

Dear Mr. Swartz,

I found you via the Stillness Speaks website. I watched a segment of your interview with Chris Hebard, and appreciated your directness. I have demonstrated the ability to get to the nuts and bolts of things, so it is no surprise to me that I find myself in the world of direct inquiry and your communication.

To get to the chase, I have always looked at the world with a sense of peculiarity. At a time when I was seriously asking questions of myself and life something would shift. I can tell you that many tightly held beliefs were simply destroyed, and from that day forward I would not abuse myself (mentally speaking). Life had most definitely changed. That is not to say that my suffering ended, but life would be light and my perspective was such that I have simply been kind to myself ever since. However, it was very clear to me that these beliefs were the cause of trouble, and without these beliefs, I still was. That got my attention, and started the questioning in earnest. Since then Life has presented ample opportunity and situations to question myself and life. To date, sitting quiet and listening to Life has been my best teacher. The number of recourses to turn to is limited here in the US. To compound that my BS meter is fairly reliable.

I read "dharma combat" on your website, and was struck by your comments about the West. I struggle with interpretation. The difference in the meaning of a word now from just fifty years ago can be quiet different, not to mention the failures in translation. I have been left of my own accord to work things out. I say that not knowing if that aids or hinders inquiry. My guess is both. I also resonate with your reference to a friend that experienced altered states for many years, and did not have a reference to evaluate them. I have an ear for this inquiry, but no reference. Where I live does not appear to be a hotbed for the non-dual, and hopping a flight to India is not an option at this time. One is left to web searching and reading, but most I just sit quietly.

I am grateful for any direction!

James: I am not completely sure what your doubt is but I think it centers around the interpretation of the words of scripture and enlightened (or apparently enlightened) beings. If that is correct, it is a very important issue because if you are trying to get direction, you need to interpret the meaning of words correctly

so that you can move forward. Unfortunately, an individual's interpretation is only as good as his or her knowledge or ignorance. And a person would not be looking for the meaning of the statements of scripture or reading the books of gurus, etc. if he or she knew who he or she was. So there is always the danger of scurrying off down a tunnel with no cheese at the end.

There is a solution, however. This is where Vedanta comes into the picture. It provides a way of looking at yourself and your body/mind and the world that helps you interpret the meaning of words objectively. It would take me quite a few pages to explain it in enough detail to make sense so I suggest you get a copy of my new book which goes into this question in considerable detail, particularly in Chapter 3. You should read it from the beginning, however, and not skip Chapter 3 which is entitled The Means of Knowledge. I think if you read the whole book you would have a very solid foundation for interpreting scripture, analyzing your epiphanies, and removing obstacles. Once you have read it contact me if you have any questions and I will try to clear them up, either with an email or by Skype or the phone.

Todd: I became somewhat familiar with the teachings of Vedanta following an experience that was beyond my limited understanding of the nature of life. I found myself reading works about Ramana Maharshi and Nissargadatta. These communications came across my path and seem to speak to what was exposed in this experience. I come to these teaching just as I found your information, via websites, books, etc. These communications either speak to me or they don't. I won't hook my wagon to just any communication; there is a lot of spiritual minutia out there. You seem to have clarity about this and speak to this. What is most important, the teacher or the teaching?

James: A purified scripture, a qualified teacher and a qualified student are necessary. They are all equally important.

Todd: Can one be guided toward realization and liberation by the teaching in a book?

James: Yes and no. A good scripture can put you in the ballpark but it will not take you all the way because the reader will unconsciously interpret the words according to unexamined beliefs and opinions and not get the pure intent, the implied meaning of the scripture. So at some point you need to be taught.

Todd: Is inquiry enough?

James: If it is guided by scripture and you are qualified.

Todd: Is a relationship with one who realizes required? The answer I have heard to this is yes.

James: Yes.

Todd: If so, what does that mean, and what about access, more specifically, the lack there of? Am I out of luck because there are no realized teachers in the part of the world I find myself, and my life circumstances do not permit travel? I guess I am just trying to settle my relationship with a teaching and a teacher, and the lack of access. I am clear that realization is an inward pursuit, but is there an efficient relationship to a teaching and a teacher?

James: If the intent is pure and intense, God will set it up for you to meet a teacher. It is quite easy nowadays, telecommunications being what they are. When you get done with the book you can also get the DVD set if you think Vedanta is for you. It is almost as good as having a teacher, particularly in the beginning. I have many friends who watch them over and over and read the book like it is the Bible. They report that this method works. Then we can meet or Skype and the doubts get cleared. It is a process. A few people realize through an impersonal communication but there it is better if there is a live realized person on the other end of the phone. Several times a year clearly enlightened people write me just to be sure. By and large dead gurus don't work. Many good people worship dead gurus. It is not the kiss of death but usually it is a sign of a lack of self confidence. They should really worship the self. At the expense of getting slightly off topic, very often spiritually ambitious people cook up imaginary relationships with dead gurus to lend gravitas to their 'teaching.' In any case, there are not hard and fast rules. For some, it takes many years, even though we meet regularly. It all depends on your eligibility.

