

A Mature Devotee Expects Exactly What He or She Is Receiving

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2014-12-18

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2785>

Hugh: The “superimposition of *satya* on *mithya*” issue seems to be getting clearer. I didn’t even know what you were talking about when you first mentioned it. Now I (*jiva*) am starting to get it. I am awareness, but God and *jiva* appear in me. The things that apply to awareness don’t necessarily apply to God or *jiva*. *Jiva* may feel bad, but awareness never feels bad.

Shams: Good. This is a quote from Sundari that could help:

“As pure awareness, *Isvara*, *maya*, the *jiva* and the world arise out of you, so you are beyond them all and always free of them, yet they are totally dependent on you, awareness. However, in the apparent reality where *maya* is operating, the *jiva*, or individual, is subject to the laws that make up the *dharma* field. *Moksa* is freedom FROM the *jiva*, FOR the *jiva* who lives in the apparent reality. The *jiva* never leaves the apparent reality, and as a liberated *jiva*, self-actualisation means understanding what it means to be self-realised in the apparent reality. As the self, you are already free and do not create anything. As the *jiva*, you are not creating anything either, except the subjective world of your perceptions and conditioning – individual creation, or *jiva srsti*, and projecting that onto the Total, or *Isvara srsti*. When self-knowledge removes the ignorance of your true nature and you know that your primary identity is awareness and not the *jiva*, *Isvara srsti* continues as before, and you are fine with it. You know that there are certain laws that operate in the apparent reality and you have no problem abiding by them, because peace of mind is your primary goal. In addition, you automatically follow *dharma* by following what is right for the *jiva*, which means understanding his *svadharma* and taking appropriate action in light of self-knowledge to do what produces peace of mind for him.”

Hugh: The way for *jiva* to feel better is to follow *dharma* and do self-inquiry. *Jiva* thinks he’s always followed *dharma* though, so wonders why he suffers sometimes.

Shams: Suffering is something innate to life when you don’t know your true identity. While you’re ignorant of the self, you take you as an individual, and therefore you pay too much attention to your likes and dislikes. These are only *vasanas*, the result of *karmas* that are manifested in the subtle body as inclinations. What causes suffering to one person does not necessarily provoke it to another. Someone who identifies with the *jiva* and its *vasanas* interprets pain as suffering. But there is a difference between the two. Pain is the result of trauma experienced by the body, whereas suffering is a matter of existential angst brought on by a deep-rooted sense of incompleteness and inadequacy that is experienced in the mind. Now let me quote this excellent explanation from Ted Schmidt, another endorsed Vedanta teacher:

“Pain is easy to understand in terms of the physical body. I bark my shin on the coffee table and the sense instrument that records kinesthetic sensations sends a message to its

associated perceptive organ in the mind and I have the apparent experience of pain in my leg (I say “apparent” because the experience of pain is actually occurring in the mind). We also experience pain in the subtle body as a result of its subjection to emotional or intellectual trauma. For example, if I am involved in a romantic relationship with someone I love and that person breaks up with me, I will feel the pain of missing the person, of no longer experiencing that intellectual and/or emotional rapport, of no longer having my sexual needs satisfied, of feeling rejected, etc. Suffering occurs when I believe that the pain I am experiencing is actually affecting me, that I have been wounded, damaged, reduced or somehow diminished by its cause and/or influence. If I believe I am incomplete and inadequate and that I need to obtain or hold onto some object in order to be whole or “good enough” and I fail to obtain the object or end up losing it once I have obtained it, then I feel that I am “less than” or that I have been diminished. Initially, this is perhaps easier to understand in terms of the subtle body. If I don’t know that I am whole and complete, limitless awareness whose very nature is love and joy, and I feel that I need the love of another person to validate my worth and thereby supply me with a sense of satisfaction and happiness, then if or when I lose that person’s intellectual approval, emotional affection and physical intimacy I feel that I am incomplete, that I am a loser, that I am worthless, and I suffer accordingly. In terms of the physical body, if I am attached to or define myself in terms of a certain condition of health or comfort or functional ability and that condition is impinged upon, modified or altogether withdrawn, then here again I feel incomplete and inadequate and consequently suffer.

