

Guru Can't Help

Ram (James Swartz)

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Shanti: Dear James, I've been reading some of your e-*satsangs* and I am very happy to have discovered you. I am an American living in India, in the *ashram* of a famous woman *guru*. Things have become quite complicated and confusing for me around her. When she is away, it's peaceful here and I'm very happy, but when she comes, her energy stirs my mind up with so much emotion, strong feelings and confusion that I don't have any peace except during *darshan*. Every time I try to approach her, she walks away or ignores me, and I can feel an intense almost electric vibration which seems to come from her that feels like she's pushing me away and keeping me at a distance, then later my mind goes crazy and I get frustrated and caught up in such confusing thoughts that just won't stop. She refuses to talk to me except very rarely (she once said to me that it's better for me if she doesn't talk to me). She won't let me work anymore even though all the other devotees are doing many hours of *seva* for her. I remain in my room and sleep, which I actually prefer really because it's very chaotic at the *ashram* school and the work was overwhelming for me, so I'm happy I could be alone, it's so peaceful sleeping.

However, there have been moments when I am relaxed, calm and more conscious when she will allow me to approach her, but most of the time she does not put up with me at all.

So why am I with her then? My soul was instantly attracted to her the moment I had *darshan* with her for the first time. I literally fell at her feet, my soul felt it was home. Since that day there has been an intense, beautiful, continuous and very deep spiritual connection between us, which felt to me like True Love and I was drawn to her like a magnet. She was all I could think of and I always prayed to her for help and my prayers were answered. I considered her my spiritual Mother, my beloved and my best friend, my heart was completely devoted to her. I was also in awe of her power and grace, and she has helped me in my life in so many ways. Such magical and miraculous things happened after I met her, many synchronicities. It was extraordinary, and my devotion and connection to her only got stronger.

Things began to change and get complicated when I decided I wanted to get physically close to her and know her on a personal level. I went to India and offered to do *seva* for her, but when I saw her for the first time outside of *darshan* in India, I fell to the ground, shocked, the mere sight of her body turned my mind inside out. The body I was seeing seemed completely different than the one I was praying to. It was hard for me to see her as a normal person (and she always did everything she could to show me she was a normal person). But my mind just couldn't believe it, and I could think of nothing else but serving my beloved and being close to her also in the physical. She allowed me to do this, but the conflicts and confusion began to get worse and she was not treating me very nicely, and I started to resent her. I had such confusion and frustration, which later turned anger, great sadness and deep depression. In *darshan* it was always the same and the only place I was peaceful, felt welcomed and was allowed to be close to her. But in the daily life situation it is rarely like that. I wonder why she would allow me to live in her home when she acts as though she cannot stand me, which breaks my heart. So outwardly, to my mind, it seems like she does not like me, but when my heart really needs her or if there is trouble, she knows, synchronicities appear or somebody will show up to help. So inwardly we are compatible, but outwardly it seems we are not. She can feel me, knows my soul and my mind and I feel she is

always watching me, there is a strong and beautiful connection between us. Even outwardly she may be trying to teach me something, but her outer way is not clear, there is never an explanation. She has told me she is not a teacher, only a simple woman. But I need clear communication and she won't communicate with me outwardly, perhaps expecting me to know intuitively without talking, communicating on the higher levels. But how can I do this if I don't even know who I truly am? And she knows that I don't know, and she knows I like being around her and near her, and she is letting me do this, but the cost is great suffering. My personality/habits are in direct conflict with hers, and this breaks my heart because I so much want to be close to her on the physical level as well.

So I decided that the only chance for any harmony between us is if I go deeper into myself and see what my mind is doing that is causing such disturbance between us and not allowing me to see clearly. I always pray that I can become more conscious and know my Self and can be around her more easily.

