

Samsara Is Awareness

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2012-05-21

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/705>

Terry: Hello, Jim. I'm talking to a fellow who is meditating and asking me stuff now and then. I don't want to do any damage, so check this out and see if I've got my head screwed on straight.

Jim: Seems the old noggin is screwed on pretty straight. Can't fault it. If you need a job writing *satsangs* for the Vedanta punters I can give you gainful employment. 😊 Incidentally, congratulations on the California show and your success in the art world. You look quite smart standing beside your painting. I love that painting – the joy.

Anyway, back to your *satsang*: just for fun I provided your friend with a little more of the logic behind your excellent answers.

Dave: It is slowly beginning to sink in, but the difficulty is understanding Vedanta at the reality level – the experiential level.

Terry: It's an about-face of regular understanding. There is a need for faith that the teaching is true, so the bullshit detectors should be on all the time. It's investigation by asking if your version of reality stacks up. It does seem that that objects appear in awareness and it also seems that identifying with them has a cost.

James: Perfect, Terry.

Dave: Everything is interconnected because everything is in the field of awareness and there is only one awareness. Our belief of self is only an illusion and therefore everything is interdependent.

Terry: Everything is one thing, awareness... even *samsara*... and *samsara* is real, but not constant and therefore not reliable as a bringer of happiness.

James (to Terry): I know what you mean when you say *samsara* is real, I think. You mean that it is non-different from awareness? If that is what you mean, you are correct – and it is a very important point so that the doer does not try to avoid action because he somehow thinks that it doesn't count. But there is an opportunity here to introduce the idea that it is apparently real, not actually real, which is implied in your statement that it is not reliable. Insofar as someone takes his or herself to be an apparent person, *samsara* is real, but it is a seeming reality, not a real reality.

Terry: The mind-body really exists, but it exists as an object that arises and passes in awareness. Awareness witnesses them. Awareness is the self. It is who we are. It

is ignorance to take the mind-body to be the self.

James: Correct.

Dave: How do we gain understanding of this, how do we learn/experience this rather than just repeat a *mantra* or say words in an academic way... where is the real understanding? If we do not need to understand, because awareness is whole and complete, then what is the point of anything? Or behaving in any way other than how we want... whether that is in a good way to ourselves or others or not?

Terry: The understanding comes through exposing the mind to the truth on an everyday basis till we get it. *Mantras* are fine as long as they are in line with the truth. The whole point is to respect the mind and to expose it to the understanding that sets it free from the suffering that comes from chasing objects. We are free to behave in any way we want, but there is a price to pay if you rub against the laws, *dharmas*, operating in *samsara*. So being honest and straight counts. *Samsara* is beautiful, complex ignorance. It can be enjoyed, but believing happiness or freedom can be found in *samsara* is suffering.

James: This is an excellent reply, Terry. You can expand this a bit by saying that he needs to investigate his own experience to see if it does not conform to the words of scripture. If he uses the teachings of Vedanta to expose the unexamined logic of his own experience – that reality is non-dual and he is not separate from it or that he is everything that is, for example – he will see that he is already experiencing wholeness. People take their interpretation of their experience of life – that the self is incomplete and separate from objects and therefore subject to the pull of objects, which leads to attachment and suffering – to be a fact. But by examining experience carefully – the “location of objects” teaching is particularly powerful – one sees that the subject-object distinction is just a belief, an assumption, one that breaks down on contemplation of the teaching. All of Vedanta’s teachings reveal non-duality, the non-separation of the subject and the objects, to be a fact, not the interpreted perception of individuals.

Dave: If we do not need to understand, because awareness is whole and complete, then what is the point of anything?

James: What is the point of doing anything now? You are going to die one fine day, and nothing that you do is going to go with you. In fact if you think about it carefully nothing belongs to you now. You do not gain by doing or lose by non-doing. Action has nothing to do with you (awareness).

If you say that getting what you want and avoiding what you don’t want is the purpose of life, you will suffer. Only animals accept suffering because they do not know there is an alternative. Everything that we do is meant to relieve suffering of one sort or another and to gain happiness. When you understand this you see that the point is to get out of life – while you are in it – so you start investigating your assumptions about who you are and the purpose of it all. If you are sincere you will be led to Vedanta because it is a proven way out.

The purpose of Vedanta is to relieve you of your sense of doership, which is the cause of great suffering. You actually have no choice about action – you are always doing something – but when you think about the complex chain of causation that brings about action and the total interdependence of all the factors in the field of action, i.e. life, you are left with the knowledge that you are the witness of the doer. And by further investigation you see that the witness is free of action all the time, and finally that you are that witness now.

Once this fact sinks in, as far as action goes, Dave keeps on acting, but since you no longer identify yourself as Dave, action and the sense of doership (“I have to or want to do this or that”) doesn’t trouble you. So Dave does what he does happily, not expecting the results of his actions to make him happy.

Dave: ...or behaving in any way other than how we want... whether that is in a good way to ourselves or others or not?

James: When you think about it, Dave, the doer of actions does not want conflict. So he needs to take into account the field of action and the rules that operate there, particularly the common-sense moral laws, the violation of which causes suffering. If a person is suffering the disease of self-ignorance and thinks he or she is incomplete, he or she will be troubled by a strong desire/fear for/of objects. This will lead to situations where conflict is inevitable because everything that Dave gets comes from the field through other people. But if the ignorance that causes the belief in incompleteness is removed, the oneness of everything will be exposed, one’s actions will be in harmony with the nature of reality and conflict will disappear.

~ James