

Enlightened and Still Dissatisfied

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Greg: Hi, Ram. How are things? I hope that you are well.

It has been quite a while since we last communicated, and so I thought that a bit of an update on things might be in order. I'm glad to say that I am well; though I'm not sure if I am not becoming reclusive or paranoid these days, perhaps both. Whichever it might be, the symptom that it displays is one of being unable to raise any enthusiasm for Facebook or wanting to be followed around on Twitter. So I hope that you don't mind receiving my tweet on a good old-fashioned email.

Glancing at your schedule, you sound busy, but no doubt enjoying yourself, I imagine. Life sounds good. It's fascinating how things work out, isn't it? For me, things of late have not been quite as energetic as they have been for you, at least not in a physical sense. For the past five months I have been living something of a sedentary life. However, while I can't deny that it has indeed involved a lot of sitting in my armchair by the window and watching the clouds drift by, it has also turned out to be a period of deep reflection and thought and in its own way nonetheless active.

After three-and-a-half years of continuous employment I now find myself out of work. My current situation is the result of a couple of moves which I made that on the surface would appear to have been a mistake. However, at some level I think that I may well have engineered the position in which I now find myself.

I can honestly say that I had been enjoying work more than at any other time that I can remember. I even joked provocatively with colleagues that I was simply attending the office each day for occupational therapy. My position could easily have continued well into the foreseeable future, but something in me said that I needed to move on. While what I do has served me well as regards the earning of a living, for a long time now a feeling has persisted that there is something else that I should really be doing. That feeling is a common experience, and I can't think of anyone that I know who hasn't expressed it at some point. I guess that we all want to spend our time doing what we love the most. If that love, however, is for the spiritual life, it isn't exactly something for which we can plot a career path. The most I would say that we can do is to make ourselves available and respond to what life presents to us. However, in the absence of anything obvious in which to respond to, it didn't make a great deal of sense for me to finish work just to sit at home doing nothing.

To see where things might lead, I decided to shake things up a bit and roll the dice, as it were. I got another job offer and so took it. After six weeks I was told that the job required me to go on-site to do a survey in a radioactive area. I checked out the dosage levels to which I would have been exposed and decided that my new position wasn't turning out to be in keeping with my idea of therapy. And so I moved on again. The Lord must have decided that the next job wasn't for me either, because after six weeks I sustained a back injury and was unable to get to the office. And so I got fired. And now here I am, sitting at home doing nothing in particular.

Glad to say that my back injury is now okay, but whether or not I'll get back into employment again, I don't know. I wouldn't like to think that I'm going to be sitting

around the house forever, but at the moment, as I can afford to meet my immediate needs, there is nothing much to drive me back into work. Boredom might eventually do it, but that's a poor reason if ever I heard one, wouldn't you say? The truth is, all I really want to do is talk *dharma*. Unfortunately, there is not much enthusiasm for such lofty discourse around this neck of the woods, which is a bit of a frustration. Sadly, that seems to be the case for this country in general. Spiritually, the UK is so apathetic. Lakshmi summed it up about right the other day when she said that if you grow your beard long and start talking about God in India, people touch your feet; here they just think that you're crazy .

I'm happy to say that Lakshmi is making good progress, but life for her is difficult. With the type of injury which she has, recovery is always going to be limited. Her accident has affected me deeply, and at times it is difficult for me to know how best to help. I can quite readily find words and reassuring viewpoints for people who are suffering from problems originating from a mental malaise, but physical pain I have no answer for. I must admit that it has made me weep. Her sister from Malaysia has been staying with her up until recently, which has been a great help, but now she has had to return home.

Recently my thoughts have been drifting back to my spiritual roots, and I have been looking at things from a Christian perspective. I think that it has something to do with the physical suffering that I have come into contact with over the past twelve months. At times the tradition seems to say more to me about human suffering in its more obvious form, than does the word *dukkha* in the context that we generally use it. While Christian symbolism can sometimes seem to dwell too much on that particular condition, it does seem true that when we allow the pain of others to get inside of us, we see that we have a relationship with the world which we cannot simply ignore.

