

Who Is the Knower of Aloneness?

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Roeland: Dear Sundari, a few weeks ago I wrote to you about the experience of boundlessness, or in other words, not being separate.

The last few weeks were nice but also confusing. Because of this shift I notice lots of changes within myself.

I remember you said I could write you if I had any questions. To be honest, I have lots of questions... I hope you can give me some advice on how to deal with these issues.

Sundari: I am happy that you have written again, Roeland, lovely to hear from you. I am also glad to hear that self-inquiry is working for you and you are observing the positive effects. Keep it up and well done for your commitment to it!

The important thing to ask yourself is this: Who experiences the shift and to whom are the changes occurring?

Because there is really only awareness, there is only one *jiva*, or subtle body, appearing as many; this is *Jiva* with a capital J. However, there are three types of *jivas*. Ask yourself at all times: Who is the I that is speaking? Is it the *jiva* who thinks it is a person? This *jiva* is often called the doer. Is it the *jiva* who knows awareness? This *jiva* is often called a self-realized *jiva*. Or is it the *jiva* that knows it IS awareness? This is the *jivanmukta*, the self no longer under the spell of ignorance. This is *moksa*.

Roeland: I almost cannot believe I am the one, and I keep testing myself.

If I go outside and be with others I can feel separated, then when back home I can concentrate on myself again or watch some stuff on the internet about non-duality. And every time I do this I can pretty easily see I am the one. Right now I am writing to you, who in fact is me in another form. In fact I am all alone in my universe.

Sundari: You are not the one if this is a statement made by the ego. "The one" has the implied meaning of uniqueness, and the ego loves to feel special or "different." This statement is true if spoken as awareness because you are awareness and as awareness you are unique because there is only you. Everything else is a reflection of you. The reflection is not the same as that which is casting the reflection – like the clay and the pot, the pot does not exist without the clay but the clay is not dependent on the pot. So whatever you are experiencing, whether it is a person, a thing, a thought or a feeling, it is all you. Understanding what this means is *moksa*, liberation from the false idea that you are Roeland, the person identified with objects. Discriminating awareness from the objects that appear in you is much easier to do on one's own, away from people and in our comfort zone, because it is less likely that our likes and dislikes will be provoked. But self-knowledge needs to translate into your life in all ways or the knowledge is

not yet firm.

And who keeps testing who? You cannot test awareness because awareness is that which makes the testing possible and who knows the one who is doing the testing. Awareness is not an object of perception because it is subtler than the means at our disposal, perception and inference, for knowing anything. Awareness can only be revealed to be your true nature through self-knowledge removing the ignorance that prevents you from knowing this. This is why self-inquiry is so important.

If you look at any object, whether it is a person, a thing or a feeling, from the point of view of the body, it will appear to be separate from you. Duality is very convincing and it does not disappear when we know that the true nature of reality is a non-duality. Non-duality is not opposed to duality; duality is not a problem unless you don't know what it is and you take it to be real. It is the same as saying that ignorance is not a problem unless you don't know what it is – or you take ignorance to be knowledge. This is the cause of all suffering, ignorance of your true nature, which means that you take duality to be reality. You are not all alone in your universe. You are all one and the universe is in you, awareness.

Roeland: Question: When with other people, I notice it's easy to fall back into the illusion of being separate again. Is it so that enlightenment is a non-stop realization of oneness, also among others?

Sundari: Yes, it is a constant reaffirmation of the truth of who you are until the knowledge is firm. We call this "taking a stand in awareness as awareness" and "affirming the opposite thought" whenever a thought to the contrary appears in the mind. When self-knowledge is firm you no longer need to do this because you will have permanent non-dual vision. However, duality will still apparently exist, you just know it is not real and do not buy into it. Like the mirage on the desert floor – you would not try to drink the water. What changes then is the motivation for doing anything: your contact with objects comes about because you are already happy and whole, not because you are looking for happiness or wholeness.

Roeland: Question: Lately, when realizing I am the one, I felt fear of aloneness but I accepted it and then it felt okay.

But somehow I still have moments of separateness when among others. But it feels like I am going to lose this also in time.

If it is true that enlightenment is a non-stop realization, also among others, how do you cope with this aloneness? Is this just something I will get used to?

