

How Teaching Works

Ram (James Swartz)

2019-05-25

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3888>

Note: People don't engage the teacher for many reasons. Some idolize him or her and don't want to have their illusions shattered, not realizing that all gods have feet of clay. Some don't want to appear ignorant. Some are afraid of giving away their "power." Some think the teacher is too busy, glamorous and famous to bother with "small people." But by far the largest group are those who are afraid that they might hear something that contradicts their good opinion of themselves. They write, but when I politely start to ask questions, they either don't reply at all or they conveniently ignore my inquiries. While this is understandable, owing to the harm inflicted under the aegis of the popular idea that the teacher's sole job is to bust egos, it is the duty of a Vedanta teacher to teach Vedanta, which brings the knowledge that allows a sincere person to criticize and correct himself or herself in light of the knowledge of the nature of reality, i.e. the individual, the world and the consciousness/existence factor.

I like this email [exchange] because the person writing [to me] is objective enough about himself to actually answer my questions. What use is Self-inquiry if it doesn't expose irrational self-protective beliefs and opinions? A healthy sense of self-disgust is required for the teaching to work.

James: Do you mean that you are supposedly Self-actualized? Or do you mean others? Or both?

Tom: I was not saying I am Self-actualized, as I'm not comfortable making that statement, but was referring specifically to some behavior that was not conducive to a *sattvic* mind and causing harm to others. With regard to others, it's the behavior, i.e. ego-motivated or harmful actions, that seemingly contradict their non-dual understanding. Reflecting on your words "without *adharma* there is no *dharma*" I can see that if I think *mithya* and the world of opposites is real, then I perpetuate ignorance. As soon as I pick up the chalice of virtue to make the world a better place or to make Tom a better person, I'm back in duality, back in time and becoming, which directly contradicts the understanding that I, the Self, am perfect as is. However, the belief that something should be done about *adharma*, that Arjuna has no choice but to fight Duryodhana, seems real and doesn't resolve easily. I find it helpful to understand the two orders of reality - *satya* and *mithya* - that one is not affected by the other, to make sense of this seeming contradiction.

Given the recent upheavals of my mind, I'm thinking of Self-inquiry, meaning applying the knowledge that both the world and Tom are perfect as they are as an anchor, a constant amid the seemingly endless movement of change. It's the still point in the midst of motion, the mover and shaker *rajas* - the engine of *samsara*.

James: Self-inquiry for whom? For you or for Tom?

Tom: Self-inquiry is the practice of applying the knowledge to action. While driving

down the freeway yesterday, it was totally clear that I wasn't moving, just observing the beautiful, captivating movement of the phenomenal world. It was completely clear that I had a choice to perpetuate the belief that Tom was a real guy driving a real car down a real highway or to simply acknowledge that it was a projection, a dream, and totally dependent on me as awareness. At those times, the practice of Self-inquiry is similar to a guy holding onto a paint brush after the house is completely painted. That being said, this boy will hold onto that brush for a while.

It's amazing to see how emotion runs the world, from the smallest bug searching for food to the Trumps of the world craving power. I see it running my mind, all likes and dislikes, all based on emotion, the root being the fear born of conditioned ignorance. Yes, the pole is really an anchor, but the knowledge is the same.

Sometimes the details of Vedanta are perfectly clear and helpful, and other times they seem burdensome and the intellect is stuffed full.

James: Well, *nididhyasana* is getting rid of Vedanta as a means of knowledge. If you are the Self, you don't need it. The teaching shouldn't stuff the intellect. It should empty it. Maybe you're trying to remember all the teachings. The teachings consume impurities and then eat themselves. You need to learn to take it easy.

Tom: The day I wrote [to you] was a particularly *tamasic* day! I watch videos daily and almost never feel that it's too much, so please disregard that comment. Vedanta continues to be a love song from the Self to the Self, and Tom is being pulled along for the ride, like a fish trailing from a boat.

It's all good, but it was poignant yesterday in one of those *Gita* videos, when things were getting complicated, that you said to simply return to the fact of existence. That simple message, combined with a gnawing realization that this whole thing is out of my hands and that no matter what I think or do as a *jiva* it doesn't make a scrap of difference, and that the whole framework of "enlightenment" is an ironic joke. Honestly, I don't know if this comes from frustration over the first question about needing to purify my mind to assimilate this knowledge or just the first inkling of what surrender means. Again, it's not a problem, all is well here in the field, and "taking it easy" is *Isvara's* message.

James: Good thinking. Yes, I think it comes from frustration over the first question. Maybe your *satya-mithya vasana* needs a bit of reinforcing. You, the ever-experienced, existent awareness, are the unchanging magnetic pole around which the thoughts and emotions cluster. Taking it easy just means appreciating the fact that you exist is the ultimate value. All else is mere epiphenomena. So you have to learn to just relax and smell the roses.

Tom: Yes, there is NO DOUBT that my *satya-mithya vasana* needs a bit of reinforcing! 😊 - but slowly, slowly, I am taking it easier. It's beautiful what you say: "You, the ever-experienced, existent awareness, are the unchanging magnetic pole around which the thoughts and emotions cluster." So simple and elegant, beyond words! Sometimes the SIMPLE FACT OF EXISTENCE is so f***ing obvious, the is-ness of all just "sitting there," and I want to cry. What a wonderful blessing this life is!

I was thinking about my recent letter and the issue of control, which seems to be

everywhere lately. I think it's being exposed due to the *karma yoga* perspective, which is forcing me to see that I'm not renouncing the results of my actions, nor accepting the fact there actually is no control. It's embarrassing and uncomfortable, but this practice is revealing the ugly stuff. I think the teachings of *karma yoga* are working.

James: Western people tend to favor *jnana yoga* and dismiss or diminish *karma yoga*. It's just not sexy enough. So inevitably they have to revisit it. Our *jivas* are DOers, not BEers, so the control element is never far away. A person may be Self-realized but not emotionally satisfied. A person who is emotionally satisfied in every situation is a free person. Emotional satisfaction means that my self-love is never in question. We call it *ananya bhakti*, love that has no otherness in it. So if there is dissatisfaction, it is always because one wants one's self or the world to be different, which can be treated by *jnana yoga* if you are predominately *sattvic* and by *karma yoga* if there is still excess *rajas* and *tamas*. Ultimately *karma yoga* and *jnana yoga* are not different, since the result of both is negation of the doer, which is liberation. When you no longer identify with the *jiva*-doer, you automatically default to the point of view of awareness. There isn't any other option.

What I like about this reply is that you are learning to correct yourself without my help.

~ Love, James