

The Hollowness of the Ego

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Marius: Dear Sundari, I hope you are both really well. The little vignette from Trout Lake that you posted is tantalizing, but I'm working so slowly through the memory stick that I won't bother with that purchase yet. It looked so beautiful there. What an amazing setting.

I am looking for some advice about applying knowledge in the heat of the moment, when things are really tough. As I mentioned before, I had a heart condition that was dealt with which has knocked me out a bit more than I anticipated, and now looks like it might not be fixed after all. Added to that is the imminent move back to the US leaving my wife with a new house to run, a new nanny to pay for and live with, and my eight-year-old girl. For my own part, I don't know if the taxi licensing authority in New York will let me drive owing to my heart condition, I have a tenant who is refusing to move out of my house in the US and not paying bills and I am wracked with anxiety about just about everything, especially my daughter. I feel adrenaline pumping day and night, the tension is almost unbearable, sleep is hard to find, and I don't know how to cope.

When I try to apply the knowledge that I hear and read about, it seems so hollow, so mechanical. Sometimes it seems to pierce through the emotions and thoughts and anxiety, but most of the time it feels irrelevant and fake. I find myself desperately using this knowledge as a way to feel better, rather than true investigation, and somehow trying to apply knowledge in the heat of all this angst just winds the mind and body up even more. Just listening to James helps me calm down a bit and at night helps me fall asleep, but when it's just a Mack truck of emotion and insistent thinking, I lose perspective. I'm not saying this as a "poor me" because this is what IS happening, and I can see how to a great extent it is the result of inefficient modes of thinking and acting in the past that has brought this about.

What I need help with is how to best approach these dramatic sensations, fears and anxieties in the best way for practicing knowledge. Any suggestions would be welcome.

~ Best wishes, Marius

Sundari: Hello, Marius, good to hear from you again. So sorry to hear that you are having a tough time of it in the apparent reality. Self-knowledge is not a magic pill for the ego; it still has to go through what it has to go through if you want to be truly free of the person and their stuff. When one finally has the courage to cut the noose to a lifetime of *adharmic* accretions, expect life to unravel. This is why this option is so thoroughly unappealing to the ego and it can put off looking squarely at its stuff for so long. There is no quick fix to this, Marius. You will just have to fight your way through it, even when nothing helps and especially when even Vedanta feels hollow and empty. Remind yourself that you are not your feelings, watch them appear in you. "Your" feelings are never the same from one moment to the next. How real can they be? Consign the anxiety to *Isvara* – that's where it belongs, not to you. It is the anxiety over the fruits of the action. The ego is terrified of change. However hard it is to get through this challenging time, the means of knowledge gives you the tools to deal with it. You have the knowledge and you know that are not your story but the witness of this unfolding drama. This is when *karma yoga* and discrimination

count more than ever. When *Isvara* messes up your life to this extent, it is time to “let go and let God.” What else is there to do? Faith in the scripture and in *Isvara* is your lifeline while the apparent storm rages for the *jiva*. I am sure you have looked at all the alternatives. You could take a different course of action; there is no law against this. You need to do what is right for you and all concerned in your life drama at the right time and in a good way. Maybe you are going about this too fast, making too many changes too quickly. Why not slow things down, put major changes on the back burner and take one day at a time, see what happens? There are never perfect or easy times to make necessary changes in the *jiva*'s life; it is always hard to do this.

But there are always more grace-filled options of going about making life-shattering changes that do not require things to fall apart with such intensity. Start with your relationship with your wife: is there any way you could live amicably together, managing expectations, maybe for a certain period of time? If you can find a way to do this as friends with the *karma yoga* attitude, pursuing your own lives while taking care of your daughter and allowing her to grow up a little more, this could work and give you all some time to adjust to changes ahead. You could explain the situation honestly and truthfully to your daughter. Remember, she is the really the self and understands far more than you give her credit for.

This could also give you a break to take care of your health until you are clearer what the long-term prognosis for your condition is. Health problems seldom have one single cause; they are obviously connected to many things. Lifestyle, exercise and diet play a huge role in how health or ill health expresses in the body. If this is not a workable situation, then you have no option but to leap over the cliff, trusting that *Isvara* will be there to catch you. *Isvara* is always there – but it might get worse before it gets better. What price freedom? I am in transit from the US to South Africa via Europe tomorrow, so will be out of contact for a little while. If you need more help, please feel free to write to James. He would be very happy to help you. Maybe a Skype chat would be a good idea? Let me know ASAP and I can set it up – or you can arrange it directly with James. Hang in there, Marius. You are the self. You are free. And this too will pass.

~ With much love and strength to you, Sundari