

Cannot Hang On to the *Jiva*

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Karen: *Pranams*, Sundari,

I hope you and James are well. I know I keep saying this, but I can't emphasize enough how grateful I am to you guys for making the teachings available in the way that you have.

Sundari: You are welcome, Karen, appreciation always appreciated! We have both been very busy lately so unable to reply sooner.

Karen: What are *pratibandikas* and *samskaras* and how does one remove them? Is it by continuously taking a stand in awareness or is there something more to the "process"? Are you suggesting that the apparent separate self (*jiva*) needs to be completely uprooted in order to render it non-binding?

Sundari: Resistant *pratibandikas/samskaras* are the deeply rooted *jiva*-programs that cause suffering. And, yes, the *jiva*-program does need to be completely uprooted to render it non-binding. But that does not mean it must be changed or perfected, just understood and negated as not real in the light of Self-knowledge.

In the final stage of Self-inquiry, *nididhyasana*, if any purification still needs to take place because the doer has "survived" Self-realization (which it almost always does), then you need to "requalify." What this means is that there is still some residual duality even though Self-realization has taken place, which means there is remaining dissatisfaction because the mind is still acting according to its *guna*-generated program. Dissatisfaction motivates most actions.

As I said to you before, discrimination, not behaviour, is the mark of a free person. If you are truly free, complete non-attachment means that the conviction of the futility of chasing objects for happiness is firm and unshakeable. If non-attachment and withdrawal of the senses are imperfect even if Self-knowledge is firm, suffering will not end, because of fructifying *karma*.

Bear in mind that even so, if suffering is still occurring, that does not mean that you cannot be inwardly free, which is why some people do not care about rendering the remnants of the *jiva*-program non-binding. If it is not real, why bother? That is all well and good, but do you really want to live with tendencies that still cause dissatisfaction, even though you know you are the ever-free Self?

Karen: Also, does taking a stand in awareness only involve applying the opposite thought when the *jiva*-program rears its head or does it also mean resting and abiding in awareness as awareness (*atma vicara*)?

Sundari: They always go together, along with *karma yoga*, which is like therapy

because it removes the existential burden of doership, which is such a relief for the *jiva* – or it certainly should be! In addition, of course, is mind/*guna* management, *triguna vibhava yoga*, and also *bhakti yoga*. A devotional practice is essential.

Karen: While I understand that awareness cannot be objectified and paid attention to, since it is the ultimate subject, nonetheless I have found that without pointers such as “resting in the I am” or “relaxing one’s attention” or simply just reminding oneself of one’s nature as awareness that the intellectual “work” of applying the opposite thought lacks a necessary “experiential reference point.” Don’t get me wrong, I know that we’re always only just experiencing awareness, but I think literally keeping the mind on the Self is necessary in order not to intellectualize the process. What do you think?

Sundari: Definitely. We say this all the time. But you can, and need to, direct and always keep your attention on the Self. I am sure I said this to you before: taking a stand in awareness as awareness sometimes turns out to be more than a little tricky because it is so subtle. The split mind watching itself has a slippery tendency to claim to be awareness. But is it “unfiltered” awareness or is it a delusion? 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 or make you awareness. It negates the idea “I am the *jiva*.” When the *jiva* identity 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 Self’s experience of itself is qualitatively different from the *jiva*’s experience of the Self as an object or as objects. As I said to you before, it is one thing to say, “I am the Self as the Self” and another to say it as the *jiva*. 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*, or as an ego, not as the Self.

Karen: When you say, “the mind is no longer conditioned by the *gunas*,” are you suggesting that one’s mind must be *sattvic* and pure permanently for one to be totally free? Isn’t it in the nature of the mind to be constantly shapeshifting from one *guna* to the other? How does one develop a mind that is no longer conditioned by the *gunas*?

Sundari: The *gunas* never stop outpicturing, because they run everything in the

mithya world. But when Self-knowledge is firm you are never fooled by the *gunas* anymore or what is happening in the mind as a result of them, because you know none of it is real. You are on to the game of life! Any *guna* is fine, though you will still manage the *gunas* with knowledge. The scriptures say that a free person has no preference for any *guna* and accommodates to all situations. Obviously, we all want to aim for *sattva*, peace of mind, but sometimes to get there we need to get through *rajas* and or *tamas*. There is nothing inherently right or wrong about any *guna*. They all have their upsides and downsides, and we need all of them to function in the world.

Karen: I understand that *moksa* is not about perfecting the *jiva*. However, in what way would Self-knowledge confer upon one the ability to choose to act as a person or not? Wouldn't the *jiva* continue to operate as before, governed by *Isvara*, the only difference being that you know it's not real?

Sundari: Yes, the *jiva* is loved and accepted as is, but its conditioning is no longer binding and the sense of doership is negated, so there is freedom from the *jiva* and for it. Though the aim of Self-knowledge is not to change or perfect the *jiva*, it works indirectly to change its orientation in how it relates to objects. As it no longer chases objects for happiness, it will automatically make very different choices to when it previously believed it had to do something to gain wholeness or happiness. It does everything because it is already happy, not *for* happiness. Whatever action it does take is in the spirit of *karma yoga*, in gratitude and devotion to *Isvara*.

A term I love that captures this *karma yoga* attitude perfectly is "*amor fati*," which [in Latin] literally means to be "in love with your fate," i.e. *Isvara*.

Karen: Lastly, I know language is dualistic and that we are compelled to talk in a roundabout way about everyday, ordinary, non-dual awareness, but it seems more and more that the obtaining of *moksa* is more a process than a seeing or an understanding, and that's fine. If indeed there does occur a "final shift" in identity from apparent person to the Self which James has spoken about, does it necessarily involve obtaining a pure mind and the death of the apparent person?

Sundari: Yes, it does. *Moksa* will not obtain, certainly not permanently, in an impure mind still identified with the apparent person. There is no fine print to this. There are no levels of freedom; you are either free of the person or you are not. Taking a stand in awareness as awareness means taking a stand in our fullness, not in smallness. 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! *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 with Self-knowledge.

Karen: I have thought about your point regarding *Maya* and the *jiva* existing but not being real and I can appreciate that although seeing the illusion as an illusion changes my relationship to it, it doesn't change the fact that the illusion continues to function. I understand what you mean by the statement about how personal ignorance ends but *Maya*, or beginningless ignorance, continues.

Sundari: Good. Understanding *Isvara/Maya* is the key to *moksa*.

~ Much love, Sundari