

# ***Svadharm*: Do Good Without the Need to Do**

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2013-09-17

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/293>

**Sundari:** Hello, Ami. I understand your situation, and it is not easy. Following *dharma* is one of the tricky things in life; knowing what one's true *svadharm* is not always obvious and it is constantly changing. You made some big changes in Ami's life some years ago when you began your *sadhana*. You are still young and there are many things to experience, nothing wrong with that. We have so many people who write to us who have money problems, not enough time and all kinds of difficult *karma* that makes it very hard for them to practice their *sadhana*. We all are given the right circumstances by *Isvara* for our growth; it is not up to us. It is funny that self-inquiry is difficult because you have too much time and no security worries and nothing to do.

You are fortunate because you have the freedom to make choices. Even if you make a wrong choice and you do it with the *karma yoga* attitude, so what? The results are not up to you. You can't really make a wrong choice anyway unless you do something to injure yourself or others. Even then, you can't really injure yourself except create unpleasant *karma* for Ami. And you know that there are no "others" anyway. You obviously have a very caring nature, and perhaps, being wealthy, you feel that you "should" be doing something for others.

Buddhism is appealing for this kind of mind, and there is nothing wrong with it per se. Do what you want to do, knowing that it is not up to Ami to fix things, because the people you are trying to fix don't really need fixing. It looks that way, but all is working out according to *karma*. So if you want to help or do something useful, join a cause or do charity work; nothing wrong with that. Just know that Ami is not the do-gooder. Or sleep all day if you feel like it!

It seems to me that Ami needs to do something with her mind though, so why not study something? Just for fun, knowledge of whatever kind is good. You must have interests and be good at many things. Or why not translate some of the scriptures into Japanese? Even if it is just for you, why not write some commentaries on some of the *Upanishads*? Use that mind, do something noble with it. *Isvara* gave it to you, and it can be a great blessing or a curse, depending how it is used or whether or not you think you are the thinker or the doer.

As far as James having a go at the Buddhists, you will have to forgive him. He gets tired of all the ex-Buddhists that come to him complaining about the world and talking about emptiness, who are completely stuck because of the conditioning that Buddhism has put into their minds. James teaches many people who found Buddhism lacking.

All of us at ShiningWorld are fed up with it. We are going to compile a selection of the most frequently asked questions for the website to tell people that we are no longer going to answer questions on the topic of Buddhism. Whatever truths you find in Buddhism came from Vedanta anyway.

We are not against it, but what is Buddhism anyway? It can be anything anyone wants it to be. There are dozens, perhaps scores, of types of Buddhism, all with various contradictory ideas. There may be some schools that have some some very good ideas and help people, but at best it's a philosophy, not an impersonal means of self-knowledge.

Our basic complaint with it is that it leaves people thinking that that they have to perfect the *jiva* and help “others” and save the world. It is all doer-based thinking, limited and limiting. The *jiva* and the world cannot be fixed. This is because the *jiva* and the world are not conscious, they are run by the *gunas*. The *gunas* are not conscious either, but *Isvara* is conscious. *Isvara* is self-aware and thus not subject to the *gunas* or ignorance and is therefore the only doer. There is no real doer. Buddhism ignores *Isvara*, which is what causes all the problems. So things are the way they are for a reason and it is not for us to question this. Help if it is your *dharma* to help, but not as the doer.

Ramji is really not against Buddhists, in fact he has a realised Buddhist friend. Her name is Sylvia Wetzel. We have put a link to her site at ShiningWorld and we promote her. Here is the announcement I put at our website: “For German-speaking people we have a link to Sylvia Wetzel’s German translations of several Vedanta books at her website *Sylvia-Wetzel.de/schriften.htm*. Sylvia is a well-known Buddhist teacher who is a friend of James. His book *Meditation: Inquiry into the Self* was instrumental in her quest for enlightenment. Sylvia has translated a few Vedanta books into German and posted them at her website, and we encourage you to make use of them.

Much love to you, Ami. Remember that you are not only a beautiful expression of awareness, you are that which knows the expression and makes it possible. The expression is the image in the mirror and you are the mirror and that which is casting the impression. It is all you but you are free of all of it.

I have attached a brilliant article for you written by Ramji called *The Mirror of Vedanta* and another one called *What Is the Self?* which Ramji put together from all the *Upanishads*.

