

# Intense Spiritual Experiences

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2016-04-25

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2677>

**Allen:** Dear Sundari, thanks very much for your response(s). It was very generous and kind of you to have written back. I sincerely appreciate it.

I'm glad you enjoyed the email. As someone who listens to others a great deal (but who has also done more than his fair share of talking), I have come to understand that it is very important to attempt to at least be entertaining if I'm going to talk on about myself. At the very least, I seek to be relatable. Anyway, thank you for the compliments on my writing, clarity, etc. I do agree with you that humor plays a large role in being objective. I'm struggling to find an appropriate way of putting it, but the best I can come up with right now is that humor is like an anticoagulant, in a way – it breaks up identification with the gunk of life. I may not identify myself as “the light” just yet, but a good, gut-busting laugh is a pretty effective way to shake off unhelpful identifications and distracting moods.

**Sundari:** Absolutely, I could not agree more!

**Allen:** I found James to be very likeable and relatable upon hearing him speak at *Buddha at the Gas Pump* and then later in his online videos and USB Vedanta lectures. His humor is definitely disarming. It is exceedingly unusual to hear a teacher (of any variety, let alone a spiritual teacher) engaging in self-deprecating remarks. This, coupled with the abundant free and/or affordable resources that he has arranged to have made available through the ShiningWorld site, caused me to take note of him. As I noted in my last email, I've been seeking for quite some time, so I have developed a sort of sensitivity for anything too phony. My discrimination has improved partly due to this exposure to numerous money-making schemes and also due to my own realization that this life, as a *jiva* anyway, is a “zero-sum game,” as James puts it. It is probably this second realization that is the most important in terms of my development of discrimination, and it was hearing James teach it so forthrightly that made me consider him a teacher with integrity. Many current “spiritual” movements are little more than self-help tips peddled by flashy life coaches for getting ahead in the rat race. My own psychic temperament has pretty much rendered me incapable of receiving more than a fleeting, momentary appreciation for most things and experiences. As this is where the world tells us happiness comes from, I quickly learned that either A: there was something wrong with me and I better go on pills so I can get happiness out of temporary things/experiences or B: the world is wrong about where happiness comes from. I've opted for B. When I heard James unpack the “zero-sum” teaching, I was thrilled. I have to admit a rather pessimistic bent in my personality – or at least that is what it has been labeled by my family and friends. I can be quite humorous and energetic at times, but as my childhood was riddled with several funerals of family members and a frightening illness, I quickly came to see this world as a rather disappointing and fearful place.

**Sundari:** You are fortunate to have the nature of an inquirer and enough dispassion to understand both the value and the limitation of your spiritual experiences. The

*dharma* field exists for the *jiva* to work out its *karma* – and we are given the *karma* in this life according to “our” *prarabdha karma*, or the momentum of our “past” actions. I can well understand a rather pessimistic worldview being the result of the dismay the *jiva* registers upon realising that there is nothing to gain in this world and everything everyone is chasing is empty. I think it is true to say that most (if not all) seekers who are qualified for *moksa* and come to Vedanta could relate to this *tamasic* tendency. How else can the *jiva* respond when it gains this understanding without having self-knowledge? This was certainly true for me until I developed some understanding of the programs that run the mind and how they relate to the programs that run the creation. It was only when I “found” Vedanta though that I could truly negate the doer and develop the discrimination between *satya* and *mithya*, the real and the apparently real. You seem to have come to the same place I did and was ready and qualified for self-inquiry.

**Allen:** Perhaps rather than being driven by desires I have more of a tendency to be driven by aversions. However, one cannot avoid pain forever, as it is built in to this reality. Hence I have long ago come to the conclusion that real happiness lies outside of this desire/aversion dance. I just didn’t know where it was. James’ teachings on the self have been a great answer to this perplexing question for me. As for becoming a finder rather than a seeker, that is my greatest wish.

**Sundari:** Desire and aversion are two sides of the same coin – both lead to suffering. Freedom is not about putting an end to all desire/aversions (if that were possible or even necessary, which is it not). It is about understanding the nature of gratuitous desires/aversions and where they originate from: ignorance of self. Krishna says: “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” All suffering is the result of ignorance of one’s nature. Suffering has its place in that it leads one to inquire about the self. When ignorance is removed from the mind by self-knowledge, one will still suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but one does so as the self, knowing it is all *mithya*: only apparently real. One can suffer without suffering over the suffering. While self-knowledge is not a magic pill for the ego, it removes the identification with the sufferer.

