

# Open Relationships

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This email is from a woman who is in a relationship with a philanderer, and is having certain doubts.

**Candice:** Dear James, thanks very much for your answer and patience!!! If you say you have the impression that I use my understanding to justify something that is not probably okay for me, then you are very probably right.

I have never experienced a difference between solving a worldly problem and enlightenment, because since I saw analysis and therapy and also “belief” and “changing thinking patterns” did not work, the answer to all worldly problems must be logically that, what else? I totally agree that in that case the little identity has to be non-attached to the “outcome” and this is only possible in knowing to be awareness.

**James:** I am not sure if it is a language issue, but when you say, “knowing to be awareness,” you mean “knowing myself to be awareness.” I disagree about changing one’s thinking patterns, because thinking patterns that are not in harmony with the truth of one’s being as awareness causes suffering. However, I agree that you should know what the reality of your being is before you set out to change the thinking that has flowed out of your non-understanding of who you really are.

**Candice:** I do experience this detachment, but I do not know what to do.

**James:** This detachment is intermittent. Ask who experiences it. Freedom is detaching from the one who experiences detachment.

**Candice:** Because “applying a rule” by paying the bills and watering the plants is perfectly, directly and naturally flowing out of the understanding to be awareness, as a natural way of being and responding to the needs of the environment, because this rule is very close to the visible facts and consequences.

**James:** Why separate these mundane things from relationships? Relationships are equally mundane. If you are going to be reasonable you need to apply the “rules of awareness” to everything. One of the basic rules is honestly, with oneself and others. The musician was not honest. And I think that in terms of a relationship you perhaps avoided finding out about this man’s character because you were not really honest with yourself about what you really wanted, both in terms of a relationship and in terms of your spiritual quest.

**Candice:** But it seems that in a relationship not any rule is “applicable” in that way, but the primary “being love” brings forth a natural and constructive response by the creator as the doer, according to “the rules.” And this has to be done now, and not in a far-away ideal relationship. And when I am this now, there is not even a far-away ideal relationship, but only this, me, and it is okay, even if it is not okay, and this is not a theory, it is really so.

**James:** I disagree. Relationships are in the apparent reality where rules apply. Ignore them at your peril.

**Candice:** I can apply rules to things because it is the willingness to see and recognize the obvious needs. That is how I got out of debt.

Also, after having a energetic “burn-out” and being unemployed for two years, I found in November quite natural a job as nanny for two and now three days a week that I love and is challenging enough, but leaves me more space for the spiritual development and a “*sattvic*” mind instead of stressful working as a teacher.

So I do not intend to justify something. I just do not feel, as little identity, to be “allowed” to apply a rule that says open relationships don’t work, because it is not factual. When I am needy and jealous, it does not work. When I am not, it works. So everything depends on me, as awareness...

**James:** Yes, ultimately it does, but you will not be needy and jealous sometimes and not needy and jealous at others if your knowledge of yourself as awareness is firm.

**Candice:** The rules I am talking about are not rules that you apply. They are just the rules of life.

**James:** The confusion that I pick up is a confusion between you as awareness and you as Candice. Speaking to Candice, by “rules” I mean *Isvara*’s rules. Your nature is not “your” nature. It is an imprint stamped on Candice by the Creator. They are not “rules” in the sense of dos and don’ts. They are the rules of existence – which you violate at your peril, in this case emotional and mental agitation. Look at the thoughts you had when you discovered that your lover is a philanderer. They were not happy thoughts. Ask yourself why.

**Candice:** I have been thinking that maybe I did not consider the specific characteristics of a love relationship, being that love and openness meets love and openness. When I am love and openness, nothing seems to miss, even if the other person stays closed, so maybe the problem lies in a relative misunderstanding, in the same way you don’t take swimming lessons from a math teacher, and that is why I feel something is wrong, due to deeply ingrained, factual, biological structures with which the rules of life and cultural structures are interconnected.

**James:** You say, “when I am love and openness,” implying that there are times when you are not love and openness. If you know yourself as awareness, you are always love and openness. So

this love and openness is purely circumstantial. What good is it if you have no control over it?

