

Doing Battle with Ignorance

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2018-09-16

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3661>

Sundari: I've thought a lot about innocence lately, what it is and why *jivas* lose it, and why they kill themselves. I wrote a piece about it, attached it for you to read. Isn't it amazing, seeing as we are all the Self, how hard it is for *samsaris* not be identified with their emotions? *Maya* is indeed a wonder!

Lisa: So wonderful to hear from you and read your piece on innocence. You are a very powerful writer. My response to it is that I really love your writing style, the same with your *satsangs* on ShiningWorld. It's full of passion, powerful imagery and visceral truth. I found it inspiring because I understand the young child's purity, the so-called influence of *Maya* as the *jiva* grows up and the kind of disillusionment/guarding as an adult. Exposure to Vedanta as an adult opens the door again to that purity, but with full understanding. It's a *tabula rasa* again, but by informed choice. That's what I got from your piece.

Sundari: Thank you, Lisa. I love your writing too.

Lisa: I was thinking a lot about what you wrote: "Rare is the soul with absolutely no hooks in this world." I was also thinking about "thy will be done and my will be done" and wondering if, in a mature person, it might be the same thing. Last night you were praising me about leaving my former life, and I didn't really have much response, because I know that *Isvara* facilitates everything, so I couldn't really take the credit as much as I would like to (even the parts of it that looked like I was struggling with this and that). Then again, *Isvara* is just delivering the results from my actions or the *jivas* who came before me, so in that way, I can accept credit. There were whisperings to pull the plug for years, but Vedanta hadn't yet made its appearance and I wasn't equipped as a *jiva* to handle that kind of dissolution. Vedanta logic made it possible for me to understand how I could be complicit in my own freedom and the consideration that the "Lisa" narrative is not real makes me very happy. It's actually kind of funny because that ship already sailed months ago and I'm just now starting to realize its meaning.

Sundari: So eloquently put. Yes, when thy will and my will be done is one, maturity is a given because the doer has been negated. It is only through Self-knowledge that we find "the kingdom of God within," which is the Self, uncontaminated by the world (*gunas*) and free of it, incorruptible. Nothing else can wipe the slate clean, because nothing else explains what the slate is, what's on it (apparently) or why. It's instant and permanent absolution solely through knowledge, no more mysteries and no more mental and emotional self-abuse.

I relate to what you say here because I too grew up without any guidance that made sense to me and found my own way, no matter the cost and through no credit of my own, living my *svadharma* despite the dearth of valid teachings and severe disapproval from my tribe. I had no choice, as *Isvara* sent me some seriously hectic *karma* to make sure the eject button was fully engaged!

I can't say that *Isvara* was good enough to deploy a parachute, yet whatever life has asked of us and put us through, we have had the good grace to be plucked from the whirlpool of *samsara*, and now enjoy it as observers – almost stunned to be doing so! Freedom from the intense limitation of identification with the *jiva* and its sad story is such a wonder, and so ordinary too.

Lisa: I have a friend I love a lot who is grappling with some difficult issues, and her decisions are between her and *Isvara*. I tried to offer advice as a friend but just upset her, so I decided to stay out of it. It's her *karma*.

Sundari: It is usually best to stay out of other people's *jiva* stuff. James and I do our best not to get involved, though sometimes *Isvara* uses us for this purpose. It's never easy or pleasant, because it often involves ego combat from the recipient and blowback *karma* for us, as you know. My rule is that whatever I say about a person to anyone I will say to them directly or I keep it to myself. It is hard to be very honest with what we think of the people close to us expressed directly to them, and sometimes compassion trumps honesty. It depends if it's an astute observation or a critical judgment and if it is to their benefit to hear it. The thoughts that we harbour ABOUT "others" and the words we use to voice these thoughts to anyone other than them is what we need to do inquiry into because they say a great deal about our own perceived (or unseen) smallness and limitations. It is always about us, not "them."

To be truly free of the *jiva* there can be no shame or guilt and nothing to hide. Freedom means we have the courage to be 100% transparent about what we think, say and do, at all times. Ramji is a good example of this for everyone, and it is not easy to be that free of what anyone thinks of the *jiva*. Although I tend to be very honest (perhaps too much so), total transparency took me a while to learn because I considered myself such a "private" person, until I was no longer identified with being a person, that is. In the light of the Self, what the hell does privacy even mean?

