

A Spiritual Being in a World of Wolves

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Ed: Dear Jim, it's taken me far longer to reply than I wanted. I was so humbled and filled with gratitude at your thoughtful and speedy reply to my first inquiry. Your words cut right to the heart of my life's situation and left me with no doubt about the depth of your wisdom. I am touched that a total stranger would take the time to counsel me so thoughtfully, thank you once again. You hit the nail on the head so many times in your response, and I'll just get right to the heart of the matter...

Since we spoke, stress at the job has increased and at times consumes me. The worst is when I bring it home and, despite all efforts to the contrary, I am tense with my family or not fully present and weighed down by the stresses of life and work in the stock market. You stated it perfectly when you said my life is like a mini stock market.

You say, "It seems there is nothing objective you can do about your profession right now, but basically, gambling is *adharmic* and contrary to the spiritual laws of the universe. This is why it is forbidden in the scriptures. You are not actually creating wealth, which is a noble occupation. You are placing bets with OPM [other people's money]. The very nature of this activity produces anxiety. Anxiety is the arch-enemy of discrimination, and discrimination is essential for a happy life. Mind you, Ed, this is not a judgment. This is just how things are."

You are exactly right. That helped clarify something for me. I realised that my lifestyle/chosen profession is my biggest obstacle to spiritual progress right now. It's as simple as that... no amount of reading or self-enquiry is going to change that. My job produces great anxiety and stress inside me and not only does it prevent me from being as good a father and husband as I want to be and know that I can be, but it will prevent me from seeing my true nature at all. I imagine it is something like trying to see one's reflection in the surface of water which is not calm. Of course the self still exists (and I am it!) but all hope of glimpsing its reflection (and thus gaining some true "knowledge of self") will be lost if the mind is so agitated... it will not be able to reflect anything but its own agitation??, or something like that...

Anyways... I found it to be the mark of a true *guru* that you can help me see with clarity that at this point what is most needed is not advanced spiritual concepts but a simple change of direction in my life, and that is where I am focusing my efforts now. Make no mistake, once I have this career mess sorted it out and I am in a place of greater peace and stability, I hope to make further progress on the deeper enquiry into the nature of things.

Please pray for me that I can somehow find the right job to provide for my family and allow me to live a more balanced life. Despite trying not to, I find myself quite worried that I won't be able to provide. One of the things I struggle with is, as you have often said, seeing the universe as a benign force and not some hostile alien territory out to harm you. I don't know if I watch too much news (or study too much history!) or just subscribe to the collective view, but I have a difficult time being optimistic sometimes... I do know it's all a matter of perspective and what you focus on... but I seem to be aware that for all the joy and happiness in life... terror and tragedy lurk everywhere. I know that sounds godawful... maybe it has to do with seeing my brother's descent

into madness... Although everyone has witnessed tragedy and pain in some form... it is the human condition, after all.

I know it's a trap to think that "if I just had this and that I could be happy," nevertheless, I find myself just hoping I can find a decent job that pays the bills and doesn't ask me to be a 15-hours-a-day, six-days-a-week corporate slave... I long for a simple life with my family that would provide ample time for contemplation and appreciation of life's simple beauties... Is that wrong?

Is that spoiled of me to think I can have that when the world is filled with billions of poor souls struggling to find their next meal? You said to me, "Fuck the bourgeois life," and, man, I'm with you on that, Jim, but life scraping by with three kids in this "rat race," as you so aptly put it, doesn't sound so great either... in this day and age in America, it isn't easy to live a nice middle-class life... it's like you gotta try and get yours or they run you over.

I know in my heart that is a bankrupt philosophy... I just got to stay positive, I guess, and hope that the universe will help provide the answer. As I'm sure you can tell (I can tell by listening to my own thoughts and seeing what I write). I'm a little fucked up right now (I don't mean intoxicated). Life has me by the balls, and too often I succumb to worrying and my own bullshit neurosis. I try to remind myself of the truth of non-duality and maintain the *karma yoga* attitude, and while often I forget, it is the only comfort I have right now and it has helped. I hope in the coming months that I can make some changes to find some increased stability... then hopefully, with your help, I can get down to the heart of the matter... the truth of all this.

