

# Doubt and the *Sattvic* Trap

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Ken:** Thank you for your guidance and clarity. You are a powerful and clear Vedanta mirror. Thank you too for being available to receive and reply to what I write. Writing helps clear matters in my mind.

My experience of doubt highlighted two things: (1) the difference between thought of pure awareness versus being pure awareness and (2) the degree of confidence in the knowledge.

I had fluctuated between *sattva* and awareness, and was often in *sattva* rather than being awareness. I had fallen into that *sattvic* trap, ie. more often identified with, absorbed in and enjoying thoughts about pure awareness rather than being pure awareness itself. I was fluctuating between Ken and pure awareness. Being in *sattva* is comfortable and pleasant but still a trap, like a bird with its leg tied by a length of fine thread.

The result of such vacillation, of identifying more with thought “Ken” rather than being pure awareness, is that the degree of confidence in self-realisation is low. I was not sufficiently grounded in, not firmly established as pure awareness. Hence *vasanas* and old mental habits still affect me. The knowledge was not strong enough.

So *Isvara* kindly sent doubt, a thorn to poke me out of my *sattvic* mindset. The arising of doubt and hesitation surprised me and made me reassess my position, my understanding. Am I just thinking about pure awareness or am I actually being pure awareness? Doubt straightened me up!! Nothing like a knock or a poke to wake me out of my *sattvic* stupor and enquire again!!! I seem to learn best when I get bruised!!!

I am grateful for your repeated instruction, which kept arising in my mind spontaneously, i.e. to put aside my experience and opinion and instead to accept and trust the teaching, *shraddha*. Yes, this teaching runs contrary to experience but definitely leads to freedom. So the crux is: Which will I trust my experience/conclusions or the scriptures? I had slipped into believing my experience.

There was still a subtle sense of doership: Ken thinking about awareness, redirecting the mind to awareness. It is helpful in the beginning to, as you said, fake it till you make it. But after some time even that mental effort has to be dropped and just remain as awareness, just be awareness. A *sattvic* doer is better than *rajasic* or *tamasic* doer. But a *sattvic* doer is still a doer and continues to be in the trap of *maya* and its *gunas*.

Those *vasanas* are deep-seated, well-hidden and really powerful. When they arise it is like walking into a thick transparent glass wall, unseen but present!! Ouch, it hurts!! As you have said, *maya*/ignorance is so intelligent and amazing. The traps are so subtle. I have to be vigilant and watch my mind. Thanks to the grace of *Isvara* that helped me recognise my mis-take and for freeing me. It is not an imagined or thought-based freedom dependent on *sattva* and a *sattvic* mind. Rather, it is a freedom arising from a direct appreciation of reality, of pure awareness, the real me. This is true freedom. It is freedom from both knowledge and ignorance, free of both and free of *sattva*. Pure awareness just is. This is who I am.

Now when any thought or event or experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant, gross or subtle, occurs, the statement which arises in my mind is: "Stop. This has nothing to do with me, awareness. I can let it be, whatever it is, and just continue being what I am, pure awareness." Without words or thoughts I remain as pure awareness and watch my form go through its motions, like a ventriloquist and his dummy!! The former is pure awareness and the latter is Ken!! Ha, ha!!

As pure awareness I am separate and unattached to my form and yet can experience happenings through the form. The form is in me but I am not the form. I am not an experiencer yet am an experiencer!!! An apparent paradox, depending on my point of view. With knowledge, it is no more a paradox. As pure awareness I am not an experiencer. As pure awareness-associated-with-a-form (Ken) I am an experiencer.

The proviso for using the above statement is that it be not used for avoidance or suppression, not be used to escape from discomfort or pain. If avoidance, suppression or escaping occurs it means the doer is present and I am identified again. So when discomfort or pain arise they will be viewed as thought or happenings and handled as such. I observe and experience them yet know: "Stop. This, has nothing to do with me, awareness." As Ken I then act appropriately yet simultaneously knowing I am pure awareness, not a doer. The doing happens through Ken and I watch. What a chuckle!!! The ultimate enigma!! Doer and not doer, experiencer and not experiencer!!

The statement indicates the discrimination between subject and object required of me. It is a wonderful statement, which consolidates me in my stance as pure awareness. This must be an aspect of what you describe as maturing from self-knowledge to self-actualisation, i.e. being pure awareness itself and manifesting that in my ordinary, daily life through my human form. Ultimately, experience is only a play. In fact the whole of life, a series of experiences, is a play, an apparent happening occurring through an apparent form. I, pure awareness, alone am.

The statement "This has nothing to do with me, awareness" helped me appreciate more clearly what Shankara wrote in the *Nirvana Shatkam*. The statement corresponds to the first three lines of each verse and what they point to, i.e. what I am not. The last line in each verse, "*Cidananda rupah, Sivoham, Sivoham,*" is what I am, pure awareness. With the sixth verse he nails it, what I really am. It is so beautiful. There is a beauty beyond *sattva*, true Beauty itself. That is what I am, here and now. What a scholar, teacher, poet, lyricist and enlightened being Shankara was!

Much gratitude and love to you and Sundari.

**James:** Lovely email. In the first six paragraphs there are six instances of the following phrase: rather than being pure awareness. Are you using the word "being" as a verb? I don't know because we are involved in a very subtle inquiry. I ask because it sounds as if you are describing being as something that the *jiva* does. And in the third from the last paragraph there is the same idea. *Moksa* is knowing that awareness – I – is the knower of the one who is either being awareness or who is identified with *sattva*. You have to be awareness or you could not know that Ken had identified with *sattva*. How did you come to this conclusion? If you came to it through logic based on my statements then you did not know what it means to be awareness when you identified with Ken. If you knew, you would not have identified with Ken in the first place. You would have observed the identification taking place. If you figured it out after the identification took place, that is good but it still leaves you as Ken. This may only all about words.

In any case, if that is true your conclusion about a lack of confidence makes sense. It is the *jiva* that lacks confidence. Awareness is just that because of which I know what I know. It is the means of knowledge for everything gross and subtle. It sees Ken. It is okay if Ken identifies with it or not. It is not confident or not not-confident. I think you know this. Yes, *Nirvana Shatkam* says it all: "I am the knower of the self and the not-self."

~ Love, James