

Emotions for an Enlightened Person

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Peter: I have a question for you. The *Gita* says “The wise grieve neither for the dead, nor for the living.” I assume this means if a person is enlightened (even though there is no enlightened person) he would have no reason to grieve or any other emotion like anger or fear. A friend of mine just lost his job and is feeling anxiety because of his finances. If self-knowledge removes suffering, is it true that a self-actualized person would not feel anxiety over finances?

James: A self-realized person would not feel anxiety over finances. It would mean that he or she thought that money was responsible for his or her sense of security. But he or she knows that the security that money offers is only temporary and that even if you have money you can still feel insecure. You can worry about losing it. A self-realized person is secure in the knowledge that no matter what happens he or she is limitless. Limitless means that he or she is not limited by the presence or absence of any object, in this case, money. I am who I am with ten dollars, with ten million or deep in debt. He or she is secure in the self. He or she knows that the self is the only secure thing because it never changes and its nature is bliss. A person only wants the money for the bliss it provides, never for the money itself. But if I am bliss, how can money or sex or anything else add to my happiness? I’ve had quite a bit of money at times, been dead broke at times and had a reasonable amount of money at other times but it has not changed me in the slightest. What’s valuable is life. That I am alive and able to enjoy this short stay on earth is an amazing gift, much greater than any object like money can bring.

The way you phrased the question makes me feel that I need to add a qualification to the last paragraph. An enlightened person is actually just the self, so your statement is factual. The self does not feel anger and loss, etc. But enlightenment only means something to the *jiva* through which the self is expressing. Depending on the nature of the *gunas*, the enlightened person may have a feeling of loss – it is quite natural – and perhaps a feeling of anxiety – it is also quite natural – but he or she would not take the feeling seriously. He or she would understand that the loss and the reaction to the loss was *Isvara* – ignorance – and the feeling would pass like a cloud in a windy sky. When the man became fearful at seeing the snake, the effects of the fear did not disappear immediately with the knowledge of the snake. It took some time for him to settle down emotionally. So depending how attached the *jiva* of an enlightened person was to the object – the amount of *rajas* and *tamas* – you may find enlightened people being emotional at times. If the *jiva* is very *sattvic* and the knowledge is super steady, there will be no emotion or perhaps the tiniest blip of feeling, lasting only a minute or two.