

Non-Doership Is Discovered through Doing Self-inquiry

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2015-10-04

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2331>

Kristen: Dear Ted, browsing *Buddha at the Gas Pump*, I came across James Swartz, and his information led me to your website, as well as your classes at Arunachala in January 2016. I'm writing you with the hope of exploring my desire to participate; studying the *Bhavagad Gita* at the foot of Arunachala sounds amazing. My concern is that, as profound as the experience sounds, am I merely distracting myself and should I simply stay in place, allowing unfolding to occur? But then, I'll be turning 70 in January and can't avoid the thought that I'd better go, if I'm going, while my health is good and I'm feeling strong. As you can see, I'm feeling uncertain.

A bit of history. I've been compelled to the spiritual path since 1984, when a *kundalini* experience arose, seemingly out of nowhere. It took 20 years for me to find my teacher. Swamiji lives in Rishikesh, and I've studied with him for ten years, both in the U.S. and in India. I spent three months last winter in Rishikesh, where our primary text was *Drg Drsya Viveka*; we have also worked with other texts, including the *Avadhuta Gita*, *Mandukya Upanishad*, *Tattvabodha* and *Atmabodha*. I had non-dual experiences that I am committed to supporting.

I'm drawn to this journey and study, but am not sure it's a fit.

Thank you for your time and for any suggestions you might offer.

~ Om, Kristen

Ted: Hi, Kristen.

I'd be happy to talk with you about your interest in exploring Vedanta and possibly participating in the *Bhagavad Gita* seminar in Tiruvannamalai this coming January.

I would highly recommend actively pursuing your interest in self-inquiry as unfoldment doesn't simply happen without effort, despite the many claims in the modern "non-dual" spiritual world that it does and that since you are not a doer there is nothing you can do. With all due respect, that notion is hogwash. It is rooted in a fundamental confusion concerning the ontological orders of *satya* and *mithya*, the real and the apparent.

Satya is limitless, non-dual awareness. As such, it is both all-pervasive and perfectly full, and thus is not a doer. First of all, it is not a personal entity with volitional will or any sense of incompleteness or inadequacy that would inspire it to seek to better its lot, which is the fundamental drive behind all actions. Moreover, due to its all-pervasiveness, it has no arena or space other than itself in which to act, and thus there exists no background against which any movement or change could be measured. Furthermore, it actually cannot change due to its all-pervasiveness. To say that all-pervasive awareness changes because of the apparent activity that occurs within the scope of its being is like saying that water is changed by the arising and crashing of the waves within it. In either case, there is no change in the essential nature of the *adhishtanam*, or substratum, of the appearance. In light of these considerations, the actionless nature of awareness stands revealed, and since our essential nature is awareness we can say

that we are not doers.

Within the ontological order of *mithya*, however, we are very much doers. The term *mithya* indicates that which is apparent, or dependently real. The entire manifestation in both its gross and subtle aspects is *mithya*, for its existence depends on awareness (i.e. is supported by awareness). Just as waves depend for their existence on the water than is their content, so all apparent objects – both tangible items and subtle phenomena, such as sensations, emotions, and cognitions – depend on awareness for their existence. Hence we say they are only apparent, or dependently real. We certainly cannot say that the “inner” and “outer” worlds don’t exist, for we experience them. But they are not real in the sense that they are subject to change and even in their absence, which we get a small taste of during such states as deep sleep and thought-free meditation, awareness doesn’t cease to exist. If awareness did cease to exist, we would never wake up nor would we remember upon awakening that we slept soundly, for you can only remember something you have experienced. From an absolute perspective, even if the entire universe were to resolve into an unmanifest state, awareness must necessarily remain existent. In fact the very existence of the universe in the first place indicates the beginningless or eternal nature of absolute awareness. Since something can’t come out of nothing, awareness must necessarily exist prior to all objects (i.e. it would be more appropriate to say that awareness is the timeless “field” of being in which all objects arise), for the very existence of all objects – including the conceptual objects of time and space, which are the fundamental parameters by means of which objects are definable as objective phenomena – depends on awareness.

Despite the fact that objects are not real, however, they are nevertheless existent. Therefore as human beings we are existent entities. Moreover, we are endowed with apparent free will that enables us to act with willful intention. And it is only by means of employing our will and actively engaging in the process of self-inquiry that we ever discover and eventually fully assimilate the underlying truth of our essential non-dual, non-doing identity as limitless awareness.

Along these lines, it is also important to understand that the self-knowledge that is tantamount to *moksa*, ultimate inner freedom (i.e. freedom from dependence on objective phenomena or the quality or character of experience for a sense of security, peace and happiness) is not an experience. Spiritual experiences are great in the sense that they can reveal that there is more to life than meets the eye, so to speak. But all experiences are objects (i.e. knowable phenomena that possess characteristics in terms of form and duration that make them distinguishable from other experiences) and, as is the case with all objects, do not last. Thus no particular experience can comprehensively define or characterize “enlightenment.” So when you say that you have had spiritual experiences that you want to support, it would be wise – and immensely less frustrating – to realize that the experience itself is not what you’re after, but rather the knowledge of your essential limitless nature, which perhaps was reflected in the transcendence you experienced when your *kundalini* was awakened or during any subsequent non-dual experiences. The true value of non-dual experiences is that they provide the basis for understanding the non-dual nature of existence. Thus if the knowledge is assimilated, then even in the wake of the experience, you retain the understanding of the true nature of reality. By analogy, we could say that once you’ve understood the true unmodified nature of gold, even though you may thereafter enjoy or appreciate the myriad forms into which it is molded, you will never again take the forms to be the fundamental truth of what you are experiencing.

Even once we have understood the truth, however, it takes time to break the mind’s habit of seeing/experiencing and interpreting experience in terms of its dualistic conditioning. Hence

continued self-inquiry is almost invariably required to solidify the knowledge in one's psyche. The truth itself is not simply a theory or idea, but it takes time to decondition the mind and strip away all the erroneous notions that prevent it from appreciating its essential nature as unconditioned awareness.

I'm not saying that you should or must come to Tiruvannamalai to study the *Bhagavad Gita* at the foot of Arunachala, but I am saying that whether you stay home or come to India you should and most likely must continue to immerse yourself in the teachings of traditional Vedanta and engage in *nididhyasana*, continuous meditation on the teachings and application of them to each and every experience of your life until such time as you stand as unshakably convinced of your true nature as limitless awareness as you once were that you were a limited individual person.

~ All the best, Ted