Lisa: At the same time, her program has triggered the appearance of a needy *vasana* in me – it turns out I HATE the needy parts of the Lisa*jiva*, so this has afforded me the opportunity to just quietly observe it.

Sundari: Everyone in our lives is there to show us what we cannot see about ourselves, the "good" and the "bad." However, your revulsion of the need/fear-*samskara* is understandable. as it is the absolute worst. This *samskara* is universal – all *jivas* have it, to some degree, it is the original sin that religion talks of. The fear/need is the "wound of humanity," as I sometimes call it. It is the king of all *vasanas*, also what we call primordial beginningless ignorance, another name for *Maya*. When it appears in full force, it's like looking into a bottomless abyss, into hell, because it is a direct portal to the worst the causal body has in store for the *jiva* to experience.

As you know only too well, this is a non-dual reality; there are no others. Everyone we have contact with in our lives is a reflection of the Self, and as apparently separate *jivas*, exhibiting slightly different versions of the same influences, the *gunas*, as the one universal *Jiva*. The less-than-fabulous parts of our *jiva* program are never easy to swallow, even if we have Self-knowledge and know that they do not

belong to us. Trying to avoid facing them often gives rise to “motivated blindness” (*tamas* of course), the unique ability all *jivas* have which inhibits their ability to perceive inconvenient data, much like confirmation bias gives rise to the cult of denialism.

However, the conditioning is JUST a program and not one we gave ourselves, and it comes with the territory of being human. But if we want to be free, peace of mind will never be permanent until we have seen, understood and transformed all our mental/emotional disturbances/tendencies into devotion to the Self.

The more user-friendly and kinder term for the need/fear-*samskara* is “free-floating anxiety,” which, if Self-knowledge is not firm, causes a non-specific, unnamed existential fear, or dread. It is the fear that causes knots in the solar plexus. It is sometimes called the fear of “being and becoming.” It is always present, yet hidden in the causal body, and it is looking for objects to attach to. It is related to “others”; it is the ultimate experience of duality or “otherness.”

Not everyone experiences it directly and acutely, but the skyrocketing number of people on pills or experiencing anxiety attacks is a testament to how powerful and prevalent it is. It’s the perfect combination of too much *rajas* and along with it too much *tamas*. It is the hangman’s noose that beckons so many to end it all because its name is despair. In most *samsaris* it works out in petty mundane and indirect ways all day long, year after year, death by a thousand cuts.

You can see the accretions in the faces of *samsaris* as they age – the exhaustion of existential suffering, the weight of the *samskara*, etched in faces inured to disillusion. Self-realization is no guarantee that it has been rooted out and often does not slay the need/fear dragon for good. For most people, it disappears for a bit, then reappears. There is no quick easy fix. The only solution is to apply Self-knowledge when it arises and see it for what it is, a paper dragon. For most people, fear is so ever-present that it goes unnoticed because it is considered “normal,” even smart. Cynicism and lack of trust are the mark of a “worldly person.”

Lisa: One more thing about the “needy” *vasana* that seems to bug me so much: I know I’m whole and complete, and the background in which all these *vasanas* appear to be appearing. God is letting me see that deep-seated fear that other *jivas* can somehow hurt me or take something away from me is just a very strong, compelling idea that I’ve carried since forever. I’m sure it’s totally common to all *jivas* who have suffered abuse and don’t yet know who they are. The more I sit with this idea (and that’s all it is) the more I know that no *jiva* could ever touch me. It’s all just a belief and a particularly sticky piece of ignorance that is thankfully shedding away in the light of knowledge.

Sundari: The poor-me saga is the ultimate bit of “sticky ignorance.” For most people, disidentifying with their *jiva* story is a very big step. It’s true what you say about the instinct most *jivas* develop to protect themselves from others, and there is a good reason for it because life in *samsara* is not what it appears to be. It is risky, unpredictable, defined by worry, anxiety, fuelled by the need for security, of which there is none of the lasting kind, sad to say. We learn to be distrusting pretty quickly as gullibility and credulity are seldom rewarded to our benefit. Most people, despite success or failure, fame fortune or penury, have erected fortresses of bloody battle weariness, within and without, by the time they reach early adulthood, if not before,

to protect and defend what cannot be protected.

