James: Hi, Martin. Your argument that silence (no-mind), not words, is the teacher:

1. Assumes that the inquirer is “listening” to no-mind;

2. Assumes that no-mind has a problem with ignorance, which it doesn’t;

3. Assumes that the inquirer is capable of assimilating no-mind’s teaching if there is one, which there isn’t;

4. Assumes the contact with no-mind is superior to a valid means of self-knowledge, i.e. Vedanta, which it isn’t. Contact with no-mind can be helpful or harmful depending on the knowledge or ignorance operating in the mind of the inquirer when said contact is happening. There is no guarantee that an inquirer will have the same degree of dispassion as Ramana and interpret the meaning of no-mind in such a way that it negates the jiva as the primary identity, and reveals the self to be one’s essential identity.

You can’t be in direct contact with the self because you are the self. You can only be in contact as an apparent self, or jiva. But, assuming that your statement is true, what values are going to inform your interpretation of the “teaching”?

If you are looking for moksa in an experience of silence, you obviously do not know who you are because you already are the self and if you are the self you won’t be trying to contact yourself by sitting in silence. You are silence. Sitting in silence can be helpful or harmful depending on how it is understood. I suggest you read my book *Knowledge and Experience* along with Chapter II of *How to Attain Enlightenment*. It will help you understand the argument.

Martin: Somehow, I do not think that James would accept “wordless knowledge.”

James: I’m not sure that the intention behind this email is really different from the first one in which you said that I have no business teaching and should stop being a teacher. The implied meaning of this statement suggests that it isn’t. You say you are just “sharing” but I am not sure this isn’t a ploy. Are you really trying to understand the experience and knowledge argument – silence versus words re: moksa – or are you still trying to convince me that I have no business teaching? It is quite strange that you are trying so hard to prove me wrong. Why would anyone in their right mind listen to the angry and condescending words of a complete stranger on a topic on which they are ill-informed? It does not make sense.

“James” – whatever that word means to you – does not have a teaching. James teaches pure traditional Vedanta. So the discussion is with Vedanta, not “James.” James is not enlightened nor is he unenlightened. He is just an object appearing in me.

Martin: I disagree.
James: You are free to disagree all you want, Martin. I don’t argue, because I don’t have an opinion about this topic. I only teach Vedanta. I can’t figure out what I said that offended you. From your references you must be a Ramana bhakta. Sometimes dedicated Ramana bhaktas have a problem with Vedanta because they think it somehow contradicts Ramana’s statements about knowledge and experience. It doesn’t. It elucidates them.

I have nothing but love and respect for Ramana. I lived behind his ashram for 15 years. Hundreds of people have written me praising the article on Ramana’s moksa. It is a chapter in my book How to Attain Enlightenment.

The Vedanta sampradaya does not have a problem with Ramana’s moksa. In fact, it accords Upadesa Saram the status of an Upanishad. However, Ramana was not a teacher. He said so himself. He spoke to whomever was in front of him according to the understanding of that person. So there are apparently contradictory statements in his “teaching.” Statements made at different times to different people do not mean that the person that uttered them didn’t know who he or she is. Nor does it mean that either statement is untrue, given the context. But when you put them together they seem to contradict each other. So there should be a way to resolve these apparent contradictions. Ramana’s apparently contradictory statements are the words of a jnani, which can be resolved with reference to Vedanta’s teachings. Many people are confused by Ramana’s statements, not because Ramana was confused.

Ramana spoke the truth, directly. He did not “teach.” Teaching is systematic. It employs a logic that transcends the experience of individuals. Later people invented the idea that he was “teaching.” Teachings are not meant to be interpreted according to one’s own beliefs. They are to be understood as they are. The words of Vedanta establish the vision of non-duality in the mind and set the self free of apparent ignorance. They are the big-picture view of reality.

Maybe you read some statements I made about Ramana’s words without an appreciation of Vedanta and assumed that I was criticizing Ramana. If you have bhakti for Ramana and/or any other guru, it is very wonderful. I am one hundred percent for it. I have nothing but respect for Ramana. There are self-deluded gurus, and Ramana wasn’t one. But many people – and I suspect you are one – believe that their guru is the only “real” guru and that ideas that seem to contradict their interpretation of their guru’s words are wrong.

For this conversation to go forward, you need to tell me what you want to know concerning your quest for moksa. If you feel that you are already enlightened, there is nothing for us to talk about because I only discuss with people who are seeking enlightenment and with those, enlightened or not, who appreciate Vedanta as a valid means of self-knowledge and are friendly, not hostile, toward me. I never argue. Opinions are useless things, particularly when they masquerade as knowledge.

If you want to argue this point about silence versus words, I insist that you read the book Knowledge and Experience and that you read Chapter II of How to Attain Enlightenment. If there is any doubt and you can present a reasonable argument, I will reply. Our satsang cannot be a referendum on Guru Jim and his putative enlightenment, for reasons already stated.
~ Love, James

**Note:** This (edited) email produced a very nasty reply. I wished Martin well and deleted his email from my contact list.