



12.UNMANI

Unmani grew up in London in a loving family, but even as a little girl she felt that something was missing in her life. She began searching for answers everywhere she went. When she was 18 Unmani went to live in Israel. There she lived on a kibbutz and went to Tel Aviv University. The drive to find what she was looking for then sent her to the Far East. She worked in Japan for a while, travelled in Thailand and spent three years in India. There she spent time at the Osho commune in Pune as well as various other meditation centres. However, it was only when she met a German Zen master that she truly found what she was looking for. She finally woke up out of the dream of separation and recognised her true nature as Life itself. For the first time in her life, Unmani could just enjoy life, so by way of a celebration she went to Australia for a year and half where she lived on

beaches and ate mangos and coconuts! Later Unmani returned to the UK, where she wrote her first book *I am Life itself*. This has now been translated and published in several other languages. Unmani began holding small meetings in Not-Knowing in the UK and over the last few years these meetings have grown and now Unmani travels around the world holding meetings and retreats.

www.not-knowing.com

INTERVIEW

In an article you wrote earlier this year you wrote.

"Many people ask me why I ask for donations or charge money for the meetings and retreats I run. Shouldn't the pointing to your true nature be free of charge?" People tend to think that if you ask for money, then you are obviously taking advantage of people in order to get rich and if you don't charge anything for what you do, then you are obviously more genuine, pure, and saintly.

We tend to get our ideas about spiritual teachers mainly from Eastern cultures and from stories of Christian saints. "

What about the practice of dana. In the tradition of Buddhism, generosity was a practice that was cultivated for various reasons. It was to help one overcome greed, stinginess, attachment to material objects and egocentric thinking about personal gain. This was built

into the dharma (teachings) and also considered one of the “paramitas”. Giving the teachings un-conditionally with no expectation at all; out of compassion and kindness to help elevate others suffering.

Unmani: I don't teach with the intention of helping others out of suffering (although often people do feel helped by what I do). I do it because I am moved to express what is true. The reality is that I don't see that there are any others who are suffering at all. In fact I find that in holding on to the belief that I am someone who can help others, this makes me separate from them and implies that I have something they don't. I don't see it that way at all. I see others as myself and don't believe the ideas of separation that cause the suffering in the first place. People often come to see me with the idea that there is something missing in their lives, and believe that if they get something from me, they might feel more complete or no longer suffer. Usually what people end up walking away with, after a meeting or a retreat with me, is a lot less than they expected. I am not interested in reinforcing the idea that their suffering is real enough for me to help them with it. In fact, another way of saying this is that I do not care about other people. I am not trying to be kind or compassionate. I have no values as such at all. Whatever happens happens without 'me' needing to try to hold onto values or beliefs at all. All I do is point to and as, who I am. I am not interested in anything else. This is a ruthlessly compassionate pointing that undercuts what people think they want or need, to what we are all really longing to be acknowledged. I do it absolutely selfishly, because there is no one else.

I charge money for what I do because in this Western society this is what people do to survive in the world. I am not part of a religious or traditional order with a structure to support teachers so this is what I do instead. In fact what I charge only goes back into paying for travel, venue and living expenses to enable me to continue to do this.

Q: In this same article you also said,

"I continue to travel around the world 'teaching' or pointing to our true nature, because that is what I do. I could play any role. I could be a gardener, I could be a housewife, I could be a secretary, I could be a monk with a begging bowl, I could be an engineer, I could be a beggar on the street, but the role I play for now, is a so-called 'non-dual teacher'. I have no choice about it, Life moves me in this way.

Then if this is the case, why have you not become a monk or a sanyasin and play that role? Giving up all your worldly and material possessions, shaving off your hair, putting away your dresses and makeup and wearing simple orange robes made out of scraps of soiled waste material, eating only once a day, (whatever is given to you whether you like it or not), never being able to cook for yourself or use fire, getting up every day at 4 in the morning and then teaching?

