

# Discourses with a *Jnani* on *Vasanas*

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2015-08-21

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2269>

**Samuel:** Dear Sundari and James, this is one of those moments that I regularly have, when I am so grateful for how you James are presenting these teachings. I have a lovely Indian man here at the moment who is associated with a lineage of Yogaswami from Sri Lanka, all traditional South Indian Vedanta teachings; they also hold Swami Chinmayananda in high esteem and they are the ones that produce *Hinduism Today* magazine. He just told me that one of their main practices is “*vasanadahatantra*,” meaning the burning up of your *vasana* load. That is of course well and good, but the whole emphasis is on being free of *vasanas* through their absence, not through understanding of what they are in the big scheme of things (and who we are!) – and finding one’s freedom through this understanding – knowledge. So few people understand this. Same, same, always – experiential- versus knowledge-based freedom.

In any case, I am well, even as *Isvara* has and is throwing some heavy artillery in my direction in the last period of time. No joke at times. Yes, all *prasad*. At times I have had to fight for my life to keep perspective. At times I lost the fight of course. But there are these little phrases of yours that keep popping up in my mind, like “I am the self and I can therefore handle any situation” or “the result of my actions or the outcome of a certain situation is truly not in my hands” that are enormously helpful and liberating. And a whole bunch of other precious teachings. I fundamentally feel part of a stream of life where everything is right, no matter what it looks like on a personal level, if that makes any sense. Quite amazing, wonderful. I am just amazed time and time again to find myself simply deeply happy, even while in all kinds of trouble at times.

**Sundari:** What a beautiful email from you again. I just love the open-hearted way you embrace *Isvara* and live the teachings. You are right of course about the way Vedanta is presented by South Indians, particularly in the Chinmaya lineage. There is that experiential slant to it which works (or worked) in the Indian culture, but causes confusion in the West. You are spot on in your assessment of the *vasana khsaya* teaching that they propound, a useless and pointless endeavour, as when you know your true nature to be the self the presence or absence of *vasanas* makes no difference. One knows all *vasanas* belong to *Isvara*, and it is not only impossible to get rid of all *vasanas*, not all *vasanas* are bad. For instance, one needs a very strong *vasana* for *moksa*! And Krishna says to Arjuna: “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” Rendering the *vasanas* non-binding only matters if they disturb the mind, making peace of mind impossible for the *jiva*. It comes down to experience and knowledge, which is where Dayananda parted company with Chinmaya. James explains it better, but basically the rift between them came over the experience versus knowledge slant that Chinmaya took in his attempt to appeal to a wider audience – strange, I know, but one has to understand this in the wider context of what Chinmaya was trying to achieve. Certainly, he knew the difference between experience and knowledge, even if he seemingly did not teach it directly.

It sounds like the ocean of *samsara* has been very turbulent for Samuel, who has sailed through the storms untouched. That’s when you know the knowledge is

working. Well done, Samuel, I am so happy for you and hope that whatever is causing the upheavals gets sorted out peacefully.

**Samuel:** And wonderful to receive yours! I did not know that this very point was what Swami Chinmayananda and Dayananda parted company over. Interesting. “Rendering the *vasanas* non-binding” – it seems so obvious... I love that phrase, so elegant and brilliant – clarifying so much, liberating. Thank you very much for your encouraging words.

On a more personal note – I keep on being a happy passenger on the Vedanta bus. The best-kept “open secret” in the universe, this Vedanta bus. I keep having this sense of amazement at the obviousness of this non-dual reality and then at the amazing illusion spun by *maya*. I don’t need reminding of the equally amazing power of the *vasanas*, but the fact of freedom in the presence or absence of *vasana* activity again fills me with amazement and such joy. Ironically, this fact of freedom despite the *vasana*-driven body/mind association I discovered while with Andrew Cohen, and many discovered this with me. I felt this was one of his great gifts to me; he certainly helped me with this discovery. What I never got as clearly, as now through Vedanta, is my identity as that inherent freedom, besides this wealth of teachings on how *maya* works. I continue to be amazed at how deeply these teachings seem to enter me, or better, reveal me as awareness. I just need to think of *Isvara* and such joy erupts in me; I just think the thought that “I am the self” and the peace that comes over me, the resonance of truth is just wonderful. I imagine at some point it will all become just what it is without this sense of amazement.

