

Be Your Own *Guru*

Ram (James Swartz)

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Mani: Dear James and Sundari, it's a long email, please feel free to pass it on after reading through the apologies. Also, it has some intimate details, but I know you will mask them if you feel fit to publish the letter (and reply, if any).

I enrolled in your and Sri Ted's Tiruvannamalai classes last year. To make a long story short, my parents and I came by car to Tiru for the start of classes, but had a change of heart and turned back to Chennai. The main driving factor was the fear of Vedanta and its reputation among middle-class Indians as a "career-killer." Coward that I was, I didn't even have the courtesy to contact you and inform that I may not be able to make it back to the classes. I didn't make it back. My (long-delayed) apologies.

The Mid-Life Crisis

Please note the liberal use of the word "I" below. I had the experience of *akhandakara vritti* (the self) last year, but did not capitalize on the experience and use it to build on knowledge. I am now starting again. Context: I discovered Vedanta and Sri Ramji's lectures in the middle of my marriage disintegrating last year. *Bhagavan* in his great mercy gave me the right knocks to accelerate the search for self. I have heard Sri Ramji's lectures several times, especially on self-enquiry, though I am yet to finish the book. At this stage, the teachings (especially on *karma yoga*) are starting to appear by themselves at the right times to solve problems and bring peace. And again, I am thankful.

I have now wrapped up my old life, experienced some level of financial loss and am separated from my wife – on the way to a divorce. I am trying to rebuild my life. This body's sexual frustration led me to online chat rooms where anonymous men and women titillate each other with words and images. This was like adding kerosene to the fire, and I was fast on my way to falling into a deep, dark place.

In the midst of this, I started chatting with a 25-year-old woman, also on the site to get over a break-up. We felt comfortable enough with each other to share our real-world identities. Our first conversation over video chat was two hours long. It's been three days and this body-mind is in the throes of a "crush" that has taken away sleep, a sweet pain permeates and this mind has thoughts of her all the time.

It's funny, I am 38, not a spring chicken, and even as of a week ago would have thought I was long past this. She is worldly-wise, experienced beyond her years, and has made it clear she is not interested in anything beyond a friendship. I know this is right and wise. This situation has already given me enough fruits, including pulling me completely out of the bad situation just three days ago. I am taking the *karma yoga* approach, thanking the Mother Goddess for her *prasad*. This woman is now a muse, fuelling my creativity and setting me back on a more *sattvic* path.

1. Beyond this, do I just disregard the "sweet pain" and wait for it to go away as another emotion,

just hormones working on a guy going through a mid-life crisis?

James: Yes. That's the mature attitude.

Mani: 2. While I get the many benefits from having this woman in my life, for as long as *Bhagavan* deems fit, what do I owe her (the field of existence)? I am afraid my whiny/immature presence around her would detract from her pursuits at this early phase of her life.

James: You owe her a polite, sincere, civilized communication, that's all. Speak to her with honesty, like you speak to me. Ask her to excuse the whiny, immature part of yourself. It isn't you; it's the result of conditioning. She will understand. If she doesn't, you don't need her.

Mani: The power of *maya* is truly awesome, the right approach would of course be to dismiss this all a *mithya*, but I don't see this body-mind at that level of maturity today.

I owe you another apology for wasting your time and flooding your inbox. Please ignore anything except the apology.

In the light of day, I can see the rest is unmitigated drivel unrelated to Vedanta. I can now see that I need to:

1. Give thanks to the field for pulling me away from the bad situation I was in a few days ago.

James: Yes, indeed.

Mani: 2. Start reading your book again from Chapter I. I will do the work before writing to you my next email. My thanks again.

James: Vedanta is a program. It is totally logical and practical. Once you see the big picture, you have something to focus your mind and a way to evaluate your progress.

Mani: Sheepishly yours, Mani.

James: Hi, Mani, I was just about to write to you and tell you to man up and quit whining when you figured it out on your own. Good for you. Vedanta need not be a career-killer. That is what the *Gita* is saying. Arjuna wants to head for Rishikesh so he doesn't have to do his job, but Krishna says that he should do his job to work out his *vasanas* but do it as *karma yoga* which prepares him for *moksa*. In your case, you may have learned that security and pleasure are pipe dreams and if you are dispassionate enough, you may be qualified for the second stage of *karma yoga*, *naishkarma karma*, action without desire for objects. This is a more advanced stage because you have to resist your desires. When your desires for security and pleasure no longer bother you, you are ready for *sanyassa yoga*, or Vedanta, i.e. self-inquiry.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Ramji