

Awareness Is Not Silence and No Shortcut to Freedom

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Brandon: Hello, Sundari, congratulations on your marriage! For some reason I thought that had already been done. James has referred to you as his wife, so I assumed...

I enjoyed the newsletter, and hope to sometime stay in Bend for some teaching at your future accommodation!

Sundari: Hello, Brandon, lovely to hear from you. We had to do the legal thing so that I can stay longer in the US, but yes, we considered ourselves married all along. We hope you make it out to Bend!

Brandon: I did have a question for you: When meditating on the silence, how to get beyond the silence seeming to be an object in awareness rather than "me"? Locking in with it has been happening to a greater degree after the Santa Fe experience.

Sundari: Just ask yourself: Who knows the silence and "locks" in with it?

You, the self, are not the silence, because silence is an object known to awareness. The same applies to space. Both space and silence are good metaphors for consciousness because they are containers for objects. But they fall short because neither space nor silence is conscious. They do not know you, so they cannot be you, meaning consciousness. They are both objects known to you. When the mind is quiet and peaceful it is capable of seeing the reflection of the self "in a pure mind." Of course there is no "in" or "out" of consciousness, because consciousness has no specific location. Consciousness pervades every atom of existence. The mind too is an object known to consciousness.

All the same, as *moksa* is for the *jiva* because the self is and always has been free, aiming for a quiet mind is the springboard for *moksa*. Without a quiet peaceful mind, *moksa* will not obtain. While being "in" silence definitely helps, a quiet mind does not depend on what is going on "in" it or "outside" of it. This is because *sattva* (the energy, or *guna*, for revelation, clarity, peace, satisfaction, etc.) is the true nature of the mind. So the mind cannot gain more *sattva*; it can only lose excessive *rajas* and *tamas*, i.e. ignorance.

When *rajas* (energy of projection/desire/action, etc.) and *tamas* (energy of dullness/denial/depression, etc.) dominate the mind, *sattva* is obscured. So therefore the mind needs to be purified, i.e. *rajas* and *tamas* need to be brought into balance with *sattva*. This is very difficult to do if the mind is constantly subjected to *rajasic/tamasic* conditions. This is why the more self-knowledge you have, the more the mind seeks conditions that are conducive to (but not absolutely essential to) peace of mind. *Rajas* and *tamas* are painful to the mind when out of balance.

When self-knowledge has obtained in the mind, it is peaceful no matter what thoughts or feelings

arise in it and regardless of what is going on in its environment.

Brandon: I also seemed to have progressed after that teaching, in that the viewpoint from the standpoint of the self was more noticeable, but after some days this seemed to lessen, and the ego/person asserted itself to a greater degree again. Not that it disappeared, just changed emphasis. I hope this is clear. It's kind of difficult to put into words.

Sundari: You are perfectly clear, Brandon, and this is a common phase for most inquirers. Remember that ignorance is hardwired and it is not going to go away overnight or without the constant application of self-knowledge. There is no shortcut to freedom, unfortunately. Continued and constant discrimination and *karma yoga* is the only way. I have set out what I call the eight steps of self-inquiry as follows:

1. *Sravana*: Listening or hearing the scripture. This requires that you leave everything you previously believed or thought you knew temporarily on the shelf. You can take your beliefs back if self-knowledge does not work for you. But for now leave them on the shelf. This is very important; if you keep comparing Vedanta to all your beliefs and opinions and try to make it comply with them, forget about self-inquiry. Vedanta is a radical teaching; it is counter-intuitive; *expect* it to challenge everything you thought you knew. Without faith in the scripture (*shraddha*), self-inquiry will not work.

This is not blind faith like religions demand, but faith *pending* the results of your own inquiry.

2. *Manana*: Reasoning, contemplation. This is thinking about what the scripture is saying, examining the *unexamined* logic of your own experience. At this point, you look at your beliefs and opinions *in the light* of what the scripture says, NOT the other way around.

3. *Qualifications*: One determines if all the qualifications necessary for *moksa* are present. If they are not, *one has to develop them* . Self-knowledge will not stick in a mind that is not prepared and purified. There is no purifier like self-knowledge (*jnana yoga*) but there are other practices one can do, like meditation for instance – or even sitting in silence . But meditation (or any other practice) is an aid to self-inquiry; it does not equal self-inquiry nor does it take its place.

