

# Self Symbols and Devotion

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Betty:** Dear James, remember that extraordinary experience at the cathedral? It seems the love/bliss was in me, not in the nativity tableau in the stained glass window. Of course you know this, and it seems so obvious now! But I now understand that I don't need to go chasing beautiful things "out there" - I can access this beauty in me, since I really do understand that there is no "out there" - although I suppose certain objects, perceived in a certain way, can trigger devotional ecstasy.

**Ram:** That is the whole point of religious iconography. If you are blessed with a subconscious religious archetype, symbols appropriate to your religion invoke the self in the form of *bhakti*.

**Betty:** I also wondered how much of the experience was because you were there as a trigger - but again, you are a concept in my intellect.

**Ram:** That is right. I am a symbol of the self for you. I am not over here in Germany. When you think of me, you think of the self. But in this case the self is conscious, unlike an icon, so you can actually communicate with yourself in real time.

**Betty:** One of my spiritual friends argues that happiness is caused by chemical reactions in us. I pointed out that this proves that the happiness is not in the externally-perceived object - and all is perception.

**Ram:** She has the right idea, just the wrong symbol. She is a materialist, actually. She believes that chemistry is destiny. No blame. It is an honest mistake because the archetypes are so subtle. You could also point out that chemicals do not evaluate the meaning of happiness.

**Betty:** But I realise bliss is more than just a collection of chemicals at the gross-body level.

**Ram:** Yes, it is the nature of the self.

**Betty:** I also understand that, if the world is in us, it really does make sense to keep the mind quiet and not stuff it with too much. I mean, it could get crowded in there! I see many people doing this nowadays - taking on the whole world and all the worries. For example, watching the news and filling their heads until they can't cope. And of course they don't understand that everything is just about their subjective perception of reality, it is their mind and where they choose to put the mind.

**Ram:** That's correct. If a thought points to something outside, you will be continually agitated. If it points to the self, you will be composed. This is *yoga*. So get rid of non-self symbols, contemplate self symbols and you will be in meditation all the time. This will lead to inquiry and *moksa*.

**Betty:** What do you mean by non-self symbols? Would these be material possessions/objects which create desire and need in us, like alcohol, big cars, celebrity culture – that kind of thing? Or is it indeed most material possessions? I am now going about the place dividing things into self and non-self symbols, which is keeping me amused. I just did this in a horrible shopping centre I had to visit and there were very few self symbols, but I managed to see the sky from the skylight. Nature has always been the big symbol of the divine for me. (Hence me laughing at the sea with joy. Well done, God!) Then I just picked up my mother's newspaper. Definitely non-self. The dog? My mother would see this as a symbol of the self. The computer? Depends what it is used for. What fun this is! My friend Sally Skyped me yesterday from China – that was definitely a self symbol because of the deep *bhakti* she invokes in me as my friend.

**Ram:** Yes, anything that invokes the feeling of *bhakti*. Actually, everything is a symbol of the self because it is the self, but when you are trying to realize the self it is important to surround yourself with things that keep your mind thinking of the self.

~ Love, James