

# Surrender Is a Concept Too

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Mary:** Dear Ram, though knowing that I'm the potential of everything, that I'm the space and the wall, that I'm the door to the self and even the Self Itself, just letting life rain on me without having any ideas how "I" would like life to unfold, and then I am going to be enjoying everything – ??????

**Ram:** Well, my dear Mary, life rains on us whether or not we let it. We can have all the ideas we want, but what happens is up to life. The only control we have is how we respond to what life sends our way. So you can be happy with what it sends – or not. It's up to you. The only real protection you have is the understanding that life is benign and has your best interests at heart and that you have been blessed by God with the tools to deal adequately with it.

**Mary:** Identifying with the self makes me feel as if I am only shifting into another "dream world" – because identification is a mechanism of the mind/consciousness. It seems to be stupid just changing identifications, let go those from the first half of the century and train another during the second half of the century and then... We both know identification with the self isn't the matter of enlightenment. It is only a limited support, a stratagem (not sure whether the right word) to outwit the mind.

**Ram:** You are right that identification with the self is a limited stratagem for neutralizing the mind's suffering. But you are wrong that enlightenment is something other than identification with the self. Here is a quotation from the *Astavakra Gita*, one of the great Vedanta classics. Verse 2, Chapter I: "If you think you are free, you are free. If you think you are attached, you are attached. The saying in the scriptures 'as the mind so your world' is true." The "limited stratagem" gets you the confidence you need to see that you are free. Do you need a stratagem? Yes and no. Yes, if you don't have confidence in the idea; no, if you do.

Enlightenment is not for the self. It is for that part of the self that has apparently forgotten that it is whole and complete. This part is called the mind/ego. As long as the mind has the wrong idea about what it is, the suffering will continue.

**Mary:** The obstacle, as far as I see it at the moment, is to completely surrender and give up any control, all desires and fears, and go straight ahead into the cage of an apparent hungry python (referring to fears). True?

**Ram:** Yes. But where are the fears coming from? Vedanta contends that they are coming from the belief in limitation. So unless the root belief is neutralized by applying the right understanding (I am whole and complete, and therefore the fear itself is illegitimate) the fears will continue and you will have to keep dealing with them (i.e. surrendering them) ad infinitum. Surrender as a stratagem gets pretty tiring too after a while.

There is a woman here who comes in twice a week to give me a massage. She is a lovely person. Over the years she has developed a strong love for me. She would be very happy to marry me, but this is not going to happen for a number of reasons. Because of her feelings I have kept the relationship friendly but professional. Slowly she has realized that I am more than just an interesting man. And recently she has been calling me “*guru*.” Mind you, I never said anything to her about Vedanta or anything else and never acted like a *mahatma*. A month ago, after the massage, she wanted to sit for a few minutes to rest, so I allowed her to do so. There was a silence for a few minutes and I could see that she wanted to say something. Indians are very respectful of spiritual people and they are not loose with their tongues concerning what is going on inside them. I decided to listen to what she had to say, and out came her story. She is forty and has not slept a night without the light on. She regularly has terrible nightmares. She will not go out to urinate in the middle of the night without waking up her daughter to accompany her. In other words, her subconscious is full of fear. As she was talking I was thinking of what to do.

The first thought was that she needed therapy. But I dismissed this option immediately because she is dirt poor and there is not a therapist for five hundred miles. When she finished she looked to me for advice. This is what I said: “When you go to sleep turn off the light. When you go to pee do not wake up your daughter. Go out in the dark without a light and pee. You are Kali. You have a big sword. When you feel fear you take the sword and kill it right away without thinking about it at all. Be very violent and angry. Do not give it the slightest chance to live.” I gave her these instructions with complete confidence that they were true. Like many Indians she has trust in the words of *mahatmas*.

When she came the following week I could see that she was very happy, so I asked her if she had any nightmares. She said that she had done as I had instructed and there were no more nightmares. She said she could lie peacefully in the dark. It is still the same a month later.

The problem with fear is not fear itself. It is the fear of fear, lack of confidence that you lack the weapons to destroy it. The sword of Kali is discrimination, knowing that you are immortal and that the mind is actually very weak compared to you. This woman surrendered to the knowledge of the self. She assumed Kali’s position and see what happened. The mind didn’t even dare make trouble. So, yes, surrender is the way, but it is surrender to the knowledge that you are the ruler of the mind. You are the boss and you need to decisively exercise your authority.

