

# The Relationship Game

Ram (James Swartz)

2014-06-19

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/65>

**Ram:** Dear Arthur, we're sorry to hear that the relationship with Mary didn't work out, although we're not surprised. I won't commiserate further: I assume that you'd like our take on the situation.

Those pesky *vasanas*! Well, you can't blame the *vasanas*, so let's look deeper. Forgive me if I state the obvious here and there. Self-inquiry is always about the why. In this case, why does Arthur fall in love (emphasis on "fall") and long for a non-dual relationship? The short answer, which is always the best, is: Arthur doesn't esteem/love himself enough to be happy with himself. If you love yourself as you should, you will have to carry a club to beat the women off, believe me. We won't go back to childhood to explain the origin of the feeling of lovelessness; it gets us nowhere.

If you don't appreciate yourself as the love that you seek, you seek it in another. The irony is that what you seek in another you always have in the form of yourself, insofar as you only want the other because it puts you in touch with yourself. You know that looking for love in a relationship doesn't work. I know it doesn't work. Scripture says it doesn't work. World literature says it doesn't work. Why? Because you are what you are seeking. But it is clear that this fact is not known by you in such a way that it neutralizes the desire for love (from a woman). We hope that this knowledge becomes hard and fast at some point but whether or not it does is up to *Isvara* so let's consider two more options.

In this option we throw the hungry *vasana*-dog a bone. It is based on the idea that the kind of love you seek is out there waiting for you but the way you are going about it is inappropriate and untimely (remember *svadharma*, appropriate and timely action?). It is difficult to talk about this problem because the ego may very well beg to differ and it may get irritated at me for saying it. But, just as Krishna was not particularly warm and fuzzy with Arjuna in the beginning, I will state the (probably unwelcome) obvious: she was half your age, Arthur. And she was from a different culture and you met her at a *satsang* which means that she is confused as to her purpose in life (i.e. *moksa* or a relationship) as you are.

Putting two confused people looking for love together does not remove the confusion nor does it equal love. To state the obvious again: nobody wants a relationship for *moksa*. Well, maybe *moksa* from loneliness, but freed from loneliness is not *moksa*. Freedom from self-ignorance is *moksa*. So for option two to work I'd say you need to get a bit more realistic. Choose a woman who is in the same *karmic* boat. She may not have a nice tight ass, her breasts may not be quite as pert and a few wrinkles may have appeared (nothing that can't be more or less rectified by modern cosmetic science, however) but the chances of making it work increase exponentially insofar as the competition is not as fierce and women of a certain age are usually attracted to men of a certain age insofar as they are looking for companionship and not excitement, which, believe me is more rewarding than you may imagine. If you want a spiritual type, which is not always the best, you will find a reasonably significant cohort available in the spiritual world.

Secondly, a bit of advice from someone who has had a fair amount of success with the ladies: Don't wear your heart on your sleeve. It's best to maintain – at least outwardly – an obvious

sense of indifference. The needier you are, the more likely you are to get a needy partner which does not bode well for happiness. Option two more or less requires you to pay lip service to your spiritual desire and set your heart on your goal: a relationship! A woman! You should do well. You are good-looking, very smart, well-mannered and, dare I say it (don't discount this fact), well-to-do, maybe rich. It goes a long way with the over-50 crowd. And when Ms. Right shows up, you do the relationship as *karma yoga*. Relationships can be useful spiritually, as the energy you formerly spent hunting can be profitably invested in higher pursuits.

Option three: man up! Commit yourself to *moksa* as defined by Vedanta and make a vow to stand up to that fucking fucking-*vasana* until it really dies. Make a binding contract with yourself. No dating for one year, to be extended if necessary. When you see a skirt walking by avert your eyes; don't let the fantasies take root.

Forgive me for being honest – I hate this bad-cop role – but you are trying to have your cake and eat it too, Arthur. It doesn't work. If you want a relationship, go for it and forget the *moksa* business. Wallow in them until you are completely convinced they don't work, and the dispassion conducive to *moksa* arises. It seems you are not quite convinced that relationship-love is a dead-end street. If you think about your recent foray you will realize that even when it was good, you were still alone. Vedanta calls your situation lack of *purushartha nischaya*, clarity with reference to what you want.

The final option is to see that there is a problem in the first place. Read your letter again and ask yourself if Arthur was the only one there when Arthur wrote it. When Sundari read it to me I thought, "WTF, the self is writing this." The clarity, Arthur. The knowledge. The only thing that alerted me to the problem was that Arthur was not laughing. See if the one watching Arthur read these stern words from big brother Ramji isn't the same one who was there watching Arthur pen that tale of hardship and woe.

