

Set Free by Vedanta

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Mario: Hi, James, I hope you have been well. You must be bogged down with hundreds of emails. You have helped me immensely in understanding about the self. Thank you. I have been reading your book, almost halfway; I know I'm going to have to reread it several times more, it's "that" kind of book. I wanted to share with you my experiences that have come about recently, since I started reading your book and the materials you have kindly provided at your website. These experiences are new to me and have not happened to me before. I'm not sure what to think of them or whether to just dismiss them altogether.

Dream 1: The very first dream involved you. The view was in first-person perspective. The crux of the dream is where I see you hand me an old foam sponge and tell me smell it, hold it right up to my nose and take a BIG whiff of it. You said that if I smelt this old sponge that I will realise the self permanently.

At this point, I felt reluctant! I felt scared and uncertain. In particular, uncertain that somehow I'd lose my family! Nevertheless, I took hold of the sponge and held it to my nose and took a small sniff of it (the kind of quick sniff you do when you want to check if your socks are old or new).

Immediately following that, I zapped out of the dream and knew I was awake (e.g. awake from the dream lying in bed with my eyes open), but then zapped back into the dream again (the zapping out and back into the dream felt like a split second). I can't remember what happened after that, unfortunately, I just remember zapping back into the dream holding the sponge... then nothing more. (That experience of zapping out and back into the dream was amazing! Like I was shot out of my dream body into the waking state then immediately back into the dream. I have NEVER had a dream like that before.)

Dream 2: I have recently been having dreams where I am aware that I am dreaming whilst inside the dream, I don't recall a time this happened to me before, but in the last few weeks I've had a couple of them happen in succession.

I dreamt that I was crossing a road; initially I was careful to look both ways, as you do when you cross a road (common sense was still apparent in this dream). But then something changed (I can't explain what I mean by something changed) and I immediately knew that I was only dreaming about crossing the road. As a result, I felt I became more relaxed crossing the road, knowing that even if I got hit by a car it was okay. 😊

Dream 3: I dreamt I had picked up a guitar to play some tunes (I've been playing the guitar for about 10 years now). Yet in the dream I struggled to play it, I felt confused and frustrated, my hands felt uncoordinated. Yet once again, something changed midway through and I knew that I was dreaming. From there, I actually started to see the funny side of it, how I was straining to play the guitar properly in the dream.

In both dreams I recall the initial dreaming was from a first-person perspective, but once I realised I was dreaming it switched to a third-person view, as if I was watching my dream body performing the actions.

What holds true though is that I am concerned how my quest for knowledge of the self will affect my family and the people close to me. My concern is, will I become distant? Non-caring? Will I not care if my kids do well in school or whether my wife leaves me because I start to neglect (not care) her needs? 😊 Would you be able to help me understand, are these concerns holding me back? I suspect the mind's fear of losing touch with the people closest to me is at play.

I noticed a change in me lately; I don't get upset or happy as much. Things that used to interest me don't really interest me anymore (there is still interest, but not as much) and things that aggravated me don't have the same impact as they used to. It's like going neutral, neither happy nor sad about how things turn out. I have not had a quarrel with my wife for quite some time now; we usually have one at least every two weeks over something silly.

Another example: the other day I was told that my dad was in need of heart surgery (he's old, and was hit by a bus last year, lucky to be alive today!). The surgery could have adverse effects on his health and is a risky procedure. Yet the thought of the death of my dad now does not have that kind of impact as it did one year ago when he got hit by a bus. I remember I was in despair and anguish at the thought that he was going to die, as he lay there on the hospital bed in intensive care.

Then this happens just the other day, in the waking state: I was driving my car and listening to your audio; you talked about how the self who witnessed the dream is also the same self that witnesses the mind/body in the waking state. (At that point, I remembered my dreams, and realised I am the same entity that witnessed Mario crossing the road and playing the guitar in the dream as the entity that is aware of Mario driving this car and listening to this audio, likewise the very same entity who knows Mario had a restful deep sleep the night before. It never occurred to me, yet after listening to your words, I realised the real self was present throughout all the states. I felt so silly to have overlooked this and didn't realise it earlier.

I am the same witness in all the states! This is proof that I, this witness, is real and true. That witness was the real I, that witness was me, IS me.

Then right at that moment something clicked. I remember looking out and seeing a woman driving past me; she was a stranger to me, I did not know who she was. It just happened that she was in my field of view at the time and I had focused in on her. I felt this undeniable feeling of love for her, this limitless love, I felt I could give her all my love, and then I'd still have more love to give; it felt like I was loving myself, that she was me! This all happened in a couple of seconds or so, until she drove past me, but right there in the moment, it didn't feel like it, it was clear and plain.

