

You Can Experience the Self

Ram (James Swartz)

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Seeker: Dear James, *The Yoga of Love* is a phenomenal book. Really. I am so grateful for the work you put in. It's PhD-level in terms of its depth and breadth of knowledge, and you don't pull punches.

I have a question on making the knowledge firm which I'd really appreciate any direction with.

As both "I"'s experience life, awareness, and in other moments the *jiva* with all "my" pedigrees of wants and fears is like a washing machine. Sometimes it stops completely and there's dead silence. Other times it's doing a *rajasic* spin, the head hurts and my ego just tries to cope. It feels trapped, squashed and irritated. And at other times it experiences the slow turbulence of drowning... *tamas*; "I know I'm drowning but I don't care, I'll get back up tomorrow," which happens rarely now, thankfully.

The question is, is the self burdened by this? When the mind is *sattvic* and inquiry is progressing, "I" experiences being let go of. It's great. It's like the whole bag of life just suddenly jettisons away, as if a hook lets go of a heavy weight and I'm on the "other" side. It is a release. Is that me? It feels so.

I'm cautious because I know the self cannot be experienced, and concerned if I wander around just trying to get that by inquiry... I have a sense it's far subtler in reality and I may get stuck. "The subtlest of the subtlest." It feels like it's just starting, not ending.

Yet it certainly seems valid. At this point everything is easy, time stops, no concerns, just completely happy, content and perplexed in a funny way at how dark and complex it all was (running in circles going nowhere, while thinking it's going somewhere).

~ With much appreciation and thankfulness

James: Excellent question. The short answer is the self can be experienced – but not as an object, although the objects that one experiences are the self. The self is not burdened by the *gunas*. So when you are identified with a *guna*, you experience all the attendant qualities of the *guna*. In the case of *rajas* and *tamas*, you experience agitation and dullness, and when *sattva* is present, you get uplifting feelings and you can inquire. When you inquire, the *jiva* is suspended, which you describe as "I" experience being let go of." It is a strange formulation from a *samsaric* perspective, but it is true to the experience. The knowledge from the inquiry – inquiry is the assimilation of self-knowledge – negates (or sublates, i.e. "merges") the ego into the self and you experience the absence of ego and the presence of freedom. It feels, as you describe it, "as if the whole bag of life suddenly jettisons away" and you experience the bliss of the self untouched by the *gunas*, i.e. the objects of experience. So, yes, that experience is you experiencing your self. It feels effortless because there is no duality, no conflict. So inquiry is just clearing *rajasic* and *tamasic* *guna* clouds that apparently conceal that ever-present experience from itself.

Inquiry is the beginning of life, not the end. The objects of experience continue to appear, but their qualities have been neutralized by self-knowledge. You are not stuck. You are right on track. Keep up the good work!

~ Love, James