So last month, feeling desperately frustrated and not knowing what to do, I decided to take a trip to Tiruvannamalai for relief and to see if I can find peace and maybe some answers there, and perhaps find a teacher who can help me. Tiru was very special, just its energy stilled my mind, and I was calm and felt so happy there. Then after some Mooji *satsangs* cooked me a bit, I had a real peaceful experience in *darshan* with Siva Sakthi Amma; it was subtle, but I was able to really feel peace inside me. I was very intrigued and had a private meeting with her afterward. Later that day I experienced a profound peace which manifested as a huge transparent white light inside my body. I felt a real sensation of it, and it was literally on the inside. For the first time I knew this was an experience of God being actually inside of me. I felt so grateful for this. I also feel peaceful at *darshan* with my *guru*, but is more like an experience one has during deep meditation, like *samadhi* with no thoughts, just floating in nothingness. This experience after the meeting with Amma was a sensation inside my body, a clear light, and it happened during an activity. I was on the computer looking at Mooji videos and Amma's website, and this strong but peaceful light appeared and was filling up my stomach and heart area inside my body.

I was afraid to go back after the feelings of peace I had on Tiruvannamalai. But I was planning on returning anyway, and Siva Sakthi Amma also made it clear that I must go back (she glanced at my watch with Mother's picture in it and looked back at me twice), so it was obvious to me.

When I got back to the *ashram* I tried very hard to maintain the feeling of peace I felt in Tiruvannamalai and with Amma. I meditated on it twice a day, but it was never as strong as it was in Tiruvannamalai; however, I did feel it very subtly at times. I was also hesitant to have my *guru's darshan* again because I thought maybe she would ruin it because her light is different, it's a different kind of light, which I think works primarily on the *vasanas*. So in meditation I prayed for peace during *darshan* and communicated silently but strongly with Mother that I am very serious about my *sadhana*, and she should support me and my peace and not mess with me!

So, James, I know you have finished your *satsangs*, but I am returning again to Tiruvannamalai this Friday, and the first thing I am going to do is pick up your book. And if you are still in town I would be delighted to meet you.

Thank you again for your wonderful contribution on the internet. I feel blessed to have found you.

~ Much love and all the best, Shanti

James: Dear Shanti, please forgive me but you are in a bad way and need to hear some truth. Take it as tough love. You are on the right track with the Vedanta.

This is a case of unrequited love. The *guru* cannot do for you what you want her to do. That is why she is ignoring you. She has no teaching, so she cannot help you sort it out. She is hoping you will figure it out. You need to own these projections – she is just an ordinary woman – and take them back. Try to see everything you project on her in yourself. You are just seeing your own self, and you are imagining that what you see is coming from her.

Here is a *satsang* that should help you to understand the situation:

The Value of Tradition

Since I got married I discovered anew that Western people have strange ideas about *gurus*. Is the *guru* an individual or is it something else? While it is true that you do not have an institution without individuals to represent it, it is wrong to think of a teacher of Vedanta only as a person with a special kind of knowledge. This is so because of the tendency of the human mind to project unconscious content. At the same time it is important not to give the instrument a pass when it violates universal values.

In the teaching tradition of Vedanta there is a particular protocol that is involved in asking for knowledge. One brings a bundle of twigs to the *guru* to signify his or her readiness to expose his or her mind to the teaching. There is a certain symbolism in the use of twigs that need not concern us. But it is important to know that self-knowledge comes down through a succession of teachers, none of whom are responsible for the knowledge. It is not “their” knowledge. Knowledge is knowledge and it does not belong to anyone. Vedanta is unique because the knowledge is not derived from the teacher’s own experience although his or her experience confirms it. At first glance this seems to be a defect, but it is actually its strength, assuming that the knowledge does what it purports to do – set the seeker free from seeking – which it does.

And in the Vedanta tradition the method of teaching does not belong to the teacher either, which is another strength. It is an impersonal method that reveals the unexamined logic of the student’s own experience and in the process reveals the knowledge that sets the student free. The teacher then is just the product of a certain institution and, through his or her assimilation of the knowledge and the means of knowledge, becomes empowered to teach.

So while a specific individual appears in front of the inquirer to teach, the inquirer is actually facing an institution, not a specific individual. It is important to understand this so that whatever unconscious needs that have not been exposed and handled do not find a convenient hook in the form of the teacher. Westerners almost universally have a problem with the idea of touching the feet of a teacher whereas Indians don’t. This is because Westerners see a person, but Indians see an institution, a tradition. In this ritual, “feet” symbolize understanding because self-knowledge “stands under” every other form of knowledge. So when an Indian touches the feet of a teacher, he or she is touching the tradition, the bringer of the knowledge, not the fleshly feet of an individual. This point was driven home to me with particular force when I became excessively familiar with my *guru* at the beginning of my discipleship. He looked at me icily and said in no uncertain terms, “Remember, Ram, I am an institution.”

