

Realization and Family Life

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Wendell: I appreciate your noting that self-realization can be lost if one starts identifying with the body-mind again. This is something that is never mentioned. There seems to be this idea of self-realization as an end-all, be-all experience. This caused me some unnecessary suffering, as this seemed to be my case.

After realizing the self, I abided constantly and consciously for about a year's time. Very dedicated practice. The results, well... they were dramatic. I was living the knowledge of the sages, I was the knowledge.

James: The problem was that you didn't stick with it long enough to burn out the residual *vasanas* and negate the doer. This is a very common occurrence.

Wendell: However, after some time, worldly affairs pulled me back in. Self-identification started again and forgetfulness started to cloud my realization. Could you give some advice for a householder on how one can remain self-realized while living as a householder? It's been a total bitch, in my experience.

James: Yes. The *karma yoga* attitude. If you are not clear on it, see my book. It is the way you make your everyday life into a spiritual practice by neutralizing your *vasanas*. What happened was that you had your awakening before you had worked out the family *vasanas*. These are the most difficult to burn out. Usually you have to go work them out *karmically* instead of with self-knowledge. If your knowledge was firm you would have realized that you already had what your desires seemed to promise and you could have foregone them until the wisdom was steady. You were probably pretty young when you got self-realization. In India, in the old system, they insist that a student get married before they teach him the self because it is almost impossible to keep your attention on the self when you have strong extroverting *vasanas* – work, kids, wife, etc.

But the real problem, Wendell, is your idea of self-realization. You cannot “remain” self-realized. You either understand that you are the self with such conviction that your binding *vasanas* are neutralized – or not. You are the self. You were always the self. You can never not be the self. So there is no “remaining” if by remaining you mean an action, keeping concentrated on the self. If the knowledge is firm, it is no big deal if you have many duties. In your case you are identifying yourself as a doer who has conflicting wants: self-realization and a family. You had this experience and the knowledge came, but the *vasanas* crept in – the sneaky, pesky bastards! – and you figured you were okay, that you could handle it, but you slowly re-identified with the doer. If you are the self, there is no contradiction. Your family is the self and Wendell, the husband/father, is the self and you, awareness, the witness, are not involved. So self-realization is the hard and fast knowledge “I am the self.” There is nothing experiential about it. Each and every experience is in harmony with it. If you can't see that you are the self and not Wendell, then the *karma yoga* attitude will get you out of this pickle. If you can see that you are the self, then

there is no pickle.

Wendell: In the section where you were talking about the teachings of Ramana Maharshi, when talking about holding your mind on self-inquiry, you mention when you are in this phase you need a cave or something like it. You do not want to be in the world. If you stay in the world your connection might be broken. Could you expand on this? Does one reach a point of stabilization? Or is constant and conscious abidance always necessary? If it can be stabilized, how long would you recommend one stay in the cave? We don't have a whole lot of those in Chicago. Perhaps I could set up underneath a train bridge.

James: You do reach the point of "stabilization," although that is a bad word. You come to a point where there is no doubt that you are the self and not Wendell. Enlightenment is freedom from Wendell, not freedom for Wendell. You stay in the "cave" as long as it takes for the last binding *vasana* to burn out. It depends on your *vasana* load and your attachment to the *vasanas*.

Wendell: Generally speaking, might you talk a bit about the process of losing the connection and having to start again? The implications for a householder? This has given me so much grief and also much undue stress on my family, as I'm projecting my anger at them (losing it), just a challenging time for us all...

James: *Karma yoga*, Wendell. Let go of the desire for the result. Do your life as *karma yoga* and the enlightenment will come in due time. At the same time contemplate this: you are you with or without a family. You are you with or without self-realization.

Wendell: Thank you for all your support and work on the matter.

James: You are welcome, Wendell.