

## **There is No Love Without Freedom and No Freedom Without Love**

Returning to Kullu after the Wisdom of Meditation tour, I dedicated my time and energy to look after a very dear friend and extraordinary soul, Zella, for her last four months in her body.

I met Zella when I first came to Kullu at twenty-two years of age. At that time, Zella was a few years younger than I am now. For many of us young, inspired minds, she was our spiritual mentor. Zella was like a conduit, translating the teachings on earth, for our teacher who spoke from the sky. When the high seas of youthful emotions were rough, she was established on the rock of doubtless awareness, and thus a beacon to direct our attention to the knowledge of our true Self – ever-present, ever-pure, ever-free.

Although I have described my relationship with her as my spiritual mother, she was not the type of mother who asked if you had eaten dinner when you came to visit, or told you to wear a warm coat as you were leaving. Rather, upon entering her home, like an excited child anticipating eating ice-cream, she would ask, "So, tell me!" Her full and accepting attention opened the door for us to unload our troubled minds, initiating a great exploration in the vast landscape of Self-knowledge, digging the soil with the tool of enquiry, "Who am I? What is Self? What is the mind? What are the emotions? What is my purpose? What is freedom? What is suffering?" And most importantly, "What is freedom from suffering?"

According to the Vedic tradition, the Guru gives you a name to represent your true nature. Zella's spiritual name is Swatantra Jyoti, meaning the light of freedom. She was indeed a brilliant light, which revealed our true purpose, to live unburdened from the weight of doubt, worry, fear and feelings of inferiority.

My teacher, Swami ji, had a direct vision to your soul. He loved all souls profoundly, unconditionally, unshakably, but his role as Guru was to challenge the mind (of those who seek liberation) in order to evolve an observing, discerning mind, rather than an ego-centric, reactive mind. His fire-like energy was intentional and, I came to appreciate later, essential in dismantling the mental concepts that prevent the acceptance of your free, unburdened nature. But the immaturity of youth defends the mental conditions, making Guru's invitation to freedom difficult to accept. So, as Swami ji was vast and all-encompassing like the sky, and powerful like fire, Zella was like earth, a stable

force that never wavered from her conviction that Guru is not a man, not even a person, but the voice and knowing clarity of your higher Self.

As Zella's body weakened, her wise and dauntless spirit strengthened. From being a rock of knowledge, she ventured deeper – to the core of the earth and further still, where all identification with body and mind melted to envelop the universe.

As I sat with her, listening to the revelations of a conscious transcendence, my mind was blown open again and again. I was not able to grasp intellectually what state of consciousness she was in. I just focused on being receptive. All these years, I visited Zella with 'my mind', seeking understanding, clarity, and ease. Now, I needed to lay down 'my ideas', which is to say to lift my head from studying the constructed map that has been my thirty-five-year discipline in *Adwait Vedant* philosophy (non-dualism) and be an open vessel for the direct realization – I am not bound to the changing body, the fleeting ideas, or the shifting dynamics of relationships, I am Swatantra – unconditional freedom.

There were times when, despite her expanded consciousness, the unspeakable condition of the body brought intolerable pain. Only a few days before she took flight from her body, Zella gave a feeble gesture scanning her body from top to toes and said, "All this, has been for only one reason – to know that it (body) has nothing to do with Me."

The power of these few words jolted me back into myself, leaving me speechless, leaving me to sit with myself, completely silent. There were so many moments like this. Again and again, the foundations of the constructed mind turned to dust and left me sitting in such profound silence, an unknowing-knowing.

Zella had three sons, all now sixty plus years old. They came as a family to live in Kullu in 1973. Zella was also more than a mother to them. They sought and realised clarity in her lighthouse beam of awareness. Only a few weeks after the diagnosis, her three sons and I were all sitting with her when the doctor came to examine her. Zella must have seen our stunned faces trying to process the situation we still didn't want to accept. From the depth of her conviction she said, "This is not death happening here! This is a celebration of our knowledge of deathlessness."

