

Several Epiphanies

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Arthur: Dear Ram, I first became familiar with you on the DVD that I purchased from *StillnessSpeaks.com*. I could tell that there was something there for me.

So I visited your website and decided to get the *Self inquiry* DVDs. I am watching these and reading your latest book in tandem. As we speak, I have ordered and am expecting your *Self Realization* DVDs this coming week.

I am learning so much from the DVDs. For this hard-boiled egg, I need to watch them several times to get the teaching.

I have one issue (?) that may be helping me or hindering me, I am not sure.

I have always lived with the identity on my driver's licence. I became aware of Neo-Advaita teachings about one year ago.

Not knowing anything about Vedanta, about four or five years ago there was an experience which threw me for a loop. I was sitting on the couch one Friday afternoon, watching the *Oprah* show. Something happened to me that I could not begin to understand until years later.

As I was sitting there watching TV, awareness withdrew from me and was witnessing me sitting on the couch. This witnessing saw the body of me watching TV. Then the thought occurred to awareness, "Look at that body watching television."

Shortly thereafter, with awareness back in the body, I (Arthur) sat there wondering what had transpired. I remember being a bit stunned by the impersonal nature in which I (Arthur) was viewed as only a body. Not knowing anything about Advaita or a separation between awareness and the body, I did not know what to think. I could only explain it as an out-of-body experience. Only after a few years, when I met Advaita teachings, did I start to get what [may] have happened.

Here is what I know:

1. There was an awareness of me (Arthur) watching TV.
2. The body of me (Arthur) was not experiencing anything at that moment. It was just sitting there inert.
3. The witnessing was taking place from behind and to the side of the human body.
4. I do not remember any sounds, just a visual of the room and the body and the thought mentioned above.

I (Arthur, the person) have had some mystical experiences.

In one, which came true later, I found myself in the dream situation experiencing the situation that was seen in the dream. In another there were dancing lights on a book when I was reading it. In a

third a huge ball of light appeared on the side of the road while I was on a walk.

I am a professional in my community and can assure you that this kind of information would be looked dimly upon if known.

I have a burning desire for truth and am focused on revealing the truth of what I am. I am deeply immersed in your teachings, as these are the first teachings that address my intellectual needs to understand truth. Up until now, I have been reading about people's purported experiences of finding their truth. I now know that they are not qualified teachers nor have I been a qualified student.

I am desperate to know the truth and will spend as much time as I can to finally know my true nature. At this time, my true nature is known for a period of time and then disappears. I am working on gaining the confidence in the knowing of who I truly am and staying with that.

Could you please comment on my experience when awareness seemed to be outside the body? I am not sure what to think of that. Also, would you consider helping as I work through your teaching? I intend to see this through till the end.

~ Blessings, Arthur

James: Hi, Arthur. Lovely email, straightforward and honest. It shows the purity of your intention. Yes, I am happy to help you as much as I can as you proceed on this journey to freedom.

You will be happy to know that this "out-of-body" experience is a garden variety experience of your true nature. It is so common it is almost a cliché. I had it many times. Nonetheless, it is a big shock when it happens because awareness has apparently been locked in the body behind the eyes more or less forever. It happened to show you something about your true nature. And not surprisingly, you did not interpret it correctly. How could you? This is why you have now been lead to Neo-Advaita and now Vedanta. It is good that you appreciate the inadequacies of Neo-Advaita. It is helpful at first and then not. Vedanta can make sense of it. I will explain it a bit.

In fact, you – awareness – are always "out of the body." It is actually inaccurate to say that awareness is out of the body, words being what they are. By "out of the body" I mean that the body is in awareness, not the other way around. By "in" I mean that the body is known by awareness, not the other way around. What is known to you is you – but you are not it. The difference between you and the body is that you are conscious, but the body isn't. It seems conscious because awareness pervades every atom of it. When you grow up you are taught that you are the body. You just naturally assume this orientation. It becomes your hard and fast knowledge – but it is not knowledge. It is completely backward. So when for whatever reason – let's say the grace of God – you actually experience the relationship as it is, it makes you doubt your sanity.

The proper interpretation of this experience is: "I am awareness and not the body."

You said, "There was an awareness of me (Arthur) watching TV."

Ask yourself how you knew of that awareness that was watching. Who was watching the watcher? Was the watcher self-aware and this is the only way it could formulate it in words? Or was there a conscious someone or something that was aware of the awareness watching? The

statement “there was an awareness of me” shows that you do not think that you are the awareness. Or maybe you do because you put “Arthur” in parentheses, which leads me to think that you are implying that you are not Arthur, the “me.”

Reality is such that there are only two things happening: you, awareness, and the objects in awareness, i.e. what you experience. Enlightenment is just knowing the difference between the subject and the objects. The subject is you – limitless awareness – and the objects are formed up out of transient thoughts made of awareness. They cannot be you, because they disappear, but you do not disappear when your experience changes. You witness ever-changing experiences. Even now, the awareness that allowed you to describe this experience of being out of the body is present observing the thoughts that appear in your mind as you read this. That awareness is what you are, and Arthur, the experiencing entity that you have taken yourself to be until recently, is known to you. He is an object.

You said, “The body of me (Arthur) was not experiencing anything at that moment. It was just sitting there inert.”

The knowledge here is that the body is inert. It is never experiencing anything. You, awareness, experience through the body, although it does not seem like for the reason I cited above, i.e. subtlety and pervasiveness.

You said, “The witnessing was taking place from behind and to the side of the human body.”

How did you know this? You have to be something other than the witnessing and the body because both appeared as objects separate from you.

You said, “I do not remember any sounds, just a visual of the room and the body and the thought mentioned above.”

This epiphany is a visual, graphical representation of the nature of reality: the subject and its relationship to objects. There was no need for awareness to use the other senses to convey its message.

Don’t feel bad that you did not come away from this experience enlightened. Even if you draw the right conclusion you would be hard-pressed to take awareness as your identity because the habit of taking the body as the self is hardwired.

The other experiences are interesting but not very useful because awareness obviously appears as an object. When you have this kind of experience it tends to serve to whet your appetite for mystic experience – which may be good – but may also be bad because it may keep you chasing phenomena, which prevents you from inquiring into the one to whom phenomena present themselves, i.e. awareness, aka you.

Anyway, as you go forward all this will make sense. The vision of non-duality will slowly crystallize in your understanding and one day the meaning of “I am non-dual, ordinary, actionless, ever-present, unborn awareness” will make perfect sense.

~ All the best, Ram