

How Much Control Do I Have?

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Brent: Hi, Jim. I wanted to check in with you. I'm reading your book for a second time now and am at your site reading and rereading *satsangs* daily. My inquiry seems to have become more intense and focused as of late. Your writings have been an extraordinary tool and almost every question that arises in me is addressed somewhere in your book or at your site. The questions are universal, right, so it's no surprise that other seekers have the same hang-ups. My life continues to be quite stressful. My job is unstable and there I experience a lot of insecurity and anxiety about life. I wanted to talk to you about this from the perspective of non-duality.

Let me get right to the heart of what's troubling me. There are so many concepts but maybe if we just pick one and I can really try to understand, it could help me sort some things out. Jim, is everything in my experience outside of my control?

Jim: Not everything. You have control of your actions. In fact you have no choice about action itself, but you have discretion about the kind of actions you do. But once you have done the action, you lose control of the result. The result is produced by the type of action you do as it interacts with the field of existence when you do it. You also have control of how you react to what happens. What happens is the statement the field of existence, i.e. life, makes about actions that you previously offered.

Brent: If I am actionless awareness and my sense of doership, or of being a separate person, are just objects arising in me, I have no control over them, right?

Jim: Actionless awareness is not concerned about controlling anything. It does not matter to you what happens if you see that you are actionless awareness. But if you think you are a person – if you take responsibility for the idea that you are a separate person, a doer, then you have the control I mentioned above.

Brent: Every decision I seem to make, whether I decide to meditate, think about Vedanta or email you, any buy or sell decision I make at work, if I give my son a hug or snap at my wife, feel anxiously nervous or at peace... this continuum of experiences and actions... none of this is actually under my control?

Jim: The whole continuum is not under your control. You can influence it by your actions, but you do not know what that influence will be when you act, assuming you take yourself to be a doer. It may or may not become apparent on hindsight when the results of your actions fructify.

Brent: I'm only the silent witness of it?

Jim: Yes. That is what scripture says. That is what most epiphanies reveal.

Brent: Is there a danger of misinterpretation of this teaching?

Jim: Yes, absolutely. For every time this teaching is interpreted correctly it is misinterpreted fifty times. If the ego tries to co-opt this teaching, it is a disaster.

Brent: Or is that just a predetermined event as well...?

Jim: It depends on who you are and how you look at it. If you are awareness, there is no predetermination, because nothing ever actually happened. Things seem to happen, but you know that nothing is actually going on. So you don't care what happens.

If you look at it from God's point of view – the laws operating in the field of existence – then everything is a set-up and you have no choice. Everything right down to the way you brush your teeth is happening to you, not by you. But if you look at it from the doer's point of view, certain choices are open to you within the context of the total. You can choose to eat an apple or an orange. You cannot choose not to eat, assuming you want to live. This doer, this person we have been conditioned to think we are, has a certain degree of reality. We cannot say that it does not exist when we look at it in the context of the framework of existence. What the average person calls life is billions of apparent entities living in a very conditional transactional dimension of reality. It only seems real to these entities because they all (unconsciously) conspire to define what their senses and minds report to be real. This, as you know, is a bit of a problem.

Brent: I'm finding myself confused and disoriented at times by the teaching. I'm not sure if this is a good sign and intended or not. I worry that these teachings can definitely cause one to disassociate with one's identity... but can this be dangerous and harmful to the extent that one does not realize the self one could be left floundering out there not fully committed to one's life, but failing to fully integrate the teachings?

Jim: To tell the truth, these teachings were not meant to be contemplated without supervision, Brent. They need to be taught because, as you are well aware, one will understand them only according to what one knows. And since the subject matter is beyond one's own experience, it is very easy to mislead one's self. It is good you are writing to me.

Brent: Of course I can easily say that it's all just an impersonal arising, but there is a concern that arises in me as well: I don't want to screw up my life or my family by fucking up my mind with something I don't understand.

Jim: This is wise. Trust the Lord but tether your camel. You have to take care of business in this life. You have a lot on your plate and you have to eat it up. It is quite possible to clean up your

karma but only by working it out. You do not have the temperament of a *sanyassi*, so you cannot just walk away from it. The only question is how to do it. And what we are saying is that if you can get self-knowledge, you can work it out happily. I can't see that there is another option for you because you have such a strong desire for freedom.

Brent: Don't get me wrong, I've thought about and pondered Vedanta for quite some time now. On one level I sense the great truth in it... but on a practical level I'm struggling in life right now and am concerned that my self-inquiry is preventing me from solving my problems.

Jim: Self-inquiry is meant only for solving one problem: your identity. So the identity issue needs to be sorted. Your identity not only involves you as actionless awareness, it involves you as everything that exists. So you have to understand what existence is and how it works if you want to be happy too. Most of these so-called spiritual types know they are awareness but often have a hard time tying their shoes. However, you have to work out the worldly stuff as you go. So it is tricky.

Brent: On another level I find Vedanta to be a great source of comfort and it is allowing me to deal with a very stressful state of mind in a more detached manner. It's strange because on the one hand I think the teachings and my inquiry are helping me through a difficult period... and at the same time I wonder if it is preventing me from being more active or forceful in finding a solution.

Jim: Life is very tricky. It is easy to get confused. You never know what will happen. I say keep up the self-inquiry – it is actually a great relief to know that there is a solution even if you have not figured it out completely. At the same time, you need to be careful that you not put all your eggs in the self-inquiry basket to the point where you no longer respond to the everyday situation at hand on its own terms. Remember, your actions created this situation. We cannot say that you consciously wanted it this way, but we have to assume that this is happening to you for a reason. That is to say, that unconsciously you made the moves you made to force you to look at yourself – because this is what is happening.

Brent: Sometimes I feel like a zombie – I just want to sit and be silent. I apologize for the incoherent nature of the email – just wanted to share some thoughts with you...

Jim: I understand and I sympathize, Brent. Find the silent still point within and sit there as the world whirls around you like a tornado.