

# An Irritated *Guru*

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Jim:** Hi, Michael. I read your Sat Chat email carefully. It irritated me. I spent about three hours replying point by point to each topic and I decided not to send it as such because it became clear as I read it that you simply don't know what you are talking about when you try to criticize Vedanta. You have never studied it rigorously. You picked up bits and pieces here and there as it suited you and evaluated them in light of your existing beliefs and opinions – what else? It is not a philosophy to be picked up by the intellect. It needs to be taught by someone who is free and who can wield the means of knowledge skilfully. If you read what I wrote you would only think I am arguing with you at best and/or trying to put you down spiritually at worst, which I am not. I happen to be an expert on Vedanta, so I know what it is and it is clear that your knowledge of the topic is inadequate.

You have worked hard on yourself; as the last paragraph indicates, you are quite happy with yourself and your life. I am happy for you. You are certainly welcome to come and visit but I don't want to talk Vedanta with you because I can see that you have an entirely incorrect understanding of it. We would have to start at the beginning and it would be an impossible challenge. If you want to attend one of my teachings, preferably the self-inquiry series, for at least a week, with an open mind, you will know what kind of questions to ask and what kind of statements are useful. Then we can have a proper discussion. But as it is, a discussion on Vedanta is not going to work. I would be remiss in my duty as a teacher if I tried to teach someone who has so many preconceived notions. I am always available as a friend, however. I am sure we can find some other interesting topics to discuss.

**Michael:** I didn't mean to sound irreverent. I hope you weren't offended.

**Jim:** I didn't think what you said was irreverent. I just felt it was uninformed. I don't expect reverence toward Vedanta, although I have reverence toward it because I know its value. And I wasn't offended either. One of my roles as a lineage-holder and one I take seriously is apologetics – defending the “faith,” so to speak. In fact, there is a very long tradition of criticism in Vedanta itself, looking at the teachings from various points of view with reference to the source ideas, the *Upanishads*. In the old days, the kings sponsored debates between the Vedantins and various spiritual teachings, Samkhya, Buddhism, the Charvakas, etc. The reason there are no Buddhists in India today is because (1) Buddhism was anti-theistic and (2) in public debates arranged by the kings it was basically shown to be at best a heterodox spiritual system and largely discredited. So to criticize one needs to know the *Vedas*, *Brahma Sutras*, *Gita*, Shankara, etc.

Believe me, we have texts that refute every possible argument against us. You would be amazed at how sophisticated they are.

Anyway, I am not surprised that your attempt to introduce spirituality to the culturati and the travel crowd failed. In general, people don't want to widen their perspective. However, generating a

spiritual experience through travel is lovely but it is only a temporary high and does not amount to a spiritual path.

I can inspire people as well as any Japanese garden, Thai pagoda or miracle of nature but it is basically pointless unless I can give them a practical way to inspire themselves without having to do a lot of exotic things. This is why I teach Vedanta. I inspire them by showing what non-duality is and how it benefits them, and then Vedanta provides them with a step by step program to keep the inspiration alive.

I don't dispute that the Vedanta you have heard from me has been helpful for you. I am glad for you. But if you are going to understand Vedanta you need to be taught. I shared with you but I didn't try to teach you because your psychology is such that it seems you are not teachable. Anyway, these are my thoughts.

**Michael:** As you suggest, I've made a mental note to re-check my coordinates on what I think Vedanta is or is not, and to be a tad more rigorous in clarifying my understanding of it. You very kindly gave me your set of DVDs and assorted literature in the past so there is no need for you to waste your time on performing that task. I will look into it at some point in the future. If I had infinite time I would, of course, love to spend a week or a year immersing myself in Vedanta, but there again, I would love to spend a year living in Japan and learning Japanese, or in Italy learning Italian, or the whole of the next year reconnecting with my musical instrument...

Unfortunately, our highly specialized Western culture does not have a working concept to describe the type of person that I am – ideas like Renaissance Man/New Man, etc. have flitted across our screens but have never really stuck.

Very fortunately, French culture does have a term that applies and it has a highly-respected category of being which is called “a generalist” – for the many people like myself who are not specialists. “Generalist” is a useful idea and would work well within the way our modern culture is developing. Therefore, as I think I did disclaim, I am looking at Vedanta from the point of view of an outsider and how it would be received by an average human being. Of course, I am not a specialist at it. Nor are the vast majority of people that come across Indian spirituality. I acknowledge your comment that I don't know enough about it to comment one way or another. In the end, it just happens to be the way that I see it.

