

# Clarity of Purpose

Ram (James Swartz)

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1574>

**Tammy:** Dear Ram, for the last two weeks or so I have been simplifying my life, inquiring, reading your book, watching your *satsang* from New Year's Day that Melissa made a copy of for me, and basically making a clear, quiet mind the priority in my life. For really, firm self-knowledge is all that I want.

It seems that as a result of this clear priority things have fallen into place. Work with Dad is finishing. I am moving to a studio apartment in Arizona next week for five weeks. I intend to lead a simple lifestyle there and to see if I can find longer-term accommodation and a job for a few days each week.

I've found that with clarity I can see that I do not need Kenneth. Yet I enjoy his company and we have a good relationship, so we will stay together. When I say "good relationship," I guess I mean that we have the same priority. He lives a pretty simple life in a small shack and realizes pretty firmly that apparent problems cannot be solved except by self-knowledge. Problems arose in the relationship when I started to think that there were problems to begin with, and that something needed changing.

A few questions...

You say below that "the mind should be restrained by the knowledge of who you are... until its outward tendency dies." What does it mean to say that the "outward tendency dies"?

**Ram:** Until it thinks that there is some solution to its fears and desires in the world. You were suffering recently and you could not find a solution in the world, because you identified with that part of you that believes in *samsaric* solutions. You then thought there must be a spiritual solution, so you wrote me and I reminded you of what you already knew, and you accepted the non-dual way of looking at it. The problem cleared up. By "the non-dual way" I mean the understanding - as you say - that there is no problem in the first place.

**Tammy:** And to restrain the mind means specifically that I should continue to inquire into my relationship to objects and experience in any state of mind?

**Ram:** Every day for the rest of your life. Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom.

**Tammy:** I found watching your *satsang* from New Year's Day to be exceptionally helpful. I cried, actually, as it is such a relief to not have to be or do anything other than what I am. Yet the tendency to feel like I should do something is strong and comes back again and again. I wonder if you could recommend any other videos that are available at your site?

**Ram:** You are young and your dispassion is not perfect. It is quite natural. So it will take time until the extroverting tendency of the mind is brought under control by lifestyle, vigilance and the application of self-knowledge. Be patient. Don't get too attached to the results. Enjoy yourself as you go. Hasten slowly.

**Tammy:** Also, having practiced in the Buddhist tradition for the last few years, I have some questions about the language that is used in relation to the language of Vedanta. For example, it is said the veils of the mind get thinner and thinner with practice after an initial awakening experience.

**Ram:** This is correct.

**Tammy:** Also, that there are cycles of insight that can be mapped. And that these cycles involve the mind opening and afterwards often closing again. Also, that insights into reality come at different times and from different angles, perhaps the same insights but in a different way. Are these formulations all just different ways to explain what appears to happen on a spiritual path? And are they equally valid ways of describing experience as the descriptions of Vedanta?

**Ram:** This is what Vedanta says. Remember Buddhism is "a chip off the tooth of the Vedas." It is just common-sense knowledge. The mind is a very conservative instrument. It moves forward, collects itself, maybe backslides a bit, then moves forward again. It is evolution.

**Tammy:** Another example is emptiness and self. I understand emptiness to mean empty of an inherent self. Isn't this a description of what to do in practice - to see that anything that can be seen is not-self with the purpose of dissolving the solid sense of self and other.

**Ram:** Yes, but this has to be based on the fact that you actually do understand that objects cannot complete you. You need to be completely convinced of their defects. The results of your actions do not last. They are empty of substance. They appear, last a while and then disappear. It is only really possible when your dispassion is highly developed and the desire for *moksa* is intense.

**Tammy:** And although in practice my Insight Meditation/Zen teacher led me to initially "rest in awareness," and now to identify with awareness; it is never explicitly stated in Buddhism that "you are awareness." It seems that the difference between the two traditions is mainly that of language?

**Ram:** They are both liberation traditions. Mind you, I am not an expert on Buddhism, but speaking in general Buddhism would not exist without Vedanta. The language is similar, but it is a heterodox Vedic "system" that wandered off on its own, and an important part of its connection with the original vision was lost. It seems to lack confidence in the knowledge and refuses to discuss the self at the outset. It is rarely mentioned, and the Buddhist people I meet are in general pretty much in the dark about the nature of the self. But Vedanta starts with the self. It works down from the

big picture to the details. Buddhism seems to work up to the big picture from the details. Both approaches have their limitations. In general, Vedanta is for very advanced people, hence the detailed discussion of the qualifications. Buddhism is good for beginners because it grounds them in a spiritual lifestyle. But once the seeker is fairly healthy, Buddhism seems to flounder because it does not seem to know how to teach the self directly. About a third of the people that come to Vedanta come from a meditation background. Mind you, this is a very general synopsis and I am not in any way an expert on Buddhism. Plus there are so many different kinds of Buddhism it is almost meaningless to speak of it. Vedanta is focused on one issue, and while there are apparently several “schools,” they all share the same aim. In fact there are no schools of Vedanta, because it is simply a means of (self-) knowledge.

**Tammy:** And compassion... I know I have asked you about this a few times but it keeps coming up. Is there no such thing as altruism? Is the only true altruism or compassion when you realise that there is no other?

**Ram:** Yes. Absolutely. You are altruistic when you see that we are all suffering from the disease of ignorance and that nobody is to blame.

**Tammy:** And I understand that compassion may not always look kind, yet I wonder about the day in Tiruvannamalai when you yelled at Rheinhardt for being rude in *satsang* and interrupting people.

How could you know that that was the most skilful course of action considering that it led him to return your book and not return to your *satsang*? Is this simply what you saw at the time as most skilful from your own experience? Is it possible that there was a better way to deal with it? Or does none of this matter, since it couldn't be any way other than what it was?

**Ram:** I was not trying to teach Rheinhardt anything. He was not qualified for Vedanta and he had an arrogant attitude. I tried to make friends with him. He used to come to where I had lunch regularly and I treated him with great respect. He talked with me personally several times. I thought that maybe he would calm down and listen. But he could not control himself. He is very insecure and angry. I could see that it was a waste of my time and others' time to have him there and he made it very easy to get rid of him. It was just his *karma* moving him along and I was quite happy to deliver it. I was not angry. The aggression I showed was an act. I was simply getting rid of him because he was being rude. I talked with him later and asked him why he left. He said, “Because you said please.” I later was told by one of his friends that he went to the South American *guru* and ended up shaving off his Mohawk and calmed down a bit. Vedanta is for well-mannered, mature people. We do not accept immature people.

**Tammy:** I know that with clear knowledge of who I am these questions dissolve, yet they keep coming again and again, so I thought it might be good to ask you about these confusions and apparent contradictions.

**Ram:** It is good. You have to make self-knowledge a priority if you are going to succeed. It is a long, hard path, but it works.

**Tammy:** I hope all is well with you?

**Ram:** Couldn't be better. Very interesting. Very stimulating. I love it.

~ Much love, Ram

**Tammy:** Take care of yourself.

~ Tammy