

What Is Spiritual Practice (Sadhana)?

Ram (James Swartz)

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Alicia: I totally appreciate what you are saying about me needing to find a way to quiet my mind and establish a *sadhana* to do that. I agree completely. Do you have any suggestions, outside of meditating (which is often just observing a very busy mind for me, not some spiritual revelation that nourishes my soul or quiets my mind), spending time alone and in nature, looking at whatever happens whether good or bad as *prasad* (a great idea that I always forget!) and constantly reminding myself of the wisdom that I intellectually know so that I will not be in my ego and personality so much?

Ram: The purpose of *sadhana* is to get a quiet mind, one that is not disturbed by likes and dislikes, preferences and expectations. Meditating does not work unless you have the *karma yoga* attitude operating in your daily life. It will neutralize the likes and dislikes and make the mind meditation-worthy. Then those soul-nourishing revelations come often.

The ego/personality is your fears and desires. You can't just ignore them and try to focus on something else, like meditation. You have to look at them with an objective mind so they can't disturb you. You can take the objective view toward your likes and dislikes because you understand the limitations inherent in getting what you think you want. This way you won't inflate their importance. I just wonder if you don't think a relationship is a kind of magic bullet that will eliminate some subjective dissatisfaction and turn your life into a paradise.

Taking it all as *prasad* should be your constant *mantra*. Try to keep it in mind all day long. It will work like nothing else to purify your mind.

Alicia: Maybe you think that Jack is causing me stress. I'm causing myself stress because of my fuzzy mind - the mind that feels confused about him, since the most important basics aren't there, yet enjoys him and stays involved. I have become more critical of him and I don't like that. Thanks to your email, I am going to try to just observe what is going on between him and me and see how I feel. Maybe we will just become friends.

Ram: No, I agree with you. You are causing you stress. The idea of a relationship is too important to you. You think there is more involved in it than there is. And, Alicia, you should be friends with anyone you have a relationship with. Friends is the only way it will work. I think we could have a good relationship because we are friends. We have a lot of love and respect for each other.

Alicia: How do I deal with the *vasanas* that outpicture as my likes and dislikes? Just observe them and let them go or continue to let them influence my interactions with someone like Jack??? I don't know how to deal with them.

Ram: Yes, observing them is very important. You can't work with them until you are aware of them. But even better is thinking them through, seeing how life will be when they are satisfied. Will it be fundamentally different? Will you be fundamentally different?

And the answer is always no. What is making you dissatisfied now (your ego) will just dream up a new something for you to fear or desire. Secondly, as I've mentioned before, seeing that what you expect to get – love, peace, etc. – you already have. You can't just let them go all at once, so they are going to influence your relationships, but it is best only to be in contact with people, particularly the object of your desire, when you are not heavily under their spell. Let them burn out and then associate with the person. Let them see you at your best, not your worst. It just creates too much negative *karma* to be with someone and always have your mind agitated because they aren't up to the mark. Additionally, you have to also understand that the person is not different from you. What you like or don't like in them is just what you don't like or like about yourself. I think one of the big problems with you and men is that you have an inflated view of the importance of sex. If it weren't so important you wouldn't have to have such exacting standards and therefore there would be a lot less tension when you are with them. If sex occurs in the context of a relaxed friendship it is great. But if you can't relax because you feel that sex is the ultimate intimacy and you can't be intimate with the person because they aren't what you want them to be, that is a problem. The belief that sex is the ultimate intimacy makes a lot of problems for a relationship because ninety-eight percent of the relationship is not sexual. So how do you be intimate when you aren't in bed?

Alicia: In response to one of your comments, I didn't say that relationship is a guarantee of spiritual growth. It's just that for some people who have some ego issues like I do and want people and situations to be a certain way, they certainly provide some fertile ground for some self-work that sitting in a cave wouldn't provide (I don't think!).

Ram: I think you're wrong. Your mind is your mind no matter what you are doing. If it is dissatisfied in one place it will be dissatisfied in another.

Alicia: Being a monk provides other experiences. I see what you are saying though. The bottom line is that I need to develop a quiet mind so that I won't be reacting so much!

Ram: Okay!!! That is music to my ears! You don't have to be a monk to get a quiet mind. You need to figure out why your relationship to your likes and dislikes is producing agitation.

Alicia: Do you tell all of the people that you write to that you love them?

Ram: Usually.

Alicia: Do you have unconditional love for all people and express it?

Ram: I have unconditional love for all people, but there are a few that I do not express it to – mainly because there is an issue that needs to be sorted before I can show it. Usually that issue is that they will misunderstand it and expect more from me than the love. A Tamil woman who has been massaging me for about a month fell in love with me. I love her unconditionally and am playful and affectionate with her, but I will not sleep with her, although she wants it, because she will think my love is very personal – like hers – and she will start making unfillable demands. I'm very skillful in keeping the friendship and the spiritual part in the forefront and keeping the emotional and passionate part in control. It is not that passion has no place in a relationship, just that the love needs to be so solid that the passion can't destroy it. Passion feels very good but it is the most destructive energy known to humankind. I even love people I find totally disgusting, like my neighbor, but I do not associate with them. Love means I understand their suffering and sympathize with them as human beings. But just because you love someone does not mean that you have to live with them or support their bad habits.

Alicia: How do some people become more important to you than others or is everyone the same to you?

Ram: They are the same, but they become more important the more they open themselves to me. If a person is going to open themselves, I give that person more of myself. Even Krishna says in the *Gita* that everyone is the same but devotees are especially dear. You're as important to me as any one of my close friends because you are very frank and open.

Okay, Alicia, it's been charming. I love you *beaucoup*. Many hugs and kisses to you.

~ Ram