

The Myth of Experiential Enlightenment

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Arun: Hi, Ram. I have been pondering over your last email response quite intensely, and there are still many very basic ideas that I'm confused about:

Quoting you, from your previous email:

1. "When the mind turns within it does not stop experiencing but it starts to experience itself. It becomes self-aware." This statement appears to be a contradiction - how can anything "experience itself" and become "self-aware"? I don't see how this is logically possible.

Ram: Let's leave non-duality out of it for now. These kind of experiential statements don't make sense from the non-dual point of view. They only make sense when we take the world and our limited selves to be the only reality. The world and the people in it and the way they live certainly seems to be real. And insofar as someone finds himself or herself in this dream and takes it to be real and is unable to fulfill themselves, we have to address the issue of experience - because experience is all that is known to them.

People are not happy when they feel inadequate and incomplete, so they to experience completeness by experiencing things, not knowing that they are actually whole and complete already. There is a certain logic to the search for completeness through experience, but when you look into the idea that you can get what you already have through experience, the logic fails. Chinmaya's teachings on this topic need to be seen in this light - otherwise they are confusing. This is such an important issue that I don't recommend his books anymore even though his teachings set me free. It is much better to stick with Dayananda, as he makes the distinction between knowledge and experience very clear. Ramana's teachings suffer from the same defect as Chinmaya's - they don't clarify this issue sufficiently. Both Ramana and Chinmaya understood the distinction between knowledge and experience, but they did not explain the contradiction exhaustively. It is very important to understand the difference between the two when one is seeking freedom.

In any case let me try to explain self-realization in terms of experience. The mind is awareness directed toward objects: physical objects, feelings, thoughts, desires, fears, dreams, etc. It is the instrument of experience. Objects cannot be known unless they are illumined by awareness. So when the mind is aware of awareness, the "light" in which objects are revealed, it is "experiencing" the self. If it keeps paying attention to the self while dismissing the objects as "not-self" it will come to know the self. Try it. This is the essence of *yoga*, meditation.

Arun: 2. "There are three states of mind to be experienced..." By WHO or WHAT are these to be experienced?

Ram: By the self. But if you don't know you are the self you think "Arun" is

experiencing. He will say, "I slept, dreamt and am now awake." But this is not actually the case, because, for example, Arun isn't present in the deep sleep state. You, the self, experience limitlessness and bliss when that state is happening but there is no "Arun" there. Likewise in the dream state Arun may appear as an object in the dream – or not – but the Arun you think you are is not there either – he's asleep in his bed. You, awareness, reveal the objects in the dream including the dream "Arun," assuming he appears as a person suffering and enjoying various dream experiences. Even in the waking state where Arun seems quite real it is only the self shining on the gross and subtle body that causes objects to appear – like holographic projections. When through an epiphany or self-inquiry Arun is dissolved or deconstructed, experience does not stop. Pure experience, the self witnessing gross and subtle objects, remains.

Arun: 3. "You have a subject, a person, who's mind is turned inward..." So here you are referring to "the subject" as a mind, where it (the mind) is "experiencing the self." How can this be true if I am the witness of the mind itself ?

Ram: It is not true if you are witnessing the mind – and you are always witnessing the mind whether you know it or not. But nearly everybody is identified with the mind; it seems to be "me" to them. The discussion in my previous email was an attempt to explain experience from the point of view of someone who is ignorant of their real nature. If you can see that you are the witness of the mind and understand the significance of that, you don't need to concern yourself with experience at all. Any and all experiences are fine as far as the witness goes; it – you – are never involved in experience. If you think you are, then you are ignorant of who you are. When you think you need certain experiences to feel okay about yourself you don't know that you are the witness.

Arun: How can the mind independently have the capacity to "experience" anything? Sorry if that's maybe a repetition of my questioning, but I really still don't understand this!

Ram: Again, taking into account that we are discussing *maya*, the dream of experience, it can't "independently" experience, but it can act as a reflector and as such it can reveal objects, i.e. what happens. Actually, the mind is just the self when it is aware of objects. It is often incorrectly called an experiencer because of this fact. If experience is taking place it can only be the self experiencing the self because this is a non-dual reality, but when apparent ignorance is operating the experiencer and the experienced seem to be two different things.

The self is not an individual, driven by its ignorance inspired fears and desires. Individuals crave experience and chase it because they erroneously believe that they can free themselves of their sense of limitation by getting what they want and avoiding what they don't want. They keep trying to get free this way because they are seduced by the experiences of happiness they do have into thinking that experience is the only way to happiness. The fly in the ointment of experiential happiness is the sad fact that no discrete experience – good or bad – lasts. But chasing experience is all they know, so they keep trying. For people who want experiential happiness, the path of Yoga has evolved. Through it – through cultivating a pure mind (since the mind is the instrument of experience) – you can

get up to about ninety-five percent happiness if you work on it – which isn't bad and which can provide a platform for self-inquiry. After a while ninety-five percent happiness isn't good enough and you look for perfect non-dual happiness.

