



Dharma Combat

In the old days in India it was customary for royalty to host great debates between proponents of conflicting points of view concerning the nature of reality and the realization of the Self. It is a shame that this tradition has fallen by the wayside in our materialistic times.

Nonetheless, last year I was invited to submit an article for The Mountain Path, the official publication of Ramanashram and the discussion that follows is reminiscent of the spirit of those times. The topic was knowledge and experience and it proved to be a somewhat provocative article as I expected. A highly knowledgeable swami associated with the Ramanashram read it and took issue with some of my statements. His criticisms and my replies follow. We communicated indirectly through the editor of the Mountain path.

Not only does our conversation point out the importance of establishing the meaning of words when discussing spiritual matters but it covers a number of important topics: savikalpa and nirvikalpa Samadhi, experience without subject and object, the nature of liberation, the distinction between Yoga and Vedanta, enlightenment sickness and others.

Swami: I write this to heartily commend a number of excellent articles in the April issue of MP. However, in the critique of neo-Advaita by Swartz, there are a couple of jarring blemishes, marring an otherwise excellent piece. He writes:

Swartz: "One of the most common neo-Advaitic misconceptions is the idea that the ego must be destroyed or surrendered for enlightenment to happen"

Swami: One wonders if Bhagavan Ramana himself is thus labeled a

neo-Advaitin? For Bhagavan constantly denied the survival of the ego upon realization and never conceded even a vestige of the "I am the body *alone*" idea to remain in the consciousness of a *jnani*. The functional personality of the *jnani* in the transactional realm is never to be confused with the *dehatma buddhi*, the hallmark of *the mula avidya*.

Swartz further says that based on his understanding and experience "realization of one's self as non-dual awareness does not destroy the ego" etc. If this is to be valid, then such "enlightenment" does not destroy ignorance at all! From the viewpoint of the onlookers, the *jnani* appears to function with individuality and so the *shastras* use the word *badhita ahankara* (falsified ego) which cannot bind the sage similar to a burnt rope, in order to reconcile the seeming paradox for the sake of the unenlightened. Bhagavan always emphasized that this is purely a concession made for the onlookers in order to demystify the state of enlightenment as an unnatural existence and that for the *jnani* himself, no such confusion exists and hence does not need any such allowances!

Swartz: The problem lies in how the swami uses the word 'ego' and how I use it. He is correct and I am also correct. "The functional personality of the jnani is what I meant by ego." It doesn't disappear, at least not from the outside, as he points out. But it is neutralized by Self knowledge. So even though it exists it doesn't exist.

Ego is also often used as a synonym for Self ignorance, what he calls 'dehatma buddhi,' so in that sense it is reasonable to say that enlightenment destroys the ego but that is not what I meant when I wrote that. I meant the jivatman...which is the Self either under the spell of ignorance or not. It is pure Consciousness, apparently embodied. Apparent embodiment is not a problem as long as you know it is apparent. It is my fault for not making it clear although this was not the thrust of my argument...it was only supporting logic.

Swami: I am very glad that Mr Swartz has clarified it as purely a semantic confusion, although it was entirely avoidable. Actually much of the confusions in Vedanta can be traced to semantic origin, where there is *unwittingly* a lack of consensus in the meaning ascribed to technical terms. Therefore, it is all the more important to conscientiously stick to Vedantic

paribhasha (terminology), as we have enough issues already to grapple with and handle well, without having to rope in additional complications arising from semantic misunderstanding.

Swartz: I agree with Swami that it is important to stick with proper Vedantic terminology and that I am sometimes guilty of not doing so. It is not for lack of understanding or respect for words or the teaching tradition of Vedanta. Had my karma kept me in India in the company of Vedanta savvy people I would not have used some of the words I used the way I used them. But it so happens at the request of my guru that I spend the bulk of my time in the West where spirituality is in its infancy and where it is basically impossible to ask seekers to learn this terminology in depth. I generally get them to study Tattva Bodh to familiarize them with some very basic terminology but the subtle and advanced terms...which Swami is well versed in...are not useful because most have not developed themselves to the point where the issues that these terms address are relevant to their sadhana. So I plead guilty but ask for mercy. It so happens that even with rudimentary terminology sincere people can make excellent progress in Self inquiry. And in the last analysis it is not the terms themselves but what they represent that is the basis of a successful communication. As long as two people know what they are referring to any term will do, since the comprehension that is brought about by knowledge is beyond words.

Finally, I may have been a bit naïve as to the readership of the Mountain Path. I should have known that proper sastris read it. If I had thought about it I would have been more careful in my choice of words but I was basically interested in stimulating thinking about the knowledge/experience issue among the Western readership and I was much limited by the number of words I was allotted. Had I been given two or three times the space I would have supplied the background necessary to keep the words from being misunderstood. At the end of this discussion I have copied in a more complete essay on the issues involved.

I also am well aware of the fact...as Swami points out below...that there is fundamentally no difference between knowledge and experience and have written about it many times. One of the big problems the Western spiritual world suffers is a strong contempt for knowledge. It is widely believed that knowledge is only 'intellectual' and that experience is somehow much superior. In India this is not such a problem because the whole Vedic

tradition reveres the intellect. The knowledge/experience issue is rather like the argument in elementary particle physics concerning the nature of subatomic particles. Are the actually particles or are then waves? From one point of view they look like particles and from another they seem to be waves.

Swami: Having said that, I object to his using the term 'ego' for the 'functional personality of the jnani' because *technically* this meaning has *nothing to do* with Self-ignorance which alone - as he has correctly pointed out above - manifests as *dehatma buddhi* (i.e. the ego), for many *jivanmuktas* have functioned brilliantly in their life after enlightenment (egoless living).

Where does neo-Advaitic misconception come in here (which was what originally sought to be condemned in the first place)? Actually for all their stupidity which Swartz had set out to brilliantly expose in the original article, the neo-Advaitins themselves (not to speak of classical Advaitins) do not give this meaning to the term 'ego' (which Swartz has given unfortunately).

Why so? Because they all the while celebrate their own functional personality 'which has bloomed after their ostensible enlightenment' and gallivant round the globe guiding gullible neophyte seekers, promoting expensive spiritual camps and attractive tourist packages! In fact, the whole purpose of *jivanmukti* is to live *here and now* as 'totally happy and fulfilled personalities' (*krta krtyaas*), and not for some future heavenly paradise! So to give such a meaning to 'ego' is counterproductive and hence unacceptable. Hence, to claim that 'he (Swartz) is also right', based on a patently wrong definition (according to *shastras* as well as sages), is simply inadmissible because of its misleading implications. Nobody would strive after enlightenment if they were to be told that they would become *dysfunctional personalities* after gaining Self-Knowledge! I hope my objection does make sense. *The functional personality of the seeker continues to remain but glows with an ethereal incandescence once he gains True Knowledge*; purified of all dross and ignorance, it is disarming with a divinity that is radiant with a healing presence. As M P Pandit said of Bhagavan, 'a *jivanmukta* is a mighty *impersonality*' (!) as 'personality' implies in a subliminal way the survival of ego.

Swartz: I already stated in my last reply that by ego I meant the functional personality and that it was not a particularly good choice of words. One

problem when talking about anything in Maya as if it is real is the fact that nothing is the same from one moment to the next. And words are often like snapshots. They give an impression that the things to which they refer are static. Whether a personality is a functional 'radiant healing presence' or a dysfunctional neurotic entity it is in a state of constant flux so that all terms are meant only as general indicators. If we take the personality to be real then Self realization is not only a description of an important point in the process but it could be considered as the process itself. It is not that at one second the personality is a dysfunctional mess and the next minute...on realization of the Self...it instantly becomes 'a radiant healing presence.' Nothing in nature is like this. One's understanding of who one is changes irrevocably when one grasps the truth of one's nature but the effects of that understanding work out gradually.

Does the personality ever become the Self? It is the Self but the Self is not it. Was there a specific individual called Ramana Maharshi or do the words only refer to the Self? There is no 'right' either/or answer. It all depends on what you know. If you look at the sun from the equator you will probably conclude that it circles the earth. If you look at it from the North Pole in the dead of winter it look like it is going around in a circle in the sky. If you assume the sun's point of view the world seems to be going around it.

Swami: Swartz confounds the issue further saying he meant 'the *jivatman* which is the Self either under the spell of ignorance or not. It is pure Consciousness, apparently embodied.' This clarification carries its own problem again because *jivatman* by definition can 'exist' only under the spell of ignorance.

Once the ignorance is dispelled in the wake of Self-Knowledge, the *jivatman* resolves irrevocably into the *Paramatman*, the Supreme Self. If it persists, as Swartz suggests, even after enlightenment, it will lead to *Advaita haani* (loss of Advaita)! The total resolution of *jivatman* in *Paramatma drshti* alone is called *Jnanam*.

Swartz: *I wonder what Swami means by 'total resolution.'* It is a phrase that would probably be benefited by discussion. In the case of snake and the rope the snake does not return with the dawn of rope knowledge. Try as you might you can't get it to reappear. But in the case of a mirage on the desert, for example, the water is 'totally resolved' by knowledge...but

the water does not disappear. It seems to me this example serves to explain the 'functional personality' which I had the misfortune to call ego. It's there experientially but it has no teeth unlike Swami. :+) In both cases, however, whether ignorance is there or not, a jnani knows that it is only the Self appearing as ignorance. These two examples are given in Vedantic literature to dispel the notion that the only proof of jnanam is the complete disappearance of even the appearance of the 'functional personality.' In both cases the resolution is 'total' because the Self is the jnani and it is not bothered by ego or anything else in the dream it projects, assuming that there is a dream in the first place.

Swami: In Sat Darsanam (i.e. Ulladu Narpadu), verse 23, Bhagavan Ramana makes it clear that 'becoming food unto Him (and thus being one with Him) is indeed to see Him truly (Vision of the Self).

