

No Real Identity in *Mithya*

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Rebecca: Hi, Sundari and James.

Thank you for all you have been doing and giving a lot of people, including myself, an access to a different way of thinking about life. We all ask ourselves a question at least once in life (or daily): "What is the purpose?" We all experience our share of suffering in so many different ways and stumble along in our lives. The scenarios are so diversified; the process is the same. It is no different with my *jiva*. I am not even sure if I used the right term; I am not well-versed in the matters of spiritual, philosophical (not even that I can clearly define), language.

Anyway, I have been fancying your website for quite some time from a distance. At the beginning it was just you, James, then Sundari joined as well, and I checked it today again after quite some time being busy with... everything, and was surprised how it has grown; new people have joined, yet the message is the same.

I cannot say that I am devoted Vedanta student. I come on and off. But it has been influencing me (my *jiva*). I take small baby steps, touching my life and my understandings of what is this all about, kind of opening the door to a different dimension.

I do have many questions, doubts, yet they are not organized at all.

It prevented me from getting in touch with you, but then this sleepless night helped me realize I can start with just this one question that came to me now, no matter how irrelevant it may seem to you.

Sundari: Hello, Rebecca, good to hear from you, thank you for writing to us and sharing your life story with us.

Rebecca: Once you are on a path of exploring Vedanta (even baby steps count) it puts you in a very odd position. You are not there yet; as a matter of fact, you are so far, far away in full understanding, you are in between, just stepped off the starting line, yet you have to live in a world of assumed personalities. Your surroundings, especially in this part of the world (U.S.), more than my original homeland, you are expected to assume a certain persona, to choose sides, to define yourself, and I have such hard time with that. It was said once: "You do not want to stand alone." Why? So that you do not feel as an outcast. But I do not. You are defined or better said, I often hear, I like this and that, I am not like this or that, society kind of asks you to define yourself, and if you cannot, there is a great deal of frustration.

My question is how to live in peace when you just started exploring different, not common, not widely accepted (not in my surroundings) ways of thinking within the society that almost demands that you clearly define yourself, to set boundaries (I see examples of that daily) for the persona that you want to overcome. It has been like living a parallel life: there's this daily persona with many things to do during the day, and there are occasional sleepless nights like this one,

when I need more. I know I read in one of your books or listened to in one of your videos – fake it till you make it! But it is still hard. Maybe that is my life circumstances (four children, full-time job, strong ability for logical, consequential, timely, measurable, abstract thinking, etc.).

Sundari: If you have the kind of mind interested in self-inquiry, this is something that sets you apart from the majority to begin with. And if you are truly interested in *moksa*, or freedom from dependence on objects, you are even more unusual. Vedanta is only for the small minority of people who have seen that there is nothing to gain in the world, that it is a zero-sum game, and no object is going to make them happy. Usually by this time there has been a great deal of suffering, which is what has driven the extroverted mind inwards to seek different answers because it is not finding them anywhere “outside.” It seems clear that this is where you are – and even though your desire for *moksa* does not seem to be your main aim, life is pulling you more and more in that direction. Maybe the desire is just not strong enough. “Fake it till you make it” works if you are prepared to do the work and commit to self-inquiry. It is not a magic formula. Whatever life circumstance you may have should not hold you back – and it definitely helps that, by what you say, you have a logical and not an emotional mind.

In the world, or what Vedanta calls the “apparent reality,” nothing is what it seems. *Maya*, the power in awareness to delude, is not black and white but everything in between. The world created by *maya* is unpredictable, and we are not in control of it or the objects we have contact with. Because of this, people who are identified with the body-mind (objects) are always insecure. They are constantly worried that they will lose what they have or not gain what they want. So *samsaris*, which is a technical name for people under the spell of duality, or *maya*, chase objects to complete them and make them feel secure. This can be anything: a job, power, status, a name, a title, an identity, the perfect “other,” children, house, vacation, etc. People believe (hope) that having an identity gives them something real to hold onto. But nothing in the apparent reality is a guarantee of anything, because nothing lasts; it’s all temporary – and not real, “real” being defined by that which is always present and never changes, which can only be assigned to consciousness, the self, your true – and only – real identity.

When you know what that your primary identity is unlimited, always present, unchanging, unbound and actionless awareness, and not the person (body-mind/story), you no longer care what your relative identity is. In fact you have many identities as a person – mother, wife, worker, sister, human being. Any of them will do and none of them matter, because they are just roles we play. It’s not that they are meaningless; for instance, if you are a mother, you have certain duties to take care of in order to be true to your *dharma* as a mother. You cannot avoid this without consequences. The same applies to any other role. But you are not identified with the role. It is like a suit of clothing you wear when you are doing this or that, and another suit for another role.

