

Appropriate Action – Passivity Is Not Necessarily *Sattva*

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Arjuna: Dear Sundari, as before, you've planted a fresh seed of thought for me to work on. I can't thank you enough. I will work on this for a few more months when I will invariably be back with some more questions.

Sundari: I am happy to hear that light has been shed on your inquiry.

Arjuna: The key takeaways for me are (I hope I got it right):

1. *Sattva* is one's true nature. It's a mistake to feel I can cultivate it. This is an important clarification. Rather my journey should focus on bringing *rajas* and *tamas* into balance.

2. Once I'm able to do this, my true nature of *sattva* should come to the fore, which will allow this *jiva* to live "happily" in this world irrespective of whether things "work out" or "not" in terms of results.

Sundari: Yes, we can cultivate *sattva* by managing *rajas* and *tamas*. Because reality is non-dual consciousness, the mind is consciousness. To bring *rajas* and *tamas* into balance with *sattva* means to align the mind with the true nature of reality, consciousness. I need enough *rajas* needs for motivational purposes, and enough *tamas* preserved to ground my ideas in reality. However, the lion's share of the mind should be *sattvic*. A predominately *sattvic* mind will gain success in any field, worldly or spiritual, because it can discriminate properly. Enlightenment – *moksa* – is defined as discrimination (*atma-anatma viveka*). It only takes place in a *sattvic* mind.

However, it's important to remember that *sattva* too has downsides. One of them is taking passivity to be *sattvic* when it is often *tamasic* – avoidance, denial or the mistaken idea that "doing nothing" will solve the problem. It may be that doing nothing is the right (non-)action to take, but it may not be. If a given situation (such as you needing to take the lead as the CEO of your company, for instance) calls for appropriate action – taken of course with the *karma yoga* attitude) and you fail to respond as the situation demands, the consequences will more than likely be neither productive nor positive (*sattvic*). More than likely the result will be more *tamas* or both more *tamas* and *rajas*. We have to work with our given nature, respond appropriately to our *karma* and to *visesa dharma* – situational ethics, which is how the *jiva* responds to *Svadharna* with a capital "S – meaning *Isvara*, also called *samanya dharma*. (See further down for more on *dharma*.)

As for living happily "ever after" as the *jiva*, if self-knowledge removes ignorance from the mind, using the logic of our own experience as revealed by Vedanta, we discover that our true nature as awareness is whole and complete, non-dual, partless, unchanging and limitless. Purity and impurity are still experienced in the mind when we know we are awareness, the aim of self-inquiry is to produce a *sattvic* mind, as that is what makes life for the *jiva* free of suffering. However, a *sattvic* mind is still an object known to you, awareness – so identifying with *sattva* still

produces suffering because it causes the *jiva* to project purity and holiness as an identity or to avoid action when it needs to engage and failing to respond appropriately, resulting in the feeling of helplessness or depression.

Even when we do achieve a very *sattvic*, peaceful mind – it does not last. The nature of the field is constant change – and we are not in control of the *gunas*, *Isvara* is. Luckily for us though, with a little work, self-knowledge and lots of determination to end suffering, we can make the changes necessary for a happy, healthy life by creating a predominantly *sattvic* mind.

If your main aim is *moksa*, you will not have peace of mind unless your life reflects the truth as well. While it is not possible to have a one hundred per cent feel-good flowing life, we can get very close if the mind is predominately *sattvic* because we can be objective about the objects appearing in it (i.e. your thoughts and feelings and the external things that happen to you). If you are clear about what is happening in you, you can work with your stuff creatively and remove obstacles to happiness as they arise, and respond appropriately.

We can call the experience of *sattva* the experience of “no-movement” because a steady and clear mind reveals the self as unchanging awareness. A beautiful verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* expresses it this way: “The one who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is indeed wise.” You know that the changes that are taking place in you and around you are only apparent changes. There is another saying much in vogue in the spiritual world: “Nothing ever happened.” When the subtle body is *sattvic*, you can act or not act; you are not compelled to act nor are you too lazy to act.

Connect Actions with Results

You cultivate *sattva* by connecting your actions with the results. This is not always easy, because results have observable and unobservable effects. It is easy to observe the results that take place immediately. For instance, if you get angry and use violent language in communicating, you will usually have instant blowback from an injured ego. If you eat spoiled food, you usually feel sick within a short while. If you drink a bottle of wine or smoke a joint, you will usually feel either temporarily stimulated (*rajasic*) or “chilled” (*tamasic*), probably both. You will also feel temporarily happy (*sattvic*). However, the next day, regret fills the mind and I have a headache or feel dull and depressed (*tamasic*). If you avoid taking action when appropriate action is called for, you might feel fine for a while, but frustration and negative emotions will most likely arise in a short while.

