

Self-Realization and Self-Actualization

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2016-09-17

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2923>

Dana: Hello, Sundari.

My name is Dana. I hope this finds you well.

I was introduced to ShiningWorld in 2015, this past July. I am interested in attending the India retreat; however, I'm not sure I can go the entire time. Can you tell me how the weeks are broken up and recommend what section you feel would be the best to attend, please?

Sundari: Hello, Dana, thank you for the feedback, I will pass it on to James. It is up to you when to attend the India talks, but if you are fairly new to Vedanta I would say it is better to attend from the beginning. That way, if you cannot stay until the end, you can catch up by watching the videos, but you will have had a good introduction to the teachings. There is nothing like being able to talk to the teacher in person, when the opportunity arises. Usually we teach every day for four days, mornings at 10:00 am to 12:30 pm, afternoons from 4:00 to 6:00 and some evenings for questions and answers from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. Then we have a day off. In the middle of the teaching schedule, we have a two-day break.

Dana: I was thinking of bringing my 11-year-old daughter with me, and wondering if there were activities or places for her to be taken care of while I'm in session with you and James.

Sundari: No, we do not cater to children, and it is up to you to make arrangements. I don't know if there are places for children to be entertained or looked after in Tiruvannamalai, I somehow doubt it. You will have to enquire. While it is wonderful to expose children to the teachings, they are not designed for them. If your daughter can attend without causing a disturbance, she is welcome to join the talks, but if not, she should not attend. India is an amazing place, but not if your child needs Western-type entertainment! It will certainly be an education for her. Most years we have people attending who bring their children, but usually they come as a couple and take turns babysitting. I am sure you could team up with someone once you are there. We could inquire of the group who has children and put you in touch with them when the talks start.

Dana: I have been reading and watching incessantly and am so grateful that Vedanta has come to me. I've been living a *karma yoga* lifestyle without even knowing it for a couple of years.

Sundari: This is very good, Dana. It means that you have been laying the groundwork for self-knowledge. *Karma yoga* is the most important practice if you truly desire *moksa* – but it is also just common sense. Many people who are not qualified for self-inquiry but live *dharmic*, pure lives practise *karma yoga* as a matter of course, without ever naming it.

Dana: I realize that I am unlimited, ordinary, ever-present awareness, but I have a question as to whether I am self-actualized.

Sundari: Self-actualisation can take months or many years, depending on your level of qualification for *moksa*. For me, and most inquirers, it took several years to dissolve the *jiva* and her stuff. Like we often say, self-realisation is where the work of self-inquiry begins. Self-realisation is an experience, and because all experience occurs in time, no experience can become permanent; all experiences will end. Experience is therefore not real, in the light of Vedanta's definition of what constitutes real, being "that which is always present and never changes." Only awareness fits that definition, meaning one can "lose" one's self-realization if the knowledge "I am whole and complete, actionless, unchanging, unlimited, ordinary awareness" is not fully assimilated and you understand what that means for the *jiva*.

It is one thing to know about awareness and that you are it; quite another to know what this means for you as the *jiva*, living in the world. There is a world of difference between direct and indirect knowledge of the self.

Self-actualisation is the consistent, total application of self-knowledge to your life, as the default response. To be self-actualised means (1) you have fully discriminated the self (consciousness) from the objects appearing in you (all objects, meaning all gross objects as well as one's conditioning, thoughts and feelings – all experience) and (2) 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 and identification with objects 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 person in order to live free as the person. What is the point of self-realisation if the mind is still under the tyranny of its likes and dislikes (*vasanas*) and modified by the *gunas*?

In order to fully actualise self-knowledge, you need to understand and assimilate the identity between awareness, *Isvara* and the *jiva*. This is where most people get stuck (or come unstuck) in their self-inquiry, and it is one of the main reasons why many self-realised people do not self-actualise. Understanding *Isvara* is the key. The *jiva-Isvara* identity is probably one of the most important teachings in Vedanta. *Isvara* is your environment and everything in it, including you. I recommend you read James' *The Essence of Enlightenment* very carefully and then progress to *Inquiry into Existence* for a much deeper and more advanced teaching on *Isvara/maya* and *jiva*.

Dana: There are moments when I forget who I am; I understand this to be true when I feel emotion arising. In some cases, typically when not interacting with others, I can observe the desires and fears, and in other cases, mostly in relationships, I catch myself forgetting who I am. Sometimes I can recover within the conversation; however, in other instances not so much. :-) I might have to step away from the situation or stop interacting for a few moments in order to remind myself who I am, and in doing so I observe my *jiva* relaxing from the knowledge. The distance between these events is getting shorter.

