

You Are the Knower of the Vastness

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Robert: Hello, Sundari. I would like to share some personal information with you and an update. I doubt this is something outside the realm of things you have experienced/heard about on a regular basis, but it was an interesting moment in my "story." ☺

When I was 14 years old, I smoked pot for the first time. My two friends ran off some distance to be silly, and I walked a bit in a field of grass. The night was dark and the stars were bright, and I somehow ended up on my back gazing at them. I became lost in them. I began to feel a vastness, as if I could perceive the unimaginable expanses of the universe. That vastness became so powerful and I (Robert) evaporated. I distinctly remember feeling like I had a choice right then: to go or stay (I felt that going would have meant dying). Suddenly I became so overwhelmingly terrified by the vastness and of losing myself that I pulled back. However, I couldn't figure out if I had gone or not. I couldn't tell if I was dead or alive because I felt no identity. After what felt like a couple of minutes I realized I was still alive and I began to cry; however, a part of me wished I had the courage to get closer, or become one with it all for at least a while, if only I could have known I would have a body to come back to.

Sundari: If you examine carefully the language that you have used here, who would you say is speaking and who would you say was having this experience? What is the "vastness and the one with it all" that you are referring to?

Robert: I wrote the above in the context that I experienced it and without coloration from the present. No other experience I have ever had was so intense, pure or terrifying. I felt like I truly was faced with dying or living. I made the right choice, as there was more to do, but I'm not exactly sure if that is what I turned down, because if it was some truth I could be and still live, I would have not wanted to refuse.

Sundari: Same question as above: Who made the choice and what was the choice?

You, as Robert, or the self under the spell of self-ignorance, had an experience of your unlimited self, and the ego was terrified because it had no frame of reference for it. It felt like it was facing its own demise – and in a sense it was. The experience only had value if you assimilated the knowledge it was meant to deliver, which is "I am whole and complete, unlimited, ever-present, all-pervasive awareness," i.e. the vastness is me. Instead, the ego felt only its own limitation, because it could not conceive of being unlimited. It interpreted the experience through *rajas/tamas*, projection/concealment, in the form of fear of death. The choice that was made here was made because of the ego's inability to see the fullness of the self as the vastness, so it clung to its limited identity.

Remember, if we go right back to the beginning of our discourses (which I think we should), we have spoken at length about direct and indirect knowledge. I can see that you have made progress with your *sadhana* and you have a very good mind, but

your knowledge is indirect. In that experience you saw awareness/the vastness as an object, and not as you, the knower of the vastness.

Robert: In a completely different way, I was just recently considering how attached I should be to this world. A couple of weeks ago I was having a conversation with my lovely roommate (who I mentioned in my first letter) about life.

She is going to medical school and plans to work in international health care in third-world countries. I told her I don't think I will be in the same line of work past another few years (I develop market research infrastructure and predictive models for companies). The things that motivated me to go into this work no longer matter to me. I told her, "My challenge now is that I'm not sure what does matter. I'm not sure anything needs doing." She said, "Well, you could always be a monk," which is exactly what I needed to hear. I knew any such life would be missing the point. If I only want to live in any way that abandons the world, what is the point of being human now and having this life? I might as well not live any longer. I was unsure if I should only focus on what I consider purifying my mind, but I can do that regardless of circumstances/experiences.

Sundari: Yes, that is correct. There is no reason to leave the world or to stay in it. The point of life is to realise the self through self-inquiry. As self-knowledge removes the ignorance of your true nature and reveals to you the nature of Robert's conditioning, certain likes and dislikes, in the form of your *vasanas*, will fall away. It is possible and very common for inquirers who expose the mind to self-knowledge to see their lives in a new way and make different choices as to their lifestyle: work, relationships entertainment, money, etc. In fact it is important that one reassess your lifestyle as part of the purification of the mind and a way to manage the *gunas* for peace of mind.

However, please hear this: it is not a prerequisite to make changes. If your life is *dharmic* and follows your nature, there should be no real need to make changes unless doing so is *dharmic* and brings peace of mind.

