

***Isvara* Is the Traffic Cop**

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2680>

Michael: Hello, Sundari.

The website suggests a short bio: I was introduced to Vedanta some time last year, after 11 years of sober searching. My whole life has been a search, as I believe I recognized at an early age (13 or 14?), the futility of happiness through worldly pursuits; this doesn't mean I didn't try. I was an anxiety-panic-attack-ridden person who used alcohol and drugs religiously from the ages of 13 to 46, at which time I ran out of steam and joined Alcoholics Anonymous [AA]. We have a saying: "Alcohol is a great persuader," and I believe that the word "life" could be substituted for "alcohol" quite easily. Both alcohol and life have provided me with the impetus to consider what might otherwise have been unthinkable: AA, a compassionate God, Vedanta. I was brought up a Catholic and had long ago abandoned what seemed to me a cruel and frightening vision of the world. I am single, after a marriage of 14 years, in which alcohol played a huge part. I have gone through the standard enlightenment myths that you cover in your books, all of which fell short.

Sundari: Thank you for sharing your life story with us. It is touching and poignant, the typical and rather tragic story of the search for wholeness through objects and the pain and futility of that quest. Regardless of the form or the path it takes, the search for wholeness is built into the psyche by *Isvara*. If we are graced with the *good karma* to "find" Vedanta, we are blessed indeed. Suffering has its place, driving the mind towards insanity or to freedom. I am happy for you that it was the latter and not the former.

Michael: I read and listen to Vedanta several hours a day. My pursuits have been limited to Vedanta, learning Spanish and playing the piano. I realize the latter two represent *vasanas*, probably of a lesser degree, that hold some promise of happiness through objects.

Sundari: Not all *vasanas* are bad. We need an unyielding *vasana* for self-inquiry, for instance, and having a *vasana* for developing talents that give the mind something noble and constructive to engage in is healthy for the *jiva*. Krishna says to Arjuna: "I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*." Habits that do not cause injury to oneself (or anyone) else and uplift the mind making it feel good are not *adharmic*.

Michael: I have read *How to Attain Enlightenment, The Essence of Enlightenment* and am reading *Inquiry into Existence*. I have purchased the video sets and watch and listen daily.

Sundari: Good work. A burning desire for freedom is probably the most important qualification for self-inquiry, which has to be the primary focus for it to bear fruit.

Michael: My question relates to the set on self-inquiry from Santa Fe 2105, #3. I believe the key to liberation lies in my freedom from the sense of doership. It is always in this domain that I find conflict. As a *jiva*, I feel responsible for feeling, thinking, doing. It is, as you say, hardwired.

Sundari: It is the belief in doership that causes existential exhaustion, wearing the mind out because life is a zero-sum game. You lose as much as you win – and no action taken by a limited entity is capable of producing a limitless result. Only self-knowledge is capable of removing ignorance, and self-knowledge is the fruit of self-inquiry, not something you do. Self-inquiry may seem like a doing as it involves preparing and purifying the mind, exposing it to a valid means of knowledge with great dedication. But self-inquiry is unlike any other action in that it is capable of producing a limitless result (self-knowledge), which is *moksa*.

Michael: I constantly apply the knowledge of the teaching, from the perspective of both the *jiva* and awareness, that I had nothing to do with the creation of my body, my mind, my thoughts, my fears, my desires and my aversions. I contemplate this idea throughout the day. I am still left with the burden of doership.

Sundari: To lessen the pressure of the *vasanas* and negate the doer, the most important teaching of all is *karma yoga*. If you do not have an understanding of this teaching or do not apply it religiously, self-inquiry will not work for you and you will not bear fruit.

Here is the teaching in brief, although it is covered extensively by James in both *How To Attain Enlightenment* and *The Essence of Enlightenment*:

Karma yoga does not say that you have to stop doing – even if you could, which as the *jiva* you cannot. Even not-doing is a doing. *Karma yoga* is an attitude one takes towards actions and their results. (1) It is consecrating every thought, word and deed before you speak or act to *Isvara*, the Field of Existence, which is to say to the self, whether or not you see that both the person and the Field of Existence share a common identity with you, awareness. It is an attitude based on the understanding that life is a great gift that requires reciprocation – and, with this attitude, we renounce the IDEA of doership, not necessarily the action. (2) It is the knowledge that the results of any action are not up to me, the *jiva*. All results are up to the Field of Existence, or *Isvara*. *Karma yoga* means responding appropriately to what life asks on a moment-to-moment basis. If you are still feeling agitation, disappointment and frustration, it means you have not surrendered the results, and therefore cannot take what results that do come as *prasad*. You are still invested in getting what you want or avoiding what you don't want. It's that simple.