The wolf at the door (ignorance) is already inside, devouring hope in great big bites. Thus most people are afflicted with the fear/need-*samskara* so have hidden agendas to get, keep or avoid what they want or don't want from others. It seems especially true of people who have suffered abuse in some form or another. But let's face it, who hasn't suffered abuse? As long as your view on life is based on duality, you are subject to being abused and being an abuser. There is an infinite number of ways either role can play out on a sliding scale of suffering for the abuser and abused because both are abused by ignorance.

The final stage of self-inquiry, *nididhyasana*, is the toughest part of Self-inquiry. It's where "the rubber meets the road," as Ramji is fond of saying, no place to hide anymore. There is no easy way to resolve what is hidden in the unconscious – and no way to stop it from emerging when the time is right. Take a bow for facing it with honesty and courage. Nobody said that the road to freedom is easy for the ego. It is, more often than not, brutal. Self-knowledge is not an instant panacea. While it undoubtedly works to end suffering, the *jiva* must walk the talk and apply the knowledge to every aspect of its life, no fine print. A good thing it is that *Isvara* has a built-in drive for wholeness in the psyche because suffering is unnatural for the Self.

When the foul smell of the fear/need-*samskara* snakes its way into the mind, it is utterly repellent, especially when Self-realization has occurred, as in your case. All *jivas* must pass this way – and here be dragons. What to do but face them because they won't go away any other way?

Here is something I wrote about an experience I had in the last stage of this *samskara* myself some years ago. You may have read it:

"Taking a stand in awareness as awareness means taking a stand in our fullness, not in smallness. As long as I try to turn the 'other' into 'my' husband/wife/son/daughter/friend, etc. and try to work things out with him or her on that level, I am keeping the concept of duality, smallness, limitation alive. The *jiva* can never compete with the Self, obviously. So the *jiva* overcomes its smallness by living as the Self and consciously doing battle with the 'voices of diminishment' as they arise. It does not try to defend them. To do so only gives them life. And arise they do! It is difficult at first because you feel like a fraud, that you are trying to be something you are not. However, if we are hooked by the turbulent thoughts and emotional patterns inherent in being a *jiva*, even in seemingly small day-to-day issues, we will never be free of them. The ever-changing and limited idea of who you are trying to keep alive as the person is just a memory, a guilt-inspired thought. For the most part, it is a toxic program. I say get rid of it, pay it no heed!

"Even though I had realized the Self, my problem for a long while was thinking that, as the *jiva* never disappeared, it had to be catered to, as it is. This may be true – the *jiva* will remain as *Isvara* made it, for the most part, even with *moksa* – and we must love it unconditionally. Nevertheless, *satya* and *mithya* is duality if you think the *jiva* is as real as the Self.

"Taking a stand as the Self means the *jiva* is as good as non-existent. You are Self. You are not The Self and the *jiva*. So, when *jiva* appears, dismiss it. When this final realization fully sank in, what a tremendous relief it was."

Lisa: Thank you for that affirmation and definition of what the “needy” *vasana* is and how it functions. It’s like one of those Guinea worms working its way out of the system, and I find it interesting to view all of this as just the impersonal *jiva* program expressing itself: *mithya* with no bearing at all on me. The so-called “others” are a gigantic boon – just a little peek at what seems to be disturbing me leads to understanding of and liberation from limiting ideas that would normally have taken me down the road to suffering; cutting false views off at the knees before they have a chance to create the illusion of whole new worlds of ignorance and pain. I’m really intrigued by the piece you wrote about not catering to the *jiva* and dismissing it when it comes up. What you wrote: “...*satya* and *mithya* is duality if you think the *jiva* is as real as the Self.” That one is going into the hopper for a thorough investigation. Actually, just thinking about this gives me a huge thrill.

Sundari: I am glad it helped. I have written on this subject in many *satsangs*, it is not new. Ignorance requires split-second response with the light sabre of Self-knowledge because *rajas* and *tamas* work so fast to condition the mind. As always, you describe the process of inquiry perfectly – I love the Guinea worm analogy! Ignorance is like that, a “living” entity eating you alive from the inside, with Self-knowledge being the only medication for it. What’s so interesting about ignorance is, unlike everything else in *mithya*, it does not die a natural death. It must be “killed” by Self-knowledge, nothing else works. Cracking this one leaves you pretty much with a “clean bill of health” – no more ignorance worms!

