

The Cat's Out of the Bag

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Sanford: How wonderful this *satsang*-style emailing, I am loving it.

Ted: I enjoy it as well.

Sanford: I will do as you say. I need to get back into regular *Bhagavad Gita* audio classes of Swami Tadatmananda, as well as listening again to Ramji's and Ram Dass's *Gita* lectures. There are also Ramji's MP3 downloads and video lectures of *Atma Bodh* on DVD which I got in Tiruvannamalai. And leaving all other teachings aside for later.

Ted: A wise decision.

Sanford: I am convinced that only Truth shall set me free, when the whole teaching gets assimilated; however, we both know that in order to do that the mind needs to be quite pure, predominately *sattvic*.

Ted: Though it is probably what you meant, given your follow-up statement concerning a *sattvic* mind, be clear that it is Truth in the form of knowledge that will set you free. Truth (i.e. awareness, consciousness, self, you) is not going to set you free because Truth is not a doer. Truth is fine with you exactly as you (i.e. Sanford) are right now. It already "knows" (not that it is actually a knower) you are it and doesn't have a problem with ignorance because to it there is no such thing. This is a bit nitpicky, I realize, but it's a good practice to be as precise as possible when it comes to language. Language, after all, is the vehicle of knowledge and so the words we use become our experience. Along these lines, you should also understand that the fundamental reason Truth will not set you free is because you are the Truth and you are already free. The only problem is that you think you are Sanford and that you are not free.

Though this is the truth, I do realize that it is not so easy to just drop the identification with being Sanford that has become so deeply ingrained in your psyche. But over time and through the repeated and constant application of the teachings to the circumstances of your daily life, you will eventually stand with full confidence in your true identity. Have no doubt about this.

Sanford: What is your viewpoint on repeating a *mantra*, doing a *japa* as a form of purification?

Ted: *Mantra* repetition can be an effective tool, provided it is done right.

It will do no good – other than perhaps producing some hypnotic state of relaxation and bliss – if you simply mindlessly repeat the *mantra*. You need to know what it means and what that means.

By that I mean you need to know the meaning of the phrase and you also need to know what that means in terms of your true identity. I recommend using a Vedantic *mantra* (i.e. *aham brahmasmi* – “I am limitless, non-dual awareness”) rather than many of the devotional *mantras* that are commonly used (i.e. *om namah shivaya* – “I bow to the inner self”). While at first glance there might not appear to be much difference since both seem to be honoring the self, there is an important distinction worth noting. The Vedantic *mantras* are direct affirmations of one’s true identity as awareness whereas the devotional *mantras* are dualistic in nature and imply a separation between a person and the self.

While both types of *mantra* can serve to purify the mind, a Vedantic *mantra* strikes me as more powerful – provided, again, that you are repeating it with proper understanding (i.e. in the case, for instance, of “*aham brahmasmi*” you understand that you are not equating Sanford as the limited mind-body-sense complex you normally consider him to be as That which is unlimited, but instead are affirming that you as the self are limitless, non-dual awareness).

Sanford: I want to add that it is difficult maintaining this awareness, just because old habits are so deeply entrenched in the psyche, doing many things under some impulse or semi-automatically. But then just being aware of what is going on, being mindful, as they say in Buddhism, does not use much energy, it is not the same as being focused, concentrated on particular subject, but just noticing the big picture. However, still, any strong force, that is, *rajas* or *tamas*, quickly overtakes the *sattvic* build-up. This fear is *tamasic* in nature, there must be still vestiges of doubt, uncertainty, not being able to connect all the dots, and besides, ego tries its sneaky ways to sabotage anything that threatens its thriving existence.

Ted: Yes, this is the strong pull of the *vasanas*. The more you acknowledge them yet resist allowing them to carry you away, the more their grip will weaken and eventually they will let go and drop away. Just stay vigilant and counter their bullshit with the teachings of Vedanta that you know to be true, or in the case that you lack 100% conviction, then “fake it till you make it,” as is said. The only way to rid the mind of erroneous thoughts is to replace those thoughts with other thoughts that are steeped in the knowledge of the Truth. It is hard work, but what else are you going to do? The cat’s out of the bag, so you can’t go back to being an idiot now, right?

Sanford: Thank you for your time and kindness.

Ted: My pleasure.