

Limitless Non-Dual Love

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A beautiful verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* says, “What is day for a worldly person is night for an enlightened person and what is night for a worldly person is day for an enlightened person.” Just as a person who has not fallen in love never understands what love is, a person who has not been set free of the doer by the knowledge “I am awareness” will find it nearly impossible to understand *parabhakti*, unconditional divine love. More people than you might imagine have unconditional love, maybe not with reference to everyone and everything – which is the definition of *parabhakti* – but with reference to a specific being: the mother of the brutal serial killer who on the witness stand testifies that her Johnnie is the sweetest kindest person, totally incapable of the grotesque acts of which he is accused, the man who jumps into a raging river to rescue a drowning stranger and the devotee who loves God beyond all else.

Although I love words and am told I am skillful using them, describing *para bhakti* is probably beyond my ability, but I am going to try anyway. The topic of this blog is the result of direct experience, not the study of devotional literature. Nonetheless, devotional texts – *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, for example – will be helpful in structuring this article.

There are two kinds of spiritual love, *guna bhakti* and *parabhakti*. Spiritual love is called *bhakti*. *Bhakti* comes from the Sanskrit root *bhaj* which means “to worship.” Ordinary daytime love is called *kama* because it is of the nature of desire. A *kami*, a person who loves an object with desire, does not worship the object. He or she wants something from the object, it could be anything, perhaps even to be worshipped and adored. There is nothing morally wrong with this kind of love – it is the coin of the realm in *samsara* – but it is severely limiting. One’s feelings are constrained by the behavior of the love object. Although it is called love it is actually the antithesis of love because love is free. It wants nothing. It fears nothing. It is self-satisfied. Desire feels like love, however, because when its conditions are being met by reality, the mind is settled and bliss is experienced. When desire’s conditions are not met, the mind is a veritable sea of storms.

Worship is free of desire. It is appreciation. You appreciate the beauty or goodness of something that stands apart from you. You do not want to possess it or make use of it in any way. There is a feeling of gratitude born out of the understanding that you have been privileged to experience it. You do not desire a sunset. You love the sunset.

Guna bhakti and *kama* have one thing in common: there is a doer, a lover, and this doer loves someone or something other than his or her self even though it is for the sake of the self that he or she loves. A *kami* feels incomplete and loves another person in order to feel complete. A *bhakta*, a devotee, also feels incomplete and loves God because it makes him or her feel happy to love this way. And there is always a sense of separation from the love object, just as there is with the *kami*. The advantage that the *bhakta* enjoys is the fact that God is always available to love, whereas the *kami* does not have this luxury; the object of his or her love is sometimes available and sometimes not, owing to subjective and objective factors. Consequently, the mind of a devotee – depending on the intensity of his or her

devotion – is generally serene whereas the mind of a desirer is rarely settled. Another advantage enjoyed by the devotee is when you love God, God has no choice but to love you back, whereas when you love a person the love may or may not be reciprocated. God is consciousness and consciousness is responsive. When it is invoked, it responds predictably with love because consciousness is love.

In the discussion on love, it is always difficult to understand the equation between awareness or consciousness and love because it seems like awareness is free of feeling whereas love seems to be a feeling quite separate from awareness. But there is actually no difference because reality is non-dual and feelings are never apart from awareness. If this explanation does not ring your bell, think about this: you love what you pay attention to. To say you love music or your dog or your child only means that you pay attention to these things. You do so because they are symbols of your self, which is love. When you contemplate them, the self is invoked. What is attention but consciousness/awareness directed to an object through an instrument, the mind/heart? Love is simply willing attention. If I hold a gun to your head and ask you to do something, you will definitely pay attention to my request, but not because you love what you are doing. However, love is involved in this situation also because you do what I ask because you love your life – which only goes to show that fear and love are both consciousness.

In any case, I say mind/heart because there is a common misconception in the spiritual world that love has nothing to do with thought, that the heart and the mind are two different things and – depending on your orientation – one is superior to the other. Heart-centered people always feel that the heart, the feeling function, is superior to the thinking function. But it is not true. They want to keep their thoughts at bay because they have found that certain thoughts obstruct the flow of love, but a feeling person thinks day and night, just as a thinking person feels day and night. You cannot separate the mind and the heart, because reality is non-dual. What happens in one aspect of reality affects everything else in reality. Certain thoughts do obstruct the flow of love, but this does not mean that thinking is in any way contrary to feeling. It is quite possible to love completely and simultaneously to think brilliantly.

The word *guna* means “quality.” So *guna bhakti* is worship according to the qualities that condition the instrument of love, the mind/heart. If the mind is dull, superstition and fear inform one’s worship. Common religious worship is fear-oriented. The devotee keeps to the straight and narrow for fear of God’s wrath. If the mind is passionate, desire informs one’s worship. The devotee wants something from God and is continually making business. “Give me this and I will give you that,” a donation to the church, for example. If the mind is pure, the devotee loves God for God’s sake. But even a pure mind sees God as an object.