When I got married I found that it changed my relationship with some people who saw me as a teacher. Three dropped me as a teacher immediately, two took some time to lose interest and two overcame their projections and became better inquirers for it. Several explanations were offered by the droppers, none of which had to do with the eligibility of the student, all of which had to do with some “failing” on my part. But it was not a failing on my part. My ability to teach did not change. I did not change on any level. My *karma* changed and this caused a conflict in the minds of those people because it seemingly contradicted their view of me – which was *karma*-based.

You cannot progress spiritually without being brutally honest with yourself. There are many things about ourselves that contradict our good opinion of ourselves. They must be owned. The reason for the change in these individual’s attitude toward me lies in their failure to understand the fact that Vedanta is an institution and the teacher is an institution. If you are attracted to a teacher’s personality, it is good, if it increases your attentiveness. But if you have unfulfilled desires for love or security or power, this attraction may inhibit your ability to hear what is actually being said. This incident brought home to me with laser-like clarity the realization that the so-called “inner child,” that small person within that has resisted growing up, needs to be faced, educated, disciplined and in every way made to accept the reality of life, to wit: the world is not there to pander to that inner baby’s every need, to find a solution for its manifold insecurities. Coming out of the womb of child-think is a painful process, but it needs to happen for the self to free itself from the emotions that bedevil it when it does not apparently know who it is.

In the many years I have been teaching I have found that there is an inordinate interest in relationships among spiritual types. I suppose it is not surprising, because love is the essence of life, but if you are a true seeker you are seeking freedom from relationship. You want the relationship with yourself that obviates the need for human companionship. Self-knowledge does not exclude or inhibit love between people. In fact it makes the connection between all of us completely transparent. So when you approach a teacher you should not see that teacher as a potential mother or father or lover. You should not try to fit them into one of the unexamined boxes in your mind. To do so is to compromise your relationship with truth.

I feel a bit sad for the jealous women who wrote me off when I got married and who thought catty thoughts about my wife. I feel sad if they are still carrying the torch for me. Well, I felt sad on that account when I was not married. I need to be careful when I say this because the same women will say that I am sexist by singling out women. Men project too. They just project differently. They often think I am their father and compete with me or become my good buddy and fraternize with me. They try to act out their childhood issues with me in various ways: challenging, currying favor, one-upping intellectually, etc. It is just that, since we are the same sex, they do not have the same kind of love issues that women have.

I do not feel sad for me or for my wife but for anyone who misuses this great institution. When you bring the twigs it means that you have something to contribute – an open mind – not something to gain personally, although you do make an incredible gain – the loss of the desires and fears that make life miserable. And by imagining that there is something wrong with me, they do themselves a disservice because they cut themselves off from an opportunity to let the whole tradition flow through them and participate in the wonderful energy of the *sanga*.

The *sanga* that is developing around this teaching is incredibly powerful, and to exile oneself from it for childish personal reasons is foolish. It is not the kiss of death if you do exile yourself, obviously. There is always a way back, but if you have been afforded the rare opportunity to serve a teacher of the Vedanta *sampradaya* and you walk away because your fantasies are not met, it will be a while before you have another opportunity. And going it alone is not ideal. There are too many paradoxes in life and in the teachings to sort out on your own. You need help.

When I say “serve a teacher” I do not mean serve James and James’ ego. I mean understand what tradition means. When you surrender to it, you get the help of all the great beings behind the teacher and the teaching. So it is imperative to keep your mind open to what attracted you in the teacher and the teaching in the first place, not let that undeveloped part of yourself co-opt the process. To find yourself on the outside is like being a fish out of water. It is a lonely and difficult path, whereas surrender to the tradition, not a human being, is the ultimate security.

Shanti: Thank you for responding to my email. I appreciate your frankness and powerful words to help me understand this. But please help me understand when you say, “Try to see everything you project on her in yourself. You are just seeing your own self and you are imagining that what you see is coming from her,” because I just don’t see it.

James: I think the reason you don’t see it is because you are convinced that there is something “wrong” with you and that if you could just be more “spiritual” you would be a better person and therefore more acceptable in your own eyes. It is very difficult to love yourself when you think there is something wrong with you. Probably you were judged and criticized by your parents and you came to think that you were not okay as you are.

