

# Don't Give Up

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**Thomas:** Hi, Sundari!

I really had to think about my last question and your answer. I have tried to understand what my question was really about. And it has been hard.

I understand feelings don't have anything to do with me as awareness.

But here is how I understand it: the *jiva* has to follow its *svadharma* or the mind won't be able to become *sattvic* enough to assimilate the teachings.

How does *Isvara* tell the *jiva* what if it not through feelings? For example, someone feels the love for playing the guitar at an early age and through that knows that is what he wants to do in life. What triggers a person to do stuff if it's not feelings?

Several times I have had people ask me: Don't you miss your family and want to live closer to them? Stuff like that makes a lot of conflicting emotion come up. I don't know if that's *Isvara* telling me something or if it's fears that manifest or what it is.

**Sundari:** There is nothing wrong with feelings and nothing that can be done about them, because they come from *Isvara*; they are generated by the *gunas*. The problem comes in only when feelings become your mode of thinking, in other words, when the intellect is run by feelings. When this happens, discrimination is not possible.

There is a big difference between doing what feels right for you, like playing an instrument, if music is your *svadharma*, and giving in to negative feelings like guilt, doubt, envy, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, neediness, malice or judgementalism, laziness, etc. – the list is long. The same problem arises if one becomes too identified with positive feelings, like the bliss of feel-good spiritual experiences, feeling superior because you are “more spiritual,” sentimentalism, self-indulgence, being a “do-gooder,” even identifying with a *sattvic* mind achieved through meditation becomes a problem. One has to have discrimination to determine the difference between legitimate feelings that arise from your *svadharma* and gratuitous feelings that do not. Either way, even feelings that arise as a result of your inborn nature should not be identified with if freedom from and for the *jiva* is your main aim. It is all *mithya* – but it does not help to deny it. One must understand the origin of the feelings in light of self-knowledge and in this way dissolve them. That does not mean that one does not act on feelings if they are legitimate, but one does so with *karma yoga*, knowing you are not the doer.

**Thomas:** The problem is this *jiva* has always had a hard time knowing what it wants. Sometimes I felt *sattva* in a horrible situation and sometimes I feel rotten doing things I love, like playing music (although I think the latter has to do with the thought that music should bring me more, and that some temporary joy is not enough).

**Sundari:** You have answered this for yourself. Low self-esteem is the problem, as is wanting things to be different from what they are or expecting things (objects – feelings/thoughts are subtle objects) to deliver what they are incapable of delivering: happiness. There is still a hidden belief that objects are meant to give you something you do not have. When self-knowledge is firm, it is irrelevant what the mind feels or does not feel, because you know that the bliss of knowledge, which does not feel like anything, is who you are. What you do feel as the *jivamukta* is complete confidence that no matter what the mind is thinking or feeling and whatever *Isvara* is presenting to it, you are whole and complete. There is nothing to gain, ever. The other thing is that *gunas* are always changing, no state of mind last for long, not even a positive one.

**Thomas:** I have tried to write you again for weeks now, but every time a heavy *tamas* takes over and makes me feel bad, making it impossible to write. I am so incredibly happy I have someone with your knowledge and compassion to talk to, and yet it feels bad and is hard to write.

**Sundari:** You are most welcome to write, Thomas; I have replied even though you said recently that you no longer need a reply. The *tamas* is a result of the low self-esteem and the ignorance it arises from. It keeps you stuck like a hamster on a treadmill, conflicted over everything.

**Thomas:** But maybe it's some sort of ego-ignorance-resistance. I guess I am afraid that if I let go of the sense of control *Isvara* will make the *jiva* do stuff it won't like.

**Sundari:** Yes, it definitely is ego resistance. Remember that Vedanta is a radical teaching and goes up against everything the ego is normally invested in. The ego will put up a fight, coming up with doubt after doubt. It will keep the mind trapped in doubt if it can. Ignorance is hardwired; it takes great commitment to self-inquiry for self-knowledge to obtain in the mind. Don't give up and most especially do not feel bad about feeling bad! What good will this do for you? All the *gunas* build on themselves if you indulge them. The feelings that arise with *tamas* are almost always negative, so see them for what they are: just feelings; they are not real, because they come and go. They are not the truth about you. When these negative feelings arise, take a stand in awareness as awareness and practise the opposite thought. Say to yourself, "This is just a feeling; it will pass, because it is not real. It is not the truth about me, because I am whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, unlimited and unchanging awareness. Nothing can be taken away from me or added to me." Say this over and over again; write it up where you can see it.

**Thomas:** For me, often I feel like all choices have felt wrong. Activities have always ended up disappointing. I guess I have thought they could add happiness, but also deep down never believed it.

