

Fed up with Epiphanies

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Cedric: Hi, James. I have given up on *karma yoga*; I can't do it, it feels artificial and I just get agitated. If I focus on self-knowledge practice and not give a damn about whether my attitude to work is "pure" or not, the day goes better. *Jnana yoga* is all I can handle, and so be it.

James: Well, Cedric, *karma yoga* is actually *jnana yoga* insofar as a non-attached attitude will be there automatically when you understand that the doer is not responsible for the results – assuming he or she has done the actions connected with a given situation in an appropriate and timely fashion. If you are trying to maintain a certain attitude without this understanding, you are right to give up the practice. It won't work.

Cedric: I have no interest in epiphanies; they are just objects in awareness, and I'm fed up with them. I don't get the flashy ones, just mini ones, knowledge-based, but ultimately just "things." I had one that bugged the hell out of me; for a while it was complete, vivid, I knew I was the self with utter, total, super-clear certainty. It happened for a few seconds during lunch break and I then had to go back to the grubby normality of the office. Okay, the lesson is that everything, subtle or otherwise, is just an object in consciousness. However, humanly it left a mark for a while, and not a nice one.

James: That everything is an object in consciousness is certainly one conclusion to be drawn, but "I am self" is the essence of the message. This is what Vedanta says also. The next step is to work out the implications of this knowledge in terms of one's daily life. If you had worked out the implied meaning, it would have left a very nice mark. It didn't, because you interpreted it incorrectly. You associated the knowledge with the epiphany and when it ended, the certainty with reference to your identity ended. Had you known that the "I" is unaffected by objects you would not have been irritated when you returned to the office since it is just another object.

Cedric: It may help build a good *vasana* but the vestiges of the memory were a thorn in the side. A zero-sum game it is. Usually, detachment kicks in immediately or quite quickly, but this one annoyed the hell out of me for a while.

James: Maybe the vestiges left a thorn in your side because you expected it to last. If you know that the epiphanies are just containers for the knowledge they should not leave a bad taste. It seems you really did get the knowledge. I don't know for sure, but I am starting to suspect that you really do know who you are but that you are not completely confident in the knowledge.

What are the implications of self-knowledge? Knowing who you are does not mean that Cedric and Cedric's *vasanas* need to be in harmony with who you are. It takes time for Cedric to catch up with what you know. Cedric, the intellect, is a reflection of

you in *maya*.

One of the last obstacles to freedom is the idea that Cedric, the experiencer, should experience things differently when he knows who he is. But it is not Cedric that knows. It is you, the self, who knows. And the self is always detached. You are the awareness of Cedric and what he experiences. The experiences – subjective and objective – are the result of actions done before you knew, actions that will fructify. It is called *prarabha karma*. I am not trying to flatter you or schmooze you, but I think you are a lot closer to what you seek than perhaps you believe. I think the irritation you experienced is a result of the environment, nothing else. If I was in that environment I would undoubtedly respond to the environment in the same way because my fundamental values are different from the values of the workplace. It is quite natural to respond that way.

Every situation in *samsara*, even the most apparently conducive, produces friction. I recently got married, for example, and several women who think of me as some kind of spiritual saint (or expect me to be one – although I cannot understand why saints can't marry and love their wives) got pissed off at me, as if I somehow let them down. One, who I care for a lot and who I have been teaching for 12 years, got downright nasty. And did Jim's mind like it? It did not. It pissed me off. I am still a bit irritated a few weeks later, but I don't mind the irritation. I love these people. I have served them well and when I do something that I want for myself, they get pissed off? What does what I do on my own time have to do with the teaching, assuming, of course that I am not molesting little boys or sticking up gas stations with handguns? I see Jim's irritation as totally the right response. It has nothing to do with me as awareness and that is why I have sympathy for my ego and the slings and arrows that it sometimes has to suffer owing to this particular role that it plays. It is just part of having an apparent presence in a flawed and apparent reality.

Cedric: I can also use the so-called “awareness watching awareness” approach and this can trigger experiential insights/mini-epiphanies, but I don't trust it, it's kind of mechanical.

James: Experience is not to be trusted. It never remains the same. Only you remain the same in every experience, spiritual or otherwise.

Cedric: On the other hand, seeing thoughts and feelings as objects in consciousness can lead to a kind of spaciousness which seems more genuine and there is a realisation that everything plays out as a game, and it kind of feels that this approximates to the self's “view,” so to speak. But is this going to solidify into knowledge?

James: This is the knowledge, Cedric. You are the “space” in which thoughts and feeling appear. You, the seer, accommodate them. This is why I think you are free, but haven't quite accepted it. The knowledge that you express in the paragraph above is self-knowledge. There are other ways to formulate it, but this is as good as any other way because all the teaching boil down to the distinction between the subject and the objects coupled with the understanding that the subject contains the objects – in this case Cedric and his subjective world – and not the other way around. Cedric and Cedric's mind cannot fit you into it. It does not work.

Cedric: Even with the “I am awareness” approach, isn’t that type of thought ultimately a rarified object in the mind and something that will have to dissipate in order for pure knowledge/awareness to actuate?

James: Yes and no. Your attachment to the idea will dissipate, but the idea will stay as a reflection of the truth in your intellect. Or not. It will not be there all the time, maintained by effort, but it will be there like your name is there, in the background but readily available should you need it for a particular situation.

Cedric: Fed up studying, fed up listening to *satsangs*. I have no big questions and I don’t think there are any huge, crushing *vasanas* but ignorance seems endless; it just reinvents itself.

James: Great. The spiritual search has or is ending. Here is something to think about: If you know you are ignorant, are you ignorant?

Cedric: I don’t know what else to do. Self-enquiry confers a kind of ineffable, subtle knowing, and a significant level of peace and smoothens the average day, but I feel like someone with a rifle shooting at an armoured tank, and you know that the tank ain’t gonna be inconvenienced by a rifle.

James: See the reply above. You don’t have to kill it. It is already dead. It is known by you. You are free of it. Let it be. Your spiritual seeking is over. This email may just tidy up the last bits in your understanding. Don’t do anything about anything. You are quite fine as you are.

Cedric: There is damn all else that interests me at a deep level. I will be spending a few days in a Catholic monastery for a bit of a rest for body and mind, and I hope there are no bloody epiphanies, of any size; I will read escapist fiction and have enjoyably heretical discussions with a free-thinking monk.

James: Good for you, Cedric. Let the spiritual thing be. It is over. I understand what you mean now about *karma yoga*. You are right to let it go as you understood it.

Again, I apologize for not getting back to you sooner. This is perhaps the most important email you have sent. I love it. I promise to be more prompt with the next one. Things are easing off a bit.

~ Love, James