When this happens – and unfortunately it is more or less the rule in Western societies where the parents are too busy to love their children properly and give them the self-esteem they need to thrive in life – spiritually-inclined individuals often take to spirituality to correct it, and one of the first “therapies” they often try is to turn their lives over to a *guru* figure. It is really an improper use of the spiritual tradition because for the spiritual methods to work one needs to be more or less mature. It can work to grow up the love-starved inner child when there is a natural bonding with the projected parent and when the *guru* is a shining example of a healthy human being. But it does not work when there is a basic incompatibility between the one seeking therapy and the “therapist” in this case your “*guru*.” In fact a *guru* is someone who removes your self-ignorance, not someone who changes you for the better. If you get self-knowledge you will change for the better on the personal level, but it will not be your efforts that will change you, it will be the result of assimilated self-knowledge.

In the cases where the teacher cannot give you self-knowledge but there is an association, your ego can “improve” only by osmosis, i.e. being around an evolved soul, assuming the personalities are compatible. In this case we call it teaching by example, not precept, i.e. words. But you do not really respect your teacher. You want her love but you see certain things that you do not like about her and it prevents you from “surrendering.” This is not necessarily a failing, a judgment. All human beings are flawed, including famous *gurus*, and you may be seeing what is actually there. And surrendering to a person is not the way to go. Surrender to *Isvara*.

I don't know that this is true for certain, but it seems so from reading your emails. Have you ever thought to question the view that has driven you into this uncomfortable situation? I don't think it is helpful or even "spiritual" to see yourself as a flawed person who needs to change. It is also not true. There is nothing wrong with you at all. There is nothing that needs to change except the idea that there is something wrong with you. You are what you are. You were created by *Isvara* and are not separate from *Isvara*. You are beautiful, pure and perfect. What you see in her spiritually is what you are. There is no actually *guru* "out there" apart from you. Yes, if you think you are the body then she seems to be someone else, but are you the body? You are not. It is known to you, so you cannot be it. So who is it that knows Shanti and Shanti's body, and who has such a clear and objective sense of observation? That being – awareness – is you, not this needy, wanting creature that is begging for the love of an older, supposedly more "spiritual" woman.

I think your *guru* realizes what you are doing because she told you that she is nothing special. She is not something special. She probably does not see herself as something special. She is just a human being like you who has some kind of knowledge of *Isvara* which she is not able to impart to you directly. She probably understands that you are projecting your unfulfilled need for love onto her and she is offering a certain practice – *karma yoga* – to help you get mature. But you are rebellious and egocentric and you want it your way.

In any case the solution to this problem is to accept yourself warts and all, to face yourself and get at the root thought, not to try to change yourself to make yourself okay in light of the negative opinion you have about yourself or some kind of desire to be a saint.

Shanti: And as for the unrequited love, yes, I see that, but we are on different levels spiritually and although I notice from her love and compassion, I am not yet able to receive it in a dispassionate and detached way like she does.

James: There are no different levels spiritually, Shanti. This is a belief brought about by the idea that reality is a duality. But reality is non-dual. She is you and you are her. Why make a separation where there is none? See the mischief that happens when you compare yourself to someone else? Even on the dualistic level she is just one of *Isvara*'s creations, as are you. She is not superior to you, just different. You have bought into one of the most unhelpful love games, seeing the *guru* as a parent. To play it you have to demean yourself. You have to act like a child. How can you take responsibility for yourself and your spiritual growth if you are not an adult? You need to find the inner adult, not identify with the inner child. She cannot make you grow. Growth comes when you assimilate the experiences you have in life. By writing to me and stepping out of that unfortunate situation you may perhaps get some distance on it and you will be able to put it in perspective and lay it to rest so you can move on. I think your time there is almost over.

You hit upon the problem in your statement about your lack of dispassion. That is the only difference between you and her. She is a human being doing her *karma*, but she is very dispassionate although I bet she is frustrated with herself because she does not have the skill to communicate with a bright person like yourself. You need a *guru* who can speak to your intellect. You need answers. You are an inquirer stuck in a situation that is not meant for inquirers. She is teaching *bhakti*, but what she does not realize is that your desire to understand is the highest kind of *bhakti* because it will lead to knowledge of *Isvara* and *moksa*. You are a duck out of water.