~ Much love to you, Sundari

**Ami:** Dear Sundari, thank you for your message. I understood what you explained. The reason that Ami wants to “help others” was because she didn’t know what to do with the rest of her life; she feels satisfied with herself and has a lots of free time, no idea to do something more for herself. She knows intellectually there are no others, no path. She is happy, without suffering or complaint in her life, and preferably wants to share and express her love. She can sleep the whole day or can serve also; luckily she is free to do anything. Even apparent reality, if someone wants to be happy, she prefers to serve, just as James *sensei* serves the total through teaching. She wanted to know the way, of how to serve everybody.

Recently she heard someone say that everything is perfect, as it is as expression of the self. So how can something be a problem? All is the expression of the self in various ways, so explore the variety of the expression. It was a knock on the head. She got an idea how she can live rest of her life; she will enjoy the various expressions in her life.

In James *sensei*’s audio, I found sometimes he was laughing at Buddhism, ha, ha, ha with the audience; if you want to hear which one, I will tell you. At the time I felt bad, but I like him, so I try not to care too much. I understand that he is naughty.

The description of the relationship between you and James *sensei* was so beautiful! I was so touched.

**Sundari:** I am happy that it did, Ami. ☺

**Ami:** *Isvara, maya, awareness, doer...* these topics are very tough! Even though James *sensei* explained to me before, I still couldn't get it (I couldn't understand what "*Isvara = maya + awareness*" means exactly). I think my understanding is better now. Thank you.

**Sundari:** You are welcome, Ami. The identity of the total, the individual and and world (*Isvara-jiva-jagat aikyam*) is the subtlest of teachings, and even serious inquirers like you still have some confusion regarding it. I have attached a copy of an article I wrote on this teaching, which incorporates the *gunas* of course. As you know, *moksa* is discriminating the self from the objects appearing in it. To do this, one must understand the self from the standpoint of the *jiva* and one must understand the *jiva* from the standpoint of the self. If one does not understand *Isvara*, this discrimination cannot take place and self-knowledge does not stick.

**Ami:** In the *Tattva Bodha* commentary James *sensei* says: "When the self operates this power and produces the apparent experienciable reality we call the world, it is called God, the Creator (*Isvara*)." But you explained the self is not the doer, so how does the self "operate"?

**Sundari:** Good question, Ami. You are very observant. Language is difficult when one gets to such a subtle teaching. "Operates" is a questionable word and needs to be understood in context. Let me explain: pure awareness, or *paramatman*, when it is identified with *maya*, "becomes" the Creator and apparently operates ignorance – meaning the *gunas*. This is why it is said that *maya* makes the impossible possible. *Isvara* as the Creator, or *maya*, is pure *sattva*, and once *rajas* and *tamas* appear, together the three *gunas* bring about the creation, or the apparent reality, which is the effect of ignorance, i.e. *mithya*. Please refer to the article I have attached on this topic.

**Ami:** You wrote "The world, the apparent reality, runs the way it runs whether you are enlightened or not. Neither the *jiva* nor pure awareness has any control over it, the *gunas* run everything." I thought an enlightened one can't be affected by *maya*. Isn't that right? I think I don't understand this explanation. Could you give me a reference, a *sastra*?

**Sundari:** There are many references to this teaching, not only in *How to Attain Enlightenment*, but especially in *Panchadasi*. The enlightened one, pure awareness, or *paramatman*, is *trigunatatita*, beyond the *gunas* and not conditioned by them. *Isvara* operating *maya* is not conditioned by the *gunas* either. However, *moksa* is for the self under the spell of ignorance, the *jiva*, who lives in the apparent reality and never leaves it. The apparent reality, or *dharma* field (*Isvara/gunas*), is run by certain laws which apply to the enlightened and unenlightened *jiva*. Read my article on the *gunas* and see what questions come up for you.

**Ami:** You wrote "How could you as a limited individual take care of the total? It is not possible and *Isvara* does not need anyone's help."

