

The Do-Gooder Is Not the Doer

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Sundari: Hello, Akira. I have replied to your questions in point form below.

Akira: Thank you for your warmhearted reply.

The description of the relationship between you and James *sensei* was so beautiful! I was so touched.

Sundari: I am happy that it did, Akira. ☺

Akira: *Isvara, maya*, awareness, doer... these topics are very tough! Even though James *sensei* explained it to me before, I still couldn't get it (I couldn't understand what "*Isvara = maya + awareness*" means exactly). I think my understanding is better now. Thank you.

Sundari: You are welcome, Akira. *Isvara-jiva-jagat aikyam* is the subtlest of teachings and most serious inquirers still have some confusion regarding it. I have attached a copy of an article I wrote on this teaching, which incorporates the *gunas* of course. As you know, *moksa* is discriminating the self from the objects appearing in it. To do this, one must understand the self from the standpoint of the *jiva* and one must understand the *jiva* from the standpoint of the self. If one does not understand *Isvara*, this discrimination cannot take place and self-knowledge does not stick.

Akira: In the *Tattva Bodha* commentary, James *sensei* says: "When the self operates this power and produces the apparent experienciable reality we call the world, it is called God, the Creator. (*Isvara*)."

But you explained the self is not the doer, so why does the self "operate"?

Sundari: Language is difficult when one gets to such a subtle teaching; however, pure awareness, or *paramatman*, when it is identified with *maya*, "becomes" the Creator and apparently operates ignorance, meaning the *gunas*. This is why it is said that *maya* makes the impossible possible. *Isvara* as the Creator wielding *maya* is pure *sattva*, and once *rajas* and *tamas* appear, together the three *gunas* bring about the creation, or the apparent reality, the effects of ignorance, i.e. *mithya*. Please refer to the article I have attached on this topic.

Akira: One question: you wrote, "...it runs the way it runs whether you are enlightened or not. Neither the *jiva* nor pure awareness have any control over it; the *gunas* run everything." I thought the enlightened one can't be affected by *maya*. Isn't that right? I think I don't know about this explanation. Could you give me a

reference of *sastra*?

Sundari: There are many references to this teaching, not only in *How to Attain Enlightenment*, but especially in *Panchadasi*. The enlightened one, pure awareness, or *paramatman*, is *trigunatatita*, beyond the *gunas* and not conditioned by them. *Isvara* operating *maya* is not conditioned by the *gunas* either. However, *moksa* is for the self under the spell of ignorance, the *jiva*, who lives in the apparent reality and never leaves it. The apparent reality, or *dharma* field (*Isvara/gunas*), is run by certain laws which apply to the enlightened and unenlightened *jiva*. Read my article on the *gunas* and see what questions come up for you.

Akira: You wrote, "How could you as a limited individual take care of the total? It is not possible and *Isvara* does not need anyone's help."

Sundari: The *dharma* field is run by *Isvara*, who is the total, and *Isvara* does not need anyone's help. The *gunas* are impersonal forces that are always operating and present in the macrocosmic mind. The *gunas* are only absent for the apparent individual in deep sleep and *nirvikalpa samadhi*. *Isvara* is always taking care of all the *karma* of all *jivas*; this is called *Isvara srsti*. When self-knowledge removes the ignorance of your true nature, revealing it to be the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, pure awareness, you will stop projecting *jiva srsti* (the individual's creation) onto *Isvara*.

You will then see that there is nothing "wrong" with you or the total. You will see the perfection in all things even if you do not understand them. This belief of yours is a strong Buddhist conviction, that there is something wrong with the world, that it should be different from the way it is, that the *jiva* must "do" something to perfect itself and that once the *jiva* is perfected, it must work to make things "better." These beliefs are for *karmis* – people who think they are people and doers.

