

Self-Actualisation versus Self-Realisation

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Sundari: Hello, Mike. Nice to hear from you again and I am so happy for you that you have dived into self-inquiry! I have replied in point form below and also attached a recent email to another inquirer on the very tricky teaching of *maya*, *jiva*, and *Isvara*.

~ *Om tat sat*, Sundari

Mike: Dear Sundari, thank you so much for your detailed reply. I have read your email multiple times in order to give it due consideration. I also appreciate the articles, which I have read, but I am still digesting.

Sundari (from previous email): “If you know that there is still irritability, fear or dissatisfaction – are YOU irritable, fearful and dissatisfied? Who is the knower of the experience of self-realisation and its apparent disappearance? This is self-inquiry. So what if the ego is experiencing those things, they have nothing to do with you nor do the thoughts that arise in you. You are not in control of your thoughts because they do not come from you, they come from the *dharma* field, or *Isvara*.”

No, I am not those things; as awareness, those things appear in me. As you have said, they are a product of nature (*Isvara*) and I have nothing to do with their rising and falling. However, there is still confusion on how suffering can be present in light of this knowledge. I'm not saying that unpleasant thoughts should remain absent, but how can identification with them remain?

Sundari: If identification remains you are not looking at the apparent suffering (or any object, subtle or gross) from the perspective of awareness but from the *jiva*'s, or apparent person's, perspective. When self-knowledge is firm and your personal ignorance of your true nature as awareness has been removed by self-knowledge *maya* functions as before your enlightenment. *Isvara srsti*, or creation, remains unchanged. What will have changed for you is that duality is known for what it is, a superimposition onto non-duality, like the mirage on the desert floor. You will know it is not real. Suffering will appear to exist but as you are the knower of the suffering, how can you be identified with it? Once self-realisation becomes actualised there should be a gradual increase of peace, rock-solid self-confidence born of self-knowledge and the bliss of awareness. If this is not happening then the effects of ignorance, or *prarabdha karma*, are still working out.

If the knowledge is firm existential suffering falls away and one is able to see all things great and small as just the playing out of a grand scheme of things that is not under the *jiva*'s control. One does not buy into it. This is why dispassion is such an important qualification. It does not mean that you no longer care, quite the opposite. Only with self-knowledge can you truly care because you understand that whatever is playing out is just a movie and you are the screen it is playing on. You know it all emerges from you and is made up of you but it is not you. It is all an object known to you so you are free of the drama. One then loves unconditionally, giving and

participating in the movie of life as the light you are without adding to its burdens but free of them.

Sundari (from previous email): “But you can manage them by how you relate to them.”

Mike: Can you clarify who the “you” is here? This is where language can become confusing. Are you referring to me as awareness or me as the *jiva*?

Sundari: That is the whole point, is it not, Mike? Who is it referring to for you? If you are identified with Mike he is the sufferer, not the knower of the sufferer. Non-dual vision is simply seeing things for what they really are. Ask yourself which I is speaking here. There are three *jivas*. Is it the *jiva* who thinks it is a person? This *jiva* is often called the “doer.” Is it the *jiva* who knows awareness? This *jiva* is often called a “self-realised” *jiva*. Or is it the *jiva* that knows it IS awareness? This is the “*jivanmukta*,” the self no longer under the spell of ignorance.

Sundari from previous email: “If you relate to them as Mike – the person – do you see the problem? You are then identified with Mike, the experiencing entity, and not the non-experiencing witness, awareness, the knower of what Mike thinks and feels. There is no solution for the problem at the level of the problem; this is why suffering continues unless self-knowledge removes the ignorance which is preventing you from knowing your true nature as awareness.

Mike: Yes, I do think the problem lies in where I have taken my stand. Instead of standing as awareness I still have the tendency to adopt the vantage point of a person.

Sundari: Indeed. That is the whole point of self-inquiry, to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding. I think that the exchange I have attached to this email will be helpful for you.

