

The Work of Self-Inquiry

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Sebastian: Dear Sundari and James, I am still alive! A much-too-long silence from my side – I want to let you know how I am doing and ask for some advice along the way. First of all, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! A measureless thank you to you both, to Vedanta, to what you are setting in motion, to all the help you are providing to my good friends and the ensuing liberation and happiness they find, thank you for having appeared in my life like sweet grace with so much beauty and generosity. From what I keep hearing, you are both very well, which is wonderful to hear.

Sundari: Hello, Sebastian! I was thinking of you so much lately, and we often talk about you with great fondness. As always, thank you for such heartfelt appreciation, much appreciated! We cannot find anything to give you advice about in this email; you are definitely on the Vedanta bus and doing your *nididhysana* with flying colours. It is normal for the *jiva* to experience difficulty as it goes through this process and there is nothing for it but to put one's head down and "do the work," as they say. This is what I wrote recently to someone on the same issue, much of which you know and are living.

Swami Chinmayananda, James' *guru*, said: "You have gone through ten *Upanishads*. Wonderful. How many *Upanishads* have gone through you?" Hence the conversion of intellectual knowledge into emotional strength is called *nididhysana*.

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Introduction to Vedānta (Tattvabodha) – Swami Paramarthananda

7.5.3. Nididhyāsanam – Contemplation / Assimilation, transformation of emotions

Then comes the process of Nididhyāsanam which is the process of internalisation or assimilation of this knowledge and the removal of my habitual behaviour. This also involves solving emotional problems in the light of Jñānam. Ultimately even though Samsara is a problem of ignorance, the ignorance is appearing or expressing in the form of emotional turmoil alone. Basic problem may be by Ajnānam but I am facing this problem in the form of Rāga Dvesha Kāma Krodhaha Lobha Moha Mada Mātsarya and Bhayam. [like, dislike, lust, anger, greed, delusion, illusion, envy, fear]. Unless the emotional problems are solved, I have not assimilated the knowledge totally.

The present behaviour I have developed very gradually, it is a habit, a conditioning that I have – this I have to de-condition myself. This process is called Nididhyāsanam or assimilation. Only when the habitual behaviour goes away, do I get the full benefit of this knowledge. We have been Samsārī, petty, ignorant, bitter people and that personality has influenced our responses, our goals. Everything has been governed by our idea about ourselves. How you behave depends on how you look at yourself.

Self actualisation, living the knowledge as a free *jiva*, is quite another matter from self-realisation, which is the experiential realisation of awareness. James says slow and steady wins the race. A humble mind dedicated to self-inquiry that carefully and steadfastly plods along, diligently subjecting the mind to the scripture and practicing *nididhysana*, often "get's there" sooner than a mind that seemingly grasps self-knowledge quickly. Of course there is nowhere to get to, because you are already there and self-inquiry is not a journey. The point is not just for the mind to grasp but for the *jiva* to understand and live the knowledge in every moment of every day.

Moksa, or non-dual vision, is complete and permanent understanding of how the field of existence operates – the forces that create it: the *gunas* (and how they govern the creation of all *vasanas*) and the natural laws that run it: *samanya dharma* (big picture), *visesa dharma* (how the individual relates to big picture/*Isvara*) and *svadharma* (inborn nature and tendencies of individual). A *jivanmukta* by definition will have resolved all its conditioning through contemplation, assimilation of the knowledge and transformation of its habitual patterns (*vasanas/samskaras/pratibandikas*, i.e. its conditioning) through self-knowledge. This is the essence of *nididhysana*.

As the *jiva* is a product of the *gunas*, belongs to and is always subject to *Isvara*, the *jiva* is never going to be perfect. But as awareness you are free of the *jiva* and you know it arises from and depends on you, and not the other way around. Then life makes sense and it is possible to see beauty all the time, even when things are not pretty.

Sebastian: I haven't written to you for about five months, and indeed I have struggled at times. After a good stint of such happiness at having found you and Vedanta's teachings, dark-cloud *vasanas* have been the appropriate gifts from

God, often I'm not even sure what they are about except a mistaken negative sense of self. I have experienced much resistance to applying the simple, effective, brilliant methodology of Vedanta. And yet it is obvious that the beautiful teachings of Vedanta are lodged deeper and deeper in my being, bringing me back time and time again to the one simple non-dual truth of who I am.

Sundari: The fine print on the enlightenment certificate that many miss is that there really is no "post"-*moksa* stage for the *jiva* even though as awareness you are *moksa* and not the *jiva*. As Vedantins we never stop "working" on the *jiva* even though we do not censure it or expect it to change. We unflinchingly follow *dharma*, personal and universal, without question, not because we want to improve the *jiva* but only because we want to enjoy the priceless benefits of a peaceful mind.

While it is true that once self-knowledge has obtained in the mind there is a definite "shift" in how one sees life and relates to objects, it is also true that the *nididhysana* stage never really ends for the *jiva*, because it is always changing and interacting with the field of existence, which is also always changing. The price of freedom for the *jiva* is eternal vigilance. Macrocosmic ignorance does not end when personal ignorance (*avidya*) ends and the *jiva* is always limited by *maya* (although no longer conditioned by it) even though its essence is known to be limitless awareness. If this were not true, the *jiva* would become *Isvara* "after" *moksa* - which clearly and irrefutably is not the case.

