

# Repetition Is a Tool to Remove Ignorance

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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**Theresa:** Hello, Sundari. My name is Theresa. I have been studying Vedanta using the materials provided at *ShiningWorld.com* and in the *How to Attain Enlightenment* book for about two years; and I have gone through all of these at least once. Without criticism, these teaching materials are highly repetitive and I suppose that is because some people require repetition and a certain amount of bulk to be convinced.

**Sundari:** I am glad to hear that ShiningWorld assisted you with your self-inquiry. Yes, some repetition is necessary and important because ignorance is very tenacious and hardwired. Although awareness is the most obvious thing, understanding that it is one's true nature is the hardest thing for the mind to assimilate. Assuming the qualifications for self-knowledge are present, Vedanta has worked for millennia to set untold numbers of people free of bondage to the prison of duality (when it is taught properly) precisely because it is taught in a very specific way, which may appear repetitive, but it so for a very good reason.

Vedanta is a means of knowledge which starts off at ground level, so to speak, gradually assisting the qualified inquirer to remove the obstacles in the way of self-knowledge through a time-tested methodology. There are many so-called "Vedanta" teachers out there who have adapted the teachings to their idea of the truth and have contaminated it with their interpretations. Removing ignorance from the mind can only be done if the mind is not only qualified but prepared to "do the work," i.e. submit the mind with great vigour to self-inquiry into the true nature of reality, using a valid means of knowledge to do so. Vedanta is such a means and it needs to be taught by a qualified teacher. James is one the very few genuine Vedanta teachers alive today. The tone of your email seems to suggest otherwise, but you are very blessed to have come across him.

The ShiningWorld website is not only a teaching tool but a record of Vedanta at work in the world. With just one text, for example, *Bhagavad Gita*, *How to Attain Enlightenment*, *Vivekachudamani*, *Panchadasi*, etc. it is quite possible to know who one really is if one is qualified to hear the teachings. We get tired of saying the same thing over and over to people who write in (which is why we insist that people read the e-*satsangs* and *How to Attain Enlightenment* before they write asking questions) but each individual requires teaching and each time we write the same *satsang* it is meaningful because the context and the state of knowledge/ignorance of the person contributes to the meaning. Also, it is Shining World's brief to rewrite as many of the Vedanta teachings written in Indian English in clear, modern English.

*How to Attain Enlightenment* and James' teaching in general has set hundreds, possibly thousands, of people free of ignorance (including you, it seems) simply because it is power packed, high-level Vedanta, taught simply and succinctly.

**Theresa:** Recently I came in contact with a person who has been considering the issue of happiness. This provided an opportunity to express what I have learned from Vedanta study.

Below is what I wrote ["A Knowledge Problem"].\* It is expressed in a simple yet complete way designed for a well-educated and materially successful Westerner to explain why and how lasting happiness is based on knowledge. If you have any comments, they are welcome.

**Sundari:** I have replied in point form below. I understand that your intention is to condense Vedanta into as few words as possible and I commend you for your diligence. I have nonetheless gone into a fair amount of detail to explain where your understanding needs some work. I hope it helps.

**Theresa:** \*Clear, consistent and practical thought requires an enduring point of reference and this is also required for happiness.

**Sundari:** This is correct. Vedanta is the logic of reality. Awareness is one's true nature; ignorance of this fact obscures it, the cause of unhappiness. Clear consistent and practical thought is *sattva*, which is the true nature of the mind when *rajas* and *tamas* (ignorance) do not condition it. The point of reference for all experience is always awareness, the one constant and the knower of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Whether the mind knows it or not, one is only ever experiencing awareness because this is a non-dual reality and awareness is all there is.

**Theresa:** \*Words can have multiple meanings, causing misunderstanding.

**Sundari:** Correct. All words have an ostensible and implied meaning. Vedanta teaches through the implied meaning of words which is why it is so insistent on the correct usage of words in the correct context. Words are objects and thus limited, but when used correctly to unfold the teachings by a qualified teacher to a qualified mind, words are capable of giving a direct experience of awareness.

**Theresa:** \*"Happiness" as used here applies at the individual level when a person feels that all is okay with an absence of wanting more. This is probably closer to what most would call contentment. In this sense, happiness is essentially independent of the economic standard of living because it is an internal value of acceptance, including whatever external conditions.

**Sundari:** At the individual or level of the person, happiness is experienced as the absence of *rajas* – desire – and also the absence of *tamas* – dullness – revealing the true nature of the mind, *sattva* – unlimited peace or happiness. It is not a state of being, a feeling or an experience. This kind of happiness is the bliss of self-knowledge and is not conditioned by anything. When the mind is free of self-ignorance, this bliss is always present no matter what the person is experiencing because it is the bliss of self-knowledge.

**Theresa:** \*A revaluation of values may begin by making this sort of happiness as the main goal of human life.

**Sundari:** Yes; in order to free the mind of ignorance, freedom has to be your main goal and highest value. Your values are determined by your conditioning, which in turn is determined by the *gunas*, also called the psychological order of reality or *Isvara*, the field of existence or the universal mind. The name is unimportant but understanding what these terms refer to is very important if freedom from limitation is your goal.

