

Why You Can't Forget Who You Are

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Helen: Hi, James. I hope you are well wherever in the world you find yourself today.

I have been bothered by a doubt for some time now. It's not easy to talk about and I hope it doesn't cause you any undue sadness to address it. It has to do with Mary. The question is this: What happens when a person... (for the sake of discussion, there are people!!!), what would have been Mary's experience, as a realized being, of developing schizophrenia and having her mind deteriorate? I understand we are talking about a purely physical disease, but do we need an intellect to know who we are initially? You taught me that once you know who you are, the knowledge can never be taken away. Once the proper identification is made, you are who you are with or without a body, but from a finite standpoint, do we lose that knowledge if our brain becomes diseased? Does a realized being with a diseased mind continue to know himself apart from the body? Rumor had it that she suffered with voices. Is it not possible to stop the voices or make peace with them if you know who you are? Would she have continue to know that she is not her mind? Please know that this is not just morbid curiosity. These questions interest me on so many levels: as seeker of knowledge, as a psychotherapist and as a friend. So what do you think??? I'm hoping that next time my doubts will be of a cheerier nature or better yet no doubts at all.

~ Love, Helen

James: Hi, Helen. I find myself in India, and just over jet lag, so I can reply. Great question, but a bit tricky. One thing you didn't know was that Mary's madness did not develop after she realized the self, although that is the way it seemed. Her madness was the result of incest. Victims of incest may develop hemophilia or madness later in life. It was the madness, which when you knew her was not highly developed but later became rather severe, along with her natural spirituality that brought about her realization. Often when the mind becomes too agitated, the person finds the exit and realizes the self. One need not be mad for this to happen, obviously. In any case self-knowledge is not memory-based. It is the self, apparently under the spell of ignorance, realizing itself.

It is certainly true that you can forget knowledge of objects. The other day I was going to see my dentist and was preparing a clever little speech to make him laugh as I walked down the hall. Just as I put my hand on the door knob, I couldn't remember his name! Relative knowledge - knowledge of objects - can be forgotten once it is gained because the object is not always present. But knowledge of the self is different because the "object" (in this case it's you), awareness, is always present.

It is not possible to know that you are not aware, because to not know you would have to be unaware. But you are never not aware. Even in deep sleep, when the individual that normal people think they are is absent, you are aware. It is not that memory-bound person that realizes the self. It is the self itself.

If you inquire into any object that object can be reduced to awareness. A shirt, for example, is actually threads. When I understand this I realize that there is no such thing as a shirt, only the name "shirt." When I look at thread I see that it is actually cotton fibers. Now the threads have been negated. If you keep analyzing you come

to the point where you only have the Higgs boson, the “particle” – or wave, as the case may be – that apparently can’t be reduced. You can actually negate the particle because when you look at it from a certain perspective it appears as a wave. And you can also negate the wave by observing it from another perspective – which makes it appear as a particle. This negatability is the most notable characteristic of relative knowledge.

Or you can reduce the particle because it does not stand alone, that is, it depends on the observer, just as the shirt depended on thread. How can a particle – which is inert matter – vibrate without the help of some other factor? And how does it have any meaning without a knower? It does not stand alone. In fact these elementary particles, like our thoughts, appear and disappear in the cloud chambers in which they are observed – which makes them negatable. In what do they appear and disappear? Awareness. Awareness is always present and therefore not negatable. This is why they call “God” omnipresent, meaning present everywhere and always present.

Once it is clear that you are awareness, memory is no longer involved for knowledge because the “object of knowlege” is you! This knowledge is “direct.” Awareness, you, are self-aware. You do not need anyone or anything other than yourself to know that you exist. It is self-evident. Awareness is your existence, your self, your essence. Even before you learned that you were “Helen” and went on to accumulate experience under her name, you existed.

Self-knowledge is like the knowledge of your name. When you get up in the morning you do not have to read the note you left by the bedside that you wrote before you went to sleep telling you your name. You do not have to sit there for twenty minutes memorizing it so the knowledge will last all day long and you can transact business under that name and your *karma* will go to the right account.

~ Love, James