It might well be the case that it would behove you to move on and make lifestyle changes. However, wanting to "do good and be of service," while a noble pursuit, is often fraught with difficulties unless one is very clear what one's motivations are. Who is it that feels this need? Is it the doer wanting to do something to make a difference or is it the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, aware of its true nature, practising *karma yoga* and leaving the results of its actions up to *Isvara*, where they belong?

Isvara is not too fond of do-gooders, take note of that. What matters here is the motivation for any action you take; make sure it is in the light of self-knowledge or it will most likely backfire. It is not about right or wrong, it is about peace of mind. The *dharma* field is run perfectly by *Isvara*, and if you are meant to be of service in any particular way, you can be sure this will be made known to you.

Whatever one does, even your present line of work, can be a life of service if it is done in the right spirit and with self-knowledge. It is not more noble to be a monk, a teacher, a *guru* or a market researcher. Dropping out is often a cop-out. It is in the fray of life that you find out how strong your self-knowledge really is, not tucked safely away in a monastery or even by battling illness, poverty or anything else in

third-world countries. This is such a common trap in the “spiritual” world, the belief that going off to help the ills of the world is somehow lofty or that joining an *ashram*, becoming a vegetarian and chanting all day long is more spiritual. We are all mystics without monasteries, and living an ordinary life as an ordinary “person” who knows they are not the person is as valuable as any other life. Unless it is truly your *svadharma* to do so and not some misguided idea of what spirituality is, going off anywhere to do anything will more than likely not work out the way you think it will. Like you so rightly point out, there is no real doer. *Isvara* is the only doer.

Robert: If I have removed any ignorance about my nature at all, it is due to the gifts of grace. Even if this game we are all playing is illusory and many *jivas* will remain in *samsara*, they still suffer.

Sundari: Who has removed ignorance, Robert? It sounds very much like the doer talking here. You are right that ignorance is removed only by grace, but that grace is earned through dedicated commitment to your *sadhana*, exposing the mind to the scripture. That grace is called self-knowledge, or Vedanta. If you truly do know that your true nature is awareness and you know what that means for the *jiva* living in the apparent reality, then there will be no *samsara* in your mind anymore. *Samsara* is just an idea, a belief in duality. This is what causes all the suffering. There is no such place as *samsara*; it does not exist except in the mind of the person, or doer, the self under the spell of ignorance. The *jiva* who is under the spell of ignorance and takes the apparent reality to be real will suffer. *Isvara* is in charge of “the game,” and only *Isvara* puts an end to suffering when the time is right. Until then, the *jivas* “in *samsara*” suffer, and that suffering serves them, because at some point it will spur them on to self-inquiry.

Robert: So considering the knowledge and experience I possess, I pondered what I could offer. Although I am not certain yet, I am looking heavily into a shift into economic policy (perhaps international – UN, etc.) My ex-wife recently won a court case that allows her to take our son with her to grad school in Chicago. It is important to me that Luke and I remain close, so I will be moving there when she does to continue our 50% custody arrangement. Once I arrive, I will begin looking to make a career transition that, I hope, will enable me to play a small part to facilitate life to be a little easier for those most challenged.

Sundari: I can understand you wanting to move to be closer to your son; that is important and *dharmic*. As for the rest of your paragraph: tread with caution; see my reply above.

Robert: By the way, I am reading and enjoying Jiddu Krishnamurti. Have you ever studied his work? Do you have any thoughts on his perspective?

Sundari: How do I say this without offending you...? Let us say that if you are seriously interested in Krishnamurti, you are not ready for Vedanta. I suggest you put Vedanta on the back burner for now and study spiritual paths to see what they have to offer you. I say this not because I am critical of Krishnamurti, but because there is no way you can reconcile what he teaches with Vedanta, which is not a

spiritual path but a means of knowledge.

Robert: I hope you are well.

Sundari: Thanks, Robert, and you too. I wish you well with the decisions you are faced with; they are not easy. Remember to see it all in the light of self-knowledge and it will be much easier. Your child and your ex-wife are *Isvara*. They are not “your” child or ex-wife. They are what make up the fabric of your *dharma* field, but like you they are both the self. You have a duty to them as ex-husband and father, but you are not responsible for how their lives turn out. *Isvara* is. Take the appropriate actions and practice *karma yoga*.

~ Much love to you, Sundari