

So I'll Never Experience the Self?

Christian Leeb

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John: Dear Christian, nice to meet you virtually too, and thank you very much for your response. I have read and appreciate the PDF as well.

The point you make about the *jiva* always feeling like a *jiva* is well taken – but hard to cement into my mind. Clearly there are some points on all this stuff that I have got to get straight.

Is the following an accurate portrayal of the situation?

In Plato's cave allegory, as I remember it, there are all these people chained to the ground, facing in a single direction, observing shadows on the wall. Behind them are fires with performers walking around, whose shadows the prisoners see on the wall, which they take to be real – perhaps the most real thing they know.

My understanding is that we cannot know awareness directly – just as these folks can't turn around and see the fires producing the light. However, the things they know are made apparent by the light – even if those things are illusory, shadows being a fine description of something illusory.

However, with this take, we cannot really ever know ourselves as awareness in the way we know ourselves as the *jiva*. I mean, we can repeat the *mantras*, or the affirmations, or the determinations, as you put it... we can intellectually know it, such as how I intellectually can affirm, "There are microscopic, invisible organisms on my thumb," but I cannot experientially know myself to be awareness itself.

This is a point I keep getting tripped up on. I know James hammers against it in his books, but somehow it is a stumbling block for me. Also, as you point out in the PDF you attached to the last email, there are certain *mantras* we may really want to affirm but don't understand. One of those, for me, is the one about the deep-sleep state. James says we are aware in the deep-sleep state, but I do not experience this to be true. It sounds ridiculous to me. However, it kind of feels like what that must mean is that I am identifying myself incorrectly, like it's a riddle – since I am aware in the deep sleep state, then whatever my usual perception is is not to be trusted, as my usual perception says that is false. But this isn't really satisfactory either. I really am perplexed on this point.

I've heard James describe it in person, in his audios and in his books as something like the following: "Since when I wake up I am angry about the teenagers partying next door at 3:00 am, it means I am aware in the deep sleep state." However, to me, this is only known after the fact – in the *jiva's* mind. It's not known to sheer awareness. The experience of knowing the disruption is known after the fact, understood then and not before.

What am I tripping over here? Clearly I'm stuck on something.

Thank you(!) for any clarity you can offer on these points.

~ John

Christian: John, if we couldn't ever know ourselves as awareness, in the way we know ourselves as the *jiva*, Vedanta wouldn't be worth it.

The teachings have to repeatedly point out that none of your five senses can know you, this awareness, because of the pervasive tendency to try to "look for the self as if it's an object that will be known to you that you haven't discovered yet."

But that's all it means, it's only talking about your five senses.

Here's what you need to concentrate on, and it's extremely good news.

You can never not experience yourself as this awareness. Can you?

You are always experiencing yourself as this awareness, not through your five senses, but strangely because you are aware that you're aware.

It's not that you see or hear or touch or smell or taste "that you are aware," but you know you're aware, right?

Yes, the *mantras* are intellectual, but that's because the mind will not assimilate knowledge until it's verified by the intellect.

If you were traveling in a foreign country that was at war, and you were concerned about being taken hostage, but then you were told that the enemy is friendly to your nationality, that knowledge would set you free of your fear, even though bombs were still going off around you.

However, when you saw people with guns or heard shots you would feel the fear automatically because your intellect had not fully assimilated the new knowledge, and you would automatically tell yourself over and over, "I'm good, my passport is all I need."

The fear might even be raging, and you might find yourself horribly anxious, but the whole time the knowledge about your nationality would actually keep you sane, free of the emotional turbulence.

Once you mentally repeated, learned, assimilated the fact that your passport was your ticket to safety, you'd start to relax, even among guns and bombs.

That relaxation is the experiential fruit of your new knowledge, once it's assimilated, thanks to your intellect verifying it.

The *mantras* are not lifeless statements. They are meant to be proven true or false by your intellect, and the process required to prove them, one way or the other, will make your mind examine this simple, obvious awareness that you are, over and over and over.

And then, once the mind has thoroughly examined and verified that, yep, you are always this same awareness, the knowledge will be assimilated and your identity will change. You will know, without doubt, that you are this simple, obvious, everyday awareness that you always experience yourself to be – precisely because you ALWAYS experience yourself to be this awareness.

What you're saying about the three-states inquiry is exactly what you should be saying, it's a really tough one. If you find it compelling, stick with it. Work it out. If you're not really compelled with it, let it go and focus on others that are easier for you.

That one took me a long time to get, and it's tricky because, as you said, it relies on memory, which can be discounted because it's not in your "direct experience." That said, you can also approach it with the question "did you stop existing in deep sleep?"

You know you existed in waking, then dream, then waking again. So did you stop existing? Logic works here. You know you existed, yet there was no mind or body. So what are you? This awareness.

If you say you can't be sure that you were aware or existed in deep sleep, because there is no mind, *Panchadas*i points out that in deep sleep what you are aware of – is not objects, including a mind. And in fact, that is how we "experience" deep sleep, total peace because there "isn't anything there." But you're aware of that "nothing there."

It's also helpful to go deep with comparing waking with dream because that starts to really loosen the bolts. If you really study your direct experience, that which you can verify yourself, you'll see that both dream and waking states experience AS waking, that you clearly have different bodies and minds, yet you are still you.

Getting firmly established in that perspective can also help understand the deep sleep.

I hope that helps.

~ Christian