Then the mind started to raise these questions: "Is this what non-dual is after all?" "She IS me, how is that so?" "Is this what it's like to be the true self?" And that feeling of limitless love for that woman subsided. This experience was so beautiful. I have never had this kind of experience before. But now that I write this up and think about this, it was only an experience and an experience always come to an end. I don't think I can realise myself through this kind of experience; it was beautiful while it lasted. Back to the drawing board, I think.

I hope to hear from you.

James: Hi, Mario. Let's go right to the end of your email. You say, "I don't think I can

realise myself through this kind of experience; it was beautiful while it lasted. Back to the drawing board, I think.”

You think wrong. The self is spelling out who you are on the sheet of paper that is your experience. It is true that the experiences themselves did not last, but that is not the point. They delivered the knowledge, “I am awareness.”

Enlightenment – freedom – is not an experience. It is self-knowledge, and you have realized who you are – but since you have an experiential notion of enlightenment, you discounted the knowledge. But the knowledge is right there screaming to be noticed and accepted. It was extracted from your own experience of non-duality. You realized who you are, no doubt.

The experiences you have been having were set in motion by your assimilation of our conversations and what you have read so far in my book.

Let’s analyze these experiences and the knowledge they brought. Experience #1, zapping in and out of the dream: Who observed you zapping in and out of the dream? It was you, awareness. It is telling you that you are neither the dreamer or the waker. You are the awareness of both. The dreamer and the waker are just objects appearing in you. It was amazing because it is probably the first time you actually experienced yourself as awareness.

The sponge is Vedanta. It soaks up all your ignorance. Once you started to hear Vedanta these ignorance-destroying experiences started to happen. You felt reluctant because you are afraid of losing what is dear to you, symbolized by your family. The ego does not want to let go. It is a gratuitous fear. Not only will you not lose your family, you will love them more when you see that they are you. They will appear to you as that woman who was driving past appeared.

One of the best clues to the meaning of the dream is that you start out in the first person and end up observing the person. The first person becomes the third person, the knower of the waker and the dreamer.

Experience #2, aware of the dream while dreaming: it means that you are the light – meaning awareness – in which the dream appears. That was your experience.

Both ways means duality. You, awareness, know duality. This is symbolized in the dream when you looked both ways. The self speaks in a strange and interesting language. It is telling you who you are.

After the second dream instance, you say, “In both dreams I recall the initial dreaming was from a first-person perspective, but once I realised I was dreaming it switched to a third-person view, as if I was watching my dream body performing the actions.”

It should be clear to you now that you have realized who you are. You are no longer Mario, the first person. You are the awareness of Mario. The only problem with all this is that you were not equipped to understand what these experiences mean. But wait! It seems *Isvara* is one step ahead. He set you up to contact me so I can reveal the meaning of your experiences. How cool is that! By now are you are thinking, “This cannot be it! It has to be much more.”

If you think about it, you are watching your dream body now. The same awareness is watching Mario read these words as watched the zapping in and out as was aware

that the dream was a dream. This Mario guy, his job, his wife and kids, etc. is a dream Mario living in a dream world with dream wife and kids, illumined by you.

Going neutral: this is the effect of self-realization on the mind. The mind is becoming dispassionate, "neutral," to use your word. It is a good word. It is the sweet fruit of self-realization.

Next, you say, "I remembered my dreams, and realised I am the same entity that witnessed Mario crossing the road and playing the guitar in the dream as the entity that is aware of Mario driving this car and listening to this audio, likewise the very same entity who knows Mario had a restful deep sleep the night before. It never occurred to me, yet after listening to your words, I realised the real self was present throughout all the states. I felt so silly to have overlooked this and didn't realise it earlier.

"I am the same witness in all the states! This is proof that I, this witness, is real and true. That witness was the real I, that witness was me, IS me.

"Then right at that moment something clicked."

These paragraphs are statements of self-knowledge. You are very fortunate. Many people would give their eye teeth to know what you know.

Finally, love: the self really laid it on. You say, "I felt this undeniable feeling of love for her, this limitless love, I felt I could give her all my love, and then I'd still have more love to give, it felt like I was loving myself, that she was me!"

Finally, finally - the anticlimax: you doubt the knowledge. To finish this spiritual seeking business all that is required is for you to own what you already know. The mind doubts. Let it doubt. It is wrong. You are the self, no doubt about it.

Mario: Without a doubt you are the catalyst to the understanding of myself. Thank you.

You are right, all the experiences I have had to date, including the conversations I've had with you, my dreams, reading your book, listening to your audio and in particular the event in the car led up to the moment "it clicked."

Without a doubt I know who I am now. In fact I am who I know, owing to my experiences. However, I somehow know I don't need these experiences to happen again to reaffirm what I now know (I hope that makes sense).

