

Should Vedanta Support You Financially?

Ram (James Swartz)

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James: (This *satsang* is a response to a person who got inspired by Vedanta and wanted to make a living from teaching it, and was having internal conflict and conflict with others.)

Dear Manny, it is a natural desire when Vedanta inspires you to want it to support you, but it is contrary to the spirit of Vedanta – it is called spiritual materialism – and it never works. I was set free by Vedanta in 1971. I supported myself in various ways – mostly as an antique dealer and furniture refinisher – until as recently as 2009. I never made any money from Vedanta and I was very poor; I couldn't even afford to rent an apartment and I often had to live in my van. And I didn't want to make money from the teaching, because when you depend on something for money you will not be completely dispassionate and if you are teaching people for money, you will not be inclined to be as truthful as you should. I had a disciple years ago who supported himself with Vedanta, but it never worked. One day his father died and left him a lot of money and he quit charging, and suddenly he was able to actually help people. There was a *swami* in our lineage – he was very clever and a very good Vedanta teacher, although he was not a pure-minded person, who became a successful in a worldly way through his Vedanta teaching, and then two years ago *Isvara* completely destroyed him. He lost everything: his money, respect, etc. He is sitting in a small *ashram* in South India, a broken man.

Isvara doesn't want the truth to be sold. It is given freely with no expectations. In 2007 I wrote *How to Attain Enlightenment*, and that made me famous and then a little money started to come, but not because I wanted it, but *Isvara* seemed to think that I had paid my Vedanta dues, patiently teaching people for all those years, and that it was alright for me to have a little money. I never took one dime from any of the many people I taught. Occasionally I would get donations, which I gratefully accepted. As you know, I teach all over the world, but I don't charge for the teachings. People write to me and say that they can get a big audience and charge hundreds per person, and that I will do very well even after they take their 50%! I say no. There was a big, famous *ashram* that wanted me to teach, but when I read the contract I said no. It is contrary to the tradition. I accept donations and then only when there are no strings attached. I give away 90% of the material. We hardly make any money on the videos, because we post most of them for free on Youtube, etc. The way it works is that Vedanta supports you spiritually and when you are set free of it, then it is your duty to support it by sharing. In the Goenka Vipassana tradition, the teachers have to have an independent source of income; they cannot charge. When you think about it, what kind of price can you put on the truth?

Your statement “due to my involvement with many different projects (basically chasing money to pay for my responsibilities) – and having a wife and kids to raise” makes me think that you have some work to do on your *karma* before you get involved with Vedanta as disseminator of Vedantic wisdom.

When I okayed the idea of transcribing my talks I assumed that your lifestyle was *sattvic* and that your idea was free of personal motives, and that you have a hard and fast *karma yoga* practice. If you have the right attitude, you will not be stressed over small things like money and raising children. Your emotions will calm down and

you will not be surprised or disappointed when your desires are not met and things go “wrong.” In fact there is no right or wrong in life. So I think that your devotion to *Isvara*, whose response to your need to support yourself created the present situation, needs a bit of work. And now *Isvara* is telling me to tell you that I can’t support this project, because your motivation is not proper.

This does not mean that I am not willing to support you spiritually. I think you need a teacher, at least until you have been properly taught and have properly assimilated the teachings. In fact I can’t recall that you have ever asked me for help with your understanding. To your credit I think you understand how great Vedanta is, Manny. It is truly an amazing means for happiness. And it is quite natural to want to capitalize on it when you see so much suffering and see other people capitalizing on spiritual teachings that don’t hold a candle to Vedanta. I don’t know, because you have not shared your heart with me, but I suspect that you are not different from anybody in that you probably want to be respected and loved for your spirituality, which I think has been an important aspect of your life, probably since you were very young. But Vedanta has only one purpose, to set people free of their desire for objects, including the desire for security and the desire to be known, acknowledged and respected for who one truly is. Of course if you surrender to the teaching and the teacher and you humbly and diligently follow not just the letter of the teaching but its spirit, you will love and respect yourself so much that it will not matter how the world sees you or whether you live in poverty. If you trust *Isvara*, you will not be stressed about money, etc. Ambition – except the desire for peace – just has no place in Vedanta.

