The statement is misleading because pure awareness and pure being are the same thing. What he calls awareness is actually knowledge, a "door" to pure being. Knowledge is awareness, but awareness is not knowledge. Knowledge, not awareness, is the door. Here we see a confusion between the real and the apparent, *satya* and *mithya*.

The reason he speaks like this is because he does not have a valid means of knowledge to communicate his enlightenment. He is relying only on his own the interpretation of experience, which perhaps freed him, but is not suitable as a means of knowledge that is good for anyone. So although there is truth to what he says, his use of language is misleading. And because there is so much truth to it, it would be easy for a seeker to accept it as the truth, which it isn't. It is like an apple that has a worm inside. You do not see the worm hole because it is so small and at the bottom of the apple. So you bite into it and it tastes so good, until you bite into the worm, which ruins the experience. These are very well-thought-out statements – we call it *manana* (logic) – but there is a glaring mistake at the end.

He also calls pure awareness “no-thing-ness,” which is good, but which needs more. It needs to be pointed out that “no-thing-ness” is fullness. It is good because the implication is that it is something, but that it is fullness needs to be pointed out. If you don’t point out the fullness, then being, oneness (which incidentally should be non-duality because oneness implies duality) and awareness can still be thought of as a void.

Furthermore, a much bigger defect is that he fails to distinguish the experiencing witness from the non-experiencing witness. Awareness is the non-experiencing witness. Being is the non-experiencing witness. The witness he is talking about is the *jiva* identified with the subtle body. If you throw out the witness idea you have to throw out awareness because awareness is the witness of the experiencing witness. If you negate the experiencing witness, you will negate the non-experiencing witness – you – because you believe that the awareness is not a witness. So you will keep looking for something other than witnessing to happen. There is nothing other than “witnessing,” meaning consciousness. In this case the word “witnessing” does not imply doership and action.

The last statement about identity is good, but he needs to explain why it is easier to realize that you are not the image but the awareness of the image. You could equally argue that it is easier to realize you are the awareness of the image. And finally he needs to make the knowledge direct when he says that “everything is one being,” because it does not identify you as everything. Even if it does, he then needs to point out the *satya/mithya* discrimination because if there is an “everything” there is *satya* (what is real) and *mithya* (what is apparent) and they are not equal. They are one, but they are not the same. This is why we do not use the words “one” or “oneness.”

So the whole problem boils down to imprecise knowledge and experiential language without an unfolding of the big picture. People like this should enjoy being the self and not pretend to be teachers because, as true as it seems to be, the one presenting it is confused. It is an attempt to evaluate *moksa* from the point of view of a *jiva*, which is fine, but which comes up short without the big picture.

Vivek: Thanks, James. This is excellent. I wish I could spend more time with you. Hopefully when you get a base it might be possible to come for a week or so to spend time clarifying these sort of questions.

The difference is very subtle and if you did not point this out to me, I would have missed it. The writer is Adyashanti, and his videos seem to make sense at the level I am at. I have no doubt that he had some sort of awakening experience, but as you keep saying, self-realization does not make you a teacher.