

THE BROKEN TUSK

Seeing through the lens of Vedanta

By Dan McKenzie

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Introduction

This is not a book about Vedanta, a venerable tradition that has enlightened thousands over centuries based on empirical and impeccable logic. Rather, it's a book seen *through* Vedanta.

There are as described in Vedanta, three phases of self-inquiry. The first stage is *shravana* and involves just listening. 'Just listening' can be a difficult task for most. We all have beliefs about who we are, about the world, and perhaps, about God that we've carried with us since childhood, not to mention a certain reluctance to admitting that some of those beliefs might be wrong. Vedanta asks inquirers at this stage to sit down, shut up, and ask questions later. Needless to say, it requires an open mind, as much of what Vedanta teaches is counterintuitive to how we've been brought up to see things.

The second stage is *manana*. During this stage the inquirer contemplates what they have heard and asks questions to clarify what, up until now, might have been only accepted pending their own investigation. Inquirers are encouraged to seek out every answer and eliminate every doubt until they see the truth in what Vedanta teaches. Vedanta can be challenging, not because of it's intellectual and seemingly encrypted content, but because ignorance is hard-wired. Which is also why a teacher is necessary.

The last stage is *nididhyasana* and yet it isn't final. There is no enlightenment certificate of achievement once you have a little knowledge under your belt. This phase is the on-going assimilation and constant application of the knowledge gained through the teachings, and it is from this stage that these writings come from.

These essays are the outcome of ingesting the teachings and observing life through a different lens. They are a journal of reflection and contemplation. For all the spiritual practices that lead up to this, this is where the rubber meets the road. Knowledge is only useful if given the opportunity to be put to use, and it's only when we're able to

take every occurrence in life and look at it through the lens of the truth, that we're able to accomplish Vedanta's main objective: *liberation from suffering*.

Dan McKenzie

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Waiting for the world to change

Person 1: I was at my son's graduation last week and we had to listen to the typical speeches full of naive optimism. Everyone always talks about how this generation is going to be different, how they're going to make the world better. Everyone implies that they know what they're doing and are not going to be like the previous group or at least, not like the ones that broke the economy. Every generation has the hubris to believe it's going to be different this time around and all I can think is "Seriously? You really think you're going to do any better?"

Person 2: It's part of growing up, it's just fear. They're trying to build up the courage to face their uncertainty and the grownups are trying to instill

that courage.

Person 1: Someone ought to tell the kids the truth.

Person 2: Someone ought to tell the grownups the truth!

Person 1: You mean, that the one with the most toys doesn't actually win?

Person 2: No, that the world won't change because it can't!

Person 1: Gee, maybe you should try a little naive optimism.

Person 2: Right, I'll remember that when I'm invited to speak at the next graduation.

Person 1: Seriously, so you're saying everything is already preordained, that it's no use even trying to change the world?

Our Problems are Internal, Not External

Person 2: Every generation and graduating class believes that this time it's going to be different, that they are about to set out to make the world a better place. They naively believe they won't repeat all their predecessors' stupid mistakes and that they have all the good ideas. What they fail to see is that the world's problems aren't an external one, but an internal one. It's not about creating better urban transportation systems, finding a cure for cancer, or being the first inhabitants on Mars. The first reason the world can't change is because our extroverted nature makes us look the wrong way. The epitome of it is believing that by inhabiting Mars someday, we will be able to escape our problems here on Earth. In many ways, Mars is the perfect metaphor for what's wrong with us. The fact that some people are even considering a red desert planet as an alternative to the blue marble planet we currently live on just goes to show that we've already left the Garden of Eden.

Impersonal Forces Control Us

A person believes themselves to be a separate individual with free will. And on the surface, that's obviously true. Unlike animals, we have an intellect and can make decisions, not just follow our instincts. But on closer inspection we find impersonal forces that are influencing our every emotion and thought and as a result, our actions too. Because we are unaware of these forces we are like objects moving to nature's every whim. We're like an autumn leaf being blown here and there, while all along believing it's us that's doing the blowing.

Person 1: Wow, like alien forces?

Person 2: Not quite. The forces may be unknown to most, but they aren't alien. They unconsciously influence us and so are only alien to the extent that we're ignorant of them. We can simplify things by stating that the same powers that create, sustain and mould the world into form are the same impersonal powers that exist within our psychological makeup. These powers within consciousness are like the

weather and include the power of clarity (clear skies), action (turbulent skies) and inertia (“the fog”). The latter two of these forces will wreak havoc on the mind if left unattended and unabated. Clear skies allow us to see and appreciate beauty, values and the truth. Clear skies don’t have many disadvantages, but if they did it would be the danger of becoming attached and conceited. For example, if you develop a Jesus-complex from clear skies you’ve obviously got a problem. Starving artists are those who are so attached to clear skies that they’re willing to die for their art. So clear skies are what gives us clarity of mind, letting the light shine through and for the most part, clear skies are good, but they can still be a hindrance if taken the wrong way.

Turbulent skies are what get us out of bed in the morning and working to bring home the bacon. They provide the energy for life to take action. Unfortunately, too much turbulence can also make us feel anxious and/or full of desire. Passion is often associated with turbulent skies. Passion is good for motivation and getting stuff done, but not so good if it becomes an obsessive-compulsive disorder and has you staying up all night binge-watching so that

you miss work the next day.

“The fog” is what allows us to relax and fall asleep at night. It’s also what keeps us grounded. However, too much of the fog can make you lazy, dense and doubtful. After all that binge-watching, not to mention the bag of chips and ice cream you just ate, you would probably feel very much “in the fog.”

Turbulent skies have the power to project and disturb the senses making it hard to discriminate, and the fog has the power to conceal and hide the truth. Throughout the day these “terrible twins” who often work in combination, come and go. Whatever we digest through the senses influences these internal forces and sometimes creates a whiplash effect. For example, drinking coffee in the morning to rev up, and then booze at night to come down. This is essentially your career-driven individual whose goal it is to become a millionaire before the age of 30. They go from whirling clouds to the fog without much clarity in between. On the other hand, many spiritual types might spend a good deal of time in the fog believing their enlightenment experience is just within arm’s reach. Again,

too much of either is not a good thing.

Person 1: Why can't we just have clear skies all the time?

Person 2: It's the weather! But unlike the weather, humans can decide whether or not to go along with their current climatic situation, ignore it or try to change it. For example, we can choose whether or not to be controlled by our desires (turbulent skies) or fears (the fog). The weather is just a metaphor for the changing conditions of the mind. And as we already know, the mind has a mind of its own. Still it pays to know how your climatic system changes throughout the day, what effects it, and how to manage it.

Person 1: Maybe I should dial back on those double espressos.

Person 2: ...And there's more. As much as we'd like to believe that we have full control of our habits, mostly they have control of us.

Person 1: Cool, like brain parasites with

neurological tentacles.

Person 2: Lets say, for example, you grow up in a family that isn't poor, but sometimes struggles to buy you the new shoes you want. All your friends have more than one pair of shoes and those shoes are usually Adidas or Nikes. Out of envy, you develop a strong desire to have the same shoes. One day, your dream comes true and for your birthday your mother lets you choose the pair of Adidas you always wanted. You love your new pair of Adidas so much that you clean them everyday and even step lightly while wearing them so the soles don't wear too quickly. As you grow older, you enter the work force and can finally afford the shoes you want. For reasons you can't remember, you have an obsession with shoes. You buy a new pair of shoes every month to reward yourself for a job that pains you. You have multiple colors of all your favorite styles. When you meet people, the first thing you notice are their shoes!

Person 1: Shoe brain parasite?

Person 2: Ok, so using your metaphor, this "shoe

parasite” was formed from a desire that began in childhood and has been kept unabated for years by your constant desire for a new pair of shoes. Each time the “host”—you—buys another pair of shoes you feed this shoe parasite and it gets bigger and stronger. The parasite now has full control of you and in spite of not being able to pay rent, you are still buying shoes.

Person 1: Ugh, how do I get rid of it?

Person 2: You starve it to death! You have no choice. You lost your job, you can’t pay rent and you’re on the brink of financial ruin. At first, it’s tough. You avoid the internet which stalks you with shoe ads at every site you visit, and you stay away from all shopping centers. But eventually, you gain the upper hand and begin to feel a sense of ease as the tension created by the desire that began when you were just a boy begins to subside. The parasite isn’t dead, but at least it has shrunk down to a manageable size and you’ll know it next time if you see it.

Person 1: Ok, so what’s your point? That we’re all mad with parasites?

Person 2: Like those internal weather conditions, some parasites can be good. For example, you might have developed a parasite...um, I mean...a habit that compels you to have good hygiene or avoid dark alley ways. In both cases, you've created a habit that benefits your welfare.

Person 1: This is all very interesting, but what does it have to do with not being able to change the world?

Person 2: It's just another example of unconscious forces that lie within us and drive us to do actions sometimes against our best judgement. We are all victims to these forces until we become aware of them and make it a point to manage them. Imagine the whole world being vulnerable to these unconscious forces and you soon begin to understand why we can't just stop crime, sexual abuse, corruption or existential threats like nuclear proliferation and global warming.

Person 1: Daaaaamn.

Person 2: Yeah, ignorance bites.

Life is a Zero-Sum Game

Person 2: It's common for most kids to believe that getting rich is the ultimate goal in life.

Person 1: Some adults too, I might add.

Person 2: Right. But as we grow older, some of us learn that the life doesn't always work out as planned. Lets say you win the lottery and the payout is a nice but relatively modest \$10,000,000. Nevertheless, you've never seen money like that in your life and can hardly believe your good fortune. The first thing you do is stress out about how to manage such a large amount of money. You hire a financial advisor but wonder if he's giving you the right advice. All of a sudden family and old friends you haven't spoken to for years are calling to congratulate you, but you sense they might have an agenda and you don't know how to manage your relationships with them any more. You go out and buy a beautiful beach-side vacation home and decide to remodel it only to find that when you're not there the contractors sit around and smoke pot. To make things worse, your "financial advisor"

didn't indicate to you that you should set aside the taxes owed on your earnings and the IRS is now sending you letters. I'm using this example to emphasize the point that life is a zero-sum game—for every up there's a down; for every pleasure, there is a pain; for every loss, a gain; for every praise, blame. We can't change that, nobody can. There are no free rides here.

Person 1: It's sort of like that yin and yang symbol with the play of opposites.

Person 2: That's duality, bro. What we believe to be beautiful only appears so against a dull and mundane background. Likewise, what we call "bad" only appears so standing next to "good". Without pain there's no pleasure, and vice versa. There is no life without opposites, it's the nature of duality. So as much as we'd like to have everything pleasant for us in this life, it's not going to happen. The world won't oblige.

The Belief that the Joy is in the Object

Another reason why the world can't change is because of funny belief we have. We believe that happiness is found in objects. On the surface it seems obvious that objects make everyone happy, but apply a little logic and you'll see why this can't be true. If happiness were in the object then the same object that makes you happy would make me happy too. Now, we know that objects aren't selective and choose who to make happy and who not to. So, that means happiness must come from within us. What else would explain you wanting to get those hideous tattoos on your arms?