You liked Tiruvannamalai because there is a spirit of self-inquiry there and a sense of freedom. Although you should stay away from Mooji, not because he is a bad guy, but because he is the same kind of *guru* you have now. He has no teaching. He is just a “presence.” You can get inspired by seeing such people but you will not be transformed, because they cannot give you the transformation tools you need. If you are going to transform, only you can do it and to do it you need tools and the knowledge of how to use them. The human mind is any time more complex and delicate than an automobile, yet automobile mechanics have to go to school for years to fix an internal combustion engine. Why should transforming yourself be as easy as hanging out with a *guru*, expecting her to do the work? Nobody can transform you but you.

Shanti: So I guess this unrequited love explains some of the cruel behavior she uses as hints to me. I always took these games as a test of my seriousness of my practice and my devotion to her. Once she told me she does not want my honor or my love, and this confused me because everyone honors and some even worship her, and she can easily make her devotees fall in love with her.

James: So what? People who fall in love with other people do not know what love is. They do not know that their nature is *parama prema*, unconditional love. She probably does not want your love because she loves herself. What good is the love of someone else when you love yourself? I think your problem is that you think you need to be a better person before you are worthy of love. But you do not. You are pure and perfect. What is not to love?

Her cruel behavior is there because she has not purified cruelty from herself. If she has to resort to cruelty it means she is unskillful at communicating in a *dharmic* way. There is no excuse for it, if it is in fact cruelty. It may be that you are projecting again, imagining that certain of her actions are cruel because she is not giving you what you want, i.e. a personal relationship. People in love project a lot of very stupid things. If you want love, fall in love with some who is your equal and work it out in the world. How can a *guru* with that many devotees have a personal relationship with everyone? It is impossible. I know about this. As soon as I pay a little too much attention to one person, the others get upset and want to be “close” to me. You have no idea how much trouble I got from some of my students when I got married recently. “Ramji spends all his time with his wife and ignores me and I am a true seeker. It is not fair. He is this, he is that, etc., etc.”

Shanti: So this broke my heart, that she singled me out here.

James: Why give away your power like this? It is not becoming. It sounds to me like she doesn't even like you that much. “Like” is a lot better than the kind of “love” you seem to want from her.

Shanti: But it's curious that she is so demanding of me on a personal level and does pay a lot of attention to my habits, my character, my expression, my behavior and frankly tells me all my faults.

James: She is not a good *guru* if she does not tell you what is right about you as well. It is very

poor psychology. She should bring out your good qualities so that you can see them and concentrate on them. You are down on yourself and have low self-esteem, and she is feeding it for some strange reason, probably because she is as caught up in the drama you are describing on her side as you are on your side. It sounds to me like she is trying to turn you into her idea of a saint. You are not a saint. You are a rebel and a free spirit and you don't belong there. You need to think for yourself and take charge of your destiny. You have incompatible natures. In short, it is time to grow up. You don't need a mother or a father. You need to think clearly, objectively. I can feel the dispassion in you from the objective way you describe your feelings and your relationship with her.

Shanti: Maybe because she knows I don't see them or it is not going to be helpful to me in life? But how can I see her as an institution when nothing she does makes sense to me?

And why would she put so much time, effort and attention on me unless she sees some potential in me or wants me to overcome behavior that may hinder that? In that way she seems to play the role of strict mother, in a kind of role-play game: she's playing into my drama. And since I'm the child here and a non-conformist and rebel at heart, she does not like it at all when I don't listen to her or follow her instructions as all the other devotees do. I see them running to do this or that for her at the snap of a finger. Perhaps this is immature, but I just don't like her ways and attitude about things and she doesn't like mine either. She abhors arrogance and I am like the black sheep of the *ashram*, and as you mentioned in the example in your email, I admit that my immature behavior is probably unconsciously fueled by unresolved emotional and relationship issues.

James: Pardon my French, Shanti, but fuck potential. Stick with actual. Actually, you are a beautiful human being. If she can't see that and help you to see it, she is not the *guru* for you. It sounds like she is a typical Indian old-style *guru*.

