

A Sea of Stories

Ram (James Swartz)

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Tom: Hi, James. I have not been in touch for a while because there has not been much new to report. I go through “good” and “bad” phases in terms of the practice of self-knowledge. I find the ego “lashes out” quite suddenly sometimes. I suppose at some level it feels threatened by self-knowledge; ironic.

James: It is quite natural. Vedanta is a radically different way of seeing things. It contradicts the “normal” way. Perseverance furthers.

Tom: Vedanta continues to infiltrate my consciousness, and paradoxically, at work a lot of the time. I seem to have more confidence, energy and seem to be tougher/stronger, in a good way. I certainly have done nothing directly or consciously to bring this about. It crept up on me, so to speak, and came as a surprise. Maybe it’s just another transient *maya* phase; time will tell. But frankly, I can’t explain it. I suspect that it is a kind of a manifestation in space and time of a subtle growth in inward self-knowledge, and that by its nature it must shine forth in some way. Who knows?

James: Your suspicions are correct, Tom. It is the effect of assimilated self-knowledge, an excellent sign.

Tom: The thing about Vedanta is you can write volumes about an infinite number of technical points, but really it comes down to trying to apply self-knowledge to daily situations with discrimination and dispassion or trying to identify with the truth of one’s nature while keeping a firm grip on common sense. The technical stuff about adjuncts and causal bodies and macrocosmic *vasanas* doesn’t matter a hill of beans most of the time.

James: This is correct, Tom. Vedanta is a very simple, non-intellectual, non-mystical application of a very simple truth to daily situations. There is nothing romantic or spiritual about it. It is a simple knowing and confidence in that knowing. And out of it comes subtle but real changes in one’s life.

Tom: I read your blog and liked your point about Ramana Maharshi and the cow. But he seemed to take it seriously or maybe that’s just the way it was reported by (gullible) devotees? The world is a weird place, but enlightened cows seem to be straight out of a parody of *The X-Files*. On the other hand, compared to some of the people one encounters, cows probably have more insight.

James: Indian sages are not immune to spiritual projections, Tom. I think he probably did take it seriously, but it probably did not mean to him what it means to us. I think he saw the self there

and spoke of it in this way, making it seem as if the cow knew that it was the self. Even if the cow did know that it was the self, so what? What good did it do us or the cow? It was still a cow. And it could have been a translation problem, more likely a gullible devotee, as you suggest. He made other similar statements. He said there was a “city” in the middle of Arunachala. Whether he believed this projection or not is anybody’s guess. Indians in general have a different kind of mind than we do. There is “magic” in it. It is called the *pratibhasika* level of reality, the dream aspect of the waking state. It is just as real to them as the empirical level is to us. But the empirical level is no more real than the *pratibhasika* level when you look at it from the self’s position. When a Westerner enters into this state, it seems very “spiritual” and unique and he or she will make a big deal out of it, as if it is something extraordinary. But an Indian will take it with a grain of salt. It is no big deal to see Krishna or Hanuman with the physical eyes. I know because my mind used to have that power, but it has since declined, although a year or so ago I did “see” one of the gods. The mind is an amazing thing. It can create anything. After all, the whole of existence is a terribly lifelike three-dimensional holographic projection. It fools nearly everyone.

Tom: When I was a teenager someone described me as “born old.” Maybe Vedanta is for old misfits who can’t fully fool themselves.

James: Yes. It is for rebels, misfits, eccentrics and “old” souls.

Tom: We use words to explain other words and use different words to explain the words that do the explaining... ad infinitum. You can nail nothing down in *maya*.

~ Best wishes, Tom

James: Isn’t that the truth. It is a sea of stories. Lovely to hear from you, Tom.