

All Objects Are *Isvara*: Subjective and Objective Realities

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David: Dear Sundari, I am so grateful for the feedback you both have given me. There were a great number of things each of you clarified, and if we ever meet in person I hope to thank you for them all. Non-duality has been a challenge for me, and based on some things you both have said, and thinking about it another way, I have developed an idea of how I may be able to fit some things together. If I take a wrong turn here, please let me know whenever your schedules permits (no rush). Thanks!

All is impermanent to awareness:

A person will only experience objects when he/she is conscious of them. For the person, the objects only exist at those times. All different emotions, different qualities and states as well as different physical objects and other people only exist in consciousness when it arises there, and afterwards they dissolve. Therefore none of these things are permanent, in that they are not always known, or in our awareness.

Meaning is assigned by the mind:

Furthermore, a physical object at its most basic level is only a collection of materials which may have a function, but even that perceived function, use or significance is given its meaning by the person (doer/thinker/mind).

Impermanence and assigned meanings mean no objects can be real, or self:

Beyond the physical objects, all the emotional, situational and more subtle objects can be known to be not-self, or not real, because they also are impermanent, and also any association that forms with one's identity (or self) is merely a temporary experiencing of them.

Furthermore, whenever any object is experienced its meaning is only assigned via the person's attachment or aversion based upon desire or fears. Therefore if two different people could experience any object two different ways, then that object is not real.

So any object can be known to be not-self because it is not permanent and its meaning is only imagined.

What objects are to consciousness/awareness:

Therefore when it comes to all types of objects (physical and mental), to our awareness they exist because we are conscious of them. But any meaning is only assigned and temporary and therefore could be said to be illusion/*maya*.

Is this what is meant by non-duality? In the reality we experience there is only our awareness.

That is all we can ever really know and it is the only thing that will ever be permanent, and therefore the only order of reality is that which appears in our awareness.

I recognize that this is a self-enclosed system and others exist outside of ourselves. However, if other people are experienced as objects to us and we assign different people unique meanings, then despite them also being awareness, any meaning we assign them based on our experience would be illusory as well since it would pertain to their relationship to our mind-body entity and not to the awareness we actually are. So while another is consciousness, just as I am consciousness, reality is still non-dual because each individual actually only experiences that which appears in their awareness.

Also, to not assign any meaning beyond the awareness of any object leaves it free of illusion. Therefore the only thing that each thing could be is an object of awareness, in awareness. Is this what is meant by all things are made of awareness?

Or will I discover upon eliminating all traces of object-associations that non-duality is shared in order of reality, being consciousness, which we are all truly sharing in harmony, that in fact I reach beyond a personal awareness as the entity who would have awareness becomes himself an illusion, and awareness is left as the only thing?

Thank you for helping. You are both very kind to do this for people. Again, please only respond when it is convenient for you.

~ David

Sundari: Dear David, I have not replied in point form because you basically have one question which is repeated throughout your email. When someone thinks like a *jiva* who knows awareness instead of as a *jiva* who knows it is awareness, that *jiva* lacks discrimination. In other words, its self-knowledge is indirect. If your goal is freedom from bondage to objects then your knowledge should be direct (“I am awareness”). From your statements it is clear that your discrimination needs some work. Freedom is discriminating you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you. To do that you need to understand the nature of objects and the nature of the apparent reality, meaning *Isvara*.

All *jivas* experience all objects (whether subtle or gross) “in” the mind, meaning in consciousness, and interpret them according to their *guna*-generated conditioning, i.e. *vasanas*. All objects, including the thoughts and feelings of the individual, are *Isvara* and have an independent, apparent existence apart from the individual *jiva*’s perception and interpretation of them. A “physical” object is just the thought of a physical object and no different from a subtle object. This is because a physical object has no meaning apart from the knowledge of the object and the knowledge of the object is conditioned by the *jiva*’s interpretation of the object. This interpretation in turn is conditioned by the *jiva*’s self-knowledge or lack thereof.

Any knowledge is object-based, not subject-based. It is not knowledge unless it is true to the object. If it is my knowledge, then it is my interpretation of an object, which is not necessarily knowledge. Ignorance (or my point of view) is causing me to see or experience whatever it is as though it is actually there. People believe that ignorance is knowledge because they believe that knowledge is subject-based, i.e. they believe that what they experience is knowledge. It may be knowledge but it may not be.

Self-knowledge depends on the nature of the self, not on knowledge gained through personal experience. On the basis of self-knowledge the individual can retain or reject the knowledge gained through his or her personal experience.

The most important reason that objects can be known to be objects is because they are not the subject. The very fact that you can know something means it is an object. Awareness is the subject and the one that knows the object. Without awareness, no knowledge can take place; without awareness, no objects, which include knowledge and ignorance, exist. Awareness is not an object of knowledge and cannot be known by the mind, which is an object known to it. Awareness can only be revealed in a *sattvic* mind with the removal of ignorance through exposing the mind to self-knowledge.

Isvara srsti, the creation, exists because *Isvara* is in charge of the *dharma* field. It means *jiva's* personal creation, or story (*jiva srsti*), and *Isvara's* impersonal creation, *maya*. *Isvara* creates, sustains and destroys the whole universe. The world we see with our senses and the senses with which we see it are *Isvara's* creation. Within *Isvara's* creation are innumerable *jivas*, individuals: plants, animals, humans, insects, etc. *Jivas* are living beings with gross, subtle and causal bodies. Human *jivas* have intellect which makes them self-aware, self-reflective. This means that they can interpret their experiences. The way that a *jiva's* subtle body interprets its experience is its "world." Its interpretation is its "creation," *jiva srsti*.

