

Bliss of Knowledge

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Amaya: On page 75 (of *The Essence of Enlightenment*), James refers to a steady current of bliss, an unexplained feeling of satisfaction, a sense of self-confidence unconnected to anything you have accomplished, which is there when the mind is quiet; it is you experiencing the fullness that you are, hidden from you when you are distracted by the mind's agitations.

I totally get that. That is the exact description of my situation. But doesn't this description negate what James says throughout the book prior to that, that enlightenment is not an experience? As I understood, his emphasis thus far was that all experience is of an object and therefore not real.

Is he saying there's a different kind of experience altogether? Self-referential experience, without an object, where the object of experience and the subject of experience are one: "The fullness that you are"? My take would be that self-knowledge is the togetherness of this experience of fullness and assimilation of the understanding of it – just the way he describes the experience and explains it above. I would expect it to be a knowingness that is the marriage of the two.

I don't get how one might attain self-knowledge without the experience he mentions above. Is that possible?

Sundari: There is no contradiction, only an apparent one. Enlightenment itself is not an experience, it is knowledge – so you cannot do anything to gain it, because no action taken by a limited entity can produce an unlimited result, other than self-inquiry which is a doing but unlike all other doing leads to self-knowledge, which is unlimited. So only the knowledge assimilated from experience in a qualified mind leads to *moksa*. But *moksa* can be experienced in a *sattvic* mind as the bliss of knowledge, such as you describe. It is not a feeling or state of mind, because both are impermanent and it does not depend on what is going on in the mind or in its environment. In fact external circumstances can be very challenging for the *jiva*, such as illness, work, people – anything. But the mind retains the steady dispassion and confidence of the knower, awareness. It is always there because it is known to be who you are and totally independent of everything.

The problem lies in the misunderstanding of the word "bliss." There are two kinds of bliss: *ananda*, which is experiential bliss, and *anantam*, which is the bliss of the self. The bliss of the self, that which is always present, unlimited and unchanging, is not an experience, because it is your true nature, *anantam*. The bliss of self-knowledge can be experienced as a feeling though, such as the bliss of deep sleep, which is inferred when you wake up, or as *parabhakti*, where love is known to be you, your true nature – meaning consciousness, the self. *Parabhakti* is having all you could ever want and knowing that it will never leave you. It is love loving itself. It is limitless satisfaction – *parama sukka* is the word used in the texts.

The nature of the self, awareness, or consciousness, is *parama prema svarupa*. *Parama* means "limitless," *svarupa* means "nature" and *prema* is "the love the makes love possible." It is the nature of awareness. In its presence even spiritual

love comes alive. However, spiritual love, no matter how pure, is dualistic, a transaction between a subject and an object, a feeling of love, for example. When I know I am awareness, I am *prema*, limitless love. **This love is knowledge because awareness is intelligent.** *Prema* is only known when the doer has been negated by self-knowledge.

That is not to say that the bliss disappears when self-knowledge is firm. It is just does not matter whether the experience of bliss is present or not, because the bliss of self-knowledge is always present because the bliss of self-knowledge is the bliss of the self. It is experienced like the bliss of sleep, and when you are “awake” it is constant in spite of the experiences that come and go. The bliss is simply known to be your true nature.

This is what Swami Paramarthananda has to say about the two kinds of blisses:

Anantum versus Ananda

In the scriptures both *ananda* and *anantam* are used to describe the indescribable *Brahman*. “*Sathyam Jnanam Anantam Brahman*” is one of these definitions, “*Sat Cit Ananda*,” referring to *Atma*, another one.

Sathyam means “timewise limitlessness,” *anantam* means “spacewise limitlessness,” so he translates “*Sathyam Jnanam Anantam Brahman*” into “*Brahman* is the eternal all-pervading consciousness.” *Anantam* as a term to describe limitlessness is not sufficient, as it does not include time.

Ananda in “*Sat Cit Ananda*” again means “limitlessness.” There are two kinds of *ananda*: *bimbaananda* and *pratibimbaananda*. *Bimbaananda* is the original *ananda*, also called *atmaananda*. It is my nature, always present but not experienceable. It cannot be gained; it is to be claimed and owned.

Pratibimbaananda is reflected *ananda*; it can be experienced in a *sattvic* mind. Translating *ananda* into “bliss” is reducing *ananda* to *pratibimbaananda*, experiential bliss. In the spiritual world you find this mistranslation and misunderstanding all over, especially in *yoga*.

Amaya: By the way, I’m thankful for the part where he explains you need faith (and grace, I think he says) to pursue or attain self-knowledge. That is also very liberating, as it doesn’t put the whole onus of self-knowledge on proof of its conclusion beforehand. It is its own proof. But it describes the openness and confidence that is necessary beforehand.

Sundari: Faith in the scripture is probably one of the most important qualifications, apart from a strong desire for freedom. Grace is the hidden factor, or *devam*; ultimately, no matter how qualified the mind is or how much faith it has in the scripture, *moksa* is up to *Isvara*. We know many people who have been totally dedicated to self-inquiry for years and have all the knowledge, yet *moksa* does not obtain in the mind. *Prarabdha karma* will play out as long as it plays out.

Amaya: Either that or I would have to question if I am sufficiently equipped for self-inquiry, to really grasp that I’m the partless whole at the outset. Would he agree with

this line of thought? I think at least in part he might.

Sundari: If the student is dedicated to self-inquiry because the desire for freedom supercedes all other desires, self-knowledge will do the work of removing ignorance. All the qualifications are necessary for *moksa*, but as I said above, it is still up to *Isvara* when *moksa* obtains.

Amaya: In particular I would like to keep reading without the question of what he's saying about experience.

Sundari: Subjecting the mind to self-inquiry with a one-pointed focus is what it takes.