

Avarana and Vikshepa Shakti

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“Pleasure and pain are didactic tools that *Isvara* uses to purify the mind and set *jiva* up for inquiry. Wise people don’t have expectations, because of the unpredictability of *prarabdha* [*karma*]; however, they have the power to contribute their actions and can therefore enjoy a certain degree of influence over events, but they never worry about what will happen.” ~ Ramji

Inquirer: Hi, Arlindo. Does this mean that the wise get to enjoy their desires without suffering? Enjoying the bliss of their fullness – plus apparent worldly desires? Win-win?

Arlindo: Hello, dear *guru*-brother. The *jnani* is the one who enjoys the quality of dispassion regarding objects of experience. Dispassion is not only a necessary qualification for the successful pursuit of Self-knowledge, but it is also a natural quality of the *jnani*’s mind once liberated by firm Self-knowledge. As Ramji often puts it, for the *jnani*, it is good when it is good and it is also good when circumstances are not good. And why?

Because the *jnani* does not depend on favorable experiences in order to enjoy its “inner” security, contentment, joy, peace, etc. These are attributes delivered by the realization of one’s nature as “full, whole, complete, limitless, pure consciousness. That is the benefit of *moksa*, freedom from experience as a means to accomplish fullness and satisfaction.

On its own, Self-knowledge provides the satisfaction and the *shanti* “as” the very nature of the *jivatman*. A *jnani* is not really attracted to worldly pleasures, although he or she is not against them. The *jnani* knows that true happiness is to be found in the Self and Self alone.

It is a win-win situation in the sense that whatsoever *Isvara* presents to the *jnani* he/she will, regardless, take as *prasad*. The *jnani* gratefully appreciates everything coming from the Lord. There is no real suffering for the *jnani*, but pain and discomfort will come and go according to one’s *prarabdha* [*karma*].

Inquirer: “But they never worry about what will happen...” as taken from your *Panchadasa* quote above, the test of a true *jnani*, one might say, or to quote Ramji, “Where the rubber meets the road”!

Arlindo: Totally! Self-knowledge is to be “manifested” in one’s life or it remains an intellectual or academic knowledge, which by definition is not Self-knowledge. But the problem is that Self-knowledge only partially cancels the ignorance produced by *Maya*. It cancels one aspect of *avidya*, but not the totality of *avidya*. There are two powers in *Maya*, which are responsible for *avidya*: *avarana shakti* and *vikshepa shakti*. Self-Knowledge directly and immediately cancels *jiva*’s *avarana shakti*, although *Maya*’s *avarana shakti* continues to operate the mind of all *samsaris*.

Avarana is the concealing power, the power that makes the Self “seemingly” believe itself to be the *jiva* – the rope “seemingly” appears as the snake. With Self-knowledge, the *avarana shakti* is canceled, but not the *vikshepa shakti*. *Vikshepa* is the power of projection. *Maya’s vikshepa* projects *Ishvara, jagata* and *jiva’s* three states. In the waking state, *jiva’s vikshepa* projects *jiva’s* own subjective superimposition over *Maya’s vikshepa*.

Vikshepa shakti continues to operate the mind of the *jnani* due to the fluctuation of the three *gunas*. *Maya’s* projection and *jiva’s* projection continue, even after Self-knowledge. Therefore the *jnani* sometimes appears to respond to *samsara* as if it is real. That is due to this *vikshepa shakti* deeply implanted by *Ishvara* in the *jnani’s* mind.

A classic example is presented by the following story.

The *jnani* is walking in the forest when a wild elephant begins running after him. After a long and intense run, the *jnani* climbs a tree and saves his own life.

One of his disciples, meditating on a nearby hill, watched the entire event. Later on, upon meeting his *guru*, the student asked, “Why did you run so intensely from the elephant? I thought you knew that the elephant belongs to *mithya*, i.e. the not-real?!”

The *jnani* responded, “There is no contradiction, my dear friend; it was a *mithya jnani* running from a *mithya* elephant, climbing a *mithya* tree. Keep your mind in *satya*.”