Parabhakti is *nirguna bhakti*. *Nirguna* means “without qualities.” So how do you describe this kind of love, since words are only suitable for describing qualities? You describe it by implication. In this kind of love, God is not an object. God is known to be you. Until the age of thirty I did not have this kind of love. Until that time I did not even know that I was seeking this kind of love, although a year or two before it happened I had glimpses. It did not happen all at once, although there was a moment when it was impossible for me to love in any other way. It happened through my association with someone who had this kind of love. It happened by osmosis and it happened through understanding.

Parabhakti is terribly attractive. Imagine getting everything you want and knowing

that it will never leave. Imagine the feeling of a mother whose child thought to be dead for many years returns to her. It is a feeling of limitless satisfaction, *parama sukka* is the word used in the texts. It came to stay when I realized my nature as awareness. The self, awareness, is *parama prema svarupa*. *Parama* means "limitless," *svarupa* means "nature." *Prema* is a special word reserved only for this kind of love/knowledge. Just as the beauty in a sunset is a pale reflection of the beauty of the awareness that reveals the sunset's beauty, even pure spiritual love is a pale reflection of *prema*. *Prema* is the nature of awareness. When you know you are awareness you are *prema*, limitless love. I say love/knowledge because *prema* is conscious and intelligent. It is not a passive experience available to the doer. It happens when the doer has been negated by self-knowledge.

In my last blog I made the point that knowing you are the self does not remove the doer, the experiencer. It negates the doer. The modern spiritual world – God bless its pointed little head – has a big misconception about the doer. When you hear the stories of the so-called enlightened people these days, in general the best they can do as far as enlightenment is concerned is to claim that there is no "me." It often seems like a kind of one-upsmanship. "I am not a me. I am spiritually superior to you because you think you are a doer, a me." It seems lost on these people that if there is no me there is no one to claim there is no me – but there you are. And it is clear that they do not know that they are the self, except perhaps indirectly, because the self has no problem with the me at all. The me is the self appearing in a form.

When I say that the self-knowledge negates the doer and makes the experienceless experience of *para bhakti* a reality, I do not mean that the doer stops doing/experiencing. There is no reason why the doer should stop doing, even if it was possible – which it isn't, because awareness is illumining the body-mind/sense complex from womb to tomb, making non-doing impossible. Negation means that you understand that your nature is *parama prema*, unconditional love. If you experience water on the desert and know it is a mirage, the apparent water does not disappear with the knowing. If you know your nature is limitless non-dual love, the doer does not disappear. It is negated. It is you, but you know you are not it. It does not stop experiencing. But when the knowledge "I am limitness, non-dual love" is firm, the doer gets an experience it never thought possible. It experiences a deep unconditional feeling of non-object-oriented love that never stops.

This kind of love has a very interesting impact on the doer, the experiencing entity. In the the apparent reality, the experiencing entity has two modes, doing and enjoying. There is a feeling I am doing (*aham karta*) and there is a feeling I am enjoying (*aham bhokta*) – not necessarily at the same time. The basic psychology of a *samsari* is that he or she does to enjoy the result of the doing. The doing is not necessarily enjoyable, but the result is or is meant to be. For example, many people work dead-end jobs and hate them. They do not hate the paycheck. The paycheck temporarily converts the doer to an enjoyer. Self-knowledge also converts the doer into an enjoyer. But the conversion is permanent, not temporary. Previously the doer did to enjoy, now no doing is necessary, because the direct appreciation of one's nature is pure enjoyment. And when the knowledge is firm the experience of satisfaction is limitless because the self is never not present.

When this kind of love happens one experiences the amazing experience of being loved. By being loved I do not mean the idea that someone else loves me – which is nice enough – but the direct certain experience that love is LOVING ME. It is not like Jesus loves me, Jesus and me being two different things. It is not a love sitting somewhere else, like God in heaven, loving me from a distance, but the love and the

I am one. I am God. I am God's heart loving. The doer, who has been negated is now effortlessly doing love, for no reason whatsoever except that he or she cannot do otherwise. Each and every action is soaked in love.

Another aspect of this kind of love is that it does not matter if it is consummated physically. The experience is so pure that the mind is terribly refined and would actually have to come down into the denser level of consciousness – the body – to consummate it. To actually have sex would dull the instrument of love, the heart. This love is not of the nature of desire, because desire is gross and emotional. To unrequited desire is to anger or depress it. Also, no material circumstances are required to maintain it, unlike desire.

It is out of time. I have a lot of friends and acquaintances throughout the world. When I posted my blog telling of my marriage I received hundreds of emails congratulating me. Two people I heard from – although perhaps there were others – were not happy with the news, one of whom said some unpleasant things but changed her mind when she had time to think about it, and the other said I was a hypocrite. Although no reasons were given, I presume that she misunderstood my statements about relationships, which is reasonable.

