

Not a Smart Ass, Part I

Ram (James Swartz)

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Ben: Dear James, thank you for your replies. I am not trying to be a “smart ass,” as Americans say. I have difficulty reconciling some points and am trying to understand them. I get ideas/thoughts and check them out with you to see if they are correct. I know some will be mistaken, but I have to test them out even at the expense of looking foolish. I have not had epiphanies, which are experiences. I have to work from ground zero, use my intellect and be clinical.

1. “No one is liberated or bound. You, awareness, are the one that knows the thought, ‘I am bound,’ and the thought, ‘I am liberated.’”

Isn't the problem that I, awareness, identify with the thought, “I am bound,” and become bound?

James: Yes, this is called *avidya*, self-ignorance.

Ben: That is why there is the effort towards liberation. The problem is identification, and the sense of being bound does exist to begin with. If I, awareness, always know both thoughts, then why bother with self-enquiry, since I am already free? Am I not correct?

James: Yes. The whole point of inquiry is to stop doing inquiry. It will stop when you know what it means to be awareness. It means that YOU are everything that needs to be known.

Ben: Also, if I am never bound I will always know myself as awareness. But that is not the case. I begin with complete ignorance of myself and have the sense of being bound. I have to work my way out and recognise myself as awareness.

James: That you are awareness is self-evident. You cannot work your way “out,” because you are not “in” anything but awareness. And you are in awareness AS awareness. All that is required is that you take a stand in awareness instead of taking a stand in Ben, in ignorance. Ben is not going to get it. When you, awareness, get it you will see that you were never Ben. You just identified with the Ben-thought. Ben is reflected awareness, the subtle body. It is not conscious, so it cannot understand anything.

Ben: Like any thought, both thoughts are objects. I, awareness, am aware of both thoughts AFTER I discover myself as awareness, the Timeless. Before recognition, under the influence of ignorance, I am identified and bound.

James: No. You cannot discover yourself as awareness. You are already awareness.

You are awareness prior to the discovery. You are the one that knows the thought, "I have not discovered myself as awareness." If you know this thought you have "discovered" yourself as awareness, although "discovered" is not the right word, because you have never not been awareness. You are the knower of the thoughts of identification and bondage as they appear in you.

Ben: 2. Your following statement supports this view that awareness does actually get bound: "It is always the one conscious awareness under the spell of ignorance - i.e. identified with the subtle body - that RE-cognizes itself."

I, awareness, identify and then I, awareness, have to de-identify. This identifying is not a seeming one, not "as though." When awareness identifies, it identifies, and not pretend to or seem to or "as though" identify. I, awareness, actually identify. The blindness of ignorance is present. That is why I suffer. Suffering from ignorance and identification does exist. It is not a seeming suffering. Ask any seeker, or ordinary person. It is my experience too; until a few years ago I was completely and utterly ignorant of myself as awareness.

James: This statement presupposes that the identification and the suffering are real. They are seeming sufferings because they come to an end. If they were real they would be permanent. For this statement to be true you have to take experience to be real. It exists, but it is not real.

Ben: It is only after recognising myself through knowledge that the whole event of ignorance and suffering is understood to be a seeming one, "as though" overcome by ignorance, "as though" bound. Now statement 1 above is applicable. Freed, I, awareness, know the thought, "I am bound," and the thought, "I am liberated." I realise they are thoughts and I am free of both thoughts. But only after "re-cognition." Am I correct?

James: Not exactly. What has to happen to get you to realize it? It seems to me that you already realize - meaning, understand - it. You just do not have confidence in the knowledge. Probably you want some kind of experiential confirmation. Does your use of the word "realisation" mean that you expect some kind of experiential confirmation of what you know? Your use of the word "event" is suspicious too. Does it imply an event that is tantamount to enlightenment?

Ben: James, you are a liberated being, hence you see both thoughts and communicate that when you reply.

James: You see both thoughts too, Ben. If you didn't you could not write about them. I am not confident as James. I am confident as awareness. There is no actual James. You are speaking with awareness.

Ben: For me, as a seeker who is enquiring, admitting I am bound to begin with makes sense because that is my experience: I am identified with the form and have the thought, "I am bound." Then I enquire, gain knowledge and become free. Then I realise the whole thing is "as though." But not till then. Am I correct?

James: Yes, theoretically, but no practically. Why allow this whole freedom business to depend on some kind of event that may never happen?

