

Who Cares about Non-Dual Vision?

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2013-01-20

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1027>

Stewart: Dear Ramji, I thought I would just go ahead and email you in case we can't chat for awhile.

I'm sure Ken mentioned to you that we have been talking to each other a lot. It has been very good. It seemed like we were both a little hung up on the whole "experience of enlightenment" bit, or at least our egos were, although after talking to him for the first time, that all really started to clear up. Shortly after that I just took a week off from any and all Vedanta studies, *puja* or meditation and just went completely *rajasic* and *tamasic*. I just watched action movies from the '80s and ate junk food. Oddly enough, this is when the whole issue really resolved. Despite the ego objecting to apparently unspiritual activities there was just this unshakable knowing that I was not changing at all, regardless of anything. In the presence of any activities or energies I was just me, unchanging awareness. During this time I went to the grocery store to get some *tamasic* pizza in preparation for some *rajasic* movie-watching. Usually, if I have an experience of "non-dual vision," it seems to happen at either the grocery store or at Denny's. But then when I stepped out of the car and looked around, everything looked very separate. The stupid-looking redneck with his mongoloid-looking kids were just that, a stupid-looking redneck with mongoloid kids. They did not prompt a feeling of love and they definitely appeared separate from me. And that is when the thought appeared, "Who cares about non-dual vision? I am still unchanging awareness. This is all me regardless of how it looks/feels." It was *advaita* in spite of *dvaita*. And ironically, as an experience it was very "freeing," not that it even mattered.

Ram: Now you got it, as they say. It does not matter what the ego experiences, dual or non-dual, it is all the same. You, the non-experiencing witness, sees. What is seen means nothing. It just is what it is.

Stewart: So firstly, the whole wrangling of the ego with a particular kind of "enlightenment" experience seems to have died or at least relaxed a lot.

Ram: Thank God. It is the number-one impediment to peace, the bane of spiritual seekers.

Stewart: And secondly, it really showed that the knowledge is there working, working, working, despite any particular kind of so-called spiritual activities such as the (apparently) deliberate application of knowledge to the mind, i.e. bringing the mind back to the idea of the self. I think this has really, REALLY, finally shown the ego that it is the knowledge, not it, that is doing the work.

Ram: Great. It is what I have been saying all along: knowledge, not ego, does the work.

Stewart: When the knowledge appears as a conscious thought like “I am whole and complete” it does. When the desire to meditate or study appears it does. When it doesn’t, it doesn’t. No matter. I am the same. The knowledge is still working, like a program running in the background.

Ram: Perfect!

Stewart: So I guess it could be said that, experientially speaking, the ego is getting on board (and yet it doesn’t matter either way).

Ram: Assuming there is an ego. You are right, it doesn’t matter. Ego is just another thought to which sentiency is ascribed.

Stewart: Everything that appears can be the perfectly acceptable play of *Isvara* in me. And *Isvara* is taking care of everything rather well, so the ego can relax. Also, all of the fears that have constrained Stewart’s apparent life are known to be inert objects and therefore do not have to be limiting anymore. And anyway, they are just me seeming to appear in a form. So nothing to fear. Stewart and his personality and desires, etc. are becoming eminently more acceptable every day, as they are known to neither be caused by me or to be affecting me. And since I neither think or have opinions, then this seems like it is in fact the ego that is “experiencing” some degree of freedom or seeing the value of the application of the freedom in the apparent reality (even though the ego is never actually free). Perhaps this is what it means when you say the ego signs on?

Ram: Your mind is becoming very subtle (*sattvic*) and you are starting to appreciate freedom from the mind, from Stewart, the ego. From the perspective of Stewart, this is called *bhakti*, devotion to *Isvara*. He trusts *Isvara*. The knowledge is loosening the big fear-thought that is the ego, putting some space around it. I suppose you could call it the ego signing on but is there an ego apart from you? The ego is you and you are the ego. There is only you and the ego-thought appearing and you assigning sentiency to it. If it is sentient, it is just another word for the self. If it is insentient, it is okay to project sentiency on it for the purposes of communicating a subtle understanding in the apparent reality. You have negotiated your way through these teachings very nicely, Stewart. Persistence pays off. It only gets better and better for Stewart.