Further in verse 26 of the same text, Bhagavan lucidly states that the spurious entity that arises between the limited body and the infinite Self and deludes one into *feeling/experiencing* that one is just a body of finite dimensions only – this phantom entity alone is called the ego, the 'I-thought', knot of matter and spirit, bondage, *samsara*, the subtle body, mind, the *jiva* etc. The irrevocable severing of this knot (*cit-jada granthi bheda*) alone is Enlightenment as one is *then truly and experientially awakened* to one's absolute reality. So *jivatman* is synonymous with ego, *dehatma buddhi* and a mind mired in ignorance. It does not survive *Atma Jnanam* ! This alone is called *mano nasha*, and not destruction of the functional personality or functionality of the mind. A jnani knows himself to be "pure Consciousness, with an apparent embodiment" to use Swartz's words but then he is no more a *jivatma* (as Swartz would have us believe)!

Swartz: *This is the same argument used above. I see it as a semantic issue and I'm happy to be wrong. Swami is right that jnanam is the destruction of the 'I' notion. But my understanding is that the jiva, which is a projection of ignorance on the Self, is destroyed by Self knowledge, not the Jivatman which is the Self in conjunction with the Causal and Subtle Bodies. Otherwise why would there be two different terms: jiva and jivatman? But again I'm prepared to be 'wrong' if there is a 'right' and a 'wrong' in this discussion.*

It seems to me that if there is a creation it can just as easily be the Self consciously manifesting itself without ignorance as it can be a projection of ignorance. I believe this is why you have two explanations for the creation in Vedic literature: Lila and Maya. It's always a Lila but is not known to be a Lila to the jivatman until its ignorance is destroyed by Self knowledge. What's left is a radiant creation. But if you look at it from the Self's perspective there isn't even a creation and this discussion is not taking place. The only reason these words are valuable is if they stimulate inquiry or remove ignorance. The last thing I want to be is 'right' or believed.

Swami: Upadesa Sahasri of Shankara also states the same point as 'experiential awakening' because our *ignorance itself is experiential* to begin with and its antidote namely the 'awakening' has to be equally experiential too. Shankara says 'just as an ajnani feels himself to be the body in direct experience, the jnani experiences himself to be purest spirit in equal intensity (if not in greater measure)'; it is direct, intimate and non-verbal and hence self-referential!

Swartz: *I can't argue with this. It is correct.*

Swami: Further, the Self is never under the spell of ignorance; can the sun be ever covered by the clouds?¹ The Self has no problem whatsoever and it is ever free. It is the *mind* whose vision of the Self is covered by *avidya* and it is only this defective vision that needs to be corrected. Thus 'Self-ignorance' does not mean that ignorance belongs to the Self; it only means 'ignorance of the mind regarding the nature of the Self'. All the problems are for the mind alone *including bondage* and we always work for the *moksha* of the mind only, we are *not* liberating the Self from the spell of ignorance.

Swartz: *Again we have a semantic problem. What Swami says is true but let me play the Devil's advocate and say that anything that exists only exists by the grace of the Self... including ignorance and the mind. If you understand that the mind is the Self but the Self is not the mind it is proper to say that the Self falls under the 'spell of ignorance; even though it is not possible that it do so. One meaning of the word "Maya" is 'that which isn't.' How can what is not, be? Or how can what isn't, be? Such is its nature*

¹ See Hastaamalakeeyam, verse 12. .

that Maya makes the impossible possible. So it is not the words themselves that is the problem but how they are used.

When you really get into Vedanta you can see that it is not a philosophy or a belief system but that it is a means of Self knowledge. The purpose of a means of knowledge is to destroy ignorance. Both Shankara and Ramanuja accepted Vedanta as a pramana. Both were realized souls and the teachings of both enlightened many but Ramanuja had a problem with the way Shankara used words. If Vedanta is a philosophy or a religion, a belief system, then there would necessarily be only one 'right' way to formulate a truth because the idea is not to remove one's notions but to see that people have the 'right' notion. Depending on how Self ignorance is formulated by an inquirer it may be as effective to present the vasistadvaita view as the advaita view. In the end Vedanta is like the stick used to stir the ashes of the funeral pyre; it is thrown into the fire and consumed in knowledge of the Self.

Swami: Bondage and liberation also enjoy only empirical validity (*vyaavahaarika satyam*), being the highest pair (among all dyads) in that order of reality. Bondage is a false notion and the release (liberation from bondage) is also equally notional, like dream food satisfying dream hunger. '*Mana eva manushyaanam kaaranam bandha mokshayoh*' asserts the Amrita Bindu Upanishad (Mind alone - when ignorant - is the cause of bondage and mind alone -when enlightened- is the cause of liberation)². Swartz surely understands all this but his communication is flawed enough to compound our *samsara* further while understanding Vedanta. I can see that his inaccurate definitions (not in line with Vedanta *paribhasha*) are the main culprits causing unnecessary confusions.

Swartz: I'm glad I didn't confuse Swami. Actually I've received about ten emails about the article and none of them called me on my use of the word ego, preferring instead to understand the context in which the word was used, that is the general thrust of the argument. Swami's reply was the only one that was mixed...he's been very fair in identifying points of agreement as well as disagreement...and his criticism is justified.

² Also Vivekachudamani verses 172 – 174.

Swami: Secondly, Swartz also claims that "no experience (including an experience of non-duality) can change one's thinking patterns". This again goes contrary to the sayings of all the sages who have said nirvikalpa samadhi is an invaluable leap for gaining aparoksha jnana (direct immediate knowledge). History is replete with instances where samadhi experiences have irrevocably changed thinking patterns and transformed lives. Bhagavan's life itself is in incontrovertible proof of this regard

Swartz: (from the previous email) Again we are both right but I'm more right than he is. I should have said, as I usually do, that experience may temporarily change one's thinking patterns but that it doesn't root out the dualistic tendencies on the spot once and for all. There would be no need for Self-inquiry after an epiphany, if experience changed the way you think about yourself and the world. The single experience would root out all the vasanas and that would be the end of all dualistic thinking.

Swami: It is disappointing that whenever Swartz says some thing highly debatable, he habitually means something else and then claims 'he is more right' as always!

Swartz: I think Swami did not get the smiley face I put at the end of the sentence. Perhaps when you sent it to him your browser or word processor didn't copy it. It was a joke. I actually didn't write the reply to Swami directly. I have several friends who are Ramana bhaktas and one of them read his criticism and asked me to comment. And I wrote it in a bit of a hurry and didn't reread it...there were a few typos etc. and my friend always gives me the benefit of the doubt so I didn't think about it. Then the idea that a little controversy might spice up the Mountain Path came to me so I sent it on to you without polishing it up and said it was fine if you wanted to send it on to Swami. From reading his reply I could tell that he was a not particularly happy with the way I used certain words but I enjoy communicating with knowledgeable people so I decided to make this reply.

Swami: If what he really means does not come out unless he is challenged, then I think it is a poor way to communicate especially when you deal with something so subtle as Vedanta because you will carry the

day with all the wrong impressions you create and walk away in triumph if no one bothers to question you and raise your hackles.

Swartz: I think Swami is projecting a little bit here. I'm sorry my words rubbed him the wrong way. I'm not trying to 'carry the day' or 'walk away in triumph' at all. I'm not a chicken so I don't have any 'hackles' to be raised, either. I like a lively debate. I think I've been quite dispassionate in the tone of my replies and tried to give Swami the benefit of the doubt on all issues. I'm not really into Vedanta apologetics, although Vedanta does sometimes need defending, particularly now that Neo-Advaita has reared its ugly head. And although I have never met Swami it seems that he is quite passionate in defense of truth...as he sees it...and I respect that.

Swami: In Vedanta, words are powerful pointers to the Reality and one cannot afford to be casual and careless, with flippant declarations pregnant with unwarranted assumptions. Shifting stands deftly as per convenience if you find your grounds slippery will not help a healthy debate, which is what *samvaada* is all about. All I had said was 'samadhi experiences have changed thinking patterns and transformed lives' in denial of his original statement. I did not imply that one glimpse of *samadhi* roots out all dualistic ignorance once for all.

Swartz: I'll ignore the pejorative terms like flippant, careless, unwarranted, slippery, convenient, etc. What he says is true but the intention of my original statement...and remember I was under word constraints in this article...was that Self inquiry is necessary to root out ignorance after an experience of non-duality. There is this notion that once you realize the Self that's all there is to it but ignorance is amazingly persistent even in the light of truth and it usually takes time to root it out. This is exactly what Swami says in the following paragraph. If he thinks I'm being clever and slippery he's free to read my website (www.shiningworld.com) and he will see this view expressed at numerous places.

Swami: (In David Godman's all time classic "Be As You Are", he has brought out the intricacies of this topic with his lucid annotations and compilation of Bhgavan's teachings in Chapter 14 under the title Samadhi.) But once you have this direct apprehension of the Self as pure spirit in *samadhi*, the spiritual journey takes a different dimension; *shraddha* (loosely translated as faith) in *shruti pramana* and the Guru's teachings get validated intimately and one pursues sadhana with renewed vigour till all

vasanas are annihilated and one is established in *sahaja samadhi* which alone is liberation from all *samsara*. This may take just a few years or a few lives more depending on the intensity of one's earnestness (*mumukshutva*).

Swartz: Be As You Are is a good book for beginners and David is a good writer but David should not be considered an expert on moksa or Samadhi. He is a pundit and a hagiographer and it is clear from his writing that his knowledge is only intellectual. One glaring example of his lack of understanding is to be seen in his definition of karma yoga. Had he understood the Gita properly he would not have fallen under the 'soup kitchen' or selfless service view that came about with the rise of 'New' Vedanta.

As far as the contents of the above paragraph is concerned I could not agree more. However, it seems to me that this is precisely what I was saying about the persistence of ignorance and its effects, the vasanas, after epiphanies.