**Sundari:** The *dharma* field is run by *Isvara*, who is the total, and *Isvara* does not need anyone's help. The *gunas* are impersonal forces that are always operating and present in the macrocosmic mind. The *gunas* are only absent for the apparent individual in deep sleep and *nirvikalpa samadhi*. *Isvara* is always taking care of all the *karma* of all *jivas*; this is called *Isvara srsti*. When self-knowledge removes the ignorance of your true nature, revealing it to be the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, pure awareness, you will stop confusing your personal creation, *jiva srsti*, with *Isvara's*. You will become objective. You will then see that there is nothing "wrong" with you or the total. You will see the perfection in all things, even if you do not understand them. This belief of yours is a strong Buddhist conviction, that there is something wrong with the world, that it should be different from the way it is, that the *jiva* must "do" something to perfect itself and that once the *jiva* is perfected, it must work to make things "better." These beliefs are for *karmis* – people who think they doers. These *karmis* are always dissatisfied people. This is why they want to change things.

**Ami:** I asked about Buddhist teachings because I'm a Buddhist; at the same time, I'm a Vedantin. I met the Dalai Lama before going to a Vedanta course, and he gave me some *mantras* I've been still practising. Sometimes I feel Buddhist teachings are helpful to me, for remembering not to be selfish, because I became so dry and far from the society and people for a long time, since I started to go to Tirvannamalai and dedicated myself to self-enquiry five years ago. I know Vedanta doesn't accept Buddhist teachings and laughs at it, sometimes the laughter is kind of looking down on it or making a fool of it; then I feel so bad. It's not because I'm a Buddhist, but because of the lack of respect for the other philosophies.

**Sundari:** Vedanta does not laugh at Buddhism nor is it disrespectful of any other "path." Vedanta is not a path or a religion. It is the knowledge that runs beneath all teachings and explains them all. It is the king of all teachings because it is a scientifically proven, independent means of knowledge that can free the *jiva* from bondage to objects (the doer, or *Ami*) and therefore from suffering. This is the only way to end suffering, not by being a do-gooder, unless you know that it is not you, the individual, doing the "good" action.

Vedanta challenges bad ideas that cause suffering or are not helpful to people seeking *moksa*. There is nothing wrong with being a Buddhist, but some of their beliefs are not accepted by Vedanta, so you will not be able to reconcile them. I have attached a *satsang* on this topic written by Ted Schmidt, one of ShiningWorld's teachers. I believe Isaiah Sanders has also gone to great lengths to explain this to you as well, so I will not repeat it.

**Ami:** I agree that a limited *jiva* can't take care of total's enlightenment, of course. What I meant was that I want to care about the total's happiness and cooperate as much as I can. Ramana and Nisargadatta Maharaj also say don't think about others' enlightenment and focus on your own. But as a result, I became very far from people and society and I became very unnatural, and I was feeling worse about myself, very depressive, closed and lonely.

Buddhist teachings say help others' happiness, and I got back my natural state, and relationships became better. I don't mean I can take care of the total's enlightenment, but at least I don't think only about this *Ami*, but the total as myself, and support others within my capacity. In that way I

can feel that the total as myself, “I,” is more expanded, more than when I was focusing on my enlightenment.

**Sundari:** Vedanta also says that you should serve others but not try to fix them or imagine that you can enlighten them. If you really understood Vedanta and *karma yoga*, you would not have this misunderstanding.

Who is the “I” talking here? You are speaking as the doer, the one who thinks it makes a difference. The self is all there is, how can you be more expansive than that? How can any teaching be more loving than to prove to you that your true nature is *parama prema svarupa*, unconditional love, and that everything is you?

Vedanta does not see that there are “others”; all objects are seen and loved as the self without judgement. When you truly know this, you worship everyone and everything as the self, as non-different from you and perfect. *Isvara* is understood to be the lord of the creation, but as the self you know that *Isvara* is you as well. Therefore your values become universal values, and so you automatically follow *dharma*, which is not causing harm to any part of the creation, because it is all you. At the same time you know that as the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, or the enlightened *jiva*, you do not have knowledge of the total and accept without condition *Isvara*’s creation. Please refer to the *satsang* I attached and to Isaiah’s reply to you.

**Ami:** I don’t think the limited *jiva* can help others’ enlightenment totally. Because suppose I introduce somebody to you and James *sensei*, and that person got enlightened, it is also help, even though indirect. I don’t know, if it’s my mistake, I’m sorry.

