

Managing Daily Life after Awakening

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Kumar: How does one manage your daily life after the awakening experience?

James: Same as before, Kumar, but happily. *Karma* is *karma*. It does not know what you are thinking and feeling. The knowledge “I am awareness and not the experiencing entity” should produce a happy, dispassionate state of mind that allows you to enjoy daily life. The likes and dislikes will still come up, but they will be seen for what they are and taken as *prasad*. You will not indulge them, because you will know that there is nothing to gain.

If you are thinking of this as an “awakening experience” you are going to be somewhat disillusioned, I think, because it is just knowledge – unless the “awakening” experience you are talking about is a consequence of hard and fast self-knowledge. If it is, then you are free to manage daily life as you see fit. The essence of this knowledge is that you are free of experience and the experiencer, so daily life can be anything you want. However, it is wise to just run off your *prarabdha* and allow it to slowly exhaust. Why should anything change now that you are no longer Kumar? Any problem that belongs to him belongs to him, not to you.

Kumar: I really feel like I need to take a month or so to just enjoy being consciousness.

James: The trick is to enjoy being consciousness in the midst of your daily life. However, the desire to take a month off is natural when you realize who you are. I took my whole life off because the completeness I felt – and still feel forty-some years on – never left, because it is the result of hard and fast knowledge.

Kumar: I also have this strong desire to be alone and just abide in awareness.

James: This is natural. There is still, however, a bit more understanding to be gained. You say, “abide in awareness.” This means that you are still looking at it from the experiencer’s point of view. For complete non-experiential *moksa* you need to be able to say, “abide in awareness AS awareness.” The first statement is indirect knowledge, the second direct. Only direct knowledge will set you free. Now it is a relief that you are not Kumar and therefore he feels free. Next you have to take a stand “in” awareness AS awareness. When you can say, “as awareness,” there are no rules and there is no *karma*, no daily life to deal with. “Daily life” is seen for what it is, a concept in you, and you are free to treat it any way you want.

Kumar: Does this go away after a while?

James: Probably not if the knowledge of who you are is firm. It is implied by the

knowledge. If the knowledge is firm then you will patiently adjust your life to accommodate this feeling, not let your life constrain it. If you see this as just another experience, then the feeling of aloneness – which is the experience of the self AS the self – will probably disappear. And you will long to have it back because aloneness is the nature of the self. There is only one self. It is always alone. This is a good thing. It is not loneliness.

Kumar: The reason I ask is, in my line of work I might be able to take a week off, but one month is probably beyond my ability.

James: You have to think long-term when you wake up in the middle of a *samsaric* life. Take a week off. It may be that you can see daily life as yourself, in which case you will not need to take any time off. Or if you can't then you will have to plot your escape. This kind of dispassion is natural when you realize you are not the experiencing entity.

Kumar: I am happy just being awareness, but I do have a family to support, and make a living.

James: See how you can eliminate the “but.”

Kumar: In your book there is no mention of the heart/soul that is found in ecstatic Bhakti and Sufi traditions. I understand that self-knowledge is paramount in any traditional path, but how come Advaita does not have a heart component to it?

James: Vedanta is all heart and only heart, Kumar. The subtle body is the soul, and when it understands that it is the self it loves the self heart and soul. The self is the heart. It is love, *parama prema svarupa*. You are love. Love is simply consciousness, what you put your attention on. You take care of your family because you love them. Your seeking is the highest form of love because it culminates in self-knowledge. You seek because you love yourself and you want to know yourself as the freedom that you are. You are thinking of *bhakti* as a special feeling. It is just *jnanam*, self-knowledge. If the knowledge is firm and clear you cannot help but love everyone and everything. *Bhakti* is not something you do, a particular experience. It is what you are. Look around. You will see that everything is love, even the things that do not look like love. Two people who don't like each other try to communicate because beneath the surface they love themselves and each other.

Kumar: Or is it possible that any expression of the path I chose to follow is okay as long as I understand I am awareness?

James: Yes, but you need to know that there is no path when you know you are awareness. The path is you. There is nothing to follow, nothing that leads anywhere but to you. You are everything that is. This means that the very idea of a path is just a thought appearing in consciousness manufactured out of you, consciousness. I started with “yes” and the “yes” means that as Kumar you are free to express yourself as you see fit, assuming such expression does not violate *dharma*, which it

won't if the knowledge is firm, because as the self you are *dharma*.

Kumar: How does one deal with the *vasanas* that still arise after awakening? I know you mentioned *karma yoga*, but are there other ways? Your unconscious tendencies drag you down.

James: You know they are just *vasanas* and that they cannot affect you, consciousness. If you are Kumar, who is the person who is addressing me in this email, they can drag you down. What to do? Practice the knowledge "I am whole and complete, actionless, ordinary, unborn, non-dual awareness." What does that mean? It means that you dismiss the fears and desires, the likes and dislikes - the *vasanas*, in short - as they arise by taking a stand in your true identity. If your self-knowledge is firm it will be easy to burn out your *vasanas* in a reasonable time. If not, you will have a protracted war on your hands. *Karma yoga* is just knowledge, a different way to formulate the knowledge. It is how the self handles *karma* when it is awake to its nature and finds itself in a human body.

Kumar: I liked the story in your book where you said you met an honest person who said that he awakened to the self 500 times. That makes me hopeful.

James: Good. The self is always present because it is you, so it is always available. You can reawaken to it over and over until you understand that you are it. Then there is no awakening. The self - you - cannot awake, because it never slept. Kumar, the experiencing entity, wakes up and goes back to sleep, as the case may be. Life is a funny drama.