*Swami: The value of samadhi cannot be overemphasized in altering one's empirical personality. A hard-nosed sceptic Narendranath Dutta was transformed into a mighty spiritual giant Swami Vivekananda by the sheer touch of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa because he was ripe and ready for the glimpse of *nirvikalpa smadhi*. The agonising *sadhana* of Sri Ramakrishna himself ended only after such an experience.*

Swartz: One has no way of knowing if this is actually the case. All of this is second hand. Once a jnani dies...even before he dies...people form opinions about how it is with him. It may be true but I had the impression from reading the story of Ramakrishna that it was his association with Tota Puri Baba that caused jnanam. I don't dispute that he had lots of Samadhi experience and that it was valuable. It's a dharmamega, a raincloud of dharma, as it says in Panchadasi. And it roots out vasanas. In my own sadhana I had several years of Samadhi experience. But since it is in Maya it is subject to various afflictions (see the quotation below from Aparokshanubhuti). In the dream of Maya anything is possible so it could be that Samadhi causes jnanam in some cases and it could be that it doesn't in others. In fact it is really inaccurate to say that Samadhi causes jnanam because Samadhi is an experience and experiences are not conscious so they do not tell the one to whom they are occurring how to

understand them. In the case of Ramakrishna he obviously didn't realize who he was with the first Samadhi or even after quite a few...he was always 'going into' and out of Samadhi. If he was 'going out' it means that he didn't get jnanam. If he had he would have realized that he was the Self and that as such he was Samadhi, meaning free from duality. People make such a fuss about 'going into' Samadhi but they seem to forget that whatever you go into you will come out of. It's the one to whom Samadhi occurs that never changes. But his understanding must have matured through his practice of Samadhi and set him right for moksa. Then his guru, Tota Puri, who was a Vedantin, showed up and his doubt about who he was resolved. Samadhi is not a simple thing and not necessarily an instant solution. In Aparokhanubhuti Shankar says,

127-128. While practicing Samadhi there appear unavoidably many obstacles, such as lack of inquiry, idleness, desire for sense-pleasure, sleep, dullness, distraction, tasting of joy, and the sense of blankness. One desiring the knowledge of Brahman should slowly get rid of such innumerable obstacles.

This is my point about 'thinking patterns' that are the result of Self ignorance.

I have a friend who is a very advanced yogi and adept at Samadhi and she experienced the Self for over twenty five years without knowing what it was. Her samadhis started at a very young age in an environment that was not conducive to inquiry, she was not particularly literate, never had a guru and had not subjected herself to the teaching tradition of Vedanta. To her the Self was just 'something watching me' as she experienced various subtle states of consciousness. It was only when it was pointed out to her that that 'something' was the Self and that that was who she was that she began inquiry and got moksa within a short time.

Swami: Countless such examples can be given. In several scriptural texts like Vivekachudamani, Drg Drshya Viveka, Panchadasi, Aparokshanubhuti and even some Upanishads (Maitreyi Up) etc. *samadhi* practice is extolled as an invaluable *sadhana* towards the final Enlightenment and as a legitimate means to convert *paroksha jnanam* (indirect knowledge from shastras) into *aparoksha jnanam* (direct and immediate knowledge). True *samadhi* is where the knowledge of the Self shines in the intellect in all its

pristine purity, unhindered by thoughts.³ Of course, we do agree that there is this rare one in a million seekers who is so ripe, who catches the 'fire of enlightenment' (without the need of samadhi practice or prolonged nidhidhyasana) by the sheer power of *antarmukha vichara* or *shravana* alone. Such exceptions like Bhagavan Ramana or a Janaka etc. in the spiritual firmament only prove the rule!

Swartz: I can't argue with this. My only comment is that 'unhindered by thoughts' does not mean that there are no other thoughts, only that the thought 'I am the Self' which is direct knowledge stands supreme and is not challenged by thoughts of limitation. As Ramana said when speaking about his epiphany "Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on. Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music but the 'I' continued like the fundamental sruti note that underlies and blends will all other states."

Swartz: (from the previous email) But the fact is that after an initial period when you think you are enlightened...which you are...the old doubts reappear and you are forced to remove them with Self inquiry or the practice of knowledge (jnanabyasa) as Shankara says. This is the common phenomenon of the 'fallen yogi.'

Swami: It is better to regard such a person as a rapidly evolving yogi or a seeker, to put it simply. The contempt for 'yogi' who is generally described as 'fallen' just because he has not yet 'reached the destination' is rather unhealthy, to say the least! To label, judge and slot everything into categories is the good old trick of the ego as a device to preserve itself and that is why the Self eludes its grasp, being beyond all categories and indicated only by *neti, neti* statements which negate every conceivable clever label. A 'fallen seeker' is to describe only that person who relapses into the delusions of the world namely its enjoyments of senses, name and fame, powers etc. due to lack of *vairagya* and not to describe someone who has had glimpses of his real nature in 'samadhi' experience and who is trying to consolidate his new-found knowledge!

Swartz: Swami is adding a negative connotation to the word 'fallen' that I did not intend. The spiritual path is full of ups and downs. Both the triumphs and the tragedies are equally valuable if one is a true seeker.

³ Talks with Ramana Maharshi : Reprinted in 2000, # 136, 137, 141, 142, 226, 230, 391, 406 etc.

Swartz: (from the previous email) Yes, nirvikalpa Samadhi is an aid to moksha but only because it burns vasanas. It is a 'raincloud of dharma' as Vidyanaraya Swami says in Panchadasi.

Swami: I am very glad Swartz agrees even if condescendingly that it is an aid to moksha. While that itself is a big concession, if not climb-down, it is to be noted that burning up one's vasanas is no mean achievement or an ordinary thing, to be regarded lightly as 'only', implying just a minor benefit. Our likes and dislikes (*raga dveshas*) bubbling up from a causal source (*vasanas*) are the main obstacles for Self-Knowledge.

Swartz: I'm not sure why Swamathan was so affected by my statements. It wasn't 'condescending' to state that Nirvikalpa Samadhi is an aid to moksha. It is just a fact unless he defines Nirvikalpa Samadhi as moksha...which incidentally many do. It could be considered a 'minor benefit' compared with Self realization but it is a necessary 'minor benefit' because jnanam won't stick if there are binding vasanas.

He is incorrect that I made a 'concession if not a climb down' about Samadhi. I've argued for years that you would be justified in claiming that antakarana suddhi is as important as jnanam because jnanam won't stick in a mind that has binding vasanas. And in so far as Samadhi facilitates anta karana suddhi it is definitely useful. And as I pointed out previously there are other ways to exhaust vasanas, particularly karma yoga.

Swartz: (from the previous email) The problem with Nirvikalpa Samadhi is that if it is really 'nirvikalpa' there is no one there to experience it, the experiencer being a subtle vikalpa. The Self doesn't need to experience it because the Self is already nirvikalpa and it is not an experiencer, unless it is under the spell of ignorance. The knowledge that comes from Nirvikalpa is indirect because it is only after the Samadhi ends that you realize that you were 'not there.' This 'not there' inferentially proves your existence as the Self. Direct knowledge comes in savikalpa Samadhi because you are there and ignorance is there and the vision of the Self is there so the akandakara vritti can destroy the ignorance and set you free...if you identify with it.

Swami: Here we get into really murky waters. Many statements are made here with great authority, which have no basis from shastras nor attested by saints. There seems to be fundamental issues at stake which need better understanding. In nirvikalpa samadhi, the 'spurious 'I – thought' is resolved in pure experience of the Self. It is a fallacy to think that the 'ego' is always necessary for any experience and that the 'ego' is the experiencer 'you'. For any experience, what is needed is only the instrument, namely a live 'intellect'. This is called the 'shuddha antahkarana' in *samadhi* because it is uncluttered with thoughts constituting 'mental noise'. The ego is only a primal thought which quickly owns up any experience as 'mine'. The experience itself precedes this 'owning – up thought'. In deep sleep, for example, to register the absence of the world (*jagat abhava vritti*), and the sense of pure 'I am', the resolved *antahkarana* (potential state of the mind) is sufficient. So one is able to recall later 'I slept well; I did not know anything' even though the 'ego' was absent.

Swartz: Actually, the Mandukya Upanishad says that there is a subtle vritti, called prajna, the sleeper 'ego' that is there to experience limitlessness. You have to have some kind of entity or instrument to have experience. The Self is experience free. Swami will probably object to my calling prajna an 'ego'. It is a suksma vritti like viswa in the waking state. Yes, we should probably use the technical term but the point of that teaching, for example, is to show that neither the waking state ego (OK, entity), the dream state entity, or the sleep state entity is the Self.

Swami: But while in deep sleep, the ego was immersed in ignorance, it is consciously merged in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, in the brilliant light of awareness.

Swartz: It would be helpful if Swami explained the word 'merged' as long as we are going to quibble about terms. Is it like 'water in water' to quote Shankara or is there still something there other than the brilliant light of Awareness?

Swami: There is a gulf of difference between the two states and not knowing this difference has bedevilled and vitiated any meaningful discussions in this topic. Being 'a subtle vikalpa', as Swartz correctly puts it, the 'ego' is just not there in *nirvikalpa samadhi* by definition but that does

not negate the experience of *samadhi*, just as the absence of the ego does not negate our everyday experience of deep sleep!

Swartz: This is correct and a good point.

Swami: Therefore to say that *nirvikalpa samadhi* gives only indirect knowledge is totally wrong. To say that 'ego' as the experiencer 'you' is required for any direct knowledge is galling and betrays some basic confusions evident in Swartz's hypothesis. If one studies *Manasollasa*, the classic commentary of Sureshvaracharya on *Dakshinamurti Stotram* under an expert Acharya, the above point can be seen with true clarity.

