

# Moving In and Out of *Samsara*

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**Michael:** My life seems to move in and out of *samsara* at the moment, which is kind of what precipitated my original email to you, that in my current environment there are times when I seem to get sucked back into it, and then luckily during the week – I work from home, alone – I am able to fall back, apply what I know and feel free, albeit with more questions that I am getting answered by learning and conversing.

**Rory:** It's good that you have space to yourself, even if it's work-time. I love being able to work at home. You can control your environment to a greater degree, avoid undue *rajas* and *tamas* and not have to deal with ego tantrums/power games/backstabbing and whatever other delights typically unfold in an office environment!

Until the knowledge is completely firm, it's natural to experience that push-pull effect. We call it the firefly effect. Sometimes the mind blinks "on" ("YES! I'm the self, I totally get it all now – I'm pure, limitless, actionless, unconcerned awareness!"); sometimes it blinks "off" ("Ugh, I'm just a lowly little person, who even cares what I think?").

That's just the nature of the mind – it's terribly hesitant to let go of its old patterning and programming. With time and consistent inquiry and application of the teaching, you'll find yourself (or rather, your mind) increasingly more "on." The whole key to Vedanta is really reorientating your sense of identity from the mind-body-ego to awareness. You have the tools you need, you have the teaching and the teacher, all it takes is steady application and persistence until the mind gets with it.

It seems you have the right attitude, so all I can say is keep going as you are.

**Michael:** Thinking back now maybe I have more understanding that I thought, but without Vedanta none of it ever seemed to be understood intellectually and converted to self-knowledge, was just experiential and came and went with certain amounts of frustration.

**Rory:** Yup, Vedanta joins the dots like nothing else. Many of the other teachings give you just enough to get you into the arena, but not much else. They get you all inspired and fired up, and you know you're on the right track, but then you come to the limitations of these teachings and realise there's often not much more to it than an experiential high. Frustration and disappointment are never far behind, because you realise that, once the high wears off, you're still the same old limited person you've always been.

The key is, as you say, the assimilation of self-knowledge by its steady application to the mind/intellect.

**Michael:** About being clear on values, this is the part that I think keeps affecting me most, as I sometimes just want my cake and eat it... 😊

**Rory:** Ha ha, who doesn't? The key is really just knowing your priorities. If you plant a seed and want it to germinate and grow, you need to keep the conditions right. In the case of *moksa*, so much of it is just keeping the mind *sattvic* and qualified. It's a challenge for us Westerners. This isn't instilled into us, quite the opposite. But the great thing is – although the cultivation of these qualifications may take some effort and a little sacrifice, the result is a happy, satisfied, contented, peaceful mind. So it's win-win really.

I once read an article about the psychology of why people don't achieve their goals. It's usually because they value their current behaviours more than they value the desired outcome. For instance, someone who wants to lose weight obviously values being thin – but they don't value it as much as they value eating chocolate cake! If the values aren't in place and in alignment with *dharma* and our ultimate goal, the results will never be conducive.

I found that such an illuminating revelation.

With *moksa*, I realised, why should I value this object, which may/not bring temporary happiness, more than I value *moksa*, which brings a lasting happiness independent of objects? It's a no-brainer really.

**Michael:** Yes, I feel that certain people in my life are needy and “need me” to be a certain way so that I live up to some kind of expectation they have of me, like an object to them.

**Rory:** That's most human relationships in a nutshell! With *jivas*, everything is transactional. You give me this, and I'll give you that. That's what happens when we think we need objects/other people to be a certain way for our happiness.

The only way out of it is full assimilation of the knowledge that I don't need things to be a certain way in order to be whole/happy/satisfied. This not only brings freedom to our *jiva*, but also enables us to give freedom to other *jivas* because we're no longer holding them hostage to our expectations, demands and likes and dislikes. It can be a hard habit to break, but the stronger self-knowledge becomes, the more dispassionate and discriminating the mind becomes.

**Michael:** Thank you, it's really helpful and good to know I am not crazy or a bad person and that someone understands how I feel and how to resolve this.

**Rory:** Nope, I totally understand you. These situations can be the most challenging. The folks that are able to go learn Vedanta at *ashrams* and *gurukulums* have it easy that way – no demanding mothers-in-law!

In general, for the cultivation of a *sattvic* mind, we can recommend avoiding *rajasic/tamasic* people where possible, but as a householder it's impossible to avoid your mother-in-law totally. All you can do is take it as *prasad*, and use it as grist for the mill of inquiry, *karma yoga* and also *bhakti*. One of the enjoined scriptural actions for *karma yoga/bhakti* is worship of our parents (which, alas, must include in-laws). If you can see her as *Isvara*, which she really is, and relate to her from that higher level of understanding, you should find even if the situation doesn't much

change, you find it much easier to deal with. This may take some time and experimentation, but see it as a challenge to fortify your dispassion and devotion.