Sundari: This is very common for most inquirers. We call it the “firefly stage.” There is nothing for it but to keep practising the knowledge with the *karma yoga* attitude. This is the “work” of self-inquiry. The knowledge is there but not firm yet. The “hit and miss” stage is normal for most inquirers when self-knowledge is working but not permanent yet. Ignorance is hardwired and very tenacious, so be patient. The mind is literally being reprogrammed by *Isvara*; new neural networks are forming as ignorance is being rooted out. Faith in the scripture is of utmost importance because, without it, the mind will not have the strength to resist the binding *vasanas*. This requires absolute dedication to one’s *sadhana*. Self-knowledge never fails if you stick to it. Once you have committed yourself to self-inquiry, you are on the Vedanta Bus and it will take you where you want to go. Relax and enjoy the ride!

Your observation is excellent – this is discrimination at work. It cannot be stated enough that *moksa* is the ability to discriminate you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you, on a moment-to-moment basis. Difficult emotional states of mind are what plague all *samsaris*, causing so much suffering. We all want to be happy. Happiness/freedom is our true nature, but ignorance of what this means prevents us from experiencing who we are. Because of this, all our actions, whether worldly or spiritual, are motivated by an innate need to attain a sense of fullness, or wholeness, which most believe comes from outside of us, through objects.

Vedanta reveals that enlightenment is freedom from dependence on objects, especially emotional states of mind that hinder our ability to accomplish our goals. To manage our emotions, the ancient science of energy management (*guna* teaching) is a sophisticated set of simple principles that allow anyone to eliminate the thoughts and emotions that inhibit our ability to live creatively and to cultivate the energies that ensure success in any endeavour. The three universal energies that each of us experiences throughout the day are called “*gunas*,” a Sanskrit word that means “qualities.” The technique that allows us to control them is called *triguna vibhava yoga*. This *yoga* is practised, consciously or unconsciously, throughout the day. If you are not consciously managing the *gunas*, they are managing you. Successful people in every field have to varying degrees mastered some aspect of this science.

We are working on a book that deals with the basic principles of the *yoga* of the *gunas* and how to apply it to transform your life, worldly or spiritual, into the life you always desired. James has covered this teaching in great detail in the *The Essence of Enlightenment* and elsewhere.

Swami Chinmayananda, James’ *guru*, said: “You have gone through ten *Upanishads*. Wonderful. How many *Upanishads* have gone through you?” Hence the conversion of intellectual knowledge into emotional strength is called *nididhyasana*.

Moksa, or non-dual vision, is complete and permanent understanding of how the field of existence operates – the forces that create it: the *gunas* (and how they govern the creation of all *vasanas*) and the natural laws that run it: *samanya dharma* (big picture), *visesa dharma* (how the individual relates to big picture/*Isvara*) and *svadharma* (inborn nature and tendencies of individual). A *jivanmukta* by definition will have resolved all its conditioning through contemplation, assimilation of the knowledge and transformation of its habitual emotional and thinking patterns (*vasanas/samskaras/pratibandikas*, i.e. its conditioning) through self-knowledge. This is the essence of *nididhyasana*.

The three basic stages of self-inquiry are:

1. *Sravana*: Listening or hearing the scripture. This requires that you leave everything you

previously believed or thought you knew, temporarily on the shelf. You can your beliefs back if self-knowledge does not work for you. But for now leave them on the shelf. This is very important; if you keep comparing Vedanta to all your beliefs and opinions and try to make it comply with them, forget about self-inquiry. Vedanta is a radical teaching; it is counter-intuitive; expect it to challenge everything you thought you knew.

2. *Manana*: Reasoning, contemplation. This is thinking about what the scripture is saying, examining the unexamined logic of your experience. At this point, you look at your beliefs and opinions in the light of what the scripture says, NOT the other way around.

3. *Nididhyasana*: The hard part. Applying the knowledge to your life; taking a stand in awareness as awareness. This is the process of self-actualisation. Here one has to identify what conditions the mind in the light of self-knowledge so that one can disidentify with it as awareness. This is no easy task. Unless one is an *adhikari* (highly-qualified person) this stage can take years for some people.