Lisa: About the ignorance worms and ignorance not dying a natural death, even if I totally disidentify with *jiva*, I don’t really see an end to the *nididhyasana*.

Sundari: In a way, it is true that *nididhyasana* never ends for the *jiva*, because it is a changing entity living in an ever-changing volatile environment, hence vigilance is the price of freedom. Self-actualization is not for the faint of heart, that is for sure! It requires a great deal of courage to face the demons that await us in the causal body, to free ourselves of the *jiva*. The “I-sense,” or ego/doer, never really disappears, because it must function in this world, but when you know it for what it is, it is as good as non-existent. And we all come in stamped a certain way which most likely will never change that much. With Self-knowledge, what changes is how we relate to objects, specifically “our” *jiva* story.

However, once Self-actualization has obtained, Self-knowledge is no longer practised, it’s just knowledge – it’s who you are, so the effects of ignorance burn up in it instantly, without any thought or effort involved, like a bug zapper kills mosquitos. It is no longer possible for ignorance to gain any purchase whatsoever in the mind, because binding *vasanas* and the sense of doership are like a burnt rope – they no longer have the power to bind.

Remind yourself of the quote of mine oft-repeated (and misquoted!) by Ramji, “the steps to get ‘there’ are the qualities of being there,” i.e., there is no “there” there, because you are already what you are seeking to “become.” There is no nowhere to get to and you are not going to be different “before, during or after” *moksa*, a big expectation in the spiritual world, and an impediment to freedom. But if we are not prepared to cede control of our lives to *Isvara* and make the scripture the boss, then we must keep suffering and stop complaining.

Lisa: The *vasanas* seem to be coming out hot and heavy, but I continue to soldier on, just giving thanks and praying for clarity. It seems a bit ridiculous because I'm just the witnessing awareness of it all, but *jivas* will be *jivas* and I seem to be intermittently stuck to mine. So that's how it appears to be. I'm extremely grateful for Vedanta for the many different mirrors it holds up to this.

Sundari: The *jiva* storm will pass as do all things in *mithya*.

Lisa: When the "low self-worth-fueled love whore" *vasana* makes itself visible, I just have to be really patient with the discrimination. The conditioning to feel so low about myself was God-given, so I forgive myself and hand it all back to the Creator. The *vasanas* still need to be dealt with directly, not by glossing over them but by actually facing the most repugnant needy parts of *jiva* and doing (yes, doing!) hand-to-hand combat with them in the form of contemplation over and over again until they are neutralized. The deep *vasanas* are emerging like gangbusters right now, and it's a total gift that I am incredibly grateful for. It feels like absolute crap emotionally at this point, but who cares?

Sundari: While we may feel like we must keep up the good fight in the boxing ring with our inner demons, and it is true, vigilance is required because they do cut you off at the knees if they get the chance, nothing you "do" can get rid of them, because the doer is the problem, except looking them directly in the eye through the lens of the scripture, faithfully sticking to your *sadhana* and living a beautiful, *dharmic* life even though the *jiva* is convinced it is flawed and needs to get love. Wah wah wah. Let it mewl like the damned. Until we have actualized Self-knowledge, Self-inquiry requires us to do battle only with the thoughts that arise in the mind, one thought at a time, over and over, always taking a stand in awareness as awareness, thinking the opposite thought. Unless the *jiva* has been fully negated, we can never let our guard down, because ignorance is so insidious, tenacious and treacherous.

Lisa: The intensity for me actually increased after Kate left. Really, this is exactly the same issue for me (duh, one *jiva*), hence what I like to call the "love whore" *vasana*, the almost zombie-like impulse to get some kind of love and approval from others, aka the duality-o-meter. I know that actually assimilating the most primary lessons of Vedanta is very hard (the joy is not in any object).

Sundari: You are right, seeing that the joy is not in the object is deceptively difficult. In fact so much so that very few people have mastered it completely, although they may think they have. Don't feel alone regarding the love whore *vasana* – for most inquirers, Self-realized or not, this is the toughest one. Where you stand with it is a good way to gauge how duality is playing out for you, as it's the key to freedom. Your emails are very explicit and incisive. Very few people have the unsparing self-honesty you have coupled with the commitment to not beating up their poor *jiva* for its sorry lot. The hungry love whore *vasana* combat will end, you'll see. One day you will notice that it is just gone, and you never saw it leave. These are the "fetus in the womb" *samskaras*, and they leave only at *Isvara's* behest when the momentum of past actions is finished.