Honestly, Shanti, you should get therapy for these psychological issues. You should sit down with someone who is professional, who can communicate with you properly, whom you respect, and work patiently work through them. Spirituality is for mature people. She is not a psychologist although perhaps the *sadhana* she has put in place has some psychological benefits – if you understand it. She is a *bhakti yogin*, not a psychologist. This kind of *sadhana* only works for mature people – or for sheep.

Many of the people in the spiritual world do not belong there. They are trying to treat psychological issues with spirituality. It doesn't work. You must have seen all the sick puppies – lost souls – wandering around on the streets of Tiruvannamalai looking for some kind of mystical fix.

Shanti: She believes in strict discipline and hard work, and the way she works just looks like boot camp to me. And even while working, my behavior is a more like a free spirit and she does not like this and does not know how to deal with me at all; she will tell me I don't listen and that I am selfish and then she will give me some kind of punishment for this. It's a very strange relationship between us. We are always butting heads. I can only think she's keeping me there with her, keeping a close eye on me because of my sincere devotion to her, God, my spiritual practice and *sadhana*, all which I take very seriously. But how can I surrender when I don't feel it

inside?

James: She is not keeping you there, Shanti. You are keeping you there. You are stubborn and you want her to love you in some way known only to you and you keep hoping that you will win this battle. But she is not capable of loving you the way you want. She is an institution. She is on a mission and has an idea and she is powerful and will get what she wants. You cannot win.

Shanti: In my eyes, I am there for no other reason except to grow spiritually, and she seems to think I need to grow practically as well, so I cannot see any other reason why she would keep me so close to her, because we are as different as night and day and frustrate each other, two personalities almost completely opposite to one another. But I'm sure many lessons are to be learned from this relationship.

James: This is what people in co-dependent relationships always say.

There is no ostensible benefit, so they imagine that they are getting some kind of hidden benefit because they lack the confidence to take care of themselves. If you have done your best at something and it doesn't work, then you should move on. It is vain to stay in an unpleasant relationship and hope that things will improve. I think you have analyzed the situation quite well. The communication between you two is negative. It is negative because you do not like each other very much. You have this romantic notion about a *guru* and it involves a lot of unrealistic ideas. One is that you should surrender to her. I think there is a good reason why you haven't surrendered to her: because it is foolish to surrender to a person. If you want to surrender, surrender to *Isvara*. What is lacking in this conversation on your side is any discussion of *Isvara*. What is your view about *Isvara*?

Trying to grow spiritually by being spiritual does not work, Shanti. You should live your life and let life teach you who you are, and when you are mature, then a *guru* will appear in your life and show you that you are the self.

Shanti: By the way, I ordered your book from the States and will continue to read your *e-satsangs*, which have resonated with me. As far as a teacher, I watched your YouTube interview at *ConsciousTV.com* and was in tears in Part V. I could see more clearly after that.

James: What you need, Shanti, is some straight talk. I am not saying that there is anything sinister about your *guru*. Not at all. I am saying that you are an intelligent, free-spirited person who has surrendered her common sense out of an ill-considered notion of spiritual life. Some sense of insufficiency is motivating this seeking and you need to figure out what it is and question it. I say there is nothing wrong with you as a person, that you do not need fixing. Only your thinking needs a bit of work. This woman is not a teacher, someone who can communicate with you on a rational level. It would be a shame if you let her break your spirit and turn you into a good little sheep-like devotee. You deserve better.

Shanti: You hit the nail on the head when you concluded that perhaps healthy relationships

were missing in my childhood and I have many personal doubts and insecurities. And because I loved my family so much (and still do), I ended up taking most of the blame upon myself and inventing stories to justify it. But at least I feel like maybe I am beginning to realize that I need to mature, and I'm trying to take things much more lightly.

You asked me what my views are about *Isvara*. To me *Isvara* is God. I have always had a sweet, intimate relationship with God. I cry often to God when I pray or sometimes when I just think of him. I very much appreciate God on my life because there really was not any person who could understand me. I guess when you've had the experience of feeling connected in a very subtle but intimate relationship, no other human relationship comes close, but I did not realize this at the time. I think it could have been the root of my problem.