A few weeks ago I visited a Franciscan monastery, and I spoke with one of the priests there. I thought that in such an environment I might encounter someone with whom I could have a meaningful dialogue about the inner life. The Christian tradition might use a symbolic language different to the one that I might use to describe that life, but to someone with genuine understanding, the inner truth should be recognisable regardless of the tradition or language used. However, I was quite taken back by the reaction that I provoked in this priest. From the hostility shown towards what I was saying, you would have thought that he was speaking with the enemy. I'm sure that he saw me as an agent of dark forces. At best he thought that I was lucky to have survived my contact with the Eastern traditions for so long without having become hopelessly lost. We talked for about an hour or so. At the beginning of our conversation he suggested that later we might have a cup of tea together. Sadly, it never happened. I think that he was happy to see me off the premises as quickly as possible. On my way out I picked up a leaflet for the monastery's public retreat program. The titles, which touched upon such things as spiritual warfare, bloodlines and dealing with the enemy in the New Age, read like something that you might expect to hear on a David Icke tour, not a programme from the Roman Catholic Church. Where are these people at?

Ram, the crossing of our paths in Tiruvannamalai five years ago was to lead me to an understanding that effectively ended my search to experientially validate the self. In our very first conversation together, in answer to a question which I put to you concerning knowledge and the experience of the self, you explained that if this is a non-dual reality, then that which we are experiencing all the time can be none other than the self. While that statement seemed obvious, it was something that

previously for some reason I had overlooked. When the non-dual relationship between experience and the self was pointed out to me, it seemed that the missing piece of the jigsaw had been found.

Since that time I have contemplated the significance and authenticity of that understanding and the influence that it has had on my life. There is no doubt that its influence has been significant. This knowledge has now become firmly established in me, and its light is the guiding principle in my life. The desire for a confirming inner experience no longer pressures me, and the inclination to search in that direction seems to have been cancelled by the experience of knowledge. My position now is such that if a non-dual experience happens, it happens by the grace of God. If it doesn't happen, then so be it; it is still all the grace of God.

While the question of experience and the self seemed to have been laid to rest, recently it has again entered my consciousness. Perhaps it has come about through the need for me to have intellectual clarity if ever a situation was to present itself where I might be called upon to convey my understanding to others. The question that keeps returning is whether or not this knowledge is authentic or merely a conceptual understanding resulting from an intellectual deconstruction of a personal sense of self. While it is true that this understanding has come through intellectual enquiry, it is experienced as a simple recognition that we are not this body-mind-ego entity. There seems to be an acceptance of this truth within me that requires no further verification. But could this position simply be an intellectual trap that obstructs the seeking of a direct apprehension of that truth? There are many who would suggest that it is. You have said that our epiphanies confirm that there is only one self. But in the absence of an epiphany, an experience, how are we able to confirm that our understanding is authentic and not just simply a belief?

A few days ago I watched a TV interview with Shanti Mayi. During the interview I was interested to hear your name mentioned. She said that you had been her teacher and the person who first introduced her to India. That journey to India would eventually lead her to Rishikesh where she was to meet her master. The account that she gave of that first meeting with him suggested to me that she recognised it as being something more than simply the outcome of random events. A feeling of coming home was, I think, how she described it. The programme caused me to reflect on our first meeting, its significance and where, if anywhere, I go from here.

The title of Shanti Mayi's talk was "In Our Hearts We Know." That statement is one that I find most aptly describes my own experience. It seems to speak a simple truth, an understanding that says that alone is enough. However, she does go on to speak about a defining experience. Describing that experience, she said that the universe pretty much turned inside out and that something happened that never changed.

So, what to make of it all?

Once when discussing experience I remember you saying that the value of experience is in the knowledge that can be gained from that experience. It is self-evident that the knowledge of an object is the experience of the object through sense perception. The senses are the means of knowledge, and the knowledge is direct. But in the case of knowledge of the self, does the means of knowledge, the *shabda pramana*, actually reveal direct knowledge of the self through the removal of ignorance or does it by its use of logic and inference drawn from our perception and experience of life seduce us into accepting a belief? I had assumed that through the

teachings of Vedanta the ignorance that clouds our knowledge of the self could be removed by purely rational and logical means, but the more I look into this assumption the more uncertain I am that it is true. The basic tenet of Advaita on which all else rests states that that reality is non-dual. While this statement appeals to my sense of logic and seems reasonable to believe, as far as I can see it rests solely on the authority and testimony of the teacher or scripture and cannot be known empirically. Again, I am compelled to ask the question whether or not the claims of Vedanta can be validated without a confirming experiential insight. This question, however, is contrary to the logic of Vedanta, which states clearly that experience is not the correct means of knowledge for the self. Here again I'm back into a circular argument and I can't get out of the loop.

