

Vivek Ramakrishnan: Dialogues with James Swartz, Part 2

Ram (James Swartz)

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DIALOGUES WITH JAMES SWARTZ, Part 2

Fifth Dialogue, May 9, 2012

Vivek: I have read your last book again, on your advice, and pondered on your online *satsangs*. Two questions:

1. I noticed that you never mention the main focus of Ramana's and Nisargadatta Maharaj's teaching, which is to trace the I-sense back to its source. Personally, I found this teaching very useful, and I am curious to know why it is not mentioned in Vedanta. I don't think I could have understood what you were teaching if not for this fundamental teaching. From our discussions, you rightly point out that the I-sense is a reflection of the self and will ultimately disappear like a mirage. I am curious to know why this is not mentioned in your book on enlightenment.

James: Tracing the I-sense can be a useful teaching – as you know – but Vedanta does not teach it (although it fits in as a *sadhana*), because it gives the impression that you can gain *moksa* by action, i.e. tracing the source of the I-sense, and it implies experiential enlightenment, meaning that you will experience the self once you find the source. One problem with this is that the one who is doing the tracing is already the source, i.e. awareness. It also implies that the source is not known. But awareness is known to you. It is you, the tracer.

However, if by “tracing” you mean thinking logically back to what supports the I-sense, then this is a Vedanta teaching. There is no I-sense without you, awareness. Vedanta says that the I-sense is just an idea in the intellect that “I exist,” that “I am.” Apart from the simple fact that no thought of I is necessary for you to be awareness, it can be only known by awareness. So all a proper teaching has to do is to reveal the fact that you are awareness. If tracing the I-sense does that then it is Vedanta. Anything that reveals the self to be limitless awareness is Vedanta.

A problem with Ramana's teaching, which is not actually a teaching, only discrete statements made to different people at different times, is that it does not reconcile the experiential notion of enlightenment, *yoga*, with Vedanta. He presents both *yoga* and Vedanta as equally valid means of *moksa* without unfolding the obvious downside of *yoga*, which I do in the second chapter of my book. The statements of a *jnani* do not amount to a teaching unless they coincide with scripture and unless they include the supporting logic. Without the supporting logic they will be inevitably be misinterpreted.

Vivek: I have been doing some research on what Maharaj meant by the “The State Prior to Consciousness.” I think what Maharaj describes as the “this is” state is the Absolute. This would be variously described as Consciousness at rest or consciousness in deep sleep. In meditation it appears as a dark void. Some people also describe it as Deep Sleep but Awake.

James: I don't think so. I think by "Consciousness" he means the subtle body and by "the Absolute" he means pure consciousness. This statement is responsible for more confusion in the spiritual world than almost any other. I have several recent *satsangs* posted on the Web that explain this teaching.

Vivek: I am also beginning to suspect that even though the self is the substrate on which everything happens, there is a relationship between the substrate and different levels of consciousness in the mind. I think this relationship leads to different mystical states and altered states of consciousness and various clues on how to burn the *vasanas*. Yes, this awareness is the template/substrate through which the world arises but the interplay between this awareness and the mind I am not clear about.

James: Awareness, the substrate, i.e. you, are present at every level of the mind and when any mystical state is happening. You are the witness of any state. The interplay between awareness and the mind is not intuitive.

The mind is dependent on awareness but awareness is free of the mind. The interplay is *sattva*. When the mind is in a *sattvic* state, mystical states can happen. When the mind changes from *tamas* or *rajas* to *sattva* is it generally referred to as an "altered state."

Continued: It Seems Like This Part Is a Repeat

James: You say tracing the I-sense can be a useful teaching, as you know, but Vedanta does not teach it – although it fits in as a *sadhana* because it gives the impression that you can gain *moksa* by action, i.e. tracing the source of the I-sense, and it implies experiential enlightenment, meaning that you will experience the self once you find the source. One problem with this is that the one who is doing the tracing is already the source, i.e. awareness. It also implies that the source is not known. But awareness is known to you. It is you, the tracer.

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Vivek: Sure, I agree with what you say, but at least for me the feeling of I-sense manifested itself as a distinct sensation on the back of my head. And I (ego, don't know the Vedantic term) was watching the I-sense. Later on, only after your explanation was I able to recognize the underlying state of awareness that is below the states. Ironically, it was my cat that helped me get it. I was sleeping one night and suddenly the cat started meowing, and when I was in the state between sleep and awake I asked the question "Who is listening to the cat meow?" and I realised awareness was, because there is was no I, yet I was cognizant of the cat meowing. It was kind of intuitive. This sort of questioning happened after the event, not during the event. Does this make sense?

James: Yes, indeed, Vivek. But there are two things that you might like to know. Awareness is not a state, unless you are a state. So you were watching the I. The realization of yourself as an object is called indirect knowledge. Direct knowledge, i.e. *moksa*, is taking the object, in this case awareness, as the subject, you. You still have the experiential view of enlightenment. Indirect self-knowledge does not negate the doer, the intuiter, but direct knowledge does. The problem is that you interpreted the self as a state, something Vivek was experiencing. You were tricked by *maya* because it was really the self experiencing itself. *Maya* made it seem as if awareness was an experiencer – and awareness was the object of experience.

Vivek: If enlightenment is knowing that seeker is the sought and awareness is the ground of being, then it is obvious. No big deal. Happens to everyone.

James: It may happen to everyone but if the knowledge was direct everyone would be free. However, this is not the case.

