

Questions on the *Mandukya Karika*

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Don: Greetings, Sundari, it has been a few months. I hope this finds your situation going well.

Sundari: Thanks, Don, we are both very well.

Don: I have some questions on the *Mandukya*. On page 47, I think there may be a typo referring to the world as being sentient; it should read "insentient" in the second paragraph, line four. Am I correct?

Sundari: The *Mandukya karika* is the most advanced and subtle of all Vedanta teachings, and James has done a fabulous job of unfolding it. It explains why the cause-and-effect teaching is not the whole truth.

There are only three sentences in paragraph two. The use of the word "sentient" is correct in the context of the teaching.

Here is the sentence: "On the realization of non-duality, the belief that the world is sentient disappears along with the belief that the Self is sentient."

The Self appears sentient when associated with *Maya*, and the world appears sentient because of its intimate association with the Self. The Self is not sentient, as the *jiva* knows sentience because it is that which makes sentience possible.

Don: On page 45 of the *Mandukya* commentary, it is written:

"Self-knowledge produces a sense of continual entertainment because *samsara* is a joke, the ever-free Self imagining that it is attached to objects. *Jivas* who know who they are always are smiling inwardly or outwardly."

How does this work when one sees *jivas* suffering because of their ignorance, their being so identified with their body-mind-emotion-objects when there is a sense that "I" am them? I ask this because I attended a grief workshop with hospice, of which I am a volunteer, and as I heard the nine other participants tell their stories I could not help observing that "my" perspective was different. They were all so identified with their particular loss, usually a loved one, whereas I saw loss everywhere and as a teaching. I understood that rather than trying to deal with the emotions of a particular loss, the work was to see the attachment to that which is not real, to objects: the practice of discrimination and dispassion.

My response to them I recognize as my own identification with the mind/intellect sheaths, but there was confusion as to my correct action, my particular *dharma*. Rather than smiling inwardly, I for a brief moment cried because of what I understood or recognized as the veil of ignorance and there was nothing I could do. I could see the matrix//*svara* at work, but could not see how it was working for Don. Why was he there?

One of the slides put up was asking the question, "Why am I talking?" and that spoke to me. I seem always to want to talk too much and I saw that my being there to train to be a grief volunteer was an opportunity for me to learn to listen. What do you see here? I must say that I did hear myself saying throughout the seminar, "Wow, Vedanta is so beautiful," but Don is not sure how to respond/act. Can you provide some clarity, please? Is this all just another case of not discriminating the real from the unreal? Can you provide some insight into what would be the appropriate path for the *jiva* here, smiling inwardly or crying outwardly?

Sundari: The statement regarding smiling in the face of the suffering of life is spoken from the point of view of the Self, non-duality, not the *jiva* under the spell of *samsara*. All the same, it is not meant to demean suffering. Even as a *jivanmukta*, Self-knowledge is not a magic pill for the ego. We still feel the slings and arrows of life as the *jiva*, even though we know they are not real. We still need to process difficult emotions like grief. What changes with Self-knowledge is our relationship with experience, good or bad.

The problem with suffering in *mithya* is an issue for many people. It is very difficult to understand if we look at it from an emotional, dualistic and personal perspective. We must take the dispassionate, big-picture view to make peace with this, as you know. The first thing to understand is that *Isvara* is not a person, doling out "good" or "bad" *karma* for any life form. *Isvara* is consciousness wielding *Maya*, unaffected by *Maya*, the *gunas*. *Isvara* is *karma phala datta*, the giver of *karma*. The *gunas* create the Field of Existence, which is a lawful universe provided for all *jivas* (human or otherwise) to live out their *karma*. *Karma* itself is value-neutral. It is just action and its results. It only becomes meaningful when we evaluate it. We either like it or don't like it or are indifferent to it. Only in the minds of human beings does action become "*karma*."

When Vedanta says the world is perfect as it is, we mean that it cannot be anything other than what it is. If the world could be different, assuming *Maya* "thought" that it was not serving awareness, it would make the world a different place. But it never does. So it must be that there is a good reason for suffering. And indeed there is, motivating a quest for understanding and self-inquiry.