We cannot deny experience or try to “transcend” it if we want peace of mind. We must work with it creatively, using *guna* knowledge, not out of beliefs and opinions born of mindless desires and unexamined fears. When the vision of non-duality is firm and my mind is pure, I process experience as it happens – in “real” time, as the saying goes. Things come up, and I respond appropriately, without any “*karmic* drag.” I see the big picture and see where I fit into it – I lay my everyday happenings to rest, leaving space for “old stuff” to come forth and offer itself into the fire of self-knowledge. If we truly want a happy life and freedom from suffering, our goal is to make self-knowledge the interpreter of our experience. We need to trust the teaching and let it do the work. Once you see how it works, you will not go back to interpreting reality from your own personal (*jiva*) standpoint unless it is also the standpoint of the self, meaning non-dual. Your life will flow effortlessly because the doer will have stepped aside and let the truth take over. It is like being on a magic carpet, floating here and there. Nothing gets in your way. You are like water,

flowing around every rock.

If your subtle body is predominately *rajasic* and *tamasic*, it is virtually impossible to gain self-knowledge. If you do, it will be a frustrating flash of insight disappearing as fast as it arrives. Even if you are predominantly *sattvic*, you will not necessarily gain self-knowledge, but you will be in a position to develop the qualifications, assuming a burning desire for freedom. If we are predominately *sattvic*, we will easily assimilate the teachings of Vedanta. If not, not. There is no escaping addressing our experience.

There are no experiential qualifications for enlightenment, only the right *guna* balance – i.e. self-knowledge. Non-dual, mind-blowing epiphanies such as *samadhis*, *satoris*, *nirvanas*, even meditation, can be as much a hindrance as a help. If the mind is predominately *sattvic*, it assimilates information carefully and quickly and lays experiences to rest. If you have a consistent issue in your life, be it love or food, recognition or power, it means you have an assimilation problem and your mind will be unfit for inquiry. Unprocessed experience can stay with you your whole life long.

The trouble with *sattva* very often is that the more pure your mind becomes the greater is the danger that you will develop a spiritual ego. The ego is that part of the subtle body that owns actions and the results. It associates with the sublime feeling of *sattva* and says, “I am pure. I am holy. I am spiritual.” The ego can co-opt self-knowledge, tending to identify with it, more or less claiming it. We call this enlightenment sickness. Unfortunately, the doer can survive *moksa*, as most of us still have “*jiva* stuff,” the remnants of psychological and emotional issues to resolve, even “after” self-realisation. Self-actualisation can take a good deal longer to obtain.

A *sattvic* mind/ego can become extremely vain and obnoxious in an obsequiously loving way. The intention to practice discrimination is not to improve the *jiva* or make you pure. The fact is that you are already-accomplished awareness and as pure as the driven snow. A pure mind, a pure heart is not the goal. It is only a means to an end, providing the field in which Vedanta can establish the vision of non-duality. The vision of non-duality destroys the ego’s sense of ownership and establishes self-knowledge as the doer. There is no purifier like self-knowledge.

Trying to perfect the person is always a problem because the world does not necessarily conform to these ideals. In reality, existence is awareness and awareness is value-neutral – but a mind under the spell of the *gunas* is not value-neutral. *Sattva* causes the individual to interpret reality in terms of “higher” or “spiritual” values, like goodness, truth, beauty, for example – even passivity. However, *Isvara*’s creation is not all sweetness and light. It contains everything in equal measure, from pure goodness to unrepentant evil, from sublime beauty to wretched ugliness. As awareness, if we are to render the *jiva*’s dualistic interpretation of its reality non-binding, we need to see everything in light of non-duality, the self.

Arjuna: My *svadharma* is to be the CEO of my family business and an active member of my family and society. I guess I’ve carried things a bit too far and fell into the path of inaction, thinking I was “accepting” things. You’ve clarified that my focus should be on right action and accept the results as *prasad*. I will work on it.

Sundari: Yes, this could well be. As stated above, having a peaceful (*sattvic*) mind is not something you can hold onto indefinitely. You need to gain the knowledge that you are always

fine no matter what is going on in the mind or in its environment, even though you aim for peace of mind at all times. Making sure one's life conforms to *dharma* in every way is of great importance if peace of mind is the main aim.

Living a *dharmic* life gives you an experienceable peaceful mind capable of inquiry. However, what *moksa* gives you is the bliss of self-knowledge, which is very different from experiential bliss. When *moksa* has obtained in the mind I may and usually do feel experiential bliss regularly, but I do not depend on it, because I know I am the bliss. In fact I could be sick, in pain and half-dead, broke, jobless or stuck in a situation I do not enjoy but cannot change, and feel blissful regardless of what is going on in the mind or around it. That is not to say that experiential bliss disappears when self-knowledge is firm. It just does not matter whether the experience of bliss is present or not, because the bliss of self-knowledge is always present and known to be my true nature, keeping the mind steady, dispassionate and confident. At this stage, both ignorance and knowledge have become objects known to me, awareness. Self-knowledge has removed ignorance and becomes the default position in the mind. I do not have to think about the knowledge anymore; it is known to be me.