**Allen:** I keep re-identifying with the jumble of thoughts and feelings going on within me as being my awareness rather than being objects within my awareness. I haven’t “zoomed out” far enough, so to speak. I end up abiding in the subtle body rather than the self. I am going to have to spend more time processing this point before I get it, I think. I’ve read *The Essence of Enlightenment* and listened to James speak at length now, and have definitely heard him go over this. There has just been something stopping me from fully assimilating what the teachings reveal on this point. I recently read a *satsang* at the ShiningWorld site that made this much clearer to me. I’ll keep reflecting on this. As I’m sure you amply know, as a therapist and as someone who has been in therapy, there is probably a tendency for psychotherapists to identify with (and to model identifying with) thoughts and feelings.

**Sundari:** Yes, in a way you could say you have not “zoomed out” far enough. It is very difficult to break identification with the person, because it is counter-intuitive. While you have realised that your true nature is awareness and not the person, you have indirect knowledge of the self, and it comes and goes. Indirect knowledge is

knowing about the self but not yet what it means to be the self. Understanding the identity between the *jiva/Isvara*/the *gunas* is the teaching that dissolves the subject-object split. This is the tough part where most inquirers get stuck. It is the most subtle part of the teaching, and with applied, dedicated self-inquiry, the “stuckness” will resolve. As the methodology of the teaching has a very clear progression, for now I would suggest you concentrate on strengthening all the qualifications, and especially on *karma yoga*. Without the understanding and dedicated application of *karma yoga*, self-inquiry will not work for you. I have attached a teaching on this, although it is very well explained in James’ books and in many *satsangs* at the website.

**Allen:** There is a new therapeutic model called ACT. It stands for Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. One of the core teachings of this model is that we are the “context” for our thoughts, feelings and experiences – not identical with them. Dis-identification from thoughts/feelings/experiences is a big part of that therapeutic process. I studied this approach along with other approaches. My immersion in Vedanta has been made slightly easier due to this earlier exposure, but I must say that Vedanta is far clearer to me on this point than my earlier exposure to ACT was. Again, this might be my failure to comprehend ACT rather than its own lack of merit. It clearly is more in accord with Vedanta than numerous other approaches.

**Sundari:** ACT sounds like a more advanced, intelligent approach to resolving one’s psychology and a big step in a more positive direction towards freedom for the person. However, as you are well aware, it is still used by therapists and other professionals in the field in the context of the doer (subtle body) being real. There is no escape from ignorance unless you can step out of *maya*/duality – and only self-knowledge allows you to do so. Otherwise, you are stuck in the apparent reality trying to make it work for the person, wearing yourself out with existential doership on the treadmill of *samsara*.

**Allen:** I believe spiritual experiences have kept me seeking for the truth. In my case, I think I would have become a die-hard atheist by now if I hadn’t been an experienter of the unusual throughout my life. I feel I cannot definitively say that Vedanta is true yet, as I have yet to dis-identify from the experienter/doer, but I do feel that Vedanta has answers for all the questions I could not get answers for across the board from other teachings. I am provisionally accepting that I have been led to the truth by stumbling upon Vedanta and am currently attempting to “drink” from the well I’ve been led to. With that said, I am always a bit skeptical of any particular spiritual movement due to numerous disappointments.

**Sundari:** Definitely, the main purpose of spiritual experiences is to initiate self-inquiry. Good for you. Vedanta requires faith in the scriptures pending the outcome of your own investigation.

