

Dharma Is Not a Licence for Abuse

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John: Hello, Sundari and James. My congratulations on the newest ShiningWorld books! They are tremendous spiritual books, and I know that I will enjoy them multiple times. They have really helped to solidify the knowledge, and have found them both very helpful. I'm in a second time through *The Essence of Enlightenment* after finishing *Inquiry into Existence*. I know the latter will require review...Wow! James told me it would be the "graduate course," and I certainly agree.

Sundari: Hello, John, lovely to hear from you. Yes, indeed *Inquiry* is definitely an advanced text and most often does require several reviews. As with any great teaching that delivers self-knowledge, it is the knowledge itself that refines the intellect each the mind is exposed to it; in subsequent readings the mind "gets" things at a deeper level as ignorance is removed. Self-knowledge being so subtle it takes a while for assimilation to take place; the knowledge forces new neural networks to form in the brain.

John: A question for you, Sundari. Sarah and I have been having a discussion on this issue and how it relates to *dharma*. My brother and sister-in-law live in Kansas, and her father lives in Colorado, as does my mother. Consequently, they make a yearly pilgrimage here to see the mothers. What usually ends up happening is they ask if they can stay in our guest room and we let them. We have been forever hopeful that after these interactions, we would have an improved relationship, but it has never happened.

They have established an insular family dynamic, which excludes other family members. For example, we have been invited there once in 22 years of marriage and stayed there once when I went for some continuing education. When I had lost a job I contacted them about staying with them while looking in their area for potential employment opportunities, and they refused, saying it was "a bad time."

Looking at all this from the standpoint of *dharma*, and doing what is appropriate rather than acting according to likes and dislikes, it seems continuing to let them do this is right because they are family members who need some help. But how to walk the line and not just always let them come in, get what they need from us and not really reciprocating? I could go on, but I think you get the idea.

Sundari: Family issues are always tricky and there is no easy answer to situations like the one you describe. There is no right or wrong and Vedanta cannot tell you what to do. However, allowing people to use you for whatever reason never feels good and self-inquiry is about peace of mind after all. It is true that kindness, patience and accommodation are important values to have and extending a helping hand whenever possible is *dharmic*. But doing your *dharma* requires that you do what is right and truthful for you first. This does not include letting anyone use or abuse you.

Personally, I do not allow situations like this, as I do not enjoy indulging people who

are users. Apart from anything, this kind of person is boring because they are so self-absorbed. As I respect “others” and their needs at all times, my rule is that the *jiva* needs to put up clear and honest boundaries that are also kind and non-confrontational. And as I like and respect my *jiva* a great deal, these boundaries are those that bring peace of mind. But then I am not invested in making a good impression on my family nor do I feel that just because they are supposedly related to me means that I have to cater to them. Everyone is my family after all, so this rule applies to anyone.

If you feel that you cannot not cater to your relatives, then you have to take the *karma yoga* attitude as always, see them as the self and have them in your space with a loving attitude. But if you can't have that attitude then it is best to be as honest as you can as kindly as you can, also with the *karma yoga* attitude of course. This means taking whatever consequences that arise as *prasad*, which could be that family relations deteriorate or get more complicated. But so what? It does not sound like you care much for either of these people.

John: Love to you both, and thank you for your time.

Sundari: You are most welcome, John; sorry I can't really be more helpful. If it were me I would put my foot down and make it clear where I stand.

~ Love, Sundari