

Discourses with Barbara on *Isvara*

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Barbara: I was going to go last year, but felt “consciousness did not approve,” whereas the year before I was definitely supposed to go, and did.

Sundari: Consciousness never approves or disapproves of anything. It simply observes. It is the *jiva*, Barbara, who approves or disapproves. ☺

Barbara: I am *Isvara*. *Isvara* arranged for this *jiva* (who I apparently am) to go to Trout Lake one year and not another year. Is that a way of saying it because of me as consciousness, awareness, *brahman*, everything is known?

Sundari: Well, it depends how one looks at it. *Isvara* did not arrange for Barbara to go or not go, because *Isvara* is not a doer either. *Isvara* provided all the constituents of action in the field from which the *jiva* could (apparently) make choices. What made Barbara either go or stay was circumstantial and seemingly based on her choice. Looked at purely from the *jiva*'s perspective, Barbara had good reason both times to go or not to go. But there was something making her choose one way or the other. She seemingly made a choice, but it was actually her likes and dislikes that made the choice for her.

Barbara: Because of me, consciousness, awareness, *brahman*, everything is and everything is known. Okay?!

Sundari: Yes, but be careful of imposing *satya* onto *mithya*. Consciousness does not set anything up; the creation comes into existence when *maya* appears. Awareness is that which knows the knower.

Barbara: At the risk of sounding too woo-woo: but I was aware that consciousness arranged that someone (I did not know) phoned and asked me to room with them in a place called Cozy Cabins, and they drove me back and forth. I was aware that consciousness wanted me to go. Consciousness is conscious.

Sundari: Consciousness is not conscious in the way you are implying. It is simply that which knows everything, true. Read this *satsang* James had with an inquirer:

Isvara Is Not Conscious

Roger: Hi, James. Just as I was admiring my enlightenment certificate I read one of Sundari's *satsangs*, *Isvara Is the Intelligent Cause and Its Effects*. The following is a passage from it.

“Although *Isvara* is not conditioned by *maya* and is conscious, and the *jiva* is conditioned by *maya* and is not conscious, both *Isvara* and the *jiva* are reflected awareness and make up the apparent reality. Therefore neither *Isvara* nor the *jiva* are real; real is defined as “that which is permanent.”

This makes me ask questions: 1. Is not *Isvara* awareness seeing itself as it is not? Therefore how can you say it is not conditioned by *maya*?

James: *Isvara* is pure awareness plus *maya*. It is the Creator. But when *maya* appears, *rajas* and *tamas* are suppressed, and awareness appears as pure intelligence endowed with the blueprint for the creation and all the powers necessary to construct the apparent reality according to the specifications of the blueprint. It wields *maya* just a potter wields his or her idea of the pot to create a pot. When *tamas* comes to the fore the material world evolves, and when *rajas* comes to the fore the myriad *jivas* appear. The *jiva* is awareness plus *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. But *tamas* and *rajas* predominate, therefore the *jiva* is ignorant of its nature and takes itself to be one among many. So the *jiva* is under the spell of *maya*, whereas *Isvara* controls *maya*. Speaking as *Isvara*, Krishna says, “By my *maya* I delude all these beings.”

Roger: 2. If *Isvara* is reflected consciousness, how can it be said to be conscious while *jiva*, which is also reflected consciousness, is NOT conscious? (I GET that *jiva* is not conscious.)

James: This is a tricky one, Roger. You cannot say that awareness is conscious, because to say something is conscious implies an object that it is conscious of. Since awareness is non-dual it is not conscious, because there are no objects. It is just consciousness. But when *maya* is operating, there is something for it to be conscious of, i.e. the creation. At this point it apparently surrenders its status as consciousness and become a conscious creator. So from pure consciousness/awareness's point of view *Isvara* is just *maya*, an inert mirror (*pratibimba*) in which all created objects appear. But from *jiva*'s point of view, *Isvara* is the intelligent designer, creator, supporter and destroyer of the creation.

Roger: 3. It is said that *Isvara* is impermanent because scripture talks about “creation cycles.” I don't believe creation cycles can be confirmed, therefore they are a BELIEF and can't be cited as proof of *Isvara*'s impermanence. (Or can they?)

James: It depends on what you need for confirmation, Roger. Perception cannot confirm it, although inference, which is a valid means of knowledge, can at least confirm the destruction of a particular cycle, insofar as we know that the creation is subject to entropy and will eventually not exist as perceived objects. However, with a bit of logic, it can be confirmed insofar as everything in the creation itself – the individual objects – appear and disappear, only to reappear again. Science teaches that matter cannot be created or destroyed, that it just cycles endlessly though certain forms. So it stands to reason that if the creation is eternal consciousness appearing and

disappearing on the microcosmic level, it would behave in the same way on the macrocosmic level as it does on the microcosmic level according to the axiom “as above, so below.”

