

A Realized Soul with a Small Doubt

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Ram: Dear Sri Sri Bhogiji Sureshji Maharaj, here are my sterling words of wisdom. They should set you free, assuming you've not had too many pints of Guinness stout.

Suresh: I have a question but it hasn't formulated itself coherently yet, so I will type it out as I go along and hopefully you will get the gist of what I am saying.

People here, a couple of friends, have had discussions with me about *vasanas*. They are saying basically that *vasanas* have to be seen for what they are in order for them to dissipate, in order for clear light of awareness to fully shine at all times permanently...

Ram: There is a misconception right here at the beginning of their argument. The clear light of awareness shines all the time. It has never not shone. It shines whether there are *vasanas* or not. Nothing any human being can do will make it shine.

The second problem with this statement is this: Who is going to "see them for what they are"? The clear light of awareness sees them always. They are only known in the clear light of awareness. Even the ego can't see them since they are subtler than the ego, although it is true that they can be "seen" when they emerge into the mind as one's desires and fears, thoughts and feelings, memories, dreams, fantasies, etc.

The third problem is that the *vasanas* need not dissipate. They dissipate naturally if you live life consciously – maybe this is what they mean. Actually, *vasanas* themselves are never a problem. If you have a body and mind you have *vasanas*, enlightened or not. The problem is attachment to them. Attachment is caused by the mistaken belief that indulging or suppressing them will bring happiness or unhappiness. When you act out a *vasana* it is always with the belief that you will enjoy a certain positive result or avoid a negative result – and that this result will somehow complete you, make you happier than you are – or less unhappy. So you become attached to the fruits of your *vasana*-inspired actions. This attachment clouds the mind and keeps you from seeing that you are already as happy as you are ever going to be. When you realize that, the *vasanas* have no hold on you, because acting them out will not improve your situation.

Suresh: ...in other words, the *vasanas* need to be gone for full-blown enlightenment (a word I do not use a lot!) to happen.

Ram: Good for you. There is no such thing as full-blown or partially-blown enlightenment. As Ramana says, it is *jnanam*, understanding who one is. Enlightenment is not achieved by getting the pure light of awareness to shine permanently. The pure light of awareness shines permanently already. It has nothing to do with time. It is out of time. It cannot stop shining. It is the very nature of the self. Enlightenment is the hard and fast understanding that "I am the clear light of awareness."

There is nothing you can do to gain it, because you are it. You can only see if it is true. It may be that attachment to certain *vasanas* prevents you from seeing that it is true, in which case you need to disassociate from the *vasana* so that you can investigate the clear light and discover your identity as it.

Suresh: Until then (the *vasanas* are exhausted) you may have no doubt that you are self itself, yet the tendency of habits can arise and cloud the clarity of being self then and there.

Ram: It is true that as long as there are binding attachments to the *vasanas* it is very unlikely that one can clearly understand oneself to be clear, ordinary awareness. The phrase “clarity of being self” is not very precise, although I think I know what you mean. It would be better to say “clear understanding that I am the limitless self.”

Suresh: Here comes my need to clarify. In the midst of emotions such as irritation, frustrations and agitation one is aware of having these emotions and one can keenly be aware that he is experiencing the shadows of these emotions as they arise yet he knows himself to be self without any doubt.

Ram: Yes, this is a statement of a self-realized person. One is aware of these things because one is awareness.

Suresh: My friends say, “If during such a mind-state one enquires as to who is experiencing these disturbing emotions, then it makes sense that the clarity of self will overtake these temporary, negative traits and remove the shadow of *vasana*.” It sounds to me like a practice that you have to do when seized by such moments. To me, thinking about these charged emotions after a situation arises (usually involving another person) is THINKING. This is what I understood what my *guru* meant when he said, “Don’t think!” or “Don’t move!”

Ram: This “clarity of self” taking over means what? The self is always clear. It isn’t going to “take over” anything, because it is already in charge of everything, meaning that nothing exists without it. Secondly, who is going to be doing this practice? If you are the self and you know it, why will you bother about any *vasanas*, because they have no effect on you? If you are the ego, how are you going to “take over” any *vasana*-generated state of mind. You yourself are nothing but a *vasana* imagining that you are somebody.