From this point of view, the central question that had been bugging me was what exactly happens to the individual being when concepts like a Universal Self are advanced. It is actually confusing.

I don't know whether that's a Vedanta-type question or just a question. I will otherwise adopt the ancient, mystical, Oriental spiritual practice called shutting up!

**Jim:** When you see Vedanta as a philosophy you get this kind of confusion. As I mentioned, it is not a philosophy or a body of ideas from which “the average man” is meant to pick and choose according to his proclivities. It is only for qualified individuals seeking freedom who need a proven means of knowledge. The average man is looking for solutions in the world to make the world work for him or her. He or she takes himself or herself to be real and the world to be real. No blame. He or she has an agenda with reference to the world. Occasionally, someone's goal is

to become a better person and he or she takes to psychology or spirituality to accomplish that goal. Vedanta is for neither of these types of people.

It is for someone who has seen that life is a zero-sum game and that, as constituted, he or she will never be completely acceptable to himself or herself. From this realization a great dispassion arises and at that time Vedanta appears in this person's life because it offers another way out. You once said to me that only ten people in the world might understand what I am talking about and you are right. For every ten million ordinary people fixated on developing their egos and making the world work, there are one or two that are suited for Vedanta.

Some people have a piddling desire to be free of their personal selves, some have a middling desire and some have a burning desire. Only those with a burning desire succeed, assuming the presence of other factors. Those with a piddling desire – they still have hope that something in the world will happen to make their lives better or make them feel adequate – drop out after realizing that self-inquiry requires rigor, discipline. The middling people make progress in fits and starts but again they are burdened with worldly *vasanas* that keep them from completely dedicating their minds to inquiry.

So the answer to your question depends on the eligibility of the person. And your question implies that Vedanta is like a religion and is interested in “advancing” concepts to people. It is not. It is not intended for those people. It does not come to people. People are led to it when they are ready. If you think Michael is real and you want to keep him distracted from deeper concerns with a frantic schedule of activities, change him in some way or pleasure him according to his proclivities, Vedanta can't help you.

It will transform the individual, but not in the way you might imagine. It will not add a few clever ideas to your already extensive repertoire of ideas, spiritual or otherwise, to round you out and spruce up your Renaissance Man resumé. Assuming Michael is qualified – which he isn't because he has other goals – it will reveal to him a much greater identity and the knowledge of that identity will transform him into Everyman.

From what you say, it is clear to me that you are quite happy and that your efforts are directed to widening your knowledge of various worldly things – mostly cultural and artistic. So Vedanta does not apply to you.

I love Vedanta as I love my own self. It set me free and it is responsible for everything that I am today. I subjected my mind to the teaching under the tutelage of a great *mahatma* and I hit the jackpot. I have pursued my inquiry diligently for forty-five years. I know what I am talking about and there are hundreds of, perhaps a few thousand, people out there who understand who I am and what Vedanta is. Vedanta works, but it is only for qualified people. I sensed a particular arrogance in your last letter – a tone that was not humble, a kind of challenge. It is okay to do *dharma* combat but you really need to know your stuff before you engage someone like me on this topic or you will definitely lose the argument. I appreciate that you took my reply in a classy way.

I think that your attraction to me is directly related to the fact Jim's particular radiance comes from me, awareness. Because you don't see me, you see Jim, my reflected self. You perhaps think that Jim is a clever, interesting guy and it is perhaps true, which shows that enlightenment does not destroy the individual at all. It enhances the individual, which can only be good news. It lifts him or her up, puts a gleam in the eyes and a spring in his or her step. You do not lose Michael –

heaven forbid! – when you realize what it means to be limitless awareness. In your light he is acceptable as he is, warts and all. In your light he is completely universal, “general” to use your term. Properly taught and properly understood Vedanta sets the individual free of the belief that anything he or she might accomplish subjectively or objectively will make a difference inwardly or outwardly.

**Michael:** What I wrote was not intended as *dharma* combat, though perhaps I overdid the satire and it came out as overly irreverent – it was not meant to cause offence. I had thought mistakenly that it was more or less in the tradition of the Swartz-ji critique but perhaps you’re right, I’m not the right person to do that.

I’ve taken in a huge amount of Vedanta through knowing you over the years and just because I haven’t gone down the gurujic route does not mean to say that I haven’t given the issues that it raises a great deal of thought, and applied them as and when.

