

Got It, Finally

Ram (James Swartz)

2013-04-16

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/398>

Tom: Dear Ramji, every object and experience, subtle or gross, pleasant or unpleasant, seems real. I, the witnessing awareness, alone am real. This is how I have been living since your last email.

I realise that I had been unconsciously influenced by the following thoughts/unconscious habits of mind:

1. I applied my work attitude in trying to understand WHY. When someone is sick, if we can backtrack to the WHY, the sickness can be cured. So in my previous long email I backtracked through my mistakes to try to understand WHY I made those mistakes. As you said, it is a fruitless enquiry. I have dropped it. Sorry to have made you go through that report so carefully. I didn't mean for you to do that and just wanted to ventilate/present my backtracking and conclusion!!

Ramji: It's fine, Tom. I am very thorough and go through every email carefully. It is true that in *samsara* you can sometimes find the causes of things but you can never find the cause of *samsara*, apart from ignorance. It is causeless, beginningless, *anadi*. So you just have to know what ignorance is in terms of your mind so you can deal with it. The way you deal with it is to discriminate *satya* and *mithya*, i.e. take a stand in awareness as awareness. The texts make it clear that there is no why as far as *maya*, i.e. *samsara*, is concerned. You just have to be willing to accept it. You can only know for certain what is real, i.e. yourself. You don't have to hunt for you. You are not the effect of something else, hidden away from yourself, except by ignorance. When you get that it is you there is always a sense of sheepishness, foolishness and sometimes downright embarrassment that you could have wasted so much time trying to find what you had all along – you, the tenth man. The basic problem is thinking that your name refers to something other than awareness. The name gets associated with objects, i.e. behaviors, when you are indiscriminating and you live as a dream person from then on.

Tom: 2. I clung to a thought about *mithya*. Swami Dayananda, in one of his talks, said that the English language does not have a translation for *mithya*. I assumed it must therefore be difficult to understand.

James: The word itself is not the issue. The issue is the meaning of the word. It takes more than one other word to explain the meaning of a word. It takes a whole web of words to contextualize the meaning of a word. Once the meaning is clear you can use any word you like. The word "apparent" is perfectly fine. You only need a few examples to understand what apparent means: the blue sky, a mirage, etc. From that point on you are just looking for examples of a mirage in your own thinking. It is a mirage to think "I think, I feel, I do." Vedanta is very simple, very practical. It is a very sophisticated means of knowledge in the sense that there are many *prakriyas* with elegant and breathtaking logic but all of them boil down to the same thing: separating awareness from the objects. People who don't understand this think they have to understand Vedanta as a means and get lost in it, never

finding the forest for the trees. It only takes one *prakriya*, properly understood and applied, to set you free. In a way happiness, success, is a problem as far as *moksa* is concerned. I call it stuck in *sattva*. When you get to a certain level you tend to lose your interest in *moksa*. You are happy, what's better than that? Happiness is like an expensive new vehicle: it is fun driving it around, polishing it endlessly and talking about it with your friends. So it is easy to get sidetracked in Vedanta. It is the sleekest, sexiest, most powerful vehicle on the road. It is very fast – if you don't lose sight of your purpose. You think, "Why would I want to be free of me? I am pretty wonderful. I am intelligent, secure, healthy, etc. Life is great!" It's not the kiss of death, obviously, but it is easy to get sidetracked.

Tom: 3. My previous exposure to Vedanta has been to think of awareness in the third person: It. This became an ingrained attitude, which is probably connected to unworthiness or very difficult to understand. I didn't realise that understanding Vedanta correctly was so simple and direct. The sad thing is much of Vedanta today is still being taught in the third person as "It" and not me, even in Chinmaya Mission. It is still being described as difficult to get, meant for a few whose *karma* is right, when the mind has been purified of all *vasanas*, and even the *Gita* is quoted to support that view.

James: Yes, indeed. Treating the self as an object, an it, is called "indirect" knowledge. Nothing wrong with it because direct knowledge is only possible for those who are qualified. But when it gets institutionalized it is really a hindrance. Swami Dayananda left Chinmayananda because of this issue. The distinction between knowledge and experience that he made in the pamphlet *The Teaching Tradition of Advaita Vedanta* was a declaration of war on Chinmaya's Modern Vedanta.

Most people do not understand Dayananda's contribution to the Vedanta *sampradaya*. It is huge. He is a modern Shankara. Chinmaya was perhaps more influential in a certain way than Dayananda and more traditional in one sense but less so in another – it is a long story and I haven't the inclination to go into it – but the *sampradaya* needs cleansing from time to time, particularly since Vivekananda muddied the waters with his New Vedanta. I am going about Dayananda's work with gusto although some of his disciples think I am corrupting Vedanta because I don't teach in the traditional style. But the *sampradaya* is the logic of the teaching, not a particular style. There is always a sense of arrogance with purists, traditionalists. Actually, I have had tremendous success because I have more confidence in seekers than the traditionalists. If they come to me I know it is the self coming, not a neophyte, and I know that the self can understand itself so I teach it directly. If the self has to go back and do some *sadhana* once it knows, so what? It has to do something insofar as it exists in the apparent reality. It is a lot easier to deal with your stuff when you are the self than when you think you aren't.

Knowledge is not a goal. It is what is. It is a means. It is always present and practical. Even if you don't have confidence in it, it works. The self in the form of the ego will do what has to be done backed by the bliss of knowledge minus the feeling "I don't know" if it has the knowledge. You can only get so prepared with *sadhana*. Then you need a direct teaching. The monastic tradition is great but it is also not that great because there is always an element of paternalism operating in institutions: "There, there, Papa knows best, do your *japa*, meditate every day, say your prayers and read the good book... be a good little seeker and get all the knowledge and you will

get enlightened one fine day. Have faith. We will guide you. Not to worry.” It is good and it works but it is a long, hard slog, a grunt. And you can get sidetracked. It is a shame that Dayananda has backed off on the knowledge and experience *prakriya* in recent years – although it is always implied in every teaching – and basically teaches *Isvara* these days to the masses but this happens when a tradition becomes traditional. You get a big crowd of beginners and you have to teach indirectly. *Isvara* is indirect knowledge aimed at getting the doer softened up so it is ready for direct knowledge. *Jiva Isvara aikyam* is direct knowledge. There is nothing wrong with direct or indirect knowledge. Both are valid, depending on the eligibility of the inquirer. But both imply something else – awareness – so there is no one answer, except that direct knowledge is *moksa*. Indirect knowledge is *yoga, sadhana*. Both Chinmaya and Dayananda understood that. So you could get *moksa* from either. *Jnanis* have different temperaments and goals.

Tom: 4. I was waiting for that flash of recognition, that “Aha!” experience which has been described by some teachers, including Vedanta teachers. I was waiting for an experience and didn’t realise it. Instead, there was a gradual recognition: “I am real, everything else seems real.”

James: Good on you, Tom! I thought you knew who you were from early on in our conversations and I could not understand why you were going on like you were. You were a victim of lack of discrimination between knowledge and experience. It does not get any better experientially than it is at any given moment. In the second chapter of the *Gita* Krishna makes it clear that there are many erroneous notions of enlightenment, the experiential notion being the most pernicious. That craving for experience dies hard. It only really dies when you are satisfied with who you are – however you see yourself.

Tom: Life is simpler and easier now. I just stand as awareness and see Creation – the rocks, plants, animals, etc. – and my little creation, i.e. all my experiences, as “seems” real. It is like being in the waking state and understanding that the dream was just a dream, seems real, and not to be taken seriously as really real. Yes, it is a liberation from Tom. I remain myself, awareness, real.

My mind is more settled and it is easier to deal with *vasanas*, desires and fears. They are getting less powerful. I now directly understand freedom and am enjoying it. My meditations are different, easier and restful. It is an opportunity to be myself by myself before being myself in action. I am truly happy.

Thank you so much for your patience. If roles had been reversed I would not have been as patient!!!

See you in Tiruvannamalai.

~ Much love, Tom