

No Last Thought for the Self

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Priya: *Namaste!* I hope you are doing well these days.

A little bit of background about me: I have written to you earlier. Also, I have read James' books *How to Attain Enlightenment* and *The Yoga of the Three Energies* as well as many *satsangs* at *ShiningWorld.com*. As usual, I want to say that I am most thankful to you and James for the clear messages you give.

Your *satsang* is a treasure, with some many different queries. I have heard some Neo-Advaita people and some traditional ones as well, but they seem to beat around the bush about some very important questions.

I am *rajasic* by nature, hold a full-time job and have two kids, which keeps me busy (though I do not carry my work beyond its hours). I have few questions. I am not sure if these are answered in the books somewhere, but do let me know if they are.

Kindly take your time, but do respond to my queries which are inter-related and very important to me.

Sundari: Hello, Priya, yes, I remember you. I am glad that to hear that you are committed to your *sadhana* and it is working for you. The Neos do not have a teaching on *satya-mithya*, they do not acknowledge *Isvara* or the *gunas*. Their message "you are the Self, nothing else exists," while true, does not help most people free themselves from ignorance. To do so, you need to understand and practise *karma yoga*, *guna yoga* and *jnana yoga* in order to discriminate *satya* from *mithya*.

Priya: 1. At the time of death, I understand the subtle body leaves the gross body. So what happens to the ego, does it die with the body or leaves with the subtle body (mind, *vasanas*)? If ego persists, then will that try to attach with another body along with the *vasanas*?

Sundari: I have answered many *satsangs* about the ego, so does James address it in his books and *satsangs*. The ego is not real, meaning it is just a thought, yet it holds the mind prisoner to ignorance to the idea that we are the limited small self, or body-mind. In fact the ego is a word that describes the thought that limitless, non-dual consciousness (you) is a limited, separate entity. When the body dies, the personal ego - the personality self - disappears with it.

The ego is the "I" thought wrongly associated and identified with objects. It is a thought that arises out of consciousness, is made up of consciousness and dissolves into consciousness with the removal of ignorance by Self-knowledge. This thought gives rise to the idea that you are a doer, the one who owns action, objects and experiences things. There is no such thing as an ego in reality; it has no existence other than as a thought arising in consciousness. No one has ever seen an ego, yet all egos function in the same predictable way. In fact there is only one ego, and all

jivas share it, unless and until they know what their real identity is as the Self, consciousness.

Our egos do actions to get something we think we want or need to complete ourselves or to get away from something we don't want. It is programmed thinking and the resulting actions that arise from the playing out of the *guna*-generated *vasanas*, likes and dislikes.

Priya: What about the ego of a person who is not enlightened versus an enlightened person?

Sundari: An enlightened person does not have an ego, as they know their primary identity is the Self. They are the witness or knower of the *jiva*/ego/doer with its *Isvara*-given personality. We need a functioning ego as *jivas* to live in the world, but it must be demoted as the one in charge (a job it does very badly) to be subservient to our primary identity as the Self.

Priya: 2. What is the significance of the last thoughts before death? I heard one of the Arsha Bodha teachers say it is the overall mental state that matters, not the final thought.

Sundari: It is the overall "mental state" that counts because it indicates how much ignorance of your true nature remains in the mind alive or dying. There is the belief in some of the spiritual literature that you can get *moksa* (freedom from limitation) at death, called *videha mukti*. It is false because firstly all thoughts arise from and return to the causal body, the *gunas*. Thoughts are all objects known to consciousness, the Self. Secondly, if you have not done the work of self-inquiry before death, which is to assimilate and live the teachings of Vedanta so that Self-knowledge can remove your personal ignorance, how likely is it that this will magically happen at death? It will not.

The thought, or *vritti*, that ends all division, freeing the mind permanently from duality – called the *akhandakara vritti* – is not really a thought. It is the knowledge that you are the Self permanently obtaining in the mind. All thoughts come and go, we have no control over them, only *Isvara* does. But the *akhandakara vritti* never goes once it has obtained, because it is known to be who you are. It is not a function of memory or thought, and you can never forget who you are once you know you are the Self.

Priya: So if I do not get enlightened by the time of my death, what can I do to keep my mind calm? Could you please throw some light on why the final thoughts matter so much?