~Thanks again, Ed

Jim: Hi, Ed. Thanks for writing. I was wondering how things were going with you. You are very clear about it all. I am glad that the *karma yoga* attitude is helping. It is the only solution in general to the problem of anxiety, but it is particularly important now – until events change the direction of your life. It is a shame to have to wait for things to force change, but if the stress that I hear coming from you is not relieved one way or the other, before long it will create some very intense and probably unwelcome *karma*. I can't see how you can keep this up until the kid in the hopper now is through college. I was in the same situation in my early twenties and in my case I hit bottom, lost my business and everything that I valued, and had to start all over – but it turned out to be a great blessing. So it would be smart to patiently start plotting your escape from the rat race one way or the other if you can.

The subjective solution is *karma yoga*. It means that you would not have to actually change your work and living situation, at least not significantly and not right away. It resolves the anxiety. Let me remind you of the reason why the anxiety is gratuitous – because the results are not up to you. Assuming that you are doing your actions in an appropriate and timely fashion to the best of your knowledge and ability, there is no justification for the anxiety. You can't help what brought you to this point. You cannot do anything about the actions that are yet to fructify, so the only issue is whether or not the anxiety is useful.

The trick of *karma yoga* is to focus on the actions themselves, not on the results. Results will come. But if once you have done the action you are still worrying about the outcome, your mind is still agitated about the result of the previous action, the action occupying your attention at the moment will get short shrift. You then may not evaluate information dispassionately and the next buy or sell may not be the correct one, considering your goal. In other words, the anxiety

compromises future results.

When you believe the stakes are high, anxiety becomes a habit on its own, whether or not the situation justifies it, which it never does. So see if you can keep your attention on the work itself and leave the results to the field. There must be so many things to do that you can just keep your working through the list and not think about what will come of the actions. Of course you can always worry about how long the list is. :-) I am not saying that it is easy. It will definitely be difficult because everyone you associate with is cranking out anxiety 24/7 and it is bound to leak into your mind.

The other issue is that you are not doing work that is in harmony with your nature. Some people thrive in that kind of environment. They love uncertainty. I am a bit like that, not so much anymore, but when I was younger. I don't seek change, but I welcome not knowing what will happen. I feel confident that I can handle whatever comes and will land on my feet. But not everyone has that nature. You are the sensitive spiritual type in a world of wolves. The competition is not good for you.

So there is a values component that is going to have to be addressed at some point. When you get stressed you often develop a lot of physical habits that are meant to take care of it. You spend money on things that only give temporary relief. Maybe you drink or dine out or live in a neighborhood that is above your means, drive a four-wheel-drive even though you only drive on city streets, etc. In your mind luxuries may become necessities. You suffer so much you feel like you need to treat yourself. So if the problem centers around money, there may be things you can do to take some of the pressure off – downsizing, to be polite.

Of course the sheer volume of activities needs to be reduced too, but this may be difficult because you need to be faithful to the choices you have made and work them out carefully. The basic problem is that you took on too much too early. But you should not become discouraged. You should look for small ways to buy some quality time with the family. Nor should you blame yourself for wanting what everyone wants. The actions have been done and there is no taking them back apart from walking away from it all – which you cannot do, because you would not be able to live with yourself, even if you were cooling your heels on a beach in some tropical country.

Not only that, but you can also downsize your view of success. For a spiritual person there is really only one definition of success and that is peace of mind. I imagine that you want to give your kids the best that life can offer. But isn't the best you can offer only love? If you bust your butt and ruin your peace of mind to give them the finer things but neglect to give them the love and attention they need, you have not done the best by them. They will just learn that life is about working their fingers to the bone and being unhappy, and that is what they will do, irrespective of their Ivy League educations, etc. I spent more than twenty-five years in India and I am always amazed how Indians in general handle their dollar-a-day, no-pot-to-piss-in poverty better than we handle our prosperity. It is because as children they are loved very well.

In your case, I think a media fast would help. The society that America has become is almost totally fear-oriented. You can't help but absorb it. Although there is nothing dumber than fear, the society makes it out to be smart. If you doubt that this is a benign world, think about why the insurance companies are the richest institutions in the society.

Anyway, Ed, I am sure that you have not failed to consider all of this. The most important bit is

that you really contemplate carefully the idea that you are responsible for what happens. What happens is not up to you. You may very well make a series of exceptional trades that bring in big bucks, get you a fancy promotion, let you get a nice place in upstate New York and keep chickens and an organic garden and live happily ever after. The whole thing may come crashing down and you may find yourself on welfare. Who knows? Even the masters of the universe with their big trading programs don't know. Nobody knows. So it is pointless to take the negative or the positive view. Just do your work as best you can and leave the rest up to God. And write to me from time to time to let me know how it's going.

~ Love, James