

How to Practice Self-Inquiry

Ram (James Swartz)

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Lynda: Dearest James, I hope that my previous “confession” was not too much. Anyway, thanks for giving me the space to express myself, a lot of things were clarified for me in the writing process. (Afterwards I thought that perhaps I had been too impulsive in sending it without editing or anything, but perhaps you are used to people confessing their life stories to you!? Ha, ha, I can only imagine!)

James: Hi, Lynda. Yes, I am Father Confessor, it seems. Confession is good, it gets things out in the open. I like to hear people’s stories. It is very helpful to see what kind of life they lead and how they think about life and themselves.

Lynda: I am not sure whether we will be able to meet in Switzerland, as the retreat was already fully booked. However, they have put me on the waiting list, so maybe a space will become available...

James: Matthias is working on it, Lynda.

Lynda: In that case, I hope you don’t mind if I ask your advice about something via email...

James: Not at all.

Lynda: Before I do, I would like to say that I have been reading more of your letters/*satsangs* and a lot of stuff has been cleared up for me. For the first time, an enquiry has started that is not mental – by which I mean not “discursive” or “philosophical.” This is a revelation for a philosophically-minded person such as myself! It is almost as though now that I better understand the nature of the problem, I am open to allowing the enquiry process to take place on its own, without too much interference from the intellect, which has been trained for years in critical, rational thinking and which is all too eager to take over any investigation with its own self-professed “cleverness.”

James: Yes, I get the impression that you are quite clever, perhaps, as the English say, “too clever by half.” Vedanta is an intellectual discipline and it seems you are well suited for it. But before you can set out to think you need to be taught how to think. You need to understand the limitations involved in thinking from Lynda’s point of view and the advantage of thinking from the self’s point of view. It is very good that you are starting to see that inquiry is the nature of the self, that it is going on all the time whether you are aware of it or not. And the process should become completely conscious and guided by the words of scripture. So it is good that you are reading the *satsangs* and the book. The fact that doubts are being cleared means that you are ready for Vedanta.

Lynda: This has produced a great feeling of “space” within – it’s almost like the intellect has realised that all its philosophical ambition and voracious reading over the years was simply an attempt to gain the conceptual understanding that you have expressed so clearly in your *satsangs*.

James: The proof of the efficacy of Vedanta is precisely this sense of spaciousness. The mind of a *samsari* is cluttered with useless and unexamined thoughts, and when these are destroyed by right knowledge the mind is liberated.

Lynda: It almost seems now that nothing more needs to be learned or read (in comparison to the desperate search that has been conducted for many years) – the intellect feels very satisfied with your explanations, and I really can’t express how much of a relief this is to be free of the enquiry at a philosophical level... a lot of the mental chatter has stopped, quite spontaneously, and there is now just a feeling of faith in the truth you express, and a willingness to let things unfold, now that they are understood... I cannot begin to convey my gratitude for the silence that now reigns in my head (at least in the intellectual section!).

James: Yes, you only need a few concepts for self-inquiry. Self-inquiry is discrimination, the application of knowledge. It is the discrimination between the seer, you, and the seen, i.e. subtle and gross objects, with the understanding that the seer is not the seen. This breaks the seer’s identification with objects.

Lynda: My question in this email isn’t really related to this, it is perhaps more of a “lifestyle” issue. For the past two years, and for the year to come, I have been blessed with an out-of-the-blue donation from a philanthropist, which means that I do not have to work. So I am pretty much a lady of leisure, with a huge amount of free time on my hands. I must admit, this was quite a challenge in the beginning, as I have always been a very *rajasic* “doer” type, and I didn’t quite know what to do with my spare time. But after feeling as though I was hitting my head against a brick wall (every new venture I tried to organise just didn’t seem to work out), I actually started to enjoy my inactivity – days that consist of long walks in the park, having fun with the kids I babysit, watching movies, lunches with friends... It really is a privileged position to be in – I have never been so relaxed in my life, the days just seem to flow into each other, and I have no real worries... This “free time” (if there is such a thing) has also allowed me to look at life very differently, and that many of the *vasanas* that were strangling the life out of me have simply disappeared. I can’t imagine or even remember how I was “before,” it just seems so far removed from my current state!

James: This situation was obviously orchestrated by God to make your mind available for contemplation. One really needs leisure to let the mind unwind and practice discrimination. When you are *rajasic*, self-inquiry is almost impossible. *Karma yoga* is advised for *rajasic* people.

Lynda: However, now that I have another year of work-free living coming up, there is the sense that perhaps I am being lazy, and that I should be putting this time to

good use.

James: Lazy is good. You are putting it to good use when you are doing nothing. This is particularly true for *rajasic* minds like yours. I wouldn't feel guilty about it. Keep the mind turned inward toward the self and count your blessings. When the money runs out you will be forced into extroverted situations and you should be armed with a dispassionate mind. The reason recent endeavors did not work out satisfactorily is probably due to excess *rajas*. You were probably in a hurry and forcing things.