Lisa: The *jiva* is like the forsaken bastard child that only needs love and understanding, care and attention and the occasional swat.

Sundari: Give the needy child a swat if necessary, but you had better love the forsaken bastard child because nobody else can. Without Self-knowledge, all *jivas* are orphans, perpetual strangers to themselves, trailing clouds of glory yet staring into the contemptuous mirror of duality with self-loathing. They long to be validated, wanted, known, loved. Self-knowledge alone has the power to shatter that mirror and reveal that which is beyond the known and the unknown, ending shame and need permanently.

What is so important to understand is that Vedanta is not about making the person wrong; it is to understand who and what they are and the forces that condition them, to be free of the identification with the *jiva* and not modifying to the *gunas*. Once we see how *Isvara* has conditioned the *jiva/ego*, it behoves us to understand the *jiva* and its impact on those around us, as well as how protecting the *jiva* identity impedes our growth and *moksa*, freedom from and for the *jiva*. It is up to us to make the adjustments so that the *jiva* lives happily and so do the people around us with whom we have contact.

You are so very okay the way you are, there is nothing about you not to love. Honestly, you have a truly delightful *jiva*, despite its *karma* in this life. Or because of it.

Please put up a Post-It note to Self: "*Moksa* is not about perfecting the *jiva*." Or another one: "I am fully in touch with my inner hungry love whore." Good ones for the fridge. Let it be what it is, so what? If you see the *vasanas* for what they are without denial or projection and know that they do not belong to you as the *jiva* or the Self, why worry? Leave them firmly in *Isvara's* hands and make it clear that you expect them to be taken care of. So be so free as the Self that you are totally okay with being flawed as a *jiva*, knowing you are done with that identity and no longer invested in it. And when that hungry whore *vasana* pops up like an unwelcome cork in the ocean of *samsara*, dismiss it instantly or just ignore it.

Lisa: I really appreciate your comments that the *jiva* is just fine as is. And I will put up a Post-It note that *moksa* is not about perfecting the *jiva*. That's a really good one.

Sundari: It is good that your discrimination is working as you see it play out in people close to you. What's interesting about the "exposé" in pushing the venomous shame/need issue glaringly into the open is the vanity of the ego! It truly believes it is exceptional and unique even in its own stinking toxic shithole. It's amazing how it clings to its stuff all the while wallpapering the *jiva* with Self-propaganda, craftily hiding the shame/need *samskara* under it. But the *samskara* is like nuclear waste in the unconscious: it keeps radiating its poisonous toxins which contaminate everything we think, say and do, mostly unconsciously. It is very much in control, while the ego struts its stuff, parroting the scripture, all dressed up pretending to be the Self!

Nothing has the power to destroy *samskaras* other than firm Self-knowledge. Of

course this requires staring our “deep dark secrets,” the stuff we most deny about ourselves, unflinchingly and without justification directly in the eye, so to speak, which requires the ego to readjust its good opinion of itself, not something the ego does easily until it understands that none of the stuff it so loathes and hides about itself is actually true.

Nididhyasana, which requires surrendering the surrenderer, applies to all *jivas* who are glued to their *jiva* identity and unaware of it. We are all made a certain way and are not to blame for our psychology until we know. When we do, the buck stops there. The ego never likes to hear about the less-than-fabulous aspects of its hidden agendas, but the knowledge makes it clear that there is nothing to feel bad about, because you never made yourself (not-self) like it is. And all *jivas* face the same issues because the *gunas* work the same way for everyone. The point is, do we want to continue being jerks and suffering or do we want to apply this amazing knowledge to the *jiva*? We can say we know who we are and like ourselves the way we are, and so does everyone else, and that’s perfect. Bravo. Only we will know if this is true or not.