This having been said, there are many things that Vedanta points out that cannot be disputed. It makes perfect sense, for example, to say that the self is that which experiences, and that it can't experience itself, because it is the self. We can assume to know this to be true even though we can't experience it. Given that assumption, it does indeed bring to an end the search for epistemological knowledge, as there is simply nowhere else for the mind go. But while that does appear to tell me something about my self, or my consciousness, it doesn't demonstrate the case for consciousness in general and whether or not, for example, consciousness is one, and that it precedes matter. I'm sure that a biologist would argue that there are as many consciousnesses as there are sentient beings. But that, like everything else, can never be anything more than just a belief.

At the age of twenty-three this existential question forced itself to the forefront of my attention, precipitating an internal debate the intensity of which hitherto I had never experienced. Its persistence was such that I had no option other than to address its demands for an answer. The question presented itself in a religious form and it was relentless in that it went on day and night for several weeks. At that time I had only known a few people whom I considered seriously religious. Those I had known were mostly proselytising Christians who seemed to me to have compromised their intelligence, if not their common sense. Having a healthy fear of not wanting to fall in with that crowd, I made a resolve to keep a record of each twist and turn in my spiritual journey, an intelligent road map, as it were, which I might refer to if ever I came to profess a particular view or religious dogma that might be challenged as being dubious. In some manner I have maintained that record, perhaps not on paper but certainly in my head. While there has been nothing on that journey that as far as I can see has been irrational or contrary to intelligence, at the same time my spiritual understanding cannot be explained purely in rational terms. In one sense it appears to have happened over the course of time without me being able to say exactly how, when or why it happened. It seems that one's spiritual life just seems to deepen the more one pays attention to it. It is the same with my understanding of the non-dual vision which Advaita presents. At some point you realise that you have it without being able to define exactly how you got it. And once that understanding is in your head, you know that you are never going to get it out again.

Whenever these deep questions arise, each of us attempts to answer them by the means that are available to us. Some are predisposed to intellectual enquiry, others are not. However, it seems that regardless of the orientation that we have to the spiritual, each of us in our own way first has to satisfy our own intellect. Even spirituality in its most devotional form, first of all has to make sense to those who decide to practise it. There will be some of course in whom this isn't true, but it is generally understood by those who are educated that belief without some

intellectual understanding is credulity.

But is not this way of approaching things something that is peculiar to modern life? In the pre-modern world the limitation of intellect was well understood. Was it not myth and ritual that led to knowledge of the mystery of existence through the experience of that mystery? If we accept this, then the only purpose of intellectual enquiry in regards to the self can be to bring that mode of enquiry to an end by realising its own limitation. I'm sure that Vedanta would not disagree with this. But to accept as a solution the authority of scripture without the truth of that scripture being confirmed by experience, in a modern world is always going to be difficult to sell. Even if we speak of scripture in terms of *sruti*, it's hard to see how its origins could be attributed to anything other than the human faculties of intellect and experience.

We can of course take the teachings on faith, or *shradda*. As you have pointed out, this is not to be understood as blind faith, but something by which the truth of the teaching, though its practise can be testified to by our experience of it. In fact, is this not the way that all religions work or should work, not by the intellectual assent to a set of propositions, but by living in a manner and with an attitude of mind as prescribed by the teachings of that religion, thereby discovering the truth inherent in its doctrines? The question then to be asked of course is, does that doctrine through its practise simply become self-fulfilling? I think that it probably does. However, I'm not sure whether or not it really matters. The more I look, the less I am convinced that there is any such thing as objective knowledge. If the teaching removes our sense of separation from our source, is it not simply pointing to an understanding which, contrary to what science would have us believe, is really common sense?

