

# Eternal Vigilance the Price of Freedom

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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**Ava:** Dear Sundari, I've been following ShiningWorld, reading the *satsangs* and James' book plus listening to his audios for quite a while now. I can't start telling you how grateful I am for your making these teachings available. I listen to James whenever I can, day or night, in the car, in the kitchen, in the living room, at the computer... It seems there's nothing else to do when there's nothing else to do... and there isn't!! So thank you to both of you. I'm sure I can't express my gratitude well enough; just know that I thank God every day for having brought you to my life.

I'm writing to you because I think I need a teacher. I don't even know what my questions are, where the blind spots are or anything. I understand everything I read/hear - which I evidently don't or I wouldn't be writing to you, right?

**Sundari:** Hello, Ava, thank you for your lovely email. I very much enjoyed reading it and getting a feel for who Ava is. I love her honesty and clarity. These teachings that have come into your life come from *Isvara*, from awareness, not from James or me. You are fortunate to have found James and ShiningWorld as he is without doubt one of the very few clear voices for Vedanta alive today, but Vedanta is not our teaching. Vedanta as a means of knowledge has been around for a very long time, longer than any religion or philosophy, for sure. It is an independent and valid means of knowledge for awareness and it does not belong to anyone. Vedanta comes to you when you are ready for it. As you must know, qualifications are a necessary precondition as without them, the mind will not be able to hear the teaching.

Even so, the teachings need to be properly taught as everyone comes to them with their own conditioning and filters, so will interpret them accordingly. That is why you are writing. You may well understand what you hear James teach and I have no doubt you do, judging by this email, but that does not mean that the knowledge is coming through without being influenced by the filters of Ava's pre-existing beliefs and opinions, "her" conditioning.

**Ava:** When my daughter was born I had a rough time adapting to being a mum for many reasons. The situation triggered a search à la "what am I?" I went online, started reading books, doing *A Course in Miracles* and eventually corresponding with Annette Nibley (although I had heard about James and watched interviews with him long before her website went online again, it was her enthusiasm that brought me to Vedanta).

**Sundari:** Annette is a great soul and an excellent Vedanta teacher. We endorse her wholeheartedly. She is taking a break from teaching as it can become all-consuming.

**Ava:** Then one night a few years ago this knowledge started pouring into my mind and it didn't stop for months. It didn't feel like anything, there were no bright lights and no choir of angels or anything, just knowledge coming in, all sorts of topics

(from awareness to time and space and the creatures that inhabit them) being revealed, explained, like pieces of a huge puzzle. And then humour and sadness at the same time, clarity, awe and humbleness at What I Am and what I seem to be...

**Sundari:** Sounds like you had a classic non-dual experience, called *savikalpa samadhi*. These experiences can be a help or a hindrance, depending on what one makes of them and if they are properly understood. Unless one has a valid means of knowledge with which to evaluate them so that the knowledge they are meant to impart can be assimilated, the experience ends and the knowledge becomes objectified. Indirect experience of your true nature is helpful but it does not amount to freedom. Indirect knowledge is knowing about the self. Direct knowledge is knowing without a shadow of doubt that you are the self.

**Ava:** After that many things changed, and yet nothing changed. The missing piece was/is the role of Ava, the person (your *satsangs* have helped me quite a lot here, i.e. how the *jiva* does have a role to play, *Isvara's* place, etc.).

**Sundari:** Nothing changes for the *jiva* when self-knowledge is firm and yet everything changes because of the way you relate to the *jiva* and their stuff. It is no longer the ego trying to experience awareness. You are awareness apparently experiencing the ego. The missing piece in most inquirers' understanding is usually the identity between the *jiva* (Ava) and *Isvara* – and what this identity means for the *jiva*. This is where all the teaching really takes place in Vedanta. It is one thing to know that your true nature is whole and complete, non-dual, limitless awareness, and quite another to understand what that means for you as the *jiva*. This is why we emphasize this teaching so much.

As you probably know, *moksa* is only for the *jiva* because awareness is and always has been free. But all the same, this does not mean that the *jiva* has to change or becomes perfect for *moksa* to obtain. As you have already assimilated, the *jiva* will always be limited and always have its quirks and shortcomings. But as the *jiva* is really *jivatman*, or awareness, its essence is limitless and perfect. This is what freedom from the *jiva* means. To be free of the *jiva* so as to live as the self, one has to understand his/her conditioning in the light of self-knowledge, i.e. in the light of the *gunas/Isvara*. This means you identify what causes and governs the conditioning (*vasanas*, the *gunas*) and then dis-identify with it as awareness.