**Sundari:** I understand what you mean, but even if Ami introduces “someone” to us and they become enlightened, who is the someone? Who is it that introduces the someone? If you believe that you are the doer, the limited entity, or ego, then you take the credit. But Ami is not the doer, *Isvara* is the only doer. You have to see that *Isvara* put this introduction-thought in your mind.

This is what you have to see: your whole email is written from the standpoint of the doer. Vedanta says that you are not the doer, you are pure, actionless, unchanging, unlimited, unconditioned, ordinary awareness. As a *jiva* living in the apparent reality, enlightened or enlightened, the most important thing to understand is the motivation is for doing anything. And when you do take action, you take it in the *karma yoga* spirit because you know that the result is not up to you.

James does not teach because he sees that there is something wrong with the world or because he wants to save anyone. He teaches because it is his way to serve the total and he knows that he is not the doer. Everyone who comes to him is sent by *Isvara* and is *Isvara*, so he does what is his *svadharma* to do, which is teach Vedanta. He knows that it is not James *sensei* teaching, it is *Isvara* teaching *Isvara*. Everyone has a different *svadharma*, and if it is your nature to be of help in any way, there is nothing wrong with this. In fact it is good. *Isvara* will make it clear to you. Like I said above, it all depends on why you are doing anything. If you see that there is only the self, everything you do is for yourself, the self, anyway.

**Ami:** Can you tell me your opinion for one more question? You said *Isvara* doesn’t need any

help. For example, what do you think about world's poverty? Should we ignore it, saying this is *maya*? What do you think about those who are helping others?

**Sundari:** See my statement above. All beings on the planet are working out their *karma*, who are you to say what is right and wrong? You do not know what is right for anyone, how do you know for sure if what you are doing to help someone is not *adharmic* for them? To repeat: this is why it is important to know what your motivation is for "doing" anything. It is not wrong to help, it is not right either. *Karma yoga* says take action or don't take action, but know that the results are not up to you, so whatever you do or don't do, consecrate it to *Isvara* as a prayer of love. Many people set out to "help" others but their real motivation is that they are lonely or bored or they want to feel virtuous because they do not love themselves.

~ *Namaste*, Sundari

**Ami:** Dear Sundari, here are some more questions.

The self is the Creator and takes care of whole world. So does it know what is happening to each individual?

**Sundari:** Yes, the self, operating *maya* is the Creator (or *Isvara*) and is responsible for the creation, or world (*jagat*), and as such, is omniscient and has knowledge of all objects. *Isvara* knows the names and forms of all objects but is not omniscient in the same way that pure awareness is omniscient. This is because pure awareness has no knowledge and no ignorance in it. Knowledge and ignorance only manifest with the appearance of *maya*. Awareness is self-knowing, and because everything is awareness, it knows the essence of everything but has no knowledge of the objects, because to awareness there are no objects. This is well-explained in *Panchadasi*, and it is one of the most important and subtle of teachings.

**Ami:** If I am the self, why can't I know what is happening in the other side of the world? Is it because our senses are limited, so can't perceive all, so the enlightened person can know what is happening anywhere in the world?

**Sundari:** Yes, it is because the senses are limited. As I stated above, *Isvara* is omniscient and knows everything about all the objects. As the *jiva* you only have knowledge of the objects you have contact with. Enlightenment does not mean that you have knowledge of all objects. When self-knowledge has removed the ignorance of your true nature (*avidya*) and you know that you are awareness, the individual *jiva* then has knowledge of the essence of everything, which is awareness.

**Ami:** I think you say there is no special experience that will happen when people get to know the self. But isn't there any clear sign or change? How can you know one is enlightened?

**Sundari:** Yes, you are right, there is no special experience when self-knowledge has revealed

your true nature to be awareness. Awareness, the experienceless experiencer, does not feel like anything. This is difficult for people who have been seeking an experience of the self all their spiritual lives to understand. This *vasana* is one of the toughest to render non-binding. There is no magic way to put this, it is just what the statement purports to say. How are you going to “experience” experiencelessness? It’s not possible. Awareness, the self, you, is not an experiencer; it is that by whose presence all experience is made possible but itself is always free of experience. It is not an object of experience, being the subject, or the cause, it is beyond perception and inference and therefore subtler than the effect. The effect can never understand the cause. Vedanta says you are that experienceless witness and that there is only that witness. You can only know it as yourself, hence consciousness evolved Vedanta.