Vivek: But if you think about it carefully, this awareness co-exists with the mind, otherwise this would not have become a memory and I would not be writing this email about the experience.

James: Indirect self-knowledge is experiential, and when the experience goes the knowledge goes. Self-knowledge is not memory-based. If you look at this experience, it is gone now because it was simply a state of mind. The mind was *sattvic*, and awareness reflected in it, and *maya* made it look like Vivek and the object of experience, the self appearing as a state, were two different things.

Vivek: So my big conundrum is, how do you define self-knowledge? Self = awareness; knowledge = mind.

James: It is "I am awareness," assuming the meaning of this is known in terms of the apparent reality, i.e. Vivek's life. It will stop the search and neutralize your binding **vasanas** and negate your sense of doership.

Vivek: BUT, and this is a big BUT, knowledge is a function of the mind, it is embedded in your neural circuits, ergo awareness cannot be separated from the mind because awareness requires the mind to know its existence.

James: It can be separated because it is always free of the mind. This is a fact you need to appreciate. No experience will resolve it. Awareness is self-aware, self-luminous, self-revealing. It does not need the mind to know anything. And in fact the mind cannot know anything because it is inert. It merely reflects light. It is not sentient. Awareness is sentient. You do not need a mind to know you exist. You exist in deep sleep and have a very nice experience, yet your mind is not there.

Knowledge is necessary to remove the ignorance, nothing more. It takes place in the mind because the mind is where the ignorance is. The self is never ignorant of what it is. *Maya* makes it appear as if the self is NOT known by itself.

Vivek: In our previous conversations you mentioned awareness is free from mind. In my daily experience it looks like they are interrelated. Can you please help to clarify this point?

James: Your daily experience is misleading. Experience is controlled by *maya*, which makes what is non-dual seem to be dual. Only by inquiry can you resolve this. Think about it this way: “I know the mind but the mind does not know me.” The mind is always an object. You are never an object. There is no one or anything that can turn you into an object.

This Seems to Be a Repeat Too

Vivek: I have been doing some research on what Maharaj meant by the “The State Prior to Consciousness.” I think what Maharaj describes as the “this is” state is the Absolute. This would be variously described as Consciousness at rest or consciousness in deep sleep. In meditation it appears as a dark void. Some people also describe it as Deep Sleep but Awake.

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Vivek: Then what would you describe the dark void that manifests itself during meditation? Obviously, it is not self since awareness is witnessing the void, but thoughts seem to arise from the void and fall back into it.

James: It is the causal body, the unmanifest (*avyakta*). It is the womb out of which the thoughts come and into which they return. It is known by you, awareness. Many people confuse the self

with the causal body because the causal body is awareness in its most subtle form. You can't actually see it except as the dark void when you are in some kind of meditative state. From the level of the conscious mind it is known only by inference. Nisargadatta was not conversant with scripture, so he used his own terms. And you have to understand that he spoke in Hindi or Marathi and he was translated by a person for whom English was not his native tongue and someone who was probably not a realized soul.*

*According to David Godman, Nisargadatta Maharajah told him that Maurice Frydman, translator of *I Am That*, was already enlightened when he met Maharaj.

II. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE I-SENSE

This happened when I was on retreat with James in May. I had never met James before this retreat, and the first thing I noticed when I went up to him was that my I-sense became stronger and more concentrated. This happened only twice before in my life, with Anadi and with a Buddhist teacher who studied with Maharaj. When I asked James about it he said that it often happens because of the teacher's *tapsya* (austerities and penance). On the final day of the retreat when we were doing a guided meditation with James a white light came from James and merged with me. At that moment my I-sense completely disappeared and I ended up in this really odd state where there was no separation between me and the world. The observer completely disappeared and there was no separate entity called Vivek but only awareness with Vivek inside awareness. I had no idea what happened so I wrote to James for clarification.

Sixth Dialogue, July 20, 2012

Vivek: Since the retreat the I-sense has vanished and is replaced by this strong energy at the top of my head. Even if I try to bring the energy back down to the I-sense it still remains at the top of my head. In our previous discussions you had indicated the disappearance of the I-sense is more akin to a mirage, but in my case, it is literally gone.

I am pretty sure I am not imagining it because I really focused on the I-sense for the last three years so I know what the energetic qualities entail. It looks like there is no solid me anymore and the experiencing entity is now awareness. I react to feelings and emotions but there is no centre from which this entity reacts. It is an odd sort of feeling. I know everybody's experiences are different, but did you have something similar? I do know that you did not practise the I-sense technique that Ramana and Maharaj taught but I am curious to know if there are energetic qualities associated with shifts in awareness.

James: Yes, of course there are energetic shifts that are the result of self-knowledge. Each point of view has its own energy configuration. It sounds to me like *Bhagavan* wants you to not focus on anything. There is no point focusing on anything if you are awareness anyway. Awareness is panoramic. It sees in all directions and has no center. You are not the one that once focused and now does not focus. You are the one that observed Vivek focus on the I-sense and now witness

the objects from the point of view of awareness. You will get used to being without a “solid me.” Actually, you were never solid anyway. It just felt like that. I have witnessed James experience just about every sort of energetic shift known to man and God, but since 1971 there have been no shifts.

Vivek: I am not sure if it was knowledge or if it was the meditation session. Maybe both. There was a white light that came from you in front of me while you were starting the session and then I merged with the light and then the I AM disappeared.

