

The Boundless Sky, Not Fireworks

Ram (James Swartz)

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Charlie: Dear James, so after reading Chapter II, I guess my focus is wrong. I have equated something transitory and experiential as enlightenment when it is an intellectual conviction of the ever-present "I-am-ness." I'm looking for fireworks when I should be looking for the boundless sky?

James: Yes, you are the boundless sky.

Charlie: Okay, I think I get that shade of difference, but I always thought enlightenment would be something of absolute certitude, whereas we are supposed to arrive at it through a logical inquiry. So it must therefore ultimately be a belief we arrive at. The trouble I have with a belief is that I seem to arrive at the same place as the people who believe in a bearded man on a cloud. Though their model is different, it is still grounded in belief.

It is tough to just believe rather than experience. I think people seek the experiential, as they want something rock-solid that alters them for life.

James: Belief and experience are not the only options. There is knowledge.

Charlie: If I got the second chapter wrong, I'll have to reread.

James: You got it mostly right, but reread it.

Enlightenment is absolute certitude in your identity as awareness. Whether it is arrived at by direct experience or logical reasoning or some combination of the two is not important. There is an upside and downside to both experience and logic.

For example, if you have a profound and direct experience of the reflection of awareness in your mind – you can only experience reflected awareness (epiphanies do not last, because the reflecting medium is in a state of flux) and the knowledge "I am awareness" does not stick once the experience ends, what use is the experience? It is best if you arrive at it through the logic that the experience generates. Vedanta is experience-based logic. But this rarely happens, so the mind – which is what enlightenment is for – the self being already enlightened – remains in doubt about its nature. Belief is not an option, except in the beginning of inquiry. But it will no longer stand once the inquiry has been concluded successfully.

When I say Vedanta is experience-based logic, I mean that when you clearly investigate what you experience and relate it to the experienter and the field of experience, a certain logic appears. It is a logic that will lead you directly to liberation. It is not possible to arrive at the whole logic of reality in a single lifetime or even many lifetimes. It is beyond the scope of an individual mind. This is where Vedanta comes in. It is the knowledge of the logic of existence that was arrived at by

tens of thousands of minds.

It is a science. You can say, for example, that Einstein was a genius, but he did not invent physics. You can say Buddha was a mystic, but he was not a Buddhist. It took many, many centuries of collective thinking to evolve Buddhism as it is today. The collective mind evolved Vedanta. The difference between Vedanta and Western science is that Western science is fixated on one small part of reality, whereas Vedanta covers it all. It has a cosmology, a psychology and a "theology," although this is not the right word. By "theology" I mean knowledge of consciousness, not a set of beliefs about the origin of the universe, i.e. the Creator. It does have a creation "theory" - *maya* - but it is not meant to be believed in. It just explains how non-dual reality seems to be a duality. It is proven knowledge about the nature of all the factors in reality and their relationship to each other.

~ James