

Transcendental Avoidance and *Nididhyasana*

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With both Ram and Sundari Responding

Sundari: James and I discussed your email. He has replied in detail below. We noticed in this past year something we see many truly serious inquirers, such as you are, attempt to do: study Vedanta as a way around dealing with the *jiva* and avoiding *Isvara*. We have noted your growing desire to withdraw from your life and duties and immerse the mind in a lifestyle and culture more desirable for the *jiva*. There is no way to jump straight into awareness, avoiding the *jiva*.

Even with all the many, many hours and years of teaching that have taken place with you and Ramji and the very fine mind you have, there is an essential understanding missing in your assimilation of the knowledge. It is clear you do not see the duality in your statements and questions; the distinction between *satya* and *mithya* is not clear. One cannot impose *satya* onto *mithya*, it just does not work. No amount of studying the scriptures, learning Sanskrit or running off to “immerse” the *jiva* in *ashram* life will solve this problem. The problem is not in the life of the *jiva*. It is that you are still identified with being a *jiva* and you do not understand its relationship to *Isvara*.

What Vedanta teaches and experience reveals is that there is no separation between the *jiva*, *Isvara* and awareness. Non-dual vision is the ability to see that everything is made up of you and dissolves into you, yet you are always free of the objects. The *jiva* as a *jiva* will remain limited, enlightened or not. There is no way to be rid of it, other than dissolving the identification with the *jiva* in self-knowledge. **This requires identifying and understanding the *Isvara*-given conditioning that has been running the *jiva* in the light of self-knowledge.**

You cannot escape *Isvara*. *Isvara* demands to be loved here and now, in whatever form appears before “Andrew’s” eyes, whether it is a patient, a stranger or your wife. *Nididhyasana* seems to be lacking in your self-inquiry. Although you are doing a good job of imparting the knowledge to others, the work of understanding, assimilating and transforming the emotional and psychological patterns in the mind has not taken place. Unfortunately, *nididhyasana* cannot be avoided if freedom from and for the *jiva* is what you are after. There is no way around but through. And *nididhyasana* never ends for the *jiva*, even when the knowledge is firm that you are not the *jiva* but awareness, because the *jiva* is always interacting with the environment it is a part of. As the *jiva* is not in control of anything other than how it relates to the environment, *karma yoga* and *nididhyasana* go hand in hand as long as the *jiva* is alive.

We love you, Andrew, and we hope we can help you through this. I feel it is a good thing this has come up. You are so dedicated to the truth – but it may be that you have missed the trees for the forest.

James’ reply: Andrew, a sage abides as pure awareness associated with a human form. When he performs action, is his attention fixed on the pure awareness he is while doing action,

witnessing the action? For example, when you reply to an email, is your attention on analyzing the question and typing the reply? Or is your attention divided between abidance as witnessing awareness and also thinking and typing?

I think we need to go back to the drawing board; you have more assimilating to do. Why would I divide my attention? I am witnessing awareness. When somebody writes to witnessing awareness, witnessing awareness reads the question, tries to figure out the doubt and formulates a response that is in harmony with scripture – and appropriate to the inquiry. I am not a sage. It is just another limited identity. Even if I am a normal *samsari*, I would not divide my attention. How could I answer the question if my mind isn't completely absorbed in the object? See the duality you are creating! Duality is bad enough, but here you are dividing your attention – as a practice. That is not what is meant by discrimination. Discrimination does not imply action. It is just knowledge. You are the self, the patient is the self, your attention is the self. What reason is there to divide it?

Andrew: A *sannyasin*-sage, because of his renunciation, is freed from duties and abides as pure awareness continuously. That is the privilege of being a *sannyasin*. He has nothing else to do: “*Kritakrityasca, Bharata.*” ~ *Bhagavad Gita*, 15.20

James: See the duality, Andrew! The sage “abides.” Witnessing awareness is the “sage.” If you are witnessing awareness there is no renunciation for you, because all objects are *mithya*. Knowing this takes care of your relationship to them, not that there is a relationship in the first place – you are free of them already. Renunciation is a psychological stance, a state of mind. In what way do duties stand in the way of the self? The *sannyasi*-sage, as you call it, is awareness. There is no “abiding.” I think you are seduced by language. “The privilege of being a *sannyasi*”? This sounds like enlightenment sickness. *Sannyas* is the natural state of mind of someone who is awareness. It is not a status.

Andrew: A householder-sage has household matters to attend to. How does he abide as pure awareness plus attend to his duties? In the midst of his action, is his attention divided?

