

Post-Enlightenment

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Ben: Dear Ramji, I just finished up your *Vivekachudamani* and *Bhagavad Gita* videos and have started *Aparokshanubhuti*. Just great. Direct, clear and to the point, as always. Plus, as a side note, I always get a good laugh when whilst you are unfolding the truth of reality you drop the F-word. ☺

I hope this email doesn't end up being too long. Most of the time I try to let my questions resolve themselves without bothering you. However, when they don't resolve they tend to pile up. Also, I've noticed too that the ego doesn't always want to have its ignorance exposed or possibly look "unenlightened" in front of you. Okay, so I have been thinking about the nature of direct knowledge, ignorance and identification. There are some things about these that I am just trying to make sure are crystal-clear. If you could, please check my logic. I would appreciate it.

First, direct knowledge is when the "I know of or have an experience of awareness" thought is turned into "I am awareness" and awareness is owned as one's identity. This is the knowledge that from which there is no return to ignorance. All discussion of people getting "unenlightened" is for those who have had epiphanies or experiences of the self and have not assimilated the self as their identity. From these states or experiences people can return to their former ignorance of their true nature.

I have just been having trouble understanding how direct knowledge "works," and this also relates to my question about the nature of ignorance and identification. Is the following how it works?

I am awareness. There is just me. I know myself by myself. There is no ignorance of myself and no possibility of identification with anything, because there is nothing to identify with.

However, taking the apparent reality into account, this is what happens: I, awareness, self-knowing and self-efulent, shine on the apparent creation. I am never identified with any of it or ignorant of myself. I simply illumine the apparent and insentient ego-thought that is identifying with ignorant thoughts such as, "I am a limited, separate, body, mind, etc." or, "I am a doer, owner of these actions, etc." The ego is the identifier. I, the self, cannot and never have identified with anything, not even apparently, because it isn't even possible. The apparent identification is the ego's identification.

As far as ignorance goes, on the individual level, it is simply this apparent happening of the ego identifying with ignorant thoughts, beliefs and opinions. I, awareness, just illumine the ignorant thoughts. I remain unchanged and self-knowing.

Then at some point the mind gets exposed to the teaching. After some time, the last bit of ignorance is removed from the mind and the thought arises, "I am the self." This thought is assimilated as being one's own identity. However, this is where it gets sticky for my mind. Granted, I have no doubt about being awareness, but I have been trying to understand the mechanics of direct knowledge. When we say that the thought, "I am awareness," is assimilated as being one's own identity, the question is, "By whom is this identity owned?"

James: By the self under the spell of apparent ignorance.

Ben: It couldn't be me, awareness, because I always knew myself and there is nothing to own.

James: No, you didn't, because *maya* made you forget. It can't happen, but it does. This is why it is said that *maya* makes the impossible possible.

Ben: That would only leave the mind, but the mind was never an obstruction to knowing myself.

James: And the mind is not conscious, so it can't know.

Ben: I know you have said that knowledge takes place in the mind and enlightenment is for the mind.

James: This is one of Vedanta's trick teachings. It pretends that the mind is conscious because the self thinks it is the mind. There is always only the self with apparent knowledge or apparent ignorance. So when I say it is for the mind, I mean that it is for the self that thinks it is a mind.

Ben: Does this mean that I can either illumine a mind that has ignorant thoughts or I can illumine a mind that has thoughts that are in harmony with the truth?

James: Yes (see above).

Ben: In this case I would say that direct knowledge is when I illumine a mind that has knowledge of its identity with me.

James: No. It is, "I am awareness. I am awareness irrespective of what appears in me, knowledge or ignorance."

Ben: However, you have also said that self-knowledge is not memory-based, and therefore I would infer that it is not of the mind.

James: Direct knowledge is only temporary. It destroys indirect knowledge, i.e. the doer/knower, and then disappears leaving only awareness aware of itself with or without knowledge, with or without a mind. Direct knowledge is for that part of the self that still believes it is a knower. It destroys the self's identification with the knower. The self is not a knower, because there is nothing other than it to be known. It is self-knowing. No instrument, a mind, is required for it to know itself. When the self under the spell of apparent ignorance assimilates the meaning of "I am

the self,” direct knowledge does not leave that part of the ego that is apparently ignorant thinking that it is now apparently a self-knower. It destroys it altogether. So if someone asks you if you know who you are, you say, yes, as the self, but not as an individual, because there is no individual as far as you are concerned.

Ben: It is just knowing myself as myself. But I have always known myself. When the thought arose in the mind, “I am the self,” it seemed like I was revealed, but I was never hidden. It’s just that I was then shining on a mind endowed with the truthful thought, “I am awareness.” However, this couldn’t be direct knowledge, because even knowing myself as awareness, I still continually illumine all manner of ignorant thoughts.

James: This is correct. But it seemed like you were hidden from yourself until the knowledge “I am awareness” removed the veil that was apparently hiding you from yourself.