Swartz: I'd like to know who gets direct knowledge in nirvikalpa Samadhi. It's true that the Self is there experiencing itself, but then the Self is always experiencing itself...Samadhi or not...if 'experience' is the right word. And the Self is not ignorant of itself because on that level knowledge and experience are one. But unless I'm mistaken knowledge happens to someone that is ignorant. So who is ignorant in that Samadhi? The fact is that Ramana got jnanam directly in savikalpa Samadhi. He says that he was there and the Self was there and the thoughts were there. With all that going on I would not call it nirvikalpa Samadhi. It sounds like a person having an experience of the Self. He says, Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading, or anything else I was still centered on the 'I'. Previous to that crisis I had felt no perceptible or direct interest in it, much less any inclination to dwell permanently in it."

It's pretty clear that there are two 'I's here. Ramana and the Self. If there is any doubt he says 'previous to the crisis I...' This 'I' is not the Self 'I' that he is speaking of. And if this is nirvikalpa who is dwelling in what?

Swami says there is a 'subtle instrument' there and that's true but is it a conscious 'subtle instrument'...or not? Actually there is only one Self and it is always conscious but taking Maya into account it can suffer apparent ignorance and apparent knowledge. So it was there as 'little Ramana' who realized that he was 'big Ramana'. As you can see when we speak of these things one needs to have a very flexible mind and understand the inherent limitation of words. Yes words are limited in what they can convey but if they are used with the right intention they can be very valuable. Much is made of Ramana's teaching in silence but Ramana had a lot to say

verbally as well. His words, if rightly understood, are a valid means of Self knowledge.

To continue with Ramana's story the only thing that happened was that his idea of himself changed irrevocably and that caused him to 'dwell' permanently in the Self by his own admission. I'd say that a good way to say this is 'dwell permanently in the Self as the Self.' But even here there is a problem if we take the words literally because the Self being non-dual will not be 'dwelling' in anything other than its self. And if it does it is to be understood that it is doing this 'dwelling' without the aid of instruments which is indeed a peculiar kind of 'dwelling.' Are there two Ramanas? It depends on how you see it. There certainly can be two Ramanas if one understands that they are actually one. And you can forget the Samadhi; it served its purpose by providing him with a situation that caused him to understand who he was.

Swami: Similarly *savikalpa samadhi* where the subject-object division is very much present in a subtle form, the triad of knower-known-knowing is acutely aware/cognised and so the knowledge obtained is still 'indirect' or to put it more accurately, it is inferior or incomplete or not consummated. In *nirvikalpa samadhi*, direct knowledge of the Self is obtained in the (alert and still) intellect as the fundamental subject-object division has been erased, albeit temporarily. One is aware of oneself as Pure Consciousness untouched in the slightest by matter vestures or thought waves⁴. But as the *samadhi* experience ends, the old *dehatma buddhi* reappears as the ego but the character of its constitution has undergone a sea change! The memory of the vision of the Self has left an indelible impression in the mind, its faith in shruti and Guru is vindicated unalterably and with renewed trust in God as the Self within and the Lord without, the journey is quickened unbelievably. When the *dehatma buddhi* is burnt without any residual trace along with the entire bundle of causal *vasanas*, by repeated practice (which can be either *jnanabhyasa* or diving into the depths of *samadhi*), *sahaja nishtha* obtains and transmigration of the soul ends once for all. It is not in *savikalpa samadhi* (as Swartz says) but only in *nirvikalpa samadhi* that 'one' identifies with the *akhandakara vrtti*, so 'one' ceases to be the experiencer by the very process of identification and only then it is *akhanda* (undivided as the subject and object) *anubhava rasa*. Shankara defines *samadhi* as "the state of undivided abidance in the awareness of one's

⁴ See Vivekachudamani verses 342, 343, 354, 355, 357-366 etc.

identity with Brahman” (*brahmaivahamasmi iti abhedena avasthanam samadhihi*)

Swartz: Again we are arguing about the meaning of words. I'm taking the world 'nirvikalpa' at face value. Before the science of yoga evolved nirvikalpa was just a simple word that meant what it said, 'no vikalpa.' Over time it accumulated considerable secondary meanings. I'm saying that the 'one' who identifies... to use Swami's words...is a vikalpa so the Samadhi can't be nirvikalpa Samadhi. He seems to be saying that the someone there in that Samadhi prior to jnanam thinks it isn't the Self but 'becomes' the Self through jnanam. Again, we have to deal with a pesky verb. What kind of becoming it is? Is an experiential becoming? Is it a removal of ignorance?

Yes, jnanam is anubhuti, experiential, but it is not experiential in the sense that we normally think of experience...as requiring a subject and an object. The Self does not need an instrument to 'experience' itself although if we take Maya into account it can experience itself through instruments. It is Self conscious and knows who it is without the aid of objects. The point of this discussion from my point of view is to bring light to the distinction between indirect knowledge and direct knowledge, between experience and knowledge. Again, indirect knowledge is not the kiss of death because it can lead to jnanam if the binding vasanas exhaust through inquiry.

It seems to me that the only way out of the word jungle is to be flexible and consider the context and the intention. I take Swami's use of quotes around the word 'one' to mean that the experiencer is the Self under the spell of apparent ignorance, not an actual experiential entity.

Whatever Samadhi is we both agree that moksa is the hard and fast realization that one is the Self. I'm just saying that there needs to be someone other than the Self there...if there are binding vasanas...because the Self is not bound by the vasanas. To reuse this argument we know that there is only one Self and that it can't forget who it is so that if it does forget it is an apparent forgetting only. And if it 'gets' jnanam it is an apparent gain of an apparent knowledge.

When describing experience verbs are necessary. But verbs can be a problem when you are talking about moksa because moksa is not an action

or an experience. It is jnanam. Ramana uses the word 'dwell' and Shankar uses the word abidance. The word 'merge' is common in Vedantic literature too. These words give the impression of doership, action. Someone 'dwells, abides,' and 'merges.' I'm not an expert on linguistic terminology but I think these are called 'transitive' verbs. There is another kind of verb which is ideally suited to jnanam and that is called an intransitive verb, I believe. An example would be Tat tvam asi. Asi means 'are'. That you are. No action is implied. It is simply a statement of fact. One is meant to gain knowledge from such a statement. It is not an instruction to act or a statement of a happening. .

Throughout Vedantic literature you will find both the language of knowledge and the language of action or experience. It is possible for knowledge to take place in the language of experience although the existence of the Mahavakyas...which is essentially what Vedanta is...seems to suggest that intransitive verbs better suit the purpose of jnanam. Prajnanam brahma is not telling anyone to do anything or experience anything. It is simply identifying the Self as Awareness. Aham Brahmasmi is not saying to 'Be as You Are' which is how David Godman's uses an intransitive verb as a transitive verb and gives the impression that being is something that you can do. Aham Brahmasmi is saying you are limitless.

It is possible for jnanam to take place using transitive verbs if you understand the limitation of words. You cannot always just go with the literal meaning; sometimes you need to know the implied meaning. This whole topic is dealt with in detail in Vedanta as I'm sure Swami knows.

Swami: As Shankara expounds in the Br Up Bhashya (1-4-10), in the state of ignorance as well as of knowledge, the true "I", the Self, is *anubhava svarupa* – the one whose nature itself is experience. But in ignorance, the experience is accompanied by all the superimposed sheaths (five koshas) which are mistaken to be the inherent features of the "I" whereas in the latter, it is totally freed from them in a direct and immediate manner and hence it is called *atmasakshatkaram*. So all *sadhana* is to extract the *right experience* (with the pincers of discrimination and enquiry), like the stalk from the blade of a *munja* grass, from our present bundle of *wrong and spurious experience* of the *atma* as a limited being.

Swartz: I agree with Shankara's statement but I disagree with Swami's interpretation. The purpose of *sadhana*, inquiry, is to extract *jnanam*,

knowledge. Jnanam reveals that Self experience is universal and eternal, not a specific experience with or without apparent knowledge or apparent ignorance. This negates the doer, the experiencer. The Self is not a particular experience opposed to non-self experiences. Even the supposedly 'wrong and spurious experiences' are the Self. If I'm wrong on this point I'd be interested to know how 'one extracts the right experience.' And if one does extract it what does one do with it? Because any experience is anitya, impermanent, it only has limited utility. And what exactly is a 'right' experience as opposed to a 'wrong' experience. Who makes this distinction? Certainly not the Self.

On the other hand one can learn something from experience if one is paying attention to it. One can 'extract' knowledge. A big billboard is not going to appear in the middle of one's Samadhi experience saying, "Hey, stupid, read this sign; it says you are limitless Awareness." But if you have a proper guru and have studied the sastra and have a good idea what you are looking for it is possible to realize that what you are experiencing is you. When you no longer project the Self or the world experientially as an object you are free.

Swami: Again as Shankara says in his Brahma Sutra Bhashya, Brahman is known only when It is experienced as one's own Self which is recognised at once as infinite and limitless (*brahma jnanam atmatvena anubhuyate*). In Sanskrit, *anubhava* means knowledge and experience; only in English which is a relatively poor substitute for understanding Vedanta, if you are not blessed with enough faith in *shruti* or Guru, all problems of such dichotomy arise. The age-old discussion of knowledge or experience – which itself smacks of a jarring duality, going against the grain of the very Advaitic vision - is unique only to English speaking Vedantins but does not plague the natives or those who go to the *shrutipramana* directly in Sanskrit, who see it as a very superfluous issue. You see, it is again a linguistic problem of epistemological orientation and not a fundamental ontological issue at all. So to sum up, nirvikalpa samadhi gives direct knowledge while savikalpa samadhi gives 'indirect' or inferior knowledge. Unfortunately Swartz has got it upside down.

Swartz: Yes, indeed us poor silly Western people do get caught up in these trivial issues. But if this is such a trivial issue why does almost every Vedantic text take it so seriously that it gives it pride of place at the very beginning? Na karmanaa...etc. Not by action is the Self to be obtained.

