

shiningworld

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Shiningworld Newsletter August 2014

What's Happening

This Newsletter finds us back in the US in surroundings that make Ramji feel like he has died and gone to heaven! We have moved into our new home in Bend Oregon, which is right on a gentle meandering river, surrounded by beautiful mountains, lakes and trees. We have deer walking through our front garden, ducks, geese and many different birds, a beaver who has a lodge right near us and all kinds of other critters abound. The first few days we were here Ramji said he felt like he was tripping on acid, the place is so lovely! Thanks to Isvara in the form of our kind sponsor Dave who has made it possible for us to have the use of this beautiful place.



We have settled in and gotten back to full time Shiningworld business as usual. Ramji is totally immersed in reading and listening to Panchadasi as taught by one of his teachers, Swami Paramarthananda, without doubt one of the best Vedanta teachers alive today. Ramji is writing commentaries, combining the Swami's brilliance with his own inimitable clarity and precision. The finished product promises to be a great a service and addition to the Sampradaya.

Recent Events

Ramji taught Bhagavad Gita to a very receptive and grateful group at Berkeley recently. Everyone seems to think that Ramji is getting better and better at teaching and I would have to agree. He is setting minds on fire and leaving a wake of happiness in his trail wherever he goes. He is at the top of his game, imparting with ever more clarity and wisdom these most ancient and infallible teachings. But he says it may seem like he is getting better but in fact maya is at work: the real reason is that you all are getting more and more qualified! Here are a few pics of the Berkeley group:



Ramji with our dear friend, Annette from California. Annette has removed the link to her website from shiningworld for the foreseeable future, taking a break from teaching for silence and contemplation. Thank you for all your support Annette, enjoy the silence of your own true and beautiful Self. You are welcome back anytime.

Ramji with Peggy and Mark, also dear friends from California. Peggy has just completed a major job transcribing the 2014 Spanish Bhagavad Gita with the help of several wonderful and dedicated Vedantins. Thank you Peggy and to you all; your contribution is invaluable. And thanks to Mark for hosting Ramji and the work you did on the Berkeley seminar.



Pics of Berkeley group: Thank you to dear friends Lance and Erin for the great work in organizing this highly successful seminar. Vance is on the far right. Erin took the pic.



Upcoming US Seminars

We are expecting a bumper attendance at Trout Lake this year. Ramji will be teaching Panchadasi, perhaps the most sophisticated Vedanta text. We will be getting to the campsite a few days early if anyone wants to join us for informal satsang and Q&A. Trout Lake is one of our favourite seminar locations. See website for details. To those attending, please remember to let us know if you are unable to bring a chair along with you.

We are hoping to be able to organize satsangs at our home in Bend in the future. There are many camping sites nearby as well as holiday rentals. It probably will not be happening this year, but if we do manage to get it together in time we will let everyone know in the next Newsletter.

New In Shiningworld

We have posted all the 3 Chapters of the teaching course in What's New on the website, along with the audio and transcript of Chapter 2 webinar. We will add Chapter 4 with the answers to Chapter three next. We are pleased with the way the course is going and the attendance of the webinars from around the world. Ramji is talking about giving weekly webinars in the future. We will keep everyone informed.

The 12 Month Teaching Course continues in this Newsletter with chapter 4, Qualifications. See text and questions below.

Next Webinar:

The next webinar on Chapter Four will be next Sunday, 17th August.

Time: 11 am Pacific Standard Time.

New E-Satsangs posted

Ramji and I have posted a big batch of new e-satsangs, perhaps two hundred plus pages answering the latest crop of pressing doubts. The recurring theme lately is *nididhysana*, the application of Self knowledge, the most difficult stage self inquiry. We call it self actualization, getting one's life to line up with the truth of one's true nature. It is reasonably easy to realize who you are if your mind is qualified. Living the truth is another matter. Ramji's favorites this month are entitled: Direct Path: Sleep Your Way to Freedom; Nearly Impeccable Logic; Vedantic Meditation and A Sea of Stories. I have a very long satsang entitled Experience vs Knowledge, one of several that covers *nididhysana*, experiential enlightenment along with much else.

More News...

For those of you who would like to hear James' guru, Swami Chinmaya, teaching Vedanta here is a link to eight wonderful Youtube Videos given at Humbolt State University many years ago.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ier98k0yXu8>

We would also like to announce the inclusion of translations of two texts in the Dutch language on the website, under the translations menu: Tattva Bodha and Bhagavad Gita Chapters 1-6. We also have chapter two of The Essence of Enlightenment in Spanish available.

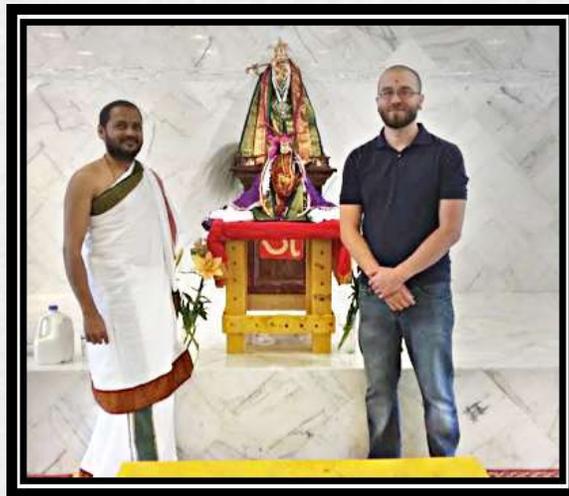
http://www.shiningworld.com/top/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=72&Itemid=89

We would like to apologize for a non-working link to John Lekay's ebook Contemporary Non-Duality. James contacted John and the link is now working. Here it is:

http://www.nondualitymagazine.org/nonduality_magazine.7.books.htm

Shiningworld Endorsees

We are pleased to announce that Isaiah Sanders, Vishnudeva, is back after a break due to health issues. Welcome back Isaiah, we love having you on board shiningworld again, and so will your fans! ॐ



Isaiah taking his new spiritual name, Vishnudeva.