Sundari: Who is the knower of the feeling of aloneness? It is you, awareness, the fullness or the non-experiencing witness, that is the knower of the one who feels aloneness. You don't cope with the feeling, you see it for what it is, ignorance of your true nature. It sounds to me like the aloneness you feel is really a feeling of alienation, of separation. When you look at feelings in the light of self-knowledge they dissolve because they are not real, and often not logical. All feelings originate from the *gunas* so don't identify with them unless they reaffirm your true nature as

awareness. Awareness is not a feeling and it is not dependent on how you are feeling; *rajas* and *tamas* can be present and causing agitation but still the light of awareness is there, unmodified. This is because as awareness you are beyond the *gunas*, *trigunatatita*. You are the knower of the *gunas*. However, as the true nature of the mind is *sattva* it is natural for the self appearing as the *jiva* to want to experience peace of mind. There is a saying I love: “Loneliness is the absence of the other; aloneness is the presence of the self.” Aloneness is very beautiful if you see it as revelling in the bliss of the self; then it is total fullness and not at all empty or alienated. Just stay with self-inquiry, keep exposing the mind to self-knowledge and it will do the work of removing the ignorance.

Most people have *prarabdha karma* to work out after self-realisation. This means Roeland’s conditioning – his likes and dislikes, or *vasanas* – need to be dissolved in the light of self-knowledge. This can take some time so stay with it. Self-realization is the easy part; self-actualisation is understanding what it means to be awareness in the apparent reality, in other words, in Roeland’s world. A self-actualised *jiva* makes the hard and fast statement “I am whole and complete, ever-present, unchanging, unlimited awareness” – and knows what that means for the *jiva* living in the apparent reality. Self-actualisation is the hard part because ignorance or duality is hardwired and very tenacious. There is a way out of suffering because even though the apparent reality exists and we can experience it, it is not real. “Real” being defined by “that which is always present and never changes.” Vedanta offers you all the tools to find the way out of suffering, or to achieve *moksa*, if that is what you want more than anything else.

Roeland: Somehow I experience more peace, there is no more fear of death or of illness. I cannot know what happens the next second; it can be good or it can be bad.

But it doesn’t matter, for I am eternal. All is okay.

Sundari: This is very good, Roeland; this shows that the knowledge is working as the gradual increase of peace (which is your true nature) is a sure sign that the pressure of the *vasanas* is decreasing. Even if a fear had to reappear you would see it for what it is, a product of *rajas* and *tamas*, and it does not belong to you because, as you say, you are eternal and very okay, no matter what “happens” or does not “happen.” ☺

Your attitude is perfect *karma yoga*: the knowledge that the results of all that we do, say and think are up to *Isvara*, or the Total, and not up to the *jiva*. With *karma yoga* everything we do say and think is done with an attitude of peace and gratitude in accordance with *dharma* because we know we are not the doer. Then we take whatever results that do come as *prasad*, a gift.

Roeland: But I notice there is no more motivation, a sort of laziness, which also is not a real problem, but I doesn’t feel right.

Question: How to deal with this laziness or not being motivated?

Sundari: As I said above, once self-knowledge removes the ignorance of our true nature the motivation for doing things will change. This is because you are no longer looking for any object to fulfill you because you know that you are already full; the joy is not in the object – it is in you,

awareness. If you are experiencing laziness that is *tamas*. It is not a problem unless you identify with it as Roeland. *Tamas*, as with all the *gunas*, belongs to *Isvara* and not to Roeland. The thing is, if you are experiencing agitation because of *tamas* then perhaps you need to make some adjustments to Roeland's lifestyle. Maybe you need to look at diet, exercise, what you do for recreation, etc. You might need to use some *rajas* to get out of too much *tamas*, like eating differently or doing some kind of exercise.

On the other hand, if you are enjoying being lazy, then be lazy until you don't feel like being lazy anymore! As you are the knower of the laziness there is nothing to worry about. Feeling bad or guilty (*tamas*) about it does not help you, it just causes more agitation (*rajas*).

Roeland: I thought about helping others but since they are all me there is no real urge to change anything. Don't get me wrong, I would love to help others but I guess I am not ready for it right now.

Sundari: Very good, Roeland! The urge to help others can be problematic because it is often based in a tenacious and subtle duality. First off, as you say, there are no others; secondly, it is up to *Isvara* to help them and not to Roeland. If *Isvara* wants you to be of help this will be made known to you. No need to look for it. Everyone is working out their lives according to the *karma* that *Isvara* gives them; trying to help or save others is arrogant and ego-based. Many do-gooders are doing good because the ego needs an identity or it needs to be validated as good or virtuous. This is not following *dharma* because trying to do the *dharma*, or the duty, of another is robbing them of the opportunity to work out their *karma*. This is not to say one should not help if one can; it is important to do everything with an attitude of gratitude and service to the whole. What is important is the motivation behind everything that we do.

Roeland: There still are some things going on with myself; if I jump into a teacher role right now my ego will rise again, and I don't want that.