If one is serious about Self-inquiry, there is no room for making excuses for or protecting the *jiva* identity – it must be seen for what it is to be dismissed. Only the merciless truth will set you free of the *jiva* program – and then we can truly accept the *jiva* as it is. We are all flawed on that level and all have our little issues, nobody is perfect. Who cares? This is not about being perfect, as I said before, quite the contrary. It is about paying attention to what is, to life as it is presenting itself to us, and managing the mind, i.e. the *gunas*, for maximum peace of mind. Or the *gunas* manage you.

The only way assimilation can take place is if we are willing to face the messy duck pond of our lives and clean it up. Everything that is not in line with the scripture must be renounced. This is non-negotiable, and if you try to make the scripture fit into your life instead of the other way around, it just won’t work. End of story. The BS has to end on all levels and if the teachings do not translate into our lives, you might as well give up on Self-inquiry.

What is very hard for most inquirers is to see family/love attachments for what they are without making any excuses and adjust relationships to them according to Self-knowledge, not the *jiva*’s conditioning. It does not require ending relationships, simply acknowledging the blind spots (dependence) and cutting the psychological bondage to the people in our lives with whom we have *karma* or the one with whom we want *karma*. Love always endures because it is the nature of life, it is who we are, not something we must work to gain or give. We can never “lose” anyone we love, we only lose our binding attachments to them as a *jiva* because we see them as the Self, while loving and accepting their *jiva* program as it is and for what it is, only apparently real.

Lisa: About the drama thing, I think it is just deflection and the subtle body’s not so subtle way of saying, “I’m not ready,” not sure if that baby is ready to come out, and it’s nobody’s business whether it does or not. The thing about toxic shame in families, as I am sure you know, is that when it’s buried in the subconscious it’s creating a lot of unspecified pain that the mind will try to find relief from by offloading it on unsuspecting prey like a poisonous spider. They can’t help it.

Sundari: Yes, as I described above, all the stuff hidden in the unconscious causes suffering, that is how ignorance works of course, and the suffering is the signal to heal ourselves. The purpose of suffering is to turn the mind inwards, but the message goes mostly unheeded, so the suffering gets compounded and lethal to peace of mind. All that pressure must go somewhere, so it gets projected on the people/world around us. While it's true that "fetus in the womb" *samskaras* will only emerge when the time is right, drama is a great avoidance strategy for the *jiva* to project, blame and deny. It works very well for its intended purpose, except it binds the *jiva* ever more tightly to the causal body, guaranteeing the intensification of drama *karma* and of suffering for all involved.

Lisa: I had a meltdown the other day, basically couldn't stop crying.

Sundari: I send you love and courage as Self-knowledge cracks open the deeper recesses of the Lisa construct, in the vale of tears, crushed hope and loss. I know how hard it can be to truly endure *nididhyasana*. Remember though, that while hand-to-hand combat with the demons is futile, the biggest tool you have to defang them, besides *karma yoga* and mind/*guna* management, is *bhakti* – transforming all emotional disturbances with devotion to the Self, the power of gratitude. Never underestimate it. It is a gift from *Isvara*. Take everything to your altar, make a focal point for your devotion. Leave it there. This too will pass.

Lisa: You are correct about the crushed hope and loss, a special delivery from *Isvara* to force the love issue to the surface.

Sundari: Remind yourself that Self-knowledge does not directly change our experience, because all experience is *mithya*. But gradually and indirectly, Self-knowledge does change our experience because it is steadily working in the background to purify the mind. One day, we just find we are relating very differently to experience, and it is natural and spontaneous. Don't try to manhandle the psyche, give up doing battle with the demon *vasanas*. None of it is real, only you are.

Lisa: Thank you for your words of love and encouragement and acknowledgment of the process. And I am deeply grateful for the chance to see and understand it in the context of Vedanta. You are absolutely right about *bhakti* and applying discrimination, those two are not separate. The despair-tinged overwhelm at the seeming mountain of *vasanas* was starting to bum me out, but it's just the appearance of *tamoguna*.

Sundari: It is not hard to acknowledge you. I see you directly and purely as the Self and as a very beautiful *jiva*, a rare gem in an ocean of dullness and BS. You shine quietly and unobtrusively but very clearly. I love that *jiva*! Yes, indeed *tamoguna* is a nasty one when it dominates, and it makes discrimination almost impossible. I find it extremely painful. Just hang in there, you are doing so well.

Remember who you are and hold tight to the lifeline like a deep-sea diver. Keep discriminating.

~ Much love, Sundari

