

My Guru Is Wrong

Ram (James Swartz)

2012-12-14

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/574>

Mark: James, I am reading Chinmayananda's *Gita*, and the commentary coupled with yours is invaluable, yet he states many times the experience of the self – Chapter IV/31 – quote: “Such an integrated man can gain a greater inner poise in his meditation through which he can easily experience the infinite and eternal,” so if I am correct, this experience is still an object, so one's identity must become that so-called experience, and again, “vivid subjective experience of reality,” he mentions this a lot throughout. Anyway, James I am hard at it still enjoying, not to mention the peace of the self is palpable. I am preparing the *Gita* for a reading at the upcoming festival, so I am drowning in the beauty of it. Thank you again.

James: This is a very interesting question and a problem with Swamiji's teaching. Swami Dayananda parted company with him on this issue, and I agree with Swami Dayananda, not because Chinmaya did not understand that *moksa* is self-knowledge, but because of his emphasis on experience.

To be fair, in the statement he says, “in his meditation,” so he is naturally going to be speaking of experience. If he is going to speak of experience of the self, he should point out that you cannot experience it as an object. You can experience it as it reflects on the subtle body. The experience of peace you mention is an experience of the reflection of the self in your subtle body. The self is the knower of the reflection. It is not an experiencing entity. It is a non-experiencing witness. Self-experience is not useless. It is as helpful or detrimental as your ability to understand it with reference to your goal, i.e. *moksa*. Self-experience is valuable insofar as it purifies the mind. You keep your attention on the bliss, the peace, the light, and you do not act out the *vasanas* as they arise, so the mind gets quiet. It is unhelpful if it sets up a craving for more and convinces you that it can be made permanent.

While this emphasis on experience is misleading – and he knew it – Chinmaya was a master of psychology. I think he did it to suck the punters in, to get them doing *sadhana*, because he was committed to reviving Hindu culture – so that Vedanta would have cultural support in the future.

Let's face it, people are experience-hungry. They only think in experiential terms, so if you can get them to meditate and change their lifestyles, they will be prepared to receive the knowledge. So this is how you advertise. But it is a dangerous teaching because at some point you have to understand that experience will not do the trick and that if reality is non-dual you are always experiencing the self, and furthermore, if you are not happy with your experience it is due to the way you are looking at it, not to what you are experiencing.

I hate to say this, but this aspect of Chinmaya's teaching was a bit of a corruption. It classified him as a New Vedantin, à la Vivekananda. He was called a modern Vedantin. Most of what passes for Vedanta in the last century was New Vedanta. Swami Dayananda set the record straight, and I completely agree with him even though Chinmaya was my *guru*. It is ironic that for every Chinmaya “experience the self” statement there is a James statement, “the self cannot be experienced.”

I am not sure what you mean when you say "...so if I am correct, this experience is still an object, so one's identity must become that so-called experience."

James: The first phrase, "this experience is still an object," is correct. And the nature of experience itself is awareness, but the conclusion that one's identity must become that so-called experience is not right. One's identity is awareness, which is self-experiencing – no object required – and while any discrete experience is also the self, the self is not a discrete experience. It is awareness. The identity must become awareness, not a so-called experience.

Mark: Thank you for clearing that up. I knew you had an issue with Chinmayananda's teaching, but didn't know what it was about. It was lucky you escaped the experience model.

James: Yes, indeed.

Mark: One more question. You said somewhere that some self-realised ones have no inclination to purify their subtle body because of their non-dual understanding, so they have no interest in doing so. I think you mentioned it is in one of the texts. Would you mind elaborating on this, please? Also, you mentioned that Swamiji, when in Bombay, invited this *mahatma* with a *tamasic* body-mind to a gathering, and all he was interested in was filling his stomach, yet the power of his presence was such that almost everyone fell silent. Could you also speak on this? James, great you are there.

James: Freedom means freedom. You are free to purify or not or to go fishing. A *jnani* is the self, and the self (meaning not a person) is not a doer, so there is no he or she to purify anything. And from the point of view of the self everything is only the self anyway, so it is already pure. Purity is a concept that is useful if you are stuck in ignorance and want to work your way out. If not, not.

Mark: I have found the cause of my confusion from listening to Art give his talk on the eannagram, which I found helpful, but there were a few misleading things he said. Also, Marharshi said that you literally feel the current of awareness, and then he went on to say that spirituality or vibration is a felt experience, which is another word for the self. This, coupled with my reading of Chinmayananda's experiential bent, the statement that the mind must become one with the infinite, or the expression he uses, "experience of the eternal," caused me to deviate from the self. Now I understand that if it had been made clear that these experiences were a reflection of awareness in the subtle body, there would have been no confusion. You beautifully and succinctly re-informed my understanding that the palpable peace I was feeling or experiencing was only a reflection of awareness in my subtle body, and not self-realization.

Thank you again, lovely fellow, for your clarity.

James: Good. Now you understand. The experience or feeling of awareness is due to *sattva* in the subtle body. It is not proof of enlightenment. There are many verses,

maybe fifty, describing an “enlightened person,” and you will notice that not one talks about experience, only the person’s relationship to his or her mind and consequently to life “outside.” If any experiential statements are made, scripture talks in terms of bliss or peace. But worldly people experience bliss and peace in various degrees, so experience is no indicator of self-knowledge. *Jnanis* can also have terrible tempers – the *Puranic* literature is full of stories of dyspeptic *rishis*. *Moksa* is just steady self-knowledge. It is self-confidence. It transcends every feeling and emotion. If you want to feel good most of the time, cultivate *sattva*. Anyone, ignorant or enlightened, can do this.