

Silently Witnessing the Cartoon Me

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3940>

Peter: Hi, James; hi, Sundari.

Thanks for the teaching. I haven't finished the beginner's course and answered the questions step-by-step but I have read four of your books, a couple of them more than once. I'm part way through another of your books and two of the books by Swami Dayananda, and I have watched the Berlin videos and read a whole bunch of the *satsangs*.

My personal story isn't too interesting. I am a divorced American man, 60 years old, professional. There are a few more details in the earlier email chain below.

The main cause of disappointment in my life is a paralyzing procrastination that has been happening pretty relentlessly since I was a child. I recently read that when procrastination reaches this kind of extreme intensity it can be a type of obsessive-compulsive disorder, and that made sense to me. I began to see a therapist but that didn't help at all so I stopped. I already had decades of trying everything else I could find, along with forty-plus years of trying to practice Advaita as I understood it from reading about Ramana Maharishi and others. Then I found your work.

Since I read your books I've stopped all that other stuff and focused on just five things:

1. Reading your books and *satsangs* and watching your videos daily.
2. *Karma yoga*.
3. Discrimination and taking a stand in/as awareness, as frequently/continuously as possible.
4. Curbing my unhelpful impulses as they happen, as much as I can. I still fail a lot but I am better.
5. A friend of mine had agreed to act as an "accountability coach" for me. I text him in the morning or the prior evening and make a promise to him of what I will get done the next day, and then follow up later. I am more likely to keep my word if it is given to someone else instead of just to myself.

The Vedanta techniques of discrimination and *karma yoga* seem to be producing a profound and rapid change in me that feels obviously right to me.

I've always had thoughts like these:

"God, I think I'll diet and lose a bunch of fat and go to the gym and get muscular, then I can start dating again, once I'm not embarrassed about how I look; and then I can start having sex again," or...

"Man, I think I want to move to San Diego and stop working in an office. I could mow lawns for a living and be happy," or...

“What is wrong with me that I can’t make myself stop screwing off and get _____ (fill in the blank) done? This is not normal. I am pathetic.”

Now when I hear thoughts like those, they don’t seem to belong to me. They seem like some shallow, dramatic and self-indulgent fantasy thoughts happening to the imaginary “Peter” character. Like cartoon-Peter having a cartoon fantasy. Not me, not real. Life as I knew it before “seems to be happening at a small distance,” as I read it described by one of the Neo teachers. I think to myself it’s just not real, but I have such affection for that imaginary guy that I’m on board with letting him go to the gym and start dating and whatever, as long as he can be lighthearted and doesn’t get upset about it all; and as long as I don’t find “myself” getting caught back up in it. I experience myself now as this kind of silent presence that witnesses the world, including that cartoon guy with his desires, and that is such a relief. It’s interesting to me that one moment nothing is real and nothing is me, and the next moment everything is real and everything is me, right down to the leaves on the trees and the cracks in the pavement, and it is all good. But I am almost never “Peter” anymore.

I really feel like I am finally on the right track, but I want to check in with you.

I am interested in a Skype chat if you have time; how do I set that up? How to schedule and what donation amount seems appropriate?

Thank you so much for your Vedanta teaching. I’ve made more progress towards inner peace since I got your book *How to Attain Enlightenment* three months ago than I have in my entire life up to now. I am also working through my backlog of work that has been left unhandled for years, a miracle in itself.

James: Loved your email! You’re definitely on the right track. Yes, of course we can Skype, anytime. I leave the donation to you. You can wait until after our chat. That way, if it’s lousy, you can send a lousy couple of bucks. If it’s great, you can send more.