

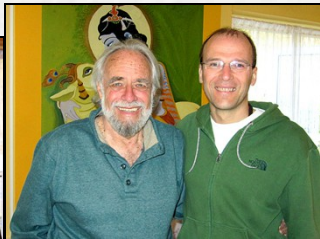
Shiningworld

Newsletter April 2014

James is just back in Spain from successful teachings in Germany and Holland.



James and Narada (Westerwald)

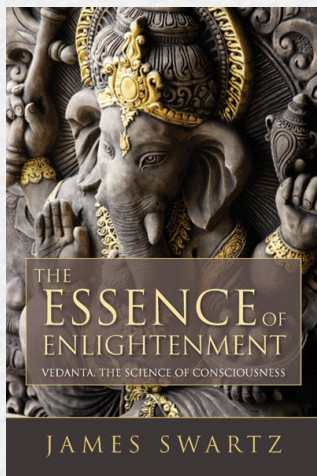


James and Vedamurti (Cologne)



James Amsterdam

~ New Book: The Essence of Enlightenment



James has just finished his latest book, called “The Essence of Enlightenment”, which, like How to Attain Enlightenment, covers the complete teachings of Vedanta. One difference from the new book is the conversational writing style. The teachings are crystal clear and were written for those for whom English is a second language so it is very easy to follow. Certain topics in How to Attain Enlightenment are expanded in the new book...qualifications, values, Jiva-Isvara, and dharma...and two chapters have been dropped...the critique of Neo Advaita and the chapter on Ramana Maharshi. It will be published in hard copy by Sentient Publications which should be available from the Publisher, on Amazon and on Shiningworld.com in about two months. It will also be available on Shiningworld.com in a week or two as a PDF download for \$13 (€10).

~ A Twelve Month Teaching Course: Lesson 1 – What do I Want?

With this Newsletter we begin a twelve month Vedanta course, on each chapter of The Essence of Enlightenment. The first Chapter is included at the end of this Newsletter. There are a series of questions at the end of the chapter. To test your comprehension you are required to write a few sentences or paragraphs on each question and set it aside until the next news letter which will contain the correct answers. As you know, Vedanta is a complete, systematic method of self inquiry and each teaching is built on the previous teaching. The goal is complete knowledge of reality...the self and the objects that present themselves to the self. Simply knowing the self is not enough. How self knowledge affects life in the world is the essence of enlightenment. It is not enough to know the truth. You are fully enlightened when your life serves the truth.

~ A Monthly Webinar

James will be available on the web at the end of each month to discuss the topic of the month and answer questions that the teaching provokes. The first webinar covers the first chapter of James book (included in this Newsletter) and will take place on Sunday May 4th at 7pm GMT+1.

~ We are Expanding



Success has its challenges and constraints. Because of the ever-expanding nature of Shiningworld we have been unable to provide service to our many friends as efficiently as we would like to do so. Consequently we have neglected the Facebook, YouTube, Website and Newsletter channels of information. You will be happy to know that right now Shiningworld has signed a contract with a professional web designer and that the website will have a fresh new home page, be better organized and within a couple of months be able to deliver information to tablets and cell phones. We will be launching a forum on the website which will be run by Stan Kublicki, who will help moderate and keep the communications flowing in the right direction. The idea is to create debate about each chapter and we will be encouraging anyone who has questions to write to shiningworld and we will post the questions and answers on the e-satsang section.

It is also true that nothing is as expensive as success. We have also taken a big leap and employed Christian Eberle, a dear friend and our tech savvy video guy, to coordinate and manage Facebook, YouTube, the Newsletter and the Website. It relieves James of a lot of work but it is also a big step for us because we basically live hand to mouth and have had to rely on volunteers, which is good...thanks so much all you who have offered a helping hand!...to get things done. If you want to participate in the growth of Shiningworld, keep the wisdom of the ages flowing to larger and larger audiences, take some pressure off us and put bread on Christian's table, don't be afraid to hit the donation button.



http://www.shiningworld.com/top/index.php?option=com_jdonation&view=donation&Itemid=87

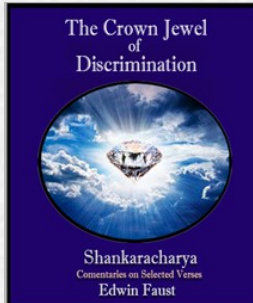
~ Do You Want to Serve?