Admittedly, it would not have been easy to draw the right conclusions from the experience without your teaching though. I agree that interpreting the knowledge is key since I would not be able to interpret the experience in the light of knowledge. I guess you need both. Having no centre allows me to have a certain detachment towards the world; it is sure an odd feeling though. However, my mind and basic functions remain. So what was the centre? The subtle body?

I feel my meditative practice has become effortless because now I can find a resting place. Lots to explore. Thank you for opening my eyes though.

James: Whether the assimilation of self-knowledge brought about the shift or allowed you to assimilate the experience of the self in meditation makes no difference.

Vivek: Admittedly, it would not have been easy to draw the right conclusions from the experience without your teaching though. I agree that interpreting the knowledge is key since I would not be able to interpret the experience in the light of knowledge. I guess you need both.

James: That is correct. You need to know what the self is and what experience is and how the two relate. The self is the knower of the experience.

Vivek: Having no centre allows me to have a certain detachment towards the world; it is sure an odd feeling though. However, my mind and basic functions remain. So what was the centre? The subtle body?

James: You are the one that knows that there is no center. Before your attention was fixed on the I-sense but the knowledge freed it of this fascination – Ramana calls it a fascination in the account of his experience – and attention dissolved back into you, the self, which has no center. This is pure dispassion, seeing from awareness, seeing everything happening in you.

Yes, the center was the subtle body where the I-sense, the *jivatman*, shines.*

*The “mind, intellect and ego” come from the Samkhya-Yoga tradition, whereas the three bodies (gross, subtle, causal) are a Vedanta notion, a quicker way of referring to the five *koshas* (the first is physical, the next three are subtle, the fifth is causal). For most people, the subtle is experienced primarily in dream state. The causal is the dreamless sleep state.

Seventh Dialogue, August 6, 2012

Vivek: Does the self negate the causal body? It seems after the experience of my self, I am more closely connected with my unconscious (causal body) than before. For example, I had a dream where I went through the whole Ramana death-experience again, and then yesterday Ramana came to me in my dream and said, "The self is the only *guru*. You need to let go of me (Ramana) and go alone."

Considering that Ramana is most likely a manifestation of my unconscious, and the fact that I never dreamed of Ramana in my life until yesterday, the only conclusion I can draw is that for some reason I am in touch with my causal body, or the collective unconscious.

James: The self is the knower of the causal body. In your dream the self is speaking to you through the causal/subtle bodies. It is saying that you should let go of Vivek, the small Ramana, and accept your identity as awareness ("go alone" means "one without a second"). The knowledge is now affecting the deepest level of Vivek's being. It is saying that the Ramana/Nisargadatta teaching of holding on to the I-sense is not sufficient anymore. You are not the holder. You are the knower of Vivek, the holder.

Vivek: I was under the impression that knowing the self will negate everything or at least allow me to get a better handle on the causal body and the subtle body, but that is obviously not the case.

James: Who is going to get a handle on the causal and subtle bodies? The handle is you, awareness. They are objects known to you. There is nothing to do about them. I think Vivek has certain *yogic* ideas about control. Knowing you are the self does negate them. It means they are not you. It does not mean that they change or that Vivek can control them.

Vivek: In my meditative practices these days it is very common to see odd psychic experiences manifest afterwards. I do understand that all experiences are happening in awareness but the visceral reactions remain. Knowing that I am awareness does not negate the pain or the fear. The only thing different from before is that the Judge that was sitting in the middle is gone. The organism called Vivek is still functioning as before.

James: Yes, nothing changes except that Judge is gone. You are just a non-judgmental witness to the objects, the gross, subtle and causal bodies. But the Judge is still there if you think, as you say below, that the subtle and causal Bodies need a lot of work. Who says they do? Awareness says they are fine as they are.

Vivek: How did you, as awareness, deal with the causal body? It seems like in some ways it is like some storehouse of all human problems.

James: I take it as an object, like a chair or a hamburger. It is not me. It is known to me. I don't think about it at all. I just let it work in me. It is *Isvara*, and as awareness I let *Isvara* do its job. As James I ALSO let *Isvara* do its job also because *Isvara* controls me completely. It is fine with me if *Isvara* wants to make me think and feel and act. It is too much trouble to do it myself so I just leave it all to *Isvara*. I am having a great time here on earth in this body because I let *Isvara* control everything.

Vivek: What I am trying to get is, what practices are required to polish the mind so that it reflects awareness? At this level, I don't think *karma yoga* will quite cut it.

James: *Jnanabyasa, jnana yoga*. It means "taking a stand as awareness." You are still looking at things from Vivek's point of view. Vivek is an object, and needs to be known as such and dismissed as "not-me." This is a very difficult orientation to break.

Vivek: What did you do to clean your mind? What practices did you use? For some reason, unlike Buddhism, Vedanta does not address the mind as much. It expects that you have already cleaned up your mind, and that is fine in some cases.

James: Only *jnana yoga*, taking a stand as awareness. It cleans the mind like nothing else if you are ready for it. Krishna says, "There is no purifier like self-knowledge."

Vivek: In my case, there is a lot of cleaning up to do. The self is shining, and I know that, but my subtle body and causal body need a lot of work.

James: See the orientation. You say "the self is shining." Taking a stand means you say "I am shining." If you know that is true your mind will become pure quickly. In fact you will know that a pure or impure mind has nothing to do with you and it will purify on its own. If you think you are Vivek, which you seem to, then I recommend all the *yogas: karma, jnana, meditation and triguna vibhava yoga*.

Why do you say the bodies need a lot of work? Why not just accept them as they are and revel in the bliss of awareness?