I am sure you are quite disappointed and angry with the situation as it stands, which goes to show that your *karma yoga* practice is not working. This conflict is *Isvara’s* way of helping your inquiry. And now you are getting the benefit of my wisdom, even though you never asked for it. I am not saying that you should abandon Vedanta or that you shouldn’t share it with your *yoga* students. It is natural to do this and it is good for you and for them, even if they are not ready to do proper self-inquiry *sadhana* and *karma yoga*. It is like planting seeds that will sprout later. So this is very good, and I encourage you to do it. Of course it is going to be difficult to teach others effectively because your mind is not quiet, your life is a mess and you have not been properly taught. Vedanta only works if the teacher is pure-minded and is a shining example of the wisdom. If you tell people about enlightenment and they see that you are stressed about money, love, respect, etc. they will have no confidence in it. They won’t do the work, and so Vedanta will get a bad name and you will collect a lot of unwanted *karma* in the process.

I am willing to teach you, but only if you really want teaching and ask the right questions. I have a question: Why are you stressed about money? It is never the object – money or respect or anything else – that is the real problem. It is always the “why” that is the problem. If you understand who you are and the place of *Isvara* in your life, you are peaceful and happy with any situation. This is the goal, not trying to create some worldly situation that will take away the fear. You are a very spiritual man, and if you let spiritual materialism grab your mind, you will suffer a lot. If you are stubborn and don’t heed my advice, you will definitely suffer, not because you were unable to sell these teachings to people in need, but because deep down you would actually feel very guilty because you did what you did for the wrong reason. I hate to give you this lecture, Manny. I hope you don’t hate me for it. But I have to tell the truth, not as I see it, as Vedanta sees it. Vedanta is a totally pure tradition. All the modern teachings and teachers – Gangaji, Mooji, Andrew Cohen, etc. – will live for a few years and disappear. They will not rate even a minor footnote in spiritual

history. And a new crop will replace them spouting the same ill-conceived notions about enlightenment. And so it goes. Vedanta is the oldest extant spiritual tradition and it is alive and kicking today. It will endure throughout the ages because it is the truth.

But you are very fortunate to have been led to Vedanta. Really, it is a great privilege. And you are lucky that I am writing you as a friend to help. Please don't disregard my advice, which is: figure out another way to support yourself and do your life in the *karma yoga* spirit. *Isvara* will take care of "your" family. After all, the most that can be said is that you are a sperm donor and even then *Isvara* made the sperm and put the idea that you wanted children in your mind. If you love your family and are committed to serving them, you have done all you need to do; the rest is in *Isvara's* hands. At the same time, work on your Vedanta project as time permits. There is no hurry to enlighten the world. You are absolutely fine as you are. Slow down. Take it easy, smell the roses and respond to this email.

As far our relationship goes, it will depend on your response to this email and whether or not you are willing to listen to what I have to say. I never tried to teach you, Manny, because I don't want to teach anybody. I have a great life apart from Vedanta; I don't need it. It is a hobby for me. But *Isvara* creates situations, and people come into my life and if they ask for self knowledge in the right way I try to help them. There is nothing more important for a spiritual person than contact with a *mahatma*. You can't do this on your own. I surrendered to my teacher and the teachings for life. I did everything he suggested and it worked. But if you try to use spirituality to solve a worldly problem it won't work, because a spiritual problem requires a spiritual solution. Unintentionally, you created a stressful life and now you have to deal with the *karma* – with understanding – and with action once you have understood. You can't blame yourself for the *rajas* – I think your mind is quite *rajasic* – and for being ambitious. But you can inquire into it and see if the solution the *rajas* is suggesting is the right way.

So I am sorry about this unfortunate situation and I have contributed my views. Let me know what you think.

