

# The Confidence of Self-Knowledge

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**Sue:** Hi, Sundari. Yes – totally agree on the social pretensions. That artificiality and ignorance that literally defines a *samsari* and that is so off-putting to folks like us is absent in Vedantins, and communication and connection becomes natural and easy. I like the way you describe it as Self to Self. I can see why spiritual types are so attracted to silence, because words and the thinking that underlies them creates something of a barrier that blocks the Self-to-Self interaction.

**Sundari:** Yes, words as they are used by distraction-hungry, extroverted minds are definitely an obstacle to self-knowledge. In Vedanta we perfect the use of words because we use them correctly and only when necessary. Spiritual types are drawn to silence because it is free of desire and dullness – it is pure *sattva*. It feels good. But most spiritual types see silence as something other than them – something to strive for. Being in silence is good, it certainly helps, but it will not lead to self-knowledge because silence is not opposed to ignorance. Silence is you, awareness.

**Sue:** Also, not needing anything from the other person and knowing they don't need anything from you is incredibly liberating. Well, I still need your teaching and guidance but you know what I mean. I felt very at home with you two – I knew I would – and did not feel the need to hide away like I always do, which was a strange but welcome feeling.

**Sundari:** Knowing you are the self frees you of the notion of relationship because there is only you. How the *jiva* relates to an apparent other ego is predicated by self-knowledge (or lack of it). The *jiva* has its particular nature and will still respond accordingly to “others” but as awareness one is always the observer. Loving from this perspective is pure joy because there is never anything to gain or lose.

I am glad you felt comfortable with us – and why would you not? – we are your own true self.

**Sue:** The very first personal development book I read at age 18 was the classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. That book points out explicitly that people are only interested in themselves, which I pretty much knew anyway. But it never pointed out the degree of garbage they speak and how tiring it is to be around them and take an interest in them. Nor did it reveal how obviously uninterested they are in what I would say. As you say, the best approach is to have compassion for them.

On teaching, I have always wanted to teach knowledge but couldn't quite find the right vehicle. By “right vehicle” I mean something that I could believe in 100% and – very importantly to me for reasons known only to *Isvara* (actually, I know some of the reasons, which relate to heavy-duty guilt and responsibility *samskaras*) – had a completely verifiable and provable, definitive answer or conclusion.

For one reason or another I couldn't quite believe enough in any other subject to

teach it, even subjects I really loved such as, early on, personal development, then *Conversations with God*, then various forms of business and professional coaching. If I couldn't give a client or student the exactly 100% definitive answer in any situation that would guarantee them the result they wanted, I couldn't teach, consult or provide any kind of professional advisory service.

Thank God the rest of the world does not share this viewpoint because nothing would ever get done. This attitude I had is absurd and nonsensical. It is insane, ludicrous, laughable. I am the first to admit that. But I was severely *tamasic* during this period and I see clearly now the extent to which it causes absurd thinking. And I had a lot of absurd thinking on many topics.

**Sundari:** I don't agree that your attitude was absurd or ludicrous – in fact, I can relate to it. I have been a knowledge-seeker and knew I had teacher-*vasana* from a young age. Like you, my quest for the truth took me down similar paths where I found bits and pieces of truth. I put the big picture together, connected many dots with common sense and logic, but I knew I had not found all the pieces and, most importantly, I knew that I did not know what pieces were missing. I did not teach because I did not want to disseminate faulty or incomplete ideas.

What is ludicrous is the ease with which many people with half-baked notions of “truth” declare themselves teachers. And equally ludicrous is the ease with which people fall for the most absurdly fallacious ideas. I have little time for the spiritual arena with its poseurs and stupid, erroneous ideas. It was only when Vedanta appeared in my life that I found the missing pieces I would never have put together on my own. James threw me in the deep end and kind of hoodwinked me into teaching. And now I am a slave to *Isvara*!!!

What is often the problem when one is too afraid to be wrong or incorrect is a subconscious belief in inadequacy, a lack of confidence in oneself. The thing is, we can only do the best we can with the knowledge we have and if we make mistakes – well, we learn from them. I know I was not that great when I first started teaching Vedanta and I am still learning. I have a long way to go to walk in Ramji's shoes, but that's okay because I am totally committed and know that I am not the doer.