~ Much love, Ram

**Arthur:** Dear Ramji, thanks for this cogent response and sound advice. There was nary a ruffle emotionally or for my ego as I read it, but just a sense of increased clarity and an appreciation for your directness. Well – maybe – the "not-so-mighty Arjuna" part stung a little. ☺ I had to laugh, and still laugh when I recall that you wrote "fucking fucking-*vasana*," or FFV, as I will forever call it... Yup, FFV...

Looking at the whole relationship thing again, with reference to what you wrote, I realize that it is in that moment where I let fantasy take root – whether it be the fantasy of a fling or the fantasy of a "lived happily ever after" story, or the fantasy of fulfillment through ownership of a desired object – that I start to skid off the road to *moksa*. And in reflecting on this a bit further, in this moment, this "fantasy" can just as well be called a "craving" or a "desire" – this is the form in which craving or desire is the most potent for me – and I can see, in my moments of clarity, that it is the tension or agitation produced by this fantasy that "I" think will be resolved by gaining the object. But Vedanta/Yoga 101 tells me that "joy is not in the object" and, further, that it is in the cessation of craving (fantasy) that the joy that is already there is uncovered. So clearly it's just more intelligent and efficient to let go of the craving at the outset and to uncover the ever-present joy rather than have it drive one to spend many months of effort and thousands of dollars on gifts, travel, living in a foreign country for a month at a time, writing long love letters professing eternal love, having hour-long Skype chats, etc. only to arrive without the object on the other side of it. Now THAT is

funny and I am laughing at this moment!

There is one thing that eludes me: This esteem/love for myself. Maybe it's just a matter of semantics, or maybe I'm tripping on the similarity between this concept of "self-esteem/self-love" and all of the psychobabble crap that uses the same terminology but which is somehow more focused on an appreciation of the "person" than it is on a wider sense of being. The truth is that if "self-esteem" is the appreciation of this "person," I must say that it's kind of hard to love something that is so mutable and clearly evanescent and which, in the wider context of "reality," seems to be so superficial. So is this "self esteem/love" that you refer to the same as the sense "I am whole and complete"? Or is that an important part of it but, beyond that, perhaps you are pointing at a more accepting embrace of my "person"? That's the sticking point for me right now. Seeing the way that I am driven to activity by *raga/dvesa*, and how foolish that way of living is, I would just as soon dissociate myself with this "person."

~ With love, Arthur

**James:** I love you, Art. You're the best, an Ocean of Mercy. With your (as always) eloquent letter you relieved the anxiety I felt the moment I wrote "not-so-mighty." I thought, "Have I gone too far? Will he still love me?" One more true confession so I can sleep at night: when you went for Sally last October, I looked at Sundari, rolled my divine eyes and said, "Six months, max!" We had a good laugh.

So, knowledge assimilated. You get a B+ on this lesson. Why not an A? Because you failed to confidently answer the last question: self-esteem/love is love of Self or love of self? And the answer: love of self. And why were you not completely confident with that idea? Answer: the old *raja/dwesas* once again! Or the FDV (fucking *dwesha vasana*). You dislike that needy little fucker named Art.

He needs your love, the poor sod. He will always be what he is. *Isvara* is the key. Art, Ramji, etc. did not create themselves. We come in with an upside and downside. We can't take credit for either. If you take credit for the upside you become inflated (arrogant/vain), if for the downside, deflated (low self-esteem/love).

If you give birth to a difficult child, you don't get pissed off at the child because you understand that he or she can't help being that way. So you love it. Your love makes the child acceptable in its own eyes and it can love itself. This child never dies. It is eternal. When you are old and grey, that child is still present. The longer you withhold the love, the more it suffers. You can't count on Mom and Pop anymore – they did their bit, for better or worse. It is up to you to love your self. Because we call it a "not-self" does not mean that it is meant to be an object of aversion. It just brings to mind the other Self, the real you, whose nature is love. The love you felt for Sally needs to go to you first. If it goes to you, nobody can resist you. You won't have to spend a dime to get the girl. No flowers, no inspired love letters, no humiliating compromises. She will be all over you.

So maybe the vow should be: "I will love Art every minute of the day. I will not judge him. I will accept him, warts and all. He is forgiven."

~ Love, Ramji

**Arthur:** Dear James, your reply has really gotten me to have a sober look at my inner sense of self-worth (or lack thereof) and how that manifests as the FDV. After I received your email, and considered whether or not I did/could love this “needy little fucker” Art, I was actually quite surprised to see something inside of myself that looks/feels like self-loathing. What a shock! So it’s timely and of vital importance that I understand what the heck is going on here.

