

Sin Intelligently

Ram (James Swartz)

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Kumar: Dear sir, I have been studying Vedanta for quite some time now and am a serious student of Vedanta. The understanding that I am not the body or mind but awareness that remains untouched by the states of body and mind is absolutely clear in my mind, thanks to Swami Suddhanandaji's teachings. Unfortunately, a recent episode left me shocked! I have a few queries in this regard.

Is it possible to learn the Truth from a *guru* who is himself not realised? How did I understand that I am awareness if Swami Suddhananda was not genuine?

James: Yes, you can learn the truth from a *guru* who is not realized if he has the correct knowledge of scripture and is able to wield it properly. Why worry about Suddhananda? If you know you are awareness you don't need a *guru*. Swami Suddhananda is realized, but not self-actualized, meaning that there is still a binding *vasana* - untruthfulness in daily life - that brought about his downfall.

Kumar: Is it really important that one has a realised *guru*?

James: It helps if the teacher is self-realized and is a living example of the truth of awareness because it lends great authority to his words, but it is not absolutely essential.

Kumar: Are Swami Dayananda and his other disciples also of a similar type? I have emailed to Venu who wrote against Swami Suddhananda, and he says that all students of Dayananda are excellent teachers, but they do not live the truth. Is this true?

James: I have been in this lineage for forty years. This is the first sex scandal I have heard of. I think this is Venu's anger and betrayal projecting on the whole lineage. Swami Dayananda and his disciples are basically saints. You have to consider your own imperfections. Everyone in a body is imperfect. Are you free of binding *vasanas*? Your anger should be tempered by sympathy for Suddhananda.

Kumar: How can we identify whether a teacher is genuine or not?

James: It is difficult to tell because lust and greed are hidden vices, unlike gluttony, for example. The way to deal with it is to take the scripture as the teacher and be very open but skeptical about the teacher. This is why Vedanta insists on qualifications. If you are dispassionate and discriminating you will not expect your teacher to be perfect. Read the *satsangs* at my website (the Satsang/New page) for an analysis of Suddhananda's situation.

Kumar: I have been listening to AVG *satsang* lectures. Are Swami Vidhitatmananda and Swami Tattvavidananda genuine saints or are they also hiding behind the saffron robes?

Sundari: No, they are not hiding behind their saffron robes, they are genuine *mahatmas*. Suddhananda is a good teacher, but a flawed human being. The issue is not sex, but hypocrisy. I recommended him. He helped many people, but he had a *vasana* he never dealt with and it was his downfall. *Isvara* will always make sure that the truth is upheld.

Kumar: Thanks a lot for the detailed reply. The reply clears the doubt that a person who can clearly reveal the truth as explained in scriptures can be a *guru* even if he himself has some personal limitations.

And more importantly, I have understood that my job is only to manage my own *vasanas* and get out of any binding *vasanas* which I have. I really appreciate the way you have put it when you said that we need to have compassion towards Suddhanandaji.

I have two further queries: Would you still recommend reading Swami Suddhanandaji's books, listening to audios and watching videos to students?

James: Yes. Discrimination is the essence of Vedanta. The truth stands above the lives of those who teach it. Don't throw the baby out with the bath.

Kumar: More importantly, as a student who got the truth from him, I feel I should look at him with the same respect that I looked at him earlier; what's your view on this?

James: He is worthy of respect as teacher, not necessarily as a human being. Love him, but hold the respect until such time as he has overcome hypocrisy. *Dharma* trumps *moksa*.

Kumar: What happened here seems to me to be emphasising the importance of *vasana-kshaya*, total annihilation of the binding *vasanas*. It seems to me that an attitude of total *vairagya* is a must. What do you think about this?

James: There is nothing particularly right with desire nor is there anything particularly wrong with it. As Krishna, speaking as the self, says in the *Gita*, "I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*." If reality is non-dual, desire is also the self. Binding *vasanas* should be rendered non-binding by the practice of *karma yoga* and self-knowledge - but nobody is free of *vasanas*.

You don't want to make desire into an enemy. Entertaining the desire to be free of desire is unwise. It will cause you to always be in a state of agitation. Keep your attention on the self and revel in your fullness, and gratuitous desires will slowly drop off and binding *vasanas* will become non-binding. Be reasonable and "sin

intelligently," as Swami Chinmaya used to say.

~ *Om* and *prem*, James