

Beyond Purity

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Sundari: Hello, Charles. How lovely to hear from you, and what a great email! James and I both loved it, thank you so much for sharing this with us. It is a privilege to be a witness to the journey of self to self.

Although your email stands alone and really needs no comment, I could not resist going through it and making comments. ☺

Charles: Dear James and Sundari, I never thought that “knowledge of the self” would be just that – to know that I am and always have been the self. Many thanks for your last emails to me, since it was exactly what I needed to hear and what I heard was “...those things that you speak of as apparent desire and temptation, etc. are not the self and no amount of improvement of that or an excessive will towards purity, etc. will change the fact that you are and always have been only the self. You are already free.” And the other thing that I heard was that “...inquiry is always going on, and it is the self that conducts inquiry.”

Sundari: It is so strange, is it not, that the self who has apparently and impossibly forgotten its nature finds it so hard to be convinced of this fact! It is so ludicrously self-evident and yet so elusive. What a relief it is to drop the impositions of the so-called “spiritual” identity as to how the *jiva* “should” behave! I have an innate suspicion, born of a rather logical nature, of the so-called spiritual world and its dictates, most of which are so patently false. You have hit the nail on the head – it is simply the self inquiring into itself and no amount of *jiva*-improvement will help one bit!

There is a vast difference between rendering the binding *vasanas* non-binding and trying futilely to improve the apparent person. This is what makes the *guna* teaching so powerful and so subtle – and so important. One cannot impose *satya* on *mithya*, and as *moksa* is freedom from the *jiva* in order for the *jiva* to abide in peace in the apparent reality, it must follow *dharma*. This means that it needs to understand what it means to be self-realised in the apparent reality. And this means that it needs to understand its conditioning in the light of self-knowledge – and in that light make the appropriate adjustments for peace of mind.

Charles: I am just now winding up a month in the UK and France, and in the midst of this busyness and eating in restaurants and drinking lots of coffee and wine and eating meat and all of the rest of it, there has been this joyful dawning that what I always thought I was is only a very small locus of sensation and thoughts and desire and fears in the vastness of what I am. The very first intimation of this was when I was enjoying my barbeque pork and broccoli in a Chinese restaurant in London. At first I thought, “This is just some sort of an epiphany that will not last, so let me see what this is about,” and while it’s true that “it” did not last, this sense that I can only call “knowledge” and what I think that you are calling “the hard and fast knowledge that I am whole and complete, unconcerned, ordinary, actionless awareness” has somehow lodged itself more

deeply into me such that it feels like it's taking up a final home.

Sundari: So beautifully put: Charles and “his” conditioning (which is not his but *Isvara's*) is just the tiniest thought in the vastness of self and, yes, this is what is so hard to get: that enlightenment does not feel like anything, because it is not an experience. Awareness is the most natural thing there is, the only thing that is always present – and when it stands up and takes the stage, everything flattens out and reels in shock. This is tough for the ego and it is not easy for it to get on board. The knowledge is so powerful and all-consuming ignorance does not stand a chance, and yet because there is no longer the body orientation, it can also feel like nothing or like “emptiness” at first. It is a tricky phase for the ego. Just stay with it and allow it to take hold, the ego will do its thing and your likes and dislikes will still be there, maybe even more urgently at first, the dying throes of a kingdom vanquished, the last effects of ignorance, the momentum of the blades of the fan spinning. You are the one who knows and sees it all, the limitless self that modifies to none of it and is modified by none of it.

Charles: My sense is that this knowledge is not yet “*sthita prajna*,” but over the last weeks this part of the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* has called to me and when I finally reread it this evening I realised that this is the final destination, a destination that I never have really left. For me, when Krishna describes the man of steady wisdom, he is really not referring to a man who became or achieved wisdom. He is referring to that which is and always has been wisdom, that which is and always has been free of desire, that which is and always has been free of attachment.

Sundari: To be fully established in consciousness as consciousness can take a little while. This is why we emphasise how important it is to take a stand in awareness and apply the opposite thought. The self, *moksa*, cannot be a destination because you cannot get to where you already are.

Who called to whom? You called to yourself – who would the man or woman be that embodies wisdom? There is no person of steady wisdom, only steady wisdom itself, you, awareness, without boundaries or limitation.

Charles: These days I will find myself walking, as I did today, and feel a fear or desire tugging on me and immediately, almost without effort, comes the conviction “but I am whole and complete,” or some variant of that thought, and it is as if the perspective shifts from this “locus of sensation,” etc. that I described earlier to just simply wholeness.

Sundari: Who finds themselves walking? Walking takes place in you. Fear – false evidence appearing real – i.e. *tamas* – tugs at your sleeve like the beggar it is, hoping for some purchase in a once-conquered mind, only to find the kingdom is empty and there is no person walking, nothing to hook into – like a pristine and vast snowy landscape that no foot has left an imprint on.

Charles: And it's not as if I need to convince myself that I am whole and complete, I simply find that it is true. Or sometimes I witness the thoughts going on in my mind, as they have for as long

as I can remember, and I ask myself, in the most sincere way, “Who is hearing/witnessing these thoughts, has always been witnessing these thoughts?” and in that simple question comes a wordless answer that points at awareness, what I am. All of these years I have been looking for some sort of a big experience that marks the boundary between my unenlightened and my enlightened self only to realize that, as you put it, “I do not have an experience problem, I have (had) a knowledge problem.”

Sundari: Amen. This is the last desire to go, the desire to experience *moksa*, and it is a tough one! Then *moksa* is simply revealed to be who you have been all along. It is the self “experiencing” the ego, not the futile attempt of the ego to experience the self. And it is as familiar as putting on your most favourite and worn-in boots to go for a lovely hike in the country: simple, honest, no fuss and totally ordinary. If the endless chatter from the *gunas* should intrude, it will not bother you at all because you will recognise it at all times as not-self; it will all be very predictable and nothing will stick. You will truly know yourself as the self even in the midst of the apparent mayhem of the apparent reality: indestructible, invincible, eternal, unchanged.

Charles: Words are really failing me right now. There’s only a sense of deep gratitude for the words and actions that you both have given me just at the right time and for my good fortune to have the sense to pay attention to them. And there is an abiding joy that transcends anything else that is going on. And perhaps I still need to hear that even this is some sort of a subtle epiphany, but if it is, I am gladdened and encouraged by it.

~ With love and gratitude, Charles

Sundari: You are that which makes all epiphanies and all other such objects possible, on which all epiphanies and all objects depend but which depends on nothing itself. It is the self-luminous light that makes the light known to be you.

~ Our love to you too, Sundari