

Spiritual Escapism

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Mario: Hi, Ramji. I've been wondering, does Vedanta accept one taking saints as *Isvara*? Do you ever see Abhedananda or Chinmayananda as a personal symbol of God?

Ramji: Vedanta accepts taking everyone and everything as *Isvara*, Mario. This is a non-dual reality, so everyone and everything is *Isvara*. I see you as a personal symbol of God, as well as my *gurus*.

Mario: For a while in the past, sick of not going forward in meditation and spirituality, naively perhaps and high on Chai confusion and reading about Neem Karoli Baba, also wanting to get *bhakti*, always being interested in your interest from your autobiography where you describe meeting Abhedananda, I decided maybe taking Neem Karoli like his followers or like the Hare Krishnas do with Krishna, I should force myself to see Neem Karoli as *maya*'s manifestation of God so I could get grace and maybe take on a step in the spiritual bucket list of things one "must" do, but I wonder if that can make problems in one's thinking.

Ramji: This is a very stupid idea, Mario. Why would you force yourself to take some dead *guru* as *Isvara* so you can get *bhakti*? *Bhakti* is just paying attention to yourself. I am not surprised you are living in a fantasy land, since *guru* worship is the norm in modern spiritual life. What can a dead *guru* do to get rid of your self-ignorance? *Bhakti* is love of yourself. If you love yourself, why do you need *bhakti* for some *guru*?

Your whole approach to spirituality is wrong, Mario. You are trying to read your way to enlightenment, interpreting what you read according to unexamined beliefs and fantasies. No big spiritual event is going to happen that will set you free. You don't know how to seek. I really don't know where to start with you. You have been asking the same kind of questions for many years now. Why are you wasting your time reading spiritual books, etc? I suggest you get a copy of *The Essence of Enlightenment* and read it carefully.

Mario: Or if the symbol taken can in fact be useless if that symbol doesn't exemplify what a "real" *mahatma* is. Looking back, sometimes I think that might be the inception of my magical thinking and that it's been hard to get past. I would like your take on this.

Ramji: You are right, Mario. Magical thinking is very difficult to overcome. You have a bad case of it. Your mind is *tamasic*. A *tamasic* mind is too lazy to do inquiry, so it indulges in spiritual fantasies. It keeps hoping that something dramatic will happen to get one out of the rut of everyday life. I told you that you need to get a good job and learn to take care of business in the world so you could get some confidence in yourself. What are you doing now? How do you make money? What is your living situation? Do you have a girlfriend? Are your parents supporting

you?

Spiritual fantasies are born out of unsuccessful lives. All fantasies are just dissatisfaction with oneself. The things you really want are only gained by hard work. Obviously, you are not ready for Vedanta, because Vedanta requires constant vigilance, constant discrimination between what is real and what isn't. The ideas of enlightenment alive in popular culture are not real. They are myths, fantasies.

We have known each other for quite a long time now, Mario, perhaps almost ten years? You must be about thirty now? Do you read the *satsangs* at the ShiningWorld website? You should if you want to get an idea what spirituality is all about. I'm a Vedanta teacher. Vedanta is totally practical. It is not "spiritual." It is just a clear analysis of experience with the idea of setting one free of binding attachments to unreal things. There is no experiential solution to suffering, Mario. You have to take a fearless intellectual inventory to see how your thinking is working either for or against you. The way you are approaching your spiritual *vasana* – which is a good thing – is wrong. Your mindset is wrong. I think you are perhaps starting to understand this now.

This kind of spiritual escapism means that there is something that you are trying to avoid. *Tamasic* people don't like to look at unpleasant facts. I don't know what your unpleasant facts are. You have to be honest with yourself and really confront this escapist part, then buckle down and trust the scripture – forget these romantic *gurus*.

Even your choice of *guru* to worship, Neem Karoli Baba, is totally silly. It is a big hippie romance created by Ram Dass. You will notice that nobody ever talks about Neem Karoli's teaching – because there was no teaching. It was all about him, his *siddhis*, his outrageous life, his larger-than-life personality.

People worship powerful people because they would like to be powerful themselves. They want to be respected and distinguished. They think that somehow, if they worship them, something magical will happen that will redeem their boring, small lives. We all have boring, small lives, Mario. I have a boring, small life. I take out the garbage every day. I gas the van. I fix the leaky faucet. I cut the lawn and do dozens of boring, small things. But I am not boring, because I know who I am.

The way out of a boring life is to face the daily grind and do what is in front of you with a cheerful *karma yoga* attitude. Life is hard work – until it isn't. During this process you discover something about yourself and about life, something inspiring that leads you on. People want the inspiration without the hard work. Spirituality, as it is practiced by most Western people, is little more than an escapist fantasy, a kind of respectable drug that makes them feel a sense of false virtue. Longing for enlightenment is pointless. Working for enlightenment is meaningful because you only get there by hard work. Anyway, I have run on about this topic long enough.

~ Much love, Ramji