

The Doubting Function of the Mind

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2014-02-05

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/806>

Simon: Sundari, I have attempted to get clarity through reading the texts that you sent me. I still have some confusion and would be very grateful if you have a few minutes to reply directly to this.

Sundari: Good to hear from you again. Your confusion is what we call the *sattya/mithya* confusion, or the lack of discrimination between what is real and what is apparently real. *Moksa* is very simply this: the ability to discriminate you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you. Awareness is that which is real, meaning always present and never changing; everything else is not real, meaning not always present and always changing. *Moksa* therefore requires the negation of the sense of doership and rendering the binding *vasanas* non-binding.

I have replied in more detail below.

Simon: When there is the identification clearly as awareness everything is, of course, fine. This seems to be more and more established in recent times. There is an ever-growing desire for freedom and a strengthening of a commitment in myself to go for freedom.

Sundari: This is good as one needs a burning desire for *moksa* in order to free oneself from bondage to objects. Of course, one does not really free oneself as there is no real doer; it is self-knowledge that removes the ignorance and nothing the ego does. That said, Vedanta is both the path of knowledge and the path of action. This is because it provides both the tools and a valid means of knowledge which if applied with great dedication will remove ignorance. Knowledge needs a means – it will not just appear in the mind out of thin air. Vedanta is such a means. Although there is an implied duality in this statement, Vedanta is a set-up: it uses a dualistic method of teaching to destroy the notion of duality. There is no other way to wield the knowledge because one is dealing with *maya*, which makes everything appear other than it really is. This is why the qualifications for *moksa* are of utmost importance.

It is fairly simple to understand awareness – after all, it is irrefutable that in order to know or experience anything you must be aware. It is fairly simple to understand the role of the apparent individual, or *jiva*, in the world.

Where the work comes in – the difficult part (and where teaching is essential) is understanding the identity between awareness, *Isvara* and the *jiva*. Anyone can say that they are awareness – but what does this mean unless it translates into the life of the *jiva*? Understanding what it means to be awareness is what self-actualisation is all about.

Simon: So when I start to get pulled back into ego-identification there is a warrior part that wants to intervene and wield a sword, to cut through this identification and bondage. This seems to mostly work. Without calling on this part, I otherwise find

myself sucked back into the same old fears, control mechanisms, etc. Just remaining passive doesn't always seem enough.

Sundari: The “warrior part” is a good metaphor and forms the basis of the *Bhagavad Gita* – the war on ignorance. Your conditioning is hardwired, and without dedicated exposure to self-knowledge it will keep sucking you back into identification with it. It takes great commitment to one's *sadhana* to render ignorance non-binding and to remove the notion of doership, which is where your confusion is. Who is this warrior?

Simon: So here's the confusion: if I as awareness am ordinary, actionless and ever-present, who is it that is wielding this sword and putting up this fight?

Sundari: Indeed, that is the million-dollar question, is it not? There are three *jivas*. There is the *jiva* who thinks it is a person. This *jiva* is often called the doer. There is the *jiva* who knows about awareness. This *jiva* is often called a self-realized *jiva*. And finally, there is the *jiva* that knows it IS awareness. This is the *jivanmukta*, the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, or the self-actualised *jiva*. The *jivanmukta* fully embraces the *jiva* and *Isvara* through understanding that its true nature and the identity common to both of them is awareness.

The *jivanmukta* is not only free of the doer, or ego, it lives free as the doer because it knows its true identity to be awareness and not the doer. The *jivanmukta* also knows that although it shares the same identity as *Isvara*, as a *jiva* it is still subject to the laws that run the *dharma* field and acts in accordance with them – because it wants peace of mind above all else. Vedanta offers a teaching for each step of the seeker's journey that is not really a journey; it is the self re-discovering itself, breaking the spell of ignorance.

Simon: Surely, this can only be a part of the same ego that I am dis-identifying from (or more accurately put it, dis-identifying from itself).

Sundari: The ego, like the mind, is inert so it cannot dis-identify with itself. The ego is just a thought in the mind and the mind only seems to be conscious because the light of awareness shines on it. When *maya* is operating awareness manifests as a subtle body, and apparently falling under the spell of ignorance it identifies with the subtle body; this creates the ego, the idea or thought of separation, duality, *samsara*. Awareness under the spell of ignorance then believes that awareness, itself, is an object to be gained. The ego is an object known to you, awareness – and although it seems to have a life of its own, upon investigation when the mind is subjected to self-knowledge and discrimination develops, it becomes clear that the ego is not real.

You are imposing *sattya* onto *mithya*, the real onto the apparently real, a very common trap for seekers. The ego will never be enlightened; when ignorance is removed from the mind by self-knowledge (and ignorance can ONLY be removed by self-knowledge) what is revealed is pure awareness (*sattya*), which has always been there or the mind/ego (*mithya*) would not exist. The ego, like all objects, has a dependent existence on awareness but awareness is always free of the ego. It is

only with the negation of the doer – the ego – that liberation can take place.

This is why *karma yoga* is important. If you take yourself to be a doer then *karma yoga* is absolutely essential as your spiritual practice. Vedanta states quite clearly that though there is nothing that one can do to free yourself, or to gain enlightenment – firstly because you are not the doer and secondly because you are already free – it nonetheless offers teachings at every level of understanding. In order to free yourself from the notion of doership, you need to practice *karma yoga*. You cannot drop being a doer because the one who is doing the dropping has to be dropped. You cannot give up doership because the one who decides to give up the doership is the doer of the renunciation. There is only one self and it is free from action. Either you know this or you don't. This is called *vidvat sannyasa*. If you think you are a renunciant you are not a renunciant because you still have doership. The self is the only renunciant.

A *karma yogi* becomes a *sannyasi* by self-knowledge. And that is the way it is. That is the whole point of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Once self-knowledge is firm it will become clear to you that although you seem to be acting, action is only an appearance and it is actually all the constituents that make up the *dharma* field (*Isvara*), forces beyond the *jiva*'s control, that are behind all action.

Karma yoga means fully dedicating your every thought, word and action – before they are performed, on a moment-to-moment basis – to the whole, or to *Isvara*, with an attitude of gratitude, knowing that the results are not up to you. Even though as a *jiva* one cannot not take action (even no action is an action), *karma yoga* is an attitude towards action. *Karma yoga* is performing one's duty, cultivating the right attitude toward life, thus one is conforming to the pattern and harmony of creation and one becomes alive to the beauty of the cosmic order. When *sattya* (which is the true nature of the mind) appears in the mind it becomes clear and one is able to see the natural order of creation. In the beginning of one's spiritual practice duty is an attitude but eventually it becomes natural.

The right attitude is not a path. It is a commitment. *Karma yoga* is not a path. It is a life committed to performing action as *yoga*, and it takes skill to perform action with the right attitude, which is doing what is to be done whether you like it or not. Thus likes and dislikes – how I feel about the situation – do not come into play. Your likes and dislikes often prompt you to perform an action which is not conducive to peace of mind so a *karma yogi* refrains from performing it because it is not proper for them. So performing actions in harmony with the natural order (*dharmic* actions) and avoiding actions that disturb the order (*adharmic* actions) is *karma yoga*.

Karma yoga is keeping one's attention on the motivation behind one's actions and adjusting one's attitude when it is found to be *vasana*-producing. When *rajas* is strong the mind cannot observe itself. It is caught up in the future, the thought that things need to be different, so the mind acts to correct the situation, usually in negative ways; it does not act to correct itself. When *tamas* predominates, the mind is too dull to discriminate; it is prone to denial and avoidance. *Rajas* and *tamas* always work together. Where you find projection (*rajas*) you will find denial (*tamas*).

Sameness of mind towards success and failure with respect to action is another definition of *yoga*. When a result is looked upon as a success attachment arises, and when it is looked upon as failure aversion arises. In fact, there is no such thing as success and failure. Every result is in accordance with the laws of action. Laws are not made by anybody; they are made by the *dharma* field, or *Isvara*, so they can

never go wrong. Every result is a right result. The more you appreciate the laws the more you are in harmony with the things around and you can find your place in the scheme of things. Action never really fails, it only produces results. A given expectation may be said to have failed but the one with the expectation has not failed. That “I have failed” or that the action has failed is the wrong conclusion – only the expectation is the problem. So nobody fails. It is only a matter of wrong judgment because we are not omniscient and we cannot have the knowledge of all the factors that shape the results of the actions. Only *Isvara* has all knowledge of these factors.

Another definition of *karma yoga* is an attitude of gratitude, a loving consecration of one’s actions based on the understanding that life is a great gift that requires reciprocation. We must remember that we have the freedom in choosing and performing an action, and whatever result comes is in accordance with the laws governing the action. This attitude of taking the result as it is, maintaining equanimity of the mind both in success and failure, is *yoga*.

Failure to appreciate this fact results in low self-esteem, the feeling that “I am a failure.” The solution to low self-esteem is the understanding that one’s knowledge of all the variables in the field that produce results is and always will be limited. Therefore the results of one’s actions can never be known.

Action can produce likes and dislikes (*vasanas*) only if the result is looked upon as a success or failure. When the result is looked upon as a function of the invariable laws of action, or what is even better, if it is looked upon as the grace of the *dharma* field, no new likes and dislikes are created. The existing likes and dislikes will no doubt create desires and produce actions but new likes and dislikes are avoided. With this attitude towards the result actions born of likes and dislikes becomes the means of eliminating the very likes and dislikes themselves. The mind becomes free from the agitations of elation (*rajas*) and depression (*tamas*).

