

Direct Path Teaching

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Mark: During the course in Germany in 2014, James mentioned that he would be addressing the texts of Sri Atmananda (Krishna Menon): *Atma Darshan* and *Atma Nirvriti*. Has he written anything on them as yet?

Sundari: No, he abandoned the idea, as the present heirs to Atmananda's writings contacted him and threatened to sue him for teaching from the texts. They think they own the work – which is most contrary to the unwritten law in Vedanta that anything pertaining to the scriptures does not belong to anyone, because it “belongs” to and comes from *Isvara*. James challenged them on this, but they are *samsaris* and don't care. Even so, you would think if they were interested in the monetary value James' writing commentaries on them would only increase it.

The Direct Path writings are on the whole brilliant, but Atmananda's writing can be misconstrued to be taken as though the teachings come from him, which clearly they do not. He is just one link in a long chain of the *sampradaya*, even though he does not acknowledge it. And one has to watch out for the experiential slant in his writing. James intended clarifying that and improving on them, which, I guess, the descendants did not appreciate.

Mark: In *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shri Atmananda*, the author (N. Tripta) points out that *Atma Darshan* was published in 1946, followed by *Atma Nirvriti* in 1952 (see page 488). In India, copyright is extended beyond the publication date for 60 years, which means the copyright for *Atma Darshan* ran out in 2006 and for *Atma Nirvriti* in 2012. Be that as it may, no one wants to become embroiled in a legal dispute. At the same time, James could certainly point out any problems with either text and quote from them.

Atmananda's position as part of the lineage of teachers of Vedanta is not in dispute, as revealed in *Notes on Spiritual Discourses*. In the coming week or so, I intend to read all three works. What baffles me is how a cult called the Direct Path could have grown from the teachings. Of course, these days, there is no end of corruptions and manipulations, to say nothing of falsifications, obfuscations and the suppression of evidence, for which one must be ever-vigilant in calling out.

Sundari: The most famous of the Direct Path teachers is Greg Goode, and James has respect for some of his work although in other areas he does not agree with his teaching. The problem with the Direct Path teachers, in general, is that they have in essence tried to find a shortcut to self-realisation, which often does lead to people realising their true nature as awareness. However, it does not teach them how to live as free beings in the apparent reality. It is all very well to know that your true nature is awareness, but it is only indirect experiential knowledge. Indirect knowledge means that the self is only known as an object of experience, not as a “direct experience.” The self as a “direct” experience is not what many think it is. You, the person, cannot gain it, because the self is not an object. It can only be “gained” by removing ignorance about it. For this kind of knowledge, you need a means, like Vedanta. To know what the self is and to live

as the self in the apparent reality are two different things. We call living as the self self-actualisation.

As you know, unless the real meaning of an epiphany is assimilated, the knowledge does not stick once the experience ends. Vedanta contextualizes experience and knowledge by revealing the complete vision of non-duality.

With Direct Path teachers like Atmananda, although brilliant in his own right and well within the teaching tradition of Vedanta, seemed to disdain the tradition of Vedanta. He, along with the other Direct Path teachers, do not offer the full teaching method of traditional Vedanta and most importantly, as I said previously, the language they use is experiential. Experiential language creates terrible confusion because it presents the self as an object of experience when the only access to the self is knowledge. Experience does not remove ignorance.

James has made his mark as a teacher of the traditional methodology of Vedanta because he has focused on the central issue regarding self-realisation: the difference between experience and knowledge, the language of experience as opposed to the language of identity. It cannot be over-stated how important this distinction is.

Neo-Advaita and the Direct Path teachings tend to ignore the world, the apparent reality, and focus only on the self. This approach to self-knowledge invariably fails because if reality is non-dual – which it is – the apparent reality needs to be taken into account. The whole point of *moksa*, or liberation, is to free the self – it seems to be under the spell of self-ignorance, from identification with the person/doer/ego that thinks it acts and experiences things in “the world.” It is not freedom for the experiencing entity, but from the experiencing entity.

Negating the doer (identification with the person) does not mean that one has to do away with the experiencing entity or destroy the mind or ego; one simply must understand it. Once you understand what it is, it makes no difference who or what you are on the relative level, because you are no longer attached to the person as your primary identity or any other object for that matter.

~ *Om*, Sundari