

# Spiritual Practice Will Not Take You Beyond *Samsara*

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Ram:** Dear Franklin, I read your letter carefully several times, thought about it and made comments to the various points you brought up. You can write back what you think about my comments and this will give me an idea whether I can help you.

**Franklin:** I read the story of your spiritual quest and just notice how much totality was in everything you have done.

**Ram:** Yes, the intensity with which one approaches things is very important. There are four basic qualifications for enlightenment: discrimination, dispassion, clarity of mind and burning desire for liberation. What you noticed in my autobiography is the fourth, burning desire. If you have that then the other qualities develop. When you want only freedom you become discriminating. You become extremely sensitive to how your emotions, beliefs and opinions limit you. So you learn how to avoid making life choices on the basis of them. And when you want only peace you become indifferent to passion – to desire – because you see that pursuing your desires does not lead to peace. It just leads to more desires. And when you are discriminating and dispassionate your mind becomes very clear. And when the mind is clear you can understand the value of knowledge in making an inquiry. Knowledge is absolutely essential because self-ignorance is the reason you do not feel you are enlightened.

**Franklin:** I am on a spiritual quest since 1980: with Osho Rajneesh, then with Devananda, a Himalayan *guru*. I lived most of those years in India and part in the USA (Oregon, when Osho was there).

I am not a deep meditator, I am not particularly fond of *sadhana*, besides *satsangs*, though I did whatever was required while living in *ashramas* but never with deep commitment. I was just in love with the *guru* and the meaningfulness of a life in a spiritual community.

With Osho I learned to be in love with a *guru* in a way that was not the usual love but the deep love that only the self can have. With Devananda I learned devotion and sacredness and became more sensitive to the presence of the Divine.

**Ram:** I have noticed in the thirty-five years that I have been teaching Vedanta that probably ninety-five percent of the Western people seeking enlightenment are actually seeking love. They are really more interested in the *sanga* than in *sat*, the self. It sounds as if this is true for you, but it seems that this desire has been useful insofar as you have learned how to love a *guru*. You learned devotion, sacredness and a sensitivity to the presence of the Divine, which are all valuable lessons.

But obviously not enough. Why? Because you believe that you and the thing you loved were separate. You thought that the Divine was something other than you. You failed to see that the

sacredness you were appreciating was your own sacredness. What Vedanta teaches is that you are the *guru*, that you are the Divine, that you and you alone are sacred.

So when you are loving a *guru* you are just loving yourself. Where is this *guru* you love? It is in your mind/heart. How far are you from your mind/heart? There is no separation. If you can't see this then the problem is that you have the wrong idea of who you are. So you have to make an inquiry into yourself and see if it is true that you are separate from what you love. You have to see if the sense of incompleteness that is motivating your desire for love is real. If you are not incomplete, as you believe, if you are whole and complete, then the love that is going to objects comes back to you.

When you see that you are whole and complete there is no desire for love at all. The desire for love is a sign that you don't know who you are. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. A *guru* can help you understand what the problem is but he or she cannot make you realize that you are whole and complete. To be whole and complete means that you know that nothing is missing in you or in your life. It means that you know that nothing that can be added to you can make any difference in how you see yourself. It means that experience does not validate or invalidate you. It means that you determine the value of experience, etc. You can study the *Upanishads* or read my writings at the website or study Vedantic texts to get the full picture.

Enlightenment is a very simple thing – so simple that most people miss it altogether because they have been conditioned to think of it as some big happening that will make them glorious and make their lives fulfilling. But the desire for enlightenment is like the desire for love – unless you know what enlightenment means – because it is based on the idea that there is something missing, that you need something to make you whole.

**Franklin:** After coming back home I have been exposed to Advaita through reading first Nisargadatta and Ramesh and then through direct contact with an English enlightened Advaita teacher. We also met personally when he came here to try to “enlighten me” but he didn't succeed, while he succeeded with two friends of mine.

I have a good understanding of what it is all about. I can have deep intuition of Truth or the Absolute when I enquire in a meditative state, but I feel still separate and identified and protective with the small self.

**Ram:** My question is why, in spite of all your epiphanies and insights and intuitions, etc., do you still feel limited? I would like to hear your reasons.

However, in the meantime I might suggest that perhaps it is because you do not know what your true self is. If you do know what it is then you will not feel separate, inadequate, incomplete and self-protective. If it is true that you do not know who you are then you must first get self-knowledge and then verify the self-knowledge through investigation. Most teachers start out accepting the way you see yourself. Then they offer some *sadhanas* to give you the experience of the self. And the best that they can do when your experience wears off is to tell you to do some more *sadhana* and then try to maintain that “state” once you are “in” it. What is wrong with this picture? They do not ask you to question the idea that is motivating your search in the first place. If you can see that you are fine as you are then the question of seeking dies.

And what is it that makes you think that you are not already enlightened? It is simply the belief that you are not enlightened – probably because you have defined enlightenment in such a way that it is impossible to achieve.

And what is the cause of the belief that you are not enlightened: the fact that you do not know that this is a non-dual reality and that reality is awareness. If you are awareness – and you could only be awareness in a non-dual reality – then you are already enlightened. The word “enlightened” means “in the light.” “Light” means awareness. So you are already “in” awareness. As what? As awareness. When it is clear that you are awareness and not Franklin, then that is the end of your seeking.

