

Fear and Ill Health

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Matheen: Hi, Sundari. My name is Matheen Khan. I had last written to you about two years ago, but under a different email address. You gave very appropriate advice then, which I have tried to follow as well as I could. Now fast forward two years. At this time, relationship issues are sorted, financial issues are sorted out, etc. I have been trying/practising *karma yoga* and keeping attention on self!

But now the main obstruction to continuously keeping attention on awareness is entirely health-related. I am following medical advice, living quieter lifestyle, trying to downsize house, etc. (in the process). But health issues arise and strike without warning, and the mind is back to a dissatisfied, fear-ridden state!!! It seems that for a small period of time, there is peace and quiet and then a health problem arises! Then attention on self is lost and fear and apprehension dominate. This has been going on for several months now. Now there is huge sense of disquiet and despondency at the thought of never been able to actualize this self-realization, unable to get the mind to turn to self-attention, and this always has to do with some health problem: What type of *vasana* is this and what kind of practice needs to happen ?

I have had a whiff of sense of mental peace, and that is very likeable. I would like to keep this mind with more *sattva* and less of the other *vasanas*. I live a fairly quiet lifestyle, do not have problems at work and pretty much mind my own business.

Please help with any suggestions. There is intense fear and apprehension currently; there seems to be one health issue after another...

Thank you for all the help and advice from before, and I'm very much hoping to hear from you. Thank you again.

Sundari: Hello, Matheen, I understand your dilemma. It is very difficult to maintain peace of mind when the body is not functioning and ill health plagues us. The only solution to ill health and the fear thoughts that arises because of it is self-knowledge, with the application of *karma yoga* and *jnana yoga* to every thought, word and deed. "Trying" to apply the knowledge is not sufficient. For self-knowledge and *karma yoga* to work, it must be our standard approach to life, no fine print. There is no other way to eliminate fear by negating the doer and its identification with the body-mind. Health or illness is a result of *karma*. If we superimpose what belongs to the Total (*Isvara*) onto the individual, or *jiva*, then we are thinking as a person, not as awareness, which means that you think the *karma* comes to you and **therefore the suffering belongs to you - because you are identified with it**. If you know that you are awareness, you see the suffering taking place in the mind-body (subtle body), so you are free of the suffering. You observe the *jiva* and how it relates to the pain with dispassion.

The subtle body has a similar relationship to the gross body as consciousness to *mithya* (the apparent reality). There is an interdependence from the *jiva's* perspective - but not from awareness's point of view, because they exist in different orders of reality. The body is *mithya*, or apparently real (not always present and

always changing), whereas *satya*, consciousness, is real (that which is ever present and never changes) – and without which the apparent reality could not exist. These two orders of reality are not in opposition to each other, but for peace of mind to be constant, we need to discriminate between them 24/7. As soon as identification with *mithya* takes place, suffering is there in some form or another, either subtle (mental/emotional) or gross (physical).

The subtle body feels physical pain, and it affects the mind. The subtle body pervades the gross body, except for the fingernails and hair, which is why you can cut them without feeling anything. However, even though the gross body does not pervade the subtle body, it can affect it. For example, if the gross body gets sick, depressed, has a headache or an unhealthy lifestyle, it can take actions to remedy this which will affect the subtle body, making it dull (*tamasic*), extroverted (*rajasic*) or clear, calm and peaceful (*sattvic*).

Identification with the gross body is inseparable from identification with the mind/intellect because the gross body exists only as a thought in the subtle body. When your attention is on a thought or a feeling, the gross body does not exist for you. It only exists for you when you pay attention to it – or when it feels pleasure or pain. The gross body is “within” the subtle body, and the subtle body is “within” awareness (you). There is no way to understand this or discriminate awareness from the objects that appear in you unless you to step out of *maya* with self-knowledge, i.e. discriminate between *satya* and *mithya*.

While the body is only apparently real, it does not mean it does not exist. We cannot deny physical pain, even though we know that body is inert. Denial will not make the pain go away. Only the ability to discriminate the self from the objects that arise in you will negate physical or mental pain because you can adjust your relationship to the pain body through knowledge. If the body is in pain, you are not in pain and you are not the pain. You are the knower of the pain. You cannot be what you know. We do what is necessary to heal the body, like the appropriate medication, diet, exercise, etc. which it sounds like you are doing. Some of us must live with chronic pain, it's just part of our *prarabdha karma*. *Prarabdha karma* is the momentum of past actions that fructify as your life experiences.

Other than taking good care of our health, there is nothing to be done about this kind of *karma* besides living with it with the *karma yoga* attitude. The *karma* comes to the subtle body, which a *jnani* knows belongs to *Isvara*. The *dharma* field, or Total Mind (*Isvara srsti*), remains unchanged if one is “enlightened” or not, which means *prarabdha karma* will play out in accordance with the laws of the *dharma* field. Both the subtle and the gross bodies are the results of “good or bad” *karma* for the *jiva*. It is auspicious to be born with a human body, particularly one that is strong and healthy. The body depends on the mind, and not the other way around, but a healthy body which is well taken care of nonetheless makes it easier for the mind to be peaceful.

