



I am not my name ~ class talk with David Life

Date: Sept 6, 2005

Focus: Shri Brahmananda Saraswati

First we're going to do Om three times call and response the way I did it, was taught to do it before I met Brahmananda Saraswati, who if you don't know is the orange guy with the beret up there on the left. OK this is the before, and you know I think the change will give you some indication of what he was like. You repeat after me.

Om, Om, Om (*very quiet, very little vibration*)

OK that's the before. And then after you get to have a few possibilities.

Om, Om, Om, Om (*strong and loud, different pitches*)

Then he did something called chewing your Om, looks something like this (*demonstrates Om with chewing movement*). Then he would make whole songs out of it.

O-am, O-am, O-am, O-am

O-am, O-am, O-am, O-am

O-am, O-am, O-am, O-am

O-am, O-am, O-am, O-am

Om

Come in. Don't be afraid. I was introduced to that little tune, kind of catchy little tune of OM in a class of Dharma Mittra. I didn't know that it was Shri Brahmananda singing but it was and you know they say that the guru is always there but they appear possibly through grace or good karma at some point in your life or not. But there were many ways that Shri Brahmananda was always calling out to us. And I want to relate something of a personal experience with him again that could maybe talk a little bit about what kind of a guy he was, what kind of a person he was. Just the OM, you know, it's like fun, it's like an experiment, it's like sound experiment, like chewing your OM, that's weird, you know? What made him a great teacher for me and I think for Sharon too is that he was always pulling the rug out from underneath you. You think you know OM? Well try this OM. He would always come up with some new approach that just shed new light on what you were doing and made it, really enhanced the experience.

So he gave us both names. And this is something that you may or may not have experienced in your life of spiritual pursuit, there's this idea of getting new names. Do you know that? Know of it? People all of a sudden, you know, one day they're Jane and the next day they're Durga, right? It happens, it happens on the sheet out front. It's part of the process and for me this is what it does. For one thing we tend to get attached and identify with our name. And we invest, we say that's who we are. Someone says who are you and I say "I'm David." That's just a name. And in a spiritual practice we try to drop that attachment. And one way you can drop the attachment is you give them different names. And you become a different being. So I'm not David anymore, now I'm Deva Das. Or whatever it might be. I've been given lots of names. Seems like every time I meet a new teacher they've given me a new name. And it's good because after a while you don't know which one you are. Am I David, or Deva Das, or Bodhananda or Omananda? Which one am I?



And you realize, does God have a name? Can we really give God a name? Isn't God by definition unnamable? If you could say that God is this title as opposed to this title aren't you limiting God somewhat? Isn't God by definition unlimited? So really God can't be named. I mean we say we chant the name of God, we chant many names, and as Krishna Das says, none of them are the real names, because the real name is unspeakable. But it's sounds that can get us going in that direction. And in the ultimate sense we are God too so we are equally unnamable. So it sort of teaches you that. You are beyond name and form. And one way that you can know that you are beyond name and form is to become David, and then become Deva Das, and then just flow into Bodhananda.

But another thing that happens with this is the process that you go through for being named is always part of the deal. The first time I was offered a name and mantra I refused it. I was like *"I bow down to no-one. I'll take no mantra and no name."* Right Sharon will verify. I said no thanks. And that put me and then immediately after I lost my chance I was like oh no. I might never get another chance for a name. I blew it just because I was so attached to me being David and not being anything else. But then I got another chance, a new offer of another name and an elaborate ritual surrounding it so I projected all of my stuff into it. I thought, you know, it's going to look this way, and the ritual's going to be a certain way, and then something special will happen and the name will be pronounced! Well three days before the ritual my guru gave me a piece of paper with three choices he said *"you get to choose."* "I get it?" "Yeah," he said *"This one sounds a little bit like Hare Krishna so I kind of don't like that one, this one doesn't roll off the tongue nicely, I really prefer this one but you choose one."* And I was kind of it kind of made me feel like this isn't really any big deal. And you know what it's not a big deal but I the trip I had to go through in my own head about it, and I loaded it up with so much stuff that either I didn't want to enter into it because it's too intimidating or it turned out that it wasn't nearly as pretentious or as ostentatious as I had imagined.

What I wanted to tell you about was how I was named by Shri Brahmananda. I had a name, I came with a name, actually I was a swami at that time, Swami Bodhananda, which was the one I picked, cos Bodh means high intelligence. (Sharon: *"The name is given and you aspire to it."*) We were with Shri Brahmananda and he took one look at Sharon and if you've heard his voice on recordings you know he has quite a gruff voice that commands a lot of attention, he goes *"UMA! You are Uma!"* and you know me, that would have ruffled me a bit but Sharon just goes, hee hee, ok. Even though she came prepared with another name also, Tripura Sundari I think you had at that point. It didn't make her pause a second and it shows how much easier this is for women than men.

I was introduced to him as Bodhananda and he looks at me and he goes, *"OMANANDA!"* Did I hear that? And I thought he didn't hear my name right. And you know he was a small guy he was only about this tall so I kind of tapped him on the shoulder and I was like, *"uh, guru-ji that's Bodhananda."* I want to tell you at that point this little shrimpy Indian guy became about this tall, his hair was out to here and there was fire shooting out of his eyes and his nostrils and he said *"OMANANDA SAME THING!"*

So that's how I was named by him. And my name became Om and Sharon's name became Uma and we were always known to him by those names and we will always be know to the Ananda Ashram people you might hear them from time to time call me Om or call Sharon Uma, they're not making a mistake because that was the name we were given by Shri Brahmananda.



And as usual a way that just pulled the rug of your mind out from underneath you because I thought I was Bodhananda. And I found out I wasn't. I found out for good I'm not any of those. The only difficulty I have is every now and then I have to fill out government forms that ask you if you have any aliases and I run out of room. Give them something to think about.

Anyway I just wanted to talk to you about that one incident in our meeting. We didn't have a lot of close encounters of the Shri Brahmananda kind actually in his presence because we were only with him we're not actually sure right now but maybe like a year. Let's say a year. But when you're with someone like that it's not a matter of taking 50 years or 75 years to comprehend something. It happens in an instant. And then you realize that that's all you were really there to hear from them, that one thing. And the lesson he gave me was about my true identity. And the lesson was you are more than your body and your mind. So let's chew our Om one more time.

OM

