

Which “I” Is Talking?

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Sundari: Hello, Isaac. I am replying on behalf of James who is very busy at the moment. I hope all is well with you.

Isaac: I have read over the first chapter of the book and listened to the corresponding Berlin talk a couple of times. When I first started going over the “no object happiness” teachings I thought, “Oh, yeah, I heard this with Chinmaya mission, I’ve got this.” Based on my own life experience, I can see that it makes sense. But upon examining my current thoughts and actions I can see that I am still very motivated and inclined to act on the idea that happiness IS in the object. I really can’t see anything I do that doesn’t seem to confirm that I still think that. I want to remove this old job so I can be happy. I want to get this new job so I can be happy. I want to get away from where I live now to be happy, I want to get a new place to live so I can be happy.

Sundari: Ignorance is hardwired, it is tenacious and aggressive. Everything in *maya* seems to be designed to keep one a slave to the system, so don’t be too hard on yourself. It takes dedication and determination to free yourself from lifetimes of enslavement to duality and the hypnosis of materialism, the bondage to the body/mind orientation. This is why Vedanta is so emphatic on the qualifications required for *moksa*. If you examine your language in the last few sentences, you repeatedly use the words “I want”: to “get to/away,” to “be happy,” etc.

First of all, which “I” is talking here? As awareness, THE “I,” is your nature, and as such is happiness. There is nothing that you need and nowhere to get to. You are it, so how can you get to where you already are or get what you already have? The reflected self, the “small I” (ultimately, there is no division, but until you know who you are, it is very important to be very clear about this distinction), will never be happy, satisfied or fulfilled. That is why it is driven to seek what it already has, namely, freedom, happiness, i.e. your true nature. Until the knowledge of who you are is hard and fast, you will be like the rat in the story of Ganesh who symbolizes your likes and dislikes, fears and desires. The rat will be on top of you, Ganesh, driving you relentlessly, instead of Ganesh, who symbolises self-knowledge, being the master of the rat, your likes and dislikes.

Isaac: I say I know that there is no inherent happiness in the object, but every time I get upset I want to gorge myself at my favorite restaurant and eat junk food so I can feel better (drugs and drinking are in the past, so that is what I do now). Do I need to deal with this issue before going further into Vedanta or does this fall away with continued inquiry?

Sundari: Isaac is gorging himself because *tamas* (frustration, boredom, dissatisfaction, wanting things to be different, etc.) is in the driver’s seat. He will then beat himself up with guilt: *tamas* again. Study the *guna* teaching, it is the only way to understand Isaac’s psychology, as the *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) are what govern the creation of the *vasanas*, likes and dislikes). The

gunas do not belong to Isaac, they belong to *Isvara* and are inescapably woven into the creation. This is why they are called “ropes”: they bind. The key is to understand them and identify how they play out, as they all have very predictable qualities and give rise to predictable thoughts/emotions/actions. Once Isaac can identify which *guna* gives rise to “his” likes and dislikes, dis-identify with them, as they do not belong to Isaac. Isaac can then manage them with the appropriate choices of lifestyle, diet, work, managing resources, relationships, etc. and thus aim for peace of mind. This does not happen overnight; ignorance is obsessively resistant to change; this is where the “work” is: remaining vigilant as each *guna* appears, tracking what triggers it and how Isaac responds. With practise, each time you do this, the knowledge is there faster, and Isaac makes the choice for peace of mind faster, with less suffering involved.

Isaac: Upon seeing that most of my pursuits (if not all) are an attempt to complete my perceived incompleteness, it has made me start to look at my life very differently.

Sundari: This is essential, and you need to ask yourself: who is looking at your life differently?

Isaac: Everything seems very frivolous, if not pointless. Or I feel like I don’t want to do something so as not to reinforce the idea of object-happiness. Yet I still have to act.

Sundari: This shows that dispassion is developing. Everything in *maya* is frivolous. It is a projection, a zero-sum game. It is *Isvara’s lila*. Once the hypnosis of object-identification starts to unwind and one sees that all objects are meaningless, the ego feels disorientated and a feeling of emptiness sets in. Remember that you are the fullness that knows the emptiness.

Who is it that still wants to act or not act? Awareness, your true nature, never acts; Isaac thinks he acts. Isaac cannot not act, but the point is to remain mindful of who is acting. Isaac has no choice but to act; just remember that he is not the doer and the results are not up to him. The *gunas* are always operational, causing predictable thoughts and feelings and the actions which ensue as a result. They do not belong to Isaac. There is no problem with doing when you know you are not the doer, so act in accordance with your nature, manage the *gunas* by making peace of mind your goal and practise *karma yoga*!

Isaac: At that point I wonder, what is the motivation? If it isn’t to gain completeness or happiness, because those things are not in objects, then why would I do anything? Is it just a matter of preference such as, “I would prefer not to be homeless, so I will work,” or, “I prefer not to be single, so I will maintain my marriage”?

Sundari: The completeness and happiness already exist in you, awareness. The problem is not whether or not you act or whether or not you are seeking pleasure in the object. The problem is that you think “you” are doing it. Who are you? Awareness is not a doer.

Maya/ignorance is a power that exists within awareness. As such, it is the cause of the apparent reality (*mithya*). It is a beautiful, purposeful creation in which it is possible to attain success, i.e. freedom/happiness, by realising your true nature as awareness. As awareness, the non-dual

essence of everything, you are not affected, enhanced or contaminated by anything in the creation. You are always free of it, always free of Isaac.