**Franklin:** I can transmit my “knowledge” and love for Truth to other people, but it doesn’t affect my daily life and the relationship to myself. I am not particularly fond of Advaita, because I have also a strong devotional side.

**Ram:** I think it is a misconception to think that devotion and knowledge are distinct paths. Anyone who follows any path has devotion for that path. So the question then becomes: Is the path that I’m devoted to a path that will set me free? Advaita is not something that one should be fond of one way or the other. One should be fond of freedom – although the meaning of “*advaita*” is freedom. Why? Because *advaita* means that you are “not two.” If you are “not two” then there is no one to be bound to “the small self,” as you call it. And there is no big self and no small self either. There is just you.

If *advaita*, non-duality, is a path to freedom then one might become devoted to it. But devotion to a path is only a means to an end. *Advaita* (please read the article in the books section of the website entitled *What Is Advaita Vedanta?*) is only a means to an end. It is based on the idea that the enlightenment problem is solved by self-knowledge and that for self-knowledge to happen you have to have a valid means of self-knowledge. What you call “Advaita” is Neo-Advaita and it is not a valid means of self-knowledge. I’m not sure how anyone could be fond of it. I’ve attached a file with an article that I recently wrote entitled *What Is Advaita Vedanta?* which you might find useful. It is not at my website yet. I’m not a Neo-Advaita teacher. I teach Vedanta as a *pramana*, a means of self-knowledge. It is a path that works. More than fifty people who have come to me have been set free by it – not by me. Any person who says they can set you free is not truthful.

For freedom a person needs to be qualified and needs to understand the problem with seeking freedom. When I’m convinced that you understand the problem then perhaps I can help you. I understand that you are not an entry-level person and I like the tone of your letter and your honesty, so you have got my attention. Let’s discuss this issue and see what comes of it. You should also know that I don’t want your devotion or your money or any worldly thing from you. My only requirement is an open mind. You need to think about what I say and reply to the best of your ability.

Anyway, your statement above that you can transmit your knowledge and love for truth but it does not have an impact on your daily life is quite strange. I don’t doubt it, but I would like to know why you think this is so.

**Franklin:** Somehow I am not looking for a *guru* anymore, yet I feel that on my own I can’t do

much.

**Ram:** Often when you get over searching for a *guru* the *guru* appears. Considering your history of seeking, I think it is wise to give up on it or at least to give up on the way you conceive of enlightenment and the role of a *guru*. You need help. Either your *gurus* were not capable of teaching you properly or you were not ready to be taught.

**Franklin:** Advaita says that it will happen whenever is supposed to happen and there is nothing I can do.

**Ram:** This is not the position of Vedanta. This is the Neo-Advaita fantasy. There is something you can do. Please read the *What Is Advaita Vedanta?* article I've attached. This explains the value of *sadhana*, etc. as does my book *Meditation: Inquiry into the Self*.

**Franklin:** In a certain sense is true, but I feel also that this "whenever" can be helped by other "beings."

**Ram:** This is true. But "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." If you don't invoke the self by making the right efforts, how will it know that you are dissatisfied? From the self's point of view you are just fine in your self-ignorance. Why should "grace" happen unless you make a fuss?

**Franklin:** I have a hard time to be dedicated to a regular practice. My regular practice since five years is reading stuff on the internet from different realized teachers. While reading I meditate and enquire. Sometimes I correspond with them and sometimes I even receive *satsang* via email. Yet all this is not enough and at the same time I feel lazy to do more (always been quite lazy).

**Ram:** Well, Franklin, lazy is good. You've probably done enough. Or maybe you haven't actually done any real *sadhana*. But whether you've done enough *sadhana* or not done any doesn't make much difference if you have realized that you will not get free by doing things. *Karma* will not set you free. It will not take you "beyond."

**Franklin:** Can you help me to go beyond?

**Ram:** How can you "go beyond" if you are already beyond? If you are already beyond, what can be done about it? You can only understand what "beyond" is and that you are it. True, understanding might require a certain kind of effort, but it is not an effort like traditional *sadhanas*. The path of inquiry means that you use your natural curiosity to find out the truth of your real nature. This curiosity is still there in spite of all the seeking you have done. You still want to know. Before you set out to seek something you should have an idea of what it is. If you had a clear idea of the "beyond" you would never have set out to seek it in the first place. Why? Because you are what you are seeking. How can you seek yourself? You are yourself. You

cannot gain yourself or experience yourself. It is simply not possible. Why? Because you are yourself, you are never not experiencing yourself. You are something that can only be appreciated for what you are. If you can't appreciate yourself as you are, then you need some help from somebody who knows who you are.

Here are some questions to consider: Can you tell me what the "beyond" looks like? Can you tell me why you want to go there? Can you tell me who is going to go "there"? Can you tell me what kind of a "going" it is? Your answer will help me understand what you know and what you don't know, and allow me to help you.

Anyway, that's enough for now. Think about the questions I've asked and tell me what you think.

~ Love, Ram