

The Instant *Before* the Upsurge

Advaita only rarely mentions Bliss, often only in precautionary terms in the context of sadhana, and usually only fleetingly when describing the liberated experience of being. I can understand this from the pedagogical standpoint during sadhana, for advaita teachers don't want their students to become attached to transient "states" or "objects" of perception, but rather to feel themselves as That within which all states and objects arise and disappear. Thus, for students, "Bliss" is often portrayed as a dangerous trap. The lack of descriptions of Bliss in the post-liberation experience of being are probably due to the notion that once one is Free, one will know for one's self the nature of that condition, and therefore there's no need to elevate such distractions for those still seeking.

You may occasionally hear some mention of Peace, or Stillness, but very rarely a fleeting mention of Bliss, and generally, Ecstasy is right out. Because Bliss is mentioned so fleetingly, one is left wondering what is meant by the word. Ramana spoke about "the current", and Jean said that satsang and all that it entails is merely a pretext for sitting together in Silence. He clearly didn't mean Silence as "quiteness" in relation to sound. So... what was this Silence he spoke of, and what was the value of sitting "in" it?

My experience, when I saw Jean, was filled with Bliss; a palpable, visceral, extremely pleasurable yet *unlocatable* ecstasy that permeated and was inseparable from the entire Experience of Being. It was, for lack of any better term in relativity, a feeling of orgasmic ecstasy that, being "everywhere", transcended physicality or any of the other aggregates of manifest form, and yet... everything existed both "in" and "as" it. To the extent one was able, in Jean's presence one became the Silence that he was speaking of. And for me, the impact of residing in and as Silence was this Blissfulness I've struggled to describe.

I knew not to grasp after such pleasurable experience. Jean was unrelenting in cutting the legs out from under such grasping. "As long as there's an experience, there's an experiencer!" he once chided me. And in fact, my experience was, and remains, that this pervasive, ambient Blissfulness was the result, the effect, of non-grasping, of

relaxed alertness in and as the very Presence of Being. Something about being in proximity to Jean's physical-energetic locus had this profound effect on me.

My experience over 26 years of advaitic sadhana, and of six years of living in Freedom, is that Bliss is the very fragrance of Pure Being (Consciousness, Awareness, whatever one calls the Formless). Prior to liberation, it was the fragrance that drew me into Stillness, that taught me the "secret" of non-grasping, and abiding as Spaciousness, as Transparent Emptiness. It was then, and is now, the "felt" impact or effect of self-identity having vanished. It is the embrace of Shiva and Shakti in union as Shiva-Shakti, a union in which both vanish, all duality vanishes, even as duality arises within Presence.

Here's the story of my first meeting with Jean.

In November of '81, using advaitic inquiry (before I knew what that was), "I" died in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. No space in which objects could arise (including the "object" of myself as the perceiver). No time allowing objects to be perceived or cognized. The vanishing of... everything. Everything. Gone. And yet... the Unalloyed Ecstasy of Pure Being. Even the saying that Consciousness was aware of Itself is not wholly accurate, for there was no "perceiver/subject" Consciousness aware of a "perceived/object" Consciousness. Perhaps you could say there was Perceiving without a perceiver, Being without a Be'er... but let's not wander any further into the jungle of words, concepts, and pointers.

But alas, when space, time, and manifestation arose again, "I" (self-identity, the personal-I) arose with it, a contraction, and the suffering of identification with the body-mind and all that that entails. In the end, nirvikalpa samadhi proved only informative. It informed me of my nature prior to the arising of... *everything*, including "me". For although "I" as a separate object did not exist in Pure Being... I was what remained when everything vanished. In nirvikalpa samadhi, "I" was not "that which is alive", but rather, "Life itself." I remember seeing, as manifestation eventually returned within Emptiness, that it was the *most obvious thing in the world* that I was neither this nor that, but that I simply... Was. I was Not an object or a thing, not the aggregates of thought, feeling, and emotion that I had always taken

myself to be. The last words uttered by the mind before all things vanished was a startled recognition and exclamation - not merely mental, but with the Whole Being - "I... just... Am!" Poof!

