

The Truth Is Simple, But You Have to Be Ready

Once, a spiritual seeker traveled to a distant town to receive initiation from a highly respected guru. The seeker bowed before the master and asked to be given the secret knowledge that would grant him the state of self-realization. "Oh, guru, please tell me the secret of life that will free me from all bondage."

The guru looked at this seeker and saw that he was not prepared to contain the highest truth. His mind and heart had not yet been scrubbed clean of their tangled webs of memories, desires, misunderstandings, and limited self-identifications. The seeker needed first to be purified by the lessons gained by living an austere, surrendered life of service and contemplation.

Nevertheless, the seeker continued to impatiently entreat the guru to give him that very truth, and so the master compassionately touched the seeker on his head and spoke. "Thou art That." Actually, he said the words in Sanskrit: "*Tat tvam asi.*" In this statement, "That" refers to the unnamable divine source of all, and "Thou" represents all the different facets that make up you.

The seeker sat down and prepared to hear the rest of the master's secret teachings, when he realized the discourse was already over. "That was it? This is ridiculous," he thought to himself, "Thou art That? These three words sound esoteric, but make no sense. Maybe this guru has gotten too old to remember the teachings, or perhaps his respected reputation is, in fact, undeserved."

The seeker politely thanked the master and asked to be dismissed, thinking, "I'm sure I can find a better teacher who can give me an experience of the truth."

For several years, the seeker searched far and wide until he came upon the monastery of another highly respected guru. Again, he bowed before the master and asked to be granted the highest state of realization.

This guru also saw that the seeker was unripe and told him, "First, you will have to offer service in this monastery. Go and work in my fields for 12 years and then come back to me. I will give you the secret knowledge then."

The seeker thought, "Wow, he must be really good to be able to charge so much!" and agreed to the terms. For the next 12 years, the seeker lived in the monastery and toiled in its fields. During this time, inner understandings about the higher nature of life revealed themselves inside his awareness, preparing the soil of his heart and mind for the sacred seed of initiation.

At the end of his assignment, the seeker came once again before the master and bowed with humility. "Oh, guru, I have fulfilled your command and worked in your fields for 12 years, and you have promised to enlighten me. Tell me, master, what is the secret of life that will free me from all bondage?"

The guru now saw before him a shining light — a purified vessel ready to accept and hold the truth. He looked into the disciple's eyes and spoke, "Tat tvam asi. Thou art That."

The seeker was about to think, "Hey, that's the same thing the other guru told me . . ." when his mind stopped and grasped the essence behind these three words. With "Thou art That" throbbing in every particle of his being, the seeker ascended to the spiritual state of the masters, and in that very moment was enlightened.

Don't Forget

Just as words on a page are meaningless to one who hasn't yet learned to read, in the same way, even the highest truths will slip through the fingers of a seeker who isn't spiritually mature and prepared to receive them.