Person 1: Come on, that was nearly 10 years ago.

Person 2: And where's the happiness from those tattoos, now? There is no happiness, there's only revulsion as you consider cutting them out with a dull-edged knife. But let's open the hood and see what's really going on when you believe happiness is in the object. Before you got those tats you *made* a desire to have them. You began to see people other than gang members and old sailors wearing them.

They began to show up on celebrities that you might have admired, and on the forearms of all your old college buddies. Hell, even your aunt had one placed on one of her butt cheeks (or so they say). It was a style choice and you bought into it, planting a seed in your mind that getting tats might be something you should be interested in. All desires create a tension, an itch that needs to be scratched. As your itch developed into full-blown poison ivy you decided to do something about it and finally get the tats. So, up until now in the story there was no happiness, only tension—some mild to severe psychological discomfort as you contemplated the benefits of getting the tats. The day arrives that you finally get your body graffiti and immediately, you feel different. You feel so happy. Why?

Person 1: Because I got the tats?

Person 2: Yes! And all that tension that you built up went away. You scratched the itch and felt wonderful relief.

Person 1: So?

Person 2: Yep.

Person 1: So, what's your point?

Person 2: See? The point is the happiness wasn't in the object (the tats in your case). It was in the letting go of the desire. Tattoos are incapable of giving happiness, they are only ink. Furthermore, any happiness you felt was only temporary, ephemeral. In other words, it didn't last. It was all just an idea the mind cooked up. Once you got what you wanted, the best part was already over. Surely, you enjoyed your tattoos for some time thereafter, but eventually the novelty wore off and now you just want to get rid of the damn things.

Person 1: The whole thing was just a thought.

Person 2: Yep, and it's not just you. We go through our lives believing that the joy is in objects and trying to squeeze every last drop of happiness we can out of them. It's not until we finally get tired of chasing objects that we stop and begin to look inward only to discover that the joy we thought was in objects, is actually in us, that we are the source

and...

Person 1: So, the whole world is chasing objects based on the belief that they hold the happiness they're looking for?

Person 2: ...Bingo.

Person 1: And the world can't change because...?

Person 2: The world can't change because of ignorance—the ignorance that objects will make us feel permanently secure and satisfied. We construct our entire life on this idea. It's like a rug that continuously gets pulled from underneath us. We put all our faith in objects that are changing and uncertain, including people and ideas.

Person 1: It's no wonder we're all high on pain killers. That explains a lot. So, if we know this, why can't we just correct our misunderstandings and fix it?

Person 2: Because we're all hypnotized by bright, shiny objects? ...software bug? ...karma matrix? ...

zombies? No one really knows. God, apparently, likes to make ignorant people.

We Lack the Knowledge and Will to Understand

Person 1: So, it's of no use. The world will never change and it will never get better.

Person 2: Not as long as God keeps making ignorant people. Remember, ignorance is intelligent, tenacious and hardwired. Most of us are not willing to face the truth, even when shown the logic. It's simply too scary. This is why we fill our days with distractions trying to squeeze a little more happiness out of objects and experiences. It's this mixture of fear and hope that keeps us on the hamster wheel. I'm assuming most people don't even know that this is what their life boils down to. 99.9% of us lack the knowledge and will to gain understanding.

Person 1: So, it's hopeless. We're trapped in this insane asylum.

Person 2: Relax, you and I are not here to save the world. You are here to work on yourself. The field of experience steers us towards understanding via our own suffering with the idea that hopefully, after a few good spankings and by a little grace, we seek knowledge and grow up someday. Only then can we reap the benefits and take it easy. The world isn't the problem, bro. It's our lack of understanding. It's always our understanding.

By the power of my *maya*...

As Einstein or someone once put it, “We can will ourselves to act, but we cannot will ourselves to will.” So, what is it that’s willing us to will? Would the man behind the curtain please step out. See the trick? This is the power of *maya*, the macrocosmic Causal Body at work. Where’s the doer?

Consumers

Those who believe the pursuit of objects leads to on-going safety and pleasure are standing firmly in *samsara*. They keep gambling, throwing the dice in the belief that this time (e.g. this next relationship, purchase, spiritual experience, etc.) will do the trick and that they will live happily ever after. The *samsari's* life is extroverted due to their always chasing objects and believing those objects to be real. In Vedanta, real is defined as that which is always present and never changes—which, as it turns out, no objects qualify as. What most *samsari's* don't realize is just how ephemeral all objects are and that it's all, as the bible so elegantly describes it, like chasing the wind.

Samsari's, generally, are trying to pack in as many experiences as they can before death comes calling.

Their mantra is 'more, better, different' and they are willing to take their life up to amazing speeds and stress levels in order to obtain what they perceive as maximum, constant, never-ending, limitless satisfaction, security and pleasure. Many of them do this simply to avoid having to think about anything else. Weekend get-aways, nights out, committees, sport events, and binge watching become weapons of mass distraction. Constant distraction means a constant disconnect to more important issues regarding life such as family, environment, health, not to mention the remote chance of ever realizing the truth.

To be in a perpetual object-chasing mode is what most of the world is doing and has always done. Except now, due to our sheer numbers, the results are killing us and other beings. Too much experience means too much consumption putting immense stress on everyone, our communities and the planet. *Ishvara* has a way of regulating such problems. What happens next is anyone's guess.

For the ambitious

We grow up believing we have to be somebody. We carry an anxious thought inside us that says we must to be ambitious in our plans, whatever they might be. But in truth, we don't have to do anything except be caretakers to what Vedanta calls our *svadharma*. For most of us, that simply means being true to ourselves, taking care of ourselves and taking care of those closest to us. In short, we do our best and let it rest. And we don't need to be "the best" at anything. Once you know who you are, being the best is meaningless. It just doesn't matter in light of the knowledge that everything here is *mithya*: fleeting, uncertain, unreliable, and not real. It's all just a fool's game, an ego trip.

In short, like a dream, there's nothing happening here. Take care of your responsibilities, minimize

the negative stuff and write off the rest as *Isvara's* magical mystery tour.

Tension

The intellect gains a little knowledge and says it has all the answers, but the ego won't buy it. The tension between the two can be unbearable, and old conditioning ensures the childlike ego won't give in. Likes and dislikes emerge from behind the curtain of the Causal Body like unsolicited salesmen waiting to see if someone will answer the door this time. The ego's last line of defense is always the threat of boredom. But even the intellect knows doing nothing is not an option for the doer/enjoyer. As for the self, it's content to just be.

Variations

We all wonder what our lives would've been had we done it differently. Truth is, it couldn't have been any different. What makes you think you would've made different choices given the same circumstances? 'You' are not even making the choices. *Isvara* knows exactly what will happen to you and everybody else tomorrow and the next day, and the next. Because when you're able to factor in all the different constants and variables (which only *Isvara* can do), cause and effect is like a math equation with only one outcome. Still, we can't help to wonder all the possibilities.

A little exercise

Here's a little spiritual exercise for middle-aged men to help remind themselves they are not the body:

Yank out one of those ugly, twisted, thick, cable-like nose "hairs" growing like an invasive plant species inside your nostrils. Take a good look at it...a really good look. Now ask yourself, "Is this me?"

The hidden truth

It almost seems trivial that people would complain day-in and day-out about all the injustices in the world. It's as if we had a skin disease and instead of trying to find the cause of it, we complain all day about the rash. We talk about its redness, itchiness, size and depth, its ability to make us irritable, cause depression, miss work and keep us away from what we love to do. We talk about the number of people who have it and in which regions of the world. We talk about its history, past, present and future. We write books about it and create museums and websites to educate others. We do everything but find a cure for it!

People have invested in and find comfort in their beliefs. Unfortunately most people would rather be "right" than be happy. It's that ego-thing again, it

always gets in the way. The world is insane, driven mad by the powers of *maya*. We go 'round and 'round on the *maya*-go-round of *samsara* never able to get off. We are stuck because we can never see past the ego-complex and unconscious forces like *vasanas* and the *gunas* that keep us pinned down.

Politics and the media is just the chattering of an unwitting society. It's the masses floundering in their own ignorance. It's just a lot of complaining about a rash that will never go away in spite of all protesting. Due to the veiling powers of *maya*, only a few will ever step off. Meanwhile, the rest of society spins out on their desires and fears. What is a *yogi* to do?

The *jhani* steps lightly and carefully, as if walking on a geese-infested golf course. The wise see everyone else as being hypnotized by *maya's* powers. They see others as children in adult body-suits with adult responsibilities. But mostly they see the self, "me," and the truth that is hidden from them.

Why would you

“Oh, how funny. You mean, you...you actually thought all those objects, people and experiences were there for you to have? You mean, you never caught on or thought once that it might all be a setup? Why would you think...? I mean, when you die you have to leave everything! Wait, why would you think...that...this... Oh, never mind.”

Use by expiration date

All objects have an expiration date. Not in the long-term certainty that eventually they will be discarded, crumble and disintegrate, but in the other unavoidable truth that they will someday stop providing us pleasure. Sometimes this reality becomes a frustration, like when the music you used to love no longer does it for you, when even silence is preferable to listening to any one of the 10,000 songs you've bought on iTunes—thus, our never-ending search for more, better, different. Vedanta is right when it says to not hang your hat on object-oriented happiness. This kind of happiness, by nature, is uncertain, fleeting and unreliable. And we're not just talking about the kind of happiness that requires a lot of maintenance and upkeep, like owning a boat or sustaining

a passionate, romantic relationship. We're talking about actual expiration dates, like the kind you see on a gallon of milk or a loaf of bread. Let's face it, eventually that \$2,000 mid-century modern coffee table you bought last month is going to blend in with all your other knick-knacks and cease to provide you with much, if any pleasure.

This is a fact, not a likelihood.

This is *samsara*, and it's why we say life is a setup. If this weren't the case, you would still be playing with all your childhood toys because they would still be providing you with hours of pleasure. Where are your G.I. Joe, Micronauts, Pet Rock, Star Wars figures and Atari 2600 game console now? What about your first car? Remember when going to the arcade or playing mini-golf was still fun? Why do you still clean out your wardrobe each year, change diets, change gyms and seek out new vacation spots?

So, if life is a setup, what is it setting us up for? What's the message? Should we just continue to seek out one temporary (and ultimately, unsatisfactory) joy after another? What happens when old age, financial restraints or war restrict our ability to tap into certain joys?

But what if there's another way? What is it that never expires and is the source of all joy? What if that all elusive happiness is closer than you think? What if it's closer to you than your nose?