As an inevitable consequence of the personal "I" returning, the experience of Pure Being almost instantly became a memory, a concept. Except... now I Knew that self-identified "I" existed both in and as Pure Being in Manifestation. This was now irrefutable. But as life-changing as this trans-intellectual understanding was, it did not stop the contraction and suffering of self-identity. I had emerged from Pure Being only more "informed" than I had been prior.

The next day, while driving, I "remembered" what had happened. And before the mind could utter a word as part of this remembering, before mental constructs arose, in a timeless instant, my Heart exploded in Ecstasy. This Bliss was immediately recognizable as the taste, the fragrance of Pure Being, and gave rise to a sense of the same Fullness and Completion I had become in samadhi, only now modified by it's arising in space and time. This Bliss was somehow both in form, and beyond. For while the physical and energetic bodies were washed over in Bliss, the mind, cognition, and the world, all began to dissolve back, back into Ecstasy. It was as if samadhi was pulling on my attention, trying to dissolve me once again into itself. The Radiance of Pure Being was shining through into manifestation. The boundary had been destroyed. But... because of the contraction of self-identity, this experience became just that, an "experience", with an experiencer, immediately qualified and conditioned by the mind, by the personal "I". But the fragrance was undeniable, arising from a bodily location near my physical Heart. The rapture was so overwhelming and my mind so dissolute and intoxicated that I nearly pulled the car over.

From that day forward, although my mind might be focused on a task at work, "behind" all movement, all activity, this Blissfulness was ever present, always ebbing and flowing to some extent, always moving like the waters of a deep Ocean; sometimes a soft ambience, other times a powerful flood, swallowing all mentation and sense of externality, pulling attention out of space and time, back, back, into the Ocean of Being. When I paused outer activity, and "fell back in relaxed alertness", so to speak... I would be overwhelmed with

brehtaking Bliss, and the acuity of perception and cognition would dissolve into Stillness. Although I never again experienced samadhi, I was thereafter "wet" with the water of that Ocean, always fragrant with the perfume of the Timeless, always warmed by that "apparently" distant Fire. But still, in the midst of all of this, self-identity persisted.

It would also happen that I might be sitting, watching television -- often the most inane show you could imagine -- and suddenly the entire Field of perception would dissolve in the most exquisitely beautiful translucent light, as if everything had become molten. All objects dissolved into each other, and then the mind would follow, and my sense of being a locatable object in space and time, and I would feel a dissolving, a pulling, back, back into Timeless Presence.

I did not take this Radiance, ever, to be "shakti", or "kundalini", or any such thing. Such terms seemed profane to me. For this Beautiful Radiance was not a "thing", not an object of enjoyment. I Knew from samadhi that it was simply the Radiance of Pure Being, somehow, magically, wonderfully, impossibly, shining into this world of form; always present, always available to be remembered or be remembered by, in a timeless instant. As Jean said, we begin soliciting that which we long for, but soon find ourselves being solicited, as well. It was a dance of the Unmanifest in Manifestation, Shiva dancing with, and as, this Radiance.

But again, all of that high-falootin', lofty verbiage aside, all Bliss aside, all Ecstasy aside, all Pure Being aside, Consciousness remained in the horrible contraction and suffering of self-identity.

I had read Jean's book, "Neither This Nor That, I Am!", and found in it a mirror of the enquiry that had led me to samadhi; a "feeling" enquiry, not a thinking enquiry. One day in 1983, two years after samadhi, a friend told me that Jean would be giving a satsang in LA, and I was very much inspired to see him. It would be my first time seeing an advaita teacher. My friend, widely read and much more experienced than I in the nature of the various spiritual paths, stressed that there would be none of this gold light business, no discussion of phenomenon or experience, almost certainly no talk of Bliss, and forget samadhi (which advaita often deemed "a mere

sweet", and a dangerous one at that). He warned that with these things so much a part of my experience of being, I might find advaita somewhat "mental" and dry.