Speaking of Mr. Cohen – I thought James’ comments to John about Andrew’s letter were spot on – of course. I think it will be a miracle if he can make a step forward from where he is now. My good brother Murray is still trying to help him, but I personally think it is a waste of time.

I also wanted to tell you that a *yoga* center nearby, who comes to our place to do retreats, has asked me to periodically write short articles about Vedanta. So I have transcribed a video section that struck me of James’ teachings on *Atma Bodh* and made a short article out of it. Of course I introduce the article by saying it is James speaking here. If you want to have a look and tell me if it is okay for me or not to do something like this, please do.

Besides all this good news, I also want to tell you that my relationship with my wife has improved so much since last January. And in part this is due to a change in me. A big load of history has fallen away since this immersion in these teachings of liberation, and it has made such a change. I can suddenly accept her as she is. Miracle of miracles! At the same time my wife is pursuing her own path with a vengeance these days. She is taking part in a “school of womanly arts,” which is kind of an exploration of every part of what it means to be a woman. It is great for her and very healing and liberating; she is radiant and looking beautiful. We’ll keep the teachings on “being identified with being a woman” for later!

**Sundari:** Your email is so descriptive and accurate – the self speaking. And one has to give credit where credit is due; Andrew is not a bad person and he did have access to self-knowledge. He does not know what it means to be the self, because he does not understand *satya* and *mithya*. If one does not understand the *jiva/Isvara* identity and is not able to assimilate what that means for the *jiva*, freedom is just not

possible. After all, it is pretty obvious that one is aware. And it is obvious one is also a person because the person exists. The nature of existence is not explained, because it is not known. Only Vedanta explains it. Andrew obviously got some of it right because if he could impart the teaching that you as awareness are untouched by the *vasanas*, he was not far off. But being close is not good enough if *moksa* is what you are after – and to miss by a little is still a miss. I agree with you that Murray is wasting his time in trying to get through to Andrew. “Do not disturb the minds of the ignorant,” is Krishna’s advice.

I read your article and your writing is excellent, well done. You make a great teacher, we are so happy you are doing this. Please feel free to use whatever material you need from our website. It all belongs to *Isvara*, not to us. You have it all sorted out, Samuel. You put all the pieces together; you are free. I can see it in the photo and hear it in your words. If there is any *jiva* stuff still playing out, that will end when it ends. But you know it is not, you so you are untouched by it. It sounds to me like you are at peace with everything in your life. Your total acceptance of your wife as the self and to worship her as the self is so beautiful. Whatever she is interested in and brings her peace is good. Everything is about the self, even though it may be ignorance. I understand her connecting with being a woman; that is a powerful archetype. The man/woman identity is such a charged issue – probably the most charged and most entrenched belief system in *samsara*. It may be the ultimate duality, but if you don’t know what duality is, you are stuck with it. So indeed – my *satsang* on *Identified with Being a Woman* would not be for her!

**Samuel:** I am very happy you liked the little article. And thank you very much for all your kind words and encouragement. Thirty-five years ago I lived for a year in a Tibetan refugee village in the Himalayas. After six months I found out that a highly-respected *lama* lived in a monastery 300 meters above me. He had been the principal teacher of the Dalai Lama, and it was said that he was able to see people’s past lives and future destinies. People would go to him and he’d send them here or there, to monasteries or retreats. His name was Ling Rinpoché. As I had come to India six months earlier to find “enlightenment,” I thought this was my chance and I eagerly went to see him the next week.