**Theresa:** \*In everyday experience everything appears to change and nothing lasts. Much of this is due to our physiology, which requires change for perception.

**Sundari:** Experience per se (which includes all objects) is what constitutes the apparent reality and is thus not real. Real being defined by “that which is always present and never changes,” which can only be attributed to awareness. *Maya* is what makes the changeless appear to be changing. *Maya* gives rise to the belief in duality. Duality is nothing more real than a mirage on the desert floor.

Our “physiology” does not require change for perception. Your statement “...which requires change for perception” is an unskilful phrase. Maybe you could rephrase it because I am not sure what it means.

Perception and inference are not suitable means of knowledge for awareness because they are part of the effect, not the cause. The effect can never know the cause directly, which is why awareness “evolved” (so to speak, because awareness is not a doer) Vedanta, an appropriate means of knowledge for awareness. As stated, in order for Vedanta to work it has to be taught and unfolded correctly. If it is not, there is a good possibility that the ego interprets the knowledge according to the conditioning of the *gunas* on the mind, the *vasanas*. The ego can then co-opt the knowledge, thinking it knows better. This is what we call “enlightenment sickness” and it is very common.

How the person perceives and makes inferences will be determined by their conditioning, which is determined by their values, which as stated are coloured by the *gunas*. Change is the nature of the apparent reality, which is made up of the causal, subtle and gross bodies, all objects known to you, awareness, arising out of awareness and dissolving into you, although you as awareness are always free of all objects, just like the water is free of the ocean and the wave.

**Theresa:** \*Experience is based on awareness of objects.

**Sundari:** No experience can take place if awareness is not present; experience is not conscious and depends on awareness to exist. However, awareness is always free of experience and is not the experiencer, but the knower of the experiencer: The non-experiencing witness or knowing principle.

**Theresa:** \*Everything an individual can be conscious of is an object. This includes not only physical objects such as the individual’s body, but their sensations, emotions, thoughts, memories and personality.

**Sundari:** Correct. All objects are not real, meaning not always present and always changing, and therefore not conscious.

**Theresa:** \*Underneath all of this is a basic capacity of awareness, which is a capability of knowing.

**Sundari:** Doesn't saying that awareness "is the capability of knowing" imply that awareness is a doer? The actual meaning of your sentence is correct but it is not skilfully expressed. It should read "knowing is the capacity of awareness" or "knowing is the nature of awareness."

**Theresa:** \*This awareness is a stable point of reference because there is no way to get under it to something more fundamental and, if it ever were not, we could not know it.

**Sundari:** This is essentially correct but confusing – and your word choice is not very good. The word "stable" implies "unstable," and awareness is neither. It is simply the substrate: That which is ever-present, never changes and cannot be negated. The word "this" to describe awareness implies that there is more than one awareness. If there was an awareness more fundamental than awareness, then there would have to be two awarenesses. This would make this world a real duality, making ignorance real and therefore it could not be removed. This is not possible because this is a non-dual reality, there is only one awareness and we are all it.

*Maya*, which is awareness plus the *gunas* (also called *Isvara*) and not always manifest, is a power that exists in awareness or awareness could not be unlimited. When *maya* manifests, the world of objects (duality) appears as a projection on the screen of awareness. And awareness is untouched by it because duality depends on awareness to exist but awareness is always free of duality. *Maya* (which is eternal and beginningless because awareness is eternal and beginningless) only "operates" on a tiny "portion" of awareness, words 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*. When *maya* appears the self (apparently) appears as the subtle body or mind, and apparently identifies with the world of objects under the spell of ignorance, believing that awareness is something to be "gained."

The subtle body or mind is inert; it is not conscious. It appears conscious because the light of awareness shines on it. Awareness is not an object of perception, so it cannot be known other than when ignorance has been removed in the mind by self-knowledge. Awareness is self-knowing or self-luminous and does not need anything to know itself; therefore there is no need to prove its existence. To awareness, nothing ever happened.

Awareness is prior to everything. Liberation or *moksa* is the ability to discriminate you, awareness, from the objects that arise in you and to never confuse the two again. Once ignorance or duality is known for what it is – a superimposition onto non-duality – it is no longer a problem for you. Ignorance or duality is only a problem when you think it is real and identify with it, just like you would not try to drink the water from a mirage on the desert floor once you know that the mirage is a mirage.

**Theresa:** \*This implies identity of the individual subject with awareness and everything else is an object and not the subject or a part thereof.

**Sundari:** Yes, the individual and awareness share the same identity and are a partless whole. What is important to understand is that even though the person (*jiva*), the world of objects (*Isvara*) and awareness share the same identity, they do not exist in the same order of reality.

There are basically only two orders of reality: (1) The subject or that which is real – awareness, and (2) the object, that which is only apparently real – the individual, who is not conscious. The third “order” of reality is not really an order as it is the (apparent) “buffer” between the two orders: *Isvara* – awareness in the role of Creator associated with *maya*.