I could write a book of the profound teachings from these past four months, as well as the huge challenges we faced. Palliative care in a small town in the Himalayas is zero. There are absolutely no palliative care facilities nor the proper pain medication. The logistics to get what we needed was therefore extremely

stressful. We were a great team of care-givers! Everyone stepped up enormously, and yet when the body is exhausted the mind's defense mechanism kicks in and projects its frustration on the pettiest issues. We all shared a great understanding, enabling us to rise above the issues and stay focused on the real – to realise there is no death for the Being, only for the body.

But a more disturbing challenge did not come from the outer circumstances. It was as if I unwittingly and unwillingly tapped into a collective realm of human pain. So-called 'normal human behaviour' appeared to be a masquerade. I saw behind the masks of surety – of ideas, philosophies, and concepts – insecurity and vulnerability. Nisgardatta's wisdom (from 'I Am That') helped me greatly. When someone asked him about his realization, he described his liberated state succinctly, *"I used to be sure of so many things. Now I am not sure of anything, but I noticed that in being sure of nothing – I lost nothing."* There were some intense existential moments that really confronted me with doubt. Had all these years meditating, studying the philosophy, and sincerely digging for deeper meaning relieved me from suffering?

BUT (and it is a powerful but) despite the intensity that can dismantle our spiritual, human, emotional and mental framework, one 'thing' cannot buckle under the pressure ... and that is TRUE LOVE. If love is given and taken, won and lost, less or more, it is conditional love. True love is what remains when the body/mind/ego illusions are revealed to be foils and follies. What kept the spirit buoyant was Zella's revelation of true love.

Zella was an artist. Her vision that penetrated 'through the walls of illusion' (which is the title of her poetry book) remained awake to watch everything being stripped from her: her beloved sons, her dear friends, her community, her body, her strength, 'her' everything, BUT 'her' vision. Her vision, seeing beauty, purity and love EVERYWHERE, as the ESSENCE of EVERYTHING was amped up a million-fold. She would try to describe her vision, the intensity of how she saw colour, the beauty and perfection of nature, how she saw the entirety of people – from a slight mannerism to their depth. Human eyes would see her as a dying body, but she is a mighty vision, seeing the core of everyone and everything as one and the same enormous intensity of love.

Words could not capture her vision completely and so she would resort to say, "It is outrageous." I knew the 'outrageous' was vaster than what can be described or even experienced. Outrageous is the immensity of love.

I was amazed to experience how vast love actually is. The whole experience broke the barriers of a limited vision of love to know that love is not preference or liking. Love is not an emotion, although it translates through the body as

emotion. Love is not partial. Love is not in opposition to hate. There is no gradient in love – less or more. Love does not appear and disappear. There is no experience in love.

In the tradition of non-dual wisdom, *Neti neti* (Sanskrit meaning, 'not this not this') is a mental device offered to the disciple to sift out theoretical knowledge from direct realization. By examining what is changing and subject to the pairs of opposites and pronouncing it 'not this', what remains is revealed.

What remained, when all was stripped away from Zella, was an overwhelming power of love – a love that needed no words but would bring tears of relief just to sit in her presence. A love that needed no justification. A love that was free from attachment and preference. A love that can never be lost.

Surprisingly, I have not been captured by grief since Zella passed a month ago today. I am left with enormous gratitude for the storm of love that scoured my mind's landscape. Zella, dear friend, you swept away any notion that love can be bound in duality, attached to body or nurtured by fear and insecurity. Love is so immense that it is simply 'outrageous'.

Zella, your name is Swatantra - freedom. You taught me that there is no love without freedom and no freedom without love. You are the fearless lover of true freedom. You are the fearless voice that expressed your vision of love rather than shouting out in pain. My love for you is a celebration of our knowledge of deathlessness. For only in the knowledge of deathlessness can we realise true love, true freedom.

Happy Valentine, my dear Zella, you are pure love.