

Freedom from What? And for What?

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Bill: You say that enlightenment is freedom. My questions are: Freedom from what? And for what?

Arlindo: Good questions, Bill. It is freedom from the fundamental problem, the fundamental piece of ignorance which is responsible for all conflicts and suffering we find in the world. It is shifting from being operated by self-ignorance, one's *vasanas*, or subconscious desires and fears, which are basically, "I want what I want and I don't want what I do not want." That is how 99%+ of human beings live their lives, compulsively and mechanically driven by one's desires and aversions. Humans' psychology is very simple: if I get what I want, I am happy; if I don't, I am either depressed or angry.

This brings us to a very simple but important piece of knowledge: If I am happy every time I get what I want, why not want anything and everything life gives me? If I like everything, if I take everything as *prasad* (a gift from the Lord), I will never get upset, I will never suffer. If we cannot manipulate and control the "set-up" of the *dharma* field, why not get to work on my "mind set"? We are talking of the fundamental attitude of the *karma yogi* that contributes to the mental-emotional strength and stability, which is required for the exercise of self-inquiry and self-knowledge.

Once the individual understands the moral/*karmic* and psychological laws operating in *samsara*, inevitably (providing he/she is not a masochist) they will "conform" their desires and fears to *dharma*. Why? Because conscious *dharmic* desires (rather than the mechanical and automatic subconscious emotional desires based on likes and dislikes) will produce a calm and peaceful mind, and of course a happier life for the individual and others around him/her.

It takes great understanding and mental strength to be able to give up or "sacrifice" our binding desires and fears at the "altar" of *dharma*. It is a very noble kind of "sacrifice" which requires *Isvara's* knowledge, the understanding of the simple natural laws governing our subjective experiences as humans. It also requires much vigilance and will power, since human *jivas* are, psychologically speaking, just like small kids: they want what they want when they want it and exactly the way they want it! They worry about the result of their actions, and when circumstances are not favorable, they often get frustrated, angry, depressed - some even throw a tantrum.

The bottom line: human *jivas* suffer when they don't get their objects of desire. In fact all human psychological suffering is based on this principle, which is a by-product of one's non-understanding of the laws operating in Creation as well the understanding of their real nature as limitless non-dual consciousness.

You say, "If I sacrifice my desires in favor of a life conformed to *dharma*, isn't it because I have finally come to the understanding that I 'want' more than my old desires?"

Yes, absolutely! And this is called maturity or wisdom, to let go of your egoic or self-centered small desires and fears, and act in the world as a contributor – acting for the benefit of the total, myself, other people, the society, our beautiful planet, etc.

You know what is happening in the world, Bill: greedy, economically powerful people are attempting to deplete our planet of its natural resources; human ignorance is affecting the planet's natural balance – and all due to self-ignorance – all in the name of their own egoic desires for money, power, control, prestige, etc. Human *jivas*, in most cases, are insane living beings! Why? Because they are almost invariably driven by unconsciously *tamasic adharmic* desires. They wish to gain what they want at any cost. They often kill and destroy in order to satisfy its desires and fears.

Then you say, “And if that’s the case, am I not simply making a choice based on what I want most?” Yes, Bill! Good point. Firm and clear wisdom of *karma yoga* will produce this “natural desire” to think and act in harmony with our own human nature, other living beings and the environment. Krishna was asked by Arjuna this same question in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and he answered: “I am the desire not opposed to *dharma* [in total harmony with].” Leaving aside the concept of self-realization and *moksa*, the assimilation and application of *karma yoga* alone will produce a much happier life for the *jiva*.

Knowing that you are an activist in your community, I will tell you this: assimilate *karma yoga* and share it with those inclined to receive it. *Karma yoga*, with its knowledge of the laws operating our apparent reality, is the most powerful remedy to alleviate the potential suffering ahead of us derived from the devastation of our planet's natural resources, due to greediness, oppression, injustice, conflicts and wars.

And what is the good of this freedom, since the self cannot be experienced?

Experience is an inevitable aspect of life, and by all means we are not against it. But experience is by nature temporary (has a beginning and an end) and it is only as good as our interpretation of it. If we interpret it from the standpoint of self-ignorance, we suffer our experience. But if we interpret it from the standpoint of self-knowledge, we get good *karma* and a free, happy life. Assimilation of *Isvara*-knowledge and self-knowledge is the key to happiness. Spiritual experiences are indeed very important indirect means to self-knowledge – they may prepare the mind for knowledge. Their only problem is that people tend to become attached/identified with such experiences. Scriptures call it stuck in *sattva*.

Freedom is most importantly freedom from attachment and dependency on objects of experience. You cannot experience the self, because the self is the “experiencer,” always ever-present in all experiences without ever modifying to it. And why strive for freedom, what for? Simply for the sake of enjoying our limitless, full and complete nature as awareness.