

Relationships and Freedom

Hi James,

Thanks for taking the time with this. I appreciate it. Text is a bad medium and probably only face to face discussion is best. However, I make some comments on some of your ideas. Sorry if they appear abrupt or rude. It is not my intention. I am just saying how it is from my perspective. Thanks again

Terrance

Hi Terrance,

Here are some comments and questions about the relationship issue from the Vedanta perspective. You say *"it is inevitable that your deeper loving emotions over time are going to get involved and I wouldn't want it any other way."* My question is: why would you want to get attached in love to another person? This does not necessarily presuppose that spiritually there is anything 'right' or 'wrong' with seeking 'incredible closeness' to use your words. What I'm getting at is this: what is lacking in your life that you should want this kind of situation? Do you feel that if you could achieve this situation you would be satisfied with yourself and with life?

Terrance: I don't see this as something lacking at all, Relationship (not dependency) is to me the natural state of people. My question is: why would you not want it? It is rewarding, satisfying and enjoyable. Who said anything about me not being satisfied with my life as it is? It is an extension of my life.

James: OK, that's good. I was not looking for a particular answer. I am not trying to tell you anything. For me, I don't want a relationship, nor do I not want one. I am the same with one or without one. Relationships and the absence of relationships have both an upside and a downside.

Terrance: To get hurt later, for whatever reason, is simply reflective of the depth of love that you have enjoyed and is the flip side of the same coin. It is something I would welcome if the choice is to remain distant and not enjoy the incredible closeness of such a union with someone.

Ram: Is non-involvement with someone the only other option, assuming that happiness in love is your goal? Do you know of any other way to achieve the feeling/experience that you are looking for without involving another person in this way?

Terrance: No, non-involvement is not the only option. I really think we are at cross purposes here. You say you are completely happy without that form of connection to others, but is that really healthy?

James: Nobody is free of connection to others. If the essence of relationship is love, then it is available through many kinds of relationships. The involvement I am questioning is the idea of passionate commitment to another or to a relationship because you cannot count on any object to provide you with happiness. But if you are willing to take the bitter with the sweet, as you seem to be, more power to you.

Terrance: All I am saying is that to generalize is obviously wrong. If I enter into a relationship it is from the point of strength, not because I have to but because I want to, not to own or impose my will on someone but because both want it. I do not in any way see that negatively and have only seen growth, maturity and strength come from it. If the relationship stops some grieving is likely, as you well know. It is inevitable.

James: I agree. If you are confident in yourself and see everything as an opportunity for growth relationships can be very satisfying.

Terrance: As regards making love (not sex) I really can't believe that you can remain unattached, without performing some sort of blocking or emotional or mental gymnastics.

James: You can, but I am not asking you to believe it. Most people can't and most wouldn't if they could. People like attachment. Personally, I don't. The upside of an attached relationship is obviously intimacy, but what is the downside? Even a rudimentary knowledge of human psychology suggests the downside is a loss of freedom.

Terrance: Loss of freedom, that takes the cake!. It sounds like a commitment issue! Give and take in any relationship is only right. With all due respect, is the self your only goal? It sounds very selfish. Obviously, if you feel controlled, you should get out. It is a different issue.

James: We are talking about two different selves, Terrance. The self I'm talking about includes everyone. What you say is true considering your view of the self.

James: To maintain this kind of intense 'deep' relationship you would have to constantly micromanage it in so far as when your love object's interest strayed for whatever reason, you would have to try to get it back on you. This means that you would have to continually monitor both your own feelings and your love objects feelings about the value of the relationship. It would require pretty much constant adjustments to keep the love bubble afloat since it depends on conditioned factors.

Terrance: No, you need to work together to maintain a relationship and give freedom. You don't ever own anyone.

James: That's a mature view. However, this is my point about attachment. As you say, you have to 'work' to remain free.

James: Aside from the fact that you do not have control of what you feel, nor does any love object (in so far as these feelings come from an unconscious source that is influenced by myriad factors), you are asking for trouble because in the realm of emotions love can easily turn to not love, or much stronger negative emotions. Why does this happen? Because freedom is the most desirable goal of everyone.

Terrance: I don't see how such a union brings lack of freedom. You have a new relationship and a freedom together to explore from a different joint, fresh perspective. Are you seriously telling me that couples can't be free and yet together?