But many were surprised by the suddenness of it. I have lived as a single man for about seventy-five percent of my adult life and I have not been particularly positive about relationships, not because I was unsuccessful in them but because as conceived in modern times they are inherently dishonest. So it is not surprising that they were surprised. If they understood the nature of this love they would not have been surprised.

Emotional types – people who value their feelings above everything else – in general misunderstand my mild negativity about relationships. To set the record straight, I am not against relationships per se. I think the modern idea of relationships without marriage is stupid, but I am all for people loving each other in whatever way they see fit.

However, it is common sense that if you are seeking freedom, a relationship as conceived by someone wanting one is not going to produce freedom, except perhaps intermittent freedom from loneliness, which is not real freedom and which does not remove all the other bondages that that an unenlightened person is subject to, attachment to money, status and power, to name a few.

And while *samsaric* relationships may produce intermittent intimacies, they also produce almost non-stop anxiety because they are always in danger of going south. Free beings are very rare because the obstacles to freedom are many and seemingly intractable, not the least of which is the idea that you need love from someone else. If you want freedom, you have to love your seeking totally. You have to convert all the emotion that flows toward objects toward your self until you have attained a devotion that knows no otherness. I would be remiss in my duty as a teacher of Vedanta if I did not point out the downside of desire-prompted relationships.

In any case, this kind of love surprises many because people only know love that exists in time. Both Isabella, now Sundari (“the beauty that makes beauty beautiful,” i.e. the self), and I have this kind of love, so we were married even before we met. That is the feeling. That is the knowledge. “I have always known you. I have always loved you.” I did not marry someone else; I married myself appearing as someone else. And that someone else sees it in exactly the same way. It does not take time to

fall in love and work out all the details when your love is backed by self-knowledge. It is instantaneous and eternal. You do not have to consult anyone, discuss it with your friends and make a big story out of it. If you do, it means that you do not have this kind of love. It is a knowing that takes place far away from the world. And the most wonderful part of this kind of love is that should the other stop loving you - which is impossible, but let's say it isn't - it would not affect your love. Why? Because there is no other. It only seems like it.

Another feature of this love is gratitude. The doer enjoys a feeling of gratitude beyond measure. I feel like the luckiest man alive and my wife feels like the luckiest woman alive. At first you wonder what you have done to deserve it - it seems like grace. And it is. But when you think about it a bit you realize that grace is earned. Of the forty or fifty people I have met in my life enjoying this kind of love all had something in common: they lived their lives impeccably, authentically. Usually at great expense, they consistently heeded the intimations of the infinite as it charted their paths home.

I have been exceptionally fortunate in life. It would be hard to imagine a more blessed existence. The first time this happened was with my *guru*. When it was time for me to go, I hated to leave him because this kind of love was reasonably common in his world. And knowing it, I became sensitive to it. As I subsequently roamed around India and the world, I met others who had it too. In my late thirties I married a woman who had it. I would still be married to her today had the marriage not ended tragically.

Sundari captured this love in her wedding vows, a portion of which I reproduce here:

I offer myself in the service of Love

This Love that is not mine, nor yours nor ours

This Love that belongs to no one and everyone that cannot be sought or kept,
only given that has no more begun than it will end

I bow in humility to this Love that loves us and through us that is us that creates
and destroys that can neither be denied or ignored

Flowing with its own unstoppable course a strength so strong mere force is
feebleness

Unknown, unknowable, all happening within us, the knower a singularity of
complete simplicity

Demanding no less than everything strips away all but Self

Nothing is hidden, all is given, all is known, all is seen, all is one

Such is the power of limitless, non-circumstantial love that even not knowing what it is, everyone seeks it. If you have it nearly everyone you meet is uplifted by it. I say "nearly" because there are perverse souls in whom envy arises in the presence of this love and they will be tormented by it. They will speak ill of you and revile you, but you are not bothered. If you have it you do not have to worry about anything in this world. All of life's wheels are greased automatically and they stay greased. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna, speaking as the self in charge of the world, says, "With a mind/heart that knows no otherness meditate on me alone. I will take care of your

getting (*yoga*) and keeping (*kshema*).”

If you multiply the deep, unconditional feeling of love by two you are talking about something extraordinary. The total is much greater than the sum of its parts. This love will have amazing consequences. I am not surprised that many of the emails I have received in the last few days have said that just knowing that such a love exists is terribly inspirational. It gives hope. We are all fed up with the tired old “I love you” love, even those still seeking it in relationship. You pretend that you want it, but in your heart you know that it isn’t what it purports to be. At best it is a Band-Aid for a lonely mind.

This love that is ours but not ours is also for the world. We will make ourselves available as I travel the world teaching scripture. In the next blog I will publish our wedding vows and I am now going through our love letters and editing them to give you an idea of how it happened. You might find this strange because they are so personal, but there is nothing personal about anything when you think about it. We are all one being. We have the same body, mind and heart. We live for each other. Neither my wife nor I can find any distance between ourselves, where then is the boundary between us and the world?