

Do You Want Vedanta or Moksa?

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Randy: Hi, James. Thank you for your reply! I am extremely thankful for your website, work and dedication! I first met you in Bavaria this year and since then I have been studying Vedanta like crazy! One example: I sometimes listen to your MP3s not only during the day but also during the night, so that I accidentally wake up with the wisdom of Vedanta. 😊

Anyway, my interest in Vedanta is so great that I have been considering taking up a long-term residential course. I have the luxury of having some money in my bank account, no marriage or children, 28 years old and deep desire for wisdom. I would love to be constantly surrounded by students and teachers of Vedanta. I would also love to study Vedanta in detail and also learn basic Sanskrit.

There are many long-term courses offered, one by the Chinmaya Mission in Mumbai, by Vedanta World of Swami Parthasarathy and one by the Dayananda Ashram. I suppose all of them are of great quality and I am looking forward to visiting them this winter to see what it is like there.

My question to you: What do you think about long-term Vedanta residential courses? Do you think the wisdom provided by ShiningWorld is enough, so that any long-term residential commitment in India would be unnecessary? Did you have students who chose to study at one of the above residential courses?

I originally wanted to ask you this question at the retreat in Westerwald this fall, but I would love to hear your opinion anytime sooner. 😊

Thanks a lot!!

James: Yes, over the years several of the people who were introduced to Vedanta have attended Swami Dayananda's course. I think it is the best. I don't think Parthasarathy's course would suit you. The Chinmaya course is shorter – two years – and it is a good course but very difficult for Westerners – the food, etc. The best are Swami Dayananda's courses. There is one in Rishikesh that lasts a year, and of course there is the three-year course in Coimbatore. It is a beautiful venue. There are three people in the present course who were introduced to Vedanta by me.

Whether you go or not depends on whether or not you want *moksa* or Vedanta. The knowledge available from ShiningWorld is more than adequate for *moksa*. It is the essence of Vedanta. I have made it very easy by simplifying the terminology and removing the cultural bias, which incidentally I love but which puts many Western people off. Many people get *moksa* through my talks, videos, books and *satsangs*. *Moksa* is very simple; it is just end of seeking and the arrival of a steady sense of self-confidence that comes from the daily constant discrimination between the self and the objects that present themselves to it. You do not need to "study" Vedanta for that. You simply need to know the difference between you and the objects that you experience and know why you can profitably cease to identify with the objects, meaning whatever the *jiva*-you is experiencing at any moment. Many people fall in love with Vedanta but fail to get *moksa*, because they become Vedanta experts and

not discrimination experts. They can't see the forest, the big picture, because they are so enthralled by the trees, the amazing teachings.

If you understand this then I think that considering your circumstances – your age, financial condition and the fact that you don't have worldly *karma* – a family etc. I think you would benefit greatly from a prolonged study of Vedanta. Your circumstances are very similar to mine when I went with the Swami. I was twenty-eight, had money in the bank and no attachments, a burning desire for *moksa* and I knew that Vedanta could set me free.

Randy: By “removing the cultural bias,” you mean removing the focus on Hinduism? Removing all the gods, rituals, etc?

James: Yes. Western people are not conditioned to the iconography and our societies are desire-based, not *dharma*-based. In *dharma*-based societies, people understand *karma yoga*, so Vedanta works well there. It works well here, but it is difficult to grasp and practice because the mind is not conditioned to consider the situation before one acts, only after. So the logic has to be explained in detail for Western people. In *dharma*-oriented societies one takes care of one's duty to the society first and if there is any time left over to indulge one's self, then desire is sanctioned. Religion is very excellent in the context of a pursuit of *moksa*, but is confusing at best in materialistic societies and downright dangerous at worst.

Randy: You said, “I don't think Parthasarathy's course would suit you.” Could you briefly explain that? Do you mean that I would not like it because it's very different from the Chinmaya Vedanta?

James: Yes, it is not directly *moksa*-oriented, more *karma yoga*-oriented, and you are advanced enough that you don't need all the basics in minute detail. If you have the *karma yoga* attitude and see that your mind is becoming quiet, then you should focus on the teachings themselves, i.e. *jnana yoga*. The downside of the Chinmaya Mission is the unnecessary emphasis on experience. If you understand the distinction between experience and knowledge when you attend that course you are fine, but if you don't you may get the wrong idea about *moksa*, although *moksa* is quite possible there. You need to understand that any course in India is going to involve Hindu culture, which I happen to love and which is perfect for *moksa*, but if you are highly qualified – your desire for *moksa* is burning – you will be subjected to considerable unnecessary stuff. I don't know you well enough to say, but if you come to Westerwald we can have a chat and I can perhaps offer some advice.

Randy: Or is it because his students have mainly a business/corporation background?

James: Yes. It's more about using Vedanta to make your life work – no blame. But if you are after *moksa* you don't care if your life works or not. Your goal is not *samsaric*. It is going beyond *samsara*.