4. *Karma yoga* – negating the doer. *Karma yoga*, when practiced properly, is really *dharma yoga* because every action you take is dedicated to *Isvara*; it is a consecration. It is understood that peace of mind only comes with the realisation that you are not in control of the *dharma* field, yet in taking the appropriate steps to act according to *dharma* and then relinquishing the results, peace of mind is produced. If you are not experiencing peace of mind by relinquishing results you are not relinquishing results. It's that simple – the doer is still there, afraid and small, still wanting a particular result, frustrated and afraid because they believe they need the result to be safe or whole and they are not getting what they want.

Karma yoga is not to destroy the doer or in some cases even its sense of doership. *Karma yoga* is meant to clear the mind of enough likes and dislikes until it becomes composed enough to do sustained inquiry. Only inquiry removes the problem of doership because it shows that you, the self, cannot be the ego (doer) that is known to you. When that is clear, the doer can appear in you, even with a trace of doership, but you do not identify with it.

5. Triguna vibhava yoga: Once the mind is clear and established in *karma yoga*, the next step is to examine and identify one's conditioning in light of self-knowledge, i.e. the *gunas*. This means you take an objective view of the programmes (*vasanas*) that modify the mind and make up the *jiva's* "stuff." If you do not have a good understanding of the *gunas*, what they are and how they function, I recommend that you go to the ShiningWorld website and use the search function on this vital topic. All the ShiningWorld writers have written extensively about this.

6. Establish a prakriya: Vedanta offers several practices that can be used very effectively to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding. The most effective is to practice the opposite thought. Whenever a toxic thought arises in the mind or a thought that contradicts your nature as awareness, immediately employ the opposite thought. For instance, if you have someone in your life that you have very bad thoughts about, think loving thoughts. If toxic self-negating thoughts arise, think the opposite thoughts. You keep up this practice for every thought that arises in the mind that is contrary to your true nature as awareness.

7. Nididhyasana: Self-realisation, which is the full understanding of your true nature as awareness. This means you apply the knowledge to your life and take a stand in awareness as awareness. If the mind is still agitated by *rajas* and *tamas* because all the qualifications are not in place and binding *vasanas* still condition the mind, one has to go back and requalify. There is no other way to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding in order that self-actualisation – the final "stage" can take place.

8. Self-actualisation: Once the knowledge is firm, one sees everything from the point of view of awareness *first*, second as the *jiva* and one never confuses the two again. This is discriminating the self, you (*satya*), from the objects that appear in you (*mithya*) at all times, regardless of how the person is feeling . Self-actualisation is the consistent, total application of self-knowledge to one's life. To be self-actualised means (1) that one has fully discriminated the self (consciousness) from the objects appearing in it (all objects, meaning all gross objects as well as one's conditioning, thoughts and feelings – all experience) and (2) that that knowledge has (a) rendered the binding *vasanas* non-binding and (b) negated one's sense of doership.

Unless self-knowledge translates fully into the life of the person it cannot be said that self-actualisation has taken place, because the person will still be identified with certain aspects of being a person. In other words, binding *vasanas* and the sense of doership or egoic belief in separation will still be causing agitation in the mind. In order for existential suffering to end and for awareness to be one's primary identity, the person needs to be free *of* the idea of being a person in order to live free *as* the self. What is the point of self-realisation if the mind is still under the tyranny of its likes and dislikes (*vasanas*)?

One can only fully actualise self-knowledge when you have understood the identity between awareness, *Isvara* and the *jiva*. This is where most people get stuck (or come unstuck) in their self-inquiry and it is why many self-realised people do not self-actualise. Understanding *Isvara* is the key. This is probably one of the most important teachings in Vedanta.

These steps are not necessarily linear; one can jump around a great deal until self-knowledge has removed all ignorance and the knowledge is firm. Many inquirers go through a stage when the knowledge is on or off, what we call the "firefly" stage. They get disheartened and start to criticize or feel bad about themselves when the knowledge is not constant or they "slip up." Don't get discouraged by this, as it is a pretty normal stage for everyone to go through. Lifetimes of ignorance will take what it takes to dissolve. And *prarabdha karma* (the momentum of past

actions) will play out as long as it plays out. It is not up to the *jiva* but to *Isvara*. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance – so day by day, brick by brick allow self-knowledge to do the work of removing every last vestige of ignorance.

Brandon: I hope that you're feeling well these days.

~ Love to you both, Brandon

Sundari: Thanks, Brandon, we are both in great health now, thank you.

~ Love from us, Sundari