

Self-Knowledge Is Love

Ram (James Swartz)

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Jean: Ramji, thank you so much for being a Vedantic *guruging* computer machine! And thank you sincerely for the notes and help on the meditation. I do indeed understand that I am entirely alone... always have been. Funnily enough, when I was a child my father, who was a bit of a philosopher, pointed this out – and other stuff too, like, “Does your mother really exist if she is in the next room?,” and, “You came here alone, will always be alone and will die alone,” and, “How do you know America really exists?” This sounds morose – but he was great (apart from being horribly right-wing) and very funny, so I enjoyed those ideas and it was a good foundation for Vedanta. He was a *jnani* dad!

Ramji: Yay for the right-wing *jnanis*! I’m a left-wing Montana redneck *jnani*.

Jean: When I was in India a lot seemed to be going on for me and coming at me. Very unusually for me, I found that I felt quite agitated in Tiruvannamali and not like my usual laid-back self. I reckon they put amphetamines in the coffee!! I am so not going to drink it next year. But of course I stayed on, as I knew profoundly that at last I was being exposed to truth during your *satsangs*. When I came home my head was filled with sorting out living arrangements, old boyfriend problems and all the mundane details of life.

Ram: This is why a simple lifestyle is recommended. You can’t really make progress when you are too agitated. Now that stuff is out of the way and you have the *karma yoga* attitude in place, the assimilation of the teachings will slowly take place.

Jean: But I was also feeling very happy and in love with the world – nature, friends, strangers. In fact it was so powerful that I went around telling people I loved them. One day a restaurateur offered to serve me and my friend Mary even though the kitchen had closed. I told him I really, really loved him. At this point Mary suggested that I needed to tone the love down a bit and keep it to myself a bit more after she picked herself up from the floor laughing at me. Because of this love though, I really understand that I don’t need anyone, including a relationship (which I may or may not have again – I certainly don’t want the agitation which I see that many of my friends who are in relationships get). And as you say – the relationship is in me – I am still on my own – even during the intimate times... it is still aloneness, even though it doesn’t seem so for a brief time. So already, in such a short time, you and Vedanta have given me confidence and happiness and felled my self-esteem issues with all this love. I had it before, but somehow now it is different. It is more secure.

Ramji: Yay! Another victory for Vedanta. It goes to show that the criticism of Vedanta as merely an intellectual discipline is off-base. If you know who you are, you will love yourself properly.

Jean: Anyhow, I continued to think, enquire, then you came and that was exceptionally helpful on all levels – especially the light-bulb moment in San Francisco when you, yet again, held up the watch and explained it was in me. I knew this before, but now I really got it – and so my perception on this has shifted and I am working with this. Those good old shifts!

Ram: The “location of objects” is a particularly powerful teaching if you are ready for it. If you are not ready you will think that the idea that all objects are the self because they are experienced in consciousness is only an intellectual trick. You will hang onto belief that there has to be some kind of permanent experiential merger into everything accompanied by a dramatic ego loss, etc. Those kind of experiences do happen but they only reveal in a dramatic way the truth of the “location of objects” teaching. And then they disappear, taking the knowledge of the non-separation of the subject and the objects with them. Even the ego is the self appearing as an object in consciousness.

Jean: Sometimes of course – maybe a lot of the time – I slip back to duality. Me, the subject, here and out there, the objects. A lot of friends called in randomly to see me yesterday evening and I was looking at them, musing how they were in me... alone, just me. This reality malarkey is quite weird. I was trying to hold a conversation with them while thinking about them not being out there. It is a bit tricky, but I think I got away with it!

BUT where I am at now is that I do still feel overwhelming love for nature, God and everything. But I also sometimes feel alone and empty as the self. Is this the self?

Ram: No. The self has no feelings. It is the knower of the feelings. Think about it. The feeling does not know anything. It is just a sensation. But you know the feelings. There are no feelings in you. But self-ignorance causes you to identify with the feelings. You say, “I feel alone and empty.” So when you know the self you assume (incorrectly) that it has feeling. The self is alone. Everything is only the self. There is nothing else. But this does not translate as loneliness. It feels rock-solid, real and subtly blissful. It is so satisfying that you would not even think to feel lonely.