I was never very religious growing up, but I always felt fortunate because my religion's God was the only one, the Supreme One, so there were never multiple gods in the religion I grew up in and there was also no form to worship. So I was used to praying to the unseen, the unknown. Maybe this is why I have such a strong imagination. But I always trusted in God which I knew was there, even during the suffering. I tested God many times. I never had any technique to access him, except for prayer or talking to him.

In my twenties when I began to get interested in spirituality, studying metaphysics and learned about protection by using the white light. I believed in the white light because it represented goodness. I also associated the white light with God. However, I always felt there was also a dark light or some kind of dark force that was also out there, but I could never imagine it nor did I ever want to see it. It was just ugly to me.

My relationship to God is more like an intuition, although in these last five years I've had experiences of lights and sounds, but I never had visions of God or anything like that. But most of my life I was more interested in the world than God. And it was not until my early forties, just before I met my *guru*, that my life was feeling like it was going to hit rock-bottom. In desperation I went to see a local psychic and she told me that I had a dark fog surrounding me and she could remove it. I said no, because I did not want a psychic doing this kind of work on me. But this stayed in my mind and I believed it was true. Very soon afterwards things really got bad and my life was falling apart in just about every area. I felt absolutely helpless. One evening as I was taking a walk, I was really down and began to lose faith in life. Suddenly felt I the desire to talk to God and ask for help. I prayed to God for a *guru*. I looked up to the sky and said, "God I am ready. I want a *guru*. But this *guru* must be a pure-white-light *guru* while at the same time able to understand the darkness." In my mind I was thinking along the lines of a Dalai Lama or something like this because I had no idea what a *guru* was like. Then a miracle happened. About a month later a friend told me that three Divine Mothers were coming to the city where I lived to give *darshan*, and all of them were coming around the same time. I knew nothing about Indian culture at that time, but the term "mother" really appealed to me, so I thought, why not, I'll give it a try. I saw all three and I had amazing and beautiful experiences with all of them, but it was only with the first that I felt a profound and deep heartfelt connection, and this is the one I chose to be my *guru*. With her my whole life changed and I experienced the deepest love I had ever felt, I was home with her, so I became a devotee, and to this day I have had no other love as great or intense as this one.

In the beginning it was unusual for me to allow a form to represent God, but our spiritual relationship was becoming more and beautiful and I always felt connected to her. I ended up

completely forgetting about God, the invisible with no form, and decided to really dive in and use my *guru* to connect instead (even though deep inside I felt that God was still hanging around). I naturally fell into a very serious spiritual practice. I think it was the first time in my life I was so focused and disciplined. My heart was filled with joy every time I would think of her. I was so deeply devoted to her. So after seeing many things in my life turning around for the better, I finally accepted and trusted that she was for me and that God was working through her. After a couple of years I became more curious and very intrigued, and I wanted to get to know her personally. It slowly began to happen and another dimension had been added to our relationship, a physical reality. That is when our relationship really began to change. I could still see her as a channel for God's power during *darshan*, but experiencing her form and personality in everyday life was very confusing for me and I couldn't understand why I had become so miserable. I wanted to have that deep connection with her and wanted that to remain and just accept that we are incompatible on the physical. But this was difficult to do being around her, and so the misery continued. Perhaps this is all a sign should stop seeking God outside myself. And just recently in Tiruvannamalai I had my first real experience of feeling God, literally inside of me. So maybe my spiritual path is making a turn now, as all I really want is to have peace, to know truth, be in God always and to realize my True Self.

So this is just a small part of my incomplete story of my relationship with God. I love God with all my heart and soul. I feel deeply devoted to God, and it's frustrating because I'm still very attached to this physical reality. I also know I have not surrendered completely to God yet, because I still feel like I'm the doer. So even though Tiru makes it much easier for me to do my *sadhana* and surrender to God, I still am very much identified with this body and mind.

PS: I appreciate your emails and making me think more about things, as I tend to want to walk away and not look at them. So I extend my sincere thanks to you once again.

James: You are using the *guru* as a symbol of God, the light of consciousness that is your own self. The light you experienced in Tiruvannamalai and God are one and the same. And God is you, your true nature. It is *parama prema svarupa*, pure love. You are right that you should now find the inner *guru*, your true self. Your outer *guru* has done her job. If you read my website and my book it will give you an idea of what the inner *guru*, awareness, is and how to find it.

~ Love, James