

Why I Appreciate James Swartz's Teaching

Ram (James Swartz)

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Martyn: Having studied spiritual enlightenment for 40 years, I ought to know the value of James Swartz's teaching. Having worked with a number of teachers, and having read and tried most everything, there was still a lingering doubt about who I was. I had had many experiences, very ecstatic, but they didn't last. And in truth, what exactly was the right experience that would mean I was enlightened? Wouldn't I have to know I was enlightened to stop the seeking?

So my final quest came down to this:

What exactly is enlightenment?

How would I know when I got it?

There were too many vague, wishy-washy, touchy-feely descriptions of enlightenment that really didn't define anything. It left *gurus* totally in charge because they could not pass on anything. They had no teaching. They just kept describing the experience from where they were. That's fine, and entertaining, but for me it was not enough.

For one thing, I was always a very powerful intellectual. I was brilliant, but not stuck in logic, as I could listen to intuition and experience. However, I was aware that it was my mind that wanted satisfaction, peace and tranquility. It was my mind that was troubled and suffered.

As much as I enjoyed the Neo-Advaita teachers, and I do appreciate them, I didn't find them satisfactory. My deepest intuition told me that they were enlightened, that they were coming from that realized space, but my common response was that they were not helpful.

I came to the conclusion that to bypass all the vague, undefinable, experiential descriptions, I needed to go to the source. Who first spoke of enlightenment? Who originated the first teachings? What did they have to say? Well, the original teachings came out of India thousands of years ago. That was the source. So if I was to satisfy my mind, then I had to learn from them.

I was always attracted to *jnana yoga*. I could not fathom the idea that I needed to get rid of my mind. I didn't think the ego needed to be destroyed. But I did think the ego needed to loosen up and know its place. But I also knew that without a little respect for the person and the mind, I wasn't going to make it.

After years of frustration, I came upon James Swartz and his teachings at *ShiningWorld.com*. I read his autobiography. Believe me, it was fun reading. He went through myriads of experiential states and epiphanies. Yet, after all those experiences, it is interesting and educational that he came back to looking for understanding, not just experiences.

Swartz was able to go to India and was fortunate to do studies with teachers who taught the original, untainted Advaita Vedanta. He learned Sanskrit and read the original texts. This was what I was looking for! Someone who spoke and wrote in current American language and idiom, someone who had a Western mind, and yet someone who studied the original enlightenment

teachings. This appealed to me. I knew that if I wanted enlightenment, I would only know it by knowing what the originators said.

I agreed with Swartz when he explained that it wasn't an experience we needed, but understanding, not that experiences, especially good ones, were bad. They were just not enough. One needed to understand what the experiences meant, what they pointed to! And Swartz didn't poo-poo the mind.

He showed that the original teachings respected the mind, valued reason and logic. Isn't it the mind that suffers? Isn't it the mind that needs relief? What is it missing? What doesn't it understand? The mind needs an understanding that removes a basic, natural ignorance.

The original teachings as presented by Swartz don't teach that you are nothing, that you don't exist, that there is nothing you can do. After all, real or not, there is a person who experiences suffering, and that person needs to be addressed, and it is that person's mind that needs to be respected and educated. Lastly, there is a method. This is not a pathless land.

To my mind, if you want to know what enlightenment is, and if you want to know if you are enlightened, then you need to go to the source where enlightenment was first described and taught. That is what Swartz brings to the table. He is not charismatic. He does not have a big following. But he knows what he is talking about. He does say that enlightenment is for the person because it is the person who is suffering, and it is the person who is mistaken about their true identity.

What it all boils down to is the understanding and knowing that one is not a person, an individual, but awareness itself. Awareness is the source and it is awareness that is experiencing the body. The original forest teachings used the mind, reason and logic to bring students to the truth of who they really were. When that shift of identity happens, and it is understood that one is awareness, then that is enlightenment.

James: Hi, Martyn. I'm so happy that you assimilated the knowledge of who you are. Your letter is an excellent testimonial to the power of Vedanta and your dedication to solve the riddle of existence. It is an eloquent and completely accurate statement of the fundamental problem facing all enlightenment-seekers. Unless the desire to experience something extraordinary is converted into a desire to understand the nature of reality and the place of the individual in it, enlightenment "teachings" are not enlightenment teachings, as you know; they are, as you say, just attempts by enlightened people to describe self-knowledge from a very limited point of view. Talking about the self, experiencing the self as an object, i.e. a *samadhi*, *satori*, etc. is frustrating, as it presents the self as an object, an event that needs to happen, when in fact the seeker is the sought and is always experiencing what he or she desires to experience. Ignorance needs to be systematically removed by a time-tested methodology that looks at the self through each facet of the diamond of existence, making it possible for an inquirer to remove any doubt that may arise, until the intellect is doubt-free. Well, obviously you know all this. In any case, the world will thank you for this excellent and important letter, and you should know that appreciation is always appreciated.

~ Love, James