As I entered his room and prostrated three times, I saw a man with the biggest round head I had ever seen, with the most beautiful smile on it. He was radiant. I sat down at his feet and he asked me what he could do for me. So I tell him that I have come to India to find enlightenment and that I am trying to meditate but that my mind is driving me crazy! I can’t still my mind! He said, “You are much too tense, you should relax. You are much too tense, you should relax.” “I know,” I responded, “that is why I have come to India, I just don’t know how to do that!” And he said again in the sweetest way, with this beautiful smile, “You are much too tense, you should relax.” So I said, incredulously, “Is that all?” And he bends forward and said, “Yes! Just do the things you like to do, eat the things you like to eat and you will see, everything will work out just fine.”

With that I was outside three minutes after I had come in. I was quite disappointed, but I did burst out laughing with the irony of the situation.

I did not listen to his advice. I could not. A few months later I entered one of the most disciplined Buddhist meditation monasteries and stayed for almost two years. But now 35 years later, with the help of Vedanta, I am able to hear his advice.

James has said one or two things to me along the same lines; this time I could really hear him.

**Sundari:** Your story about the Tibetan *lama* made me smile. It is so simple of course, yet without self-knowledge and a means of knowledge to unfold it, it is almost impossible to achieve that coveted peace of mind! In fact the *lama* sounds like a typical Neo. 😊

**Samuel:** I am so grateful for these bits of beauty and wisdom I receive from you! Just this one sentence, “It is so simple of course, yet without self-knowledge and a means of knowledge to unfold it, almost impossible to achieve that coveted peace of mind!” So elegantly said. I love these teachings. I really appreciated also what you said in your last letter to me.

**Sundari:** Thanks, Samuel, the truth is simple, but that does not make it easy to assimilate. Without a proper teaching, a qualified mind and a qualified teacher, you are not likely to work things out on your own. I know for certain that I could not have. We are blessed to have found Vedanta and James; there is no doubt about it!

**Samuel:** Yes, that beautiful *lama* did not give me much to go on. Tibetan Buddhism just wasn't my destiny.

**Sundari:** I am sure the *lama* was or is a very pure soul and probably knew who he was. But it is one thing to be born into a culture that supports a simple and powerful spiritual path, to sit on top of a mountain in the sanctuary of an *ashram* with all your basic needs (however simple) taken care of, dispensing the wisdom of the ages, with or without a means of knowledge to support it. It's quite another to live in the world, subjected to the full force of *rajas* and *tamas*, with the *karma* of a householder. Now, that is a heroic path!

I heard today from a good friend of yours whom you put in touch with ShiningWorld. Such a lovely email, she sounds wonderful.

**Samuel:** Sue is one of my dearest friends. She was here with me and my family last week. I don't see her too often, so it was wonderful. We met in the early days of Andrew's tenure, and our recovery/liberation from all that has been amazingly synchronous. Through the years we would always find ourselves questioning or suffering through the same issues at the same time. After I met James last year I sent her a link, and we weren't in touch for five months or so, and when we did speak she had been profoundly affected by Vedanta. And she hasn't stopped since. She will come to the Berkeley teachings and to Trout Lake also. She is a wonderful woman. Her partner Don will come to the teachings too. He is also an ex-Andrew student. He is just cautiously wetting his toes in James' teachings.

**Sundari:** We are looking forward to meeting her. She sent such a beautiful testimonial to both James and me for our writing.

**Samuel:** I am actually going through a period of intense mind activity and an enormous sense of restlessness that comes with it. It disturbs my sleep. I see it all as *karmic* residue, *vasana* activity releasing into the source; really, I feel wonderfully peaceful with it all. I have plenty of cause for some mind madness. It is all good.

**Sundari:** This sounds like universal *samskaras* playing out, as you correctly point out. As you are fully aware, *samskaras* have “a life of their own” because they actually have nothing to do with who we really are. Of course as long as the person is identified with them they are “under the whip,” so to speak. This can happen even after self-realisation because there is still some ignorance and self-knowledge has not yet been fully assimilated. As we have previously said and you are well aware, the effects of ignorance take as long as they take to end. *Karma yoga* is the only solution. Most people who have realised the self think that it is enough. Unfortunately, it is not. Self-realisation is not *moksa*. The doer can survive *moksa* and the period of actualisation can cause great restlessness in the mind, or ego, as self-knowledge roots out the remaining ignorance, however subtle.