New Website Progress

We had problems with our present website earlier this month, Isvara took us offline for a few days. It seems that Isvara wants the new site up soon and is getting impatient! ॐ We have been assured by Puran our website designer that the new website is coming along and we hope will be up and running in the near future. We are sure you will all be happy with the new format with its emphasis on community and sharing.

And now for something completely different... Shiningworld's shining couple....

Christian Eberle, our hard working webmaster, met the beautiful Vedantin Katja, through shiningworld a few years ago. The couple are now happily married and Vedanta guides and shapes their day to day lives. Katja is a brilliant artist and cartoonist with a wicked sense of humour. They have teamed up and become our resident shiningworld comedians 😊 I asked them to share a photo and something about themselves with shiningworld, here it is:

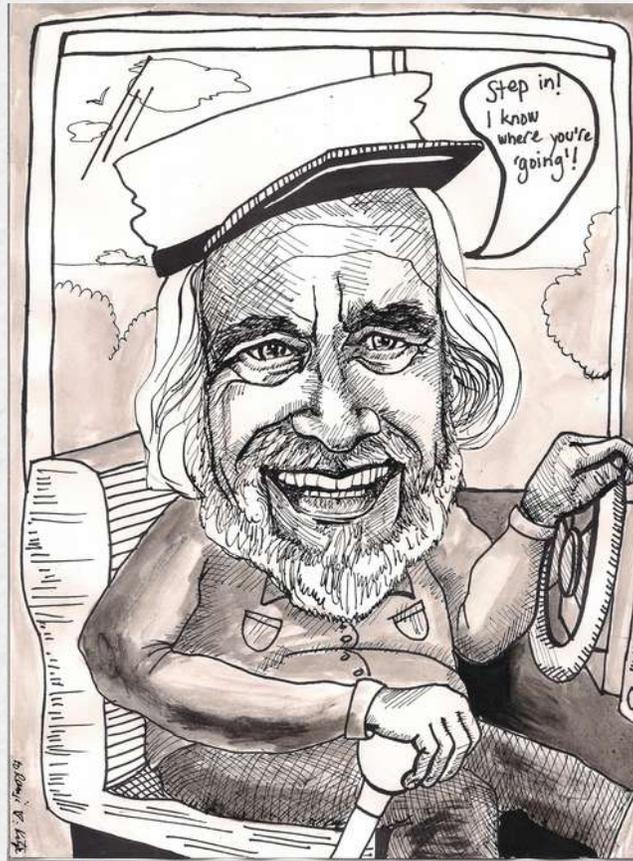
From Christian and Katja: “Sundari asked us to write something about our humble selves, so here it is:

We are Vedanta-freaks (because it's the only thing that makes sense) and otherwise lazy slackers dedicated to artsy, visual stuff like films and painting. We also like animals, self-grown veggies, yoga, karate and we worship Star Trek. Our eyes met across the crowded internet. Actually our marriage was arranged through Sundari, which we don't regret. 😊

We are absolutely dead serious people and hate laughing.”



Here are Katja's latest sketch cartoons of Ramji driving the Vedanta bus, with me his grinning cohort....



As a professional artist myself, I intend to start a collection of shiningworld artwork that we will sell on the website as a contribution to shiningworld. Katja will be making her artwork available for purchase in the shop on the website as well. If anyone would like her artwork personalized by Ramji, we can do that for you.

12 Month Teaching Course, Chapter Four: Qualifications.

A Mature Human Being

It is good that teaching Vedanta is not a profession, although I do it professionally, because to make it lucrative uncomfortable facts should be avoided, one reason why Vedanta has never been popular. We only teach because we love the truth. Telling it does not involve ‘busting’ a student’s ego, even if that were a legitimate path, which it isn’t. We are not here to figure out what is wrong with you and correct it. For that you can go to a psychologist. We reveal what is right with you and save you the trouble of trying to fix yourself. If some fixing is necessary, the truth will do the work.

Here is an unpleasant fact: qualifications are required for liberation. To my knowledge no modern teacher or teaching insists that seekers be qualified. If enlightenment is experiential, then presumably it can happen at any moment...like falling in love. So to stay in business all a teacher need do is suggest that enlightenment is a wonderful possible happening and exhort the student to seek it. But if it is a matter of knowledge and if ignorance is hard wired...which it is...qualifications are required.

This is unwelcome news for seekers who have grown up in an age of instant gratifications. Most valuable things require hard work. As far as self inquiry is concerned, there are no shortcuts or quick fixes. You have to be committed. If you tell the truth you will attract qualified students. Quite a few are quickly set free by these teachings and the rest, understanding the value of Vedanta, relax as they work on the qualifications because they know that it is a reliable path. Those who don’t understand its value hop from teacher to teacher, from one so-called teaching to another, ending up more confused than when they began.

Fishing in Germany

In Germany, you can't just dig a worm, put it on a hook and catch a fish. A cave man could but a modern German can't; he needs to be qualified. If you knew the rigmarole you have to go through to catch a trout there, you would give up fishing. A German friend told me that it takes almost a year to get a license.

Is it the inalienable right of every person to know the meaning of $E=MC^2$? $E=MC^2$ means: energy equals mass times the speed of light squared. But what does that mean? What is energy? What is mass? What is the speed of light? How do all these things fit together? Why should I care? I have no idea what it means...nor do you...because we are not qualified to understand. To qualify one has to go to kindergarten, grade school, high school and take an advanced post-graduate degree in mathematics and physics. It takes about ten years to become a doctor or a lawyer. The medical and laws schools are full of applicants. If people are willing to put so much energy into pursuits that don't even begin to address life's most important issue, much less set them free, why should seekers be unwilling to prepare themselves to understand who they are?

Because there have been enlightened and unenlightened people forever, there has been sufficient time to compare the two categories and discover the differences. The enlightened enjoy particular qualities of mind and heart that, irrespective of the material or social or educational circumstances, brought them to self knowledge. It has also been repeatedly observed that where there is an absence of one or more quality, or where one or more is only partially developed, self knowledge does not happen. Highly qualified people are quickly set free. The partially qualified take longer and it takes ages for those who are barely qualified. The unqualified never get it. We are not trying to scare you and send you off into the arms of the instant enlightenment gurus who say you can just 'get it.' If you get it, you will unget it just as quickly. These qualities are built into every conscious being and can be developed with understanding and practice.

We said that action is an inadequate means for liberation because it is based on the idea that reality is a duality and it does not resolve the issue of doership, but it is an adequate means to prepare the mind for liberation. Vedanta endorses it for that purpose. In subsequent chapters we unfold several practices that qualify the mind to understand. For lack of qualifications you should not walk away from the one teaching that will free you. By the end of this teaching you will be clear about who you are but if you have trouble assimilating what you have heard it is solely due to lack of qualification.

Some time ago I met a young man who had just graduated from one of the world's most prestigious universities. He had six figure job offers from some of the biggest corporations in the world. He had spent the first twenty-five years of his life qualifying for a worldly career. He was exceedingly bright and I could see that he was really motivated to find out who he was. He turned down the job offers and entered the student stage of the tradition which leads to the renunciation through knowledge i.e. liberation. He spent three years getting the understanding and life style in place that would serve to qualify him. This is a fine example of two of the most important qualifications: burning desire for liberation and discrimination. Everyone wants to be free but how badly do you want it? Will you walk away from worldly success without having tasted it...for freedom? Will you commit yourself no matter what it takes? In fact burning desire is discrimination. It means that you have clarity with reference to what you want in life.

Before we list the qualifications we should mention the two basic qualifications, which are actually the same, once more...the understanding that the joy is not in objects and that life is a zero sum game. Very simply it means that you know that life is set up to teach you who you are, not to give you the objects...security, pleasure and virtue etc...that you think you want.

If you want things from life, go for it. There is nothing wrong with it. In fact, chase the objects well and welcome the disappointment that inevitably results. It is a great gift because it qualifies you to seek. Now-a-days you see a lot of young people forgoing careers and families for enlightenment without having actually pursued either. It is not always a mistake but it can be a mistake because you can gain valuable skills in the world that serve well for self inquiry. It often does prove to be a mistake, however, because without the maturity that comes from succeeding and failing in life, seeking can easily degenerate into just another worldly lifestyle, one that binds you tighter than the pursuit of mundane goals because it instils you with the vanity that you are pursuing something extraordinary. Over the years I have met many middle-aged people who fell into the open arms of cults or ran off to ashrams and zendos in their early twenties only to eventually discover that the desire for love or a family or meaningful work was not ameliorated by their spiritual pursuits. Many questioned the validity of the quest for freedom and called off the search prematurely, which is always a mistake.

By living life whole heartedly as it is presented to you, you will inevitably realize the hollowness of worldly pursuits. The shallow billboard life that seems so appealing is only a whirlpool of desire and action. You want things and you do things to get what you want and whether or not you get what you want, the wanting and the doing never stops. The desires and the endless activities are quicksand, slowly sucking the stamina out of you, binding you ever tighter to the wheel of life. In this world there is a loss for every gain, a low for every high, a failure for every

success. You cannot win. Only mature people understand this. The rest are like children, endlessly wanting stuff. They are not qualified to know who they are.

1) Discrimination

The first qualification is discrimination. We use it every day. It is a very valuable quality. On the basis of your likes and dislikes you chose to associate with one person and not another. You buy an apple, not an orange. The recent collapse of the housing market is due to the lack of discrimination. People listened to con men on the TV telling them they could get rich quick and have something for nothing. That markets grow endlessly is totally contrary to common sense. Things grow and shrink. It's also contrary to common sense that you can borrow your way to prosperity. You can collateralize debt, no doubt, but life is uncertain and when you take a chance, you can't guarantee that you won't lose money.

Worldly discrimination is choosing between two apparent realities but Vedantic discrimination is choosing between what's real and what is apparently real.

Definition of Reality

Most people define reality as what they are experiencing. The sun, the moon, the stars and what I think and feel is reality for them. But Vedanta has a different definition. It is: 'what never changes.' This means that someone who thinks that his or her experience and the environment in which he or she is experiencing...life as we know it...is real has a discrimination problem. We pursue objects because we think they are real. If we knew that they weren't real, the pursuit would stop and our relationship with the world would definitely become fruitful. Discrimination is like waking up from a dream. When you are in it you think it is real but when you wake up you enjoy a perspective that renders the dream events unreal.

Every conscious being is made up of two factors, consciousness and matter. Matter changes. Consciousness is the part of you...it is more than a part as we shall see, but for now we will call it a part...that does not change. Everyone actually knows that part. It is what was there

observing your body and mind from birth. It knows all the changes that happened to the body and mind up to the present day. It is your consciousness or awareness. We call that part real. The part that changes...the body and mind...is apparently real. You can never put your finger on something that is never the same from one moment to the next. 'Apparently real' means that it is experienced but has no substance; it is not real. People suffer because they confuse what is apparently real...their bodies and minds and the world around...with the part that is real. The unchanging part is you, the self. If you don't know this, you will say you change when the body and mind change.

There is nothing you can do about either part. It is the nature of the part that changes to change and it is the nature of the part that doesn't change not to change. If you confuse one with the other you will suffer because reality does not care what you think or feel. For example, if you fall in love, and you expect the feeling of love to last, you will be disappointed because that kind of love belongs to the body and mind. When the instruments of experience change, the love changes. If you get angry or depressed because love...or anything else that is subject to time...disappears, whose fault is it? It is only your fault if you have control over it. But you don't. If I understand reality as it is, you will be happy because you will not confuse yourself with the objects appearing in you...what is real with what isn't.

Before we move on, it is important to know that the apparent reality, the part of the self that changes, is not nonexistent. Apparently real does not mean nonexistent. We discussed this point earlier but it is important to repeat it because if you think that it means non-existent, you may think be susceptible to a common spiritual myth: that freedom is not possible if the experience of the world still exists for you. The apparent reality, which is a duality, does not disappear when you know who you are like a dream disappears when you wake up. The changing part of the self always exists. You have to deal with it before enlightenment and you have to deal with it after enlightenment. There is an escape but it is not what you imagine it to be.

The discrimination that qualifies you for Vedanta is the knowledge of the difference between what is real and what is apparently real. A qualified person keeps this distinction in mind always and makes life choices based it. Jesus' statement "On this rock I build my church." means that his life was centered what is eternal, not on the shifting sands of time. If the rock of truth is the foundation of my life I can weather any storm.

An indiscriminating person is someone who stubbornly expects reality to conform to his or her likes and dislikes. Such individuals are not qualified for Vedanta.

2) Dispassion

The next qualification is dispassion. If discrimination is developed, a person will be dispassionate. Dispassion is indifference to the results of action, one's own and those that the field of existence presents.

A passionate person is always emotional about what has happened, what is happening or what is going to happen. He or she is attached to the result of his her actions. When a passionate person doesn't get what he or she wants, he or she feels angry or depressed. If you are very passionate you may even get angry or depressed when the idea that you may not get what you want appears.

Although passion is considered a wonderful quality by the worldly, passionate people will be disturbed unless their passion is channelled into the search for truth. You don't have to dig around in your childhood to find out why you are an emotional mess. You can leave mom and pop out of it. You are emotional because you are not getting what you want in the present. A disturbed mind is not qualified for self inquiry.

Dispassion is a sign of maturity. It is indifference to the results of your actions. How does the doer in you feel about this qualification? He or she is probably not happy with it because the doer is the undeveloped immature part of the psyche: like a child it wants what it wants when it wants it the way it wants it. Dispassion means that you don't care if you get what you want. It is a very rare quality because people's desires make them blind to one of the most obvious but almost always denied facts of life...the results of your actions are not up to you.

Dispassion does not mean that you don't want things and that you don't work to gain them. It means that you work patiently with a quiet mind and leave the results to life. You understand how silly it is to get upset about something over which you have very little control. This quality is absolutely essential for inquirers because one never knows when (and if) you will be set free, assuming that you believe that freedom is for the person...which it is and isn't as we shall see. If you are dispassionate you can do the preparatory work in the right frame of mind.

Another definition of dispassion is objectivity. The apparent reality has two aspects: the subjective and the objective. Money, for example, has an objective value; it can buy practical things that are needed to maintain life. In terms of the world it is real. But it assumes a subjective value if you think that it can remove insecurity. Projecting a subjective value on an object is called superimposition and appears in two forms: 1) mistaking an object for something else and 2) adding a value to an object that is not inherent in the nature of the object. The antidote to passion (for objects) is dispassion. You cannot make yourself dispassionate. You cannot make someone mature. Trying to do so is like prying a rose bud open to reveal its beauty before it is ready to flower. You need to live well with open eyes.

3) Control of the Mind

You don't control the mind by controlling the mind. If you think you are in control please tell me what you will think in five minutes. You do not control it because your conditioning controls it. So what do we mean when we say control of mind? We mean that you understand that because the thoughts and feelings arise and subside on their own, they have nothing to do with you at all. Understanding this fact is control.

The meaning of your life is projected by your conditioning, your values. Feelings and thoughts have no power to disturb you apart from the way you interpret them. How you interpret them depends on your values. Your values are your point of view. If you examine your values, the bad values will fall away and the good values will come to the fore, changing your thoughts and feelings. Merely by observing it, you gain a certain mastery of the mind.

If your mind is not controllable, you should at least control your senses, the next qualification.

4) Control of Senses

Even if your mind is a mess and you can control your senses, at least your outer life will not be a mess. When your outer life is in line with the cosmic order, your inner life tends to follow suit. You can think and feel what you want, but once thoughts and feelings become actions, they are in the hands of the world and they will bounce back to you one way or the other. If your thoughts are not happy the world will not smile at you. If they are, it will.

Attachment to any sense organ can get you in trouble. If you don't like someone and say something nasty, not only will you worry about the outer consequences you will feel guilty for violating the value of non-injury. If you eat, drink, work, have a lot of sex or watch too much TV, you will not succeed at self inquiry. So you must restrain your organs...assuming that you cannot bring them under control with objectivity.

The most important sense to control is the organ of speech because it is through our words that both healthy and unhealthy emotions reach the world. It is not a coincidence that the organ of speech is connected to the fire element and the fire element evolves from rajas, one of the three basic building blocks of nature about which much will be said later. Yes, rajas is desire and longing and it is also anger, thwarted desire. It is an intractable foe because it is a major source of psychological pain. When you cannot resolve the pain with reference to the vision of non-duality, you will try to relieve yourself of it in mechanical ways...physical violence, for example... and you will evolve speech habits that are self insulting and injurious to others. The rules of communication require truthful and pleasant speech in so far as you want to succeed in life. It should be appropriate to the context that requires it and it should add value to the context as well. Just talking to talk is a sign of low self esteem and a waste of energy. When you find yourself in the grip of anger, it is not wise to try to speak loving words. They will not come out properly. Just walk away from the situation.

5) Doing What is Appropriate to your Nature (Svadharmā)

Failure to live up to this value will definitely prevent enlightenment. It is hard to understand and harder to accept because it seems to go against two of society's core values...doing good for others and bettering yourself.

Dharma is a very wonderful and complex concept about which much more will be said in Chapter 8. It needs a lot of unfolding because the word has many meanings. Svadharma means self dharma. Essentially it means doing your duty to yourself. It can refer to your essential nature...limitless awareness...or it can refer to your non-essential nature, the person you think you are. In the context of the discussion on qualifications it means doing your duty to the person you think you are. If you don't take care of that person, you will never realize who you really are.

The World Does not need Fixing

The Bhagavad Gita, one of the three pillars of the Vedanta teaching...perhaps the most important...makes an important statement. It says that to do the duty of another is 'fraught with danger'; it is better to do a third rate job looking after yourself than a first class job looking after someone else. Everybody wants to look good in the eyes of society and society defines virtue as 'making a difference'. It is a warm and fuzzy idea that often leads to mischief in so far as it easily translates into vain attempts to control and manipulate the lives of others according to your idea of what is good for them. Most of us are taught that it is noble to 'sacrifice' for others. But since 'others' follow their own natures irrespective of our wishes at the end of the day, is it any wonder that we feel frustrated, angry and resentful?

It may be news to you but we are not here to save the world. The world is perfect as it is. The good and the bad serve consciousness perfectly. When you understand the big picture you will settle down and look after yourself properly. But when you have the special vanity that you know best...which is actually born of a sense of inferiority...and find yourself 'helping' someone else, you are not actually doing a favour because you are creating a dependent person. The number one spiritual value is self reliance. If you do the thinking for others and take care of their lives, they will not grow. This is not to say that legitimate and occasional demands to help should not be cheerfully responded to or that it is not the duty of parents to mould the lives of their children with love and good values. In the context of the quest for liberation, however, you should ideally avoid relationships that demand constant service, unless it is your nature to serve, a topic which we will consider presently.

They say that life imitates art. The soap operas are a good example of the svadharma problem because they glorify almost every bad value known to man, particularly manipulation. The victims are basically immature none-to-bright people and the victimizers are do-gooders from

hell. As they stab the victims in the back with smarmy smiles and warm embraces say they claim it is for victim's own good. "I am having sex with your wife and cheating you in business because I love you so much. You just can't see it because you are so stupid." The message is obvious: look after yourself. If you don't work out your own stuff, you'll never get freedom.

'Should' is a Bad Word

The second meaning of svadharma is equally important. It means not trying to live up to an ideal. People imitate role models. Worldly women, I suppose, want to be like Angelina Jolie and men want to be like Brad Pitt. Spiritual people try to be like the Dalai Lamas, Ramanas and Amachis of the spiritual world. It is a big mistake to try to be anything other than what you are.

When you don't know that you are whole and complete actionless awareness you either want your circumstances to be different or you want yourself, as you understand it, to be different...or both. Everyone thinks "I should be...I should do..." Should is a very bad word. Whenever you hear the mind thinking 'should' press pause, think about it and hit delete. The road to liberation is not about transcending or denying your little self. It is accepting who you are here and now. If you made mistakes and did bad things, don't punish yourself by doing penance. Understand that if you knew who you really were you would not have done what you did and forgive yourself. Ignorance, not you, is to blame. Understanding this makes forgiveness possible. Then convert the desire to be different into a desire to know who you are, since you are pure and perfect and incapable of harmful actions.

My Relative Nature

Nobody comes here on his or her own. We all appear here once fine day at the behest of a power much greater than ourselves. We arrive programmed with a certain nature. After the basic biological stuff is sorted we differentiate into various types. The creation itself is a vast and complex intelligently designed program that requires the contributions of many mini programs or beings. The world needs thinkers, artists, business people, scientists, workers, saints, criminals, athletes, musicians, warriors, politicians, farmers, managers, administrators, accountants and so on. Plants and animals follow their programs faithfully and human beings are expected to follow theirs too. If they don't, they suffer.

However, owing to a self reflective intellect and the desires and fears that self ignorance engenders, the minds of human beings are not always attuned to their relative natures. In the old days, it was not hard to figure out what you should do. Your actions were more or less determined by socio-economic factors. Your father was a baker, you became a baker. But with the advent of technology and global prosperity it is not always clear what reality requires because options are seemingly limitless. To be sure, there are people who feel inclined to a certain path from childhood and unquestioningly pursue their dream. What should be done is never an issue for them because they are obsessively driven by their programs.

If I do not know what my svadharma is, I do not know how to respond appropriately. Travelling the world as I do and meeting hundreds of people I never cease to be amazed at how many people, even adults in their forties and fifties, are uncertain of what they should be doing. If this is the case, you can safely actualize your relative self by responding to the rules governing the immediate situation in a disinterested spirit.

Doing whatever is to be done at a given place and in a given situation, whether you like it or not, is svadharma. For example, it is a mistake to override your svadharma because of a need for security. Taking an unhealthy job just to pay the rent is not always the best course of action. Sometimes it is appropriate to resolve security related conflicts by taking a chance and following your heart (and perhaps suffering privation) or alternatively to perform the unwanted job in the karma yoga spirit, about which much will be said later. Karma yoga is the best way to qualify for liberation irrespective of the type of activity you perform.

Through dharma yoga we master our likes and dislikes. Doing what we like is not always appropriate and avoiding what we don't like is not always appropriate either. To break the hold of your likes and dislikes you need to do what the situation requires and avoid doing what is not required. Exercising this understanding in every situation builds self esteem. It empowers you and makes you feel successful because you have done what is right, not just what is expedient. The battle is over when you stand up to your desires and fears.

6) Single Pointedness

This quality is meant to correct two not unrelated and unhelpful tendencies of the mind: multitasking and too many interests. They are both born of greed and render the mind unfit for

inquiry. The mind is curious. It is its nature to wander. If it does not wander you will not know anything. It is like a video camera, not a still camera. It is momentary, a series of energized images. But this tendency is not always helpful for self inquiry.

It needs the ability to hold the mind on a given topic for a considerable period of time. The only topic for those of us looking for freedom is the self because it is the only free thing! The way to keep it in mind is to bring it back to the teachings over and over until the tendency to wander is curbed. Contemplate your desires and fears in light of them until daily life conforms to the inquiry. One needs to see that inquiry is not just an occasional activity...or one among many... that is done when one is bored or unhappy.

All the qualifications are related. Seekers famously complain about their inability to focus on the self and are continually looking for new techniques to make focusing easier. Difficulty focusing is a values issue. Does anyone have difficulty focusing on sex? No, because it is highly valued. Failure to focus means that clarity with reference to what you want, in our case freedom, is not the number one priority. When freedom is the number one value concentration takes care of itself.

7) Forbearance

Forbearance is objectivity toward pain of all kinds without anxiety, complaint or attempt at revenge. It only applies to situations that we can do nothing about. In other situations you should act to change them if you can. Understanding that people cannot be changed but giving them the freedom to be what they are and setting up boundaries to take care of yourself is forbearance.

This qualification creates a simple life. These days society is highly complicated and neurotic. Our sense of entitlement knows no bounds. We feel empowered to whine and complain from dawn to dusk about petty things. Our likes and dislikes are out of control. Luxuries have become necessities, our lives complicated and our minds shattered. These small things are not worthy of attention. My teacher used to call them 'life's little pinpricks.' Suffering them in good humour is necessary. If trivial things ...body odors, unaesthetic landscapes, a messy room, dirty dishes, wrinkled clothing, incompetent or needy people, sounds from the street, a missed

connection, a catty remark or a mistake on your bank statement...upsets you, you need to work on this qualification.

I love my wife. My wife loves her mother. My mother in law does not love me for various reasons. She wants to visit her daughter on the weekend. I am stuck indoors because of an accident at work. We are going to have to spend two days under the same roof. Should I make a big issue of my bad feelings and react to hers or should I let the feelings slide? If I let them slide and treat my mother in law politely, I am a forbearing person. If I seek every opportunity to let her know how I 'really' feel, I am not qualified for self inquiry.

8) Devotion

The qualifications...dispassion, single pointedness, burning desire, discrimination, etc. and devotion are intimately related, more or less different ways of looking at the same thing. Devotion is love of truth, love of knowledge. It means that my emotional power is squarely behind my quest for freedom. It is a positive value. I am not devoted solely because my suffering demands it...although it does; I am devoted to inquiry because I love truth.

I am always puzzled how parents can suffer so much misery at the hands of their children. I find it almost impossible to put up with my own needy mind for more than a few minutes so the only explanation for a twenty plus year commitment to the needy minds of two or three others...not to mention that parents often stay devoted to their children for as long as they live...can only be devotion. Devotion knows no pain. It is steady and deep and overcomes everything.

9) Faith

Some say faith is the number one qualification. The faith that qualifies you for self inquiry is very simple and it is not blind. Vedanta says that there is nothing wrong with you on any level. Even your self ignorance is not your fault. The faith that is asked of you is the belief that you are pure and perfect...pending the result of your scripture-based inquiry.

Toward the end of the cold war the Russians said “Trust us, we are destroying our nuclear weapons.” And the Americans said, “We trust you, but we would like to see for ourselves.” Even if you believe you are bound, you should live as if you are free...and see if reality doesn't support you one hundred percent. Experience may say it doesn't, but knowledge says it does. If you continually doubt, it will compromise your ability to hear, reflect and assimilate the teachings. There is no happiness for doubters.

Studies of people who have faith in God have found that on balance those who believed in God are happier than those who don't even though neither the believers or the non-believers know who or what God is. So you have to trust the teaching and the teacher.

10) Burning Desire for Freedom

One day a disciple asked his guru to talk about burning desire for freedom. The guru said, “Never mind. It is not important.” The disciple was very intelligent and curious and not one to be dismissed so he asked again and again he got the same reply.

A few days later they were at the riverbank taking a bath. The bathing ritual involves dunking oneself three times in the water. On the third dunk the guru jumped on top of the disciple, put his foot on his back, grabbed his arm and held him tightly on the river bottom as he struggled to get free, releasing him just a second before he was about to drown. The disciple was very angry and was about to give his guru a good beating. The guru agreed to take his punishment but not before he asked the disciple this question, “What were you thinking when you were down there on the bottom of the river?” The disciple that he definitely wasn't thinking but the guru insisted that he was. They argued for a minute or two until the disciple asked, “OK, what was I thinking?”

“You had one thought and one thought alone,” the guru replied.

“What was it?” said the disciple.

“Air,” the guru said. “Your only thought was ‘I want to breathe.’ Wanting liberation with the same intensity you wanted air is burning desire.”

Everyone says they want to be free but on this issue you need to be very honest with yourself. Is your desire, piddling, middling or burning?

A Qualified Teacher

So far we have a valid means of knowledge and a qualified student. You also need a qualified teacher. As mentioned previously you cannot teach Vedanta to yourself. Reading books and listening to unqualified teachers does not work. It is natural to begin your journey in this way but there is an obvious downside: your ignorance will cause you to interpret what you read.

An enlightened person is not necessarily a qualified teacher and a qualified teacher is not necessarily enlightened! If my teaching is nothing more than me and my enlightenment story... what I did, what happened to me... is not going to work for you. My enlightenment and the conclusions I draw from it do not amount to a teaching because the problem is generic ignorance. The solution for self ignorance is self knowledge and knowledge is not personal.

Walk the Talk

Enlightenment has no meaning apart from how you live. It is quite amazing in this day and age that the 'crazy wisdom' idea still has legs. "Do as I say, not as I do," is not a teaching. What use is enlightenment if it amounts to nothing more than a license for the ego to indulge its cravings? It is quite sad that so many teachers have compromised themselves over the years and given truth a bad name over the most banal vices: money, sex, fame, or power. One imagines that the vices of the enlightened should somehow be more exotic.

When someone sits in front of you on a throne with hundreds of people staring at them and the 'energy' is wonderful, you are tempted to imagine that they are very enlightened. In reality you know nothing about who they really are. A pleasing image and good feelings is all you require. A discriminating seeker is a fly on the wall and buzzes unobtrusively into the life of a teacher to see if he or she shines outside the limelight. Find out where the money goes. Listen to the gossip with discrimination; often where there is smoke there is fire. Public figures are always suspect. They often suffer low self esteem and are clever at creating an image of themselves as caring souls, but a healthy dose of suspicion is warranted. The more 'spiritual' they are, the greater should be your doubt. Like patriotism, spirituality is also a popular refuge for scoundrels.

We teach by precept and example. Only an extremely advanced, highly qualified person can get the knowledge from a rogue...if at all. Freedom talk is seductive and cheap, but who is actually free? When you meet a free person, you can feel it. There is a lightness, an unconcernedness, an ascetic simplicity to them that is unmistakable. They never have an agenda.

You should run fast when a teacher tries to recruit you. You should run twice as fast when a teacher tells you what to do. A teacher is someone who reveals the truth. If you see the truth, it will do the work for you. Who are you if your self confidence is so low that you cannot figure out how to live your life? A teacher who asks you to surrender to him or her...or accepts your slavish personal devotion is an immature human being, not a teacher, no matter how glorious he or she appears to be...as are you for offering it. You need be only a devotee of the truth... nothing else. If you are devoted to the truth alone, you will not be given a bad teacher.

A teacher who allows you to become dependent is not a teacher. He or she is power hungry. And a teacher who tries to hang on to you when you want to leave...tries to convince you that you are compromising your enlightenment...is a scoundrel. A real teacher will be happy to see you leave, knowing full well that life is the best teacher and that you will be back, not necessarily to him or her, but to the teaching. If the teacher is on the level and the teaching works...like Vedanta...you should feel more and more free of the teacher as the teaching progresses. A few weeks after I met my teacher he said, "Sit down and listen. We will have you out of here as quickly as possible because you are taking up valuable space that someone else can use."

A teacher who expects you to believe his or her words based on an epiphany you have had in his or her presence is not a teacher. A teacher who convinces you that your ego needs busting or that your mind needs to be destroyed is very dangerous. Fame does not a teacher make; groups of people can be as deluded as individuals. You will notice that the teachers around whom cults of personality develop invariably make the mind the enemy. Whenever a doubt happens, you are told that it is just 'mind' and asked to dismiss it. If you find yourself with this kind of teacher and teaching, it means that he or she does not have a valid means of knowledge and is power hungry or needy. It is amazing how many popular teachers actually need your love. If you feel that a teacher needs you for any reason, head for the hills. You are asking for trouble. A true teacher is dispassionate and self fulfilled and has nothing to gain by teaching you.

A teacher who teaches silence does not have a teaching. Silence is happy with ignorance. A teacher who teaches experiential enlightenment is not a teacher because you are always

experiencing the self; there is always only consciousness. Finally, a teacher who does not present the downside of his or her teaching is not a teacher. Many teachers, for example, tout tantra as a means of enlightenment. Perhaps tantra as it is conceived in its entirety is a useful indirect path for qualified people. However, sexual tantra...the most popular practice...barely deserves mention in so far as it is only one of many techniques. Sexual tantra works as far as non-dual epiphanies go...if you are lucky. However, sexual tantra...which is a perfect set up for unfulfilled immature egos...has a glaring problem. The technique that gives you the experience of non-duality produces attachment to the technique! You become attached to sex, not the knowledge of non-duality which should absorb your mind. Fixing the mind on the self is self inquiry. Instead it is concerned with the next sexual episode.

It is the duty of a teacher to warn against attachment and offer techniques like karma yoga that destroy attachment instead of feeding it. Instead, unscrupulous teachers use this teaching to attract thousands and further their pursuit of fame and fortune which usually leads to their undoing and to serious damage to their followers. Only Vedanta fearlessly points out the downside of everything to help you develop dispassion. Were we interested in attracting people, we would avoid informing seekers of the long list of qualifications enumerated in this chapter.

I understand that it may be difficult to hear this message but keep in mind that these statements are in harmony with a teaching that has worked for thousands of years, that is as solid as the truth on which it is based. Your confidence is a valuable asset. Don't squander it on damaged goods.

I tout Vedanta because it worked for me and it has worked for many others since time immemorial but don't think that you need Vedanta as I present it to get free...although you do need self knowledge, however it comes to you. Vedanta is only a means of knowledge. If you are qualified and invoke consciousness properly, you will be set free, whoever and wherever you are...Vedanta be damned. We do not look down on other paths, nor do we feel superior because our vehicle is beautifully efficient and others less so. Do what you will and seek as you see fit but don't discount these teachings.

At the expense of gilding the lily I repeat: the spiritual market place is a human institution, imperfect in every way. Because your options are limited, you find yourself in it by no fault of your own. You can wander in it for twenty plus years and realize that the means available to you are faulty. And although it was not your intention and you had no idea how to seek when you began, you may have actually qualified yourself while you were there. All seeking is a mistake

but it is a good mistake. We call it a 'leading error' because it may very well indirectly lead you to where you need to be. Do not be surprised if Vedanta comes to you and you appreciate its beauty. Years ago in San Francisco I saw a poster with a guru's smiling face that said, "Come to me when you are already happy." Whether the teacher was just fed up with unhappy people or whether he actually understood something, there is truth to it. Vedanta works when you are ready to stop seeking.

Finally, keep in mind that there are also teachers who know the truth, know they are the truth and live dharmic lives but do not have a legitimate means of self knowledge. It is not the kiss of death to associate with them; you can gain much. And do not lament if you have been used and abused at the hands of a spiritual teacher. Take it as a gift and don't give up. When the time is right the right teacher will appear.

The Grace of God

So I have a qualified means of knowledge, I am qualified myself and I have a compassionate teacher who wields the means of knowledge skillfully. Case closed, right? Wrong. One more factor needs to be taken into account...grace. Our enlightenment is meant as much as a service to the total as it is a personal liberation. God knows the needs of the total and caters to the needs of the total so that you will get your enlightenment when God wants it, not before. The conclusion to be drawn: expose your mind to the teaching at every opportunity, work sincerely and cheerfully on yourself and stop worrying about the result.

Before we teach the self we should review what we have learned so far. It is vitally important that you understand the complete logic of the teaching. You should go back and read the first four chapters again but let's review what has been said so far because repetition is the best way to cement the knowledge.

A Short Summary

I know the joy is not in the object. I know the joy is in the subject, me, the self. I want to pursue the self directly so I can enjoy the fullness that comes from knowing who I am rather than taking temporary bits of happiness from objects and situations. Therefore, I become a seeker of liberation.

The experiential approach exhorts you to do practices that are meant to get you enlightened. The pathless path of knowledge is based on the idea that you are already free but don't appreciate this fact. If you don't understand who you are, you need a means of knowledge that will reveal it to you.

The first approach is unworkable because people have limited desire and knowledge and their actions produce limited results. They want a limitless result...freedom...but cannot perform actions that produce limitlessness.

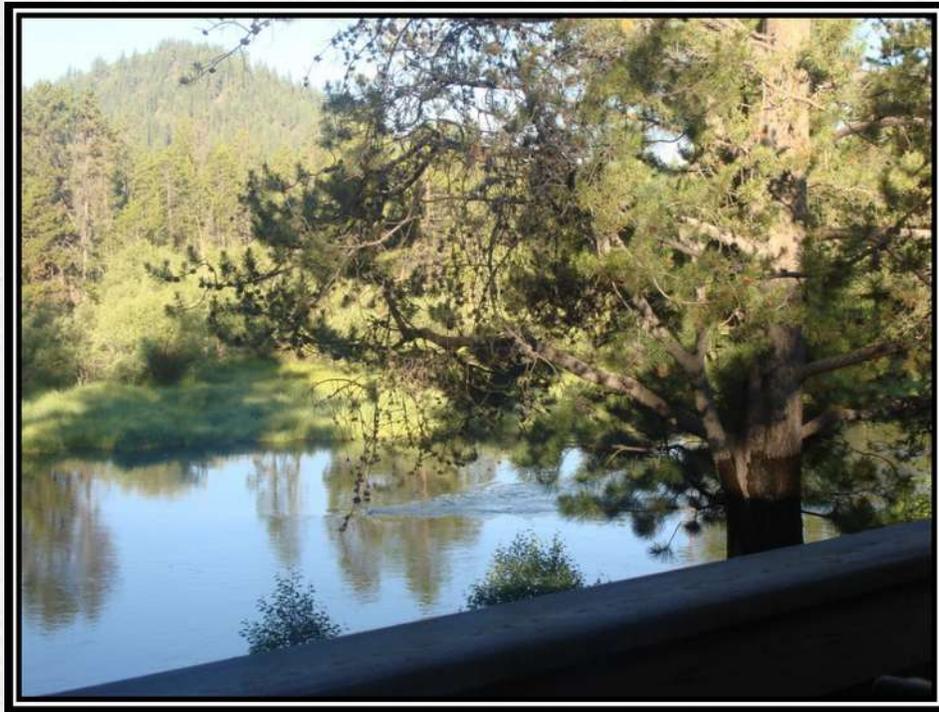
The way out of this conundrum is to put the doer to work doing something that does work... inquiry. Inquiry works because the result of inquiry is knowledge, not action. Knowledge sets you free because you are already free. The knowledge that I am free, that I am whole and complete is freedom assuming it negates the doer and renders the doer's conditioning unbinding. Once it is firm, self knowledge doesn't require maintenance. Experience requires constant maintenance, so seeking never stops. Once self knowledge is firm, the compulsion to do stops and you don't do what you do for happiness, you do what you do happily.

We said knowledge requires a means of knowledge and that our God given means are inadequate because the self is not an object of knowledge. So consciousness, not people, revealed and evolved Vedanta, a proven means. It removes the lack of clarity about your wholeness, your completeness. Knowledge only sticks in a prepared, qualified mind and it needs to be worked on you by a qualified teacher.

Lesson 4 Qualifications - Questions

1. Why do most modern 'non-dual' teachers and teachings ignore the qualifications?
2. Why do most seekers dislike the idea of qualifications?
3. (A) Are the qualifications arbitrary? (B) On what basis are the qualifications determined?
4. What are the two basic qualifications unfolded in Chapter 1?
5. Discrimination is separating what is real from what is apparently real. What is the definition of reality?
6. If experience is not real because it changes, what ontological status does experience enjoy? Give an example.
7. Why is discrimination necessary for liberation?
8. Dispassion is defined as indifference to what happens, i.e. the results of one's actions and the actions of others. Why is it necessary for liberation?
9. Why does the doer find dispassion so difficult to achieve?
10. Give two examples of superimposition.
11. Mind control is control of your relationship to your thoughts. Why is it not control of the thoughts themselves?
12. If you can't control your mind by observation why should you control your actions?
13. Svadharma means doing your duty to yourself. It appears in several unhelpful forms. Name two.
14. Svadharma means responding to life according to who you are as a person. Why is it necessary to act out your conditioning?
15. Multitasking and a wandering mind disqualify a seeker of liberation. What is the solution?
16. What is the reason keeping the mind focused on the self is difficult?
17. What is forbearance?
18. Vedanta requires faith. Why is it not blind faith?

19. Vedantic faith is faith pending the result of inquiry. It requires faith in two objects. What are they?
20. Why is burning desire for liberation the most important quality?
21. Why do you need a teacher and an impersonal teaching?
22. Why is a teaching derived from an individual's interpretation of his or her spiritual experience(s) not a valid means of liberation?
23. Why is sitting in silence not a suitable teaching for liberation?
24. A qualified inquirer, an impersonal time-tested means of knowledge and a qualified teacher are three factors required for liberation. What is the fourth?



With much love, Ram and Sundari