

Big *Dharma*, Small *Dharma*

Ram (James Swartz)

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Kim: Hi, James. I have a question I would like to get your thoughts on.

James: Dear Kim, Sundari and I have replied jointly to this interesting email. We both have similar views, worded differently.

Kim: How can one tell whether a certain behaviour/response is one's nature or a *vasana* – where is the line? Obviously, one's true nature is the self, but the nature of “Kim”? – and is that nature a direct result of the *vasanas*? I guess they are one and the same in a way? You often talk about living and expressing one's *dharma* – relative to the kind of life you live and what you do, etc. So I am asking the question with this in mind.

James: There are all the same – in a way. The basic structure of your response to life, your *dharma*, is determined by *Isvara*. The creation is complex and requires a lot of different talents (*vasana* complexes, or *samskaras*) to make it work. So *Isvara* makes *samskaras* that create businesspeople, artists, politicians, scientists, academics, teachers, military people, mechanics, salespeople, doctors, etc. When you stick close to your *dharma*, your natural talents, and react from that point of view, you will basically be free of inner conflict. This is why Vedanta puts such an emphasis on *svadharma*, doing only what is appropriate to your conditioning. Your conditioning will follow your nature. But sometimes a person “works out,” or outgrows, his or her conditioning. He or she has done it well and there is nothing more to gain by it. At that time another of *Isvara*'s programs will start to assert itself and one will feel that it is time to change careers, etc.

Sundari: You, as the self, have no qualities, so the nature of “Kim” is apparent and not real. The nature of Kim and her *vasanas* is therefore not the same as that of the self. If you mean that Kim's nature is a direct result of and the same as the *vasanas*, that is correct. Kim's nature does not “belong” to her, as the *vasanas* are *Isvara*'s *vasanas*. Fully knowing this means that you know you are not the doer and therefore not responsible for “your” *vasanas*. This is a great relief, as it removes all existential guilt.

Isvara operating *maya*, i.e. ignorance, has *dharma* built into the creation. It is called *Svadharma* (with a big “S”). These are the natural laws that operate and they are impersonal and unavoidable. As the reflected self, “Kim” has her personal *svadharma* (with a small “s”). This is governed by her *vasanas*, which will produce “her” likes and dislikes, which will be coloured by the *gunas*.

There is a great saying by Margaret Thatcher that goes like this: “Your thoughts become your words, your words become your actions, your actions become your character, your character becomes your destiny.”*

Until such time as self-inquiry reveals the true nature of reality, you will be run by your *vasanas*, the likes and dislikes that originate from them and the *gunas* that colour everything.

Therefore your *svadharma* is something you incarnate with and it will be these *vasanas* that “create Kim’s world.” We have an in-built nature, and the self has no problem with it. As the reflected self, we have not come here to make ourselves perfect. We are already perfect, that is the main thrust of Vedanta you, as Kim, are okay as you are. We have come here only to realise the self.

When Kim acts in accordance with her nature and follows her own *dharma*, she will be “minding her own business,” attending to what Kim needs. This is an essential qualification for *moksa*. Kim will know what her *dharma* is because it will be evident in her personal creation and the *karma* that unfolds from it.

***Editor’s note:** Ms Thatcher apparently borrowed this quote from the *Upanishads* by way of Mahatma Gandhi, who had paraphrased it.

Kim: To give you the context that I am asking the question around, the Kim-*jiva* has always been prone to being quite forthright and vocal, especially when annoyed. :-) Temper tantrums when younger and generally a loud voice when provoked, though without any fury driving it now, it comes out like a reflex and then is gone. It has always seemed to be a form of expression not always indicative of anger. My mother has, for all of time, not particularly enjoyed a loud voice; she seems to shut down when there is a loud voice about (specifically related to events as a child). My mother likes to chat, and when Kim is tired and has been around people a lot and dealing with requests, etc. the brain shuts down when it comes to Mother wanting to chat or ask a million questions about how to do things on the computer. This has been an ongoing challenge in communicating with one another at certain times, especially as we live together. When tired and busy the Kim-*jiva* needs to withdraw and be left alone. I usually tell her to pretend I am not in the house, as the brain feels bruised and needs to rest. Sometimes she pushes, asks a million questions, which makes it feel like being at work, which brings up annoyance. The upshot is irritation and a loud voice. Not a lot of words coming out, just an exclamation of sheer annoyance and, “WHY are you asking me all these questions?”

I can watch it and see it for what it is, and it’s fine as it is. I am not trying to make it different like I did in the past. Luckily, my mother is also into Vedanta – although I think perhaps I need to have a few words with her about her accepting this aspect of me and me accepting her chit chat and respecting that there is a time and place for both. I have just returned from a month of business in Asia, and it took a number of weeks to square off, and during this time the levels of irritation were high – maybe there was a low-lying irritation beneath it all, but the irritation just seemed to just come from nowhere, unfurling itself without any warning. I am not sure if this bellowing is a form of frustration or a way in which the *jiva* expresses itself or if it is a *vasana* – or a combination of all three. Maybe it doesn’t matter. I am not trying to make it go away, but just to understand it so I can see it clearly, especially in terms of the sheaths – that teaching has been supremely useful. Just honing in on it over the last couple of weeks has reduced it somehow, unravelled it a bit. Other aspects that I see is guilt around speaking to my mother in that way, looking to see if this is indulgent behaviour (generally one knows when one crosses a line and when something is appropriate), sheer frustration that I cannot have some space when I need it because my mother

wants help on the computer... those kind of thoughts. I used to try to make it different, make it go away, but it is enough for me to see it all unfold. I would be interested to hear your thoughts, especially where there is the opportunity for my mother and I to live together in a true way – I want to be sure that I am not being blind to something.

James: As far as this example is concerned, you get angry because your needs are not being met. The reason for this is that you and your mother have not established the boundaries that normally operate between adults. You are an adult, an independent person, but she does not see you that way. You have weaned yourself, but she has not weaned you. To her you are still her daughter, even worse, you are her in a material, not a spiritual, way. You came from her body and she still sees it that way, which means that she cannot separate you from her. Unconditional mother-love has no boundaries. Mothers feel that their children are their possessions. So she just intrudes in your life as she sees fit, as she did when you were a baby. Good fences make good neighbors. So you have to sit down with her and work out a contract, a conscious arrangement about access to you. She has to agree to it consciously. Make it her *sadhana*. It is difficult to do because it upsets the balance of power. People do not like to cede power when they have it. But she has to do this. She will be happier too.

Sundari: You have a clear understanding of yours and your mother's nature. Neither of you intend injury to the other. These are your *vasanas* which create your likes and dislikes and the reactions (*rajas* and *tamas*) that ensue as a result. You obviously care very much for her and do not want to be disrespectful of her as your elder.

Having said that, as the self you have no preferences, no likes and dislikes, when your binding *vasanas* have been neutralised and your sense of doership negated, and *rajas* and *tamas* are ameliorated. Whatever happens in your environment is okay with you, awareness.

As you wish to co-habitate, boundaries need to be established. It is reasonable for Kim to be annoyed and irritable when tired. It is reasonable for your mother to want to chat and make contact with you. However, as James has said in his reply, your mother needs to let go of her role as a "mother" and you as a "daughter." If she is really following Vedanta, she should know that there is only the self and everything else is just an idea. She is no more your mother than you are her daughter.

Simply have a clear discussion without any blame or shame and no violent or "trigger" language involved. Remember, *rajas* projects and blames and *tamas* denies. As soon as these two energies set in, one becomes unconscious and the negative ego takes over. Make a time for such a discussion to take place, set the parameters and boundaries for the discussion and allow only one person to talk at a time. Listen to each other and HEAR what the other is saying. Then agree on a way forward. Make a contract. Set up a check system that allows for either of you to inform the other when your boundaries are not being respected, BEFORE any aggravation sets in. If reaction still sets in, acknowledge the *rajas/tamas* and see it as operating in Kim, not you, awareness. If you have difficulty with this, James often recommends Non-Violent Communication (NVC).

Kim: I have attached a couple of pictures of Tokyo during cherry blossom week (the first week of April). It was so beautiful. I hope you enjoy them.

I mentioned to Sundari that I was possibly interested in the Doro retreat this year. I see that there is still no info at your site; if I want to find out more, who should I speak to?

James: The information on Doro will be at the website this week. I hope you come. We will get back to you on the Doro retreat very soon.

~ Much love, James and Sundari