

# Vivek Ramakrishnan: Dialogues with James - Part 3

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## Vivek Ramakrishnan: Dialogues with James- Part 3

This represents the third part of my dialogues with James focusing on Self-Inquiry and understanding the nature of the mind. The first two part of my dialogues was on questions related to Awareness and nature of the Self. This can be found at (<http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/index.php>) under Dialogues with James Swartz and Vivek Ramakrishnan.

The hardest part for me after my awakening to the knowledge that I am the Self was realizing that actualizing this knowledge requires a serious commitment to Self-Inquiry. This was much more difficult than I expected, and most of the questions in the following pages deal with actualizing this knowledge. In my opinion this is the most critical part of anyone's spiritual quest because it requires looking at *Jiva* from the perspective of the Self and taking the necessary steps to change one's behavior so that it aligns with *Dharma*. It also requires one to face his Shadow since the Self includes both the good and bad parts of oneself. It very tempting after an awakening experience to focus on the good parts of yourself, and ignore the dark parts but one does that at his or her peril. The Shadow is always beside you and if you don't acknowledge it or force yourself to reject that part, it will always come back only stronger. Buddha's battle with the demon king Mara and his daughters, or Jesus being tempted by Satan are just descriptions of confronting one's Shadow and the unclaimed parts of one's personality. Yes, the *Jiva* is apparently real but if you have spent a major portion of your life identifying with the apparently real, it is not going to go away in an instant. The application of Self-Knowledge to the *Jiva* is what constitutes *atma vichara* or self-Inquiry.

During this process of actualization, I realized that integrating this knowledge requires one to look and see how identification with the body-mind complex (*Gross/Subtle/Causal Body in Samkhya or the Five Sheaths in Vedanta*) gives rise to the existential crisis that every human in this planet experiences. This existential crisis is a by-product of self-awareness. Of all beings in this planet, human beings are the only species that can reflect on themselves; unfortunately, most of us get attached to the reflection instead of the Light that illuminates all existence. This existential crisis is described in various religions as the Fall, Dhukka or Maya. It has no beginning and afflicts all human beings. Another aspect of Self-Inquiry is looking at these identifications deeply as they arise in awareness and negating them on a moment to moment basis. This requires a very stable and focused mind which is why great sages like Shankara, Ramakrishna, Ramana, Nissargadatta, spent time doing yogic concentration practices. An unstable, unfocussed mind will not be able to look into the moment to moment unconscious identifications that arise when the mind automatically identifies with the body-mind complex.

That said, there is a fine balance between identifying and dis-identifying with this body-mind complex. The body-mind complex is responsible for even the simplest of actions like sitting, walking and eating one's food. Completely disassociating yourself from the body-mind complex is not only impossible, but dangerous and unrealistic. Even in the case of Ramana Maharishi who after his near death experience completely lost his ability to identify with the body-mind

complex, needed the help of caring attendants to feed him and take care of his body. Otherwise he would not have survived his initial years of isolation. Even a great Jnani like Adi Shankara, had to use his subtle body to enter the body of a dead king so that he could answer questions related to sex that \*Mandana Misra's wife asked him during their debate. I love this story because it illustrates how the apparently real body-mind complex was needed to answer a question about the Absolute! (*\*Mandana Misra was a Mimamsa scholar, so learned that legend says that the parrots in his house could recite the Vedas. He was a student of Kumarila Bhatta and later became a student of Adi Shankara*)

Self-Inquiry is long and arduous process, and requires a clear sattvic mind so that the teaching of Vedanta can take effect and reshape the mind. There is no shortcut, and imagining that no work is required after awakening is deluding oneself. Like James once said, the greatness of Ramana was not his enlightenment but the fact that he polished his mind to such a degree that it reflected the pure light of the Self.

### Self-Inquiry

**Vivek:** James, these days the Self feels like a screen or in other words a stateless state if we can call that. I as the Self can see that emotions occur on the screen/awareness but they are not me. However, I as the Self have no experience of bliss as the scriptures claim. Right now it feels like a screen on which the movie is played, the movie being my life and emotions.

It is an odd place to be in, it is a sort of dis-identified state of being. Any thoughts or comments?

**James:** The bliss the scriptures tout is experiential bliss. It is just a hook to motivate a person to seek moksha. The bliss of the self, the bliss of awareness, the bliss of knowledge is not experiential i.e. a feeling. If it feels like anything it is just rock solid confidence. If you want feel good bliss, you need to cultivate sattva.

**Vivek:** Thanks that makes sense. The emotions are separate from me but I find I prefer happy emotions to unhappy ones even though they are not me. I stopped meditating after moksha since I realized I am not the doer but I realize now that purifying the mind is not necessarily a bad thing. I was feeling out of sorts that last 3 months, now I now why. Whether you are the doer or not is irrelevant for cultivating a Sattvic mind. Sattvic mind is a good mind. I should have known that. Nobody beat the system but everyone thinks he can beat it :). It is like the dialogue between Yuddhishtira and the Yaksha in Mahabharata. "It happens to everyone but everyone thinks it will not happen to them. What am I talking about?"

**Vivek:** One follow up question, it is odd but recently I have felt that there is invisible entity that keeps following me around. It doesn't do anything, but I feel like it is keeping watch over me or just observing me. Have you had any experiences like that? What or whom is this entity? It is rather disconcerting having someone invisible follow you around. I am not a big fan of invisible beings, and as of now it has not stopped my meditation. Should I just leave it alone and will it go away? It has happened before occasionally but now seems to be on a full time basis

**James:** Quite a few people have this kind of experience. I don't know for sure but I think that as your mind becomes more 'aware of awareness' i.e. **sattvic it objectifies awareness in the form of an experience of a witness, not unusual in so far as awareness is a witness, albeit a non-experiencing one.** It is indeed odd if you identify with Vivek...reflected awareness... because He thinks it is the only witness. But it is not odd if you look at it from awareness. It

means you are aware of Vivek and the sensation that Vivek is being watched...which he is...by you. I don't think there is anything you can do about it. It seems Isvara is playing some tricks. It will probably go away. It will be interesting to see what happens.

**Vivek:** I hope all is well on your side and you are enjoying life. I wanted to ask you a question that I am not clear on. I know that the non-experiencing entity (Self/Brahman) is from where all things arise including the experiencing entity as the witness. That knowledge is firm and I don't think it is ever going to go away so that is not the issue. However, I feel completely disconnected from the world and I have no experience of the love Vedanta talks about (Prema Svarupa). One Zen master said that first enlightenment experience was when he saw his face reflected in everyone else's face, which is probably a metaphor for the love he felt for all his fellow human beings. I am happy with myself but I don't have any love for my fellow beings in sense of being compassionate. I don't want to harm them but I don't have any desire to help them either.

My wife says that this is very elitist viewpoint and I should make an effort to do some social service and help children/orphans etc. but honestly I think it is a waste of time. Not that helping orphans is bad and I do sponsor orphans abroad through a program but suffering is an existential condition and whatever I do, there will be orphans and unhappy people in the world. My philosophy these days is mind your own business and let others mind their own business. Is there a process of reintegration before one feels Prema Svarupa? Honestly, most spiritual people get on my nerves these days and I have no desire to help anyone. Hope all is well on your side.

