

A Really Cool Guy

Ram (James Swartz)

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Carl: Dear James, if I'm hanging out in Annamalai Swami's *ashram* hoping that his former attendant Sunderam will talk to me, does that technically qualify as needy?

James: I don't know, Carl. I'm not sure what you are really looking for. You know who you are, why not just discriminate and get on with your life? Seeking is just a state of mind. Nobody and nothing "out there" in the "spiritual" world is going to solve the seeking. At some point you will accept the fact that there is nothing to seek. Probably *Isvara* didn't get you into that *ashram* last month because it understood that the knowledge/experience issue hadn't been sorted by you.

Vedanta is not for seekers. The jury on who you are is not out. Spiritual life is just discrimination. It goes on every moment of every day till you die. It is totally unromantic and ordinary and completely fulfilling. Somehow there is an unexamined belief about the nature of enlightenment that seems to be driving your search. Somehow the logic of Vedanta has seemed to escape you. The desire is illegitimate that you or your life should be different from what it is. You must be so weary of this incessant movement, of this dissatisfaction. I suppose "needy" is about right – no blame, we are all needy – but the "why" needs to be addressed. Anyway, I don't want this to sound like a lecture. I feel for you. I know what you are going through. I hope the lights go on soon.

Carl: I wasn't actually expecting a "real" reply. I thought we were just goofing around but appreciate your sincere response, as always.

Was lying in bed last night doing the "*neti-neti* shuffle" towards the appearances for what seemed to be about the billionth time. Since arriving in Tiruvannamalai, I've been doing *sadhana* à la Annamalai Swami, i.e. "not me, not mine, not my business, not my problem," etc.

Despite my spicing things up every now and again with a little tweak gleaned from some book or some talk, there's just a real heaviness that's been associated with the whole approach for a long time now. It feels really, as you aptly put it, wearisome. Like some never-ending existential game of Whack a Mole.

And just like any other addiction, the condition is progressive. At least in my twenties there was something mildly romantic about the spiritual life. I gotta admit, it felt kind of rock 'n roll to be in my late twenties, almost always the youngest guy in Ramesh's *satsang* room, staying in a groovy fleabag hotel in Colaba, banging my cute little Israeli backpacker girlfriend after getting home from the talk, smoking pretty decent *charas* together around dusk while watching *BBC World* in the room, and then hitting Leopold's for beer and dinner with the cooler *satsangis*.

Nowadays, with the sacred portal of middle age looming on the horizon like one of those alien motherships in the movies, things don't seem quite so rock 'n roll anymore. Although I'm still practically the youngest person around these parts, it hardly counts for much in FUCKING TIRU, replete as it is with all these weirdo "lifers." There are certainly no cute Israeli backpackers in this

neck of the woods, marijuana just makes me self-conscious and paranoid, and alcohol is a total non-starter (my little misadventure in that *tamasic* Coimbatore drinking den taught me that much). So yeah, to paraphrase the great sage Sri Sri B.B. King, the thrill is gone, baby.

Strangely enough, this morning I was listening to a talk of yours on *Vivekachudamani*, and this really, in the parlance of our times, “resonated”...

“He is said to be liberated while living when self-knowledge is clear, bliss (ie. self-confidence) is continuous and the world *more or less* forgotten.”

I’ve added the italics in deference to your emphasis on that point: “*more or less* forgotten.” As you say, spiritual life is just discrimination. What the hell am I looking for? Why have I been making such a big deal out of it? What difference does the mind, body and world make to me, really? I don’t want to count all my chickens just yet, but today there’s a lightness around the whole thing that I haven’t felt for a while, at the very least since rocking up to this shit-hole cowtown.

Not sure if I’ll stick around for your talks. Will let you know if I fly the coop.

~ Thanks again, Carl

James: I love your writing, Carl. It is excellent. And yes, you are whatever Carl thinks he is looking for. It is no big deal really. I was a tad luckier than you in that I quit the seeker right on his sell-by date, but not by much. The sacred portals are always looming and it is nice to let them pass through you than the other way around. You’re a big boy now. You can get out your diaper and sit in your bed like Ramana and let the fools come to you – or not.

Sorry I didn’t get the joke, but usually jokes are a proxy for something else – isn’t everything in the apparent reality? Why not write the whole story up and put it on the shelf for posterity and invent a new thing for the Carl to do, something that puts a spring in his step, a smile on his face and bright light in his eyes? I’ll publish it at ShiningWorld for the edification of all.

The thrill is definitely gone. I came to really hate Tiru, that one-horse cowtown, after a few years, seeing the same seeker types every year, getting, as my dear departed father said on his deathbed, “too soon old, too late smart,” the life draining from the bodies, their mouths parroting the same old non-dual shit. “Get a life,” I used to say – “fall in love, inherit a factory” – but they looked at me like I was some sort of alien and soldiered on in the trenches of Papaji’s phoney idea of self-inquiry, much the worse for wear.

Enlightenment is just discrimination, knowing what is *satya* and what is *mithya*, letting that knowledge keep you out of trouble. Whether our paths cross again or not, I wish you well with everything, Carl. You’re a really cool guy.