

Non-Dual Love

by Sundari

Non-Dual Love Is Who You Are

“Non-dual love” as it relates to relationships is not a common term in the spiritual world. We have been asked if we “invented” it, and in a way we did. I had never heard it used before, nor had James. We coined the term when we came together in love in 2011, in what we called “rising in love.” We did not see our coming together as “falling in love,” which is the common term used to express relationship love, because anything you fall into you will fall out of. There is no falling out of non-dual love, because it is who you are, whether you are in a relationship or not.

Non-dual love is not a modern concept, although most people are undoubtedly unfamiliar with it. The term is a translation of a Sanskrit word, *parabhakti*. In fact, if everything is awareness as Vedanta proclaims, everything is non-dual love – love that never involves another. It is the self, loving itself, in all forms. When two free people come together in a relationship, whether it is sexual or familial, the love will automatically be non-dual because they will see themselves as non-different from each other. The relationship is in you – love/awareness – you are not in it. It chooses you, you don't choose it.

Non-dual love is the pinnacle of the expression of love for an individual, a *jiva*. It is little understood and sought by everyone knowingly or unknowingly because the self knows itself as non-dual love. Ignorance of who we are turns

the mind outwards towards objects in a futile attempt to gain love, instead of inwards towards the self. As much as we all want love, to love from a non-dual perspective does not come easy, as ignorance is hardwired. It is not something we can wish into existence. To love freely, we must be free. You cannot jump into a non-dual relationship or “make it happen.” There is no magic bullet or *mantra* to chant. It comes as a gift of grace when you get to a certain stage of growth.

We Don't Seek Relationships for Freedom

The impediments to non-dual love, especially in sexual relationships, are many – not the least of which is the belief that if I know I am the self, I am “beyond” desire and love relationships. It is unavoidably true that if I am seeking *moksa*, which is liberation from dependence on objects for happiness, I will not seek a relationship, because we don't seek relationships for freedom. We seek them for attachment to another. But knowing that I am ever-free consciousness does not imply that there is anything spiritually wrong with the human part of me that has various needs. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna, appearing in the world as a human being and speaking as the self, says, “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” This is a very interesting statement because it says that desire operating in the *dharma* field that respects and is not in conflict with the psychological and moral laws operating in the field is awareness. But I, ever-free awareness, am free of desire.

Freedom and Desire Are Not Incompatible

The implication of this statement is not always appreciated by spiritual and worldly types, who deny love and are often afraid of human love for any number of reasons. It simply means that there is nothing inherently wrong with desire. You get to be the person you are, feel what you feel, do what you do and think what you think, as long as you follow *dharma* – meaning you are mindful of the non-dual basis of life’s rules and laws. In terms of human love, it means that if I play by the rules of love, I am quite within my rights to love another human being as a human being, as a manifestation of the divine or for any other reason, whether I am “enlightened” or not.

The Desire That Is Opposed to *Dharma* Is Also Awareness

But then desire that is opposed to *dharma* is also awareness. It could only be that way if reality is non-dual, which it is. Although we can say that *dharma* is another word that points to the self, there is no *dharma* for the self, because the self is not in the world. The world and its laws are in awareness. For the world, or apparent reality, to function, both *dharma* and *adharma* must be possible. *Dharma* only applies to the person living in the world, never to the self. The question is always, what are my main motivations and which serve my highest purpose? If I want peace of mind and a happy life, I need to align my desires with what produces peace of mind and freedom from limitation, therefore my desires must be *dharmic*. If non-dual love is my goal, I need to

resolve what stands in the way of expressing unconditional love, my true nature. What stand in the way are *adharmic* desires, beliefs and actions when I do not follow my nature or break life's fundamental laws. In other words, ignorance of my true nature stands in the way – the belief that I am incomplete or lacking in some way and must find the right object to make me whole and complete. When I know what love is, I automatically and unflinchingly follow *dharma*. In the spiritual game, it is often considered a great prize to find a “spiritual mate,” someone who is somehow better than us, on whom we project our idea of perfection. The fallacy of the spiritual seduction is as old as time and a big obstacle to both freedom and non-dual relationships.

