

The Signs of Enlightenment

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2004-01-31

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1406>

Joseph: Dear Ram, in your last email you made the statement “So that you which is unaffected by experience is called the self, and the knowledge ‘I am the self’ is enlightenment.” What would be the signs of that?

Ram: Here is a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*, so I am just going to tell you what it. First, Arjuna asks Krishna the question, “What are the signs of an enlightened soul?” and Krishna says, “When a man completely casts off, O Partha, all the desires of the mind...” (Chapter II, verse 55).

Joseph: Does that mean, for example, if I were sitting in a restaurant, a beautiful woman comes in and I start fancying her?

Ram: It has nothing to do with whether or not you fancy her. It has everything to do with why you fancy her. If you fancy her and are thinking that making love with her will increase your fundamental happiness, you are deluded. If you fancy her as the self, if you see the light in her and recognize it as the light in you and everything, then that would be the response of an enlightened person. But that does not mean that you will try to get her into bed. If you are just conditioned, like Pavlov’s dog, to start fancying a woman that your *vasanas* attract you to, then you are just an animal. It’s okay to be an animal, but it isn’t self-realization.

Joseph: But there is nothing actually stopping me from doing it? As long as I am not caught up with the idea that it will make me feel good or feel bad?

Ram: People usually want things because they think things will make them happier. If you feel that love is modifying you, then you are not the self. That person would be Joseph, the ego. It is very easy to fool yourself on the issue of desires. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna is not saying not to have desires in the mind. In fact in one verse he says, “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” An enlightened person can have desires, it is quite natural, but an enlightened person – someone who sees himself or herself as limitless awareness – has a non-attached relationship to the desires that appear in the mind. It is all about one’s relationship to the desires.

So how does a *jnani* view desires? In *A Course of Miracles* it says, “From what you want God won’t save you.” What does that mean? It means that the *karma* from indulging your desires may not be as wonderful as you think. In fact experience teaches that sometimes we get what we want and sometimes we don’t, so on one hand, we can’t even count on getting what we want – which can lead to frustration and depression. It also teaches that sometimes we aren’t happy when we get what we want and at other times we are happy when we get what we don’t want. So on the other hand, tying happiness to the satisfaction of your desires is foolish.

In the *Gita* it also says when a person "...is satisfied in the self by the self, then is he said to be one of steady wisdom," (Chapter II, verse 55).

This is a statement that applies to an enlightened person: when one is satisfied in the self alone. The desires of the mind are optional and can be ignored without causing agitation. When you know that you are the source of your satisfaction and don't look for satisfaction outside yourself through fame, security, pleasure, wealth and duty, etc. then you are wise.

Joseph: I think one of my difficulties when you tell me these things is when did it start? When was it that I started to say certain things? In some way I could say I was always like this. As long as I can remember that was true.

Ram: Yes, that is the self. It was always true for the self. It did not become true at some point for the self. Maybe for Joseph it became true at a certain point, but for the self it is always true. It says in the *Upanishads*, "It is not for the sake of the wife that the husband loves the wife but for the sake of the self." Now that could mean the ego, but it does not mean the ego, it means the self because everything is done for the sake of the self and everything is the self, including all activity. When you love somebody, it isn't your girlfriend you love, although you perhaps think it is, it is the self in your girlfriend that you love. When you get involved as a person, love goes out the door.

Joseph: So what do you make of my personal situation? How does my situation fit in with this whole "self" thing we are discussing?

Ram: You see, Joseph, you are not a person. You have no personal situation. What is personal about you - your hair, your nose, your mind? Nothing here is personal. "Personal" is a concept that comes about when you don't know your real nature. How does any of what you consider yours become yours? Your body is just five elements, not different from any other body. The physiological systems are just universal forces working in the impersonal body. Where is it written that any of it belongs to a guy named Joseph? Are any of the thoughts in your mind unique? They are not. As we speak there are millions of people thinking the same thoughts we are. What about your feelings? When you feel lust, is it a special Joseph-lust? It isn't. When you enter the state of deep sleep, are you entering your own personal state of sleep? No. A king sleeping on silk sheets and a drunk sleeping in the gutter are enjoying the same state. There is nothing personal here.

The *Bhagavad Gita* says, "He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, and who in prosperity does not hanker after pleasures, who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom," (Chapter II, verse 56).

If you hanker after pleasures, that may be Joseph but it is not the self. If you are upset when things don't go your way, that's Joseph and not the self.

Enlightenment confers the power of *viveka*, the ability to discriminate between the self and the non-self, to know which is which. So all you need to do is know what Joseph is and know what the self is. When you get that sorted you can decide whether you want to be Joseph or the self. It is up to you. When you think of yourself as Joseph, a person in this world, working to get certain things and get rid of certain

other things, then you are said to be an *aviveki*, someone who lacks discrimination, a *samsari*.

Joseph: I can clearly say that I am unattached to those sorts of things. Today in *satsang* I was telling a story about how I met this person and someone called out, "That's not *satsang*." Everyone was shocked by the interruption. I didn't react at all. I stopped talking and waited to see what was going to happen, then other people started to talk and a whole thing happened. I sat quietly through it and it felt really good. I noticed that there was one man in the room who was simply present in the self, sitting there and everyone else was being hooked into the big drama that was happening. I felt myself totally with him.

Ram: The first fellow was right. It wasn't *satsang*. It was Joseph talking about Joseph. But it is also true that as the self you are not going to be any less than what you are if people either like or dislike you. It isn't a statement about you at all. It's just their own projections that are causing them to behave in the way they do. Your happiness and peace of mind doesn't depend upon their opinion, their feelings about you and whether they love you or not. It's the ego that cares.

Joseph: I feel pretty clear about this one. That is definitely not the case.

Ram: Let's get back to the *Gita*. This is something that only you know in your heart unless you're in denial. You may be able to delude yourself, but you can't conceal it from others. Anyway, the verse says, "The self, free of attachment, neither rejoices nor hates." The one who rejoices is the ego, the one who hates is the ego.

Joseph: Joseph is attached to a friend staying here longer, but at the same time I really don't care. Does that make me unattached?

Ram: No, it doesn't. Joseph cannot be unattached. It is simply not possible. Being limited, Joseph is by definition always attached to something. Spirituality is not about a person, like Joseph, achieving a state of non-attachment. This is a very common misconception. Behind this idea you have a lot of people trying to detach from bad habits, other people, negative thought patterns, etc. But it is a futile endeavor. You cannot gain what you already have by *karma*, by doing something, in this case detaching. You can only see if you are Joseph or the self. When you see that you are the self, you get perfect non-attachment, a non-attachment that does not have to be cultivated. But then Joseph, after living through so many experiences, can suddenly realize that nothing here is going to make him permanently happy, and he can just let go. So in that sense a kind of relative detachment can come.

This is probably enough for now. I hope it clears things up.

~ Ram