

Gunas or Vasanas, Which Comes First?

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Robert: Another context for me is rooted in an observation made in an earlier email, which now forms a cornerstone of my practice and possibly raises a question.

Sundari (from previous email): So take a good look at him in light of the knowledge. Trace every event and its effects (*vasanas*) to the *gunas*. You will see that no one was doing anything. Without minimizing the pain Robert suffered, you can let it go.”

Robert: As a practice, is this not in a way “dwelling on the past”? Practically, what I have been doing of late is exactly this, tracing events in the past (and present as they arise) and mapping them to *vasanas* and the *gunas*, then discriminating the *guna* as belonging to *Isvara*’s creation, and not me. I find there is no emotion in this for me, and if it does arise, it is quickly negated as object. I find I am still quite clumsy in the practice, but it is getting easier. ☺

Sundari: Yes, this is correct and an excellent grasp of the teaching.

As stated many times now, understanding the past requires that you look at all events in light of self-knowledge (*gunas/Isvara*) so that it becomes clear that no one was doing anything. It is about negating the doer. The whole point of the exercise is to drop the story – and to drop the dropper of the story. What is not helpful is a deeply-rooted (and mostly unconscious) tendency to live through the past – through wounded young Robert. The mind is in a vice-like rut of negative thoughts as a result. As I said to you previously, in order to discriminate the *gunas* one has to first identify them so as to dis-identify from them as not-self. It is not about dwelling on them or meditating about them. All three *gunas* are very predictable and play out the same way for everyone. They are not rocket science but common sense. It is helpful to know the typical thoughts/emotions that arise from each *guna* – and they are pretty self-evident once you understand the basic qualities of each *guna* – but only so as to discriminate them as not-self.

Robert: I still get stuck on the *vasana/guna* relationship, and have tried to express this confusion before with little success. If an existing *vasana* is a tendency based on repeated *karma*, how is it created out of the *gunas* if the *gunas* preceded the *karma*? The *guna* must have then informed the *karma* to result in the *vasana*? *Isvara = guna = vasana*?

Sundari: There are three forces in creation that make up the *dharma* field: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Together these three forces make up ignorance, although it is primarily *rajas* and *tamas* that form the basis of ignorance because pure *sattva* is the nature of the mind. However, even *sattva* has a downside. In order for a *vasana* to arise, like any other object it has to arise from one or a combination of these three forces. Therefore it can be said that the *gunas* are another word for *Isvara*. They are impersonal, which is why we say *Isvara* is not a person. Everything in the

apparent reality is the result of *karma* (action) because everything in the apparent reality is a result of these three forces. Anything created by action is *karma*. It can also be said that everything in the apparent reality is a *vasana*. We attach a story to “our” *vasanas* and suffer. All *vasanas* are coloured by the *gunas*, which precede them, and in turn the *vasanas* reinforce the *gunas* in the never-ending *karmic* cycle called *samsara*.

To sum up: the *gunas* precede action because they are macrocosmic forces that cause the world to change. But action “creates” them too, in the sense that actions done from a particular *guna* reinforce the tendency (the *vasana*) for that *guna* to express itself again as *karma*. And all the *gunas* reinforce themselves too: *tamas* builds more *tamas*, *rajas* more *rajas* and *sattva* more *sattva*. The *vasanas* and *karma* are just two ways of speaking of the same forces, i.e. the *gunas*. *Karma* is *vasanas* manifesting, and *vasanas* are the unmanifest results of *karma*. You can’t separate the *vasanas* from the *karma* in reality. You can say that ignorance (*gunas*) appears as *vasanas*, and the *vasanas* grossify to become *karma*, which in turn “subtly” back into *vasanas*.

As long as you take yourself to be a doer, the mind is conditioned by the *gunas*, the *vasanas* belong to you and so does the *karma*. What we have been trying to steer you towards is this: identifying that Robert’s story is a result of the *gunas* (*Isvara*) which preceded and created “his” *vasanas* and the resulting *karma*. Seeing that as the *vasanas* and the *gunas* do not belong to him or to anyone else in “his” narrative, the actions and their results do not belong to him, because there is no doer. No one is to blame for anything. Your parents, your abusers and everyone else in Robert’s story acted according to their nature, which was given to them by *Isvara*, creating the *karma* that ensued. If they could have been different, they would have been. But they could not be different, because they did not have self-knowledge. So it is only ignorance of the self that caused the suffering for everyone involved. Once you understand this, then you know the truth: there is no *karma* for the self.

What we are trying to steer you away from is this: Robert is so entrenched in the tendency of living through “his” painful past (fear thoughts) that he has become a construct of it. And as a result, it has become very difficult to neutralize.

The *prarabdha karma* that is playing out for Robert is the momentum of past actions, from “this” life and “beyond” it, from time immemorial (causal body/*Isvara*). A powerful identification with the story has created much suffering for Robert. The way forward towards freedom is to understand the story and to create a new narrative for adult Robert: one that is not based in the past or in fear.

The new narrative, which is not personal, is this: “I am a *karma yogi*, an inquirer. What I am inquiring into is my true nature, which is: I am not a person, I am the self. The person exists in me and is fine the way he is. I have no past. I am beyond time and space. I was never born and will never die. Nothing touches me. I am whole and complete, limitless and unchanging. I need nothing and embrace everything as me, always discriminating myself from the objects that appear in me. My seeking is over because I am now a finder. All I need to do is actualise this knowledge so as to live free as the self while still appearing as the *jiva*, with his apparent nature. I love myself unconditionally, which means I love Robert unconditionally.”

Robert: Jumping ahead, as I am still digesting the rest of your comments. With gratitude, thank you for the input.

Sundari (from previous email): “In addition, what is also important for the *jiva* is seeing to it that the *jiva* has noble work for the mind and not indulging in gratuitous unnecessary explorations into the past.”

Robert: Is Vedanta noble work referred to here?

Sundari: Yes. Vedanta is the noblest work there is and the highest *dharma*. Constantly recycling the *jiva* story is not. The mature thing to do is to discriminate you, the knower, from the *gunas/vasanas/karma* by seeing them all as not-self.

Robert: Thank you ever so much for this!