

Does Liberation Resolve Pain?

Ram (James Swartz)

2015-08-06

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2225>

Jeff: Dear Ramji, I sincerely hope you and Sundari are well – I thought that since a bit over a year has passed from when I first contacted you, I should drop you a brief note to say “hi” and “thanks” (sorry, it’s been a while since I wrote, but I haven’t felt the need to ask any questions). I was actually visiting *ShiningWorld.com* today and browsing some of Ted’s *satsang* replies, and I felt a great affection for you. I was actually thinking just the other night about where I might be if I hadn’t got this knowledge/experience thing sorted out – probably in the loony bin!

(By the way, this email turned out to be much longer that I’d initially intended!)

James: Hi, Jeff. I think of you fondly and often, and wondered what was going on with you. I am not surprised that things are going well. Vedanta is great! Yes, we are well, thriving in fact. Life is grand!

Jeff: I’ve been listening methodically to Vedanta each day. I understand now two critical things: (1) the relationship between awareness and the apparent reality of *Isvara, jiva, jagat* and (2) that *karma yoga*, and contemplation as a consequence, should continue until that vision of reality (including *mithya*) is always present and available to me, just like any other mundane knowledge (such that it never needs to be recalled or remembered). At the moment, an applied effort is still required to cognitively resolve *mithya*, up to the knower, into pure awareness. Perhaps I’m wrong here, but I’ve deduced that the fully ascertained vision of reality implies an effortless cognitive resolution of the apparent reality into awareness (such as when one knows there is a mirage, no further effort is required to cognitively resolve it or remember it is a mirage – it is ascertained and treated as such).

James: You are right, an effortless cognitive resolution is freedom from *mithya*. Well said.

Jeff: I do have a couple of questions, actually:

1. Concerning the subtle body and what happens when the *pranas* are withdrawn and the *sthula shariram* is left for dead: I understand that if I haven’t got *moksa* yet then the “internal pressure” of the *vasanas* in the causal body is going to result in a further round in *samsara* (because the sense of smallness centred on the “I,” or ignorance, remains). But if instead I am already *jivanmukti* (the sense of smallness centred on the “I” is resolved once and for all and all the *prarabdha karma* is exhausted with the death of the gross body), is that the end of the *jiva* for good, just when I’d learned to live with him?

James: If by “*jiva*” you mean Jeff, yes. The *jivatma* is an eternal principle and it continues. But the *jiva*, the apparent individual created by the association of the *jivatma* with the subtle body, is finished. Its *karmic* account is closed. Even if there has been no effortless cognitive resolution,

the specific Jeff-*jiva* is toast and a new “Jeff” appears to work out the unfulfilled *karma*. It is a new Jeff because the personality, Jeff, is an interaction of the existing unresolved *vasanas* that cause rebirth as they work out in a different time and place. We often remember that we were before (*déjà vu*, for example), but not who we were before.

Jeff: Do I then just abide as I, pure disembodied awareness, with no particular story/identity?

James: Yes, as you do now with a particular identity.

Jeff: This is a tricky one because at its heart is the fear of death of the *jiva* and the sense of being erased (so the essence of ignorance). Or does the *jiva* continue to shine as reflected awareness, but with the fully ascertained vision of the self-shining “I”?

James: That particular *jiva* is always only an apparent entity, so it is as good as dead to you even when it is present as it is now. So if you have a particular fondness for that person, it is good to see it as *mithya* while it is still present or it may cause rebirth, although it really doesn’t matter for the reason just explained – it is a different “Jeff.” The complete cognitive resolution of the apparent person negates the sense of doership, i.e. Jeff-ness, and Jeff realizes that he has done everything that needed to be done. He knows that the next time around will be exactly like this time around with a few different details, and he has no particular interest in returning. Although he may have developed an incipient fondness for life, there is no reason for him to return insofar as *jivas* are only here to get free of “here.” This doesn’t mean that all one’s efforts to be free are wasted, necessarily. It seems *Isvara* needs a handful of free beings in this earthly plane, so the *jnani* may be reborn at the behest of *Isvara*, the needs of the total (*samasthi vasana*). But even in that case the *jnani*, like the *samsari*, does not remember that he was a guy called Jeff in his last life. Or in the event that he did – anything is possible in *maya* – it would not mean anything to him, because he would know that that his past incarnation as well as his present incarnation is *mithya*.

