



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Big Questions #4

What is Love?

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Love is an essential part of life. Without love, life is dry, even feeling meaningless. What is it about love that makes it so essential? Love brings forth your essence, which is your own Self. Without your essence, you're not you. This is why people devote their life to love — both to loving and to being loved. It fills them up on the inside.

But yoga says you are already full. So when you're looking outside for someone to fill you up, you overlooked your inherent fullness, your in-built Divinity. It means you've lost the thing that makes you loveable. It is your own inner light that makes your relationships work. If you're not truly you, there's no real relationship. Since yoga makes you more "you," you become more loving and more loveable. It's a win-win. Yoga gives you love. But love doesn't give you yoga.

With more people getting vaccinated against COVID-19, they're ready to get back to life. For many, that means romance. It's a big part of life — partnering and building a life together. In the West, love comes first, then (hopefully) commitment. In more traditional societies around the world, commitment comes first, then love grows. These are very different kinds of love.

There are so many types of love! Romantic love is different than the love you feel for your parents or siblings. Both are different from your love for your children. Love for nature is not the same as love for music, though you seek the same thing from both — a feeling of aliveness, even peace and expansion. Yoga says this is what love is all about, the inner experience of aliveness, peace, expansion, even bliss. This is what life is all about. And this is what yoga is all about. Except yoga urges you to find it inside. Why? Because the feeling itself is inside. When you feel alive, it's a feeling inside your own skin. Peace and expansion are inner feelings. Bliss is all of the above and more, yet it also happens inside. Therefore, you need to look inward for it. This inner search is mysticism, the whole point and purpose of yoga.

Classic movie scenes show two people in a group (pre-pandemic). Their eyes meet across the room. They each feel something wonderful arise inside. They want that inner feeling to continue, so they make their way toward each other, to connect, to get together. If they decide to spend their life together, that glorious inner feeling doesn't continue 24/7. What happened?

In the meeting of their eyes, each saw the other as shining with light. When you see the light shining in another, it prompts an inner experience of the light within yourself. That experience of shared light is called love.

When they aren't shining, when they get tired or cranky, you don't feel so much love. They're not shining. Maybe you're not either. Now you two must learn to get along, so you can make it through the long stretches between the moments of light. That's called commitment.

Yoga makes you able to find the source of your own light by looking inward. Instead of waiting for someone else to shine, you can be the one to bring in the light. It will take care of both of you. The goal of yoga is for you to be always based in your own Divine Light, which shines out and affects everyone in the world.

Lokaananda samaadhi sukham. — Shiva Sutras 1.18

In every moment, the yogi experiences the Bliss of the Self, which is transmitted to those who come in contact with him.

This explains why I went to live and study with my Guru. It wasn't about his teaching, though his talks were illuminating. My staying there was not motivated by the live music filling 5-24 hours of our day, though chanting with him was heart-opening. Meditating with him was like diving into infinity. But the reason I stayed was because I got to sit with him in silence for an hour or more every day. My own inner bliss deepened by the minute, as though he were radioactive. He emanated Consciousness. I soaked it up. Then I found the source inside myself. He's the one who showed me the way.

Looking back, I now see that it was a deep sense of need that motivated me to be there, not love. It can be hard for anyone to discern the difference between them. Similarly, most people confuse love and dependency, love and passion, love and power, love and gratitude, etc.

What is love without bargains? What is love without fear? The answer is not found by managing your relationships better. The answer is found inside. When you are free from fear and dependency, free from need and manipulation, free from all your limitations, your love becomes pure. It is perfect, whole and full, the way you always wanted it to be.

Your love becomes pure and powerful only when you discover the perfection, wholeness and fullness of your Self. Knowing your Self, living and resting in your own Divine Essence, you share who you are without looking for what you'll get back. That's true freedom!

It's easy to tell that you're settling deeper into your spiritual essence. The list of people you love expands. It grows to include everyone in the whole world. Divine light shines through everyone's eyes, but you rarely even look unless they're family members. When you pause, even while saying the perfunctory "thank you" to a cashier or tech support person, you find a real person there. Every single one of them has a story. Every one of them shines with light. Do you have the eyes to see? Can your heart hold them all?

Yoga's texts distinguish between ordinary love and Divine Love, the focus of a yogic system called bhakti yoga. While we are chanting and hearing the ancient stories, we're bhaktas. Putting flowers on the altar, lighting candles and even talking to the photos or statues you've placed there makes you a lover of God. These ancient practices invoke an inner flow of love that transcends anything that comes from the world. It is hard to tell whether you are loving God or experiencing God's love for you. Together, they are called Divine Love.

Am.rta svaruupa caa. Yal labdhvaa pumaan siddho-bhavati am.rto-
bhavati t.rpto bhavati. — Bhakti Sutras 3-4

Divine Love is pure nectar, which confers immortal bliss. It grants perfection of the soul, eternal bliss and complete inner fulfillment.

Bhaktas turn toward God in order to feel inner fulfillment. You do the same thing with your relationships, looking for someone outside of you to trigger your inner experience of your own light. But no ordinary person can prompt Divine Love in you. For that, you need to turn to God or to an enlightened being, one who has merged into the Divine Light within. That's what I got from being in relationship with my Guru, an opportunity to see, hear, feel and interact with one who lived the light. Not only did he show me how it worked in him, he opened up the same in me. It's called "Self."

A perfect metaphor is when you put the cart before the horse. When you know your own Self (the horse), you have the horse pulling the cart, which holds your worldly life and all whom you love. But most people put the cart in front, hoping the world will give them their own Self. It works sometimes. Love can bring forth your essence, providing rare and delicious experiences that last for a short time. Yoga gives you your essence directly, which is your own Self. Your essence is what makes everything else work, including expanding your capacity to love.

How much love do you want? Long before I found yoga, I figured out that I wanted more love than I had found so far. It was yoga that put me on the pathway to infinite love, to deep love, to unconditional love. This love frees me while it empowers me to serve all. While this love is pure nectar, it is grounded in reality, making it possible for me to do this work. When you find this inside yourself, it is the Self, but people watching from the outside call it love. Dive inside and you'll know.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, "BIG QUESTIONS"

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