*Isvara* associated with *maya* is conscious (although it 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* in the role of Creator “merges” back into pure awareness at the end of the creation cycle, so it too is not unchanging and not always manifest, i.e. not real. Real being defined by “that which is always present and never changes,” which can only be attributed to awareness.

Like *maya*, *Isvara* is always present in awareness but it is either manifest or unmanifest with reference to awareness. Therefore *Isvara* associated with *maya* 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. Only awareness is limitless.

The most subtle “aspect” of this teaching is the irreducible fact that because consciousness implies unconsciousness, it is not strictly speaking true to say that awareness is conscious. Awareness is without qualities, it is the non-experiencing witness and although it gives rise to all objects who are not conscious and *Isvara* who is conscious, awareness is not “conscious” in the same way. Awareness is that which makes consciousness possible in that consciousness is reflected awareness.

Unless you fully understanding the identity between all three: (1) the individual, (2) the world, the field of existence or *Isvara*, and (3) awareness, you are not free of limitation.

In order to self-actualise, *Isvara* is the main teaching and where many inquirers get stuck because understanding *Isvara* is the key to *moksa*. *Isvara* is also called the field of existence, the psychological order of reality (the *gunas*) or the creative force. It consists of powers that make up and that condition the mind.

If you would like a deeper understanding of the individual (*jiva*)-*Isvara*-awareness identity, I am happy to help you. You can also read the website as there are many articles and e-satsangs on this vital teaching. I suggest you read *How to Attain Enlightenment* a few more times as well because James has gone into great depth on this teaching in his book.

**Theresa:** \*Because of this identity, its constancy and habituation, no one can directly experience pure awareness, that is themselves, but they can know it indirectly based on logical reasoning.

**Sundari:** Yes, this is true but not very well-put. I would express it like this: The function of the mind is to reason and doubt, which is not the only way to directly experience awareness, but certainly a valid way. Scripture is very clear about it. However, as all experiences end, and unless the direct knowledge “I am whole and complete, limitless, unchanging, ordinary awareness” has been assimilated from the experience, self-knowledge does not take place. Only self-knowledge permanently removes ignorance, not experience. Self-knowledge is not an experience and it is not a doing. It is grace, and grace is earned.

Until such time as self-knowledge is direct, reasoning is the second step in the process of self-inquiry. The first step is *sravanna*, listening without interpreting. The last step is assimilating and actualizing self-knowledge, liberation. Indirectly knowing that your true nature is awareness is just that – indirect knowledge. It is not tantamount to freedom from bondage to objects because awareness is still objectified – something to be attained through some action of ego, i.e. reason and logic.

When self-knowledge is firm, reason and logic may be still applied to everything but no longer necessary because everything is as clear as daylight. All is known in the light of awareness. Knowledge and ignorance are then seen for what they are: Objects known to you, awareness. For liberation to take place, all your own beliefs and opinions need to be evaluated in the light of self-knowledge, not the other way around. Vedanta cannot be made to fit into one’s idea of the truth if freedom from the belief in duality is what one is after. This is why self-actualisation is the most important step. It is one thing to know about awareness, and quite another to know what that means for you as the person. Don’t forget that freedom is for the person or the mind; awareness is and always has been free.

Self-actualisation is the application of self-knowledge to one’s life. To be self-actualised means: (1) that one has fully discriminated the self (awareness) from the objects appearing in you (all objects, including one’s conditioning), and (2) that that knowledge has (a) rendered the binding *vasanas* non-binding and (b) negated one’s sense of doership. Unless self-knowledge translates fully into the life of the person it cannot be said that self-actualisation has taken place because the person will still be identified with certain aspects of being a person. In other words, binding *vasanas* and the sense of doership or egoic belief in separation will still be causing agitation in the mind. In order for existential suffering to end and for awareness to be one’s primary identity, the person needs to be free of the idea of being a person in order to live free as the self. What is the point of self-realisation if the mind is still under the tyranny of its likes and dislikes (*vasanas*)?

**Theresa:** \*Because awareness is constant it is complete; because it is complete it is constant; therefore it is happiness.

**Sundari:** Yes, this is correct. The true meaning of happiness is *anantam*, meaning unlimited or not conditioned by anything, i.e. without qualities.

**Theresa:** \*An individual who knows they are awareness is therefore permanently happy. They are also permanently happy before knowing this, but have not realized it. Realization of happiness is just a knowledge problem.

**Sundari:** You are permanently in the bliss of awareness once all ignorance has been removed from the mind and self-actualisation has taken place. And yes, this is true (but it is not known) even when ignorance covers the mind. Self-knowledge is the only way out of ignorance. It seems like your understanding is pretty good, Theresa. My feeling is that you need to clear up some understanding with regard to the *Isvara-jiva* identity. Another thing is that Vedanta is extremely insistent on the correct terminology for the simple reason that it avoids confusion and misinterpretation. I hope self-knowledge continues to unfold for you.

**Theresa:** Best regards.

**Sundari:** *Namaste.*