Your idea seems – don't be insulted – very narcissistic. What is love in this world but intimate and honest communication? And if you really know what intimacy is with yourself you will be satisfied with intimacy with one other person – looking at it from his point of view. There is no such thing as “more” intimacy. Why is this man not satisfied with the intimacy he experiences with you? If it is real intimacy he will not be going here and there to replicate it. He is looking for relief from his desire – which he gets – or thinks he gets – occasionally by sex.

By “narcissistic” I mean that what the other person thinks and feels is just as important as what you think and feel. And when you truly love someone, what they are is what you are. You are bound by what they think and feel. You can try to escape by thinking that you are awareness, but if you are awareness, you will not be self-centered and self-indulgent and you will know what intimacy actually is and you will respect the rules that keep it sacred. I do not think this relationship was born out of self-knowledge. I believe it was born out of loneliness and a need for intimacy. I think he probably is seeking love too, but like most men thinks that sex will lead to intimacy. It may lead to the illusion of intimacy, but that is all.

**Candice:** Even pain is pain, but at the same time it is not pain! So how can I measure a subjective experience of feeling something is wrong? Or how can this experience be the guideline for my actions, since as awareness, objectively, I do not need any confirmation, and this is a living reality for me. Isn't there a reason, beyond relative understanding that people meet each other, and shouldn't I honor and trust this?

**James:** Do you think that pain is not pain when you are feeling it? *Au contraire*, Candice. This seems to be a clever “spiritual” justification.

Whether you honor and trust, it depends on the values that underpin it. If you do not examine them but just take what comes, how can you say that you are little more than an animal? Things come for reasons, noble and ignoble.

**Candice:** Acting from a rule, without an embodied understanding, is to me like not opening a present and looking for another one. I will get the same present with a different wrapping though... until I understand. This is why I as relative identity cannot move, and it is useless to move, but I have to be moved, by the Creator.

**James:** So the Creator told you to fall in love with a philanderer?

**Candice:** I don't believe in the “soul mate” stuff, because “dreaming” about that, half a year ago I met somebody I was heavenly in love with and he with me. I realised it was not only the circumstances (he was married and his wife about to have a baby), so we did not touch, but also the “perfection” that at the end I found not something to “pursue” because I experienced this fundamentally as not different from the relationship I am in right now, since love is love, and this was very revealing for me!!

**James:** Why did you sleep with the musician and not with this man? If love is love, what difference does it make? You followed the *dharma* with reference to the married man, but the *dharma* with the musician is less clear, so you were free to ignore it. On the surface it is okay, considering the prevailing attitudes in Western materialistic societies. But if you are a spiritual person, you want more than just pleasure and relief from loneliness.

I am not moralistic. You can do whatever you like. I am just saying that if you want freedom you have to question everything in light of your desires. You could see the suffering in the married situation clearly, but in the present situation there is a different kind of suffering – the knowledge that this relationship will not lead you to what your heart desires. In the meantime you let your intellect make up some very clever spiritual reasons for letting things be. The intellect should stand apart from the emotions and the ego, and offer impartial counsel based on a vision of the truth.

**Candice:** Also, I do not recognize my relative me as love-starved as you state. I have been living alone for 14 years, with my son, before this relationship, and was pretty okay, and at the times I am by myself I do enjoy it. Maybe it is the opposite, not that I am sexually greedy but I always have been afraid of being “trapped” in a relationship and the psychological entanglement that comes with it, so the actual openness in this relationship paradoxically made me feel safe and free, as not being the center of attention and criticism.

**James:** I am not suggesting that you are love-starved or sexually greedy – he is definitely sexually greedy and lacks imagination insofar as he can't figure out how to satisfy himself with a single partner – only that a less-than-noble motivation is behind both of your interests in the relationship. You yourself say it is fear of being trapped. But this fear itself is illegitimate because you are awareness and awareness is always free. It can never be trapped by a relationship. You put yourself in a trap and then you fear being trapped. This is a very common situation. It leads to a lot of suffering. The fear of being trapped is a reasonable fear for someone caught in *samsara*, and it should be honored all the time, not just when you find yourself in the trap. If you do find yourself in a trap and this fear is not examined properly, you will develop a psychological problem. You may, for example, become hard and cold in your relationship to your lover – to “protect” your freedom. In fact you have injured yourself spiritually because openness and accommodation are primary spiritual values.