It so happens that there is a lot of creative talent in the Shiningworld Community. As you know Shiningworld is no longer a one man band. When James and I got married it became a two man band but even with both of us banging away on the drum of truth, clanging the cymbals of enlightenment, and tweeting the flute of inquiry we have been unable to meet the demand.

~ New publications

There is an excellent book by Swami Dayananda commenting on 108 verses of Vivekachoodamani. It is really a great text in that it presents in detail the essence of the method of discrimination that will set you free. James has recommended it to many serious inquirers.

About a year ago it went out of print, which is a great pity. In fact it irritated him so much that he decided to write commentaries himself but with the heart problems he had last year (all is fine now on that level by the way) and other Shiningworld duties he realized it was not going to get done any time soon. So he asked a good friend, an adept inquirer, serious Vedanta guy and a very literate ex-editor (Edwin Faust) who is our official Shiningworld editor, if he wouldn't like to render Dayananda's commentaries in good clean English with a minimum of Sanskrit. To our delight he agreed. The result is a real boon to anyone interested in self inquiry. It is called "The Crown Jewel of Discrimination" and includes a foreword by James. It is available in the shop for \$7. James highly recommends it. Edwin has generously donated the proceeds to Shiningworld.



~ Transcribing Bhagavad Gita

As most of you know it is Shiningworld's mission to disseminate Vedantic wisdom and to that end we are making the ancient texts available in straightforward English. Because life is short and there are only twenty four hours in a day, it would take several lifetimes to do the tradition justice. We could use some help. Another project we have underway is transcribing James' Bhagavad Gita talks. If you would like to volunteer to transcribe one or two hours please contact Peggy MacKay (mahadevi@me.com). She will send you an audio file which you can return to her once it is transcribed.

~ Spanish Translations

Our friend Eleonora who speaks fluent Spanish has translated five chapters of How to Attain Enlightenment and another friend, Shams, has translated Tattva Bodh, What is Advaita Vedanta and

Bhagavad Gita into Spanish. They are all on the website. Here is the link:

http://www.shiningworld.com/top/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=72&Itemid=88

Mattias Raetz, one of James' best friends, is nearly finished translating The Essence of Enlightenment, into German. Anyone who would like to translate James's texts or satsangs into their native tongue is welcome to do so. We will put them on the website for all to enjoy.

~ **Sundari's New Book: The Guna Guide to Health and Lifestyle**

I started writing this as a booklet which was meant to be a brief summary on diet and lifestyle and how this relates to a spiritual practice. It has grown into a fairly comprehensive overview of this topic and covers quite a bit of information on health/lifestyle issues and how they relate to the gunas. This book is the precursor to the book on the full teaching of the *gunas* which is in the pipeline later this year. The Guna Health book is in the final editing stage and will be available for \$5 in the shop next month.



~ **New Audio and Video Releases Available in the shop in the last month:**

Portland Satsang 2013 Audio and Video

Vivekachudamani Spain 2013 Audio and Video

Bhagavad Gita Spain 2014 Audio and Video

Panchadasi Spain 2014 Audio and Video

Upanishad Set 2014 Audio and Video

~ **New E-Satsangs:**

We have posted over 50 new e-satangs on Shiningworld website.

~ **Social Media: Shiningworld Facebook**

We are bringing our Facebook page up to date with regular postings and pics. James and I would like to thank all of you who post such lovely messages, giving your love and support. We so wish we had more time to answer each one of you individually, but please know that we do read all the messages and send our love and best wishes to all of you who write in.

~ **London Seminar with James**

Our good friend Billy has invited to his home in Rochester near London and James will be holding a two day seminar there from on the 26th and 27th April. Unfortunately we have limited space available as we can only take 15 people and already have 12. If anyone would like to attend, let us know and we will take the first 3 people who reply.

The Essence of Enlightenment: Vedanta, the Science of Consciousness

(Please Note: the questions relevant to this chapter can be found at the end of the chapter. Answers will be posted in the next Newsletter).

Lesson # 1

Chapter 1 - What do I Want?