Unmani: You ask why I don't give up my worldly goods and become a monk or sanayasin, well I don't see any reason to try to become anything at all. This is how this woman is playing out. For whatever reason, this is the way she lives and expresses. I have no choice about it. I have spent time in monasteries and have several friends who are Buddhist monks or nuns, but have never felt drawn to change my dresses, shoes and make up, to robes and a shaven head. Why would I have to enter into a foreign tradition or religion in order to be who I am? What I am pointing to is for the ordinary person who lives in the ordinary world. It doesn't require anyone to live in any particular way. In fact it radically has nothing to do with the way the person lives. That is the freedom of it; the freedom to not have to be in any particular way. This is the freedom that is beyond experience.

I have found that in my own journey, it has been about this woman flourishing and blossoming more and more as a wild feminine energy in this manifestation. As a young teenager/woman I was insecure and terrified to be in the world, and would have welcomed a structure such as a nunnery to hide in to explore my inner self. However, as I have been moved (beyond what I might have actually wanted) to step out in front of crowds and speak out, despite the terror felt physically, I have found that these old fears and insecurities have been held in the love of who I really am in a much more 'lived' way. It is a constant surprise and wonder to see how she dances free of the old beliefs and fears. She now lives as a sensual woman who walks hand in hand with vulnerability, out there in the world. She plays in the world in a way that in the past she never had the courage to do. And she loves the play of it all.

I feel that my life is without real worldly possessions anyway as none of them actually mean anything to me or about me at all. This woman plays with them in the same way as a child plays with toys but in the next moment can walk away from them. None of them ever actually belong to me. Nothing ever actually means anything about me. I am at the mercy of whatever life provides or takes away. My lifestyle the last 10/15 years has reflected this as well. I have no home but travel around depending on where I am invited. When I get there I am at the mercy of whoever I am staying with and the way they live. I am not saying that this is the way everyone should live. It is just funny that this is how life has played out in the last few years.

Q: Are you saying that you have no free will over what you do?

Unmani: No I have no freewill. But the point is not that there is no freewill. The point is that there is no one in charge of it. It certainly seems that there

are choices that are made but when I look to find who is in the driver's seat, I don't find anyone. The train is going along the tracks, out of control.

Q: Many traditional Indian teachers in the past did not even ask for donations or charge money for the teachings. For example Ramakrishna would not even touch money with his bare hands. Ramana Maharshi also would not charge, neither did Papaji or Nisargadatta.

Then why is it that many contemporary non dual teachers in the US seem to charge for this?

Unmani: I feel I have answered this one. The main point being that Western contemporary teachers do not live in or belong to a tradition or culture which supports teachers like they do in India for example.

Some teachers have another way of making a living instead of charging for the meetings, in which case they are more inclined to offer their time for free. However, others need to charge a fee so that they can pay for the venues, travel and accommodation etc. How else would they be able to do it? Although seekers do sometimes open their homes or donate some funds to support teachers, generally it is not such an acceptable thing to do in Western culture.

What seems to be happening nowadays is that this message is coming out of the closets of mostly Eastern tradition and culture, and is now available to the ordinary people in the West. Somehow it is fitting into our culture here in a way that people are starting to digest it. In the West, time is money. So teachers need to charge for their time just like anyone else.

Q: What about charging for Skype video sessions?

Unmani: Modern technology enables us to offer online teachings which was unheard of before. Just because it wasn't done before, just because teachers in the past didn't charge money, this doesn't mean that we should not do so now. Things change all the time. It is a constant letting go of our old ideas of how it should or shouldn't be.

Q: Why is it that some non dual teachers charge exorbitant fees like Eckhart Tolle, while another like Tony Parsons charges very reasonable fees in comparison? (Only \$10 dollars at the door.) Would this indicate that Tony Parsons is more enlightened than Eckhart Tolle, but not as much as Ramana Maharshi who did not charge?

Unmani: As this teaching is spreading around Western culture, some expressions are more accessible to the mainstream. Some teachings are packaged in a way that the average person is more likely to grasp, whereas other more radical expressions are not packaged in the same way. People usually pay for the package. In other words when people hear a teacher's name again and again and even hear that he was on Oprah and that his books are best sellers, then many people will pay more to hear him. I don't know much about marketing but it seems to have a snowball effect.

It has nothing to do with how enlightened a teacher is. No one is more or less enlightened. It's just that each teacher has a different and unique flavour and expression. Some expressions attract many people and some attract less. I presume more popular teachers have to charge more because their venues and other expenses cost much more than teachers who attract smaller groups.

END OF INTERVIEW