James: Duties are *mithya*, Andrew. What do duties have to do with it? You do your duties – or not. What does it matter – if you are the self? If you are a person who thinks he is the self, then you need to do your duties or there will be a lot of conflict. And in any case what do you have to lose by doing your duties? And conversely what do you have to gain by abandoning them? You are not thinking clearly. By the way, I'm taking the words “householder sage” to refer to Andrew, the *jiva*.

Andrew: I tried this out. When a patient is in consultation with me, I found paying attention to the patient plus abiding as witnessing awareness not practical.

James: Can't you see the duality in your thinking? I have a hard time believing you are actually writing this email. It seems your self-knowledge has deserted you.

Andrew: My attention to the patient was reduced, which is not good. I found it better to give my full attention to the patient, and then after the consultation to rest again as awareness. But with other activities which are not critical, e.g. at home or in the garden, I could abide as witnessing awareness and do the action.

James: I don't agree. How can you rest as awareness if you are awareness already? You are what Andrew "rests in." Even if you think you are Andrew, you should not divide your attention at all. What is in front of you is *Isvara*, so you pay attention to it. If your wife wants something, that is *Isvara* wanting something, so you need to pay attention to her and give her what she needs. That is service to *Isvara*. It is appropriate behavior.

If you put your attention on "witnessing awareness," who is doing it? This statement shows that you think you are a *jiva* abiding as a *jiva*. You can't study Vedanta. You are over-thinking it, making a mess of it. Some *pratibhandaka* is operating that is covering your knowledge. It has to be acknowledged and resolved or you can't go further. I don't know and it is none of my business, but I suspect it has to do with your relationship with your wife. You can't hide out in enlightenment/*sannyas*/Vedanta – whatever – and ignore your *karma*.

Abiding as awareness means that the teaching on *satya/mithya* has been assimilated. It is just knowledge. Knowledge does the work. There is no doing involved, no renunciation, etc. Until that time, the *jiva* needs to do *karma yoga* and *upasana yoga* and *jnana yoga*, i.e. take a stand as awareness. If you are awareness – obviously you don't think you are or if you do you have the wrong idea what it means to be awareness – or if you are taking a stand as awareness, the commitment is lacking, because you have these doubts.

Andrew: Krishna was right in *Bhagavad Gita* 4.18: "Even sages are confused about action"!!! Ha, ha!

James: Andrew is confused, that is all. In that verse, Vyasa is using the word "sage" to refer to spiritual people who think they are sage-like but who are not actually sages. It is an ironical, almost sarcastic, comment. It actually means *samsaris*. A self-actualized person has no question about *karma*, because he does not take himself to be a doer and knows that *karma* is *mithya*. This whole letter is *mithya*. There is no *satya* in it. The ideas are *mithya* but you don't seem to know it. The person with the questions is *mithya* but you seem to take him to be real. I guess we have to start over from the beginning.

I love your humility, Andrew. It is your saving grace. Blessed are the meek. Most people who have so much invested in their spirituality would not accept what I said.

The lesson is that you have to take care of your life, you can't retreat into Vedanta. Vedanta should run in the background, be an aid to life, not the focus. This is the message Krishna gives Arjuna in the beginning of the *Gita* when Arjuna is thinking of taking off to a cave in the Himalayas. There is some very old deep *samskara* that has never been addressed, and you can't progress unless it is uncovered and integrated into your self-knowledge. It's not going to be easy, because it is buried so deeply. It is childhood stuff, a responding pattern that developed to take care of some kind of emotional pain. This can only be the explanation because you have the

knowledge, but it gets covered. When you were here, both Sundari and I noticed what I call “transcendental avoidance.” We had the feeling that you felt that you thought you were too spiritual to actually participate in the interactions that were going on in “*samsara*.” Our lives are very ordinary – you could say *samsaric* – but our minds are not *samsaric* at all. We hover in the background, in the knowledge, and play our *samsaric* roles very nicely. We enjoy the world. And why wouldn’t we? It is all us. *Isvara* is very beautiful in all its forms. That is the message in the eleventh chapter of the *Gita* where Arjuna asks Krishna to remove the cosmic vision because it is too uncomfortable. It is the same problem with Yoga and Neo-Advaita. They want to transcend the world and live in some kind of spiritual bubble, divorced from the world. But all this does is strengthen the belief that the world is real. As Swamiji once said to me, “You are what you are rebelling against.” I suppose being an Asian and being aware of the monastic culture, you have developed a fondness for it – it promises relief from the world – but the fact is that you are not a *sannyasi*. You are a worldly person, a doctor and a husband with duties, so you have to accept your *dharma* completely. Avoidance of *dharma* is *tamasic* and it never works. *Isvara* will keep creating problems for you until you face it.