**James:**Hi Vivek, Things are quite well here. The seminar was a big success and we are enjoying the lovely fall weather. Deep dispassion...which is seems you are experiencing...is a sign of self-knowledge, Vivek. It is not opposed to love but I don't think that helping the poor is the correct solution either. Having said that, if the knowledge is solid and you understand what it means to be the Self, you should notice a steady current of peace, bliss, love...unless it is hidden behind some unresolved emotional issue. Were you a happy person before you realized who you are? Were you happy as a child? Maybe it is just your nature to be non-attached. The Self manifests in many ways. What Vedanta calls love, can also be called bliss or peace.

But if things are getting on your nerves, it suggests some obstacle, a pratibandika. It will be unconscious. Perhaps you are attached to some subtle monastic idea? Maybe you are disillusioned with the idea of marriage and worldly love. Maybe you need something new to love, now that you are no longer a seeker. The love is there. It is the nature of the self. If you can't feel it, start loving something small and feed it. Or just wait for it to reveal itself. I don't have a crystal ball so I can't say what is troubling you. You need to give me more information.

**Vivek:** Thanks James for your answer. I should have clarified a little bit more, I love my kids and my wife obviously but desire to help others is gone. I think I might have identified the problem based on today's meditation at home but I am interested in your thoughts.

I was talking to my wife yesterday about this, and it seems on reflection that my desire to help people came from the need to be appreciated. I was also psychic and very empathetic since I was kid, so a person's pain automatically drew them to me. I think the story of Katha Upanishad, when I read it at the age of four, probably influenced my life, since I realized after reading that Upanishad that everybody around me is going to die. I understood that I was separate and different from the world around me. In India it was very difficult because everyone around me was suffering, and some days I was so incapacitated that I could not get up from bed. I did not realize until last year that every woman that I dated had a death of a very significant person in their lives.

My wife is the only exception, unless you count what the astrologer said about she drowning in her previous birth.

I was always a guy women were attracted to but after Moksha, I can walk through a mall and feel invisible because nobody looks at me anymore. I am not unhappy about this but it is the weirdest experience, just thought I would mention it to you to give you another data point. My wife is surprised as well but my feeling is that the unconscious energy that I was emitting is gone. I don't draw people into my life anymore. For a longtime I actually thought I could help someone but I realize now that most people don't want to be helped, all them want is to play their own set of games. I don't dream about people I meet anymore, or people who I will be meeting soon. That is another oddity I remember.

I think I might have found the answer when meditating today, and realized this existential separation that I have had since birth is probably related to dread when the person begins this conscious life or in Christianity it is called Original Sin or in Buddhism it called Dhuka or pervasive unsatisfactoriness of life. In Vajrayana, this feeling would be described when empty space (consciousness) takes form. Consciousness becomes concretized. In Vedanta this would be Maya, I presume?

How does one deal with this existential crisis assuming that I interpreted the above correctly? Knowing that I am the Self is helpful but this feeling of separation is so visceral that taking a stand in awareness is only moderately useful. When I start focusing on it using Vipassana type techniques it feels like I am going to have a heart attack. The only time this separation went away was when I met that Shaman in Chilliwack. It was also the only time my wife was surprised to talk to me after 13 years of marriage. She said I came back as a new person and it was the only time where I felt like there was nothing in the world that I need to be afraid of. I felt no fear in that state and I was in love with all beings in the universe, I could speak to all trees and animals. I felt like I was grounded/stuck to the ground. Of course I knew better than chasing the Shaman down so I never met the shaman again.

So my question is how does one resolve this existential dread? It seems like probably the last battle I have left. The non-experiencing witness remains and watches the pain but situation is not resolved with the experiencing entity. The experiencing entity exists even though it is interdependent on other factors and rests on awareness. It is almost like this existential dread is pulling me back into the experiencing entity and fostering it's continuity, and causing awareness to get attached to objects. It took me enormous effort not to run away and write this email. I understand that the experiencing entity will not go away despite my efforts since any sort of fight along these lines actually strengthens it. Any ideas that you can share?

**James:** I understand the situation completely. It is quite common for realized people. You may have a hard time with what I am about to say so please forgive me. There is nothing wrong with you, but Vivek is depressed. I think he is depressed because his life situation is not in harmony with who he has realized himself to be. Being awareness means that you are free and when you are free, the love that is the nature of awareness is always present. It is not a dramatic aggressive love, an orgasmic love. It is just a deep sense of peace and satisfaction.

Vivek's description of the feeling of *dukkha*, non-specific existential suffering, is eloquent and very accurate. If you are the Self you will not identify with it. It will be seen as only an object and it will lose its power to trouble you. This suffering has been with Vivek since the day he arrived on earth, as is so with everyone. Not knowing that it was driving you, speaking of Vivek, it created a

whole life for you, a life that had meaning because it seemingly kept you distracted. The education, the job, the wife, the kids were all created through your desire to escape this feeling. At the same time the Self was strong in you, knowing that you were living a lie. Happy people don't seek.

Seeking began at the very beginning along with this ignorance. *Isvara* made you listen to the Katha Upanishad at age four. You kept seeking and recently you discovered who you actually are. The feeling of invisibility is an excellent description of the Self as it appears here in the form of a realized person. I have felt this way for forty five years. Sundari feels this way. Every enlightened person feels this way or he or she is not enlightened. But being invisible is not acceptable for a *jiva*. *Jiva*'s want to be known, to be noticed, to be valid in the eyes of the world. This fundamental conflict (*rajas*) is causing the depression (*tamas*).

Life serves the Self. The Self does not serve life. This is just a fact. An inconvenient one for *jivas* to be sure, but a fact nonetheless. I was lucky because when I discovered who I am, I was young and did not have a 'life' in the conventional sense. I was a leaf in the breeze. I liked it that way because, like a rolling stone, I gathered no moss. My outer life mirrored the freedom I felt as awareness. It still does today but there is a gradual diminishment of the physical freedom that I once enjoyed. It is OK because nothing can be done about it. You are an intelligent person so you will have already seen where this *satsang* is heading. If the scriptures told us how difficult it is squaring our lives with the truth, we would never seek. Somehow we want the Self to fit into our lives and lift them up. But this is not how it is. The Self does not compromise.

I wish I could say, 'do this or do that.' But this is not how it is either. But there is no easy doing, or clever spiritual trick to justify your life. Sundari says, "there is no essential right or wrong, but if you are depressed, it is a sure sign that your life is not congruent with who you are." She calls making your life congruent "facing down *Isvara*."

The first step is for you to think about this and see if you can take it on board. If you seek a 'spiritual' solution because the idea of changing your life is too painful, you will not succeed. There is nothing more to know about who you are. There is no longer a 'spiritual' fix. If this is too abstract it may help to think back to a time when you were really happy and free...as a child perhaps...and capture that feeling and set the ship of your life on a course directly to that point. The bliss is present. The love is present. It is only hidden by a tired life.

