

# Emptiness Is Not Empty

Ram (James Swartz)

2010-05-25

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1788>

**James:** Any feeling is an attribute. You are that because of which the feeling is known. You do not feel anything. When the mind is predominately *sattvic* awareness as attention flowing through the subtle body causes the feeling of love in the mind. It is a pure attribute. It belongs to the mind, not to the self.

**Thomas:** This was my point with bliss. Isn't bliss a feeling? Would not that make this an attribute? What is the difference between bliss and love, or compassion, as the Buddhists put it?

**James:** The "bliss" word is one of the biggest all-time problems in the spiritual world. The word *ananda*, which has been translated as "bliss," actually is *ananta*, which means "without limits" or "without end" and refers to you, awareness. But because people are so emotionally unfulfilled they imagine that if they realize who they are they will be walking around feeling good all day long. What bliss actually means is a sense of authenticity, wholeness and peace that emanates from the understanding "I am whole and complete" and emanates as good feelings.

**Thomas:** As far as I know through my practice of Buddhism, what Buddha meant was the sense of a "personal self." He described it somewhere like the rafters of a house being removed, removing the wrong identification with the person, in his case, being Siddhartha Gautama, his biography, memories, thoughts, feelings, emotions, habits, conditioning, *samskaras*, *vasanas*, *karma* and so on. This is what he meant by "emptiness," the sense of the person no longer being there. The new sense of who you are is *brahman*, awareness, according to Vedanta, or emptiness, according to Buddha, but they are almost identical. How much of a departure was this really from the *Vedas*?

**James:** Yes, I think that is what he meant, no separate self, or personal self. I am of course very familiar with the *Mundaka* quote. It is one of my favorites. The Buddha quote is much-welcomed. I get asked about this all the time and since I don't know anything about Buddhism I cannot speak with any authority. This makes it clear that emptiness is not empty. Buddhists do not appreciate it, but the Vedantins have a clever saying: Buddhism is just a chip off the tooth of the *Vedas*.

How the Brahmins describe *Brahman*:

In the highest golden sheath is *Brahman*, stainless, without parts;

Pure is it, the light of lights.

This is what the knowers of the Self know. The sun shines not there nor the moon and stars, these lightnings shine not, where then could this fire be?

His shining illumines all this world. *Brahman*, verily, is this Deathless.

~ *Mundaka Upanishad*

How the Buddha describes Emptiness:

Where water, earth, heat and wind find no footing, there no stars gleam, no sun is made visible, there shines no moon, there the darkness is not found;

When the sage, the Brahmin, himself in wisdom knows this place he is freed from the form and formless realms, from happiness and suffering.

~ *The Udana*