Finally, why is thinking a problem? Why are emotions a problem? You cannot remove thinking or emotions. Did you ever meet anyone who did? When your teacher says, “Don’t think!,” to whom is he addressing this command? He will not be addressing it to the self, because the self is free of thought. If he is addressing it to someone else, who is it that can stop thinking? There is nobody who can stop thought. It is just a fantasy. The thoughts come up on their own. They are the *vasanas* outpicturing. Nobody is going to stop them. And even if you could stop thinking, does that equal enlightenment? We stop thinking for a good seven or eight hours a day when we sleep, yet we are none the wiser. Thought is arrested in coma and *nirvikalpa samadhi*, yet when you wake up you are still an idiot. If the absence of thought is enlightenment, then who isn’t

enlightened?

Suresh: It is perplexing me to some degree because it is a very fine line, since self has no qualities, yet these colours of mind arise in the midst of self! Self is not excluded from anything, including these emotions. How can self be separate from anything? Yet there is this need to weed out *vasanas* and an admission that in these moments you are not awareness itself, you are separate.

Ram: You are absolutely correct about the self. You are self-realized. You just lack confidence in what you know. This is often a problem when you argue with people who don't know – they plant doubts. It is good, however, because it makes you think more clearly and sort it out.

The problem lies in the meaning of “need to weed out.” If I am the self the *vasanas* are me but I am not the *vasanas*, so why do they need to be “weeded out”? If there is any “weeding” it is a weeding that takes place in understanding only. One needs to understand that the *vasanas* are just the self in its subtlest manifest state. If I'm an ego, a body-mind entity, then I can worry about the *vasanas* because they are making me what I am and I may not like what I am. But I am not a body-mind entity. I am the clear light of awareness, the light in which the *vasanas* dance. What do they have to do with me? This is how a *jnani* sees it.

To whom does this need arise? It is impossible that you are not awareness itself in any moment. Awareness is your nature. It is unborn. It is not something that you get or develop or cultivate. This whole business of “becoming aware” is ridiculous. You cannot “become more aware.” You are awareness. It is something to be realized. In awareness certain things are known and certain other things unknown. If you want enlightenment you need to pursue knowledge so you can lay your ignorance about who you are to rest. Becoming more aware, even if it were possible, will not get you anywhere.

Suresh: I am reminded of Ramana's *samadhi* in the Patala Lingam. I recall you saying once, (correct me if I am wrong) that he was clearing away some subtle *vasanas*. In reading his answers he says *vasanas* cannot live if one is present. Teachers such as Issac, Gangaji and John De Ruiter, even Papaji, teach to either dive, melt, embrace, welcome, soften around these states of mind in order to see their unreality.

Ram: I would like to know what “dive, melt, embrace” actually means. Who is doing this? And why? There is no subtle action you can do to see their unreality. You can only understand that they are unreal. Unreal just means impermanent. How does “diving,” etc. help? To dive you need a diver, a doer. You dive and you reinforce the belief in yourself as a doer, a limited being. Maybe what these *gurus* are saying is that these states of mind are not a problem if you accept them. This is true, but the language is unhelpful – because it reinforces your belief in yourself as a doer.

If you want to see their unreality, make some decisions based on your desires and see how they play out. See if you get lasting happiness. If you don't you can conclude that they are not real and dismiss them. Most of these spiritual types refuse to live in such a way that the *vasanas* exhaust quickly and naturally. They just hang onto their desires and try to get what they want – which reinforces the *vasanas* and produces unpleasant states of mind – and then they want some kind

of technique to neutralize the *vasanas*. Or they want an experience that will take them where there are no *vasanas*. But this is not possible, because the only place where there are no *vasanas* is the self and they are already the self. So they are trying to get what they already have.

And none of the *gurus* you mentioned teaches *karma yoga* as it is conceived in the *Gita* – because they would not have even one disciple. The only effective time-tested way to deal with the *vasanas* is to assume the *karma yoga* attitude which is based on the hard and fast truth that actions in the world, not what you want or don't want, cause *karma* to fructify. And secondly, that *karma*, the results of your *vasana*-inspired actions, has no power to disturb your mind – unless you are longing for a specific result. If you just do what you do, surrendering your actions to the self and accept the results as *prasad*, a gift from God, the *vasanas* burn out quickly and naturally and you are not subject to unpleasant emotional states. The *gurus* you mention are actually not telling the whole truth, either because they are confused themselves or they have an attachment to their identities as *gurus*. The people they are talking to are basically immature Westerners who have no idea what the *karma yoga* state of mind is because the societies they grew up in are completely based on the idea that satisfying one's *vasanas* is the only intelligent way to live. Consequently, they have virtually no *viragya*, dispassion, and are forever looking for some easy magical technique that will put them in charge of their emotions.

