

Committed Devotion

Ram (James Swartz)

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Ed: Dear Ram-ji, I was very happy to hear that you and Sundari have finally found a beautiful base in Spain! It looks wonderful from the picture I saw in the newsletter.

I have only seen you teach two times. The most recent was last January for two weeks in Suryalila. A year since the last retreat has gone by so quickly, and actually I feel like I never left. You have been my constant companion through listening to hundreds of hours of teachings. I've become a Vedanta fanatic, somewhat to the consternation of my wife. However, very interestingly, since I have devoted myself to living the teachings as much as I can, my wife, who is a Chinese Christian, has become very involved and dedicated to a local Bible study group which she attends a couple of days a week. *Isvara* works in mysterious ways...

I've read Swami Dayananda's *Home Study Course*, and Ben very kindly shared his transcription of Swami Paramahansa's *Gita* with me too after I had a chance to hear Swami P talk in Chennai. It was so inspiring to hear him teach after I had heard you talk about him so much. He radiates light and joy! Despite the Indian setting, when I was sitting on the ground in Chennai, a thought flashed through my mind that I was sitting in *Brahmaloka* listening to *Brahma* teach me *dharma*! I'm currently working my way through the *Gita* teachings you gave in Carbondale which are so wonderful, rich, profound and funny.

My current approach to Vedanta is immersion to allow the knowledge to burn away those binding *vasanas*. I've developed a morning reading practice and a short meditation practice (which I previously found impossible, as I would always fall asleep) by the grace of *karma yoga*. I used to feel so undermined by always falling asleep, but actually finding my passion for freedom and the interest to be free of binding *vasanas* makes all the difference. Even when my mind goes back to old habits, I just observe it and renounce the wanting. Not wanting based on the conviction I'm already whole and complete is very attractive and reinforces the conviction that it's actually true. I even find my interest in sex has fallen off or if the mind goes there, I don't want it, as I know it just leads to more attachment. Of course the sin-intelligently clause is helpful to not be too much of a fanatic, especially when I'm married!

I had wanted to write for some time but after listening to the teachings so much I kept finding my questions would be answered if I hung in there long enough. As a *jiva* I wanted to connect even though I know the real connection with a teacher has no time or space. It has also only recently dawned on me that enlightenment is for the mind and actually I want to be a disciple by doing the work, which is my real connection to you. I even have an *Ishta Deva* thanks to you. During the teachings in Spain last year, just for a moment, I saw your face turn into Ramana Maharshi's face, so he has now become my *Ishta Deva*. I understood that fleeting experience as showing me the *sampradaya* is unbroken, alive and eternal. I was brought up a Catholic but became disillusioned by the Church's teachings and corruption as a teenager. After becoming a Buddhist and then finding a crazy enlightened teacher, God had totally disappeared from the picture and I was an atheist until very recently. After finding Vedanta I thought I was looking for the Self but have found the Lord again. My morning prayer to *Isvara* is to keep my attention on him and him

alone.

Thank you, Ramji, and I look forward to seeing you next weekend in Suryalila.

~ Much love

Ramji: Dear Ed-ji, what a lovely, eloquent testimonial to the power of Vedanta and consistent devotion to freedom! I'm so happy that you are coming to Suryalila. We can have a proper chat. *Bon voyage.*

~ Much love, James