What this means is that we can take action to gain a given result (which may or may not give us what we want) but whether we like it or not, the Field of Existence alone determines the result. It is possible to take the right action with the right attitude and still get a result we do not want because the Field of Existence, or *Isvara*, considers the needs of the whole before it takes our individual needs into account. However, we can maximize the chances of getting a positive result with appropriate and timely actions.

How we relate to results determines how peaceful our mind is. If we are very

attached to the idea of getting what we want (strong likes and dislikes), life will soon prove to us that we lose as much as we win, maybe more. At best we will be happy half the time and unhappy the other half. More likely though, when one is driven by likes and dislikes, the mind is agitated whether or not we get what we want because nothing ever really satisfies the mind for long, other than self-knowledge. It is the contention of Vedanta that happiness is our true nature and exists independently of winning or losing. Actualising this knowledge is freedom.

The action itself can never fail us; it only produces results. A given expectation may be said to have failed, but the one with the expectation has not failed. That I have failed or that the action has failed is the wrong conclusion; the expectation is the problem. So nobody fails. As the *jiva*, it is only a matter of bad judgment because we are not omniscient and we cannot have the knowledge of all the factors that shape the results of the actions. Only *Isvara* is omniscient. Action can produce likes and dislikes (*vasanas*) only if we see the result as a success or failure.

When I see the result as a function of the immutable laws of action or what is even better, if I see it as the grace of the Field of Existence, no new likes and dislikes are created, and I maintain peace of mind. With this attitude towards results, actions born of likes and dislikes become the means of eliminating the likes and dislikes. The mind becomes free from the agitations of elation (*rajas*) and depression (*tamas*). Such a mind is tranquil and contemplative.

If peace of mind is the aim, taking whatever results that do come as a gift will be the attitude one brings to everything. Sameness of mind (towards success and failure) concerning action is another definition of *karma yoga* and is the essence of peace of mind, *sattva*. In cultivating the right attitude toward life, one performs one's duty by conforming to the pattern and harmony of creation, and thus one becomes alive to the beauty of the cosmic order. When the mind becomes clear, one can see the order. At the beginning of our spiritual practice, *karma yoga* is an attitude we have to cultivate, but eventually it is simply knowledge, so becomes natural.

Michael: A “walking apology” is how I sometimes describe myself.

Sundari: Which self are you referring to as a “walking apology”? Remember that when you use the word “I” or “myself” it should always apply only to you, awareness. Every time you use the word, press “pause” and ask yourself which I is talking. Is it the person identified as a person, is it the person who knows about awareness but does not know what it means to be awareness or is it awareness that knows it is awareness and not the person – which is direct knowledge?

As the self, you certainly do not have anything to apologise for nor do you feel any existential drag, because you are not a doer. As Michael, you never made him the way he is. He is a product of the *gunas* and is an object known to you. Understanding him in the light of self-knowledge (the *gunas*/causal body) will not magically transform him; he is made the way he is by *Isvara*. But by negating the doer and rendering the binding *vasanas* non-binding through *karma yoga*, you can be free of Michael – and make life a WHOLE lot easier for him.

