

Gratitude

Ram (James Swartz)

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Sven: *Namaste*, Ramji! My name is Sven, and I had the fortunate *karma* to attend your *satsangs* and teachings on Vedanta and the *Gita* in Tiruvannamalai. I came quite late in the course, but appreciated and could apprehend your teaching in spite of the fact that I am a novice in the Vedanta tradition. I am schooled in the Buddhist tradition and first I interpreted everything you said through the mental filters of Buddhism, but it was impossible since this knowledge is in a diametrically different order of understanding. I just had to completely let go of all biased and preconceived spiritual information to be able to grasp this beautiful means of knowledge.

I feel so blessed that I have met you in this part of my life when I was almost ready to give up on spirituality. I have been doing my *yogic sadhana*, have been teaching *hatha yoga* and meditation and have been in New Age circles (circus ☺). But it is all spiritual consumerism and spiritual-high shopping disguised and dressed in the emperor's new clothes. Even doing my *sadhana* dutifully and doing *seva* by contributing to society in good ways, I felt a total lack of self-esteem and self-worth.

I held up fantastic *sattvic* ideals as an armour to defend myself from feeling inadequate. But I felt so alienated in my striving and thought that I had to renounce everything. So much resistance and agony towards broken relationships, bad jobs, emotional havoc, sick to the stomach with everything (almost).

The beautiful spiritual journey that I started about ten years ago turned into a dark night of the soul that I could not solve on my own. I was meditating and still do, but I was tuning in to the wrong frequency and was obviously dancing to the wrong music. The *samsaric* disco is still playing, but I don't identify so much and have learned how to observe the tumult in my mind.

I started reading *The Perennial Philosophy* half a year back, and was so happy when *Isvara* synchronized my deeper longing for truth with your teachings at Tiruvannamalai. Even when I declared myself a Buddhist, the notion of God was still there and I have always felt since my childhood that I belong to something greater than just nothingness, but I couldn't formulate or communicate this almost mystical feeling of oneness with the whole.

My English is not very good, so I can't express in words my gratitude towards you. I feel like I am near freedom because I see the same self in all my fellow beings and don't feel as much alone as I did before. The suffering is not personal, like a *karmic* punishment, but is universal due to misapprehension and misinterpretation of the self. I still struggle, but I feel that it's part of the cosmic plan or God's *lila* to wake me up from the nightmare of separation. Pain is more like flashlight on a dark road now that it's letting me see everything that I before tried to hide from myself and others.

I still have some confusion around the concept *Isvara* and *brahman*. If they are to be understood as separate entities, like a divine awareness and the Creator God mixed up with *maya*, this equals our Western understanding of God? Here is where I reveal myself to be unenlightened, I suppose. ☺

Anyhow, I went to Rishikesh and walked straight into Swami Dayanada Ashram, and they declared that they didn't have any room or place for me... so much for good *prarabdha karma*. I returned a couple of days later and they had a place for the second camp. I was so happy. Puja Swamiji's lessons were absolutely amazing, but to be honest, I had it easier grasping this knowledge from your lessons. The Sanskrit was tough and the subjects thorough, beautifully and profoundly composed wisdom from a living sage. It turned out that I could stay for another week. So blessed.

Now I am home am trying to figure out how to keep up my Vedanta studies and my *sadhana* without losing its essence and falling down from the grace of this glimpse of awareness. A *satsanga* is important to me and I will try to find like-minded people to study together with. If it's possible to send you further questions, I would be very appreciative. I bought your *Atma Bodh* and will start with that one as soon as I have listened to Swami Dayananda's *Tattva Bodh*. I have also purchased your book on the internet and will start reading it soon. I send you all my kind and blissful regards and hope that you will live and teach for many years more. You reminded me of something that I intuitively knew but didn't have the proper means of knowledge to express. The fragrance of the flower will keep spreading unconcerned of its receiver and its petals will open to the sun of awareness.

Thank you from my innermost heart.

James: You are most welcome, Sven. Thank you for the open and honest letter. Vedanta usually comes when you are at the end of your seeking. Other paths are good, but they can only lead you to Vedanta, the pathless path. It is to your credit that you could drop the Buddhist filter and hear the scripture as it is. Buddhism is a "chip off the tooth of the *Vedas*" and it has lost the original clarity of the vision of non-duality. I teach many former Buddhists who have been well served by it. But it does not seem capable of closing the sale.

Isvara is pure awareness illumining *maya*. When it illumines *maya* the creation springs to life. Awareness is free of creation, but seems to be a duality when *maya* makes objects appear. Through inquiry, the objects – your thoughts and feeling, perceptions, etc. – are resolved back in you, awareness, and you discover that you are free of them.

Yes, you can write to me your questions once you have read the book carefully and studied the *satsangs* at the website. Every possible doubt is answered there, but if you still have questions feel free to write. It may take a bit of time to get the answer or I may have my wife Sundari reply. She is a *jnani*, and I review the *satsangs* she writes to make sure they are in complete harmony with scripture.

~ *Om* and *prem*, James