Karma is a difficult topic and it depends on who you think you are. *Karma* is real if you think it is real; it is often almost impossible to understand because the one trying to understand it is in the *dharma/karma* field and part of the field. It is like trying to understand the mind of *Isvara*: it cannot be done. Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “On the topic of *karma*, even sages are perplexed.” There is no *karma* for an enlightened person (*jnani*). The individual, or *jiva*, identified as a *jiva* accumulates *karma* that seems to come to the body-mind-sense complex. But when *moksa* obtains, the *karma* burns up. However, we must look at what “burning up”

actually means. *Karma* does not burn up for awareness, as there is no *karma* for awareness, because for it nothing ever happened. It is not a doer. *Karma* is not real, from the perspective of awareness.

But the *jiva* lives in *mithya* and it must live with the laws that govern the Field of Existence. *Karma* is just an idea in the subtle body that causes suffering. So “burning up” *karma* happens when the *jiva* is **no longer** identified with the subtle body and knows that it is awareness. This does not mean that the *karma* does not still play out for the *jiva*. **Remember, the body belongs to *Isvara*, the Total.** The momentum of past actions, *prarabdha karma*, which is *Isvara* delivering the fruits of *jiva*’s actions, plays out as long as the *jiva* is alive. When *prarabdha karma* is finished, the body dies.

Karma “burns up” for the subtle body because it is **only ever** “in” the subtle body, not the physical body or the self. Because the body is just meat and inert, there is no *karma* for it either, although it appears as if there is. It is a counter across which experience is transacted. It seems to take place in the physical body because the physical body is “attached” to the subtle body. From *Isvara*’s point of view (causal body) there is no *karma*. *Isvara* is called *karma phala datta*, which means “the one who delivers the fruits of the action.”

Problems arise when the doer thinks it can make the body “whole” through its own actions, which one can, to some degree. But there are many illnesses that are not a result of one’s state of mind and are not in the control of the person. Take Ramana, for instance: he was a great saint who lived a pure, *sattvic* life and had a great state of mind, yet he died of cancer. If the ill health you are suffering is part of your *prarabdha*, do what you can to ameliorate it with *karma yoga*. I have had issues with chronic pain the result of a car accident in my youth and found that apart from exercise and a healthy diet there are some natural energy healing modalities that work to reprogram the microcosmic causal body. What usually happens with chronic pain is that the body assumes a compensatory “holding pattern” (*samskara*, or conglomeration of *vasanas*) to cope, and this often prolongs and intensifies pain and the thoughts associated with it.

Of course it takes extreme dispassion to deal with chronic illness or any pain. This is where dispassion and *karma yoga* is so important; it is the only way to deal with chronic pain (or anything else) from the *jiva* or *jivanmukta* level. However, taking appropriate action with the *karma yoga* attitude does not guarantee any result, because results of any action depend on the nature of the action and NOT necessarily on the state of mind of the person taking the action. It is possible to get a negative result from a positive action/state of mind and vice versa. Very importantly, the results of actions ALSO depend on the nature of the field – i.e. *Isvara*.

The important issue to consider is the type of thoughts which arise because of your health problems. A peaceful life is always about thought and emotion management, which is the same as saying *guna* management. If we do not manage the *gunas* and the thoughts they generate with self-knowledge, they manage the mind. Every *guna* has typical thoughts that arise with it. Make sure you understand the teaching on the *gunas*, covered extensively in James’ book *The Essence of Enlightenment*. We will soon be bringing out two books on this vital teaching. One can work with *Isvara* regarding illness and body pain by one’s attitude to the thoughts that give rise to illness/pain and to the thoughts which come because of illness/pain.

Coping with chronic pain (which is *rajas*) makes the mind dull, depressed and fearful (*tamasic*). Maintaining a *sattvic* mind when the body is in a lot of pain can be done with the right attitude the result of self-knowledge. For most people, apart from the worry of being incapacitated, which is bad enough, the most common thought is of mortality. Fear of death is the biggest fear all of us must face and make peace with. Like all fears, it is completely gratuitous. However, unlike most fears, this is not because the fear of death has no basis in truth but the opposite - it is completely unavoidable. No one gets out of life alive, if you think you are the body-mind. For the majority, this fear is constantly present in the mind, always ready to pounce - but when it does so, it usually manifest in unconscious ways, particularly when the health of the body is threatened. Only self-knowledge can eliminate this fear permanently with the certain identification with the self as our true identity and the logic of our eternal existence as unborn and undying awareness, the knower of the body-mind.

~ Much love, Sundari