“To illustrate the point, I’ll give you an example from my own life. When I was a kid, the only thing I wanted to be in life was a major league baseball player. All of my thoughts and activities fed that dream. I not only played baseball during the season but also engaged in daily workouts year-round specifically designed to enhance my baseball skills. I played baseball board games (no computer games in those days; dates me a bit, doesn’t it?), watched baseball movies, read baseball books. Basically, I walked, talked and ate baseball. Then during spring practice of my freshman year in high school, I broke my arm. The injury sidelined me for the entire season and though it didn’t end my playing days, I had an epiphany at the moment it happened in which I realized I was not going to ever play professional baseball. I cried myself to sleep that night, not because of the pain I was experiencing in my arm, but because of gaping wound in my heart for which at that time I had no fix. My whole identity at that time was wrapped up in being a baseball player. In the absence of that identity, I didn’t know who I was or what mattered to me. Though the physical pain was intense, it was the associated emotional turmoil due to ignorance of my true identity that caused me to suffer.

“Anyway, having said all that, the bottom line is that self-knowledge will not entirely alleviate pain but it will bring an end to suffering. Pain is a phenomenon of the body even, as pointed out earlier, on a subtle level and is the effect of *maya*, or macrocosmic ignorance, while suffering is a phenomenon of the mind and is the effect of *avidya*, or microcosmic ignorance.”

According to your comment, I also noticed that there is the idea that, by following *dharma* you’ll avoid suffering. This is partially true (when pain and suffering are seen as the same), only in the sense that (a) *dharma* is the order of cosmos, and when you live according to the order, life is easy and frictions and bad reactions from the world are few and (b) knowing that you live according to the absolute gives you peace of mind. For example, if you found a million dollars that belong to someone else and had the chance to take them with the assurance that no one would know, what would you do? We all know *dharma* instinctively, but few know the value of *dharma*. A person who ignores this value would probably value more the security that one million

dollars can give (apparently). On the other hand, a person who understands the value of *dharma* hardly could take something that does not own (actually, it's almost impossible for him or her to imagine that action) because he values more the peace of mind that comes from living a life of *dharma*. The person who took the million dollars has now a new worry. The person who lost the chance to be a millionaire doesn't care, because he or she knows that *dharma* is the greatest asset for a *jiva*. He kept a (b) peaceful mind and (a) didn't create "bad" *karma*.

So following *dharma* gives peace of mind and avoids the creation of "bad" *karma*. However, *dharma* does not assure you that you won't receive unwanted results ever. It will not change your past *karma* and what *Isvara* has saved for you, like it or not. Being a good boy or girl (according to what society or culture asks for you) is not always the same as following *dharma*, and clearly, the relationship between the *jiva* and *Isvara* is not what the Semitic religions imagined: a Big Guy who rewards good actions and punishes evil ones. That is a vision built on the identity with the ego and its likes and dislikes. It's true that every action asks for a reaction and ignorant actions will give you painful reactions. But, for your past comments, I think that you maybe imagine that, if you follow *dharma*, then you will get wanted results in your human endeavors. That is not true. Neither *dharma* nor *moksa* ensure that you will get what you want in life fields (like profession, love, family, etc.). These dreams come to a subtle body who is focused on its desires with *rajas*, interpreting reality via its likes and dislikes.

The field of life is always changing, and it's impossible for the *jiva* to escape all kinds of experiences (good, bad and neutral), even if he or she strictly follows *dharma*. The *jiva* wonders why, if he has always followed the rules, he still suffers. *Jiva* suffers because he doesn't know his true identity, which is the same for everyone in *samsara*. Suffering will disappear only when ignorance is gone. As for the pain, it will still appear in dense and subtle bodies because that's their nature. However, the pain becomes unimportant when you develop a dispassionate mind, which is, at the same time, a qualification for *moksa* and one of the fundamental values of *dharma*.

As for the experiences that you get from the world, they will remain in the hands of *Isvara*, who does what he/she/it wants. Life is out of *jiva*'s control, and knowledge and peace of mind are your best allies – to accept that everything is fine just as it is.

Hugh: Thank you for your suggestion to pay attention to *Isvara* too. It was a good reminder to look at the things that sustain me, without "me" doing anything, like the beating of my heart. Regarding "devotional conversion identities" (*How to Attain Enlightenment*, p. 159+), *jiva* finds the "confidante" and "child" as easy images to talk with, although finds it slightly weird talking to God as if it's his child. *Jiva* is asking *Isvara* to understand his *dharma*, and *Isvara* better. *Jiva* wants to have more confidence in *Isvara*.

