

# Let Neither *Sattva* nor Shame Subvert Self-Inquiry

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**Henry:** Dear Ted, this is Henry, who wrote you a little more than a week ago on *slokas* prior to study, etc. You sent me the invocations James uses prior to his talks. I woke up yesterday experiencing, it seemed for the first time, a very powerful *sattva* experience. The entire day felt blissful and clear for the first time in some years. A lot of various events have taken place, and this “Henry” has gotten through with some degree of sanity.

**Ted:** This is great, Henry. It would seem that self-inquiry is paying off.

While it is wonderful that you felt blissful and clear, however, it is vitally important to understand that such a state does not define the character of “enlightenment.” In other words, bliss and clarity are no more the experience of the self than any other experience. Remember, the self, which is pure, attributeless awareness, is not an experiential state. The self doesn’t feel like anything. The self, awareness, is the “light” by means of whose presence all other states are known. This is not to demean the quality of your experience, for the clarity characteristic of the *sattvic* mind is the springboard toward gaining self-knowledge in that not only does it facilitate the concentrated introversion necessary for effective self-inquiry, but it also provides the “mirror” in which an accurate reflection of the limitless, unmodified nature of the self can be seen. Nevertheless, the state of bliss should not be mistaken for “enlightenment” and its cultivation should not be considered the goal of self-inquiry. Experience is but an objective phenomenon, and all objective phenomena are doomed to demise. In other words, all experiences are subject to the limitation of time. And when any experience inevitably ends (as all experiences inevitably do), it is only the knowledge gleaned from it that remains. Therefore though a peaceful mind is both pleasurable and helpful in terms of self-inquiry, the assimilation of self-knowledge is the only means of eradicating self-ignorance and permanently alleviating the suffering consequent to it. Simply put, cultivate a *sattvic* mind, but understand that rather than a particular state of experience, the assimilation of self-knowledge is the goal.

**Henry:** But last night I got a call that my ex-girlfriend (whom I love very much) went into respiratory failure this past Wednesday night and died. She was battling a nasty alcohol dependency for about three years now. She couldn’t get any time together sober and has been in and out of the hospital probably 15 times in the past 12 months over this. So now I’m walking around feeling very foggy, very ashamed of the way I feel. I’ve been a jerk to her and didn’t treat her kindly this past year. We talked about five nights ago and it ended in me being mean to her on FaceTime. I feel in shock. I know this is all relative, but it feels absolute.

**Ted:** I am very sorry for your loss. Losing someone you love – even if your relationship with the person was tempestuous – is perhaps the most difficult thing we have to deal with in life. My heart goes out to you.

**Henry:** I don't know what to do. My desire to continue studying James' book and *Tattva Bodha* is still there, but is it wise? I don't know.

**Ted:** The simple answer is that, yes, by all means you should continue to engage in self-inquiry. While your doubt is understandable, it doesn't hold up to logical scrutiny. It implies that one should only engage in self-inquiry when one is clear and *sattvic* and fully understands the apparent nature of reality. It is also colored by the shame you feel regarding your past actions toward your ex-girlfriend, and contains a suggestions that you are not fit for self-inquiry, because of what we might call your transgressions of *dharma*, or appropriate behavior.

A mindful consideration of these two aspects of your doubt, however, reveals that neither is a reasonable cause for avoiding self-inquiry and that both are actually an impetus for a more ardent engagement in it. Only by means of self-inquiry in conjunction with spiritual practice will you be able to cultivate a sufficiently *sattvic* mind to ultimately assimilate self-knowledge. And only self-knowledge will ultimately lay to rest the *raga-dveshas*, or compelling likes and dislikes, and the consequent pursuit of objective ends intended to satisfy them that causes one to transgress *dharma*, either in the pursuit itself or as a result of the anger, sadness, jealousy and/or frustration that arises when one doesn't get what one wants or circumstances aren't to one's liking. Hence self-inquiry supported by spiritual practice is imperative now more than ever. So in this case, indulge your desire and continue your inquiry.

~ All the best, Ted