

The Forgetfulness Gap

Ram (James Swartz)

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Edward: It's funny, James, but since we last wrote, I have been emailing a lovely lady from Spain, amazingly, from just one comment that she had written on Google/YouTube. She is 14 years older than me, with two girls, and is in a broken-down relationship with a man who bullies her and her girls! Anyway, she's thousands of miles away. I've got a pen pal. I really like writing to her and she feels that she has someone (a male) to speak to and feels supported, which can't be a bad thing? I just wanted some wise counsel from Mr. Wisdom, as you have lived a bit; if you possibly could give me some advice I would be VERY grateful. I know we are just words on a screen (me and her), but it is still a rather beautiful experience all the same.

James: I'm not sure what advice you're looking for. It all seems quite innocent. Do you mean that you are falling in love with her or she with you? If you are considering getting involved in any way other than as a pen pal, I'd say think twice. Relationships tend not to work unless the *karmic* factors are clean and properly aligned. And it seems she is unhappy and in a rather difficult situation, not to mention thousands of miles away. Tread lightly, Edward. But this is very superficial "advice." You have to tell me more about your thinking, i.e. why this is a "beautiful relationship" and what that means to you.

Edward: Well, James, she does like me and I her. But, and it's a big but, she and her partner are not getting on at all, and I have said to her that I cannot be involved in a sexual way even if that "sex" is just talking about what we'd like to do to each other, as I can't speak or indeed think that way, because of the shame and even if he has cheated on her, as she says. You cannot fight fire with fire, can you? I know it is wrong. She seems happy with this and I feel very relieved. I know it is a long way away, and I definitely want to keep it innocent. I seem to be completely unable to break *dharma* in any way. I even sometimes (God forbid) think that *Bhagavan* is trying to turn me into a saint of some kind. There are worse things, I suppose! As I can't leave reality for a moment, as in knowing that I am love itself and all that goes along with that. The beautiful part of this pen pal "relationship" is simply The Self, which includes "her" of course. So this, Ram, is the very best way that I can put the situation. Thank you for listening and hopefully answering in some way. ☺

James: It's good you have self-knowledge because it would be *adharmic* to involve yourself in her life in any way except as a dispassionate witness. She has a huge pile of *karma* to dig herself out of, and you would do well to avoid it. She should not use her love for someone else to get her out of a relationship that has gone sour. It is the needy, cowardly way to go. She should clean up her *karma* with the husband, heal emotionally for as long as it takes – a year or two – and then sign up for *Match.com*. Forget the saint idea, staying out of this is just common sense. If part of you is considering getting involved, then some inquiry is in order. Nothing wrong with a relationship, but you can find a nice girl your own age who lives nearby and do the love thing in a *dharmic* context.

Edward: Yes, thank you, very well put, Ram. I won't get involved with her, that wouldn't be possible anyway, as I can see it's completely empty. It's all just thoughts, isn't it?

James: Yes, it is just thoughts born of some kind of desire.

Edward: And Spain is way off my radar. It is just a great lesson in how *maya* can rear its ugly head and tempt someone who has supposedly seen right through Her. Vigilance is the eternal key that should be kept in one's pocket at all times... Thanks, James.

James: *Nididhyasana* – self-actualization – requires constant vigilance. Desire remains once you know who you are. If it is channeled into noble pursuits, it is good. If it is about satisfying some emotional need, it isn't.

Edward: Do you think that helping someone to see the light, as in advice, as I am a support worker anyway, would or could be a noble desire? This is what I seem to be doing with her. I am being dispassionate, as you said, but I have always felt called to help/advise others, as I have a wise head on my shoulders, and now that I can see who I am clearly I think a few well-chosen words could help, in a way. I know you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink though. By the way, I could just as easily forget about her, as she is okay, if I don't want to. I really don't mind either way, but I'm just thinking I may be of some help. I didn't think when I got up this morning that I would have to make a decision (albeit a small one) like this today. Just goes to show that, that wonderful thing we call life always has things to teach us.

James: I think it's a good idea to help. Scripture recommends it as part of your spiritual practice. Of course the whole issue is why you want to help. There should not be anything to gain personally, however. So you should maintain your dispassion, if indeed it needs maintenance. I think it does in this case because there are romantic undertones and she hasn't asked for teaching. If she does it is fine, as long as she understands that a non-conforming lifestyle is required for Vedanta, i.e. she needs to clean up her karmic mess or the teachings won't be useful. At the same time it is good for her to have contact with someone who knows who they are. You can think of it as planting seeds that will eventually germinate.

