

Enlightenment Is Not Experiential Bliss

Ram (James Swartz)

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Katia: Dear Mr. Swartz, I wanted to ask you a couple of questions – the first I thought I could work out on my own, but so far have failed.

In the class before I left, you explained the five sheaths with the bliss sheath being linked to the causal body. I have puzzled about this for some time – how can the “bliss” body be the same as that which causes so much distress via the *vasanas*? Or is this why the *vasanas* get reduced if we meditate? (I hope this isn’t another dumb question. I have some knowledge, but clearly not enough and sometimes I think it would be easier if I was starting from scratch.)

Ram: Yes. It is always easier for me if you know nothing. A little knowledge is sometimes better than no knowledge but no harm done, because you are open to learning more. The *vasanas* are the dormant seeds of your past action lying in the bliss sheath. The “sheath” is their container. It is also called the causal body. It permits awareness to experience itself without the modification of thoughts as happens in deep sleep. In the waking state when you experience happiness you, awareness, are experiencing the causal body, the bliss sheath. Then when the next binding *vasana* sprouts and becomes a desire, attention (awareness) goes to the desire and the experiential bliss stops.

Katia: I am seeing my *yoga* teacher soon and only hope that I am not tempted to ask him. I will try to rein in my curiosity until you reply. I’ve looked at my *yoga* notes which refer to the five sheaths as birds; the head being aligned to love and the wings relating to happiness.

Ram: Sorry to be so blunt, but this is romantic nonsense. Somebody who does not understand “interpreted” this teaching completely out of imagination. This is what happens when Westerners study Yoga and Vedanta with unqualified teachers. They imagine that what is being talked about is something that corresponds to some aspect of their own experience – it may be – and try to express it in a profound or poetic way.

The “five sheaths” teaching is about the five levels of misunderstanding that need to be addressed by anyone seeking enlightenment. You can find it explained in my new book. The point of the “bliss” sheath teaching is to dissuade you from pursuing experiential bliss. People imagine that enlightenment is a state of permanent experiential blissfulness. Liberation is self-knowledge. Ask what knows the bliss. Bliss is not conscious. The self knows the bliss. It is not what it knows, even though the bliss is the self.

I hope this has been helpful.

~ James