

Relationship *Vasanas*

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Anne: Thank you so much for your words, for taking the time to respond so appropriately to each point of my mail. I truly appreciate your clear stand, so to speak. Perhaps it was indeed necessary to ask for help as it is not always easy to lift oneself up from the ocean of one's own self-created *samsara*.

Rory: Hi, Anne, lovely to hear from you again.

I'm glad my words were of help, that's what I'm here for. Sometimes just a little reminder is enough to reorientate the mind and get you back on track. The path (insofar as it is a path) can be a tricky one, no doubt about that - like walking the razor's edge as the *Upanishad* famously states.

You've got everything you need to take you there though. You're on the bus. Or better yet, the Vedanta train (trains are more comfortable and you get served tea and coffee! Win-win).

Anne: During my long spiritual quest, I left one teaching after another, meaning also a human/social network behind. So I found myself quite solitary but so grateful to have found Vedanta or that Vedanta found its way to me.

Rory: It shows great courage and devotion to Truth on your part to be able to leave a teaching/teacher/*sangha* when necessary. That's something a lot of people simply can't do. They get sucked into the *sangha* aspect and attached to the sense of community and belonging that comes with it. It's pretty sad when you see this because when this is the primary motive, it's usually to the detriment of the ultimate goal, *moksa*.

Anne: Thank you for your clear, uncompromising Vedantic view, which helped to put me back on track. I have found back my inner balance, though I know well that vigilance has to be kept until our last breath. I know also that language is tricky, as it is dualistic and sometimes inadequate in its expression.

Rory: I'm so glad to hear this. Vigilance is always the key. Vigilance and perseverance. As Ramana said, those who succeed owe their success to perseverance. Just keep on going, keep inquiring, keep up your *sadhana*, regardless of whatever obstacles the mind throws up. I remember Ramji once telling me slow and steady wins the race.

Anne: As Ramji expresses it, I am still in the "firefly" stage, going from times of pure *sattvic* mind to falling back into the grip of some stubborn *vasanas*.

Rory: Frustrating though it can be, the firefly stage is actually a good stage to be. The good thing is you're already tasting the fruits of your inquiry and seeing that it does indeed work. As you persist with your *sadhana* and inquiry, you'll find yourself ever-increasingly more "on" than "off."

Anne: In the article you sent me, I noticed the sentence "When you give something up, an attachment remains."

I can see that. Life forced me to give up on one cherished desire, but the attachment remained. I may think it is done and over, especially when living alone and away from people, but that does not mean that the attachment is fully burnt up.

Rory: It's an important understanding. Just because we renounce a desire, it doesn't mean that the desire isn't still there in seed form. It's likely to keep trying to sprout again for some time - which we experience as that certain "itch" - whether in the form of thoughts, feelings or a compulsion to undertake certain actions.

Sometimes the *vasana*/attachment burns up quite quickly as you're applying Self-knowledge to the mind. Other times, it takes a little longer. There's no right or wrong. The great analogy from the *Gita* is that some dealing with some *vasanas* is like wiping grime off a mirror - others *vasanas* are like smoke - they're a little more obstructing, and take longer to clear - then there are the *vasanas* that are like a foetus in the womb, and there's no choice but to carry them to term. They're basically there until such time as they're not.

That's where *karma yoga* is essential with regard to *vasana*-busting. I found the right attitude is cultivating a Tao-like balance of fortitude and determination, along with non-resistance and acceptance. As troublesome as they are, it helps to see the *vasanas* as enemies, but as opportunities - opportunities to put knowledge into practice and to polish the mirror of the mind. I love the poem *The Guesthouse* by Rumi. The *vasanas* and *samskaras* are just guests staying for a finite time. They might be good, friendly guests or they might be problematic monsters, forever trying to trash the room. It's up to us to be gracious hosts, while at the same time deciding which guests we want to stay and which we don't want back.

Anne: I conceived the idea that if my desire for relationship would be fulfilled in this life, not as a mere means to happiness but as way of living and serving life as a *jiva* here, that would end for good this desire in the experience of it, and I could leave this plane without leftover attachment. But it did not happen, despite my great efforts. So I have no certainty that this desire may suddenly not rise up again leading to another life on earth, which is something I do not look forward to! I am perfectly capable of living on my own and have done so for decades, so I cannot say I "cannot live without" a relationship nor that I need one for my well-being, like I have heard married people say. I just feel it would have been more akin to my nature, but it seems *Isvara* in its expression of my life circumstance and people I found myself involved with said, "No, this is not for you for this time round."