**Allen:** For me, the idea that Vedanta is not a philosophy or a school of thought, etc. is rather something of a stumbling block, as I got burnt earlier in my life by having it stressed to me that Christianity and the Bible were “revealed” and therefore something I shouldn’t think critically about. I hope you will understand then that hearing that Vedanta is revealed is something I am inclined to just push out of my

mind. James pretty much says that it is revealed, but I have also heard him say that we are invited to think critically and to put all the ideas to the test. I've also heard him say that "the proof is in the pudding," so I'm willing to keep chugging along, in spite of the disagreeableness of the word "revealed" for me. Being somewhat empirical, there is no way for me to test or determine whether or not something is revealed. It is easy for anyone to make such claims. However, it is very clear to me that the teachings of Vedanta are quite remarkable and extremely clear and penetrating. I am impressed by how Vedanta really speaks to the human condition in a way that other spiritualities and even psychology fail to do. Granted, while my exposure to various philosophies, religions and psychologies is rather broad, it is not exhaustive, and I cannot preclude the possibility that there are other things out there that might be equally impressive to me. (You don't know what you don't know, etc.)

**Sundari:** Most definitely, Vedanta is a critical tradition. But it does not criticize people, only dumb and illogical ideas. The confusion you have here is that by "faith in the scripture" Vedanta means that you have to be able to, at least temporarily, put your own ideas and beliefs aside. You cannot try to fit Vedanta into your beliefs and opinions; it will not work. If upon investigation you find that what Vedanta states is not true - that your true nature is non-dual, actionless, whole and complete awareness - and there is another teaching "out there" that works for you better for you, you can always take your beliefs back. If on the other hand you confirm with your own experience that what Vedanta says is true, then you have to accept the scripture as the *guru* - which literally means "the one that dispels the darkness." In this case, you throw out all ideas and beliefs that do not correspond with scripture as ignorance. Vedanta teachers do not have followers or disciples, because both the teacher and the student are seen as equal in the self. However, the inquirer has an ignorance problem and the teacher helps to wield the knowledge in a way that will assist in removing the ignorance - but it is not the teacher that achieves this. It is only ever self-knowledge that removes ignorance.

I can really understand your doubts about the scripture being revealed knowledge because of similar claims being made by religious and other spiritual paths and teachers. The big difference is that Vedanta's claim that the scripture is revealed depends on undeniable logic, not belief, as all religions require. While faith in the scripture is a prerequisite and necessary qualification for self-inquiry, it is not blind faith. It is faith pending the outcome of your investigation. And all Vedanta is really saying is that you are perfect, whole and complete, non-dual awareness and not the limited suffering miserable person you think you are. It's amazing how hard that is to assimilate! Without the necessary qualifications present in the mind, discrimination and self-inquiry will not be possible, however. The mind, or ego, will be too invested in its own beliefs and suspicious of the teachings, so will not have the requisite faith in them to put aside its own opinions, biases and beliefs. Non-duality is not theory in practice, it is not a philosophy nor is it the fabrication of teachings based on a prophet or mystic.

Vedanta is called "*brahma vidya*," which means the science of consciousness. It is an objective and scientific analysis of the true nature of reality and your OWN (unexamined) experience, based on the facts. Like any other science, it is not personal and it has a methodology, which if followed with great dedication and commitment will provide irrefutable knowledge that is *moksa*, if the student is qualified. Vedanta is simply the truth about you. Not your truth or my truth or anyone's truth: The Truth.

This is why Vedanta is called *apauruseya jnanam*, meaning not the philosophy or experience of one person like a prophet or a mystic, as in the Buddha or Jesus. As you know, it is not a belief system or religion either. Vedanta (self-knowledge) predates all known religious and philosophical paths, and it is an independent teaching, or *sruti*, which means that which is “heard.” As I pointed out to you in our last exchange, self-knowledge, unlike object-knowledge, is always true because it is true to the self, meaning it cannot be dismissed or negated by any other knowledge. Self-knowledge is different from knowledge of objects, which is object-based, not subject-based. Knowledge of objects is not knowledge unless it is true to the object. If it is “my” knowledge, then it is my interpretation of an object (*pratibasika*), which is not necessarily knowledge. Ignorance (or my point of view) causes me to see or experience objects in a certain way because of “my” conditioning. People believe that ignorance is knowledge because they believe that what they experience is knowledge. It may be knowledge, but it may not be.