When the mind is exposed to Vedanta through self-inquiry, it is possible to experience the self in a pure mind; this is called the *akandakara vritti*. But when the meaning of the *vritti* is assimilated, what is just left is you, pure knowingness. When self-knowledge removes ignorance of your true nature, both knowledge and ignorance disappear as well. Only the self remains and is known as your true nature. Many people go through a period of emptiness, even depression, at this stage. This is because the ego “sees” that there is nothing “out there,” the apparent reality really is empty and nothing has any intrinsic meaning. This passes when the knowledge becomes firm and you know that you are the fullness that knows the emptiness.

There is no special “sign” to prove that you (or anybody else) are enlightened except an ever-deepening sense of peace and bliss. Enlightenment does not mean that anything changes except your understanding. The only change will be that instead of seeking objects to complete you, or for happiness, you are already happy and therefore have contact with everything happily. You are free of the person, Ami. Ami will become your secondary identity and you will be the witness or knower of everything that she thinks, says and does. You will not want to fix her or change her or make her special or different, because she will be fine the way she is. The doer will be negated and the binding *vasanas* will be rendered non-binding, but this does not mean that Ami will stop doing things or having experiences. Her motivation for doing anything will be very different though; peace of mind (*sattva*) will be what she values most, thus she will always follow *dharma*.

**Ami:** We are the awareness and creator of all, but the individual can’t get what he/she wants, because awareness has to take care of total. Even if we are still feeling limitation as an individual, if you recommend us to live from the standpoint of awareness, we have to take care of the total, logically speaking. But you are criticizing the *bodhisattva* ideal. Could you explain more about this matter?

**Sundari:** When ignorance of your true nature as awareness has been removed by self-knowledge, this does not mean that *maya*, macrocosmic ignorance (*Isvara srsti*), changes. It continues to operate as it always does.

As a liberated *jiva* you will have understood that the *dharma* field (*Isvara* wielding *maya*) is made up of the *gunas* and it runs the way it runs whether you are enlightened or not. *Isvara* does not care if you are enlightened, and neither the *jiva* nor pure awareness has any control over it; the *gunas* run everything. The *gunas* no longer condition the subtle body in the same way but they still operate and always will. As a liberated *jiva* you will understand what they are, how they

operate, what thoughts, feelings and actions very predictably arise with all them. And you will know that it has nothing to do with you, awareness.

You will also know that the *dharma* field is perfect the way it is and will not want things to be any different from the way they are.

No *jiva* is “responsible” for anything, certainly not the enlightenment of anyone, not even their own, nor can any individual save another. The *bodhisattva* ideal is incorrect because its premise is that a limited entity can help another limited entity to be free. If *moksa* has truly taken place and the *jiva* knows it is really awareness, it would not have the erroneous belief that (1) it could save anyone or (2) that there is anyone to save. It would see only awareness and therefore no one is in need of saving, or enlightenment.

Your statement “...even if we are still feeling limitation as individual, if you recommend us to live from the standpoint of awareness, we have to take care of the total, logically speaking,” is not logical at all. How could you as a limited individual take care of the total? It is not possible and *Isvara* does not need anyone’s help.

*Isvara* is taking care of the total perfectly at all times, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. The world does not need to be fixed. If it was supposed to be different, it would be different, because *Isvara* is all-powerful. *Isvara* sets it up to lead each person to enlightenment through joy and sorrow, through pleasure and pain. No one but *Isvara* takes care of the enlightenment or unlightenment of anyone. If you are supposed to get *moksa*, *Isvara* will give it to you. If not, not. This futile belief presupposes that there is something wrong with the world the way it is.

**Ami:** I am awareness and producing the world apparently, as if God is creating the world; is my understanding right?

**Sundari:** From the perspective of pure awareness, your statement above is true. As pure awareness, *Isvara*, *maya*, the *jiva* and the world arise out of you, so you are beyond them all and always free of them, yet they are totally dependent on you, awareness. However, in the apparent reality where *maya* is operating, the *jiva*, or individual, is subject to the laws that make up the *dharma* field. *Moksa* is freedom from the *jiva*, for the *jiva*, who lives in the apparent reality. The *jiva* never leaves the apparent reality, and as a liberated *jiva*, self-actualisation means understanding what it means to be self-realised in the apparent reality. As the self, you are already free and do not create anything. As the *jiva*, you are not creating anything either, except the subjective world of your perceptions and conditioning, *jiva srsti*, and projecting that onto *Isvara srsti*.