Although I have latterly come to the conclusion that the attempt to inculcate spiritual principles into my various cultural projects has ultimately failed, as the principles have been operating at too implicit and subconscious a level. Nevertheless, what follows below was the general idea. You can decide for yourself to what extent Indian spirituality has played its part.

**Jim:** The following email prompted the irritation I expressed above:

Dear Jim,  
Here is my most recent Sat Chat.

### **Clarifications**

You, as your everyday self, may be intensively engaged in an all-consuming teaching process, in conveying a school of thought, a way of being, of living. For my part, I would not say that I’m a signed-up follower of Vedanta, nor would I say that I m aligned or committed to it. This is not to say that I do not find Vedanta very interesting which, of course, it is. It is merely to say that I would not adhere to any specific point of view or system of thought as a matter of principle.

The interest in Vedanta is for two reasons. Obviously, the knowledge in itself, but also in its exoteric role as a fundamental expression of Indian culture, in the same way that Zen permeates Japanese culture, that democracy and human rights permeate Western culture – the forms may differ but the essence is fundamentally the same. Whenever asked which have been my favourite places and cultures, I have always answered that one appreciates different cultures for different reasons, that it is impossible to decide between them. From this perspective, all world cultural forms are equal.

If you find this noncommittal approach irritating or have difficulty in maintaining a friendship with someone that doesn’t have an aura like the rings of Saturn, or whose *chakras* are not flashing like fairground rides, then I will have to plead your continued divine forbearance of such shortcomings.

**Jim:** I think you don’t appreciate the true meaning of Vedanta, Michael, because your basic

approach to it is cultural and social. Vedanta is not a point of view, a philosophy or a school of thought, as you put it. It is simply a means of knowledge for consciousness that works to remove the in-built sense of limitation that individuals experience. It is not something to be followed or believed in. It is not a way of life that has special rules, etc. It is a rigorous, logical method that needs to be applied to one's thinking, but not in the service of one's beliefs.

I have no followers. I am simply a machine that wields this tool on minds that realize its value. Vedanta is the knowledge that reveals the unexamined logic of an individual's experience and sets one free of the notion that one is only a person. It has nothing to do with culture, philosophy or religion. It is not the contention of an individual or a group of individuals.

I never saw you as a disciple, although you are a disciplined person. I see you as a thoughtful person, a friend who is inquiring into the meaning of life.

Assuming you want *moksa*, your attitude is a pity because Vedanta would save you a lot of time but you will get there on your own one way or another. I am not saying that you are stubborn or egocentric and I don't want you to be anything other than what you are. You are completely acceptable to me whoever and whatever you are.

I think your matter of principle statement is not particularly intelligent but if it serves you it is fine with me. It doesn't apply to Vedanta because you don't seem to understand what Vedanta is, apart from the idea that it is a body of ideas about consciousness. This is not to say that you haven't – or can't – find value in it. But Vedanta is not something that you can actually evaluate unless you have subjected your intellect to it in a systematic and professional way. You have been picking and choosing what ideas suit your own conclusions over the many years we have been discussing it.

Enlightenment is freedom from and for Michael and especially from things like principles which are usually enslaved by an individual's likes and dislikes. Vedanta is like the eyes. The eyes are valuable because they allow you to see. Vedanta is valuable because it reveals your ever-free nature. For it to work, it needs to be worked on you. You cannot read your way to enlightenment or figure it out from interpreting your live experience. Of course, this means that you have to fully surrender your mind to it, which you won't do if you think it is just another philosophy – and rightly so.

### ***Mahatmas / Morons***

**Michael:** When I first met you in 1986, one of the first things you said was, "Man, I haven't had a bad day in the last twenty years." Naturally, my immediate reaction was along the lines of, "Obviously this guy has spent far too long in California. Whatever happened to the inalienable right to bemoan one's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of grumpiness?"

Perhaps one of the worst bum steers of humanity is to be found in the American Constitution and its notion of the pursuit of happiness, that there is some kind of allotted quota of happiness that everyone is entitled to. Imagine the illusory sense of failure when a person finds themselves to be unhappy? By comparison, possibly the best advice anyone ever gave me, when I was going through stuff in my twenties, came from Erica who had only gone through Siberia in World War II: "Life is tough."

Although actually being happy would doubtless come as a profound shock to a large majority of people, nevertheless the notion that happiness is some kind of elixir to be unleashed by the alchemical powers of Oriental mysticism is not exactly hard-edged, as if the exuding of a beatific smile was the ultimate proof of the power of awareness.

**Jim:** I agree. Happiness is not that happy because it depends on what happens. The happiness that is one's nature is a different kettle of fish that has nothing to do with alchemy, mysticism or what happens, etc.

