

Spiritual Experience Is Only a Waking-State Phenomenon

Ram (James Swartz)

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Carlos: Hello, Mr. Swartz. My name is Carlos and I'm writing to you from Spain.

I've found your very interesting website after having found your name somewhere in the internet. That allowed me to read your personal and spiritual path and, having no doubt about your knowledge on the matter and especially interested in that moment where you dropped any "path," I've decided to send you this email hoping that you'll have the time to write a few words for correction or confirmation. I have to say I sent the same email to another teacher, but I'd love to have your opinion since you seem to have reached a place that transcends traditions or spirituality itself. Any help will be much appreciated. Okay, this is the email I sent to my friend. The personal parts have been removed:

Michael, I'm writing to see whether you share my recent thoughts or I've gone completely nuts. They relate to the "waking state spirituality" versus deep sleep, and they're so simple that I'm afraid that I could have missed the point somewhere. I think that reading some interviews and articles on Suzanne Segal and getting to a point of complete mental exhaustion regarding "spirituality" has triggered all this.

The last time I wrote to you, I explained that "objects" (thoughts, sensations and, even more important, the sense of a personal "I" with all its notions and convictions, even the sense of subtle witness) had all started looking like floating ghosts. But one day I woke up and stayed in bed for a few minutes, and examined this gap between deep sleep and waking and suddenly I realized something very obvious (but usually overlooked in spiritual teachings). It was this: something that is present during the waking state, but not during deep sleep or dream state, cannot be completely real, cannot be my nature.

There is no way something "real" could have waked up with me if it had not been already present during deep sleep. I suppose this is a humble version of Ramana's statement "Discover what you were before your parents were born."

So I compared the three states and realized that the only thing that resists the fire of the "deep sleep state" is simply Being, untouched by and independent from experience. There's "Being" in the three states, but since there are not objects or subjects whatsoever during deep sleep, we can discard them all as absolutely real (yes, these subjects or objects are the shape Awareness "takes" during the waking state or dreams, but they can only be real as "Being," that is, they are real inasmuch as they are made of Awareness, but not as objects or subjects on their own. A tree is real as a form Awareness has taken in the waking state, but not as a "tree," which is a relative form that only appears when the mind is functioning.

And, considering that Being did not need a mind to know Itself during deep sleep, we could say that It is aware of Itself without an object. That is, it's not tied to space and time. It has no beginning, no end and no form.

But that also implies a shocking truth: it means that all (I mean ALL) of the spiritual notions, practices, explanations, enlightenments, “unenlightenments” (such as Suzanne Segal’s), traditions, paths, gods, mysticism, visions, *yogas*, religions, etc. not only imply the existence of a separate “I” that, in fact, does not exist, but all of them belong to the waking state only!! They cannot be absolutely real. They are only real as relative expressions of the Unmanifest Absolute. It is the mind... not present when there’s no space and time... that superimposes spiritual ideas onto the Unmanifest, where by definition there’s no mind at all, that is, no spiritual object or subject.

I felt relieved, but also cheated in some way, because why in the hell don’t those traditions start with the obvious truth that our true nature must be present in the three states? That immediately would free the pupils of the expectation of trying to get somewhere, of the need of practice, of the idea of an “I” who has to evolve, of drama, of the horrible suffering Suzanne felt when his “enlightened state” disappeared... (I think she was somehow identified with a new state of consciousness, with her “waking-state enlightenment,” not with That which allowed her new state to be experienced, i.e. Being... something she could never lose. Where are the out-of-body experiences, the NDEs, the *bardo* lights, the *kundalini* energies, the *gurus*, etc. during deep sleep? Who meditates? Where to go?

I realized that just effortless “Being” is, that there’s not anything to do or think, and also that any experience, no matter how profound, is only a play of Awareness (even the most angelic visions) that lead to the suicide of the world of name and form.

Does this make any sense? Can it be so easy or I’m going too far, too soon? I mean, I know you come from the a tradition that has the manifest in the highest regard. I’m not denying the manifest. I’m just implying that, not being present during the three states, I should focus in that which pervades them all. In fact, even me writing you this email seems like an insubstantial dream. Thanks in advance. As always, any opinion or advice would be really appreciated.

Well, that was my email. It’d be very important for me to read your opinion and have a comparison between yours and his. Nothing else, James. Thanks in advance for any word you could say and for your website.

James: Dear Carlos, have you been taught the *Mandukya Upanishad* by a proper *jnani* or did you work this out on your own? It does not matter, because you are completely correct. It is much more clear than anything Ramana said, although he said the same thing. This is called *manana* in Vedanta, establishing the existence of the self through reason. It is completely in harmony with scripture, i.e. the *Mandukya Upanishad*, which is the king of the *Upanishads*. It is the essence of Vedanta. All that is left is to identify yourself as awareness. Perhaps you have done this, although the last statement “I should focus in that which pervades them all” makes me understand that you have another step to make. Your conclusion is correct. You should focus on that which pervades them all. But what is that? That is you, awareness. Ramana defines self-inquiry as holding the mind on awareness, i.e. that which pervades them all. This is also called *yoga*. One’s attention should remain on the self. For what purpose? For the purpose of contemplation. The last step, once the mind is focused on the unmanifest, which is just a fancy word for you, is to identify yourself not as the one who is focusing but as that which you are focused

on. *Moksa* is the hard and fast knowledge “I am awareness” as long as it renders your *vasanas* non-binding and cancels the doer, the one who focuses.

Suzanne Segal was caught up in the experiential view of enlightenment, meaning she thought enlightenment was some kind of experience. She just had an epiphany, identified with the bliss and felt unhappy when the experience ended.

This teaching will only make sense to advanced spiritual seekers. It is not something you can teach to entry-level people caught up in waking-state experience.

I suggest that you get my new book *How to Attain Enlightenment: The Vision of Non-Duality*. It is traditional Vedanta in clear, modern English. It will give you the big picture. It will explain the difference between *satya* and *mithya*, what you call the manifest and the unmanifest, the nature of enlightenment and the qualifications necessary for enlightenment. This will make it clear to you the limitations of spiritual traditions, apart from Vedanta. There is also a formal analysis of the three states in chapter nine. It is available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

~ All the best, James