

# Self-Knowledge Is Not a Prescription for a Suffering Ego

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**Sundari:** Hello, Frank. It is good to hear from you and we are sad to hear that you are going through such a difficult time. I have replied below in point form.

~ With much love, Sundari

**Frank:** Dear Ram/Sundari, I recently read James' *satsang Stand Up and Fight* that was sent with your recent newsletter, a very good *satsang* with much wisdom. I guess the first thing I want to ask: is it okay to experience the feelings of suffering that arise, even though according to the Vedanta teachings I know I am not those feelings? Is it not better to experience them rather than repress them?

**Sundari:** Krishna says, "Grieve neither for the living or the dead," which more or less covers everything! This is very hard for the *jiva* to hear but it is nonetheless true because none of it belongs to you, awareness. However, the *jiva* lives in the apparent reality. As you know, the apparent reality consists of the *gunas*, which are functioning 24/7, with predictable thoughts and feelings attending them. As a *jiva* you are subject to the causal body; there is no escape from *Isvara* (ignorance, or *maya*). Only through self-knowledge is ignorance of your true nature removed, but *Isvara* and the *gunas* remain. All thoughts and feelings come from the *gunas*, not from the *jiva*. The *jiva* has no choice but to feel and think; it has a choice how it relates to thoughts and feelings arise in the mind.

Freedom from Frank (the *jiva*) and from suffering comes with self-knowledge and the dis-identification with thoughts and feelings. As long as you are identified with them, there is no relief from suffering. As awareness you know that grief (*rajas*) is there but it is not you.

Frank experiences it as the feeling of loss that comes from the perceived absence of an object; the depression and sadness that come with it are *tamas*. These two troublemakers always come together. There is no point fighting them or denying the feelings. As you well know, trying to suppress them is asking for more pain, as it ensures that they will stick around for longer and become more intense. Wanting things to be different is a great source of suffering in itself. Asking if it is appropriate to have these feelings after the loss you have just experienced is like asking if it is okay to breathe. Breathing happens, as does thinking and feeling. It is not up to Frank. Death of the body is simply the last thought and the last breath.

**Frank:** I understand the non-identification part; I know and believe in my heart that I am limitless awareness, but at this time for me it is only a belief.

**Sundari:** Who is it that knows that your understanding is only a belief? If you know that Frank thinks it is a belief, are you Frank? Who are you? – you can't be Frank, can you?

**Frank:** Sometimes this belief is overshadowed by sadness, fear, anger or whatever is arising. It's difficult when in the grip of emotions to stand as awareness, when feeling so contracted and small. The emotions seem to take center stage in contrast to my mostly intellectual understanding of the Vedanta teachings.

**Sundari:** When Frank believes he is Frank he apparently forgets his true nature and identifies with the *gunas*, *rajas* and *tamas*. He then becomes his feelings, and they become his mode of thinking. His intellect is in the service of the mind and ego, a highly unstable place for it to be, at which point there is no way to avoid feeling small and overcome by these feelings; the separation and diminishment is total duality, total ignorance. This smallness and ignorance belong to *Isvara*, not to Frank or to awareness.

What does "intellectual" really mean? Basically it means something you know but have not experienced. This is the *jiva* speaking, who is the self under the spell of ignorance, the one who believes it has not yet experienced its true nature as awareness. How is this possible? *Maya* makes the impossible possible, because in order to know this, consciousness (you) would have to be present, wouldn't it? Consciousness has to be there to have any thought or feeling or you would be six foot under. Consciousness is prior to Frank: no consciousness, no Frank. Yet consciousness is not a thought or feeling and it cannot be experienced by Frank. Frank is an object known to you; he is inert like all objects and will never be enlightened. The light of awareness (you) shining on the subtle body give Frank the appearance of being real. Frank is just a name that refers to awareness under the spell of ignorance.

