

The Inadequacy of the Ego

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Anna: I have one difficulty in managing my one particular *vasana*. I don't even know how to describe it. I am conducting lectures for students this year; this is my first time but I always thought it is a path I want to put my foot on. But I am stressed that I won't perform it in a good way. I am preparing the material that I find interesting but all the time fear of not knowing enough is accompanying me. It's been three lectures done and still I feel that fear, even though all went more or less smoothly. I like what I am doing, I decided on my career in the history of art because it felt the right thing to do. I still think so. But that fear of not knowing enough is clouding my mind, making me feel as if I am doing something in a wrong way, that I am not enough trying.

It must be some deep-rooted *vasana*, but I don't know how to approach it nor how to name it.

Sundari: It sounds like you have found your *svadharma* and living a life that is true to your inborn nature, good for you. The lack of satisfaction you feel from doing what you do could come from a combination of *vasanas*, and usually all of them are connected to and originate in fear – *rajas* and *tamas*. It is fear that robs us of our self-confidence and ability not only to cope but to shine and enjoy life.

One of the most difficult side-effects of ignorance, especially in breaking the identification with the doer, is a deep, primeval sense of inadequacy that almost everyone feels, whether they are inquirers or not, successful or not. It is the result of an inborn fear the ego has of the unpredictability of the world and the knowledge (often unconscious) that it is not in control of anything. The ego never feels it knows enough, because it is impossible for it to know all that it needs to know. Only *Isvara* is omniscient and all-powerful. No matter how much knowledge the *jiva* gains in any field of knowledge in the world, it is always limited knowledge, subject to verification.

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 subjective 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.

For anything to qualify as true knowledge, it must possess three non-negotiable qualities:

1. Exist in all periods of time – past, present and future.
2. Exist in all three states – waking, dreaming and deep sleep.

3. It cannot be negated and is not subject to verification.

Only consciousness qualifies in all three categories.

So knowledge and qualifications in any field are not a guarantee of security for the ego. In fact there is no guarantee of success in the world, even when we do the appropriate actions. We may or may not get what we want. It is not up to us, but to *Isvara*, the Total. And *Isvara* takes care of the needs of the total first, before our needs. This why *karma yoga* is so vitally important because, without it, the pressure of the *vasanas* cannot be reduced nor can we negate the doer.

The ego is a fear-thought, born of separation – it is the small, limited identity we inhabit when we don't know who we are as the limitless self. It is the belief that I am "other than," at the mercy of the unknown, that I must fight to win, to gain (or not lose) what I want, avoid what I don't want. Confusion goes with the territory of being human because nothing is the way it seems in the *mithya* world. *Isvara* gives us all a doubting function for this purpose and why the ability to discriminate is so very important, whether we use discrimination to determine the relative truth of objects or the ultimate truth between *satya* and *mithya*.

Moksa is the ability to discriminate awareness from the objects that arise in you 24/7. But if we do not know what the true nature of reality is, that it is *satya*, non-dual consciousness, and that is who we are, how do we gauge the validity of anything? There is no way to definitively work out anything in *mithya*, because none of it is real. It is impossible to know anything for certain when ignorance rules the mind, because the *jiva* is half spirit and half matter. Unless the mind is qualified for self-inquiry with a valid means of knowledge for awareness (Vedanta), it will attach itself to all kinds of erroneous thoughts or belief systems that do nothing to assuage this inbuilt sense of insufficiency – and of course keeps it small, afraid and suffering.

On top of this, if we have not been properly loved and acknowledged as children, we will find it very hard to trust or esteem ourselves properly. We will not have self-confidence in our own ability, be constantly second-guessing everything we think, say and do. Or if we have been judged as children, we could develop what we call the "perfection" *vasana*. This is a tough one to crack, and we come across it often. If this is what underlies your inability to trust yourself or enjoy your achievements, you will never be satisfied that you have done the right thing, done enough or done it properly. No matter how much we know or how many degrees we have behind our names, without self-knowledge this nagging sense of deficiency follows us like a shadow, robbing us of peace and the enjoyment of our accomplishments. It makes us needy, and we often seek validation from others.

Another big (and very common) issue is "free-floating anxiety," a by-product of very deeply rooted *samskaras* which have their origin in fear. This universal fear, as do all fears, originates in macrocosmic *tamas* and *rajas*. It is not specific to anyone but it feels like it is. This fear is the "wound of humanity," as I sometimes call it. It is the king of all *vasanas*, also called primordial beginningless ignorance, another name for *maya*. If self-knowledge is not firm, it causes a non-specific unnamed existential fear or dread. It is the fear that causes knots in the solar plexus. It is the fear of "being and becoming." This unnamed fear propels the mind to make us "be something" or do actions that are not true to who we are, our *svadharma*, making us feel incompetent and unworthy. Or it makes us think we should be doing something other than what we are doing. It often manifests as panic attacks and a range of other symptoms, from minor to serious mental disturbances. The Christians call it

“Original Sin.” It is always present, yet hidden in the causal body, and looks for objects to attach to (*rajas/tamas*). It is the ultimate experience of duality, or “otherness.”

As an inquirer, your aim is to take a stand in awareness as awareness and practise the opposite thought whenever a thought arises that contradicts your knowledge of yourself as awareness. When the dissatisfied thought arises and clouds your mind, the one that is “making me feel as if I am doing something in a wrong way, that I am not trying enough and I am afraid of not knowing enough,” press “pause.” Look at the thought. See that it is an object known to you, awareness, therefore it cannot be you or the truth about you. See that it originates in ignorance, not truth – and it does not come from you, not as the *jiva* nor as the self. It is the voice of diminishment, of the small, limited ego, afraid that no matter what it does, it is not safe, not good enough, not accomplished enough. Just NOT enough. Full stop.

It is never going to feel any other way, because no object has the power to give it what it wants – which is the knowledge that it is whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, unlimited, ever-present awareness. Everything the ego does is an attempt to experience the bliss of the self. It is always seeking itself. But it is what it is seeking. Pat the ego on the head, say, “there, there, dear, don’t worry your silly little head.” And ignore it. Not much point trying to figure out your childhood or trying to reason with the ego. Just see it for what it is and dismiss it as not-self.

Very importantly, make very sure that everything you do is with the *karma yoga* spirit. Trust that you are following your nature both as a *jiva* and as the self. Trust that *Isvara* takes care of everything. Put your life in its hands. Make peace with the knowledge that the results are never up to you as a *jiva* (or to anybody), that it is utterly futile trying to control objects, thus opening yourself fully to accepting all results as *prasad*, “good or bad.” We can only do things to the best of our ability. Remember, as there are so many factors involved in the field of existence for anything to happen (even making a cup of tea), how can we possibly be doers?

Doership, especially perfection doership, is an egoic stronghold, an attempt by the ego to buffer itself against failure and “smallness.” But life is a zero-sum game. You cannot win here. Even if you succeed at everything you do in the *mithya* world and get everything you want the way you want it when you want it, you will fail as much sooner or later. The only permanent success and satisfaction possible is self-knowledge. This never leaves you and never fails, because it is who you are.

I am not sure how well you understand *karma yoga*, but it seems that this could be the problem with your *sadhana*. You have anxiety over results because you are not experiencing what you think you should be experiencing. *Karma yoga* is designed to negate the doer, the one seeking and attached to results. *Karma yoga*, when practised properly, is *dharma yoga* because every action you take is dedicated to *Isvara*; it is a consecration. It is understood that peace of mind only comes with the realisation that you are not in control of the *dharma* field, yet in taking the appropriate steps to act in accordance with *dharma* and then relinquishing the results peace of mind is produced. If you are not experiencing peace of mind by relinquishing results, you are not relinquishing results. It’s that simple – the doer is still there, afraid and small, still wanting a particular result because of its likes and dislikes, frustrated and afraid because it believes it needs the result to be safe, good enough or whole.

Karma yoga is not to destroy the doer (ego). *Karma yoga* is simply to destroy the

notion of “doership,” that we are doers. *Karma yoga* is meant to clear the mind of enough likes and dislikes until it becomes composed enough to do sustained inquiry. Only inquiry removes the problem of doership because it shows that you, the self, cannot be the ego (doer) that is known to you. When that is clear, the doer can appear in you, but you do not identify with it.

So next time you must teach, even if the fear thought arises (and it probably will), saying that you will not be up to the mark, make sure you consecrate your teaching to *Isvara*, knowing you will do your very best. Trust the results to be perfect, no matter the outcome. Build up the confidence that the *jiva* lacks by resolutely ignoring the ego’s neurosis. You are not only “good enough,” you are great because you are the self, not the ego.

~ Much love, Sundari

Anna: Thank you for your time and help.

~ Love, Anna