

What is next? – A map of Enlightenment

Brian [name is changed]:

Hi Tan.

It was nice of you to get in touch. It's made me think about where I am in this process, and the truth is that I really don't know.

Tan:

Hello Brian,

Yes I got in touch because I wanted to know how you were doing, after your last message.

In order to give you a map of sorts, let me briefly outline the “enlightenment process” before we go deeper into the progress that you are making. There are three stages that mark this process in the apparent world.

First Stage:

The first phase we can call endarkenment. The person lives his life firmly believing that his self is limited, incomplete and inadequate. He seeks for happiness –without realizing that he does- in experiences and objects such as security, pleasure and virtue – (money, sex, rock and roll ... and do-gooding)

At some point the person will be struck by a non-dual epiphany .This is often accompanied by a feeling of limitlessness, freedom, expansion, joy etc. This epiphany usually shows the person that there is a “solution, something more” outside this world of darkness and *samsara*.

Second Stage:

This marks the beginning of the second phase called self-realization/self inquiry.

Here the person will inquire into what he/she is and what the universe is and will probably follow a modern path (psychology, physics) or a spiritual path (e.g. religion, yoga, Vedanta).

This phase will end when:

- a) You realize “What you are not”
- b) You realize without a doubt “What you are” – Non-dual, action-less, unborn, limitless, ordinary awareness.
- c) This realization negates the doer
- d) This realization renders the binding Vasanas non-binding

The points b), c) and d) can happen at once (-or not) when you own the *akandakara vritti*, the unbroken I thought, in a deep meditative state (see the text of James below that I have attached).

This unbroken I thought is not something spectacular just the opposite. It is the reflection of yourself in a still mind. You reflect in the Subtle Body (your mind) as the pure ordinary everyday ground feeling of existence, being and consciousness. This feeling has been there all along. This reflection of yourself is the ordinary everyday feeling of just being alive.

You are the light of the camera and not the film. You are the canvas but not the forms painted on it. You are that ordinary existence from which all experiences, thoughts and feelings arise.

Third Stage:

You realize that you are Consciousness in which the process of enlightenment and the concepts of being enlightened or not enlightened arose. All these stages were just an appearance. But you are none of that. You have been consciousness all along. You cannot become awareness. You seemingly “become” it by merely understanding who you are.

Brian:

I feel very isolated, as there's no-one I can talk to about Vedanta, so I seem to be in no-man's land.

Tan:

Yes, there are very few people if any with whom you can talk about this. There are few who are interested in freedom outside the world of objects. Even among the few, the majority of so called “spiritual people” are still hunting an object (“enlightenment”).

You are alone in this. And it sounds like you are at a stage where this can be frustrating because you are in the process of negating the world and its objects as “Not-Me”. However this is a necessary step and it is worth it, because what you are searching for is everlasting peace, freedom and joy ... yourself.

Maybe you already know the meaning of being really alone. Alone means All-One. It is the same in the German language.

A group of like minded friends however can be helpful (as a *sat-sanga*) but is not necessarily required.

Where are you located? You are in the UK, yes?

If yes, there is Swamini Atmaprakashananda in the UK. She is a disciple of Swami Dayananda. This is her website <http://www.arshavidya.org.uk>

There are regular meetings on Vedanta even via Skype.

Maybe there is a local group of hers with which you can connect. If not you can also connect with James via Skype (I think James still offers that) or with me or any of the other teachers at shiningworld via Skype if you wish.

Brian:

I would say that I know the teaching fairly well, but it's taking a stand as awareness that I don't find easy.

When I do become aware of a thought or a feeling, I can dismiss it as not-self, but I can't do that every minute of the day, and if I do it when I can, so what? What then?

Is this it, do I just go on doing this for the rest of my life?

Tan:

You are making good progress and working on understanding “a) What you are not”. You are establishing a “witness” so to speak who witnesses everything and dismisses it as not-me as not-self. In the beginning the witness will still have some attributes (e.g. being time-bound, being a doer, having a form/size/location or shape). In the end there will be nothing in the outside and inside world left. This can take a long time. It took me 2 years of watching literally 24x7 to understand that there is nothing out there. And this is an initial step. This is however where other spiritual paths end - in a frustrating limbo which seems like a dead end. “There is nothing there. Only Emptiness”

But that is only one side of the coin. The other side is the witnessing awareness (yourself) that sees all the objects. An inquiry into this “thick” witness will reveal what you are and what you are not. The witness will be completely thinned out as well until it has no attributes. But even this thin witness will be inquired into. Because this thin witness is still a subtle duality which will be negated as not-self as well at some point. That is the end of stage 2).