Sundari: This shows very good discrimination and honesty, Roeland; well done. Let *Isvara* take care of everything, including what is going on with Roeland. At this stage jumping into the teacher role would more than likely be the ego co-opting the knowledge and needing to assert itself. Unless one is very clear about one's motivation teaching is not something that one should seek, and one should only embark on it when it is clear that this is what *Isvara* wants you to do. It is natural to want to share what we know with the people around us but unless they are ready to hear Vedanta will not make sense to them. Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Let not the wise unsettle the minds of the ignorant." The ignorant are the self under the spell of ignorance, identified with objects, and it is arrogant to assume that they should hear what you have to say unless they specifically ask you to talk to them about Vedanta. Talk normally to everyone, see them as the self and honour where they are at. You can be an inspiration to others and serve them by how you live the knowledge.

Roeland: The question about not being motivated also relates to another issue I am thinking about: choice and free will.

I ask myself the question “What should I do now that nothing really matters anymore?”

Sundari: Now that you know that you are not the doer but the knower of the one who apparently does you will follow the nature that *Isvara* gave to the apparent person called Roeland. The only motivation that is valuable for doing anything is that it makes you feel good or at peace. This is called following *dharma*, doing your duty, and doing what is in accordance with your *svadharma*, which is Roeland’s nature given to him by *Isvara*. This will naturally be what is most beneficial to you as Roeland and the most fulfilling; it will also be what causes no harm to you or anyone else because there is no one else. There is only you, awareness. For instance, if it is your nature to be an artist and a loner then trying to do something to fit into what others expect of you, like being an accountant or a socialiser, would be *adharmic* for you. The highest *dharma* is self-inquiry into the true nature of the self for the purpose of *moksa*, or liberation. The desire for freedom must be stronger than any other desire so self-inquiry must be top of the list for you if you are truly seeking liberation.

Roeland: And at the same time I can’t help questioning myself: “Can I do anything or can’t I?” If I am God somehow it must be possible to create things; to create is divine.

Sundari: If you take yourself to be the person called Roeland then you are the doer, the one who is identified with objects, who believes that reality is a duality, the one who suffers. If you know that your primary identity is awareness then you know that the only apparent doer is the *gunas*, or *Isvara*. As a *jiva* who lives in the apparent reality you cannot NOT do. You are always doing something from the day you are born till the day you die. Even not doing is a doing. The point of *moksa* is the knowledge that you are not the doer but the one who knows the apparent doer. This is the essence of self-inquiry into the nature of awareness and of discrimination.

You are also not God, or *Isvara*, you are awareness appearing as a subtle body, or as a *jiva*. Only awareness in the role of Creator, or *Isvara* wielding *maya*, can create; the *jiva* cannot create anything other than its subjective reality (*pratibasika* or *jiva srsti*). Even though the *jiva* and *Isvara* both share the same identity as awareness the *jiva* appears in the apparent reality (*mithya*) and is therefore subject to the laws that run the *dharma* field. Only *Isvara* (or the Total) is in charge of these laws.

Isvara is omniscient and omnipresent, the *jiva* is not. *Isvara* knows all things, *jiva* only knows the objects it has contact with. And even then it cannot know everything about those objects – like what other people are thinking. When self-knowledge has removed all ignorance of your true nature then as awareness you will know the essence of all things to be you, awareness. But this does not give you knowledge of the whole *dharma* field because the *jiva* is limited to and seemingly contained within its own subtle body. As the self no longer under the spell of ignorance you will understand all things even if you do not have knowledge of all the details.

The *jiva* (apparently) does have a limited free will or success would not be possible in the apparent reality: you can choose to eat an apple and not an orange, go somewhere or stay home. But when you investigate the matter further using the logic of Vedanta it will be clear that all your choices, likes and dislikes are programmed into you by *Isvara*, or the *gunas*. Although it seems like we are making choices – and from the *jiva*’s perspective we are – in reality it is the *gunas*, or *Isvara*, making the choices. Only by exposing the mind to Vedanta can you understand this

conditioning and dissolve it in the light of self-knowledge. This is what is meant by rendering the binding *vasanas* non-binding and negating the doer, in other words, discriminating you, awareness, from the objects appearing in you.

Roeland: It feels like seeing things from a different perspective (from my aloneness/self) is a totally different way of being. And this asks for some kind of adaptation.

Sundari: It is not seeing things from my aloneness, or myself, because awareness does not belong to Roeland or to anyone. Awareness is the knower of Roeland and his feeling of aloneness; seeing from the perspective of awareness is not the ego experiencing awareness. It is the other way around: awareness apparently experiences Roeland, or the ego, the doer. Awareness is the non-experiencing witness without whose presence experience cannot take place, but because awareness is without qualities and actionless it does not experience.

Awareness associated with a subtle body makes it possible for awareness to experience and have contact with objects, when *maya* is operating. This is the self under the spell of ignorance. When self-knowledge removes ignorance *avidya*, or personal ignorance, is over for the *jiva*, or the self no longer under the spell of ignorance. But that does not mean that macrocosmic ignorance is over for the total. *Isvara srsti* (creation), or *maya*, continues as always but you no longer buy into it because you know it is not real. As I said, “real” being defined by “that which is always present and never changes.” Only you, awareness, fit this definition.

