

Ignorance + Knowledge = Freedom

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Questioner: James says that if you know what ignorance is, you are free from it. I know what ignorance is and yet I don't feel free. Ignorance still compels me to do things which are no good for me and others therefore I create bad *karma*. What is the relationship between knowledge, ignorance and freedom? I seem to have no free will!

Arlindo: Fundamentally, the implied meaning of affirming that you know the difference between ignorance and knowledge is that you are aware of both, and therefore "something" other than ignorance and knowledge, of course provided one has clearly and firmly assimilated the basic "subject-object" teachings of Vedanta. Having said so, knowledge and ignorance are both objects appearing within the scope of pure consciousness, you, the only subject there is.

Due to the power of *maya*, objects are imbued with apparent qualities, either attractiveness or repulsiveness. As an example, it is ignorance to believe that those qualities are indeed inherent in the objects. Knowledge is to firmly know that objects are devoid of value – that they are value-neutral – and that whatsoever appreciation or aversion we experience is only due to one's *vasanas* – one's subjective perception of the object. Therefore the teaching "the joy is not in the object, but in the subject."

The relationship between knowledge and ignorance is such that the "constant" application of knowledge to one's mind will eventually cancel or neutralize its "ignorance" to leave the mind free from both as the witnessing conscious principle pervading all gross and subtle objects. Ignorance + knowledge = freedom, or self-knowledge. We are all "born" out of ignorance. But we can "die" in freedom. Knowledge has the power to cancel the beginningless cycles of reincarnation due to self-ignorance.

Questioner: Thank you, but in order to apply knowledge, one needs free will. I sometimes hear James saying that there is free will. At other times I hear him saying that there isn't!

Arlindo: There is only apparent free will. From the prospective of *jiva's* subtle body, there is an apparent choice between eating a banana or an apple. But those are only *vasana*-driven choices. But from the perspective of *Isvara* we could say that free will is a thought *Isvara* plants in the mind of the *jiva* that says, "I want to understand and know my true nature and no longer to be pushed around by my *vasanas*."

This apparent "free will" or desire for liberation does not seem to come as a default program for the *jiva*. Everyone, with maybe the rare exception, is born out of ignorance, all default *vasanas* are directed towards objects as an attempt to restore *jiva's* sense of limitlessness, completion and satisfaction.

This apparent "free will" to break out of the system will instead question and challenge the self-perpetuating mechanism which binds the *jiva* to the world of objects – it is the desire to

understand and know oneself independent of all objects as the only subject there is: free, actionless, pure awareness. It marks a radical turn of tendency, from being totally operated by ignorance to saying “no more” to *Isvara*’s continuous self-ignorance-based system.

But since ignorance and knowledge exist both in *mithya*, and since in *mithya* nothing really escapes *Isvara*, this apparent “free will” or desire for liberation will rapidly develop to become a new “knowledge-based” *samskara*, which will in turn begin operating the *jiva* (no more in search of objects), in search of the firm understanding of its true nature as the subject, i.e. awareness.

After all, it is all *Isvara* in operation who, by the way, may at times appear to be a “control freak.” And that explains why even great *mahatmas* may still have *bhakti* for the Lord. But there is a great deal of difference between an ignorance-based *vasana* and a knowledge-based one. The ignorance-based *samskaras* will produce fleeting experiences of pleasure and pain due to the constant contact with modifying thoughts and objects, and the knowledge-based ones will produce self-knowledge and freedom. Self-knowledge will put an end to the compulsion to control one’s experience, and *jiva* will live a much happier life.