Akira: I asked about Buddhist teaching because I'm Buddhist but at the same time a Vedantin. I met the Dalai Lama before taking a Vedanta course, and he gave me some *mantras* I've been still practising. Sometimes I feel Buddhist teachings are helpful for me for remembering not to be selfish, because I've become so dry and removed from society and people for long time since I started to go to Tirvannamalai and dedicating myself for self-enquiry for five years now. I know Vedanta doesn't accept Buddhist teachings and laughs at it, sometimes it sounds like the laughter is kind of looking down or make it foolish; then I feel so bad. It's not because I'm a Buddhist, but because of the lack of respect for the other philosophies.

Sundari: Vedanta does not laugh at Buddhism nor is it disrespectful of any other "path." Vedanta is not a path or a religion. It is the knowledge that runs beneath all teachings and explains them all. It is the king of all teachings because it is a scientifically proven, independent means of knowledge that can free the *jiva* from bondage to objects, (the doer, or Akira) and therefore from suffering. This is the only way to end suffering, not by being a do-gooder, unless you know that it is not you, the individual, doing the apparently "good" action.

Vedanta challenges bad ideas that cause suffering or are not helpful for people

seeking *moksa*. There is nothing wrong with being a Buddhist, but some of their beliefs are not accepted by Vedanta, so you will not be able to reconcile them. I have attached a *satsang* on this topic written by Ted Schmidt, one of ShiningWorld's teachers. I believe Isaiah Sanders has also gone to great lengths to explain this to you as well, so I will not repeat it all myself.

Akira: I agree that the limited *jiva* can't take care of the total's enlightenment, of course. What I meant was that I want to care about the total's happiness and cooperate with it as much as I can. Ramana and Nisargadatta Maharaji also say to not think about others' enlightenment and focus on your own. But as a result I became very distant from people and society, which felt very unnatural, and I was feeling worse about myself, very depressed, closed and lonely. Buddhist teachings say to help others' happiness, and I got back my natural state, and relationships got better again. I don't mean I can take care of the total's enlightenment, but at least I don't think only about Akira, but the total as myself and support others within my capacity. In that way I can feel that the total as myself, "I," is more expanded, more than when I was focusing on my enlightenment.

Sundari: If you really understood Vedanta and *karma yoga* you would not have this misunderstanding. Who is the "I" talking here? This is spoken as the doer, the one who thinks it makes a difference. The self is all there is, so how can you be more expansive than that? How can any teaching be more loving than to prove to you that your true nature is *parama prema svarupa*, unconditional love, and that everything is you? Vedanta does not see that there are "others"; all objects are seen and loved as the self without judgement.

When you truly know this, you worship everyone and everything as the self, as non-different from you and perfect. *Isvara* is understood to be the Lord of the creation, but as the self, you know that *Isvara* is you as well. Therefore your values become universal values, and so you automatically follow *dharma*, which is not causing harm to any part of the creation, because it is all you. At the same time you know that as the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, or the enlightened *jiva*, you do not have knowledge of the total, and accept without condition *Isvara's* creation. Please refer to the *satsang* I attached and to Isaiah's reply to you.

Akira: I don't think the limited *jiva* can't help others' enlightenment totally, because suppose if I introduce somebody to you and James *sensei*, and that person got enlightened, it is also help, even though indirect.

I don't know, if it's my mistake, I'm sorry.

Sundari: I understand what you mean, but even if Akira introduces "someone" to us and they become enlightened, who is that someone? Who is it that introduces that someone? If you believe that you are the doer, the limited entity, or ego, then you take the credit. But Akira is not the doer, *Isvara* is the only doer. This is what you have to see; your whole email is written from the standpoint of the doer. Vedanta says that you are not the doer; you are pure, actionless, unchanging, unlimited, unconditioned, ordinary awareness. As a *jiva* living in the apparent reality, enlightened or enlightened, the most important thing to understand is the motivation is for doing anything. And when you do take action, you take it in the

karma yoga spirit because you know that the result is not up to you.

