

# To Purify or Not to Purify: That Is the Question

Guest

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Self-realisation is, arguably, the ultimate paradox. The knot of ignorance is cut, and the apparent person knows their own essential nature directly and permanently. At the same time, the ego still has many games to play (*prarabdha karma*) and play them it most certainly will. This is not in itself a “bad” thing. It is part of *Maya*’s strange, strange dream. The ego/our hang-ups/issues are now known to have no substantive reality, and therefore need not be taken overly seriously. Of course we continue to live a *dharmic* lifestyle, but central to that lifestyle is the knowledge of the difference between true reality and apparent reality. Therefore we live lightly: the continued purification of the mind need not be regarded as a heavy burden, an ultra-important project to sweat over night and day. Our “shadow” side may be, at one level, disturbing and painful. But shadows are by their nature insubstantial, ephemeral, deceptive in their apparent, but only apparent, ability to change our inner landscape for the worse. They are part of *Maya*’s shadow-boxing, a game which frequently may seem to be in very poor taste. Yet self-knowledge puts everything in perspective. One’s life automatically focuses on enjoying our own nature as ever-free awareness. Life becomes, as Swami Paramarthananda calls it, an entertainment.

It is worth remembering that this lived appreciation of the apparent “orders of reality” simultaneously delivers both the joy of freedom and the purification of the mind/ego. Self-knowledge educates the subtle body as to its own essential nature and triggers many profound psychological benefits. For instance, one can “simultaneously” experience the joy and serenity of ineffable knowledge and also inner turmoil, fear, etc. This makes a huge existential difference to the quality of our daily lives. Our automatic identification with our true nature acts as a continuous purification mechanism (as the *Gita* states). The post-realisation “work” can be expressed as allowing our understanding to heal and strengthen the mind. The mind assumes its rightful position in the “pecking order” and is no longer seen as the master of our internal universe. It is seen to be an object in unchanging awareness. Its claim to be the master has been refuted and will not be reinstated. And we get to laugh at it, frequently and spontaneously – and with kindness. It is part of the “entertainment.”

This purification process is not the same as the “cultivation of virtue” *sadhana* in the Christian or other dualistic traditions. In such traditions, the individual person or “soul” operates from a position of insecurity and danger. His or her nature is seen as fundamentally flawed, limited, damaged, with a (hidden) core of evil – the consequences of “original sin.” As a result, it is gripped in a “life-and-death” struggle for spiritual survival, with eternal consequences. It is experienced as a dualistic interior war between two opposing forces. There may well be a reduction in some *vasana* issues, but at the price of seemingly endless guilt and frequent (spiritual) exhaustion. It is part of *Maya*’s (cruel but effective) game.

In contrast, the purification of the mind in Vedanta is a radically different process and, in itself, need not be stressful. It functions from a position of strength and security – the peace of self-knowledge. The *vasanas* are known to have no actual reality, and their “activities” are known to be like shadow-boxing. *Moksa* is known axiomatically to be a fact. (The only fact in fact.) There are no chronic doubts or fears that one is deluding oneself with some kind of esoteric “salvation.” Why? Because the freedom, the self-knowledge, the bliss of the knowledge of completeness are

effortless and self-evident to the head and heart – and “soul.” So neither Vedanta nor the knowledge it teaches lead to neurotic guilt or any form of scrupulosity.

Sadly, this cannot be said of the Christian tradition in general – the latter has too, too often triggered relentless self-hatred and self-rejection. Even its genuine saints seem, too often, to have experienced their apparent humanity as a curse. Even the Christian mystical tradition (which, arguably, is the best thing the West has produced) has been, and is, burdened with a (subtle) dualistic sense of separation and the consequences flowing from that. In Vedanta, “the good, the bad and the ugly” are known axiomatically and existentially to never touch our true nature as *sat chit ananda*, and to be transient forms of the self. Therefore if we, so to speak, “bring” our less-than-delightful qualities into the light of self-knowledge, or see/understand them in that light, they resolve, dissolve and gradually “evaporate.” The “blood, sweat and tears” of dualistic traditions are seen to be part of *Maya*’s (apparently) sadistic game when they are understood to be mental constructs subsequent to *moksa*.

*Vive la différence.*