Climate control

It's impressive how much our emotions drive us even when we know they are driving us or wish them not to. They're always on in the background setting the mood of the moment, and the mind is always there giving a status report. The mind constantly asks itself, "How are we doing? ...and now? ...and now? ...and now?" As curious as it is that our emotions have such control over us, is the ability for them to change within moments, just like the weather. Sometimes all it takes to snap out of a funk is to discover some new music or go for a walk. We claim so much ownership of our emotions thinking they are who we are and that they are our permanent state, but really they are just little passing wisps of nothing. If anything, they're just an occurrence requiring some forbear-

ance—one moment *sattvic*, next moment *tamasic*, next moment *rajasic*... There is no substance there. In fact, there's no there, there. Just like all objects in *mithya*, our emotions are only apparently real. "Don't be fooled!" Vedanta likes to remind us, "They aren't real." And so they aren't, they are derived from a power unknown to us, the Causal Body, from behind *maya's* curtain. They are fueled by our *vasanas* and *karma* in the combustible engine of *samsara*. Like everything in *mithya*, in this inexplicable dreamscape, they are nothing more than objects on the screen of awareness.

Be happy

A rule of Vedanta is to never trust your feelings, emotions and thoughts. Instead, one should trust knowledge and logic. This is tough to practice as it's so ingrained in us to constantly ask ourselves, "How am I feeling right now?" and act based on however we feel. This occurs most often when we're depressed, fearful or experiencing some other kind of negative thought. The last thing the ego wants is to admit is that it's being emotional and illogical. The ego always wants it its way, logic be damned! As humans, we take pride in our ability to feel and intuit. We embrace feeling, emotion and passion as something uniquely human. It's what gives us "soul." The question is, do you want to be right, or be happy?

We are all being watched

“WE ARE ALL BEING WATCHED!!!” cried the deranged homeless man. “Yes, we are all being watched,” I thought to myself.

Impersonal forces

The disturbing daily events and history of man is nothing but a constant course correction in relationship to the physical, psychological and moral laws of the universe, better known as *dharma*. Forces bump into the wall of *dharma*, which in return, cause the opposing forces to be pushed back within their set boundaries. The result is a return to balance and harmony.

In spite of all appearances, the drama of life and world events is nothing but *Isvara* bouncing off the restraining walls of its own universal laws. A few men and women may live long enough to brag about scaling the wall, but they don't do so for very long. When they do finally come down it's usually with a loud splat!

Seen in this perspective, the drama of life loses

its threatening appearance and a dispassion arises within. It also gives meaning to the knowledge that the world is perfect the way it is and couldn't be otherwise. From Vedanta's point of view all the world's apparent chaos is just impersonal forces bouncing off the described walls.

Those who take the chaotic world to be a battle between good and evil miss the point. There is no good and evil, just the conditions of unconscious internal and external forces making course corrections. Sometimes these forces ricochet like a tennis ball being thrown in a small room. But all forces eventually wind down, as they must, until they're stirred up once again. What are these impersonal forces? The *gunas*.

The only game in town

One thing that comes clear as one actualizes self-knowledge is that the goal of reaching *moksa* no longer is just one life objective among many, it's *the* objective. Vedanta shows the truth and even though the mind is often clouded-over and *tamasic*, when the teachings come into full focus, confidence in the teachings becomes strong. Sooner or later truth-actualization becomes the only game in town and everything else, just a side show. Even the most existential threats or life-destroying events are just a side show. Nuclear war? Global warming? Armageddon? ...all just side shows when the truth of what we are comes into focus. Our ambitions die. Fame, fortune and prestige become non-pursuits. A job just becomes a role to play, a means to fulfill responsibilities. Family is a network to help, support

and instruct when the occasion arises, but not to be attached to. Life is no longer something to squeeze maximum pleasure from, it's something to be understood to its fullest. "Reveal all to me" becomes the mantra of the *jnani*. The world becomes less substantial and more ephemeral, more dream-like. Not in a cartoonish way, but by knowledge that everything outside the self is constantly changing. The *jnani* knows this world to be the 'shifting sands of time' but now he or she has a rock to stand upon. It's all shifting constantly and continuously, it's called *samsara*. We ride out events, people and the coming's and going's of life always anchored in the one thing—unchanging, limitless, ordinary, attribute-less, eternal, non-dual awareness—the light that makes it all possible.

Zoomed in, zoomed out

The truth that Vedanta teaches makes more sense when juxtaposed with how the *jiva* experiences life on a daily basis. Zoomed-in, life on the surface is never what it seems. It's only when we're able to zoom out and look at things from a 40,000 foot view that we are able see the truth. Here are some examples:

Free Will

Zoomed-in: Because I have an intellect I have free will. I am able to make choices and fulfill actions based on those choices. I don't have control of everything, but I pretty much do what I want to when circumstances are in my favor.

Zoomed-out: There is no free will. You are controlled by impersonal forces, namely

vasanas (conditioned likes and dislikes), *dharma* (universal laws), and the *gunas* (powers within us that have the ability to alternately conceal, project and reveal). As a result, the world for you and everyone else is constantly changing. *Ishvara* calls all the shots. Personal control is an illusion.

Self

Zoomed-in: I am myself, an individual. I have a name, a body, a history and preferences. I also have a mind along with all my thoughts and emotions.

Zoomed-out: There is only the impersonal self, the one without a second. Through a process of negation it becomes clear that you are not the body-mind-sense complex. You are the smallest derivative—consciousness. The ego is just an illusion, a by-product caused by *maya* and the self's proximity to the body-mind *upadhi*.

World

Zoomed-in: All physical objects are real because they feel real. If they weren't real I could for example, walk in front of a moving car and not get hurt. If my senses tell me something is real, it's real. I kick a rock and stub my toe. It's real!

Zoomed-out: The world is not real, it's only apparently real. The world cannot be validated as we never actually come into contact with objects, that is, all objects only exist as thoughts. Furthermore, the world is ephemeral due to objects constantly changing and coming and going. All objects, when investigated, are made of other parts and don't stand on their own. Scripture says objects exist in me but I am not the objects. Only the self is real.

God

Zoomed-in: God is creator, sustainer and dissolver. God watches over all and makes judgement. I must negotiate with God if I want to lead a happy life.

Zoomed-out: God is consciousness plus *maya*, a mysterious power that creates the appearance of objects out of awareness. The essence of God is consciousness, which is your essence and everyone else's essence too. God and God's creation is only apparently real. God exists in me, the self, but I'm not God. Everything resolves into consciousness, even God.

Lila

The reward is the drama.

— The Tick, from the Amazon TV superhero series, “The Tick”

If the universe was built so that *Isvara* could play (the lila theory), then why all the pain, sorrow and suffering? The self isn't here to play because the self has no desires or attributes. Also, if *Isvara* created the universe for play, why did he make object-focused happiness so temporary? Why not make it easy and provide infinite pleasure for the *jiva*?

Maybe *Isvara* created the world for the drama? Like a good movie, *Isvara* sits back and watches all the conflict and resolution and is intrigued by it? After all, there's not much interest in having everyone just be happy all the time. A movie

without opposites, without ups and downs, doesn't make for a very compelling story. Where's the glory in success without a bit of struggle? Where's our hero without a bit of conflict?

The *jivas* think all their pain and suffering is real. Little do they know they're just movie characters playing out their parts in a dream being dreamt by *Ishvara*. However, this brings us to the question of why *Ishvara* needs to be entertained in the first place. *Ishvara* isn't a person with a Gross or Subtle Body. *Ishvara* doesn't have preferences, only laws. It all goes back to the mysterious power of *maya* for which there is no answer.

Oh, well.

Power

All of us have certain degrees of power—power that influences others. It's not magic but it might as well be. When we're young, we often admire the powers of others and try to emulate it mostly to our disappointment (because you cannot pretend power). In youth, we want the powers of physical attractiveness, charisma, and that of popular athletes, musicians and celebrities. When we get older, we want the more refined power of successful business leaders, politicians, poets and gurus.

Some of us discover our own powers early in life, while others much later. Some of us, blind to their use or importance, never realize their powers or never learn of their existence. There are different degrees of power. For example, we might be creative and exhibit sparks of genius early in life,

but not have enough will to sustain it, to hold onto it, to cultivate it.

All powers in the end, have one goal: to influence the world, to have some control. Powers are magical in that they allow an individual to do things others cannot. Where doors open for one, they won't open for others no matter how much they try.

No matter how much you try, you could never play basketball like LeBron James. No matter how much you try, you could never make a company like Elon Musk. No matter how much you try, you could never be an actor like Daniel Day-Lewis.

Powers not only influence, they enchant, charm, even put some under a spell. The spell might be evoked by a smile, a tone of voice, body language, use of speech, or a show of leadership. When I catch myself in the moment admiring someone, I observe their power. What is it? What did he or she just do to enchant me and their audience? What was their technique? Is it one power or a mixture? Is it real power or just the illusion of confidence that most people feign when they don't know what they're doing (which is most of the time).

How about powers for good? The power of kindness, compassion, understanding? We mustn't

always view power cynically. After all, these powers don't belong to anyone in particular, they belong to *Isvara*. They are *Isvara's* way of helping to keep the creation moving.

When I observe people, I no longer just see them as people, but as power-wielding *jivas*. The world is all of a sudden more interesting and less mundane when you realize all the magic around us: the dancer with perfect movement, the writer that raises the spirit, the guru that shows the logic, the politician that cuts through the cynicism, the CEO that inspires innovation.

One leader has the power of oration with his deep baritone voice and sharp intellect, while the other has the power of intimidation, a master of innuendo. But what greater power than the power to know who you are? All the world's greatest politicians, artists and intellectuals are just actors on *Isvara's* stage. But how many of them actually know that? What greater power is there than the power of self-knowledge? Self-knowledge is the power that surpasses all other powers. It's the power that sees other powers for what they really are, just temporary feats of fancy.

A trip to Costco

February 11, 2018

If you have never been to Costco, it can be like going to another planet. I had been to the mega warehouse shopping club before, but it had been a while, maybe two years, and I had forgotten how it felt. I was originally supposed to wait for my wife in the car while she picked up a few things, but as soon as we parked I felt like exploring and decided to go in with her. The first thing I noticed as we approached the entrance were the giant shopping carts. They looked like something Fred Flintstone would use to pick up a few of his favorite dinosaur ribs. These extra-wide shopping carts should be the brand symbol of Costco and really, of our consumer society. Just looking at them made

me chuckle. I was surprised nobody else was doing the same as little women half the cart's size, pushed them around with their bounty inside: 48-roll packages of toilet paper, '10-pak' loaves of bread, cake-size boxes of frozen chicken wings, a couple of dog mattresses for Fido, and a grease-laden cardboard box with pizza inside for the family at home.

Costco has the identical vibe to an amusement park. There, you can observe all kinds of people, each hankering to fulfill his or her desires in a feast for the senses. Costco advertises the benefit of warehouse prices, but I believe the real reason people like to shop there is because it's Ok to want multiples of everything—chocolate cakes, plasma screens, sweatpants, underwear...whatever your fancy. Bottom line: Nobody at Costco is going to judge you for being an absolute glutton.

People wheel down the aisles with their Flintstone shopping carts grabbing and trying samples of food on every aisle cap. They are all running the same algorithm, unconscious of the forces that compel them to forage and stock up while it's available in front of them. This is what gives them their zombie appearance. And maybe

they are real zombies for all I know. I couldn't help but to get a very "nobody's home" feeling. I'm sure had I stopped to talk with any of them that wouldn't have been the case, but from the outside it sure appeared that these weren't actual people, but humanoids running on pure high-octane *rajoguna*.

