

The Wrong Spirit

Ram (James Swartz)

2011-07-23

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/942>

Adrian: Hi, Ram. Once again I'm going to just go with the flow in my own mind and this time just try to just focus on all the nitty-gritty that seems to be just hanging in the air, perhaps between us or perhaps just among us. It all seems to come down to understandings/misunderstandings about ego identities and the concept and/or definition of enlightenment. But I'm definitely coming from a different sector of the universe than you regarding these items, as you have correctly identified.

Ram: Do you think it is worthwhile, considering our different views, that we try to get on the same page?

Adrian: All the "grok" I wrote you before was simply about the five basic identities the spiritually-inclined ego is capable of identifying with. These quite simply and eloquently correspond to the ego's identification with the practice of the four *yogas* and the ego's eventual identification with the *atman*, which can only really occur when there is a reasonable peace and harmony achieved from one's practice of these four *yogas* as the necessary spiritual preparation. As I understand this to merely be rather ordinary Vedanta, I do wonder why this should only be seen as grok to you.

The element of disagreement seems to be your assertion, in so many words, that, "I am the *atman*, you are the *atman*, we are all the *atman*..." This does not wash with me at all. But that's only because I don't think it washes with Vedanta at all. This is because as soon as you use the words "I am," I believe it is only your ego speaking.

Ram: I understand that. I am the last person that could convince you otherwise – not that I am inclined to – because, as you say, it is belief. Beliefs may correspond with the truth or they may not.

Adrian: That means that what you are really saying is that your ego is the *atman*...

Ram: If reality is non-dual, the ego is the self. But the self is not the ego.

Adrian: ...or that your ego and the *atman* are one...

Ram: See the statement above.

Adrian: ...or have become one... or your main message, always have been one.

Ram: The problem here is your lack of appreciation of *satya* and *mithya*, the relationship between the self and the ego. The ego is the self but the self is free of

the ego, just as a shirt is cotton but the cotton is not the shirt. One depends on the other, one is free of the other. They are one, but they are not the same.

Adrian: Either way you slice and dice it, it always comes back to the same: you no longer have an ego, in the ordinary sense of the word, but the rest of us do.

Ram: Evidently you have not read my writings very carefully. I definitely have an ego. Definitely. I just am not it in the same way that I have a hand but I am not my hand. "My ego" is not my ego. It is just ego, a function that appears in awareness – me – when it is necessary to interact with the world.

Adrian: This is also, incidentally, exactly what my own teacher tried and failed to teach me. So why couldn't she teach this to me? Either my ego or her ego or both of our egos were quite obviously in the way of the teachings.

Ram: I don't know what ego has to do with a failure to understand the teachings, except insofar as identification with beliefs and ideas is ego. Vedanta says it is just ignorance. You do not have to be egoless to be the self. The self is there prior to the ego. It is not an either/or, because they are not in the same dimensions of reality. One is *satya*, real, the other is *mithya*, apparently real. There is no contradiction. I make this point over and over again in my book. It is the essence of Vedanta. Shankar says, "*Brahma satyam, jagan mithya.*" The self is real, the world/ego is apparently real.

Adrian: As I understand things, Vedanta teaches that the highest identification the ego can achieve is with the *atman*. This does not mean or imply that the ego has always been the *atman* or anything like that. The key to understanding this is understanding that the ego's final trick is simply to identify with the identification of the *atman*. Because identification means sameness, the ego is now convinced that it is the same as the *atman* and then acts accordingly, beginning with uttering the classic words, "I am the *atman*."

Ram: Yes, this I call "enlightenment sickness." Enlightenment is direct self-knowledge, meaning "I am awareness." Self-knowledge means that awareness is limitless and the ego is the self seen through ignorance, making it seem to be limited.

Adrian: I was specifically taught that the ripe and spiritually mature ego merely resonates with the *atman* through its identification with the reflection of the *atman* that can only be seen in a very pure mind. For me, it is impossible for the ego to actually be the *atman*.

Ram: It is, but it isn't. See the distinction between *satya* and *mithya* above. The shirt is the cloth, but the cloth is not the shirt.

Adrian: All identification in that direction is merely identification with the reflection

of the *atman* in one's own mind. In other words, it's all a desert mirage, and your assertion that you are the *atman* only means that you have gotten that far but no further.

Ram: If I am only the ego, yes. But I am not only the ego. I am something more, the one who sees the ego. So there is nowhere for me to go. And my ego is happy with itself as it is, so it is not striving to get anywhere.

Adrian: You don't seem to fully realize that you are only seeing a reflection of the *atman*, but as I have come across the word "reflection" in your writings, you must somehow also know what I am referring to.

Ram: You are not correct, Adrian. I make it very clear what the difference between the subtle body (reflected awareness) is and pure awareness is. It is the same *satya/mithya* distinction which is the topic of this email. This is the most difficult point to understand. That is why it is Shankara's signature teaching.

Adrian: As to enlightenment... once again, different strokes for different folks.

Ram: I don't agree. There is one self and the knowledge of the self is one. But if you look at enlightenment as something that belongs to an ego, then you are right. Enlightenment is not for the ego, the experiencing entity, it is freedom from the experiencing entity. This does not mean that the ego, the experiencing entity, ceases to exist.

Adrian: Rather early on in my introduction to Vedanta, I was specifically warned about the various dangers involved if one chose the path of *gnana yoga* too exclusively over all the other *yogas*, specifically *bhakti yoga*. The specific danger was that one might end up with merely an intellectual understanding of what enlightenment actually is as opposed to actually realizing it. The next step is for the ego to identify with the intellectual understanding and then automatically take the springboard to "enlightenment" through incorrect identification.

Ram: The *Vedas* only unfold two paths: the path of action and the path of knowledge, *karma* and *jnana* or *samkya*. Vivekananda queered the pitch with his New Vedanta. We call it the "multi-path confusion." If you read my article *What Is Advaita Vedanta?*, it will clarify this issue for you, Adrian.

Adrian: In the spiritual group I was in, I was so bold as to take the rather audacious step of simply asking "everybody else's" *guru* if she was enlightened. This created absolute havoc in the community, but then again so did all of my various spiritual shenanigans, but at least I got her answer. It just seems that everything in life has its price, and one must pay it in order to get it. That said, she said that I basically had the whole question entirely wrong, as enlightenment was always just a matter of degree. But you don't seem to agree, Ram. Yet I wonder if you ever even bothered to ask your own *guru* if he was enlightened or not. If not, you may still have a very serious spiritual omission on your hands to deal with.

Ram: People asked him all the time. This is what he said: “I cannot say that I am enlightened. But I cannot say that I am not enlightened.” What this means is that enlightenment, as conceived, has nothing to do with the self. The self is the “the light,” i.e. awareness. When did it not shine? The “are you enlightened?” question presupposes that there was a time when you were not the self. So you cannot be unenlightened.

You can only know what it means to be the self. Often when asked this stupid question he would say, “You are inviting me to cheat you,” meaning that if you don’t know, how are you going to evaluate the answer? It is like this conversation, Adrian. You have an idea what enlightenment is and who I am based on your interpretation of what you have read. What you have read depends on your knowledge and ignorance, your beliefs and opinions, and those depend on who you are. From what I gather I am talking to Adrian, the experiencing entity, not the self. I am saying that the best way to see things is through the “third eye,” i.e. scripture. The personal locus is not the kiss of death, but it certainly leaves something to be desired.

Adrian: In my world, Buddha, Jesus, Ramakrishna and Ramana were fully enlightened, but I know of no others in the same class. There may well be many others. I just don’t know any of them as yet. To me, the sure sign of enlightenment is when there is no essential difference between what is going on inside the mind and that which is going on outside the mind. And that something can only be *sat-chit-ananda*, which is perhaps best understood as the substratum of the universe, usually experienced as a flow of otherworldly particles in the ether, where all colors, shapes and sounds are all one. My teacher once casually showed this whole world to me, but I previously had had glimpses of it before, and still get them occasionally since. This aspect of reality can only be observed through the medium of the third eye, and you do not seem to speak of such things, Ram, and therefore I wonder about you.

Ram: I spoke about it before I read this paragraph, Adrian. Wonder away. If you think I am a dogmatic, deluded individual with a case of enlightenment sickness, it is fine with me. In fact your view is simply an opinion based on what you believe enlightenment is. Even if you were enlightened, by your definition you would have no idea of whether or not Buddha was enlightened. Nobody alive today knows. So your idea is based on inference, probably founded on the idea that such fame could only indicate enlightenment. There are no enlightened beings. There is only one self, awareness, and it is neither enlightened nor unenlightened.

Only in the *maya* world is enlightenment full or partial or not at all. Reality is non-dual, so there is only “enlightenment.”

Adrian: On the home front a few interesting and perhaps very relevant events have occurred. I have finished reading your autobiography and had earlier read and re-read Chapter II of your new book many times over, so I am well acquainted. Otherwise, I mostly hang out with your take on *Atma Bodh* and have recommended it to many others as the best explanation of Vedanta out there so far. I found the story of your *guru’s* visit to your *chakras* and his tell-tale tracks of tobacco stench most intriguing. Odd that my chimney with the help of some back-drafts of wind should leave my house filled with a most acrid smell of smoke the following day. And that later that night, while in an expanded state of consciousness, I experienced a

heavy flow of light and energy doing some repair work on first my liver, then my small intestine. Interesting, that I could not feel any of my body at the time, only the sensation and sight of healing in those two organs. Pretty cool experience all in all, but I've had stuff like that happen before. Soon afterward, I had a little Buddha epiphany, hardly worth mentioning, other than it was the first time he ever visited me like that. But then something somewhat very mysterious occurred...

While way down in my subconscious, words were getting written in English, but in an unusual text size and style. These words were written one word at a time, but were no longer visible as the sentences progressed. That is to say that the words were disappearing at about the same rate they were appearing, meaning only one chance to understand. It was all pretty heavy stuff, and I won't pretend for a second that I really understood any of it. Yet it seemed that way at the time. But I had a most distinct feeling that these words were not meant for my consumption. Upon regaining consciousness, I couldn't remember any of the words, but I know they were spread out over four separate sentences.

Ram: Yes, it is pretty hard to understand things when you are unconscious.

Adrian: My take... I think your *guru* has been up to some of his tricks and has planted four sentences in my subconscious that are meant for you, not me. And I don't really know or care what they are. But if so, they have likely either come out in this email or will come in subsequent emails. I take this to mean that he may be experiencing difficulties getting through to you. Your standoff with him in your final days certainly reminds me a lot of our email exchanges up to now.

Ram: Jesus, Adrian, you seem to be living in your imagination. There were no final days, Adrian. My *guru* and I were the best of friends right up until the day he died. We had different views on some tangential issues, but on the issue that counts we were one.

Adrian: We do all seem to be cut from the same piece of cloth. I wonder what's going to happen next?

Ram: This conversation will die. The spirit of it is wrong. We got off on the wrong foot. It is a "he said, she said" thing instead of a proper communication. It sometimes happens. I wish you all the best.

~ Love, Ram