

A Benign Reality

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2011-07-23

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/113>

Thomas: Hi, James. I've been learning about Vedanta recently through your books, interviews and the ShiningWorld website. I am a fan of your writing and the unbelievable clarity to which you deliver the message of Vedanta.

Anyhow, through my journey I've come to a roadblock. I've always been stricken with mild anxiety, and as a result physical ailments such as IBS and mild dizziness have ensued. On *WebMD* they say IBS and anxiety co-exist, while the dizziness could be unreleased emotions (that I've been bringing up to the surface through my practice).

It has been almost a year since I've started this journey. It has been mostly beneficial. Increased awareness, more energy and recently I've been enjoying "the gap," as Eckhart Tolle would say.

Even though there is a gap that I'm aware of, bringing me joy and a sense of well-being, there also feels like a detoxification process going on. The more I'm aware of my thoughts, feelings, emotions and any physical sensation, the more anxiety I'm confronted with. As I mentioned earlier, this has contributed to mild IBS and slight dizziness, which has been with me for the past month or so.

My question is, is this really just part of the detoxification process (my diet has changed by the way to include more *sattvic* food as opposed to *tamasic* or *rajasic*) or am I stuck with this "heavy" feeling that seems to never leave my body?

James: Dear Thomas, the short answer is that uncomfortable feelings often do accompany self-inquiry because you are shedding light on a part of the mind that has been hidden. But these uncomfortable feelings should not persist for very long if they are honestly examined and accepted.

You say that the more you are aware of your thoughts, feelings, etc. the more anxiety you are confronted with. I think the problem is not the feelings and thoughts, etc. themselves but your interpretation of them. These uncomfortable things are known as Shadow content. They are the result of repression. Everyone has them. They produce anxiety because they contradict one's own good opinion of one's self. So when they come up they are not acknowledged and accepted. You should not feel that they are a sign that you are morally corrupt, that there is something wrong with you. Repression is a natural social mechanism that works unconsciously to protect you from expressing this content in a social context and therefore creating unwanted *karma*. When for whatever reason the repression mechanism is disturbed – self-inquiry is only one way that it can be disturbed – you are confronted with things about your apparent self that you do not like. Hence the anxiety. So you look at them and you accept them and you say, "So what, this is not me after all. These are only psychic remnants left over from when I was unaware of the deeper things going on in me. They are not me. I am the one who sees them now. I have the power to neutralize them by accepting them." When you do this the uncomfortable *tamasic* feeling should gradually dissipate. If another deeper wave of them comes up later, you dismiss it in the same way until eventually the unconscious is purified of them.

It may be that the anxiety is not the result of repression but is a failure to appreciate the benign non-dual nature of reality. If you believe consciously or unconsciously that the world is a threatening place, that things are always in danger of heading south and that you need to protect yourself by being especially vigilant, then you need to confront this belief and lay it to rest. You do this first by examining reality dispassionately, using scripture as a guide. In fact reality is not a hostile force out to get you. It is looking out after you all the time. To dispense with this kind of anxiety, you need the *karma yoga* attitude. It will remove it slowly.

Yes, there is natural gap between you and your stuff. But what is on your side of the gap? You are on the other side of the gap. Is there anything wrong with you? If there is anything other than an emphatic “no” to this question, then you are not clear about who you are. Once you see that you are fine, no matter what is appearing in front of you on the other side of the gap, you see that there is no reason to be disturbed by any unconscious content.

You need to know that none of the stuff actually does contaminate you. It only seems to because you wrongly identify with it. It is the identification with what is appearing that causes the bad feelings, the sense of heaviness, etc. You can do this because of a simple fact: you are not what you experience. You are the seer, not the object seen. The seer is always free of the seen. There is nothing spiritual or mystical about it. It is a just a simple existential fact. You stay on your side of the gap and you allow what appears on the other side, and presto chango, things are just fine. Anxiety is a non-starter.

This will take some doing, but I am sure you will work it out. I hope this has been useful.

~Love, James