Once one has realised the self, the effects of ignorance (*prarabdha karma*) play out for as long as they play out and one cannot change that. How *prarabdha karma* (the momentum of past actions) plays out is not up to the *jiva* or to awareness. It is up to *Isvara*. It is common that people who have realised the self still struggle with stubborn *samskaras*, with difficult *karma* and with fears that seem to have no origin. One can only see the effects of ignorance for what it is and accept it without resistance and with dispassion, always with the *karma yoga* attitude. One must do what one can to ameliorate the *karma* with equanimity through self-inquiry and through the application of self-knowledge, such as *dharmic* lifestyle choices. Resistance keeps you tied to the person and is a guarantee of more suffering. The *gunas* are constantly changing and impersonal, like everything else in the apparent reality; what use is control? *Karma yoga* is the only solution, as there is no way to fast-forward this process.

Lifestyle issues must be addressed because if your life does not serve the truth, self-knowledge will not stick in the mind. *Moksa* is not about attaining some kind of ideal, quite the contrary. It is about accepting things as they are and not seeking more, better or different. All that changes for the *jivanmukta* is how and why he or she contacts objects. Once ignorance is removed, the *jiva* who knows they are not the *jiva* but awareness automatically follows *dharma* because peace of mind (*sattva*) is the true nature of the mind when not contaminated by *rajas* and *tamas*. Contravening *dharma* is extremely painful for a *sattvic* mind.

Other than gaining the knowledge of what the *gunas* are and how they operate, which is half the battle, you can do a great deal to manage them through self-knowledge. This means that you know that there are appropriate actions to maintain peace of mind for the *jiva*. Some enlightened people do not bother managing the *gunas* and simply accept whatever transpires in the *dharma* field, knowing it has nothing to do with them. This practice is fine if the underlying motivation is not a refusal to face binding *vasanas* or a way to camouflage the doer.

This is a common trap for spiritual seekers and even for self-realised people, one the ego likes. Often it is not lack of self-knowledge that is the problem. It is just that the “self-realised” person is avoiding doing what it takes to change their behaviour – meaning staring down their *vasanas* in the light of self-knowledge and getting their actions and lifestyle to conform with *dharma*. *Karma yoga* is really *dharma yoga*. Many people try to avoid following *dharma* by trying to make self-knowledge work in situations (like work, relationships, money, etc.) that are unworkable by taking the *karma yoga* approach. But this will not work, because your life has to serve the Truth, not the

other way around. Truth is impersonal. If you find yourself in an *adharmic* situation of whatever nature, to be free of the agitation there is no way around facing the truth and taking appropriate action. Or accept it totally without complaining. The thing is that for *moksa* to obtain in the mind it has to be free of agitation and dullness. Neither awareness nor *Isvara* care one way or the other, because neither awareness nor *Isvara* have a problem with duality. It is up to the *jiva* to choose peace of mind.

Practical Lifestyle Management

Take a look at your lifestyle and change what you can. Diet is very important for *guna* management. Learn which foods cause which *guna*. Examine what you do for a living, where and how you live, who you are in relationship with and why, how you recreate, spend money and exercise. Stop hoarding unwanted “stuff” (psychological and otherwise). Examine your relationships with people. Don’t keep company with highly *rajasic* or *tamasic* people. Or if you can’t avoid them, see how the *gunas* run them. See where they (or you) want things to be different and the pain it causes. People can’t help being true to their predominant *guna* when they are unaware that there is choice.

The practice of seeing how the *gunas* operate in yourself and “others” will put you in a whole new world of perception. Of course there really are no “others,” as there is only one self with three *guna*-manufactured bodies. By that I mean that they work the same way in everyone. The *gunas* run the show for everyone who is identified with the body-mind and the story of personhood. Keep in mind that removing ignorance of your true nature does not mean that you change as a person. The person never leaves the apparent reality and the apparent reality is limited. The person is fine the way they are; they do not need to be perfected. *Isvara*’s creation, or the world, is the way it is because it cannot be any other way. No need to go try to change the world, it is fine the way it is, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Dana will always have her particular nature and tendencies. *Isvara* made her like that. *Vasanas* that are rendered non-binding never entirely go away. They are like inactive volcanoes that are never fully extinct but they no longer have the ability to burn, even if they do occasionally erupt. To the *jivanmukta*, or the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, if the old volcanic *vasanas* rumble occasionally and send up puffs of smoke, so what? They are no longer an issue. You just see them for what they are: not-self, and so the mind does not condition to them.

Dana: I understand that when one is self-actualized they still have fears and desires, but how is the *jiva* affected by them? Will the *jiva* still have emotion in responses to the fears/desires and does it sometimes take a bit of time (seconds, minutes) to re-establish who they are as awareness? Or does the fact that the emotion arises mean that my knowledge is not firm?