Even if these arguments are not convincing to you, what use is suffering because of the suffering you see? It not only does not change the suffering, it adds a bit of suffering to the total. We *jivas* have no control over results. If you want to make a positive contribution by helping in some way, do so. But it is a thankless task, so let your contribution be an act of service without any thought of changing things or making them better or different. We must always examine our motives for doing anything; see if it is to make yourself feel better, superior or to give you a purpose in life. Often do-gooders have a hidden agenda, which is really about them rather than the people or situation they purportedly serve. Many have low self-esteem, and "helping" is a way to feel better about themselves. Act to help because it is your nature to do so- or just because you can - with the *karma yoga* spirit, and leave the results to *Isvara*. You cannot beat the system. *Karma yoga* is the only way to peace. We all want the world to be a better place, but it is what it is.

Some people respond to this knowledge by saying, "If one cannot change anything because it is not real, and it is perfect the way it is, why bother trying to help anyone?" But Vedanta says why not help if everything is perfect. Your helping is also perfect. If it is your nature to help, you will help. If not, not. If it is your nature to

sometimes help and sometimes not, then that is the way *Isvara* created you. “Do-gooders,” as we call them, are not that popular with *Isvara*. This is because this kind of mind usually believes that it knows better and sets out to “save” the world or people. This is not a good motivation for doing anything to help, because you are assuming you know more than *Isvara* does in delivering *karma*.

Your question, “Why was Don there?”: Why was who there? Consciousness is always present, but when it is identified with experience, it suffers. Your *dharma* as one aiding the dying or survivors should always be as the Self, loving compassion and attention. Just be there for them and listen. Talking is the last thing you need to do, because nobody who has suffered the loss of a loved one wants to hear your story or what you have to say. Many do-gooders are conversational narcissists and use the opportunity to gain mileage for their own suppressed issues. Hold the grief in a safe space, don’t try to fix it or change it. I lost both my parents by the time I was 20 to cancer, and trained as a hospice caregiver thereafter. It was an interesting experience. I wanted to learn more about death or, should I say, non-death, being the knowledge-seeker I have always been.

This is what I discovered to be true: do not grieve for the dead. Perhaps the dead think of us as dead, and grieve for us! A sobering thought, not so? Death is only a problem for the living identified with the body-mind.

Finally, and most important, freedom comes when we can see *Isvara* as both good and bad impersonally, from the dispassionate, non-dual perspective, as the inevitable playing out of the *gunas*, while still being empathic and helping when we can.

Don: On page 64, 2nd paragraph, of the commentary, it says:

“The Self is never recognized as an object with the help of the mind, because the mind is insentient. It can produce knowledge of objects in the world, but not Self-knowledge. When the mind and the Self are understood to be *mithya*, apparently real, the Self, which previously seemed to have forgotten itself, recognizes itself and the mind and the world as the Self alone.”

I hope it’s a typo when it says that “When the mind and the Self are understood to be *mithya*, apparently real...” because I don’t recall ever seeing the capitalized Self being understood as *mithya*. I don’t understand the statement.

Sundari: It is actually correct, but your confusion is understandable because, as stated above, the *Mandukya* is the most advanced and subtle of all the texts. The sentence would be easier to understand if it said, “When the body-mind (small self) and the CONCEPT of the Self are understood to be *mithya*, apparently real...”

The Self implies not-Self. When you know you are the Self, there is no *satya* and *mithya* for you anymore, they are just concepts/principles used to teach you that you are the Self and can be discarded. *Mithya* “becomes” *satya* because it was *satya* all along. You see everything as just IS-NESS, a direct experience of existence as your identity, the Self.

Don: On page 80, I came across the word *adhyaropa* and noted the spelling difference, I think, from the glossary in *Inquiry into Existence*, where it is spelled

adyaropa, and above in the glossary the word for projection is spelled *adhyasa*.

Sundari: *Adhyaropa*, *apavada* and *adyasa* are all have the same meaning: the confusion that comes from projection, confusing one thing for another.

~ Love, Sundari