To use Greg Goode’s excellent term, take a stand in awareness as awareness. Vedanta has many brilliant *prakriyas*, or teachings; one that is very powerful is to “practice the opposite thought” every time a thought contrary to “I am non-dual unchanging, ever-present, actionless, unlimited awareness” pops up in the mind. The price of freedom as long as awareness is apparently embodied as a *jiva* is eternal vigilance. Ignorance is tenaciously persistent.

Sundari (from previous email): “It is not that difficult to deduce that your true nature is awareness; after all, without it you as the subtle body, or mind, would not exist. It is quite obvious that you are an apparent person living in an apparently real world and that you and the world exist. The most difficult part is understanding how this relates to you as awareness, which is always free of both the *jiva* and the world, what Vedanta calls *Isvara*. This is why self-actualisation is the hard part, it involves the work and absolute commitment to self-inquiry.”

Mike: Self-actualization, if I understand it correctly, seems to be a missing piece to this puzzle, and that is okay; the tools did not appear until now.

Sundari: Yes, you are indeed blessed to have come across ShiningWorld. *Isvara* has brought

you all the tools you will need. It is up to you to apply them.

Sundari (from previous email): “The reason your experience of self-realization did not last is that it was just that, an experience. No experience is capable of freeing one permanently from ignorance unless it imparts the knowledge “I am awareness” and that knowledge is assimilated. There is no experience that will ever be permanent because all experiences by definition end.”

Mike: There was an experience, which was lost, but there was also knowing. However, for a long time I did confuse the two. I thought that one came with the other, and when the experience vanished I felt it needed to be regained. I no longer feel this way. Since reality is non-dual awareness, every experience is an experience of the self (awareness). Is self-realization considered indirect knowledge and self-actualization considered direct knowledge? Is this my conundrum?

Sundari: “Direct” as opposed to “indirect” knowledge is essentially the same as “self-realised” versus “self-actualized.” Indirect knowledge is “I know awareness” and direct knowledge is “I am awareness.” However, one can have direct knowledge and may still have the effects of ignorance (*prarabdha karma*) to work out.

Self-realisation is the easy part. Self-actualisation is understanding what it means to be the *jiva* from the perspective of awareness and what it means to be awareness from the perspective of *jiva*. One cannot understand the *jiva* without the full understanding of the *gunas* and what makes up the *dharma* field, *Isvara*.

The effects of ignorance do not disappear overnight as they have been lifetimes in the making; ignorance is hardwired and beginningless even though personal ignorance (*avidya*) has been removed. *Prarabdha karma* takes as long as it takes to play out, like the blades of the fan still turn after the fan is switched off. It is not uncommon for the ignorance responsible for the *jiva*'s conditioning to take some time before it all “comes to the surface” so that it can be understood and dissolved in the light of self-knowledge. This does not mean that the *jiva* or its conditioning disappears “post-enlightenment.” The *jiva*'s conditioning is not under the *jiva*'s control as it belongs to *Isvara* and not to the *jiva*. To be free of the *jiva* all conditioning must be understood in the light of self-knowledge. This is what I call “facing down *Isvara*”!

As peace of mind is your true nature and is therefore the primary goal for awareness no longer under the spell of ignorance (or the *jivanmukti*) there might still be some work to be done on the mind in order to fully render all the binding *vasanas* non-binding. For most inquirers “post-self-realization,” or enlightenment, this is usually the case. This entails examining everything in the light of self-knowledge: lifestyle and values may require some modification. Some people give up self-inquiry once the self is realised and erroneously believe that seeing that ignorance is an object known to them and the *jiva* is known to not be real no further work is necessary. If binding *vasanas* are not rendered non-binding they will continue to agitate the mind and bind it to objects, so freedom is not that free. There is no way around doing the work of facing down *Isvara* unless one is truly utterly dispassionate about the agitation caused by remaining binding *vasanas* and is prepared to live with it.