Eighth Dialogue, August 9, 2012

Vivek: Thank you for taking the time to answer my queries and setting me on the right path. In ancient times I would have had no option but to pack my bags and follow you around the world; anything less would be a disservice in my search for Truth.

So I am grateful that you take the time to answer my queries through the internet.

I went through your replies and I have a few questions.

For some reason, I thought that having no centre would free me of my *vasanas* because there is no one to whom the *vasanas* will bind. There is no centre but the organism functions and things are the same as before except the fact that there is no centre.

James: For whom is there no center, Vivek? Who notices the absence of a center? You are looking at this problem from Vivek's point of view. Vivek is the center. Vivek was the center before also but he was meditating on the I-sense. Now that meditation has gone it seems as if there is no center. If you are Vivek there are *vasanas* and they have meaning. Evidently, you think *vasanas* are not desirable. But what about this amazing *vasana* for truth? Isn't it a beautiful *vasana*, worth cultivating? And what about many other positive *vasanas* you have? If you are the one who sees the absence of center, the *vasanas* are meaningless. This is not a *vasana* problem. It is a self-knowledge problem. You have realized that you, awareness, has no center but it is not clear to you what it means to have no center. This is indirect knowledge. Now, by contemplation it needs to become direct.

You need to say "I have no center. I am everywhere – and nowhere. What are *vasanas* to me? They are just objects appearing in me, manufactured out of me by some strange force. I am without a center but I am fullness itself." This is what has to be realized.

Vivek: I need some clarity on what you mean when you say in an enlightened person the *vasanas* are non-binding. In Hindu scriptures a *jnani* is someone who can renounce desires as they arise in the mind. Desire is not necessarily a bad thing, as we all know, so how does one discriminate between wholesome and unwholesome desires?

James: A *jnani* is someone who has desire but is not affected by desire. He or she does not own it. A *jnani* is the self. Krishna says, "I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*." There is nothing wrong with desires at all, only desires that bring injury to yourself or others because they are sourced in ignorance, not fullness. It sounds to me like you are trying change yourself in some way. Why is what you are now not acceptable? You can never get rid of *vasanas*. As long as you are alive you will have them. Why not leave them alone? Act on the ones you want to and don't act on the one's you don't want to. Why make them into a problem? I think you have an idea that Vivek should be pure and holy, etc.

Your knowledge of *Isvara* needs some work. You need to see if the *vasanas* belong to you. Do you personally and consciously manufacture them? You don't. They appear in you as if by magic.

Vivek: In your commentary on Ramana's teaching you give the example of the water tower to show that it is separate from you. But the thought connected to you as a human being/entity housing the self is lot different that a thought about a water tower. If someone insults the water tower you probably would not care but if someone insults the human being/ entity housing the self, obviously it is different. I know for a fact that I will react if someone insults me or my family, even though I know I am the self.

James: Vivek will react. That is natural. You will observe his reaction. Why should he not react if he is insulted? If he does not react there is something wrong with him. It is *dharma* to react to insults as they reveal an absence of the knowledge of non-duality. Self-knowledge does not make you indifferent, like a stone – unless it is your nature to be indifferent. I don't react to insults. I notice James' reaction, which is usually one of wonder and amusement, sometimes irritation. But whatever reaction there is, I don't take it seriously because it is not real. It appears in me and then disappears. What does it have to do with me? I am the non-experiencing witness. This you should contemplate. Desires and fears do not define you.

Vivek: Traditionally what happens is that you put in your time, practise your *yogas* and purify the mind. When you know yourself as the self, most of the binding *vasanas* are already taken care of, in essence.

In my case, exactly the opposite has happened. I had knowledge of the self through the grace of your teaching but I really don't think I put in the time and effort to clean my house before self-knowledge happened.

James: That is correct. It didn't need cleaning. Your *vasana* for the truth obscured it. Now you notice that you have a dirty house. So what? If you don't like dirt, get out the vacuum cleaner, the *yogas*, and clean it. If you like dirt let it be dirty. I have friends who like their messy, dirty lives. Purification is good but it has a downside too. The more pure you get the more impurity you discover. It is like knowledge. The more you get the more ignorance is revealed. There is no end to it. The house will crumble one day. What does it matter if it is a clean or a dirty house? Rest in awareness as awareness and let the knowledge "I am pure awareness" be your identity. You will see that as time passes Vivek's unholy *vasanas* will slowly disappear.

Vivek: Your email indicates that knowing that you are self should remove any binding *vasanas* but it is extremely exhausting to focus your mind from moment to moment and practise discrimination.

James: Okay, so do *karma yoga* if you can't purify the mind with knowledge. Let the mind focus on what it wants to focus on. As Krishna says, "What use is control?" It will follow its nature. If you want to change it know that you are in for a long, hard slog. Krishna again, "The mind is difficult to control, an entrenched tyrant." But it can be brought under control by repeated practice (of the knowledge "I am awareness"). It is easier than will power – which doesn't work anyway, because how will you control your ego if you purify your mind with will power? You will just end up on a big ego power trip like so many *yogis*. Take the *karma yoga* view. Do what you for purification and leave the results to *Ishvara*. That means that while you are waiting for purity you enjoy your impurities.

Vivek: Actually, reorienting yourself as the self is extremely tiring also.