Manny: Well, everyone sees things through their own *vasanas*, so differences of opinion are inevitable. The real test of one's spirituality is how we manage our views with reference to others. I can't see that either you or Arlindo are right or wrong in this situation, only that for some reason the relationship broke down.

So, since it seems necessary, I'll clarify my intentions: As I told Ramji before, I would love that Vedanta could be my main way of living, especially because that would mean that I would be able to study while working and serving a greater purpose, since translation and teaching are two of my best abilities, and I didn't study or prepare for them, they just came with my program... so they seem to be both part of my *dharma*.

Ramji: I think the root of the conflict with Arlindo lies in this statement.

It is a natural desire when Vedanta inspires you to want it to support you, but it is contrary to the spirit of Vedanta – it is called spiritual materialism – and it never works. I was set free by Vedanta in 1971. I supported my self in various ways – mostly as an antique dealer and furniture refinisher – until as recently as 2009. I

never made any money from Vedanta and I was very poor; I couldn't even afford to rent an apartment and I often had to live in my van. And I didn't want to make money from the teaching, because when you depend on something for money you will not be completely dispassionate, and particularly if you are teaching people for money, you will not be inclined to be as truthful as you should.

Manny: Yes, I can see that and totally agree.

Ramji: I had a disciple years ago who supported himself with Vedanta, but it never worked. One day his father died and left him a lot of money and he quit charging and suddenly he was able to actually help people. There was a *swami* in our lineage – he was very clever and a very good Vedanta teacher, although he was not a pure-minded person, who became quite successful in a worldly way through his Vedanta, and then two years ago *Ishvara* completely destroyed him. He lost everything; his money, respect, etc. He is sitting in a small *ashram* in South India, a broken man.

Ishvara doesn't want the truth to be sold. It is given freely with no expectations. In 2007 I wrote *How to Attain Enlightenment* and that made me famous, and then the money started to come, but not because I wanted it. I had paid my Vedanta dues patiently teaching people for all those years. I never took one dime from any of the many people I taught. Occasionally I would get donations, which I gratefully accepted. As you know I teach all over the world but I don't charge for the teachings. It is contrary to the tradition. I accept donations. I give away 90% of the material. We hardly make any money on the videos because we post most of them for free at YouTube, etc. Vedanta supports you spiritually and when you are set free of it, then it is your duty to support it by sharing.

Your statement “due to my involvement with many different projects (basically chasing money to pay for my responsibilities) – and having two small daughters to raise” makes me think that you have some work to do on your *karma* before you take up such an ambitious project.

When I okayed the idea I assumed that your lifestyle was *sattvic* and that your idea was free of personal motives, and that you have a hard and fast *karma yoga* practice. If you have the right attitude, you will not be stressed over small things like money and raising children, or very small things like someone's use of Sanskrit, etc. Your emotions will calm down and you will not be surprised or disappointed when things go “wrong.” In fact there is no right or wrong in life. So I think that your devotion to *Ishvara*, whose response to your need to support yourself, created the present situation, needs a bit of work. And now *Ishvara* is telling me to tell you that I can't support this project, because of your motivation.

Manny: Okay, it's very clear, James.

James: This does not mean that I am not willing to support you spiritually. I think you need a teacher, at least until you have been properly taught and have properly assimilated the teachings.

Manny: Thank you (what a relief...).

James: In fact I can't recall that you have ever asked me for help with your understanding. To your credit I think you understand how great Vedanta is, Manny. It is truly an amazing means for happiness. And it is quite natural to want to capitalize on it when you see so much suffering and see other people capitalizing on spiritual teachings that don't hold a candle to Vedanta. I don't know, because you have not shared your heart with me, but I suspect that you are not different from anybody in that you probably want to be respected and loved for your spirituality, which I think has been an important aspect of your life, probably since you were very young.

Manny: Yes, that's very precise.

James: But Vedanta has only one purpose, to set people free of their desire for objects, including the desire for security and the desire to be known, acknowledged and respected for who one truly is.

