

Stand up and Fight

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Carlton: Hello, Ted. I continue to immerse in Vedanta in any way I can. I have joined a group at Facebook. I'm wondering if you have an opinion on it and/or are you familiar with this group? It's called the "Formless Path" Santthosh Kumaar.

Ted: I have never heard of this group, so I can't give you an informed opinion. If it is not focused on the teachings of traditional Vedanta, then my advice would be to not waste your time with it.

Carlton: I also follow Darryl Snaychuck's posts at Facebook, and comments, which I find helpful...

Ted: That's great, though I have no idea what you mean by "helpful," so I can't say whether the teachings are accurately reflecting the purport of Vedanta, and thus are actually helping you assimilate the knowledge that is tantamount to *moksa*, ultimate inner freedom, or freedom from dependence on objects for happiness.

Carlton: I'm looking for helpful ways to stay totally in constant reach of this teaching in any way I can!

Ted: I recommend rereading *How to Attain Enlightenment*, perhaps reading James' second book *The Essence of Enlightenment*, immersing yourself in James' audio/video talks and participating in the beginner's course available through the ShiningWorld website. You really are not going to find a more accessible teacher than James. And his presentation of Vedanta is in full alignment with the *sampradaya*, the teaching tradition that has preserved the integrity of the teachings and the pedagogical methodology through which self-knowledge is most effectively unfolded, since time immemorial.

I understand that such an approach might sound rather restrictive – especially to the Western mind, which cherishes the freedom to follow its own will. But to be honest, Vedanta will only work if you are dedicated to it. As I mentioned, I have no idea what the teachers you mention are teaching, but if their teachings are not in alignment with traditional Vedanta, they will lead you astray. Also, language is a big issue because language is the means by which the knowledge is unfolded. In this regard, it is very important that the meanings of the words used to unfold the teachings are understood accurately. Traditional Vedanta takes great care to define all of the words it employs in order to prevent any erroneous interpretations of the teachings based on previous misconceptions from arising. In this way the teaching methodology employed by traditional Vedanta ensures that teacher and student are on the same page, so to speak, so that there arises no confusion about the subject matter being unfolded. Teachers outside the realm of traditional Vedanta may very well use the same terms that are used in traditional Vedanta, but the

meaning those teachers intend to convey through those words may not accurately correlate with the true meaning of the word.

An example of this type of confusion is the term *ananda*. The nature of the self is indicated as *sat-chit-ananda*, or being-consciousness-bliss. In common Sanskrit parlance, so to speak, *ananda* means “happiness” or “joy,” and it is almost invariably translated into English as “bliss.” This has led to a great deal of confusion concerning the nature of the self and, moreover, to the popular but erroneous notion that the nature of “enlightenment” or self-realization is an experiential state of unending good cheer. In terms of Vedanta, however, *ananda* is a technical term that refers to limitlessness, or fullness, the sense of wholeness and completeness that is the true nature of all-pervasive, non-dual awareness. While it is true that one who has realized one’s true nature enjoys a generally happier demeanor than one who does not, one does not become permanently established in a permanent state of experiential happiness. Even the *jnani*, one established in self-knowledge, still experiences mood swings. He or she simply knows they are passing fancies, however, and is not swept away by them. The problem that arises if the student does not understand the true meaning of *ananda* with reference to the self is that he or she can get caught up in all kinds of practices aimed at trying to achieve and stay established in some high emotional state, thinking that particular state is what constitutes enlightenment. The problem is, however, that all states are observable objects subject to the limitation of time, and so none last permanently. If the student believes that the bliss that is said to be his or her true nature is an experiential giddiness, then the student is doomed to a continuous struggle to achieve and maintain the state and the inevitable frustration and suffering that ensue when whatever degree of experiential bliss they do attain inevitably comes to an end.

All of this is to say that I highly recommend choosing one path and one teacher and sticking with that path and that teacher. You of course are completely free to do as you choose. I only offer this advice based on my own course of spiritual investigation. The spiritual forest is thick with many different kinds of trees. Knowing which provide the most nourishing sap can be very difficult. Time has proven the efficacy of traditional Vedanta. And from my own experience, traditional Vedanta was the only teaching that delivered the goods, so to speak. That is not to say that traditional Vedanta is the only method that works or that even for a select few of extremely mature individuals a method is even necessary. It is to say that Vedanta is means of knowledge that has been proven to work for those ready to fully embrace it.

Carlton: I’m not sure I can report any significant shift in my understanding or application of this teaching though, Ted.

Ted: As we’ve previously discussed, the assimilation of self-knowledge takes time.

Carlton: I continue to pray for knowledge of the truth of who I am and I continue to read and listen to talks as much as I can, but yet I seem to be stalled in this place I have been in the past several months, and frustration is seeping in.

Ted: I understand that this may not be much consolation, but that’s how it is for everyone.

Carlton: I'm not looking for a magic-wand kind of answer, but yet I need re-reminder of the basic things I should be focusing on in order to gain the knowledge from this teaching.

Ted: The basic teaching is the discrimination between the self and the "not-self." Yes, reality is non-dual, and so this discrimination is provisional and will be negated later. But initially this is the focus. You've got to be able to "see" (i.e. understand) the difference between all the objects, both gross or tangible items in the surrounding world, as well as subtle objects, such as sensations, emotions and cognitions that arise within the subtle body, or mind. The basic principle is that you cannot be what you see. The subject cannot be the object. Even such a subtle object as the "void" experienced in deep sleep is nothing more than an object appearing within the scope of your being. You are the "light" of awareness in which these objects appear. As such you will never literally see yourself, but you will eventually recognize your true nature as the limitless conscious existence (i.e. *sat-chit-ananda*) in which all objective phenomena, including the apparent person you take yourself to be, appear. In other words, anything perceivable, conceivable or experienceable in any way whatsoever is not you, and thus while acknowledging its existence you can negate its reality. Only you, the pure awareness in which all these objects appear, is real. Thus while all the objects are nothing other than you – of what other substance could they be made in a non-dual reality? – you, pure awareness, are entirely free of all objects. Whether objects arise or do not arise, you always are. Even when all tangible objects, sensations, emotions and thoughts cease, such as in deep sleep or thought-free meditative states, you don't stop existing. As limitless conscious existence, you always are.

Carlton: Please help me in getting back to basics and the approach I should be taking at this point.

Ted: Continue to expose yourself to the teachings of traditional Vedanta and practice *karma yoga*. *Karma yoga* is the foundational spiritual practice and the best way to purify the mind of its past conditioning and consequent binding *vasanas*. *Karma yoga* converts your whole life into spiritual practice. *Karma yoga* is essential. *Karma yoga* is a must.

Carlton: My desire for this knowledge just absolutely consumes me! Is that maybe not a good thing, Ted?

Ted: No, it is a good thing. A burning desire for self-knowledge and continuous focus on the teachings is essential for the eventual assimilation of self-knowledge.

Carlton: Looking for help here. ☺

Ted: Don't lose heart. Muster all the courage you can and stay the course. This is what Krishna meant when he advised Arjuna to stand up and fight!

Carlton: Thank you in advance, my friend!

Ted: All the best.