Imagine yourself in the springtime in a mountain valley. Many beautiful flowers are blooming. Pick one of each, bring them home and lay them on a table. Each has its own beauty, but if you arrange them into a bouquet, the total becomes more than the sum of its parts. Vedanta takes all our experiences and arranges them in a way that gives us a perfect appreciation of our true nature and purpose.

Many things - wonderful skyscrapers and bridges, cell phones and internet - are the result of humanity's collective knowledge. Similarly, our collective spiritual experience and knowledge has coalesced into a perfect bouquet of teachings that has the power to set us free. Nobody owns it because it belongs to everyone. This perfect bouquet, this most refined vehicle, is Vedanta,¹ the knowledge that ends the search for life's meaning.

The human heart will not rest until it understands who and what it is. Without the vision of non-duality, you will be forced to keep seeking. If you want to understand who you are and live free, you need to sign on to the logic as it unfolds in this book. If you can't accept the first teaching, you cannot benefit from the second. If you can't sign on to the second, the third will not make sense. Each teaching fits seamlessly into all others because reality is one consciousness. Vedanta is its science. To get the most out of it you must be patient, because non-duality is challenging. Knowledge may come in a flash but it does not remain without constant exposure to the teachings. Incrementally, the vision of non-duality will coalesce in your mind. So read carefully. Never hurry. You will not be disappointed.

It is very important to see reality as it is, not as you think it is or want it to be. Everyone is proud of his or her spiritual knowledge, so you will have a tendency to evaluate Vedanta according to your own ideas, but this does not work. Once you have heard the teachings, you should evaluate what you know with reference to what you have heard, not the other way around. If you evaluate the teaching with reference to your beliefs and opinions, you will fail. A sense of incompleteness, separateness and limitation will remain.

The Unexamined Logic of Your Own Experience

Vedanta is an impersonal method of self inquiry. The first stage is listening with an open mind, setting aside your personal views. Listening without judgement is difficult but not impossible. If you find yourself deciding whether or not you like what you hear, you are not listening. There is nothing to like or dislike, only something to know. If you listen without prejudice, the words will make complete sense, but if you are only looking for an explanation of reality that fits your views, Vedanta is not for you.

¹ *Veda* means knowledge in Sanskrit and *anta* means end. The compound word Vedanta has two meanings: 1) the knowledge that ends the search for knowledge and 2) the knowledge enshrined at the end of each of the four Vedas. The Vedas are the oldest extant texts on the topic of consciousness, the self.

Once you have heard a teaching in full, as it is, you can let your beliefs and opinions interact with the truth, keeping those that make sense and discarding those that don't. This, the second stage of self inquiry is reflection or contemplation. If you surrender to this process, you will succeed.

You may understand a particular teaching well enough, but to succeed with self inquiry you need to understand the truth that links all the teachings together in a beautiful necklace of meaning, like pearls on a string. The vision of non-duality is not gained by synthesizing teachings from different traditions. It is, however, easily gained if you consistently expose your mind to it.

I will introduce a few Sanskrit terms so that you understand that this is not 'my' teaching. I have no teachings. I am simply a person who has been taught. I am not unenlightened, nor am I enlightened. I do not want you to believe me, to depend on me. I only ask that you listen with an open mind to this great knowledge. You will not be disappointed or cheated because I follow the rules of the tradition. I have no agenda. Teachers outside the tradition, even the sincere ones, are usually unreliable guides to the truth because they only know that part of reality revealed by their own experience.

You will not get partial knowledge or be misled by an 'enlightened' person if you listen to Vedanta because it is a proven scriptural tradition. If you know the source of this great wisdom, you can check to see if I am teaching truth or merely what I think or believe. Teaching scripture protects me, too. If you have an argument with something you hear, the argument will be with the teaching, not with me. Hearing things you do not like is inevitable. Please don't blame me. I am a good person and I do not wish to upset you, but I sometimes have to deliver bad news.

What do I Want? Security, Pleasure and Virtue

Vedanta's first inquiry is: what do I really want in life? It is clear that I do not want to be miserable. If misery comes - and it does - it is not because I want it. It is probably because I am incompetent or inefficient in my seeking owing to lack of understanding about myself and the world in which I live.

