

Grace Is Earned

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Bob: Hi, James, I trust all is well with you.

I just wanted to offer you a sincere thank you for your teaching and guidance. For years I've read about the love and devotion one should have for the teacher, and I really tried (ha, ha) to conjure up such reverent feelings for the spiritual teachers I've had, namely Gurumayi. I bowed before them and supplicated myself to them and put pictures of them up all over my house and waved incense in their honour and chanted devotional hymns in their honour, and so on and so forth. And I truly did feel thankful for their presence in my life. As I mentioned in my last email, however, I never fully understood what they were offering, what I was supposed to get from them or how I was supposed to most appropriately receive it, and more importantly, how I was to most effectively put it into practice or for that matter simply experience it in my daily life.

I had years earlier fled from the Christian teachings I was fed in my youth because they seemed to offer no understanding beyond the idea that I was a horrible sinner who could only hope that by some act of grace accompanied with an impossibly intense degree of individual effort and discipline (which really seemed more like a lifelong exercise of repression and denial) I would somehow be saved from my sinful nature and earn a reservation in some paradisiacal Club Med in the seventh heaven where I would apparently lounge for eternity in a bejeweled beach chair on right side of God, sipping non-alcoholic nectar cocktails while stroking the strings of a solid gold harp. Ironically, for years my *yoga* practice seemed little more than the same judgmental blame-game revised, redesigned and recast with sacred Hindu images and saffron-robed *swamis*.

This is not to say that I learned nothing or remained completely in the dark about the nature of reality and the truth of my being, but, I must admit, that for many years I kept hoping to somehow please the *guru* and waiting for the big explosion that would once and for all annihilate my ego.

It wasn't until I encountered the timeless means of knowledge that is Vedanta and your down-to-earth teaching methodology that I was finally freed from the bondage of ignorance.

Though I understand that you do not wish to be revered as a *guru*, I am nevertheless thankful beyond words for your presence in my life.

James: Appreciation is always appreciated, Bob. But you get all the credit. You paid your dues. Grace is earned.