

Suicidal Thoughts in a Mind Run by *Tamas*

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Nick: *Namaste*, Sundari.

I hope that *jiva* is hale and hearty, and basking happily in the light that you are.

Sundari: Thanks, Nick, all is grand, thank you. Sorry to hear you are having such a bad time.

Nick: May I ask advice on a *guna*-related topic, please?

What is the best way to deal with intense levels of *tamas* within the subtle body? Is it simply to be accepted as *Isvara* doing *Isvara*-type stuff in this dreamy *dharma* field?

How does *jiva* rest in the knowledge of self when that knowledge suddenly appears to be empty and insubstantial, like a sailor (subtle body) adrift in a boat (gross body) upon an ocean (life... *Isvara's dharma* field) guided by the sun (pure light of self-knowledge) suddenly plunging into a dense bank of fog. He knows the sun is there and burning brightly, but cannot see it, and therefore loses his way.

Sundari: Everything is *Isvara* of course, but that does not mean that you must accept it all and go along with it. If you want to be free, you must clean up the *jiva's* mess by seeing it for what it is and neutralizing it in the knowledge. No shortcut to freedom. The *gunas* are impersonal forces, they will play out relentlessly, if you don't manage them. And to manage them, you must live right and think right. And for that, you need a valid means of knowledge, which you have. It's the only solution if you are doing it right.

When *tamas* predominates, the mind is too dull to discriminate. As you say, it is like a heavy cloud has covered the sun. It is prone to denial and avoidance as signature states of mind. The list of *tamasic* qualities is very long!

Tamas distorts perception, inhibiting assimilation of experience because it produces delusion, giving rise to fantasies and fabrications, which in turn cause distrust of oneself, others and "the world" or life in general. When the subtle body is predominately *tamasic*, the self, masquerading as the ego, feels totally stuck, almost dead. Some people enjoy *tamas*, but other than for sleeping and for steadfastness, I don't enjoy *tamas* at all, although I don't identify with it.

When *tamas* is in charge, it results in the failure to see and appreciate what we need to in any situation, what life requires of us, and a lack of will to take the appropriate steps to accomplish what is required, even if we do, which is why *tamasic* people are messy, forgetful and prone to accidents and losing things. They are perpetually confused and lazy, preferring to enjoy without doing (which is not a bad thing, if you know what it means not to be the doer).

As you seem to suggest, many *tamasic* spiritual people try to use the truth to avoid dealing with their issues or to legitimize being enjoyers/doers by saying that, as their

conditioning comes from *Isvara*, there is nothing they can do about it. While this is true, this attitude is a common trap for seekers and even for self-realized people (one the ego likes) because the truth is *Isvara* helps those who help themselves.

Often the problem is not lack of self-knowledge. It is just that the “self-realized” person is avoiding doing what it takes to change their behaviour – meaning cleaning up their act, looking objectively at their *vasanas* and getting their actions and lifestyle to conform with *dharma*. Many people try to rationalize the *karma yoga* approach in situations like work, relationships, etc. that are unworkable and require changing.

But our lives must serve the truth, not the other way around. Truth is impersonal – we cannot make it fit our idea of what we want it to be. Awareness/*Isvara* does not care one way or the other, because it does not have a problem with duality. It is up to the *jiva* to choose peace of mind and balance the *gunas* by taking appropriate action. If you are dragging your heels in situations you need to change and are not *dharmic* for you, you will be putting your hands in the fire, and you can COUNT on *Isvara* to turn up the heat. It’s a bitch. But what to do? There is no other way to be free of the *jiva*. You must face down *Isvara*.

Tamas inhibits the assimilation of experience as efficiently as *rajas*, but for different reasons. Under its influence the subtle body, though seemingly quiet and calm (you can fool yourself into thinking you are *sattvic* when you the mind is *tamasic*, like when you take antidepressants) is dull. Efficient evaluation of experience requires mental clarity. Perception is distorted when a stagnant stupor veils the intellect, making it very difficult to connect the results of its actions with the thoughts motivating them, causing uncertainty with respect to what it must and must not do. It cannot respond appropriately to *Isvara*, and pays the price.

As you are experiencing, the bad news is that, when the subtle body is predominately dull/*tamasic*, you are negotiating the ocean of *samsara* in a rudderless ship, adrift at sea. Up the creek without a paddle. “Where should I go? What should I do? What’s going on? I don’t know. I cannot decide. I don’t want to know. Life is terrifying, life is empty, pointless,” are some typically *tamasic* thoughts and responses.