Manny: I totally understand that, James, and agree and am profoundly happy that somehow Vedanta found me because I truly want that freedom. But I have ups and downs. Since I came back to the city everything changed. My mind was much more *sattvic* while I was on retreat. When I came back it was like hitting the ground running, and I had to deal with a lot of practical matters. I found myself dealing with every loose end that had been left opened.

James: Yes, this is typical of the *rajasic* mindset. The *mantra* to correct this is "less is more." The more you do, the less peace of mind, and conversely the less you have to do, the more settled the mind becomes. As you know, peace of mind is absolutely necessary to allow discrimination to serve you. So there is always this tension between your perceived short-term needs and your long-term goal. I am at the center of a *rajasic* vortex: ShiningWorld brings all kinds of demands and energy, everybody wants something. So there is a tendency to multi-task, which just divides the mind into many compartments and creates conflict. The discipline that I have evolved is to keep things simple - I turn down so many opportunities to teach and to do things - and do one thing at a time. I put the *satsangs* in a queue and do them one at a time. Even though I have several ideas for books, I start one book and finish it before I start another, etc.

Karma yoga takes care of stress about results, but it does not immediately remove the conflict between one's short-term needs and one's long-term goal. So it is a discipline. One should always renounce the gratuitous needs as they arise and focus on the most immediate need, working patiently on it with the understanding that the result is up to *Isvara*. You need to get in the habit of recognizing the non-essential needs and dropping them as they arise, not imagining that it is necessary to pursue them. There is always a lot of deadweight associated with the *rajasic* mindset. This whole spiritual business is like building a house, brick by brick. There are no shortcuts, no fast track. Every thought has to be dealt with carefully.

Manny: So a lot of strong *vasanas* just came back... family stuff... and I realized there was still a lot of work to do. That's when Vedanta came in.

Since then, I feel I'm trying hard to balance this high level of *rajas* and I can see that one of the things that really help me is to study Vedanta and apply self-inquiry to my life. Sometimes it's beautiful and it works very well (certainly when my mind is more *sattvic*), and I'm given to see the situations quite clearly, and then I'm not bothered at all, but sometimes it doesn't and I'm not able to perceive things with the same clarity. I never asked for your help before, James, mainly because somehow it didn't feel appropriate. I thought you were already busy with your projects and close students.

James: I have no close disciples; there is no "inner circle." You are as important to me as everyone else. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, so if you squeak, I will reply.

Manny: But I would be completely grateful if you'd take me in as your student in a more direct way because, yes, I need help.

I fell in love with Vedanta through your vision, James, and the clarity that came with your teachings – even though I still stumble and fall – is truly helping me to reach a much more stable state of dispassion and gratitude regarding whatever comes to me, like accepting my kids as my *dharma*. This was a result of applying self-inquiry to the matter because I used to think that there was something wrong with the program – like since I was so spiritual, I deserved a much more calm and free lifestyle, so I could dedicate myself to what really matters: my enlightenment – which is basically why I left to live at the *ashram*. This was my way of thinking.

Now I can see there's nothing wrong or apart from my liberation. It's only my *karma* playing out, and no matter where I go my mind comes with me and I still have a family obligation, but it's not a burden anymore.

I'm using all situations with them (or whoever) to work with discrimination, trying to add value and to do what's best for all, not only me. And it's not different with other issues. I know Vedanta works because it is working for me. I have learned that the *vasana* pressure is not something to be underestimated, because it will be always present as long as there's *maya*.

James: Well, *maya* is eternal, so it will always be there for the *jiva*, but not for you, awareness. Of course if you surrender to the teaching and the teacher and you humbly and diligently follow not just the letter of the teaching but its spirit, you will love and respect yourself so much that it will not matter how the world sees you or whether you live in poverty. If you trust *Isvara*, you will not be stressed about money, etc. Ambition – except the desire for peace – just has no place in Vedanta.

Manny: Trusting *Isvara* is maybe the most difficult of all, but I'm learning every day to surrender and to accept the pawn's place in the big game. I'm watching very closely this need to be special, to have my beliefs heard, to be respected (and you're right: the need to teach still comes mainly from that place, unfortunately. Even though I get thrilled when I witness the change happening in someone else's mind due to the exposure to the knowledge).

I loved a *satsang* yours called *Isvara Is Not Your Daddy or Your Mommy*, where you

say something like “you can say yes or no to *Isvara* because it delivers *dharma* and *adharma*, but it’s up to you to decide whether to act or not.” I can see this tendency I have to bypass *Isvara* and go directly to “I am the self,” and of course most of the time it doesn’t work properly, because my mind is not pure enough. Occasionally, usually when I’m suffering, I talk to *Isvara* and ask for guidance, which somehow always comes, in one way or another.

James: The Neo world is full of this very bad idea. There is even a term for it, the “*advaita* shuffle.” It’s one of the most glaring examples of lack of discrimination between *satya* and *mithya*. *Moksa* is only change in the status of the world, it does not change or remove the *jiva*. What belongs to the *jiva* belongs to it and what belongs to the self belongs to it. There is no actual connection. The world is not non-existent – it is *Isvara* – but it is as good as non-existent because it has no impact on the self. If you shuffle off your *karma* because you are the self, your *karma* remains and it has an impact because the very fact that you want to get rid of it means that you think you are a *jiva*. The only way you can get rid of your *karma* is to shuffle off the *jiva*, and the way you do that is to understand that you are the self. If you really understand – if you have accepted all the logic of the scriptures – then whatever *karma* the *jiva* has doesn’t matter to you. If it has money worries, so what? When you understand who you are you have great love for Manny. You understand that if he was meant to be different he would be different. He is like a child to you. You don’t stop loving your child because it throws tantrums and is a jerk. The “I am the self” idea doesn’t work until *karma yoga* is in place. Or it works intermittently, as it seems to be the case with you. So the key is *karma yoga*. If you understand *karma yoga* clearly, it is the same as *moksa* because *moksa* is the hard and fast knowledge “I am not the doer.” Since you exist as consciousness and since you know for certain that you are not the doer, you see that by default you are consciousness.

The fact that your ego was disappointed and angry with the situation shows that your *karma yoga* practice is not working.

Manny: Yes, I trust that.

James: And now you are getting the benefit of my wisdom, even though you never asked for it. I am not saying that you should abandon Vedanta or that you shouldn’t share it with your friends. It is natural to do this and it is good for you and for them, even if they are not ready to do proper self-inquiry *sadhana* and *karma yoga*. It is like planting seeds that will sprout later. So this is very good and I encourage you to do it. Of course it is going to be difficult to teach others effectively, because your mind is not quiet and you have not been properly taught. Vedanta only works if the teacher is pure-minded and is a shining example of the wisdom. If you tell people about enlightenment and they see that you are stressed about money, love, respect, etc. they will have no confidence in it. They won’t do the work and so Vedanta will get a bad name and you will collect a lot of unwanted *karma* in the process.

Manny: Very, very clear, James, thank you.

James: I am willing to teach you, but only if you really want teaching and ask the right questions. I have a question: Why are you stressed about money?

Manny: I'm not sure. It seems that it is because of an idea that "with money in the bank things get easier, and I'm less limited to come and go – and that includes the kids." But when that thought is subjected to the light of inquiry, it is obvious that it is not true. And also, if I trust the field, this apparent limitation must have a purpose, even though I can't see it or even don't prefer the limiting aspects of not having the random amount that I've decided to be good enough. But still I can see it's a strong idea in my mind. What to do? Do I just keep inquiring and observing that the results of "money in the bank" are not as liberating as they seemed to be as a simple idea?

James: Analyze your experience. Does the presence of absence of money actually change you? If it does, then chase money and be willing to accept *Isvara's* judgment about your money needs because money is definitely not up to you. It comes from others.

Manny: Funny... just by doing this inquiry that idea has already lost its grip a bit. Most important of all, more money = more experiences to try to get rid of the sense of limitation... that's the real problem... thinking that I can get rid of that through any object.

James: Yes, indeed. The self is the self and Manny is Manny, with or without money. You always have the right amount of money. *Isvara* sees to it. In the *Gita* Krishna says, "With a heart that knows no otherness, keep your mind on me alone and I will take care of your getting and keeping."

It is never the object – money or respect or anything else – that is the real problem. It is always the "why" that is the problem. If you understand who you are and the place of *Isvara* in your life, you are peaceful and happy with any situation. This is the goal, not trying to create some wordly situation that will take away the fear.

Manny: Yes, I understand that's the only possible freedom. Perfect.

James: You are a very spiritual man and if you let spiritual materialism grab your mind, you will suffer a lot. If you are stubborn and don't heed my advice, you will definitely suffer, not because you were unable to sell these teachings to people in need, but because deep down you would actually feel very guilty because you did what you did for the wrong reason. You can't fool *Isvara*. Or as they sometimes say, "God is watching you!"

Manny: Yes, I understand. Thank you!

James: I hate to give you this lecture, Manny. I hope you don't hate me for it.

Manny: I have tears of gratitude in my eyes right now, James, I could never ever hate you for being so clear and honest and kind. You have my eternal gratitude. While I was waiting for your answer, my biggest concern was to lose you as a teacher, because I see (and feel in my heart) the purity of your intention and your

impeccable approach.

James: But I have to tell the truth, not as I see it, as Vedanta sees it.

Manny: Thank you for that.

James: Vedanta is a totally pure tradition. All the modern teachings and teachers – Gangaji, Mooji, Andrew Cohen, etc. will live for a few years and disappear. They will not rate even a minor footnote in spiritual history. And a new crop will replace them spouting the same ill-conceived notions about enlightenment. And so it goes. But you are very fortunate to have been led to Vedanta. Really, it is a great privilege. And you are lucky that I am writing you as a friend to help. Please don't disregard my advice...

Manny: Never! I'm aware of how lucky I am...

James: ...which is: figure out another way to support yourself and do your life in the *karma yoga* spirit. *Isvara* will take care of "your" family. If you love them, you have done all you need to do; the rest is in *Isvara's* hands. At the same time, work on your Vedanta project as time permits. There is no hurry to enlighten the world. You are absolutely fine as you are. Slow down. Take it easy, smell the roses and respond to this email.

Manny: Okay, I'll do as you say. Thank you.

James: I never tried to teach you, Manny, because I don't want to teach anybody. *Isvara* creates situations and people come into my life and if they ask in the right way I try to help them. There is nothing more important for a spiritual person than contact with a *mahatma*.

Manny: YES, I know!!!

James: You can't do this on your own. I surrendered to my teacher for life. I did everything he suggested and it worked. But if you try to use spirituality to solve a worldly problem it won't work, because a spiritual problem requires a spiritual solution.

Unintentionally, you created a stressful life and now you have to deal with the *karma* – with understanding – and with action once you have understood. You can't blame yourself for the *rajas* – I think your mind is quite *rajasic* – and for being ambitious. But you can inquire into it and see if the solution the *rajas* is suggesting is the right way.

Manny: Great advice, this is very practical.

James: So I am sorry about this unfortunate situation and I have contributed my views. Let me know what you think.

Manny: Actually, I'm happy that all of this came into light, so I could be led back on-track.

James: This is the *karma yoga* spirit. The good stuff is a gift and the bad stuff is a gift. This whole conflict is *Isvara's* doing. Nobody is right and nobody is wrong. Life is *Isvara's* way of purifying our hearts and minds..

Manny: And I think that this letter that you've sent me is the most beautiful present I could have ever received. I will study it, follow your advice and do as you say. Thank you so much for your words and concern, Ramji, my beloved teacher. My heart is overflowing with love and gratitude.

~ Manny