James: That is true. Nobody said it was easy. There is a lifetime habit of thinking you are Vivek. I

think the best thing to do is to accept Vivek as he is. What is actually wrong with him? I think you have an idea, an ideal that you are trying to achieve. This whole business is just a desire to be different. When you think like this you will never be satisfied. You will just reinforce your sense of self-dissatisfaction. Having no center means that you are full. See the satisfaction in it, not the dissatisfaction.

Vivek: Just to reiterate, taking a stand as awareness is extremely exhausting and energetically draining. I can maybe pull it off for an hour a day but it is very tiring. Maybe that is where all the *yogic* practices come in.

James: Yes, you are a householder, not a *sannyasi*. You have *karma* that needs attending too. So *karma yoga* is for this problem. Don't fight the tide. Surrender to your *karma*. See the meditation in the same light that you see everything else. Or see everything else in the light of meditation. This is not a doing problem, Vivek. It is about understanding what it means to have no center. You experience from the self as the self now, thanks to the teachings of Vedanta. But the effects of ignorance are still with you. It is a tribute to your commitment to truth that you can see that you have the cart before the horse. But it is good because it is much easier to clean up the mess knowing what the self is than not knowing, assuming you actually are Vivek. Are you?

Vivek: After an hour of meditation it feels like all the energy on my crown *chakra* is just going to explode. This energy is not awareness, but being in awareness increases the content of the energy on my crown *chakra*. I know it sounds bogus but it actually does feel like a halo around my head.

James: It is a halo of energy. But it is no big deal. If you don't like it, stop meditating. In any case, it does you no good because only you and I can see it. And I have my own halo so I am not envious of yours.

Vivek: It might be simple if nothing changed when you realise you are awareness, but in my case, that is patently untrue. Maybe it will take time for these manifestations to settle down and become normal.

James: Nothing changes and everything changes. Take it easy, Vivekji. Enjoy your life, your wife and kids. Let go of this spiritual stuff. You are fine. *Isvara* will do the work. Relax.

Vivek: It's funny to notice that when I was on my path the last 15 years these kinds of energetic manifestations would have been extremely desirable, but these days I have come to realise exactly the opposite.

James: The apparent reality is an upside/downside reality.

Vivek: Being an ordinary human is the greatest gift you can have. Wake up in the morning, do your job and then go to sleep. The simple life.

James: You came up with the solution on your own. I should have read the last sentence before I wrote so much already. Take it easy.

Ninth Dialogue, August 10, 2012

Vivek: A few more follow-up questions:

What exactly is the nature of the self?* I know that the Buddha did not answer these sorts of questions but does Vedanta offer any insight into this process? Can you refer me to any texts?

James: Awareness/consciousness. It is what is observing you read these words. It is you. Texts won't help, Vivek. They will just confuse you further. What understanding will you use to interpret them?

Vivek: Where does the self begin and end?

James: Take a look, Vivek. Where do you begin and end? The self is just you, awareness. If you can't determine that you have no beginning or end then take scripture's word for it. You are *ajati*, unborn. If you are unborn you have no end. You need to give up on this *yogic* thinking, Vivek. It is just confusing you. You seem to be very attached to it. You are way beyond it yet you persist in it.

Vivek: Is there one self or multiple selves?

James: One self, appearing as many. If you look at it from the body level there are multiple selves. If you look at it from your level, there is one self. What is the difference between you and your wife and kids?

Vivek: Nowadays the body feels like a shell, which it might as well be, but the self cannot be perceived without the body.

James: The body feels like a shell because it is a shell. It is inert and insentient. Your second statement is ignorance. The self is self-aware. It does not need the body to know itself. It does not need the mind. How can it perceive anything if it is just inert food? Even if it was conscious it couldn't perceive the self because the self is beyond perception and inference. Honestly, Vivek, you seem to have forgotten your Vedanta. Maybe your experiential filter was so strong you missed the knowledge.

Vivek: Another interesting thing happened: for some reason after my enlightenment experience I stopped dreaming. I don't have dreams anymore. Is this a common occurrence? Scientifically, it has been shown that everyone dreams and in my case it is probable that I cannot recall my dreams, but do you know why? Have you heard anything like this?

James: Yes, it is quite natural. The experience evidently cleared a lot of your *samskaras* so there is little basis for dreams. Dreams are just *samskaras* outpouring in the subtle body. You may have occasional dreams, however. This experience probably did not clear everything, just the most superficial layer.

Vivek: Another odd thing is that I don't have psychic experiences anymore. I was very gifted and I could instantly sense what people were thinking or feeling around me but now I cannot feel anything or sense anything. The connection to the outside world for some reason has broken. Do you know why this would happen? If you read traditional descriptions of enlightenment, you would expect the exact opposite to happen.

James: You are the self. What use are psychic experiences anymore? They were only useful for Vivek and you are no longer Vivek. The problem is that you did not understand what the enlightenment experience meant.

Your identity has shifted but your intellect has not caught up. It still thinks you are Vivek. It is quite odd, really. I have seen this happen before but it is unusual. You won't figure it out by reading texts, I'm sorry to say.

The broken connection with the outside world it called *moksa*, Vivek. You were never connected. You just thought you were. When you transcended Vivek the connection was broken because Vivek died. You won't be able to reconnect, sorry to say. So you better adjust to being the self and stop trying to revive Vivek.

Vivek: I hope you are enjoying the vacation.

James: Yes, indeed. I have been on vacation from *samsara* for 41 years. It promises to continue.

Vivek: Thanks, James, for the reply. It is interesting, as you point out, that the identity has shifted but the intellect has not caught on. I am concerned about fooling myself because the mind can artificially impose a reality on the self, so I want to make sure every step is logically and clearly thought out. I have seen enough instances of people falsely believing that they are enlightened and spouting nonsense afterwards.

James: Trust the knowledge, Vivek. Anyway, this is not the way to make sure. The way to make sure is to revel in your wholeness, to take your sense of security from who you are. Recognize the doubtful intellect for what it is and ignore it. You cannot remove the doubt by talking with

others or reading books. Look to yourself and see that you are immutable. In this way you develop confidence in the knowledge. I get the sense that you are still not satisfied, that you still expect something more to happen. Enlightenment is not an experience, an event. It is hard and fast knowledge in the intellect that you are the light, i.e. limitless awareness, and not the experiencing entity. You need to develop the discrimination between you and the experiencing entity. In any case, don't feel too bad about it. Most spiritual literature is actual spiritual porn, calculated to incite fantasies of amazing cosmic orgasms, etc. It is no wonder that an ego that feels limited and incomplete is susceptible to them.

Vivek: What I was trying to say, unsuccessfully, it seems, was that you need a fully functional body and mind to realise the self. A schizophrenic patient or mentally retarded patients will not have the tools to realise the self.

James: Okay, it wasn't clear. A lot of people think the self can be known by the body-mind.

Vivek: Until I met you I did not know the difference between knowledge and experience. All my previous training, including Ramana's and Maharaj's teaching, was very experience-based teaching. In addition, the identity shift happened through an experiential process through you in the retreat. So obviously, the experiential filter is very strong since all my understanding and shifts occurred through experiences. The I-sense is an energetic process and so was the light coming from you into my body, and the disappearance of the I-sense since then. After that Ramana came in a dream and said that I need to let go of him. That was the first and last time I dreamed about Ramana.

James: It is so easy to be fooled by experience. The experience of the light coming from me into your body causing the I-sense to disappear is how the mind personified the understanding that there is no I-sense. The light was only knowledge. The destruction of the I-sense, a subtle object on which you had been meditating, destroyed your identification with the experiencing entity and shifted you back to where you always are. You never were Vivek, the experiencing entity. But the tendency to identify with Vivek is so strong that you tend to take his spiritual *vasana* seriously. Since this *vasana* has been such an obsession I suppose you are unwilling to let it go. Seeking often becomes a treasured identity. The knowledge of who you are is very simple. If you are still looking for confirmation from the outside it is not firm. Use it to destroy the doubter.

Vivek: The body feeling like a shell, no dreams henceforth and the psychic connection being broken all seem to me as a very experiential process.

James: Sure, but so what? What is the fascination with experience? Why not make a big deal out of the lunch you had yesterday? It is all the same. Experience is nothing special. Everything is experience. Only one fact stands out: "I am not an experiencer." The experiencer is not real, Vivek. If the experiencer is not real then experience is not real. Yes, it is the self but the self is not experience. It is the non-experiencing witness. If you want to be doubt-free you need to get your head around this fact. All this experience stuff is just a big spiritual wank.

*The Buddha actually did very occasionally talk about the Absolute, such as in the *Udana Sutta*, wherein he referred to the Unborn, Uncompounded, Unmade, without which there would be no freedom from that which is born, compounded, made. He also speaks of the *Anidassana Vinnana*, the “surfaceless” or “seamless/structureless” awareness which is NOT one of the five *skandhas*, including the fifth *skandha* of *vinnana*, or personal consciousness. His famous refrain in the Pali-language *suttas* is “*n’etam mama, n’eso ham asmi, na meso atta*,” (“This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my Self.”) Thus he is pointing back to our source nature, the absolute awareness, or one reality/self. This is why the Tathagata-Garbha school of Buddhism came in (circa third century CE) to correct a misunderstanding of Nagarjuna’s “emptiness” teaching (*sunyata*), crucially affirming the *satyatman* or “True Self.” This is what later Hua-yen and Ch’an Buddhism refer to as the Original Mind, Unborn Self, etc. (from discussions with Timothy Conway).

Tenth Dialogue, August 21, 2012

Vivek: A couple of days ago when I was driving my car, for a little while it looked like the entity “Vivek” was an object in awareness. It has happened a few times after that. My question: is that the looking at the world and your “personality/ego” through the lens of your awareness an experiential shift? Seeing the world through the self is completely different than seeing the world as the entity “Vivek.” This is an experiential shift. Where does knowledge come in?

It seems to me that this enlightenment, or awakening, or whatever people choose to call it, is a combination of both an experiential shift and a paradigm shift (knowledge). I would be interested in knowing your thoughts about this matter.

James: There was an apparent experiential shift that was brought about by the assimilation of the knowledge “I am awareness” that took place in Vancouver. You were always experiencing things this way but *maya* made it seem as if you were Vivek and awareness was an object. Nothing actually happened but because you have been thinking you were Vivek and living from the Vivek perspective for so long it seemed like you experienced a different state when the knowledge destroyed the idea that you are Vivek. An apparent shift seems like a real shift when you have been identified with the experiencing entity because reality is non-dual experience and knowledge are one. But the knowledge is required to make the shift permanent, although it occasionally happens the other way: the shift gives rise to the knowledge. It doesn’t matter. What matters is that you are whole and complete awareness, and the search for the self has ended. Now you can live free of Vivek and his limited point of view. He was/is only a concoction of beautiful, intelligent ignorance

Eleventh Dialogue, August 21, 2012

Vivek: Thanks for your answers. I think I am not doing a good job communicating what I am thinking. I need to be more precise in my writing.

