

Animal *Karma*, Planes of Existence and Physical Pain

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Tamara: Thank you for the response and taking the time for the detailed explanation. I already read the German version of *The Essence of Enlightenment* and now I read *How to Attain Enlightenment*. I am really interested in this teaching and would love to learn more about Vedanta, but what is the difference between the book *The Yoga of Love and Inquiry into Existence* or which one is more suitable after reading *The Essence of Enlightenment* and *How to Attain Enlightenment*?

Sundari: You are welcome, Tamara. I am glad to be of service to you. If you have read *Essence* very carefully and slowly, making sure you assimilate ALL the teachings, then I would say first read *The Yoga of Love* before progressing to *Inquiry into Existence*. *The Yoga of Love* is about the true nature of love and the importance of a devotional practice. It is very necessary to understand as a practice for an inquirer, along with *karma yoga*. *Inquiry into Existence* is a very advanced text, but it will give you a deeper understanding of the relationship between awareness, *maya*, *Isvara* and the *jiva*. It will also help you to understand the other very important teaching in Vedanta, *triguna vibhava yoga*, or the *yoga* of the three energies or psychological forces, the *gunas*.

Tamara: And thank you for reminding me that this world is not real; it is unbelievable how quickly ignorance comes back into the thoughts.

Sundari: Yes, ignorance is hardwired and very tenacious! The essence of self-inquiry and of *moksa* is being able to discriminate between *satya* and *mithya*.

Tamara: You said there are only a few true teachers out there who teach Vedanta and the right, unchanging means of knowledge. Do you maybe know if there are any true Vedanta teacher in Germany (or even better, in Berlin)? I already found Tan, a Vedanta teacher from South Germany, and I am really excited to go to his Vedanta workshop in October. But I read that, to learn the true knowledge of Vedanta without any ignorance, you need a teacher.

Sundari: Tan is an excellent and qualified teacher, taught by James and endorsed by ShiningWorld to teach Vedanta. As he is German, it would be easier for you to write your questions to him. You do need a teacher to assimilate the teachings properly because if they are not correctly unfolded by a qualified teacher you will interpret them according to your *vasanas*, opinions and beliefs. And that will not serve you at all – if freedom from suffering is what you are after.

Tamara: Is that even possible here in the Western world or does it only takes place in Asia/India

(and how long does it normally take, the teaching between the student and the teacher)?

Sundari: I am not sure why you ask this, as James is one of the best teachers in the world, East and West, and he is not Indian. He has brought Vedanta to the West in a powerful and clear voice that makes it much more accessible. He has taught Tan, me and other people at the ShiningWorld website to teach. We are all qualified teachers. While it is definitely beneficial to have personal contact with a teacher “in the flesh,” it works just as well to be taught via email or Skype. Although it is very important that you are taught correctly, self-inquiry can only be carried out by you, on your own, by submitting your mind with single-pointed focus and dedication to the scripture. You could spend years with a teacher and never “get it” if the mind is not qualified and you don’t have the proper dedication to your *sadhana*. Make very sure you understand what the qualifications for self-inquiry are. And take a fearless moral inventory of your values, what truly motivates you. We can aid you every step of the way as your doubts and questions arise. You can also make use of the e-*satsang* section at the ShiningWorld website, which has an enormous library of questions and answers. There is a search function you can use to take you to a specific topic.

As for how long self-inquiry takes, no one can answer that for you. It is different with everyone, depending on their level of qualification and dedication to their *sadhana*. It takes as long as it takes. If you make self-inquiry the most important thing you do, it will get you “there,” by the grace of *Isvara*. What price freedom? The price is eternal vigilance and utmost commitment to freedom from suffering and limitation.

Tamara: Also, there are a few questions that came up lately that I would like to ask. Animals have no ego and no intellect; does that mean they have no *karma*?

Sundari: Correct. There is no *karma* for animals, because they are entirely ignorant, whereas humans are in the twilight zone with half knowledge (spirit) and half ignorance (matter). *Karma* itself is value-neutral. It is just action and its results. It only becomes meaningful when we evaluate it. We either like it or don’t like it or are indifferent to it. Only in the minds of human beings does action become “*karma*.”