Swami will understand the prominence of this statement in Vedantic literature. In fact understanding the limitation of karma...doership and experience...could be considered one of the primary qualifications of a seeker of moksa. Without it there will be no dispassion, discrimination, etc. As long as you are chasing experience...Samadhi or anything else...you are not qualified for Vedanta. Again, this is not to say that experience is not valuable, only that it will not produce moksa because the Self is already free. It is an almost universal belief among seekers that some kind of spiritual practice...read experience...will set them free.

I believe Shankar was a native Indian and it seems to have been an important enough issue for him because he makes this distinction over and over in his works. In Aparokshanubhuti, for example, he goes so far as to redefine the experiential terms native to Raja Yoga in a Vedantic way. Perhaps they originally had the meanings he gives them before they were co-opted Raja Yoga. In any case the reason he does this, I believe, is to make clear the distinction between experience, doership and the like, and knowledge. Yes, at the end knowledge and experience are one, but when one is on the path it is important to make the distinction so that one doesn't end up frustrated and disappointed when one's Samadhi comes to an end. Nirvikalpa Samadhi can end when a fly lands on your nose. What kind of moksa is that? When you realize that you are what you are experiencing the craving for experience ends. And it is precisely this craving for experience...spiritual or otherwise...that maintains one's Self ignorance. His views are understandable, however, because to the best of my knowledge Ramana did not address this issue directly although you find that he uses both the language of experience and the language of identity.

Swartz: (from the previous email) The problem with savikalpa Samadhi is that if you are not very dispassionate and do not have at least rudimentary Self knowledge you will be so overwhelmed by the vision of the Self that you will not grasp the significance and you will not be freed. This happens all the time. So who is the 'you' in this case? It is the Self under the spell of apparent ignorance

This word 'nirvikalpa' is a big problem when you try to apply it to the mind. The idea in Yoga is to get to this state of mind...no thoughts. This is OK but as I pointed out above the only benefit is that vasanas are burned up when you are 'not there' because they have no way of

working out through the mind and body and getting reinforced. But it doesn't directly remove ignorance, as I point out although indirect knowledge is certainly better than no Self-knowledge.

Swami: The earlier comments have addressed the above para as well. Why should the word 'nirvikalpa' be a problem at all unless you have an uncommon allergy to it and an infatuation with thinking all the time? The word is meant for understanding and not for obfuscations. It occurs in shruti, smrti, and in Shankara Bhashya countless times. Bhagavan says 'it is as difficult for a jnani to engage in thoughts as it is for an ajnani to be free from thought.' (Talks #141, January 19, 1936). The ego feels insecure without thinking and hence its morbid obsession with thoughts without which it feels threatened of its very survival. Eckhart Tolle explains lucidly this paranoid fear of the ego to let go of thoughts, in his books 'Power of Now' and 'A New Earth'.

Swartz: To me this is a friendly debate. It is only a discussion about the meaning of words. There is nothing personal about it. All I said was the term 'nirvikalpa' is more appropriate to describe the Self. It is the nature of the mind to think and nirvikalpa means no-thought. So many people believe that they need to empty the mind of every thought before they can be happy. Even Ramana was thinking during his famous epiphany. It's true what Swami says about the ego for some people but for many people thinking is a great pleasure and sport motivated by joy. The mind is a great blessing and can as well be a part of the solution as it can be the problem. If thought itself was a problem you would not have the sruti and Ramana and Shankara would have never uttered a word. Self inquiry, viveka, is very careful thought process. The Vedanta texts are full of instructions how to think.

Swami: The purpose of yogi is not to stay like a stone in a thoughtless state, as an end in itself. That would be *laya* and no one is holding a brief for the same. He resorts to thought-free Self-Awareness in a conscious manner, only because it facilitates the recognition of Reality, *which is the consummation of his pursuit as well*

The third sutra (PYS) says 'the seer then abides in his natural state of the Self' (*tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam*). True, the word 'nirvikalpa' is a *lakshana* for the Self pointing to its nature but in the sadhana stage, the

mind has to take the form of the Self in order to approach its reality and gain the appreciation of the same. The use of the word 'nirvikalpa', therefore, lies in applying it to the mind for all 'practical purposes' of sadhana like meditation etc. Again to quote Bhagavan, 'Absolute freedom from thoughts is the state conducive to such recognition' (Talks #224, 2nd July 1936)

Swartz: This is the point I've been trying to make. Nirvikalpa is a word indicating the Self. If there is a yogi in Samadhi he is there because one of his vikalpas needs examination. When he gets it straight that he is Awareness and not a yogi he sees that if there is a Samadhi it is in him, i.e. in Awareness, not the other way around. A yogi is someone who is trying to quit being a yogi practicing Samadhi or self inquiry or whatever. Being a doer is a heavy weight. One gets fed up. He wants moksa. He's looking for the 'yoga of no contact' to quote Vidyaranya Swami. The yoga of no contact is jnanam. And jnanam is liberation to quote Shankar and Ramana and countless others.

Swartz: (from the previous email) The word nirvikalpa is actually an adjective meant to reveal something about the nature of the Self. The Self is free of thoughts. So if you could get direct Self knowledge through teaching or otherwise you would 'become' nirvikalpa simply by knowing who you are.

Swami: What is this 'knowing' again? *Paroksha jnana* through scriptures cannot resolve 'you' into 'nirvikalpa' and one popular school of jnana margis remain deafeningly silent about the description of what this 'knowing' is all about. As a consequence, anybody who understands *shastras* these days can claim to be a *brahmavit* (Knower of Brahman) and some do indeed! They assert all spiritual knowledge is only intellectual only. Because they have *not* shed their dehatma buddhi, *only their knowledge is intellectual* (!), meaning it is all cerebral and highly mental and will collapse without the prop of thoughts, a mode of analytical thinking.

Swartz: I'm with Swami completely on this point.

Swami: When queried as to whether one can realise the Truth by learning the scriptures and study of books, Bhagavan replied categorically "No. So long as vasanas remain latent in the mind, realisation cannot be achieved.

Sastra learning itself is a vasana. Realisation is only in *samadhi*' (Talks #230). Further He says 'The Real Existence is the only One devoid of objective knowledge. That is absolute consciousness. That is the state of happiness...and must be brought about even in this waking state. It is *jagrat sushupti*. That is *mukti*.' (Talks #311, 2ND January 1937). Scholars addicted to 'thinking knowledge' and mere erudition in sastras will naturally recoil in aversion to such blunt statements of unpalatable truth.

Swartz: Can't argue with this.

Swartz: (from the previous email) You would be 'samadhi'. Why? Because Samadhi means that the intellect, the 'buddhi' (dhi) sees everything equally (sama). This is called jnanam, of Self knowledge. The intellect sees things from the Self's point of view. The whole discussion is highly technical as you can see.

Swami: The etymology of samadhi is completely different. *samyak aadheeyate sarvam yasmin iti samaadhihi* – “when all thoughts are totally resolved and the mind is very well absorbed in the Self” is termed samadhi. This is grammatically valid, not what Swartz which will turn out as 'sama-dhee'. What we are discussing is 'samaadhi' – please see the phonetic difference and hence the etymological meaning. The 'equal vision' (*samatva buddhi*) of the jnani is the fruit of Self- Knowledge, not a sadhana means which is what we are discussing all along. In the state of absorption of mind in the Self, there is no plurality available as “everything” to be seen 'equally'. Incidentally, the Self has no 'point of view' which the intellect tries to adopt, though this can be seen only as a semantic inaccuracy as usual.

Swartz: Samadhi is a term that can be applied equally to the fruit of jnanam and a particular sadhana. Neither yoga or Vedanta owns this term. In Aparokshanubhuti Shankar defines it as jnanam in the final portion where he converts the yogic terminology to Vedantic terminology.

Swartz: (from a previous email) My statement is obvious if you have had lots of epiphanies and you still don't see yourself as the Self...which is the case with most seekers and the audience for whom my article was intended. One has no way of knowing but I think one could make a case that while Ramana's idea of who he was did change with that experience, he tendency to think otherwise must have still remained or he wouldn't

have taught Self inquiry. Self-inquiry goes on after one is awakened, until the last doubt about one's nature is destroyed.

Swami: Again all wrong. 'One' is not considered *awakened* until the last doubt about one's nature is destroyed. Bhagavan Ramana's awakening was complete after the death experience in Madurai (lasting less than half an hour perhaps) and he did not have to do Self-enquiry later in Arunachala caves as a follow-up sadhana. Bhagavan himself made this very clear to Prof D S Sarma when queried specifically about his later day *tapas*. He said in unequivocal terms that his Knowledge did not diminish a whit nor enhance a little in all his later life after the Madurai experience. His abidance as the Self appeared to on-lookers as a severe penance for 'attaining' something! Bhagavan taught Self-enquiry to all seekers who came to him because it delivered the goods for him (in terms of *moksha*) with supreme efficiency and in His equal vision (*sama dhee*). He saw no reason why it should not work for others as well! Incidentally this is a demonstration of the true humility of a jnani who does not put himself on a higher pedestal and disqualify others from walking the same path. To think that 'Bhagavan taught Self enquiry, as a counter to the lingering tendency to think otherwise (dualistically) after his famous death experience' is a travesty of historical truth.

Swartz: Swami jumps to conclusions rather quickly. I'm not saying that it was one way or the other as far as Ramana is concerned. In the next paragraph I'm quite willing to accept the idea that it happened all at once and only once. But what difference does it make how it happened? We have no way of knowing exactly how it is with anybody. That it happened is all that matters for seekers. If Ramana can do it anyone can do it. We can accept Ramana's words because he was an honest man but how we interpret them depends on our beliefs and opinions. How it was with Ramana is how it was with Ramana. This does not mean that if it isn't the way it was with Ramana for you you're on the wrong path. In fact, considering the uniqueness of Ramana's moksa his is definitely the exception. Most everyone in the spiritual world is a sincere person striving for freedom and each will somehow be eventually led to freedom by the Self according to their situation.