**Vivek:** It seems like after enlightenment I am in this in-between state that is troubling.

**James:** In between what and what?

**Vivek:** I keep shifting my perspective from the experiencing entity to the non-experiencing entity. It is more a matter of keeping at it and using discrimination at the duality the mind keeps throwing. I don't expect there is any shortcut. I was just complaining.

**James:** OK, I get it. Actually YOU weren't shifting from one perspective to another. You are what knows that Vivek's Subtle Body shifts perspectives. I call it the firefly stage.

**Vivek:** I can access the subconscious of the people around me and I don't like what I see and I also see deep into my subconscious (collective unconscious?). Once when I meditating, I saw a demon so terrifying that I was really scared. Good thing I was meditating in morning and not at night because if I had seen that face in the night, I would have completely freaked out. I am pretty

sure this is consistent with others before me who have gone through it before me but it is nonetheless disturbing. I can laugh about it now but when it happens all of a sudden it startled me. It was broad daylight, I was sitting on my cushion and this demon comes straight out right in front of me.

I also have dreams that I am 100% sure that are not mine. It almost like a computer connected to the internet. You can download data when you are connected to the internet, and some of the data can be garbage :).

**James:** This is often one of the unintended consequences of self- knowledge. It is important to know that you need to be careful when acting on the knowledge of the subconscious...assuming it is somebody else's subconscious...in so far as they will not be privy to the same information and conflict with them will develop. But I assume that you mean that you now have information about your personal subconscious that is disturbing? If this is so, you can remove the agitation about it by understanding that whatever you see there belongs to *Isvara*, not to you. You did not put it there. It was 'given' by *Isvara* in accordance with your karma. Purifying it is an option, however.

**James:** Two points to consider 1) what's to like or dislike about what you see. It is just *Isvara* revealing the dark side. 2) None of what you see is 'yours,' *Vivek*. It is all *Isvara*. The key to freedom is knowledge of *Isvara*. Everything is done by *Isvara*, everything belongs to *Isvara*. You are the seer/knower of what you experience. Discrimination is identifying with the knower, the non-experiencing witness. There is still some attachment to likes and dislikes, it seems. It is natural. They will burn out naturally.

**James:** I do not understand what you mean by this sentence, "One main advantage I see is that constant chatter and vanity hides the collective unconscious from the thinking mind." Would you explain?

**Vivek:** Meaning for most people a busy mind/ego blocks access to the subconscious/collective unconscious. The development of the ego has an evolutionary advantage in the sense that the desire/greed/craving keep the unconscious in check. Otherwise most people would go mad if they were exposed to the unconscious suddenly or on a daily basis. The story of people in Near Death Experiences being chased by demons or angels probably is a reflection of the ego dying and the mind suddenly accessing the subconscious/collective unconscious. It is a hypothesis of course but for me it makes sense since the ego is not entirely useless as many traditions make it to be. Ego is useful from the evolutionary perspective.

**James:** Yes, *Isvara* set up a filter to regulate the flow of unconscious stuff into the conscious mind. When that filter is damaged by drugs or trauma or in some other way, the conscious mind is overwhelmed by information, both positive and negative, that can completely destabilize it.

**Vivek:** Since in my case the whole process was backward maybe it might make sense to go back and practice the 8 Jhana states that Buddha, Adi Shankara and lot of the adepts practiced?

**James:** What do you think that would accomplish?

**Vivek:** Purifying the mind is an option that I am going to focus on. I am going to do a study of the 8 Jhana states that existed throughout antiquity in Vedic culture but for some reason is preserved mostly in the Buddhist tradition. Myth says that the Buddha went through the 8 Jhana states

successively before passing on to the other side. Adi Shankara when challenged about sexuality from Mandana Misra's wife, went into a trance state and entered the body of a dead king to learn about sex. Ramakrishna who studied with Totapuri went through similar sort of training. I am curious to see what this is all about since a few teachers in the West are now teaching it openly.

Ultimately all of these states serve the knower of all these states but it is nonetheless good to know of the states in detail. All famous adepts studied some sort of Jhana training, and I am finding out from my family tradition that Ramana did study with a famous yogi Sri Shesadri Swami who is revered in parts of southern India. In fact Ramana was called *Little Shesadari* during his early years. I am aware that Adi Shankara, Ramakrishna, Ramana, Nisargadatta Maharaj and Buddha said that these Jhana states are not important for realization, and that was the case for me personally but I do find it interesting that all of these sages were adepts in some facet of this tradition. The fact that this tradition in some form or another has existed since antiquity argues for its inherent utility.

Personally, I feel it is useful tradition to explore and purifying the mind is a good thing anyway. I wrote to my Zen teacher about exploring the Jhana states and he said, the guest needs to know only one entrance but the Master needs to know every entry point into the house.

**James:** Let me know how it goes. It seems like a lot of work but maybe you have time on your hands. I can't see any particular advantage but if you think it will purify you, go for it.

**James:** Good for you. First self-realization, then self-actualization. It is slow and patient work. It is good work. The mind needs a noble goal or it will eat you up, enlightened or not.

**Vivek:** I love this statement. The mind always needs a noble goal or it will eat you up, enlightened or not. I am realizing why the whole path is like walking on a razor's edge.

I am at a stage where it is critical for me to be around Mahatmas or enlightened sages. I need the energy of the path to support my practice. I could always pray to the saints of yore to come and help me in my practice when I meditate but I am not sure if this is a good idea or not.

Please pray that I never waver from my path and I hope to meet you soon this year.

**James:** You will never waver, Vivek, because Isvara is driving you. Isvara's will is inviolable. You cannot fail.

## **Body-Mind Complex**

**Vivek:** Hi James, I came across this interesting article when I was looking up Michael James, the student of Sadhu Om. It was very fascinating to me personally because I can see the logic of this practice and why it takes a long time to be fully liberated. I think the initial insight that you are not the experiencing entity can get you started on the path but to be fully liberated means that you stop identifying with the body-mind complex. In other words, this is an interesting take on Self-Inquiry. In my opinion, this is exactly what Self-Inquiry should be, along with reading the scriptures and following Dharma.

I don't think there is any shortcut to this process of dis-identifying yourself from your body-mind complex. I was wondering how to proceed with the next stage of my Self-Inquiry process and I think what the author is saying below makes sense. There is a reason why Ramana, Maharaj, and lot of people spent time doing Self-Inquiry. It takes a while to go through the whole process of

negating the five sheaths experientially. This is why in Buddhism you are always tasked with practicing the four form Jhanas before proceeding to the formless Jhanas because ignoring the body-mind complex and going to the subtle states of the mind is deleterious. I think Laxmana Swamy says it best. When asked to define liberation he says it is like being in zero gravity. Your vasanas don't push and pull you anymore. I would be interested in your thoughts. My take is that Sadhana is the shortcut to liberation :). I am convinced that there is no "end" to this path. Yes, you are free in one sense, in other sense as long as you are human you have to do Sadhana, enlightened or not.

<http://infinitemwavesofbeauty.blogspot.ca/2014/03/what-enlightenment-is-what-it-isnt-why.html>

**James:** Hi Vivek, I read it carefully. Yes, it is dis-identifying with the equipment, but where is the energy you put into maintaining the idea that going to go? It has to go somewhere. So the next step is shifting the identity to the Self. Swamiji called it detachment/attachment Yoga. To move the identity to the self, you need to know (1) what the self is and (2) what it means in terms of the apparent reality i.e. your life in the world. On the other hand, if you understand the relationship between *satya* and *mithya*, nothing needs to happen because this understanding effectively shifts your identity for you in so far as the equipment is as good as non-existent. How can you shift something that is not real to something that is real? And why would you, if you know you are the self without a doubt? So if you take the position of the *jiva*, then you need to transfer the identification to the self. This is what *nididhasana* is all about. *Nididhasana* is the work you do after you know 'I am awareness,' assuming this knowledge has not negated the doer. If the doer has been negated, there is no one there to shift identities and if there is a doer and it has been negated, it will know how futile it is to shift something that is unreal i.e. apparently real to something that is real. In other words, there is nothing to shift. So liberation is the 'firm,' meaning unshakable, conviction that one is whole and complete actionless ordinary awareness, meaning there is no doubt about it. So when you speak and act you are awareness speaking and acting, even though nobody else...except other *jnanis*...can tell. You continue to look like the fool you always were and you are ever so fine with it. *Nididhasana* is simply continuing with your *sadhana*...right living, values, increasing *sattvaguna*, etc. We call it 'actualizing.' There is no desire or anxiety associated with it because you know that it is just an enjoyable game. The *vasanas* are like roasted seeds. They can't sprout but they are pleasant to eat.

**Vivek:** Thanks James. As usual it is brilliant Satsang. I have a lot more respect for your teacher Swamiji now because I can see the logic of why he choose to teach the experiential methodology along with Vedanta. Most people, and that includes me too, take a long time to realize that they are not the body-mind complex. In meditation, or studying scriptures it is very easy to realize that you are not the body-mind complex but pure awareness. In day to day living it is not very easy.

My general impression after talking to a lot of Vedanta people is that they really haven't negated the mind-body complex but somehow believe that by repeating the same phrases again and again, they can negate the mind-body complex. It is not so straightforward and I am sure Swamiji knew that and that is why Swamiji taught both experiential and Vedanta type teaching to common man. I am sure Ramana, and Maharaj realized that it is impossible to teach Vedanta to one who is not ready and hence taught a provisional experiential type teaching. The danger of practicing Vedanta without negating the mind-body complex is that it is very easy to ignore parts of yourself that you haven't come in terms with, and issues will crop up later on in your life that you haven't really negated. I can attest to that personally.

In your presence or in the presence of Jnani, Vedanta is deceptively simple and easy to fool yourself that you have "it". "It" is a lot harder than that for sure. I also realized that the white light which came from you and hit my heart was probably cutting the energy knot of the heart center, which is why the shift was so dramatic and irreversible. I talked to my wife about this and she says that she is 100% sure that something changed after the Vancouver meeting with you. She says that I am not the same person anymore and there is a fundamental shift in my personality. Also, she says there is no need to change anything since I know who I am, and she is happy with the change.

That said, I would be glad if you gave some pointers or Satsangs on Self-Inquiry for people who know that they are awareness. I would appreciate that personally. There is a reason why the Jnanis spend so much time in solitude and contemplation because Self-Inquiry is energetically intensive. It cannot be otherwise assuming you are honest and not deluding yourself.

**James:** Hi Vivek, Yes, you are right about the reason for emphasizing the experiential aspect of the teaching. But like everything in duality, there is a downside: you think that *moksa* is some kind of experience...which is isn't. But it is experiential in this sense: if it didn't have an experiential impact what would be the use of seeking it? So once the knowledge "I am whole and complete actionless ever-present non-dual unconcerned ordinary awareness and not the body/mind/sense complex" is firm, it definitely has experiential implications. The personality, one's life, and the way one relates to life change. The point, however, is that while the changes **may** be enhanced by acts of will, they **do not require will power** because they are the karma that comes from self knowledge. The knowledge allows the *jiva* to be happy with it's apparent imperfections...as those imperfections are gradually effaced by the knowledge. In fact *moksa* is understanding the meaning of the word 'apparent.' Imperfections...such as they are...exist and persist but if they are apparent, they are **as good as non-existent**. You may have a good cry at a movie but you aren't really crying because the movie is...well...not real. If you know the movie isn't real, the tears can't be real either even though it feels like they are.

I have just finished my most recent book, "The Yoga of Love" which basically is a very simple practical description of a self actualized *jnani*. It should be on the website in a week or two. It is commentaries on Narada Bhakti Sutras. There is a video in the shop called the Narada Bhakti Sutras that I did in Trout Lake in 2015 also. You should probably read my satsangs on the website. Many of them are addressed to self realized people. I'm not sure what your doubt is specifically.

**Vivek:** James, I was thinking of about this for a couple of weeks and realized that thinking Moksha is an experience is a logical fallacy. Any experience by definition requires knowledge to confirm it's validity otherwise how would you be able to evaluate the nature of the experience.

Even the experience of enlightenment depends on knowledge about the nature of the enlightenment, otherwise how would you be able to know whether the experience was valid or not? Even the "experientialist or the Yogi" depends on knowledge to validate his experience, therefore knowledge reigns supreme! It's pretty obvious if one thinks about it.

Well, that is my thought for the day :). I am getting pretty tired of this whole rigmarole that people call Samsara. Hope you are well.

**Jhana Retreat:**

**Vivek:** I trust you are well.

**James:** Better than ever! Nice to hear from you, Vivek.

**Vivek:** I believe that the Jhanas is a powerful technique to sharpen your mind so that insight might appear, take root and become integrated with your real life. It is also historically used as a tool to burn the mind of conditioning and residual karma. The insight is through Vipassana practice since Jhanas does not lead to liberation by themselves. I am working backwards since I already know who I am but it is an excellent set of techniques to deepen your understanding of how the mind works.

**James:** Well, working backwards is always easier than working forwards because the seeking has stopped. As long as we are here action is required and the Jhanas are as good a way as any to spend your time.

Few thoughts:

**Vivek:** a) In Hindu tradition doing Jhanas would be like doing tapas. Very useful for stilling the mind, burning Karma and allowing the Self to reflect in a pure mind. Enlightened or not, the mind needs to be carefully monitored at all the time.

**James:** Yes, indeed.

**Vivek:** In my personal experience doing tapas or Jhanas is essential for maintaining equanimity and a calm tranquil mind. I also realized the connection between the Pranayama exercises taught in Raja Yoga and connecting to the non-experiencing witness through breath practice. It was a very powerful feeling knowing that breath can help connect the mind to the non-experiencing witness in a radically different way. Of course, the assumption is that you already know that you are the non-experiencing entity.