Shams: Having confidence in God is like having confidence in gravity. Gravity will do what it has always done, like it or not. The *Jiva* of *Isvara* is the sum of all *jivas* and the intelligence that orders them. The dynamic of the *jivas* and *Isvara*'s *Jiva* itself is always the same: creation, conservation, destruction. This process is governed by love because the nature of consciousness is love, and *Isvara* is consciousness (wielding its power of *maya*). *Isvara* loves the same way a fly and the U.S. president, a tree and a child, a serial murderer and Albert Einstein, because He/She/It recognizes Him-Her-Itself in everyone and everything. Human *jivas*

have the ability to think, and their ego has decided that some things are better than other things (the famous likes and dislikes). Therefore they assume that there are things about God that are not right. For example, those related to destruction, lack, sickness and failure. These interpretations come from the ego, which decides what is good or not based on personal parameters. *Isvara*, however, contains all this and more. On the other side, the small *jiva* identifies itself only with some things and prefers *Isvara*'s elements related to the creation or preservation, especially if they have to do with its safety and personal pleasure. Religions often speak about confidence in God, having the idea that we must trust Him in order to get positive results. When God doesn't give them that they want, they stop trusting because the only parameter that they have is the individual (which is just a bunch of arbitrary likes and dislikes). The religions' common approach is very much like a child's.

A mature devotee expects exactly what he or she received. So an appropriate word for his or her devotion could be "surrender." Of course you as a devotee immediately have confidence in God because you know, deeply, that the field of life is totally beneficial. That does not mean that you believe that God will not deliver negative results to you. It doesn't matter, because your parameter is not personal anymore, i.e. you are unattached to your likes and dislikes. Your parameter is God, so you want what you actually have. A devotee's confidence does not depend on events or consequences. So it is surrender. As we saw in a previous email, this surrender is not to stop doing what you have to do. It is rather an inner attitude born from the understanding of life. As with gravity, you're already surrendered to *Isvara*. There is nothing that is not surrendered to *Isvara*, as *Isvara* is all that there is: it is what looks through all the eyes, and it's the intelligence that gives order to the whole network of life and death.

To give all your actions to *Isvara* is an act of wisdom because that's the way things are. All *jivas* are moved by the enormous force of love. Confidence? We don't need a proof that life is wonderful and beneficial, because we have it with every breath. As *jivas*, we should know that creation, preservation and destruction depend entirely on *Isvara*, not on us. If you stop pretending that you are the author of the *jiva* or its actions, it will be easier to see the entire map and understand that the source that has sustained all those beliefs is love. And then *jiva* can also surrender its mind. You don't do it for the sake of *Isvara*. The benefit is for the mind. *Isvara* loves you completely, regardless of your intentions or your actions (after all, he is the true author of all that). However, when our soul is open to God and is able to say "yes" to and "thank you" for all we get, it's easier to see the love (which is yourself) shining in the mind. Then, gradually, the identity of the *jiva* with *Isvara* is revealed.

Hugh: *Jiva* is also afraid of having a totally clean, empty life, losing out on the joys of life, even though *jiva* knows that, as awareness, all joy in life comes from who I am.

Shams: Don't worry. That will not happen. *Moksa* changes the knowledge of your true identity. People who know their true identity are normal ones who still live a normal life with normal *vasanas*. The only difference is that the *vasanas* have become non-binding. They are known for what they are and do not cause suffering anymore. The "totally clean, empty life" idea is a myth. The little joys of life will remain there (if they are *dharmic*) and they will be more enjoyable, as you will see them as your self. The little things you like, in fact, are part of your *svadharma*. That is, your way, your personal *dharma*. For the *jiva* they are an indicator to know what *Isvara* wants from him, which is his specific calling to serve in the field of life.

Hugh: I'm looking forward to James' new book. I had it on pre-order, but apparently it has been released, but it's not even in stock. I guess people are snatching it up wherever it is, before any of the copies get sent to Japan.

Shams: The new James book is one of his excellent presentations of Vedanta, this time held with the intention to increase clarity on some topics. Fortunately, in Vedanta there is never anything new, so with *How to Attain Enlightenment* and *e-satstangs* you have a full deployment of the teaching. Also, I'm sharing with you a text from Swami Dayananda on *dharma*. I find it very useful and I think that it could help you to inquire a little more about this subject.