

A Game of Hide-and-Seek

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Tracy: Hi, Ted. My wife and I met you at James' Trout Lake retreat.

I wanted to share this with you as a way to begin a dialogue, if you have the time. I know you have begun your busy school year, so I understand if your time is limited.

Last night I bought a homeless person some food. It sounds simple, and it was in the end, but after reviewing the whole event afterward, it was interesting to look at all the drama that went on inside Tracy's head.

Ted: It sounds like your assimilation of the teachings is taking hold, since you are able to so readily make the discrimination between the apparent individual – i.e. Tracy – and you – i.e. pure awareness. This fundamental discrimination, which Vedanta refers to as *atma-anatma-viveka*, or the discrimination between the self and the not-self, between the real and the apparent, is the basis of liberation, provided that it neutralizes one's binding *vasanas* and cancels the sense of doership/enjoyership, the sense of being a separate, independent, volitional entity.

Tracy: I had just ordered some takeout food for myself and was waiting outside the restaurant while my order was being prepared. The restaurant was in a little strip mall with other restaurants and a convenience store, so there was lots of activity. A young woman approached me and asked if I had a couple of dollars I could spare. As it was, I did not have any cash and told her so. She was very disappointed and I felt there was something dark and desperate about her. I continued to watch as she moved around the parking lot asking others for money and not receiving any. Mostly people just ignored her. She began to cry openly. I suddenly got the strong notion to buy her some food but didn't immediately act because I was afraid of how I would be perceived by all the other people that were coming and going and who were also aware of this woman's suffering. I had a strong message to act but I was frozen by *vasanas* and illogical fears. It was quite an interesting little drama going on inside my subtle body.

Ted: You hit the nail on the head with this observation. The subtle body is basically a Broadway stage – or perhaps in your case I should say a Hollywood movie set ☺ – on which *maya's* never-ending story plays out.

Actually, it is more accurate to say that *maya* (macrocosmic ignorance) as wielded by *Isvara* (God the Creator, or the personification of the macrocosmic causal body) is the stage/set itself, and the apparent individual's *avidya* (microcosmic or "personal" ignorance) is what projects the *vasana*-based interpretations upon the "creation" that basically constitute one's experience. *Isvara's* projection/"creation" is completely *sattvic*, and being so it is value-neutral. The apparent individual's *vasanas* are composed of combinations of various degrees of the three *gunas*, and thus superimpose *rajas* and *tamas* upon the purely *sattvic* "set" of the apparent reality, which color it according to the values with which the apparent individual programmed and by which he

or she has been conditioned.

Both *Isvara*'s projection of the apparent reality and the apparent individual's interpretation and consequent experience of that "creation" are the effects of *maya* (macrocosmic ignorance), and are only apparent in the sense that neither is permanent. The individual's *vasana*-based interpretation of the apparent reality, however, while fundamentally rooted in macrocosmic ignorance, is a second "layer" of personal or microcosmic ignorance (*avidya*) that is projected upon the apparent reality.

Tamas, which is a veiling or concealing energy, blinds the apparent individual to the true nature of the apparent reality, and *rajas*, which is a projecting energy, compels the apparent individual to superimpose his or her *vasana*-based interpretations upon the objective world. The point is that when under the spell of ignorance nothing about the apparent individual's understanding and experience of the world is real. It is all one elaborate drama. I like to refer to it as a high-definition, three-dimensional, kaleidoscopic, holographic, cinematic extravaganza presented in sense-surround. And it all takes place in the theater of the subtle body.

It is important to note that the individual's *vasanas* were not of his or her own making. In other words, the apparent individual did not create or choose his or her *vasanas*. The *vasanas* stored in the apparent individual's causal body are actually the property of *Isvara*. In fact there is really only one causal body, which is a gigantic storehouse of all the *vasanas* that comprise the apparent creation and compel the apparent beings that inhabit it to act as they do. The *vasanas* that one considers one's own are only those *vasanas* existing within the macrocosmic causal body with which one's mind-body-sense complex – i.e. one's subtle body – identifies, so to speak. And who caused this identification? *Isvara*. It is true that the apparent individual has been imbued with apparent free will by means of which he or she can execute actions that will strengthen or weaken his or her *vasanas*, but even the sense of personal will and the choices one makes while apparently wielding it are essentially determined by *Isvara*. This understanding does not negate one's responsibility with regard to exercising his or her apparent free will – indeed if he or she doesn't wield it wisely he or she will never get free from ignorance – but it does alleviate the burden of personal responsibility for the way things are on both a microcosmic and macrocosmic level. Knowing I'm not personally in charge of any aspect of the apparent reality, I take whatever action I feel is most appropriate in a given situation and leave the results to *Isvara*, and moreover, knowing that *Isvara* is taking care of the whole in whatever way serves the best interests of the total (i.e. that the field of existence is absorbing and reconfiguring itself in order to accommodate whatever actions are executed within it in a way that will ultimately maintain the balance, harmony and well-being of the whole), I accept whatever results manifest as a gift from God.

