

Who Stops Suffering?

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Martin: Thanks for such a speedy reply, Ted.

There's one idea in your email that's sort of confusing. You said, "But you will no longer suffer at the hands of 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' with which he is faced."

What does it mean to "no longer suffer"?

Ted: It means that while the apparent individual person will still experience pain and pleasure, he will no longer suffer or, for that matter, enjoy, at the hands of the erroneously projected idea that getting or not getting what he wants will either complete or diminish him in any essential way.

As no experience can touch pure awareness, once the apparent individual person acknowledges and assumes his true identity as pure awareness he remains ever untouched, untainted and unaffected by experience.

Martin: Who stops suffering?

Ted: The apparent individual person stops apparently suffering.

Martin: I'm not a doer, so I've never suffered in the first place, right?

Ted: Who is the "you" to whom you refer? You, pure awareness, have never suffered. You, the apparent individual person, is an apparent doer who has apparently suffered.

Martin: Who are you referring to when you say that I'll "no longer suffer"? It can't be Martin whose suffering ends, because Martin will have *vasanas* until he dies, although the *vasanas* may be weaker than before.

Ted: True, Martin will continue to have *vasanas* until the day he "dies." The difference is that he will no longer be compelled to act at the behest of binding *vasanas*, for the *vasanas* will have been neutralized by self-knowledge, nor will he apparently suffer from the effects of the actions he executes under their influence because he will know that as whole and complete, limitless, all-pervasive, perfectly full awareness he is himself the source of any joy that the fulfillment of any desire is intended to evoke. Hence it will no longer matter to him whether he as an apparent individual person gets what he wants or not. Now he is free to enjoy the objects with which he is naturally presented by the field of the apparent reality and even joyfully pursue certain objects,

but he will no longer seek to procure joy from them nor suffer sorrow as a consequence of the limitation of their effect.

Martin: Before enlightenment, pain appeared in the subtle body while thoughts appeared in the intellect that said, “I am in pain. This is bad.” These things happened because I was aware of them but I never thought the thoughts or felt the pain myself.

Ted: There is an important distinction to be made between pain and suffering. Pain is a physical or emotional sensation, so to speak. Suffering is an existential malaise that results from the erroneous notion that one is inadequate and incomplete and that the acquisition or attainment of objects can produce permanent fulfillment. Under the influence of ignorance, the apparent individual person is doomed to suffer from the lack or absence of any object that he feels he needs to complete him, and since no limited object can produce limitless happiness, he inevitably meets with the same deleterious psychological consequence even if he obtains the object of his desire.

From the perspective of awareness, however, you are right. There is no suffering because there is no one to suffer, not to mention the fact that since there is nothing other than awareness, there obtains no time-space continuum, which is the context for the existence of objects such as thoughts, and thus no context for change, which is the defining characteristic of action, and, moreover, since pure awareness is inherently whole and complete, no desire, which is the impetus behind action, and therefore nothing is now happening or has ever happened and so no such experience as suffering could possibly occur.

Martin: It seems like the only difference after enlightenment is that thoughts of being limited no longer appear in the intellect or if they do appear they’re quickly neutralized by self-inquiry. The body is still the body, the mind is still the mind and awareness is the same as it always was; nothing has changed except for the elimination of limiting thoughts.

Ted: True, the eradication of ignorance in the form of limiting thoughts is the only change, but what a powerful impact this “simple” shift from the perspective of the limited apparent individual person to that of limitless awareness has on the experience of the apparent individual person. Rather than apparently identifying with the phenomena arising and obtaining within the subtle body, the intellect of the apparent individual person registers the recognition of its true identity as limitless awareness and thus remains ever free of all experience. While the apparent individual will still perceive, feel and think, he will no longer suffer as a consequence of whatever objective phenomena appear within the scope of his being.

Martin: It seems like saying that I “no longer suffer” is a statement of ignorance, because I’ve never really suffered in the first place. There used to be a thought that “I” was suffering but thoughts are just objects, not me. It seems like when you try to explain the self-aware state all you can do is repeat ignorant statements about the self beginning and ending the experience of suffering. This kind of makes the mind wonder what the point of *sadhana* even was since awareness is the same and the mind is mostly the same, minus some limiting thoughts.

Does this make sense?

Ted: Again, the experiential effect of the eradication of limiting thoughts is rather profound in terms of eliminating suffering and increasing the apparent individual person's enjoyment of life. The point of *sadhana* is to prepare the mind for the assimilation of the knowledge that affords the apparent individual the freedom from the sense of limitation and consequent suffering. The point you make is true from the standpoint of pure awareness but it neglects to acknowledge the apparent validity of the apparent reality, which is the context in which all experience takes place, including the experience of self-knowledge and *jivanmukti*, or liberation while in the body.

Vedanta is a complete teaching that affords one a comprehensive view of reality, within which the apparent reality appears. Though the apparent reality is not real because it is impermanent, it nevertheless exists since it is experienced. Moreover, it is the context in which we have to make the effort or take the action that will ultimately afford us freedom from it. Hence while it is of vital importance that we be able to discriminate between the real and the apparent, we can't simply deny the apparent aspect of our being. In order for self-knowledge to be complete, you want to be able to shift perspectives at will, so to speak, and thus enjoy the relative reality for what it has to offer while at the same time standing with unshakable confidence in your true nature as whole, complete, limitless, actionless, ever-present, all-pervasive, non-dual awareness.

Martin: Thanks again, Ted.

Ted: All the best, Martin.