

Vasana Bundle and the Subtle Body

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Don: Thank you for your timely response to the question of reincarnation. You say it is an easy response, and I would agree but only because I have had the blessing of the teaching and the teachers and some degree of qualification to “hear” both.

You may be amazed, but I have only one question about something you said. (“Really?” I hear you saying.) You say, “The subtle body (*vasana* bundle) is called the ‘traveller’ because it is that which may or may not reincarnate.”

What do you mean by the subtle body being the *vasana* bundle?

Sundari: The “personal” subtle body is the “carrier” of the *vasanas* that make up the personal *jiva*, its inborn nature and tendencies. It gets subsumed into the impersonal subtle body (eternal *Jiva*) when the body dies (and in deep sleep). As the Self is never really under the spell of ignorance, nor is the eternal *Jiva*, who is also the Self.

Don: I thought the causal body was the *vasana* abode (I don’t know if bundle and abode are equitable?), and the subtle body was the doer/enjoyer, the intellect, the mirror of the *gunas* that reflect the Self.

Sundari: No, bundle and abode are not equitable. You could call the causal body the “abode” (I prefer repository) of the *vasanas* in that all *vasanas* are universal, not personal and originate from the causal body. But “bundle” refers to the particular *vasanas* ascribed to a personal *jiva*, otherwise called *avidya*, personal ignorance.

Don: I understood your clear response to my email regarding the topic of reincarnation, but I was seeking your comments on the explanation I provided in the email. After reading your response I feel we were implying the same understanding. Is that a correct understanding?

Sundari: Yes. There are always only two options to understand anything: the perspective of the Self and of the *jiva*. Both are necessary for *moksa*. If Self-knowledge is firm, the default or reflexive response to anything is always as the Self first, second as the *jiva*.

Don: I ask because I acknowledge that the thoughts that come through are being filtered through the subtle body, in particular the ego. I attempt to filter them through my understanding of Vedanta as shared by James, you and others, and I want to make sure that they are in keeping with the teaching. Maybe it is a case that I am not willing to stand firm in the Self because there is fear the ego might be usurping the understanding, recognizing the ego is so devious.

Sundari: Indeed. Before Self-actualization, when taking a stand as awareness, what makes things tricky because ignorance is so subtle is the split mind watching itself. It has a slippery tendency to claim to be awareness. But is it “unfiltered” awareness (meaning not subject to conditioning) or is it a delusion tainted with ego, the *jiva* program? How to know, and how to deal with that? Taking a stand is done with the mind and can lead to a kind of self-hypnosis that makes the *jiva* think it is the Self without the full understanding of what it means to be the Self. Of course, based on logic alone (is there an essential difference between one ray of the sun and the sun itself?), the *jiva* can claim its identity as the Self – but only when its knowledge of *satya* and *mithya* is firm.

The practice “I am awareness” does not give you the experience of awareness nor make you awareness. It negates the idea “I am the *jiva*.” When the *jiva* is negated, the inquirer should be mindful of the awareness that remains because negating the *jiva* only produces a void. Nature abhors a vacuum. Many inquirers get stuck here and depression can set in if they cannot take the next step, which is understanding that the emptiness of the void is an object known by the fullness of the Self, the ever-present witness. Or, at that time, many inquirers “start” to experience as awareness and make a big fuss about it even though you have only ever been experiencing as awareness all along! So the discrimination between *jiva*’s experience of awareness and the Self’s experience of awareness is essential.

The reason people get stuck in the claim of enlightenment is that it generates sublime emotions, i.e. *bhakti*, which makes you attractive to others and to yourself. It is true that if you think you are enlightened you more or less feel pretty good about your *jiva*-self all the time, which is definitely preferable to the time when your happiness depended on intermittent situations of validation. *Jiva* self-esteem is enormously enhanced by the “I am awareness” practice, which is a good thing.

But the downside can be that your ego gets so big you imagine that you are superior to everyone. Sadly, for little *jivaji*, “I am enlightened” doesn’t mean “only I am enlightened” or “I am more enlightened than others.” In fact claiming it usually means that assimilation of the teachings has not taken place.

The inescapable fact is that while it is fairly easy to say “I am the Self” as the *jiva*, and quite another to say it as the Self. The Self’s experience of itself is qualitatively different from the *jiva*’s experience of the Self as an object or as objects. This realization may well be a painful moment for inquirers who are very convinced that they are enlightened without knowing that they are only enlightened as a *jiva*, not as the Self.

Even though being the Self sounds easy and is pretty obvious if you are even slightly qualified, Self-actualization is far from easy, because of how subtle ignorance is. Even when Self-knowledge is hard and fast, the last vestiges of the *jiva* hang in there tenaciously. Hence *nididhyasana* is the longest and toughest stage of Self-inquiry.

~ Much love, Sundari