Swartz (from the previous email) It may be that Ramana's epiphany did root out all his dualistic thinking all at once but this is extremely rare...if it happens at all. Maybe he just liked sitting in caves but usually one retires

from life and cleans up the residual dualistic thinking with Self inquiry which is the application of Self knowledge to the mind. But my statement is not obvious if you have not had these samadhis and have faith in the words of the Yoga Shastra or a particular Yogi. I'm not arguing for or against Yoga or Vedanta, knowledge or experience. I'm just trying to apply the principles of Self inquiry to this age old discussion

Swami: It is gratifying to see that Swartz gives the benefit of doubt after all to Bhagavan's one stroke attainment, which was actually the case. But for most seekers, one would agree to what he has said as subsequent sadhana to consolidate the knowledge gained in a beatific glimpse till it becomes effortless natural abidance in the Self.

Swartz: Finally, to answer the last issue, while nirvikalpa Samadhi is a valuable non-experience on the way to moksa, it is by no means necessary for moksa.

Swami: I am very glad at last that Swartz gives a honourable place for samadhi in the scheme of things and does not condemn it like some modern jnanamargis who are great scholars but nevertheless have a pathological aversion to yoga sadhana. To say it is a 'non-experience' is quite fine as it is a healthy device to negate the linguistic conditioning that any experience has to necessarily do with "sensory apprehension" or "grasped by thought". This is a typical limitation of translating *anubhava* as 'experience'. Please see Rustom Mody's superb article on the fallacy of the assumption of translatability, for elucidation of this idea.⁵ Since there is no other better word in English, we are forced to use this word which is alright if we clearly keep in mind the severe limitations of linguistic conditionings; otherwise one can easily get carried away by wrong and often unintended implications. Also 'experience' in common parlance implies an 'enjoyer' of the same as 'experiencer', whereas in 'samadhi anubhava', the experiencing ego (*pramata*, the knower) is itself resolved. What shines is pure knowledge (or experience) without anyone inside to own it up as 'mine'. Bhagavan used the good old example of a radio which sings without a 'singer sitting inside it'! It is also akin to the Cheshire cat's grin which remains long after the cat has vanished out of existence, in the brilliant spiritual allegory portrayed in 'Alice in Wonderland'. This is the ultimate paradox in Vedanta where True Experience remains after

⁵ Mountain Path 2006 January issue: From Vak Vichara to Atma Vichara by Rustom P Mody

swallowing the 'experiencer' and this is 'sahaja nishtha/samadhi' and this alone ends once for all the transmigrations of the soul after death (*jiva yatra*).

Swartz: Can't argue with this. Very good!

Swartz: (from the previous email) The Self gives you the experiences you need. If you have a burning desire and you pray to the Self for moksa it will guide you by the most efficient route. Ramana got moksa without practicing any yoga. It just happened because he was ripe. One doesn't set out to be a yogi or a jnani. These are just further limited identities. It is something that happens when one is true to the desire for freedom. People who are interested in spirituality who have not walked the path to the end will be necessarily be confused by these distinctions. They don't get worked out, however, simply by believing one point of view or the other. They get resolved by experience and reflection.

Swami: Very true. Simply believing some point of view does not take one far. One's own reflection and analysis of life's experiences, in accordance with the logic of the *shastras* and not as per one's own pet whims and prejudices, will go a long way in clearing all fundamental cobwebs of confusion in the spiritual journey. That is what *manana* (contemplation) is all about. But as one saint told this writer, *manana* should eventually lead to "mana na" ('no mind') where one transcends the analytical and logical mind and allows the still and receptive intellect to intuitively facilitate the recognition of one's ultimate reality in a direct, immediate and non-verbal manner. This last stage is possible only by the operation of Grace in total surrender and not through human effort

Swartz: I completely agree with this statement. To me the most important point is the phrase 'in accordance with the logic of the shastras.' The idea of Self inquiry in the modern Neo-Advaita world taught by Papaji and many others that you ask the question 'Who am I?' and then wait for an answer is completely ridiculous. The great souls who went before have left a great legacy to guide inquiry and anyone who fails to make use of it is severely handicapped. It is amazing that Papaji claimed that Ramana was his guru...who doesn't these Neo-Advaitic days...but evidently had no understanding of Ramana's notion of Self inquiry and the importance of scripture. If you want my take on the Papaji 'lineage' idea there is a essay

on the home page of my website entitled 'The Horse's Mouth' that exposes the bankruptcy of the Neo-Advaita claims of lineage.

Swartz: (from the previous email) This is an age old discussion brought about by the apparent differences between jnana and yoga, knowledge and experience. Many yogis with Samadhi experience...both nirvikalpa and savikalpa...get moksa, not necessarily because of the Samadhi but because these samadhis stimulate Self inquiry. And many yogis with Samadhi experience pigheadedly cling to the notion that enlightenment is purely experiential and do not get moksa because moksa is freedom from experience and the experiencer. And you also have jnanis who have no Samadhi experience who get moksa through sravanana, manana, and nididhyasana.

Swami: This is a very unfortunate assertion and not in good taste either. Enlightenment is not of two kinds, one corresponding to yogis and another kind which vibes with jnanis. The enlightenment of the jnani (through sravana etc.) too is experiential only. It is the same for anyone, whether a yogi, or a bhakta or a jnani. We have discussed the limitations of the word 'experience' earlier in detail and so will not repeat it *ad nauseum*. Bhagavan Ramana has extensively used the terms 'aham sphurana', 'jagrat sushupti' 'sahaja samadhi' and 'avasthatraya sakshi' in the context of enlightenment. According to his testimony, a jnani is literally aware of all the three states of existence (see Talks #313). These terms describe enlightenment as NOT ANYTHING OTHER THAN EXPERIENTIAL AWAKENING to our true nature. We request Mr. Swartz in all humility to ponder over these eternal verities (available for verification in one's own experience), shedding all preconceived prejudices and notions. Advaita does not end with flexing one's intellectual sinews and communication muscles or flaunting one's scholarship. If someone is impervious to Bhagavan's revelations in this matter, he is welcome to wallow in his own views.

Swartz: This is a good example of the importance of the discussion of experience and knowledge. I have said above once or twice that there is no difference between knowledge and experience when one has Self knowledge. I think Swami is missing my point...probably because the different way we use some terms. My point is a simple one and I don't mind making it again. There is deep craving in everyone for experience brought about by a lack of the knowledge that one is whole and complete

actionless Awareness. Getting what one wants is intended to remove the uncomfortable feeling of inadequacy, incompleteness, etc. When a person does get what he or she wants he or she feels whole and complete because the craving for the object leaves the mind. But this action produces a vasana and the craving returns. When one is engaged in life in this way one rarely thinks clearly about one's experience. One simply chases the 'high' that comes from getting one's desires fulfilled.

This psychology operates in people chasing the big experience of moksa too. In other words they define moksa as something that one can obtain experientially just as one can enjoy a good meal or some other pleasure. So they set out to do certain things to get it. Most everyone gravitates to yoga because most everyone thinks he or she is a doer and that the results of his or her actions will bring happiness. Usually hatha yoga first...the cultural poses...then to the meditation poses. In their quest for Samadhi...a blissful state...they don't tend to question the assumption that you can get what you already have...the bliss of the Self...through action, the practice of Samadhi being an action. Mind you, I'm not talking about Samadhi, only the 'practice' of Samadhi. To repeat, the Self is limitless and any action that one would perform to obtain it would necessarily be limited because the doer is limited. So the result of any action would not be limitless.

So how do you get what you already have? Only by knowledge. You need to know what the Self is and that you are It. Vedanta and Ramana and every jnani worth his salt says it, "By jnanama alone is the Self realized." So what needs to happen at this point is that while one pursues one's sadhana...Vedanta does not say don't do sadhana, this is a Neo-Advaitic perversion...one should pursue knowledge as well. Yes, at the end they are non-different. But at this stage they need to be discriminated. Almost everyone who has sincerely done sadhana comes to realize that his or her practice is not producing the desired result. Yes, maybe it is making life a bit more manageable but it is not tantamount to liberation. So my only intention is to provoke some thought on the topic. I'm not for or against any idea...they all have limitation. My intention is to present a viewpoint...the Self...that allows one to understand the relative importance of any idea.

At the end of this document I've copied in an essay I wrote giving a more complete version of the knowledge and experience argument. It is more

detailed that the one published in the Mountain Path and had Swami read it first we probably would not have burdened each other with so many words.

Swartz: (from the previous email) The problem is that most yogis have a built in prejudice against jnana, knowledge. And most jnani types have an unhealthy disdain for experience. So both try to keep 'enlightenment' in the strict within the strict confines of their beliefs. One of the most common statements one finds in Vedic literature is 'about this topic even the sages are confused.' It's easy to find a 'sages' on opposite sides of every conceivable issue so what your favorite sage says is not always correct. I got moksa through Swami Chinmayananda but I do not agree with some of his statements about Self realization. Faith is good...up to a point. But faith in the words of scripture or the sages means that you don't know. It is like being a little bit pregnant.

Swami: Well, well, we knew it was coming! But one wonders whether it is moksha from samsara or merely from the most powerful personality of the revered Swamiji, who was perhaps the greatest visionary-cum-missionary of the last century. Till the end he never laid claims to moksha himself! No jnani ever does!!

Regarding 'faith', a poor translation for 'shraddha' we have this to say. Faith is good all the way because it is fulfilled in Knowledge and not falsified as Swartz unintentionally implies.

Swartz: I don't believe Ramana, for example, every said he believed in the Self. He encouraged bhakti and so does Vedanta but jnanam is jnanam, not shraddha. At a certain point all doubt is resolved.

