



## 9. ANANDA WOOD

Ananda Wood is a disciple of the Sage Sri Atmananda Krishna Menon (1883 - 1959). He was born in 1947 of mixed parentage (mother Indian national of Parsi descent, father English national of Irish descent). His upbringing and school education took place in Mumbai, India. He obtained his bachelors degree in mathematics and theoretical physics at King's College, Cambridge, UK and his doctorate in anthropology (with specialization in Indian tradition) at the University of Chicago, USA. After his university education, he returned home to India, where he worked for some years as a junior industrial executive. He has now settled down to work from home in the city of Pune, on a long-standing interest in the modern interpretation of Advaita philosophy. He is married, but with no children.

[www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/ananda\\_wood/ananda\\_wood.htm](http://www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/ananda_wood/ananda_wood.htm)

## INTERVIEW

***Q: What are your thoughts on charging for Advaita teachings?***

Ananda Wood: Very problematic. I can't see that Advaita teaching can rightly be conducted as a commercial transaction in the world.

Did Krishna Menon ever charge for teachings or accept gifts and donations of any kind?

Ananda Wood: This is of course a tricky question. In trying to address it, perhaps the best I can do is to tell you what I have heard about an income tax case in India: concerning a home that was built for my teacher, Shri Atmananda, by his disciple John Levy.

John Levy was an architect by training, and from a sense of gratitude for what he had learned from Shri Atmananda, he wanted to do something in return. So John Levy bought a property in the Kerala countryside and there built a home, which he handed over to Shri Atmananda.

The income tax department's case was that this handing over of property from guru to disciple amounted to a payment for a service that had been rendered by

the teaching. Shri Atmananda was himself an accomplished and well-respected lawyer, and thus spoke on his own behalf.

The judge who heard the case knew Shri Atmananda well, as an upright lawyer. So he asked: "You have done something by way of teaching a disciple, and the disciple has recompensed you by gifting you this property. So why should this not be taken as a payment for which income tax is due?"

Shri Atmananda replied with a request for latitude, to describe the Guru-disciple relationship by way of an analogy. He pointed out that when wet clothes are put out in the sun, they are not dried by anything that the sun has done for them. Instead, they get dried by the very nature of the sun, which is to shine with radiant energy. There is no quid pro quo here. The shining of the sun is not a personal or a commercial transaction, done for the sake of some expected or required reward. So too, the Guru's teaching is no personal doing or service, for which any payment can be due in the world. The teaching comes about from the Guru's true nature, which is essentially impersonal. It is thus purely spiritual, beyond all transacted personality.

Needless to say, the judge could not accept this argument and ruled against Shri Atmananda, so that the income tax was duly paid (through donations by some well-off disciples).

What you make of all this is of course up to you. I personally think of it as a very delicate issue; which somehow needs to be thus delicately judged, in an essentially spiritual relationship between teacher and disciple.

***Q: Would this be considered guru dakshina?***

Ananda Wood: Yes, Shri Atmananda was quite clear that Guru dakshina is not rightly treated as a commercial transaction in the world.

Are there any exceptions to this rule that you know of? When is it ok to make a transaction of some kind for atma vichara? A special circumstance perhaps?

***Q: What about Jean Kline, wasn't he a student of Shri Atmananda?***

Ananda Wood: No, I don't quite know what Jean Kline's relationship was with Shri Atmananda.

***Q: Is there a reason why Atma Darshan isn't available in print anymore? Did he leave any instructions on keeping this book private or not to be taught to others for some reason?***

Ananda Wood: No, not so far as I know. The copyright for Atma Darshan, Atma Nirvriti and other works of Shri Atmamanda and his disciples passed by normal family inheritance to Shri Atmananda's eldest son, Shri Adwayananda. After Shri Atmananda's passing, the eldest son went on to accept many disciples, who identified the father and son as essentially the same teacher and rather demanded that Shri Atmananda's disciples make this identification. So far as my family and I are concerned, there never has been any question of acceding to this demand, and we have been treated with some suspicion accordingly.

Before Shri Adwayananda's passing, he went on to nominate his grandson as his successor and he is currently the President of what is now called the Shri Atmananda Trust. As I understand the current legal position, the copyright for Shri Atmananda's works vests with the Shri Atmananda Trust and hence with the Shri Atmananda Trust President who is Shri Atmananda's great grandson.

***Q: Is it traditional in India to copyright these Advaita teachings?***

Ananda Wood: No. Advaita is taught from individual teacher to individual disciple by direct personal contact. And it most certainly can't be legislated in any worldly institution. It is essentially a matter between teacher and disciple, completely outside any legal institution. Shri Atmananda was quite clear on that. When asked about succession by a teacher after him, he said plainly in Malayalam, his native language: "ivite paramparayilla". Translated into English, it means simply: "There is no succession here." But his eldest son's disciples and followers would disagree.

**END OF INTERVIEW**