Such a mind is tranquil and contemplative. Contemplation is not something you do. It is the nature of *sattva*. It is not that the mind becomes *sattvic*, it is that self-knowledge removes the excess *rajas* and *tamas* which cause the agitation which prevents you from experiencing your true nature. When the mind is *sattvic* you automatically think dispassionately about things, and discrimination comes naturally from such a mind. *Karma yoga* produces a *sattvic* mind. A person who has been on the spiritual path for a long time but whose mind is still *rajasic* does not understand the value of *karma yoga*. As Krishna says, a little *karma yoga* removes a lot of agitation.

Simon: And if so, can I trust this part, even if it feels that it is serving the cause?

Sundari: Which part and what cause would that be? Awareness is actionless and has no parts – it also has no cause. Awareness has no problem with ignorance, or duality, because it is free of it; it has nothing to gain or lose because everything proceeds from it; it is whole and complete, unchanging, unlimited. *Moksa* is for the *jiva* who lives in the world – and *moksa* is freedom *from* the doer, not *for* the doer. So the ego identified with being an ego/doer in the question above is asking if it can trust itself – and the answer to this, of course, is a resounding NO. The only thing there is to trust is self-knowledge because everything else is limited and flawed. Any knowledge the ego thinks it has will be contaminated by the *vasanas* and based in

ignorance. Only self-knowledge is always good because it never changes.

The ego that is identified with the doer will hate the idea of *karma yoga* because it has nothing to gain from it except its own demise. When self-knowledge makes it clear that it is awareness apparently experiencing the ego and not the ego experiencing awareness, the ego gets on board with the idea of *moksa*. *Moksa* is not about denying the existence of the ego, perfecting the ego or banishing the ego, it is about understanding that the ego, or the *jiva*, is not real. You still get to be the apparent person you are after *moksa*, and this person, of course, will have a certain inborn nature and be doing things a certain way until the day the body dies but the sense of doership will be negated and the binding *vasanas* rendered non-binding. So the suffering that is created by the *vasanas* no longer obtains.

Simon: Who was Krishna speaking to when he told Arjuna to stand up and fight?

Sundari: Krishna was speaking to Arjuna as the doer he took himself to be because Krishna realised that Arjuna was not ready, meaning not yet qualified, for *moksa*. There are apparent contradictions within Vedanta which are not real contradictions because they can all be resolved in the light of self-knowledge. Depending on one's level of qualification these contradictions can be difficult to understand. Ignorance being what it is – hardwired and tenacious – a seeker needs to have the guidance of a qualified teacher so that the apparent contradictions can be resolved. In the quote from the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna, symbolizing awareness, is exhorting Krishna to fight also because he is pointing out to him that it is important to follow one's inborn nature, or *svadharma*. In Arjuna's case, his nature was that of a warrior so it was his *dharma* to fight.

Simon: Awareness, being actionless, cannot wield any sword so why would my ego slay itself? Can it really be that the surrender that my mind says it wants really is genuine and can be trusted? Can the ego give itself up because it realises its own limitations and the desire for freedom becomes stringer than the desire for control? This is what certainly seems to be happening but a sceptical part of me wants to verify this with a teacher in case I am going down a blind alleyway.

Sundari: See above for the answer to this. The desire for liberation from limitation comes from the self under the spell of ignorance, not the ego, as the ego is inert. The sceptical part of the mind is the doubting function, *manah*; this is an important part step in self-inquiry as it also incorporates discrimination and integration. The three basic steps to self-inquiry are:

1. *Sravana*, listening, or hearing the scripture. This requires that you leave everything you previously believed or thought you knew temporarily on the shelf. You can your beliefs back if self-knowledge does not work for you. But for now leave them on the shelf. This is very important; if you keep comparing Vedanta to all your beliefs and opinions and try to make it comply with them, forget about self-inquiry. Vedanta is a radical teaching; it is counterintuitive; expect it to challenge everything you thought you knew.

2. *Manana*, reasoning, contemplation, comparative thinking. This is thinking about what the scripture is saying, examining the unexamined logic of your own

experience. At this point, you look at your beliefs and opinions in the light of what the scripture says, NOT the other way around.

3. *Nididhyasana*, applying the knowledge to your life, taking a stand in awareness as awareness. Self-actualisation.

I advise you make sure that you understand all the qualifications required for *moksa* and to make it part of your spiritual practice to track yourself on them on a moment-to-moment basis. Make a thorough investigation of your values and what underpins them; make sure that your lifestyle is congruent with your *dharma*, meaning that it is conducive to peace of mind. Listen to as many of the video recordings by James that you can and read the *e-satsang* pages at the website; they offers a huge resource of non-dual wisdom at the highest level. Keep writing if you get stuck.

Simon: How is James doing? Is he home now?

~ Love and thanks; in anticipation, Simon

Sundari: Yes, we are in Spain and James is feeling and looking great, all systems good to go!

~ You are most welcome, Simon, and much love to you, Sundari