Sundari: Who is the "I" asking this question? It is the "I" wrongly associated with objects, i.e. the "I" that thinks it is a *jiva*, a limited person, or body-mind. You cannot "get enlightened," Priya. If you submit your mind with great dedication and *karma yoga* to the scriptures, develop all the qualifications required and live the teachings, it is by the grace of *Isvara* alone that Self-knowledge will remove the ignorance of your true nature as unborn and undying consciousness. Enlightenment is not

something to gain. It is who you already are. You have ignorance covering this fact. You “get your mind calm” by trusting what the scripture says about you: that you are the Self, that you were never born, so cannot die. You will never have a “last thought” as the Self, because all thoughts are objects known to you and not real. Even if you do not believe this yet, fake it till you make it because it is the truth about who you are.

Priya: 3. Is enlightenment only for this birth so that the *jiva* stops suffering or does it really stop the cycle of life and death? If I do not reach enlightenment, what will happen?

Sundari: I see you have not understood the basic teaching on *satya-mithya*. The difference between that which is real and always present, consciousness, and that which is only apparently real, not always present and always changing, the *jiva* and the world of objects. You are asking this question again from the point of view of the *jiva* who thinks it is a *jiva* and thinks like a *samsari*, someone deluded by duality. Please sign on to our 12-month course, freely available on our website. It is based on James’ second book *The Essence of Enlightenment* and it takes you through the whole teaching step by step. It provides the right questions to ask and the answers to them.

Enlightenment is not for this birth or any other birth. It is your true nature as ever-aware, always present, unborn and undying consciousness. Realizing and actualizing your true nature as the Self permanently removes the delusion of duality, which is the source of all suffering. It gives you non-dual vision, which means you see everything from the point of view of the Self, as non-separate from you. If Self-realization does not take place in the lifetime of the *jiva*, the subtle body gets subsumed back into the causal body and may reappear as another *jiva*, living out that particular *vasana* bundle. But it will not be Priya, so why worry about it? If you are truly dedicated to *moksa* as your primary motivation in life, trust the scripture to “get you there,” where you already are, whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, unlimited, ever-present, unborn and undying consciousness. You are on the Vedanta bus, put down your heavy life-suitcase and relax.

Priya: 4. Do onions, garlic and caffeine actually restrict your spiritual progress (decrease *sattva*) as some people say? Is this traditional Advaita?

Sundari: No, it is not traditional Advaita, this is an Ayurvedic belief. What we eat needs to conform to our personal body needs and *dharma* for peace of mind. Both garlic and coffee have very strong health benefits.

Priya: Is there any reasons for burning a dead body rather than burying it? Is this just a cultural thing or does it have any significance?

Sundari: How we bury a body has cultural significance only as the body is inert; it has no meaning in and of itself. It is just a shell made up of the five elements and returns to them.

Priya: 2. In the *gunas* book, James does talk about impact of food on us. With your experience, would you recommend me to avoid any food, considering I am newly introduced to spiritual teachings (about two years now)?

Sundari: I am busy finishing my book on the *gunas* and lifestyle, which includes an in-depth look at what we eat. Ultimately, although our food choices are influenced by cultural and spiritual upbringing, there is no absolute right or wrong about what you eat. However, there are certain immutable factors that influence the health of the body, and if you disregard them or are ignorant of them, your health will suffer, such as eating too much sugar or too many carbs, eating bad fats such as hydrogenated vegetable oils and fried foods, too little or too much protein.

There is a persistent belief in the spiritual world that you cannot be “enlightened” if you are not a vegetarian or even better, a vegan. But while there is definitely value in respecting all life forms and non-injury, unfortunately, if you investigate how food is produced, no matter what you eat, something has to die to feed you. This is how the field of existence is set up by *Isvara*. Additionally, *Isvara* has placed some nutrients that are absolutely essential for our health exclusively in animal products. If we were not meant to eat them, why would this be so? If you are a vegan or vegetarian, you need to know what these nutrients are and make sure you supplement correctly.

Priya: Thanks so much for all the service you are doing to mankind. With much love and respect and thank you for your guidance, I will take my time to reflect on them. Being *rajasic*, I sometimes take a while.

Sundari: Never rush to assimilate anything, Priya. You are going about your self-inquiry correctly while also taking care of your *karma* in the world. Well done, and keep up the good work.

Much love, Sundari