I don’t know if this applies to you, but many people are uncomfortable with authority – for obvious reasons. In Western societies the Dr. Spock view of childrearing has been the dominant view for fifty years. It is a good idea to give children what they want – but only up to a point. There is a lot of truth to the criticism of this view: “Spare the rod and you spoil the child.”

Because they are afraid that their children won’t love them if they don’t give in to every desire, mothers often don’t establish their authority at the beginning. The first mistake they make is that love means that you should never deny the one you love the things they want. What should happen is that when the child comes out of the womb and it is given to the mother by the doctor or midwife and the child looks into the face of the mother, the mother should not immediately give it a loving smile. She should make sure that the child knows who is the boss. She should wear the stern face of authority and wait a minute or two to check the child’s reaction to make sure it is paying attention. Then she should smile and cuddle the child. You can argue that this is a mixed message and will confuse the child, and this is true to some degree in the beginning. But the fact that the love is delivered after authority is established sets up a respect for authority that is

absolutely essential.

This is the most difficult thing for a sentimental mother to do, but it is extremely important – for the child. Why? Because children lack discrimination. They are completely prisoners of their desires. And if you give them the message that they are going to get what they want when they want it the way they want it, you will give them a lot of psychological problems. So once the face of authority is imprinted on the child's consciousness, the mother should feed the child with love – because it knows who is boss. This puts the child in its proper position. It is forced to accept the fact that the fruits of its actions are up to someone or something else. This is excellent training for life – which does not consider us to be gods and is not inclined to mindlessly pamper us. Parents who fail to establish their authority early on will find it next to impossible to establish it later, much to their own detriment. Once the child has this power it will never relinquish it and the rest of the relationship will be an ongoing power struggle. This training should go on until the child surrenders. It will surrender because love trumps fear. It takes a mature parent to do this, one that knows the value of love and the value of authority. The point of all this, as I'm sure you have divined, is not about childrearing but about establishing your authority with the weak ignorant childish part of the mind – the part that wants what it wants the way it wants it when it wants it. Yes, everyone has fears but the problem is not the fears. The problem is that you permit them to be there in the first place. You accept them. Vedanta says to stand up to them. Show contempt for them. Tell them to fuck off. Laugh at them. Mock them. They are nothing.

If you can't see this, then there is another approach: find the fun in fear. There is a positive payoff to every state of mind, including the negative states. One of the most successful businesses in the world is the "fear" industry. The fear industry knows one thing: there is a lot of fun in fear. People love it. It is stimulating. It is exciting. It is a good high. They are building amusement park rides these days that scare the shit out of you – and people love it. Extreme sports are more popular than ever. What is the fun in fear? It is the self. Behind every emotion the self sits – blissful and eternal. Stay with the fear, follow it to its source and ka-pow! – you explode into the fearless dimension of freedom.

**Mary:** Meditation in its various forms is a path of dis-identification, or the attempt to quit the deepening of the *vasanas* and trying not to deepen others, endless work and effort. I never could make friends with this method, my character is not a doer. And as you said already, one can sit half a century not attaining an essential result without knowing that one is the self. In this moment I get the idea to think that identifications and conditionings cannot lead to a direct and immediate knowledge, there is a contradiction within.

**Ram:** Yes, this is true. But is this an either/or situation? Why not see it as a both/and situation? Why not surrender to life and at the same time communicate patiently with the mind, help it to see things the way Vedanta sees them. People spend twenty-plus years trying to get their children to see things the way they want them to see them (often to have the children reject them completely), but when they are asked to take a few years to get their own minds sorted out they say it is too much work. I've said this before: the mind is a muscle. A one-time surrender is not going to change the thinking patterns. They will continue.

And so you will be forced to continue "surrendering" to cope with the negative thoughts. Remember, it is the mind that is surrendering. You have to condition it to surrender. How is that

different from conditioning it to think “I am free”? Surrender is not superior to “I am free,” but it is still a coping strategy.

**Mary:** Taking a risk to surrender completely, no back doors at all, could be a gamble. To surrender one must be convinced 100% that surrender is a superior state. One should believe that there is all profit and no loss when one surrenders.

