

Some *Vasanas* Are with You for Life

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James: Hi, Ben. Sorry for the delay, but fame has struck and it is all I can do to keep up with the onslaught of activities.

Ben: It's been a bit longer than usual, but there has not been a huge amount to report. Looking at it objectively, three things have been happening, more or less in succession. I went through a "dark night" phase where there was a kind of apophatic purging, where even subtle concepts were undermined and everything seemed dry and tasteless, a kind of "spiritual depression," a desert. It's a place I've been to quite often over the years, as my background prior to Vedanta was apophatic mysticism. While it doesn't get any easier, it can be endured if one does not panic. It went on for about a month or six weeks and I came out of it quite dramatically one day while using self-inquiry by seeing that I was not the darkness. I then had a nice week or so when self-inquiry flowed easily and I could understand experientially that actually there is nothing that needs to be done, there is no need to try to improve, that sometimes effort can be the enemy; I was seeing that as the self I am free from the transient forms, subtle or otherwise, through which the self appears. After that phase, I had to use affirmations about my identity to keep focussed.

James: The "three *gunas*" teaching is very helpful for objectifying states of mind, in this case *tamas*. *Tamas* is difficult to objectify because identification with the state happens unconsciously. You don't realize that you have "become" the experiencing entity until *sattva* becomes predominant and you can use inquiry to break your identification with the state of mind. Irrespective of the energy playing in the mind at the time, you – awareness – always stand apart from it, illumining it.

Ben: Currently things are a bit of a mixture from day to day. Some days the *vasanas* are more assertive than others, but so be it, I am not going to exhaust myself in open warfare, so to speak (and frankly I don't have the energy). My average working day is a bit like a war of attrition, nothing dramatic, but over time it can wear you out if you don't box clever. I have absolutely no idea what "stage" I am at; it might just be a distraction anyway, another concept for my ego to gnaw at.

James: There is really no sense in warring with them. It is helpful to just identify them and turn your attention to the self, if possible – although that can seem like a bit of a war too because of the tendency to identify with them. There are a lot of *vasanas* that will never disappear through inquiry. The way to deal with them is to accept them. A crippled person, for example, can do nothing about his or her disability except to neutralize it by taking it to be normal. The *vasanas* actually have no power to disturb you unless you define them as unacceptable. Obviously, if you are an ax murderer or a child molester you need a bit of work, but most run-of-the-mill *vasanas* can be safely left in place. And ultimately they do not belong to you anyway. You did not create them or even consciously solicit them, so you can just see them as *Isvara's* will and be happy

with them.

Ben: It's probably a blend of getting older and the influence of Vedanta, but most human desire seems like an absurd attempt to find your way home by walking in the exactly opposite direction. (Or maybe it's just me.) Everybody expects others to make them happy, to complete them, as if one limited transient form can "save" another of the same type. It's like a perpetual, poorly-written soap opera where the same plot lines are repeated endlessly.

James: I'm with you on that one, one hundred percent.