When Non-Dual Love Is Known, We Don't Seek It

Anyone who says he or she is not interested in love is a liar. Love is the very essence of life and the nature of every being. We pursue it in innumerable ways because the desire to know love is what drives us, whether it is known that the quest for love is behind everything we do or not. When you know what love is, you no longer pursue it. You see it, you enjoy it, you are it. You experience it in everyone and in everything, and you graciously give and receive it. Experiencing non-dual love is always a rediscovery because love is the essence of every experience, and those moments of joy and peace that come frequently – or infrequently, as the case may be – are always moments of self-love.

Thus you can love anyone. And you do. But knowing what love is (who I am) is most uncommon. If you are a full-fledged member of the “love club,” which you will be if you have lived well and learned life’s lessons properly, you will feel that this knowledge can be enhanced if it is shared with someone who also knows, someone who is not constrained by the small, conditional notions of love that bind people hypnotized by duality. And it can and does, assuming both parties are truly free.

A Free Being Is Always Alone, but Never Lonely

When James and I met, neither of us needed anyone to love us unconditionally, because we loved ourselves unconditionally. It is not lonely being free and alone. Being love means being alone, i.e. all one. Freedom means that there is only one non-dual being that is always alone, by default. Aloneness is the presence of the self, and loneliness is the perceived absence of “the other.” Although James and I were not seeking a relationship, it was our desire to have a partner who knew and who loved unconditionally because they knew who they were. It is very natural for love to want to be understood. Love is understanding, what “stands under” or supports us. In non-dual love, you see things through your eyes and you see through the eyes of the apparent other. In fact non-dual love demands that you see through the eyes of the beloved. You want to love them in the manner that they need to be loved and vice versa.

Non-Dual Love Is Its Own Reward

Where relationship love is a means to non-dual love, non-dual love is the goal. To say that it is a goal implies that non-dual love is something we can gain, but in truth we cannot gain it. It is its own reward because it is who we are. We appreciate this fact when self-knowledge removes the impediments to the full expression of non-dual love in our lives through self-knowledge and the maturity and self-objectivity that is its required precursor.

If you are a simple person living an ordinary life, working hard to keep yourself afloat in this complicated and demanding existence, the opportunities to meet someone you can love and who can love you are always limited, not just because of any number of external factors, but because unexamined likes and dislikes constrain and limit your ability to love. When self-knowledge has destroyed binding likes and dislikes, and you live large, unlimited by fear, the love that you are is unconstrained and flows into everyone with whom you come in contact, assuming the ability to receive love is not obstructed in the mind of the recipient.

Non-Dual Love in Relationships

Non-dual love, being the self, is *nirguna*, meaning “without qualities.” It is not a product of anything and has no set characteristics, but it does have very definite signature attributes

as it expresses itself in the apparent reality in the form of non-dual relationships. A non-dual relationship involves mature adults who look to and rely on themselves for everything. The degree to which you are free of your likes and dislikes is the degree to which you can have meaningful relationships. Conversely dualistic relationships are about re-establishing patterns in childhood because likes and dislikes control you. You have not taken care of the inner child and expect others to do so. The basic principles that determine unconditional, free love – as opposed to limited, conditional love – are very simple but indisputable, and very rare. I have listed a few of the most important ones below.

The Qualities Inherent in Non-Dual Relationships:

1. Freedom to Be My Own Person

Non-dual relationships are consciously entered – after giving careful thought and consideration to the implications of being in relationship, to each other's *karma* and, most importantly, to what each partner values – without imposing each person's likes and dislikes on each other. The highest value held by two people in a non-dual relationship (besides non-injury) is freedom. Each person is always free to think, speak and act in accordance with their nature. They are their own person and respect this in the other. How this looks is like this: no matter what unfolds in the relationship, my duty is primarily to doing my own *dharma* (*svadharma*), second to following the *dharma* of the relationship, which includes taking your needs into consideration. While it is

always my aim to be of service and give you what you need, I cannot do this if I neglect my *svadharma*. If I neglect my *svadharma*, I threaten the foundation of the relationship. Therefore I act in accordance with my nature and expect you to do the same, without expectation, complication or misunderstandings, such as “you should have done/said this or that.” I trust that you will be true to yourself without abusing the mutual values upheld in our relationship and vice versa because this is the bedrock of our non-dual relationship.