Stewart: Looking over some of our more recent emails, I noticed I still had a confusion over the whole nature of ignorance and identification. This is something I wanted to resolve not only for myself but in order to be able to explain it to others as well. I have had difficulty wording this question, so bear with me. We can say that, owing to *maya*, ever-free awareness apparently identifies itself with the body, mind, ego. The question is, what are the mechanics of this identification? If we say that awareness “thinks” it is an ego, by what faculty does it “think”? This seems like awareness has a mind to think with outside of the mind that it is identified with. Do we just say, “Well, that’s just *maya*. It does incomprehensible things.”

Ram: Your statement “This seems like awareness has a mind to think with outside of the mind that it is identified with” is very excellent. Awareness has all powers, including the power to think. If reality is non-dual and any thinking is taking place, it is awareness thinking. *Maya* just makes it look like something other than awareness is thinking. This is duality. Awareness thinks by the power of *maya*. It wields the power of thought (*chinta shakti*). You are starting to see that you are *Isvara*. Don’t get a swollen head. 😊 There is a notion that because the universe is so vast, you cannot be *Isvara*, but the idea that the universe is so vast is just an idea. Nobody ever saw the vastness. In fact the vastness only has meaning when viewed from the perspective of another bit of ignorance expressed in a spatial metaphor. *Isvara* is just a thought too, produced by *maya*, another Vedanta trick to destroy ignorance. Vastness, *jiva*, *Isvara*, universe, *maya*, etc. are all just thoughts, objects in you. It seems the means of knowledge is eating itself up.

Stewart: Or is it like the relationship between the ego and other objects? The ego doesn’t have a mind or any other faculties, it is just an inert thought in the mind. Yet it still owns or identifies with other thoughts, actions and objects.

Ram: See the problem of words! The “ego” is inert but it “owns.” It identifies. Ownership and identification are the mechanics of *maya*.

Stewart: Regarding ignorance, again we can say the self is apparently ignorant. This means it is “hidden” from itself and then it identifies with projected, or superimposed, objects. Since the mind can still entertain ignorant thoughts after awareness knows itself as awareness then what role does removing ignorance actually play?

Ram: “Actually play” with reference to what? Ignorance is just a play. Because you are awareness you can see it working.

Stewart: Do we just say that, owing to *maya*, a certain amount of apparent ignorance has to be apparently removed to let the self apparently re-identify with itself?

Ram: Yes. Ignorance is not bad if you know what it is. I see it operating in me and it is okay. It makes things interesting.

Stewart: The *pramana* has to remove a certain amount of apparent ignorant thoughts and apparent doubts and then the self apparently is freed from its identification. This all happens in the mind, a certain tipping point, we could say, when enough ignorance has been removed. So there is a “happening” at the *pratibasika* level that apparently allows the self to seem to free itself.

Ram: Good thinking. Yes. Freedom is seeming freedom because the self was never bound in the first place. The *pramana* just takes away enough ignorance to expose the mechanism of ignorance. Ignorance, duality, is fine. When we say ignorance is

destroyed by knowledge we only mean that it is understood for what it is.

Stewart: We can say that “enlightenment” does happen in the mind as a removal of a certain amount of ignorance. But as the mind is inert, and even though apparent knowledge then appears in the mind, the enlightenment does not correlate to any apparent knowledge. It is only the self (apparently) re-cognizing itself, regardless of any knowledge appearing in the mind. This is why any manner of thoughts can appear in the mind “post-enlightenment” and it doesn’t matter.

Ram: Yes. Brilliant. Are you angling for my job? 😊 You can have it. I am ready to go fishing.

Stewart: However, this “event” does in fact depend on a certain apparent happening such as removal of apparent ignorance. Without removal of ignorance, the self does not know itself as itself alone. Is the right explanation of the “event of enlightenment” at the *vyvaharika* or *pratibasika* level?

Ram: Yes.

Stewart: Lastly, I wanted to ask you about teaching. I think before I asked you about the qualifications for being a teacher. Partially, I was talking about temperament. Otherwise, I was talking about preparation. Just as there is a systematic way to learn about the self, is there a systematic way to learn how to teach the self?

Ram: Yes, just memorize the logic unfolded in my book. You get the big picture, then within each teaching you unfold the logic of that teaching. To teach on the individual level you have to recognize the problem first, then you apply the specific teaching and from there you branch out into related teachings. Hip bone connected to the thigh bone. When you teach groups you have to just unfold the logic of a particular teaching, say knowledge and experience. You need to have the logic down or they will eat you up. You have to intimidate them with the logic. Vedanta is a sharp sword. You have to brandish it very aggressively and they will just roll over. You need to outshine the occasionally brilliant one that challenges you. And you need to recognize the troublemakers and send them packing – never try to save them. Let them bump up against *Isvara* for a while until they soften up. You need to make them realize how ignorant they are. It is like those old Western movies where the gunslinger shows up in town and does some fancy draws and hits a beer bottle fifty yards away. Everyone thinks, “Wow! I can’t go up against that.”

Stewart: Ken and I had discussed this a bit and he said that by merit of being taught by you we have already learned a lot about how to teach.

Ram: Both of you will make great teachers. The king is handing over the kingdom to the princes.

Stewart: This did make sense. I just wasn't completely sure. Before, the nature of our relationship as *guru* and disciple was one of you wielding the knowledge to point to my true nature as awareness and then removing my doubts. Now that I know who I am I wondered, what is the nature of our relationship now? I feel like there is still a lot you can teach me. Since I want to teach, do you now teach me how to do that? Or am I, as Chinmaya might say, "taking up valuable real estate"?

Ram: Ask your questions. I will tell you what I know.

Stewart: At this point I have watched all of your videos, read your book a couple of times, listened to your audio talks and read most all of the *satsangs*. I had had an interest in starting to study the *Upanishads* but wasn't sure how necessary this was. I wanted to study them more in depth out of love for scripture but when I started I saw they were just saying what you have already taught me. So it seems that the application of studying those other texts (and the *Brahma Sutras*, etc.) is more for Vedanta scholarship than for application to teaching. Granted, I will still study them eventually, but it doesn't seem as important at the moment. What do you think?

Ken and I have discussed this a bit. He has probably told you that we plan on going through Dayananda's *Bhagavad Gita* home study course together this year. You had also sent me Paramarthananda's audio series on the *Bhagavad Gita*, so I was going to listen to it while we went through the text. Paul's opinion, and I tend to agree, is that the *Bhagavad Gita* covers everything one would need to teach. However, I was a little skeptical, as it doesn't go into the three states, *pancha koshas*, three bodies, etc. like the *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya* or *Atma* and *Tattva Bodha*. That being said, I know these *prakriyas* pretty well because you have already taught them to me, so it may be a moot point. I was just wondering what your thoughts were regarding what texts or what order of texts would be the most beneficial for continued study.

Ram: You can't beat the *Bhagavad Gita*. It has it all. And because it is a story, it has added appeal. Everything that a beginner needs to know is in it. It ties *bhakti* and *jnana* and *karma* up in a nice package. *Jiva* and *Isvara*. *Satya*, *mithya*.

Except for the three states, it has everything. It is big on the *gunas*, which is even more useful than the three states. You can always unfold the three states when you teach it. There are places where it fits in.

Stewart: I hope we can meet someday and talk about some of this stuff face-to-face. It's just an issue of funds. What else is new? I always have food, shelter and clothing, no doubt. Always taken care of. But there isn't extra for trips and such. Still, I suspect *Isvara* will work it out, as usual.

Ram: Maybe I can get the money so you can come for one of the retreats.