Everyone wants to be free and happy, to feel whole and complete. If you think there is another reason you are here on earth in this body, self inquiry is not for you. When people want to be free and happy they chase things that they believe will make them free and happy.

The first thing we chase is security. It stands to reason, because life is insecure. You can't expect anything to last. There are many forms of security, the most obvious of which is financial security. Few feel they have enough money. It is a fact that everyone wants more money because desires are endless and money is required to get what you want. It is natural to believe that the more money you have, the more secure you will be, but it is not true.

Seeking is based on a sense of insecurity and insecurity has many faces. If you are financially secure, rest assured that you will feel insecure in other areas of life. You may be insecure socially or morally. When I ask if anyone has enough love, almost no hands go up. You always believe that you could love yourself more or receive more love. If you want attention, it means you are emotionally insecure. Before I go on enumerating the things we seek, you should know that not all necessarily apply to you. This is just a general list on the basis of which we are going to expose certain facts about the reality of worldly pursuits.

There is a famous book in the Vedic tradition on the topic of pleasure, the Kama Sutra. It is there because pleasure is something that people feel they need to know. Once you are financially secure, you want to enjoy life, so various forms of pleasure may become your goal. Our societies are financially successful and therefore we are obsessed with entertainment. Security is a necessity; pleasure is a luxury. You don't see people sleeping on the streets as they do in India, where luxuries are virtually non-existent and people have no time to pursue pleasure. In our world luxuries have become necessities.

When you are emotionally insecure, you want to have a good time. See how much energy is put into entertainment: internet, sports, gambling, travel, music, sex, drugs - you name it. We don't really need these things, but they are available, so we want them. Sundari, my wife, calls them 'weapons of mass distraction.' I go through airports all the time and have to walk through a gauntlet of shops with all manner of tempting things: thousand-dollar handbags, mountains of chocolate and electronic toys too numerous to mention. A sane person does not need even one of these items. I bought a small digital scale on the plane yesterday to weigh my luggage so I would not get charged extra to carry my useless luxuries from one country to another. They printed a receipt from a tiny computer.

Pleasure is not a goal that is conducive to happiness because moments of pleasure require three factors that are not always available: (1) *an object capable of giving pleasure*: sometimes I am out in beautiful nature surrounded by mosquitoes (2) *an appropriate, effective instrument for the enjoyment of said object*: sometimes there is beautiful music playing but I have an ear ache; and (3) *the presence of the proper frame of mind for enjoyment*: sometimes I am feeling randy in the presence of a sexy willing person but I am worried about losing my job. Because pleasure is dependent on these ever-changing factors, moments of pleasure are occasional and fleeting. This fact should...if I am a thinking person... lead me to conclude that there must be more fruitful pursuits.

Let's say you are secure financially and you are uninterested in pleasure because your life is good by the usual criteria. However, you don't feel that you are good enough as a person. You feel selfish, vain, arrogant and self-indulgent; perhaps you are cruel or none too honest. You know you have a moral problem and you feel guilty. Consequently, you would like to be more honest, pure, holy, sweet, generous and loving. What do you do? You pursue virtue.

In Christian cultures you learn that you are a 'sinner' more or less as soon as you pop out of the womb. Yes, there is a grace period when Mom and Pop think you are God's gift to the human race and lavish affection on you, but before long they start to tell you that there is something 'wrong' with you. It's news to you, a rude awakening. Before you know it, you start to have a complex. You believe, without a shred of evidence, that you are not good enough. These days many people with low self-esteem work hard to become holy and good. This striving to be virtuous is very sad because there is nothing actually wrong with you.

Some people feel weak and set out to seek power. They tend to make the lives of others miserable because they feel miserable inside. There are many other things people want, but the last one I will mention is fame or recognition. You feel small and unimportant because there is a small person inside - an inner child that never grew up, a small person that wants to be noticed and appreciated. So you become a needy pest, always seeking attention. You develop sophisticated strategies to get people to notice you.

There is no need to discuss all human pursuits; these are the basic ones. All are meant to make me feel adequate, whole, complete, happy and free. Let's see if they work.

We have now arrived at a very important point in our first inquiry. Some part of you is not going to like what comes next, but try to take this on board. Examine the logic carefully. Failure to understand the next teaching may disqualify you for enlightenment.

Does Happiness Exist?