Now let us examine together where you are and what might be next. You are stating that “I can't do that every minute of the day”.

This means that the “witness” that you have established is a doer and not limitless. This witness can not do it all the time. He is time-bound and can only witness with effort. (this is what can be called a “thick” witness with attributes) But you? Are you that witness?

You are aware that “you as a witness” cannot witness the whole time. However at the same time you are aware that sometimes “you as a witness” are witnessing and dismissing the objects. So who are you then? Are you the one who cannot do it every minute of the day or ... are you the one seeing doing and not-doing?

Brian:

I read Nisargadatta almost every day, and find him very inspiring, but he seems light years away from where I am.

Tan:

I am not so sure about Nisargadatta. I also felt very inspired by his book “I am that” and the beautiful poetic sentences many years ago. But it did not really help me getting rid of my confusion. It helped lighting up my motivation and my desire for freedom. However it seemed vague and confusing at times.

I have read a few emails on the e-satsang section of shiningworld.com where seekers were quite confused by the language that Nisargadatta is using. Quite a number mails were sent to James about this and also one to Paul Hardman. James has met Nisargadatta before he was famous. And although Nisargadatta was probably “enlightened”, he was not a proper teacher using consistent terminology and teaching methods...

And who is this Nisargadatta who is light years away? Does it matter in anyway for you? There is only one self –you-. Nisargadatta and Brian are just appearing as concepts in you.

In this stage It can be helpful for you to you to go to a seminar of James if you are able to. I believe it would be helpful for you to be in contact with a teacher face-to-face to clear your doubts.

Brian:

I think I'd leave it there, because as you can see I'm struggling to express where I'm at.

Love, Brian

Tan:

I can see that you are struggling and I remember that struggle. You will live through it, if the desire for freedom is strong enough.

Love

Tan

p.s. I have added a section of an e-satsang from James which could be helpful.

Brian:

Hi Tan.

I've just read your email, for which many thanks. My first impression is Wow, spot on! It's like wandering lost in the forest and suddenly coming on a signpost. It's very reassuring to know that I am at a certain point on a process, and that there are certain things that I can do to move on in that process.

Obviously, now, I'll have to read your email in detail, and I'll get back to you when I've digested it.

You mentioned talking on Skype. How do usually arrange that; how long do you like to talk for, etc.?

As you say, you're giving me a map. I've realised I've never had this before, not a map made for where I am, specifically for me, and it's very exciting. I've just printed it out and I'm going to read it in detail.

Thanks

Love, Brian

Tan:

Hi Brian,

You are very welcome.

It is Vedanta that is able to give a map. I am just the messenger.

In terms of Skype. I know that James was offering Skype sessions based on donations on www.shiningworld under events/Individual/Group Skype Satsang by Appointment

Love

Tan

e-Satsang From James (Ramji) on Stages of Enlightenment:

There are no 'enlightened beings' because there is only one formless self. So when knowledge destroys a person's sense of individuality, the individual 'becomes' the self by default. The 'becoming' is not a physical change or the experiential removal of the individual. It is a change in understanding. Just as knowledge of the nature of a mirage will prevent one from taking it to be water, the knowledge that I am the self allows one to understand that the experiencer, the individual, is only an apparent, not a real self.

An 'enlightened being' is just the self functioning through a mind whose self ignorance has been removed. But the removal of self ignorance does not automatically remove the vasanas in the mind although it eventually renders them non-binding since they bind only because of ignorance. Since from the self's point of view all the vasanas are known to be only the self, it has no preferences as to the type of vasana it illumines. Therefore it works through the existing vasanas. Because the vasanas are the cause of the mind's energy, attitudes and opinions, ignorance and knowledge and every mind has unique and varied experiences, the self seems to be unique and varied. This 'seeming' is caused by lack of discrimination, the power to separate the real from the experiential, so that an indiscriminate person will wrongly assume that there are many types of enlightened beings and many stages of enlightenment.

