

The Key that Frees the Mind

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2015-05-10

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2138>

Upton: Hi, Ted. I found your email through the ShiningWorld website and really enjoyed reading some of your answers to people's questions there.

I guess you're a busy person, but would be very grateful if you could spare the time to make a comment or two on some sticking points I seem to have.

I have come to all this through, I guess, what you could describe as "Direct Path"-type teachings. I have had lots of interesting experiences of peace, happiness, oneness, etc. The usual transient things! Amongst those there have been a couple of times when something has happened which I knew at the time were not experiences... I sort of knew that everything that arose was me but I wasn't any one aspect of it.

Ted: This is an interesting way to describe your understanding. First of all, you can't "sort of" know something. You either know it or you don't. You might say that you have an idea about something that you believe to be true, but once you know something, all uncertainty or doubt has been removed. You don't sort of know that you are a human being, for instance. You know it without doubt.

Having said that, the understanding you describe is very close to a direct realization of the self, it would seem, but still smacks of experience. I say this only because were it actually an understanding rather than an experience, you would have assimilated the knowledge and would no longer be questioning your true identity. Though you do not precisely articulate to whom you are referring by the term "me," it would seem that you were watching the objects that arose within you and distinguishing each as different from – or at least not definitively – you, from the perspective of some kind of discrete entity that might be considered the collective body of all objects. It is true that no discrete object arising within you is definitively you, but it is moreover true that even the collective whole of all objects do not constitute the entirety of your limitless fullness. While objects depend on you for their existence, you are ever free of all objects. A simple consideration of the deep sleep state reveals that despite the absence of objects, you do not cease to be. If you did, you would not wake up, for something cannot come out of nothing.

The implication of this contemplation is that among the objects that are not you is included the body and mind of the apparent person you seem to be. Therefore the declaration that all objects are known to you does not mean that objects are known to the intellect or even that objects are known to some "super intellect" that is the self. The self is not a knower in relation to any known object, for the self is not an entity endowed with a mind. The mind is an object, a machine, as it were, that appears within the self, "whose" nature is limitless awareness, and when illumined by awareness performs various psycho-emotional functions, among which is the perception of objects. The self, limitless awareness, is simply the "light" of consciousness in which all objects appear. However, when illumined by awareness, the mind of the apparent person does perform the function of understanding its true nature and distinguishing objects as limited forms appearing within the scope of limitless awareness.

The ultimate truth of course is that all objects are actually non-separate from you, for you, awareness, are the essential content of all objects. That is, since reality is non-dual, you are the “substanceless substance” of which all objects are made as well as the “field” of being in which they appear. In this sense, all objects are nothing more than projected images/sensations appearing on the “screen” of you, awareness. Figuratively speaking, the entire manifest universe is nothing more than a dream appearing within the “mind of God.”

Before we can appreciate the non-dual truth, however, we need to break our identification with the mind-body-sense complex and our belief that objects and experiences have any essential effect on the self. Thus we begin by discriminating between the self and the “not-self.” Then, when we understand that no object has any affect on us, and that even in the absence of all objects we still exist, it is revealed that the essential nature of all that exists is limitless awareness, which is the self. When this understanding is fully assimilated, no object or experience can enhance or diminish it. Though the knowledge of one’s true identity as limitless awareness registers as a thought in the mind, it is not a bit of information that needs be retained. Rather it is simply the acknowledgment of that which stands revealed in the absence of all objective phenomena. Moreover, this knowledge accommodates both the relative knowledge and ignorance of objective phenomena, realizing them to be nothing more than objects themselves. Thereafter one stands with unshakeable conviction in one’s true identity as limitless, eternal, immutable, unassailable awareness.

Upton: At the time I would describe it as an understanding rather than experience. These periods of understanding never lasted for too long though and my mind then seemed to turn them into experiences or concepts which I have since tried to recreate.

Ted: I’m not exactly sure what you mean by the “mind turning understanding into an experience.” If you simply mean that you tend to lose track of the fact that you are limitless awareness and to consider yourself the apparent person you seem to be, then what you are experiencing is what we call “the firefly state.” The knowledge of your true nature flickers on and off, on and off. You remember for certain periods of time, and then you seem to forget again and get caught up in the drama of the apparent person playing its role within the grand drama of the apparent reality. The reason this “flickering” of understanding occurs is because we are so deeply conditioned by ignorance that it takes an extended period of persistent effort to change our erroneous thinking patterns and re-habituate ourselves to thinking in alignment with the truth.