Even the employees in hair nets at each end cap appeared to be nothing more than rudimentary android models built for the single task of handing out enticing treats to the zombie shoppers. They were pleasant and all, and fulfilled their task beautifully, but only half there, really.

The robotic movements and responses of the zombies put me in a sort of hypnotic state, as if I was an actual visitor from another planet quietly walking around observing a newly discovered species for the first time.

My experience at Costco was most interesting due to my understanding of what was happening. In Vedanta terms, I was in *samsara* and I knew it! I was witnessing the impersonal and unconscious forces that drive all human beings. At the same time, I was also witnessing how my own program was responding to *maya's* tricks. When we first arrived at Costco my vision of *samsara* was as clear as day,

to the point that I found myself laughing out loud at the absurdity of it all. But by the time we had spent a good 30 minutes there, I was beginning to find the objects interesting and feeling more comfortable with the exotic landscape. The scene was normalizing for me and the original shock of being transported to a different planet was wearing off.

Sometimes I find it hard to believe that we humans all come from the same mould. Why isn't everyone clamoring for *moksa* begging to escape *samsara*? True, I am the self and so are you. It's a bit creepy to think that you and I are the same, that it's all just me, and that all *jivas*, including this one, exist in me. It's even stranger to think that the person I believe I am is just a robot and so are you. I'm glad to know I am the self, because as *jivas*, we are just too...what's the word for it?...alien.

A zero-sum game

Unlike some teachers of non-duality, a Vedanta teacher won't just tell you that you're the self and then ask you to discuss it amongst yourselves. They usually begin with something a bit more easy to chew on. For example, they might start off stating the obvious: that life is a zero-sum game, for every up there's a down. Now, it's easy to recognize this when you look at celebrities and politicians who think they have everything, until they don't. But I always wondered how the zero-sum teaching applies to a starving child in Africa. I can see how a rich and famous person's life would be equalized by the zero-sum game, but not one that is starving and weakened by extreme poverty. Where's the upside to starving to death?

I suppose the only silver lining for a starving

and dying child is that suffering doesn't just go on forever. In extreme cases, the finality of death serves as a welcome refuge. In fact, death is probably the only situation where it's hard to imagine a hidden upside. But I believe the teaching still holds water in every situation. Similar to death, even war has its hidden upsides. For example, destruction is always followed by rebirth.

Beauty can only be found when juxtaposed with the mundane. Paradoxically, the ugliness of war can only be seen against the backdrop of peace. *Samsara* is a world where opposites come and go like the weather. Opposites are a part of the natural order of things. They are simply, how the field of experience operates.

Another point is, taken at a macrocosmic level, the death of a child or many children may bring attention to the problem and ultimately, safeguard thousands more children from suffering the same tragedy in the near-future. In this case, a relatively smaller percentage of children may need to die for the survival of the greater. God (*Isvara*) always does what's in the best interest of the total. There's a not-so-obvious balance that *Isvara* is constantly performing. From this perspective, *Isvara* is like

a machine, taking everything into account and producing an equilibrium.

The teaching of the zero-sum game is really the teaching of *dharma* and *Isoara's* universal laws (call it nature, if you prefer). Life is a zero-sum game because if it weren't, only the extremes would ensue, birthing greater extremes, and not before long, the world would fall apart. Extremes in the field of experience don't just go on and on infinitely. There are no winners here, nor are there losers. There is only the balance of forces—*dharma*. As usual, it's only our ignorance of the truth that creates suffering from the changing weather conditions. Ultimately, we are beyond all of life's ups and downs. Only in that realization, can we find freedom.

Bliss

Any spiritual experience will eventually become dull and useless. In the end, all that us poor *jivas* have to rely on is knowledge of the self. So, we learn about it, contemplate it, use it to discriminate (when we remember to), and take everything as *prasad*. Only by the grace of *Ishvara* do we become any wiser or happier. One of my favorite quotes is from Marie Curie—

Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.

All *jivas* fear, we worry, a lot. It comes with the package. I suppose bliss, through understanding of the self, is really about not having to worry anymore.

Done

“Done” is the end of seeking not just spirituality, but with everything this world has to offer. That’s why self-realization takes so long—people aren’t done exploring all that life has to offer yet and believe there’s more to know, more to experience, there must be more! That can’t be it, can it? Not done means you still think there’s something better out there, which usually equates to chasing more objects and getting stuck in *samsara*. “Done” is the satisfaction that I’ve found what I was looking for, that I’m content with the knowledge, that the self has rediscovered itself and that there is union. “Done” is being done with the world in the sense that we’ve learned what needed to be learned and now there’s just being. It’s the end of *samsara*, which is the end of chasing one’s tail, really. “Done” is

seeing the world's and *samsara's* limitations. "This is it" is no longer a belief but hard knowledge. "This is it" is realizing and accepting you're in a dream and simply playing along with it (what else is there to do?). "This is it" is seeing through *maya's* illusions and all the myriad ways *jivas* get caught in its net.

Living the dream

As soon as we're born, society puts all kinds of things in our head. Parents, relatives, teachers, friends, movies, television, books, magazines, advertising and other channels of influence shape our attitudes and understanding of what it means to be a person.

Our first lesson in personal identity is that we have a name. We spend the rest of our life building and maintaining a story around that name. I am...I grew up...My family is...I went to school at...I married...and so on. We actually take on multiple identities such as son, brother, father, spouse, employee, boss. Society then helps dictate what our likes and dislikes are ranging from how we choose to dress, to which political party we affiliate with. Our tribal instincts mean that few of us ask any

questions. We accept the family, religion, education, culture and political party we've been given. As consumers we naively accept whatever is popular.

Waking up to these influences and outside forces is like flying in a rocket ship to the outskirts of the solar system. As you ascend, you watch Earth growing smaller and smaller in the rearview mirror. With self-knowledge you begin to see through society's stories, and discrimination and dispassion eventually set in. Movies, television, magazines, newspapers and advertising just become noise for your already crowded and over-stimulated mind. You begin to realize that ignorance thrives not just among individuals but among large groups, even countries. Groups just magnify what was already there in the minds of individuals, except now it's given permission to become normalized.

As we become self-realized we want to escape from society's constant lies and persuasion. We want to stop drinking the Kool-Aid of politics, media and consumer society. Nature, uncorrupted by man's desires and fears, becomes our refuge. We try to take control of what we ingest on a daily basis. We make an effort to separate ourselves from the herd. We may still need to play our role in

society but know it's just an act. In short, we play along quietly knowing that everyone is trying to do the same. In short, we try to lead a *dharmic* life, one in line with our true nature.

Treadmill

Samsara really comes down to running in place. We think we're moving, making progress, but in reality, there is only the illusion of time and space moving against the static screen of awareness. Legs are a danglin', arms are a flappin' but we're not actually going anywhere. Against the backdrop of awareness there is no progress, there is no forward, backward, up or down. The whole world is just an elaborate stage to encourage more running. Why do you think they call it a treadmill?

Samsari

“More, more, more, better, better, better, different, different, different. Pleeeeeaaaaase, something just make me feel adequate, whole and complete! Sometimes I feel like I’m not even doing this, that something else is. My desires? Yes, they must be indulged. If not, there are consequences—that gnawing, empty feeling. Plus, everyone else is doing it, all my co-workers, friends and family. I have to keep up! This is just the way life is—we work our butts off so we can have nice things and amazing experiences!!! Got a problem with that?”

- Samsari

Bubbles

Each of us—celebrities, politicians, spiritual leaders included—lives in a bubble. We do our best to make and decorate the bubble to our liking. In our bubble is our house, office, city, country, family, friends, lover, pets, hobbies, memories, preferences, objects and beliefs. However, what doesn't live within the bubble is the truth. The truth is that which cannot be encapsulated or shaped to our taste. It's what remains even after the bubble has burst. The trick is to know you're in a bubble and see past it, to have your sights on the horizon at all times, and to know that nothing can or ever will diminish the truth. The truth is the truth, the rest is just... bubbles.

Glimpses of the truth

March 24, 2016

Glimpses of the truth are always fascinating and like little gifts the universe doles out from time to time to keep us curious. I usually get mine lying in the silence and darkness before falling asleep. As the eyes adapt to the darkness, I witness only awareness—it's the void minus all the scary imagined connotations associated with it.

Last night I was lying in bed before falling asleep and digesting a thought that had been with me since the beginning of the day. This particular thought is a way of seeing the self through negation, which is the only real way of "seeing" it as you can't actually see that which you are. I was thinking to myself, "The self has no attributes. It doesn't think, feel,

enjoy, suffer or do.” The self is incapable of any of these, for they all belong to the *jiva*. There are a whole bunch of other implications that go along with this, but what was interesting last night wasn’t the understanding of this thought, but how it made me feel. It was sort of creepy in a fascinating way, as if I was momentarily able to peel back the body’s skin and look at the mechanics of the operation.

“It’s so weird” was what I was saying out loud to myself. For a second, I could see I am not the doer, that in fact, there is no “I.” What was assumed to be “I” is just an aggregate of the three bodies¹. “I” am just a program! Just as Vedanta states, “I”, the ego, can’t claim creator of anything. Body, sense organs, mind, intellect, feelings, objects...it’s all *Isvara*! I am a sentient program created and run by *Isvara*. The “I” I think I am is just the self looking through the program’s hardware and figuratively assuming an identity of its own. What I am is beautifully hidden and perfectly safe from any perceived harm, even death.

Any suffering is purely a result of the sentient program’s conditioning and ignorance. The mind isn’t getting what it wants and feels limited and constrained, so it imagines suffering. “I” am not

doing the suffering, the mind is. Why? The mind has an algorithm called “suffering” which it apparently runs provided the right conditions. What’s truly amazing, more than the shock of discovering who/what you really are, is that the mind is able to take data, process it and learn that it is not the “me” it thought it was. It seems that God has allowed a window into the system that provides the intellect the opportunity to know the self. The window or path is almost impossibly covered up, but it’s there!

These glimpses are important because although, like all experiences, they are only temporary, they help provide the faith necessary to continue along the path. They are something to fall back onto when the mind once again becomes dull and full of doubt.

Lastly, it’s no wonder so many people are afraid of the truth. For better or for worse, we love our ego even if we do sense it to not be real. We don’t want to leave the belief of the ego even when we say we do. Not because the truth is “bad” but because we are frightened, like children. The fright isn’t a big bad monster kind of fright, but more like the fright you had jumping into the deep end of a pool the first time.

It's a shame we don't all become enlightened soon after becoming a teenager. It's no wonder we're all so screwed up. We are trying to put this thing called "human life" together without a user manual. To make things worse, we have people telling us they have it! What they have resembles nothing of the such, or only includes torn pages from it.

Ignorance is a powerful force. Only a lucky few sneak past *maya* in the dark of night. At particular times, I count myself one of the lucky few.

¹The three bodies, as described by Vedanta, are the Gross Body (the physiological body along with all its vital energies), Subtle Body (the mind, intellect and ego), and the Causal Body (the "seed" form, or where thoughts bubble up from, and where the mind goes to rest while in deep sleep).

