

# The Fish Out of Water

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**Sundari:** Hello, Rick, I am sure Ram has replied to you, but in case he has not, I just want to acknowledge your lovely email. I answer most of the e-*satsangs* now, along with the other teachers that we have endorsed at ShiningWorld. He might have sent this to them as well, so you could be getting a few replies.

**Rick:** I am sorting through my hard drive of Advaita materials and reading collected notes and excerpts I have taken from your e-*satsangs*. (Please publish another set soon!). I am glad to have found you. In your first email to me, a few years ago, I think, you said that I must have great merit to have found you. Yes, yes!

**Sundari:** Indeed, we are all blessed to have come across Ramji and been taught by him; we must have great *punya karma!* I am not sure what you mean by “please publish another set soon.” We publish e-*satsangs* at the ShiningWorld website regularly, and there are numerous new videos and publications available from the shop at the website as well.

**Rick:** An image that captures my recent experience is a fish that periodically lands in a boat or on a pier. Life and inquiry and all that are going along pretty fine, until the fish finds itself (all of a sudden, it seems) gasping periodically on the pier.

That fish is again swimming in the water and I appreciate (to a degree 😊) that even these excursions onto dry land are okay. They are not particularly to my liking, but that’s okay too. And I understand better what throws the fish onto the pier.

**Sundari:** This is an interesting analogy. What you are saying, obviously, is that the fish is the *jiva*, or individual/doer, and the water is awareness. What apparently throws it out of the water is *Isvara*, the *gunas*, or the *vasanas*, the *jiva’s* conditioning, your likes and dislikes, in other words, ignorance, or *maya*.

**Rick:** But mostly you are helping me to see that that image is not quite right, in that the fish is not “me.” It is instead *manas* as a whole or the subtle body. I am not a fish that can periodically find itself out of the water. I am the whole thing: the water, the pier, the fish, the obstacle/thing that bounced the fish out of the water and whatever knows all that is happening.

**Sundari:** Yes, indeed. This understanding involved the identity between the individual/*jiva*, the macrocosmic mind, or *Isvara*, and awareness (*jiva-Isvara srsti*). It is also the basis of self-inquiry: discriminating the self from the not-self, or awareness from the objects arising in it (*satya* from *mithya*). This means that once all the objects have been negated, one knows that there is only the self, awareness. One has to negate the objects that arise in awareness first though, before one can take the next step which is to see that everything is made of awareness; there is

only the self, awareness. It is the self “seeing” itself. Thus if one does not see the apparent reality with objectivity, it means that the ego, the experiencer/doer (*jiva*, or subtle body) is still there and is the one doing the seeing, through the screen of ignorance, i.e. *rajas/tamas*, or the *vasanas* (patterns of thinking/conditioning). The ego and the objects appearing are still taken to be real.

**Rick:** And the knowledge of that is getting firmer. The teaching really does take hold.

~ In gratitude, Rick

**Sundari:** When the knowledge is firm, meaning when it is no longer indirect knowledge (I know the self) but direct knowledge (I am the self), the one who sees the apparent reality (the knower, or the self no longer under the spell of ignorance) is free of the *jiva*, thus it is known that what the *jiva* “sees” is only an apparent reality, all the objects have been negated and the binding *vasanas* rendered non-binding. They may still be there but they no longer have the power to “throw the fish out of the water,” so to speak. When the knowledge is firm and you have realised your true nature as awareness, there is still the task of understanding what it means to be self-realised in the apparent reality, i.e. to actualise the self. *Isvara*, or the *dharma* field/total mind (whatever you want to call it), continues to operate as before self-realisation. There can be considerable work still to be done to manage the *gunas*: *triguna vibhava yoga*. The practice of *karma yoga* is imperative as well, along with a devotional practice of some kind. *Moksa* is for the *jiva* who never leaves the apparent reality, and as such it is freedom from the *jiva*, or person/doer, not for it.

Your fish out of water (H<sub>2</sub>O) metaphor is a good one in that you can see where it falls short. The fish out of water (or who believes it is out of the water, because of course this is not possible, as you correctly point out) is the *jiva* identified with being the person, or doer/*jiva*. This is the sufferer, and it suffers because it is deluded by *maya*, or ignorance, i.e. the self under the spell of ignorance. The (fish/boat/pier) *jiva* is never anything other than the self (H<sub>2</sub>O = water); there is never a time when it is not the self, and it is always experiencing itself, H<sub>2</sub>O, only it has a knowledge problem. It does not know this and believes it is small, limited and separate. *Maya* has tricked it into believing it is separate from H<sub>2</sub>O. It thinks it is a person (or a fish) and sets off trying to find what it believes is missing, by doing something to make it feel less afraid, lonely, incomplete and so on, and it suffers. It seeks an end to suffering through experience. The problem here is that experience is an object like everything else in *samsara* (the belief in duality): it begins and ends, it is not real. Only self-knowledge has the power to remove ignorance, which is the root of the problem. When self-knowledge removes ignorance of its true nature, the self under the spell of ignorance, or *jiva*, sees that the “person” is an object in awareness, with only an apparent existence in the apparent reality. It arises out of awareness but like all other objects it has a dependent existence on awareness, although awareness (meaning you/H<sub>2</sub>O) is always free of the object.

This is why the wave and ocean metaphor works so well. The wave and the ocean are both H<sub>2</sub>O but the ocean and the wave cannot exist without H<sub>2</sub>O, although H<sub>2</sub>O is always free of both the wave and the ocean.