For starters, I am not looking for any particular spiritual experience to free me. I realised in Vancouver that any experience happens in awareness and adding or subtracting experience is not going to be of any help. I gave up chasing experiences a while ago.

James: Okay, it must be a language problem. One needs to be very precise when talking about these things. This is where Vedanta is so valuable. We need impersonal scientific words whose roots are directly related to what they indicate. And if one understands the basic structure of the teaching and sticks to it when communicating one's words will be easily understood because they will be properly contextualized. But if someone picks up appealing terminology here and there and rambles from one topic to another without obvious logic communications become idiosyncratic and lose their power.

Vivek: I am the last person to think that my experience is special. Compared to the spiritual porn out there my experience is surprisingly benign. If I understand statement (a) above then the second statement is irrelevant.

My *sadhana* every day is to read Chapter II. Trust me, I have spent more time on this than I would like to admit.

James: That's good. Failure to understand the distinction between experience and knowledge is the number one impediment to *moksa*.

Vivek: The things I am struggling to understand are:

A. How does one communicate this sort of knowledge in scientific terms? What exactly is happening in the brain and the mind, which is an emergent phenomenon. I don't expect an answer from you on this, but as a scientist I think about this often since I work with doctors all the time. Hence the question on the mind-body-self connection. This is me thinking aloud.

James: You communicate with scientific terms – aka Sanskrit or English words derived from Sanskrit – and you use Vedanta. It is called *brahma vidya*, which means the science of consciousness. The exact thing happens in the brain when you transmit self-knowledge as happens when you transmit any kind of knowledge. It is only that the words take the mind to the consciousness instead of to objects. So they produce a different kind of experience and knowledge. The brain is just an instrument. The mind is the organ. Nobody knows exactly what is happening in the brain except *Isvara*. Science will not figure it out, just like they will not figure out the Higgs boson or what love is. The best they can do is infer that it exists. They can't figure it out just like we can't figure out the results of actions. The field is too complex. And there is no actually line demarcating the beginning of pure consciousness and pure consciousness as subtle matter and subtle matter as physical matter. There are no instruments that can explore that interface and get direct hard and fast knowledge. And the brain is not real. It is just a very subtle instrument that is modifying to circumstances all the time. It behaves differently in different people according to the *gunas*. And ultimately, when the scientists do get it all figured out, so what? The *vasanas* will continue to drive it and people will continue to suffer. Humans seem to delight in pursuing things that cannot be known. Inscrutability is a fact at that level.

I understand what you mean by “scientific” but people with this kind of mind are not interested in this kind of knowledge. Of the hundreds of people I meet in the course of a year, I have yet to meet a proper material scientist. They are neither interested nor are they qualified to understand because they are totally under the control of the senses and the mind. I could blow material science apart and reconstitute it in such a way that human life would benefit immeasurably but it will not happen. Those people are *asuras*, their faces turned away from *surya*, the sun. They are looking at matter.

Vivek: I know you define knowledge as something that cannot be negated, which I agree with wholeheartedly, by the way. Let’s break down this knowledge versus experience using my experience in the retreat as an example.

A. Knowledge is communicated through words from James.

B. What are words? What exactly is a word? It is a concept/arbitrary definition that we as humans (James and Vivek) agree on.

C. For the listener (Vivek) the word is a vibration on the tympanic membrane in the ear, which is then translated by the brain. This is a physiological experience. If you block my eardrum, no transmission of knowledge.

D. The word/words/sentences, which is/are received in the brain, is/are now compared to previous experiences/understanding and the brain catalogues this information. (Brain does not equal the mind.)

E. This information content is caused by neurotransmitters firing in brain. No neurotransmitters, no thought, and you are brain-dead.

F. Somehow this knowledge affects the mind and the self is revealed. We know that enlightenment can happen only to the mind/subtle body and not to the self since the self is already free.

What I am trying to say with my above train of thought is that if you actually break it down the difference between knowledge and experience is completely artificial. At the fundamental level all distinctions fade away and all you see is emptiness, or energy if you want to put a positive spin on it.

James: That is true but knowledge does not affect the brain. It affects the one who sees the emptiness. You only care about the brain because you care about the one who sees the emptiness. You don’t think about digestion because the effect of digestion is that you live. You are interested in life, not the digestion of food. You drink the Coke, not the bottle. What does it matter how it happens? Even if you understand it you have no control of it. It happens and it has a huge impact on one’s life. You can never resolve the meaning of anything in the apparent reality because it is an apparent reality. It has a conditional meaning, one that is always changing, one that has different utility according to the needs of the one who is investigating it. As soon as you disconnect the brain from consciousness you don’t have a brain. Whatever it means is totally subjective. It will only be what you want it to mean. It will never mean what it is – because it is not real.

Vivek: The concept that Sidharameshvar Maharajah and few others bring up (Ramana included) is to allow the Unmanifest to reveal itself as *shakti* in the heart space.* When I was around you it was pretty obvious that you had manifested the *shakti* in the heart space. I am not familiar with any Vedanta teaching that talks about it yet you are able to allow the manifest to reveal in your heart space as *shakti*.

This is a distinct, energetic feeling. I don't know how this can be a knowledge issue.