Here is an email from someone who got this issue sorted. It is the real deal.

Seeker/Finder: Dear Ram, I am the self, awareness, the infinite boundless self. I am the self. It is nothing but me who is always here, forever here, the loving, endlessly loving, me. Nothing separates me from me, from love, from peace. I am love. I am peace. Knowing this, all doubts disappear like clouds in the sky. Ignorance disappears as a real world. A beautiful epiphany that is sweet, sour or bitter seems so real, but it never lasts.

So, my dear friend, if you discriminate the real from the unreal, you are always free, boundless and at peace. It is ignorance that makes you believe it is not so. Knowledge, all one, opens the eyes to the truth. I am deeply grateful that I met you, dear Ramji, for sharing Vedanta, which is nothing but love!

Something has changed since Tiruvannamalai. Even if it seems that actually everything is the same like always, something very important has changed: the feeling of loneliness and the longing have disappeared. And most important, there is

a new clarity about my perspective. Being awareness, the self, gives me all the fulfillment I could ever need. Good news! Vedanta is a great help. So for me there is a lot more to learn, for making things transparent. This is a great adventure. Feedbacks are astonishingly good. This is all a great gift from *Bhagavan* and of course from Big Chief Ramji. Oh, thanks so much!

Jean: It is just that, as this is a non-dual reality, there is only one self rather than objects or people out there. It is the enquiry which is throwing this up for me so far. Is this a normal thought process, I wonder?

Ram: The people, the objects, are there alright, but they are not substantial. They are just what you interpret them to be. As a person I am what you think I am in your mind. You may think I am a *guru*, a friend – whatever. But I am just what I mean to you. There is nothing objective to me. Even if I am right there with you and we are interacting, the interaction takes place in your consciousness and it is constantly changing. At one moment you will see me one way and at another moment in another way. You may feel a certain way about me one minute and some other way the next minute. Me, the object, has not changed. Like Popeye, I am what I am, but the me in you is only made up of your thoughts and feelings, and your thoughts and feelings are non-separate from you – although you are separate from them. When you do not understand how perception works it seems that you are separate from the people in your life. They seem to be others and you find yourself caught up in relationship.

Jean: I am not sure how to explain this. And you have answered this, so I need to meditate and think more on this. Is this idea of aloneness just my intellect? Is it wrong thinking? To repeat, if everything is in me, including friends and all connections, then there is just me, i.e. the self. This is why the meditation brought up a feeling of desolation. I am not sure about this – I guess I need to stay with it... but some clarity would be helpful and assurance that I am on the right track. I am also talking to Kay about this – she went through something similar and says I need to meditate and enquire. Sorry to ask the same question and sound thick.

Ram: You are absolutely right that everyone is just you, but your interpretation of non-duality is faulty. It is the craving for love through others that makes the self seem lonely. Ask yourself why you think that you should feel a certain way when you know who you are. What is the expectation? Women are particularly afflicted with this when they realize who they are. Another of my women friends took almost two years to get through it when she realized the self. The desire to be connected is more hardwired than any other desire, including sex, money and whatever else human beings want. Men in general are happy on their own, so it is easier for them to assimilate aloneness. Note the “in general.” I put that in lest I fall victim to charges of sexism, not that I am a man, whatever that is. This not to say that I am a woman either. Let’s see – what does that leave? 😊

Ram (from the previous email): Okay, so the self is negative. Fine. But what about you? Are you negative? This is about you, not the self. Answer: you are not negative or positive. You are the one who knows the negative and the positive.

Jean: What do you mean by “you,” Ram?

Ram: I don't see a Jean. I see the self when I talk to you. I know that the self (temporarily under the spell of *maya*) thinks it is Jean – poor self – but this is not how it is. There are not two selves, a Jean self and a true self, although that is the way it seems when you are conditioned to dualistic thinking.