**Ram:** This is a rather dramatic way to see it, I'd say. Nothing in life is one hundred percent. You can trick yourself out of surrendering by imagining that you do not believe in it one hundred percent and that there is no downside. But what about just doing it and see what happens? It's not a life-and-death matter, after all.

**Mary:** For more than forty years now life is telling me the story that there is completely nothing under “my” control. But when I look on other people's lives, it often seems different, as if something was wrong with me and I was not able to find out how it works. A very deep imprint!

**Ram:** It is a waste of time to compare yourself to others. Everyone is motivated by different things. The people who seem to be getting it right often have problems that you can't see. If there's something wrong with you it's not because there is something right with others. It's because you think there is something wrong with you. A “very deep imprint” is what I mean when I say that the mind is a muscle. This “I am unworthy” thought is a big muscle that you have built up over a long time.

**Mary:** I often ask myself why famous and successful people are not enlightened. An obvious reason could be that they are so bothered with their jobs as artists, politicians, scientists, musicians, etc. that they have no time and space left to think about who they are. There seems to be no question about this question. In my life this question has attended me since childhood when I was able to reflect on life and people.

**Ram:** Vedic science prescribes only two lifestyles, that of the householder and that of the *sannyasi*. This is because human beings can be divided into two distinct psychological types. The first type is the people who take the world to be real, do not question their appearance in the world and go for security, pleasure and *dharma*. These are the householders. Ninety-five percent of the human race is of this type.

The other type is the *sannyasi*. These are people like you and me who have a question about why we are here and what it all means. These people are called *mumukshus*, people who want freedom. Almost every spiritual person I have met has said that they have had this orientation since childhood.

If you have the temperament of a *sanyassi* you will not be successful as a householder and vice versa.

**Mary:** Another version of an answer is that if one lives a fulfilling life then he/she needs no concept like enlightenment, for there is only a little frustration but it feels good on the whole.

**Ram:** This is true. What incentive is there to seek freedom if you are enjoying your life? You need to be dissatisfied and want out. I drink to the people who are satisfied.

**Mary:** If you don't have a fitting concept, life is like suicide. In terms of concepts the most attractive one is the non-dual view, but to enjoy life for itself fully, without any concept – surrender, faith, trust, giving up control – simply being able to live life peacefully and happy, this would be the greatest to me, the peak.

**Ram:** It's a nice dream, but you have to have a concept on the road to freedom. You get to freedom through concepts. As long as you have a mind you have a concept. Just see that the concept is the highest one. Even surrender is a concept.

**Mary:** I'm tired of longing, searching, wanting to understand, identifications, psyche, body, mind. Why am I not able simply to lean back and let them do their work while I watch the drama: sometimes smiling, sometimes tears, sometimes laughter, sometimes fear...? I want (no way out of desires!!) to finish this search I'm on the road now for almost thirty years.

**Ram:** I hear you loud and clear. This *samsara* is not worth all the trouble. It is not particularly bad, but it is not particularly good either. It is just a lifetime of work, work, work, doubts, doubts, doubts, a bit of joy, a bit of sorrow – and then you die. So it is no wonder that people want out.

**Mary** (from above): Why am I not able simply to lean back while I watch the drama?

**Ram:** It's a great idea, Mary, but (here's that famous and ubiquitous "but") the problem is that you have a *vasana* for thinking. You can't just not think, i.e. surrender. Surrender only works if you have the understanding that this is a benign universe and that you are non-dual. And even if you can get up the courage to surrender you will discover another problem. The one who surrendered will still be there. What will you do with her?

Evidently, you haven't "hit bottom," as they say in the 12-step literature. You are tired but perhaps you aren't quite tired enough to surrender the Mary identity. When you are truly convinced that you can live without the support of things outside yourself then you will do it. Perhaps you're not convinced that freedom is superior to dependence. The idea that you will lose something good is not true. If what you had was so good you wouldn't be seeking a way out. You will lose attachment, but is that bad?

**Mary:** Now it's your turn, Ram, your dance and your game!! Surprisingly, I'm full of love from top to toe, a miracle, ALL THAT...

**Ram:** You're full of love because you are love. As far as the dance goes, I did my best: eight pages. I hope you enjoyed it.

~ Much love, Ram