A good example of revealed knowledge is Einstein’s “discovery” of the law of relativity and gravity or Thomas Edison’s discoveries about electricity. To discover means to uncover something that was there but previously unknown. Relativity, gravity and electricity describe how the world works according to the laws of physics, not according to Einstein or Edison. Gravity, relativity and electricity do not care if you believe in them. They operate the same way whether you understand what they are or not. It is the same with awareness and the means of knowledge of Vedanta. Awareness does not care if you have realised your true nature or not, because it (you) is unaffected by knowledge or ignorance. Liberation from ignorance is for the apparent person who lives in the apparent reality. As awareness, you have always been free. This is why *moksa*, or freedom, is discriminating you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you, in other words, dis-identifying with Allen as your primary identity – AND knowing what that means so that self-knowledge translates into all areas of life. It is freedom from the person and for the person. This is why you can trust it.

Vedanta teaches that you cannot do anything to get enlightened, because the doer is the problem; no action taken by a limited entity can produce a limitless result, which is what liberation, or *moksa*, is. However, Vedanta is a complete teaching in that it is both a path of action, self-inquiry, and a path of knowledge. Although self-inquiry is an action, it is not the action itself that provides the results but only self-knowledge that removes ignorance, not the one “doing” the self-inquiry. And the result that self-inquiry produces is a limitless result because it produces freedom from the limitation of identification with the doer, which is *moksa*.

**Allen:** My sense, after having steeped myself in Christianity for a fairly long time, is that Jesus said a great deal that I now feel I understand more deeply thanks to my encounter with Vedanta. There are numerous enigmatic things Jesus says in the New Testament that no minister or priest ever gives a sermon on. Here in the U.S., Christianity has been trivialized into a more or less political movement that seeks to alienate gays and women, and spends the rest of its time trying to control youth sexuality. When those favorite pastimes are not being engaged in, they make “hell houses” at Halloween and spread the “Good News” that basically everyone is going to an eternal hell for a roasting after death unless they fall on their knees and agree to sign on to the party line (or literally sign a form saying they accept some or other interpretation of the atoning death of Jesus for their own personal sins). But enough about that! (Phew, my blood pressure was mounting for those past couple of sentences.)

**Sundari:** Religion uses fear as a means to keep people in line. It works for some, some of the time. Ultimately fear is self-defeating. Most religions are very limited in what they have to offer in terms of tools to help people deal with their lives.

**Allen:** I'd find it fascinating to look into the parallels between the Jesus sayings and the teachings of Vedanta. Just last night I read or listened to something where James points out that one qualification for studying Vedanta is a "masculine" mindset. This caused me to recall the line in the gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* which says, "Simon Peter said to them, 'Mary should leave us, for females are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'See, I am going to attract her to make her male so that she too might become a living spirit that resembles you males. For every female (element) that makes itself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.'" Granted, this passage is not an accepted passage for orthodox Christians, but even several sayings from the accepted canon suddenly seem penetrable in light of Vedanta.

**Sundari:** The statement that Vedanta requires a "male" temperament has nothing to do with gender. Vedanta does not recognise gender, because the self is not a person. However, the gender issue, being one of the biggest issues causing polarisation because it is the ultimate duality, often trips people up. A "male temperament" is one where the intellect is not in service to and is not governed by emotion, where the intellect functions clearly and with dispassion. As soon as emotion takes over the intellect discrimination goes out the window. I have no idea what the quote from Jesus means - it sounds pretty bizarre and sexist. But seeing as the Bible was written up by scholars who lived centuries after Jesus did and would not have known him if they bumped into him in the street, do you not think that a certain amount of personal bias might just be involved here?

**Allen:** As a wisdom teacher, I could see how the historic Jesus or the historic communities of early Christians may have been incorporating teachings about the self into their movement. It may not even have been a matter of Jesus or the early Jesus community encountering Vedanta - it may have simply been a case of the self making itself manifest amongst another community outside of India. As Jesus purportedly said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." An interesting thought, hopefully one I can return to after self-inquiry completes its job on me.

**Sundari:** Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "In whatever way you worship me, I will come to you to make your faith strong." There is only the self, so what else would anyone be worshipping? The self is always speaking, either in self-knowledge or self-ignorance. Man has always sought an end to the pain of separation. The search for wholeness is built in to the psyche by *Isvara*, and for most people the drive for wholeness is stronger than our pathology. Religion is good in many ways. For one thing, especially as inquirers who have found it does not give us the answers we need, religion does at least help develop an attitude of devotion, which is essential for self-inquiry to work.

As for the majority, we need rules that uphold *dharma* in the society as a whole. James says that without religion we would all be packing guns. Well - that is a bit of

a specious argument because it seems like half the world is packing guns at the moment! Religion on the whole is based on an interpretation of truth by “the Church,” which is made up of people who believe God revealed truth to them personally, not through inquiry into reality by an independent, irrefutable and logical means of knowledge. Religion is based on an apparently infallible belief in a superior, extra-cosmic deity to whom allegiance must be given to avoid punishment and gain salvation. Its basic contention is that we are flawed at birth and can only be redeemed by divine intervention. If we are saved, we will experience eternal bliss in the life hereafter; if not, eternal damnation is unavoidable. Unlike Vedanta, religion does not encourage the individual to question and think for himself or herself. It requires believers to mindlessly submit to unprovable doctrines.

Religion teaches that God is bigger and better than you, the pathetic little person. It teaches us to believe in a God outside of us – it does not teach that there is only God and we are all it. It does not teach that even though as the self you are beyond God, God (we prefer “*Ishvara* associated with *maya*”) as Creator gives rise to the whole creation (including the *jiva*), and the creation is intelligently designed, running on natural laws that must be understood and lived according to – or the *jiva* will suffer.

The contention of Vedanta is that you are whole and complete as you are, you do not need anyone to save you and happiness and bliss is your nature, here and now. If you do not know this, there is nothing wrong with you; you just have a knowledge problem, meaning there is something you do not know, the knowing of which makes all the difference.

This is not to say that religion does not have its place; it is a source of great comfort to many people who are not ready for self-inquiry. Religion on the whole promotes good values, providing structure in the ever-changing and unpredictable sands of *samsara*. Notwithstanding the fact that many religions are based on divisive and self-righteous dogma, which has been (and still is) the cause of so much suffering worldwide, religion does help many to make good choices and live *dharmic* lives. It makes ordinary people feel safe, providing guidelines that help sort out relationship and life issues. Having an unshakeable core set of beliefs is one of the few buffers to help the person cope with life and develop resilience. It is a fact that when the mind is subjected to beliefs that give meaning and purpose to life, the mind is psychologically healthier and more able to cope with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune than a mind that does not believe in anything. Although most religions are based on fear as the main motivator, fear may be useful to beginners to turn the mind inwards towards self-inquiry. For an inquirer starting out on the path, fear can produce great *bhakti* for *Ishvara* and for finding the truth, but ultimately fear is self-defeating and immobilizing unless it is directed toward *Ishvara*, the field of existence.

Many people who come to self-inquiry have a lot of negativity towards the idea of the religious God and hate the idea of God. But as stated, it is essential for self-inquiry to understand the importance of worship. Most inquirers start off with dualistic, informal or undisciplined worship which is totally subjective and emotional, “heart”-based. Most religious *samsaris* worship a personal deity, seeing it as a HE usually, a big daddy who takes care of them and listens to their problems. It is worshipping God as a person, but a much bigger and better person than you are. It produces childlike or childish devotion – supplicating God in order to get the results you want and avoiding what you don’t want. This is where all religious fanaticism and dogmatism originate; it leads to sectarianism and fundamentalism. It makes people feel they have “God on their side” and can act out whatever they believe “in His

name," that they are better than others and their way is the only way. It gives rise to all religious wars. Religion is for people who are totally identified with being people and the world of objects.

Religion does not offer a valid and independent means of knowledge with which to deconstruct and understand the true nature of reality. Vedanta is not for or against any particular religion or path. It sees all paths as one, as it is the pathless path that underpins all paths – because everything arises out of consciousness. Whether one is aware of it or not, there is only one principle, and that is consciousness, so however or whoever one worships, one is worshipping the self.

The Bible is open to interpretation, like all religious texts. One can find proof of almost any view in them. Vedanta is not open to interpretation, because what it states cannot be dismissed or negated: there is only awareness and it is you, its nature is whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, complete, unchanging and unconcerned. All suffering arises from ignorance of this fact.

No religion and no other spiritual path has an independent means of knowledge for awareness. Only Vedanta offers this. We make it very clear that the teaching does not belong to us. As teachers of Vedanta, we are simply mouthpieces for the truth. While everything we teach is confirmed by our experience, it is not based on it.