The *jiva* will always be limited because it is a mixture of spirit (*satya*) and matter (*mithya*). When you are free of Michael, you can live happily as Michael without identifying with him. See how the *gunas* underpin everything in his life, track each

thought before it becomes an emotion to the *gunas*. Once the emotion takes over the intellect, it is almost impossible to discriminate. We define *moksa* as the ability to discriminate the self from the objects that appear in you, 100% of the time. The whole point of *moksa* is for self-knowledge to translate into the life of the *jiva*, otherwise, what use is it? Purely cognitive knowledge will not do the trick; this is “the work” of self inquiry. Lifetimes of self-insulting habits/thoughts/emotions are not going to go away overnight. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

Understanding the relationship between *Isvara* and the *jiva*, what makes it the same and what makes it different, is where most of the teaching in Vedanta takes place. It is where many inquirers get stuck because the teaching is very subtle and the mind must be properly purified to assimilate it. It is one thing to realise the self and quite another to actualise the self. The two orders of reality are the knower, that which is real, always present and unchanging (*satya*), and the known, the person, that which is apparently real, not always present and always changing (*mithya*). What makes them the same is that they are both awareness. What makes them different is that objects depend on awareness to exist, but awareness does not depend on the objects – like the wave and the ocean are both H₂O, but the wave depends on the ocean while the ocean is always free of the wave.

Micheal: Today I heard something that really excited me. James was describing attention, in debunking one of the theories with respect to being more aware. He said that attention was awareness shining through our instruments of perception, creating a certain experience. He said that the “traffic cop” that determines upon which object awareness shines is the causal body, specifically driven by our *karmic* account. This, to me, means that my moment-to-moment experience is completely out of my hands, and this of course includes my perception of it. To a guilt-ridden, recovering alcoholic/Catholic, this is great news! Could you please let me know whether my understanding of this dynamic is an accurate reflection of the teachings?

Sundari: Yes, it can be said that the “traffic cop” is a term that refers to *Isvara*, or the causal body. The subtle body (mind-body, intellect and I-sense (ego), or *jiva*, is the lens through which awareness experiences objects, even though awareness itself does not experience, but without awareness no experience is possible. How we pay attention and how we perceive/experience will be determined by and through the filters of “our” conditioning, or *vasana* load, which comes from *Isvara* – the causal body, or unconscious. Nobody makes themselves the way they are. It is the result of *karma* and as a *jiva*, the *dharma* field exists for us to work out our *karma*. Without self-knowledge, it is impossible to escape the wheel of *karma*, which is why you are so fortunate to have found Vedanta. It is grace, and grace is earned. Indeed you can forever release the mind from its torturous patterns of guilt and remorse (*tamas*) knowing that if you had known better at the time, it would have been easier to follow *dharma* and not cause injury to yourself and “others.”

Moksa is not about perfecting the person, for three main reasons. (1) The person and the world are *mithya*, not real, and you cannot perfect something that is not real. (2) The *jiva*'s true nature or essence is awareness, which is real – meaning, always present, whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, unconcerned, unlimited and unchanging, i.e. *satya*. (3) Freedom means freedom from and for the person – only. As the self, you are already free. Freedom is not possible unless the apparent reality (the person and its world) is understood – in the light of self-knowledge.

To understanding the *jiva* and its world, you need *triguna vibhava yoga*, the teaching on the three *gunas*, which is extremely well described in James' books as well as in many of the *satsangs* (use the search function) and in the videos. I have just finished writing a book on this important teaching, which will be out in a few months.

In brief: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* correspond to the three forces in creation: (1) *rajas* (*vikshepa shakti*), which is the projecting energy, responsible for action, desire, projection, agitation; (2) *tamas* (*avarana shakti*), the concealing energy giving rise to denial, depression, dullness and (3) *sattva*, the revealing energy giving rise to peace of mind. As the components that make up the *dharma* field, the *gunas* govern the creation of everything; this of course includes the *vasanas* that motivate the individual and the individual's relative nature (*svadharmas*), or "their" conditioning. The conditioning is then reinforced by their environment and life experiences, which is also made up of the *gunas*. So managing the *gunas* is nothing less than understanding how to relate to the totality of your environment, the gross, subtle and causal bodies. Each *guna* has very predictable thoughts, feelings and actions that arise from them.

The *gunas* are not a problem unless you identify with them or if you are unaware of them. The *gunas* are always present and operating on the *jiva* and in the *dharma* field because the causal body is there whether the *jiva* is present or not, enlightened or not. The *gunas* condition the subtle body at all times, other than in deep sleep, coma or *nirvikalpa samadhi*. Once the self is actualised as one's true nature, the *gunas* still affect the *jiva*, but as self-knowledge has obtained, the mind does not modify to them.

I hope this helps.

~ Love, Sundari