**Candice:** Now the need to escape this by knowing to be awareness is going away, a more pure, independent and transparent understanding of love is stirring up, without fear of “losing myself,” which makes me more sensitive to “twistedness.”

**James:** This is good, I suppose. I think the twistedness is in your unclear thinking about this relationship.

**Candice:** I am not really asking you for help, because I can work this out on my own, but I hope you have something to say about the apparent confusion of this relative identity between the experience of the absolute and the relative rules according to the law of life.

**James:** Yes, it is a confusion between who you really are and who you think you are. Candice is nothing but her priorities and values. Below you say she does not exist, but this is not true. You do exist as Candice. But she is just not real. You are taking her to be real. You think this love affair is real and that your thoughts about it are real and you are trying to work it out – and you will. You have to go through the experiences in this life. The experiences themselves mean nothing apart from your evaluation of them. If desire or fear is operating when you are examining them, you will not come to the right conclusions and the force that caused you to seek happiness there will force you to seek happiness there again.

**Candice:** I decided to go in therapy once more, a “one-session coaching” from somebody I trust, so I hope to gain more relative understanding.

**James:** Let’s see what the coach has to say.

**Candice:** Another important question that comes up though is this: for a long time I have been interested in “inner engineering” from the Isha foundation, founded by Sadghuru Jaggi Vasudev. I have been guided, however, to go directly to the understanding, taught by you, so I could not be deluded in an experiential feeling of bodily empowerment and confuse that for ultimate truth (after I saw this confusion in “hiding in devotion”).

I do also notice a physical attachment in this relationship. I think that is normal, and also beautiful, and meant to be so as a basic bonding between lovers. At the same time, I feel intuitively drawn to practice this method, to become also physically more independent. It is also my intuition that with this independence I can see more clearly and move more directly as relative identity, from awareness.

**James:** See the conflict. On the one hand you want physical intimacy and on the other you want to be independent physically. This is textbook *samsara* – upside and downside. You will not find a solution in *samsara*, Candice. You are wasting your time. This problem stems from a lack of clarity about your fundamental purpose here on earth.

And the whole notion of “bodily” empowerment sounds ridiculous. The body is just meat. What’s to empower?

**Candice:** First, I thought I might be deluded and this would be a trap to keep the doer alive.

**James:** It is the doer through and through. The one who is writing this is the doer. The absence of the doer is not freedom, because you can have a doer and be free. You are already dead to the doer – as awareness – but you do not appreciate this fact.

**Candice:** Also, the transparency and innocence I experience in my body is totally enough!

**James:** Enough for whom? The self? No, it is enough for the doer. For now it is enough. It will not be enough later. This kind of satisfaction is always temporary.

**Candice:** It is enough because this transparency transforms by itself in every kind of energy that is needed, in the moment. Passion, quiet attention, purposeful activity, absorbing, concentration and then it comes back to the basic alert transparency, and it is there also during the “colour” of the energy because it keeps the colour pure.

**James:** So the color is pure. What about you? If you are pure, you will not care about the color of your experience. You are pure as awareness. It is not awareness that is talking to me here. It is awareness talking to you, however.

**Candice:** Also, I am not chasing eternal bliss or cosmic orgasm or that kind of thing, because I feel the ordinary as divine, so that would be kind of impractical, in the sense that I feel being self-supporting and whole and complete does not mean drowning in one’s own bliss and forgetting the world, and I also feel there is enough time to be like that when I have no body anymore, so why would I want it now? (That is why I kind of look forward to that!) Since I have a body, it is honoring the facts (awareness as matter!!!) to let it be as body, in doing, and not use it as a motionless *nirvana*-temple.

**James:** This does not make a lot of sense to me, Candice. Reality is non-dual, and if there is bliss there is only bliss and the world, which is not apart from you, awareness – whose nature is bliss – is also bliss.

The body is inert and insentient, Candice. It does not feel anything, bliss or otherwise. There is only awareness, apparently experiencing itself through the subtle body which seems to be conscious, but in fact is just an inert reflector. It is ignorance of yourself as awareness that makes all this experiential stuff seem so real and so important to you.