As previously discussed, we all have an *Isvara*-given nature and *karmic* load, which we have to be true to or life does not work for us. Here is a breakdown of the three basic types of *dharma*:

The Natural Laws, or *Dharmas*

The literal translation of *dharma* means "law." Built into the Field of Existence are the laws, or *dharmas*, governing the apparent reality, and if contravened consequences are unavoidable. *Karma* is the result of all actions, whether through appropriate action (*dharma*) or inappropriate action (*adharmas*). On a macrocosmic, or universal, level, gravity and electricity are just two examples of universal *dharmas*. There are many others. No matter what religious or non-religious views one has, these laws, or *dharmas*, operate the same way for everyone. On a personal (or microcosmic) level, the laws, or *dharmas*, apply to appropriate and timely conduct, such as responding at the right time to what life presents. Another example is the law of non-injury, the highest human value. This is an expectation we all hold, and if contravened we feel unpleasant effects, as do others. It is our experience that "as you sow, so shall you will reap."

Whether or not we abide by these laws, we all know what they are and feel the effects. They are built into the very fabric of life, and thus into our being. It may seem like some people get away with contravening these laws, but that is never true in the big picture. Even a hardened criminal has a value for non-injury because he does enjoy injury, though he does not understand that by injuring "others" he is injuring himself because there really are no "others." Although everyone's personal *dharma* is different, the fundamental laws apply to everyone. Ultimately, there is only one *dharma* because reality is non-dual, but *dharma* works out in three ways:

1. *Samanya dharma*, or universal values: (1) moral laws governing the Field of Existence that apply to everyone, like non-injury, honesty, fairness, freedom, etc. and (2) the macrocosmic laws of physics, like gravity, thermodynamics, nuclear forces, etc.
2. *Visesa dharma*: how the individual interprets the universal rules and applies them to their lives, such as in lifestyle, diet, money, how one relates to people and the environment one lives in.
3. *Svadharmas* with a lower-case "s": the individual's conditioning. This is the nature and the

predisposition with which each person is born. The individual needs to act in accordance with his or her inborn nature or he or she will not be following *dharma*, and not be happy. For instance, if it is an individual's nature to be an artist, it will not work for him or her to take up accounting. If it is a person's nature to be kind, generous and forgiving, it will cause great agitation if the individual contravenes this with negative thoughts, words or deeds.

All *dharmas* are just common sense and logical. However, unless one understands what they are and how they function, one may contravene *dharma* and make decisions that cause great agitation, suffering and discomfort to the mind and body, making peace of mind impossible.

Arjuna: (3.) This would be the right time for me to start the true journey of self-inquiry into who is the observer.

Sundari: Well, that is the main question and the underlying aim of self-inquiry, is it not? The definition of *jiva* is "awareness with a subtle body." *Jiva* is a principle, a *tattva*, not a specific person. The true nature of the *jiva* is *Jivatman*, pure awareness, *Paramatma*. There is really only one person, or subtle body, although it appears as the multitude of seemingly different and unique individuals. The eternal *jiva* has three levels of knowledge; the one individual appears as three types of individuals, or *jivas*.

Press "pause" every time you hear or use the word "I" and ask yourself, who is speaking here? Is it:

1. The *jiva* who thinks it is a person with a name, a history and an address. This *jiva* is called the doer, or the human being, the one identified with objects (including all experience). Humans who don't know about awareness are called *samsaris* because they are caught up in the web of *samsara*, the apparent reality, or the hypnosis of duality, as I like to call it.

2. There is the *jiva* who knows about awareness, but does not know what it means to be awareness. This *jiva* has indirect knowledge and is often called a self-realised *jiva*. This *jiva* has had an experience of being awareness but has not actualised self-knowledge, so the knowledge is not firm and ignorance is still present. This *jiva* is the one who re-identifies with objects or still seeks experience because the *vasanas* are still binding and doership not fully dissolved.

3. And finally, there is the *jiva* who has permanent direct knowledge because he/she knows that their true identity IS awareness and they know what it means to be awareness, while still apparently manifesting as a *jiva*, or individual. This means that self-knowledge translates fully into ALL aspects of the person's life. The self no longer under the spell of ignorance, or the person whose *vasanas* have been neutralized by self-knowledge, is said to be liberated, or enlightened (*jivanmukta*). The *Bhagavad Gita* says it is a person with "steady" wisdom. We call it a self-actualised *jiva*.

Arjuna: I hope I got it right. Thanks again for your timely intervention. I hope you have a good time in South Africa. Are you and James planning to visit India anytime soon?

~ Regards, Arjuna

Sundari: Thank you, Arjuna, your inquiry is flawless and proceeding very well! Yes, we are teaching in India in January, all details at the [ShiningWorld website](#). I hope to see you there!

~ Much love, Sundari