

# Which Self Am I?

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Jose:** Hello, Julia. I write this with gratitude for your beautiful job. Sorry, because my English is not so good. I write from Mexico City.

**Julia:** Hi, Jose. Thank you for your email. Don't worry, I am not a native speaker, so my English isn't perfect either.

**Jose:** I recently read James Swartz's post *Do You Want Your Ignorance Back?*, and I felt that it was very much like my own experience. I recognized that as a person I can do a thousand things, have lots of experiences, forget everything, die and be reborn, but there's only the knowing that what I really am is behind all this.

**Julia:** Yes, everything is changing all the time. There is only one constant factor, and that is you.

**Jose:** I'm 26 years old. I began my search three years ago and my *sadhana* has been poor and erratic: some *vipassana* meditation, work with my ego in therapy and a lot of reading on spiritual topics. I could be described as a lot of things, but not as a realized person.

**Julia:** The apparent personality called Jose can be described as a lot of things – but you cannot be described. You are beyond any description. You are not even a person, so what use is the question of whether this apparent person Jose is realised or not? Who wants to label the person as realised or ignorant? It is the ego that thinks in those terms and identifies with them. There is only one self operating through ignorance or through knowledge.

**Jose:** One year I had a psychedelic trip on magic mushrooms and saw with extreme sureness that my life, the person that I believed I was, was only a mask, a dream. Now I can see that with clarity and calm, but I have lived a strange and lonely life upon accepting and understanding that.

**Julia:** The mushrooms made your mind expand and you had an insight. When you see who you are, you cease to identify with this person. You only continue to play your roles in this dream world. It is difficult for the ego to accept it in the beginning, and indeed it is a strange and lonely process because your identity as this person is dying and you realise that there are no others – only you. In the beginning it can feel like emptiness and loneliness, but that will eventually pass and change into fullness.



**Jose:** One month later I suffered a car accident. It was a typical near-death

experience where one realizes that this thing that I am remains above all that, and is pure and enormous yet more little than the little me.

**Julia:** I know exactly what you mean. I had a bad car accident in India this year and I saw everything happening in me and I knew at the same time that I am completely untouched by it.

**Jose:** Well, I lived through those two experiences and my body was fine, but I was always trying to get back that hidden untouched knowing. Then suddenly two months later I realized my essence, the meaning of everything.

**Julia:** Great. Your mind assimilated the experiences and you finally saw the essence, the underlying truth of yourself.

**Jose:** That night when I went to bed, I realized that I'm not my body, nor anything I can imagine or think or do. I am forever in every place and every time. Or you can say every place and every time is in me and I'm not anywhere. And there is nothing more than this awareness. It wasn't a big event, although I was terrified to tears. I was not happy. I thought, is this it? Is this what I came looking for two years ago and, if I am honest, every moment of my little life? It wasn't what I was looking for. I remembered that three years ago I had a strange agenda: I wanted to become a special being, an immortal man. But now with this realization I saw that there is no man, no salvation, no anything. Before that, I had no idea of This, and now, with This filling every part of the Universe, I wanted to search for an escape.

**Julia:** Everything you say is true. You are all that is and every time and place is in you and you are nowhere and everywhere. You are smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest. You pervade everything. It was the ego that was trying to hold you back. It didn't want to surrender, and so it created fear and doubts. It was also the ego that wanted to become a special immortal being – to become “enlightened.”

But this is impossible. Why? Because you cannot become what you already are, and because the ego is not real. The ego is the incorrect belief that you are a person. It is only a thought, or to be more precise, it is the belief that you are a doer. Enlightenment/*moksa* is freedom from the identification with the doer. The person can never become immortal, because the person is only apparently real. The person is a hologram appearing in you.

And you, pure awareness, are immortal, all-pervading and the only reality. When you realised that you are pure awareness and that this person is not real, the ego function of the mind didn't want to let go of its small identity and it created fear. It wanted to keep you ignorant. It is the servant of ignorance and it will never surrender. Just don't believe what it tells you and observe it. Soon you will discover that it has no power at all. It is totally dependent on you, awareness.

**Jose:** Now, I venture to ask again: Is this it? Now it seems that some kind of bliss is fighting to conquer everything even if I refuse to act. I know I'm not crazy. Since my epiphanies I thought I was going crazy, but one month later my personal life became

full of love, abundance and some kind of magic. And my mind became cleaned by a power coming from my Heart, and I became calm. Maybe since then I've been searching to get a pure mind, to let the Being touch and change this unreal being. There still a lot of ignorance in me.

**Julia:** It is in you, but you are not ignorant. The recognition of your true nature is no big deal, because you were always what you were searching for. You did not gain anything new. Knowing who you are is not a mind-blowing experience. It is more like coming home after a long and exhausting journey. You still have some doubts and need to do some work to clean up your unconscious stuff. Your mind wasn't purified before you realised who you are. The purification is happening now, after your realisation, and you are right, it is coming from your Heart, meaning your self, awareness. There is no purifier like self-knowledge. The bliss is a sign of the purity.

