

Hiding in Devotion

Ram (James Swartz)

2011-12-14

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/420>

Marilyn: Dear James! Thank you very much for your answer. It was really a blessing to me. I realized it is possible to be honest with another human being. Having written off this possibility from a very young age, it is causing a tsunami of emotions and pain. What I described as devotion was also a longing for purification. I saw an interview with you in which you stated that knowing oneself to be awareness is the greatest purifier. I realized I treated devotion as a hiding place, to become ready for “the next step,” since I felt I did not to deserve to say I am everything.

James: Your explanation below of your relationship to your mother was helpful in understanding your psychology with reference to authority figures. It is natural to “hide” when you are confronted by dominating people. In any case, your revelation about your misunderstanding about the nature of devotion is an important one. I admire the forthright way you are facing the obstacles to the assimilation of the knowledge that everything is you. None of this psychological stuff is important when you understand that you are awareness.

Marilyn: I also saw the connection between my last letter, in which I kind of left it open for you to be my teacher, and a letter from last summer in which I said goodbye to you because staying in “I am” was good enough for me, and I described this state as being in a cocoon, and knowing that I am awareness would be born out of that, as a cocoon becomes a butterfly.

James: The mistake of course is thinking that awareness – which is you – would be born out of some action on your part, in this case staying in the “I am” state. Because you are, have been and will always be only awareness, it is comical to think of it trying to be born. In fact awareness is *ajata*, meaning “unborn.” In this case you were thinking that freedom/enlightenment is some kind of experience that would happen. You can stay in the “I am” state forever and you will never be free, because ignorance of your nature caused you to believe freedom can be obtained through an action, in this case “staying” in a particular state. It shows that you think you are a doer.

Marilyn: Since in this cocooning the intellect functions in a totally different way, without analyzing judgments. It is very important. But when it becomes a hiding place, a “stage” to wait for transformation, it is opposite to truth.

James: Yes. The only way to truth is to face yourself. You do this by keeping the mind open, understanding how little you know and being open to hearing what you do not want to hear. Your mother was an opinionated woman and you have this tendency too. You want to believe that what you think or believe is “right.” This is not a judgment. I only say it because it explains why assimilating the simple truth of your nature – freedom – is difficult.

Marilyn: I have to tell you I did a very stupid thing. The last letter I wrote to you was nice and I said I was not being judgmental. At the same time, without being aware of it, I judged you to be the one that does not believe in *shakti*, or transmission between student and master. Since that was the only thing I seemed to need, I came across a teacher on the internet who said he was an embodiment of truth and emphasized transmission and *shakti*. I wanted to get in contact with him, but I felt like I was “having an affair” with you.

At the same time, this belief in transmission and unity between teacher and student (not a personal unity but divine unity) gave me the clarity and confidence to see the unity between the outer and inner master.

In this way I could finish the personal attachment to you, simply in being aware of what is happening, knowing it is the self working through the little me, and it is needed to see and experience the teacher as not opposite, but as the self.

In writing the last letter to you, I did not mention my plan to be in contact with another teacher, since that would be “being opposite you on the issue of transmission.” I decided to leave this open, and let nature do its work, and after writing you I participated in an internet *satsang* with other people, with this teacher.

James: I don't know what that teacher transmits as *shakti*, but the *shakti* that I “transmit” is called *jnana shakti* and it is the highest *shakti* because it sets you free. *Jnana shakti* means “the power of knowledge.” So what does this teacher say you are and how does he say you can realize it? We are not against other teachers. We are interested in making your intellect the teacher. By that I mean that you need a complete means of self-knowledge at your disposal if you are going to evaluate anything – particularly teachers and teachings – in *maya*. I suspect that he is talking about some kind of enlightenment experience that will set you free. If this is true it is complete nonsense because you are already free and no experience, which is subject to change, can produce changelessness. It is good for you to tell me this because it shows that you do not understand the value of Vedanta, that you are fixated more on the teacher – owing to your psychological background with your mother – than you are on the teaching. The teaching is always superior to the teacher, unless of course it is the teacher that cooked up the teaching. I have no teachings. I teach Vedanta.

Marilyn: When I received your letter it was indeed a blessing, but it was also a big hit on the head because nature was doing its work. I felt very guilty but at the same time it was different from before since it did not make me feel small and not good enough. But pain was still there because of the feeling that I did something very wrong.

James: Guilt is a natural reaction when you make a mistake. You should not feel too guilty that you felt guilty, because everyone is guilty here. Guilty of what? Guilty of not knowing they are free. It is a big “mis-take.” You are taking something that is limitless and whole to be something that is limited and incomplete.

Marilyn: In letting this truth work with and through me, I realized transmission, or

shakti, is the total commitment and honesty to the teacher as the self, and the meeting point is the devotional space between the student who wants to know she is the self and the teacher who already knows this. Without this devotional attitude it is absolutely impossible to learn the truth.