**Sue:** But the inability to be certain of anything in the human dimension – as opposed to fact-driven endeavours like science and engineering (well, there is plenty of uncertainty there too, but you know where I am coming from) – was immensely frustrating to me. When Ram says in the videos that there “isn't enough light shining here to determine what is happening” and that we are “dim bulbs”... man, did that resonate with me. After reading a reasonable number of books over several years, in addition to doing a degree in accounting, finance and economics, that was the exact conclusion I reached at about age 24 to 25, after which I just declared that nobody really knows anything about anything.

**Sundari:** Moment of wisdom. See, you were qualified for Vedanta way back then.

**Sue:** I had put a lot of effort into acquiring knowledge and, yeah, sure, some of it helped in various ways and, of course, I wouldn't really say nobody knows anything about anything – for that would be equally nonsensical and ridiculous – but the only

thing I really knew for sure was that every action has consequences, but that you can never accurately predict their effect in time and space. That was it. I eventually read a couple of books on systems theory which goes into these ideas in some detail. The next thing I studied after that was computers to avoid this uncertainty.

**Sundari:** Yes, in *samsara* object-knowledge is subject to interpretation, therefore it is not a substitute for self-knowledge; nothing is.

Knowledge of objects is always true to the object and not the subject. For instance, you will not see a rock if you are looking at a tree. Knowledge of objects is not knowledge unless it is true to the object. If it is “my” knowledge then it is my interpretation of an object, which is not necessarily knowledge. Ignorance (or my point of view) causes me to see or experience objects in a certain way because of “my” conditioning which creates the filters through which I view the world I think I see. People believe that ignorance is knowledge because they believe that what they intellectualize, experience or believe is knowledge. It may be knowledge, but it may not be. Most often it is a mixture of both. Self-knowledge, however, is always true because it is true to the self, meaning it cannot be dismissed or negated by any other knowledge. Self-knowledge is different from knowledge of objects, which is object-based, not subject-based. Self-knowledge depends on the nature of the self, the subject, not on knowledge gained through personal experience or intellectual prowess, meaning through object-knowledge.

In Vedanta, qualified teachers write with the authority of self-knowledge, not their own knowledge. We do not have to substantiate what we teach (as long as we stick to the scripture) because Vedanta is based on the irrefutable logic of existence and not our own teaching, beliefs or opinions. We may fail as teachers of Vedanta if we cannot teach it properly but Vedanta itself never fails. Although Vedanta confirms our experience, it is not based on it. It does not come from us. We know where it comes from. It is given to us by *Ishvara*. It cannot be argued with. If you have an argument with Vedanta it is because you have either not understood the teaching because the mind is not qualified to hear it, or the ego is invested in its own opinions.

It is grace that brings one to self-knowledge, however one arrives there. It is grace that brings one to a qualified teacher capable of unfolding the scripture. It is grace that the mind is qualified to hear the truth. It is grace that the mind is freed from ignorance by self-knowledge. It is all grace because there is no doer.

I turned to science when the spiritual arena failed me, even though it was obviously a flawed and incomplete “system” of knowledge. At least it attempts to question its conjectures. Without self-knowledge, all systems of thought are intrinsically flawed, no matter how refined or erudite the thinking.

**Sue:** In my personal life it wasn't quite like this in that the uncertainty wasn't so crippling, but when considering working with prospective clients and presenting myself as some sort of expert, this uncertainty bugged the heck out of me. I wanted, had to have, basically demanded, certainty of results. But *Ishvara's* world doesn't work like this, as you know – not even close. There is no certainty, only probabilities, but that wasn't good enough for me, and I couldn't teach, guide, coach, consult or advise. I could not get around this issue and I totally walked away from any ideas of teaching or coaching because of it. Even though I am much better balanced now in

my outlook, and I realise the craziness of these ideas, I don't have the passion for those things anymore.

**Sundari:** *Karma yoga* is the answer to everything. Without it, the *jiva* is eventually worn out and worn down by the exhaustion of existential doership – and then inevitably finds itself crushed by disappointment and disillusion. Certainly one cannot teach Vedanta without *karma yoga*. What a relief to finally understand that *samsara* is a zero-sum game and that there is nothing to gain!

**Sue:** Looking back, it is downright bizarre that I thought I could ever attain this perfect knowledge by reading books. It should have been obvious that only God – though in the early days of my reading I didn't even believe in God – could have this type of omniscience.

**Sundari:** Well, I think you had an innate knowing (we all do because self-knowledge is the nature of the self) that it is possible to understand everything with absolute certainty – even though as the apparent person it is impossible to know everything. Only *Isvara* is omniscient, as you say. But as the self no longer under the spell of ignorance you know that the essence of everything is you, which is a different kind of omniscience. You also no longer care about knowing all the facts. It is only the ego that needs certainty and to be right – and most egos feel deficient and inadequate, therefore being certain and right is of paramount importance.

