

Dealing with the Hound Dog of Conditioning

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Helena: Hi, Ted. Did you go through a phase that was very, very frustrating, when you knew in theory that you were awareness, but the Ted-conditioning was still so strong it hounded you constantly?

Ted: Yes, everybody does. The assimilation of self-knowledge takes time and effort. This is why *atma-vichara* is a three-phase process. The phases are not mutually exclusive, but they do follow a logical progression in general. The first stage is *shravana*, during we've got to hear and fully understand the teachings. The second phase is *manana*, during which we bring our doubts and confusions to the *guru* and seek his or her insight in order to resolve them. The third phase is *nididhyasana*, during which we engage in constant – continuous, non-stop – application of the teachings to each and every circumstance, situation, encounter and interaction – in short, every experience – of our lives in order to fully and finally lay our doubts to rest.

Avidya, or *ajnana* (self-ignorance), is our ticket in the door to the apparent reality, for if we already knew that our true nature was whole, complete, limitless, actionless awareness, we would have neither any desires to fulfill nor any sense of being a doer who could do things to fulfill them. In other words, *jnana* (self-knowledge) would have negated any trace of *kartritva* (doership) – the fundamental misunderstanding upon which the whole *karmic* “Ponzi scheme” is based – and thereby closed our *karmic* account. Thickening the plot is the fact that our self-ignorance is further fortified by the conditioning we receive from every sector of our environment – parents, teachers, preachers, politicians, the advertising industry and even our nearest and dearest friends – that we are a separate, inadequate, incomplete individual living in a dualistic, dog-eat-dog world. These factors make for rather formidable foes to overcome. In fact they seem to breed enemy soldiers faster than we can slay them.

All we can really do is take a stand against these phantom troops, armed with the artillery of self-inquiry. In more practical terms, let Helena be Helena, but use Helena as an instrument through which to see your true nature. Whenever Helena identifies herself as “I,” hit the “pause button” and contemplate which “I” is talking, so to speak, bearing in mind the fundamental truth that if you can “see” (i.e. perceive, know, experience) it, you can't be it. This practice requires constant vigilance and determined effort, but the payoff is huge. The gap between you and Helena that this simple recognition initiates will continue to grow with each reacknowledgment until one day you will abide in your true unattached nature. If you stick with it, this practice alone can break the back of the conditioning that currently so relentlessly dogs you.

Remember, however, that *moksa*, freedom, is not a matter of getting rid of Helena. Nor is it even a matter of fixing her. In fact it might be good to simply let the poor girl be for a bit. Instead of trying to disavow her experience, embrace it, accept it and use it as a means for seeing how you have never been affected by it in the least. I know that is a subtle understanding to assimilate, but look closely and consider carefully. Has there ever been a time when you were not a witness to the “Helena game”? Has there ever been a morning when you were too sick or tired to accompany Helena on her daily rounds? Has there ever been a time when you had something better to do,

and so sent her off on her own? No. You are simply there witnessing whatever Helena goes through. You see Helena feel good, you see Helena feel bad. You see Helena feel mad, sad, glad. You think you are going through what Helena is going through, but the fact of the matter is that Helena herself is going through you.

In any case, this is a subtle shift in perspective. It takes a *sattvic* and contemplative mind. It takes time and fortitude. I wish there were an easier way, my friend, but the truth is that you just have to keep contemplating the teachings. The suffering will cease to the degree that your preoccupation with the apparent sufferer does. In this regard, you might contemplate the very question that initiated this response. Who is it that knows “in theory” that you are awareness? Wouldn’t that entity have to be aware? And therefore isn’t the awareness of which you speak more than a theory? And, moreover, given that Helena’s mind is nothing more than a known object, it can’t be the source of Helena’s “theoretical” awareness. So again, I ask, who is it that is aware of – dare I say it – the fact that you are aware?

Think on this for a while, and let me know how it goes.

~ All the best, Ted