Shradda is a very interesting concept in Vedic culture. It does not mean blind faith, but faith pending the result of inquiry. So you admit your doubts while you believe that you are the Self at the same time.

Ramana didn't say he was enlightened? Then what is that large statement on the temple wall if it isn't a statement of enlightenment? He says, "I am the Self." For certain he didn't go around spouting it out verbally every day because he was a humble man but as far as the claim of moksa is concerned I don't think Ramana ever said he wasn't either. If the idea that

you are enlightened is a problem then a jnani would be duty bound to claim that he wasn't enlightened. And Ramana spoke as the Self...what is that if it is not saying you are enlightened? Some jnanis, for reasons known only to themselves, make a point of concealing it. Additionally, the very depth of his knowledge is a statement that he is enlightened.

There are many ways to show the world that you are free that do not involve words...the way you live for example. And there are ways to use words to discuss your freedom that show that you are not suffering enlightenment sickness...which I define as the ego co-opting the Self's point of view. Every time a jnani opens his mouth he is saying he is enlightened, although not directly.

In fact the whole enlightenment business is a bit of a joke because if this is a non-dual reality who isn't enlightened? In the Kena Upanishad there is a statement "The one who says, 'neither do I know nor do I not know It, knows It.'" This is certainly an acceptable way of saying one is enlightened.

The whole issue is very silly. In fact, out of the six or so billion people in the world only a very tiny fraction of the very tiny fraction who are seeking what they already have have a problem with this idea. And interestingly, Vedanta actually says that you should claim your enlightenment...as a sadhana...because even if you don't 'feel' that you are enlightened it is important to recondition your mind to get in harmony with its true nature. As you think so do you 'become' is one of the basic principle of Yoga. Of course this is not an instruction to blab it endlessly to the world, although it is often a useful tool to get friends and acquaintances who insist on seeing you as the fool that you do not wish to be to engage in serious satsang.

Swami makes a good point, however, because the issue is whether or not you have a need to tell the world. But even this is a tricky issue because when one actually does wake up...not everyone responds to his or her awakening in the extremely dispassionate way Ramana did...one is so inspired and so happy that one just blurts it out innocently like a baby and then later as the excitement cools becomes silent. But there are no rules for jnanis. It is up to the people who are hearing these words to discriminate.

Finally, behind this whole idea that 'he who says doesn't know and he who knows doesn't say' is the idea that enlightenment is a special status. But it is not a special status...although certain 'spiritually inclined' human beings make a big deal out of it. Ramana is a great example of this. I love the

story about him returning to the ashram when the gates were closed and sitting outside until they opened. There was no abimanam...just a regular person sitting in the dirt waiting to get in. It is the nature of Self and the Self is all there is.

It is a good point, however, because with the consumerization of enlightenment every Tom, Dick and Harry is 'enlightened.' All you have to do to realize it is walk around the cafes, etc. in Tiruvannamalai and you will find dozens of enlightened people eager to wake you up. Is this bad? Yes and no. It's a shame but it is a fact. And it is good too because there are so many frauds that it makes one think more carefully about what enlightenment might be.

As far as I am concerned evaluating people by this very abstract standard is not helpful. Whether or not they are a cultured person following dharma is a much better standard. There is a saying by a great Zen master that encapsulates this point of view nicely, "Next to good manners enlightenment is the most important thing in the world."

Even if you don't think you are enlightened you should treat yourself and others as if you were, including those poor self-deluded fools who think enlightenment confers some kind of special status.

Swami: Faith does not come under the *adhyaropa-apavada* category in Vedantic teaching methodology. It is more like dating before marriage and doting after! Love is common in both forms but it is intensified after the marriage because it has fulfilled all the expectations of happiness that one had before. The love present in dating was a fond hope; in a successful marriage the hope is redeemed in the fulfilment of its promise. So dating resolves into doting, if you may call it so but love is not jettisoned like a ladder which has served its purpose. Shraddha in *shruti pramana* is exactly like that except that *it never fails*. That is why, in texts like Vivekachudamani, Panchadasi, Kaivalya Navaneetam etc. the disciple after getting enlightened goes into raptures of ecstasy and gratitude towards the guru who made this possible, for his faith and emotional investment in the guru and his teachings has paid off in *svanubhava* and stands splendidly vindicated. He does not say 'Thank you but I don't agree with some of your teachings, let me have the freedom to disagree and go my own sweet way'!

Swartz: Swami Chinmaya was a great jnani. I stayed with him for two years. I carried his oxygen bottle, flew around the world to various centers with him, shared living accommodations with him, lived in his ashram when he was there and have the greatest respect for him. He was a very classy guy and he looked after me like a father and treated me like a brother. He took care of my living expenses, except my air travel, during that time. His style of teaching was sakya bhava. Once I lost my pen and he gave me his gold Cross pen and didn't ask for it back.

It's true he never verbally said he was enlightened in public but there are many other ways to say you are enlightened and it was clear if you knew him that he knew it and didn't mind you knowing it. One interesting thing about him that most people don't know is that he did not encourage bhakti of the guru's form, and on the very rare occasions when they did pada puja he gave a little talk about what one was actually worshipping...and it wasn't Swami Chinmayanada. He encouraged Self bhakti.

In fact he used to make great fun of himself as a guru and spoke harshly of his weaknesses and didn't try to conceal his addiction to tobacco, for example. He had a very intimidating manner and he often spoke of his faults in such a way that made it difficult to love him in a sentimental way. He was ruthlessly critical of mindless guru bhakti and often said as he stroked his long beard with a gleam in his eyes, "The longer the beard, the greater your doubt should be!" He said life was short and the guru would be gone one day and you needed to be your own guru and he was such an excellent teacher that many were set free by his teachings.

He encouraged a questioning attitude, self reliance and independent thinking. He sent me out to teach Vedanta and greased the wheels to make my life easier after I left and we kept in touch until the day he died offering good advice whenever I needed it. He even sent me to see a very great mahatma of the same caliber as Ramana, Swami Abhedananda from Trivandrum, to deepen my understanding of Bhakti Marga. He encouraged me to find my own voice and think for myself and teach Vedanta according to my own lights. I went my own way but that in no way affected the love we had for each other and the bhakti for the Self that he instilled in me. I happen to think that his 'modern' Vedanta was good for the times but like the New Vedanta that came out of Vivekananda's teachings it distorted the

tradition in certain subtle ways. I did not think that his 'great Hindu nation' idea was appropriate for a Vedanta class but one can not deny the profound effect he had on Indian spirituality...all for the good. In fact Swami Dayananda parted company with him on the topic of how to teach Vedanta.

Your guru is your guru and you are you. Only in a spiritual sense is he or she you. You don't owe the guru anything, including gratitude, although it is impossible not to feel it when contact with a mahatma transforms your vision. What is given is given freely. The Self puts the guru in your life when you are ready for moksa and the Self makes the guru dance to your tune. Bhakta bhaktiman. The guru is the devotee of the devotee. It's a two way street. This is not arrogance; it is just the truth.

Swami: Lastly Bhagavan Ramana is NOT just 'one of your favourite sages who need not always be correct' just because even sages may 'differ' (not confused) in only in communicating their experience but not in content. Bhagavan enlivened *shastras* in an incomparable way and revitalised the *vichara marga* in a very original and unique manner. So *shraddha* is indispensable to grasp his subtle and profound teachings which have a seeming simplicity. The Upanishad says " Only to those great souls who have supreme devotion to God and have equal devotion to their Sadguru, the teachings of the Upanishads shine brilliantly without obstructions" (*yasya deve para bhaktihi yatha deve tatha gurau, tasyaithe kathithaharthah prakashante mahatmanah*).

We respect and love Mr Swartz highly for his consistent commitment to the pursuit of Vedantic teachings over decades, it is not an easy achievement for it demands tremendous sacrifice in one's life. It is our fond hope that he will take the entire discussion in the spirit of a healthy debate. We are open to any corrections from his side. For until such time *aparoksha jnana* is gained, we all sail in the same boat towards the same goal in the same direction with faith in God and the words of the Guru and the scriptures. We do not claim to be absolutely right in our understanding, for we are only fellow travelers in a spiritual odyssey where our aim is only to partake of love and insights along the way and never acrimony.

Om Sri Ramanarpanamastu !!

Swartz: This is certainly a useful exchange of views. I took no offense and did not intend to give any. I've spent more than twenty five years in India and love it because of people like Swami who understand the greatness of Vedic culture. I appreciate his passion for the truth. I'm inclined to post it on my website if Swami does not object.

Om Tat Sat

Is Enlightenment Knowledge or Experience?

The Vedas define enlightenment as freedom from suffering, the most desirable human goal. To attain freedom they present two apparently contradictory paths. One, the experiential approach, is known as Yoga. It says that there are two basic states of experience, suffering and freedom from suffering. There are many yogic lifestyles employing various yogas, techniques, that are meant to set one free. The most well known are Astanga Yoga, the eightfold path, and Kundalini Yoga. Both promise experiential enlightenment. 'Experiential' means that through spiritual practice one sets in motion a process that eventually results in freedom. Astanga Yoga helps the seeker patiently develop a disciplined mind, one that is capable of attaining Samadhi, a high thought free state of Consciousness which it defines as freedom. Kundalini Yoga is also a disciplined approach that through certain rigorous practices, 'awakens' the dormant spiritual energy and generates mystical experiences that lead to the 'final' experience, union of the individual with the universal.

The second approach to enlightenment is called Vedanta. Like Yoga it presents freedom from suffering as the most desirable human goal...but it does not share the yogic view concerning the means.

To understand the validity of these views we need to consider a basic existential problem: what is the nature of reality?

