

Action and Knowledge

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“I am composing this treatise on self-knowledge for those who are purified and peaceful, calm of mind, free of craving and desirous of liberation.” ~ *Atma Bodh*

Terrance: Yes, for those who are purified, peaceful, calm of mind, meaning a *sattvic* mind, no *vasanas*, who are already liberated. Is this correct?

James: No. It is for qualified people. All Vedanta texts start with some version of this verse. In this case, the text is one step up from the basic text, *Tattva Bodh*, which establishes the terminology for the teaching. Therefore it only briefly mentions the qualifications and gets right on with the basic teaching about experience (*karma*) and knowledge (*jnana*) which are two basic topics of Vedanta. The last three words show that it is for people who want *moksa*. If a person is qualified, he or she does not have to go through the kind of process you did although if you are alert and inquiring you will get qualified through them. I have successfully taught twenty or thirty epiphany-free people. Sometimes they get it quicker and easier than those what have had powerful epiphanies.

“Just as chopping wood is the indirect cause and fire is the direct cause of cooking, spiritual practice is the indirect cause and self-knowledge the direct cause of liberation.”

Terrance: Meaning meditation, *yoga*, chanting, *mantras*, *shakipat*, personal experiences, epiphanies, book-knowledge, are the indirect causes. Is this correct?

James: Yes. All this fuss about experiential enlightenment is about confusing the indirect means with the direct means – which is knowledge. I sent you these verses because they refute the notion that there is direct and indirect experience. Uninformed people think that mystical experience, i.e. “experience of the self,” is direct, and ordinary experience is indirect. All experience is indirect because there is an experiencer. Awareness is apparently “directed” through an experiencer so that it can apparently know itself as objects. But the self is not an experiencing entity. It just seems like you are experiencing something.

So only knowledge, which is immediate, is “direct.” If one’s means of knowledge is operating properly knowledge takes place without effort, without “experience.” It is immediate. For example, if the eyes are open objects appear in the mind. There is no effort involved. When the mind is open and the teacher is qualified, the self is effortlessly revealed through words. There is nothing “intellectual” about it, although knowledge takes place in the intellect. It needs knowledge because this is where the ignorance is.

Most of the confusion around this point centers around the use of the word “*anubhava*,” which can mean both “experience” and “knowledge,” depending on the

context. What is not understood by most people is that there is in reality no distinction between knowledge and experience. Experience is the container and knowledge is the contents, the essence. So if a person favors experience over knowledge as enlightenment, his or her discrimination is incomplete. *Moksa* is simply discrimination, knowing what is experience and what is awareness. Nothing can be done about anything, as you know. Everything is just what it is. You can only understand what is.

In Vedanta we have to dismiss experience in the beginning or we cannot teach anyone. I am about to post a long document, a conversation with a psychotherapist who was into Yoga for thirty years and who is seriously epiphany-prone. The average spiritual person would give his or her eye teeth to have her epiphanies. In it you can see the amazing resistance to knowledge. It is unbelievable. I usually hit the "delete" button on these types right away, but I let this one go on and on for four or five months just to get a document that would show the amazing attachment to experience and how it makes one completely blind.

Terrance: However, knowing who you are by erasing the ignorance of the ego with the mind, by understanding, through discrimination and assimilating the indirect causes, like chopping wood, not just intellectually but knowing that you are *brahman* through intensive *atma vichara*, consciousness or awareness of the unfathomable intelligence and truth of who you are, when the knowing, the known and the knower are one, that you are and always were awareness/consciousness, being awareness, existing as awareness, truth and bliss, not a fleeting experience of awareness.

James: Yes.

Terrance: Seeing through the *maya*, meaning all the objects, mental or external, spiritual, physical, subtle and even more subtle. Is this correct?

James: Yes, any experience on any level. Experience is an object. It appears in awareness. "Seeing" means knowing.

"Action cannot remove ignorance, for action and ignorance are not opposed to each other."

Terrance: Because you are not the doer, the thinker, the experiencer, the enjoyer. The ego is not aware of what it is, that it is just a false idea, a notion. The ego believes it is taking the action, such as how can you separate the dancer from the dance? Why or how can an ignorant ego oppose itself or its actions? And even if awake, aware. "A house divided cannot stand." It has no benefit from its self-destruction.

Is this what he means? Is this correct?

James: What you say relates to the preceding statement, but this statement has another purpose because it appears in the beginning of the text. Vedanta provisionally accepts the notion that your experience of yourself as a limited being is

true. It is saying in effect, “Okay, you are a person, you are a doer. We accept that but tell me, how are you going to get what you already have by doing something? You can do something to get what you don’t have, but what about what you do have? You know you have a self and you are trying to get it by doing something by experiencing something?”

The second teaching is to wean the mind of the notion that action (read: experience) is the means for *moksa*. It is brought in here at the beginning to soften up the doer. We say, “Okay, you are a doer and you want to feel free and limitless, but isn’t it true that your knowledge and desire and power limited? You want limitlessness, but how can you produce limitlessness with actions that will only bring limited results?”

We want to get the doer out of the picture right at the beginning or it will not hear the teachings. It will think that Vedanta is theory and practice. Vedanta is not theory and practice. It is saying that the subject matter is you, the self. How are you going to practice that? You can only get what you already have by listening and reflecting. Yes, listening and reflecting are actions, but they are actions that produce knowledge, not experience, although technically you can say the gaining of knowledge is an experience. But it is not an experience actually, because you do not have to do anything once it is firm. You don’t have to get up every morning and repeat “I am Terrance,” because you know that you are Terrance. Every other kind of experience decays and to get the fruit you have to do something again. But self-knowledge is its own fruit because it is inseparable from you and you are always present and accounted for.

“Self-knowledge removes it as light removes darkness.”

Terrance: Yes, self-knowledge of who you are removes this ignorance of this ego and by doing so the “*maya*,” the mirage, finally disappears, like in a dream. Is this correct?

James: Yes, indeed.