**Candice:** Still, I feel this urgency to know my body as an instrument and know this energy more, and to understand the science of the body, not like a real *yogi*, because then I would be busy with that for another 20 years, also not to attain “powers,” because non-interference is the basic rule, but out of the urge to know enough of the relative to become as functional as this relative character can be in responding to life.

**James:** It is just a body urge you feel, nothing more. Anyway, good luck with it, Candice, but why do you want to get to know your body better? I am glad you wrote this because it is clear to me that your interest in freedom – which is what I am about – is not a very burning interest, more a curiosity, I would say. As you say above, you will have to work it out on your own. Freedom is freedom from the body and its urges.

**Candice:** I feel I have the choice between intellect (gaining relative knowledge) and feeling (subjective experience) and all possible combinations of these two, according to this relative

character, to be developed according to the (practical) needs of this relative character and its environment, not that I make the choice, but when I am drawn to it then I am drawn to it. What do you think about that?

**James:** I don't think it is a very intelligent statement, assuming that you are looking for freedom, which I define as freedom from both relative knowledge and subjective experience. This is the statement of a doer who is not clear about what she wants.

**Candice:** Also, I am drawn to participate in an online study program with Adyashanti, mostly because I feel he can touch areas of relative understanding I cannot see now. At first I experienced him as "too nice," and I needed your judgments and fierce-love comments, to learn to shut up.

But now I am starting to feel comfortable with you, and I feel his "niceness," without compliments, criticism or judgments, is actually not "nice" but patient, detached and objective, and this can help me to explore the relative side.

**James:** Okay, but when you are fed up with the relative side, get in touch with me. I can show you what is next. You are still fascinated with experience and the experiencer, Candice. You still think there is something to discover here. You are wrong. But you will have to go through what you have to go through until you realize it. People come to me when they want out of the relative existence.

**Candice:** When I read your *satsangs*, I experience love, stability and deep appreciation. Everything you say is always new, fresh, nutritious and brilliant. Also, it is opening a door to a sea of knowledge, and I learn much from it, seeing the same thing from so many different angles, so it also functions like "exercise," like a spiritual keeping fit. I know I am this sea of knowledge, but the conscious appreciation of it as relative identity has the size of a drop. So I do not consider myself ready, and I am happy for that... also because I love the tradition and ancient wisdom, and I like to learn and stay in touch with that, and I appreciate very much the way you embody this.

**James:** Appreciation is much appreciated, Candice. It is good that you appreciate self-knowledge but, as you say, your knowledge is just a drop in the ocean. Keep studying the website, etc. Come to the seminar in Holland. I think you should get the videos. I have a hard drive with about a hundred hours of serious Vedanta teaching for 200 euros. That's two euros per hour for the wisdom of the ages. If you have room on your computer for 250 gigabytes of info you can return the hard drive and save 50 euros. You should view them in order from start to finish if you want to get the big picture and obtain maximum benefit. Your clever and unruly intellect is still in charge.

I am not trying to discourage you. On the contrary, I am trying to encourage you, but the lesson today is that you examine your deeper motivations. I can see a truth seeker in you, but it is not the only seeker. To succeed it needs to be the only seeker.

**Candice:** But the “sting” is out. I do not get hurt, fired up, restless or fearful by your words, like before. The judgments that first hit me painfully, now they mean just an indication of always the same thing, that the relative entity can never be enough, because it does not exist, and the psychological problems are a manifestation of not knowing this.

**James:** If the relative entity does not exist, there are no psychological problems. You cannot deny the doer, the relative entity. This is the biggest failure in the modern non-dual teachings. You have to take it seriously and work through its issues until it is discriminating and dispassionate. Then it is qualified to seek freedom.

**Candice:** But I don’t feel to have a psychological problem, because I am not suffering, it is the effect, the life-situation now, that has been manifested by insufficient understanding, and while I can appreciate these circumstances as an excellent reflection of my convictions, (and thank the Creator for that), I have to look in detail at these convictions and understand them.