As the self you are the only thing that is right; everything is relative to you. So who cares? Object-knowledge becomes kind of passé – even though you may (I still do) enjoy understanding how things work and unfold in the apparent reality.

**Sue:** While there was tremendous ignorance and stupidity in the position I had with reference to knowledge, I see now that this lesson was really a misunderstood frustration with the ephemeral and ever-changing nature of the *dharma* field. It was a perfect set-up for a spiritual path and in its own way was my first experience of the idea of “the end of knowledge.” In some of the Ramana material I read, he speaks of this quite a bit, that the world of non-stop change is deeply frustrating and unsatisfying and that wasting time, energy and resources trying to manage life in a changing world is a waste of time, other than dealing with practical matters. Well, it is a waste of time until you realise who you are but the Ramana authors are pretty useless and don't point out things like that. Of course, this all accords with Vedanta's teaching on temporary happiness.

**Sundari:** Yes, again *karma yoga* is the solution. Once you know for certain that only *Isvara* is the giver of results, there is no pressure to succeed, prevail or attain. This is when discrimination truly kicks in – the knowledge that the *jiva* will always be limited but the essence of the *jiva* is awareness which is unlimited.

**Sue:** That Vedanta is the only teaching on earth that systematically reveals a certain, definitive, provable, irrefutable answer is one of the (many) reasons I am so deeply attracted to it. For this reason, it is the only subject I've come across that I could teach.

**Sundari:** That it is. Remember though, Vedanta is not different from you. You are attracted to it because it is you: the subject matter is you.

**Sue:** In all of this I was failing to respect the other person's opinions, knowledge and experience or the role of *Isvara*, but I didn't think of it like this back then.

**Sundari:** No point looking back. Without self-knowledge one simply cannot see clearly, not the whole picture anyway.

**Sue:** Sorry this is a little long but I thought it would be good to write down my perspective on knowledge.

**Sundari:** Sorry I took a while to respond. We have had a very busy time getting the newsletter out and so much else. We really have a hard time keeping up with all the demands made on us.

**Sue:** I am definitely not ready to work with students but I would enjoy doing some writing, which would require your guidance. That said, I am concerned about the time issue, especially now, because I need to continue purifying and furthering my knowledge, and writing is very time-consuming, but I recognise I would learn a lot from it. I am pleased with how things are going but there is a lot still to do in my *sadhana* and I still have some confusions. I am confident they will be resolved, as other confusions have been in the last nine months since I started having breakthroughs. I will send you a piece I wrote to my sister earlier this year contrasting NLP and hypnosis with Vedanta. I definitely have the necessary love of the tradition though.

**Sundari:** Just keep at it, Sue, you are doing great and we have so much respect for your dedication. I will read your writing and get back to you about it ASAP. I have a huge email backlog I am trying to reduce. I can never really catch up! We are leaving for Reno this week and have a lot to do to get ready and then when we get back I leave almost immediately for South Africa.

**Sue:** I totally see James' point about reluctant teachers being the best. I am extremely glad you are teaching. I love everything you write. I see the great freedom in your writing in that you are not trying to impress anyone or acquire/keep students. I can also totally understand why you were so reluctant to teach to start with. I mean, the thought of interacting with all these people and having your time taken up by it must have been a concern for someone who generally prefers seclusion, and I can relate to that a lot. But I guess it would have been hard to decline Ramji's invitation to teach – when an irresistible force asks you to do something, it's not easy to say no!! I am glad you enjoy it and there could be nothing more rewarding than bringing people home.

**Sundari:** Thanks, Sue, I so appreciate your feedback and acknowledgment. I have loved writing and expressing myself in words since very young. I have zero interest

in being known or recognized and have not a single doubt that *Ishvara* is the only doer. There is no way I could possibly take credit for my writing (or anything) except to say that as the mind is purified, the intellect becomes a better instrument in the service of self-knowledge. There is no higher *dharma* than teaching self-knowledge so, yes, this *jiva* is very grateful for its good *karma*! I am enormously grateful for having the great *karma* to be taught by the best, which is what Ramji is.

**Sue:** Teaching for me may be something that develops organically over time. But your suggestion to consider it gave me great confidence.

