

Rich or Poor, You Will Seek Freedom

Ram (James Swartz)

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Karen: Dear Ramji! Thank you so much for the edited *satsang* and the letter to Marian. I translated and forwarded it to her yesterday, so she got it as an Easter egg. She called me today and she was really happy. She was impatiently waiting for it the whole week, so when it came it was a real gift. She says she needs some time to think it through. You gave her (and me) a lot of aspects to ponder concerning the question of desire for liberation. I didn't change anything in it. I think your answer was just fine because it is so interesting and complex. I never thought about these subtle changes that have to take place in the thinking mind so that one is able to see that one is already liberated. Even when I am (sometimes) convinced that I am already free, I still find it difficult to believe that I'm really free under all circumstances. As you know, I live a very privileged life and I ask myself how free I would feel if I had to work a lot, was caught up in a family with a bad-tempered husband and a couple of demanding, nerve-wracking kids, in short, if I had to cope with life like nearly everybody else. I need so much time and space for myself to keep up the vision up, what would happen to this vision if I was forced to lead a busy life?

Also, I'm feeling that I'm kind of moving out of the world more and more. When friends come from "outside," like "normal" friends from the city, not my spiritual friends, I'm often amazed and shocked about the tenseness and this feeling of fight they are radiating, as if the world was the bogey man. Everybody is so tense! But if I try to tell them that the world is not the bogey man, they may say, "People in your kind of situation can talk! If you had to live a normal life you couldn't afford such lofty views." And they would be right too. So you see, I'm feeling pretty insecure about my "self-knowledge." You say the I-thought is nothing, and I know that's true if one has understood what it is, and yet this nothing is causing all the suffering...

Sometimes the thought comes up that you're the only person in the world that I can talk to. That's nonsense of course, but it does come up.

Ram: Dear Karen, with regard to your doubt about your self-knowledge I think that the self or the "universe" set up your material situation in advance because it knew that you were going to be one of the people to keep the fire burning and the flower of knowledge blooming. I see you as a torch-bearer. Krishna says that He treats everyone equally but that He has special love for his devotees. He knew who you were before you did. And He knew when you would awaken, He caused your awakening, He knows what role you have to play in the awakening of the world and He set it up this way on purpose.

It was the self in you that made you sensitive to conflict and that gave you the discrimination to not get yourself entangled in the world. You passed through the awful human condition relatively unscathed. And furthermore, you would have sought this knowledge irrespective of your circumstances. You would have sought this vision because even though the desire to be free is built into everyone you were somehow sensitive to it and you made choices that would lead to the highest good. This started long before you became wealthy.

I have heard the same kinds of statements from people all along – that I had a privileged life and that this was the only reason I could afford to have the lofty views that I had. But I see it differently. I see that I somehow made the right choices and that when I made the wrong choices I caught the mistake quickly before there was any serious harm done, and got back on the right track without too much grief. And I don't see my life as privileged materially, at least not within the context of the society into which I was born. I made a lot of money in my twenties but I spent it all in a few years and the lack of it did not send me back to the business world. No, in fact it was when I was nearly broke and had no material prospects that I plunged headlong into spirituality. I had control of a lot of money and power when I was in my thirties, but I walked away from it all with virtually nothing when it was time to move on spiritually. I got a small inheritance from my mother and I did not squander it – I could have run through it in a couple of years – I hung onto it and lived like a pauper on the interest. All the while I keep my eyes peeled for a chance to make a few bucks. I ruthlessly cut every possible corner to save fifty cents or a dollar and take any kinds of hard physical work so I can stay free of debt – and it's still that way. And, if anything, I've become more uncompromisingly spiritual as time goes on.

No, there is something extra in certain people that just will not settle for anything less than the vision of non-duality, that will not settle for anything less than freedom. It is the inner freedom we feel that keeps us from getting entangled in the world like all these tense, angry people – not good material luck. When you know this you see how the self sets it up for you to live like a king, money or not.

It is the vision itself that is the riches, the security. Somehow I'm sitting here in an apartment that costs \$1,200 dollars a month and it is not coming out of my pocket, except insofar as all pockets are my pockets. I couldn't even imagine living in such comfort on my own money. And I have to do very little to justify being here. When I quit India I had a few hundred dollars a month income, no place to stay and no automobile. Now I've a nice van, a nice flat and sure, I need to work a bit, but the work is good; I get exercise and I make a sick young girl happy. So don't believe your mind when it thinks like that. Don't believe worldly people who have no devotion for the Lord when they chalk up your vision to material circumstances. How could you walk away from what you know, from who you are? Even if you could, you wouldn't. It would make a mockery of everything you have been working for spiritually all these years. It simply is not possible.

The reality is that there are many people who do not have the vision that live quite excellent lives in *samsara*, irrespective of their material circumstances – so making oneself relatively happy and relaxed in the world is not rocket science. Most can't do it, because they are dull and fearful, but it is quite possible to live well without a lick of spiritual vision. At a certain time in the life of the soul it is time to wake up and this awakening takes place no matter what. It happens to rich and poor alike. It is true that there are a lot of wealthy, bored people who dabble at seeking, but you are not one of those. Your quest evolved slowly and naturally out of your experience. You would do fine in any circumstance. You cannot separate this knowledge from who you are. You worked too hard on it and it has gone in. The doubt is natural but it is illegitimate. So do not indulge in this kind of thinking. Move as far out of the world as you want. There is nothing to get in it anyway. It is devoid of self-nature. Better yet, see that you are already out of the world. Nobody is in it, apart from the belief that they are in it. The world is in you, an object in awareness. You give it meaning, not the other way around.

Karen: I can't believe, Ramji, that you are painting a house to give the money to that Indian girl in school. Did I understand this correctly? You should have told me, I would have come and helped you.

Ramji: Yes, you did understand me correctly. I thought of asking you, but I decided against it because I didn't want it to set up any kind of idea that maybe I was using you for money. There is a file attachment with this email that should open in your browser. It is a page from my website called Begging Bowl. If you want to help, let me know. I'm committed to taking care of Uma even if it hurts, but I can't afford to help the others until this is over. Mother Teresa once said, "Give till it hurts," and I think this is good advice for me.

~ Much love, Ramji