**James:** Yes, you can connect with the breath. It happens in the method I teach too but the big issue, as you say, is whether or not you know you are the non-experiencing witness. Seems your self-knowledge is firming up nicely.

**Vivek:** Actually any meditation practice or scriptural study should suffice but one advantage of doing Jhanas is the bliss the mind feels while meditating. It would be the Buddhist equivalent of Bhakti yoga. Also, in these deep absorption states, the knowledge that I am limitless awareness will stick better and continue to grow.

**Vivek:** There is some confusion in Buddhism about awareness/self as presented by Vedanta and non-self. When I asked the teacher if the Jhana arises in the mind or awareness, they had no idea what I was talking about. Nobody ever asked them this question before. Also, I asked who is the recognizer of the Jhana state because to recognize that you are in Jhana, there has to be an element of recognition, otherwise you will have no idea what state you are in. Recognition necessarily has to happen in the mind because it is an instrument of the Self and the mind is insentient except as illuminated by the awareness.

**James:** I am not surprised that they don't know the Self. That is our issue with Buddhism since time immemorial. I have yet to meet a Buddhist that understands it. There is a video on my website of a Buddhist...the only one...that seems to indicate that self-knowledge is alive somewhere in the Buddhist world but it is very rare. They are doer oriented, experience oriented,

particularly the Jhana guys.

**Vivek:** Anyway, I found that odd that this obvious fact was lost to them. Maybe the concept of no-Self is misinterpreted by Buddhists as a non-recognizing entity, don't know but I wish they just said that it was awareness or the mind illuminated by awareness. I had a big discussion with my Zen teacher after the retreat but it seems in Buddhism they dance around the fact.

**James:** They don't know, Vivek. They simply don't know. When Buddhism left its Vedic roots it splintered into a myriad of ideas, most of them...I hesitate to say 'all'...devoid of self-knowledge. They talk about it, they dance around it, but they do not have a valid means of self-knowledge.

**Vivek:** That said, I have no doubt it is a powerful practice and stilling the mind allows one to see the conditioning of the mind as a whole. I can bet easy money that Choiceless awareness that Krishnamurti talks about, it using the practice of Jhana to still the mind so that at some point in time, the spark of awareness catches fire and ignites.

James: This is probably true but again, it just generates experience and without a way to evaluate it apart from the *jiva's* (always uninformed) interpretation it just develops into another frustration and attachment. What do the Buddhists say is the purpose of the Jhanas? We know they are good for getting a sattvic mind but what do they think they are accomplishing?

**Vivek:** Maybe if you sit long enough and you are an intelligent person, the insight that you are awareness might arise but Vedanta is easier.

**James:** That's right. We give them that. Meditation is called a 'leading error.' It is a mistake but it can put you in the right arena and inquiry may develop and like, Ramana, you might just get that you are awareness.

**Vivek:** Historically, Buddha had to differentiate himself from the Vedic culture so it is entirely possible that he articulated the same concepts slightly differently. I am pretty sure when Buddha said Anatman, he meant that there was no permanent experiencing entity, which is correct.

**James:** That is true but concepts are just concepts. Their implied meaning can 'point' to the self and deliver self-knowledge but unless the concepts are used in the proper way...we have a definite method for using concepts...they won't remove ignorance, they will just supply definitions, more concepts...for objects in the apparent reality. Their problem is that they don't know what enlightenment is. You have to know that the problem is ignorance and that getting a concept of who you are is still ignorance. What happened is that as you say the Buddha felt he had to 'differentiate' himself from the Vedic culture. Which means he didn't understand what it actually was. He was only looking at it from the religious/cultural level. He was never taught. And if he was enlightened it was not due to teaching. It was like Ramana, experiential, from which he probably extracted the knowledge. But we really don't know. Nobody knows. Buddhism was cooked up many years after the Buddha and he didn't write or if he did it was lost to time. What we have are a few snippets of his words. And who knows exactly what he meant by them, or what those who remembered them did to them as they were handed down. I think you are right about his meaning of the word anatman. But this is not a teaching. It is one small idea that needs to be contextualized within a much broader framework if it is going to make sense.

**Vivek:** Hope your retreat went well. I am enjoying sitting still in silence and watching my breath unfold. The journey continues.

**James:** Good for you. I have 'been there and done that' as they say. Yes, the retreat was excellent. Take care of yourself, Vivek.

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**Vivek:** James, I hope you are well. I recently fractured my arm into 3 pieces (picture attached) and have been spending time at home recovering. Two interesting things happened along the way that I thought I would share with you:

a) When my arm broke, I was far away from the hospital and my friend had to drive me half hour to the ER room and then I had to walk another 15 minutes because we went to the wrong place. Everyone was surprised that I tolerated the pain so well including the doctor who was setting the bone. He said most people would be screaming during the process but I did nothing of that sort.

Lying the ER room afterwards I realized that I had automatically shifted my perspective to the non-experiencing witness which allowed me to detach myself from the pain. It was a powerful experience that helped me see how you could separate yourself from the world around you, including pain by shifting to the non-experiencing witness as the primary way of looking at experiencing the world.

b) Coming home, my wife was impressed by my resilience along with my indifference to my situation and wanted to know what I was doing differently. Thinking about, I realized that I was not creating a story around my situation. I just took my situation for what it was for and did not waste energy blaming others or myself for my situation. It seems to that most of our energy is wasted creating stories around our situation. If we looked at life as is, without blame or gain, we would have lot less trouble and more happiness in our lives.

I believe, this is what our ancients called Maya, the innate ability of the mind to fabricate stories instead of accepting the reality of the situation. It is not that the world is an illusion but the projection of the world in our minds is an illusion. Once you see through direct perception, the ability of the mind to create stories, the illusion falls away. This also means that this shift has to be through knowledge because experience cannot remove this illusion. Only knowledge can.

Hope all is well on your side. My arm still hurts though :).

**James:**

Hi Vivek, Very interesting story. I had the same thing happen years ago when I cut off the tip or my finger in a planer. I walked to the hospital and let them sew the finger without anesthetic. I didn't feel a thing till much later when I came down into the body. The lesson you learned about the waste of energy creating stories around the events in our lives is the truth. I read about this guy who had open heart surgery like me and it took him two years to recover...probably it took that long to let go of the story he concocted about it. Except for a bit of physical discomfort, my recovery was virtually unemotional because I didn't add anything to the event: they cut some meat and bones, stitched up the wound, gave me some pills and that was that. It had nothing to do with me. If you can't accept reality, you make stories. Of course the essence of the whole thing is your concluding idea; the shift away from stories only comes about through knowledge. I can see your discrimination is perfect.

Experience does not remove illusion. It is easy to see this story generating power of the mind around dramatic incidents but the mind weaves its tales every minute of the day around the most

prosaic events...shopping, eating, driving to work, phone conversations, sex etc. It is difficult to keep our head above water as we are literally drowning in a sea of stories

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## **Dreams**

### **Vivek:**

James, I had an interesting dream recently. Both of us were transported in time and sitting next to Ramana. I asked you, James, I know I am the Self and so does Ramana. Why does he look so blissful whereas I am happy sometimes and sad other times. You looked at me and said, Ramana's mind is always fixed on the Self. There nothing from the outside world that he needs to complete him. That is the difference.

