

The Absolute Is Not Prior to Consciousness

Ram (James Swartz)

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Kumar: Dear Ram, as discussed in my previous email, I recently had my first awakening experience which made realize that the “I” is actually the observer and the observed. I have stabilized in the I AM, and this state is present without effort. I also get that chasing mystical experiences is waste of time. In one sense I see that the search is over, but other times I have doubts, because when you look at Maharaj, he categorically says that the Absolute is prior to Consciousness or prior to the I AM.

James: Well, if this is a non-dual reality, which scripture says it is, then there is only consciousness. This means that there is nothing “prior” to consciousness. Consciousness is the absolute. It is the “I am” in the sense that it is what is, i.e. consciousness, or *sat*. He was probably referring to the subtle body when he said “consciousness.” It is reflected consciousness, and pure consciousness is “prior” to it, in other words, the source of its reflection.

The problem with Maharaj is that he was not a teacher. He just made statements from his own experience, and one would have had to be there to understand the statements by the context or to question him. It may very well have been a translator’s error too. It is easy to lose a lot when you move from one language to another.

This is a statement that implies that merely the realization of consciousness is not enough, that one has to “go beyond” it to get to some kind of “state” prior to consciousness. In fact in your introductory paragraph you use action language and say that you are “stabilized” in a particular “state.” It may be true, but being in some state does not remove doubt about who you are, because there is only one consciousness and you are it, and if that is true then the “I am” state is in you. You are not in it. Consciousness is not in any state. As Krishna, speaking as consciousness, in the *Gita* says, “They [all objects – states are objects] are in me. I am not in them.”

Kumar: I understand that the knowledge leads to freedom and is the only important thing, but if you look at what Maharaj says, he is also talking about an experiential experience.

James: He may be talking about it, but who is the knower of the experience? The knower of the experience is consciousness and is not in any way affected by the experience, including all the so-called mystical experiences.

Rather than imagine that there is some experience that you have not had that will make you happy, why not look into why whatever you are experiencing right now does not make you happy? Why? Because what you are experiencing right now is consciousness – the absolute – and there is nothing to experience beyond consciousness, because there is only consciousness.

You have been infected with the experiential notion of enlightenment. Go ahead and keep trying to experience something beyond or prior to consciousness if you want. It will not solve your problem, because the fact that you think you are an experiencer is the problem. *Moksa* is freedom from the experiencer, the subtle body. The only way this happens is by understanding that you are not the subtle body, i.e. that you are non-dual, actionless, ORDINARY awareness. Notice the word “ordinary.” Consciousness is not “absolute” except in the sense that everything depends on it, but it depends on nothing. It is totally ordinary, simple and ever-present. There is nothing special about it at all. This is why so few realize it. They have read all this experiential nonsense about it and they imagine that it is some sort of incredible mind-blowing thing. It is all fantasy.

Kumar: In your books you say that knowledge is everything, and in I agree with what you are saying, but it seems that the *vasanas*, or unconscious tendencies, remain even after awakening.

James: That is correct. “Awakening” is just an experience. You can get a *vasana* for it too if you go back to sleep, which will happen if you awake. Awakening is not *moksa*. *Moksa* is *jnanam*. What knowledge is it? “I am awareness.” There is only awareness, and it never slept. So how is it going to awaken?

Kumar: I get that it is impossible to remove all *vasanas*, but then what is liberation?

James: Liberation is self-knowledge. The self is unaffected by the *vasanas*, so *vasanas* can appear in it and disappear out of it without leaving a trace. If you are awareness, the self, why would you be concerned by *vasanas*? You worry about *vasanas* because you identify with the experiencer and the experiencer is pushed all over the place by the *vasanas*.

Kumar: Knowledge/*viveka* that there is nothing to do except be is what Vedanta talks about as liberation?

James: Being is not something you do. You are. See what is the nature of your existence. It is awareness. From the *jiva*'s point of view, the hard and fast knowledge that you are awareness is liberation, assuming that it neutralizes your binding *vasanas* and destroys your sense of doership.

Kumar: There seems to be some gap in what Advaita is saying and its practical application in daily existence.

James: I am not sure what you mean by “Advaita,” but there is some gap in your understanding of who you are. The first thing you need to determine is whether or not reality is non-dual. If you can sort that out – hint: take the scripture’s word for it – then the experiential idea is not workable. It is not logical. It only appeals to you because you think you are an experiencer and your present experience – even though you are in some kind of exalted “I AM” state – is not satisfactory. There are still doubts.

Kumar: Can you clarify?

James: I just did. What do you think?