The king of all *vasanas* is what we call primordial beginningless ignorance, another name for (*tamas*) or *maya*. The more user-friendly term is “free-floating anxiety,” which if self-knowledge is not firm causes a non-specific, unnamed existential fear, or dread. It is the fear that causes knots in the solar plexus. It is sometimes called the fear of “being and becoming.” The Christians call it “original sin.” It is always present, yet hidden in the causal body and it is looking for objects to attach to (*rajas*). It is related to “others”; it is the ultimate experience of duality, or “otherness.” Not everyone experiences it directly, although many do. In most *samsaris* it works out in petty mundane and indirect ways all day long, year after year. You will notice that it is called “beginningless” ignorance. The implied meaning of this phrase is that it is not endless, because self-knowledge ends personal ignorance (*avidya*) for good.

As you have experienced, it disappears for a bit then reappears, so you know that the fear is not real. Unfortunately, there is no quick, easy fix. It will play out until it does not anymore, so you are going to have to somehow embrace it, as you seem to be doing. It is a by-product of very deeply-rooted *samskaras*, and they have their origin in fear of course. This is macrocosmic or universal *rajas* (projection) and it is part of the *dharma* field. Everyone who is identified with being a person is affected by it to some degree. Usually, the *vasanas* will exhaust themselves after a while, but this one, this unnamed fear, is constantly “on.” As the self it doesn’t bother you at all of course, as you know. It is manageable if one does not identify with it.

**Samuel:** One question I have: Where James has moved away from classic Vedanta is in “rendering the *vasanas* non-binding” rather than having to empty one’s mind of every last *vasana* impulse before we are ready for *moksa*, which I read all the time in the scriptures, is there anybody else who adheres to James’ view? Have there been examples in the past? Has this been an under-the-table teaching, while working with the classic texts at the same time?

**Sundari:** I am not sure what scriptures you are reading, but actually it’s the other way around. Chinmayananda broke away from traditional Vedanta by promoting an idea made popular by Patanjali and Vivekananda, which was the experiential view of enlightenment. It is not that he did not know the difference between experience and

knowledge; he certainly did and he taught it too. His intention was to revive interest in Vedanta and to appeal to a greater Indian audience. Dayananda, who was taught by Chinmaya, broke away from him when it was pointed out to him by a traditional *swami* that what he was teaching was not pure Vedanta. Likewise, James moved away from Chinmaya and took Dayananda as his *guru*, while never giving up his allegiance and respect for Chinmaya as his *guru* too. Paramarthananda (who was taught by Dayananda) and all traditional teachers teach classic and pure Vedanta, as does James. James may not be a traditionalist, but he sticks firmly to the tradition. Classic, or pure, Vedanta does not say you have to remove all *vasanas* for *moksa* to obtain, because it's not possible. As I said before, even Krishna in the *Gita* says, "I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*." What Vedanta teaches is the difference between *satya* and *mithya*. While it's true that *moksa* will mostly likely not obtain unless all the binding *vasanas* have been rendered non-binding, it states clearly that as the *vasanas* arise from the causal body and do not belong to the *jiva*, they only need to be seen and understood in the light of self-knowledge (i.e. the *gunas*) in order to dissolve. One has to first identify them, understand their origin and what governs their creation (*gunas*) in order to dis-identify with them. Of course this is easier said than done with binding *vasanas*, which is where the "work" of self-inquiry comes in.

In fact some traditional Vedantins (usually Indians) believe that as they are the knower of the *vasanas*, they don't even need to render even binding *vasanas* non-binding. This is fine if you don't mind living with agitation in the mind. Seeing as the main aim for *moksa* is peace of mind, this latter approach does not make much sense.

~ Much love to you too, Sundari