**Ava:** Slowly I became acutely sensitive to conditioning – I don't know what else to call it. It's like I can see "the sins of the father" travelling from generation to generation. I can "see" people coming, their intentions and where they come from.

**Sundari:** What you are seeing is the *vasanas* operating and the *gunas* that generate and govern them. Everything in our reality is made up of and generated by the three *gunas* – there is nothing unique about anyone's conditioning. The *gunas* all have predictable emotions/thoughts/feelings and actions associated with them. There really is only one person living out endless permutations of the same forces. When the mind becomes very clear and free of excess *rajas* (projection/action/desire/extroversion) and *tamas* (dullness/denial/introversion/lethargy) then *sattva*, which is intelligence, revelation and clarity

(the true nature of the mind when free of *rajas* and *tamas*) becomes the predominant *guna*. This is the *guna* springboard for self-realisation as self-knowledge will not obtain in a mind that is overtly *rajasic* or *tamasic*. When *sattva* predominates one has x-ray vision or “clairvoyance” as one can literally see everything going on – on all levels.

Because the apparent reality is run by *maya* there are always two levels of interaction taking place, that between the subtle body and the causal body, the conscious and the unconscious – i.e. *jiva* and *Isvara*. I have attached an article I wrote about this topic using some brilliant research by experimental psychologist and Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman.

We also refer to these two levels as System 1 and System 2. Both affect our experience simultaneously, all the time, as all experience is a combination of these two factors. In terms of this idea it is reasonable to say that experience takes place on two “levels” at the same time, one experienced directly and the other indirectly. This is the essence of duality. In reality there are no levels because there is only one awareness and this is actually a non-dual reality. Duality is a superimposition caused by *maya*, the hypnosis of ignorance. Only in *maya*, the apparent reality, do levels exist. For more on *maya*, see the email attached.

Direct experience is simply the thought that is playing in the subtle body at any moment, the one we are conscious of. We only experience one thought at a time and therefore we only have one experience at a time, so two streams of thoughts, one from the subtle body and one from the causal body, do not come out simultaneously. Even if they did we could not process both because incoming experience is controlled by the same rule governing outgoing experience. When the mind is very *sattvic*, these two levels work together synergistically and we pick up everything going on around us in our environment; even though we may not always be able to consciously compute or identify both levels at once, we register what is going on far more clearly than “other” minds. Only *Isvara* is omnipotent and omniscient having full knowledge of all things at all times.

When ignorance (*samsara*, the belief in duality) has been removed from the mind by self-knowledge, the *jiva*, being really *jivatman*, understands the essence of everything. This can be difficult because very often (as you have found) it is not the kind of information one can share with other people in our life. One is always conscious of being first and foremost the witness and secondly the apparent experiencer, never confusing the two – if *moksa* has obtained. This can make one feel pretty disassociated and detached from one’s life. Those around us pick this up and it is disconcerting for them as it can come across as indifference, which it is not. It is dispassion and discrimination at work.

We know many people like you who have a hard time relating to their life and the people in it once *moksa* obtains. *Karma yoga* is the only way, accepting it all as it is, knowing that it is all *Isvara* and not try to change it unless your life is truly no longer congruent with who you really are and has become *adharmic* for you to continue with it. There is no right or wrong about this issue as it is a personal matter for everyone to work out for themselves. What is important is that one’s life has to serve the truth, not the other way around.

**Ava:** And the mother-daughter relationship has been very painful. I see my mother, myself, my daughter... there seems to be an immense pool of grief and anger in

there, a bottomless pit.

**Sundari:** The conditioning (ignorance/*vasanas*) gets passed on from generation to generation. You can break the destructive cycle and end the pain of it through self-knowledge. This is the only way. You need to see “your” daughter as the self. The mother role is just a role you play at this time. Daughter is a role too and she is conditioned by “her” environment just like you and your mother were and are. If you want to help her, help yourself. Even if you can’t talk to her directly about your self-inquiry you can explain much of the means of knowledge in simple terms. Knowledge is always the only answer to all problems. Teach her to understand her conditioning, where it originates from. Help her to obtain the ability to observe herself objectively. The *gunas* can be taught without any reference to Vedanta per se because everyone can relate to these energies as they run everyone’s life. James has written extensively about the *gunas*, so have I and the other endorsed writers on ShiningWorld. James and I are busy co-authoring a book on this very important topic. Follow up on this.

If you have not subscribed to our mailing list, make sure you do. We have a teaching programme going on where James teaches a chapter of his new book *The Essence of Enlightenment* every month through webinars. If you are on our mailing list you will get notification of times and dates as well as our newsletter.