I think it is fair to say that if Jesus (as with the Buddha) were alive today he would not be a Christian and the Buddha would not be a Buddhist (whatever that is). And I think while it can be said that Jesus and the Buddha were non-dualists if their teachings were/are properly understood, they did not have a means of knowledge, so everything they said was (and continues to be) interpreted by prevailing thinking. This is why anything can be said to be "in the name of God," the Inquisition and ISIS being good examples. While there are many so-called Vedanta teachers out there and not all of them adhere strictly to the scripture, those of us who do are part of the *sampradaya*, or grand lineage of Vedanta. It is alive and well because there are many genuine and qualified teachers teaching it, James being one of the best.

**Allen:** I have read some of James' autobiography, and his experiences are admittedly very impressive. You are right though, in that what do any of these sorts of experiences get accomplished if we just end up chasing more experiences? The condition we end up in, as consumers of experiences, is still just the condition of being a limited, needy being. I think having come from a Christian background I have been prone to accepting this position, as we are taught that we are inherently limited beings and that we will always be such. The idea of being whole, complete, non-dual, ordinary, unconcerned, actionless awareness is a more difficult teaching for me to integrate, based on my earlier indoctrination to see myself as fatally flawed and limited. I will keep exposing my mind to it. I never found agreeable the idea that God made contingent, lesser creatures so that He could bask in the glory of having them worship Him. This always seemed to be the epitome of narcissism to me and smacked of anthropomorphism. Sadistic, insecure tyrants enjoy such things, but a divine being? This is why I enjoy the teachings regarding the self. What can decrease the self? Legions of people could remain ignorant of it, even mock the idea of it, and it would not be reduced in the least. Nor would it be capable of being disturbed by such mockery. It would remain forever perfect, undisturbed, unconcerned and blissful. This is a far more attractive image of the divine to me than a two-dimensional, jealous, Iron Age tribal king.



**Sundari:** You hit the nail on the head! If you cannot yet see that this is why you can trust Vedanta now, if you stick to your *sadhana* it will become clear in time. As with many true inquirers, to me it seemed preposterous to believe in the Christian idea of God – it just did not make sense. Vedanta is about common-sense logic.

**Allen:** The other night I had a dream in which I was discussing my interest in Vedanta with a man. I tried to explain it, to the best of my understanding, to him. After hearing me out, he said, “You know, someone once told me that what we are looking for is what is looking.” This resonates with what you wrote above. It is likely to address an error in my understanding.

**Sundari:** Yes, you are what you seek. Okay, so you know that. Now you need to understand what that means for the *jiva* so that it can be loved unconditionally for what it is and can live free of limitation. And you have a valid means of knowledge and qualified teachers to assist you in your inquiry.

**Allen:** I have had a recent past life experience and two previous dreams, one very realistic, which point to previous lives. I found both rather disturbing and the clear one extremely disturbing. In fact I woke up already crying on account of it. I find the concept of reincarnation intriguing, but I can see how it is very much a distraction. While in the dreams I felt identified with the “subtle bodies” of the individuals I apparently used to be, once awake I found them extremely alien. It was a very disorienting and depressing experience, not glamorous at all. If that was “my” life, I am glad it ended and I am not experiencing that anymore. I suppose the trick is not only to not identify with that life (which is easy enough to do) but with this (apparent) one as well.

**Sundari:** It is so true that most people have past life experiences of grandiose proportions. Reincarnation is a spiritual diversion/distraction for most who are fascinated by it. Vedanta says that “past” lives do not have much bearing on this life, although some past life experiences can shed some light on our present conditioning. However, without self-knowledge there is no way to understand the conditioning or to be fully free of it. Like any other experience, it makes no difference if the experience is past, present or future if one is still bound by the doer/experiencing entity and takes experience to be real.

**Allen:** I’d be happy to reread *Essence*. Until this time, I’ve never encountered most of the concepts we’re discussing, so there is much new terrain here. James seems to push reading *Essence* over reading *How to Attain Enlightenment*. Do you think it would be fruitful to read them both?

**Sundari:** They both say the same thing; *Essence* is more accessible and easier to read. Also, there is the 12-month teaching course available at the website that corresponds to each chapter with questions and answers, which will be very helpful for you.