The human subtle body has an intellect which reflects consciousness, but although an animal also has a subtle body which reflects consciousness, it does not have a developed intellect capable of self-reflection or “free will.” Animals have no power to analyse or think other than in terms of their desires. Therefore animals do not interpret their environment; they do not evaluate the things that happen to them, in them and around them. Animals act purely on “instinct,” meaning according to *Isvara*.

Animals don’t need scripture or enlightenment. Being totally ignorant (*tamasic*) of the self, they do not have problems. They are not plagued by guilt or shame or lack of self-esteem. They are not bound by the *gunas*; only humans are bound, as having free will and an intellect capable of doubt we can make choices not conducive to peace of mind, creating “bad” (*papa*) *karma*. But a human subtle body also has the advantage of being capable of analysing and doing inquiry, and because of this ignorance can be removed from the mind by self-knowledge; therefore a human subtle body is better than an animal body because it is capable of *moksa*, whereas an animal subtle body is not. Animals do not feel incomplete or separate, so do not chase objects to

complete them. Animals don't worry, because they accept reality as it is. Only human *jivas*, who are a mixture of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, worry because they have intellects; they are self-reflective, they have apparent free will and the ability to choose. Because of this, human *jivas* are always confused about what the truth is until ignorance is removed by self-knowledge. Fear of what will happen and worry is the nature of human beings. But animals do not have any concept of the future and do not fear it.

Tamara: And if it is like that, how do these "souls" become reborn? Is it true that all "souls" have to pass through all forms of species (from aquatic ones to plants to insects to animals) till finally the "soul" gets a human form?

Sundari: It is not for us to ask or to know how or why *Isvara* assigns the *karma* that all *jivas*, human or otherwise, are given. Whether we all cycle through all the levels of creation or not, what is true is that none of it is real. What does it matter? It is enough to know that the *vasana* load we were born with is given to us, not created by us. It is up to the grace of *Isvara* to have the good *karma* that will bring us to Vedanta. Although it is all *Isvara*, freedom from *mithya*, or *samsara*, comes only through self-knowledge, no other way. It is up to us to commit ourselves above all else to self-inquiry and the scripture if we want to be free.

As for the different levels of *jivas*, Vedanta teaches that there are 14 levels of existence and experience in the Cosmic Egg of Creation. These worlds are inhabited by three levels (or types) of sentient beings – *viswas* or *jivas*. A *viswa* is a *jiva* with the mind and senses totally extroverted, chasing objects. The lower levels are animal *viswas* (also birds, insects, etc.) and have little merit. To achieve *moksa*, a *jiva* must have developed the ability to assimilate the meaning of experience. Animals (and most human *jivas*) are not able to achieve *moksa*, because they cannot assimilate the meaning of experience. But animals can evolve upwards. As stated above, they are happy and do not worry, because they are *tamasic*, so do not suffer self-doubt.

The middle level of creation contains human *viswas*, who have some merit (*punya*) and some demerit (*papa*). *Karma* is either meritorious or deleterious based on how pure or impure it renders the subtle body because a pure subtle body is the instrument for attaining *moksa*. Humans can evolve upwards or downwards, depending on the predominance of merit and demerit that their actions produce.

The "higher" levels of creation contain celestials. Celestials are totally *sattvic* and do not worry either; they are happy. But they will become human *jivas* again when the momentum of their good *karma* is exhausted, bringing them back to earth, *samsara*, where they will have to work on another round of human *karma* before final liberation, *moksa*, is actualised through self-knowledge. *Moksa* can only be achieved in a human subtle body, through self-knowledge. All three levels of existence are *mithya* – only apparently real.

Tamara: In the *dharma* field you should not hurt, but there are a few exceptions according to the situation, so what about killing mosquitos? Is that a violation of *dharma* because as a *jiva* you only try to protect yourself?