**Jose:** This knowing feels so true, more true than any other thing, and it's getting bigger and bigger although I cannot tell it to anybody. If it is what I think, it didn't change my life in the way that it changed the *jnanis*. I see that I'm not that person who can be changed. It has nothing to do with who I really am.

**Julia:** The knowledge is doing its job. Great! Forget about the "*jnanis*" and don't compare - this is about you. Knowledge expresses itself differently in every person. It is not changing your outside life but changing your view towards life and your reactions to life.

**Jose:** Maybe I'm confusing things because my mind needs *sadhana*. I'm not a realized person.

**Julia:** Yes, you need *sadhana*. Don't believe it when your mind tells you that you are not a realized person. You are not a person at all. You are the self. Have confidence in this knowledge. The *sadhana* for you is to gain confidence in the knowledge "I am awareness" by keeping the knowledge in your mind all the time.

**Jose:** But I see how everything arises and disappears instant by instant, and how I try to get joy taking things that are already me, and it's so obvious, so common and so beautiful, awareness, or maybe something behind awareness, or only being. Recently, I like Sufism: it really speaks to my heart, and it's a true Sufi order, not Neo-Sufism. I think that my personality and soul needs this kind of *bhakti* and *karma yoga* because there are still a lot of things untouched by the non-dual light: I am still jealous, lazy, narcissistic, etc.

**Julia:** Yes, you need to do *sadhana* in form of *karma yoga*, meditation and contemplation. *Karma yoga* and contemplation of the self is pure *bhakti*.

**Jose:** It is strange because I feel that I know very well what happens in the universe, although it is really impossible to know anything. And I see exceptional and spiritual human beings and know I have to learn a lot from them, but I can see that they don't know who they are. How is it possible to be subtle and *sattvic* but to ignore the

truth which is so easy and obvious? Maybe they are frightened of it. I still am very *tamasic* and egocentric, although my life and habits have changed a lot, yet I can recognize the spark of the self.

**Julia:** If you know you are *tamasic* and egocentric, are you *tamasic* and egocentric? The self is free of the *gunas*. A spiritual person with a lot of *sattva* is a blessing for the world because he will be predominately happy and *dharmic*, but he can be still be ignorant of his true nature. You are not *tamasic*, Jose. *Tamasic* and egoistic tendencies (*vasanas*) appear in your mind and you tend to identify with them. They will dry up if you lock your mind on the self. Just observe them and see how idiotic they are. The knowledge will do the purification of *tamas* and you will act in a *dharmic* and *sattvic* way. Be patient and alert and don't allow the ego to take over.

**Jose:** Now, I'm trying to get more into It. I need It more. I want to disappear in It.

**Julia:** See how you are switching from the perspective of the self to the person. You cannot disappear into anything, because you are all that is. Remember this all the time and don't believe your ego.

**Jose:** Well, I know that nobody is going to achieve that, but that feeling implies that my search remains. Then I try to do the meditation in the book *Meditation: Inquiry into the Self* where Swartz says if you are meditating it means you don't know who you are. I don't have silence, but I am who I am; there is nothing more. I rest there, but soon I get distracted by the pain in my back or I feel the necessity to something. I feel like I'm still living in the little ego's house but, on the other hand, the house is in me. I am not in the house.

**Julia:** Yes, you are switching from the self's perspective to the ego's perspective. Your self-knowledge is not firm yet.

**Jose:** If I recognize this big secret, what's next? My ego is so bad-mannered but, yes, it is my ego saying it.

**Julia:** Correct. 😊 If you see the ego, are you the ego? You can see it very clearly. Great! It is the ego that wants something to follow. It wants more of whatever. Ignore it!

**Jose:** I think that your opinion would be very good guidance on this because there is something missing. Don't be afraid to tell me what you see. I want to know. I'm not very good with using the Advaita Vedanta terminology, but I can understand it and I love it very much. One last thing: Can you suggest me some kind of practice and suggest texts?

**Julia:** Develop *sattvic* tendencies! Meditate! If you cannot sit, lie down or rest your back on a wall. Observe your thoughts appearing in your mind and see how hollow they are. Contemplate while acting! Are you really acting or is action happening?

Observe it!

Don't oversleep and overeat, try to avoid drugs and alcohol, as this makes the mind *tamasic*. Spend a lot of time in silence and with *sattvic* people.

If you can rest in bed before you get up in the morning to observe your mind, do so – your mind is still and calm in the morning, and you will see the arising of “your” tendencies. Act with the *karma yoga* attitude. All this will purify your mind and the knowledge will become firm.

Did you read James' book *How to Attain Enlightenment*? If not, you should. And don't hesitate to write to me if you have questions.

~ Love, Julia