

A Long Journey

Ram (James Swartz)

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James: This is the inspiring story of one of my dear friends, Arlindo Moraes, also known in the spiritual world as Nagarjuna. It takes the reader through the universal stages of inquiry: suffering, the discovery of the spiritual way, the work on the ego to build a positive self-image, the quest for experiential enlightenment through meditation and the teachings of Neo-Advaita, the development of a quiet mind, the discovery of the missing ingredient – self-knowledge – the rise of a burning desire for freedom in the form of constant contemplation, the arrival of self-knowledge and the realization that the fruit of self-knowledge – perfect satisfaction – was the goal and the understanding that it is obtained by mastery of one's fears and desires.

Devotion to the truth is always difficult but it pays a handsome dividend if one perseveres. If you wish to communicate with Arlindo, who speaks Portuguese, Italian and English, I have included his contact details below.

~ James

Nagarjuna: I was born in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1955 to a middle-class family. My upbringing was far from healthy and by the age of 20 I was full of negative notions and feelings about myself and the world. In spite of all my emotional suffering I graduated as an engineer at age 22, but my career did not last long nor did my marriage. I dropped out and became a disciple/devotee of a famous *guru*, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, later renamed Osho.

My life in Osho's community was intense, vibrant and filled with psychological challenges. It was the perfect spiritual playground to process negative emotions and build a more positive sense of individual identity. By the time Osho left his body I had already exhausted most of my interest in *ashram* activities. Next, I became a disciple of Sri H.L. Poonja, also known as Papaji, a disciple of Ramana Maharshi who lived in a dirty and noisy city near Delhi, India, called Lucknow. Although Papaji did not have a proper teaching methodology, at least he had good pointers that directed me towards the truth, the pure consciousness we all are. His message was simple: turn the mind away from objects of experience and keep it on its source, the self. He was also a *shaktipat guru*, and to be in his presence was a great opportunity for experiences of the self and other epiphanies. But the greatest gift I received from him was an introduction to two important spiritual sages, Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Nisargadatta's powerful words became my main source of inspiration. My life in Lucknow was calm and comfortable with lots of *satsangs* and time to read spiritual books. However, Papaji was concerned about the education of my son and told me to go back to the West to provide him with a proper education. I didn't like the idea, because I was attached to the lifestyle in India and I felt as if my ticket to enlightenment was canceled forever.

I made and lost money and ended up in the Pacific Northwest to be close to another spiritual community. I participated in some retreats and studied under a few modern so-called "non-dual" teachers who mostly teach duality. In the spring of 2012 I was giving up hope for *moksa* until my

long-term meditation on the thought-feeling “I am” inspired by my dear *guru* Nisargadatta began bearing fruit in the form of the effortless experience of peace, love and bliss. My mind was becoming *sattvic*. At the same time the teaching of Nisargadatta’s teacher Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj made me understand in a moment of clarity that no state of consciousness, no experiential bliss, love or ecstasy would resolve my quest for permanent happiness, because all states produced by my meditation always ended, leaving me again and again thirsty for more. I told my wife, “I will never meditate again!”

The seeking continued for a few more months, but a deep dispassion toward experiential bliss developed. A few years passed and I eventually realized that my problem was not about getting the right experience of enlightenment but that I was ignorant of my true nature as awareness. What I once thought of as meditation became an “intuitive” contemplation of the nature of consciousness. It was more like a prayer, a burning desire to directly know my true identity as the self. In my prayers I used to evoke God to take my physical body in exchange for Him to reveal my true nature. Before long I realized and assimilated the knowledge “I am pure consciousness.”

But that was only the beginning and it did not translate into real day-to-day freedom. The knowledge of my true nature as awareness was clear, but I did not have the full understanding of the implications of this knowledge.

I needed a complete body of knowledge that not only revealed the non-dual nature of reality as the self/awareness but one that would set me free of the need of discrete objects of experience in order to feel permanently complete.

That was when *Isvara* sent me a book written by James Swartz called *How to Attain Enlightenment*. The words of Vedanta penetrated my soul like an arrow. The missing link was found. I took Vedanta into my heart and stopped offering *satsangs* to my friends. Slowly but surely the teachings of Vedanta produced in me the firm conviction that as awareness “I am already full, whole, and complete” and with that hard and fast knowledge, dispassion towards my desires and fears developed.

After all, real *moksa* is freedom from craving, needing or dependence on any particular type of experience, which is only possible with the full apprehension of the nature of consciousness, so brilliantly revealed by the teachings of Vedanta.

Nowadays, I reside in a small town in the mountains surrounding Sao Paulo, Brazil. I live a quiet life as a retiree householder and share my self-knowledge with a small group of friends in Sao Francisco Xavier. My passion for Vedanta compels me to continue my studies under the guidance of my dear teacher, the one who brought Real Freedom into my life through the ancient teachings of the *Upanishads* – James Swartz – affectionately known as Ramji.

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