Well, Ram, my letter appears to have meandered well away from what started out as a simple hello and brief update. It has evolved into a plethora of rhetorical questions and a statement of where I appear to be at this particular junction in time. I apologise if I have gone on for far too long. But whilst writing this letter it has become increasingly apparent to me of a need to clarify in my own mind that which I may only have assumed to have understanding of. I think that the written word can sometimes best aid this exercise. I like to talk and explore ideas in conversation, but committing one's thoughts to paper does necessitate a more weighed consideration of that which one is attempting to express.

While it has been helpful for me to present these concerns in the form of a letter, having digressed so far from its original intent, I had wondered in the end whether I should refrain from actually sending it. However, in order that I might benefit from any guidance that you may be able to offer concerning the issues that I have raised, after some consideration I decided that I should proceed with it. I hope that you don't mind.

So, where do I stand with all this?

I know, but what do I know? The more that I look at this question, the only thing it seems that I can be certain of is that I know, and not what I know. I can say that I know that I am. All else appears to be a construct.

Prior to our first meeting, and several years before I had even heard of *jnana yoga* or a path of knowledge, I used to attend a local *satsang*. The group could be described as loosely Buddhist and firmly orientated towards what I would later come to understand as the experiential view of enlightenment. Within this group I regularly

argued in favour of knowledge and wisdom as having a value worthy of consideration. I suggested that one could spend one's life in anticipation of a non-dual experience that might never happen, while wisdom resulting from knowledge gained from self-reflection and discrimination was something that could, from my experience, be worked towards. Also, from my observation of some who claimed to have experiential knowledge, I had concluded that experience and wisdom are not always commensurate.

If true objective knowledge is a fallacy and experience is unreliable, then perhaps it is in terms of wisdom that we should be speaking rather than experience and knowledge. Carl Jung once said that the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally unsolvable. They can never be solved, they are only outgrown. Wisdom could be said to be the recognition of the truth of that statement and an indication that the question is no longer relevant to our spiritual understanding. With wisdom we are able to acknowledge with deep reverence the mystery that is the source of our being. It also enjoins us to live with gratitude within that mystery. I really can't see what more one can do other than to follow its dictates.

But even here, though I might extol wisdom and its virtues, I still have a sense that it is something of a consolation for experience, particularly when one hears statements such as "the universe pretty much turned inside out" and that "something happened that never changed." It is not difficult to feel that something is missing when one listens to people like Shanti Mayi.

When I turn my mind to the vastness of the cosmos, what I can say with certainty is that there is not one molecule in my body that did not exist on day one of the so-called Big Bang. Also, no person of intelligence can deny that the inanimate matter that comprises the universe, through our consciousness, is aware of itself. If I simply contemplate these facts alone, I am left in awe. So much so, that my spiritual orientation begins to look more *bhakti* than *jnana*. That I am that cannot be disputed. A deeper insight would be that I am that by which that is known. But does this knowledge satisfy my existential problem? If my experience is still one of separation, then the answer must be no.

Yesterday I went for a walk along the canal path. It was a beautiful autumn afternoon. The sun was soft and warm and the air still. The water reflected perfectly the colourful narrow boats moored alongside the canal bank, and the quietness of the idyllic scene was broken only by the joyful sound of children playing in the distance and the occasional bird passing high above. As I sat on a bench watching and listening, the mind was still; nothing was desired nor was anything rejected. It was the closest that I could imagine to perfect mental equanimity. Yet even in this state, or perhaps especially because of this state, the sense of separation was palpable. It was as though the abyss could not be crossed, and that the only escape from this feeling of separation was to forget oneself by retreating back into the distraction of activity or into sleep. It is little wonder that people in general try their utmost to avoid this existential question; it can lead to a dark place.

So, Ram, what would you suggest... *deeksha* or *ayahuasca*?

A *bhikkhu* friend with whom I have been speaking recently says that my experience is simply an insight at one particular level. He suggests that I return to my meditation practice. Perhaps he is right. But while meditation might deliver a myriad of interesting experiences, its practise as a means to experientially realise the self

no longer makes any sense to me. And not only that, just the thought of all that cross-legged sitting again... I think that I'd sooner go back to work, LOL.

Perhaps we'll get to meet up again later this year. I hope so.

As always, Ram, best wishes.

Ram: Lovely to hear from you. You probably shouldn't listen to people like Shanti unless they give a reasonable explanation for "inside-out." The *Gita* speaks that way in this verse: "What is day for a wise man is night for a worldly man." But what Shanti implies by her statement is not what is meant. Mind you, I am not criticizing Shanti. She is a lovely person. I am criticizing so-called spiritual teachers who use their experiences to justify themselves as teachers. The verse is speaking of knowledge and ignorance, not a particular experience that somehow solves all problems. I think Greg is just bored and wants something meaningful to do. The mind does not do well without a noble endeavor. In any case Shanti's whole teaching, which is nothing but her own experience, and which it seems is primarily used by her, in the absence of a proper teaching, to make her look enlightened and burnish her credentials as a teacher, creates dissatisfaction. Instead of pointing to the non-dual nature of experience, it makes one want to experience something special and life-transforming, and distracts one from the reason for the desire to experience enlightenment, which is not experiential. You are the self and you are always experiencing it because that is all there is. Investigate the location of experience and you will see that you are always present and that experience, spiritual or otherwise, is always in you. It is a known object, so while it is you, you are not it. And it can never validate you, because it is not conscious. Maybe you will find some clarity in Greg Goode's book *The Direct Path*. It is a series of exercises that show that you are always only experiencing yourself as awareness. I would say that it is indiscriminating to let that small dissatisfied voice within take your attention away from the fullness that you are.

Experience never ends because it is of the nature of the consciousness - which is eternal. Discrete experiences of the self always end. They never resolve the voice of incompleteness, except temporarily, because that voice is born of ignorance of the fullness of you. You say you know that you are. Next it is incumbent on you to determine what you are and what it means in terms of that apparent entity called Greg. I think Greg, the doer, is a bit restless without the obvious distractions that employment has to offer. You are the only authority on you. Scripture is meant to bolster your confidence in your completeness, until you no longer need it. Contemplating on your fullness can be augmented by rationally thinking through contemplated actions. Nothing you can do or any result that flows from an action can complete you, because you are there in your completeness prior to every action and its result.

There are a number of questions and statements that probably need to be answered in your letter. I suggest that you perhaps read the last few months of e-satsangs at the website and if you still have doubts, contact me. All the issues you raise are answered clearly and many times there. Everyone has the doubt you express. Maybe we can Skype sometime.

As for the wonder that is me, life is wonderful! I am having the time of my life. My wife and I are going to move to Spain next year - the last few years of travel engendered by the success of the book, website, etc. is more or less over. I am in

South Africa now, about to do a seminar in Cape Town, then two months in a nice flat on the beach at Durban, then off to India for a five-week Vedanta teaching. Eighty have signed up so far with two-plus months to go. After England it is house-hunting in Spain and a bunch of seminars in Europe. Maybe you can attend one just for fun and to have a chat. I don't come to England anymore. You are right about spirituality in England.

Anyway, I really mean it when I say that it is lovely to hear from you.

I woke up this morning thinking about your excellent letter, particularly the following phrase: "If my experience is still one of separation..." and thought I should offer this: experience, from Greg's point of view – which is caused by identifying with the body-mind – will always be one of separation. Non-duality is not experiential. It is simply knowledge. Knowledge is not intellectual. It is what is. What is non-dual, you – awareness. – includes duality as a subset. It is not in conflict with duality, the sense of separation. In fact there is no separation, but experientially it seems as if there is. If you see water on the desert you will not try to drink it even if you are thirsty if you know that it is mirage. The knowledge negates the experience of water and it loses its power to attract. Knowledge negates experience as something real, particularly the idea of experience that seems to have been triggered by the Shanti Mayi video. If you look more closely at the nature of your experience you will see that it is always one of non-duality – if you do not take the sense of separation, which after all is just a thought – to be real. It is born of ignorance of the nature of the self and will not be removed by a discrete experience of non-duality. It is perhaps lost on you that the implication of your statement is that for *moksa*, which is freedom from experience, not experiential freedom, duality should not be experienced. But when you identify with Greg, which is just an idea in you, and Greg's body and the idea that non-duality experiential, you will always experience duality. It is not undesirable. Ignorance of the nature of reality makes it seem undesirable. Duality is terribly funny – when you understand what non-duality is and how it relates to duality. It is not something to be experientially eliminated.

