

Rise in Love

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Once when I was excessively familiar with my *guru* in public he looked at me with an icy stare and said, "Never forget, Ram. I am not a human being. I am an institution." Well, he was an institution, no doubt, but he was also a human being who through hard work – "brick by brick," he said – had actualized his full potential here on earth.

There is a strange notion in the myopic and self-obsessed world of Western Advaita that "you" don't exist. What this half-baked teaching is meant to mean is that everything that exists is just consciousness and that there is no separate, unique "you," no person. This statement is true if you look at reality from the point of view of pure consciousness and is partially true when you look at it from the point of view of the *samsaric* life. While this teaching is meant to reveal the highest truth and confer on those who "get it" the exalted status of the enlightened, it is a half-baked teaching because the "you," the person who is supposed to not exist, actually does exist.

The existence of individuals is established by common-sense experience. The very fact that the existence of the individual is denied proves its existence because you cannot deny something that does not exist. In fact, non-existence is purely a concept because there is only consciousness and consciousness is existence. In Vedanta we say the individual definitely exists but that it is not real, a statement that sometimes takes a bit of contemplation to make sense of. It makes sense when reality is defined as "what never changes, what lasts." Individuals pass into and out of time like elementary particles pass into and out of a cloud chamber. They exist and then cease to exist, although not really. They just pass into an unmanifest state and then reappear. There is nothing that does not exist because consciousness is everything.

To deny your existence here is a great shame. When you do so, you deny yourself the amazing pleasure being a part of a world shot through and through with light, a world of intense and wonderful love. This blog is about love. Those who criticize Vedanta as a merely "intellectual" path do not have a clue about Vedanta or a clue about love. If consciousness is all there is and love exists, then love is all there is and anything that reveals the nature of reality by stripping off ignorance about it is definitely a path of love.

In the first place, love is not a feeling. It appears as a feeling and it appears as all feelings, including those that we do not commonly call love. Hate, for example, is just love passing through an unpurified heart. Strip the heart's impurities and hate becomes love. To understand that everything is consciousness, love, is to fulfill one's true purpose here.

I have more or less taken the stance of a Vedanta teacher. I am not a Vedanta teacher. I teach Vedanta in a professional manner but it is not my profession. At best it is a hobby that I have pursued with passion for forty years because I never felt like earning a living and being part of a society whose values I cannot, in general, relate to.

By the standard of most people's dull little lives, my life as a Vedanta teacher has

been terribly interesting, exciting and glamorous. I get invited all over the world, meet the most spiritually interesting people on the planet, am treated to exotic locations too numerous to mention, don't have to worry about money and am shown great respect by nearly everyone. But even an important role like this is just a role, a lifestyle. It is not who I am. When I say who I am, I mean awareness as it exists in the form of the person named James who was born seventy-something years ago and who, by all accounts, has led a very exotic life.

When you teach Vedanta you teach truth. Everyone wants the truth. So when you surrender your mind to the Vedantic methodology you very often see the truth and it transforms your life. I am very clear that it is the truth that is making the impact and not me personally, although the dedication that I bring to the teaching is certainly a major ingredient in the transmission. When a person becomes awakened to the truth, he or she reacts in a very positive way toward me. Mostly, this means that I am loved and respected. If I had a love deficit, which I would if I did not know that I am love - which is the message of Vedanta - I might be tempted to take advantage. That I have an excellent reputation is a tribute to the fact that I do not take advantage of my position to satisfy my personal needs.

Perhaps you will object and say that if a person is enlightened he or she will have no personal needs, as if needs were somehow unspiritual. In a way it is true, insofar as nothing is actually personal. In a non-dual reality "personal" and "impersonal" are just concepts and are easily resolvable into their source, awareness, which is neither personal nor impersonal. But it is never the person who is enlightened. It is the self that is enlightened, not that enlightenment is a good word for the self because it implies endarkenment, which is not a fact because there is only consciousness. The self is always the self and the person is always the person. The person is always much benefited by the knowledge that it is non-separate and completely dependent on the self for its very existence, assuming that an understanding of this dependence cancels the person's sense of doership.

Knowing that consciousness is all and that I am consciousness does not imply that there is anything spiritually wrong with being a human being with various needs. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna, speaking as the self appearing in the world as a human being, says, "I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*." This is a very interesting statement because it says that the desire operating in the *dharma* field that respects the physical, psychological and moral laws operating in the field is actually awareness. It could only be that way if reality is non-dual, which it is. The implication of this statement is not always appreciated by spiritual types who are often afraid of human love for any number of reasons. It simply means that you get to be the person you are, feel what you feel, do what you do and think what you think as long as you are mindful of the non-dual basis of the life's rules and laws. In terms of human love, it means that if I play by the rules of love, I am quite within my rights to love another human being as a human being or as a manifestation of the divine or for any other reason.