It was a very vivid dream. Almost like I was right there. I never considered Ramana my guru and actually never read much of his writings. I like Nissargadatta Maharaj a lot more but for some reason the only two dreams I have had since I met you were about Ramana. One dream was when my I-Sense was destroyed after meeting you, and that night Ramana came in my dream said you have to go alone without me. The second dream about Ramana was yesterday. Odd...

**James:** Dreams are statements from Isvara. Dream #1 was saying that you don't need spirituality (Ramana is the symbol) and Dream #2 was saying that experiential bliss is inversely proportional to the degree of extroversion of the mind. 'Transported in time' means that the dream is the view from the self.

**Vivek:** Hi James, I had an odd dream yesterday that I am unable to explain. Also never had a dream similar to this before. In this dream I was on a train, and the train goes two ways. One way was to the world and second way was to a forest where all magic and secrets lie. In my dream, as I looked outside I saw a thick group of trees and knew instantly that I was going to the forest where the spirits and fairies reside. As you know after Moksha, I hardly dream anymore but this dream felt real in a tangible way. It was pointing me towards something, and I am not sure what it is saying. It seemed that I was supposed to find magic or spirits in the forest that would help me.

### **James:**

**Vivek:** I am having repeated dreams about losing my favorite guitar that I play. In some dreams, the guitar in my case is replaced by a violin. Is this related to my dream of going to the forest? I don't dream very often, in fact this is the second major dream that I have had after the dream of me going to the forest.

**James:** I think it means that your mind/ego is becoming more refined. The instrument the self plays is the mind i.e. Krishna's flute. A violin is a more sensitive refined instrument than the guitar.

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## **Self-Realization and Other Awakenings by Ed Muzika**

### **Vivek Comments:**

I have enormous respect for the author for the time and effort he has put in finding the Self but

sadly the book offers no proven methodology to help the seeker find the truth. There are multiple contradictions in the book regarding Vedanta and the author confuses Samkhya and Yogacara philosophies when he is describing his version of how the 3 bodies (Gross, Subtle and Causal) bodies interact. He also seems to believe that enlightenment is an experience and is a matter of making an experience permanent. This is completely contradictory to what Advaita Vedanta teaches, and surprisingly what Ramana taught. Ramana Maharishi was very clear in saying that only through knowledge is the Self known.

The author also misunderstands Siddharameswarar Maharaj's use of terminology. Siddharameswarar sometimes speaks of the universal play of consciousness as "Brahman"-- meaning "saguna Brahman," to use sage Sankara's distinguishing of "manifest Reality with qualities"-- whereas Siddharameswarar reserves the term "Parabrahman" for what Sankara calls the "nirguna Brahman" or "unmanifest, quality-free Reality."

I am also surprised on the lack of emphasis on morality in the book. The Buddha emphasized Sila or morality in his teachings. The story of his teacher Robert Adams having relations with his women students is appalling to say the least. I doubt Ramana Maharishi or Nisargadatta Maharaj behaved in this manner to their students. It seems to be a uniquely western way to justify immoral behaviour, make the cake and eat it too. Enlightenment does not give you the right to abandon ethical rules. Vedanta speaks of two orders of reality, the Ultimate and the provisional reality. When you are enlightened both orders of reality remain.

Another odd idea, often repeated in the book is that the reader is somehow encouraged to believe that thinking is bad, which probably comes from Zen approach so common in the West. Ironically, in Vedanta, one of the key requirements to find the Self is Viveka, which means discrimination. Without a discriminating mind, one cannot separate Truth from Falsehood. Vedanta as a philosophy is time tested way to help the seeker find the truth and is validated by centuries of seekers following the path. The Upanishads were vetted by multiple seers and are a robust enough to stand the test of time. One man's insight cannot be greater than the accumulated wisdom of centuries.

TAT TWAM ASI.

**Mark:**

But contrary to what you write, the kind of self-inquiry given in the book (the focus on the sense of "I am") IS based on Nisargadatta's own introduction and recommendation to those who wished to pursue self-inquiry. So you're incorrect in saying as you do that there's "no proven methodology to help the seeker find the truth." And maybe he doesn't state it clearly in the book but on his website, he DOES make it clear about the distinction between Awakening and Liberation (to address your criticism that he's equating enlightenment with experience and then claiming to make the latter permanent). And based on his own Buddhist background, he would KNOW that to be a false equation anyway.

**Vivek:**Hi Mark, My comment was on the I-Sense teaching. For starters, the I-sense is a subjective experience and can mean different things to different people. How do you know what you are feeling is the I-Sense? How will you compare the feeling with someone else's experience? And even if you find the I-Sense and trace it back to the source as Ramana, Maharaj and a few others have suggested, what knowledge will you extract from that experience? Tracing the I-sense back to the source let's you know that the seeker and the sought are one and the same but

what about it? It does not make you free and cannot be equated with enlightenment. The I-sense teaching is a preliminary methodology to get you in the ballpark but has nothing to do with enlightenment. And it is not an Advaita teaching, despite what people in the West like to believe, but more likely a puranic teaching.

And before you ask, I traced the I-Sense back to the source just as Maharaj and Ramana suggested. It was an interesting experience insomuch that it removes the duality associated with the observer and the observed but I had to find Vedanta to extract the knowledge from that experience. I am not aware of any Buddhist text that discusses the difference between knowledge and experience. Can you please point them out to me, including the paragraph number?

**Mark:**Vivek. Well, I certainly have no quarrel about the value in Vedanta, having recently just read James Swartz's "How to Attain Enlightenment" and finding I was in close agreement with a lot of what was said. Nonetheless, based on my personal experience since undertaking self-inquiry in the style or manner prescribed by Nisargadatta, the "I Am" is a "sensed" feeling which may not have even been all that different from the sort of meditation I had previously done (i.e., Vipassana) except that the feeling is more shall I say, prominent or appears in the foreground (as opposed to the background during my previous sorts of meditation). I can't speak for others where their experience is concerned though. And while you claim that the practice/technique "does not make you free and cannot be equated with Enlightenment" does that then mean you reject the role it had in Nisargadatta's own Awakening after a three year commitment? Such an Awakening would not have automatically created Enlightenment as such but was cultivated over time, something he himself noted when he stated that Enlightenment was definitely not a "state" and that the realization of such was in itself "enlightening." (Because of course a truly enlightened being would know how transient certain induced states are and would know they hardly characterized what Enlightenment or Self Realization is all about).

As I re-read what you wrote, I think we might be in more agreement than either of us would think since your own experience with the I am sense got you in the "ballpark" but further work was needed to continue on the path to Self Realization

**Vivek:**I agree with you Mark. Well said. Having studied Zen for 10 years, the I-Sense teaching was refreshing to say the least. I spent some time with Anadi formerly known as Aziz Kristoff in Almora, who helped me solidify the I-Sense so it was permanent in a way. After that it was just a matter of persistence tracing the I-Sense back to the source. As you know well, there is no "source" to speak of but it is a useful exercise nonetheless. Getting you in the ballpark is about right.