Jeff: The fear of death, i.e. non-existence, persists as long as the vision of Reality is not ascertained: strange to be afraid of non-existence, which is impossible. But there it is, the ego is small and afraid (primordial ignorance), limitless “I” apparently collapsed down into a tiny being, what’s to become of “me”?!

James: As you point out, the fear of death – which is just a belief in non-existence, which is not possible since everything is always only awareness – is very strange because what is born is always dead, even when it appears to be alive.

Jeff: Sorry, that seems a little self-indulgent, but I guess it is the fundamental human problem. I think I really need to investigate this ignorance a bit more and see if it comes unstuck.

James: Speaking as the apparent James, I don’t want to go but I don’t want to stay either. The

world and the beings in it are not non-existent, but they are as good as non-existent because they have no impact on you, the self. Fear of death is a strange business because the apparent person dies every night when it is resolved into the causal body. You presume that you will be back as the you you think you are, but you don't know; many people die in their sleep. Yes, probably some more contemplation is warranted.

Jeff: 2. This question is somewhat related to the above but concerns the status of “higher beings”: Assuming there are higher beings that enjoy a much greater degree of *ananda* than human beings (the happiest of whom only enjoy a fraction of that fullness), and assuming that their bodies are solely subtle (but material) and that they have a predominantly *sattvic* nature, wouldn't they all be liberated on account of that *sattvic* nature because of their sheer reflectivity and resultant ability to know the truth?

James: Not necessarily, although *sattva* does incline one to inquiry. A high degree of *sattva* may be a consequence of self-knowledge, but generally it is a consequence of following *dharma* impeccably. A *jiva* can follow *dharma* without knowing that it is awareness. Abilities need to be actualized to bear fruit. The degree of experiential *anandam* is related to the *guna* mix. You can get the right mix for intense and prolonged *ananda* by *yoga* or *jnana*, knowledge, by exhausting the binding *vasanas* and living a *sattvic* lifestyle.

But the reason higher beings do not seek or gain *moksa* is this: pleasure does not incline one to inquiry. The *jiva* is too happy to think about who it is because the intellect is subsumed in pleasurable sensations, so these *jivas* just exhaust the *punya karma* that brought them to their respective *lokas* and then are reborn again as human beings where they suffer and enjoy according to their *prarabdha karma*. Perhaps they seek *moksa* and perhaps they don't.

Jeff: Are they just “aspects” of *Isvara* and their *raison d'être* is simply a share of *Isvara's*?

James: I don't understand this question. Can you rephrase it, please?

Jeff: I'm finding it difficult to understand why the ascertainment of knowledge for the human being will result in the resolution of the three bodies, but for much higher, *sattvic* beings bodies continue to subsist in *Isvara* (assuming these beings are *jnanis*).

James: “Higher beings,” whatever these words mean, are not *jnanis* although *jnanis* may be higher beings. There are many *jnanis* who do not have a lot of experiential *anandam* owing to their *prarabdha* – I think you are talking about experiential *anandam*? The bliss of awareness is not experiential; it is self-confidence. It doesn't guarantee a particular kind of experience in the apparent reality.

The resolution of the three bodies is purely cognitive. It does not necessarily have experiential ramifications, although it may. For example, if a person in extreme pain resolves the three bodies, the pain in the bodies continues – until it doesn't. The resolution doesn't immediately resolve the pain, because they are in different planes in the apparent order of reality. It may eventually

resolve it in time – depending on the nature of the pain – completely or partially because objects in the same order of reality do affect each other, often in ways too subtle to detect. While the resolution does not necessarily remove the pain, it removes suffering. Suffering is the web of mental and emotional negativity that the mind adds to the pain. The cognitive resolution amounts to knowing that the pain belongs to the bodies, not to the self. So the *jnani* is both subject to pain and not subject to pain, because *jivas* are a mixture of pain-free *satya* and pain-prone *mithya*, i.e. consciousness and matter. And although *satya* and *mithya* are both consciousness, they are not the same. I hope this is helpful.

Jeff: Your replies were very good and cleared up the doubts I was having to some extent. Just to clarify a couple of points then:

From the absolute perspective of the self (so from the point of view of the truth), I am free of the *jiva* already and always have been, so death and the “loss” of the *jiva* (I can’t really lose it, since I never had it) is inconsequential.

