

Sports, Work, Health and Self-Inquiry

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Ellen: Hi, Ted. I grew up with sports being a major part of my life (both through playing them and watching them). Although I don't play sports anymore, I still watch quite a bit of football, basketball and baseball. I am less interested in watching sports than before (almost all of my attention now is on learning, understanding and assimilating self-knowledge), but still watch because I am drawn to them and because they are one of the main commonalities I have with my brother and parents. As trivial as it may seem to others, sports has been and in some respects still is a significant part of my experience, and I think therefore an area in which it is important to apply what I am learning through the teachings.

Watching sports this weekend, and contemplating the teachings, the possibility occurred that every action on the field is playing itself out according to the movement of the totality. In other words, the players and coaches appear to be making decisions, but because all actions are conditioned by *vasanas*, their reactions to each situation within the game are just playing out according to their programming and the movement of the whole. So in a way, sports are like a tapestry of movement, seemingly weaving together in a dance that is reflective of the movement of the totality rather than individual actions. Is this correct?

Ted: Yes. Each apparent individual player enjoys apparent free will, but as you correctly surmised, the individual's choices are essentially determined by the *vasanas*, which are themselves essentially *Isvara* (i.e. the maker, administer and matter of the manifest universe), and thus are basically the movement of the total according to its "will" (not that *Isvara*, the apparent reality, is a volitional entity with a personal agenda).

For all practical purposes, the apparent individual's fundamental lack of free will makes essentially no difference in terms of the apparent individual's experience or approach to life. Though the *vasanas* that arise unbidden in the apparent individual's subtle body are *Isvara's*, they arise within the psyche of the apparent individual as seemingly personal desires and prompt "choices" that accord with those desires. Thus *Isvara's* "will" appears in the form of the apparent individual's desires and decisions. This doesn't mean that it is *Isvara's* "will" is that every apparent individual should or will get what he or she wants (unless, that is, you understand that the essence of all human pursuits is the permanent peace and happiness that only self-knowledge provides and that all actions, whether or not they lead to one's procurement of a desired object, are in some way contributing to one's spiritual growth, and thus are actually helping one "attain" the essential end that one seeks). It simply means that *Isvara's vasanas* (i.e. "will") are expressing perfectly (i.e. according to "design") through the apparent individual's apparent choices and consequent actions.

There is an article in the Publications section (> 2013 > October) of my website (*NeverNotPresent.com*) titled *The Cycle of Life and the Illusion of Free Will* that will further clarify this issue for you.

Ellen: I also notice that it doesn't feel good to root for my favorite teams. According to what I'm learning about considering the *gunas* when observing my apparent actions and their effects, watching sports has a *rajasic* quality for me. Although it is trivial and silly to put any energy toward hoping for one's team to win a game (or hoping for a rival team to lose for that matter) it is still a *vasana* for this apparent person that was set into motion through growing up within a passionate sports family and having much of life centered around sports from the time I was a small child. As I watch or reflect on watching, there is dispassionate observing on one hand (seeing through it all) and yet I can also almost see the energetic formation that is apparently there, the pull or leaning toward watching sports at all and toward hoping for a certain result and the silly suspense and anxiety that flows through during a close game. I "see" that I am unconditioned awareness, and that the "game" is unfolding within and as my very own being, but also (although it is nothing serious or painful) observe the *rajasic* irritation or agitation that appears to come along with the experience. I was wondering if you still watch sports and what your experience is with it and if you have contemplated the teachings at any point in relation to sports as a part of your inquiry.

Ted: This is a great method of contemplation, Ellen. The question you might consider within the context you describe is the following: If you are aware of the *rajasic* irritation you experience in response to the game, are you bound by it? Is the *rajasic* irritation you, or is it simply an object appearing within the scope of your being? From your comments, it seems that you have already answered this question, but it appears that you have not assimilated the knowledge revealed by the experience. You cannot be what you see. Hence you, awareness, are not bound by Ellen's *rajasic* irritation; you are simply observing it.

As I mentioned in one of our previous exchanges (if I'm recalling correctly), there are two channels to which you, awareness, have access:

1. pure awareness, which is your true nature and the channel you turn to when seeking lasting peace, permanent happiness, infallible support and ultimate inner freedom;
2. reflected awareness, which is the apparent individual person you seem to be (and with whom you, awareness, through the vehicle of Ellen's intellect, is currently identifying rather than simply associating) and the channel you tune in to when you seek entertainment, education or opportunities to serve, all of which are only temporary objective phenomena that provide only ephemeral fulfillment.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying the programming playing out on the second channel as long as you know it is not real and will not provide permanent fulfillment, and thus encounter its drama with an attitude of dispassion rooted in proper discrimination between the real and the apparent so as to circumvent the further propagation of binding *vasanas*.

Desire and one's emotional responses to experiences are not the problem per se. In fact the apparent individual will never be completely rid of *vasanas*. Indeed the only reason you, awareness, have taken birth as an apparent individual person is in order to provide the *vasanas* that have resulted from your own inherent deluding power of *maya* (i.e. ignorance) a means of expression. When the *vasanas* slated to express through the particular mind-body-sense complex with which you, awareness, are currently associated have been expressed (i.e. the apparent person's *prarabdha karma* has been exhausted) and the physical vehicle has worn out,

then the subtle body withdraws from the physical body and the apparent individual “dies.” Thus as long as the apparent individual is embodied he will have desires. Moreover, *vasanas* themselves are not intrinsically bad. There are many good desires, such as the desire for *moksa* (i.e. liberation) that inspires one to purify the mind and undertake self-inquiry. Or as you mention further on, the desire for physical health that motivates one to eat right, exercise regularly and refrain from imbibing too many toxins.