However, it does not matter to us whether or not it can be scientifically proved, because we are not interested in the creation. We are only interested in awareness/consciousness (which cannot be proved by science, i.e. perception and inference) because knowledge of the self as consciousness is *moksa* and we want *moksa*. For knowledge of it we rely on the *Vedas*, i.e. the *Upanishads*, which say that the macrocosm appears and disappears ad infinitum. At the same time it is always present – eternal – as a potential creation (The “Night” of *Brahman*) or as the actual creation (The “Day” of *Brahman*).

As to the question of *Isvara*’s permanence, it is beginningless, not permanent or impermanent. Beginninglessness looks like permanence insofar as *Isvara* is always potentially present in awareness, but *Isvara* disappears when we look at the creation from pure awareness’s standpoint. Anything that can be dismissed is not permanent, although with reference to *jiva*’s lifespan, *Isvara* is relatively permanent. In fact no one ever experienced *Isvara*, apart from the experience of his or her individual *upadhi*, which is definitely limited. And even revelations of *Isvara* are just temporary experiences in an individual’s *upadhi*, subject to *jiva*’s beliefs or opinions, which can easily be negated. Remember, all that is required for *moksa* is to discriminate the subject from the objects presenting themselves to it. *Isvara* is a thought-object, as is *jiva*. I am the one that knows *Isvara* and *jiva*. I am free of the creature and the Creator. By my grace *Isvara* creates and *jiva* suffers and enjoys. (End of *satsang*.)

Barbara: Quote from James: “And even revelations of *Isvara* are just temporary experiences in an individual’s *upadhi*, subject to *jiva*’s beliefs or opinions, which can easily be negated.”

From the above by Ram, I understand that the woo-woo was just a temporary experience in my *upadhi*.

Sundari: Correct, well done. You projected *satya* onto *mithya* and saw, meaning where and how the *jiva* wanted to see it, i.e. through the filter of the *vasanas*.

Barbara: It is okay to think of *Isvara* as an aspect of *brahman*, which is an infinite mind which has the capacity to dream, and this *maya* is *Isvara*’s dream? Thank you again.

Sundari: You are most welcome, Barbara. It’s always wonderful to communicate with you.

The answer to your question is yes, almost. The only problem is the word “aspect” because *Isvara* is *brahman* (we prefer to say awareness) and as such has no aspects. So is the word “infinite” with reference to *Isvara* as Creator. As you know, *Isvara* refers both to pure awareness and to awareness plus *maya*. As awareness *Isvara* is infinite, but as awareness in the role of Creator, *Isvara* is only relatively infinite. *Isvara* as Creator goes unmanifest when the creation cycle ends. *Maya*, or *Isvara*, is pure *sattva* before *rajas* and *tamas* (ignorance) manifest. So we say that ignorance is a power in awareness or it could not be unlimited. Saying that *Isvara* dreams personifies it – which creates problems because *Isvara* is an impersonal force, simply and powerfully, the Creator. *Isvara* does not think, because it is not a person, although it is

intelligence itself, just not the egoic kind we are identified with and take to be real. Because *Isvara* is actually pure awareness associated with objects, it is that which makes thinking (any experience) possible. It is that which provides the raw materials, creates, governs and controls the environment without ever being affected by it or even involved in it. Yet because *Isvara* as Creator is not always present, it is only apparently real. Only awareness is real. Tough one to grasp!

Remember this teaching I gave you from last year? Many people think that *Isvara* is real. Here it is the teaching again:

Isvara associated with *maya* is conscious (although *Isvara* is not a *jiva*, or person) and is not modified by ignorance/*maya* (the *gunas*). *Isvara* is conscious because with the appearance of *maya*, there is something for awareness to be to be conscious of, i.e. objects. *Isvara* (awareness in the role of Creator associated with *maya*) “merges” back into pure awareness at the end of the creation cycle, so *Isvara* is also not unchanging and not always manifest.

Isvara is always present in awareness, but it is either manifest or unmanifest with reference to awareness. Therefore *Isvara* associated with *maya*, like the *jiva*, is not real either, although in terms of the apparent person *Isvara* is “relatively” real and eternal. In other words, *Isvara* associated with *maya* is eternal or permanent with reference to the *jiva* and the objects it experiences, but impermanent with reference to awareness. To say that *Isvara* associated with *maya* is eternal with reference to the *jiva* does not mean that *Isvara* is limitless with reference to awareness. This is because ignorance, or *maya*, only “operates” on a tiny fraction of awareness and because *Isvara* is resolved back into awareness at the end of the creation cycle. The words “operates on a tiny fraction of awareness” are also used simply to put *maya* in perspective because the self has no parts and cannot be quantified. It is important to understand this because “partially covered” means that awareness is never actually covered, because it is aware of the partial covering brought about by the manifestation of *maya*.