And, very importantly, there is no getting around the truth that your life must serve the truth, not

the other way around. There is no fine print to *moksa*; if you want to be free then everything has to come under the uncompromising light of self-knowledge. If the life you are living is not congruent with the truth of who you are you are not free. It is that simple.

Sundari (from previous email): “The knowledge ‘I am whole and complete, non-dual actionless, unchanging awareness’ is not firm for you.”

Mike: I agree, this does appear to be the case. Even though I know that I am awareness there are still actions or situations that seem to momentarily eclipse that knowledge. If I say an unkind word to my wife I feel guilt. If she (or someone else) does something contrary to my desires I feel irritated. This seems to be smoking gun that indicates there is some work to do that remains.

Sundari: Yes, work does remain. But remember that *moksa* is not about perfecting the *jiva*, or apparent person, it is about realizing that they are not real. In the light of self-knowledge one makes the changes to lifestyle, attitudes and values that are necessary for peace of mind, i.e. follows *dharma*, not because one wants to be perfect as a person but as one knows one is awareness appearing as a *jiva* and peace is your true nature one aims for a *sattvic* mind. One automatically aligns oneself with non-injury as that is the highest value.

Remember also that enlightenment is not a magic pill for the ego. Mike will still have the apparent personality and character that *Isvara* gave him. He will still apparently feel sad and angry at times but as he is the knower of those feelings, and feelings are not his mode of thinking, thus he will have the dispassion he needs to free himself from identification with the feelings. The feelings are objects known to him as are his apparent personality, or character. As peace of mind is the goal all excessive *rajas* and *tamas* have to be purified in the light of self-knowledge. This is what rendering the binding *vasanas* non-binding means. Remember that *moksa* means freedom from the doer not for them – but the doer, or *jiva*, lives in and never leaves the apparent reality. If you want an end to suffering for the apparent person who is identified with objects it can only be achieved by negating the doer.

Sundari (from previous email): “As I have said above, what remains unclear for you is what the *jiva* and the *dharma* field really are. In order to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* (conditioning) non-binding you will have to understand what they are in the light of self-knowledge. This requires subjecting the mind to self-inquiry and letting self-knowledge do the work of removing the ignorance.”

Mike: Yes, in addition to the study of Vedanta I am working to bring inquiry to each moment and into every experience. If understanding the *jiva* and *dharma* field in the light of self-knowledge is what is required then I will investigate and contemplate this teaching. I read the document you sent and do have some questions regarding it. The *dharma* field is everything that is not pure awareness, correct? *Jagat* is the creation, all subtle and gross objects. Does this include *Isvara* and the *jiva*?

Sundari: Yes, correct. Although it is more correct to say that *Isvara* wielding *maya* make up the *dharma* field, or world of objects, which includes the *jiva*.

Mike: Or is *Isvara* only the Creator standing outside of *jagat*? Right now I have this visualization of nested dolls, with *jagat* containing *Isvara*, and *Isvara* containing the *jiva*.

Sundari: The nested dolls metaphor is sometimes used to describe the *dharma* field. I think the *e-satsang* I have attached will answer this, but briefly:

Isvara in the role of Creator wielding *maya* is everything below the line, so to speak, and makes up what is called the *dharma* field. Only awareness is above the line. There is no real line of course as there is really only one principle, which is awareness, but it is necessary to make the distinction in order to discriminate the apparent reality from awareness. Awareness does not exist in the same order of reality as the objects that appear in it because awareness is that which is real, meaning always present and never changing. The apparent reality, or world of objects, *jagat*, is reflected awareness and only apparently real because it is not always present and is always changing.

The *dharma* field is all objects and the forces that govern them, the *gunas*, which give rise to the five elements out of which all objects materialise. *Jagat* does not contain *Isvara*, it is the other way around. When *maya* appears *Isvara* in association with *maya* (meaning awareness under the apparent spell of ignorance) manifests and so the creation appears, which is the world of objects, or *jagat*, also called the causal body, or *Isvara srsti*. The objects (*jagat*) are impermanent, subject to the forces that run the *dharma* field (the *gunas*) and not real (they are always changing and not always present).