As society takes my daughter

February 2, 2016

I see my eldest daughter fall into the abyss of popular culture that breeds in the petri dishes of high school science classes across the country. I try to have compassion for her as I know it's irresistible for youth not to want to try everything, even when common sense tells them not to. I so badly want to teach her about becoming an adult but I know she's not receptive to it. The social forces are just too strong for any kind of serious talk right now, and society—under the spell of *maya*—has already cleverly made such discussions taboo for her. I see her falling in quicksand and feel helpless to save her. I know she must sink in deep enough before she begins to cry out for help.

Suffering eventually catches up to all of us and it's really only a matter of time until we decide to do something about it. Some will start smoking, drinking, taking drugs, finding an escape through sex, or seeking Jesus's love. Others, more sincere, will start a spiritual practice and slowly dig themselves out, gaining a bit of self-knowledge here and there. I hope my daughter chooses the latter. For now, I can only try to be an example. Subtle encouragement is the only way.

So, one apparently awakens while the other falls asleep. In an enlightened society there would be no falling asleep. Children would grow up knowing what they are and what their role is. Why is this so hard for us?

Maya, the original time machine

Everyone imagines how they will be when they are 60, 80 even 100 years old. We imagine getting old will happen many, many years from now. However, once you get there you will marvel at how quickly time has passed and what seemed like “many, many years from now” feels like only a few minutes ago. Of course, the real marvel isn’t the passing of time but the illusion of it actually passing. For that, we have to thank, *maya*. *Maya* is the original time machine.

Rattle rattle rattle

The mind is like an electrical home appliance that rattles when it's running. Waking up in the morning we are a witness to all kinds of thoughts from the day before: likes, dislikes, things seen, spoken, read and heard. Should we get upset because the machinery rattles a bit? Nothing in this world operates without making a little noise.

Body, mind and soul

People often attach to or work on only one aspect of their person: the body, the mind or the soul. They may go to extreme lengths to pursue ultimate health in one area, while ignoring everything else. What many people don't realize is that all three areas deserve equal dedication and discipline in life.

Often we see athletes who have an exceeding amount of *rajas*, but little *sattva*. Because they emphasize the health of their Gross Body and ignore the Subtle Body, they are over-stimulated and must always be doing. They can't sit still for a moment and struggle to stay on one topic for any length of time.

We see academics and intellectuals who consume great amounts of knowledge, but lack physical exercise and are closed-minded regarding spiritual

matters. They keep the mind stimulated but have little capacity for understanding life. Their physical and spiritual health is generally, *tamasic* and neglected.

Then we have the zealous spiritual types who see their bodies as nothing more than dead matter and therefore, have little interest in preserving its health and welfare. While they have God-awareness, they miss the fact that health of the body directly effects the clarity of mind. It's so elementary, and yet how much suffering is due to the inability or unwillingness to maintain the body?

The point is it's important to put one's attention on all three aspects of the person, dedicating equal time to the body, mind and soul. The health of one benefits the health of the other. The body effects the mind, the mind effects the soul, the soul effects the body, and so it goes... Where would the mind be without a healthy body? Where would the body be without a compassionate soul? Where would the soul be without a qualified mind?

Unfortunately, in today's society all three areas are often overlooked in pursuit of objects—namely, money to buy more of them. People work themselves to death so they can buy their kids the

latest iPhone, neglecting parts or all of their person. In return, they may become overweight, ignorant and spiritually empty.

It's all *dharma*. It's our responsibility to try to maintain optimum health in all areas given whatever resources available to us. Life is quite simple when seen from this perspective. Stay healthy, stay happy.

Dear *jiva*

Dear *jiva*,

You're already as good as you get. There is no further perfecting "you." This applies to all your apparent attributes including, but not limited to, the physical condition of the body, psychological state, outward appearance, intelligence, virtues, spirituality and worldly accomplishments. There is no next version of you. This is it. Enjoy!

Love,

You

P.S. The real you is already perfect.

Meditation

Meditation is a conundrum. The basic idea is to relax and make the mind *sattvic*—that is, clear, free from obstructions, and conducive to seeing the truth. Although we might be able to make the body relax doing such things as mentally scanning the body or imagining light or cleansing breaths, it's almost impossible for the mind to do so. At best the mind experiences brief moments of "letting go" by focusing its attention on the breath or silence. However, the mind will only follow a task until something more interesting bubbles to the surface, and then it's off on a new thought thread pursuing some kind of subtle pleasure—anything, as long as it's remotely more pleasurable.

Telling the mind what it can and cannot do just makes things worse. While teachers always like

to give a set of instructions for how to meditate, this, unwillingly, sabotages any chance of success. The mind knows what you're up to and will refuse to cooperate, especially if there is no immediate pleasure involved. Meditation in the beginning might be a new and exciting experience for the mind along with surprising epiphanies that keep you coming back for more, but sooner or later the mind is going to get tired of these experiences and will decide that thinking about mom's cooking or old TV reruns or whatever it might be, is more important.

The best way to meditate is to not try to be still, not try to stop thoughts, not try to "just be," not try to do anything. Throw out any and all agendas. Don't even call it 'meditation.' As soon as we try to label it anything, we're creating an agenda or expectation for what it should be. Don't try to not have an agenda. Don't try to not label it. Don't try to do anything.

Can you do that? Don't try to answer that question!

Don't try to figure out meditation. But that's what makes meditation so difficult for most people. Meditation is an un-doing and even that is implying

too much. Meditation is like the self, you can only really describe it in the negative such as, "it's not this..." or "It's not that..." Meditation is as close to the self as we can ever hope to get. But don't try to get close to the self and don't hope! See the conundrum?

Perhaps it's just better to seek knowledge. At least with knowledge you can do something and the mind is happy to oblige.

Enchanting experiences

August 16, 2016

These days I've been feeling a bit melancholy due to a spiritual vasana I have. Although I know life is one spiritual practice from birth to death, I feel as if all seeking is finished for me, and because of this I'm experiencing some withdrawal symptoms. Discovering, learning and experiencing spirituality is one of the most beautiful activities in life. It builds self-confidence, inspires love and brings out the best in people.

In spite of Buddhism's "road to nowhere" approach, it's a beautiful tradition. I miss its calm and peaceful aesthetic. I miss being blissed-out on peace. Vedanta is wonderful too, but it too has lost its original luster. Which is a good thing! Any

enchantment is experiential at best, and not real. It's just the intellect getting high on the novelty. Vedanta isn't there to enchant (although, that's an inseparable outcome), it's there to provide knowledge.

But while the truth will set you free, it can also be a bit disorienting. Things, people, occupations and events lose their meaning. You see that everything is just a chasing after the wind. Don't get me wrong, it's beautiful to be here and experience so many wonderful things. It's just that boxing up childish things isn't easy. This is why they say Vedanta is for adults because what you give up are your dreams, ambitions, hopes and passions. Actually, it's not so much that you give them up, but that you see through them. You see that they are made of no substance, that it was all just a mirage. It's what the Buddhist mean when they talk about emptiness.

Seeing that you are not the doer is a major let down. On one hand, out goes a whole lot of suffering, boats load. On the other hand, what fun is it if I'm not the doer? Well, there is still fun. I guess what it comes down to is that life is truly a zero-sum game, and anyway, maybe this is all ego that's talking, and maybe I do have a spiritual *vasana* and am just disappointed that the adventure is over. No

more late nights reading spiritual books, no more questions that must be answered, no more fairy tales to believe in, just the hard truth.

Really, after covering your basic survival needs and learning who you are, there's nothing to do here but play and love. The truth is just a big party pooper. After all, what could be less sexy than the truth? (Paradoxically, 'sexy,' only works because of untruths. For example, no one would ever have sex with anyone if they knew the person they were making love to was just the five elements. It's all just dead matter, plus a good dose of *maya's* magic to give the illusion that the whole of it is "sexy." We're constantly being duped. It's a setup, and when you know this, it's both a relief and a disappointment. It's a relief because you no longer need to be played the fool and suffer the results. It's a disappointment because in a way it's fun to be duped, just like riding on the Pirates of the Caribbean at Disneyland—it enchants, thrills and delights.)

This thing called life—with all its enchantment and suffering—in the end, is just a show. Once we understand this, we can try to just enjoy it, free from suffering.

Awash with emotion

August 2, 2016

Somedays the *jiva* is not happy and there's no amount of logic that will change it. Everything is just shit and there's no convincing it otherwise. Blame it on AT&T for sending me a text message about my phone bill at 5am this morning, or my car getting ripped into yesterday by a speeding driver...fuck it! Of course, all this too will pass. An apparent person is feeling miserable and an apparent car has been wrecked. Still, fuck it!

A most peculiar situation

Vedanta is good medicine but sometimes you get frustrated by your own hard-wired ignorance. “I want *moksa* and I want it now!” the ego declares. Unfortunately, it takes time. You’re not going to erase decades, possibly lifetimes of ignorance in six months, six years, or maybe ever in this lifetime. Self-actualization takes time because there’s a sort of a reprogramming that occurs.

First, you work on getting the knowledge, and next, the knowledge works on you. It’s one thing to see the truth and another to actually have the truth programmed and actualized. The knowledge works on you, chipping away at your *vasanas* and slowly letting more of the truth come through. Self-actualization is made difficult by the fact that we don’t always know what’s preventing us from

getting *moksa*. *Tamas* hides the ways to *moksa* and won't always allow us to see where we're getting trapped. This is why they say ignorance is intelligent. The ego, in particular, is very clever and will continue to delude us in spite of knowledge.

In the end, it's all a bewildering game because it's only the person that wants *moksa*, the self is already free. The self, pretending to be a person and bound, is seeking apparent liberation. Why the self plays this game, nobody really knows. It's fun to speculate that *Brahman* was bored, so it created the world and all its *jivas* to entertain itself with. But if that's the case, *Brahman* is a masochist who has no qualms about pain or suffering.

Before Vedanta, I would've said that some *thing* wants to experience. What that thing is and why it wants to experience is unknown. Why there is anything at all, including consciousness, blows the mind. As it turns out, Vedanta doesn't claim to have the answers to every question, but would disagree with (1) that there is a thing that wants to experience and (2) that there is a "why." The self is actionless, attribute-less and cannot be viewed objectively. So, it's not a thing. Vedanta doesn't even debate a why. There is no why, even the sages are perplexed to

why anything exists. There is the self and there is a mysterious power that makes the world appear. That's it!

The fact that so few even consider this at all is testimony to how *tamasic* we are as a society. If everyone were qualified for *moksa* we would all be racing toward it together like a steam locomotive. Every conversation would be about the self with absolute wonder, amazement and devotion. Instead, most of us choose to meditate on money, sports, politics, sex and what we're going to wear tomorrow. It's like 99.9% of the population has mental cataracts. What a peculiar situation.

Politics

How would someone self-actualized respond to someone's constant complaints about politics? On one side, he or she would empathize with the *jiva* and simply say that he understands her frustration—the frustration of injustice, national embarrassment, blatant corruption, indignity, defiance of the constitution, frustration with an ignorant populace, treason, and the threat of losing democracy.