James Swartz is my teacher and it took me a year of solid work studying Vedanta before I could extract the knowledge that I am limitless awareness from my I-Sense experience. Our dialogue is on his website titled SuperSatsang.

It is an interesting question on where the I-Sense teaching originated. It is not found in the Upanishads, or the Gita. The only reference I could find it was in "Tripura Rahasya" which is a puranic text. Maharaj, Ramana and Atmananda all taught some form of this meditation but I cannot find any teacher before them that taught a version of the I-Sense teaching. By some quirk of fate this teaching became very popular in the west. Personally, I prefer the I-Sense meditation to Vipassana or Zen Shikantaza. Depending on your personality, it is a quicker path to liberation,

assuming once can talk about these things in "time scales". My only concern with this teaching is that it might be not a suitable teaching for everyone. The difference between traditional paths and specifically tuned paths is that traditional paths are more accommodating of diversity. Everyone can join the fold and practice it in one form or the other despite large differences in personality. The I-Sense path requires an extremely obsessive mind-set and love for meditation/introspection. This might be not for everyone.

Pleasure talking with you. Wish you all the success in your endeavours.

**Mark:**Vivek, Indeed, it would seem that a primary prerequisite for the I am practice is having a mind predisposed toward introspection, something Ed also points out in his website.

But at the time I made the "transition" to this prescription for self inquiry about six years ago, I was intrigued by a YouTube video I saw and then obtained a CD from one of Nisargadatta's students, Stephen Wolinsky and it was essentially a series of short meditations of what he called "the non verbal I Am". At the time I felt I'd reached an impasse with Dzogchen and thought of simply giving it all up forever so the timing was critical here.

It would seem that Nisargadatta's own teacher, Siddharameshwar would have been well steeped in the practice since Nisargadatta certainly credits him with having done so along with the complete allegiance and trust that he instilled in him. But prior to Siddharameshwar, it could have well been a well established practice/technique in their tradition. Namaste

**Vivek:**Hi Mark, Siddharameshwar Maharaj taught traditional Advaita Vedanta. If you read "Master Key to Self Realization", he is teaching traditional Advaita Vedanta, and starts from the description of three bodies. The technical term for the I-Sense is Jiva-atman the connecting link between the Subtle Body and the Self. In the two years that Nisargadatta Maharaj took notes of Siddharameshwar teachings (early 1930's), there is hardly any mention of the I-sense teaching. In Tripura Rahasya there is exactly one paragraph devoted to the I-Sense teaching.

Point being, that unless this teaching is understood in the context of Advaita Vedanta, chances are that it will lead into a dead end. The I-Sense is a useful tool within the context of the teachings of Vedanta, divorced from Vedanta it loses it's utility. Maharaj and Ramana were both familiar with Vedanta and studied the texts associated with it. This body of knowledge has been available since Vedic times. Actually as James Swartz told me when I first met him, if you actually study Vedanta the I-Sense teaching is irrelevant. Depends on your personality I guess.

**Mark:**Does that mean then that the practice of the I Am is irrelevant to James because it hasn't any kind of guiding perspective in which it would show it's value? This was for instance why when beginning meditation, I soon immersed myself in Buddhist literature and Buddhist oriented retreats (I.e., Vipassana, Dzogchen) so it would have that kind of framework (though I hasten to add that a practitioner can easily succumb to conceptual scaffolding as did I).

**Vivek:**Mark, that is probably correct because in isolation the I-Sense has limited value as a teaching. As technique it is relevant but not as framework to understand Vedanta. Advaita Vedanta starts with the premise that reality is non-dual and works backwards using logic to show that it is true. The key is separating the non-experiencing witness (awareness) from the experiencing witness. This is brought about by application of Vedanta through a teacher who is skilled enough to wield the teachings. Once you can separate the non-experiencing witness from the experiencing witness, you would be considered Self-realized and can actually begin self-

inquiry.

Self-inquiry is the application of this knowledge to the mind so that it drops its limited concepts about the Self after which the person can be said to be completely liberated. There is no shortcut to this process. Ramana spent 20 years after his initial enlightenment experience in caves to practice self-inquiry and remove all dualistic descriptions of the mind. Same thing with Maharaj and every other genuinely enlightened person. There is no simple way to remove the residual karma instantly.

Paraphrasing Yoda, you can do sadhana before enlightenment or after enlightenment but there is no not doing sadhana. Obviously it is a lot easier to do sadhana once you are self-realised.

Buddhism is basically Samkhya and Yogacara philosophies melded together. Buddha was born in Kapilavastu, the birth-place of sage Kapila, the founder of Samkhya school of thought. This is distinct from Vedanta; in the sense that Vedanta believes that enlightenment is not a discreet experience of the Self but more application of Self knowledge to remove ignorance. This debate has been going for over 2000 years.

I personally believe that the knowledge that you are the Self will stick in pure and still mind, so meditative practices are helpful in that regard. However, Samadhi does not equate enlightenment. A discriminating mind, honed to a razor sharp precision is a critical requirement. In the west, for some odd reason, thinking is not encouraged. In most cases to cover a teacher's inadequacies and lack of understanding. Getting to enlightenment is fairly easy once you have a good methodology and a critical mind.

## **DISCUSSION WITH ED MUZIKA**

**Ed Muzika:** I am not Vedantin and I am not Zen. I am talking of an incarnate spirituality, of being God in the flesh and realizing that through love.

Nor did I ever say Robert had sex with his students. He flirted with women for his own reasons, which were clearly stated in the book. People who ought to know better, and who have read my book, continue to misrepresent what I am teaching. Some of them state that I profess to teach about final or ultimate awakening, then spend too much time talking about emotions, the body, energies, etc., which they conclude have nothing to do with any ultimate awakening. In point of fact, in my opinion there are multiple paths and multiple awakenings, and depending on how you define "self-realization," there are multiple self-realizations.

Nor do I believe there is anyone who has completely understood, mastered, revealed, or opened every aspect of him or her self. I think self-discovery is unending, or can be unending, except that certain paths, such as Nisargadatta's Advaita are self-limiting, because for him, all of the manifest universe, the body, mind, emotions, energies, external world are unreal because they are transient, and only the unchanging Witness, the subject of all, is real.

With such an attitude there is no energy behind self-exploration, because anything that can be seen, heard, felt, tasted, smelled, thought of, imaged, is transient and thus not real, thus not worth paying attention to or understanding. This is my own teacher's POV, and one I profoundly disagree with. This sort of dead end or final enlightenment, for most, is a complete dead end, resulting in a multidimensional being believing that all he or she is, is the Witness, Parabrahman, and all else is illusion. I see multiple paths to multiple goals and multiple "realizations." To me,

everything is me and is real, and is personal in the sense that I am the "owner" of the manifest world, its shepherd and protector.