**Ava:** Ava wants to do it better, be better, more loving; she wants to be forgiving... I know she can’t really, but I see her efforts and her guilt. Some time ago I wasn’t aware of my reactions until afterwards and I felt awful, I felt so guilty... Now I can see it as it’s happening. I watch Ava’s thoughts coming, the heat in the body, a knot or some other physical sensation... her opening her mouth, and off she goes saying things I don’t mean, things that totally contradict what “the little voice” in the back of my head is speaking... Fear seemed to give way to anger and guilt. Now these emotions have softened up a lot, but they still visit from time to time. But there seems to be an expectation that they will disappear, that Ava will be perfect, the perfect mother, the perfect daughter.

**Sundari:** Your ability to see from the self’s point of view is growing stronger, a very good thing. It means self-inquiry is working, so keep at it. Ava does not have to “be better, more loving or forgiving” to be a better person. She needs to take a stand in awareness as awareness, knowing her true nature is awareness and not Ava. Ava is still conditioned by “her” *vasanas* and needs to do some work on understanding what they are in the light of self-knowledge (the *gunas*) so as to render them non-binding. When the pressure of the *vasanas* is rendered non-binding through self-knowledge, Ava will still be Ava but she will not be conditioned by “her” *vasanas*, so will not suffer the torment of having to be a “better” person. She will be free of Ava while living as the self.

Until then, do whatever it takes. Practice the knowledge; make sure you apply *karma yoga* to every thought word and deed. Observe the *gunas*, identify how they work and why. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Find a practice that works for you – like stating the opposite thought every time a thought to the contrary that you are awareness arises. Or press “pause” every time you hear yourself using the word “I” and ask yourself “Who is speaking?” Is it the *jiva* identified with the person, the *jiva* who knows about awareness – or is it awareness? The voice you hear “in the

back of your head” is you, awareness. Pay attention. Do not pay attention to the voices of ignorance: diminishment, blame, guilt, fear and all their many debilitating and undermining derivatives.

It is clear you already observe Ava from the perspective of the self because you objectify her, but these deep *samskaras* are not so easy to dissolve. You clearly have developed dispassion and discrimination. You just need to work on it. As stated, *moksa* is the discrimination of you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you (Ava and everything else), never confusing the two again.

In order to dissolve the conditioning that caused the *vasanas* and *samskaras*, one has to understand what gave rise to them to be free of them. One cannot deny the *samskaras* but very often one cannot work directly on them. *Isvara* reveals what we need to see when we are ready to see because the unconscious mind or causal body has a drive for wholeness. Even if we do try to deny or hide from our inner demons, they will come out sooner or later presenting themselves to the conscious mind, that is a given. And we have no control over when this will take place. But it will. *Isvara* makes sure of that. The answer is not to get lost in the feelings associated with one's wounds (and how one responds to the triggers) but to understand what gives rise to the thoughts and feelings in light of self-knowledge. Thoughts and feelings are just objects known to us – they are a very unreliable means of knowledge.

If feelings become your way of thinking, your intellect is in the employ of a very unstable mind which does not bode well for self-inquiry or for *moksa*. I call this “woundology” and it is very prevalent in the therapeutic as well as the spiritual worlds. Many people are so invested in their wounded persona and the pay-offs they get from it, they are not very keen to let go of it.

Guilt is the most useless of emotions in that it really has no positive side to it, unlike all other emotions. Along with the guilt felt as a result of life experience or actions taken, nameless guilt and its cohort shame are built into the causal body. Think of the Biblical “original sin” idea – how ludicrous that is, that we are born flawed! Most of us are born into ignorance but we are not flawed. Guilt and shame are used to great effect by religions of whatever origin. James says guilt and shame originate from the shame of ignorance, duality. That makes sense to me. They are very similar to and associated with free-floating anxiety which, like guilt and shame, are also *samasti* (collective) *vasanas*. i.e. they come with the territory of being “human.” They have nothing to do with you as awareness and are best ignored.

**Ava:** *Isvara* decided to play a joke on me and sent me a baby a year ago. How's that for divine humour, knocked up at age 45? I'm totally in love with the boy and so is my daughter. My husband has had quite some trouble adjusting though... he still does, although he's doing better. A baby didn't fit our/his plans at all (how funny is just the thought of that?).

**Sundari:** Sounds like a blessing to me, not a joke. Your husband may not understand *karma yoga*, but you must know by now what this vital practice entails – whatever we do we take action knowing that the fruits of the action are not up to us. And we take the fruits that do come as *prasad* – a gift.

