

All Roads Don't Lead to Rome

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2016-04-19

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2620>

Mary: James, I really like Vedanta and sometimes I really like you, but sometimes you make me angry. With all due respect, but I sometimes think that you are an elitist, an arrogant person who thinks Vedanta is superior to other all other paths. We had this argument before, and I won't go into it except to say that I found two statements of yours about mindfulness that seem to conflict with one another, at least to me. How is that? I disagree with your opinion about mindfulness. I think all techniques lead to *moksa*, not just Vedanta.

James: Yes, we have been through this before. Let me remind you that I don't make you angry. You make you angry. You tend to be quite opinionated and when you hear something you don't like you get upset. I don't argue, and you are quite free to get angry with me or with anything else. I don't take it personally. So let's see if I can explain the contradiction. I'm glad you said "seems to conflict." If you had said that there is an actual contradiction, I wouldn't reply, because I never argue. You are entitled to your opinion but Vedanta is not a bunch of spiritual opinions. It is an impersonal scientific means of knowledge. You either see what it is saying or you don't.

Mindfulness as a practice will not produce *moksa*, liberation from the reflection, i.e. the *jiva*, because it is an action done by a limited entity. No action by a limited entity will produce a limitless result. However, mindfulness as a practice can purify the mind. You can say the *karma*, *dharma* and *jnana yogas* are "mindfulness" techniques because they still the mind. Liberation is freedom from the *jiva*. Since the *jiva* is actually the self, pure original consciousness, it is already free. Therefore the only thing that works to set you free of the *jiva* is the knowledge "I am the self, pure original consciousness, not its reflection." The self is not only joy, it is full (*purna*). So you can't make your self full by doing something; it is not like eating. You can only appreciate the fullness that you are. In fact, the self is *paripurna*. This means that it was never empty, so there is nothing that can be done to fill it. It is "self-fulfilled."

The teachings on mindfulness that are floating around in the spiritual world today, mostly coming from modern Buddhism, fall under the first type, yet most of the people who practice them without the aid of an understanding about the nature of *moksa* and its relationship to *karma*, i.e. spiritual practice, expect the technique to set them free. If simply "being mindful" was a legitimate path to liberation, then the self would not have revealed Vedanta.

I know you are defensive about criticism, Mary. I think you must have been criticized by one or both of your parents. All roads don't lead to Rome. Only knowledge leads to *moksa* because the self is already free. So the whole idea – unity, or oneness, that came up in the Victorian era and has been heavily promoted ever since – is misleading. Vedanta calls it a leading error. It may get you to appreciate the value of inquiry after a long time, but there is a simpler, direct way, if you are qualified. The idea that all paths are equal is a projection of the non-duality of the self onto the duality of the spiritual world. Everyone wants to think that what they are doing for liberation is going to set them free, not realizing the limitation of *karma*. So their seeking ends up reinforcing the belief that the seeker is real, increasing attachment to seeking and to the seeker. Seeking becomes an identity in itself. And when the seeker sees that the path he is on hasn't set him free,

he is loath to let it go. Or if he moves on, he moves on with the same misunderstanding intact. At some point, if the person is a sincere inquirer, *Ishvara* will bring Vedanta, and he or she will realize that liberation is liberation from the doer, the seeker. So the seeking stops.

~ Love, James