Another reason that periods of understanding do not last is that the “understanding” may have been accompanied by an experience that you have equated with the knowledge gleaned from the experience. Consequently, rather than retaining the knowledge of your true nature as such, you are seeking to re-experience a certain emotional state that you believe somehow defines your true nature more accurately than what you normally experience. The truth is, however, that no experience lasts permanently. The only real virtue of any spiritual epiphany, no matter how intellectually or emotionally satisfying it may be, is the knowledge that is gleaned from it, for only knowledge will last after experience has passed.

The most important factor in cultivating self-knowledge is exposure to a proper unfoldment of the teachings by a qualified teacher and the continued guidance of that teacher throughout one’s process of self-inquiry. While reading “spiritual” books can be helpful, most such books on the

market today are less than helpful, if not outright misleading. Among the plethora of books espousing non-duality, the “Direct Path” teachings as presented by such individuals as Greg Goode, Rupert Spira and Francis Lucille (that is to say, those individuals whose teachings reflect the teachings Sri Atmananda Krishna Menon) are about the only modern teachings traditional Vedanta can endorse. While the books espousing the non-dual nature of reality do articulate the ultimate truth, none offer a time-tested “road map” for how to realize and fully assimilate the truth. Moreover, if we try to read the scriptures themselves, our conditioned ignorance will invariably cause us to misinterpret their implied and intended meaning. In short, we need a proper means of knowledge, which is what Vedantic self-inquiry is, and we need a qualified teacher who can unfold the teachings and guide us through an analysis of our own experience through which our true nature as limitless awareness will stand revealed beyond the shadow of a doubt. Thereafter, our understanding is immediate and firmly established. No longer will we have to believe in or agree with any idea. We know directly who we are. Case closed.

Upton: I came across traditional Vedanta not very long ago by finding the ShiningWorld website and also reading James’ latest book *The Essence of Enlightenment*. What struck me was the idea of knowledge and not experience. Something about that really clicked with me. I have also watched a series of YouTube videos of James called *Self-Inquiry* (about 20 hours long). A lot of things now make sense to me. I feel like I know I am awareness, and every time a limiting idea comes up I kind of...

Ted: Kind of? These words indicate a lack of *shradda*, faith, in the teachings. While Vedanta does not advocate blind faith, it does demand provisional faith in the teachings pending the results of inquiry into your own experience. In order to buck the strong influence of ignorance, you’ve got to, in the words of my teacher (James), “man up.” Take a stance in awareness as awareness. Apply the teachings with conviction and see if they don’t withstand the onslaught of any limited ideas and/or *vasana*-compelled pursuit of object-joy.

Upton: ...apply that and know it doesn’t actually apply to the real me. But I still seem to have some confusion, which I think is between the ideas of the Direct Path teachings and the traditional ones. I have this sort of concept of awareness as an ever-present witness, which is how it keeps being portrayed, but I know this can’t really be true as the implication of a “witness” is that it is separate from what it is witnessing. In one of your recent *satsangs* at ShiningWorld you describe it as the knower of ideas or objects which I think makes a bit more sense to me.

Ted: This issue was addressed earlier. Awareness is not a knower of objects, but rather the “light” by means of whose illumination all objects are known by the mind.

Upton: Another sticking point which seems to pop up from time to time is this idea of wanting experience to be different from what it is. Like I have this idea in my mind of how it felt before during the times I feel I understood all this and how I felt limitless and want that experience back, although I know really that experience was just a by-product of knowledge or understanding.

Ted: This issue was also addressed earlier. Self-knowledge, no doubt, has an impact on

experience, for when one knows oneself to be limitless awareness and that nothing can enhance, diminish or otherwise change him in any essential way, one tends to let go of one's binding *vasanas*, the compelling likes and dislikes, that are rooted in the sense of inadequacy and incompleteness, that drive one to satisfy them through the obtainment of various subtle and gross objects in the vain hope that doing so will provide one with permanent fulfillment, and thus one tends to experience less anxiety, agitation, anger, jealousy, confusion and grief, and more peace, happiness, light-heartedness and contentment. Nevertheless, knowledge cannot be equated with emotion. In fact even knowledge is not pure awareness. Self-knowledge is simply the key that frees the mind and allows one to abide in the ultimate inner freedom that is now and has always been one's "already accomplished" true nature as the limitless awareness in which all objects, emotions, ideas and experiences appear.

Upton: Anyway, I'm not sure if you can pick any questions out of that!

Thanks for your time.