

We Need an Absolute Method

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Xena: Ted, thanks for a fabulous exposition! I've found very few truly realize the non-dual nature of the One. And thanks for being so open with your viewpoint.

For me, I am still "teaching myself," as I am not "there" yet, and I do find it helpful for me to explain to others, as that makes me see the Truth more clearly.

Ted: Yes, this is one of the aspects of *nididhyasana* that is advocated by Adi Shankara. The more you keep the teachings boiling away in the mind, the more they distill the ignorance.

Xena: There is absolutely no reason that the absolute Truth cannot happen instantaneously to us upon the asking. *Karma*? No.

Ted: Well, truth itself is not a happening. Limitless awareness is all-pervasive – though "pervasive" is not exactly the right word, given the fact that there exists nothing other than "itself" for awareness to pervade – and thus *achala*, incapable of change, which is the defining characteristic of a "happening."

Of course the assimilation of self-knowledge is an event, but even that is not in itself the truth. The understanding that remains in the wake of the thought or recognition of the fact that "I am limitless conscious existence" is what we call *atma-jnana*, or self-knowledge. But, yes, this realization can and does occur in an instant. Fully assimilating the knowledge is what takes time and effort.

The dawning of the realization that one's true nature is limitless conscious existence that you suggest can "happen instantaneously to us upon the asking" is not an event visited upon us by chance or delivered unto us by the grace of some volitional cosmic entity. Rather "grace" is earned through *karma*.

First, we must put forth the proper effort to cultivate the *antahkarana shuddhi*, mental purity, and *antahkarana nishchaya*, mental focus, necessary to enable us to engage in effective self-inquiry. This is the purpose of the fundamental spiritual practices of *karma yoga*, living in accordance with *dharma* (i.e. universal ethical norms), meditation and devotional worship. Though these practices themselves won't produce self-knowledge, they are necessary aids to self-inquiry in that they make the mind introspective and render it still enough to "see" a reflection of the limitless nature of the self in the "word-mirror" of the teachings. In other words, only in a mind sufficiently undistracted by conditioned beliefs and extroverting desires will Xena be able to recognize the non-objectifiable "light" in which all objective phenomena (i.e. sensations, emotions and cognitions) appear.

Next, once we have caught a "glimpse" of our true nature, we must make the effort to engage in *nididhyasana*, the continuous meditation upon and application of the teachings to each and

every aspect of our lives, both in terms of our internal thoughts and external actions. Because our old patterns of thinking and the dualistic paradigm in terms of which we interpret our experience is so deeply ingrained in us, it takes quite a bit of effort for all but a few highly qualified seekers (perhaps one in a million) to sand away its stain.

Xena: When the realization comes, the sages say *karma* dissolves at that instant.

Ted: *Karma* dissolves because the sense of doership has been erased.

Limitless conscious existence is impersonal, all-pervasive and perfectly full. These three factors render it incapable of action. First of all, given that it is not a personal entity, it has no volition or Xena to act. Second, because it is all-pervasive, there is no “arena” or “field,” so to speak, in which it can move nor is there any background or substrate against which any movement or change, which is the defining characteristic of action, could be measured. Moreover, it neither possesses any parts or instruments with which to execute an action nor does there exist any other entity for it to act upon or in response to. What’s more, its attributeless, immutable singularity means that there is no second entity that could threaten awareness, nor any possible source of enhancement or diminishment, and thus awareness would have absolutely no reason to act. Third, even were we to grant impersonal awareness some sort of volitional Xena, given the fact that it is perfectly full, it would have no motivation to act, for it would have nothing to gain by means of action.

Xena: So what are we doing here? We know that we should have liberation, but not necessarily be separated from *samsara*, because we have work to do here.

Ted: What we’re doing here is experiencing the fructification of the *punya* and *papa karma* (i.e. merits and demerits) that we’ve earned through our past actions. Also, given the capacity for discrimination, self-reflection and will power with which we have been endowed as human beings, we also have the opportunity to seek release from the existential whirlpool of *samsara*, the repetitive and self-propelling cycle of birth and death that tends to be characterized by fleeting experiences of joy and languishing periods of sorrow (or at least disturbance, discomfort and dissatisfaction).

So we basically have two options with regard to what you call the work we have to do here.

The first option is to unconsciously move from one experience to the next, exhausting little by little the *prarabdha karma* (i.e. the *punya* and *papa* that is slated to play out within the context of our present incarnation) while at the same time engaging in actions that create *agami karma* (i.e. *punya* and *papa* that Xena eventually has to fructify either in this lifetime or a subsequent birth) that Xena be credited to our store of *sanchita karma*, which is what we might call the vast reservoir of *punya* and *papa* that constitutes our entire *karmic* account. The problem with this option is that it only perpetuates our existential dilemma and keeps us bound to the wheel of *samsara*.