Maya, which is the *upadhi* for *Isvara* (awareness plus the *gunas*) is said to be eternal because it is a power that exists in awareness and awareness is eternal. This is why *maya* is beginningless. Personal ignorance (*avidya*) ends for the *jiva* when the self is realised to be its true nature, ending its personal cycle of incarnation and suffering; but *maya*, or macrocosmic ignorance and its effects (*mithya*), continue unchanged. However, the creation (*mithya*) is not always manifesting, because *maya* is not always manifest. When ignorance, or *maya*, does manifest, *Isvara* in its capacity as a Creator appears, followed by the apparent creation (*Isvara srsti*), the world of sentient beings and insentient elements (objects).

Barbara: I clearly see my choices were fear-based (not fear of Ram). The only problem is the word “aspect.” Oh, God, I knew I would get in trouble using the word aspect. Swami Dayananda uses the words “incidental attribute.”

Sundari: “Incidental attribute” means a non-essential quality, meaning it does not define but rather describes the inherent nature of something.

Barbara: “Saying that *Isvara* dreams personifies it – which creates problems because *Isvara* is an impersonal force.”

Now, this is interesting... Swami Dayananda teaches that (I hope I'm saying it okay) with *viveka*, the sense of I/me is recognized as separate from the body-mind-emotions complex, and is awareness which was never born and is unchanging.

Sundari: Yes, correct. Although discrimination reveals that as awareness the body-mind-intellect is not separate but a reflection of awareness. This is a non-dual reality; remember, nothing is separate from you. Everything arises in you, awareness, is made up of you and depends on you to exist, but you depend on nothing to exist.

Barbara: Swami Dayananda: "Personhood is the very nature of *Brahman*, and that Personhood is the very truth of the Universe."

"Personhood is fundamental to the Universe. The Universe is never without personhood."

"Personhood is the very nature of consciousness."

"The conscious being is fundamental to the Universe."

"Infinite consciousness-existence is the me, the Self. From that, manifest knowledge projects and resolves from beginningless time."

Sundari: Dayananda equates personhood with consciousness, which is not a very good word for it. However, you have to understand how he uses the term in the context of what he is saying. He does not mean the egoic person with likes and dislikes, or *Isvara* as a big person. As the jiva a person is defined by their likes and dislikes—which belong to Maya or *Isvara*, not the person. However, as long as the person is identified with their likes and dislikes they are bound by ignorance. *Isvara* does not have likes or dislikes, because it is not conditioned by the *gunas*. So what Swami D means by the word "personhood" is the universal person, consciousness, in whose "image" (reflection) the person is made.

Barbara: "He who sees action in inaction and inaction in action, he sees truly." ~ *Bhagavad Gita*. This teaching clears things up for me... okay with you?

Sundari: You got it!

Barbara: Believe it or not I understand it is not the body-mind-emotions-world. Recently the world fell away and what was left was ME, the personhood which is fundamental to the universe... Personhood which is the very nature of consciousness.

Sundari: So happy for you, Barbara, we could see how clear you are when we saw you in Portland. You were positively glowing as the self! Well done to you for your dedication and determination to get it all right. *Moksa* is grace and grace is earned. It could not happen to a nicer person. May self-knowledge continue to unfold every aspect of life and may you revel in your true nature as awareness.

Barbara: It was definitely not a big deal, it was the knowledge that the me is separate from the body-mind, like it has been said all along.

There has not (yet!) been a shift to where that knowledge is firmly there all the time. Any suggestions? I ALWAYS remember Ram telling about the last time he saw Swami Chinmayananda. Ram left his office, walked outside and a man died right in front of Ram. Ram understood it symbolized the death of James, and Ram had a shift in consciousness then and “has been enlightened ever since.”

Sundari: *Moksa* is no big deal, but it is also the only real deal. ☺ And the “shift” to self-actualization is not a shift, because it is who you are. But I know what you mean – the final stage of self-inquiry is to give up the desire for *moksa* because you see that you are the knower of the desire, you are *moksa* – and it is ordinary because you have always been that. So self-actualization is a shiftless shift, if we can call it that. I believe the knowledge is operating for you all the time. I believe there is never a time when you are not thinking thoughts about you, awareness. Perhaps there is still an expectation that liberation is an event, something that you can gain? This is a tenacious belief for many genuine seekers like yourself. Because the *jiva* does not have to change to be enlightened, the ego takes a while to get on board with the idea that it is perfect the way it is.

Barbara: I use the word “shift” because years ago I heard Ram tell of his SHIFT and I thought there had to be an event that was a shift to no longer ever identifying with the body-mind but always watching them, no matter what... total freedom all of a sudden.