The Stages of Enlightenment

(1) Endarkenment

Nonetheless, from the individual's point of view there are three 'stages of enlightenment.' The first stage might well be called 'endarkenment.' We come into this life experiencing our limitlessness and oneness with everything but, because the intellect has yet to develop, we do not understand what we are

experiencing. When the intellect does develop it is trained to think of the self as a limited, incomplete, inadequate creature and encouraged to solve the problem of inadequacy by picking up experience in life. At a certain point, the individual comes to realize that no matter how much experience he or she can garner, the experienced objects and activities do not do the job. This is usually an unpleasant realization, often resulting in a profound disillusionment with life and is frequently referred to as the 'dark night of the soul' in religious literature or 'hitting bottom' in popular culture.

Most react to this existential crisis by sinking into distracting habits, mind numbing substances and/or frivolous entertainments, but for unknown reasons a few begin to enjoy a variety of peculiar and invariably confusing religious or spiritual experiences that lead them to the idea of God or some sort of 'inner light' or 'higher state.' And at some point during this period the person becomes convinced that he or she can find happiness 'within' or in some relationship with God.

(2) Self Realization/Self Inquiry

The second stage might be termed the 'seeking' or 'questing' phase and usually heads off in two apparently separate directions. The religious road leads to the development of a personal relationship with God who is conceived as a pure and perfect someone other than one's self. The idea of the self as inadequate, incomplete, and separate is retained and often conceived of as corrupted by sin. Salvation is meant to lie in invoking the grace of God through prayer and the study of scripture and working hard here on earth for a place in the 'promised land,' a heaven far from this veil of tears which can only be accessed by relinquishing the physical body. The religious life offers a positive alternative to the belief in the world as a source of meaning.

The other branch of the road leads in a less doctrinal and belief-laden direction into the experience of the 'inner' world and an investigation of the self. In its worldly form it may incline one to the study of psychology but in its 'spiritual' form the person experiences epiphanies, fleeting samadhis, satoris and the like that give rise to the conviction that the 'the truth' dwells 'within' as the 'higher' or 'inner' self or as some transcendental state of consciousness. He or she will probably characterize the changes during this phase as an 'awakening.' Although the experience of the inner self/truth/state is invariably uplifting and intensifies one's quest, it is always confusing because the information one gathers challenges the habitual view of oneself as a needy, incomplete, inadequate, separate creature. Many of these experiences can truthfully be described as the experience of oneness with all things, limitlessness, and of transcendent bliss.

During this stage which might be also called the meditation stage, the mind, formerly riveted on happenings in the outer world turns inward and fixes itself on the self, the 'light within,' and at some point, usually after intense investigation, 'realizes' the self, since the self is the source of all experience. This 'realization' is always in the form of an experience and is thought by many to be the end of the search...and the ultimate 'state.' But Vedanta says that while this is a welcome and enjoyable 'state' it is not the end because there is still a sense of separation between the experiencer and the object of experience, the self. When there is separation there is doubt and the doubt is always that this 'state,' like all states will end, plunging the experiencer back into darkness...which invariably happens because what is actually happening is that the experience is actually not the experience of the self but a reflection of the self in a still mind and since both the experiencer, the ego, and the mind are in time they are subject to change.

This doubt is due to the failure of the experiencer to understand that what is being experienced is just his own self...in which case it could never be lost. The failure to convert the experience to knowledge is usually caused by the belief in the experiencer that knowledge is merely intellectual and that there is such a thing as a permanent experience. So when the experience happens the intellect gets submerged in the bliss, peace, and radiance and switches off, as it does in most intense sensuous experiences, and stops inquiring.

To enter the 'final' stage, which is not a stage, inquiry must continue during the experience of the self. In ordinary perception a thought wave arises in the mind that corresponds to the nature of the perceived object. You see a tree and you know it is a tree because the self, awareness illumines the thought of tree as it arises in the intellect. Similarly when the ego experiences the reflection of the self in a pure mind a thought corresponding to the nature of the self, called an akandakara vritti, an unbroken 'I' thought arises, and this thought needs to be owned. When it is taken as one's own, it is this 'I' thought, backed by experience, that destroys the notion in the ego/mind that it is limited, incomplete and separate.

(3) Enlightenment

At this point everything stops and there is a subtle shift in awareness in which the foreground becomes the background and the background the foreground. The ego/mind, the subject, meditating on the self, the object, becomes the subject and the subject, formerly the object, becomes the subject. And this never changes because it was obtained through the knowledge that what I experience is me but I am not what I experience. In other words, one

'becomes' the Self. Unlike an experience, the self can never be lost because it is me, the basis of everything...and there is nothing other than it to lose it.