

The Post-Enlightenment Attitude to Vedanta

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Seeker: Dear Sundari, the Vedantic reading of the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* (NBS) is loaded with important and quite practical teachings, particularly at the so-called “triangular format” (*jiva-jagat-Isvara*) level. This is perfect for most students of Vedanta, I think. (The developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky has said that the best teaching is the one that gives the student something right within his/her grasp. Then learning feels like remembering, something that’s coming from within.) As the NBS teachings themselves repeatedly express, *bhakti* is a very effective entry point into self-knowledge because love is always already available in us all; it needs only to be discovered or purified.

One thing I’d love to discuss with you both (hmm, this is difficult to put concisely, but I will try): the shift that occurs when we begin to see through the “set-up” (i.e. the iterative science of expanding the mind) that is Vedanta, especially in texts like the *Gita* and the NBS. Or put another way, when the *shastra* is seen for what it is: a *pramanam*. The sense of reliance on it begins to dissolve, even as the sense of reverence and appreciation for its elegance remain very much alive. One thing that seems to happen in conjunction with this is that the most potent teachings now come from the continuous flow of life (they are *shastra*-coherent, but no longer *shastra*-dependent). Does this make sense?

Sending all my love to you, Ramji, and the whole *sangha* for a beautiful time at Trout Lake. (I have a beautiful picture of Ram teaching by the river last year, and every time I look at it I get choked up with a sense of gratitude.)

Sundari: You have voiced your thoughts about the post-enlightenment attitude to scripture very well and you make perfect sense. In many ways, the NBS addresses the issue you raise. The NBS is not only for beginners, although it certainly does cater to that level of self-inquiry. I agree that a truly good teaching meets the student where they are at, but in the case of Vedanta, things are quite different because the student has to meet the teachings. The way knowledge is normally conferred and taught in academia or anywhere else does not work for self-inquiry, no matter how advanced the method. One cannot study Vedanta; the teachings do not work without the mind being qualified and the requisite devotional spirit and faith in the scripture.

If the mind is qualified, the means of knowledge provides the perfect toolkit, as it were, to remove ignorance. However, I do agree with you that within the context of self-inquiry, assuming the mind is qualified, the way the teachings are taught makes a huge difference. Ram has made an enormous impact and contribution to the *sampradaya* with the methodology he put together and his straight-to-the-point, clear and easily accessible teaching style. Vedanta is a radical teaching, and this assists the student to relate to the teachings within the context of their lives. As all the teaching in Vedanta boils down to understanding what *satya* and *mithya* are and the ability to discriminate the one from the other, a teaching method that helps the *jiva* understand in simple terms what that discrimination entails is where freedom is more easily found.

The NBS also sets forth the attitude the *jnani* has to life as the *jivanmukta*. As Ramji said when I

read your email to him, “The scripture protects you while doing self-inquiry, and when the knowledge is firm, the *jivanmukta* protects the scripture,” which is what he has done for the last 40-plus years – and is still doing. He gave his life to protecting and promoting the scripture. This devotion is also clearly stated in the NBS. It is the duty and the *dharma* of the liberated to protect the scripture. After all, the subject matter of the scripture is you, awareness. If one’s interest in the scripture is purely intellectual or theoretical, this point will be missed and so will be *moksa*.

If self-inquiry has worked and self-knowledge has removed *avidya*, the *pramana* is supposed to become redundant, a throwaway, because you are no longer reliant on it.

The teaching is only a set-up in that it uses a dualistic methodology to destroy duality, so it is not really a set-up, because it reveals the self. But it is a set-up in that Vedanta is in the apparent reality for people who think they are people, offering a way out. Once duality is known to be no more than a superimposition onto non-duality, one then allows *Isvara* to unfold life without any complaint or expectations. *Karma yoga* is just knowledge, no longer a practice as such. Still, as *mithya* never goes away and *moksa* is only for the *jiva* after all, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. As I have said to you before, for the truly liberated, there is no room for grandiosity or over-confidence of any kind if freedom is to be found and maintained.

~ With much love from both of us, Sundari