Suresh: At first I thought, my friends meant that you have to ACTIVELY seek out these tendencies in order to refine the diamond that you are, but this is not the case...

Ram: Here's another misconception. You cannot "refine the diamond that you are." You are the diamond that you are. There is nothing to be done about it. Either you see that you are "a diamond," i.e. the self, or you don't. There is no working on it. It is unchangeable.

Suresh: ...it is only when they arise. I personally felt that seeing such states was some kind of indulgence in experiencing them. Self IS, untainted, unmoving and objectless. So why bother with them? If they arise, they arise, and as they are not permanently present, do not to bother with them.

Ram: Yes, absolutely. You are right. These people are *karmis*, doers. They have an unholy need to do, to gain a result that they feel will make them happy, in this case remove or refine the *vasanas*. It is not possible. *Vasanas* drop off as they become exhausted through honest living and intelligent thinking based on the *karma yoga* attitude. These people have not realized that enlightenment has nothing to do with doing. It has everything to do with understanding.

Suresh: They (*vasana*-inspired states) just disappear as the day goes by or as they came. People have used *mantras* to turn away from such distractions or even singing to sing away the blues (I like the latter!). I have observed them and let them go like clouds. Yet the point is given that if one is self, all-pervading, limitless and complete, then no object will arise such as these states or *vrittis* since they are movements of mind.

Ram: This is incorrect. The mind is the self in motion. That is all. It is not some enemy to the self.

It is not something other than the self. Only for the purpose of discrimination is one asked to separate the unchanging self from the changing self. When you know which is which you will not invest yourself in what changes and think that it will produce lasting happiness. You will just let it be.

Suresh: I have even heard that it is not possible for anything in the entire universe to cease activity (this was quoted from the *Bhagavad Gita*), everything is happening and so are you.

Ram: This is absolutely correct. The universe is in a state of constant flux. The *Gita* is right. It calls it the *kshara purusha* in the fifteenth chapter. It is just common sense. There is a self that is free from activity too. The *Gita* calls this the *akshara purusha*, the unchanging self. There is nothing that is to be done about either. It is something to be realized, or understood. Enlightenment is simply the hard and fast knowledge that “my primary identity is unchanging and that this self has the power to change, or apparently change.”

The *Gita* also talks about another self in the seventeenth verse of the fifteenth chapter. It calls it the *Paramatma*. It is the awareness of the changing self and the unchanging self. The movement from the changing to the changeless and then beyond is not a physical or experiential movement. It is a movement in understanding or realization. It comes when one inquires deeply into the both the changing and unchanging selves. Both the changing and unchanging selves are the *Paramatma*, but the *Paramatma* is neither the changing nor the unchanging self. If there is any evolution of consciousness it is the movement in identity from the changing to the changeless to the awareness of both. *Samsaris*, or *agnanis*, are people who think that they are changing. They have identified with the body-mind entity. *Jnanis* have dropped this identification and have identified with the unchanging self. They have freedom from change. The final realization frees one from both. The “experience” of the *Paramatma* “state” is “I am that which illumines both the changing and the unchanging.”

Suresh: It seems that the more I hear all about refining and polishing that I get the impression that one has to cultivate the experience of self to such a degree that *vasanas* will never arise again.

Ram: This is not right. How can you “cultivate the experience of the self”? You are the self. There is nothing to cultivate. If this is a non-dual reality any and all experience is the self. “The self” is not an experience unlike every other. Brushing the teeth is the self experiencing the self. Who is going to cultivate this? This would mean that there is some sort of doer working on his or her experience to achieve a certain end. But in a non-dual reality there are not two selves. There is only one self with apparent knowledge and apparent ignorance. It is simply ignorance to say that one can cultivate the experience of the self. It is also ignorance to see the *vasanas* as something other than the self. They are not opposed to the self. How can anything be opposed to the self in a non-dual reality? It is not possible.

