

Upside/Downside

Ram (James Swartz)

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Philip: Dear Ram, my name is Philip. I'm 34 years old. We met last year in Cologne. Shortly after your seminar we had a brief email conversation. I followed your advice and reread *How to Attain Enlightenment*. By today I've read it three times and I listen every day to your CD *Self Inquiry*. I changed to a vegan diet and don't expose myself to parties anymore. I try hard to implement the teaching in everyday life although *vasanas* give me a hard time.

James: I remember you well, Philip. It is good to hear from you. I am happy you have found your path in Vedanta.

Philip: This is already my first question. Besides my job as a self sales rep, I run a nursery for heather plants. Having my own horticulture business has been my dream since my early youth. How can I tell if this is a *vasana* or *svadharma*? I lack courage to leap into the business entirely and quit my job as sales rep. This double commitment causes a lot of trouble and anxiety in every respect. The thing is that I make descent money in my job and the nursery is really struggling. Negotiations with my bank even deterred me from coming to your Malaga retreat. But still, I feel that I should be in the heather nursery, but how can I make sure that this is not only a *vasana* I'm supposed to overcome?

James: Okay, let me see if I can help you. Basically, you want to have your cake and eat it too. You want security and you want to follow your heart. I think the reason the horticulture project is not working well is because you can't give it your full attention. To make a small business work, you have to work full-time at it. I had two successful small businesses because that was all I did. I had no security for a couple of years and I worked 16-hour days. Eventually I started to make money. So if this was my problem I would quit my job and grow plants. But you are not me. You seem to have a different temperament. I don't care if I have money or not. I don't care where I sleep or what I eat. I just do what I want to do and don't worry about the results. In your case, you will be unhappy if do your sales rep job. You will be unhappy if you continue like you are, splitting your time between the two, and you will be unhappy if you only do horticulture. This means that there is no solution in the *karma* world. The only other possibility is to change your state of mind – to look at the problem differently. It is a spiritual problem, not a *karmic* problem. So *karma yoga* is the solution. No matter which option you choose, you need to surrender the results to *Isvara* and act. You can do both as you are doing now – if you can accept the result – no satisfaction with the job and no satisfaction with the nursery. If you decide to do the nursery full-time it will only make you happy if you don't worry about whether or not it is going to succeed. If it is your *svadharma* and you are always worried about the result – financial success – you will not enjoy it and it will probably not succeed. The issue is security. And the truth is that there is no lasting security in worldly things. There is only real security in knowing yourself.

If you do the nursery and it doesn't work, it does not mean that you are a failure. It is

not the kiss of death. You will still be you. If you stay in the sales job and it doesn't work, it is not the kiss of death. You will still be you. You will have food and a place to sleep. If you do both, it is the same. So you cannot tie your sense of self-worth to action, to what you do. It does not matter whether it is your *svadharma* or a *vasana*. Your *svadharma* dictates your *vasanas*. This is an attitude problem. The worry is not legitimate because the result is not up to you. If the result was up to you, then you are free to worry. All you can do is do your best. If you stay in the sales rep job, do your best and be happy that you have some money. If you do the nursery full-time, be happy that you are doing what you love. If you do both, be happy that you can have financial security and the pleasure of following your heart. There are no bad results for *karma yogis*. They know that life is a zero-sum game. You can't win and you can't lose. You lose as much as you win and you win as much as you lose. So don't make an issue of what you are doing. Do whatever you do with a happy heart.

Philip: Needless to mention that my relationship has dramatically deteriorated. Sometimes I wish to be in cave in India.

James: Sounds like *karma yoga* is needed in the relationship too, Philip. You don't gain by staying in it and you don't gain by going to India. You need to understand that what you do is not a statement about who you are. Vedanta is about HOW you do what you do. So this is the same problem as the work problem.

Marcel: Does the "fake it till you make it" approach also work for *karma yoga*? I sacrifice my sales appointments and the crops regularly to God by saying it mentally, but I don't really feel it. It's in my mind as a thought but there are no emotions coming along. Can I continue doing it this way?

James: No, it does not work because you don't understand the nature of your mind. You have to see that there is no solution to your problem by doing something. If you stay in the relationship you will gain something and you will lose something. If you go to India you will gain something and you will lose something. It does not matter whether you stay or leave. It only matters how you look at the problem. You think that if you do something different, you will be happy. You may be happy for a short time but after a while you will see the downside in the new situation and your unhappiness will return. So the problem is that you expect the world to make you happy. It can't.

Philip: Lastly, I have to say something nice about Neo-Advaita. Without it I probably would have never come across you and your teaching. I attended one of Premananda's *satsangs* and as an appreciation I bought his book *Arunachala Shiva*. From that point on I knew that I had found my path - Vedanta.

James: Yes, it is all good, Philip. Neo-Advaita is good, but it has its limitations as far as being a complete teaching. So it is good to get someone started but it can't take them all the way.

Philip: Dear Ram, thank you so much for your relentless effort to spread the

teaching of Vedanta. I'm going to attend your Westerwald workshop in the middle of March. Are you going to do a workshop in India next winter? Any advice how to intensify my studies will be deeply appreciated...

James: You are welcome, Marcel. I look forward to seeing you in Westerwald. I don't think I will do India next winter, but it is still a possibility. I hope this letter helps.

~ Love, James