

The Teacher Finds You

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Glynn: Hi, James, thank you again for your website and books. My wife and I are very much looking forward to spending some time with you in Portland this summer.

I'd like to ask you a few questions about teachers because I wonder if I am fooling myself about my motivations for seeing you.

Like many people who appear in your published *satsangs*, I have had 30+ years of searching for a teaching and teacher that would deliver the goods. My most recent 20 years were with a group that was loosely based on the teachings and methods of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. The leader of the group was (is) very charismatic and not a true teacher, as finally became clear to me. One of the hallmarks of the group and the members was a very strong devotion to him, and I ended up subsuming my considerable doubts because they seemed to go against the current. Essentially, I was not true to myself, and that was one of the strongest lessons I learned there. Part of that lesson was that it is easy to be deluded and to delude oneself, so ironically, while I learned to trust myself, I also learned how hard that can be. I mention this because it is background for what comes next.

About five years ago I came across the teachings of Vedanta in the form of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's book *I Am That*. Of course you know much better than I do how electric he was. Anyway, it set me free from the earlier group on what I was certain was the final quest for a teacher. After a few false starts, I was able to meet a teacher in Europe who was a student of Maharaj. I tried to be very honest with myself when evaluating him, his presentation of the teaching, etc. and I can say I would have been completely happy finding a way to make it work on all counts had he and the people around him passed with flying colors. Making it work would have included learning a new language to facilitate communication, regular trips to Europe for retreats, etc. While at one of his retreats we learned of another teacher nearer to home from a different tradition, and after some thought decided to meet him and test the waters there. The main reason for this was because I understand the critical need for oral transmission and instruction. As it turns out, the teacher in Europe was diagnosed with a difficult to treat cancer shortly after we met him, and it is likely that he will not live very much longer, so the choice was really not a choice.

I'm sorry for the longish email, and I am getting now to my question. I do not feel the same affinity, trust, meshing of gears, I really don't know how to say it, with the person nearby (as I did with the one in Europe) nor do I feel his general approach is structured enough (again, it is hard to come up with words for all this because it is mostly a "feeling"). I am open to the possibility that this difference is at least partly explained by the first-love phenomenon, where you have always a special place in your heart for the first person you fell in love with. I find it very hard to know when I am being completely honest about this and when I am just thinking too much. On the other hand, as soon as I came across your website, I had an instant "click" and have been by turns ravenously devouring and very patiently savoring and re-savoring books and chapters and whatever ever since.

How can I tell if I am just fooling myself? Is not a fully-realized teacher the “same” as any other? Obviously not, because, as you say, Maharaj took one look at you and sent you up to another. I am really tired of looking and I “think” I found what I need when I got to your website, but much of my life has been a self-deluded mess. Also, it looks like it will be a long haul, and assuming I have a normal lifespan I won’t share the “end” with you. What happens under those circumstances? Vedanta must have dealt with that many times over the millennia; do you pass on your students to a recommended successor?

~ Many thanks, Glynn

James: Hi, Glynn. Yes, you probably think too much, but I can understand your problem. The teacher should be ethically and morally pure, obviously. They should have a systematic and proven methodology and you should be attracted to them personally. But there is another issue in this teaching business: the teacher should really find you, which will happen if you are ready. The self will fix it up. It sounds to me like you are a householder and have quite a bit of worldly *karma*. Is that true? If it is, it is best to clear most of it up with the *karma yoga* attitude, and then the right teacher will appear.

Actually, Maharaj was not a very good teacher, even though he was a realized soul. His *guru* was a good teacher. Maharaj had only one teaching really and it was for *sanyassis*, not householders.

~ Love, James