James: Yes. You never had it. You didn’t create it and you don’t sustain it. *Isvara* generates it to fulfill an unfulfilled stream of *karma*. It comes and goes at *Isvara*’s bequest like all objects. “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.” However, because the person-object is so subtle – it is just a thought, actually – and is pervaded by awareness, it seems to be living and seems to be “me,” so there is attachment to it. It is virtually indistinguishable from awareness.

Jeff: The trick is to practise the discrimination of the ever-actionless knower from the known (*jiva*) until the permanent cognitive resolution, or arising of self-knowledge. I appear to lose the *jiva* every night in sleep without the slightest bother, and it’s only because of continuing to confuse the self with the *jiva* that the fear of death appears. The self is just ordinary knowing (but actionless). So sitting here right now writing this, there are all the objects, including Jeff, and there is me, the ordinary, actionless awareness of it all.

James: Yes, indeed.

Jeff: The “eternal principle” though, of the *jivatma* – is that equivalent to the awareness-as-the-knower? What I’m processing here is that awareness is not the knower, but the knower is none other than awareness, just as the light is not the illuminator, but the illuminator is none other than the light. Knower and illuminator are such with reference to known and illuminated, but their *swarupam* is awareness and light respectively. Is that knower then *jivatma*?

James: Yes. It is awareness plus the subtle body, the apparent person. They are one but they are not the same insofar as the *jivatma* is you, awareness, but you are not the *jivatma*. Appreciating the difference is liberation. Awareness appears as a *jivatma*, a knower. It can know because it has a subtle body and exists in the *mithya* dimension of awareness. Awareness is not the knower, because it is in the *satya* order of reality and there is no *mithya* in *satya*, so there is nothing to know. However, it is self-knowing. It is conscious is-ness, being.

Jeff: It remains, as you say, an eternal principle, and it is present now as me, the knower. However, won't *Isvara* and *jagat* "continue" "in awareness" (as these are also fundamentally eternal, but *mithya*)? Isn't awareness's "power" (*maya*) co-eternal and therefore along with it the shining of *Isvara* and *jagat*?

James: Yes. *Jiva*, *jagat* and *Isvara* (the Creator) are eternal principles. They are manifest when and where *maya* operates. They become unmanifest at some point and remanifest at some indeterminate point.

Jeff: By "higher beings" I meant apparently individuated "creatures" with a subtle body and *antakarana*, including *buddhi*. This could include beings that are enjoying a time in a *loka* "higher" than this earth, all the way up to *devas*/demigods. I think your point about being saturated in bliss and thereby having the *buddhi* subsumed answered that very well. Suffering is indeed a good motivator for truth-seeking. I was struggling with the notion that such beings, with a much more refined intellect and quantum of intelligence, would continue as apparently individual creatures.

James: I suspected that is what you meant. Even if these beings want to know the truth, they can't until their good *karma* runs out, because they need a physical body for *moksa*. There is no way to assimilate one's experience without a physical body and an intellect. And there are no teachers or scripture in those *lokas*. And there is no need for *moksa*, because, as I pointed out, they are saturated with experiential bliss.

Jeff: I guess this isn't really critical in terms of Vedanta, but I saw what I thought was a contradictory situation. I made the erroneous assumption, however, that such beings might be interested in self-knowledge.

James: No, it isn't critical, but it removes the belief that if you carry on as you are accumulating merit here that you can get *moksa* later in heaven (*svarga*). It was a common belief in the Vedic age, the answer of religious types who were attached to ritualism. They didn't like the idea of *moksa* here and now.

Jeff: By the way, when I asked if they are just "aspects" of *Isvara* and their *raison d'être* is simply a share of *Isvara's* I was thinking of something akin to the Christian concept of "angels." It is said that angelic beings' wills are totally and irrevocably aligned with the Creator, so by "aspects" I meant something like "pure reflections" or those in whom a potentiality has been fully realised. This was more a curiosity than something of substance concerning Vedanta teachings (apart from the question about why such beings may not be liberated), and my language is pretty imprecise.

James: I also had this thought when I read your question. Yes, they are "angels." They are just phenomenological aspects of *Isvara*. Their wills are aligned with *Isvara's* insofar as they

experience *ananda*, bliss, which is the nature of *Isvara*, but they don't know there is no separation between them and *Isvara*, so they are reborn. They are still only *jivas*. They are still ignorant and bound to their *karma*, although they don't know it. It is silly to even talk about them because once they come back here they have to experience whatever *karma* caused them to be reborn. Maybe they are inclined to *moksa* and maybe not – who knows?

