

A Big Blow

Ram (James Swartz)

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1400>

Lannie: Dear Ram, thank you for taking up the *satsanging* again. It is really inspiring. The last one to Marilyn helped a lot. I just got fired from a job I had for 10 years. The first reaction was: "Oh, good! Now I can dedicate myself more to what is the most important to me, *dharma*."

Ram: Hi, Lannie. I'm glad the *satsangs* are helpful. I'll be getting more "spiritual" now, at least for a while, as the material plane work is winding down. When I get my website up more Vedanta will be available. I'm sorry to hear that you lost your job, but I'm sure you will rise to the occasion and make the most of your (probably temporary) unemployment. It just goes to show that nothing in this world lasts forever, doesn't it?

Lannie: Then came the doubts: "Will I be able to support myself? Is it morally okay to depend on others (like parents) for a living? Can I live with the feeling of uncertainty that comes with it?" ... and then (without changing any choices about what to do) came the big storm of Lannie feeling totally hurt by the fact that her skills are not wanted. That is a kick in the ego... since I am also working freelance, there is enough job left to make the blow bearable, but the force of the pain was interesting to witness.

Ram: See how the mind works, hopping back and forth from the bright to the dark side. Since nobody has a problem with the bright side I'll confine my remarks to the dark side, the doubts, with the idea of giving you some ammunition in this (ongoing) war with the mind/ego. You say, "Will I be able to support myself?" I say, did you ever support yourself? Aren't things pretty much laid out well in advance? Don't they proceed on their own second by second, quite apart from you? Does it really matter whether or not you have a job? Is it the kiss of death? As you mentioned above, now you will have more time to pursue other interests. Find the bliss in being out of work. Maybe you will have to sacrifice some comforts and a few bad habits for a while but learning to do without is a valuable lesson. When the Buddha applied for a job he was asked what his qualifications were. By "qualifications" is meant the skills you rely on to get through life. He said, "I can wait. I can fast. I can think." He was so secure in that he could wait forever for things to come and he could do without anything. When he said he could think I believe he meant that he knew how to use the mind to solve problems. Rather than making problems he had trained it to ask questions and figure out what was possible.

As for the big storm of Lannie's feeling, perhaps it will be helpful to realize (the sad fact) that people don't want you for yourself, they only want you for what you can do for them. An inquiry into this question could lead to the conclusion that you are not your skills. Skills are in *maya* but you are not. Skills and the need for them come and go according to the ever-changing needs of an always fickle world. If one is inclined to pessimism one might conclude that since nobody cares, life is not worth living. I had this realization when I was twenty-five and it depressed me for two or three days, but as I thought about it I realized that this cloud had a bright silver lining: if nobody really cares about me, then I am perfectly free to do whatever I want (as long as I follow

dharma). One of the most important spiritual lessons one can learn is: change is good because it forces you to rely on yourself. Of course it is natural for the mind to think the worst but these feelings quickly dissipate when you understand that everything here, both the pleasant and the unpleasant, serve the self every minute.

Lannie: During the darkest hours the only thought that helped was the question: Who am I? Who is talking? Who is having the self-doubts and the pain? With the realigning of the perspective the pain was gone completely until Lannie reappeared again... once I knew the pattern, the answer to the the doubt attacks came faster (isn't it always the same answer somehow?) until the doubts did not come so forcefully anymore... maybe another day or time or incident...

Ram: By far and away the most spiritually interesting aspect of this letter is the awareness of Lannie. You accurately report what is going on. This shows that you are beyond Lannie and her story. You correctly say that this job loss was a blow to the ego, not to you. It shows that your mind can think. What a gift! This blow caused you to inquire into who you are and when you did the pain disappeared. This is the purpose of self-inquiry. A *samsari* might conclude that the only way to feel good again would be to get another job, but the object is never the source of the happiness or the unhappiness. How we see ourselves determines whether or not we are happy. When you say "Lannie" you mean the desire to be wanted, appreciated and used. But Lannie, the real you, actually has no desire and when you rediscover her, presto chango, the suffering goes!

You are right; there is only one question, "Who am I?," and one answer: whole and complete, unchanging spirit. And this answer is always waiting to be discovered. It is always lurking behind the emotion that is troubling you at the time.

Lannie: It's interesting what you said about choices of what to do and what are the motivations behind those choices. This seems to be worth looking into again and again. In my case to be valued by others more seems to be a big thing for me... better watch out...

Ram: Yes, everyone wants to be loved and valued, but it is a big trap. Always think, "I am the ultimate value. I am that which every being strives to attain. I am always free of need and want. I am happiness itself."

Lannie: But to take on some new responsibility is something that seems to wake me up from my slumber a bit. It is fun because I feel awake if I talk about *dharma*. So as long as I know who I am...

Ram: Perhaps this is the lesson to be learned from this job loss. It is always good to take responsibility for your destiny. When you get too comfortable you die. I have recently fired myself from this chapter of my life because it was just too comfortable and boring. I thrive on uncertainty. I like to demonstrate to myself over and over that I can handle any change with class.

Lannie: Anyway, I am happy that you have time to email. You are a great inspiration and in

general the “bliss” *satsang* to Mark is still my main prayer (or at least the key sentences stick with me: this is a non-dual reality, nothing is missing anywhere; and: if you experience an unpleasant emotion look for the bliss underlying that emotion). Thank you for those and for confirming them again and again.

~ Love (lots and more), Lannie

Ram: You're quite welcome.

~ Much love, Ram