Sundari: It is a shift from the *jiva*'s perspective, but not from awareness's point of view.

My only advice would be to keep doing what you are doing. *Sadhana* is your life, always has been. Acknowledge that you are no longer a seeker but a finder because you know there is nothing to seek. You are it. Once you know you cannot “unknow,” which is why Ram revels in the heart of all things at all times because he knows he is all things. The blades of the fan will turn until they don't anymore. It's up to *Isvara*.

Barbara: Thank you for the message below. It is very heartening.

Sundari: You are welcome, Barbara, it's the truth.

Barbara: Could you say it's a shift to awareness's point of view, standing as awareness, as Greg Goode puts it? I think of it as focusing on the real me; more of an introverted stance than an extroverted stance. And that real me is the real me of all, the one unchanging real me.

Sundari: Yes, you could say it's a shift to awareness's point of view, but that does imply having to go somewhere you are not already. So who is shifting? Remember, it is not the ego that

experiences awareness, it is awareness that experiences the ego. So actually, it is a shift for the ego to awareness's point of view, not the other way around. As long as that is clear. The ego is the self anyway.

And you are right, non-dual vision is a more inward view of life, as everything is experienced "in" the mind – but the mind, although only apparently real and an object known to you, is also known to arise and dissolve in you, awareness. It is clear that the mind is not personal but universal, like you said. So there really is no inwards or outwards for awareness, because there is nowhere that you are not. Where does the mind begin and end? It is not contained anywhere. There appears to be a personal mind because of *avidya*, "your" seemingly personal *vasana* load. So what happens once self-knowledge has obtained is the way you contact the world is not conditioned by your *vasanas* – or a sense of doership. You are the universal mind.

Barbara: I am *Isvara*... I am not a personal doer, nor a personal body-mind. All is equally me and I welcome it all and reject none of it – just like *brahman*. Is that correct?

Sundari: Yes, as pure awareness you are *Isvara* (prior to *maya* manifesting), and *Isvara* is another name for you. You are also *Isvara* in the role of Creator wielding (or associated with) *maya*, but *Isvara* in the role of Creator is not you. *Isvara* in the role of Creator is eternal (but not always manifest) and real with reference to *jiva* but only relatively real with reference to awareness. Even though universal *jiva* is also eternal (but not always manifest) and therefore real with reference to small *jiva*, it is too is only relatively real with reference to awareness. As awareness you are universal *jiva*/person/mind, but universal *jiva*, or person, is not you. You (awareness, or *brahman*), unmoving, unchanging, unlimited and ever-present neither welcome nor reject anything, because there is nothing but you, so how would this be possible? Only *jiva* identified with *jiva* rejects or accepts because it does not understand that nothing is non-different from it.

Barbara: Quote from Sundari: "Both *Isvara* and the *jiva* are reflected awareness and make up the apparent reality."

Sundari: See above answer.

Barbara: I have never understood the concept of reflected awareness and talk about mirror(s). I can understand the self being a screen. I can understand *satya* and *mithya*. Can you explain?

Sundari: There is original consciousness and reflected consciousness = the self and the *jiva* (subtle body). The *jiva* is awareness plus a subtle body, and takes itself to be conscious. The best metaphor to illustrate this point is the sun and the moon. The moon appears to be shining, but it is just a rock floating in the space with no light of its own. The sun is a flaming ball of fire and its light illuminates the moon, which is what makes it appear to be shining. Just like the light of awareness shining on the subtle body makes it appear to be conscious. People who think they are people think they are conscious, but they are borrowing consciousness from awareness.

Let's look at the screen and mirror metaphors:

It is true awareness is like a screen upon which everything manifests and dissolves. However, images on a screen are different from the mirror metaphor. There are two kinds of screens: one that reflects its own light, and in that light (like the light in a computer screen) objects appear and disappear. This screen has its own [emitted] light. Then there is a screen like a movie screen which is like the sun and the moon – i.e. the screen does not project its own light, but borrows its [reflected] light from the projector.

A mirror:

Everything reflects light, but a mirror reflects light clearly, as it is. The clearer the mind (reflective surface) the more distinct are the objects in it. Even though all objects arise in awareness, it is not as easy to see some objects as awareness, because they are obscured by *tamas*. The point is, if the mirror (mind, or reflective surface) is clear, the self as the object reflected in the mirror can be clearly known as an object of knowledge/experience. In non-dual reality experience and knowledge are the same. There is no obscuration in a clear mirror.

Another reflection metaphor is an image in a mirror. In a mirror objects are reflected because a mirror reflects light, so it is the source of the light in this metaphor. The question to ask is this: How far are objects from the mirror? Do they pop out, stand apart? No. The reflection in the mirror and the mirror are non-different.