Everybody has been happy for a minute or two, an hour, a week or a month. This proves happiness exists. But where does it come from?

Is it in Objects?

When you get what you want, you feel free, happy, complete and whole. Does this mean that the feeling of happiness-wholeness-completeness-freedom comes from the object? You do not chase things to make yourself unhappy. You pursue what you pursue because you believe the joy is somehow contained in the object.

But is it true? Is there happiness in objects? If it were, the same object would give everyone happiness. A granny who knits socks and little wool caps for her grandchildren is not going to enjoy bungee jumping. Can you see granny standing on the edge of a bridge with bungee cords attached to her legs? And how happy is her teenage grandson who loves jumping off bridges going to be knitting socks?

If objects are the source of joy, it is reasonable to chase things in the world. Let's analyze the situation and see where the joy lies. You have a well-developed fantasy about the perfect person - your soul mate. You believe your loneliness will end and happiness will come when he or she appears. You go to a meeting. You see someone who fits your fantasy. Your eyes meet across the room. You feel an exciting buzz.

What happens to the fantasy when you actually connect? It disappears! Why? Because the object is present. A great feeling of love and happiness floods over you. You assume that the joy is coming from the object and immediately become attached to it. But your assumption is incorrect. *When the desire for the object disappears, the love that is the nature of the self immediately floods the mind.* The object is not the source of the feeling; it is just a catalyst that releases your inbuilt joy. The only reasonable conclusion I can draw leads me to ask: if happiness/love is my nature, why am I looking for it in objects?

If you cannot accept this fact right now, we can still teach you. Let's accept your contention that joy is in objects. Before we move on, let me ask you this question: what kind of happiness is it? You cannot claim that it is permanent happiness. When the experience ends, your sense of incompleteness returns and you try to reconnect with the same object or you seek a new object. You may argue that objective happiness works if you can stay connected to the things that seem to make you happy. But objects come and go. No object remains permanently in your life. The only constant is me, the subject! Vedanta contends that the nature of the subject is limitless bliss. It is a contention that we will prove in many ways. But if you are attached to your belief in the value of objects for happiness, please tentatively accept our view as a working hypothesis and listen to these teachings. You may change your mind.

Objects don't work for a very simple reason: I seek completeness when I am already complete. I do this because I do not know who I am.

We should consider one more sad fact about objects: you do not get rid of the seeking when you get what you want because the effort that went into obtaining the object is required to keep it. Everything is going south all the time. If you get a good job, your troubles have just begun; you must work hard to keep it. If you are lucky enough to have someone fall in love with you, you need to reciprocate more or less constantly or the love will go elsewhere.

Finally, not only are the objects inherently flawed in terms of their happiness content, the field in which the objects appear is set up in such a way that lasting happiness is impossible. The field of my experience, which is just my mind, is a duality. This means that because I do not know the non-dual nature of reality, I think in terms of opposites. For every upside there is a downside. Every gain entails a loss. For example, you fall in love and discover intimacy. But you also suffer attachment. To live in the house of your dreams makes you happy, but to do so you have to take a mortgage and pay through the nose for thirty years, which does not make you happy. Life is like that. There is no way to beat the system and get only the upside from life's experiences. As the poet says, 'joy and sorrow woven fine.' It is a zero-sum game.

Definition of an Object

An object is anything other than me, the subject. My body appears as an object in me. My feelings appear in me and are known to me. They, too, are objects, as are my thoughts, beliefs and opinions. Absolutely anything that I experience is an object, including the past, present and future. Experience itself is an object known to me. Please do not forget this definition because it is the essence of self inquiry; you will need it right up to the end of your inquiry - and beyond. It is the basis of the practice that will set you free.

I am not an Object

If something is known to me, it cannot be me. Physical objects, thoughts and emotions and my experiences in the world are objects known to me.

Am I separate from Objects?

Let's deepen our inquiry. Where do I end and the objects begin? Is there a separation? If there is, what kind of separation is it? If you analyze perception, you will see that the objects are not actually separate from the subject, me.

