

How Vedanta Works to Enlighten You

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2004-01-31

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1727>

Ram: Dear Carl, to continue our discussion about teaching the self from the last email, the ego is assumed to be the "I." When I have a person's confidence, I often flat out tell them that they are working on the wrong "I." Teaching the whole and complete "I" is not a problem, because that "I" is the most intimate companion of every person. Once the person hears about the nature of the "I" (that it is whole and complete, that it is eternal, that it is ordinary awareness, that it is "the life" as Jesus said, that it pervades everything, that it is non-separate from what it pervades, that lasting happiness comes from knowing it, etc.), they should begin to inquire into it. People want to hear that they are just fine as they are. They do not want to hear that they need to do something to be okay.

Carl: Yes, this is a MAJOR relief!!

Ram: But if the person needs to be convinced that he or she needs inquiry, then there is not much a teacher can do except wait until the person realizes that freedom from psychological problems is not enough. Often at this stage, however, some sort of "awakening" happens and inquiry begins naturally. If this is the case, then the person is ready for a teacher and the teachings. The teachings need to be wielded in a very precise way. Most who think of themselves as spiritual teachers only talk "about" the self. They say there is this wonderful thing called the self in some hidden dimension. They promise self-realization based on faith and the pursuit of certain practices - prayer, meditation, transmission from the *guru*, etc. But what needs to happen is that the self be directly revealed. This revelation happens when the proper teaching removes the person's doubt about who they are. So the teacher needs to find out what form that person's doubt (about himself or herself or the world) takes and apply the teaching that removes it.

Carl: This is very useful... you describe a subtle process that requires an attentive teacher... I guess, often responding from intuition.

Ram: It isn't really "intuition" in my case, because Vedanta teaches how to recognize and address any doubt. So as soon as a person opens the mouth, ignorance flows out and I start with what is in front of me. It is quite simple, actually - if you observe how a person uses the word "I." Invariably, usage shows that the person thinks the "I" is limited. Or if you dig out the "I" behind beliefs and opinions, etc. So what I do is challenge the belief. I explain how it is not the person's fault that he or she thinks about himself or herself in this way - that it comes from their conditioning at the hands of parents, teacher, etc. And I end up with the idea that if their understanding of the "I" is actually a belief or an opinion, it can legitimately be dismissed - and the true nature of the "I" embraced. It turns out the almost nobody has ever thought about the nature of the "I." There is always resistance, but the idea that the "I" is limitless and complete is also music to the ears. And inquiry, which until this time had been more or less an unconscious process, becomes conscious.

If you don't have a means like Vedanta you could rely on "intuition" and more or less reinvent Vedanta as you go - as long as it is 100 percent clear to you that you are whole, complete and limitless.

Although there are only a limited number of ways that one's self-ignorance can express, there are still quite a few, so the teacher needs be versed in the teachings and be committed to patiently work through the student's doubts. Generic advice, which is the staple of most teachers, is not ultimately useful, because it relies on faith and it does not address the particular form that ignorance takes.

Carl: I understand you to be saying that the teacher helps the enquirer remove ignorance.

Ram: Yes, absolutely. Ultimately, the inquirer must accept the truth based on his or her reasoned consideration. But the teacher is a very important part of this process by presenting the teachings in a clear, reasonable way. This initiates a process of discrimination which will ultimately result in the inquirer letting go of the idea of limitation and incompleteness.

One teaches not only by precept but by example. The teacher serves as an example of how it is possible to live fully and joyfully without the limited "I" concept. This gives the inquirer confidence.

All this presupposes that the teacher knows how to wield the means of knowledge. If the teacher is relying on his or her inspiration of energy to give the person some sort of experience that temporarily resolves the doubt, it means that the teacher does not know how to wield the means of knowledge. It probably also means that the teacher is only self-realized and does not understand that experience does not change thinking patterns.

Carl: Can you explain this further? I understand the "means of knowledge" to be the intellect...

Ram: By "means of knowledge" I meant Vedanta, since it is a time-proven method of removing a person's self-/Self-ignorance. It works through the intellect because this is the source of the "I" concept. In one short lifetime no single person will have the intelligence or the time to figure out how to effectively knock off all the doubts. So over time, thousands of years, this body of knowledge and the tools to wield it developed - and it has effectively been enlightening people ever since.

Experience does not change thinking patterns.

Carl: I understand that thinking that experience changes thinking patterns is misguided... although someone might change their thinking patterns given certain experiences...

Ram: Yes, this happens quite frequently.

Carl: ...in this case, for example, having the experience that self-realisation that you mistakenly ascribe to an experience is not an experience... does not endure, etc. when you think it should – this experience would lead to self-realisation, but still requires the student to think differently.

Ram: Could you rephrase the question? It's a little confusing. But if it means what I think it means, the answer is "yes." It's yes because no matter what one's experience on an emotional or spiritual level, you are still going to experience life according to what ideas are operating in your mind. And if these ideas, particularly your self-idea, are not in harmony with reality you will not be happy. You have a lot of people who are in the self-realization phase, whose minds are fixed on the self and who are experiencing a lot of peace and bliss, but who are still not satisfied, because they think of themselves as the experiencer, the recipient of this "magical" connection to this "incredible state." In this case the idea that the "I" is separate from the self (which is being incorrectly thought of as a separate "state") is the problem. If you see that what you are experiencing is you, the "I," you completely relax because you know that you can't disappear. So the knowledge that the "I" is blissful, peaceful, self-luminous, etc. needs to happen before the person is completely free.

It is also true that knowledge does not change thinking patterns, but knowledge is necessary before one sets out to change one's way of thinking about oneself and the world.

Carl: Maybe the above does start to answer my questions... but still, please elaborate.

Ram: This relates to the idea you mentioned above, that the conclusions one comes to about one's experience can change the way they think. But what I meant was that before a person can even begin to systematically inquire into who they are they need some basic concepts to guide the inquiry. They need to know the difference between the ego and the self. They need to understand the limitation of experience and the problem with experience-based *sadhanas*. They need to understand the concept of impermanence. They need to know why desire is inherently unworkable as a means of gaining happiness, etc.

Everyone is actually inquiring, but conscious inquiry is rare. So I try to find out what the person wants, or thinks he or she wants, since that is the area in which the truth is believed to reside. And then I use logic, reason and the person's own experience to turn them away from their pursuit while simultaneously showing them the self by knocking off their ignorance. If someone can see that it is possible to get what he or she is seeking directly from the self without having to initiate the whole *karmic* process, they will quickly take to inquiry. The teacher's job is to guide the inquiry by correcting the thought process.

Carl: So this will require the teacher to enquire as to the thought process of the student?

Ram: Absolutely. The student wouldn't be a student if he or she were aware of how

he or she thinks – and the implications of that thinking. So it is for someone who sees it clearly from the outside – and who has an impersonal, time-tested means of knowledge like Vedanta at his or her command – to make the student aware of the thought process and how it impacts on happiness. Experience-oriented or faith-oriented systems do not set one free, because they leave the thought system intact. Everything on every level, subjective and objective, is just fine as it is, but it's a person's inability to see how his or her thinking impacts on happiness that condemns them to suffer.

~ Love, Ram