I found a seat at Jean's satsang and, waiting for him to arrive, noted that the Radiance of my Heart was welling up with uncommon intensity, even before he arrived. Jean arrived; a small, older, somewhat frail man. He sat in silence for quite some time. And as I sat there, I was taken by a veritable tsunami of Ecstasy. I couldn't think, I couldn't move; I was in rapture. I felt my Heart would explode in Ecstasy. And because I kept my eyes open as we sat there, everything in my field of vision vanished completely in that exquisite, translucent illumination that I'd become so familiar with. Mind and cognition dissolved into Ecstasy, too intoxicated to function. I could see only one thing in this field of light in which everything else had dissolved: Jean, sitting in Silence. But all around him, nothing but blinding luminous Radiance.

Eventually, Jean spoke briefly about advaita, then asked for questions. After listening to a few questions and answers, I could no longer hold the frustration that had become the heart of my sadhana. I raised my hand and was recognized by Jean. Expressing frustration and despair, not intending to sound rude or hostile, but unable to help myself, I said, "So, we're just supposed to inquire in this manner, and keep inquiring, and keep inquiring, and keep inquiring, and keep inquiring, and keep inquiring, until one day, maybe, maybe -- *but don't count on it*, because only a handful ever attain the goal -- maybe one day Grace will fall on us?!" He sat for a moment... and then, turning to face me more directly, leaned quite forward in his chair, and held his right arm out, low by his knees. He then brought his arm up quickly, in a shot, saying as he did so, "It's in the instant *before* (emphasized) the upsurge!" He held his arm in that higher position for some time, looking directly at me, and then, very slowly, sat back, saying, "In time, the Lover and the Beloved will become one." And then, leaning forward again and pointing emphatically, he said, "Count on it!"

The upsurge? The upsurge?! How did he know? This was an advaitin, not some siddhi-imbued mystic dealing with phenomenality. How could he know?! We'd never met before! And advaitins didn't talk

about "the upsurge", or so I'd been told. But Jean knew, having never met me before in this life! And he reiterated to me the very simple and obvious truth of which I was already aware, that this Bliss that had become an inherent aspect of my experience of being was an "effect", *not the cause*. Bliss arose in the *instant* of remembering, before the explosion in my Heart, when Awareness ceased all "outer" focus, and relaxed back, fell back into Itself, so to speak. In the years to come I would often hear Jean say, "Feel yourself 'behind'." And many years later, I would read of Ramana referring to "the current". So... there *was* some mention of all of this in advaita. My experience of Being was not as strangely aberrant as I'd come to feel.

From that point on until his death, I saw Jean whenever I could. And in those years he clarified further the essence of what he had communicated that day. But I have to say, he did so in ways that were not always in line with advaitic pedagogical orthodoxy. It was as if we had an outer relationship and teaching that adhered to pedagogical advaitic form, and an inner relationship and teaching that functioned in the very aspects of awareness that advaita turns attention from.

For although Jean relentlessly stressed the classical advaitin stance, and would not deign to discuss phenomenal experiences and such, he never once in all those years directly answered a question I would ask, *never once in all those years*, but always, instead, answered the more secret, private questions that had been arising in my Heart and mind in the days prior to seeing him; questions around the relationship of Heart-Bliss to Pure Being, and around why, why, why, I remained self-identified. And every time I saw Jean, there was the phenomenon of radiant, translucent light, and dissolution in Bliss. Proximity to his physical form always gave rise to an intensification of dissolution. Jean would never discuss such "phenomenon", stating, as I've said, that as long as there was an experience, there was an experiencer. His only discussion of the mystical was his assertion that all the talking, including his introductory speech, all the questions and answers, all the moments of "meditation" that preceded his talk, were merely a "pretext" for sitting together in Silence. It took me years to reconcile my own direct experiences with Jean with the pedagogical imperatives of the advaitic form. He was not denying the existence of the mystical, but simply pointing, relentlessly, past manifestation, to That from which, within which, and ultimately "as" which, all these mysteries arose.

Throughout all those years of satsang and reading and inquiry, however, no amount of bliss, no amount of mental clarity, no amount of remembering the source of Bliss, no amount of feeling myself as That within which all arises, no amount of feeling myself "behind", no amount of resting in relaxed alertness brought about the cessation of the contraction of self-identity, of the personal-I. Until... twenty years after meeting Jean, and some time after his passing, I sat up in bed one day and realized, in the most uneventful way, as if recognizing "after the fact" something that had already been the case but had somehow gone unnoticed, that I could not feel "myself" anymore.