Light strikes objects, travels through the eyes and the experience and knowledge of the object happens in the mind. The knowledge of the object is true to the object. If a dog is walking in front of you, you do not see a cat. What is the experience of the dog made of? It is made of your mind, the perceiving instrument. The mind is your consciousness taking the shape of various objects. It can know anything because it is formless and limitless. If you think about the experience of the dog, you can see that from an experiential point of view the dog is actually in your mind, not outside walking on the street. It looks as though it is outside, but if you try to experience it outside, you cannot. No matter how close you get to the dog, it is always an object. You cannot just jump out of your body/mind and experience objects because objects are not located where they seem to be. They always seem to be away from us but they are not.

Here is one of Vedanta's counterintuitive assertions: objects are not real. When we say they are not real, we mean that they never stay the same from second to second and they are made up of parts. Which part of the dog is actually the dog? The hair, the teeth, the paws, the nose? And if the dog is the nose, what is the nose? It is an aggregation of particles changing according to various natural laws. So which particle is the nose particle? When you get very close to the dog, the dog is only a patch of hair.

When you investigate, all objects ultimately break down to the space in which the particles appear and the observer of the space. The observer is conscious of space and objects sitting in it, or they could not be known. And the consciousness of the observer is the consciousness that knows everything.

Definition of Real

Something is real if it never changes. Objects are not real because they change. If you think about it carefully, this fact will upset you because you would not pursue objects if you knew they were unreal.

In any case, we are trying to determine where objects are located and the relationship I have to them. Here is another exhaustive analysis of the relationship between the subject, me, and the objects that present themselves to me. This inquiry shows that the objects we identify and think we are experiencing through sensory perceptions are essentially nothing more than specific sensations created by the sense organs. The sensations we experience do not constitute the entirety of the object with which we associate them. For instance, the hardness we feel on our rear end when sitting on a wooden chair does not constitute the knowledge of the entire chair. The 'chair' only becomes a chair because we make an inference based on an idea of what a chair is. What we experience is only certain distinct sensations in the body, which in turn are interpreted to 'mean' something by the mind, which like the body, appears as an object in me, awareness. These sensations and the knowledge that arises with them do not equal either the experience of the chair or the knowledge of the chair. All we experience is hardness or softness (if the chair is upholstered) and an idea of chair. Greg Goode's book, *The Direct Path*, presents many concrete experiments that prove that objects seem to be out there but are not 'really' located where they seem to be.

If you investigate further, you will see that the chair is nothing but the experience of the particular sense organ through which it is perceived. Furthermore, the independent existence of any sensation cannot be verified by an organ other than the organ that experiences it. For the chair to be objective and subject to common knowledge, it would have to be verified by some other organ of perception. But it is only when a given sensation appears in me that I experience what is called seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, or smelling.

Continuing to inquire, we discover that sense organs are essentially nothing other than me, the awareness that sees them. I do not experience them as instruments sitting around waiting to be used by me. I do not think, "I want to smell the rose. I wonder where I left my nose? I had it yesterday but it seems to be lost. Let me call my wife, maybe she misplaced it." Analysis reveals that each organ is a unique function of awareness by virtue of which a particular type of perception occurs.

Finally, since awareness is required or the sense organ cannot sense, it is clear that the senses are dependent on awareness for their very existence-but awareness does not depend on them. You, awareness, exist whether or not you are sensing objects, as in deep sleep, for example. If they have no independent existence, the objects the senses seem to report...which is the basis of our knowledge of them...have no existence apart from me, the witnessing awareness...about which much will be said as

we proceed. If the objects only exist as sensations and sensations only exist as me, the joy that is apparently caused by contact with objects is only coming from me. If we think one step further, it will become clear that I cannot separate the happiness I feel from me, the subject. Just as a wave is never separate from the ocean in which it 'waves,' the joy that waves up when I get what I want is just me, consciousness.

So we see that objects are not away from us in a world 'out there.' They are experienced and known 'in' us. If we take our inquiry a bit further, we come up with the fact that is the basis of Vedanta, the knowledge that sets us free from dependence on objects: we discover that reality is non-dual and that we cannot depend on objects because they are us. If our analysis is true - and it is - then the objects we experience are not separate from the consciousness that makes the experience of them possible.²

The Objects Are Me

Let me ask a million dollar question. How far are you from your experiencing consciousness? And the answer is: you are not far at all. In fact, there is no difference between the real you, the non-experiencing witness consciousness, and your experiencing consciousness, the person you think you are. Although the person you think you are is an object known to you, like the physical objects are known to it, it is non-separate from you, the non-experiencing witness - the real you - just as a ring made of gold is not separate from the gold. If this is true, the objects are you! This is what we mean when we use the word non-duality. Duality, the distinction between the subject and the object, breaks down when you investigate the nature of perception.