The reflection theory is a big topic in Vedanta; Shankara brought it up and developed it. There are two basic theories about it: look up the Bhamati and Vivarana schools of Vedanta teachers.

I hope this clears it up. ☺

Barbara: Are *jiva* minds like keyholes into the one universal mind of *Isvara*?

Sundari: Yes if the *jiva* has self-knowledge and no if it does not. Knowledge of *Isvara* is not the same as self-knowledge, because complete knowledge to qualify as *moksa* involves knowledge of *Isvara* as the Creator, *jiva* and the elements and their relationship to awareness, i.e. *satya* and *mithya*. What good is knowledge of pure consciousness if it does not include knowledge of the creation? And what good is knowledge of the Creator if it does not include knowledge of the self?

Barbara: The line in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "He who sees action in inaction, and inaction in action, he sees truly," could that be translated:

"He who is action in inaction and is inaction in action, he is truly."

Sundari: Beautifully put. It just means that as the self, nothing ever happens.

Barbara: For the past few days it has seemed like everything, including this body-mind, is a manifestation of knowledge.

No one was actually born, rather knowledge manifested. At some point this knowledge is no longer manifest.

Sundari: Yes, indeed. The knowledge of the environment/body/mind appeared before you one fine day, and one fine day it will be gone – but you will not be. Everything in the apparent reality is made up of knowledge – and ignorance is also a kind of knowledge.

Ignorance is the absence of knowledge; it is a kind of knowledge because it is a *vritti* – a thought. You cannot have ignorance without knowledge, because ignorance means ignorance OF something and implies a knower. There three types of ignorance: (1) there are things you think you know and think are true, (2) there are the things you know you don't know and (3) there are things you don't know you don't know. This is where the suffering comes in: confusing ignorance with knowledge, not knowing what is true and being ignorant of being ignorant. Knowledge is the only thing that can remove ignorance and self-knowledge is the only means at our disposal to remove ignorance of our true nature.

Once ignorance (*avidya*) is removed, both knowledge and ignorance are known to be objects known to you. You are no longer ignorant of your true nature and therefore you no longer need self-knowledge, because you know you are the self. This does not mean that as a *jiva* you are all-knowing. It means you understand the ESSENCE of everything to be awareness. The *jiva*, enlightened or not, lives in the apparent reality, which is a lawful universe run by forces not in the control of any one *jiva*, even a *jivanmukta*. The *jiva* only has knowledge of objects it has contact with. Only *Isvara* is all-knowing and all-powerful in and as the apparent reality.

Barbara: Does this mean I am on or off the bus?

Sundari: It means you are the bus! ☺ The bus is self-knowledge, Vedanta. You are the knowledge.

Barbara: I find if I read some correspondence every day it helps.

Sundari: Yes, it certainly does. It is the self reading about itself.

Barbara: In just reading the article you sent written by “James,” I could feel the AUTHORITY, the CERTAINTY, the UNDERSTANDING, the KNOWLEDGE...

Sundari: If you can hear it so clearly, it is because you know you must be it. ☺

Barbara: Is that how to think with knowledge?

Sundari: You don't have to think non-duality, because you know the thinker. ☺ You make thinking possible – and, as we said, you are the knowledge. When you know you are the self,

thinking takes place as it always does in the intellect, which becomes highly refined. You understand everything with total clarity because you understand *Isvara* and how the *dharma* field works. There are no mysteries anymore, no more doubts. You may not have the mind of *Isvara* and know all facts, nor will you know what “other” people are thinking, but because you know you are really awareness, you know that you are beyond *Isvara* and the *dharma* field, being the essence of it all. So you live free as the self while still appearing as a person in the apparent reality.

Barbara: B-E-A-U-T-I-F-U-L R-E-P-L-Y.

Pocketful of Miracles and I walked to the top of Mount Tabor this morning, and your words were not just beautiful, they were epic. They brought about an “aha” moment.

Sundari: You are the miracle, Barbara! So wonderful to see the knowledge working its magic and your spirit soaring to the top of the mountain on eagle’s wings, strong and true with the confidence of the self you are.

Barbara: Would like to talk to you about self-actualizing... specific practices, etc?

Sundari: There are no specific instructions for self-actualisation; it depends on how much *jiva* stuff you have – meaning what *prarabdha karma* is playing out for the *jiva*.

Once self-realisation has taken place (which is the full understanding of your true nature as awareness), you are well established in self-inquiry and applying the teachings in your life, if the mind is still agitated by *rajas* and *tamas*, often that means that all the qualifications are not in place, so binding *vasanas* still condition the mind. Then one has to go back and re-qualify – which is called *nididhyasana*. There is no other way to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding in order that self-actualisation – the final “stage” of *moksa*, can take place.