If we are going to accept Yoga's view, reality needs to be dualistic. A dualistic reality provides the proper conditions for action and experience: an ego experiencer and a world of experiencable objects, gross and subtle, one of which is the self, the experience of which is freedom. On the surface at least, this seems to be what we have. I am here, the world is there. I interact with the world and make experience happen. If I do the actions recommended by my particular brand of yoga... meditation and the like...I can set myself free and attain a state of 'union'...yoga means union...or non-duality. Non-duality is freedom.

Freedom from what? From the struggle to be free. Buddhism's statement that freedom is 'nirvana,' a thought free state of mind, or 'sunya,' the void, is a yogic or experiential idea of enlightenment. Why is non-duality freedom? Because in a non-dual reality there are not two states, suffering and freedom from suffering, bondage and liberation.

Vedanta sees a problem with the yogic view because it says that, contrary to appearances, reality is non-dual and the nature of the self. Because one is never without a self one is never lacking non-dual experience and therefore the attempt to obtain such an experience is gratuitous. It says that you are a conscious being and that all your experiences are held together by one thread and that thread is you, Awareness or Consciousness. How can there be experience without you? You are always present and self-evident in every form of experience. You are the very essence of experience. If this is true then the solution to suffering, liberation, is only available through understanding the nature of reality, the self. The 'path of understanding' is often called 'jnana yoga.'

Vedanta contends that for the experiential argument to hold water the non-dual ever-free self would have to be separate or away from you. But the nature of the self...and there is only one self according the Upanishads...is chaitanya, consciousness. What is always present is you, consciousness. So the self is never away from you, that is to say it is never perceived as an object of experience. If it is an object then there was a time when it was not experienced and it will eventually not be perceived. But this is not possible because it contradicts experience. When did you not experience? Even the absence of experience, like deep sleep, is experience, a pleasurable one at that.

Vedanta presents another argument that calls into question the yogic idea of enlightenment. Remember, Yoga counsels action, the result of which is enlightenment. To do action a doer is required. But Vedanta contends that if there is a doer the doer is limited in nature. Secondly, if the doer is limited the results of its actions will necessarily be limited. But freedom, liberation, is limitless. No number of finite actions will ever add up to limitlessness. Vedanta says that enlightenment is the discovery that one is not a doer, that one is limitless actionless consciousness already...and it offers a proven means by which the self can be known.

Vedanta also argues against the evolutionary or yogic view that the one self, limitless consciousness, 'became' limited at some point in the distant past and is now involved in the patient process of evolving out of

its material roots toward some divine experience of oneness. If we accept the yogic view that the self is a limited transformation of Pure Consciousness or the product of material evolution, how will it ever know or experience limitless consciousness? Just as the senses cannot experience the mind/ego entity, the mind/ego cannot 'experience' its far subtler source, the self.

Vedanta, however, does not dismiss Yoga altogether. It provisionally accepts Yoga's limited dream of duality and its experiential orientation because that is where we are when we begin to look for a way out. If we accept the idea that consciousness is transformed into a world of experience through some mystical or 'supramental' process then as consciousness 'involves' itself with itself as matter, its 'light' or consciousness is seemingly absorbed by the objects and apparently stops shining. For example, even though light reflecting off my body falls equally on a mirror and the black wall on which it hangs, I will only see myself in the mirror. The self is also seemingly absorbed by a mind clouded with emotion and thought, making it unexperienceable for all intents and purposes. It can, however, be 'experienced' in a mirror-like pure mind. So the way to get the experience of the (reflection of) Self is to purify the mind. This is the essence of Yoga as explained by Pantajali in his Yoga sutras.

Vedanta does not accept that the experience of the self in the mind is freedom but it does value a pure mind for another reason: only a pure mind is capable of self inquiry. It is capable of self inquiry because it has a clear experiencible reflection of the self as a basis for inquiry. Only self inquiry will produce freedom because self inquiry produces self knowledge...which is just the removal of ignorance about the ever-free nature of the self. And if this is a non-dual reality the problem of suffering is ignorance based.

In fact, Vedanta argues that Yoga, experience, is at least as valuable as knowledge because you can't gain firm knowledge unless you have a pure mind and you cannot get a pure mind without doing some work, i.e. altering your experience, since the mind is both the instrument of experience and the instrument of knowledge. Therefore, Yoga is essential for anyone seeking freedom. As what? As a preparation for Self knowledge. In this light epiphanies of all ilk, no matter how fleeting, if properly contextualized by the teachings of Vedanta, can be valuable aids for liberation. Vedanta only reminds the seeker that discrete experiences are impermanent...and limited freedom is not freedom at all.

Actually, the confusion that has bedeviled the spiritual world for millennia is little more than a linguistic problem...but therein lies the rub. When enlightenment is presented experientially it is presented as an

attainment, a merger, a union or a shift. Merger, union and shift are verbs. Verbs are action words that give the idea that something happens or is happening. Of course we know that if reality is non-dual nothing ever happened; the perception of action is simply the result of the moving instrument through which reality is being perceived i.e. the mind. The moon seems to be racing across the sky when viewed against the backdrop of moving clouds. When you no longer assume the mind's point of view, time, meaning motion...and experience is just motion or change...stops. If we look for an implied meaning in our experiential metaphor is it unreasonable to assume that the 'experience' of freedom is just a shift from the individual's point of view to the point of view of the self?

And if it is a shift, what kind of shift it it? Is there any time when you are not conscious? If the answer is no...which happens to be the truth according Vedanta...then the 'shift' is merely a loss of ignorance, not an experiential gain.

Experiential language need not be a problem if you understand the limitation of words and know that the implicit meaning of words can produce knowledge. It is also acceptable if it is understood that literal interpretation of words can easily be misleading, particularly on the road to enlightenment. Perhaps the unthinking acceptance of experiential words is the primary factor in the failure of seekers the world over to set themselves free. It is an enormous problem because modern spiritual literature and the words of deluded teachers create the impression that enlightenment is only experiential. Additionally, there is an insidious corollary to this misunderstanding: knowledge is 'only intellectual' and not a valid means of enlightenment.

Vedanta and any realized soul worth his or her salt, including one of the greatest modern sages, Ramana Maharshi, categorically state that only through self knowledge is enlightenment 'gained.'

To gain knowledge a means is necessary. If you want to know the world you need senses. If you want to know ideas the senses will not work; you need an intellect. Inference and testimony are other valid means of knowledge. These means are fine when it comes to objects and ideas but how can they help...if the self is the object of knowledge? They cannot help because the self cannot be objectified. Try to see yourself. You cannot because you are consciousness and consciousness is eternal and non-dual; it does not split itself into subject and object and become you, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

Objectifying the self is rather like trying to see the eyes with the eyes. This example is useful in another way because the only way to see one's eyes is to look into a mirror. Two mirrors are available for the spiritual seeker, a pure mind gained through experience and the teachings of Vedanta. A pure mind is not enough for enlightenment, however, because any experience, including experience of the self, is only as good as one's understanding or interpretation of it. And any experiencer can only interpret experience according to what it already knows. If the experiencer, the ego, is a product of self ignorance in the first place, this being a non-dual reality, then any interpretation of the self...or the significance of an experience of the reflected self...would be incorrect. In fact the belief that the self can be attained through action...and the many other ignorances masquerading as knowledge in the spiritual world...is the result of incorrect understanding of the nature of the self.

In rare cases, like that of Ramana, it is possible to understand the nature of the self without outside help apparently in one go. But this does not apply to the rest of us. However, help is definitely available in the form of Vedanta, a purified word mirror whose prakriyas, teachings, are sruti, revealed self knowledge. Revealed knowledge is knowledge that has not been contaminated by the human mind. The knowledge that makes up Vedanta is also confirmed by smriti, the experience self realized souls, like Ramana and many others. Vedanta is a pramana, a means of self knowledge that has been setting people free for millennia, not a philosophy or a school of thought. There is no experience involved in enlightenment because we are already free...as we are.

Knowledge is not gained like experience is gained. It is simply the removal of ignorance. Coupled with a pure mind it provides the guidelines for self inquiry. The purpose of self inquiry is not experiential; it is to remove self ignorance. Remember; there is only one self and you are it; therefore whatever you experience can only be you.

Nobody can remove your ignorance but help is required for the removal of ignorance. Inquiry needs to be guided by knowledge, not by personal interpretation of reality, which is always biased, based as it is on beliefs and opinions.

Simply asking 'who am I?' will not help either. First, because the jury is not out on this topic; you are limitless actionless consciousness and not the experiencer entity you take yourself to be. And secondly, because inquiry is the application of knowledge in the form of the discrimination

between the real and the unreal. And to develop discrimination one needs to understand the difference between the Self as pure consciousness and the Self as mind or manifest consciousness, not with the idea of transcending or destroying the mind experientially but to destroy all experiential notions, including the pernicious idea that it is possible to transcend or destroy the mind at all.

Discrimination removes one's identification with the mind/ego/doer entity...which is not an actual experiential entity as we think, but only an erroneous self notion. Vedanta unfolds the method of discrimination by scientifically describing in great detail the nature of the world, the individual, and the self.

Since the Sixties, the exponential increase in spiritual seeking is a telling commentary on consumerism's limitations as a solution to the problem of suffering. Unfortunately, what could be a conscious search is almost always a blind fumbling, an attempt to fashion a modern relevant means of self knowledge. Consequently we have the 'New Age' with its plethora of quasi religious pseudo therapies and...since the Nineties...Neo-Advaita, the modern 'satsang' movement whose spiritual deficiencies are apparent to even the untrained eye.

There is no need for a 'relevant' modern approach to the spiritual quest because there is nothing modern about human beings. A few material gadgets do not qualify the human race as spiritually evolved. Ignorance, greed, fear, superstition, selfishness and vanity have not been dispelled on account of the internet and the iPod. Human beings are human beings. It so happens that a long time ago, the Vedic seers solved the human problem once and for all. For who are inclined and qualified the means of self knowledge that has served for millenia is with us today in the form of the teaching tradition of Vedanta, the royal road to Self realization.