A common myth in the enlightenment game is that enlightenment is another object to obtain, and when it is the *jiva* will be different, better. It may or may not be. It will still have its *Isvara*-given character and tendencies, it will still be a pain in the ass to itself and others sometimes. It will still suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, feeling joy, pain, loss, grief as well as the constant bliss of self-knowledge.

When *moksa* has obtained in the mind one may and usually does feel experiential bliss regularly, but one does not depend on it, because you know you are the bliss. The bliss of knowledge does not feel like anything. Experiential bliss is an object known to you and you are always blissful, whether or not experiential bliss is present. In fact you could be sick, in pain, half-dead, broke, jobless or stuck in a situation you do not enjoy but cannot change - and be totally blissful because who you are is not influenced by what is or is not going on in your environment. You feel blissful regardless of what is going on in the mind.

The subjective reality never ends for the *jivamukta* and it can and often does still project its subjective reality (*pratibhasika*) onto *Isvara*. It will always have its particular way of relating to *Isvara* which will be unique to its *Isvara*-given *vasana* filters. The difference will be that a *jivanmukta* knows when it is projecting, instantly dissolves the projection in the knowledge and so is instantly free of it. Thus it does not create any new *karma*. It keeps its *karma* like a little dog on a very short leash, right in front of it, no *karmic* drag, ever, no unfinished business or drama. Every moment of every day is complete. There is never another person involved in its interactions and transactions in the world of objects/experience. The *jivanmukta* knows in the moment that it is transacting only with itself because there is no "other." There is only awareness.

Sebastian: I read somewhere, I think by Tan, that the self cannot be remembered, but it seems to me that my main practice consists of remembering who I am. A correction of identity. Eternal peace. Liberation. I do not enjoy the fruits of self-realisation without fail, that is for sure, but I can (re)turn to the truth of who I am without fail. And what a gift is that.

Sundari: What is meant by the statement that the self cannot be remembered is that self-knowledge is not a function of memory, because it is who you are. You cannot forget who you are, your essence, even if the mind is clouded by ignorance. The self always knows itself and observes the mind that is under the spell of ignorance. So the "rememberer" is the doer, the *jiva*, aligning itself with its true, ever-present identity as awareness. Ignorance being what it is, hardwired and highly tenacious, it "takes time" for self-knowledge to do the work. That is why Vedanta is so brilliant, providing the perfect methodology to subject the mind to. Stick with any of the *praktiyas* that work for you; dedication, faith in the scripture and *titiksa* is the name of the game.

Sebastian: In speaking with some of my friends who have stayed with Andrew Cohen for all these years, the misunderstandings they have about their essential self and the nature of consciousness and non-dual reality stand out so clearly. Vedanta is so brilliant! Yet they cling to these misunderstandings for their sense of self-worth, just like he does. Time, they all need time. Andrew is actually meeting with many of his ex-students right now, travelling from country to country. It is good he is doing this, even though I do not trust him one bit in the persona he is displaying now - humble, listening to people, agreeing with their perspectives, apologizing. Time will tell, as always.

Sundari: Ah, yes, no doubt the leopard has not changed its spots, because only self-knowledge is capable of doing that! His "humility" is probably the ego's attempt to regain its lost influence of "power" over his "lost" flock. There is ZERO tolerance for self-aggrandizement of any kind if *moksa* is what one is after, and I doubt Andrew understands that. Once the mind is purified of duality, humility is its natural response to everything in its environment (*Isvara*) because it understands there is only itself, awareness. It no longer sees "otherness" as awareness, even though it observes the *jiva* still apparently experiencing it. Duality is understood and appreciated for what it is - enjoyed, even. But as it is not expected to deliver something it is incapable of doing, i.e. happiness, duality is never a problem for the *jivanmukta*. This takes so much pressure off the *jiva* because there is no need to make it conform to some silly "spiritual" ideal. It is just known and loved for what it is: a reflection of the self in a mirror, which is also the self.

Sebastian: Thank you for the video on non-dual relationships. Incredibly helpful, clarifying uncharted territory, as

far as I know. I have an unqualified partner, and I am more at peace with the situation than I have ever been, my love for her deepening. We are both committed to raising our child, seeing eye-to-eye in how to go about this venture, she is the most beautiful mum, I respect her for doing her own work towards realisation of the self in her committed involvement in her own *sadhana*, we are supporting each other 100% in our paths and our love for one other is growing, a blessed situation. Amazingly, I seem to want and expect less and less. This has opened much wonderful space between us.

Sundari: We are so happy to hear this, Sebastian, what great news! Well done to you both. May love continue to blossom and grow.

Sebastian: I hope to see you and James in Germany in March. Big hugs to you both. And much love to you.

Sundari: Much love, grace and peace to you and your family from both of us.