

He Realizes He Is Realized

Ram (James Swartz)

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Mark: Dear James, thank you for the offerings at your website. They are inspiring. I actually came across your website because of the “enlightenment quiz,” which was linked from another site. I took the quiz and got a 93 using your point system.

At first I thought, “I have been reading ‘spiritual’ literature for many years. This is just a way of talking that I have become familiar with. That’s why I got a 93. I certainly am not an ‘enlightened sage.’ Besides, if I were enlightened I would not need a quiz to validate it.”

The funny thing though is that as I entertained these reflections something in my mind began to come loose. The nagging feeling that, “I couldn’t possibly be free, because _____ (fill in the blank),” began to lose its tenacious hold. I considered how long – since childhood really, long before I ever encountered this “way of talking” – I have been inquiring into the nature of reality, the nature of this mystery. And I recalled how, while taking the quiz, I decided to answer the questions “as the mystery” rather than as someone who had supposedly unraveled it.

James: That’s precisely the point of enlightenment: you are “the mystery,” so to pass the test you have to see things from the mystery’s point of view. Its knowledge is your knowledge.

Mark: I’m not sure what my question is. There is still this doubt, this seeking, this yearning. Perhaps it is simply the nature of my vehicle to yearn.

James: It is the same vehicle in everybody. It is the nature of the vehicle, the mind – which is the self in the world – to seek. It seeks every second. Every activity here is motivated by a desire to know. You mentioned above that ever since childhood you have been inquiring into the nature of reality. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna, speaking as the self, says, “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” There many desires that are not opposed to *dharma*, but the desire to seek, to know, is the most important because if seeking leads you to seeing from the self’s point of view you don’t need to desire anything ever again.

Mark: But there is also a growing sense of confidence that I know something, or rather know nothing.

James: This is good sign. It means that you actually do know. Or put it this way: you know that you are the one who knows. Even worldly confidence comes from what one knows. Enlightenment is self-confidence, the confidence that comes from knowing that you endure in spite of what happens to the body-mind instrument.

Mark: Changing topic slightly... self is characterised by existence-consciousness-bliss. Okay...

so what is “bliss” exactly? I normally associate the word “bliss” with being a very positive, happy experience. But the self in its pure form (*sat-chit-ananda*?) should certainly have nothing to do with bliss as an experience, right? The self should be neither negative nor positive, but bliss seems to imply a positive attribute.

James: Good reasoning. This is correct. Experiential bliss is the result of certain factors – basically a mind free of agitation which can be brought about through worldly circumstances or through self-knowledge. The “bliss” of the self is simply the realization that you have no limits. It is pure knowledge but it has a powerful experiential component. It translates as a sense of solidity, permanence and confidence. By “confidence” I mean the conviction that you can adequately deal with whatever life sends your way. This kind of confidence never goes away. It is there during the most intense agonies and ecstasies. Each enlightened person has his or her unique personality and unique *karmic* situations, but one thing you will notice above all is that each has a rock-solid sense of self-confidence.

Mark: I worry that it is a false confidence, or a confidence in the false, but it is growing nonetheless. How can I tell the difference?

James: If it's growing on its own it's real. I haven't had the pleasure of your company, but I'll hazard a guess that it is the fruit of a life of inquiry. Perhaps you have lived in such a way – drawn the right conclusions from your experience – so that you no longer pursue things in this world – security, pleasure, virtue, love, etc. The way you write makes me think that you are a dispassionate and discriminating person. This coupled with the fact that there is only one self and it passed the enlightenment quiz with flying colors makes me think that somehow your reflections removed the doubt about who you are. At a certain point the self realizes that it has the wrong knowledge about who it is and lets it go.

Perhaps the enlightenment quiz shook loose the belief that enlightenment is something extraordinary, something much more than the simple elimination of ignorance about the nature of reality. This is usually the biggest impediment to enlightenment: “How could little old me join the company of the illustrious enlightened ‘greats’?”

It was Jesus' claim of identity with “the Father,” i.e. the light, that brought about his demise. This only shows how deeply resistant the ego – as represented by the people who crucified him – is to the idea that it has no limits, that it is non-separate from anything. The whole message of Vedanta from the get-go is that you are enlightened. It doesn't start with the idea that you are a sinner – which is how we are conditioned to think about ourselves. That sense of limitation is hardwired and it saps our confidence completely.

Mark: And if it is real, what does it mean to live from this knowing more and more?

James: If reality is non-dual, as scripture and our epiphanies reveal it to be, then everything is just awareness. Awareness is “the light.” This means that “I,” my consciousness, is also the light. What does it mean to say that “I am the light, the knower and the knowing”? It means that “there is nothing that can be added to me that will make me more than what I am.” It means that “nothing

can be subtracted from me that will make me less than what I am.”

And how does that translate into practical terms? It means I can relax completely. It means that fulfilling desires is completely optional. It means that fear of undesirable outcomes no longer motivates my behavior. It means that I am quite content to let the day evolve on its own irrespective of my list of “to dos.” When I lie down to sleep at night the events of the day dissolve quickly and I fall asleep effortlessly. I am not inclined to start ambitious projects. It means I understand that people wouldn’t be what they are if they could help it and do not become agitated when they act like jerks. It means I’m not disturbed when the mind thinks a stupid thought or an unkind emotion passes through it. It means that being there for others does not require special effort.

Once this knowing is established, life becomes fluid and easy. You do not make trouble for yourself. You feel immensely grateful to yourself for appreciating the value of the inquiring nature of the mind and for supporting its search.

I hope this has been helpful.

~ James