



24. DENNIS WAITE

Educated in Chemistry, Dennis Waite worked until 2000 in computing, after which he began writing. His books to date are: *The Book of One* (2003), extensively revised in 2010; *The Spiritual Seeker's Essential Guide to Sanskrit* (India, 2005); *How to Meet Yourself* (2007); *Back to the Truth* (2007); *Enlightenment: the Path through the Jungle* (2008). His most recent book is 'Advaita Made Easy', which is scheduled for publication in July, 2012. The above is the second chapter of this book. Dennis maintains the most popular website on Advaita at www.advaita.org.uk, which has been redesigned and extended as Advaita Vision.

INTERVIEW

Q: Can you please tell me about how money is exchanged for the traditional teachings of Advaita Vedanta? Is it through alms, dana, tithes and offerings, suggested donation or by some other means?

Dennis Waite: John, I am not actually the best person to answer this, since I don't really have direct dealings with any teachers.

Traditionally, of course, sampradAya teachers would be sannyasins, meaning that they would have renounced all possessions and money would be of no interest to them at all. If they were 'attached' to an organization such as an ashram or math, then their needs (accommodation, food, etc) would be looked after by the organizers, who would make collections of money, or receive offerings from visitors to cover essentials. And, if a traditional teacher should travel then, again, those organizing would obtain funds from attendees or whoever to cover the costs of travel etc. But the teacher himself would not have anything to do with money. And, as regards amounts, the traditional approach would be to accept only what the seeker was able/willing to offer, and not to demand a fixed fee. Teaching would never be refused to someone unable to pay.

In modern times, where someone is qualified to teach (self-realized and knowledgeable in the scriptures) but is not a saMnyAsin, it is perfectly ok for them to teach and request donations to support their essential needs – food, travel, clothes and so on. The guidance would be that they should not be aiming to 'profit' from their teaching, and again should not refuse teaching to someone unable to afford to make any donation. There's a nice quote from Jed McKenna: "It may be true that the price of truth is everything, but true don't pay the bills. In the commercial model, the price of truth is whatever you can comfortably afford."

Q: What about contemporary neo-Advaita teachers that may be “self-realized” as they say, but also unknowledgeable in terms of the scriptures. What does the tradition of Vedanta have to say about this?

Dennis Waite: Your first question seems a bit loaded. If you are talking about ‘neo advaita teachers’ as I have defined them in ‘Jungle’, then they are mostly trying to speak about absolute reality. And this is not possible. They usually refuse to talk about ‘individual persons’ and ‘seeking’ or ‘teaching’. So, effectively by definition, what they have to say cannot be very useful unless one already appreciates where they are coming from. In order to teach, one has to have a method and the ‘method’ of most modern teachers is a ‘non-method’. So, to answer the question, it is ok to charge money if those paying are going along to be entertained. But if someone is paying in order to gain self-knowledge, then they are mostly being seriously misled and one cannot really condone such action on the part of the ‘teachers’. Even when these make it clear up front that they are ‘not teaching anything’, I think that many of those attending will not take that as a literal statement but as somehow part of what is being taught. And I rather think that, in many cases, that is intentional.

Q: What are your thoughts on western celebrity teachers, like Eckhart Tolle, who charges relatively exorbitant fees?

Dennis Waite: Regarding people like Eckhart Tolle, the situation is a bit different. He does have some useful things to say regarding attitude and mental preparation. And his first book (I haven’t read any others) deserved its success. (Mind you, there are lots of other books that are equally or more deserving but didn’t receive all the favorable publicity and marketing!) But I do feel that all of the hype now surrounding him and all of the money presumably being made is reprehensible. The value of his teaching, as far as enlightenment is concerned, nowhere near merits the exposure that he

is getting and, unless all of the money is going to deserving causes, it also seems somewhat immoral.

You mention Swami Dayananda. He is a giant compared to teachers in both categories. Yet his organization retains its charitable status and, as far as I am aware, all monies go towards valid maintenance or deserving causes.

In genuine teaching, no individual makes any monetary gain, rather they give up their time and effort for love of the truth and the desire to communicate it to others. Not altogether serious, but perhaps the best advice to a seeker is to gauge the value of a teacher by the amount charged for attending the talks... but in inverse proportion!

Q: What are your thoughts on this SAND? Science and non duality conference and this statement?

"Since the Scientific Revolution, when empirical discoveries began to undermine religious doctrine, tension grew between those who sought truth through rational inquiry based on observation and those who accepted truths based on the authority of religious dogma."

Dennis Waite: SAND is inspired about creating and growing a community/movement of likeminded individuals believing that the time has come for the fragmentation of knowledge we have seen over the last four hundred years to give way to a new paradigm in which science and spirituality reenter into a meaningful dialogue with one another. Spirituality need not be at odds with scientific inquiry — a new kind of integration is possible. What is required for this reintegration is an empirically-

responsible spirituality, one that is not beholden to dogma or authority, and a more humanistic science, one that is willing to consider the big questions of life.

The statement from the SAND promotion sums up the fundamental problem: “Since the Scientific Revolution, when empirical discoveries began to undermine religious doctrine, tension grew between those who sought truth through rational inquiry based on observation and those who accepted truths based on the authority of religious dogma.”

There are these explicit assumptions that only the scientific method can lead to the truth and that ancient scriptures are necessarily out of date and cannot be relied upon in any way.

But what these attitudes completely ignore is that the fact that ‘everything is Brahman’ and the fact that ‘I am That’ can never be arrived at by observation and inquiry. The only way to find out about this is by being told or by reading about it. Initially, of course, one is bound to be totally skeptical, since it is so counterintuitive and entirely against what we observe and think we know. So there has to be further explanation from, and discussion with, someone who has already realized the truth of this for themselves. Hence the traditional ‘methodology’ of shravaNa, manana and nididhyAsana. Scientists and neo-advaitins may not like this but there is no alternative.

END OF INTERVIEW