Sometimes this will mean that I do not get what I want or cannot give you what you want, but this is easily relinquished in the spirit of freedom and non-duality. And it doesn't matter, because there is no expectation for you to fulfil my desires or me yours. “No” is always accepted with equanimity and understood to be given for good reason. Non-dual love never asks the other person to solve its problems. You solve them yourself with reference to self-knowledge, nothing else. You are never a burden to anyone and impeccably take care of your own *dharma* and *karma*.

2. Friendship Is the Basis

The healthiest basis for any relationship, whether sexual or not, is friendship. This is because true friendship only happens between equals. Only friends can deal dispassionately with relationship issues. Friendship is a lot closer to real love than sexual/emotional love. Friends will still love you if you fail to satisfy their emotional needs. Friends will not burden each other with unreasonable emotional demands, like “being there” for you all the time, for

example. Sex and emotion are a natural part of life, but they need to be contextualized by love, not expected to stand on their own.

3. Focused on Sameness, Not Differences

As the relationship exists in awareness and not the other way around, the guiding principle is that there is no “other.” You are always transacting only with the self. You don’t see the other person as other than, or different from, yourself. How do you do this? You subtract the body by focusing on the shining being, the light of awareness in the “other,” which is the same self shining in you. As soon as you pay attention to and relate to the differences that obtain in the other person, relating becomes dualistic. Your peculiarities must transact with their peculiarities. Non-dual relationships are focused on oneness, sameness, not on differences in body and mind. Any conflicts or projections that arise from the causal body (the personal level) are instantly dissolved in self-knowledge, leaving no trace and no unresolved *karma*.

4. Relationship *Dharma* Is Always Upheld

The relationship itself has its own agreed-upon *dharma* which must be respected by the people involved. When both parties agree to sublimate their likes and dislikes to the entity called “the relationship,” a higher court of appeal for the good of both people and the health of the relationship comes into play, based on implicit and explicit agreements which are based on eternal, not temporary, values. When there is conflict or an issue of whatever

nature, it is taken to the relationship and not given to egos to fight over, which makes it much easier to eliminate conflict. It is the *dharma* of the relationship to resolve issues. The relationship itself becomes an inbuilt fair, just and wise elder.

This leaves no opportunity for misunderstanding, even though neither partner asks the other to fulfil any conditions. The conditions agreed upon are mutual and healthy for both parties, and for the relationship to thrive.

5. Communicate from Fullness

Most conflict in relationship is a result of faulty and unconscious communication. Non-dual love uses words wisely and consciously with knowledge of the implied meaning of words and how easily they can be misinterpreted. It communicates from completeness, positivity, sufficiency and self-confidence. It never berates, diminishes, judges or criticizes anyone. It has no wish to spread bad feelings by talking negatively or indulging in useless small talk.

It enjoys silence and respects this in others. It listens when others talk, instead of waiting to talk. It pays no heed to rumour and gossip, trying always to see what is good in others.

6. No Expectations or Demands

Non-dual love does not demand love and attention, trying to extract what it wants from others. It is not about needs-fulfilment, expecting another to fulfil

you. You feel secure in yourself and you never seek outside of you for fullness, satisfaction or happiness.

Conversely, in dualistic, high-maintenance relationships, it is taken as a given that the other must fulfil your expectations, as your right. Non-dual love has one primary aim, which is its greatest joy, and that is always to contribute, to look for opportunities to satisfy the beloved. Attention is always on a higher purpose, on the welfare of the beloved, not looking for opportunities to satisfy yourself. You don't have to worry about satisfying yourself, because the other takes care of you. You take care of yourself by taking care of others. You want to see the other grow, you always think of the other first while being true to your own nature.