Sundari: As stated many times now, *moksa*, or self-actualisation, means that you have firmly and permanently rendered all binding *vasanas* non-binding and negated the sense of doership. However, the fine print on the enlightenment certificate that many miss is that there really is no “post-” *moksa* stage for the *jiva* even though as awareness you are *moksa* and not the *jiva*. As Vedantins we never stop “working” on the *jiva* even though we do not censure it or expect it to change. We unflinchingly follow *dharma*, personal and universal, without question; but not because we want to improve the *jiva*, but only because we want to enjoy the priceless benefits of a

peaceful mind.

While it is true that once self-knowledge has obtained in the mind there is a definite “shift” in how one sees life and relates to objects, it is also true that the *nididhyasana* stage never really ends for the *jiva*, because it is always changing and interacting with the field of existence, which is also always changing. The price of freedom for the *jiva* is eternal vigilance. Macrocosmic ignorance does not end when personal ignorance (*avidya*) ends and the *jiva* is always limited by *maya* (although no longer conditioned by it) even though its essence is known to be limitless awareness. If this were not true, the *jiva* would become *Isvara* “after” *moksa* – which clearly and irrefutably is not the case.

A common myth in the enlightenment game is that enlightenment is another object to obtain and when it is, the *jiva* will be different, better. It may or may not be. It will still have its *Isvara*-given character and tendencies; it will still be a pain in the ass to itself and others sometimes. It will still suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, feeling joy, pain, loss, grief as well as the constant bliss of self-knowledge. But if you find that even though you have self-knowledge, you get swept up into identification with the *jiva* and her stuff under certain circumstances, you are not free. It's that simple. There is work to be done.

The subjective reality never ends for the *jivanmukta* and it can and often does still project its subjective reality (*pratibhasika*) onto *Isvara*. It will always have its particular way of relating to *Isvara* which will be unique to its *Isvara*-given *vasana* filters. The difference will be that a *jivanmukta* (free person) knows when it is projecting, instantly dissolves the projection in the knowledge, and so is instantly free of it. There is no time lag in the knowledge, not even seconds, because when you are free you are the knowledge. The *jiva* is instantly dismissed, and thus it does not create any new *karma*. A free person keeps its *karma* like a little dog on a very short leash, right in front of it. No *karmic* drag, ever. No unfinished business or drama. Every moment of every day is complete. There is never another person involved in its interactions and transactions in the world of objects/experience. The *jivanmukta* knows in the moment that it is transacting only with itself because there is no “other.” There is only awareness.

When *moksa* has obtained in the mind one may and usually feels experiential bliss regularly, but one does not depend on it, because you know you are the bliss. The bliss of knowledge does not feel like anything. Experiential bliss is an object known to you and you are always blissful, whether or not experiential bliss is present. In fact you could be sick, in pain, half-dead, broke, jobless or stuck in a situation you do not enjoy but cannot change – and be totally blissful because who you are is not influenced by what is or is not going on in your environment. You feel blissful regardless of what is going on in the mind.

There is ZERO tolerance for self-aggrandizement of any kind if *moksa* is what one is after. As soon as the ego takes credit the doer is back and so is limitation and bondage. Once the mind is purified of duality humility is its natural response to everything in its environment (*Isvara*) because it understands there is only itself, awareness. It no longer sees “otherness” as awareness, even though it observes the *jiva* still apparently experiencing it. Duality is understood and appreciated for what it is – enjoyed even. But as it is not expected to deliver something it is incapable of doing, i.e. happiness, duality is never a problem for the *jivanmukta*. This takes so much pressure off for the *jiva* because there is no need to make it conform to some silly “spiritual” ideal. It is just known and loved for what it is: a reflection of the self in a mirror, which is also the self.

As the *jiva* is a product of the *gunas*, belongs to and is always subject to *Isvara*, the *jiva* is never going to be perfect. But as awareness you are free of the *jiva* and you know it arises from and depends on you, and not the other way around. Then life makes sense and it is possible to see beauty all the time, even when things are not pretty.

Dana: It is interesting to notice the thought I have to put into how this is written. Writing as a *jiva* and as awareness...

Sundari: Yes, indeed. That is part and parcel of discrimination. Always ask yourself: Who is speaking here? From which perspective am I seeing things? Although the *jiva* is awareness, awareness is not the *jiva*. Unless you are free of the *jiva*'s conditioning and doership, you are not free. When you no longer have to ask this question, not even for a moment, you are free.

Dana: Warm regards.

~ Dana

Sundari: You are most welcome, Dana. I hope we get to meet you in India.

~ Much love, Sundari