But I am not an Object

The fly in the ointment of duality is this: the body cannot be you because it is an object known to you in the same way that any other object is known to you. Like the body, you are not your emotions or your thoughts or anything that happens in you, because all these objects are known by you. My hand is me, but I am not my hand. If my hand is removed, I am still the same. Of course, if I am the body, I am not the same. I am a body with one hand.

This is an incredible fact to appreciate because it means that I am never in conflict with objects and I am free of them - particularly the unpleasant ones – at the same time.

Definition of Non-Duality

It is vitally important at the beginning of the teaching to understand the meaning of non-duality. It is easy to understand when you undertake the inquiry into perception, but it is very difficult to accept because it is contradicted by experience. We do not think deeply about the process of experience as we

² The words consciousness and awareness are synonyms. Both refer to me, the subject. I have purposely avoided using the Sanskrit terms, Brahman and Atman because we have no way to evaluate them outside the Sanskritic tradition. Both words refer to consciousness (*chaitanyam*, *chetana*) viewed from slightly different angles. And there is no difference between them. I tend to favour awareness because the Western mind tends to view consciousness as subjective objects appearing in consciousness, which creates a problem because the whole point of self inquiry is to distinguish consciousness from objects.

Experience. We take the appearance of experience - that the subject and the object are separate - to be the reality and build our lives on it, when in fact nothing is separate from us at all.

It makes a huge difference to know that everything is actually you, not someone or something else. Conflict virtually disappears and the small conflicts that do develop are easily laid to rest. Furthermore, it makes an equally big difference to know that you are free of objects.

Finally, the icing on the cake of life is the fact that you are happiness itself. If happiness is not in the objects and there are only two categories in existence, the subject and the objects, then happiness can only be you. When you appreciate yourself as the subject, you will be blissful because you are always present.

If I am not happy, it is not due to the presence or absence of an object, it is due to a failure to distinguish myself from the objects that appear in me. Vedanta is a workable method for discovering both our oneness with everything and our freedom from everything.

Non-duality does not mean that you walk around in some kind of ecstatic orgasmic spiritual daze unable to distinguish yourself from the objects and the experiencing consciousness - the 'little' you. It doesn't mean that the person you have taken yourself to be for so long is 'not there.' You hear spiritual people saying that a particular 'enlightened being' is so 'not there', as if there was virtue in being non-existent.

For the record, that person...the one you are trying to change or rid yourself of...remains when you know who you are. It is just known to be an object non-separate from you, awareness, the non-experiencing witness. That person, the one that gives you so much trouble, is only a problem because you identify with it. When you understand clearly that you are not exclusively that person and identify with who you really are, he or she appears as a good friend, a toothless enemy, or at worst just an amusing bundle of irrational tendencies.

You may feel a little silly when you realize that you were tricked by duality and that you are actually awareness, the non-experiencing witness. Don't berate yourself for taking yourself to be the experiencing awareness for so long. Everyone is fooled by duality.

So far I have equated the understanding of the non-dual nature of reality with the word happiness. Maybe happiness is not a precise word to describe the result of the discrimination between the subject and the objects. The 'happiness' we are talking about is not the result of a happening, getting what you want or avoiding what you don't. It is not 'ha ha' happiness. Or "I won the lottery and fell in love" happiness. The kind of happiness that is the nature of the self is a subtle simple sense of wholeness and completeness, a quiet contentment born of an unquestionable sense of self confidence: knowing that no matter what happens, good or bad, I am always OK because I am a partless whole. I am adequate. There are no divisions in me, no boundaries or borders separate me from anything.

So the self inquiry process boils down to determining if I am whole and complete - and therefore free - or if I am incomplete - and therefore not free. If I am complete, then I needn't chase objects. If I am incomplete, I must keep chasing objects.

Self inquiry is an existential, not a philosophical, intellectual, religious or mystical issue. The basic question is: what am I doing here on Earth in this meat tube? Who am I? What is life all about? If I could figure it out on my own, I would have done so by now. But the problem is too tricky. I need help.