Suresh: Until then you are an ordinary man/woman animal with a conditioning that makes you act, behave and be the way how you are with all your *tamasic*, *rajasic* or *sattvic* qualities, and until you are free of them or until you physically die you are not pure or free.

Ram: There are no men or women or animals. These are just concepts. You are only the self and the self is already free. Freedom is not something you can gain by doing.

Freedom is a complete myth because you are not bound in the first place. These people take themselves to be unrefined, ignorant and bound, and then set out to free themselves. How is this possible? If they want freedom they have to get free of the notion that they are bound in the first place.

Suresh: Now this will sound like a report of experience, but I have to say it all because it follows up from this whole thing about *vasanas*. Do you recall the time when I visited your *satsang* at Shesha Bhavan a couple of seasons ago?

Ram: Yes. I remember it well.

Suresh: We talked about this expansive quality which gave me the feeling of being outside of everything, out of the senses. I was saying that Arunachala is in ME. That this body of Suresh is in ME. You are in ME. All is in ME. It came with a stunningly alive and electric feeling. Afterwards I also told you that this experience was expansive and contracting and that it gave me a sense of little self since it was moving beyond and shrinking whenever there was some need to move the body or undertake some work; I could also see that it was all happening in awareness/me.

Ram: Yes. This is the natural state. This is the view from the self. This is you as the self, as awareness.

Suresh: This gave some confusion, and you stated that this was a subtle thought, or *vritti*, called *anantakara vritti*, symbolic in the deities when they had four arms.

Ram: It is called the “*akandakara vritti*,” the unbroken “I am” thought. I don’t know how the deities with four arms worked into the discussion. You can forget the deities with four arms. The deity represents the self and the four arms represent the *antakarana*, the subtle and causal bodies, but this teaching is for a different purpose.

Suresh: It is a continuous, subtle thought. You said if I continue to look at this expansive, clear, transparent, open space that it would lead to realisation...

Ram: The thought is continuous because you, awareness, are unchanging. I said that if you keep your attention on this clear, transparent space, if you investigate it – which is what Ramana calls self-inquiry – at some point you will understand that it is you, awareness.

Suresh: ...and that the “bubble was ready to burst.”

Ram: I meant your ignorance, sense of duality, was about to disappear.

Suresh: Remaining in this *atmanishta* sounds like deepening or cultivating the experience of no experience, which is contrary to what I have heard you say, since all is self and there is no need to deepen.

Ram: Yes, this seems like a contradiction. I don't think I would have used the word "deepen." It is highly unlikely because there is no deepening, there is only understanding. If you don't know what a mountain is and somebody puts you in front of a mountain and asks if you see it and you say yes, and the person says, "That is a mountain'," it instantly becomes hard and fast knowledge. There is not shallow mountain-knowledge. There is no deep mountain-knowledge. There is only knowledge. So when your mind is fixed on the *atma*, awareness, and you see that it is you, there is nothing more to do. You are "finished."

Suresh: Recently at some point in Tiru I gave up on this *saguna samadhi* experience of expansive, all-reaching, all-encompassing whatever. I realised that I was attempting to define what it was, and the more I wanted to define it, it seemed that the more I was fragmenting it into a self without qualities and a self with qualities.

Ram: The problem here is seeing things in terms of experience. The experience was of the clear, expansive, all-encompassing awareness. But there is nothing to say about it. Just like the mountain in the previous illustration, you just see it. What needs to happen is that you need to identify it as you. In fact you have already defined it. The *Upanishads* have defined it perfectly, in case anybody wants to know what it is.

Suresh: It looked like a separation was being entertained, so I just let the feeling of being in the body be as it was. All it takes is for me to feel this expansiveness and I begin to have an open, vacant gaze where there is no mind, still aware that the expansiveness is in awareness.

Ram: This correct. The expansiveness is in awareness.

Suresh: In fact it is so fine that it is revealing no object at all, therefore no body, no time.

Ram: Yes, no body and no time exist in awareness. This can be taken in two ways. In awareness itself there is no body and no mind. And secondly, the body and mind appear within the scope of awareness.