Having said that, deep *samskaras* and *pratibandikas* will take as long as they take to dissolve, even when they are seen and understood. Some will never completely go away; the *jiva* is made the way it made. We are all born with a certain character and tendencies that go along with it. Not all of them are bad, which is why it is important not to try to perfect the person. The way to be free of the *jiva* is to identify the conditioning that runs the mind, especially those very stubborn patterns. Once they are seen for what they are in the light of self-knowledge, then when they do appear one simply dis-identifies with them as not-self. This may or may not involve taking appropriate action, of course not as a doer but with *karma yoga*. Either way, once self-knowledge is operative, it is much less likely that the patterns will bother you, as the mind does not condition to them, because you KNOW you are the knower of the tendencies. As always, freedom is the ability to discriminate *satya* from *mithya*, no matter what is going on for the *jiva*.

So that’s what it takes, Barbara; every day, chop wood and fetch water, trusting that *Isvara* will let you know what you need to know – and of course trusting the knowledge that you are already free.

Barbara: As you are not available to talk to, I am listening to Rupert Spira at YouTube. After Ram so strongly approved of *The Transparency of Things* by Spira, I took the train to Southern California and attended a five-day retreat of Rupert's in Montecito. Near the end of the five days, Rupert and his wife were walking on the beach and his wife stopped to talk to someone. I walked on just with Rupert and told him my husband was "consciousness." To my surprise he whirled around and said to me with great enthusiasm and concentration: "That is the highest."

Sundari: I have so many people I have to write to, so I can't always reply straightaway. We can only do so much. I usually bump you to the head of the queue anyway because you are special.

☺

I am a bit mystified by this last paragraph of yours. Firstly, while James likes Rupert as a stand-up guy, he does point out that Rupert does not have the whole teaching, in fact, he does not have a teaching. He can only take you so far. Secondly, I have not the faintest idea why he said what he said to you or why you said what you said to him. As far as we know you have not had a husband, and if you did, he could not have been unconscious or he would have been either in a coma or six foot under. And why Rupert would say that is the "highest" – highest what? The self is consciousness itself – it can never be unconscious. And *moksa* is not a "state." It is who you are. However you take this statement, it makes no sense. It's just a stupid statement.

Barbara: "It is not James or Ram who is full. Only awareness is full."

If this statement was fully understood, it would be *moksha*?

Sundari: Yes, if you know what it means and this knowing puts an end to your sense of limitation and doership, freeing you permanently from the *jiva* and its conditioning. But like we have discussed many times, this does not mean that the *jiva* miraculously changes, only how it relates to objects changes.

Barbara: The body is an experience that happens to awareness.

Sundari: All experience happens in awareness. The language you use is bad; it implies that awareness is modified by experience. Nothing "happens" to awareness. Awareness does not experience – it is that by whose presence experience takes place – and who witnesses experience.

Barbara: Awareness is aware of itself.

Sundari: Yes, correct, awareness is self-luminous and does not need objects to be present to know itself.

Barbara: "Barbara" is awareness aware of itself (awareness is not modified, does not experience and does not know there is Barbara).

Sundari: Correct. Barbara is an object known to awareness, who awareness sees as awareness because there is nothing else for it to see.

Barbara: The world is awareness aware of itself.

Sundari: True, from a non-dual perspective; and from the *jiva's* perspective the world is reflected awareness and not aware of itself; awareness shining on the world makes it appear to be self-aware.

Barbara: I listened to a two-hour interview of David Godman's online and was just transfixed. He told all these wonderful details of Ramana's life which I had never heard before. It made me think how fortunate Ram was to live in Tiruvannamalai for so long.

Sundari: Ram knows Godman well, and did not have a good experience with him in Tiru. He is a famous hagiographer and spiritual writer. He is an expert on Ramana, but not really a devotee, to our knowledge. I am happy for you that you got something inspirational from him – but be careful of giving too much weight to people you think know more than you do. Just because they live in Tiru for ages does not make them more knowledgeable about what counts – self-knowledge – and it definitely does not make them free. In fact many people who have lived in India for long periods believe they are spiritually superior because they “live in India,” and they are so identified with their spiritual persona that they would not know what *moksa* was if it whacked them on the bottom. ☺

Barbara: I completely understand what you are saying, and appreciate your truthfulness.

Yes, I do tend to think that everyone knows more than I do. But I also think there is no everyone and no me. There is only consciousness being creative. There is only water and which can manifest as many waves, but still remains water.

Sundari: Beautifully put, Barbara! Of course it is all *Isvara*, and it all has its place.

But without self-knowledge one does not have discrimination, and so cannot tell the difference between ignorance and knowledge. You do, so you can.

That's called *moksa*.

Barbara: I need to work consistently on making it clearer.

Sundari: Well, who is working? It is only by consistently subjecting the mind to self-inquiry that self-knowledge does the work of removing ignorance.

Barbara: By saying something as stupid as, “I need to work consistently on making it clearer,” shows why “It is only by consistently subjecting the mind to self-inquiry that self-knowledge does the work of removing ignorance.” YEAH, SUNDARI!

Sundari: Don’t be so hard on yourself; it’s just a language slip-up. I know you know – but yes, freedom requires eternal vigilance because those *vasanas* can spring back anytime.

Barbara: I am eternally aware.

Sundari: Amen.

Barbara: Is more “progress” possible after death?

Sundari: Death and progress for whom? Are we going in circles here – we dealt with this – ?

The physical body lasts only one birth, but the subtle body lasts for the whole macrocosmic cycle of time. The universal mind, or *Jiva* with a big “J,” is eternal relative to the small *jiva*, or ego, but it is only relatively eternal with reference to awareness because it goes into seed form at the end of the creation cycle. The leaves of a deciduous tree last one season, but the tree continues. So the tree, relative to the leaf, is eternal. But the tree is also temporary, relative to the earth in which it is rooted (awareness). *Isvara* in the role of Creator is eternal relative to the *jiva*, but like the tree, it too is only relatively eternal with reference to awareness.

So this means there is only you, ever-present, unchanging, whole and complete awareness. Like clouds moving across the sky, the apparent creation appears and disappears before you, but you remain unchanged. Death is only for the gross body; the subtle body, or *vasana* load, goes into seed form in the causal body when the body dies – and depending on *prarabdha karma* may or may not take form again; it is up to *Isvara*. If it does, the next form has nothing to do with the previous one, so how can there be progress “after death”? There is no death for awareness.

Reincarnation is something the mind can inquire into when it is still identified with being a person with an address and a history. When self-knowledge obtains and the doer negated, this falls away once non-dual vision makes it clear that there is no birth or death for you, so no reincarnation – and – no progress! Progress to what? You are whole and complete here and now. How to improve on that?

Barbara: We are definitely not going in circles. Personally, I do not want to reincarnate. I understand there is no birth or death for me.

The question was based on something I recently heard Eckhart Tolle say...

Sundari: Well, it’s good that you (who?) don’t want to reincarnate, seeing as the *jiva* has no choice in the matter anyway and awareness never really “reincarnated,” so it cannot RE-incarnate!

The apparent reality is nothing but a dream, remember? It seems real, but it is not. It exists, Barbara exists, because you can experience it and her; but experience is a dream too, because, you, awareness, are the non-experiencing witness. When “Barbara” dies, “her” *vasana* load will continue ad infinitum as part and parcel of the macrocosmic playing-out of ignorance that exists as a power in awareness and gives rise to the apparent reality. Although there seem to be many *jivas*, each with a personal identity, there really is only one eternal and universal *Jiva*. Your “personal” ignorance has been removed by self-knowledge, which has freed you of the notion that your primary identity is Barbara – or *jiva*.

There is so much nonsense bandied about as truth in the spiritual arena and many so-called teachers who claim to have worked out how *karma* works – i.e. they think they know the mind of *Isvara*. But no one knows the mind of *Isvara*. Most of the New Age spiritual modalities take the apparent reality to be real and do not know the difference between *satya* and *mithya*.

You must be well familiar with the term *pratibhasika*, or subjective reality. Within the apparent reality there are many *lokas*, or “realms,” of existence – psychic, angelic, demonic, hell, heaven, astral, etc., etc. They fascinate many seekers who get stuck, thinking that there is a “higher realm” than the one they are in and they have to “do” something to “get there.” But all of these so-called realms are in the dream and they are all equally unreal. The only way to freedom is to understand that you are not in the dream, the dream is in you – the knower of the dream. And there is nowhere to get to or anything to do, because you are what you are looking for. There is nothing you can do to get what you already have. Only self-knowledge has the power to remove ignorance. When you know this all these fascinations and spiritual distractions fall away. These realms do have a kind of existence, just like *vyavaharika*, or the empirical realm, does because many experience them. But they are still only apparently real.

When one embarks on self-inquiry into the true nature of existence, subjecting the mind to a valid means of knowledge, the *dharma* of self-inquiry is to put all your beliefs and opinions on temporarily the shelf – or there is no way self-inquiry will work for you. If you insist on hanging onto your opinions then self-inquiry is not for you. This is the first and second stage of self-inquiry: *sravana* and *manana*. Once self-knowledge obtains and discrimination develops, it becomes clear that all opinions and beliefs that are not in harmony with scripture are not valid, so you leave them behind – permanently.