Awareness is not an object of perception and subtler than the effect; the effect cannot know the cause. This is why awareness evolved self-knowledge, which has the power to remove ignorance so that Frank can experience the reflection of awareness in a pure mind. Awareness, through the power of ignorance, seems to cause thoughts and feelings which arise from the causal body and create experience. Your apparent lack of experience of awareness is what is just a belief. The truth is you can never not be experiencing awareness. The ego still thinks it is going to "get it." It is never going to get it, Frank. Self-knowledge will simply remove ignorance and your true nature will reveal itself. It has been there all along, illuminating your every thought and feeling. What you are experiencing is the self under the spell of ignorance (Frank) interpreting what is happening in "his" world according to "his" *vasanas*. But it is not "Frank's" world, or his *vasanas*. *Maya* operating ignorance is playing out the *gunas* according to the needs of the total, and Frank gets the *karma* he gets. It is impersonal.

As an ego, Frank cannot not modify to the *gunas*. Only with self-knowledge and the understanding of what the field of awareness is (i.e. the macrocosmic mind) can Frank manage the *gunas* in such a way that the conditioning effect they have on the subtle body does not affect him. Awareness is the one that never modifies to anything, the one who knows the modification and the modifier, i.e. the ego. The *Gita* again: "...water does not wet it, fire does not burn it, air does not dry it..."

**Frank:** I'm trying to make this my *sadhana* as you suggested in the *satsang*, to remember my true nature when identifying with the small ego-self. It is easy for me to find time for meditation but it is more difficult to be vigilant and catch myself

identifying with small-self. And I know that all experiences are impermanent, even ones of peace and expansiveness, but at least if I had these to remember during difficult times it might be easier to not identify with ego. But as I said, my understanding is on the intellectual level, and emotions are experienced on a visceral level, which makes non-identification more difficult.

**Sundari:** As you say, all experiences are impermanent, which includes this experience of grief. This is the self under the spell of ignorance speaking here again. It is the ego/doer “trying” to experience the self and to remember your true nature, trying not to identify with the objects. It is the doer meditating and the doer trying to “be vigilant and catch myself identifying with small-self.”

What about *karma yoga* and *triguna vibhava yoga*, Frank? *Karma yoga* does not say you should or should not think, feel or act. It says that you are not the doer and as such you consecrate your every thought, feeling, word or action to *Isvara*, or the total. *Isvara* is you, awareness. *Karma yoga* is the greatest of all meditations; it is devotion to you, the self. It is pure knowledge. Offer the grief to *Isvara* as an act of devotion. Direct or indirect knowledge of the self is not a prescription for a suffering ego. It is not a magic pill that will make Frank feel instantly better. Remember that although grief seems like it is such a negative feeling, it is another form of love, and you can't stop it from playing out. Even though it is not real, it is natural for the ego to grieve when it experiences loss. This is conditioned superimposition, the mirage on the desert floor. When you know it is a mirage it still remains as an object of perception, even though you know it is not really there and therefore not real. Once again: as the *jiva*, you have the power to determine how you relate to what's happening; you do not have power over what is happening. *Karma yoga* is the *jiva* understanding reality from the point of view of awareness. As awareness nothing ever happens. To repeat: you are the knower of the grief as well the knower of the one who thinks it only has intellectual knowledge of your true nature, awareness.

The practice of *triguna vibhava yoga* (managing the *gunas*) is the understanding that the field is impersonal. It is made up of natural laws that function the way they function and as Frank you have no control over them. It is *Isvara srsti*, the *dharma* field, macrocosmic mind, or field of awareness. None of it is happening to you, it is happening in you as awareness, and you are always free of whatever happens.

Apart from dis-identification with the *gunas*, it usually involves lifestyle changes to manage them if you want peace of mind (*sattva*) for the *jiva*. This means *karma yoga*, taking appropriate action on all levels, surrendering the results and following *dharma*. You cannot speed up the process of grieving, not even when you are not identified with the feelings. It is quite natural and normal to have them; being self-aware does not mean that as a *jiva* you are made of stone. You can help the ego along by allowing it to grieve while making the changes that are necessary, saying goodbye to the past and gently help Frank to let go and move on.

**Frank:** Any advice or words of encouragement would be appreciated.

~ Love and blessings, Frank

**Sundari:** We send you much love, Frank; our hearts go out to you and we hope peace of mind will reassert itself soon.

~ Sundari