**Sundari:** I have no doubt you would make a good teacher, but let it unfold as it must. Trust *Ishvara*.

**Sue:** You make a fascinating point about not being able to work on *samskaras* directly. In the past, even though I never really understood it like this, that is exactly what happened. I would apply the knowledge and *vasanas/samskaras* would arise, but I certainly wouldn't choose which ones would arise. Whatever came up is whatever came up as per *Ishvara*. Now, I am choosing, or at least appearing to be choosing, what *samskaras* I want to work on. And it's interesting, it feels like I can do that, but is that another example of the illusion of doership? My answer would be yes. But my experience shows that I can choose which things to focus on so maybe, yes, I do have a degree of influence here, and perhaps that influence grows somewhat as the mind becomes more *sattvic*.

**Sundari:** The ego thinks it is choosing, and from its perspective, it is, but it is always *Ishvara* choosing – and yes, the influence of *sattva*, of course, makes things much clearer – but again, that is *Ishvara* too.

You are probably aware of the teaching on free will but here it is again:

Free will is a tricky issue and one that most people struggle with. Vedanta has a two-fold approach, which in both cases takes you to the same irrefutable conclusion.

1. If you think you are the doer (the person or ego) you have limited free will in that you are seemingly free to choose one thing over another, according to your nature or conditioning. The *dharma* field operates according to certain laws and if they are understood and followed, it is possible to achieve success. If that were not the case, *moksa*, or freedom from the apparent reality, would never be possible. The apparent reality is not real so it is possible to “take action.” i.e. self-inquiry, to be free of it. If it were real, no one would ever be free of it. So if one applies this rule and takes the appropriate action at the appropriate time, desired results are usually achieved. There is no guarantee of this though because *Ishvara* runs the *dharma* field.

The other side of this is that the choices that people make, although they seem to be volitional and individual, are usually pretty predictable and repetitive. This is because most people, who have none or very limited self-knowledge, behave like automatons, although they don't know that they do. They think that they are doing the choosing but actually, their conditioning (*vasanas/gunas*) is doing the choosing. Still, it does look like one has free will and in a way, the person does. From this standpoint free will gives the person the choice to “make the best” of their lives, and relative success is thus possible in the apparent reality.

2. When ignorance has been removed by self-knowledge and you know that your true nature is whole and complete, non-dual awareness, what is there to choose? It is all you, awareness, and it is all good. This means that you will have negated the doer and all the objects, as well as rendered the binding *vasanas* non-binding. *Samsara* no longer exists in “your” mind and you see everything from the perspective of the self, which means that you have non-dual vision and see everything as non-different from you.

From this perspective remaining *vasanas* and *samskaras* take on a different meaning because you know that they are not self.

**Sue:** Lately I have been working on free-floating anxiety with great success. But maybe that is just coincidence. Maybe that is what *Isvara* would have given me anyway, yet here I am taking the credit! And how did I decide to work on anxiety – did I choose that? And there may be *samskaras* I am not aware of that still need to rise up into the conscious mind, and I cannot consciously choose to work on *samskaras* whose existence I am unaware of. A lot for me to think about here, and gee, it gets extremely subtle at this level.

**Sundari:** I know what you mean by “I have been working on free-floating anxiety with great success” but remember that “free-floating anxiety” belongs to *Isvara*, so you can’t “work” on it. Who is working? You can only understand free-floating anxiety in the light of self-knowledge – and when you do, it automatically dissolves because it is just a mirage. It is a *samasti* (collective) *vasana*. All the “*jiva* stuff” (as we call it) has to be understood and dissolved in the light of self-knowledge if *moksa* is the aim. No way around this. But one cannot work on the “stuff” unless one thinks one is the doer.

*Isvara* reveals what we need to see when we are ready to see because the unconscious mind 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 present 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 ones’ wounds 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 spiritual world.

Only by subjecting the mind constantly to self-inquiry will self-knowledge do the “work” of removing ignorance. *Prarabdha karma* will play out the way *Isvara* wants it to, no way around that. When you are ready to deal with it *Isvara* provides the safety net for you to do so. Freedom is not to identify with what comes up or “tackle it” but to see it as not-self – thus rendering the *vasanas* non-binding. Some people (we know many) go through a pretty hectic time “after” *moksa* when the stuff that was never available for observation starts to emerge.

**Sue:** I am glad you mentioned those mistakes people make. I have made a point of

not making those mistakes, and I think I've done reasonably well there. I definitely don't want to have intellectual-only knowledge. I have focused very heavily on keeping it practical, real and grounded. That is why I think I am so attracted to the *satsangs*, because they do exactly that. I couldn't care less about being able to quote the *Gita* or how many Sanskrit terms I know (I know very few) to impress people. This is about getting the job done.

