

# The Non-Dual Bliss of Awareness

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Maggie:** Dear James, thanks you so much for *The Yoga of Love!* I can't wait to give it a read. I found *Inquiry into Existence* pretty hard going – I'm not quite qualified enough – but I'm listening to the last Trout Lake *Panchadasi* audio set and hope to find a way in that way.

Vedanta continues to work on me, and despite still being quite identified with the “doer” I find that my attention is frequently drawn to the lived understanding that “I am existence/awareness/bliss” in the most simple way – the only way that I can explain it is that I become aware that something is flowing through this body as existence/awareness and that, in itself, is bliss. Still, and I realize this, I just described an experience but, right now, if I inquire as to where this experience arises, I find that it's in “me.” So, perhaps slowly, Vedanta is weaning me from looking for experience so that I can rest in the knowledge, rest in awareness as awareness.

**James:** I love the clarity of your writing. That “something” flowing though you is the non-dual bliss of awareness, the experiential aspect of you, the self. As the *vasanas* are attenuated by your *sadhana*, i.e. *karma* and *jnana yogas*, the experience “becomes” more and more available, even though it is always present. It is the self experiencing itself. As the *vasanas* ameliorate, it becomes more and more a prominent feature of the *jiva's* experience and the limited experiences generated out of it by thoughts and actions become less and less meaningful until one day *jiva's* primary experience is one of constant non-dual bliss. Discrete experiences generated by *karma* don't stop, but they play on top of the bliss (superimposed is the Vedantic term), like ghosts dancing in the ether. You can't get away from experience, as experience is the self and the self is all there is, but you can get away from “looking for” experience and identifying with discrete experiences. In fact the only problem spiritually is the “looking for” because the bliss that you seek in discrete experiences is going on all the time in the background, or if you want spiritual terminology, “in your heart.” It is incomprehensible – not to mention ironic – that what we always have what we seek, but that's the way it is.

I've been in touch with Manny since the workshop. Mostly we talk about Vedanta and there was a period where I felt – and he agrees – that he was putting herself in the role of “teacher” – but after I objected and he gracefully accepted my objections, we are becoming friends. I like him a lot – he's a gentle soul with a very good heart. There also appears to be some mutual attraction, but I already know where that leads, unless inquired into, and so it goes. He does appear to have a obsession with Vedanta, even seems to be self-realized, so he's a good reminder to me cultivate my desire for *moksa*.

**James:** Yes, I love Manny. Perhaps he has a bit of a case of enlightenment sickness or maybe he's just enthusiastic with his “sharing.” Just between you and me, I got a nice email from him recently and posted it on the web the other day with a bunch of *satsangs* and I wrote one of his old girlfriends who introduced him to Vedanta last year, in which I indirectly referred to enlightenment sickness, the idea being it might

get back to him just in case he thinks he's "done," even if he is. Enlightened or not, he will stick with his inquiry. He's a really good guy. The teaching thing is probably just enthusiasm.

**Maggie:** I got into a tech company before it was big and got stock options that matured to the tune of two million dollars in two years. Anyway, I'm making the best of the work situation since, at least at present, it's hard to walk away from the money. Perhaps some day it will let me go?

**James:** Well, the key is to decide how much is enough. The problem is that you get accustomed to luxury when you can be just as happy with very little. You have to plot your escape, not just go with the flow. When I went "spiritual" in my mid-twenties, I figured I had enough money to last for five or six years, and I got the ascetic idea, which meant that I taught myself to enjoy the basics. My *mantra* was "three square meals a day, a roof over my head and pocket money is all I need." It was pretty easy, actually, because I was obsessed with enlightenment so I didn't notice that I was "doing without." People used to admire me for it, but it didn't feel like virtue, just common sense. In our culture luxuries have become necessities. So don't wait for "it" to let you go, develop the self-confidence to let go of it. Anyway, someone with your skills is never going to end up pushing a shopping cart full of aluminum cans to the recycling center.

**Maggie:** It never ceases to amaze me that smart people can't figure out the relationship between consciousness and matter. The only answer is that *maya* is very powerful indeed.

This morning I shared the email that I sent to you last evening with Manny, and in doing that I came to the realization that I was trying to present myself as the "good" student, more "cool," more Vedantically politically correct rather than simply say the truth as I understand it and experience it. So please bear with me as I make a more authentic statement of how my life is and about how I see the relationship with Manny.

The knowledge of my identity as awareness is firm. The only thing, I believe, that continues to stand in the way is some sort of long-held notion that there should be an "experience," for the *jiva*, to go along with the knowledge. But it's absolutely clear to me that I am awareness and that this body arises in me as well as every other object - thoughts, people, dogs, feelings, epiphanies, etc. It's because the knowledge is firm or at least "firm enough" that it can be "used" to free Maggie from mistaken identifications with thoughts and feelings, etc.

I love Manny deeply and he loves me, and I see this love as a mature love and, quite often, it feels like it's a love in which there is no other. It's also a love in which each of us gives to the other out of our fullness, without expectations, and also in the light of the love we each have for ourselves. In this love there is romance, intimacy, occasional misunderstandings which we clear up quickly, as with mature, qualified people. One of the things that we both revel in is a love for and an understanding of the scriptures. We are always learning something new, seeing a new facet of Vedanta, and there's such joy in that. I can also honestly say that if it were not for this beautiful relationship that I believe I would still be someone with a middling desire for *moksa* and I would still be living a more *rajasic/tamasic* lifestyle, still

fascinated by “stuff.” So when I said that he was a “good influence” I was being pretty “cool” and not stating the fact that quite often I am awed by his clarity, understanding and uncompromising attitude towards living a life in keeping with the teaching, in keeping with our true nature. I feel a great sense of gratitude for having had the opportunity and good sense to get to know him, to listen to him and to understand him with my heart and mind, to trust him and, yes, to love him.

I trust that this beautiful life that is arising in me, and in which Manny is a brilliant, loving gem, is arising in me out of the fullness of my true nature. It's beyond anything that I could have conceived of myself, and it's happening effortlessly. And the core of all of this is that I know that I am and have always been whole and complete, ordinary, unconcerned, limitless awareness. My gratitude to both of you for your support, love and clarity in teaching. I by no means consider myself to be “done” and will continue to actualize what I know by living the teaching, studying the scriptures and by living a free and happy life.

**James:** I didn't feel that you were trying to impress me. I thought your letter was an eloquent (as always) and sincere statement of a humble, devoted person. I think you have enough objectivity on the relationship thing now to do one with class, and he is a good candidate for a spiritual relationship. Good luck to both of you!

~ Love, James