

That Primal Grasping Energy

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Toby: Hi, James. I saw that my last email about “perfect understanding” was posted as an *e-satsang*. I just wanted to let you know where it has gone from there. I recently heard one of your *Panchadasi* audios and a question came up relating to free will. “From *jiva*’s point of view there is free will,” and, “from *Bhagavan*’s point of view there isn’t,” you said. This has been one of the more burning issues in my mind. How does anything happen? As a *jiva*, I seem to have a choice in the matter. But as *Bhagavan*, that choice has already been made. Which one is right?

James: Here is a good synopsis from one of my students. There are also a number of recent *satsangs* on this topic at the website.

On Free Will and Choice

“Rocks are insentient and do not react to stimuli.

“Plants and animals have sentience and react automatically to stimuli. They have in-built instinctive patterns of behaviour and do not know the mechanism of their reaction. They are not self-aware and do not have a sense of ‘I,’ or doership (‘I am doing it’), nor the sense of ownership of results.

“The ignorant person reacts automatically to stimuli. He does not know the mechanism by which his mind-body system works. He has a sense of ‘I’ and the sense of doership (‘I am doing the action’) and willfully engages in activity for his survival, security and comfort. He has a sense of the ownership of results and expects successful outcomes to his actions. He thinks he is a separate entity existing in his own right as an autonomous individual. All this happens because of ignorance.

“The liberated person responds consciously and appropriately to stimuli. He has overcome ignorance and is aware of how the mechanism of his mind-body system works. Thus he does not have a sense of doership or of ownership. He flows with the laws of Life. He is aware of the substratum of unity underlying the appearance of differences, ‘apparent’ differences. He does not have a sense of separateness yet appreciates and respects the apparent individuality of each. He remains as actionless awareness in the midst of the activities of normal life.”

Toby: Then I asked myself, “Why do I want to know?” The answer inevitably was that, “When I know this, it will benefit me in some way.” I then saw how this whole teaching is an edifice of concepts (very fancy ones too) and that at some point this edifice must be torn down. I cannot continue to have this conflict of “which point of view is more correct, *jiva*’s or *Bhagavan*’s?” since the only reason I want to know the right answer is for the benefit of the very entity that this knowledge seeks to destroy.

James: I can see where you are going with this argument, but before I read on you need to know that neither *jiva's* nor *Bhagavan's* point of view is "correct." For liberation you need to understand how *jiva* and *Bhagavan* relate to you, awareness. Also, you should know that *jiva* is awareness (associated with the five sheaths), so you will not destroy *jiva*. The goal of Vedanta is to destroy *jiva's* ignorance of its nature.

Toby: So I saw how both the *jiva*-thought and the *Bhagavan*-thought arises IN ME. The whole edifice of concepts that is Vedanta collapsed right there and all I saw is this primal clinging to something, anything, this primal energy that just wants to grasp on to something, to just be something. It can grasp onto the *Bhagavan*-thought or the *jiva*-thought or whatever.

Isn't this where Vedanta is supposed to lead you? To the realization that all of this is unnecessary? All these cute concepts of *Bhagavan*, *Isvara*, *gunas*, *jivas*, etc.... they are just means to an end. And then it's a matter of simply being with that primal energy that wants to grasp onto these concepts...

I am interested in what you have to say.

James: This is a good start as far as where you are going, Toby, but no, it is not where Vedanta is supposed to lead you. And no, the goal is not simply being with that "grasping primal energy." It is about seeing that the primal grasping energy is just an object in you – and dismissing it as unreal.

Vedanta is about appreciating the fullness and ungraspable nature of your self. It is a very positive understanding, one that will keep a smile on your face forever, one that dispels the grasper and its energy once and for all. You are getting close. Keep inquiring and you will see it.

~ Much love, James