The only real purpose to do anything in *maya* is for you to free yourself from limitation and your identification with the subtle body, i.e. Isaac.

Having said that, discrimination is one of the very important qualifications and you need to apply it to everything. There are definitely situations and people that are best avoided, and discrimination is essential. Remember also that we all have our apparent nature to deal with, so accept Isaac with all his peculiarities and love him unconditionally. He did not make himself the way he is, *Ishvara* did.

Once your personal ignorance of your true nature is removed through self-inquiry and the knowledge that you are whole and complete, non-dual awareness is hard and fast, *maya* remains and will still condition the subtle body, until it does not anymore. The *gunas* still operate and the *vasanas* will still be there. Whatever you have not resolved before self-realisation will have to be dealt with “after” self-realisation. There is not getting away from this. Isaac is the self under the spell of ignorance, so when the self-knowledge reveals your true nature to be the self, you will know that Isaac is not the doer and Isaac’s conditioning has nothing to do with him. Thus his *vasanas* will be rendered non-binding and will no longer be a problem. You will not waste time trying to change Isaac; you will accept him as he is and not want anything to be different. Isaac will then naturally gravitate towards peace of mind because *moksa* is for the *jiva*, as the self is already self-aware. Once the mind has tasted the bliss of the self there is no going back.

Awareness, you, will be (and has always been) “experiencing” Isaac; Isaac will no longer be trying to experience awareness.

Isaac: It seems like the only important thing to do is self-inquiry and everything else is playing make-believe.

Sundari: Yes, indeed self-inquiry is the only game in town. Nothing else is real, the definition for “real” being “that which has an independent reality and is eternal,” i.e. unchanging. Without you, awareness, there would be no creation. Everything exists in you, but you are free of everything.

Isaac: Is there any room for *kama* in this scenario or is that the root of the problem, that I am identifying with the enjoyer.

Sundari: Desire for objects to complete oneself is the root cause of bondage. *Moksa* is freedom from dependence on objects. As it stands for you, the knowledge of your true nature is not hard and fast. Once the self is realised, *kama* is no longer a problem. In the *Gita*, Krishna, speaking as awareness, says, “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” As awareness, Isaac can have desire without desire, i.e. without pain. You will enjoy everything because you will know it all to be you. You will enjoy Isaac and give him full rein to wander as far as he wants to in *mithya* because you will know that he always comes home to you, awareness.

Isaac: In other words, I am having difficulty applying these concepts to my apparent reality.

Sundari: You cannot “apply these concepts to your present reality,” as awareness is not a concept and you are not the doer. Self-knowledge does the work; keep up the practice of all the *yogas*: *jnana yoga*, *karma yoga* and *triguna vibhava yoga*. Trust *Isvara*, you are on the Vedanta bus, it will get you there.

Isaac: I am having trouble doing “normal stuff” or even being nice to people because it seems like I only do that because it reinforces my idea of myself being a “nice person.”

Sundari: Again, which “I” is talking here? Isaac is talking here, and he really is okay, even with all his tendencies. Whatever he does or does not do will not change who he is as awareness one bit. Stop beating yourself up, you are fine the way you are. This is not about being perfect, it is about removing ignorance of your true nature. Once you know who you are, you will treat everything and everyone accordingly, as you will know that everything and everyone is you. You will also follow *dharma* impeccably because you will see no “otherness.” Practising *karma yoga* means consecrating all your thoughts and actions on a moment-to-moment basis to *Bhagavan* with an attitude of gratitude and worship, knowing that the results are not up to you with and then taking the results that do come as *prasad*.

Isaac: I have been reading the *Gita* out loud as part of my daily prayers and trying to identify with Krishna. I can see why you recommend Dayananda’s translation, it is very clear.

Sundari: Good, keep it up.

Isaiah: I feel like I have had much *rajas* and *tamas* these last few weeks, and it is hard to sit down and assimilate the teachings. I have been prone to lack of concentration or sleepiness. At night I have been having very vivid dreams and I awaken often. In the morning I feel exhausted. Then I am tired, agitated or just plain spiteful during the day. I have noticed too that my ego appears to have ballooned in size in regards to me being a “know-it-all” now that I have learned just a few things from Vedanta. It seems like this pattern has increased since I have really started to dig into the teachings, watch my mind and examine my motivations. Do you have any recommendations on what I can do?

Sundari: If you know you are spiteful and a know-it-all, are you really spiteful and a know-it-all? Observing Isaac dispassionately, objectively and honestly is necessary, but don’t wear yourself out with negative thoughts about him. He is not responsible, the *gunas* are. The agitation is *rajas* and the lack of concentration, sleepiness, exhaustion, spiteful and negative thoughts are *tamas* and they do not belong to Isaac. The vivid dreams are subconscious content made visible. The dream state is coloured by Isaac’s *vasana* load. My suggestion is that you conduct a fearless moral inventory; find out what values underpin your life. See what lifestyle changes you can make; *rajas* and *tamas* are often a consequence of an unhealthy *samsaric* lifestyle.

Visit James' website; there is tons of material available; read the e-*satsangs*. Make sure you work through *How to Attain Enlightenment* systematically, starting with the motivations and qualifications. We all go through the same struggle to free ourselves. Don't give up on you, you are beautiful. You are the self.

Isaac: Thank you very much.

Sundari: You are welcome.