Arun: 4. “The mind/intellect can only be the self – in non-dual reality.” If I am the witness/perceiver/ultimate subject that is able to objectify the mind, then how can I also be the mind?? Again, a seeming contradiction.

Ram: Think about where the mind comes from. A spider's web comes out of the spider. It is the spider. Take away the spider and you have no web. The mind is the self, awareness appearing as objects and focused on objects. It seems to be separate from the subject, but it isn't.

Arun: To sum up, Ram, I think my main doubt stems from the following misunderstanding: IN WHAT SENSE am I EVERYTHING (*purnamidam, purnamadah*)? How can the objects that I perceive be me??? I can accept that I am the ultimate formless subject. But Advaita asserts that I am the objects as well, BUT IN WHAT SENSE?

May I take a guess?...

Everything in the universe has (1) name, (2) form, (3) existence, (4) consciousness, (5) bliss. The first two are illusory. But the last three are real. So I am only the objects I perceive, in the sense that somehow all objects are actually permeated by existence-consciousness-bliss. Is that right? This isn't really clear to me.

Ram: Good for you! Got it in one. Here is another way to think about it: if you analyze experience carefully you will see that you are the objects. Think this through with me. Where do you experience objects? In the mind. The mind takes the shape of the object and it is illumined by awareness, therefore it is known. The mind is formless and can conform to any object. It is like a reflective movie screen that permits objects to appear in/on it. Now consider this: How far is the object from the mind? There is no distance. The object “out there” has become a form “in here.” Now ask yourself, “How far am I from the mind?” Take, for example, the idea of a spider and its web. The web is non-separate from the spider. It comes out of the spider and is shaped by the spider's intelligence. Likewise your experience – the thoughts and feelings which make up experience – are made of awareness and are crafted by awareness.

Therefore the objects are you. If you can't get it by contemplating on this, send me ten quid and I will send you a short video where I give the teaching in detail.

Here's another contemplation: What are thoughts made of? How far are they from awareness? Is there a gap between the thought and source of the thought? Thoughts (feelings, etc.) are to awareness what waves are to the ocean. They are awareness taking a form. They arise out of awareness and go back into it. How far is a gold ring from gold? Take away the ring and the gold remains. All objects are just names and forms superimposed on awareness.

Inability to understand the “I am everything” teaching is brought about by an erroneous belief in what it means to be everything. It is imagined that it is some

kind of overwhelming experience of blissful oneness where you run around hugging everyone and everything because it is all you.

These experiences do happen and we do not denigrate them, but where do they happen? They happen in the mind, which unfortunately is that part of the self that changes. The whole problem comes because we are conditioned to think of the body as the self. When you look at objects from the body's point of view you cannot be everything. When you drop the body orientation and look at it from awareness's point of view it makes perfect sense.

Arun: If that is true, why do I have to negate objects? Why don't I assert that I AM the objects I perceive?

Ram: You are a clever one! You don't have to negate objects if you can see that this is true. They can't be anything other than you. You only have to negate objects if you can't see that the objects are you. The "negation" teaching – if applied to every object – is meant to prove that you can't negate yourself – which is what you are doing when you seek for completion in objects.

Arun: Also, this *sat-chit-ananda* that I am... is the ultimate subject within this name and form of "Arun," just a small part of that consciousness permeating everything?? Is the witness of this seemingly limited consciousness of "Arun" actually somehow a universal consciousness that is not really only witnessing via ARUN's name and form, but somehow is the SAME consciousness witnessing everyone/everything else's name/form entities?

Ram: Yes, absolutely. Awareness illumines the individual and the total. It is not a "small part." It doesn't conform to objects, no matter what their size. It is the same whether it illumines a microbe or the whole cosmos. "Big" and "small" are just concepts related to body identification. They do not apply to you, awareness.

Arun: AND going back a bit, I'm still not seeing how the mind fits into this and is even able to INDEPENDENTLY draw conclusions about ITSELF (if it's MERELY an object with name and form) after learning Vedanta.

Ram: If you see things non-dually, you can forget the mind. It has no existence apart from you – awareness. It is just a tool awareness uses to know itself in the *mithya* dream.

This is not to flatter you, Arun, but you're on the verge of cracking the code. Keep thinking.

Arun: I'm really sorry for the overload of questions – but I really need your help in understanding this stuff – there is no one else I can ask! As ever, I am grateful for your help.

Ram: It's fine. This is what I do.

~ Love, Ram