The problem is that you are starting from the wrong position. Why admit that you are bound? Why not admit that you are free and look at reality from that platform? You are free because you are awareness and if you think you are not awareness you are also free to think you are free. Why keep thinking you are bound and you need to do something about it? Ignorance does not require you to believe it.

The key to the problem is that you believe your experience. Experience is unreliable. It tells you are something other than what you are – the experiencing entity. It does not tell you that you are the non-experiencing entity. If it tells you that, then trust it because it is in harmony with scripture.

Ben: Currently, I have less ignorance and some knowledge, hence I am less bound than before and somewhat liberated. More needs to be done, but even this bit of recognition does give relief. Awareness bound and awareness liberated are not two awarenesses; being partless, it is the one awareness in two modes. It is similar to your next statement below (3).

James: That may be true, but you are not less or more aware than you have ever been. You are not more or less you than you have always been. See yourself as awareness, not as ignorant or with knowledge. If you are aware that you are ignorant, are you ignorant? Awareness is just that “part” of your experience that does not change. Are you aware that something in you has been there all along, irrespective of what has happened to your body and mind?

Ben: 3. “The problem is that there are two orders of non-dual reality: *satya*, pure awareness, and *mithya*, the objects appearing in it. They are both awareness, but they are not the same. Objects depend on awareness, but awareness does not depend on objects. Your thoughts depend on you, but you do not depend on your thoughts even though they are you.”

Once again, isn't the problem awareness identifying with objects? Isn't the problem I, awareness, identifying with my thought? That is why the teaching and teacher have to point out: “You are not the object/thought, but awareness.” As my ignorance is reduced and removed, the recognition arises that I am awareness. Am I correct?

James: It seems that way, but it is not actually that way. Self-ignorance/knowledge is not like money; you can't have less or more of it. It is like pregnancy. You cannot be a little bit pregnant.

You are not learning Vedanta. You are leaning you. You are just one simple, present self. You either see it or you don't. You are neither *satya* or *mithya*. You are the one that is aware of the ideas *satya* and *mithya*. Look at yourself, right now. Don't worry about what you know or don't know. Knowledge and ignorance are objects in you, awareness. When you get this you are going to have a big laugh, Ben, because you are making it much more profound and complicated than it actually is. When you say or think, “I,” it always only refers to limitless awareness.

Ben: About awareness: isn't there a totality of awareness and awareness as me? It is not two awarenesses. It is one partless awareness in many different "modes," e.g. as James with full recognition of itself, as Ben with partial recognition, as Mr. Average with no recognition at all. Is this correct?

James: Only if you choose to look at it from the *jiva's* perspective. But the *jiva* is not conscious, so you have to understand things from the point of view of awareness. It is not true from that standpoint. If you understand reality from awareness's point of view and you understand it from *jiva's* point of view, why would you chose *jiva's* point of view? It makes no sense. As long as you think you are Ben and that Ben is going to get it, you are barking up the wrong tree. First you have to analyze the word "Ben" and see if it refers to anything other than awareness. To save you the trouble of thinking about it, I can tell you that it doesn't. So take yourself to be awareness and operate "as if" you are awareness. It is not a lie, although it feels like it. It feels like it because I think you have the wrong notion of enlightenment. Enlightenment does not change the feelings, the suffering, etc. - except in the long run. It just gives you a platform from which to view experience that takes the sting out of it. Over and over you take a stand in *jiva*-hood, perhaps expecting something to happen that will convince you that you are not a *jiva*. But even if something does happen to reveal your real nature, it will not change your thinking patterns. They will come back once the experience wears off and you will re-identify with Ben, the *jiva*.

Ben: In fact we can take this point further and state that there are other "modes," like the mineral, plant, animal, human, spirit kingdoms. But it is all the one same awareness. Is this correct?

James: Yes.

Ben: After writing the above, I contemplated on "reflected awareness" and the following ideas arose. They make sense, but I am open to correction.

Your words: "...there are two orders of non-dual reality." Could there be THREE orders?

James: Yes. Remember, there is only awareness and all these teachings and distinctions are only meant to remove ignorance about your self-awareness. The three are *paramarthika satyam* (non-dual reality), *vyvaharika satyam* (empirical reality) and *pratibhasika satyam* (subjective reality).

Ben: 1. *Satya*: the totality of awareness, always pure, unassociated, unattached, by itself. This is the first order.