**Ava:** So this has opened a new avenue I wasn't aware of before, the female/male

conditioning, the wife, aging... Anyway, I hope you get the picture. It's like this stuff wants to be seen, felt... I don't know. Does it? Must it?

**Sundari:** I get the picture and it is just *maya*. The "female/male" conditioning is the ultimate duality. It is just an idea, a belief. There is no such thing as man or woman; how can there be if there is only one self and we are all it? The belief in aging (especially the wife aging!) is just that – a limiting idea based on identification with the body – duality, again. Awareness never ages. The "stuff wants to be seen" is simply the drive for wholeness, the self wanting to know itself as itself through the lens of the *jiva* – to be free of the limitation of ignorance. The self is always there, witnessing. If the mind is qualified for *moksa* it will want to see and understand everything; it is impossible to switch this drive off once *Isvara* switches it on.

**Ava:** I don't know what else to say as an introduction. I'm French but have been living in Italy for the last 13 years after a few years in the UK. I was brought up Jewish but was exposed to *yoga* from an early age, even visiting India and spending some time at an *ashram* a couple of times with my parents. God/Truth has always played a big part in my life, albeit a silent and almost hidden one due to the circumstances. I have no one to talk with about all this. Annette's website has gone offline.

**Sundari:** I hear you and feel you, your words speak clearly. It is the voice of the self talking to itself, ready to end the spell of ignorance. Clearly your *karma* has prepared you for this.

**Ava:** My mother is what you'd call an eternal seeker, but I can't talk to her about any of this. I tried, but it gets her even more agitated; she only likes "beautiful stories." My husband tolerates my spending hours at the computer in the evenings (he travels a lot too, so it's okay) but he is not even remotely interested. And none of my friends or people I know are either...

**Sundari:** Your mother is a seeker, not a finder. She is not qualified for Vedanta. The same is true of your husband as well as most people on the planet. Vedanta is a radical teaching and totally counterintuitive. It only appeals to you if you have established that there is nothing in the world to gain. The world needs to have utterly failed you. Vedanta is the court of last appeal, only for the very few who are ready to become finders. It is the knowledge that ends the quest for knowledge. Many seekers do not really want to become finders. They like the identity of being seekers; it gives them a feeling of being "special" or "better than." The ego is not ready to die to the attachment to its identity as a person. It is pointless talking about it to anyone who is not qualified, you are wasting your breath. You are awake in the dream and they are sleep walking, believing that the dream is real. Have compassion. See everyone as the self under the spell of ignorance not ripe or ready to be free. Love and honour everyone as yourself.

**Ava:** I am open to whatever questions you have and I hope to have the courage to be totally honest. I am a bit concerned about privacy.

**Sundari:** I don't have any questions, Ava, and I am happy to answer any of yours, if you have any. We publish most of the good *satsangs* we engage in because they are such a great resource for other seekers, as you know from your own experience. We remove all trace of personal details so there is no way for anyone to identify you, no need to worry about that. If you think about it, there really is no such thing as a personal story. A life story looked at dispassionately is fundamentally no more than a recollection of experiences seen from a subjective or dualistic point of view. As people we all have a story to tell. From a non-dual perspective there really is no such thing as "my" story even though we all feel that our story is unique to us. From the microcosmic point of view, our story is unique. There is not another one like it. From the macrocosmic point of view, however, there has only ever been one story played out in never ending renditions of the same elements shaped by the same forces.

It is all a matter of what we are identified with. The problem is most people are identified with themselves as people so take their story to be real. "Real" can only be defined by "that which never changes and is always present." Nothing in our reality fits that description. "Apparently real" is defined by "that which is always changing and not always present" – a fitting description of reality as we know it. There is only one factor that is outside the game, always present, unchanging and unmoved: consciousness – the substrate or cause. That which knows and observes all experience and by which you know what you know – or anything can be known. The witness: you, awareness.

Most don't have knowledge of their true non-dual nature as consciousness so do not realise that their human story is the story of duality, of experience – positive or negative – and not real. Perhaps the hardest thing for any of us to grasp – whether we are seeking answers to the true meaning of life or not – is that life is impersonal. It is a zero-sum game. There are no real winners or losers. There are only experiencers. How we interpret and assign meaning to experience is where we identify with our story – and – is the potential source of all suffering, depending on what meaning we assign to it.

**Ava:** I pray you'll find some time to talk to me. I'm stuck. Please help me.

~ Love to you two, Ava

**Sundari:** We are here and listening and happy to talk to you. May self-knowledge continue to unfold your life with ever more clarity bringing the peace that surpasses understanding.

Much love to the one we all are.

~ Sundari