Rebecca: It is interesting that my sister had very strong epiphany experience, and when she was telling me about it, it fit perfectly what I read about it in your books and posts. Everything I have grasped so far came through the thinking process, $1 + 1 = 2$. I wish some kind of epiphany strikes me to accelerate the process, to put me on another level of understanding and help me overcome the huge walls in front of me because it is painful living in between, to help me shed the walls I see. It takes courage. It is like superficial living, it is like living with one’s head in the clouds and feet on the ground. It is like being an ultimate example of a phony.

Sundari: Yes, it definitely takes courage to break down the walls of ignorance. It is not for the faint of heart or the unqualified. Epiphanies can be a great help but they can also be a hindrance to self-inquiry because they are all experiential. All experiences take place in time, and so end – and when they do, the tendency is to believe you have to do something to get them back again or you are not “spiritual.” Most spiritual paths teach that there are actions you must take to “gain” enlightenment. Vedanta says that it is only knowledge and not experience that is capable of freeing you from ignorance of your true nature. And because your true nature is and always has been awareness or consciousness/the self, you cannot do anything to get what you already have. No action taken by a limited entity is capable of producing a limitless result.

You need to subject the mind to a valid means of knowledge for awareness – in other words, the scripture, Vedanta. Although self-inquiry is also an action, it is different from all other actions because the fruit of self-inquiry is self-knowledge, which is limitless. True scripture is not based on religion, philosophy or anyone’s subjective opinions or beliefs. It is the irrefutable knowledge revealed by awareness to the human mind since time immemorial, free of all subjectivity. It is different from any other knowledge because it cannot be negated. It is always true and always good. Who can deny that they are conscious? But to know what it means to BE CONSCIOUSNESS – and what that means for the person – is where all the work of self-inquiry takes place. Vedanta is the only knowledge we can trust to reveal to us our true nature as awareness because awareness is not an object of knowledge – it is the subject, who we are – that which makes all knowledge possible and the knower of the person, or *jiva*.

Rebecca: I apologize for the lack of clarity in this, but it reflects my state of being at the moment. I want to tell what you gave to me at this point. When I was suffering, I found you. It helped me reduce my suffering. I cannot say I am devoid of it, but I control it better. So my level of peace increased, while the time to come back to the balance when shaken reduced. Not bad at all! Oh, yeah, you gave me the dark circles under my eyes too!

Sundari: Your email is very clear Rebecca; you write well and your innate intelligence shines through your words. You sound dispassionate too, and it is clear you can be objective about Rebecca – the *jiva*. You do know who you are; everyone really does. But to take the next steps is what will count for you. I am sorry about the sleepless nights and dark circles, but it is not easy to overcome the walls of ignorance in the mind. Ignorance is hardwired, tenacious and very resistant to change. Vedanta is counter-intuitive and difficult for the mind to assimilate, especially if all the qualifications are not present. They can be developed, but it takes 100% commitment and dedication to stick with self-inquiry for self-knowledge to end existential suffering. Vedanta is a tried and tested methodology which will work, if YOU do the work. You need a qualified teacher to unfold the knowledge or it will be interpreted through the filters of your conditioning. By the grace of *Isvara* (or the Field of Existence) you have come to the right place. James is the best teacher you could find. There is no one better.

And if you truly want the knowledge to work for you to permanently remove suffering, you will have to start at the beginning, sign on to the logic, work through it step by step – NO skipping! There is a methodology to the teachings for a very good reason. If you continue to come on and off, as you say, you will have to be satisfied with a little bits of happiness here and there that do not last. Self-knowledge will not obtain in a mind that does not have the required motivation or

dedication. It has to be the most important thing to you. Are you ready for this?

If you are, start with James' book *The Essence of Enlightenment* and work slowly through it. We have it for free on the ShiningWorld website as a 12-month teaching course. It supplies the right questions you need to ask and the answers to them. Start with the qualifications. Make sure you understand them all, track yourself on them on a moment-to-moment basis. Work through the motivations and values. What do you value most, what are the values that underpin everything you do, think and say? Corroborate this with the teaching videos, especially the *Berlin Self-Inquiry* series.

It is up to you. Feel free to write anytime, but we can only help you if you do your part by committing yourself to a proper *sadhana*, which is central to your life. Then you will know what questions to ask.

~ Love, Sundari