James: This is absolutely true. This is what we call *shraddha*, faith in the teaching and the teacher pending the result of inquiry. It is very important but there is a real danger in it because if you do not know who you are, you do not know who is a proper teacher. Anyone can say they are enlightened. It is quite the fashion to do so nowadays.

If you will notice, I bring Vedanta into the conversation over and over to get you to understand that the scripture is the real teacher. I do this to depersonalize our relationship. If the relationship gets too personal you will not hear what I have to say or you will interpret what I have to say through your idea of your relationship with me. In our tradition we help you develop a relationship with the scripture, with inquiry, so that you do not need us. The last thing I want is someone who is dependent on me. It does not really matter to me, because I am the self, but as a teacher it is my duty to see that you become independent and free. So I have to help you transfer the personal devotion you have for me to the teaching itself. But for that to happen you have to understand the value of the teaching. I don't think you have understood that fully, although if you have read my book properly you cannot help but understand the value of the teaching.

It seems you are in the window-shopping phase of your spiritual search. You can go to any teacher you want but if you understand what Vedanta is you will not be interested in an inferior teaching. When a qualified person comes to Vedanta they don't leave. Going elsewhere would be like going out for burgers and beer when you have a filet mignon and champagne in the refrigerator. Only knowledge is going to set you free and for that to happen you have to have a proven means of knowledge. Vedanta is such a means. The teacher is absolutely essential too because you cannot read your way or think your way to freedom or have enlightenment transmitted to you in some mystical way. You will interpret the words according to your ignorance. So you have to be taught. And you must be taught by someone who not only is free but who can wield the means of knowledge skillfully.

Marilyn: In the past months I have seen a lot of teachers and read a lot. This was always in tune with the interaction between me and you. To treat another teacher as opposite to you, as giving me something you could not give me, was a big mistake. In the first place because it defines me as not complete, and secondly, as consequence and connected to that, to define the teacher as not complete. I understand therefore it is not the fact that I learn from other teachers, but the intention behind it that reinforced my strategy that made this action wrong.

James: This is true from your personal psychological perspective, Marilyn, but it is not true because not all teachings and teachers are equal. And hopping around here and there does not work after a while, because ignorance is hardwired and very intelligent. Ninety percent of the people I teach have been through the whole spiritual charade. They have visited all the teachers, read all the books, had all the transmissions and *shaktipats* possible and are at the end of their spiritual rope. Vedanta only comes to you when you have exhausted every other possibility. You

need a valid means of knowledge. Once you get over your psychological stuff you will understand. I cannot beg you to understand the value of this teaching, so I say go ahead and experiment with everything. One day you will appreciate Vedanta for what it is and then you will go right to your goal.

Marilyn: In being able in my last letter to identify the inner and the outer master as the same, I thought it was impossible to act out *vasanas* anymore towards you. And this is true. Except for the fact that what I wanted most, but I did not know, was to avoid acting out *vasanas* towards you, since that exposes me as “unqualified,” and the way to “reach” this “qualified state” was devotion and I saw another teacher in opposition to you who could help me in this, so this was also a *vasana*.

James: You can see duality operating in all its glory in this teacher discussion. Again, see the ego emphasis here. You are only concerned with how Marilyn acts, thinks and feels. She is very important to you. For Vedanta to work you have to be able to leave Marilyn at the door of the teaching when you enter, like one leaves one’s sandals at the entrance to the temple. You should be able to set her aside. The teaching is not about Marilyn and what she thinks and feels. It is not about Marilyn learning from various sources. It is about you. Once you are clear about who you are, then Marilyn will not be a problem for you. She is a problem now. It’s okay. Don’t feel guilty about it. But this obsession with how you think and feel means that your dispassion needs a bit of work.

Marilyn: I have always been very afraid of submitting. But this is exactly what I should do to you. Not to you as a person, but to you as the divine self that is also me.

James: You say not to me as a person but to the divine self, but if you knew what the divine self was we would not be having this conversation. So somehow the person, me, is involved. If it is, then how do you know that I am an honest man? I am very clever and intelligent. I certainly know more than you do about yourself and probably a lot of other things. Perhaps all this wonderful spiritual talk is just a clever confidence game to get control of you. Maybe I am power-hungry. Or chasing money or sex. How do you know? You never met me. It is very important to me that you understand the value of Vedanta. If you do, then no teacher can have his or her way with you. And to understand the value of Vedanta you need to understand the value of knowledge and the power of ignorance. Then you will see that most of what is offered out there in the Western spiritual world is inadequate.

Marilyn: As such you expose me and you make me feel ashamed, and I should not search for a way to avoid that, but I should let it happen and this is how I understood that knowing myself to be awareness is the greatest purifier.

