

# Personal or Impersonal Teaching?

Ram (James Swartz)

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Dear James,

Recently I was having dinner with my wife and I realized how beautiful Life has been for two years now since Vedanta set me free. I am without seeking, without doubts about life, without fear, at peace. Since I still can remember – although it's fading – how it was before, gratitude fills me in these moments. Thank you so much.

On a different topic: you once recommended to a seeker to go see Francis Lucille if there is no traditional Vedanta around.

I was wondering whether I should recommend Francis to others since you spoke highly of him. In order to be able to form an opinion I went to attend a two-hour *satsang* a few days ago. I sat in and listened to the dialogues of consciousness as seekers and consciousness as Francis.

Francis speaks the Truth in every sentence and is rock-solid. Even if it is not clear to the inquirers, he sometimes draws directly from the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* (quoting lines, but in his own words). It is beautiful to listen to, when you already understand.

But as with any modern “*satsang*-setting,” the questions go all over the place, and I could only wonder if some people were not confused since they asked the same question in different clothes – although he had answered them – over and over. Also, an ignorant former Zen student monopolized a large portion of the *satsang* trying to impress and to show people that he was a better teacher than Francis.

After the *satsang* I briefly spoke with him – he seems a polite and nice man – and asked him if he also uses a more structured approach to teaching, or *prakriyas*, in his week-long retreats. It seems that in these week-long retreats he has three elements in his approach.

1. Bodywork – a more structured approach which seem to be similar to the experiments in Greg Goode's book.
2. Questions and answers – “*satsang*.”
3. Physical presence of the teacher/spending time with the student – I think these retreats could be recommended to seekers but not the settings where there is only the “*satsang*.” Even if the self-knowledge of a teacher is rock-solid and beyond any doubt, as in Francis' case, it seems that the “*satsangs*” are not effective if not accompanied by a structured approach that wipes out 95% of ignorance before coming to the Q&As.

**James:** About Francis: he is a good man and some people will be benefited but, as you say, there is not a proper impersonal, structured “teaching” apart from his personal experience. We call this kind of “teaching” *smriti*. He refers to *sruti*, but indirectly. It is a tribute to his *mumukshutva*, his high degree of qualification, that he gained self-knowledge without being taught in a proper *sampradaya*. It is also quite remarkable that his enlightenment has not gone to

his head. He is a humble person.

But all he can do is talk about enlightenment, which is not the kiss of death, but it is woefully inadequate. Most everyone in the spiritual world knows that they are awareness and not who they think they are. Seekers need a practical method – proven, impersonal teachings like Vedanta – to get their spirituality out of the *satsang* and into their lives. Perhaps the biggest myth burdening seekers is the idea that they can just “hang out” with an enlightened person and somehow enlightenment will just rub off on them.

I call it the “osmosis theory.” It is true that if the enlightened person is decent and *sattvic* like Francis there is a benefit but only a highly-qualified person will really benefit from this kind of teaching.

I agree that unstructured *satsangs* are basically useless. I attended one once at his home. People don’t even know what the right questions are. I would not waste my time giving that kind of *satsang* but it is the only kind you can give if you do not have a teaching. We don’t actually encourage *satsang* until you are very familiar with the teaching. Then you know what questions are legitimate. I suppose half a loaf is better than none. I think entry-level people are benefited but properly-qualified inquirers would be quickly bored. Francis Lucille, Greg Goode and Rupert Spira are good guys and certainly will not mislead or manipulate. Perhaps they even inspire. I leave it up to your discretion.

~ Much love, James