Suresh: Now it doesn't matter if I go into this or not.

Ram: Anyone who is going or coming is not you. Who is going into this state? Is that you or are

you the awareness of “the I going into this”?

Suresh: But there is always movement in daily life in doing where spaciousness is not there, yet awareness is vaguely in the background. I have no problem accepting coming or going.

Ram: All that’s left is for you to say, “I am vaguely in the background.” You are still presenting awareness as an object. Awareness is the “I.” There is nobody else who is aware of awareness. Awareness is aware of awareness. It is self-aware. It requires no mirror. Do you need the help of a mirror to know that you have eyes? When you drop that person, that’s the end of the whole spiritual business.

Suresh: This question of *vasanas* happens because without self I wouldn’t be experiencing these tendencies, and since they arise of their own accord there is an understanding that can come up, an insight. Maybe this gives them less power and makes room for open clarity to be as it is. I hope this is not too confusing for you.

Ram: No, it is confusing for you. You are so close it is amazing. There are just a few subtle points that need to be cleared up in your understanding. You are still not thinking completely from the self’s point of view. There is some identification with duality.

Okay. Let’s take the first statement: “This question of *vasanas* happens because without self I wouldn’t be experiencing these tendencies.” This is correct. So far so good. But then you say “since they arise of their own accord an insight can come up.” To whom is this insight occurring? Is it occurring to the self? No. The self already knows what a *vasana* is and that it is not a problem, so it is completely uninterested in knowing anything about the *vasanas*. Then you say, “Maybe this gives them less power and makes room for open clarity to be as it is.” What does it mean to say “make room for open clarity to be as it is”? This does not make any sense. You have the self shining on the *vasanas*. It is “open clarity.” It is the knower of the *vasana*. Who is going to “make room” for this to happen? And the *vasanas* have no effect on the self, so they can be as powerful as they want and the self is not bothered. All I can conclude is that there is somebody there who wants to have clarity about the *vasanas* and also render them powerless. So who is that somebody? It is not somebody. It is just a lack of understanding.

Suresh: It is a fine point since I feel I am clear about self, but about this *vasana* thing I am slightly shaded. Maybe it is accurate to say that you cannot remove a *vasana* in order to become free (Annamalai Swami says it is a *vasana*)...

Ram: He’s right. Chipping away at a *vasana* is just another *vasana*. This whole *vasana* exhaustion business is for doers. The self is not a doer. If you are the self you do not care one damn bit what the *vasanas* are or if they even exist. You see them and you know they are just awareness in motion with no power to bind.

Suresh: ...but that you can see a *vasana* and have an insight as to why it is that way and it will

chip away the weight of the tendency, which is probably the summary of so many words! But I am reminded of your disagreement with the *sattvic yogis* about enlightenment being after removal of *vasanas*.

Ram: You can get enlightenment after *vasanas* are removed. It is quite possible. But it is not necessary to remove all the *vasanas* to get enlightenment. You need to remove enough identification with the *vasanas* so that the mind is capable of thinking clearly, what Ramana calls making an inquiry, but you do not need to get rid of every *vasana*. If you want to get rid of *vasanas* then the best way is through knowledge. Krishna says this in the *Gita*. He says, "There is no purifier like knowledge." What does this mean?

First, it means that the knowledge born of trying to get lasting happiness through satisfaction of the *vasanas* will purify the *vasanas*. What is that knowledge? That you cannot get lasting happiness from getting what you want and avoiding what you don't. When you realize this you quit trying to satisfy your *vasanas* and they just wither and die. Then you become dispassionate and are qualified for enlightenment. If residual *vasanas* are there you are not bothered by them.

On the other hand, it means the knowledge "I am actionless, ordinary awareness" destroys the *vasanas*. If you are whole and complete, then what will you want? If you are indestructible, then what will you fear? Wants and fears just symbolize all the *vasanas*. It is a very simple thing.

Of course those who think of themselves as embodied limited entities are always afraid of the *vasanas* because the *vasanas* seem to take away their freedom.

Suresh: So I will look forward to showing your response over a pint of Guinness stout in the local pub with my friend Carl! Cheers! Here's to smoking , drinking and carousing!

~ Love, your *bhogi* self, Sureshji

Ram: Long live the *vasanas*!