Tracy: She came nearby again, and I asked her if she needed something to eat, and she said yes. She said she was feeling sick and going crazy because she was so hungry. So we walked across the parking lot to a Chinese food place, and she told me what she liked, and I ordered it for her and paid with my credit card. She sat down to wait for her food and she thanked me as I left.

What I saw later, upon reflecting, was that simply following *dharma*, the clear message to buy someone some food, was effortless.

Ted: Yes, *dharma* is a built-in feature of the subtle body. It is based on mutual expectation and is part of our programming. In other words, I know how I would like to be treated, and since really there is only me, know that everyone else would like to be treated with the same respect, courtesy and kindness. Thus we know what is “right” and what is “wrong” but, as you noticed, sometimes our conditioning freezes us or our *vasanas* compel us to violate *dharma* in order to get something that, due to ignorance of our true nature as whole and complete limitless awareness, we erroneously feel we need to complete us.

Tracy: There was a feeling of power, expansion and clarity as all of Tracy’s petty little fears vanished. In a sense, most of the world, the part not involved with buying this young woman some food, seemed to drop away. From the perspective of awareness nothing really happened at all but the movement of thoughts coming and going and the following of *dharma*, nothing more than Tracy surrendering to *Isvara*, the puppet master. It seems we’re animated by *Isvara*, and forgetting causes tension.

Ted: *Dharma* is essentially *Isvara*, for *Isvara* is only a personification of the laws that project, sustain and govern the field of existence. For this reason when we follow *dharma* it does feel effortless because it is essentially, as you point out, an act of surrender. The ego gets out of its own way by dropping the pretense that it is actually doing something and “allows” *Isvara* to take care of business, which is actually what has been going on all along anyway despite the ego’s ignorance of this fact.

Tracy: I can see the beauty in the practice of *karma yoga* in making that knowledge abiding. This seems to be my *sadhana*: watching my thoughts come and go, watching emotions as they arise and my habitual urges to react, and finding that sometimes I’m not reacting habitually anymore but striving to remain dispassionate in any event and coming back to the perspective of the self, seeing how everything is apparently happening within awareness. It all just seems to be thoughts arising and dissolving from and back into the field, creating an illusion that there is something happening.

Ted: You’ve got the idea, my friend. But you can let go of the striving. I understand that sometimes it feels like Tracy is doing the work, the spiritual practice, the *sadhana*, but remember it is awareness “striving” through you to recognize itself through the vehicle of the intellect. In other words, though awareness has never actually forgotten itself, when seemingly under the spell of its own power of ignorance it identifies with a particular limited mind-body-sense complex – in this case, Tracy – and having assumed that perspective illumines the subtle body of the apparent individual it takes itself to be who then thinks it has forgotten itself and therefore has to do spiritual practice to purify the mind and prepare it to assimilate the knowledge of its true identity as whole and complete, limitless, actionless, ordinary, unborn, ever-present, all-pervasive, non-dual awareness. See how absurd the whole “striving” business is? It is simply awareness playing a game of hide-and-seek with itself. So give up the idea that Tracy needs to strive for liberation. Quite honestly, Tracy will never get liberated. Tracy is an apparent individual who by definition will always be limited. The good news of course is that you are not Tracy. So, yes, stay vigilant but let the knowledge free you from Tracy rather than allowing the ego to co-opt the process and believe that it is getting enlightened through its own efforts. In short, keep in

mind who you really are and let the chips fall where they may. *Isvara* has it all under control.

And you, pure awareness, are ever free of it all anyway.

Tracy: I appreciate any thoughts or questions you might have for me that would serve to strengthen my knowledge of self.

~ Love, Tracy