This will bring about a change in the way you see and react to everything as well as your motivation for doing anything because you will have negated all the objects, which includes the doer and rendered the binding *vasanas* non-binding. You might have to make some lifestyle changes as a result. The adaption is that you will make choices that are in harmony with your *svadharma* and your *dharma* as a seeker of liberation; these will be choices that produce peace of mind. When self-knowledge is firm non-dual vision is normal and natural and no big deal. You just see reality for what it is and will naturally follow a *dharmic* lifestyle.

Roeland: Question: I also noticed I cannot feel the drama of other people that much, and this feels like a loss or a bad thing; is this normal?

Sundari: This is very good and very normal; in fact if you are not experiencing this then self-knowledge is not working for you. It is certainly not a loss or a bad thing; dispassion is one of the most essential qualifications in order to discriminate the self, you, from the objects appearing in you. Once self-knowledge is firm you relate to other people as the self no longer under the spell of ignorance (*jivanmukta*) and you then have no problem with them. You accept everyone as they are because you know who they really are even if they don't who they are. If you get caught up in other people's drama it means that you have identified with the body-mind, or *jiva*, as your primary identity. Thus you have forgotten that your true nature is awareness, and that this is so for others as well.

Roeland: In the last few weeks I did some painting, volunteering work, relaxing, sleeping and walking. I remember your advice was to be good to my body.

To be honest, sometimes I was busy being healthy but other days I just did not care. And I noticed this ideas in my mind, saying to myself "I can't help it if I don't care because there is no free choice." But now I am rethinking this as it is a bit confusing.

Sundari: I have replied to this question above. The more firm the knowledge becomes the more you will make *sattva* your goal in everything, not because *sattva* is something to gain but because it is the nature of the mind; you want to feel good or at peace. Anything other than this is painful so you will avoid people, places, situations, food and activities that cause agitation (*rajas* and *tamas*). It is not that *rajas* and *tamas* are all bad; you need some *rajas* in order to get things done and you need some *tamas* in order to sleep and be grounded. It is excessive *rajas* and *tamas*, total extroversion of the mind and dullness (projection and denial), that is the basis of all ignorance and suffering. The *gunas* are what generate all the *vasanas* so make sure you understand this teaching as it is very important. It is called *triguna vibhava yoga*.

We have many *satsangs* at the website about the identity between *Isvara* and *jiva* and about the *gunas*. I have attached an article I wrote about this topic.

Understanding this teaching is absolutely vital if you want liberation. As the *jiva* you are not free to choose your conditioning. This belongs to *Isvara*. However, with self-knowledge you are able to make the choices that render your conditioning non-binding. This may require some changes to your lifestyle. Continued self-inquiry is highly recommended.

I have also attached an article of mine based on the research done by the experimental psychologist Daniel Kahneman. I think you might find it helpful.

Roeland: I smoke a lot, and I would like to stop, but I feel no urge to do so. I am clinging to this idea that I will stop when the time is right.

Because of all this confusion I sometimes experience (without resistance) that I feel bit weird, and I notice I smoke even more because of this.

Maybe it is a good idea not to stop instantly but to restrict my smoking a bit more. I think you will understand what I am saying.

Sundari: Smoking is *adharmic* because it is harmful to the body (*rajas*), which belongs to *Isvara*. It is a binding *vasana*, and you will need to examine why you smoke. Smoking is a crutch, a coping mechanism, which is *tamas*. Making excuses or rationalizing why you cannot give it up is just denial: *tamas*.

Roeland: I still am on unemployment and I am busy withdrawing from medication but I'm taking my time with that.

My intention is to go work again in the future. I told you about the human design system by Ra Uru Hu.

I am thinking to do a course in this system; maybe it can become my work later on.

But I feel I first need to get some things straight for myself in order to proceed. I'm hoping you can give me some advice.

Sundari: It is good that you are not rushing things and taking your time to decide how you want to proceed, especially with regards to your medication. If Ra Uru Hu's ideas work for you, are not contrary to your self-inquiry and you find it beneficial then go for it. I am happy to hear that your primary motivation seems to be your self-inquiry, which is very good.

Roeland: I know I ask a lot of your time and there are many questions. I don't really have someone to talk with about this subject at this level so I appreciate your time and care.

Thank you for reading this far.

~ With love, Roeland

Sundari: You are very welcome, Roeland, my apologies for the long delay in getting back to you. I got back to Spain just over ten days ago after my daughter's wedding, and we went straight into preparing for a seminar. James will be coming to Amsterdam to teach next month, in Amstelveen. If you can make it to attend I highly recommend it. All the details are at the website.

~ Much love to you, Sundari