

Is Self-Knowledge Enough?

Ram (James Swartz)

2012-08-24

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/474>

When we listen to the teachings, we often get the idea that self-realization is the goal and the final liberation. And while in its absolute sense that may be true, our daily lives are not always in harmony with our understanding of who we truly are.

Even after the recognition that we are whole and complete, actionless, ordinary awareness we may still find ourselves bogged down with unresolved life issues. Relationship issues, financial issues and health issues may linger long after we know who we are. People stay in dysfunctional relationships where the aliveness has long disappeared and only persist by the force of comfort, stability or habit. Struggles with looking for financial security and their associated fears continue. Or we look to others to be emotionally taken care of. Fears of disease, despair with chronic conditions and concerns about the future may plague people who have been with the teachings for a long time. Somehow recognizing yourself as awareness does not automatically resolve all unpleasant issues. Why?

The Difference Between Self-Realization and Self-Actualization

These problems come from the “not-self.” Understanding it at this point takes on an unprecedented importance. Vedanta goes to great lengths to analyze different layers of the not-self, which is made up of sheaths (*koshas*), to help us instantly recognize them for what they are and not be enamored of them. Classical texts such as *Tattva Bodha* devote more time to analysis of the five sheaths and the three bodies (*shariras*) than to direct assertions about the nature of self.

Being able to look at your issues, your unhealed tendencies, is a prerequisite for self-actualization, the life that expresses the non-dual realization in daily experience. While the dessert of spiritual life, the beauty of awareness – the self – is so attractive and fulfilling, it is the recognition of the non-substantial nature of life problems that frees us to live in harmony with the nature of the self (*dharma*). This is accomplished by discriminating between the light of awareness – the self – from its shadow – the apparent, or “not-self.”

Self-Realization Does Not Automatically Erase All Vasanas

Even after self-realization we observe persistent *vasanas* – hidden, i.e. unconscious, tendencies – manifesting themselves as desires and aversions. Those that do not bind us to action are harmless and need not concern us. Whether you like vanilla or chocolate does not tie you to the wheel of *samsara*. But some may severely affect your life. They may keep you persisting in situations that do not support peace of mind – or even actively distract you from it.

Recognition of such *vasanas* is an important step toward neutralizing them. Working according to the principles of *karma yoga*, being guided by understanding rather by emotional reactivity, is the key to harmonizing our life according to *dharmic* principles.

Understanding the Value of *Mithya*, the Apparent Reality

The dazzling shine of the self may be so attractive it makes it difficult for us to turn toward and examine the emptiness of the apparent reality, the everyday world we live in. We are often satisfied, at least for a time, not to touch the shadowy world of appearances, because it requires diligent work and does not bring up good feelings. It may feel a bit like doing “dirty work.” Because it is an unnerving feeling, we shy away from it. We forget the lesson of the *Gita*, to be a fearless warrior in the service of *dharma*. We withdraw at the thought of facing our partner with truth. We run away from honest work and look for handouts. We avoid going to a doctor when it is appropriate – or the opposite – we become compulsively preoccupied with healthy foods and other “healthy” practices to keep from looking at the root of the problem: dismissing the apparent reality of our lives because they are “only apparent.” We think we are beyond all that because the apparent reality – our everyday lives – are not “the truth.”

But we are not enlightened until our lives are enlightened. So we need to take the teachings of the five sheaths and the three bodies seriously, not just pass over them in pursuit of some kind of transcendental enlightenment. Self-realization is one thing, but living according to the *dharma* of our true nature with a devotional self-actualized mind open requires hard and fast knowledge of the apparent reality and how it relates to the radiant self “beyond.”

~ Paul Badhur