Anyone who says he or she is not interested in love is a liar. Love is the very essence of life and the nature of every being. People pursue it in innumerable ways because they are driven by the desire to know it. When you know it, you do not pursue it. You see it. You experience it in everyone and in everything and you graciously give and receive it. People who have read my autobiography often come away with the idea that I am a big lover-boy, out to have a good time with the women. They are wrong. I have had numerous loves and love affairs, some very deep and meaningful, some not so deep and meaningful, but I can honestly say that I never had a bad one

because I was only looking to understand how to give and receive the love that is my nature. I was seeking the knowledge of a love that would make every human contact a loving one. And with persistence and God's grace I discovered – or should I say, rediscovered – it one fine day. It is always a rediscovery because love is the essence of every experience and those moments of joy and peace that come frequently – or infrequently, as the case may be – are always moments of self-love.

When you know what love is you can love anyone – and you do. But knowing what love is – who I am – is very rare, and if you are a charter member of the love club – which you will be if you have lived and learned life's lessons – this knowledge will want to share itself with someone who also knows, someone who is not constrained by the small conditional notions of love that bind people to *samsara*. It will seek the company of someone who has been also set free by self-knowledge.

In any case, it was always my desire to have a partner who knew who she was and loved unconditionally. I did not need her to love me unconditionally because only I can do that, but whose love for herself – and by extension everyone, including me – was unconditional. It is very natural for love to want to be understood. Love is understanding. You see things through your eyes but it does not prevent you from seeing through the eyes of the other. In fact, love demands that you see through the eyes of the beloved. It is not lonely being free, although freedom means that that there is only one of us and that you are always alone, but being alone means being love and this love is its own reward.

If you are a simple person living an ordinary life, working hard to keep yourself afloat in a complicated and demanding existence, the opportunities to meet someone you can love and who can love you are always limited, not just because of a host of external factors, but because your ability to give and receive love will be constrained by unexamined likes and dislikes. But when the knowledge of who you are has destroyed your binding likes and dislikes and you live large, the love that you are is unconstrained and flows into everyone with whom you come in contact, assuming it is not blocked by some idea in the mind of the recipient. When you teach Vedanta, the love behind the words gives them the power to awaken the self. This awakening is little more than the self's recognition of itself in the words. The words point the mind back to the self, and an appreciation of one's nature as love ensues.

When you are awakened by the words of truth by a teaching and teacher, a heartfelt sense of gratitude arises. If you do not understand how the teaching works, you will assume that the teacher is introducing you to the love that you are and you may fall in love with him or her. You can see my dilemma. Here I am, a human being who would like to be in a love relationship with a woman who knows who she is and, because of my situation, I find myself surrounded by women who would like to – and do – fall in love with me. I could easily have my way with them. I don't do it, first because it is a violation of the rules of the teaching tradition, and second because I want more than just another worldly or spiritual love. I want someone who understands me as I understand myself. It is not enough that someone project their fantasy onto me and declare their love – which happens more than you can imagine – or be willing to love me because I have somehow been instrumental in changing her life or because I am a charismatic and an interesting character.

Man proposes, God disposes is the essence of life. If you do not understand this fact you will never be happy. So even though I wanted to marry someone who understood me as I understand myself and God had not seen fit – until a couple of months ago – to act on my request, this desire did not in any way make me

unhappy. It was a back-burner, not a front-burner, issue. I took the non-disposal of this desire as God's will – and since I long ago surrendered my whole life to God, which means that whatever happens is absolutely perfect because it cannot be otherwise, it being God's will – or grace, as the case may be – it was fine with me. In fact, the non-fulfillment of this desire coincided with remarkable success in my Vedanta teaching, and I have been having the time of my life.

One never knows the “true” reason for anything in the world because there is no one true reason. There are ten thousand reasons for even the smallest event. When you want something that is extremely rare, God is constrained by the availability of said object in the field of available objects. Every man wants Angelina Jolie for a lover but there is only one of her, and so only one man is going to get her, assuming she wants a man. When you know who you are and you want to marry someone who knows who she is – assuming she wants to marry someone who knows who he is, which is not always the case – the odds are not in your favor.

I knew this all along. I was not holding my breath. I had not resigned myself to the situation because resignation would have meant that I was attached to getting this desire. I was not. I just thought it would be nice, the icing on the cake of my life. In any case, about two months ago God finally came through on my request.

She was out there looking for me forever, and we rose in love. Just as a person who has not fallen in love can never understand what love is until he or she experiences it, it would be impossible to tell anyone what this kind of love actually is because it is so rare. But in my next blog I am going to try.

My wife's name is Isabella Viglietti. I call her Sundari, “that which makes beauty beautiful.”