James does not teach because he sees that there is something wrong with the world or because he wants to save anyone. He teaches because it is his way to serve the total and he knows that he is not the doer. Everyone who comes to him is sent by *Isvara* and is *Isvara*, so he does what is his *svadharma* to do, which is teach Vedanta. He knows that it is not James *sensei* teaching, it is *Isvara* teaching *Isvara*. Everyone has a different *svadharma*, and if it is your nature to be of help in any way, there is nothing wrong with this. *Isvara* will make it clear to you. Like I said above, it all depends on why you are doing anything. If you see that there is only the self, everything you do is for yourself, the self, anyway.

Akira: Can you tell me your opinion for one more question? You said *Isvara* doesn't need any help. For example, what do you think about world poverty? Should we ignore it, saying this is *maya*? What do you think about those who are helping to relieve it?

Sundari: See my statement above. All beings on the planet are working out their *karma*; who are you to say what is right and wrong? You do not know what is right for anyone; how do you know for sure if what you are doing to help someone is not *adharmic* for them? To repeat, this is why it is important to know what your motivation for "doing" anything is. It is not wrong to help; it is not right either. *Karma yoga* says take action or don't take action, but know that the results are not up to you, so whatever you do or don't do, consecrate it to *Isvara* as a prayer of love. Many people set out to "help" others but their real motivation is that they are lonely; they need to feel loved and special, that they matter and make a difference. Or they are bored and don't know what to do with their time; or they want to feel virtuous because they do not love themselves.

Akira: I understood about marriage well. Thank you.

Sundari: I am glad, Akira.

Akira: I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

~ With love and respect, Akira

Sundari: Much love and respect to you too, Akira.

~ *Namaste*, Sundari

Akira [earlier email]: Dear James *sensei*, thank you for your reply. I have some questions again. When you have time, I'd appreciate it if you could reply again.

Sundari: Hello, Akira. As I told you, I would reply for James, so please see my replies below.

Akira: 1. The self is the creator and takes care of whole world. So does it know what is happening to each individual?

Sundari: Yes, the self, operating *maya* is the Creator (or *Isvara*) and is responsible for the creation, or world (*jagat*), and as such is omniscient and has knowledge of all objects. *Isvara* knows the names and forms of all objects but is not omniscient in the same way that pure awareness is omniscient. This is because pure awareness has no knowledge and no ignorance in it. Knowledge and ignorance only manifest with the appearance of *maya*. Awareness is self-knowing, and because everything is awareness it knows the essence of everything but has no knowledge of the objects, because to awareness there are no objects. This is well explained in *Panchadasi*, and it is one of the most important and subtle of teachings.

Akira: If I am the self, why can't I know what is happening in the other side of the world? Is it because our senses are limited, so they can't perceive all, so the enlightened person can know what is happening anywhere in the world?

Sundari: As I stated above, *Isvara* is omniscient and knows everything about all the objects. As the *jiva* you only have knowledge of the objects you have contact with. Enlightenment does not mean that you have knowledge of all objects. When self-knowledge has removed the ignorance of your true nature (*avidya*) and you know that you are awareness, then the individual *jiva* has knowledge of the essence of everything, which is awareness.

Akira: 2. I think you said there is no special experience that will happen when people get to know the self. But isn't there any clear sign or change? How can one know one is enlightened?

Sundari: Yes, you are right, there is no special experience when self-knowledge has revealed you true nature to be awareness. Awareness, the experienceless experiencer, does not feel like anything. This is difficult for people who have been seeking an experience of the self all their spiritual lives to understand. This *vasana* is one of the toughest to render non-binding. There is no magic way to put this, it is just what the statement purports to say. How are you going to "experience" experiencelessness? It's not possible. Awareness, the self, you, is not an experiencer, it is that by whose presence all experience is possible but itself is always free of experience. It is not an object of experience, being the subject, or the cause; it is beyond perception and inference and therefore subtler than the effect. The effect can never understand the cause.