7. Physical Presence Is Not Necessary

Although being in the same proximity is savoured and enjoyed without fail, the physical presence of the other is not necessary, because you are never separated. While the other is loved wholly and unconditionally, the need for the other has permanently been removed by self-knowledge, so fear of loss or loneliness is non-existent. Whether you are alone or together, you are both equally happy.

8. Love Is a Devotional Attitude of Service

Non-dual love is love loving itself in the form of the other in an attitude of devotional service, which is natural, uncontrived and second nature to both parties because each sees the other as their symbol of the self. Non-dual love keeps growing; it loves you and through you, as you. You (as the person) are being loved by a greater force, the self, and there are no obstacles to this love.

9. Dispassion Towards Results

Karma yoga, indifference to the results of action, is the natural approach to life on all levels, as it is simply the knowledge of how this reality functions. The non-dual lover always has dispassion about action and its results, and does not overreact emotionally to situations. This does not mean that you are never emotional. It just means that you do not allow emotion to dictate how and why you act. Non-dual love is not about suppressing feelings or denying that they exist. When strong emotions arise, they are taken as *prasad* and acknowledged for what they are – the relative truth about the jiva in the moment, not the truth about you. *Karma yoga* requires that we act taking into consideration the needs of the total, but we also take into consideration each other's personal likes and dislikes. Feelings are not disregarded, nor are they confused with ultimate truth, because they are always changing.

How to Be Free, but in a Dualistic Relationship

As stated, if you are a free and mature person, you enter relationships not for attachment but for the enjoyment of experiencing love as your nature with an

apparent other, who you know to be yourself. This does not mean that you do not enjoy and respect the other's apparent personality for what it is, even though you know it is not their primary identity, whereas people in dualistic relationships go into to them specifically for attachment, fully identified with each other as people. The whole idea behind most dualistic relationships is that I am half a person without that special "other," and when I find them, I need to hold onto to them to ensure that I do not "lose" them. Fear and anxiety are signature qualities of dualistic relationships, as is boredom and loss of freedom. As a non-dualist, it may appear to others that you are attached to your partner, which you are and you are not. As the self, you see that there is no other, except in the apparent reality, which you know to be unreal. All the same, you know that, as all objects arise from you and depend on you to exist, you can love all objects as non-different from you. In this way you are attached and simultaneously unattached because you know that you do not gain or lose anything by being in or out of a relationship.

Unconditional love takes care of the idea of the other, so love flows easily. If you are qualified and in relationship with a qualified partner, they will love you in the same way, so there is no anxiety, no loss of freedom or fear of loss.

Dualistic relationships are fraught with difficulty because people identified with themselves as people are insecure and usually have low self-esteem, always wanting their partner as a proxy for Mommy or Daddy to fix their problems and give them what they want. If you are qualified and in a relationship with an unqualified partner, complications often arise, so *karma*

yoga is the only way forward. *Karma yoga* takes care of your relationship with the world, as it converts emotional needs into devotion for the truth. It allows you to act without attachment to results. Any relationship can be devotional and will grow if you can get your personal issues resolved through self-knowledge. In spiritual relationships, you take care of yourself and serve the other person without contradiction because you see the other as yourself.

The problem in unequal relationships is that the other person will often take your *karma yoga* attitude, your lack of need and dispassion, as disinterest. As a non-dualist, you don't get upset and you can't get excited about things, because you see that all problems are fabrications of the mind. They are not real and have no ultimate importance. You will often be accused of having no feelings because you are unemotional in your response to situations that arise. So your partner may think you don't care about them and will project their bad feelings onto you. They might feel neglected or diminished because they have low self-esteem and need you to make them feel good about themselves. Such a relationship is very difficult because you are not equal.