When we say the world would not be there without the mind (subtle body) we mean *jiva's* interpretation, its projection, would not be there. It does not mean that the material world, the senses, subtle body and the *vasanas* (*Isvara srsti*, or creation) would not be here. We call the *jiva's* creation, "*pratibhasika satyam*," the subjective reality. There is only one David, and he sees things a certain way owing to his conditioning. *Isvara's* creation is called "*vyavaharika satyam*," the objective world. This is the world of science, the objects and the laws which are not under the control of any *jiva*.

We need this teaching so the *jiva* does not confuse its creation with *Isvara's*. The *jiva* is in *Isvara's* creation and is required to respond to it. This is called *dharma*, appropriate response. If the individual responds properly to what *Isvara* wants it will be in harmony with *Isvara*, the creation, meaning its environment. But if the *jiva* is living in its own world, and gets a request from *Isvara*, and responds according to its fears and desires, likes and dislikes, it is quite possible that it will run afoul of *Isvara*, meaning its circumstances – and therefore suffer.

This teaching makes the *jiva* aware of the difference between the subjective and the objective realities. If it is clear which is which, it can choose to follow *dharma*, not its own desire – in case they are different. There is no problem with *jiva's* desires as long as they conform to *dharma*.

In order to understand non-duality, one first has to understand the identity between pure awareness, awareness operating as the Creator, or *Isvara* (the *dharma* field, or apparent reality), and the individual, or *jiva*. As all objects are experienced in the mind of the *jiva* (the self under the spell of ignorance), how objects are experienced depends on whether the *jiva* knows its true identity as awareness or not. Through self-inquiry, discriminating the self from the objects appearing it, self-knowledge negates all objects and reveals that they have only an apparent reality, i.e. they are not real even though they do exist, because you can experience them. All objects arise out of consciousness, like the spider's web arises from the spider, all objects have a dependent existence on awareness – but you, awareness, are always free of the objects.

The self-realised *jiva* knows that all objects are value-neutral and incapable of delivering anything; the joy comes from them as awareness. So they do not seek objects to complete them. Until such time as ignorance is removed by self-knowledge, the *jiva* takes itself to be a body-mind and sees all objects as real and separate from it. So the *jiva* seeks objects to complete it, and this is why *moksa* is freedom from dependence on objects.

There are no real “others” once one really understands non-duality. There is only one awareness manifesting as many apparently different *jivas*. These apparent others appear to have an impact on us and we on them. As the liberated *jiva*, or the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, we continue to have interaction with them as “other,” knowing that all objects are *Isvara* and we experience them according to “our” conditioning, meaning the *guna*-generated *vasanas*.

When your true nature is known to be awareness you no longer project your interpretation of objects onto “others” even though you may still experience your interpretation of so-called others. Your interpretation is an object known to you and therefore not a problem for you, awareness. Everything dissolves in the light of self-knowledge.

There is no “beyond” awareness, and it is not “the awareness,” there is only awareness. Awareness does not belong to the *jiva*. As a *jiva*, self-realised or not, it is very difficult not to assign meaning to objects as they appear to us and we respond to life. Duality does not disappear once reality is known to be non-dual. It is known for what it is, a superimposition, like the mirage on the desert floor. You still experience the mirage but it is known not to have a true referent, i.e. it is not real.

Your use of the word “illusion” is not a good choice, as it implies that something has no existence. “All objects have a curious ontological status,” to quote James. The world is neither real nor is it unreal. It is not real, because it has a beginning and an end. It is not unreal, because it is experienced. The world is not real because it is impermanent, but it is real if you see it as the self. The most truthful statement about the nature of the world is that it is an apparent reality. It seems to be, but in reality it doesn't exist, like a snake perceived in a coiled rope at twilight.

Your question, “Is the world created by my thoughts?,” is a psychological question. Whose world are we talking about and who is asking the question? The world and your thoughts are dependent on your conditioning and who you think you are. From the point of view that you are asking the question (which is as the apparent person, or body-mind), it is not the world, it is David's world. The right question would be, “Is my world created by my thoughts?,” and the answer to that would be yes, if you think you are the person called David. This is the subjective reality I talk about above. The world is *Isvara* and that world exists independently of your interpretation of it. *Isvara* is responsible for your conditioning, so without knowledge of your true nature as awareness, your world is actually created by *Isvara*, your conditioning, but you think David is creating it. Your question does not indicate the real identity of the mind – which is awareness – the knowledge of which is enlightenment. The only way to effect change in David's world is with the knowledge that you are not David, but awareness.

“Is the world me?": the answer is yes, because reality is non-dual awareness. The world is not separate from awareness, and because I am awareness the world is me. I experience the world in awareness, and there is no separation between what I experience and myself.

A better expression to use with reference to all objects rather than “illusion” would be “not real,” understanding that by “unreal” you mean not always present and always changing.

So even when the *jivanmukta* (the liberated *jiva*) does assign meaning, as awareness you have no problem with it, because it has nothing to do with you. As peace of mind is the main goal, the *jivanmukta* automatically follows *dharma* and manages the *gunas* accordingly. David does not disappear and is not an illusion. He has an apparent existence and is simply an object known to you, awareness, like all objects.

I hope all is well with you and love from both James and me.

~ *Namaste*, Sundari