The problem of suffering arises when the apparent individual’s desires and consequent habitual tendencies become so deeply entrenched in one’s psyche that they exert an irresistible degree of control over the individual’s decisions and actions. Rather than being simple preferences that the apparent individual can take or leave, binding *vasanas* are intense likes, dislikes, desires and fears that enslave the apparent individual and force him to act at their behest, even to the point where he is willing to transgress *dharma* (i.e. ethical law) in order to attempt to satisfy their insatiable demands.

And, yes, I still watch sports. For the most part, however, I really don’t care who wins or loses anymore. In certain circumstances, I am partial toward one team over another and I do experience the “highs” and “lows” associated with the successes and failures of the team I am rooting for. But, as I explained, I know these reactions have nothing to do with me. Nor, at this point, are the petty desires with which they are associated binding *vasanas* that cause me any suffering if unfulfilled.

Ellen: Work is another large part of my experience (much larger than sports). Thanks to the teachings, for a while now I have been recognizing myself as awareness, that in which all of this is appearing and that which is free of objects, but which is also not separate from anything. However, I am watching some familiar patterns play out that I think are *vasanas* running their course:

- The anxiety of apparently “having to be” at work each day, rain or shine, week after week.
- The incredible busy-ness of the job.
- Interacting with “difficult people” who so beautifully trigger so many of the *vasanas* that appear to agitate or threaten this individual.
- The apparent conflict of being a part of a system I believe in in many respects, but disagree with in many others.
- The desire of the apparent individual that sometimes appears of wanting to be out having fun somewhere or with loved ones rather than in a building doing something that appears to have to be done to make a living.

With work, I see what I think I’m understanding as my *dharma* playing out. I am using my gifts to help others much of the time and have the constant opportunity to share understanding and offer compassion (although I often seem to fail to do this). What I’m saying is that despite the appearances, which come and go in relation to work, there is also sweetness and joy and a sense that this individual is playing his part within the dance of the whole.

Ted: This feeling is a good indication that you are following your *dharma*.

Ellen: I was wondering how you experience applying the teachings to work. What it would be like for you when or if students are challenging behaviorally and/or academically, the incredible workload of grading papers and managing the many mandates that often are given from the state or district, getting evaluated, having to be there day in and day out, dealing with “difficult” people – and then also of course what I imagine as a joyful opportunity for you as an apparent person to share your gifts and enjoy being a part of the school community and the teaching and learning process.

Ted: My experience is very similar to what you describe yours to be. Just because you know who you are doesn't mean that you stop being (or at least appearing as) human. You still think thoughts, feel emotions and experience sensations just like you always have. You simply know that these phenomena are not real and do not enhance, diminish or otherwise impact your essential nature in any way, and thus neither challenging nor enjoyable experiences affect you in necessarily the same way and certainly not to the same degree as they did prior to your having understood your true nature and their apparent status in relation to it.

Ellen: Another way I have watched *vasanas*, or fears and desires playing out, is with regard to health issues. Feeling what I think is a hernia from lifting heavy things or seeing new marks on my skin and hoping they are not potentially harmful to the body. Although I seem to know myself as awareness and the body as an object, fear – or more accurately, concern/anxiety – is there with the arising of the thought (relative to circumstances that could be potentially harmful to the body) that I want to be healthy or avoid being unwell. In other words, I know I am not the body, but still observe thinking and feeling reactions that would seem not to go along with the understanding.

Ted: In addition to the previous comment, I would here add that carrying out your professional responsibilities and maintaining your physical health are *dharmic* endeavors. It is important that the apparent individual you seem to be act in accord with the physical, psychological and ethical *dharmas* (i.e. laws) governing the apparent reality – assuming, that is, that you wish to contribute to the maintenance of the harmony, balance and well-being of the total as well as experience a relatively enjoyable existence as an apparent person.

Ellen: I am so thankful for your support and your help with understanding the teachings and applying them to “my life.”

~ With much gratitude, Ellen

Ted: Always my pleasure.

~ All the best, Ted

Ellen: Hi, Ted. Reflecting about my last email, “Sports/Work/Health” (I meant to include “Health” in the title), I think I am trying to refine, verify and/or improve my understanding on one hand and

resolve doubts on the other. How could the true realization of myself as limitless awareness be real if these indications of ignorance also appear to exist? This is one of the questions within the questions.

Ted: The doubt you express concerning your emotional responses to various environmental circumstances and interpersonal encounters suggests that you are still thinking that self-knowledge can be defined in terms of a particular quality of experience or that the self (i.e. pure awareness) can be described in terms of a particular emotional tenor. The self, however, is limitless, attribute-less, non-objectifiable awareness. It is that in which all objects, experiences and emotions appear, yet remains ever free of all such phenomena. The liberation that ensues (i.e. is understood to be one's true nature) from the assimilation of this knowledge is not freedom for the apparent individual, but rather freedom from the apparent individual. In other words, self-knowledge doesn't establish the apparent individual in some permanent transcendental or feel-good state of experiential bliss. Rather self-knowledge frees you, awareness, from the erroneous notion that you are the apparent individual with whom you are associated. Thereafter no matter what the quality of experience arising within the subtle body of the apparent individual is, you as awareness remain the undisturbed witness of it.