The Ancient Contraction was gone. The Great Suffering was gone. "I" was gone. I did not feel myself expanded as all that existed, nor did I feel myself as "That" within which all arose, I did not feel myself *at all*. There was simply... This. I was no longer That which was alive, but rather, Life ItSelf, but now with eyes open, not vanished in samadhi. There was no longer any sense of interior or exterior, no subject perceiver perceiving perceived objects. Space and time became purely notional, for everything was simply Present, All At Once. In a dialog with Francis Lucille, as I struggled to express this experience of Spaceless-Spaciousness, he interjected, saying that everything was perceived, in a way, as "flat". Perfect. I did not even sense a "Now" in which Existence Was. There was simply... This. Only in mentation did such "concepts" arise.

The first year following this liberation was nothing at all like what I had read concerning the end of self-identity, for while the Great Suffering was gone, many of the samskaras and vasanas that had defined the personal I continued to arise, usually in a flash, without apparent cause, and with startling intensity, only to vanish with equally stunning rapidity, like smoke in a breeze. Sorrow, despair, heartbreak, or anger could arise with crushing intensity, then vanish, leaving no residue, no energetic or physical trace of having been there. Before liberation, it would have taken many days to shake off such intense emotions and their impact on the mental, emotional, and physical form. I actually wondered if I'd not simply come into some aberrant psycho-physiological pathology. Confused, I would sit and wonder if I was simply delusional concerning the cessation of self-identity. But upon "looking", I could not find personal-I

anywhere. There was only "Transparent Emptiness", as Francis would sometimes say. "Personal-I" was nowhere. I was now simply... This. The situation was frightening. Imagine, all these things arising in Timeless Emptiness-Fullness, in... This, and as they arise, the absence of attraction or repulsion; only unmoving, impenetrable Presence, Untouched by all that arose. These arisings were not "mine", for the personal-I did not exist to take ownership, and react with guilt, shame, judgment, or qualification of any kind. Confounding. Again, this was not in any of the books I'd found. I needed help. I needed a guru who would not think me insane, a poser, or otherwise fail to discuss these things from the Heart.

One day, more on a lark than anything else (for all seeking, all grasping had vanished), I went to one of Francis' satsangs. I just needed to get out of the house. I had no plan on entering into a dialog. But once there, I explained my experience of being, and then expressed my confusion about the strange arisings that were ongoing. Francis gave me some of the most "practically" useful teaching I have ever received; the teaching that is not in any of the books I'd found. He told me that over the next few years I should expect, and not be confounded or troubled by the arising of subtle (or not so subtle) residues of self-identity. He had experienced this, himself. The duration of this process varied with each being, and it had taken nearly five years for him, because, he said, smiling, he had been a tough case. I relaxed. I cannot stress how much comfort this friendly advise, this voice of experience, gave me. And true to Francis' description, it took nearly two years for the more intense arisings to diminish, although more subtle arisings continued for several years and may still be occurring subtly, although I'm simply not aware of them.

After the second year, Bliss, which had never vanished, but had simply become unlocateable in space and time, and had seemingly dispersed into everything, everywhere, rolled like a tide back into the locus of this Heart, and, apparently, overflowed. For in short order, friends began telling me that in simple conversation, and especially while meditating, they felt themselves dissolving into Silence; Peace and Blissfulness washing over them.

I am not a teacher. But if someone notices this Radiance and asks

about it, or asks to meditate, I find myself pointing, as Jean did, beyond the experience and the experiencer, beyond the "effect" of Bliss, back, back, "behind", as dear Jean said, into Globality or Vastness or Transparent Emptiness or Presence, or whatever flawed words can be used, beyond even the concept of "That", to... This. My words inform the mind, hopefully, for intellectual clarity is vital. But really... as Jean said... it is Stillness, this Ambient Radiance of the Heart, that "magically" teaches and transforms, from the so-called inside, out. All else is a pretext.