

Nothing Ever Happened

Ram (James Swartz)

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Student: Hi, James.

You are very welcome for the donation. I would give more each month if I could – the work you and Sundari are doing is a gift beyond measure that has brought to fruition my lifelong pursuit of becoming one with God – or *moksa*, as I came to understand it as I got older. As the second verse of *Vivekachudamani*, one of my favorite Vedantic texts, states: “It is by the grace of the Self that life’s highest blessing is gained: the status of a human being endowed with a burning desire for freedom and a relationship with a qualified teacher.” I feel very blessed indeed and offer gratitude to the Lord every day for this blessing. And I offer that gratitude to you in turn, as it is ONE gratitude for that great blessing.

When I left Andrew Cohen’s community, like many others I was in a pretty bad state. But I made to two pledges to myself that I feel saved me from many months or even years of suffering: (1) not to allow myself to be victimized by my experience with Andrew – especially how it ended – nor to play the “blame game”; and (2) to stay true to what had brought me to Andrew in the first place – my commitment to liberation, above all else. My time with Andrew (23 years), for all the unnecessary suffering and confusion, was a time when I committed fully to attaining *moksa*. And I feel a lot of the work we did as a community nurtured many of the qualifications that I now know, through the teachings of Vedanta, are the foundation for attaining Self-knowledge. And I developed a passionate love and discipline for Self-inquiry. For that I am grateful to Andrew and those years in an intentional spiritual community, it has to be said.

My final liberation from Andrew came several months after I left, when I realized one day while I was in contemplation/meditation, that the essence of who I really am was literally untouched by what had happened in my 23 years with Andrew. It was as though it had never happened. And this realization was not a momentary experience – by the grace of God I internalized it and it became a deep understanding that has held to this day. I was freed of Andrew and freed of need to fix or resolve anything. And I was free to move forward wholeheartedly on my path to *moksa*!

Around this same time, I came to see the utter simplicity of the task at hand – to irrevocably shift my identification from the separate sense of self to my true Self, but simultaneously was truly humbled by the enormity of this challenge. Twenty-three years in a spiritual community and devoted to a *guru* had not done the trick, and I simply didn’t know how to get there! I immersed myself in other teachings, Sri Aurobindo and Krishnamurti in particular. Krishnamurti’s book *Freedom from the Known* did help me to continue to cultivate my capacity for Self-inquiry and my willingness to question everything and let go of the many ideas I had absorbed over the years.

And then came that moment, in March of 2015, when a friend told me about you and your book *The Essence of Enlightenment*, not knowing whether I’d be interested or not. I ordered your book right away, and though it sat for a month or so before I picked it up, when I did start reading it the impact was instantaneous. I had found the answer and became consumed by Vedanta. Lucky me, Vedanta found me at the

perfect moment – which, as I came to learn, is the way it works! And now, after three years of passionate immersion in your books and videos, and the *satsangs* (both yours and Sundari's) and a couple of weekend retreats with you, my life has become one of what I like to call “beautiful, intelligent surrender”! With absolute trust and faith in the Vedantic teachings, based on hours and hours of listening and reading the teachings, which you articulate and explain so beautifully, and hours and hours of contemplating and absorbing the teachings, I can now simply focus on doing the work – doing my part – surrendering my life to *Isvara* and to Self-actualization. What a beautiful life!

I am happy to say that I will be joining with three dear friends for a blissful week with you and fellow Vedantins in Trout Lake's gorgeous setting. I am thrilled that I will get to spend this time with you and look forward to seeing you.

~ Much love to you and Sundari