**James:** I agree.

**Candice:** Knowing they all arrive from the same source of feeling small and inadequate is very important because in this way I can see much more directly the specific conviction as expression of this same source, in relation to different areas of life, without being hindered by emotions, as if I am not okay now. Solving psychological problems is trying to slay a dragon that develops seven heads: when you cut off one and knowing this one source is finding the dragon’s belly and killing it. So I understand very well if you don’t keep yourself busy with that it is useless and ineffective.

**James:** You need a way to solve psychological problems. If you don’t have them and you are a freedom seeker, then we have a program for you that will take care of your issues. It is called *karma yoga*. If you were doing your life as *karma yoga* – which needs to happen before you can actually inquire effectively – this love affair, etc. would not have manifested. You would have been clear about what you wanted, have consecrated your actions to the Creator and you would have avoided this problem.

**Candice:** A lot of time you mention disgust towards the little identity, and I never understood this, until I did. To kill the dragon, really be willing to find its weak spot, needs a deep disgust towards the little identity. I cannot simultaneously move as dragon and at the same time kill it; this is why all the heads keep growing. “Solving psychological problems” is therefore a divided action of a divided mind. So it seems to me that before realization disgust is essential, and you name this “being qualified.”

**James:** Maybe “disgust” is too strong a word, but you need to see clearly that there is no solution in experience. I hear you arguing for experience as some sort of solution.

**Candice:** Only when I realised to be love is one, and any movement just spoils its purity, and the

movement is just a translation of this purity caused by ideas based on insufficiency, love and disgust go hand in hand, like a very effective sword. But disgust does not seem appropriate now. How can I fight a dead dragon? It must be the patient loving, understanding, and therefore a decomposing attitude towards what is left that is needed.

**James:** But the dragon is not dead. It may look dead, but it is still alive.

**Candice:** I have the impression your teaching is not sustaining this practice.

**James:** It is not my teaching. It is just Vedanta. But you are wrong. Patience, love and understanding are good – but in service of what?

**Candice:** First of all because the aspirant is supposed to be successful, content and relatively happy, having done the psychological work already. At the same time you mention that without the incentive to seek freedom, feeling dissatisfaction and wanting to get out, no desire for enlightenment arises. So you are very realistic and not bound to a “principle,” which I extremely appreciate and why I trust you.

**James:** This is correct.

**Candice:** Secondly because awareness itself will guide the aspirant in this period after realizing who one is, so you do not need to sustain this practice, and you talk much about that, about cleaning the mind.

**James:** I disagree. Awareness will not guide anything. It is fine with everything. You need a means of knowledge to guide you because you are confused about who you are. You are still trying to guide yourself.

**Candice:** And thirdly because your judgments are very appropriate to fire a person up to leave the little me and concentrate on the self till the little me is recognized for what it is, but after that, how can it be effective?

**James:** Of course it can't. Vedanta is a throwaway. But you have to use it properly first before you throw it away.

**Candice:** I think it can't, because during this time another instrument is needed, like patient, discriminating observing, beyond judgment because every judgment is directly pointing to the source of all confusion, but when the confusion is recognized and located, I cannot see how judgment and even discrimination works because the judgment and discrimination lead to understanding, and understanding can only lead to more understanding and this is supported by patience and love, and let the Creator “do.”

Is that right?

**James:** It looks good, but it is only partially right. You have the cart before the horse. Any discrimination or judgment depends on your priorities and values, and your priorities and values depend on what you know and what you know depends on who you are. The judgments I make are based on the “theory” that you are whole and complete, non-dual unborn, ordinary, actionless, unconcerned awareness, not the apparent self which you take yourself to be. They are not judgments if the “theory” is true – which it happens to be. “Discrimination” is a much better word. There is one basic discrimination that is required for freedom, the discrimination between the experiencer, the doer and the self, awareness.

**Candice:** But what now? I am not leaving you like I do and cannot leave *brahman* and you are me! And within you that is me other instruments appear that are as much you and me, but I feel are appropriate for this time. Is my understanding right? What do you think about that?

**James:** I don’t know what you mean by “other instruments.” I told you what I think. I think there is confusion about who you are. I do not think you will be successful in either the world or in the enlightenment business until you are clear about what you actually want. I think you are getting close to getting serious about freedom, but I think you still have a few silly romantic notions about what life can offer you.