Ben: This leads to one more topic: “post-enlightenment.” I have read over that chapter in your book a lot, and there are a few things I want to get completely straight. I know I am awareness. Of this there is no doubt. When it comes to this you either know it or you don’t. You can’t partially know. This knowledge can’t be firm or shaky. However, you do talk about “firming up” the knowledge. This is for the mind that remains as an object appearing in me because it will still have a tendency to operate under ingrained ignorant tendencies.

James: Yes.

Ben: This firming-up of knowledge is meditation, bringing the mind back to the idea of the self over and over until its ignorant tendencies finally die. To be clear though, this is optional, right? The mind can continue to be grouchy, dull, agitated or dissatisfied. The ego may continue to identify itself with certain thoughts or actions. However, this has no bearing on self-knowledge, because these are just objects appearing in me and they have no effect on me. It matters not to me. If it doesn’t matter to the mind either, then so be it. BUT... if the mind does want to be happy then the *yogas* need to be applied.

James: All of the above is correct.

Ben: And there may be a long period of time before the mind changes. As you know, despite all of your skillful teaching, my ego still formulated *moksa* as being some kind of happening. Perhaps it was reading the glowing testimonials at the website. Although, from the standpoint of my experience, I will say that with self-knowledge, the problem of existential suffering is **TOTALLY FUCKING DEAD**. I emphasize that because it is so nice. Okay, so there’s a glowing testimonial. ☺

James: Yes, let the mind/ego be what it is – or not.

Ben: Still, all of the other stuff people talk about like bliss, total contentment, etc. are a little bit lacking.

James: It's not all that wise to listen to other people. People love to create dissatisfaction in others with tales of their amazing experiential selves.

Ben: Granted, that is the ego talking, so it's not a problem, but this does seem to agitate the mind and the mind wants that to stop. When the mind is brought back to the self, then, yes, it sees there is no limitation, and therefore bliss. Taking up meditation full-time has certainly helped to keep this idea in the mind on a more regular basis. Still, the ego is gripey and bitchy. It still likes to complain, albeit much less. Hmm... actually, writing this has put this last part in perspective. I can see that the mind actually has been changing.

James: Gripping is the inalienable right of the mind. It finds satisfaction in it. Let it gripe until you get tired of it. Then shut it up. You are the boss.

Ben: Well, thanks for listening to my ego's petty grievances anyway. As far as contentment goes, all of the major desires have in fact died. The only major thing I can see the mind wanting is to study Vedanta constantly to keep itself rightly-oriented and to learn how to teach. I mean, it really wants to learn how to teach; the mind won't seem to let this go. I still listen to your talks daily, read your book and study commentaries by Shankara. The only reason I mention this is because I wonder if this is a remaining seeking *vasana* or if I just want to do it.

James: It doesn't matter what you call it. It is a desire that is not opposed to *dharma*, so go for it. Freedom means you are free to do what you want.

Ben: Also, I sometimes question my ego's motivations for wanting to teach. The ego doesn't feel like there something wrong with the world, and thus see a need to teach, but there is also not a wealth of compassion for those stuck in ignorance.

James: It is just natural to relieve suffering. It is *dharma* because there is only one of us here. If you ego gets kicks out of it, so what?

Ben: I also notice it entertains a sense of importance in having knowledge, but I also see a genuine love of the means of knowledge. Speaking as the ego, knowing I am awareness, all I can say is that I just don't care about anything else. I can't even generate a desire for anything else to do.

James: You joined the *jnanis'* club.

Ben: I don't have a single business *vasana* and I never have. I've always done things for the sake of themselves (art, music, etc.) and never for the money. Even a lot of the music I made was explicitly about God, and before I left Christianity I was in seminary school studying to become a minister. Granted, this is *jiva's* story before knowledge, so how much bearing that has now, I don't really know. Does the *jiva's svadharna* remain after *moksa* or does it dissolve into my nature, *sat-chit-ananda*, the source of *dharma* itself?

James: It remains. It is actually *Isvara*.

Ben: How was it for you? When you knew who you were, why did you keep studying Vedanta?

James: I liked it.

Ben: How did you know you should teach and were qualified to do so?

James: I felt like it. I don't know what "qualified" means. I just did what I wanted and saw results. I have always only done what I wanted in life. The results qualified me. There is nobody other than me to qualify me. I don't know if I am qualified now. It just do what I do. And when I don't like it, I will do something else.

Ben: Lastly, and randomly, I have inferred from the *e-satsangs* that you have a student from Nebraska that is about my age who is at the same "stage" (for lack of a better word) that I am at. If you think of it, would you mind giving him my email when he writes you again? It would be nice to have a "Vedanta buddy" to talk shop with sometimes. It may help to spare my wife the headache of listening to my sporadic rants, although it's not always bad. The other night before bed she said, "You're stuck with me forever." I said, "Well, I'm never going to die and I am you, so, yes, I am stuck with you forever." She liked that.

James: Cool. Yes. Sundari writes him regularly. I will tell her give him your email.

Ben: Okay, no more questions. Thank you so much for giving and giving some more.

James: It is my pleasure, Ben.