

Dealing with *Adharma*

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Damon: Hello, Ted.

I've been lurking on both yours and James' websites for the better part of a year, but trying not to write you unless it was very important, and also trying on my own to find the best path to take to gain some peace of mind through Vedanta or Yoga, I feel that I could no longer afford to wait.

First, some background: I'm a 59-year-old African-American struggling with depression and the social anxiety that usually accompanies it.

I'm originally from Maryland, but I've been living in Europe intermittently since 2001 (ONLY BECAUSE OF MY TWO CHILDREN). I've had and keep having bad experiences here, and I actually hate myself for leaving America in the first place.

Because of my disease(s), it so happens that each unpleasant situation I have (overt racism, micro-aggressions, hostilities, etc.), seems to be harder for me to bounce back from. Each day I have so much anxiety with going out to take my son to school or going anywhere because of the hostility I encounter.

And it's not that Vedanta hasn't been of some help to me. For instance, I read on your introductory page, I believe, that you asserted that you don't care what happens to your body, that you want to know the truth. I know that I am not the body, that I am pure awareness, that anything other than *Brahman* has apparent but not absolute reality, *ajativada*, or no creation, etc. I've read so much that would probably have helped a normal person or at least someone living in a different set of circumstances. I get "firefly" glimpses of realization, but of course like everything else it doesn't last. I've read about developing non-attachment to objects, but it seems that I'm not strong enough to not get upset about the dirty looks I get each day or people wanting to bump into me as I walk down the sidewalk.

I feel that *Brahman* is real and the world is not real, and that oneness is the fact underlying the universe, but I find it so hard to feel that way once I leave the house!

So, what I wanted to ask you pertains to self-realization of course, but how best to use the teachings to my particular situation. I've read about the peace one gets through *karma yoga*, and the sense of oneness to be attained from *jnana yoga*, so I've kind of taken self-realization off my plate; besides, if I wasn't meant to get it in this lifetime, I won't anyway. So, I thought a steady *yoga* practice with meditation would help, but I'm not sure how or what *yoga* or thought control I could employ for hostility. I don't know if a *mantra* would help me when I leave the house, but I usually try not to look at people's faces when I walk, but I don't want to feel that people know that I'm on guard. I need some step-by-step practical guidelines on how to study.

Since I was a teenager, I've always sought spiritual solutions to life's problems. In fact that's what originally brought me to Europe. Now that I'm here, the work has just begun.

Sorry for such a long email, Ted, but there is nothing more important to me in my life or ever has

been. I feel that I can't keep living without a spiritual way of dealing with life.

~ Best, Damon

Ted: Hi, Damon.

It is a pleasure to meet you.

I'm sorry to hear about your emotional turmoil, but it doesn't seem without some justification. It is only natural that the human part of us takes umbrage at such a gross violation of *dharma* as overt racism. Nevertheless, it is imperative for your own mental quietude and freedom from suffering that you find a way to effectively deal with the agitation caused by these injustices and their psychological residue.

A daily practice of self-inquiry that involves reading either James's books or my own, which is available via *Amazon.com*, contemplation of the truths revealed by a meticulous analysis of logic of your own experience, daily meditation and the practice of *karma yoga* in your daily life are all integral aspects of the process of self-inquiry that will ultimately culminate in your assimilation of self-knowledge and the freedom from suffering you seek.

Keep in mind that while life in the apparent reality is not real, it does exist and is experienced, which is pretty obvious. So we don't need to annihilate the world. We simply need to see through it. What this means is that rather than trying to deny your emotions or seeking to eradicate them, you should observe them and acknowledge the degree of validity they do hold. They are natural feelings for a human whose dignity is denied by the actions of others. Still, through inquiry it is possible to see that your true identity is not the person you appear to be and that your essential self, which is the limitless conscious existence in which the appearance of the world (both its beautiful and ugly aspects) appears within, is essentially unaffected by the drama playing upon its "screen." In this way, you can create a little space between yourself and what is happening, which will perhaps allow you to feel less afflicted by the injustice. In practical terms, it is also helpful to contemplate that fact that all such injustice is rooted in self-ignorance. Those who exhibit racist tendencies do so because of either the conditioning they have received or because they feel incomplete or incompetent themselves, and so make judgments about others that allow them a false sense of security. Usually, it's a combination of both of these factors. I understand that this insight might not make it any easier to bear the injustice, but it might evoke some compassion on your part. Ironically, you might be able to see the perpetrators as victims themselves, for they are riddled with fear.

For now, that is the best insight I can offer. I highly recommend immersing yourself in contemplation of the teachings laid out by the books I previously mentioned. Both James' books and my own also describe a form of meditation that helps one cultivate identification with the self as awareness rather than as the apparent individual, the virtue of which is as I mentioned. We should never deny our personhood, but it is helpful to be able to see that we are the awareness informing the person and that the conditions of the body and the character of its experience do not define us. Once we see that, then we are able to play our role and take appropriate action as an individual without fear and anger.

As you continue to inquire, please feel free to contact me with more specific questions should they arise.

~ All the best, Ted