Hence consciousness evolved Vedanta. When the mind is exposed to Vedanta through self-inquiry, it is possible to experience the self in a pure mind; this is called the *akandakara vritti*. But the *vritti* disappears and what is left is just knowledge. When self-knowledge removes ignorance of your true nature, both knowledge and ignorance disappear as well. Only the self remains and is known as your true nature. Many people go through a period of emptiness, even depression, at this stage. This is because the ego "sees" that there is nothing "out there," the apparent reality really is empty and nothing has any intrinsic meaning. This passes when the

knowledge becomes firm and you know that you are the fullness that knows the emptiness.

There is no special “sign” to prove that you (or anybody else) is enlightened. Enlightenment does not mean that anything changes, and the expectation for this is also a block for many seekers. Nothing changes except your understanding. The only change will be that instead of seeking objects to complete you, or for happiness, you are already happy and therefore have contact with everything happily. You are free of the person, Akira. Akira will become your secondary identity and you will be the witness or knower of everything that she thinks, says and does. You will not want to fix her or change her or make her special or different because she will be fine the way she is. The doer will be negated and the binding *vasanas* will be rendered non-binding, but this does not mean that Akira will stop doing things or having experiences. Her motivation for doing anything will be very different though; peace of mind (*sattva*) will be what she values most, thus she will always follow *dharma*.

Akira: 3. We are the awareness and creator of all, but the individual can't get what he/she wants because awareness has to take care of total. Even if we are still feeling limitation as individuals, if you recommend to us to live from the standpoint of the awareness, we have to take care of the total, logically speaking. But you are criticizing the *bodhisattva* ideal. Could you explain more about this matter?

Sundari: When ignorance of your true nature as awareness has been removed by self-knowledge, this does not mean that *maya*, macrocosmic ignorance (*Isvara srsti*), changes. It continues to operate as it always does.

As a liberated *jiva* you will have understood that the *dharma* field (*Isvara* wielding *maya*) is made up of the *gunas*, and it runs the way it runs whether you are enlightened or not. *Isvara* does not care if you are enlightened, and neither the *jiva* nor pure awareness have any control over it; the *gunas* run everything. The *gunas* no longer condition the subtle body in the same way but they still operate and always will. As a liberated *jiva* you will understand what they are, how they operate, what thoughts, feelings and actions very predictably arise with all them. And you will know that it has nothing to do with you, awareness.

You will also know that the *dharma* field is perfect the way it is and will not want things to be any different from the way they are. No *jiva* is “responsible” for anything, certainly not the enlightenment of anyone, not even their own. Your statement, “Even if we are still feeling limitation as individuals, if you recommend to us to live from the standpoint of the awareness, we have to take care of the total, logically speaking,” is not logical at all. How could you as a limited individual take care of the total? It is not possible and *Isvara* does not need anyone's help.

Isvara is taking care of the total perfectly at all times, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. This is an erroneous belief that is imbedded in the spiritual minds of some who think the world needs fixing or saving. It does not. No one but *Isvara* takes care of the enlightenment or unlightenment of anyone. If you are supposed to get *moksa*, *Isvara* will give it to you. If not, not. This futile belief also presupposes that there is something wrong with the world the way it is.

Akira: 4. I am the awareness and producing the world, apparently, as if God is

creating the world. Is my understanding right?

Sundari: From the perspective of pure awareness, your statement above is true. As pure awareness, *Isvara*, *maya*, the *jiva* and the world arise out of you, so you are beyond them all and always free of them, yet they are totally dependent on you, awareness. However, in the apparent reality where *maya* is operating, the *jiva*, or individual, is subject to the laws that make up the *dharma* field. *Moksa* is freedom from the *jiva*, for the *jiva* who lives in the apparent reality. The *jiva* never leaves the apparent reality, and as a liberated *jiva*, self-actualisation means understanding what it means to be self-realised in the apparent reality. As the self, you are already free and do not create anything. As the *jiva*, you are not creating anything either, except the subjective world of your perceptions and conditioning, *jiva srsti*, and projecting that onto *Isvara srsti*.