Need Attracts

The world is full of needy people desperate for love, wanting to be wanted, and who feel happy only when they are wanted, needed. Being needed makes them feel loved and validated. This is dangerous because need and love are two very different things and if you confuse love with need, you will suffer. That is guaranteed. Need attracts initially, but needy people are extremely

unattractive in a very short time. It is exhausting trying to fulfil a needy person's needs, and vice versa, because nothing makes us feel secure other than knowing who we are. Nobody can give this to us. Only we can give this to ourselves through dedicated self-inquiry with a valid means of knowledge capable of removing ignorance. Two needy people trying to get what they want from each other can only end up in disaster with both parties blaming the other for not fulfilling their fantasies or desires.

In a non-dual relationship, you always feel wanted, happy, never needy. You can play-act at being needy, but you never take it seriously. You know it's a game. Two happy, self-sufficient people create a synergy, what we call a "love bubble," and it keeps growing. They are never disappointed in the "other," because they expect nothing, being self-satisfied.

If the other fulfils their needs they are happy, and if not they are also happy, whereas two incomplete people in a dualistic relationship are always anxious because they never know if their needs will be met. They must be careful of what they say because their idea of love is that you satisfy each other's likes and dislikes. But the problem is that you can't always know what another's likes and dislikes are – they are always changing and are often highly unreasonable demands. When one partner cannot satisfy the other, it creates anger and denial because they feel unloved. They believe they can only be satisfied through the other and it is the other's fault if they are dissatisfied.

Ending Relationships

The only purpose of a non-dual relationship is to enjoy the other as the self in a free association based on mutual values. It is possible, however, that a non-dual relationship no longer serves its purpose and both parties decide to move on, but this is never because the relationship failed to deliver expectations. Perhaps logistics or other outside factors, such as health or practical issues, play a part. Or one partner chooses to live alone. There is never any rancour or blame should this happen, just an amicable and loving parting of the ways.

If you are free and in a dualistic relationship, you can move out of a bad relationship without leaving the relationship, through *karma yoga*. You do this by putting the needs of the total first – and you subject your personal needs to the relationship, doing this as service and learning from results. It will not be easy to keep a peaceful mind if you are constantly at odds with a partner's unrealistic demands, but it can be done as a spiritual practice. Don't be tempted to put fake emotion into it, as that never works. If you truly love your partner and want the relationship to work despite its inequality in understanding, you must accept them as they are and love them as the self, with the knowledge that you cannot make them see life as you see it. It requires patience and understanding, but it is possible to achieve reasonable happiness this way. If you cannot do this and there is constant conflict as a result, it is probably best to part ways as amicably as you can, even if you still love the other person. There is no right or wrong about this, just what works best for both people in the long run.

Advice for Seeking a Good Relationship

It is never advisable to seek a relationship, especially if you are committed to self-inquiry. By seeking one you are saying that you are incomplete and you need an object to complete you, which we know does not work. So change your attitude towards need. See how futile it is to expect another to give you what you want. Get yourself strong, independent and free – leave it to life, to the Field of Existence, to deliver what you need. Take care of yourself – your unresolved *karma* and psychological issues – first. You need to become a mature adult before you can love properly, with no conditions or demands in your love. Emotions should flow from attention to values, which creates admiration, respect and love for yourself as well as the “other.” Make certain that you are totally honest with yourself and everyone else. When you work on yourself, all your relationships improve. You do not want to be a burden to anyone. When you are asking for something, you are a burden on other people – you like being wanted. They must look after your needs all day long, which nobody can do. In free relationships, there are no obligations, and you want to serve. You pay attention to the other because love is attention. We do not love what we do not pay attention to. If you say you love someone but never pay attention to them, they do not feel loved. If you are in a relationship, make certain that your values on important issues like sex and money concur. Fidelity is about respect and honesty, which supports the basic structure of life. Open relationships are about greed, nothing else. For more

on what constitutes successful relationships, read Chapter II, Section 2 of my forthcoming book *Enlightened Lifestyles*.