**Allen:** I accept that I have to further develop my qualifications. My desire for liberation is pretty strong, but “burning desire” sounds very, very powerful to me. Nonetheless, there are few other things I desire. I believe my desire for liberation is more than simply “piddling or middling” though, if I may say so myself. I suppose my aversions are pretty strong, however. I struggle with bouts of hypochondria which I know are based on identification with the body. I will keep inquiring.

**Sundari:** I think you have a strong desire for freedom from suffering. Developing the qualifications does not mean perfecting the person. It means that the mind is clear and capable of assimilating self-knowledge, which will further purify the mind of bondage to binding objects. The *jiva*, or person, will always be limited because it is always changing and it is part of the environment which is also always changing. It will always have a certain inborn predisposition given to it by *Isvara* (*svadharma*) governed by the *gunas* (*rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva*.) Self-knowledge does much to ameliorate this, but our nature will never completely change, even with *moksa*. As long as one does not injure oneself or others, certain tendencies are not obstacles to self-inquiry or *moksa*, if one can see them as not-self and has rendered them non-binding. As I said before, *moksa* is freedom from and for the *jiva*.

**Allen:** You said: “All experiences end as they happen in time and convey one message: I am the knower of the experiencing entity, not the experiencing entity.” This is an interesting conclusion to come to. My most potent spiritual experience came nearly twenty years ago. It happened following a long period of prayer and meditation which I embarked on my own without any direction from anyone else. It was a very spontaneous and quirky sort of thing. During this time, I spent many nights locked in my room reading the Bible and praying. Sometimes I would start shaking in ecstasy for long periods of time. Once or twice I had short-lived visions. Most of the time, I sat in bliss, assuming what I was experiencing was the presence of God. It was really wonderful! And some of the best times of my life, to be honest.

**Sundari:** You were experiencing the bliss of the self without knowing what it is.

**Allen:** One night I woke up in my room to a blazing, golden being standing in my room. He/it was very intense and stern-looking. It pointed into the air at some burning letters that I could not read or understand. Then he disappeared. I was dumbfounded and confused. “What could this mean?” I wondered. Then, as suddenly as this being disappeared, a blindingly bright light exploded to the left of where he had appeared. The light was like a nuclear explosion. The brightness and intensity of it is something I cannot describe. I threw myself on the carpet of my bedroom and covered my head. While the presence of this light was overwhelming and terrifying, it was not malevolent. Along with the terror was joy, ecstasy and horror all at once. In this light I was exceedingly small. It was just too much for me. I inwardly said something like, “Please leave or you will kill me.” Then it disappeared. I was left there, lying on the floor, shaking with both terror and joy, filled with gratitude, but unsure why.

I bring this up because I heard James talking yesterday in the recordings about experiences of “the light.” Do you think this light I experienced and the light he and others have talked about are the same? I suppose the takeaway conclusion I am supposed to have from that experience is that I am the witness of that light or the

light itself. One thing I definitely took away is that, compared to that light, I am nothing. I suppose if I am identified as the body-mind, that really is as nothing compared to the self. Again, a very remarkable experience, but I have never been able to properly digest it. So what good is it? I spent quite a long time trying to figure that one out. Fortunately, Vedanta does provide an answer, whereas I was left to speculate endlessly previously. Is this silly?

**Sundari:** No, it's not silly, but it is how the not-self, or ego, would see an experience like this: as a small, limited, grovelling entity. What this experience was meant to show you was that you are the knower of the experience, it took place "in" you, not outside of you. It was meant to show you that the small limited being you took yourself to be is not who you are. As for being the light or a smaller source of it, is there a difference between one ray of sunlight and the sun? Quantitatively, yes, but in essence, no. So, yes, you are the light which makes light possible – and you are the knower of the light. Light is a good metaphor for the self because the speed of light is always constant and never changes, and light pervades all things. But light is not possible without you, awareness. Anything that is known to you cannot be you.

**Allen:** Thank you very much for your time. I very much appreciate that you took the time to write to me.

~ Sincerely, Allen

**Sundari:** You are always welcome, Allen. We cannot always reply straightaway, as we travel extensively teaching all over the world and we have a big backlog of inquirers to reply to. Please feel free to write anytime.

~ Love, Sundari