Jean: But I am the self – so are you saying it is the intellect that is negative and the self is neutral?

Ram: Yes.

Jean: You say this is about me, not the self. I thought that we were talking about the self, not Jean. Or are we back in duality again?

Ram: Yes. Look at the way you phrased the original statement. The self appears as an object and Jean appears as the subject. But the self is not an object. The self is you. This is the meaning of the word “self.” Jean is just a name for the self, but your statement shows that you think it refers to someone other than the self.

Jean: Damn! I may have to go and have a lie-down and a cup of tea after writing this. That is, I mean my gross body now needs to lie down and will take the subtle body and causal body with it... oh, yes, and it will all be in the self! 😊

Ram: Dualistic thinking definitely results in headaches. I have a friend who drives himself crazy with dualistic thinking. He looks on one side and it seems to be that way, and then looks on the other side and it seems to be another way, and he can't make up his mind which is real. He wrote the book on dithering. There is always some kind of tension around the issue *du jour*. It wears him out. He is so conditioned to the dualistic thought process that he is not sure what will make him happy. “Should I wash the dishes or go to the movies? Let's see, would I be happier happy or would I be happier staying awake and worrying about what will make me happier?”

Jean: Last night I was reading in a *yoga* book about what an enlightened person is. Anyhow, part of the description explained you and how you talk about yourself as limitless, etc. but it also described a “Jim” as someone who can be all things to all people. This interests me – are you like a sort of liquid plastic entity who is one way with one person and another way with the next? Are you just in the business of saving poor souls like me who happen (by God's grace) to find you and you communicate on whatever our level is? But perhaps we are not meant to understand who Ram is. He is the self with a few odd *vasanas* which kick in sometimes, e.g. he likes coffee, can be grumpy occasionally and not too much humility, but is also completely kind, wise and generous.

Ram: Yes, you got it in one. I am not a fixed personality, although there are certain consistent traits that make up my subtle body. My friend Herb, who is an enneagram specialist, says I am a “nine” – or was it an “eight”? – with a “seven wing.” I’m not sure how to fly with only one wing, but there you are. When it is important for the person to see me a certain way I become that person, nothing diabolical in it. I don’t violate *dharma*. Not everyone can see me the way I see me – at least not until their self-knowledge is firm. I am like an actor that can play many characters but never forget who I am. I temporarily identify with the character to make the communication convincing. At the same time you get a feeling for the real person behind. But the apparent person is fluid and ghostlike.

Some people, for example, think the literal meaning of a scripture is the only meaning. But there is a symbolic meaning too. You have a certain leeway. I am a bit of a problem with my friends who take things literally, whose world-view is not complicated. This kind of person will accuse me of being inauthentic. They may not trust me, think I am shifty. I am, but not in an unhealthy way. I am just very light on my feet. Things can be any way for me and the apparent me can be anything it needs to be because the sense of the bedrock real me is always present.

Jean: Yes, I intend to do something good with the money my mother gives me. Of course it will make no difference to how I feel about looking after her if ever I have to – I love her and would always make sure that she is all right. I am very very blessed that she is my mother – even if she does go on about the Divine Dog the whole time! My brother is here and we are making lots of jokes about how she loves the dog more than us. She confessed, sort of, that this was possibly the case with the Divine Cow which, next to my father, was the love of her life. Really, we could be scarred for life with such a mother!

Ram: Well, in a non-dual reality, how do you come out better than a cow? 😊 But your mom figured out the most important thing in life: how to keep the love flowing. Those stupid mutts are her God symbols and they work just fine. She is a healthy person.

Jean: So, with the inheritance money, how about a world cruise in exchange for guaranteed *moksa*? It would be a fair swap! Although who can guarantee the Grace of God bit? If you can guarantee that – let me know and I will give you everything!! Then I will be like you and won’t need anything... so that would be rather good!

Ram: Really, a world cruise? Okay, okay, *MOKSA GUARANTEED!* In writing. I’ll send the papers tomorrow.

~ Much love, Ramji