

Guru Bhakti

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Manfred: Dear James, I was in your retreat in Tiruvannamalai and I'm very thankful for it. I just read your book before, but didn't have any contact before. Advaita revealed itself as being a major contribution to my spiritual path.

After your retreat I read *Mystic by Default* and got confused because the stories about your *guru* seem to be somehow contradictory to your teachings in Tiru. Let me explain. In your teachings you told us sometimes that you felt a lot of love and appreciation for your *guru*. But you never said that falling in love with the *guru* or being close to him is required on the Advaita path.

James: It is not required, but it can be very helpful or very unhelpful depending on the reasons you fall in love.

Manfred: But in your book *Mystic by Default* you told many times about the love relationship and how important it was to be close to the *guru*. It seemed to me like the *guru's* radiance was what gave fuel to your awakening. You wrote that only at the very end you started meditation.

James: The *guru's* radiance was indeed a contributing factor to my success, but my burning desire for freedom was the most important factor. If you appreciate what your teacher is doing for the Truth and for you, you can't help but love him or her. But the real love is love of the Truth and the teaching – which are one and the same. If you really love the Truth, it does not matter whether or not you have a personal feelings about a teacher. Teachers come and go, but the Truth remains.

Manfred: But your teaching in Tiru seemed to have a different content in that respect. You also told in this book about your *samadhi* states and those seemed to be like a step on the way to the goal. But in your teaching in Tiru I thought you said that they were just experiences. Maybe your spiritual understanding after your time with your *guru* changed in some aspects, so that *Mystic by Default* has maybe more to be understood as a diary?

James: They were just experiences which I interpreted correctly and let go. In my autobiography I make a point of saying that all the spiritual experiences were a problem – a big frustration, actually – because I believed that *moksa* was a particular kind of experience. I think you must have missed that.

There is a new book at my website called *Experience and Knowledge* in the Publications page that you should read to get it clear about the value of spiritual experiences. Actually, everything you are experiencing all the time is spiritual, every moment is an epiphany, so seeking for special experiences is not recommended.

However, if they happen it is good as long as you don't get attached to them. They come by the grace of God. And if they don't come, they are not meant to come. You should keep up the *karma yoga* attitude and keep discriminating the self from the not-self. Not one experiential qualification is listed in the Vedanta texts.

Manfred: The reason why I'm asking this question is also because I was in an *ashram* in India after your retreat for four days. I was so touched by the 84-year-old *swami* in a way I couldn't have imagined before. I even had tears in my eyes, even when he was not talking, just sitting next to me. So one part of me could understand what it means to have a relationship with a *guru* very well. But it might be difficult for me to return to India; also, because of his age.

James: That's a great experience, but just because you feel love for a *guru* does not necessarily mean that he or she is capable of teaching you. The kind of love I am talking about is an appreciation of the noble, or selfless, qualities of a human being. It is not needy and personal.

Manfred: So I'm thankful to have received the Advaita teachings from you. I also have good books from Dayananda, and can study texts of Shankara or the *Upanishads*. So my access to Vedanta had a good start and I could work a lot on it.

James: I am glad that you appreciate the value of Vedanta, Manfred.

Manfred: But how important is it to have a real relationship with a *guru*, to have a love relationship with him?

James: It is important. But you need to look at the reason for the relationship. Many project love on a teacher because they have not healed emotional wounding picked up in previous primary relationships, usually with parents. You need to keep in mind that you are in love with the Truth at all times, so you do not form the kind of bond that keeps you tied to the teacher. If you have a proper teacher you will feel more and more free all the time and the personal bond will not become a problem. There are many people in the spiritual world in love with teachers for the wrong reasons, much to their detriment.

~ Love, James