

Almost Enlightened

Ram (James Swartz)

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Martin: Dear Ramji, *pranams*. I have listened to your last four retreats (Portland, Trout Lake, Berlin and Tiruvannamalai) that you offer at ShiningWorld. I have read quite a few of e-*satsangs* also. I have not read *How to Attain Enlightenment*, because I don't have the money to buy it.

I live as a *sannyasin* (a rather dubious claim in this day and age, I know.) This term I picked up from you and Vedanta. It fits though. Priorly, when people asked me what I do for a living, I replied, "I am not a lay person." It is the most honest answer I can provide.

Now I am going to bore you, it bores me, but still, here it is. Please forgive me.

I have been on a spiritual search most of my life. My first deep spiritual question came naturally to me at the age of seven. The question was, "Who thinks the thinker?" I spent a lot of time pondering this, sitting quietly, watching my thoughts, until around the age of fourteen. I have always had a predisposition to spending time alone in forests and the great outdoors contemplating the great reality. I have also lived a heavy *vasanic* life, relatively speaking. Later I practiced Zen for ten years with a Rinzai master, completing a few hundred koans, and became disillusioned and moved on to practice Soto Zen with the world's pre-eminent Dogen scholar and master. After spending several years with him, I cornered him and got him to admit that he did not believe enlightenment was possible, that the Buddha, Dogen and masters of old were more special than us. I called it bullshit and left him. I was ordaining as a disciple at the time and walked away from all of it. I could go on and on. I have had hundreds of *kenshos*, awakenings, whatever, and it still did not lead to a cessation of suffering. These epiphanies began in childhood, some lasted for hours, a few days, weeks, months, and one for several years.

During a ten-day *sesshin* a couple of years ago I once again (having done so over and over during many *sesshins*) looked deeply into the five *skandhas*, and once again found nothing there. But I also noticed something that had always been there all these years, awareness. I had noticed it all along, but when I was less mature in my practice and lacked confidence I asked the *roshi* about awareness and was told that wasn't it. This time, however, I was sure that awareness was it.

All in all, I have been practicing for about 45 years and I am now 52 years old.

It is as though I have swum upstream through many layers of relative truth to find Vedanta. Now I can't get enough of it.

I am clear that I am not any object, including memory. I have been sleeping knowingly (following Sri Atmanada's *prakriya* from the *Mandukya Upanishad*) for about four years, having begun doing so when a dream suggested that I investigate dreaming and sleeping. I am clear that I am the knower of the waking, dream and deep sleep states. When I meditate it is clear that I am the knower of the causal body, which I have also clarified as being the same as deep sleep state, or emptiness, as the Buddhists call it. I know I am awareness. I believe that this awareness is not limited to the body-mind-intellect (BMI). But I still have some doubt because I am not free from experiencing, which is the cause of all suffering.

It boils down to this – I am the knower of memory, and all the memories I know have always included the meat suit/BMI. The meat suit is what seems to suffer, and no matter how much I am not it, it has always been here with awareness that is me. Or better put – as awareness of memories, all memories, including the meat suit. I have no memory being awareness without the meat suit in close proximity. This is where I am stuck, I think.

I am actually very aware that I am always not aware of my body or my mind or my intellect and sometimes nothing at all, even the sense of “I Am” is a subtle object and it is not always there. Still, I am facing north rather than south.

Please help me understand.

~ In gratitude, Martin

James: Hi, Martin. I enjoyed your email very much.

You are very close to what you want to know. There is just one small issue, one that hangs up nearly everyone.

You say, “I am clear that I am the knower of the waking, dream and deep sleep states. When I meditate it is clear that I am the knower of the causal body, which I have also clarified as being the same as deep sleep state, or emptiness, as the Buddhists call it. I know I am awareness.”

If you stopped at the end of this paragraph you would be enlightened and could call off the search. But you go on to say, “I believe that this awareness is not limited to the body-mind-intellect.”

The operative word in this statement is “believe.” You are correct. It is not limited to the BMI. It is limitless. But it should be more than a belief. Investigation will reveal it to be a fact.

Next, the I shifts. From what to what? From the witness, which does not experience, to the experiencing entity. You say, “But I still have some doubt because I am not free from experiencing, which is the cause of all suffering.”

What is wrong with this statement? If you are awareness, as you say above, you are free of the experiencing entity and experiencing itself. This statement shows that you do not know what it means to say, “I am awareness.” Ask yourself, who is the I in the statement, “I am not free from...” This I is the experiencing entity, and it will never be free of experience. It is meant to experience. The real I, awareness, does not experience. It witnesses experience. Your belief is that liberation means that the experiencing entity should be free of experience. But liberation is freedom from the experiencing entity.

~ Much love, Ramji