Isvara in the role of Creator is not conditioned by the *gunas* and is permanent with reference to the objects but is not permanent with reference to awareness. This is because even *Isvara* in the role of Creator (causal body) is withdrawn back into seed form at the end of the cycle of creation, which from the *jiva*'s, or subtle body's, point of view is relatively permanent and eternal.

Sundari (from previous email): "In simple language, freedom is forever being able to discriminate that which is real (awareness) from that which is unreal (all objects or anything other than you, awareness)."

Mike: I can understand how this discrimination is initially important but doesn't even this distinction eventually fall away? In the end if awareness is all there is, can we really say there is a real and an unreal or a subject and an object?

Wouldn't this be a subtle duality?

Sundari: Good observation; this is why Vedanta is a set up in that it uses a dualistic teaching to prove that reality is non-dual. If you read the document I sent you on Kahneman's work this will help to illustrate the point here. Non-duality is not opposed to duality because duality is not real; however, it apparently still continues once it is known for what it is because you can experience it. How would you make love to your wife, enjoy a good meal, go for a hike, hug your kids, etc. if you could no longer experience duality? There is nothing wrong with duality, it is only a problem and causes suffering when you don't know what it is. When you do you enjoy it, for it is because you literally know that you are the joy in it. You are the source of the joy. Thus you live free of the

fear of loss, of lack or of the need to gain anything. You know that there is nothing to gain or lose in the apparent reality. You are all there is and you love every part of the apparent reality accordingly as a reflection of you, awareness. What changes then is that you have contact with objects, not for happiness but because you are the source of happiness. It is very simple but it changes everything.

Sundari (from previous email): “All *jivas* consciously or unconsciously seek Vedanta because it is the truth of who they are. Not all minds are purified or qualified though; Vedanta comes to you when you are ready, it is that simple. It is grace and grace is earned. And you are right, once you are on the Vedanta bus you can put your bags down and relax because it most definitely can and will take you all the way, as long as you want liberation more than anything else and you stay on the bus until it takes you to your destination. This is not a destination but simply the understanding that there is nowhere to go because there is nowhere that you are not. In the words of the poet Sylvia Plath, there is no “there” there – because there is only one principle, awareness, and you are it. Duality is then seen for what it is, a superimposition onto non-duality. And even though duality still apparently exists you know it is not real, like the mirage on the desert floor is not real, even though you can experience it because you can see it.”

Mike: This is very beautifully articulated and is my sincere desire: “I am the desire in beings which is not contrary to *dharma*.” ~ *Bhagavad Gita*, 7:11

Sundari: Yes, that is my and James’ favourite quote from the *Gita*.

Sundari (from previous email): “As you now undertake your *sadhana* with great dedication and commitment make it your practice to take a stand in awareness as awareness; whenever the opposite thought comes up practice negating it by simply repeating this statement: ‘I am whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, ordinary, unchanging, unconditioned, ever-present awareness.’”

Mike: This is very practical advice, and I will work to incorporate this throughout the day. Over the past two days I have made it my practice to observe my thoughts, especially the troubling ones, and say “This is not mine (me); it belongs to *Isvara*.” The addition of recognizing the *jiva*’s identification and the operating *gunas* will no doubt be key.

Sundari: Great; that is the work.

Mike: Thank you again, Sundari. I am very fortunate to be learning from you, and I will repay that debt with dedication and hard work. This is such a beautiful teaching, and I have to confess I am really excited about this adventure!

~ Warmly, Mike

Sundari: You are most welcome, Mike, and there is no debt to be repaid! I am simply handing

over the torch that was handed to me and it is utterly rewarding in that I am giving to myself.

~ Much love to you, Sundari