

Vasana-Busting Is Housekeeping for the Jiva

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Steve: Even though I know I am the Self, I/my *jiva* still has some binding *vasanas* to work through. It's interesting because when I was at risk of being made redundant a couple of years ago from my job, I applied *karma yoga* to the situation and had great results in maintaining peace of mind with regards to the outcome, knowing that *Isvara* will provide the correct result and I would accept it as *prasad*.

Rory: Awesome! As they say, the proof is always in the pudding, and it's wonderful when you see first-hand the effect knowledge has on the mind when dealing with challenging life situations. Swami Paramarthananda calls it our "shock absorber," and it really does make life in the *mithya* world so much easier.

Steve: I am a healthy guy, manage my weight, eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly – since my daughter was born – though I have a binding health-anxiety *vasana* such that, if I get mildly ill or find a lump/bump, I catastrophise and have these crippling thoughts that I have a serious illness and am going to die.

Rory: This is not an uncommon anxiety at all. I think it's actually one of the core human anxieties. It's not surprising either, given that we all inhabit bodies that are subject to disease and infirmity and which are all, alas, to quote a Lana Del Rey song, "born to die."

So it's kind of a rational fear in that respect. The body is subject to change and deterioration. That's just a fact and there's no changing it.

Our suffering is rarely down to the fact itself, however, but our resistance to that fact.

It can be helpful to dissect such fears a little and get to the root of what's driving them. It could be a lingering identification with the body, in which case the solution is just continued and steady contemplation on the knowledge "I am awareness and free of the body."

Or it may be that your fear isn't so much related to the body itself, but to fear of the idea of death, the unknown or lack of control.

From what you said, it sounds like what is really tripping the mind are the "what if?" scenarios – the fear of what might be. This can be helped by some rational analysis. When a health issue is diagnosed, there's usually a set protocol to follow, a specific course of treatment or whatever. And you just follow that. *Isvara*, the eternal pervert, causes the problem, but in His/Her benevolence also lays out the solution.

Lack of control can also be a big issue for the mind. Which, in all fairness, was only ever an illusion anyway.

For some people, the ego really can't stand giving up the notion that it's in control. It kicks and screams and creates all kinds of disturbance.

Upasana meditation, deep reflection on the nature of *Ishvara*, can help allay this, i.e. seeing the entire universe, including our bodies, as the body of *Ishvara*, and the subtle body and all its thoughts and *vasanas* as part of the mind of *Ishvara*.

There comes a certain point where *karma yoga* is no longer *karma yoga* as such, but just pure knowledge in action. You realise that *Ishvara* is actually doing everything – and IS everything – at this level, and that your only obligation is just to follow *dharma*, hand it all up to *Ishvara*, and endeavour to just relax, take it easy and enjoy the show that is life.

Sometimes the real block is just the mind's resistance to taking it easy and its attempts to co-opt *Ishvara*, believing that it can somehow run the universe better than *Ishvara* does. If ever I catch my mind trying to do this, I basically laugh it out of the building – and it kind of shuts up, feeling suitably ashamed that it got ideas above its station. 😊

Steve: I have a strong desire to be free from this health fear, but maybe that's the problem, the desire to be free? The ego does not like the teaching to accept the thoughts and fact that our health and longevity is always uncertain, thus when I try to apply *karma yoga* to the situation, it resists and fights! It wants certainty and relief and it wants it now!

Rory: The ego gets immensely threatened by this because it has always taken itself to be the controller.

Part of the mind's job is to keep the body-mind-sense complex safe, and it does this by asserting itself as controller, attempting to manipulate the environment into conformity with its likes and dislikes.

What an exhausting and futile job it has!

Ramana Maharshi once gave the example of the stone figures you sometimes see lining the bases of old buildings. These figures are carved to look like they are holding up the entire structure, and their faces are etched with immense strain and exertion. But these sculptures are actually entirely decorative and aren't, in fact, doing anything to hold the building up. They just look like they are. That pretty much sums up the ego. It huffs and puffs and strives, strains and struggles, but all the doing is actually being done by *Ishvara*.

You may have hit the nail on the head when you say that the real problem may be your intense desire to be free of this fear.

The focus of *nididhyasana* is the complete integration and assimilation of self-knowledge. This basically means learning to own our nature as awareness and applying this knowledge to the mind, while gradually converting binding *vasanas* into the non-binding variety.

This is important work, as it enables the full digestion of the knowledge. Without proper digestion, we don't get the benefits of our meal, and may in fact just be left with a tummy ache.

It's an ongoing process too, and by no means a quick fix. Patience and perseverance are the key when dealing with whatever ignorance the mind keeps spewing up – as

well as compassion and kindness toward one's mind. Sometimes we forget that.

Something I've discovered in my own process of inquiry is that this "polishing" of the mind and neutralising of *vasanas* is not necessary for *moksa*. *Moksa* is unqualified. *Moksa* is the realisation that you don't need *moksa*, because you, the self, are already free!

Nididhyasanam and the commitment to neutralising binding *vasanas* is simply a kindness for the *jiva* so that the *jiva* can enjoy the fruits of self-knowledge. If freedom was dependent on anything in *mithya*, then it wouldn't be freedom. *Moksa* is knowing that you are free irrespective of what's happening in *mithya*-land. The mind can be a turbulent battleground or a tranquil lake, and it doesn't affect you one bit. It affects the *jiva* of course, but you are not the *jiva*.

Working on the *vasanas* is a kind of housekeeping. No one wants to live in a dirty house, so we get out the brush and sweep the floor and clean the windows. It's nothing more than that. It's still important work though, because why go to the effort of attaining self-knowledge if not to enjoy it? And enjoying it means helping the *jiva* out, even though you, awareness, are free regardless.

Because there's a bit of resistance or push-back happening, it might be an idea to try approaching your *nididhyasanam* with a lighter touch.

Ease off your grip. It's rather like playing an instrument. You don't hold it too tightly, nor do you let it slip out of your hands.

Sometimes when we try too hard to eradicate unpleasing *vasanas* or patterns in the subtle body, we just end up reinforcing the ego's false notion of doership.

The fastest way to burn off *vasanas* is to keep your mind on who you are, while accepting every part of reality as it is – knowing that everything is *Isvara*. Why not just view the mind's disturbances as *Isvara's* stuff – as weather fronts passing through – impersonal mechanisms controlled by *Isvara* for reasons that only *Isvara* knows – accepting what comes up and applying the knowledge as needed?

You may find that is enough.

Steve: For such strong binding *vasanas*, is it a case that I have to be patient and just keep applying the teaching? Or am I missing something/not doing something? For such strong binding *vasanas*, is it a case that I have to be patient and just keep applying the teaching? Or am I missing something/not doing something?

Rory: The big *vasanas* take time. Like I said, try consistently applying the knowledge but with a lighter touch, letting go of the results and knowing that *vasana* or no *vasana*, you, as the self, are free as you are.

You may have heard the Vedantic analogy likening some *vasanas* to smoke, which clears quickly. Others are like polishing a mirror, which takes a little more effort. And some are akin to carrying a foetus in the womb – they're simply gonna be there until such time as they are not.

Which form these *vasanas* take is basically determined by the *jiva's prarabdha karma* – which, like everything, is down to *Isvara* again.

Isvara works to His/Her own speed – which is usually a lot slower than the *jiva* would like. Slowing down to the speed of *Isvara*, however, takes the pressure off like nothing else.

For a number of years, a *mantra* I would repeat to myself in challenging times was: “It is as it is (until it isn’t).”