**Candice:** I have to contemplate this and inquire into what you said. One thing I really totally do not understand is how to handle this. Do you suggest I say, “Sorry, I found out to be love and awareness, and so I leave you”?

**James:** Well, you have to know what it means to be love and awareness to say that. Leaving the love and awareness bit out of it, why is the relationship not satisfying? Tell him that.

**Candice:** What about loyalty and the shared history? Are these silly romantic notions?

**James:** Loyalty to what? You should be loyal to the truth, to your spiritual search. Shared history? Criminals have shared history. Is this reason to stick together?

**Candice:** When somebody would beat me up, I would have no problem in knowing what to do. Is his behaviour similar to that on a more subtle level?

**James:** No. Your behavior is similar to that. He is not beating you up. He is just following his desires. He does not care about you. He cares about sex, and he is clever enough to know that you will swallow his talk as long as you think you need him. You are beating yourself up by involving yourself with someone like this. You injure yourself morally and spiritually by indulging in this kind of situation. Find a nice decent man who actually loves and adores you. Or just do

this one and suffer. But don't make up a lot of clever explanations to hide the fact that it is not right for who you really are.

**Candice:** Is the sacredness of love dependent on two persons?

**James:** No. But both people need to understand what love actually is. It is not a feeling. It does not violate *dharma*.

**Candice:** How can that be if I am love and awareness? Does everybody who knows himself or herself to be awareness have to be in a relationship with another person who knows?

**James:** If you know you are awareness you cannot be with someone who does not know. You will not be able to put up with the ignorance, the lies. But this is not the only option. If you have the right values you can be in a relationship with someone who does not know he or she is awareness. In your case you know intellectually that you are awareness, but the significance of this knowing has not filtered down to the emotional level. Your emotions are more powerful than your knowledge.

**Candice:** What are the criteria for that, since everybody who does not know is "dysfunctional" on one or more levels? How can this define who a person is and make me decide "he" does not "deserve" "my" love?

**James:** The only criterion is self-honesty. You deserve better. Wouldn't you have preferred to have a faithful lover? You can go ahead with it and suffer. Anyway, you will tire of it eventually or he will tire of you when you get demanding and it will end. You do not value yourself properly if you settle for this kind of relationship.

**Candice:** Am I in a way responsible for his behaviour by accepting it?

**James:** You are enabling it, but you are not responsible. He is responsible.

**Candice:** Is this acceptance also unnatural and twisted?

**James:** Yes. It is against nature to accept this kind of behavior.

**Candice:** But acceptance is not the same as agreeing.

**James:** You should have been a lawyer, Candice.

**Candice:** Accepting, not agreeing, not moving, observing everything and gaining true knowledge seems to me the only way, so I act in the moment and I notice this is always constructive.

**James:** Accepting what? True knowledge of what? There is no true knowledge here. This whole thing is just about desire. Desire needs to be known for what it is. If you understood the desire behind the desire – the desire for freedom – you would not be in this situation. You are not in this relationship for freedom. You are in it because you want to be free of loneliness or free of feeling unloved.

**Candice:** Well, “one fool can ask more questions than ten wise men can answer” is a Dutch expression.

**James:** I can answer any question you can ask, but you have to see the logic in my answers. I think it is best to just let this relationship run its course. What I say will make sense one day, if not today.

**Candice:** Also, I am very sad if you think “my search” for freedom is just curiosity and I did not consecrate all my actions to the Creator.

**James:** You did not answer my question, “Did the Creator ask you to get into a relationship with a philanderer?” If you worshipped the Creator you would know what kind of relationship was ordained by the Creator. You should not be sad. If you want freedom, you want freedom. If you want love from a human being, you want love. You do not get in bed with someone to get spiritually free. You get in bed to get free of your desire. But it doesn’t work, because the freedom is temporary. And temporary freedom is not freedom.

**Candice:** At least you proved me wrong in assuming that your judgments do not touch me anymore!

**James:** You call them judgments, but they are just logic. They look like judgments because you are emotionally attached to this situation.

**Candice:** Anyway, they are appreciated in their power and significance, coming from awareness.

**James:** Good. Anyway, I touched up the last letter this morning to make it more clear.

~ James