Sundari: This kind of thinking is based on Buddhist ideals of non-injury to all life. While the idea

behind it is commendable, as non-injury is the most important value for anyone to have, you must question what non-injury really means. You cannot live without some form of life dying in order to provide life for you. With every breath you take you are killing micro-organisms. If all life is consciousness (which it is), what is the difference between the consciousness of bacteria, a mosquito, a cow, a carrot or a human? There is no difference. There is only one consciousness appearing as all the names and forms. The gross body of all living beings is the lower principle, and the subtle body is the higher principle. The gross body depends on the subtle body, but the subtle body does not depend on the gross body. The subtle body is made up of very fine matter or *prakriti* and is subsumed into the causal body after the gross body dies. The gross body is made up of grosser matter, the five elements, and returns to them after death. And what is death, anyway? Nobody and nothing dies. All life exists because it comes from consciousness, it will return to the elements of which it is made and return as some other object or *jiva*.

You cannot kill anything. For instance, no matter what you eat, you eat life because you cannot eat death. That is the way the Field of Existence is set up by *Isvara*. So if you believe you have to live on plants exclusively so as to cause no injury, you are deluded because plants and trees are living *jivas* too. They just do not have the kind of subtle body that humans and animals do. But they do have a rudimentary subtle body. I suggest you go to the website and read my article on *The Politics and Morality of Food*.

Tamara: And finally, a last question; sorry for the amount of questions, you probably have a busy schedule. If I (as a *jiva*) feel pain, then this pain is not real, because the body is not even real, right? The teaching of Vedanta has helped me a lot in terms of handling minor body aches. But unfortunately I have really painful period/menstruation problems, but if this pain is not even real, how is it that it is so painful and weakens my body so much?

Sundari: The body is only apparently real, but that does not mean it does not exist. However, the gross physical body is actually inert; it does not “feel” anything. It is just meat. Both the subtle and the gross bodies are the result of “good or bad” *karma* for the *jiva*. It is auspicious to be born with a human body and also a body that is strong and healthy. As stated above, the body depends on the mind and not the other way around, but a healthy body which is well taken care of nonetheless makes it easier for the mind to be peaceful.

The subtle body has a similar relationship to the gross body as consciousness has to *mithya* (the apparent reality) – there is an interdependence from the *jiva*’s perspective – but not from awareness’s point of view, because they exist in different orders of reality: *mithya*, or that of the apparently real (not always present and always changing), and *satya*, the real (that which is ever-present and never changes) – and without which the apparent reality could not exist.

Physical pain is felt by the subtle body and does affect the *jiva*, the mind. The subtle body pervades the gross body, except for the fingernails and hair, which is why you can cut them without feeling anything. However, even though the gross body does not pervade the subtle body, it can affect it. For example, if the gross body gets sick, depressed, has a headache or an unhealthy lifestyle, it can take actions to remedy this, which will affect the subtle body, making it dull (*tamasic*), extroverted (*rajasic*) or clear, calm and peaceful (*sattvic*).

Identification with the gross body is inseparable from identification with the mind/intellect because the gross body exists only as a thought in the subtle body. When your attention is on a

thought or a feeling, the gross body does not exist for you. It only exists for you when you pay attention to it – or when it feels pleasure or pain. The gross body is “within” the subtle body and the subtle body is “within” awareness (you). There is no way to understand this or discriminate awareness from the objects that appear in you unless you step out of *maya* with self-knowledge, i.e. discriminate between *satya* and *mithya*.

What is the point of denying physical pain? The point of understanding that nothing in the *mithya* world is real is not denial. Denial will not make the pain go away. Only knowledge, the ability to discriminate the self from the objects that arise in you, will negate physical or mental pain. If the body is in pain, you are not in pain and you are not the pain. You are the knower of the pain. You cannot be what you know. You observe the body in pain and do what is necessary to heal it, like the appropriate medication, diet, exercise, etc. Some of us have to live with chronic pain; it's just part of our *prarabdha karma*. I have an old neck injury from a car accident in my youth which causes almost constant pain. Other than taking good care of our health, there is nothing to be done about this kind of *karma* besides living with it with the *karma yoga* attitude. The *karma* comes to the subtle body, which a *jnani* knows belongs to *Isvara*. The *dharma* field, or Total Mind (*Isvara srsti*), remains unchanged if one is “enlightened” or not, which means *prarabdha karma* will play out according to the laws of the *dharma* field. *Prarabdha karma* is the momentum of past actions that fructify as your life experiences.