**Sundari:** This is typical of a *samsaric* mindset. *Samsara* is invariably disappointing. It rarely delivers the way we want it to. This is exactly the suffering that has brought you to Vedanta; you are so tired of feeling bad all the time. You are so tired of the

drudgery of the doer. Most *samsaris* live with constant disappointment and disillusion because life is a zero-sum game. You cannot win as a *jiva* identified with being a *jiva*. Nothing is ultimately fulfilling or capable of delivering lasting happiness other than self-knowledge.

**Thomas:** Well, actually the option available to change my life is not beneficial for my Vedanta studies: maybe moving closer to my family, settling down and maybe starting a family.

**Sundari:** This the *jiva* identified with being a doer talking here. You cannot do anything to make things better, because doing is the problem. Moving closer to your family, if that is not right for you, will not be the answer unless you undertake this with total commitment to *karma yoga* and with the aim to devote yourself to self-inquiry. But if the *jiva* is unhappy and feels that it is not being true to itself, that won't work.

**Thomas:** I guess it's because I'm that age when everyone starts families. But being a householder cannot possibly be as good for Vedanta studies/the pursuit of *moksa*? I mean, you will have far less time. Unless it's my *svadharma*? And I don't know if I want a family. I sometimes want a girlfriend. I have full confidence in that Vedanta is the way to *moksa* for me, but all this *svadharma* stuff confuses me.

**Sundari:** How is being a husband or father going to bring you what you want? It will only add to the disappointment you already experience if you think it is going to deliver what you are looking for, which is freedom from limitation. Do not pursue a relationship if *moksa* is what you are after; it will more than likely result in more unhappiness because it cannot give you what you want. Nothing can.

You have to decide what you want most, *moksa* or *samsara*. If you want *moksa*, then the *svadharma* of an inquirer is to commit the mind totally to the scripture with single-pointed dedication. It is simple. There is no higher aim than this.

**Thomas:** James said at one time that if you have full confidence that you are the self you can just let the *jiva* follow its nature.

**Sundari:** Yes, that is true for the *jivanmukta* who knows it is the self and knows what it means to be the self. When the mind is free it can do or not do anything; it no longer matters, because nothing will change it or bring it anything it does not already have. James and I are in a relationship because we are free, not because we are looking for freedom. We are freedom.

**Thomas:** And in one of the *satsangs* I read that you must make your life match your identity as awareness. It seems so contradictory.

**Sundari:** It is only a contradiction if you do not understand what it means to be the self and live as the self, which you clearly do not. When you know you are awareness, your primary identity IS awareness, so it does not matter what the *jiva*

does, as already stated. Whatever identity the *jiva* has is unimportant, although the *jivanmukta* will always follow *dharma* no matter what it does. It will understand the conditioning that runs the *jiva* and will no longer be conditioned by it. That is what it means to be free of the *jiva* and to live as the self, while still appearing as a *jiva*.

**Thomas:** I see this life as projection sometimes, a movie. But then meddling in it seems unnecessary.

**Sundari:** It is a movie. It is not real, because it is always changing and not always present. Only you, the knower of the movie, are real and always present. And yes, indeed it does not help to “meddle in it,” because *Isvara* is running the show, like it or not. The whole point of freedom is to stop projecting the *jiva*’s identity onto *Isvara*, because you understand and live as who you really are, the self. As the self you are “beyond” both *Isvara* and the *jiva*. But the *jiva* never leaves the apparent reality, so even when it is no longer identified with it, it is still subject to the natural laws that run the *dharma* field.

**Thomas:** But I also fear that *Isvara* is going to create a life for this *jiva* that the *jiva* will not like, simply because the *jiva* is not so sure what he wants himself (exempt for *moksa*).

**Sundari:** The ego always fears that its likes and dislikes will not be catered to even though it is its likes and dislikes that are the cause of all its unhappiness. This is why *karma yoga* is so important, and without it the pressure of the *vasanas* cannot be reduced. *Isvara* is *karma phala data* – the deliverer of the fruits of action. If what you are most committed to is freedom from limitation, you have nothing to fear except fear itself. The self always responds to itself and will provide for you the perfect circumstances most conducive to your growth. You cannot have your cake and eat it if you want to be free of the *jiva*. If you cannot surrender to *Isvara* with complete trust in the teachings, i.e. with *karma yoga*, then you have some work to do on your qualifications for self-inquiry.

**Thomas:** What I always longed for, apart from experiencing less suffering, is the sense that life is an adventure, that sense of wonder of being in a movie where you don’t know what will happen. Now I have access to the knowledge to make life an adventure. But it seems I don’t trust it to be a good one.

**Sundari:** Well, exactly, Thomas. Another word for the ego is fear because the ego never feels satisfied with anything, not for long. It lives in mistrust of life, no matter how good it is.