Edward: Planting seeds is a thought that popped up yesterday. Romance is something that I have always enjoyed, but in this instance it is far more about words of wisdom. She has said that she thinks I am very wise for a 36-year-old, and that has not gone to my ego/head. I know it is simply *Isvara* coming out when advice happens. Thank you very much for the reply, as always.

In any case, I'm taking a stand in awareness as awareness... Phew, for a minute there I apparently lost Myself! Just goes to show you can't let up the vigilance for a second. A momentary lapse of reason can bind one for a long time! It is definitely dangerous to ever think you are done with your spiritual work. It's all over the scriptures as well. Oh, well, silly me. Back to base camp.

James: Good for you, Edward! Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. It will happen again and again until the knowledge is firm. Then you will be able to think the desires through in light of the teaching and let go of them as they arise, until they become non-binding. The *vasanas* are very powerful, particularly the desire for contact, love. Don't underestimate them. If you are diligent, the forgetfulness gap shrinks quickly and eventually knowledge, not desire, reigns supreme.

A Whole Day with No Desire

Edward: Yes, thank you, James. Now I understand that a major realization alone like I just had means squat without the constant application/contemplation of myself as awareness afterwards. So the *sattvic* high wears off and the *vasanas* come back. They are nowhere near as powerful, but they are still there. I actually had a full day with no desire, as I would walk past an extremely beautiful woman and no desire whatever. Then it crept back in. I could probably do with staying in my man-cave for a while (flat/apartment), and just take a stand... What do you think? Or do you think facing these things is better?

James: I don't think you should physically separate yourself from the world. In itself it is a sign that you take the *vasana* to be real. *Vasanas* are *mithya*. The love/sex *vasana* is pure *Isvara*. It is deep. You need to stay on the battlefield, O Mighty Arjuna, and fight!

Edward: Yes indeed, I was in a café earlier today reading Dayananda while battling with a sex *vasana* related to a gorgeous woman who works there. ☺ So I will stay in the field, as it were and battle on, although I am deeply at peace overall, James. These thoughts only occur when and if I come across the ladies... I still don't know, however, whether or not to ask one out, as I can see that she is *sattvic* and always smiling with her eyes, and always very friendly and looking in my direction. It is a dilemma indeed, but a small one. In the grand scheme of life it is nonsense, really.

James: Well, it is not my brief to steer you one way or the other with reference to your *vasanas*. My job is to give you the logic that helps you keep your mind on the self. By the way, how is it that you have time to hang out in coffee shops and think about seducing women? Don't you have a day job? Where does the money come from? Are you on the dole?

Edward: No, James, I work part-time and finish at 3:00; didn't I tell you I'm a musician as well? I get gigs that enable me to not work as much. Anyway, what's wrong with the dole? I've never signed on though, thank God... I've just been for a walk in the local park and it all became crystal clear anyhow about women. They're just me in female form... more thoughts, blah, blah, blah. And I'm at peace, so I think I'll just rest in that peace until the next time... And anyway, they're not MY *vasanas*, are they? ☺

James: No, they are not your *vasanas*. See if you can remember that the next time a *sattvic* babe gives you the eye. ☺

Edward: You are so funny! Last night after our funny emails, I laughed because I remembered... Duh!... that I am the SIMPLE witness/knower, that which makes it possible to know anything. The pure simplicity felt like a great relief/release, not a feeling but rather a complete non-feeling that I am beyond “enlightenment/endarkenment/ignorance forever. It really is that simple. I emailed your good self around three months ago saying the exact same thing, and you said that it should be a one-off, as I had “seemed” to have “cracked the code.” I must have nodded off slightly though, but when I recently had the MAJOR realisation, I thought very stupidly that I was beyond it all! Which I am indeed, not in a mind-blowing way, but in a very VERY SIMPLE WAY! This really is a revelation to me, Ram, my unbelievable and wise teacher of Vedanta. You, my dear sir, have through the great *Isvara* dumped another soul on the banks of the Endless Sea.

