

Ambition to Teach Vedanta

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Robert: Please tell me what can I do to become qualified Vedanta teacher and make this beautiful knowledge available to “others” and in that process to keep resolving my own remaining ignorance issues. I feel driven towards teaching and would like to know exactly what it entails.

Sundari: Before you jump into this idea of teaching Vedanta, consider seriously a few important points. First and most importantly, be very honest about your motivations. Why do you want to teach Vedanta? Is it really your *svadharma* or are there other reasons involved? Secondly, understand that there is no glory in teaching Vedanta; it is a life calling and it is very hard work. The timeless tradition of the great Vedanta *sampradaya* has honoured the finest minds on this planet, who were all dedicated to serving the Self only.

A genuine Vedanta teacher is never looking for any personal reward, fame or recognition and keeps the tradition pure by serving it by passing on these priceless teachings to those who are ready to hear them. They know the teachings do not belong to them, they are no more than a mouthpiece for the Self. Our job is to protect the integrity of the teachings, first and foremost.

We emphasize this point because unless you are clear about this and your motivation to teach is pure, the ego can co-opt the knowledge, which is what we call enlightenment sickness. Vedanta is a very powerful teaching, and if the ego is not in check, it will identify with it and claim it. Teaching Vedanta can build ego like nothing else can. So ask yourself why you are so driven to teach because it never works to have an ambition to teach Vedanta.

We have seen this ambition in several teachers we have promoted over the years. More often than not, the ambition masks a hidden agenda/*samskara* on the *jiva* level, even when the teacher has realized the Self and knows who they are. It can be a love-related issue, a security issue or a need for validation/recognition. Teachers with these hidden emotional *samskaras* can wield the knowledge well, even brilliantly at times. But if the last stage of self-inquiry (*nididhyasana*) has not been completed, the teaching can be compromised by ambition which is the result of ego/doer impurities that have not been addressed.

We recently had a situation with a young teacher we promoted and gave a platform to teach, and as a result, he had access to a huge base of inquirers worldwide. We knew he was ambitious, and carefully observed him over a period of a few years. It soon became clear that the *jiva's karma* was not taken care of, and teaching Vedanta became a way for him to resolve his security issues. He made teaching Vedanta a career and broke the rules of the teaching tradition by asking for donations for personal reasons, even though we had made it clear this is against the rules.

While donations given freely may be used for personal reasons by a teacher because everyone must live, and it is correct for inquirers to support the *guru* if the *guru* has genuinely assisted them with their inquiry, teaching Vedanta can never be

mixed with material issues. Teachers of Vedanta must have their own source of income and not rely on the teachings to take care of their worldly needs. Ram has been teaching for almost fifty years and has only recently accepted donations for teaching, but he never asks for them. He worked as a manual labourer until he was sixty-five rather than rely on donations. These young teachers who we made known to the ShiningWorld community have taught for a few short years.

Therefore the motivation for teaching must be purified in the knowledge to ensure that the teacher is free of the *jiva*. Teaching is never about the teacher, who is a servant to *Isvara* and the student. Vedanta teachers teach in the spirit of friendship because a genuine teacher sees everyone as equal in the Self. We do not teach the ego. A qualified teacher unfolds the teachings so that the inquirer can be free of the small and limited ego and learn to identify themselves as the unlimited Self. As a qualified teacher, our only job is to be a vehicle for Self-knowledge to remove ignorance in the mind of the inquirer. The teacher does not remove ignorance, and nor can the *jiva*. Only the knowledge itself can do the job.

If you want to teach Vedanta, follow the methodology that James has developed in his books, mainly *How to Attain Enlightenment* and *The Essence of Enlightenment*. He sets it out simply and logically, both for teaching and inquiry purposes. Nobody has ever developed the methodology to teach Vedanta quite so clearly, in the entire history of the *sampradaya*. What would be very helpful would be to teach according to the 12-month teaching course we have available for free on the ShiningWorld website. It covers one chapter per month, with all the relevant questions and answers.

Make sure you understand the methodology and the progression of the teachings because Vedanta must be taught in this way to be properly assimilated. As teachers, we must unfold the teachings according to the level of understanding of the student, which is why the teachings are set up the way they are. They are designed to encourage and answer the right questions and to resolve each doubt, at every level of understanding and inquiry. It also addresses any apparent paradoxes that arise with the teaching.

Therefore to sum up: if it is your *svadharma* to become a qualified teacher of Vedanta, you must have fully assimilated the means of knowledge, and at the very least realize (if not actualize) the Self. Check your motivations by conducting a fearless moral inventory. One can develop the skill to wield the knowledge by teaching, but one must at the least understand the whole methodology of the teaching from beginning to end, preferably as set out by James, if you are teaching Westerners. Other great teachers, such as Swami Dayananda and Swami Paramarthananda (to name a few of the Indian greats), are legends, and their teaching methods are impeccable, if somewhat more inclined towards Sanskrit.

If on the other hand, we do not wish to become a qualified teacher of Vedanta but simply to be able to clearly enunciate the basic message of Vedanta in an accessible way to people who ask to hear it, we must only fully understand and be able to intelligently verbalize one of the many *prakriyas* in the teachings. All of them say the same thing: you are whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, unconcerned, ever-present, ordinary, unlimited awareness.

Because most people are accustomed to speaking the language of experience, you must understand and know how to teach the language of Self-knowledge – the language of identity – the ability to understand and speak the truth without

interpreting it in accordance with your own conditioning. Vedanta is very specific about the use of words. Using the correct terminology for Vedanta is not about learning how to master a technique or parroting Sanskrit. It is about understanding the true meaning of the terminology that Vedanta employs and what it is pointing to.

Vedanta offers direct knowledge of the Self using the implied meaning of words when they are unfolded through the specific methodology, which is the tradition of Vedanta and provides a valid means of knowledge. It is a toolkit, as it were, with which to unpack one's life in the light of Self-knowledge, not in the light of one's own (or anyone else's) opinions or experience. Make sure that you understand this vital point.

The reason Vedanta is so insistent on the correct usage of words is to eliminate interpretation and misinterpretation. To be clear on the terminology, make sure you have read *Tattva Bodh*, which sets it out clearly. If you try to mix Vedanta in with what you think you know or dilute it with other teachings, it will be contaminated and will not work! We have seen this happen many times and many people who claim to have teaching *vasanas* but are really after personal recognition and power.

Although James has developed a system of teaching which uses as little Sanskrit as possible, it is very difficult to avoid the use of some Sanskrit terms, as there are no good English equivalents for them. You need to understand these and use them correctly. We need these words because so far our own scientific and spiritual traditions have come up woefully short as far as Self-knowledge and intelligent living are concerned. Unfortunately, the way language has developed is so open to interpretation, misinterpretation and the contamination of one's own conditioning that it is very often the greatest source of misunderstanding.

Vedanta is called a *sabda pramana*, the oral or spoken testimony of competent witnesses, meaning that the words are time-tested, impersonal and they work to remove ignorance IF the mind is sufficiently qualified and ready to hear the truth, AND if the teacher is qualified.

Two books that are also extremely helpful for Vedanta teachers are *The Teaching Tradition of Advaita Vedanta* by Swami Dayananda and *Vedanta: The Big Picture* by Swami Paramarthananda.

~ Much Love, Sundari