

The *Dharma* of an Inquirer

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Hi, Mark. I woke up early yesterday morning thinking about our conversation and thought I would write a small summary unfolding the logic of Vedanta's argument. You probably know all this but maybe some of the logic is not clear. This *satsang* deals with a doubt that comes at the very end of one's *sadhana*. You are much closer to understanding than perhaps you think.

It is your contention that you do not know that you are awareness. You know that the scripture, which is impersonal time-tested knowledge, says that you are. So I was wondering why you might not want to accept awareness as your primary identity since it is the *dharma* of an inquirer to take "I am awareness" as your identity until such time as there is no doubt about it.

Five or six years ago I had a friend whose last doubt was that he felt that accepting himself as awareness implied some kind of change in his life. He had a good life, a wife, two grown children, a successful business and a beautiful home in one of America's premier environments. He thought that *moksa* implied some sort of change on the *karmic* level. He thought it meant he had an obligation to teach. I told him that it had nothing to do with anything on the *karma* plane, that the only change was the inclusion of an identity that did not cancel his identity as a doer but included it. About three weeks later he "got it." What did he "get"? He understood that he, awareness, is free of *karma*. In other words, nothing changed in his life except his relationship to the person he previously took to be himself, a person that he realized was only a name pointing to who he actually was. So I wonder if you feel that accepting yourself as awareness somehow obligates "Mark" to change in some way that is not acceptable to Mark. I have no way of knowing why there seems to be an attachment to the "I don't know" or the "I don't know if I know" thought and I wondered if this is the issue. In any case, I think discovering the cause of the resistance would be fruitful.

One problem with the idea of getting *moksa* is that it assumes that *moksa* is some kind of happening, that there is a "before" and an "after." But *moksa* is not something that happens. *Moksa* is just a word that describes you, the one seeking *moksa*. So *moksa* cannot be an object to be obtained. It is a word that describes you as awareness. It means "I am free." It does not mean that Mark is free because Mark is not free insofar as there is a Mark – and there is – Mark is always bound to *Isvara*, life. Mark was born in *Isvara*, lives in *Isvara*, depends on *Isvara* and dies in *Isvara*. This is true whether or not "Mark" is "enlightened." In other words, *moksa* is not something you get, it is something you are.

But let's assume that there is something to get or lose as far as *moksa* is concerned. How about doing a cost/benefit analysis on it to see what in terms of what Mark would potentially gain or lose? The reason I suggest this is because *moksa* is only knowledge, the thought "I am free." If Mark said, "I am free," instead of, "I doubt that I am free," what would his life look like? I'd be interested in seeing your analysis.

In any case, let me review the argument I made the night before last. If you are an inquirer it is wise to live without the idea that "I am a knower." This may sound a little confusing, so let me explain. On the *mithya/maya* level, the subtle body – Mark – is an experiencing and knowing

entity. So on that level it is inevitable that Mark knows or doesn't know or is not sure if he knows something. These are the possibilities of knowledge. You can say you know, you don't know or you are uncertain if you know or don't know. These three possibilities of knowing require an object. The last two, "I don't know and I am not sure if I know," can be both taken as not knowing, so we have two basic objects to sort out – knowledge and ignorance.

The self is not an object of knowledge so it cannot be known in the way that you can know an object. It is not the knowing self – the subtle body – that knows the self. It is always only the self that knows the self – when ignorance about its nature is removed. The removal of ignorance does not mean that ignorance has to disappear, only that it has to be known as ignorance, just as a mirage does not disappear when it is known to be a mirage. If it is known as ignorance the self will not believe it. Are you saying that you do not believe you are the self? It seems to me you are but I may be wrong. I am not trying to tell you anything, only to help you find out why you cannot accept scripture's contention that you are awareness.

The self is not a knower although it is often called a knower when objects appear in it. It becomes a witness when there is something to witness. But when there are no objects it is not a knower except in the sense that it knows itself. It knows itself because it is awareness and awareness is self-aware whether the subtle body is active or dormant, as it is in deep sleep.

I said the night before last that you know each of these options is a fact but that you take "I don't know" or "I don't know if I know" (the self-ignorance options) to be true is not supported by evidence. It is true that the third option – "I am awareness" – is not supported by evidence except scripture. So in the event that you know what scripture says (and you do) it seems to me that you have set up your belief as the basis of your view about yourself rather than scripture's view about you, which is a statement of fact, although Mark can only believe this until it is known.

In the *manana* phase of inquiry it is the duty of the inquirer to sacrifice what you think is true about who you are in favor of what scripture says is true – if there is a conflict between the two. If there is not sufficient confidence (*shraddha*) in the knowledge "I am awareness" then you need to live as awareness until the confidence comes. It will eventually because when your idea of who you are is in harmony with who you are experience confirms it. At first I wondered if you were waiting for some kind of experience to prove it to you before you accept it but I know that isn't true, although it once was.

I know you are familiar with the argument that it is possible that *Isvara* might provide an experience that convinces you but it is by no means certain and it is also by no means certain that the conviction "I am awareness" will remain once the experience is gone – because the belief "I don't know" may very well have become a *vasana* which will assert itself with force once the epiphany is gone and, assuming that you take it to be real, wipe out your self-knowledge. Matthias made a good point last night when he said that self-knowledge is only training the mind to think in harmony with the truth. I know that you have repeatedly said, "I don't know." So I suspect that it has become a *vasana*. You deal with it the way you deal with any other bit of self-knowledge. You refuse to believe it until it goes away, based on scripture's contention that it is ignorance. Or if you understand that it is ignorance, you do not believe it when it appears, if it does. "I" is a fact. "Don't know" is not a fact. It is purely subjective – a belief.

You may not wish to accept the authority of scripture although Vedanta says it is wise to do so. The *dharma* of an inquirer is accept knowledge. The purpose of inquiry is knowledge. Even without scripture you can gain self-knowledge. Here is the reason:

Go back to your basic experience, which is that there are only two things in reality: me and what I experience/know.

The only reasonable conclusion, since these options are known, is to choose to take the “I know” option. Vedanta says that if you do inquiry on “I don’t know” you cannot maintain that it is true. Why? Because you know the “I don’t know” thought. Knowing the “I don’t know” thought can only mean that you are awareness because it is your experience that there is only you and what you know and because there is only one knower of thoughts and that is awareness.

Presently you think that the “not-knower” is Mark but there is no evidence that “Mark” – like the thought “I don’t know” – is anything other than a name for awareness since you cannot actually produce a “Mark” for anyone to see. If Mark is real and if Mark’s thoughts are real they would be always present and available for anyone to see at any time. Awareness is the only thing that fits this definition. In fact anyone can see you because you are always present. It is awareness that people see, not the person called “Mark.” Mark is a sign pointing to you, awareness. Unfortunately, people take the sign for what it refers to.

In any case, you do not need to produce awareness because it is obvious that you are aware and that the word “Mark” is an object known to you, awareness.

There is one more aspect to the experience/knowledge argument that may apply in your case. It is clear that you do not think that a mystical experience is necessary for *moksa* but, as I hinted at above, experience does not stop when the knowledge that is *moksa* is gained and it is true that knowledge has an impact on experience. So is it possible that Mark’s ego, the part that thinks about the results of actions, is reluctant to declare “I am awareness” for fear that it would impact negatively on its present life – or lifestyle – after *moksa*? One thing that is definitely lost is the seeking. If the ego has identified itself as a seeker, as “I don’t know,” then that identity will no longer be relevant. Of course the loss of seeking is not the only upside – or downside, as the case may be.

~ Much love, James