

# Breaking Family *Samskaras*

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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**Francesca:** Dear Sundari and James, I read about James and his health; we are very happy that he's in good health.

I have a question. I am standing up to a very, very deep *vasana* which has been playing the boss all my life.

I will give you some background info to give you an idea where the *vasana* is rooted: I was raised by a single mother who had a deeply traumatic background so she wasn't really up to raising two kids by herself. She could stroke your hair lovingly and in a split second turn into a rage and beat the crap out of you.

On the run from my father and without any dispassion on life at all, from a very young age I took responsibility for most everything around and in the family. My older brother was always a troublemaker and was later diagnosed with schizophrenia; he got locked up in jail from the age of 18 till today. This meant I continued to answer to my mother's call of being the helper, mediator, the one who tries to fix everything.

My mother visited me last weekend on my birthday. She made some trouble. Back in the day I would take the bait and let a fight erupt. These days I can keep dispassion way more easily, so Giacomo and I could see when she was projecting during her visit and we switched topics when she wanted to start trouble.

When she got back home she gave me a call and started what she didn't finish when she was here. She basically offends me in those calls which always served as a power tactic. For the first time in my life I didn't respond and call her back to let her have her say and let peace be re-established by being "the adult." From the age of 5 or 6 I have always been available for her, literally.

By breaking this *samskara* I experience especially a lot of guilt, besides other emotions. My question is: my mind seemed to be very, very *tamasic* last week, although I do the same routine (food and exercise-wise); can this be related to my (unconscious) fight with this *samskara*?

I never wrote this information down (about my youth) before; reading back this email, it might have a bit of a dramatic tone, but for me it isn't dramatic; I feel blessed with a clear mind with which I can take an objective look at my *vasanas*. I sometimes feel sad for my mother that she can't.

~ Much love to you and James, Francesca

**Sundari:** Hello, Francesca. Thank you for your very touching email and for sharing your story with us. We feel for you, as breaking the hold that deep *samskaras* have over the mind which come from our family are the toughest ones to break. Well done for using self-knowledge to do this - this is what is meant by rendering the *vasanas* non-binding. *Samskaras* are particularly difficult because they consist of a conglomeration of very binding *vasanas*. The ability to dis-identify with the story of

our lives and to see it as a product of the *gunas*, and therefore not personal, is the essence of liberation.

Your mother, like most *samsaris*, is totally identified with her story and has not been able to see it in any other way; as you say, she is controlled by it. Because of ignorance of her true nature, she forced you and your brother into an *adharmic* relationship with her, which was one based on fear and guilt. She was supposed to be the adult and take care of you and your brother but because of her identification with her conditioning she was unable to do that. I am sure she has suffered a great deal as a result and, of course, she would project her suffering onto others, mostly you because she feels so guilty about being a bad mother.

You, on the other hand, have used this suffering to seek freedom through knowledge and you found it in the teachings of Vedanta which is why you are able to be dispassionate about your mother. By breaking the *adharmic* relationship with her through acknowledging and dissolving the *samskara* that bound you to her, you have set yourself free of her and her conditioning. Clearly, she is not going to like this loss of power over you. Your feeling guilty about this is natural because whenever we break *dharma* even though in your case you broke an *adharmic* relationship, there is an initial feeling of guilt because we go against the way things are supposed to be: the *dharma* of a mother is to nurture and support her children, not the other way around.

Don't worry about this guilt, it will soon pass; what you did was *dharmic* for you. You ended the abuse, which is what you were supposed to do in order to follow your own *dharma*. Continue to love her and see her as the self under the spell of ignorance but do not let her drag you down again, which she will try to do. Stand your ground; be loving but firm. Let her know that you have boundaries and if she wants to be part of your life, she will have to respect them. If necessary, put distance between you and her.

It is also natural for the mind to feel *tamasic* as the feelings associated with this are exhausting, which is *tamas*. Guilt is also *tamas* but as Ramji said to tell you, this is good guilt because you need to free yourself of her.

Remember that from awareness's point of view she is not really your mother and you are not really her daughter. You had a movie to play out, and you are blessed with self-knowledge, so you can see that it is a movie, which she cannot.

Don't stress yourself about things being different - remember that *karma yoga* is the only appropriate response in all situations. You cannot change your mother, and wanting things to be different from the way they are will simply cause more suffering. It is what it is - and because your true nature is awareness and not Francesca, the story belongs to Francesca, not to you.

We wish you well and hope life continues to unfold in the light of self-knowledge.

~ Much love to you from both of us, Sundari