

# A Negative “Teacher Vasana”

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Patty:** Dear James, I am writing to thank you from the bottom of my heart. I have been a silent student of yours for almost a year now, and cannot thank you enough for your generosity and sharing of this beautiful teaching of Vedanta.

Discovering the knowledge of Vedanta through you has turned my life around. Since last year in Berkeley I became hooked and have studied, read your books and watched videos ever since. I had hoped to come in person to the teaching in India but that was not possible this year. I have not contacted you sooner, because since my time with Andrew Cohen I have had a negative “teacher *vasana*” that prevented me from calling any other human being “my teacher.” Now I cannot continue with this any longer since I must express to you how grateful I am to have you as my teacher and to receive the true teachings of knowledge that you have made so accessible.

Prior to discovering Vedanta last year – I already knew of the tradition but had not “understood” its real meaning – I spent the years after leaving Andrew in misery and confusion. I turned to work as a focus for my life instead.

My story is in 1986 I had been fortunate to experience a profound epiphany that revealed the truth of the non-dual self to me, and my *karma* bound me to Andrew to whom I surrendered to as my teacher, thinking this was the way to liberation. The resulting confusion – between the call of the self, ever-present, and the inability to understand how to live in this apparent reality was my ongoing struggle until I met your teaching. I did learn from Andrew – it would not be true to discount his teaching altogether, but his insistence on the mistaken idea of the “ego problem” gave license to a form of crazy wisdom that was in the end both cruel and ineffectual, and caused me to abandon (I thought) my spiritual life. My struggle was that although I knew the truth of non-duality because the veil of illusion had parted for me, I had NO IDEA how to actualize this in my earthly life. The understanding that knowledge, not experience, is needed was a revelation.

Vedanta is the most beautiful path to a life of truth, and you have an extraordinary way of making it so understandable and possible. That alone brings great joy because the means is there! The rest of my *jiva* life is committed to living a life of surrender to *Isvara* that expresses LOVE as best I can.

I am coming to see you teach in Berkeley and also the Trout Lake camp, and look forward to meeting you again.

~ With so much gratitude for the Love that fills my heart, Patty

**James:** Hi Patty, appreciation is always appreciated. You are indeed fortunate to have found Vedanta. Yes, even unpleasant experiences serve inquiry, and it seems to me you got the point, i.e. that knowledge alone, not experience, sets one free. And furthermore, you seem to understand that the way the Neos formulate the “ego problem” is the problem. There is no contradiction between the ego and the self, as they are in different orders of reality. Teachers like Andrew never purified their

understanding when they had their non-dual epiphanies, so they actually teach the duality of the ego and the self while they claim to be teaching non-duality. If a person has the experiential view and is not committed to self-inquiry à la Vedanta, the ego will co-opt the teachings and use them to achieve unfulfilled ego ends, in Andrew's case power and fame. It is really amazing that it took him 27 years to own up to it. In any case, God bless him. It is all good. I look forward to seeing you in Berkeley and Trout Lake.

**Patty:** Thank you so much for your response. I have realized that the reason I spent so many years with the "wrong teacher" is because I was not qualified at the time to discriminate what I needed. This is a humbling realization for the poor little ego – and helpful in understanding that all things happen exactly as they should. In your book I read that many Westerners have spent years getting to a place where they are mature enough to assimilate the perfection of Vedanta. Better late than never!

Of course all of these thoughts are meaningless in the light of the self, which was, is and always will be, so I am happy to let it all go and lie back in the arms of that which never changes, which is my true self.

**James:** Great! Take it easy. Yes, Vedanta only comes to you when you are ready. It is all a matter of qualifications. One can't really blame people like Andrew, because even a glimpse of one's true nature can create great enthusiasm and a strong desire to share it. But without a teaching sharing is confusing at best and dangerous at worst, particularly when the individual is deeply flawed and has done no *sadhana*, like Andrew. It takes a long time to get enough experience of life under one's belt to realize that life is a zero-sum game. We always want to feel better than we feel and when we feel better we want to feel even better, so dispassion doesn't develop. One time a few years back I was looking for an interview at *Conscious.tv* and I accidentally came across one with Andrew. He was in the middle of a rant when I tuned in. I have rarely seen such an angry person. He wore his anger like a badge of honor. He thought it made him a noble soul: "So much injustice in the world. I will fix it. Admire me!" It's very ironic because the desire for recognition is born of a lack of understanding that one is the self-validating self, full and complete in every way! Do-gooders have the right idea, but usually have the wrong reason: they NEED to feel virtuous. Anyway, enough on the Andrew topic. It is a cautionary tale, however, and needs repeating.

~ Love, James