James: It is not a knowledge issue. It is pure experience, what is happening all the time in every sentient being. It is the interface between pure consciousness and matter. That vibration is the vibration of life. It is revealed by words. They direct the attention to it. It is also revealed when the mind is under the influence of *sattva guna*. Unfortunately, the subtle body is not influenced by *sattva* alone, so the experience is not always available through experiential means whereas it is always available when ignorance of the self is removed. This *shakti* that the spiritual world is so enthralled with manifests in everything all the time. Complete morons and worldly people feel it from time to time. Lovers feel it intensely.

Vivek: If knowledge manifests itself as energy and causes energetic shifts in the body then it means that knowledge and experience are not as separate as most people believe. However, as a beginner, and to understand the self, the knowledge/experience distinction is critical.

James: That's right. They are not separate at all at the self level. They need to be separated at the empirical (*vyvaharika*) level, however, or you will never get to the self level.

Vivek: I hope this explains my position a little better. I am not looking for any more experiences because it will not make any difference to who I am. I know that 100%, so please don't worry about me losing this essential insight. The seeker and the sought are one, the same. The self is the non-experiencing entity.

James: Cool!

Vivek: My questions are coming from another place. Doubt is the wrong word for it.

James: It's my problem, Vivek. I had my *guru* hat on. To tell the truth, I am a one-trick pony. I am only interested in Vedanta. Any and all *samsaric* things bore me – no offense. All knowledge resolves in self-knowledge eventually, so I just sit in the self as the self and enjoy. For me there is no brain – I never saw mine and as far as I am concerned I don't have one or if I do I can't see it working so it is of no interest, just like I can't see my blood circulating. It means nothing to me. The only meaningful thing is the experience of myself experiencing myself as bliss, quite independent of the body and of course the understanding that I have to do nothing to experience it, nothing to maintain it and that it can never go away because it is me.

*Siddharameshvar calls this the “non-experiencing” Witness because the Absolute Reality (he often calls this the “Parabrahman”) is not in a dualistic relationship with the universal play of consciousness (in which all personal consciousnesses figure). In other words, the worlds of phenomenal happenings and beings are not an “experience” for the Parabrahman. When he says “allow the manifest to reveal itself as Shakti in the heart space” he means the *hridayam* (heart of reality), not the *anahata*, “heart *chakra*,” or the physical heart organ. He’s simply saying here that in reality a manifest play happens. We call this universal play of consciousness the play of *shakti*, the dynamic, manifesting aspect of the self. The absolute, non-dynamic, unmanifest is the “Shiva aspect” of the *atman/brahman*.

A point for clarification: Siddharameshvar 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 Siddharameshvar reserves the term “Parabrahman” for what Sankara calls the “*nirguna brahman*,” or “unmanifest, quality-free reality.”

III. SEPARATING THE EXPERIENCING WITNESS FROM THE NON-EXPERIENCING WITNESS

It took me about four to six months after these dialogues to become firm in the knowledge that Vivek is just an object in awareness. One thing which really helped was downloading all the *satsangs* from the website and going through them.

Then one day while I was lying in my bed I realised that enlightenment is freedom from Vivek, not freedom for Vivek, and at that point my knowledge became secure. It finally dawned on me that knowledge is the ultimate purifier and the knowledge that you are full and complete is a powerful antidote to the ego’s desire for completeness.

It does not mean that I am free of desire and have become a holy man. What I do know is that nothing outside of myself can make me happy. Whenever a desire appears, for example, in my case, it would probably entail buying a BMW car, I look at the desire, indulge in it in my mind and then realise that it is never going to complete me and then drop it. Even if I do end up buying a BMW car it will be with the full knowledge that having an expensive car is not going to make me happy and complete. I AM THAT.

I don’t practise meditation anymore though occasionally I do sit and meditate to give the thinking mind a rest. I stopped reading scriptures, and in my spare time play jazz guitar and do martial arts. I have become an ordinary man.

One thing I would advise any seeker to do is stick with tradition. One thing a traditional path does is that it allows for people with different mindsets or personalities to progress within the framework of a path. Initially, the thought of following a traditional path might be arduous or boring for a seeker, and it is very tempting to follow one of the New Age *gurus* like Krishnamurti, Adyashanti, Papaji and a host of others who promise instant enlightenment. The first thing to realise is that instant enlightenment is not possible because enlightenment is not an experience. Unless the idea of any kind experience freeing you goes away it will be impossible to assimilate the teachings of Vedanta.

Twelfth Dialogue, November 15, 2012

Vivek: Is it possible to have an experience without an experiencing entity? Is deep sleep an experience or is it not?

James: No. Deep sleep is an experience. The experiencer is a subtle *vritti* called *prajna*.*

Vivek: Is deep sleep similar to *samadhi*? The question being whether the mind is not aware of the experience of deep sleep.

James: It depends on the *samadhi*. *Nirvikalpa* is similar but you are present as awareness witnessing the absence of thoughts. In *savikalpa* there are thoughts, one of which is the subtle body, experiencer, but all the *vikalpas* are known to have equal value, i.e. they are seen as awareness.

Vivek: Also, how do you know the experience is a subtle *vritti* if there is no one to know the experience?

James: Awareness is there. *Sruti* says so and *sruti* comes from awareness. And inference is a valid means of knowledge. There has to be a *vritti* for experience.

Vivek: My life has become rather uninteresting these days. No more spiritual experiences to chase and no earth-shattering mystical experiences either. No dreams either. Enjoying family life and hobbies. I have become a common man.

James: Good. The spiritual stuff is a real wank. Enjoy.

Vivek: I hope you are enjoying your vacation.

James: Life is grand.

TAT TWAMASI