

Anorexia, Body Identification and Fear

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2018-04-18

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3543>

Seeker: Dear Sundari, firstly, thank you for allowing me to share with you the situation regarding my daughter, who, as I mentioned, has been struggling with disordered eating, which has now developed into anorexia.

It is clear to me that the “cause” of her difficulties is identification with her body-mind rather than with the Self. If she were able to remove this ignorance and gain knowledge of the Self, then we know her worldly experience would change drastically, but I can’t force that on her.

I have to tread very lightly and I know that ultimately we are in the hands of *Isvara*, but I have a parenting role with her and it may be that something you have written (around the politics of food?) could help her on her journey.

Sundari: We are very happy for you that you found your way to Vedanta and pray that it will give you all the tools you need to cope with the hand *Isvara* has dealt you. Our hearts go out to you, as the situation with your daughter must be very worrying and difficult. There is not much I can send you that would reach her, as she is more than likely not open to the teachings or to anyone telling her what to do. However, I have attached the original article I wrote, *The Morality and Politics of Food*, which has since been expanded and revised for inclusion in my book on lifestyle and Vedanta.

The problem, as you know, is not about food but fear. And once this *vasana* digs in, it creates a neurological condition which is only assuaged by not eating. In other words, the reward from eating is replaced by the reward from not eating. It is a way to manage stress and fear: *rajas* and *tamas* of course. As is the case with many anorexics, they do not fit the profile once presented by the medical/therapeutic world, that their condition must be caused by their parents or life circumstances. While this definitely plays a part, very often this condition arises, such as in your case, from perfectly healthy, loving background conditions.

From what you shared with me, it sounds like your daughter’s condition originated in the fear of not being attractive, of not fitting in with a projected idea of what she “should” look like. Of course this is ultimate body identification, but it also means she is rejecting herself and will reject those who love her because she does not love herself or believe herself lovable. Everything you do to try and help she will reject and also feel guilty about because deep down she must think there is something wrong with her.

Unfortunately, anorexia presents one of the most difficult psychological conditions, for the psychological/psychiatric community and/or therapists/spiritual counsellors and teachers. There has not been much agreement as to what causes it until recently. I attached a very good article that elucidates this more clearly than I have heard it explained thus far. What is now known is that some people have a predisposition for this kind of neurological disorder: in other words, they are born with this as part of their *vasana* load. It is not anybody’s “fault.”

The typical profile is people who are perfectionists, to the point of being OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder]. They cope with stress by controlling their environments (and body) and set very high standards for themselves, often impossible to achieve. If these qualities can be used positively, without the corresponding feeling of guilt that accompanies them, there is a good chance that a person with these *vasanas* can manage them in a healthy way. Of course self-knowledge is the only ultimate answer, but a mind gripped by this fear is not qualified to hear the teachings. They simply will not assimilate because the fear (*rajas*, projection, and *tamas*, denial) is too strong.

We cannot help your daughter, she is in *Ishvara's* hands. We can only help you help yourself with the tools Vedanta offers: *dharma yoga*, *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, *triguna vibhava yoga* and mind management. I have attached a short version of my book on lifestyle, which covers all these teachings. The more you stand as the Self, the better chance you have of reaching the Self in her.

We send you much love and courage. Always remember, no matter what happens, to surrender results to *Ishvara*.

~ Sundari

[Link to the anorexia article.](#)