

Why Study Vedanta?

Ram (James Swartz)

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Lila: Hi, Ram. I'm happy to hear all is going so well for you. And that so many people are benefiting from Vedanta. I'm really enjoying your *Bhagavad Gita* DVD set at the moment. Great to hear that you'll be in India again. Will you be in Tiruvannamalai? If you are, will your *satsang* be in the same place and format as last time, i.e. is it okay to join after you've already begun teaching? And what dates are you there for?

Ram: Yes, I will be in Tiru from mid-December to mid-February. The place will be different, quieter and closer to Ramanashram. I will post the info at the website presently. And the format will be a bit different. Yes, you are welcome to come anytime. You already have a good foundation, so you can step in at any time and make sense of it.

Lila: As for the questions that I wanted to ask you, it seems that some resolution is coming on its own, i.e. whatever I decide is okay.

Ram: That's right. You have a tendency to *rajas*, and *rajasic* people are greedy to get the most and the best as quick as possible, so they have a lot of anxiety about which course of action will produce the most happiness. Because they want so much and getting what they want is so important, they often end up dithering when there are options. When you are confident in yourself this is not an issue, because you know that the joy is not in what happens, it is in you. So you have the *karma yoga* attitude: you are fine, no matter what happens. And because you are a good person you will not violate *dharma*, so any choice is okay.

Lila: Sometimes I am still getting myself in knots over some decisions that I need to make (or think I need to make). This year I've been doing insight meditation and Zen retreats often, and babysitting in between. This has been fantastic. It feels like an easeful way of living and is becoming more habitual. The retreats haven't been like they used to be, no big epiphanies or particularly deep meditation. Instead, as I practice resting with whatever is there, it feels like layers slowly peeling back and the world becoming clearer and less problematic.

Ram: Cool. That is the way you should look at everything, meditation or not. That is *karma yoga*. Take what comes, and as the *vasanas* exhaust the mind becomes composed.

Lila: My question now is what to do next year... And when I try to decide or see what is true for me there are so many conflicting beliefs: 1. that I should study to make my parents happy.

Ram: Bad reason. You are not "their" daughter. They are not "your" parents. And if they

are not happy with you now, they will not be happy with you later, no matter how hard you try to please them. How can they know what is good for you? Particularly since you have a different nature from them. They are *samsaris*, into security, etc. You are a *mumukshu*, into freedom.

Lila: 2. Or that I should stay in India, as that's best for me spiritually.

Ram: This is not necessarily true. You can get just a confused and agitated in India as you can anywhere. Plus, you already basically know everything you need to know about yourself, so I think it is just a matter of the confidence to live what you know. You could even argue that India is a distraction, that it would be better to learn to be happy where it is seemingly more difficult to be happy. And you cannot live in India all your life. But this does not mean that India is not the best choice either.

Lila: 3. That I shouldn't waste my money, that I should stay in India while I still can because in future who knows if I'll have time... etc.

These come up and I end up confused. I know all are just beliefs and not ultimately true, but they still have a way of hooking me. I've enrolled in an introductory psychology subject in the first two weeks of December. But this costs up front about \$2,500. Doing this course will allow me to begin the graduate diploma in psychology in March 2011 and finish it that year. Alternatively, I could wait until semester 2, 2011, to do the introductory psychology subject with no cost and use the \$2,500 to spend some more time in India, perhaps studying Vedanta if Swami Dayananda is doing the camps again in Rishikesh or some other form of practice.

Ram: I like this option. I am poor, so money is always the number one issue when I want to do something. If you can get the government to pay for it and enjoy India spiritually, it seems like this is a no-brainer, unless you have lots of money, which you don't. Even if you do have money, this is the best.

One thing I think you may be confused about is that you need to "study Vedanta." The subject matter of Vedanta is you, so what's to study? You either know who you are or you don't. I think you know who you are but you lack confidence in the knowledge. If that is true then no amount of study or meditation, etc. is going to change it.

Lila: When I think of this, the mind just swings like a pendulum between the two options. Attachment to the results is perhaps what's causing the problem for me here (thinking that I'm going to gain something more from one option or the other, which relatively seems to be true?)... I want to do what is best, but how to tell? I'd love to hear your perspective, even if it's just to say it doesn't matter either way!

Ram: I wrote that paragraph above about *rajas* and greed before I read this. You want to do the right thing and you want a guarantee. Ha, ha!

There is no "best," Lila. There is a lesson in any result. Yes, the problem is lack of the *karma yoga* spirit. I think this was the problem the last time we did a *satsang* too? You are a good person. You can do what you want. The result is not up to you. If you are happy as you are, you can take a "bad" result as a good result because there are no good and bad

results. There are only results... if you are a spiritual person. If you are a *samsari*, you are only what happens.

And what do the results have to do with you anyway? You are there prior to them, during them and once they are gone. If you are an idiot before you get something you will be an idiot afterwards. If you are wise before, you will be wise after. I like the "cake and eat it too" option. Spend the money on India and get the government to pony up for the course. And forget about pleasing Mom and Pop. If they love you, they love you when you do not have the lifestyle they want for you. You have to wean yourself from them if they didn't do it. If they are good parents they will be quite proud of you for sticking to your guns and doing what is right according to your own lights. I did not do what my parents wanted, but when I was in my thirties my mother told me that she admired me for doing what I thought was best for me.

Lila: I also have some questions about relationships, but I will write another time about that. I've just had a back adjustment this morning and turns out my spine was out by several centimeters... I am enjoying an unusual lightness today, but need to rest now.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

~ Love, Lila

Ram: Too bad I have to wait for the juicy stuff till later.

~ Much love, Ram