The second option is to engage in self-inquiry and thereby to gain knowledge of our true nature as limitless conscious existence and thereby gain *moksa* (i.e. liberation, or ultimate inner

freedom). Once this ultimate inner freedom is gained, the manifest universe doesn't simply go up in a puff of white light. As long as our *prarabdha karma* lasts, so do we as apparent individuals. The difference will be, however, that we will no longer suffer.

We will understand that since everything is essentially nothing other than impersonal, all-pervasive, attributeless awareness, the whole notion of being an individual person who executes actions is only the result of a projected appearance with which we have identified and believed to be real. Thus, having gained the understanding that the doer we believed ourselves to be is actually nothing more than an apparent entity and that the body-mind-sense complex with which we are associated as well as the entire mechanism of the manifest universe are nothing more than organic cosmic machinery that functions according to its design when illumined by awareness, we will no longer consider ourselves doers, and thus will not create or accrue any further *karma*. In short, because there is no more *karta* (i.e. doer), there is no longer any entity who can create new *karma* nor any entity to which the stored *karma* belongs. It is in this sense that the whole *karmic* Ponzi scheme collapses once and for all.

Xena: Long ago I had a doctoral-level knowledge of what I thought was Vedanta, and Buddhism; I could quote almost anything (including *Aparokshanubhuti*), but where did that get me... nowhere. Direct action was absent. Wise sayings were worthless without the realization. Oh, I've had many, many "aha" moments; I remember once seeing all reality and saying to myself, "I've got it!," to which the mortal mind said, "I've got WHAT?," as outside the awareness, it was incomprehensible...

Ted: There is nothing "outside" awareness. Awareness is the very substratum of existence. In fact it is existence itself. Only by means of awareness is anything known to exist. Even time and space are dependent upon awareness for their existence. We are not talking about the "field" of awareness accessible to the mind of the person you take yourself to be. Rather we are talking about universal awareness. By the same token, this universal awareness is your personal awareness in the same way that the ocean water is the content of any particular wave arising within it.

In light of this consideration, the question to contemplate is who was witnessing those "aha" moments. Who watched them come and go? Who is the ever-present witness of each and every moment of your existence? Sure, our experiences appear in the mind, but what is the mind? The mind is not a thing per se, but is the name we give to the thought-forms arising within (and actually made out of) awareness. Thus awareness is watching itself appear to itself. And while all the forms depend on awareness for their existence (for what else could they consist of or their existence be confirmed by?), awareness itself remains ever free of all forms. That is, while the forms come and go, awareness always remains the ever-present witness of what is and what is (seemingly) not.

Xena: Intellectualizing doesn't help, as you know.

Ted: It is the starting point. You've got to understand the teachings before you can assimilate them. But you're right, mere intellectual understanding doesn't resolve the fundamental problem. You've got to "see" your true nature in the "word-mirror" of the teachings. Once you recognize the

“is-ness” that you are, you will never doubt it again.

Xena: Meditation, maybe.

Ted: Meditation is a platform for self-inquiry. Once the mind is sufficiently introverted and still, you can begin to reflect on who is witnessing the mind.

Xena: We do need an absolute method...

Ted: Exactly, which is what Vedanta is.

Xena: ...and I have not yet found it. I hope that you have or that at least you are close.

Ted: Traditional Vedanta is a valid means of knowledge that infallibly reveals the true nature of reality to those whose mind is sufficiently qualified. Moreover, if the mind is not yet sufficiently purified to “see” or recognize one’s own true nature, it also provides the various spiritual practices through which one can cultivate such a mind.

Xena: I have been “around the block” with this issue too many times. I probably should have accepted Swami Bhashyananda’s invitation to stay with him at the Vivekananda Vedanta Center many years ago, but I wasn’t ready and I was married with a young child. I recently discovered he wrote *From the Unreal to the Real*, a fine book which resonated well with me.

Ted: You can take this for what it’s worth to you, but my suggestion is that you read either *How to Attain Enlightenment* or *The Essence of Enlightenment* by James Swartz. Both of these books lay out the entire teaching of Vedanta in a very practical and accessible way that might help you move beyond a mere intellectual understanding of the teachings and see the truth they reveal in terms of your own experience. Then, if any further questions arise, feel free to contact me, and I will be happy to help you resolve your doubts.

Xena: Thanks for your input. Thanks for contributing to the rest of us...

Peace.

Ted: All the best.