Fear is a natural emotion, the downside of desire. To live happily it needs to be managed. Sometimes a fear is smart, sometimes it not smart. Yes, if you are standing in the middle of the road and a car is coming toward you at sixty miles an hour and fear motivates you to move, fear is smart, assuming you enjoy living. The problem is most fears have no basis in truth whatsoever.

All *jivas* are born in fear. This is the original sin that religion talks of. Religion sells sin as a transgression against God, but that is not what sin means. It means to “miss

the mark.” In other words, the idea that we are born in sin means we are born in ignorance of who we are, our true nature as awareness. The ego is a fear-thought born of the belief in separation. This fear is the “wound of humanity,” as I sometimes call it. It is the king of all *vasanas*, also what we call primordial beginningless ignorance, another name for *maya*. The more user-friendly term for this *vasana* 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,” what the Christians call “original sin.” It is always present, yet hidden in the causal body, and it is looking for objects to attach to (*rajas/tamas*). It is related to “others”; it is the ultimate experience of duality, or “otherness.”

Not everyone experiences it directly and acutely, although many do without even knowing it much of the time. The skyrocketing number of people experiencing anxiety attacks is testament to this. However, in most *samsaris* it works out in petty mundane and indirect ways all day long, year after year, the death by a thousand cuts. You can see the accretions in the faces of *samsaris* as they age – the exhaustion of existential suffering, the weight of the *vasanas* etched in faces inured to delusion. The fear-thought is reinforced at every turn in our society, though advertising, the media (only bad news sells, after all) and of course through “entertainment.” The more violence or threat of violence in a book or a movie, the more it sells. It seems *jivas* are addicted to fear and are drawn to it like moths to a flame.

You will notice that this ignorance 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. However, the nameless fear-*samskara* is one of the last to go for most inquirers. Self-realisation is no guarantee that it has been rooted out. For most people it disappears for a bit, then reappears, from which we can determine without doubt that fear is not real. Unfortunately, this knowledge is often not enough to slay the fear-dragon for good. There is no quick easy fix if fear is playing out in the mind. It will play out until it does not anymore, so the only solution is to apply self-knowledge when it arises and it is seen for what it is. In order to apply self-knowledge to fear-thoughts, they need to be identified and dissolved in the knowledge. For most people, fear is so ever-present that it goes unnoticed, because it is considered “normal,” even smart. Cynicism and lack of trust are the mark of a “worldly person.”

The ever-present but often unseen anxiety is a by-product of very deeply rooted *samskaras*, which have their origin in ignorance of course. It 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, even though they inevitably return, but this one, this unnamed fear, is constantly “on.” As the self it doesn’t bother you at all of course, and for those who are self-realised but not self-actualised, this unnamed fear will come and go. It is manageable if one does not identify with it, but to be free of the person’s conditioning it needs to be purified through self-knowledge, as it causes great agitation for the mind, making true peace of mind difficult to achieve or maintain.

So how are we going to negate the deeply entrenched fear-*samskara*? A “coping strategy” while helpful is not the answer; self-knowledge is the only answer to fear because fear is not real. Fear stands for False Evidence Appearing Real.

Ramji recognised the power of fear when he first realised the self and he strove to eradicate its power in the mind with a vengeance. He will not entertain any thought that has its origin in fear, not even relatively benign thoughts like wondering about someone's hidden motives or locking his car door, unless he is in an area where crime is rife, which is seldom. One does have to use common sense. But beyond the application of common sense, fear-thoughts are the most debilitating and life-negating. Fear-thoughts come in many disguises, like having a suspicious, mistrusting mind, acting as though you are better than others, criticising others, mistrusting yourself, guilt, anger, desire, manipulating people or situations emotionally or by whatever means to get what you want, dishonesty, etc. The list is long.

To believe in the reality of fear and carry it in your mind throughout your life is to kill the joy and spontaneity that make life truly beautiful.

So make a *sankalpa* (commitment) to negate every fear thought that arises in the mind with the opposite thought, in the moment. Dare to live dangerously by embracing the freedom of choosing to live without fear. Never give in to gratuitous fear, for if you do, the price is always loss of freedom, loss of joy, loss of peace. Trust *Isvara* in all its glorious forms.

**Thomas:** Sorry for going on so much. It seems that when I write you is one of the few times I actually examine and summarize my thoughts.

Much love and thank you for your support.

~ Thomas

**Sundari:** You are welcome, Thomas, keep going, don't give up. Committing to self-knowledge is the hardest thing the mind will ever do, but you are so fortunate that you have come to Vedanta. It has all the answers you need, but it may take some time for self-knowledge to remove lifetimes of ignorance. Stay with it, you are doing just fine.

~ Much love, Sundari