I profoundly disagree with any teacher who self-proclaims him or herself as being more enlightened, awakened or advanced than all other teachers. Having spent over thirty years in the field of psychology, I am well aware of how most "spiritual" people have used spiritual theories and practices to "disappear" emotional and developmental problems. I see a very large percentage largely unable to articulate what is going on inside of them emotionally because emotions have been downplayed in favour of realizing emptiness, or the Void, or the clear, self-lighted, Consciousness, or bliss, or experiences of inner energies, lights, etc., coupled with ideas of how special they are spiritually as a result of their endless inner explorations which have sedulously avoided emotional exploration.

Even those who have spent years in psychotherapy often trade openness to feelings for insights about themselves and their pasts, or current attainment of functionality as a result of therapy. They really lack an ability to be open to their emotions and instead talk about them. Then there are many, many people that use techniques to "process" emotions, like fear, depression, anger, etc., by letting them "pass through" their self of Self. They become "possessed" by a continuous process of processing emotions, physical problems, etc., that essentially, again, they have become active witnesses in complete control of their emotions, rather than have them flow freely.

If they feel lonely, they process this feeling until it is gone. If they feel needy of another, they process this feeling until it is gone. If they feel angry towards another, rather than express it to the "other," they process the feeling until it goes away and no real contact has been made with the other. They want to feel only love, and love of a special kind--love that is universal, impersonal, unattached, and unconditional, rather than the rather "messy" love with many facets that most feel towards others, which is "flavoured" by romantic love, sexuality, possessiveness, attraction, projections, protective, sibling or parental love.

Emotions are not everything, but they extremely important for those who talk of an ultimate awakening or enlightenment, which will make them self-contained and independent of need of any other human, or animal. They are important in the sense that powerful emotions motivate their search for transcendence of emotions. If you try to feel such people with your heart, you reach but do not touch them. They are not emotionally solid and tend to be detached, aloof, and self-contained.

So, I teach openness to everything within oneself, starting with repressed emotions, progressing to internal energies, increasing acquaintance with "Shakti," and the energetic and emotional linkages to the world, until the Manifest Self, the Atma Jyotin, reveals Itself to Itself, which, to this point, only believed he or she was human, and had no access to or knowledge of the divine within oneself. This is the kind of awakening and Self-Realization that is best for today's individuals as well as for society itself in the sense that psychotherapy has made us more aware of the impact of repression and denial on our health and flexibility, and has allowed us to construct models of the Self that augment and challenge the eastern models.

Modern Vedantins and Buddhists would have us believe that modern psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, etc., have nothing to add to thousands of year old healing traditions. This is because their proponents know little of modern psychology. This is the kind of awakening

and Self-Realization that is best for today's individuals as well as for society itself. It is part of a larger movement today away from Vedantic transcendentalism, to what Francis Bennett calls "incarnational spirituality," or reowning our humanity, our human/divine incarnation as sentience beings.

Readers can now download this book for free from my website, <http://wearesentience.com>.

**Vivek:** Hi Ed, I agree with what you are saying but it is nothing revolutionary in my opinion. Advaita/Zen in the west has been equated with nihilism or some version of it because of a profound misunderstanding of its roots. Advaita Vedanta cannot be divested from the Indian culture.

Adi Shankara was a tantric adept and so were many of his disciples. Same with Nagarjuna who was the founder of Madhyamika. Bhakti, as you well know, is never seen as separate from knowledge in Indian culture. Adi Shankara's hymn, Bhaja Govindam, is a perfect manifestation of the union between Bhakti and Jhana. Ramana Maharishi loved animals and spent a lot of time feeding the animals in the ashram. He cried when his cow Lakshmi died. If he really thought emotions were irrelevant and repressed them, why express them so freely during his life? Nissargadatta Maharaj emphasized chanting, and worshiped his previous teachers everyday during his life, why bother?

For readers unfamiliar with Tantra and Shakti, I would like to add that Ramana spent about 10-15 years under the tutelage of an tantric crazy wisdom teacher, Sheshadari Swamikal after his awakening experience at the age of 16. Maharaj's teacher was a part of Navnath Sampradaya, which has a strong tantric component. The teaching of Shakti was always a part of tradition.

I have met many advaita and Zen teachers in my lifetime and found them to very personable and lovely human beings. I see no evidence of repression that you talk about. However, many western Neo-advaita and Zen teachers exhibit psychotic tendencies. Ramesh Balshekar, Gangaji, Genpo Merzel among the many. If your criticism was against western pseudo-advaita I can buy it but authentic teachers in any tradition never exhibit these tendencies. How can you? Enlightenment means that you are actionless awareness. Emotion is an arising in awareness, why would an enlightened person suppress it?

Please do not take my points as personal attacks on you. Your article on the I-Sense along with Sadhu Om's teachings helped me trace the I-sense back to the source. It took me 3 years of serious practise but your map was very useful guide and I am immensely grateful for your commentary. I found Vedanta after that to clear up the final misunderstanding but could not have done that without understanding that the seeker and the sought are one and same.

TAT TVAM ASI, **James:** Interesting dialog. Ed doesn't understand the relationship between the self and the person clearly. His approach to moksha is all about fixing the jiva, particularly those who have used transcendental spirituality to avoid working on themselves. I can't disagree with him on this point. However, there is no contradiction between the transcendental self and the personal self. So it is a both/and, not an either or. He would benefit from the satya/mithya teaching but I doubt he would accept it. He is obviously locked into his point of view about spirituality. Vedanta agrees that you need to purify the personal self to get to the impersonal self but that is only a means to an end, not the goal. He doesn't seem to understand self knowledge at all, particularly its value in purifying the personal self. But why should he? He is a psychological

type with a strong spiritual vasana an a bit opinionated. My experience is that you can't tell the gurus anything. He's quite articulate and seems to be a good sincere guy and thinks he is 'enlightened' whatever that means to him. In the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king. He seems to have a lot of knowledge but he's definitely missing the most important piece of the spiritual puzzle, the distinction between satya and mithya the real and the apparently real. So in the end, as usual, it boils down to the knowledge and experience argument which virtually none of the Neos appreciate. God bless them.

I thought your letter was very clear. It seems the knowledge is very firm. The problem with talking with people who have never subjected their minds to Vedanta pramana is that they don't have a context for understanding what we are saying. This is why the Bhagavad Gita says, 'let not the wise unsettle the minds of the ignorant' particularly the ignorant that think they are wise. The Neos like Ed are all very nice well-meaning people, no doubt, but they are locked into their views and sadly they think that we are just presenting another point of view. So why should they listen? The Western spiritual world is, as you know, in its infancy and considerably self obsessed. There is nothing to be done about it, actually. Because the 'teachings' are not actually teachings but simply idiosyncratic views of individual's interpretations of what they have read, heard and experienced spirituality, true seekers gradually tire of them and one day Vedanta comes into their lives. He is probably providing a valuable service, calling attention to the need for anta karana shuddhi in so far as Western people particularly are generally emotionally challenged for a number of reasons, not the least of which is a vain sense of entitlement. It's a good satsang, Vivek. I'll post it on the website if you don't mind.