On a relative level, these are all good reasons for being frustrated. On an absolute level, all that's wrong about politics is to be expected. In other words, it's the nature of this existence to have corrupt politicians who are willing to break all the rules. To explain this would be, however, almost impossible to someone not qualified to hear it.

Clearly, it would be a waste of time to begin to explain to them about the self, *maya*, *vasanas*, *karma* and *dharma*. It would be almost impossible to have them see how *maya* obscures the truth and projects the false. It wouldn't be appropriate to tell them that who they believe they are isn't real.

...or that the world is the way it is and can't be any different.

...or that ignorance of the self is the cause of all suffering.

...or that nothing is actually happening, that impersonal forces have created all our problems.

...or that we shouldn't hate a wanna-be fascist because it's only the self under the spell of *maya*.

...or that they have nothing to fear because nothing can ever touch their true self.

Sure, the *jiva* will have much cause to be upset about politics. The *jiva* is threatened, becomes angry, outraged and then depressed when it realizes it's powerless in the face of so much corruption and injustice. Or perhaps it directs its energy to protesting, or even entering politics to rid the injustice it perceives.

The self-actualized person knows the truth and therefore, is dispassionate about politics. They don't

lose themselves in the drama. They know life is theater. They fight *adharmic* forces when it's within their ability to do so in order to maintain a sense of peace, but they never lose perspective. Even in a dream, the dreamer wishes to have the dream world comfortable and peaceful, so the *jhani* does what he can to maintain a pleasant life without ever forgetting that in the end, it's all just a passing fancy.

History

After watching Ken Burns' PBS video series about the West, I came to the conclusion that as interesting as US history is with all its different characters and storylines, it and all history can be summed up as the unsuccessful pursuit of object-oriented happiness.

Over and over again, throughout history, we see man inflict suffering upon himself and others due to desire for objects. We see man inflict suffering on their spouses, their family, their friends, community and country. In the history of the West, it's apparent in the frontiersmen who put their families in extreme danger for want of their own land, in the Mormon founders' revision of Christianity in exchange for absolute power, in the railroad tycoons using (and later, throwing out) the Chinese like

disposable widgets, in the lies and killings directed toward the extinction of Native Americans, and of course, in the 49'ers who stopped at nothing to seek riches from the earth.

It's all greed.

And don't think it was just the Neo-Americans. Previous Spanish inhabitants were equally lustful in their own search for riches and their wanting to convert a native population to Catholicism (a clever psychological means to control the indigenous population in a way that was both cost efficient and didn't require armies of men to keep them down). Neither were the Native American Indians, saints. There were plenty of over-zealous warriors from tribes willing to capture, imprison, enslave, kill and push their Indian neighbors out for territorial gain. "And on and on it goes, where it stops nobody knows."

Man's pursuit of object-oriented happiness is beginningless and continues unabated today at breakneck speed thanks to the internet and other recent technologies. This is man's insanity. It's man's fever, regardless of race, nationality, location or time.

Doesn't man see that all his greed leads nowhere?

Doesn't man see that it's all just a 'chasing after the wind,' that once your basic needs are met the rest is just vanity? Doesn't man see that 100 years from now hardly anyone will remember their name or have a care about the wealth and power they once amassed?

I could go on and on describing how illogical and absurd it is, that it's a psychosis. It's inexplicable, until we learn of the source. Greed is just a symptom of self-ignorance, of not knowing what we are. Greed is the impossible mission of trying to satisfy our inner ghost, a non-existent entity—the ego—which is nothing more than a strange byproduct of the intellect reinforced by beliefs, family and society at large.

Buddhism with its Four Noble Truths is right when it teaches that desire in the form of grasping causes suffering. Whatever we hold too tightly eventually comes back to hold us in negative ways. Unfortunately, Buddhism doesn't provide us with the complete picture, which would be that the source of our desire is our mistaken identity. Our whole bloody history is about a mistaken identity and you can count on it that our future will be more of the same.

Man, or *jivas*, are just the self under the spell of *maya*. We can't say it's the *jiva's* will to be deluded and ignorant. Nobody chooses to be dominantly *rajasic* or *tamasic*. Nobody chooses to be ignorant and to suffer as a result. Who would make such a choice? Who would pursue something they know in the end will just hurt themselves and those around them? Who would pursue a path to self-destruction? Nobody is doing anything. Nobody is doing the *gunas*, nor is anyone doing their *vasanas*. History isn't written by *jivas*, it's written by the creator, maintainer and destroyer—*Isvara*.

Strange place this is, and yet, how could it be otherwise? I suppose in some alternate universe we would all be born enlightened, but that's not in the plan. History is just a stage and life, a strange karma matrix.

From a macrocosmic view, history looks like *Isvara* playing. This is *Isvara's* most amazing story or game, and the game doesn't work unless there's *maya*—a mysterious power that exists within awareness and makes the impossible, possible. *Maya* is not only responsible for every physical object in creation, but for every thought, desire and fear. The ultimate maze in this game is that which leads

the *jiva* to find out that the master / creator of the game is also the player; that *Isvara* is the game, the game pieces, and the game rules. It's *Isvara's* game that it plays with itself. It's a game of pretend on an elaborately created stage.

Why must awareness need a means to know itself? Why the game? Why why why? Nobody knows the reason, not even the sages. Our only salvation is knowing *maya* or ignorance isn't real, that it ceases to exist with knowledge. This is all just *Isvara's* dreamscape that awareness is for some reason, experiencing. It's *Isvara's* most amazing experience. The show is playing, the actors are performing, and we are a captive audience.

WestWorld, Season 1, Episode 5

One of my favorite scenes from the HBO TV series, WestWorld is where the life-like humanoid Dolores in Episode 5, finds herself in front of a fortune teller (who turns out to be herself, of course). The fortune teller shows her a card with a maze (her destiny) but also suggests Dolores is unraveling, literally. Dolores finds a hanging filament protruding from her arm and irresistibly pulls on it to discover the synthetic materials she's actually made of. In this dream-like state, Dolores discovers the truth—she's not a real person!

Which begs the question, aren't we just humanoids too? The body is an organic robot made up of five basic elements (earth, water, air, fire, space). These bodies are just made of stitched together mom and dad parts that come out of the

earth and will someday return to it. They are just the five elements plus consciousness, allowing the Gross and Subtle Bodies to mobilize and think. There is an intelligence (*Isvara*/Dr. Robert Ford in *WestWorld*) behind the name and form that provides the knowledge to create it, maintain it and eventually, dismantle it. The *jiva* is just a robot with reflective consciousness. Like the humanoid “hosts” in *WestWorld*, we are all just *Isvara’s* puppets.

WestWorld portrays the hosts experiencing repeated violence and being used as sex toys and shooting targets for rich vacationers. It’s interesting to note that the moment where the hosts begin to rebel is at the point that they begin to understand the truth. What they now have in common with their creator and the guests is self-awareness.

WestWorld is a captivating story with lots of great quotes and philosophical conundrums. However, as most fears about future technology are concerned, robots will never obtain consciousness. They may imitate it, but will never have it. A robot or computer, despite the appearance of consciousness, is still just programmed inert matter without any essence or lasting attributes. A robot can only ever be cause and effect, not the causeless cause—

awareness itself. A robot can only ever imitate, it can never be.

Science

The problem with science is that it's limited to what we can perceive with the senses and infer with the intellect. Scientists assume that consciousness arose out of inert matter, but how can that be? The more logical conclusion turns everything around by stating that the world isn't out there, the world is in you. In other words, objects rise out of consciousness. That means consciousness is the substrate and everything else is just superimposed. The mind is like a virtual reality player and I am just the witness. This makes non-duality a much more elegant an answer than thinking we can squeeze consciousness out of dead matter. Will scientists ever find the cause of consciousness? No, because they're looking in the wrong direction.

Dumb and dumber

Why is it that we only use the word “ignorance” to describe man but not nature? We don’t talk about ignorant forests or complain about naive oceans. There are no immature squirrels or unschooled ants, stupid rocks, moronic volcanoes, or idiotic protoplasm. Why is man the only self-proclaimed dumb-ass here?

Fear

Most people are sadly unaware of the most basic causes of their suffering. They walk through life with a pebble in their shoe. They complain and cry out loud to everyone about their suffering without taking notice to the reasons.

For those blessed with some knowledge, it's hard not to feel like the smartest kid in the class. One begins to wonder if most of the population is somehow retarded in their spiritual development. You want to shake them and say, "Hey, you've got a huge fucking rock in your shoe and ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS TAKE IT OUT!"

I know, ignorance is hard-wired and *maya* is a clever trickster, but still, it's hard not to feel like the inmates have taken over the asylum most days. I suppose Vedanta's explanation is that we're in this

sort of *karma* matrix until we reach *moksa*, but even then, we still have our *prarabdha karma* to deal with. In other words, you're stuck in this kindergarten until you finally figure it out and until then, you better find a way to deal with all the other snotty-nosed kids.

The conundrum is that the kids aren't so stupid. Some of them are actually quite smart (in a clever sense that is). In fact, many of them are smarter than you. The problem is they can't see. A blind man may have great intelligence, but no amount of smarts is going to make him see. For whatever reason, the kids' passion for objects always overrides the sting of its suffering. It's not until the suffering is deep enough that search for self-knowledge becomes a possibility. And for that to happen, perhaps a little grace is needed.

All of man's problems are due to ignorance. And what feeds ignorance? Desire, but more so, fear. Ignorance is intelligent and fear is its insurance that only a handful of people ever get to the bottom of what's causing them to suffer.

We desire many things to help make us feel whole, but mostly we fear understanding why we feel incomplete in the first place. We know there's

something in our shoe, but lack the courage to look
and take it out.

Judging others

Often when I travel and have time to people-watch I become judgmental, and then I become judgmental of my judging. I wonder if everyone were just like me, would I still be judgmental? Definitely! I would see all my faults and wonder why I couldn't be a more perfect version of "me." I would get impatient with others for being quiet and unsocial, and later, for being restless and silly. I would criticize them for eating the wrong foods, for not standing up to their teenage daughters, for not taking care of their front yards, for driving too fast, for spending too much time on the computer, and for picking their nose in public when they thought no one was looking. I would be skeptical of what they were thinking and how they were judging me.

Funny thing is, it is all me! It's all just me buried

under countless layers of bodies, histories, tendencies, likes and dislikes, and thoughts—lots of them. Somedays, it's hard to get my head wrapped around this and stop judging "others." There really is just one operating system here. The truth is we're all just sharing the one self. It's all me!

Other people

Maya must be extremely powerful because it's baffling why everyone isn't desperately seeking to better understand this strange human experience. People go through their entire lives spending more time thinking about what's on TV tonight than their own existence. When asked why they don't have more interest in understanding life, they sort of just look at you like you as if it were an inappropriate question, or like they have more important things to think about. People are more open to discussing their sex life than the very meaning of their existence.