I need a means of self-knowledge. Vedanta is a means of self-knowledge. It reveals the hidden logic of our own experience and convinces us that if we are rational, it is to our advantage to abandon the pursuit of objects and to go for freedom directly.

We are almost at the end of the first teaching. If you want to move to the second teaching, you need to have signed on to the logic so far. If you can't accept it, the next teaching will make no sense, because you will still be expecting some kind of object...usually changed circumstances...to make you happy. If this logic is not enough - and it often isn't because of the ego's pig-headed insistence that objects are the source of happiness - please consider one last fact...

Life is a Zero Sum Game

As previously mentioned, the lid on the coffin of the object happiness idea is the sad fact that life is a zero-sum game. It is a zero-sum game because the world of objects is a duality. You cannot win every time. You lose as much as you win. I need money for security, but my desire to spend (what good is money if you can't spend it?) makes me insecure. The more pleasure I get, the more pleasure I want. Wanting is painful. I want power to be free of my sense of inadequacy and smallness, but power depends on circumstances not under my control, causing me to feel powerless. I want to be perfect, but the more perfect I become, the more hidden imperfections come to light. I want to enjoy the intimacy of a relationship, but to get it I need to be attached to the object, so I lose my freedom. If I want to be free, I have to sacrifice intimacy. The list goes on.

The Fourth Pursuit

We divided experience into three basic pursuits: security, pleasure and virtue. Objects can give us the first two, and the way we go about pursuing objects can give us the third. But actually, there is only one pursuit, the pursuit of freedom. Why? *Because I want an object for the freedom that comes when the desire for the object goes.* I don't want security. I want freedom from insecurity. I don't want pleasure, I want freedom from suffering. I don't want virtue, I want freedom from sin.

There is nothing 'wrong' with objects per se. But they are only an indirect means to temporary happiness. Since the real object of pursuing objects is freedom, I need a direct path. On this path, I go directly for happiness. I understand clearly that objects will not help. You are not a mature spiritually healthy person, one qualified for inquiry, unless you understand this teaching on objects.

This is the point where the rubber meets the road, spiritually. Everyone wants freedom, all right, but they want freedom **plus** the objects. They want to keep all their stuff and add the freedom object to their object pile. It doesn't work but that does not stop them from thinking that it does. It doesn't work because freedom is not an object that we can get as an experience. If we can, then it is not freedom at all because all experiences come to an end one fine day.

Understanding that there is a direct path to freedom is perhaps the most important moment in life. To pursue anything properly, whether it is security, pleasure or virtue, you should commit yourself to it 100%. The more things you pursue, the less likely you are to get any one of them. You can only get so far with a particular desire before it conflicts with another desire. The next goal seems more attainable, so you drop the first. People hop from one thing to another, never finding success in one thing because they believe that something else will work better or faster. If you are actually awareness and not the needy wanting creature you think you are...and awareness is non-dual and always free of the objects

known to it...pursuing anything else is not going to work. If you want to pursue security, pleasure or virtue or power or fame or whatever, then go for it. But there is no substance in those things. They give pleasure and pain intermittently, but not the self-confident happiness that comes from knowing that freedom is your nature.

Questions

- 1) What distinguishes Vedanta from modern non-dual teachings?
- 2) What is the first stage of inquiry?
- 3) Why is it difficult?
- 4) What is the second stage?
- 5) Why doesn't reading Vedanta texts work?
- 6) What are the three basic human pursuits?
- 7) Why do we pursue them?
- 8) Why is the pursuit inherently frustrating?
- 9) What is the definition of an object?
- 10) Why is happiness not in objects?
- 11) What do I actually want when I want an object?
- 12) What is Vedanta's definition of reality?
- 13) Why are objects not real?
- 14) Why are the objects not separate from the subject?
- 15) What makes the objects seem to be separate from the subject?
- 16) What is the relationship between the subject and the object?
- 17) Why are the subject and object the same but different?
- 18) What is freedom?
- 19) Why is the subject, the self, free?
- 20) Why can't you 'win' in life by pursuing objects?
- 21) What is the direct path to freedom?



The first spring flowers in Spain