

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

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Manny: Hey, Ramji, I hope life is finding you well. I'm sure as usual you find that it does. I wanted to write just to thank you. I think I should be signing off the Vedanta train maybe, at least for a while. I think I might be mucking it all up and not have the qualifications to proceed, also not knowing how to set up my life to revolve around it and get peace of mind at the same time. I don't know if perhaps I never was qualified or am just getting older, circumstances that I seem to trace some things to a *tamasic* way, or just bad thinking, conclusions and the like, and getting into bad habits, not realizing how that would take one on a bad trip. I see my vision of hope or faith isn't the right one and may be a bit misplaced, if not lost.

James: Well, you seem to be pretty aware of Manny and his train of thought. For Vedanta to work you have to follow the program, not set the agenda. Trying to get out of suffering on your own doesn't work. You have to realize how helpless you are and then seek help. I've made suggestions all along but you don't reply to them or make the changes, probably because you don't like what you hear.

Manny: It's funny, sometimes I think I brought it on during angry times, praying for change and shifts that I thought would help some areas, but if they were answered ended up going horribly wrong even though I know it was probably dark stuff, but I also think my language and reasoning skills and how I view symbols might be a bit off, growing up with two languages, but maybe no, sometimes I notice that I relate to things differently and then later figure out what was going on or years later realize a conversation's meaning was probably viewed differently by others.

James: Well, praying for change is not the answer. You have to ask yourself why you aren't happy in the first place. *Isvara* led you to me, but somehow you have been unable or unwilling follow my advice. Yes, you certainly do relate to things differently. I have a hard time figuring out where your head is actually at. Your mind seems to be quite *tamasic* and prone to fantasy.

Manny: Anyway, so my sources of inspiration don't seem to hold the same power and feel like a ghost or shadow of my former self, and maybe can't maneuver big-deal teachings.

James: Maybe you are starting to ripen up a bit. You haven't quite hit bottom, perhaps. This statement that you feel like a shadow of your former self is encouraging.

Manny: I don't think I ever mentioned that one of my reasons when I went to Arunachala to try to find answers was that I met some mendicant or *sadhu* or *swami* or something that invited me to eat with other Saivaites up on the mountain. He later proceeded to tell me that I would get into acting or movie-star stuff and meet a

girl who would be my wife, with kids and charming life and all.

Of course being American that's easy to say to get someone to really be happy about that. I did always have an interest in acting and at the time was a hopeless romantic, wanting answers and telling the guy that I wanted God, not that life, and him saying not it's not up to me, don't worry, it's a great life all the same. I latched onto the the idea, thinking, ah, yeah, I'm in Arunachala-romantic, India is full of mysticism and glory, ha, and it just sounded right. So maybe for the longest time believing in a destiny kept me high on Cloud Nine. But then later saying, hey, I should renounce that stuff and be a God-man, I guess not genuinely, but looking for glory again, maybe I wasn't living my *dharma* - I seemed to chase dark things, which obviously should have been a sign that no, I was not doing the right thing.

James: People tell you what you want to hear. If you wanted *moksa*, they would have told you that. I understand your dilemma. You are between a rock and a hard place. You don't want the world and you are not ready to do what it takes to do inquiry. You're a dreamer, Manny. Or as you say, "romantic." I'd suggest that you quit worrying about what you "should" be doing and just enjoy whatever you are doing at the moment.

I didn't know that you had gone to India. I think I told you that you should get a job and take care of business, not run off to India. As you can see, it didn't solve the problem. You are still confused about what you want.

Manny: Before that I had the greatest luck. Reading quotes like "one should cultivate and want suffering to become enlightened" were bad ones to accept. I still had less an idea that I was mixing up knowledge and experience. Then realizing the bad turns I thought, hey, maybe I should pray for a return and renounce where I am now and get back what was there before since the other time something I thought took, then it should reason this will switch back; of course this was *tamas*, but being desperate and a wierdo, hey, I thought anything. But then got angry when it wasn't that way. I think before I had good anger I related things with attitude and it seemed right, now the anger is from fear and thinking, oh, one shouldn't get angry with the God idea or one will get even worse cards the next time they are dealt.

James: Well, anger is anger. You are just confused about what you want out of life. Probably you will bumble along pretty much like you have been for a while longer. Then you will either shit or get off the pot. Sometime it takes a long time for young people who grow up in the West to actually take life seriously. There are no real penalties for being a weirdo and a fuck-up. You can just float along from one experience to the next without committing yourself to anything meaningful. You think you want *moksa*, but you really don't.

Manny: But I don't know, I guess it's hard to admit that maybe one can't deal and isn't qualified.

James: You get qualified by doing *karma yoga* and *jnana yoga*. You have to follow the program. You are not the boss. You do the practices whether you like it or not. You want to keep control but it doesn't work that way. You can't have your cake and

eat it too. You have wasted a lot of time, but it is not the kiss of death. Probably you have to hit bottom before you get off the dime.

Manny: Still, your patience and understanding all these years has been greatly appreciated. You were very loving and giving from the start, so I of course have admired that, you, and the teachings, plus the whole ShiningWorld family. I thought maybe in a corny way I'd send this song link that got me energized to send an email, since from time to time I send you little YouTube videos, as I have little to share. It's a cool song that brings me back to a good center or maybe because I think the girl is cute, ha. I think maybe my generation likes a different kind of music but maybe that youthfulness will also give you some joy.

James: Appreciation is always appreciated, Manny. Thanks for the link. Much love to you.

Manny: Hmm, okay, yeah, I usually haven't replied out of knowing it hasn't sunk in; it's always refreshing and sobering to read and I don't get bothered, it just puts a lot more into perspective and I don't want to get overexcited and reply, "Yeah, yeah, awesome, I got it," knowing more work is to come or just get over it and accept, and I realize after a while too much back-and-forth has been the same or not the best on my part, so I need to focus a bit more or a lot more. Thanks, I suppose seemingly bad luck might be a good thing, let's see if the mind gets with the program. *Hari Om* and all that good jazz.

James: I wouldn't leave it up to "the mind," as you put it. The mind has no interest in freedom. It takes commitment on your part. Grace is earned. There is no such thing as luck. If, however, your value for freedom is insufficient, there is no point in seeking. After all these years of seeking, it seems to me that you should accept whether or not your approach is working – perhaps that is what you are saying. Anyway, I think you know what is required and Vedanta is always available. It sets many committed people free. The point is, however, that this longing to be free will never go away. It is God in you, longing to get out of prison. I am always willing to help but I teach Vedanta and Vedanta *sadhana*, and for it to work the inquirer has to follow the program, as I mentioned previously. Anyway, all the best, Manny. I love you.