I have written a book – it is actually a collection of my best *satsangs* on knowledge and experience – that may help. It is in the shop at the website. It is an e-book that costs \$5.

Anyway, think about this and get back to me. I would like to hear your take on it. It is not unusual for enlightened people like yourself to have doubts once they are enlightened. If you examine your own experience carefully, you cannot but help to accept the logic of Vedanta. It is impeccable.

~ Love, Ram

Greg: Hi, Ram. It was good to hear from you. Thanks for your helpful, excellent and speedy reply.

As I mentioned in my letter, by the end of the writing of it I had been hesitant to actually send it on account of its length and ramblings. However, I am extremely glad that I eventually decided to do so.

Until recently my understanding regarding the relationship between experience and the self felt solid, and I could speak about such things with a conviction that seemed to go beyond simply belief. As I explained previously, the desire for a discrete experience of the self no longer seemed to pressure me. I guess that when one

hears talk about things which appear to be completely outside of one's experience, then it is natural for questions to arise, and a re-check on one's own position seems necessary. As you rightly point out, it doesn't take much for that enquiry to turn into doubt. That tendency towards doubt is more so the case when one doesn't have direct access to a close and knowledgeable spiritual friend who can offer support.

James: Yes, indeed.

Greg: But, yes, of course, you are right. Greg is also an object appearing in consciousness. When you reminded me of the fact, everything fell back into place again. I couldn't believe how easily I had come to forget it in the first place; but it seems that I had. The teaching is very subtle, and the mind can be so easily knocked off-track.

I spent yesterday afternoon writing a detailed explanation on the way that I perceive things, a sort of personal study on subjective and objective knowledge. On returning to it this morning and reading once again what I had written, I thought to myself what absolute nonsense that is, and I swiftly consigned it to the recycle bin. I have generally prided myself on having a sharp and analytical mind, but this teaching of Vedanta is so damn clever that it renders one's own ideas completely to dust. As you rightly say, the logic is impeccable. It really is humbling. Anyway, glad to say that it looks like I am back with the programme again.

James: Cool. It didn't take much to get you there and you saved the price of a trip to South America and the cost of the ayahuasca.

Greg: I found your comment regarding Shanti interesting and helpful. Thanks for that. I'm amazed at how many people appear to be having non-dual experiences these days. A quick look around the internet and you find yourself tripping over them at every turn. It sometimes seems that virtually everyone in the spiritual world is having them, with the exception of Yours Truly.

James: Thank your lucky stars, Greg. *Isvara* evidently doesn't think you need them. And as I never tire of point out, they just set up a craving for more. What is the point? There is not one experiential qualification listed in the whole of Vedanta. Almost every major text makes a point right at the beginning that the self is not available for objectification. At least half of the people who realize who they are have never had one.

Greg: You are absolutely correct about Greg's state of boredom. I confess that it is an issue and I am glad that you have brought it up. This question of boredom is something that, if you recall, we have spoken about previously. However, to my mind it never really got satisfactorily resolved. Yes, it is true that without a noble endeavour the mind does not do well. I guess that we are back to the "genie and the pole" story again. It is one that I often think about and there is no doubt an undeniable truth in it. The only difficulty that I have with this is in how it relates to someone who is self-realised. I would have imagined that the life of such a person would be self-satisfying. While they may choose to undertake some activity, they

would not, I should have thought, have had the need to fill their lives with activity, noble or otherwise, in order to avoid boredom and the consequential unhappiness which that state tends to produce. But perhaps I am completely wrong about this.

James: You are not right. A self-realized person is just someone who has stopped seeking to know his or her self. The mind is still the mind and the ego is still the ego, and if you don't keep them entertained, they will get bored. So if you want them to be happy you need to find them something worthwhile to do. I keep James quite busy. It is best for him. Speaking as James, I just kept developing my knowledge and the ability to communicate it. It is very satisfying insofar as it is completely in harmony with *Isvara's* will. You are a beautiful writer. You should write your story.

Greg: Uncertainty about this matter is something that does at times engender doubts in my mind regarding the authenticity of my own understanding. It is a question that certainly needs resolving. Perhaps you might be able to shed some light on this matter, Ram? It would be much appreciated.