

Does Knowing Who You Are Change Your Everyday Life?

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Joseph: Hi, James. This brings me to the real source of my dissatisfaction. No matter what angle I look at life, I have little interest in it. You'll recall the quote you took from one of my emails that prefaced an online promo for your book. If I remember correctly, it says at one point that I now have something to wake up for in the morning, which leads me back to my last message to you... because I thought that knowing who you are would change my life.

Well, it does and it doesn't. My perspective has shifted – but my everyday life hasn't. Even then that's not entirely true, because some things have changed in *maya*. My sex *vasana* has left, but tobacco and beer remain. I don't much care much about tobacco. I quit once with not much difficulty and could again because my habit is only four or five cigarettes a day. I took it up again to suppress my appetite because I was overeating, changing one bad habit for another. My alcohol *vasana* is still binding, I am sorry to say. But it is binding in the most paradoxical way: I barely find any pleasure in it. After a couple of beers I just feel *tamasic* and wonder why I even found myself in front of a bottle. It's sort of like grasping for a soap bubble. Shortly after making contact you realize how empty it is. I think it won't be long before this *vasana* leaves also. Perhaps, as you mentioned, in one *satsang*, awareness gradually balances out the *gunas*. Or maybe life will make me eat my words. I don't want to play what Andrew Cohen calls the Advaita Shuffle (and I won't get into the many shuffles he plays with his devotees)... but what you've slowly helped me understand is that it's the *vasanas* that are acting/doing in the *mithya* world. Correct me if I'm wrong, but what I now understand is that all we basically are in *maya* are *vasanas* of the causal body.

James: That's right. We are just the *vasana* that is expressing at the moment. There is no doer. As far as your statement that not much has changed, I'd say that a lot has changed. The knowledge is cleaning up the residual *vasanas*.

Joseph: The best that Joseph can "do" under the circumstances is adopt the *karma yoga* attitude. I've had difficulty coming to this understanding until now because I thought that as awareness I was somehow above or not involved with *karma yoga* (I don't mean superior or special, but that *karma yoga* is happening within me).

James: The *karma yoga* view is just the way the self would deal with the world if it was in the world as an individual. When you know who you are, it is the default view. When you don't, it is wise to adhere to it, as it relieves suffering.

Joseph: This is of course ultimately true... but as you often say, *mithya* is tricky. I'm far from having your understanding of all of this, although I feel that some of your teaching is starting to sink in... what I was earlier referring to as integration. A more appropriate word would probably be "assimilation."

James: It takes time to work out all the implications of the fact that you are the self in the *mithya* world. It is a long, hard slog. Or not, if there is little resistance.

Joseph: In any case, I think one of Joseph's problems is that he's not appreciative enough of life.

James: Since life is the self, it means that he is not appreciative of himself. It is often hard to let go of negative self-judgments.

Joseph: Or it might be more precise to say that his expectations are both too high and unrealistic.

James: The way is indeed difficult for the one who has expectations.

Joseph: You know, I'm extremely grateful for Vedanta and our encounter. Once more, I just thought that knowing myself as awareness brought more of a permanent solution to living in *maya*. To be more explicit, I have been contaminated by visions of constant bliss, owing to the fact that spiritual literature liberally employs the language of hyperbole... as you point out. Yes, I know I'm awareness, but I thought that meant that there would no longer be an experience of identification with the subtle body. All that inaccurate no-mind, dead mind, dead ego literature (even from Ramana) is still buzzing around my head somewhere. The fan keeps spinning for some time even after the plug is pulled. I blame the popular idea that we should have what we want yesterday, as Mark likes to say. It is the opposite of *karma yoga*.

James: Enlightenment brings a permanent solution to the "Who am I?" question. The seeking in *samsara* stops. It doesn't deliver all the things you want in this world.

You are right. That hyperbolic literature is tailor-made to seduce an unhappy ego and set it off on the quest for endless experiential bliss. If you want to be happy in this world you have to destroy your identification with limiting thoughts and take small practical steps to achieve your goals. If you understand that self-knowledge means that you are happiness itself, then nothing has to be done.

Joseph: In light of the above, do you think I need to do more self-enquiry in order to alleviate the negative tendencies? I must add that I did little of it before our encounter, as you pretty much settled my score on the first evening in Montreal when you "screwed in my light bulb."

I should also add that I engaged in so many spiritual practices in the past that near the end of my disillusionment I was literally heading for the looney bin. Without going into all the different forms of *yoga* I tried, I repeated *Om Namah Shivaya* for two years straight, night and day - probably even in my sleep - so much so that I was getting a permanent headache. This on top of doing a good amount of *japa* in *kriya yoga* with a different *bija mantras* (among other things). The same for Ramana's self-enquiry process - "Who, what, is this 'I'?" In fact one of the reasons why I quit everything was that all the different forms of *sadhana* led me to throw the

whole thing out the door. I read once that the purpose of *yoga* was to make your head spin so intensely that you finally realize that you can't "do" anything for enlightenment. So you quit *yoga* and immediately see that you have always been enlightened. I mention this not to prove that I've been Mr. Mahayogi, but because practices no longer seem to have a positive effect on me. Quite the contrary, as I mentioned. So I don't know if monitoring my mind for negativity and continually referring to the "not-self" strategy would be helpful. (The opposite thought when not abused seems to be more adequate. I say "not abused" because having been somewhat of an extremist in the past, I tend to overdo things.) In light of this context, what do you think?

James: I think you should keep doing self-inquiry in real time in this way: reject the negative feelings as "not me" when they come up and switch your attention to the positive thought "I am whole and complete, ordinary, actionless, non-dual awareness" and contemplate the meaning of that statement until the negative feelings dissolve or shrink to a manageable size. This assumes that you don't want a negative mind. I met *mahatmas* in India who had negative minds and it did not bother them at all, because their attention was only on the self. You can purify or not, as you see fit. I happen to like cleaning my mind, not that it ever gets very dirty. But then, I have a cleaning *vasana*. One time I took a tab of acid, thinking I would trip in nature, and ended up cleaning my cabin the whole trip!

Joseph: So psychological models, apparent personal stuff and collective *vasanas* (or *Isvara's vasanas*)... I guess I could sum it up as "the child of a barren woman." Or also in *Yoga Vasistha's* words, "A mansion visualized in space does not need the support of real pillars." Speaking of which, I've never dreamt so much as in the past few months. I never put much attention to dreams in the past, as I could barely even remember them. I more or less scoffed at people's broadly diverging interpretations of them. Now, more often than not, they reveal premonitions of simple daily occurrences. They seem to be showing me either upcoming *vasanas* or presenting me as awareness, observing what's going on in my life. It's like they are saying, "To hell with you, Joseph, you are awareness whether you like it or not. Take it because you can't leave it!" For this I couldn't be more grateful.

James: This is good news. The causal body is purifying. It sounds like things are right on track.

~ Love, James