**Sundari:** Yes, I know you are not making the mistake of hiding in or getting lost in the means of knowledge or the rituals of devotion as a very subtle cover for the ego. There is nothing quite as crafty as the "spiritual ego" and also, nothing quite as prevalent among spiritual seekers.

**Sue:** That's also a big reason for keeping the journey private - there is no temptation to try to impress people. For a true seeker, the spiritual world is a dangerous place, full of lifestylers and poseurs trying to impress themselves and others, not to mention the delusional teachers.

**Sundari:** *Samsara* is only dangerous if you don't know what it is. I have a saying I like: duality is cool if you know what it is and cruel if you don't. We will never get rid of duality - and it is not a problem other than for *jivas* who think they are doers pursuing results.

**Sue:** While most students and teachers are probably well-intentioned, I didn't want to spend time with them. A few years back I went to a workshop for *A Course in Miracles* and while there was only a handful of students there, they weren't serious about it and even after years of study they (and the teacher) clearly had no real idea what spirituality was all about (nor did I at that time, but I knew it wasn't *ACIM* which despite having some conceptual similarities to Vedanta, is the living definition of a half-baked and flawed teaching, but I do give it credit for at least having a methodology). My copy of *ACIM* and half a dozen supporting books went for recycling last year, and I hit the "delete" key on my electronic *ACIM* materials at the same time. Most people who study it become experts on *ACIM* but have no idea about spiritual truth. Vedanta's assertion that you cannot really study Vedanta because the subject matter is yourself is lost on the *ACIM* crowd.

**Sundari:** Yes, totally agree.

**Sue:** I tried attending a regular meditation class in Sydney being held by a supposedly enlightened woman and it was the same type of students there. My experience matches exactly what you mention - when *Isvara* unleashes Vedanta on you, well, look out because there is no turning back. And after you reach a certain threshold or critical mass in the mind, you can't really get off the path. A couple of times in 2008 - 09 when things were just starting to get under way spiritually, I wandered off the path a few times to pursue some other interests but felt a tremendous compulsion to get back on it, which I did. By mid-2010, any desire to do anything else was more or less totally gone, and I have stayed with it fairly consistently ever since, with a couple of breaks thrown in for various reasons. The breaks in one way or another have actually helped my *sadhana* though.



**Sundari:** Yep, no escaping Vedanta – once it gets its teeth into you, you are a goner.

**Sue:** As for my confusion over the nature of the knower, I have done some writing to clarify my uncertainty and the reasons for it which I would like to send you. I did not explain the situation particularly well during our call, but it's hard to verbally discuss subtle topics.

**Sundari:** I have replied to that and will get back to your reply to my reply as soon as I can.

**Sue:** Regarding visiting Australia, the distance is always a problem. It definitely puts me off travelling too. I would love you to visit but I understand your reluctance, especially if you don't have a lot of students here relative to other places. And I figure you must get tired of travelling. The Blue Mountains would be a fantastic setting though and have great proximity to Sydney, but nothing you haven't seen before.

**Sundari:** A visit is in the cards; we leave the details to *Isvara* if it is meant to be.

**Sue:** As for the donations, it is a true delight to be able to make them and they are only a tiny reflection of the contribution to me and the world that ShiningWorld has made. Even if **Isvara** came to me said, "Okay, Sue, that's enough Vedanta for you, and you will not make one ounce more progress in this lifetime," – Lord willing that doesn't happen – it has still massively relieved suffering in a way that nothing else could have. One of the most amazing things about Vedanta is that you don't even have to fully understand it all perfectly, as I don't yet, and yet it still works extremely so well. I don't have many expenses but spend a lot on health supplements.

**Sundari:** It is true, Vedanta is the jewel beyond price. We want you to take care of your own needs too. Like Ramji always says, "Trust the Lord but tether your camel all the same"!

**Sue:** All the best with getting your bases going. I can see how valuable that would be. I am glad you can stay in your US place as long as you like – that must be a big relief, especially in a beautiful part of the world. It's great that Isaiah will be working with you more too – that guy is awesome.

~ My love to you both, Sue

**Sundari:** Yes, we are so happy that the house deal has been concluded and Dave is on the way to owning it, so we can stay here as long as we like. Totally agree about Isaiah, we love him to bits and he is awesome. Much love to you, Sue.

~ Sundari

