

Spiritual Ego

Ram (James Swartz)

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Vythand: Dear Mr. Swartz, I guess there's no real point in telling you my "life story," because, after all, it is only the story of a *jiva* who isn't really me anyway. However, in order for this thank-you note to be meaningful, I think it is appropriate to briefly share it.

I was introduced to the concept of enlightenment almost two years ago, when I was around 21 years old. For approximately the next year-and-a-half I obsessed over it and read everything I could, meditated, the whole nine yards. But I still felt incomplete, still felt like there was something more that I was missing. I had been exposed to some good ideas and plenty of erroneous ones. Even so, one notion that I continually questioned was the idea of the necessity of an "experience of enlightenment." It seemed strange to me that the lessons learned from such an experience couldn't be reduced to some core ideas and that so-called "enlightened" people needed to have one of these esoteric, yet poorly defined, experiences. Anyone who I talked to on message boards screamed "blasphemy!" at my claims, until one member directed me towards you and the teachings of Vedanta about six months ago.

Admittedly, I initially wrote it off, thinking it was simply a religion and I would be told what to believe. I am a person that likes logic, reason and evidence, and wasn't expecting to find that within Vedanta. At that point though, I had become so frustrated with the search that I figured, why not? So over the next two to three weeks, starting early in the morning and ending late at night, I watched your retreat videos, many of the other videos that you graciously post on YouTube, read *The Essence of Enlightenment* a couple of times, and pored over the content on *ShiningWorld.com*. The knowledge made sense very quickly, thanks to your clear manner of presentation and *Isvara's* grace (in fact I watched many of your videos at 2x speed so that I could cram more into a day, ha ha). That was about four to five months ago, and I'm happy to say that the knowledge has stuck, even as my focus shifted from time spent reading and listening to time spent applying the knowledge throughout the day. There are still plenty of smaller details that I'm excited to learn from your *Bhagavad Gita* talks, but even so, the big-picture understanding of who I am has led to a drastic paradigm shift. The "location of objects" teaching, the difference between reality and apparent reality, clarifications regarding common myths, descriptions of the three bodies, three *gunas* and *karma yoga* have been particularly helpful. I truly can't thank you enough for all that you do to make this knowledge readily available.

James: Sorry I'm so slow replying, but I've been terribly busy with ShiningWorld stuff. It just keeps growing! Anyway, I'm happy to hear that Vedanta is working for you. About the spiritual ego: it's a natural thing. It's a tribute to your inquiry that you notice it and a tribute to your character that you can admit it. It's enough to keep an eye on it. There is nothing wrong with small self-improvement if you can avoid pride, keep the *karma yoga* attitude and continue with self-inquiry. But it is best to conceive of your spiritual work as purification of the mind - *rajas* and *tamas* - and let the personality flower on its own as a result of your self-inquiry. Anyway, good luck with everything. You have my full support.

~ Love, James