

Investigate Your Own Experience

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Manny: Dear James, I heard your teachings and find them very efficient for me, especially the suggestion to create a “truth *vasana*”...

I have a long-time confusion about “who am I?” When I ask this question, there is a sense of knowing or intuition that I am limitless awareness, but how can I be certain that this is truth and I’m not fooling myself?

James: Scripture and the words of enlightened people say you are awareness. If you have faith in the scripture, that should be enough to confirm your sense of knowing, your intuition.

Manny: I mean, how can I be sure that whatever I recognize is not *drishya* (what is seen)?

James: Whatever you recognize is *drishya*, what is seen. You, awareness, are the one that sees what it seen. Through knowledge you “see” yourself as awareness.

Manny: How can I recognize something without qualities? It seems that I can only understand who I am by inference – by negating everything, so I am that which is left after negation.

James: This is correct. Now look and see if what is left has qualities. Awareness is just you. “Manny” is a name for you. You see qualities and no qualities. Both are just ideas appearing in you, made out of your thoughts. You are the awareness of both.

Manny: Another problem is that negation seems not so honest to me, because it is not totally true that I am not body-mind. *Neti neti* creates duality... I am not only the body-mind, for sure, but it is the self (*atma*) as existence (*sat*). It’s extremely confusing for me, for my logic, that I am aware (*chit*) of an object which is also me (*sat*), though I do have a sense that existence is one, and not dual.... I guess the essence of my question is: How to be sure that this is reality and not imagination?

James: Yes, you and what you are aware of is just awareness. Examine your own experience. I will help you with the inquiry so that you can see the logic of your own experience. Reading and listening to *satsangs* is not enough. You have to examine your own experience using the teachings of Vedanta to guide you.

Now for the inquiry.

You exist. You exist as awareness. You experience everything in awareness, nothing outside of

awareness. The physical objects you experience are the thoughts of the objects as they appear in awareness. See if this isn't true. The feelings that you have are just awareness appearing as feelings. The thoughts you have are just awareness appearing as thoughts. So you and what you see are non-different. *Maya* is a power in awareness that makes it look like the seer, you, and what you see are separate. It is tricking you.

The separation of the subject and the objects is only a belief based on a false perception of objects. The way you can be sure is to accept the words of the scripture. It is the testimony of hundreds of thousands of enlightened people. Or contemplate the teaching in this paragraph. It is called "the location of objects" teaching. See if you can find an object that is not made out your thoughts.

Then see if your thoughts are made out of anything other than you, awareness. Everything you experience is coming out of you. Can you find any other place where you are experiencing things except in you?

The *neti neti* teaching is a trick, but a necessary trick. All the objects are you because reality is non-dual. But if you don't know what non-duality means, i.e. you do not know you are awareness, you will think that you are Manny, a person seeking *moksa*. If you are a person seeking *moksa* you will be attached to certain objects, including the idea that you are seeking *moksa*. So you need to break your attachment by understanding that the objects are not you. It is not obvious that they are not you when you are ignorant of your nature as awareness, because you need them to make you feel secure or to support your identity. So you have to free your mind of them. Then you can investigate awareness, which is left over because you cannot negate awareness. When you have understood what awareness is, it becomes clear that the objects are also awareness. Concentrate on "the location of objects" teaching I give you in this email and your confusion about the "not-self" will go away.

Manny: Another thing which is unclear to me these days is, why call *atma* "consciousness"? To say that I am consciousness is to give an attribute to something which is supposed to be without any attributes. If it is conscious, it can be unconscious as well. "Conscious" and "unconscious" are only dualistic terms created by the mind. I don't know how to call it, but "consciousness/awareness" seems confusing to me, something mixed with name and form (*nama rupa*). In deep sleep, for example, I'm not conscious, at least not in the regular way the word "conscious" is used.

James: There is only one *atma*, one self. It is you. You have to be conscious to observe your doubts and to write these words. Look and see if you can find an origin for you. You will not be able to find a beginning to you. Consciousness is not an attribute. It is the knower of attributes. It has no form, so it has no attributes. It is just the knowing principle. It can know anything and it knows everything. It cannot do this if it is an attribute of something else. It can only do this because it is free of all attributes.

Attributes limit things and attributes are not conscious. They do not know anything. They are objects (ideas) appearing in you, awareness. Consciousness appears to be unconscious because *maya* makes seem to be unconscious. But to be unconscious you need to be conscious or you will be dead. In deep sleep you are conscious, but not a Manny. Manny is unconscious in that state, but you are that which makes it possible for Manny to be unconscious there and to be

conscious when the waking state happens in you, consciousness.

It is true that conscious and unconscious are dualistic terms, but how are they known? They are known by you, awareness. So awareness is the knower of what is conscious and what is unconscious. At the same time it is conscious of itself whether or not objects are present.

There are only two categories in existence, you and what you see/experience. If you can see something, it is not you. You see your thoughts. In fact all you actually see is thoughts. So they cannot be you. Now look at the one that sees the thoughts. When you understand that one, you will see that the objects are you also.

Manny: If you can help me understand who I am, I will be endlessly grateful. I'm quite stuck with it (though I see more clearly the opposite – that the ego is inert, so the “me” is only apparently real).

James: Yes, the ego is just a thought. It is not alive. It is not conscious. It is inert subtle matter.

Manny: I also think that my confusion is a result of listening to inaccurate teachers, borrowing false understandings.

James: If you are going to inquire, you should only stick with Vedanta. You should not read or study or listen to anyone who is not a teacher of traditional Vedanta. Yes, there are apparent contradictions in scripture, but the teacher can resolve them for you. In this case I suggest that you only think about “the location of objects” teaching I have presented in this email. Just stick with it until you understand. It will kill your doubts.

~ Love, James