

All Symbols Are the Self

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2018-09-16

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3657>

Samantha: *Maya* is a wonder indeed! As you say, without Self-knowledge we have our heads in the mouth of the tiger! And even with Self-knowledge it can be hard to extricate!

I had the following experience yesterday, which I'd like to tell you about.

I have always had an aversion to Christianity and Catholicism in particular. Yesterday, I went with a friend to a church nearby. Franco grew up in a non-religious family but in a very Catholic country. We went in one of the opulent churches and he started explaining to me his vision of Catholicism, including a story of how he almost died as a young child and his mother had no other recourse than to pray to a Catholic saint, which she did for several days with great fervor, by the end of which she says, "She saw the life force flow back into his body." So she dedicated Franco's life to this saint. And needless to say, this saint has had all kind of significance in his life. It is a beautiful, touching story. We spoke softly for more than an hour in this church standing in front of the ornate altar, dating from around 1500 AD.

Then we walked to the next main church, and just at the entrance stood a life-size image of Mary, tears streaming down her face, wearing a black, gold-embroidered dress, gold crown, seven daggers lodged in her heart!, the kind of image that usually elicits in me, "Please take it easy with all this suffering. Can we have a more uplifting image, please?" But this time we stood in front of it and I got totally transfixed, locked on the image, with her soft, suffering gaze. And pretty soon I got filled with the most beautiful love, overwhelmingly so. Her tears were tears of love – of course! Love as the source of all beings, compassion for all apparently suffering beings. I stood there for a long time.

I actually ended up sobbing like a baby. Just as I thought it was time to carry on, thinking I was fine, I turned away from the image and sobbed. After a few minutes, Franco came with some tissues, and I had a good cry in his arms. The whole experience was all pretty much thoughtless, wordless, imageless, associationless.

It is the middle of the night now. And I woke up with an almost shamanic vision of suffering, a grand-scale sea of human suffering, and a bit of a shocking thought about the Jews, that if you insist on the reality of this *Maya* world, with all its apparent love and pain and suffering, that *Isvara* will take it to unimaginable extremes in order to get through to you that it is all unreal, that you have to let go of the whole thing, and that you have always been free of it, etc., etc.

My question is: at some point, one must let go of the whole thing, step out of the game, recognize and embrace the Self as yourself, the only reality. If not, one keeps being thrown here and there on the rocks of one's *karma*, to unimaginable extremes if one so chooses. Obviously, the answer is yes, one has to let go of the whole game and know it to be only the glory of the ever-unaffected Self. Otherwise, one can go on forever having shamanic experiences like the one I had in the church, but so what? I have had experiences like this in various forms, but never in a Catholic context.

Franco said I had entered the mysteries of the Catholic Church.

Maya's game of magic has no end.

All this drama is a projection of *Maya's* infinite apparent-manifestation game, played out in me, as me, as pure unaffected being, pure love. And not played in me, as me, as nothing ever happened.

I cannot formulate a question, but I think there is one.

Can you please comment on all this?

Sundari: I don't think you have a question. Your explanation of your experience is very eloquent and a clear indication of the solidifying and maturation of Self-knowledge. What you experienced in your emotional response to the icon was the unavoidability of God, *Isvara*, and thus of Self. Your mind, being open and pure, felt the high voltage of devotion to the Self, you, in the form of the iconic symbol, Mother Mary, holding the suffering of *mithya* (seven daggers – seven deadly sins) in the peace of the Self, untouched by the *gunas/Maya*. *Isvara* talks to us all in symbols, in the language of experience, which always has seeded in it the truth of knowledge, a delivery system for reality as it is, not subjective and individualistic, but objective and non-dual. You have transcended the limited *jiva* perspective.

If we get distracted by the symbols or invested in the emotionality of the experience, we miss the gift of non-dual vision and are stuck in separation, duality, when the experience ends, which it always does. For you, it did not end, because the knowledge was extracted, and the knowledge is you, the Self, ever-present and never modifying to experience. I think the test of Self-knowledge you recently mastered by applying the teachings to your life situation means Self-actualization is firming up. The fruit of Self-inquiry is the grace of non-dual vision, and it is earned. Well done to you for facing the Samantha program and not being seduced by *Maya*, the ultimate seductress.

You saw that suffering is not caused by *Isvara* but by ignorance of *Isvara*, that *Isvara's* Creation is playing out as it must. *Karma* is impossible to understand from the *jiva's* perspective, because the *jiva* can only look at what takes place in the apparent reality from within the framework of the apparent reality. This perspective will always be limited. The apparent reality will always be limited. The only solution is to see it from the point of view of the Self, which is non-dual vision. *Maya*, or ignorance, is not "responsible" for suffering, nor is *Isvara/the Self*. *Maya* is not real. We know this because it disappears with Self-knowledge. If *Maya* is not real, then the effects of *Maya* – good and evil in the apparent reality created by *Maya* – are not real either. Suffering is taking something that is not real to be real. The *gunas* are simply impersonal forces, and for this movie of duality to work, they must manifest in the full spectrum of "good or bad" attributes. If this were not the case, the game would be over. It's the only way the *jiva* gets a field in which to work out its (apparent) *karma*.

The proof that Self-knowledge is firm is when you can see the Self//*Isvara* in all the manifestations that appear to us, "good" and "bad." We have renounced the final obstacle to *moksa*, the idea of "purity" and "impurity" as objects known to you, and we see how benign this world actually is. When we say 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. Although it makes awareness appearing as *jivas* seemingly dull and evil, it also makes them sensitive and awake, which provides them with indirect knowledge of their nature as awareness, thus motivating their quest for direct knowledge. Understanding and embracing this is freedom from and for the *jiva*.

As dedicated inquirers, we need to understand the definitions of God//*Isvara* gradually and systematically until we can see the full vision, the whole *Mandala* of Existence. The way in which I define God will determine my *bhakti*, devotion. In the first level of understanding, my devotion will be to a personified deity: a personal God, as in dualistic religion. In the second level of understanding, I will worship the Lord in everything, including nature. In the final stage of understanding, I see God as the formless essence of all, both manifest and unmanifest. The final stage does not negate the previous two; it simply completes the full picture. When we appreciate *Isvara* as both form and formless, we can happily worship the Lord/God//*Isvara* as a personified deity, as the totality of nature and as the formless essence of all things, the Self.

The three definitions of God can be broken down further into four stages of devotion. The first three stages are called *dvaita bhakti*; all three involve free will and the *jiva*, the person, which is why these stages are called dualistic worship. The purpose of these stages of worship, or *bhakti*, is that these practices reduce subjectivity and neutralize *vasanas* – likes and dislikes – as well as negate the doer. It takes care of the childish ego. The last stage and fourth stage of devotion, non-dual *bhakti*, takes place once the doer is negated and all our emotional baggage is converted to devotion to the Self, based on firm Self-knowledge. The next stage is permanent satisfaction, *tripti*.

It could not happen to a more deserving inquirer!

~ Much love, Sundari

Samantha: Dear Sundari, your words strike me as the most beautiful words I have ever received.

Thank you.

I will contemplate them.

~ So much love, Samantha