Jeff: I've mulled over those points during the last few days and I think I've resolved an error I was making. Since there is only one *jivatma* subtle body as a principle, I was identifying that with the *Isvara* total subtle body. That is not correct, as the *jivatma* and *Isvara* are two *upadhis* of pure original awareness.

James: Yes. The *jivatma* is awareness apparently associated with a single subtle and gross body. *Isvara* is awareness apparently associated with the totality of gross and subtle bodies. Both are *upadhis* for awareness.

Jeff: But is it right to say, at the level of empirical reality rather than that of pure awareness, that although *jivatma* is not identical with *Isvara* (two different *upadhis*), it is non-different and also it is one with it? This is meant in the sense of the wave being non-different from the ocean – it's only identical with the ocean at the level of "water," but it is ever one with the ocean, nothing other than ocean itself, but not the totality and power of the ocean. Or using your analogy of the sun ray: the ray of sun is not different from the sun, but it is not its entirety either. However, one can appreciate what is "sun" through the appreciation of the single ray.

James: Yes, again. Yes, *jivatma* does not need to drink the seven seas to know salt water. It only needs to taste a single drop. The essence of the *jiva* is awareness.

Jeff: Also, you used the terms "*Isvara 1*" and "*Isvara 2*" to help me appreciate the difference between *jivatma* and *Isvara*: just to clarify, I take it to mean that by "*Isvara 1*" you are referring to the original pure awareness ("*brahman*," "*satya*"), and "*Isvara 2*" as that awareness in association with the original subtlest matter, or *maya* (taken together to be "the Lord"). I understand you steer away from the term "*brahman*" in your teaching because of a lot of wrong associations and "baggage" around it. Is there any further subtle distinction that I'm missing here?

James: This is basically right, but the teaching is a little more nuanced. *Isvara 1* is pure, limitless, original consciousness. This is called *nirguna brahman*, the self without qualities. It is free of objects. When or where the power of *maya* appears in pure consciousness all the objects, gross and subtle, are instantaneously fashioned out of *Isvara 1*. The gross and subtle objects are the three bodies. *Isvara 2* is pure consciousness associated with the whole creation. It is called *saguna brahman*, awareness with qualities. *Isvara 1* is also called *atma* or *paramatma*, indicating its limitlessness, and *Isvara 2* appears as *jivatma*, an eternal individual, owing to its association with the three bodies. When the *jivatmata* knows that it is *atma*, it does not identify itself with the three bodies and is called a *jivanmukta*. When it does identify with the three bodies, it is called a *samsari*, an ignorant person.

Jeff: So I am the knower, which is *jivatma*, being pure awareness shining in/on the individual subtle body (as opposed to the total, macrocosmic subtle body of *Isvara*). I am unobjectifiable, not available for transaction or experience – and the *jiva* Jeff is a story that appears “in” me: it has a beginning and end, but I am beginningless and endless. That’s why you say that freedom is “freedom from, not for, the *jiva*.” Death for the *samsari* is the end of that story or chapter, and *karma* writes a new story. For the *jnani*, the story already ended with self-knowledge and *karma* is finished.

James: This is correct. The Jeff-story is a construct caused by superimposition, confusing the *jivatma* with the bodies. A *jivanmukta* has a story, but knows it is just a story. A *samsari* thinks he is his story.

Jeff: You once told me that with “enlightenment” you “get to keep your *jiva*” – did you mean that in the sense that the story of the *jiva* continues (and is known as such) here on earth until the *prarabdha* is exhausted? And only in that sense?

James: Got it in one. The idea that one is a specific individual need not be non-present, because the story is *mithya* and *mithya* does not cancel *satya*, because they are in different orders of the one reality, awareness. Many people believe that if there is a story, you are not enlightened. The idea is that story, which amounts to the person, needs to be non-present. So the “two orders of reality” understanding destroys the *yoga* notion that you have to destroy the mind/ego to be enlightened. You can put it this way: before you knew that you were pure awareness, you thought you were your story; afterwards the thought that you are your story may arise, but you don’t believe it. It is good to keep the idea that you are a specific individual alive because it makes the transactional reality a lot easier to negotiate insofar as everyone in it thinks they are their stories. *Jnanis* are always acting, pretending they are people, unless they have enlightenment sickness. Then they pretend they aren’t their stories to impress others and make themselves feel “enlightened.”

Jeff: Anyhow, James, thanks again – you’re a godsend.

James: You are most welcome, Jeff. Write anytime.