Where I have gotten to so far is to ask myself, “What’s stopping you from loving that ‘needy little fucker’ inside?” and, “What does Ramji mean by FDV as it applies to the aversion to myself?” What seems to be the case for me is that I can’t simply “will” myself to love myself, as much as I want to do that. So the tack that I am taking now is to use my intellect and what I understand from Vedanta to dig myself out of this apparently deep hole that I have been in for my whole life. Can you let me know if this makes sense?

Part of the reason that I am taking this approach is that I have been so inspired from my recent study of *Bhagavad Gita* chapters 13 and 14. Between your recordings on these chapters and Swami D’s home-study course on these topics, I have come to see how powerful these teachings are in helping me to achieve a high degree of objectivity, and of course to see how that objectivity exposes the Subject. More practically, the process goes like this for me:

- There is no doer (*karta*), only the play of the *gunas* and the witness of this play of the *gunas* is me (*atma*);
- For my purposes in this analysis, I take the essential nature of *sattva* as illumination/clarity/joy, of *rajas*, longing/restlessness, and of *tamas*, apathy/sloth/delusion;
- “I” am *guna-atita*, beyond the *gunas*. Therefore to the degree that I am able to see my momentary state as an expression of one *guna* or another, to that degree I am already beyond the *guna* that is manifesting at the moment. So in this simple application of knowledge, I assert my identity with the self.

This is an experiment that is currently in progress, but the first fruits are becoming evident. So if I feel “longing” or a sense of “neediness” (they really are the same thing) as I have been, I can just take it as a “*rajoguna* cloud” manifesting in that moment rather than something that either identifies “me” with this “needy little fucker” and know that it will pass. And along with this, I tell myself, “Of what use is aversion here? It’s just the play of *rajoguna*.” In the same way, and because I am doing this work now this happens more frequently, if I see a sudden and uncaused upwelling of joy and peace, I can also take that as a “*sattva-guna* cloud” passing and tell myself, “Of what use is taking credit for this or expecting it to last?” And as for self-loathing, which is really just, if I understand it correctly, the *dwesha vasana* asserting itself, it seems to make sense to treat that as an expression of *rajoguna*, but on this point I am not clear. Is aversion like this just another facet of *rajoguna* or is it something orthogonal? In any case, it appears that if I just objectify this loathing, now that I am more aware of it, I can see it as something that will pass as well, and as not me.

So I am kinda sidestepping this whole “self-loathing” thing, with the exception of seeing it as just another object in my awareness, but my hope is that once enough clarity develops that the self-loathing will just evaporate. And of course I can still make efforts to love myself whenever I catch this movement in my mind. Bottom line: Vedanta rocks! And if there is anything faulty or missing in my reasoning or process I would certainly appreciate some clarification. I love you too, Ramji.

~ Art

**Ram:** Dear Art, your thinking is a perfect example of self-inquiry, “taking a stand in awareness.” You understand the *guna* teaching well. The idea is to “sidestep” the self-loathing, see it as an object belonging to ignorance and not to you, the seer. It is something that motivates certain actions but not every action. In short, it comes and goes. So it isn’t real. If you can’t maintain that objectivity and *rajoguna* causes Art to act, then Art should apply the *karma yoga* logic. In the case of relationships, there is nothing inherently unspiritual about one unless it is accompanied by the belief that it will complete you. The only problem with the Sally thing was Art’s inability to turn the result over to *Isvara*, hence the grief once it ended. *Rajas*-inspired love is so compelling that one wants to lock it up and keep it tucked away forever. But no one can lock it up. It is fleeting.

If you consistently apply the *guna* teaching – the feelings and thoughts always only belong to the *guna*, not to the self – the self-loathing will slowly fade as *rajas* loses its power. What you said about not being able to will yourself to love yourself is indeed wise. Love only flowers when it is watered by understanding. As I believe I mentioned, whatever is, is not the result of conscious choices made by Art.

Ignorance made him do it. Desire made him do it. Fear made him do it. Understanding this fact is forgiveness, and love flowers in the waters of forgiveness. When I see you, I don’t see your past. I see *atma* shining. When you see me, you don’t see my past, you see *atma* shining. The trick is for you to see *atma* in you and me to see *atma* in me. All the thoughts, the history, etc. are not real. They have nothing to do with you or me.

You are on the right track, Art. Keep at it.

~ Love, James