Health or illness is a result of *karma*. If one superimposes what belongs to the Total, or *Isvara*, onto the individual, or *jiva*, then you are thinking as a person, not as awareness, which means that you think the *karma* comes to you and therefore the suffering belongs to you – because you are identified with it. If you know that you are awareness, you see the suffering taking place in the mind (subtle body), so you are free of the suffering.

Karma is a difficult topic and it depends on who you think you are. *Karma* is real if you think it is real; it is often almost impossible to understand, because the one trying to understand it is in the *dharma/karma* field and part of the field. It is like trying to understand the mind of *Isvara*; it cannot be done. Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “On the topic of *karma*, even sages are perplexed.” There is no *karma* for an enlightened person (*jnani*). The individual, or *jiva*, identified as a *jiva* accumulates *karma* that seems to come to the body-mind-sense complex. But when *moksa* happens, the *karma* burns up. However, one has to look at what “burning up” actually means. *Karma* does not burn up for awareness, as there is no *karma* for awareness, because for it nothing ever happened. It is not a doer. *Karma* is not real, from the perspective of awareness.

But the *jiva* lives in *mithya* and it has to live with the laws that govern the Field of Existence. *Karma* is just an idea in the subtle body that causes suffering. So “burning up” *karma* happens when the *jiva* is no longer identified with the subtle body and knows that it is awareness. This does not mean that the *karma* does not still play out for the *jiva*. Remember, the body belongs to *Isvara*, the Total. The momentum of past actions, *prarabdha karma*, which is *Isvara* delivering the fruits of *jiva*'s actions, plays out as long as the *jiva* is alive. When *prarabdha karma* is finished, the body dies.

Karma “burns up” for the subtle body because it is only ever “in” the subtle body, not the physical body or the self. Because the body is just meat and inert, there is no *karma* for it either. It is a counter across which experience is transacted. It seems to take place in the physical body because the physical body is “attached” to the subtle body. From *Isvara*'s point of view (causal body) there is no *karma*. *Isvara* is called *karma phala datta*: which means “the one who delivers

the fruits of the action.”

Problems arise when the doer thinks it can make the body “whole” through its own actions, which one can to some degree. But there are many illnesses that are not a result of one’s state of mind and are not in the control of the person, because the body belongs to *Ishvara*. Take Ramana, for instance: he was a great saint who lived a pure, *sattvic* life and had a great state of mind, yet he died of cancer. And there is nothing much you can do about your menstrual pain. It is part of your *prarabdha*, so suffer it with *karma yoga*, doing what you can to ameliorate it.

That being said, of course it takes extreme dispassion to deal with chronic illness or any pain. This is why dispassion and *karma yoga* are so important; it is the only way to deal with chronic pain (or anything else) from the *jiva* or *jivanmukta* level. One can work with *Ishvara* regarding illness and body pain by one’s attitude to the thoughts that give rise to illness/pain and to the thoughts which come as a result of illness/pain. Coping with chronic pain, which is *rajas*, makes the mind dull, *tamasic*. It is very difficult to maintain a *sattvic* mind when the body is in a lot of pain, but it can be done with the right attitude and knowledge. There is appropriate action to be taken but that still does not guarantee any particular result. The results of any action depend on the nature of the action, and NOT necessarily on the state of mind of the person taking the action; it is possible to get a negative result from a positive action and vice versa. Very importantly, the results of actions ALSO depend on the nature of the field – i.e. *Ishvara*.

I hope this helps.

~ Much love, Sundari