Rory: It sounds like your inquiry on this topic is spot on. The desire for a relationship is there, and it's a natural desire - we're social creatures, and on a biological level, the desire for companionship is hardwired into us. But, as you said, you know that your sense of well-being and wholeness isn't dependent upon it. Therefore you've

rendered it into a preference rather than a need. That's basically why we use *karma yoga*. It neutralises binding desires and aversions and converts them to non-binding preferences. The result is freedom from psychological dependency on external factors.

There's no problem at all with non-binding preferences so long as we remember that *Isvara* has the ultimate say. It could be that being in a relationship wouldn't have been conducive to your particular path. Maybe it will be in the future? Only *Isvara* knows, and all we can do is trust, knowing that *Isvara* has our best interests at heart and is always, with every step, leading us to freedom.

I can relate to your journey. Through life-long health challenges, *Isvara* conspired to make me a *sannyasi* by default. I had a great deal of time to devote to my spiritual path, and it became my reason for being. But I still had some worldly *vasanas* to work out, and they often manifested as a desire for a relationship or love. So, for a number of years, my focus was split between the desire for *moksa* and the desire for love.

While I don't believe they are mutually opposed, the truth is, when it comes to *moksa*, you need all your wits about you. You need focus and a burning desire that overrides all other desires. I'd intellectually reasoned that I didn't need a relationship to be happy, but the desire was still there in seed form. So when relationships did come along, I usually figured why not? What's the worst that can happen? Famous last words!

I guess I had to learn the hard way that relationships have an upside and a downside. The upside can be great, but the downside is never fun and can be lethal to the seeker of liberation. When our real goal is *moksa*, which necessitates a clear and *sattvic* mind, relationships can be a real obstruction, especially if you happen to be in a relationship with a *samsari* (which, unfortunately, accounts for virtually everyone in the singles market!). There's no bigger *sattva*-killer. I learned that even when things seem to be going fine, one's energies and attention tend to gravitate to the relationship and keeping things going smoothly, managing that person's expectations and *vasanas*, as well as our own. But there's no greater testing ground for *karma yoga*, that's for sure. 😊

What I ultimately found was that relationships tended to lure me away from my path and bind me to *mithya*. But I'm glad I went through all the experiences. It forced me to see not just intellectually, but with every ounce of my being, the zero-sum nature of *mithya*. As Rumi wrote, "The wailing of broken hearts is the doorway to God." I believe that was a foetus-in-the-womb *vasana* for me, and one I had to let play out until it burned itself up and left me wondering why I was ever seeking love outside of myself when it was all just a limited reflection of the love that was within me.

Sometimes it's enough to simply apply knowledge. Vedanta is often called objectivity *yoga*, and I love that definition. Shankara said that to neutralise desire you need to continually focus on the downside of that object of desire. By changing your mental view of the object, and removing the positive superimposition you've put on it, it becomes less favourable to the mind, so the mind stops automatically gravitating to it. That works too, another great tool for the *vasana*-busting arsenal.

Ultimately, again, *Isvara* decides what is good for us and given that, as *jiva*, our knowledge is finite but *Isvara's* is infinite, we have to yield to *Isvara*. *Isvara* knows best. *Isvara* knows where we need to be and how we should best get there.

Freedom is our nature and I believe everything here is set up, designed, in such a way that, like a moth drawn to the light, we're being led to the full realisation of that freedom. If something doesn't work out a certain way, you can trust that it wasn't meant to for some reason. Your commitment is to *moksa* and you can guarantee that *Isvara* has your back at all times.

Anne: Also, I had first ordered the last month of Ramji online course on the *Bhagavad Gita*, then I ordered and viewed the second month, and finally bought the first month, which starts with *karma yoga* and which I am currently studying; you address this in your mail!

Rory: Wonderful! Enjoy the seminars, I'm sure they'll be of immense benefit. Ramji's skilled teaching is an enormous gift to the world.

Anne: Anyway, there I am, now willing to take the longer way (*karma yoga*) and dealing with whatever arises in the moment with the right attitude. Thank you again, Rory, for your clarity and openness. I will take your words to heart! They have given me plenty to inspire me to work on and put into action.

Rory: You're doing so wonderfully, Anne. You have the knowledge, and you've also been blessed with the time, space and means to devote yourself to the teaching. You have your head screwed on, and the foundations are all in place. Just keep as you're doing, keep inquiring, keep the *karma yoga* spirit and observe the *vasanas* for what they are - just little blips appearing in the light of your consciousness, little pockets of past thinking. They'll come and they'll go, but you...

...you are eternal. ☺