James: Yes, the whole point of the teaching is that ignorance is alive and well even in *jnanis*; they can “nod off,” as you say. When you wrote before about your big epiphany, I used the word “seemed” quite consciously. The problem comes from confusing *satya* and *mithya*. You are the self and only the self. You are a simple conscious being. Everything is you. What applies to you applies to you, not to Edward. Edward is an existent but apparent being. What applies to him applies to him. So Edward should always think he is just Edward and do what is right for him. *Maya* is beautiful and variegated, always new and exciting. If you are going to play in it, play intelligently. That business with the Spain woman showed me that you had doubts about what was good for Edward. I’m not saying that Edward should not have a love interest – not at all – but come on, man! A married woman in an abusive relationship with kids living five thousand miles away? Don’t say that in those intimate romantic moments online, the idea of taking up with her didn’t cross your mind. Probably you thought she deserved better. Probably Edward – by his own admission a handsome, non-attached, enlightened, musical man with a powerful intellect – could save her soul and have his way with her into the bargain. ☺ Correct me if I’m wrong. Experience is good, but experience is only as good as how you interpret it. Knowing who you are is one thing, applying that knowledge in the apparent reality is wisdom. You are simple, but life isn’t that simple.

Edward: Yes, James, spot on... In a way, I never thought of waking up with her though. But, yes, a few sexy thoughts popped up from time to time. I do realise it’s a silly dream. And as you say, I am simply (a) conscious being, but life isn’t simple at times. Thank you for your sterling wisdom/advice, as always. You are a hard man and don’t mince your words, as I think the great Swamiji was. He was probably a lot tougher. In the end though, especially today, I feel emptied, cleaned and healed, so very well done, Ramji, I needed a kick in the ass.

James: Yes, he was a lot tougher. It was understood that silly worldly things like sex and love were not useful topics. It was understood that all that stuff was behind you – or that at least you had the good taste to repress it – and that you knew the value of Vedanta and that you kept your thinking on the topic of the self alone. In general Western seekers are spoiled rotten. They are self-absorbed, entitled and have the leisure to indulge their passions. I’m remarkably forbearing and polite, actually, but you can imagine how tedious it is for me to offer advice on stupid topics like sex, love, etc. I don’t know who it is now, but in my day it was Dear Abby. At the same time, dealing with kid stuff is part of my brief, I suppose, so I do it up to a point. But eventually I get fed up and show a bit of steel. If someone is going to do inquiry, they should do it professionally, not as a hobby. One’s life should be centered around one’s inquiry, not vice versa. Somehow I like

you and am willing to indulge you a bit, maybe because I never had kids of my own.

Edward: Anyway, here comes a sort-of question, relating to spiritual prowess/power and the “death” of the sex *vasana*. I was reading up on celibacy and Swami Sivananda, who was a celibate, like Chinmaya? Correct me if I’m wrong. Well, he is saying that only a true celibate (no masturbation even) can “attain” spiritual wisdom... I know from first-hand experience that this is utter nonsense, although he was just talking to and about *brahmacharya*, I think.

James: Swami Shivananda was a nice man – very inspirational – but he wasn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer. Of course his idea is nonsense, although sex is a *vasana* that probably never goes away until they put you six feet under. It’s *Ishvara*’s little torture. In India it was – and still is to a large degree – difficult to have casual sex. And these old-timers like Shivananda and Swamiji were a bit cranky on the topic– “a stinking cesspool of sensuality” was one of Swamiji’s favorite sound bites.

Edward: So here comes the question at last: Do you think I could take up celibacy because I have not been with many women in my admittedly short life so far and sex has NEVER been such a big deal to me... Until recently, that is, when the mind opened completely and sexual desire shot up like a raging inferno! I STRONGLY desire this way of life, James, I really do. I know I have been confused recently, but reading Swami’s take on the spiritual life left me in... well, awe, really, that such a thing is possible.

James: Well, it’s not my style, but give it a try if you want. Although in public Swamiji seemed a bit old-fashioned and required by the tradition and Hindu culture to be down on sex, he was remarkably liberal. He even agreed to give *sanyass* to a (non-active) homosexual, a friend of mine, but died before he could do it. His teaching was actually “sin intelligently.” Mindless indulgence is not helpful, complete repression is not helpful, so throw the dog a bone once in a while and let him have a bit of fun.

I hate to give advice because if it doesn’t work then you will blame me and I won’t be the great *guru* any more. But here is my opinion: if you want anything in this life passionately, except freedom – and freedom is behind this desire to be celibate – you better be ready for some ups and downs.

Edward: I had a girlfriend who was 11 years my senior ten years ago. I would stop having sex with her and just want to be sex-free and celibate. So the celibacy is not a new idea I’ve cooked up out of thin air. Anyway, come to think of it... what can you do about it anyhow? It’s down to this *jiva*, isn’t it? Just forget it, Ram. I’m going for it anyhow.

James: Right. Why make such a song and dance about it? It’s not the kiss of death one way or the other – it’s kid stuff. Do what you do and enjoy it – or not. Who but you really cares about your sex life or lack thereof anyway?