Mostly, people don't want to talk about it because it's too scary. "Just keep swimming, just keep swimming" says Dori the fish. It's an odd situation, like the entire populace has been brain washed or

drugged or given something to prevent them from even asking the most fundamental questions about life.

As a society we talk about existential threats like nuclear proliferation and global warming without ever paying attention to the elephant in the room. Try to engage people in some conversation about the truth and it magically gets side-tracked. At times it feels a little like an army of white blood cells attacking an intruder. Which just makes me appreciate more, Vedanta's longevity.

So, not only is it bewildering that nobody talks about *this*, it's also a bit lonely. For when you know who you are, there really isn't much more to talk about (and as you can see, anyone to talk to!). Sure, from time to time you still get passionate about things that used to interest you. You reminisce about old likes and dislikes just to make conversation with kindred spirits and connect with other beings, but you know it's all just an act. In other words, you play along. Once you know, nothing else really matters.

It's hard carrying around an open secret. You want to say to everyone, "What is wrong with you? Wake up! Put away your toys and grow up!"

Unfortunately, most are just not ready yet.

The meaning of life

“We’re not here to gobble up experiences and objects. We’re here to understand,” he tells us.

What a sigh of relief.

Our duty

Lets face it, life is over-rated. Now, I know it's taboo to say that but deep inside everyone knows it and is afraid to state the obvious. Why? Because by saying it we're afraid we might let the air out of the balloon. That is, the will to continue.

If life were so great we'd all spend more time expressing it. All art would be expressions of our love for life, and history would be about celebration of life, not conflict. The fact is life is tough. We sense the preciousness of this life, we sense the richness of love when it's offered, but we constantly struggle at keeping our chins up in face of all the perceived negatives.

True, love and bliss are available to us here and now, but by almost impossible conditions—conditions hard to maintain and make constant.

There is no enlightenment, only the on-going recognition that due to certain personal imperfections, I'm unable to remain happy. Thank you old wise sage for clarifying things, but I'm kind of psychologically stuck in this dream-waking thing and can't seem to just pretend that I'm not real and the world neither!

...But maybe that's all part of the master plan. I mean, we're not here to just find the next best experience. We're here to do the work, and the suffering, great or small, we experience everyday is a reminder of that.

It's as if Krishna on the battlefield were saying to Arjuna, "Get off your ass and do your job!!! All those things you find pleasure in? All those hopes, attachments and grievances? They're all TRAPS!—traps to break your stubborn ass and put you on the path! Get in line soldier! DO YOUR DUTY!"

Until we see our true duty, until we see ourselves as slayers of ignorance on the field of experience, it's just one disappointment after another. Life sucks because we don't understand our duty, our *dharma*. It's all *dharma*. Live it or suffer.

The name of the game

Part of Vedanta's *nididhyasana* stage, a stage that includes ongoing meditation of the teachings, is acceptance of the world as it is. It's easy to read the news headlines and get sucked into the world's drama. It all seems so real and tragic! We complain to ourselves and to others about the incompetence and disfunction at government's highest positions. But what do you expect when 99.9% of the world is driven by forces they're not even aware of? Blame it on *karma* and the *gunas*. Blame it on *Isvara*, this is not *jiva's* show, after all.

A sign of a mature being is one who has dispassion for society. Why? Because ultimately, he or she knows that it's senseless to worry about something you have no control over. As much as we wish for the world to be different, we just don't have control

over how it plays out. Even leaders of state, with all their influence, are limited in what they can do. At the end of the day everyone must play by *Isvara's* rules. For every action there is a reaction, and every *adharmic* thought or action in this world has its price. It's called *karma*, and it works.

Jnanis know that this world is just a *karma* matrix and that the ultimate goal for all human *jivas* can only be *moksa*. Everything we do, consciously or unconsciously, is for freedom from limitations. We may pursue a better paying job to be free from debt, or pursue a relationship to be free from loneliness. As *jivas* we pursue objects and experiences for happiness. It's only by the power of *maya* that I fail to see that the happiness I seek, lies within me and not "out there."

The richest and most powerful may generate great envy among us but their's is all just a passing fancy—here today, gone tomorrow—leaving the *jiva* broken and disillusioned when the experience dissipates. Those who lust for power and money are trying to fill a hole they can never fill. On the surface it seems glamorous, until one recognizes just how discontent these *jivas* really are. No amount of profits, property or pretty friends can make them

happy.

Society's idea that power and riches is the apogee of success, is just a belief. It's a bizarre conjecture that says riches and power bring absolute security and absolute happiness; and most of all, that with absolute power and riches "I" will be complete. It's *maya's* most irresistible trick. Money and power are like a pleasure-inducing drug that requires a greater and more dangerous dosage each time in order to experience the same high. This, of course, is a description of *samsara*—a system built purposely to frustrate *jivas* and ultimately, break them down so they might get a glimpse of the truth. We have to ask, where's the envy in that? What appears to be a cruel setup is just *Isvara's* way of pointing the *jiva* toward freedom.

So by practicing *nididyhasana* we stay focused on the teachings and let the world be as it is. For reasons we'll never know, *Isvara* has created this strange, virtual classroom for the self to discover and learn of itself. The world is a university and you don't get to graduate until you learn the name of the game: *moksa*.

Lucid dreaming

November 6, 2016

Non-duality seems impossible until you remember that in a dream you are both the subject and the object. It's not obvious until you think about it, but you are both that which creates and experiences the objects in a dream. You are the perceiver, the perception and the perceived.

Lately, I've been experimenting with lucid dreaming. It's not something I plan for thinking to myself, "Tonight I'm going to dream and know I'll be in a dream." It just happens. I find myself aware that I'm dreaming and begin to get curious about the dream world.

One observation I've made is that dreams feel very real—as real as real gets! The only difference

with lucid dreaming is that I know I'm dreaming, that what I'm experiencing is not consistent with waking life.

Lucid dreaming is quite an experience especially when you're able to make what appears to be decisions like, "Now I'll try flying." However, what's most interesting, apart from making apparent decisions and testing them, is that the lucid dream is me. I am the dream body, dream house, and dream people.

Like dreaming, waking life feels very real, but upon close examination doesn't add up. Vedanta lays out the evidence beginning with the impermanent and changing nature of all objects, and ends by proving that the location of all objects is the mind. It's all just thoughts. Dig a little deeper and what you find is that the universe isn't made of matter, it's made of awareness.

Sin

I often get the frustrated feeling that everything is wrong about the world. I've had this sense often since early childhood. I've always known it, but only now can I understand this feeling that most everything feels off the mark. This feeling is really about sensing what's true and what isn't (discrimination) and why when I'm in nature, I don't have the feeling. The world of man makes us feel uneasy because it goes against our true nature. When man knows who he is, he's in balance, he's following *dharma* and he can take it easy knowing that everything is Ok. When man doesn't know he's awareness (which is most of the time) he's off the mark—which is the original definition of “sin” in the Christian-Judeo tradition. Man doesn't know he's awareness and instead believes he's

what in Vedanta they call the *upadhi* (in man's case, the body-mind-sense organism). His environment reflects this error in every way and as a result, those who are able to discriminate intuitively, feel that it's all wrong, that what's missing is a fundamental truth. And they're right.

Teaching children about death

There is something in you that has witnessed your life since you were born. This something never changes, is never born and never dies. It's a light that illuminates the world and your every thought. It is the same light that gives life to this body and every body. When you die you lose the person, but not the light. That light, which has shined forever, even before you were born, is pure, infinite and eternal. If you're inclined to think so, you may believe that you will be born in another body in order to experience this world once again. If it helps, you can think of dying like falling asleep. When you're in a deep sleep the world and the person you believe you are disappear, but the real you is still there, happy and at peace just being, just being the light.

About enlightenment

There is no enlightenment. What would it be that gains enlightenment? Only the ego can claim enlightenment and ego is only a reflection of the self. The ego is just a thought, how can something that's not even real claim enlightenment? Enlightenment is just more *mithya*. "I," the person I believe I am, may not be enlightened but I do have knowledge of the self and what I am and am not. But relax, because ego isn't the problem. In this world it's impossible to operate without an ego. Society may give the feeble ego a negative rap, but ego isn't just a mind corrupted with the "I" thought. The ego serves a purpose. It's what helps us stay out of trouble and live a *dharmic* life. It's the voice we hear inside that helps us to solve problems (and make a few, as well).

This is why the ego is synonymous with the intellect—the thinking portion of the mind. ‘Intellect,’ ‘ego,’ ‘voice in the head’ are all the same. Once we have self-knowledge, we tolerate the ego knowing that it’s a by-product of the intellect. It appears that the self is fooled but actually It’s the software that is confused. it’s the intellect itself that’s confused. The self is just the light that makes thinking possible and therefore, confusion possible. In other words, confusion cannot be a attribute of the self, but only of the intellect (the self has not attributes).

Jivas are programmed to accept the mind-body as itself. By the power of *maya* we are tricked into believing we’re a separate entity encased in a sausage tube. Enlightenment is just a concept the intellect uses to suggest the concept of self-knowledge.

Do I wish my intellect/ego-enlightenment was better? Sure. I’m not looking for an experience of enlightenment, but I do wish I had effortless, constant non-dual vision. When the *jiva* has an epiphany it witnesses the potential for the intellect to see the naked truth. Most of the time the *jiva* is *tamasic*, the reflection is dull and the intellect takes

the mind-body to be “me.” What if the *jiva* could have non-dual vision all the time without ever falling out of it? What if, like a biologist studying cells under a microscope, we could see the truth without trying? What if we were immune to all of *maya*’s tricks? How amazing that would be!

This, of course, is just a description of a mind with pure *sattva*. And while *jivas* may experience moments of pure *sattva* from time to time, only *Isvara* has perfect non-dual vision all the time. As *jivas*, we must still experience all the *gunas*. We really have no choice. So, we can forget about the idea of gaining 100% pure *sattva* and never losing it. It’s just another enlightenment myth.

Alas, all the *jhani* can hope for is *nididyhasana*, constant meditation on the truth. Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. It’s our best weapon against ignorance and really, the best use of this intellect/ego.

Wake up call

There is no enlightenment, only knowledge. This is a hard one for the ego who keeps looking for its payout, convinced beyond all evidence to the contrary, that enlightenment is an event that will be rewarded. The ego just patiently sits, waiting for its big day.

There is nothing mystical or extraordinary about enlightenment other than the fact that so few people ever actually achieve it. In concept, it's quite simple: learn and apply. How complicated is that?

It's not learn, apply and wait for a celestial transformation. Or learn, apply and wait for complete unity with the cosmos, or any other variation of those. It's really no more complicated than learning any discipline that requires observation, intelligence and vigilance. It's only our beliefs and our big egos that get in the way.

After enlightenment...boredom?

As human beings, we are a fickle bunch. In life we don't like experiences coming at us too fast. We don't like too many deadlines and commitments because too much, too fast stresses our bodies and minds. We also don't like experiences coming at us too slowly, because stagnation and boredom can affect our bodies and minds in other negative ways. In a society fueled by *rajas*, this constant self-regulation to find the sweet spot (not too stressed, not too bored) happens on a moment-by-moment basis.