2. *Mithya*: objects, subtle body. All are appearance arising from *satya*, and are inert. It is here in the causal and subtle bodies that ignorance is present. This is the second order.

3. *Jiva*: pure awareness "reflected off" the subtle body. This "reflected awareness" is the third order.

James: *Jiva* belongs to both orders. It is actually *satya* but with the five sheaths it is *mithya*. This is why discrimination is the nature of *moksa*. The self has to separate itself from the *mithya* sheaths.

Ben: The phrase “reflected off” is a verbal metaphor. There is really no “reflecting” as such. Would the phrase “associated with” be more accurate?

James: It’s fine, but “reflection” is fine too, as people who have epiphanies of a certain type see the self as “light” because the subtle body is made up of *sattva*.

Ben: Thus *satya* associated with *mithya* (as a human form) is *jiva*. Is this kosher?

James: Yes (see above).

Ben: Because pure awareness is associated with the subtle body, it is affected by ignorance present in the subtle body. Awareness “picks up,” “gets contaminated by,” “is influenced by,” “is affected by,” “is overcome by” ignorance. It is a juxtaposition which makes associated-awareness become ignorant. It is more than appearing ignorant. It actually becomes ignorant. Such is my experience, and your statement 2 earlier confirms it.

Awareness by itself, ever-pure *satya*, has no problem. *Mithya*/subtle body has no problem, since it is inert.

Awareness associated with the subtle body is affected by ignorance, forgets itself and identifies with the subtle body. This is where the problem lies. Such awareness is called *jiva*, whose life is *samsaric*.

Enlightenment is when all ignorance is removed and awareness associated with the subtle body recognises its true nature of awareness. The association continues and such awareness is called *jivanmukta*. The association continues until the form, including the subtle body, ends. Then awareness continues unchanged. *Satya*.

Is this accurate?

James: Yes. But remember, enlightenment is not an experience. It is just the end of the last doubt about your nature as awareness. It renders the binding *vasanas* non-binding and cancels doership. The binding *vasana* you have is thinking that you are not enlightened, i.e. awareness. The idea, “I am Ben. I do not have hard and fast knowledge,” is binding you. Is it true?

Question: who/what is looking out of your eyes? Who is looking out of my eyes? Who is looking out of the eyes of Mr. Average, who is completely ignorant?

Ben: It is the same awareness associated with the subtle body with different degrees of ignorance, from zero ignorance to mixed to full ignorance. Is this correct?

James: Yes.

Ben: From my own experience, a few years ago I was completely ignorant of myself as awareness. Today I am partly ignorant and partly aware. More enquiry and contemplation is needed. Hopefully through Grace, one day I will be completely free of ignorance and completely aware. Through all this, I am the same awareness with different degrees of ignorance. Isn't this correct?

James: Yes, from the *jiva's* point of view, but how can you be both free awareness and bound awareness? You have to make up your mind whether you are free or bound. Otherwise, continue trying to reduce the ignorance. The problem with this approach is that the more you apparently know, the more you realize how much you don't know. So it is not really about what Ben knows and what Ben doesn't know. It is about seeing that Ben is just a thought in you and that as such it is incapable of knowledge.

Ben: You dislike use of the word "awakening" and use "enlightened" instead. But isn't the distinction an arbitrary one, a personal preference in the use of words? You do not like "awakened," because you say awareness is never "asleep." Similarly for "darkened" and "dulled." But the same argument can be applied to use of the word "enlightened." Awareness is never "unenlightened." However, some word has to be used to indicate the effect of ignorance on awareness associated with the subtle body. Your preference is for "enlightened." The word "awakening" also carries the sense of ignorance being removed and of I, awareness, recognising my nature of awareness. This is not experiential, but a direct recognition. Is my thinking about arbitrariness correct?

James: Yes and no. Any term is good as long as you have a way to contextualize it, i.e. to explain it in terms of the big picture. By "big picture" I mean the understanding of *satya* and *mithya*. Actually both words, enlightenment and awakening, are flawed. But yes, it is totally arbitrary. Words have ostensible and implied meanings. The implied meaning of "awakening" is less useful in terms of *moksa* than enlightenment, in my humble opinion. Both, however, are experiential terms.

Ben: Thank you, James. You have done so much for us. We are very grateful to you.

James: You are most welcome, Ben.

~Love, awareness