

# Self-Realized Enlightenment Sickness

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Mark:** Dear James, after an extended period of enlightenment sickness, reality has come crashing down and everything seems like a hollow shell. Life and the world appear as a desolate and lonely wasteland where there is no shelter. There is deep loneliness and near-panic. It's like being buried alive. It's all empty of meaning. This isn't depression, I've never suffered from that. This is the end of something that I can't go back to. And I don't have the liberation of self-knowledge as I thought I did. I'm out in the bitter cold, the goblins are approaching and I'm knocking at the door of *moksa* begging, "Let me in, let me in!"

**James:** If may not feel like, it but you are actually lucky. It's particularly to your credit that you realized your "enlightenment" yourself. If I had been the one to tell you, you probably would haven't listened. Very occasionally one of my students denies enlightenment sickness when I suggest it, which means that the sickness is going to continue for some time, but when someone is honest enough to admit it themselves, it is a great day. It is perhaps the last hurdle an inquirer faces on the path.

**Mark:** This is the dark night of my soul, and the only thing I can do is sit with it, let it reveal itself to me. It is as though it wants to show me the things that scare me the most, things that scare me so badly I wouldn't even discuss them with another person. This is the bogey man come to visit me. I know this has been experienced by many people before; perhaps everybody gets this at some point in their lives. It breaks my heart to think of the fear they have experienced and had to face alone. It breaks my heart that I may have dismissed the suffering of others who were feeling as I am but I, having no knowledge of such sorrow, couldn't give them comfort.

Existential grief and fear and sorrow are flooding the mind. It's like a tidal wave. Understand, I don't believe this is real, but it's making enough of a noise to compel me to write to you and seek something from you that will make this rough ride a little easier. I hope to see you in Atlanta next month if that is still on for you.

**James:** It happened to me when I was twenty-five. You may not see it this way, but it seems to me that it is the result of your diligent self-inquiry which has stripped away the rosy projections that kept your view of the world interesting, novel and variegated. It is particularly painful because it contradicts your good idea of yourself. It is a stunning revelation. You are right: it is not depression. You should not interpret it to mean that you wasted your life chasing shadows or that your enlightenment was useless. It is a purification. You will emerge stronger. *Isvara* seems to need to make a point and is delivering the results of your actions in this unpleasant form so take it as *prasad* – what else can you do? It is just an experience – you could be in Syrian prison with electrodes attached to your genitals – that won't last. I wish I could wave a magic wand and make the pain go away, but it's not like that. Knowing that it's not real helps. Avoid the "poor me" thought if possible and if not see it as a projection. Come to the weekend in Atlanta – it's definitely on.

~ Much love, James