Taking in experiences too quickly or too slowly can lead to a variety of health ailments, but with taking in experiences too slowly there is the additional attribute that doing nothing is not an option. In other words, we can choose to slow down and have less experience but we can't choose to

have no experience. Even the deep meditative state of *samadhi* affords some experience due to the fact that even when there are no thoughts occurring in the mind, there is still the awareness that there are no thoughts.

The spiritual world and those drawn to it tend to avoid stress and an extroverted approach to living. Many of us who fall in this category are looking for the perfect peace or to repeat elusive experiences of perfect peace. The problem with this and with all experiences is they don't last and are not readily available. Furthermore, the older and more mature you become, the harder it is to derive pleasure from experiences—they just don't ring your bell like they used to and when they do, the moment is too fleeting to make any difference.

Once you get to a point in your spiritual journey where you've had the good fortune to learn all you need to, there really isn't much to do but go fishing. By that point, you've nobly and courageously slayed all your dragons but now have boredom to contend with. As they say, "for every up there's a down." Nevertheless, I'd much prefer resigning myself to a good nap knowing everything is Ok than to debilitating existential angst.

Actually, its only our *karma* that creates boredom and drives us to fill every waking second with sensual and emotional excitement. Unfortunately, once we have a bit of self-knowledge, the momentum of our *karma* doesn't immediately dissipate. This "*karma* in action" is referred to as *prarabdha karma*, and it has a lifespan of its own. So next time you get bored, examine how much anxiety is behind it and realize that your *karma* might be the reason for your boredom. Ironically, boredom is anxiety.

It should also be mentioned that as the teachings reveal their truth more and more to us, our desires begin to lose their grip, dangle and fall away. What's left is a feeling of absence, a void, like the feeling of missing your glasses or forgetting to wear your wedding band. This can be a bit disorienting due to the mind's habit of chasing objects. Out of habit, the mind is still chasing, but not wanting. The result is anxiety/boredom. As they say, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. *Nididhyasana* never ends, not even for the enlightened.

When I remember

*When I forget my real nature, I convert life into a burden.
When I remember my nature, I convert life into entertainment.*

—From 'The Five Capsules of Vedanta' according to Swami
Paramarthananda

Person 1: The older I get the fewer illusions I have and the more I see life as something just to be endured.

Person 2: I disagree. Life isn't to be endured, it's to be lived and you, my friend, are being lived. So relax and enjoy the ride.

Person 1: OK, explain.

Person 2: Well, you have to ask yourself, “Who is it that sees life as something to be endured?” The ego takes over and instead of just being with the moment, begins to grumble and complain. It begins to feel frustrated and question things. It might even begin to despair. Take ego out of the picture and there’s really no problem. Just live. Just be. It’s the easiest thing in the world and yet so many of us fail to do it. Why? Because we don’t see that issues like boredom are the ego’s problem. The self is perfectly happy with just being. The self has nothing to do, nowhere to go, nothing to be. It’s only the ego that steps in and tells us something is wrong, that something is lacking, not pleasant enough, etc.

Person 1: I’m not a tree. I can’t be happy just standing.

Person 2: Right, you have a mind and that mind needs to be used. So, choose a healthy occupation or pastime to occupy it with. The problem is when the ego begins to make up stories. It creates its own suffering by exaggerating its needs— “I need to be busier, I need to have more fun, I need to travel

more, I need more money...so I can do all the things I need to do!" Life is so much simpler than we believe it to be. Once we're able to accept life as it really is, it's no longer a burden.

Person 1: Well, part of it is that the older I get the more dispassionate I become. I've lost so much—my interest in art, music, books, even spirituality—not because I'm apathetic and don't care, but because so many illusions have been seen through and once you know the magician's trick, it's just not interesting any more. The magic was in the illusion as was the pleasure, I suppose.

Person 2: ...As was the suffering, I would add. The suffering to obtain, to keep, to maintain, to find new sources of pleasure, to never stop seeking the new, the better, the different, the more beautiful. The suffering when the novelty wears off, and when that fancy danish chair you spent \$2,000 on last year begins to blend into the background with all of your other knick-knacks. What was fulfilling and satisfying is no longer because all objects and experiences are limited. It's all just dream stuff, really.

Person 1: Dream stuff?

Person 2: Yeah, it's like a mirage, not real. It was all just an illusion, just like you said. Only awareness, the essence of who you really are is real. Awareness is the only absolute proven constant in this whole experience. Everything else is ephemeral and in the process of becoming something else. While asleep, have you ever tried to pause a dream? Maybe you're having a really sexy dream and you don't want it to end. You want it to never stop, but you can't! The dream keeps changing in spite of your wishes.

Person 1: So, I'm dreaming?

Person 2: No, but what you are experiencing is dream-like. You are having an experience of being a human, which on the surface appears very real but zoomed-out is only apparently real. At best, reality is just a thought in your mind. Nothing is what it seems. It's like watching a movie—we only become engrossed in the movie because we're able to ignore the fact that it's just flickering light projected onto a flat surface. Our experience works in a similar way.

A deluding power within these minds magically creates name and form out of awareness and makes us believe that it's real. We're programmed to see the world as real, not as actual input sensory data translated in a virtual reality box experienced by consciousness. So the thought that you must endure something is just another object being projected on the screen of awareness. It's not you. And anyway, there's nothing to endure here, only to understand. It's only our ignorance that makes us suffer, my friend.

Winning the Super Megalotto Jackpot

Maya is intelligent. With its power of projection and concealment, it fools everyone. One of its most astonishing tricks is the one that conceals the truth from all of us. *Maya* makes us both fearful of and blind to the truth, thus keeping us *jivas* securely in *samsara*. The truth is so concealed that nobody recognizes it, not even the smartest among us. We don't recognize the truth because it is who we are. It's like the camera looking for itself in the photographs it takes. Because we are unable to find life's answers we create beliefs out of desperation and try to convince each other that "Jesus loves you." When our confidence begins to falter, we blame it on our lack of faith and not on the stories we tell ourselves and convince others of. And so we go through life, through generations, believing that

we suffer from lack of faith rather than blaming it on the real culprit: beautiful, intelligent ignorance—*maya!*

My friend, that you are able to see the truth, that you are able to recognize it and pick it out from the thousands of imposters is nothing trivial. It's a gift. It means you are qualified. Too many of us are walking around with this two-ton boulder strapped to our backs called 'suffering.' How many of us actually have the privilege of unstrapping that boulder and being free of its tremendous weight? How many of us recognize that ignorance is the very strap that holds that boulder to our backs? What an amazing privilege to see and know the truth!

My friend, today, you have won the lottery. Congratulations.

Glossary

Adharmic - That which goes against *dharma* or the universal physical, psychological and moral laws as governed by *Ishvara* (God).

Brahman - Pure awareness. The original source of awareness.

Causal body - One of the Three Bodies (Gross, Subtle, Causal) that make up the *jiva* (person, or being). The Causal Body is the seed state from which all objects manifest, including thoughts.

Dharma - The universal physical, psychological and moral laws as governed by *Ishvara*.

Gross Body - The physical body.

Gunās - The three powers (*sattva, rajas, tamas*) as used by *Isvara* to create, sustain and dissolve the world. Within the Subtle Body, the *gunas* act as the three mental conditions that must be managed by the *jiva* in order to lead a peaceful life.

Isvara - The creator, sustainer and dissolver of the field of experience. *Isvara* is pure awareness plus *maya*. *Isvara* is sometimes referred to as God.

Jagat - The world, *Isvara's* creation.

Jnani - Self-realized human being. One who has self-knowledge.

Jiva - Person or being, including animals and plants.

Karma - Action, results of action. With every action there is a result administered by *Isvara*. Vedanta talks about *karma* being like an account that a person accrues. The *jiva* accrues both good and bad *karma*, therefore setting the conditions for their life.

Manana - The second stage of self-inquiry that involves resolving any doubts or confusion regarding the teaching.

Maya - A mysterious power that creates the world of objects out of awareness. *Maya* has the ability to both veil and project, therefore hiding the truth from the *jiva*.

Mithya - Apparently real. All objects are *mithya* due to their changing nature and dependency on other factors. Vedanta defines 'real' as that which is always present and never changes.

Moksa - Liberation from *samsara*, or inner freedom from object-oriented happiness.

Nididhyasana - The final stage of self-inquiry that involves the contemplation and assimilation of the teachings.

Non-duality - The logical conclusion that everything comes out of, is sustained by, and resolves back into awareness.

Prarabdha karma - The *karma* that continues even after self-actualization or “enlightenment.”

Prasad - Gift from God.

Rajas - One of the three *gunas* or powers. *Rajas* provides the energy to create, sustain and dissolve *Isvara's* creation. On a more subtle level, *rajas* is one of the three mental conditions that needs to be managed by *jivas*. *Rajas* can effect the *jiva* in both positive and negative ways. On one hand, *rajas* helps to motivate and move the *jiva*. On the other hand, too much *rajas* can create anxiety and strong desire. *Rajas* has the power to project and therefore, hide the truth from the *jiva*.

Satya - That which is real, never changes and is always present.

Sattva - One of the three *gunas* or powers. *Sattva* provides the intelligence to create, sustain and dissolve *Isvara's* creation. On a more subtle level, *sattva* is one of the three mental conditions that needs to be managed by *jivas*. *Sattva* is clarity of mind, and the ability to see things as they are. *Sattva*

is generally, perceived as a healthy state of mind and one that should be cultivated for self-inquiry.

Self - Awareness. The unchanging, always present “light” that vivifies the *jiva* and makes life possible. The self is sometimes described as limitless conscious existence. It has no attributes and cannot be objectified, and yet, it is the single source and essence of our very being.

Shravana - The first stage of self-inquiry requiring an openness to sustain disbelief and hear the teachings.

Subtle body - The mind, intellect and ego.

Svadharmā - One’s personal *dharma*. Vedānta suggests that we honor our own innate abilities and avoid action that conflicts with our nature.

Tamas - One of the three *gunas* or powers. *Tamas* provides the matter to create, sustain and dissolve *Isvara*’s creation. On a more subtle level, *tamas* is one of the three mental conditions that needs to be managed by *jivas*. *Tamas* can effect the *jiva* in both

positive and negative ways. On one hand, *tamas* helps to keep us grounded and is required in order to fall asleep at night. On the other hand, too much *tamas* can make us lazy, doubtful and fearful. *Tamas* has the power to veil and therefore, hide the truth from the *jiva*.

Upadhi - A limiting adjunct or conditioning agent. An *upadhi* is something that makes an object appear different when placed in close proximity, like the color of a crystal when placed next to a rose. Vedanta uses the term to describe how *jivas* mistake their identity as a person. In the case of the *jiva*, the body is the *upadhi*. In the case of *Isvara*, *maya* is the *upadhi*. However, the true identity of both *jiva* and *Isvara* is awareness.

Vasana - Conditioned tendency. Once a like or dislike is established and reinforced through thoughts and action, it becomes a conditioned tendency or *vasana*. *Vasanas* can develop to have a life of their own, influencing our actions at an unconscious level.