The undigested experiential backlog brought on by a *tamasic* mind causes the ego to dither and procrastinate, and dive headlong into depression, to which suicide can seem a neat way out. Alternatively, if you have a highly *rajasic* lifestyle and feel constantly exhausted, *rajas* inevitably causes *tamas*. Although *rajas* is the antidote to excess *tamas*, *tamas* is always the price to pay for excess *rajas*.

The mind can develop a negativity *vasana* when the *jiva* has had to overcome or cope with extremely damaging and destructive programming because of difficult past-life *karma* in this or any other life or if your present-life *karma* is just very difficult and you cannot extricate yourself from it for whatever reason. Very often the default position of the mind becomes negativity, *tamas*. You see this in people all the time. The abnormal has been normalized and they have become negative, miserable people.

To rise above this heavy blanket of *tamas* requires a gruelling effort, which often cannot be sustained. Occasionally there may occur a spontaneous bursting through the clouds, but even that never lasts long and usually leaves the mind feeling worse than before because of the seemingly ephemeral nature of happiness.

Tamasic people usually have a raft of personal and lifestyle problems because they avoid cleaning up their mess and keeping adding to it with the constantly accruing blowback *karma*. Because they continually indulge themselves, they do not accumulate good *karma*. In fact they collect bad *karma* or simply spend whatever good *karma* stands in their account until it is gone. They are perpetually in debt, financially and energetically. Life is a huge weight, a millstone around the neck dragging them down. They neither grow nor stay the same. They devolve.

Tamas is inertia, and although it takes more time to destroy than *rajas*, destroy it will. Pure *tamas* is pure ignorance. To overcome it, you must force yourself to act. *Rajas* is about obtaining things, and *tamas* is about keeping them. Even maintenance requires energy. If you don't take care of the details, they will eventually take care of you, but not in a way you will enjoy. Everything in *samsara* is sliding into the abyss, all the "time," even as we speak.

However, when you are *tamasic*, you are too lazy to protect what you have – or to care. Nothing in your life lasts, so there is nothing to build on. You end up living hand to mouth. It wears you out. You become fatigued; a sense of failure and despair will overcome you. Suicidal thoughts are pretty common once *tamoguna* has moved in and taken over because you cannot see the reason for anything. You are blindfolded. Fear and despair are in charge, leading you by the nose.

Solutions – you need to get up enough stamina to get ruthless with *tamas*. It is tough, and the mind will kick and scream and whine. Breaking the habit is very tough. *Tamas* is an intractable tyrant when entrenched and will not give up easily. And if it has taken over for a long time, it will have so depleted your ability to discriminate that your self-confidence will be at ground zero. It will take a Herculean effort only possible through knowledge you can trust, like a mountaineer scaling a sheer cliff uses his hook to hoist himself up. Vedanta is the only hook you can trust to scale the dangerous precipice of ignorance.

I suspect your work and environment has a lot to do with your state of mind. There can't be many environments more soul-destroying and *tamasic/rajasic* than gambling joints. There is no way around this one, Nick, you must take dispassionate stock of your lifestyle, your health, diet, exercise, work, relationships, associations, money, sex, everything! No fine print. Change what you can change, accept what you can't with *karma yoga*. To repeat: ALL of it must conform to the truth, NOT the other way around if you want an end to the suffering.

Avoid negative people and situations like the plague, just like a drug addict must avoid other drug addicts if he wants to come clean. *Tamas* is highly contagious, as are all the *gunas*. Stop all self-insulting actions. Just stop. You can. If we don't find something noble for the mind to do – *tamas* will eat us up. You have found the noblest thing possible for the mind to do: Vedanta. Stick with it. Put it into practice.

There is no mystery to Vedanta. It's common sense. If it's not working you are not applying the teachings to your life, full stop. Make a list of what you value most and least. Track yourself on the negative values you must change and the positive values you need to develop. Stop making excuses for self-insulting habits and commit to peace of mind. Become a disciple unto your own good self.

The mind run by the *gunas* is a very big problem for the *jiva*, with many adverse consequences – as you experience with the negativity and hopelessness that has clouded your thinking. When involuntary thoughts and the emotions they produce

kidnap the mind, it means the mind is not available for our use in self-inquiry or for much else. We do actions without thinking, as an absent-minded or mindless person "living in absentia." We can go through an entire life doing actions inefficiently and to our detriment, making many mistakes, causing much trouble for ourselves and others.

The problem of emotional disturbance is a serious one. We only have to look at what it does to people. Suicide is often the result of a mind that can no longer tolerate or endure the thoughts that control it. It is the thoughts that kill. Death is preferable to those thoughts. When toxic emotions continue for a long time, they cause the loss of physical health as well.

Loss of efficiency is the first problem, loss of physical and mental health is the second inevitable adverse effect of involuntary thoughts. *Rajas* and *tamas* always work together, and if they run the mind, you are in big trouble. You are stuck with a mind you cannot get away from, it comes with you wherever you go, and there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide from it. You will die young or old by whoever's hand with a mind that is not your friend but your worst enemy.

The quality of our life is dependent on the most powerful organ, the mind. The mind is so primary and powerful, it has the unique capacity to convert heaven into hell and hell into heaven. A person with every convenience can feel miserable and tortured and a person weighed down with so many problems can feel totally happy and peaceful. Most of us do not understand the first thing about how to manage our thoughts or even that we can and indeed must manage our thoughts and emotions – if we want to be free of the torture the mind can produce for us.

Here is a good analogy for you, one you might have read as I have given to out in several *satsangs* recently, called *Squatters in the Mind*: it's like Nick owns this beautiful piece of land, but squatters have moved in: ugly, smelly, gross, uncouth – even evil squatters. And they take over. Worse, they do not even see him. They ignore him. It seems he is helpless to get rid of them even though they contradict everything about him. They paralyze the mind, like a virus. Nick feels dark, heavy, dull, depressed, sick and hopeless. In despair. Life, knowledge, everything seems meaningless.

Then, through the dark cloud of *tamas*, a sliver of light appears, and he remembers. He is not Nick; he is the knower of Nick and his *tamasic*, negative thoughts. Nick, the *gunas*, exist only because of the knower, his true self, awareness. The bad thoughts recede somewhat into the shadows for a short while. But they have a life of their own. Even though he is the light that makes even those thoughts possible, there is a certain order that is keeping the involuntary thoughts in the real estate of the mind. They do not go away and they keep coming back.

They come from an unknown and unknowable place, the unconscious – the Macrocosmic Causal Body, the repository for all *vasanas* (mental/emotional tendencies) and the *gunas* that generate them. *Isvara* has an endless supply of them. But sadly, self-knowledge, which is the only way to manage this unruly mind, is not working to protect Nick from the negative thoughts/feelings, those awful imposters that have taken over his mind.

Why is the knowledge not working? Because the knowledge does not translate into his life. His self-knowledge is purely cognitive. Indirect. His life does not conform to *dharma*. So even though the thoughts are not real, they are like phantoms of the

opera, they run his mind. What to do about them? How do you reclaim the power and real estate of the mind? You can't. Unless you get serious.

Religiously dismiss every single thought that arises from the voices of diminishment – the terrible, damning, persistent voice of your inner judge and jury, the one that tells you how useless you are, what a failure, what a mess! Disgusting! How could anyone love THAT? When you hear that, that's *tamas* talking. And tell it to shut TFU! Because it is never true.

So. Make a choice, Nick. You have permission. Choose your thoughts. Choose the opposite thought because that one is the truth about you.

There's no magic to Vedanta. It all boils down to owning your mind as your primary instrument and repeatedly and consistently reconditioning it with thoughts that are true – in other words, that produce peace of mind. Vedanta shows us that the mind is our primary instrument for experiencing, realizing and actualizing ourselves in this world. Any seeming failure to realize or actualize ourselves or to have a peaceful life is only due to lack of knowledge and incorrect thoughts that dominate the mind/emotions/intellect. The simple solution is reconditioning the mind with chosen thoughts that are aligned with the truth and based on self-knowledge. This is called volitional, deliberate, thinking.

When skilfully managed, the mind will produce peace of mind and allow us to express and enjoy the beauty that we are in our day-to-day life, no matter what life dishes out to us. When you feel bad, for any reason, you can convert your emotional distress and mental agitation into gratitude and peace through managing the *gunas*. This involves observing the habitual emotional thought patterns dominating your mind – and creating your negative state of mind – emotional and mental suffering – like a hawk, and literally transforming those thought patterns into new thoughts of your own choosing AS THEY ARISE!

Vedanta has a term for the constant management of the mind, *mano nigraha*. It involves the consistent application of *guna*-knowledge to the mind. It may sound like hard work, and it is, at first. Ingrained, habitual patterns that have been in the mind forever are not easy to change. What price a happy, peaceful life? The price is eternal vigilance.

You can be in the world and free of it by applying the only true power every single person has, which is the power of voluntary, deliberate thinking based on self-knowledge. But to do this, you need to understand the causal body, *Isvara* – the forces that condition the mind, the *gunas*, and how they created Nick's condition, along with the application of *karma yoga*. There is getting away from this. Without *karma yoga*, you are dead in the waters of *samsara*. You know this.

You may not have seen it, but we have a brilliant course, available free on ShiningWorld, Christian Leeby's *5 Step Formula to Mastering Mind Control*. I have taken the liberty to adjust and flesh out this simple guideline for managing the mind, below.

Seven-Step Formula to Effective Mind Management

1. Own your mind as your primary instrument.
2. Clarify your highest values by conducting a fearless moral inventory.

3. Take responsibility for every experience you have; it comes from your thoughts, not the world.
4. Your thoughts/emotions don't come from you; they come from the three *gunas*. Make sure you understand what they are.
5. Monitor your every thought and the emotion it produces, see the *guna* behind it.
6. Discriminate the habitual emotional thought patterns that compel you to act against your highest values creating pain and suffering.
7. Evaluate your daily actions to discover those that do not support your highest values.
8. Change those thoughts and the actions they produce by conditioning new chosen thoughts into your primary instrument. Always apply *karma yoga* to every thought, word and action.
7. Relax and stop worrying, as your primary instrument automatically serves your highest values in your day-to-day life, no matter what unfolds.

Nick: It came very close to ending this *jiva* recently, but I guess *Isvara* has a use for ol' Nick yet because here I am.

What is the Vedantic approach to suicide?

Sundari: Read above. Yes, there is Vedantic wisdom on the topic of suicide, but it is so simple that you might not appreciate it: they are just thoughts brought on by a *tamasic* state of mind. They are objects known to you, and therefore have nothing to do with you at all. So just ignore them and turn your attention to the self, the knower of the thoughts, when they arise. Tell Nick that they are not real. All they mean is that your mind is dull. There is nothing wrong with you, nor are the suicidal thought portentous. The solution is to transform the *gunas* using the knowledge of Vedanta, as explained above.

As explained, these thoughts are symptomatic of deeply suppressed and unaddressed psychological issues, highly negative thoughts produced by the suffering experienced through the identification with the body-mind and the unpredictable nature of *samsara*. And symptoms of unaddressed *karma*. In a way suicide is a strange attempt at survival because beneath these thoughts is love for oneself – and the desire to experience this love by ending pain. This is why the saying “suicide is the ultimate attempt at survival” is sadly true for *samsaris*.

But you are not a *samsari*. You don't have that excuse anymore, not to mention the mess you would leave behind, especially for your poor children. I have seen suicide up close a few times, and let me tell you, the *karma* it creates for all involved is not escaped by your death. That *jiva* will be back to face the music. Suicidal thoughts can also be the result of terminal boredom with life – or fear of really living – all again, a result of *tamas*.

Nick: How does *jiva* rest in the knowledge of self when that knowledge suddenly appears to be empty and insubstantial.

Sundari: It rests in the knowledge by removing the obstacles that prevent the knowledge from obtaining, as explained above. If there is no follow-through with your lifestyle and life *karma*, you can't expect a miracle. It won't happen. As I said, *Isvara* does not care one way or the other, because it sees you as the self. *Isvara* helps those who help themselves.

You are actually asking, "Why gain self-knowledge if it doesn't even change anything?" And you would not be asking this if self-knowledge had truly obtained and a translated into your life, because it changes everything – while seemingly changing nothing. Do the work, Nick, nobody can do it for you. Self-knowledge is not magic wand.

We are always here for you, but we can't free you of your ignorance or change your life experience for you. You have to do the work.

Nick: Since all this is only apparent, it shouldn't mean anything if awareness just stopped being limited by a certain limitation.

All is as *Isvara* wills it, after all.

Sundari: Awareness cannot stop being limited, because it never was limited in the first place. You are forgetting that *Maya*/duality/limitation is not real and it does not hide or limit awareness, even though it would not exist without it. In the *Maya* world, everything is run by the *gunas*, *Isvara*.

Yes. And as a *jiva*, to be free of the *jiva* and the *gunas* only happens through self-knowledge, which removes the play-play ignorance and limitation imposed by *Maya* in the movie called *Life*. Without assimilated self-knowledge, however, the play-play ignorance/duality is no game. It is cruel, it bites and hurts.

Nick: As you may have guessed, *tamas* has me in its cloudy clutches, and I'm operating from the point of view of Nick again. Just sit back and let *Isvara* handle it, I guess.

Any advice would, as always, be welcome...

Though I get the feeling it's going to be *karma-yoga*-related...

Sundari: Yes indeed, *tamas* has shut down discrimination and you are once again identified with Nick and his stuff. You have the tools to get out of it, Nick. Use them.

~ Love always, Sundari