Lynda: The thought of "doing" something causes me a bit of stress, but there is perhaps also a pinch of truth to it, in that I do not want it to turn too *tamasic*.

James: The fact that the idea of doing causes you stress is a sign of sanity. I am the same, although I "do" a lot – but without a sense of doership. In your case you are still identified with the doer. This is the cause of the stress. As you get more quiet you will see that the *gunas* are doing everything and you will get more lazy. But it is a good lazy, a laziness that is not opposed to action.

Lynda: Recently the need for self-enquiry has come up strongly, and so I have been spending most of my time reading and watching anything I can find on the internet.

James: Self-inquiry is a very simple practice, as I said above. Apart from the knowledge contained in my book, there is not much to know. It is the application of the understanding that there is only one "I" and that it is whole and complete. Application to what? To the opposite thought. The opposite thought is always playing in the mind. It supports the mind. This thought needs to be exposed and destroyed by the application of knowledge. In your case the thought is "I should be making good use of my time so I don't get *tamasic*." Self-inquiry in this case would be: "The 'I' does not need to make use of its time. It is eternal." Then you should recall that there is only one "I" and that it is in fact you. When you hold your attention on that thought and contemplate its meaning, there will be a noticeable experiential shift from the ego's point of view to the I's point of view. It will be accompanied by a feeling of inner spaciousness, peace and separation from the mind. Whenever you want something or fear something (see your statement: you fear becoming lazy and you want to do something so you can't be lazy; crazy, isn't it?) it means that you think the "I" is limited in some way. Inquiry is a practical process that destroys this sense of limitation little by little.

Lynda: After "examining the evidence" – and after the disappearance of many of the conflicting *vasanas* – I am filled with a lot of energy to finally "do something about it." The problem, however, is that I am not exactly sure what I need to "do"! I understand that, from the point of view of the self, it is simply a matter of understanding one's identity, but why is there the feeling that something now needs to be "done"? I don't know – is it just boredom perhaps?

James: Yes, your mind is *rajasic*. Boredom is the arch-enemy of *rajas*. The problem

here, as I mentioned, is that your inquiry has not exposed the “I.” You think the “I” is a doer. You are not exactly sure of what to do, because there is nothing to do – except keep the mind turned inward looking at the thoughts and ferreting out the “I.” There was a saying in the eighties: “Stop making sense.” It could equally be “stop being useful.” Doing for doing’s sake masks the real problem: lack of self-knowledge. There are many Chan and Zen stories about the usefulness of being useless. Yes, inquiry is a doing, but it is a doing with a difference. It destroys one’s sense of doership and frees the self to act effortlessly. The *Bhagavad Gita* says, “The one who sees action in actionlessness and actionlessness in action is indeed wise.” From reading your story it seems that you have been driven by *rajas*, a craving for experience. It is good that you went at life with such vigor and that dispassion has finally set in. This happened to me when I was twenty-six and lead quickly to *moksa*. I suggest that you resist the temptation to make good use of your time. Keep studying my book and try to keep the mind turned inward. Take walks, sit in the cafés and waste time.

Lynda: I’m not sure what type of answer I’m expecting from you about this. I am just in a bit of a funny position because all ambition seems to have “left the building,” and yet at the same time all possibilities are open.

James: This is a very good sign of your spiritual awakening. It is excellent. Ambition and spirituality are intractable enemies. The fact that you see a life of endless possibility means that you are free. Don’t be in a hurry to actualize any one of the possibilities. Keep all the options open until the sense of doership is gone.

Lynda: I could just as easily move to an *ashram* in India as take up the artist’s residency I was offered in Armenia or that teaching post in Germany. The problem is that I am tired of adventure; in fact it would not be too much to say that I am tired of “experience” in general... At times I feel like a 90-year-old in a 30-year-old body... Everything in this life has been experienced so intensely, I already feel a bit worn out! It sometimes feels as though I am coming to the end of a very long journey, and although I am weary, I am prepared to put some effort into those last steps to get home more quickly...

James: Yes, your experiential goose is cooked. You are a lucky lady. This last paragraph says it all. Thank God for this feeling. Treasure it. Complete peace is coming.

Lynda: So I guess that’s my question: Do you have any suggestions as to how an ancient youth might best spend her early retirement?

James: Take it easy. That’s what retirement is for. One day something will present itself and it will seem “right.” It will flow along. You can do it without the stress that ambition causes.

Lynda: Or how she might take those final steps, for which she has saved up this last bit of energy? Any thoughts... whenever you have the time... or the inclination... ☺

James: I hope you get into the seminar so we can meet. Maybe a few talks with me are the final steps. If the seminar does not work, I will be in Europe for three months and in India for about three, so maybe our paths will cross. If not, think about what I have said and write when you need help.

Lynda: Until then...

~ All my love, Lynda