As I have explained above, when self-knowledge removes the ignorance of your true nature and you know that your primary identity is awareness and not Ami, *Isvara srsti* continues as before, and you are fine with it. You know that there are certain laws that operate in the apparent reality and you have no problem abiding by them because peace of mind is your primary goal. In addition, you automatically follow *dharma* by following what is right for Ami, which means understanding her *svadharm*a and taking appropriate action in light of self-knowledge to do what produces peace of mind for her.

**Ami:** You wrote in *Tattva Bodha* commentary: “The individual possess both a subtle and a gross body. While the gross body absorbs awareness like a brick wall absorbs light, the subtle body is reflective and the self can be apprehended in it.”

I couldn't understand “like a brick wall absorbs light” well; could you explain more?

**Sundari:** If the sun is shining on a brick wall, most of the light gets absorbed by the wall. But if it is shining on a mirror, all the light is reflected, not so? This is why James uses this analogy: when the mind is pure (like the mirror) it can reflect the light of awareness clearly. When the mind is impure, or clouded by ignorance (like the brick wall), it absorbs all the light and the self is not known.

**Ami:** You say if we want enlightenment we have to give up marriage or partnership (I think you said that in an audio from Tiru; sorry if it's my misunderstanding). And you said sometimes people say having partner to do all actions as *karma yoga* regarding the partner, so it doesn't create *vasanas*. But it doesn't work that way, you said. Why? I have a partner, and want to marry. But does it mean I have to give up enlightenment?

**Sundari:** James is not against relationships or marriage, in fact he is all for love. The reason he teaches that one should not make a relationship or marriage your goal if you are seeking *moksa* is that *moksa* is freedom from dependence on objects. There is nothing wrong with the objects in and of themselves, but if you want *moksa* you need to negate the objects by realising that they are value-neutral. The joy is not in the object, it is in you. So if you want a relationship or you want to marry because you need someone to love you or complete you, it will never work, because no object is capable of doing this. This causes bondage, attachment, *vasanas* and suffering. If your *mumukshutva* is strong and you still want a relationship, go into it with the *karma yoga* attitude and see if that works. If you can see the other person not as “another” person, but as yourself and are very sure that you are not entering the relationship because you are looking for love, it can work. Even if the “other” person is not interested in self-knowledge (this does make it more challenging), if you can see them and love them as a symbol of self, it could work. You can make it part of your spiritual practice. It is not easy though. James and I are together because neither of us was looking for anything and we know that our true nature is love. We know we are the self and therefore have no dependence on objects. We know that no one can give us happiness or take it away from us. So we are free of each other. We do not project onto each other and we are never in denial about anything. We live Vedanta because we know we are Vedanta. We are 100% aware of who we really are, 100% of the time. So we are very happy, not because we make each other happy, but because we share the happiness we already are.

Without this approach to a relationship, it will be difficult if not impossible to make *moksa* your main priority. Maybe you need to put *moksa* on hold for a while and just go fully into this experience of marriage. There is nothing wrong with this; you are young and beautiful and you can learn from the experience. If you cannot not pursue a relationship – if the *vasana* for the relationship or marriage is too strong – do it wholeheartedly and enjoy it. Give yourself totally to it, love with all your heart and know that whatever the result is, it is not up to Ami, and she will be fine whatever happens.

**Ami:** I think you got *moksa*, so maybe having been married is not a problem for you, but is it different for those who still haven't got *moksa*?

**Sundari:** Yes, James and I are not seeking *moksa*, because we know we are *moksa*. So it makes no difference if we have a relationship or not. But there is no reason not to have one, as it is not against *dharma*. And we are not in a relationship, the relationship is in us.

As I said above, it does not work to seek *moksa* and to seek a relationship, because that means you are dependent on an object for your happiness and therefore you will not get free of the doer/ego/person/Ami.

**Ami:** Sorry for so many questions. I may have the wrong understanding. Thank you very much for your kindness.

~ Love, Ami

**Sundari:** No problem, Ami, these are good questions! Much love to you from James and me.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari