

Ignorance, the Only Prison

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2015-02-27

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2065>

Devon: My, Sundari, okay, it seems some qualifications are more pronounced, more noticeable than others. But it is merely *karma* or *samskaras* playing out. It has been a while since I was last in touch. Quite a lot has happened, though really nothing, ha, ha. Last spring through your guidance and James' book I had the understanding that he refers to as self-realization, an oxymoron if ever there was one. ☺

Sundari: Hi, Devon, good to hear from you again. Yes, that is true, some qualifications are more pronounced, discrimination and dispassion being most important – but all the qualifications are necessary for *moksa*.

Devon: Although I can say it was a non-event, it wasn't gradual, the realization. Even so, as abrupt as it was, the manner in which it filtered into life was sporadic and piecemeal, most definitely the “firefly” stage.

Sundari: This is quite common – which is why we emphasise that self-realisation is where “the work” begins. Self-realisation is experiential, and to make the knowledge firm, one has to go through all three stages of self-inquiry. There are three stages to self-inquiry:

1. *Sravana*: Listening or hearing the scripture. This requires that you leave everything you previously believed or thought you knew temporarily on the shelf. You can take your beliefs back if self-knowledge does not work for you. But for now leave them on the shelf. This is very important; if you keep comparing Vedanta to all your beliefs and opinions and try to make it comply with them, forget about self-inquiry. Vedanta is a radical teaching, it is counterintuitive; expect it to challenge everything you thought you knew.

2. *Manana*: Reasoning, contemplation. This is thinking about what the scripture is saying, examining the unexamined logic of your own experience. At this point, you look at your beliefs and opinions in the light of what the scripture says, NOT the other way around.

3. *Nididhyasana*: Applying the knowledge to your life; taking a stand in awareness as awareness. This means that if all the qualifications are not in place, one has to go back and re-qualify. There is no other way for the *jiva* and its conditioning to be understood in the light of self-knowledge, to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding in order that self-actualisation – the final “stage” – can take place. Once the knowledge is firm, one sees everything from the point of view of awareness first, second as the *jiva*, and one never confuses the two again. This is discriminating the self, you (*satya*), from the objects that appear in you (*mithya*).

Devon: Over the last couple of years I have been sharing my woes with you guys. Drug abuse seemed to take over everything. I stopped teaching self-defence, stopped mentoring online, my wife and kids left, etc. Looking back I can see *Isvara*

was preparing me. In a way, my life became that of a renunciant. Just before Christmas 2014 I was arrested and put in prison for a month. More renunciation. I lost my freedom, access to kids, my wife formed a new relationship, my friends and family deserted me. Even my prison requests, such as medical treatment, were ignored. I had lost the ability to have anything that I desired. I did manage to have a vegan diet. I drank lots of water and meditated round the clock. By fate I was arrested with James' *How to Attain Enlightenment* book, which I read five times. I also cut out all sugar products. I had to face the intense pain of loss, loss of my desires being fulfilled.

But the loss is false. Behind that illusion is a freedom from fear, a rock-solid knowing that I am ever complete. My desires vanished. I spent Christmas and New Year's Eve as the silence that is self. My fortieth birthday on Monday will be the same. My fears and desires do arise, but they don't disturb. If a flicker of some remnant of a supposed disturbance glimmers, the consistent knowing "I am complete" that is always present immediately dominates. I am not writing seeking you to verify. No verification. I thought it kind of a cosmic gag that I had to go to prison in order to understand true freedom! My discrimination is my nature.

Sundari: It seems *karma* is playing out as it will, but whatever it stems from, you really do sound dispassionate and discriminating about it all. There is no prison for the self once self-knowledge is firm. The only prison is ignorance of who you are. Well done to you for staying with the knowledge. I truly hope this takes you as the *jiva* to a place of peace and harmony, living in accordance with self-knowledge, and your life is lived fully as the self you are.

~ Much love to you from both of us, Sundari