As I have explained above, when self-knowledge removes the ignorance of your true nature and you know that your primary identity is awareness and not Akira, *Isvara srsti* continues as before, and you have are fine with it. You know that there are certain laws that operate in the apparent reality and you have no problem abiding by them, because peace of mind is your primary goal. In addition, you automatically follow *dharma* by following what is right for Akira, which means understanding her *svadharma* and taking appropriate action in light of self-knowledge to do what produces peace of mind for her.

Akira: 5. You wrote in the *Tattva Bodha* commentary: “The individual possesses both a subtle and a gross body. While the gross body absorbs awareness like a brick wall absorbs light, the subtle body is reflective and the self can be apprehended in it.

I couldn’t understand “like a brick wall absorbs light.” Well, could you explain it more?

Sundari: If the sun is shining on a brick wall, most of the light gets absorbed by the wall. But if it is shining on a mirror, all the light is reflected, not so? This is why James uses this analogy: when the mind is pure (like the mirror), it can reflect the light of awareness clearly. When it is impure (like the brick wall), it absorbs all the light and the self is not known.

Akira: 6. You say that if we want enlightenment, we have to give up marriage or partnership (I think you said that in an audio recording in Tiru. Sorry if it’s my misunderstanding).

And you said sometimes people say having a partner and doing all related actions as *karma yoga* doesn’t create *vasanas*. But it doesn’t work that way, you said. Why?

I have a partner, and want to marry. But does it mean I have to give up enlightenment?

Sundari: James is not against relationships or marriage, in fact he is all for love. The reason he teaches that one should not make a relationship or marriage your goal, if you are seeking *moksa*, is that *moksa* is freedom from dependence on objects.

There is nothing wrong with the objects in and of themselves, but if you want *moksa* you need to negate the objects by realising that they are value-neutral. The joy is not in the object, it is in you. So if you want a relationship or you want to marry because you need someone to love you or complete you, it will never work because no object is capable of doing this. This causes bondage, attachment, *vasanas*, and suffering. If your *mumuksutva* is strong and you still want a relationship, go into it with the *karma yoga* attitude and see if that works. If you can see the other person not as “another” person but as yourself and are very sure that you are not entering the relationship because you are looking for love, it can work. Even if the “other” person is not interested in self-knowledge (this does make it more challenging), if you can see them and love them as a symbol of self, it could work. You can make it part of your spiritual practice. It is not easy though. James and I are together because neither of us was looking for anything and we know that our true nature is love. We know we are the self and therefore have no dependence on objects. We know that no one can give us happiness or take it away from us. So we are free of each other. We do not project onto each other and we are never in denial about anything. We live Vedanta because we know we are Vedanta. We are 100% aware of who we really are, 100% of the time. So we are very happy, not because we make each other happy, but because we share the happiness we already are.

Without this approach to a relationship it will be difficult, if not impossible, to make *moksa* your main priority. Maybe you need to put *moksa* on hold for a while and just go fully into this experience of marriage. There is nothing wrong with this; you are young and beautiful and you can learn from the experience. If you cannot not do it, that is, if the *vasana* for the relationship or marriage is too strong, do it wholeheartedly and enjoy it. Give yourself totally to it, love with all your heart and know that whatever the result is, it is not up to Akira, and she will be fine, whatever happens.

Akira: I think you got *moksa*, so maybe having married is not problem for you, but is it different for those who still don't have *moksa*?

Sundari: Yes, James and I are not seeking *moksa*, because we know we are *moksa*. So it makes no difference if we have a relationship or not. But there is no reason not to have one, as it is not against *dharma*. And we are not in a relationship, the relationship is in us.

As I said above, it does not work to seek *moksa* and to seek a relationship, because that means you are dependent on an object for your happiness and therefore you will not get free of the doer/ego/person/Akira.

Akira: Sorry for many questions, I may have the wrong understanding.

Sundari: No problem, Akira, these are good questions!

Akira: Thank you very much for your kindness.

~ Love, Akira

Sundari: Much love to you from James and me.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari