

The Essence of Karma Yoga

Dear James,

Thank you for your invitation to write. I finished your book, and found it very helpful. You describe a very straightforward approach. Other approaches I have had experience with seem less direct and 'business like' as you say, at least to me; Zen seems to be a bodily athletic challenge to sit for extended periods until something happens; Nisargadatta describes things very clearly, but the method is 'slippery' sometimes ("just hold to the feeling of 'I'). Ramana's writings are well presented by Michael James and David Godman, but your interview about Ramana clarifies some things that I didn't even recognize were unclear before.

You say that many seekers are really seeking love more than self-realization and I think I relate to that somehow in that my mind can be disturbed by emotional 'somethings' involving other seeker-types although I am happily married and my husband does his own inner work.

Anyway, I have an odd life situation that comes to the foreground of my attention at times, and did so again yesterday. I am beginning to apply knowledge to it, and would like some feedback. Without too much unnecessary biography, my career life has had a consistent theme of 'jobs with nothing to do', at least since I finished my professional training. I have also taken many other kinds of vocational training, all towards learning how to 'do', as Gurdjieff, an early hero might have said; programs in gardening, painting, sewing, and other activities to numerous to mention. I have been in positions where I literally had to find some way to entertain myself.

I have a good job now but I still look for ways to occupy myself. The problem is that sometimes I feel guilty that I should be doing something more 'productive', but I do not know what that would be. The odd thing is that I left this job a year ago for another one I thought would be more fulfilling but it didn't work out and they generously agreed to take me back and I am much more appreciative these

days. However, occasionally the old feelings I described come up.

Anyway, I just started to do karma yoga (as of today :-), offering my work and activities up to God. I also finally identified that when I feel afraid or guilty it means I am not recognizing that I am limitless being, and that the outside world depends on me, I don't depend on it. Even just writing this out is helpful; it is like I am having to retrain my mind, to keep my eyes on the road so to speak instead of letting my gaze wander over to irrelevant happenings off to the side.

I also want to say that I discovered some videos by Swami Dayananda and Chinmayananda on YouTube. They are spellbinding. I will come into some money in about 3 weeks and plan to get your videos then. I was looking at Dayananda videos on Sunday and felt very good and confident about all this, and so was surprised yesterday (Monday) that feelings of inadequacy were displacing my sense of who I am.

Thank you again. I walk to work and enjoy offering up my work to God. One of the *satsangs* on your site described that, and I like it a lot.

Mandy

Dear Mandy,

Very nice to hear from you. I am glad the book is helpful. Spirituality should be practical. The mystical 'woo woo' stuff is fine up to a point, but at the end of the day, you will not succeed without a manly no-nonsense attitude. It is, as you say, about 'retraining the mind, keeping your eyes on the road instead of letting your gaze wander.'

Without meaning any disrespect, I have to say that in all the years I have been in the spiritual world, I have yet to meet anyone who subjected themselves to Zen who got much more a few epiphanies and bad knees for their trouble. Ramana was definitely a realized soul and much of his teaching is excellent but there are certain problems with his teachings...as I point out in that interview. I am sure that his words would not have been a problem for anyone who was actually a

physical disciple, but for Western people who are not very sophisticated spiritually who think they can crack the self inquiry code by reading some books by people who are admittedly not enlightened, his words get interpreted according to what they know or don't know, so there is ample room for misunderstanding.

Thanks for the clear presentation of your situation. An analytical discriminating mind is necessary for self inquiry. Not only have you scoped out the problem, you have come up with the solution. Let me recap the contents of this letter and make a few observations. The sense of fear driven inadequacy that has motivated you in life so far has generated a very active, creative, dissatisfied (*rajasic*) mind, one that is easily bored. Hence all the hopping from job to job. I think you have realized that 'doing' i.e. a more interesting creative job will not remove this sense of incompleteness, that the problem is not what you do but how and why you do what you do.

Karma yoga is the solution to this, assuming that you are going for freedom, which you obviously are. You take the *karma yoga* attitude because it gradually removes the sense of dissatisfaction that is making the mind hop around, compromising its ability to keep its attention on the self. One of Ramana's definitions of self inquiry is 'holding the mind on the self.' It is impossible to assimilate the import of the teachings i.e. 'I am whole and complete ordinary actionless non-dual awareness' when the mind is not composed. You probably have realized it, but since you didn't mention it, I will. You offer your work to the self because you feel a fundamental sense of gratitude for the gift of life. When somebody gives you something beautiful you are immediately inclined to reciprocate. This sense of gratitude neutralizes the fearful, greedy attitude that produces the restlessness and as the *vasanas* exhaust through your work, the mind naturally turns toward the self. Once the mind is composed it is easy to contemplate on subtle ideas like "I am That."

A lot of Western people who have a strong desire for liberation but who have busy distracted minds are unsuccessful with the "I am That" type of practice...taking a stand in awareness as awareness...because their minds have

not been prepared by *karma yoga*. At best the practice will generate epiphanies that momentarily inspire them but end up being a source of frustration because they cannot keep the mind on the self until the knowledge has become steady. One thing you mentioned with reference to 'I am That' is holding on to the 'feeling' of I. I am not sure what you mean by 'the feeling of I' but feeling is an experiential term and probably accounts for the slipperiness of the practice. If an inquirer is looking for a special experience of 'I' he or she will never be satisfied. The 'feeling of I' is just the hard and fast knowledge 'I am the self.' Until the knowledge is hard and fast (*stithya pragna* to use the Sanskrit term) you will not be fulfilled. But it should be noted that holding the mind on the knowledge is also tricky because of the distractions created by the *vasanas*.

Negative emotions...guilt, fear, longing etc...are not to be indulged in but seen as opportunities to change one's attitude and turn your attention to the self. *Karma yoga* is essentially a religious attitude without all the doctrinal nonsense the church has attached to it. There are a lot of things to be grateful for and a practice centered in glad acceptance quickly bears fruit. So, you are definitely on the right track.

Yes, get the DVDs. I also recommend a book by Swami Dayananda entitled *Vivekachoodamani* (The Crown Jewel of Discrimination). It is his commentaries on 108 of the verses of Shankara's most important work. The whole of Vedanta is presented there. It is an amazing work.

Anyway, thanks for writing. I am glad you are happy. Write again if you get stuck. I doubt that you will. I think everything will gradually resolve from now on.

All the best,

Ram