Todd: I hope these questions don't appear frivolous. They may not reflect any dept of self knowledge, but are nonetheless questions that have been working on me. I did not come to any of this by following a spiritual path or belief system other than asking myself questions about life, and asking questions about an experience that revealed something more true and fundamental than the life I had been living. Quite honestly I have been hesitant to do explore any path.

James: Well, Todd, count yourself among the lucky ones. The 'spiritual' types who have been on various paths are the most difficult to teach. They have all kinds of silly ideas which they believe amount to knowledge and they are attached to them. It is a big mine field out there. If you are uncontaminated by the modern seeking world, you have a leg up on the rest.

Todd: Greetings James! I see quite clearly that this life and world occurs before this unchanging Presence. Why is that I feel more like a fish flopping around the beach in frantic need for water, then this still- unchanging- Presence? It is tiring and I am growing impatient, yet this too is seen in this Presence! Is there an end?

THANK YOU!

James: You are the end. It is not something that is going to happen. So to get out of this seeming ocean of *samsara*, you should identify with the Presence. Then you will not feel like a fish out of water. Identification with the Self is the end of suffering. But identifying with Self is hard work owing to the tendency to identify with the body mind entity. Still, what else do you have to do? Breaking the identification is like breaking any addiction. You need to be alert and pay attention to your mind. Whenever you see that you are caught up with the limited 'I' switch your attention to Presence and contemplate on the meaning of being Presence. When you see beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are the Presence suffering ends because as Presence you are the end.

Todd: I am on my second meditation through your book. I am taken with the directness of Vedanta and your communication of it. My gut and insights have suggested the truth is not something more but less (in the sense that anything needs to be added); something so obvious that it is not apparent.

James: That's correct, Todd. In Vedanta the Self...the truth...is called the 'royal secret' in the sense that it is hidden in plain sight. It is wrongly assumed that it is tucked away in some faraway heaven or concealed in some inner state and therefore remains unknown and unappreciated.

Todd: I am going out on a limb and say a glimpse of non-dual reality was seen couple of years ago while healing from a potentially limiting trauma (and a couple other simultaneous life altering events). The chance of some permanent limitation was very real. During a lengthy recovery process I had ample time to contemplate how I would be impacted and **it was clear that the sense of Being**

(the animating life) was completely unaffected. This was curious. This quickly led to noticing that the body was an experience of Being, and if that was the case for something as intimate as the body so is everything else. Then what is Being? I have not left this inquiry since.

James: You are very fortunate, Todd. I'm sure at the time the trauma was not a cause for celebration, but see the effect on your understanding. I know many people who would give their eye teeth to know for certain "I am not the body." It is really the foundation of inquiry and all the texts go at this notion at the start because until it is clear that the body exists for the 'I' and not the other way around, one's understanding cannot mature.

Todd: Vedanta, as you have laid it out, speaks specifically to this. The number one thing I take away from the book is clarity and assimilation.

James: This is the whole point, Todd. The real issue is not whether or not the 'I' exists, but the implications of understanding the nature of the self in terms of one's apparent existence.

Actually, everyone does know the self, but there are certain confusions about it and its relationship to itself in terms of the body and mind and the world that need to be clarified. Freedom is just the knowledge that allows one to know how the self and the apparent self are related. In the modern teachings they are thought to belong to opposite orders of reality so that if you have a mind/ego you cannot have a self, the idea being that if you destroy the mind/ego you can 'gain' the self. But it is not a two way relationship. Awareness stands prior to and 'above' the apparent self, so there is no conflict between them.

Todd: **As I was reading the significance of self knowledge I was relieved.** My mind is always working on this. **Why contemplate, or why would one attend a satsang if self knowledge was not valuable for the reflection of Self?**

James: Yes. The contradiction between modern teachings dismissing knowledge as merely intellectual and the plethora of words on the topic of the self by the selfsame teachers is obvious to anyone with a lick of sense. When your contemplation is guided by an invalid means of knowledge it will not bear fruit.

Todd: I also come away from the book knowing I need to **look at my effectiveness at inquiry while in silence.** I can quickly forget, and get lost in

drama **until I recognize I am lost.** I will continue to read your book, and I will continue to inquire. Any additional direction would be welcome, and greatly appreciated.

James: The key here is the simplicity of your lifestyle. If you have a very simple sattvic lifestyle and your relationships are in order, it is easy to apply the knowledge when the mind becomes 'lost.' I really can't offer you anything more at this time because you are obviously on the right track but if any problems occur feel free to write.

Todd: I have gotta say I was not expecting the confirmations. Doubt likes to sneak in from time to time, but then I notice I am aware of the doubt...and on and on. I do have to express my gratitude for you taking the time to respond. Other than a couple of quick email exchanges, I have not discussed inner recognition with another soul since the first epiphany got the insight ball rolling almost twenty years ago. It took all of a day to learn to keep my mouth closed about such things. The electronic nature of this communication, though not face to face, is coming from the recognition of Self as best as I can and I know I am hearing the truth in your communications. This is good. Should you find your travels taking you to Central Florida please keep my email handy. I would enjoy meeting you. Or, perhaps I will find my way to a Satsang. In the mean time I will continue to inquire, look to the book, the literature on your web page, and perhaps pop an email every once in a while.

Much Gratitude and Best wishes!

Todd