

# Criticism Is Good

Ram (James Swartz)

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/258>

**Vijay:** Dear James, knowing how busy you must be I am amazed by your quick and wonderful replies. Writing to you and receiving your answers triggers all sorts of things, and often not what was expected. I noticed that writing the first letter, with my story and the request to join your course, was accentuating, and therefore becoming noticeable, the habit of not really wanting to stand on my “own” feet, not to completely own the realization I had more than two years ago and again be under the influence of someone else.

While as the SELF, one has to stand alone.

**James:** That is the truth.

**Vijay:** That it took so long to get this fire going might be because of my upbringing in a large Hindu family where the parents were busy from morning till evening and no time to condition us properly. In school there were many children and not much personal attention, and I did not go to university where one’s opinion or views were called for. So there has never been much sense of being a person, maybe you would call this low self-esteem. I would not know, as I have nothing I can compare it with.

**James:** Well, I suppose it is low self-esteem in a way, but not really the kind of low self-esteem that you see nowadays. I meant that not being able to own the self is an example of low self-esteem. In this case it is the norm, not the exception.

**Vijay:** So late in coming, I have to actively be busy with the realization I know I AM.

**James:** Yes, it is all about owning it. You know who you are. You have been very fortunate in that you have not only had clear epiphanies and you have evaluated them correctly. Many people make a big story out of their experiences. It is natural, but it is not helpful. On the other hand, their meaning should not be discounted and denied either. I replied quickly because your email was so eloquent and clear and it showed how the self is always at work, that it will reveal itself one way or the other.

**Vijay:** I have started writing a blog, as I see that writing (like being really open and honest to you) helps to clear the fog and finally stand for what I AM.

**James:** It is not arrogance to accept your true identity. It is not a special status, which I think you probably thought it was. It does not make you great. It just sets you free of smallness.

**Vijay:** Also, I realized, James, that if ever things change around and I would want to

join the course, even if just for the pleasure of your and the other students company or if I want to invite you to come and visit me in Auroville, I could not if you are openly, as at your website, critical of Aurobindo. It could backfire in a bad way.

**James:** I hardly ever think of Aurobindo. It is only when people who have become disillusioned with him contact me that I have something to say, which is not often. I am a polite person and I do not make trouble for anybody, even people who should be disturbed. As Krishna says in the *Gita*, "Let not the wise unsettle the minds of the ignorant with their wisdom." I often go to Pondicherry, stay at the Park Guest House and keep my mouth shut. I have a very good friend there who has been with the *ashram* for thirty-five years in a position of considerable importance. He is a wise person and understands the limitations of Aurobindo, is a Vedantin but he has *bhakti* for the Mother and Aurobindo. Everyone is good and serves *Bhagavan* in one way or another.

But the website is another thing. It is about Vedanta, not me, although the lines are sometimes a bit blurred. Vedanta is a very mature means of knowledge. It is totally open-minded and fair. And it has a very long tradition of debate and criticism. I can't recall a lot of criticism of Aurobindo in it. I actually have a soft spot for the old guy. I do attack Neo-Advaita, but nobody can equate Aurobindo with Neo-Advaita. If you study the criticisms at the website they are always carefully reasoned and make good sense. I don't do it to exploit the Neos' weaknesses or pander to the many souls who find it inadequate as a means of self-knowledge, only to make it clear what is actually involved in self-inquiry. If you do not defend the truth, it will disappear. People think that there are a lot of truths, but there are not. There are a lot of beliefs and opinions about the truth masquerading as the truth that need to be questioned and examined.

The modern spiritual world, like the modern world itself, is made up of many spoiled, self-indulgent, thin-skinned individuals who are so enamored of their beliefs and so insecure in them that they are afraid of any kind of "judgment" irrespective of whether or not it is well thought out. If you want to grow you have to be critical. Even you, who are not inclined to rock the boat, were forced to re-examine your views of enlightenment when you were out of that oppressive atmosphere and new ideas entered your mind. It always amuses me how people who don't like criticism are quick to criticize the critic.

**Vijay:** I really appreciate being able to write like this, and your answers are, as always, clear and to the point.

**James:** It is my pleasure, Vijay.