James: Absolutely. This is the most important realization you can have.

It shows that you have understood what liberation is. If you do not understand this fact you will keep longing for experience. Liberation is hard and fast knowledge, "I am awareness." It frees you from the craving for experience. You know now that no experience can fulfill you, because you are fullness itself.

James (from above): The only problem with all this is that you were not equipped to understand what these experiences mean. But wait! It seems *Isvara* is one step ahead. He set you up to contact me so I can reveal the meaning of your experiences.

How cool is that! By now are you are thinking, "This cannot be it! It has to be much more."

Mario: You read my mind 100%!!! That is my exact thought. Looking back at the events that led up to this moment, I must say, "VERY COOL INDEED!!!" With hindsight, things just played out so perfectly. *Isvara* is truly wondrous! I am now left contemplating, what happens now?

James: Nothing happens now as far as seeking is concerned. Life goes on just as before with a big difference – your seeking stops.

Mario: Where to from here?

James: For whom? Mario or you? For Mario it is more of the same – job, wife and kids, thinking about the self. For you there is no "where to?"

Where will you go? You are everything and everywhere.

Mario: That unlimited love that I felt before has subsided; where has it gone?

James: It hasn't gone anywhere. It is just you, awareness. It will flow through Mario into Mario's life in the form of what he pays attention to, blessing and enriching everyone. It is unlimited because you are unlimited. For a moment *Isvara* opened your heart so you could see who you are. That is all that is required. If you want to tangibly feel it, then you need to remove the *rajas* and *tamas* from your subtle body. This will make the experience of love more intense.

Mario: I still have these internal conversations, analysing and questioning my thoughts and actions, and those of others. Actually, now they are even more intense and frequent.

James: Yes, self-knowledge awakens inquiry. It makes you bright, intelligent and curious, but not about you. Or put it this way: you are curious about the objects appearing in you only. The mystery of you has been solved.

Mario: I plan to continue reading your book to completion. There are still many concepts and teachings that I still do not understand and hope to learn.

James: That is very wise. There will be residual ignorance in the form of doubts that it is profitable to clear up.

Mario: Thank you for your time. I hope to hear from you.

James: You are welcome, Mario.

Mario: Hi, James. Mario initially was scrutinising me before, but now the roles have reversed. He is the one under scrutiny now. I don't take any enjoyment in it, it just happens now. Is it Mario's fate to be scrutinised now until the end of his days?

I also have this nostalgic feeling bugging me. The seeking has stopped. I don't yearn to have it back. I find it hard to describe. It's not quite disappointment. It's not sadness. It's not depression. I don't feel happy or blissful, nor do I feel sad or angry. Maybe I had a false notion of expecting something more to happen?

Do I take a backseat now and observe how Mario's life unfolds?

James: Hi, Mario. Two questions. First, the word "scrutinize." Does the scrutiny involve any interpretation or evaluation of Mario and his behavior – his thoughts, feelings, etc. – or is it just seeing, observation without comment? If it involves evaluation, then it is Mario, reflected awareness – what is sometimes called the opaque witness, i.e. pure *sattva* illumining the bundle of Mario-*vasanas*. It is a beautiful state of mind, but implicit in it is a subtle evaluation, a lovely spiritual bias – what happens is seen in terms of truth, beauty, authenticity, enjoyment, etc. The word "scrutiny" implies an active evaluation of things, whereas the non-experiencing transparent witness makes no comment whatsoever.

Your second paragraph makes me think that it is the transparent non-evaluating witness. It conveys the sense of complete dispassion.

"Is it Mario's fate to be scrutinized until the end of his days?" It depends on what you mean by the end of his days. Isn't this the end of Mario's days insofar as you are not Mario? It seems Mario only lives because you have falsely identified yourself with him. Is he closer to you than any other object, like his wife and kids, for example? If the knowledge of who you are – the non-experiencing witness – is firm, then the Mario-object will gradually fade away and become more and more transparent and insubstantial. If it is not firm now, Mario will become like a mirage – there but not there. And at some point it will merge into you, awareness, leaving only you, appearing – from the outside – as Mario.

Did you or do you have a false notion of expecting something to happen? Yes, indeed. *Moksa* is rare because everyone has an idea that something wonderful is supposed to happen. Actually, what has happened is very wonderful, but it doesn't seem important because of expectations that have been set up through your contact with spiritual culture, which almost exclusively presents enlightenment in grandiose, hyperbolic language – the light of a thousand suns, etc., etc. A sense of relief probably accompanies this knowledge. And a gentle irony – my God, I was only looking for this – for me – all along? Nothing has been gained. Only ignorance has been lost.

"Do I take a backseat, now?" If you take a backseat, your knowledge is not firm. If you understand, "I am the backseat," that is the end of it.

~ James