Eckhart Tolle had a self-realisation experience from which he it seems he assimilated the knowledge that his true nature is awareness. All the same, he is identified with the experience and teaches his experience. He has never been taught self-knowledge properly, so he has no independent and valid means of knowledge. All he can do is ramble on and on about his experience, inspiring people and making temporarily feel better about themselves. He does not teach *moksa*.

Barbara: Your writing is truly succinct and beautiful, and the time you took to write it is most appreciated... Every day now, more and more often, knowledge is brought to bear on thoughts, beliefs, opinions and I see that I am awareness, not the thoughts, beliefs, opinions. And every day I read Ram’s *Song of the Self*.

Quote from *Song of the Self*: “8. In this strange condition it seems as if I am affected by ignorance, but I am not. My form is in one order of reality and I am in another. When there is smoke in space, it seems as if space is smoky, but it is never contaminated. I am never contaminated by the

thoughts and feelings that appear in me. I am unaffected by the body superimposed on my radiance.”

How do YOU do self-inquiry?

Sundari: I no longer need to do self-inquiry, as I know I am the knowledge. I have no doubts and everything in the *jiva* life dissolves into me.

Barbara: Nonsense limerick for Sundari:

Sundari is the Self.

Her ego is on the shelf.

It's good for her health.

It's good for her wealth.

All is now herself.

Sundari: That is so sweet, and really good too! Thank you.

Barbara: I know you do not want to hear anything about Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, but I will tell you something remarkable that happened about three weeks ago.

Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn recommends the vegan, no-oil, low-salt, low-sugar diet which I have been on for quite a while now. The Kaiser Ayurvedic internist doctor recommended I add *ghee* and *lassi* (made with dairy yogurt).

I went to New Seasons to buy the *ghee* and yogurt, took an empty shopping cart and headed towards the aisle where the *ghee* is.

Just before I got there, I had a vision of the full body of Dr. Caldwell. He was in a large misty oval, his full 6'4" or so frame and he was wearing a tan suit. The entire vision was pulsating with divine energy and I whirled the cart around and left the store without *ghee* or yogurt, and continued on his diet from his bestselling book *How to Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease*.

Sundari: It's not that I don't want to hear about Esselstyn, I have nothing against him. I am sure he must be a good man and have the best intentions.

Diet is a personal thing, but the no-oil/low-oil fat diet has been resoundingly proved to be the worst idea ever to become mainstream health dogma by every kind of research done worldwide. This dogma has caused more ill health than any belief before or since. The China Study has been thoroughly debunked, as most of the research figures quoted are based on confirmation bias, i.e. it includes only research that corroborates what the author believes and excludes all the massive amounts of research that do not.

You are entitled to your own opinions and subjective experiences, however convincing they may be. They will come forth from your microcosmic causal body and appear to be “other” than you – a message from *Isvara* – and they will be projections based on your own personal *vasanas*, or filters.

All the same, you are not entitled to your own facts. There is no arguing with facts, and there is too much irrefutable evidence against this kind of diet that you claim to be so healthy for you.

However, having said that, one cannot exclude the power of the psycho-spiritual effect on the body – which is: if you believe very strongly that something is good or bad for you (the placebo or nocebo effect), chances are the body will reflect that belief. The other thing is of course that coming off a low-fat diet one needs to become knowledgeable about what fats are the good ones – and balance is the key, as always.

Barbara: We have jumped into the middle of *samsara*. I tend to read things like the below from the University of California Davis Department of Integrative Medicine. In the end this dream world goes when it goes, and it doesn't really matter. Sorry to have brought it up in the first place... my fault.

Sundari: Yes, it is true we can always find whatever we are most invested in to corroborate our beliefs. I can tell you that the information you read is outdated, that science has moved on from those opinions and there are mountains of irrefutable scientific evidence to support this. But choose to believe what you believe and works for you. In the end, as you say, everything ends here and we all have to die of something, so what does it matter?

However, as the body belongs to *Isvara* and the *dharma* field is run by certain immutable laws, if you do not know what these laws are and go against them, then *karma* comes back and health is compromised. As I say, you are entitled to your own opinions, but not to your own facts. The body needs certain raw materials to be healthy and the consensus research now supports a very different diet to the one you believe in. All the same, everyone is different and what works for one will not work for another, even though the laws apply to everyone.

Although the body is not real, if one is seeking *moksa* then lifestyle issues have to be addressed. It is almost impossible to maintain peace of mind in a body that is in pain or unhealthy due to bad lifestyle choices. One cannot deny the apparent reality, it exists – and *moksa* is for the *jiva* that lives in it.

In the end you have to do what is *dharmic* for you – and in this there is no one right or wrong. *Ahimsa* includes taking care of the body in such a way that it flourishes, but not so much that one becomes paranoid, pedantic, dogmatic or obsessed by doing the “right thing.”