James: You are a beautiful, pure soul, Marilyn. This is a correct understanding of the purifying power of self-knowledge. Mind you, it is not me that makes you feel ashamed. It is the fact that you are assimilating the truth that produces the shame. It is good shame.

Marilyn: I did not know I used devotion as a hiding place to avoid submitting to the truth. I realized this devotional “all is one” experience carried me and protected me through difficult periods in my life.

James: This kind of devotion has its upside and its downside. It is protective but it does not protect you from identifying with the devotee, the part of you that needs protection. You do not need protection. You are what protects everything.

Marilyn: When I was young my family was part of a church community that believed it represented the truth. This approach was rational insofar as only the belief of knowing oneself to be free (in Christ) was sufficient. It was an empty, mental approach in which personal development was excluded. My mother was intelligent and had studied psychology and felt the urge to reform this community. She emphasized the personal and the process of surrender.

In doing this she took her own sense of rightness to be true and backed up by God. She considered my father to be a neurotic and also wanted to reform him. This resulted in years of therapeutic family sessions that lasted many hours during which we as family had to admit she was right. She did not know she was trying to beat our egos with her ego. It was fear-based brainwashing.

When I understood what happened as the play of opposites and that only somebody that knows themselves to be nothing and not a doer can really teach, I was able to forgive my mother, seeing as that this is how ego and *samsara* works and I as the little self do the same, and I felt ready enough to be in contact with you as teacher.

Had I submitted to my mother, it would have meant taking her human judgment as the truth instead of my own and I was very afraid of losing myself. This is why devotion became a hiding place for my true self and the development of my observing and analyzing intellect was a way of surviving.

James: Yes, you have to wean yourself if your parents do not do it. And this involves trusting your own judgment over the judgment of others. But on the “who am I?” issue, your own judgment about yourself is no better than anyone else’s. The judgment of the scripture is the only judgment you can trust. So you have to know what the scripture says, and for that you need a teacher. There is no other way. I think you are starting to realize that.

Marilyn: What happened between my last letter and this letter is the understanding of this survival mechanism. Not only the former use of the intellect, but also devotion as hiding place had to be exposed.

James: It is a great realization, Marilyn. You are slowly working your way out of *samsara*.

Marilyn: When I was six years old at school I received a pencil and a piece of eraser in case I made a mistake. I got so carried away by the possibility of doing what I wanted without consequence that I pushed the pencil very hard into my workbook.

Of course the imprint of the scratches could not be wiped out, and I came in tears to my teacher, asking her to forgive me, as I had learned at home. She felt very uncomfortable with this, and told me in a very friendly way that it was not a big deal. This made me feel even more ashamed, and I stored this event in my memory as the moment that “everything went wrong.”

Somehow I experienced your answer and the consequence of this in having to admit to you I made a mistake as returning to this early moment in my life, and I felt the need to “come clean.” Submitting, discipline, love, devotion are all one in the recognition that freedom is not an imaginary safe place without consequences and the consequences cannot be wiped out by being “forgiven,” but they bring me back to the point of not getting “carried away.” As soon as I do get carried away, the inner master presents itself as outer master, to bring me back to the “original unity.”

James: Yes, that is true – if you are Marilyn. But you cannot be ‘brought back.” You are always and already “back.” This is what needs to be understood. The light is beginning to dawn.

Marilyn: What I really want is to cut through is the complexity and find this original unity and real freedom.

James: This is a good insight. Marilyn has a tendency to make things very complex. You probably picked this up from your mother who probably used her intellect to rationalize her silly beliefs about her rightness about Christ. Truth is very simple. You are free. There is nothing complicated about this fact. Only complicated thinking and attachment to complicated thinking and complicated psychological explanations stand in the way of your appreciation of it.

Marilyn: Without submitting to you as the self (experienced as loss of freedom and total commitment) there is no way to know to be the self and to be really free and no way to become normal and honest to all human beings.

James: Without submitting to the teachings, yes. In my case I am the teachings, so you are okay.

Marilyn: All the teachers I experienced confirmed my strategies in one way or another, and my little self was able to feel comfortable with what they said. With you this is not possible, so I hope you want to continue teaching me.

James: I am warming up to it, Marilyn. Every one one of your letters shows a burning desire to know the truth and an uncompromising integrity in the search. Present your ignorance openly. I will try to show you the way out of it. It is just a matter of how you think. It is very difficult to think from the position of your true nature. It is totally easy to think from Marilyn’s perspective. You have been doing it all your life. Once your self-knowledge is clear then you can purify Marilyn’s understanding. Marilyn is the self, awareness, under the spell ignorance. Vedanta erases the ignorance if you submit to it. I am just the guy that transmits the knowledge. I am online to the *rishis*, the scripture and I am empowered by the

tradition to do this small job. So your interest should be in getting the knowledge, not in me. I am just a facilitator. I am not important.