James: The spiritual definition of freedom is freedom from dependency on anything - objects or relationships. This does not mean in any way that you can't have loving relationships, it just means you do not depend on them for your happiness. Attachment always carries the risk of dependency. Everyone enjoys their innate spiritual freedom and to have someone hanging on you, expecting you to 'be there' for them whenever they are needy or lonely is a real deal breaker. If you know who you are and secure in the uncaused bliss that is your nature, you can love purely without attachment. You are not a burden to the other. What better way to make someone happy than to give them the space to be who they are.

Usually, the subtext of the romantic 'I love you' idea is 'I need you.'" In fact, most of what is called love is just need dressed up in fancy romantic language. It's fine to be needed. It's fine to be attached to someone if that is what you want and you can find someone as needy as you are. The problem with relationships with spiritual types is that by definition they are seeking freedom. It is the goal of spiritual life. So they are particularly wary of relationships, particularly passionate romantic ones. Most of them have been in relationships and are trying to find a different solution to the love problem, the freedom problem. They are trying to find the love and the freedom within themselves.

James: Why would someone want a deep emotional bond with someone else, if it did not free them from some sense of lack or insufficiency?

Terrance: I really don't understand the question at all..why not? And there is no deep emotional need, just the joy of relationship.

James: It's not clear that you want a relationship because not having one is not satisfying? Let's put it this way: a person who is fulfilled will not long to be attached to another person.

Terrance: Big big assumption here, what sort of fulfillment?

James: Happy in themselves. If you need someone else to be fulfilled, you will become attached to the person who you believe is fulfilling you. If you are fulfilled, you can take or leave others. In relationships you may solve the intimacy problem but you may just as well create a freedom problem. It will be a big sacrifice for a spiritual person whose ostensible existential goal is freedom.

Terrance: Hold the bus, I wouldn't enter into a relationship with a non spiritual person. A large amount of my personal spiritual journey and growth has occurred in relationship... and out. When the relationship turned out to be destructive, it ended, so in that sense you are right. However, lessons have even been learnt from that and there is growth again.

James: Yes, spiritual growth does not depend on relationships with others. It is how you assimilate whatever life puts in front of you. I had one unsuccessful relationship in my early twenties. I have had quite a few since then and everyone has been successful no matter how they ended because I was not looking for a relationship to fulfill me.

Hi James.

Thanks for your reply. It seems to me like so many of these discussions that what each of us understands by a particular word needs to be clarified.

James: Yes, indeed.

Terrance: So, let's see if I have got this right. If you are enlightened and therefore not dependent, relationships are possible and should in theory not lead to dependency...

James: That they should not lead to dependency presupposes that the individuals are consciously seeking freedom. However, most relationships spring out of unconscious factors, the most powerful of which is the need for emotional security. So there is a built in unacknowledged bias towards dependency which conflicts with the equally powerful need for freedom. In general people want both and therein lies the rub. It takes a particularly savvy individual to manage both impulses.

Terrance....although you may still need to work at that as human emotions etc do vary.

James: Yes. I think the reason so few relationships endure is that the human being is a work in progress. He or she comes from an indeterminate point and is growing to an

equally indeterminate point. And the factors that have gone into shaping the individual's values and needs, beliefs and knowledge are never the same. In addition, the field of life, particularly these days, is changing so rapidly it is very difficult to keep both lives on the same track.

Terrance: However, the only major difference between us appears to be that I want/desire/enjoy a relationship and you do not. There is no right or wrong in that it almost seems a question of personal choice.

James: I didn't say I don't want one. I said that I know that no relationship can complete me. But yes, absolutely. Anyone is free to choose to be in one or out of one...or something else altogether. There are no rules. I have found that the availability of potential relationships increases astronomically when you don't want one, in so far as people tend to want to be with happy people. They do not want the pressure of making someone else happy. They want to share their happiness with another happy person. When you accept an emotionally needy person you have a certain obligation to fulfill their desires. And this may not always be possible, particularly if you have other strong desires, like a career.

Terrance: The rest I think if we met we would find we actually agree, although my arrival at these conclusions seems to have taken a different path.

James: We are all human beings trying to sort out the existential riddle and will eventually come to the same conclusions irrespective of the paths we take.

Terrance. Intriguing ideas, I have to say. All the best.