Please feel free to write to me if you have any queries.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari

**Rick:** Sundari, thank you for your detailed and caring response. It is nice to meet you. I admit I was expecting Ram to answer. I feel like he knows me, but I get that he is very busy now. Your answer is helpful and appreciated.

**Sundari:** Hello, Rick. Thank you, it is nice to meet you too. 😊 I know how you must feel, it must be a bit disappointing not to have Ramji reply as there is no one quite like him! He is not too busy for you though and, if you prefer, he is more than happy to continue replying to you. He is in Europe at the moment and I am in Spain, so he emails me the emails that come through, as I answer most of them for him. Maybe you are not on our mailing list and did not get our last newsletter. In it we endorsed a number of new teachers, and between them and me we have taken over replying to the *e-satsangs*. Ramji has trained us all in his own inimitable style, and we all know how to wield the knowledge correctly in keeping with the great tradition of the *sampradaya* and also Ramji's exacting adherence to the integrity of the scripture. He has a big teaching schedule and is also trying to finish several books, so we are taking the load off him. Actually, I think he meant to answer yours though. I replied to it before he could. If you like, he will still do so, no problem. I sent both replies to him before sending them to you and he gave his seal of approval on both counts.

I have replied to your points below.

**Rick:** The reference to "publish another set soon" was to the online *satsangs*, which are published every three months or so. I like to pull out excerpts to save (and savor) and reread.

**Sundari:** I am still not sure what you mean, because if you have been keeping up with the website, we publish a newsletter and at least 200 pages of *e-satsangs* every six weeks, eight weeks maximum.

**Rick:** In the past few days I do feel something has "clicked" differently in relation to the Vedanta teachings. Ram has said before to me that the next step, so to speak (that was not his language exactly), is to let the *vasanas* wear themselves out. He has put up some of my letters as testimonials or examples, and that has felt a little odd since I didn't necessarily feel like "I have it," or rather that my sense of identity had shifted from orbiting planet to stationary sun (so to speak).

**Sundari:** Ramji posts writing and *e-satsangs* to the Web that are helpful and inspiring to others. Your testimonial was beautifully written and a very good example of how the knowledge works, which is why he posted it. He sees only the self in everyone no matter what, so however you still see yourself, he sees who you really are.

With ongoing self-inquiry, exposing the mind to Vedanta and the application of *karma yoga*, the knowledge itself does the work. This is why Vedanta is so effective and this is where it differs from other paths: it is both a means of knowledge – a

pathless path – and a path of action, meaning that it provides tools and the instructions how to use them which when applied rigorously and with dedication will remove ignorance and its effects. It does take commitment and dedication though before the knowledge is firm. What Ram meant by the “*vasanas* winding down,” to use your expression, is that with the application of the knowledge to the mind, meaning the *yogas* (*karma yoga*, *triguna vibhava yoga* and of course most importantly *jnana yoga*) it neutralises the doer, and in so doing renders the binding *vasanas* non-binding. It is through understanding the *jiva-Isvara*-awareness identity that one is able to discriminate the self from the objects arising in it. Self-knowledge is the great purifier and the only thing capable of removing ignorance.

**Rick:** But what the heck... I would appreciate if you could expand a little on what you said.

**Sundari:** “There can be considerable work still to be done to manage the *gunas*: *triguna vibhava yoga*. The practice of *karma yoga* is imperative as well, along with a devotional practice of some kind.”

**Rick:** I feel Ram has given me a pretty good idea about *triguna vibhava yoga* and *karma yoga*, but what are you thinking of specifically when you mention a “devotional practice”? I did spend some time with a local Dayananda-trained *swamini* who showed up in my neighborhood a few months after encountering Ram. Her name at that time was Sadhvi Chaitanya. Her name now is Svatmavidyananda. Anyway, I would say she was really big into statues, and I never quite got what the “statue thing” is all about.

**Sundari:** Devotional practice is not about statues or any other object. It is the understanding, through the application of self-knowledge, that everything is the self. Anything you pay attention to is devotion to the self. Devotion (*bhakti*) is a natural by-product of self-knowledge; in fact it is self-knowledge, because Vedanta is about you. It reveals your true nature, which is *parama prema svarupa*, supreme love. When you see the beauty and perfection of who you are, and therefore what this world is, how can one not feel love and devotion for the self? Krishna says in the *Gita*, “In whatever way you worship me (the self) I will come to you.” And he says that those who think they are worshipping other gods are just worshipping the self, because there is only the self.

The reason that devotion as a practice is encouraged in Vedanta is that it helps neutralise the ego and makes the application of *karma yoga* into a prayer to the self; giving up the results of your actions then becomes a consecration, an act of love for you by you, the self.

**Rick:** What I resonate with when you say “devotional practice” is the practice from Neville Goddard of feeling “Thank you, Father” with a sense of utter gratitude and fulfillment, of all desires fulfilled, *purnam*. Does that qualify as a devotional practice?

~ Sincerely, Rick

**Sundari:** Yes, indeed gratitude is the essence of devotion, which is not gratitude for

something, it is gratitude in the knowledge that all is given, all is known, all is you. There is no need for any elaborate ritual or to make a big thing of it; just paying attention and consecrating your every thought, word and deed in love for the divine is what it is all about.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari