

You Can't Improve Yourself

Ram (James Swartz)

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James: Hi, Kumar. Sorry for the delay but ShiningWorld has made me very popular and I get hundreds of emails a month. So to be fair to everyone and keep ShiningWorld going I put the emails in a queue and work through it patiently. I made a few comments below. It is a great pleasure to read your email because you are definitely on the right track.

Kumar: I have read about your experiences on the path numerous times at your site (absolutely loving it every single time, by the way) and I find it incredible how the things you went through and the reactions you had to those experiences are so similar to what I'm experiencing. I then realized that a lot of people who pursued enlightenment had similar experiences and similar reactions, like with the Buddha.

I do have a few questions that I would love some input on, if you have the time:

1. For the longest time, I have pursued enlightenment in an attempt to get rid of the anxieties and stresses that plague me. My fears are what most people would consider irrational fears (like the fear of dying without being enlightened and coming back to the world), but I've come to realize that these fears are simply *karmas* that this body-mind entity must exhaust and that I should not concern myself with them, because I'm not the body-mind entity, and so it has nothing to do with me. Is this understanding correct?

James: Yes, indeed, Kumar. The idea is to focus on self in the form of the teachings, not Kumar's apparent problems. For instance, if you think of this fear as simply a thought in you and you apply the teaching to it, you can easily dismiss it as belonging to the *jiva*, not to you, awareness. Remember, the idea is to think of yourself as awareness at all times, if possible. It is only when you forget to think of yourself in this way that you assume the Kumar point of view, which is based on self-ignorance and takes apparent realities, i.e. fears and desires, to be real.

Kumar: 2. Self-improvement has always been a big thing for me, and I've found it very difficult to reconcile this desire with Vedanta for the longest time, but now I've realized that the ego can go on functioning like it does, with all of its desires and fears because it has nothing to do with me, i.e. I can "pretend" to be a doer-enjoyer entity (while accepting the anxieties that come with it, as it is unavoidable) in order to function and be successful in the world without causing harm to myself, as I know without a shadow of doubt that I am indeed *brahman*. I've come to realize that you can be both successful in the world as well as be enlightened, and most anxieties can be avoided by simply following *dharma*. Am I on the right path here?

James: Yes, again. Spot on. The idea that there is something wrong with the self is incorrect. It is based on a confusion of the self with the *jiva/ego*. In fact there is actually nothing wrong with the *jiva/ego* either, because it is not real. You can't fix something that isn't real. At the same time, you needn't fix something that is real,

i.e. you, the self. So there is no fixing involved, only corrections in one's understanding. If you follow the *dharma* of a *karma/jnana yogi*, the kinks in the *jiva's* personality straighten out and peace ensues. Yes, you can be a great success or a great failure in the world and be enlightened because the self is in a different order of reality from the world. It is *satya* and the world is *mithya*. Even if you think that there is something "wrong" with the *jiva*, it does no good to feel bad about it, because the *jiva* didn't consciously create itself. It is a reflection created by you, consciousness, in the role of the Creator and it is subject to ignorance until such ignorance is removed by Vedanta. Since you didn't create ignorance, you can't be blamed for any choices that you made. Hence the results of those choices don't belong to you. You can offload them onto *Isvara* where they belong and be happy as a *jiva*.

Kumar: 3. As I'm sure you've experienced yourself, it's very difficult to come across people who are into things like Vedanta, and mysticism in general, especially in Western societies, and I feel somewhat disconnected socially, as not many people are interested in talking about the self. While I get along with most people in general, I have this desire to talk about the self with other people, but I'm met with disinterest or even fear when I bring up the subject with most people. I feel a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the increasingly consumerist society we live in, where a person's value is measured by how much money they make and the things they own; however, I feel like this is where the world is heading (perhaps it has something to do with the Kali Yuga?), and that it's just the way things are. Any advice?

James: There is no sense keeping the thought that the world is a mess. It is a mess, no doubt, and it will always be a mess and the thought that it is a mess only adds to the messiness of the world. So this criticism needs to go. Actually, the suffering serves a purpose - it leads to self-inquiry eventually - although it is not always easy to see.

Maybe you can participate in the ShiningWorld forum, make a few contacts and then communicate through Skype. Most of us don't fit into the world at all, so there is always a sense of loneliness, I suppose. But when you think about it, you see that you are always alone even when you are with people, because there is only you.

By the way, I have a new book out - see the website - *The Yoga of Love*. I think you might find it useful and enjoyable.

~ Love, James