**Michael:** As distinct from this, I would advance the Theory of Imminent Moronhood, otherwise known as Un-Self-Realisation – like all the best things in life, the essence of simplicity. What it states is this: rather than being spun round and round on the *dharmic* wheel trying to perfect one's faculties, when someone finally admits to themselves what a complete and utter moron they have been and continues to be, then it is at that precise point that it becomes unambiguously self-evident that awareness is truly working for them.

**Jim:** Yes, indeed. This realization is nearly tantamount to enlightenment. However, it is still a prisoner of the belief that one is a doer, insofar as the self is not, was not and never will be a moron. Awareness is the light in which this understanding takes place. A full appreciation of this realization depends on understanding that the above-mentioned someone is not actually the self.

**Michael:** This is a tough regime: people who love to disport their intelligence are super-attached to how cool they think they are. But facing down their real IQ (idiot quotient) would be the ultimate test of consciousness for the great and the good... and the spiritual.

Nor is enlightenment a final state, like graduating from a degree course, like a dollop of ice cream after a great meal. Enlightenment starts from zero every day. The very demons, the seven deadly sins, are just as omnipresent as the uncaused cause – there's a wealth of fallen angels in the spiritual world to attest to that. "Imminent" also implies that one can be moronized in an instant, irrespective of whatever might have happened hitherto.

Rather than enlightenment projecting a person outwards towards an idealised state of consciousness, it is when awareness operates inwards into the maw of life, in the blood and guts of existence, that it is truly validated.

**James:** I agree. However, validated by whom? Certainly not by itself insofar as there is nothing other than it to validate it. And certainly not by the ego because the ego is only an idea in awareness. But I take your point, insofar as the one who validates it is actually awareness itself in the form of an individual that was previously seeking validation and apparently got it when he or she realized that he or she was actually awareness along and therefore needed no validation.

## **In the Forest / In the World**

**Michael:** You may remember me saying that after many visits to the gardens of Kyoto, I suddenly

realised that the gardens that I liked best were all at Rinzai Zen temples, the stunning rock arrangements directing the attention outwards, towards objects that can only be experienced non-conceptually, that is, through pure awareness. This is the training of the mind at the heart of Japanese garden culture.

This is in accord with Rinzai Zen's in-the-world message. Soto Zen differs from this with an in-the-forest approach which says "sort out your stuff, establish oneself in Zen and then everything will go right for you" – an approach obviously not without merits. The downside of the Soto approach is that it leads to self-absorption and narcissism, an unhealthy obsession with the myriad reflections of one's inner world.

I know that it doesn't do my *ashram* cred any good to say this, and one could say that it's a viewpoint rooted in the manifest world, but the things that I remember most about you are what has happened outside the *satsangs* – not the Sanskrit commentaries but the spiritual obiter dictum, commentaries on life as it happens around you, the reactions to a wide variety of situations, comments, actions, realities over the years – those are the things that have really stayed with me, the way that the Vedic ideas have played out in Reality.

**Jim:** Yes, but Jim's view is completely informed by the vision of non-duality delivered by Vedanta. Without this vision Jim is just another ordinary schmuck. In a sense, Vedanta is a throwaway but you can't dismiss it until you actually understand what it is. I think you have relied more or less completely on your own experience in your spiritual thinking and I think that you have pretty much interpreted your experience in a way that harmonizes with the truth of life but I think that the essence of non-duality escapes you.

As far as Vedanta is concerned, you are entitled to your opinion. However, it is not a completely informed opinion. No blame. If Jim can claim any credit it is due to the fact that he realized when he was twenty-eight that he was not capable of figuring life out on his own and, seeing that Vedanta was a very effective and intelligent short cut, surrendered his interpretations of his own life to the vision of non-duality, sat down and let himself be taught without resistance. It was the smartest thing he ever did. Once he surrendered Jim and his Jimness to the teaching, it was clear sailing. If a person wants to figure it out on their own, God bless them. But if you are tired and weary walking home alone and a taxi comes by, why not take the ride? It is so much easier. I didn't come here to spend my whole life figuring out who I am. I came here to enjoy life. For forty-three years it has been a great joy owing to the fact that I was clever enough to surrender Jim to Vedanta.

## **Values / Reality**

**Michael:** I know that I've been banging on about this for a while, but there is this notion of the value of values and it's an eternal subject. Put succinctly, you start with Jesus Christ and you end up with the Spanish Inquisition, you start with patriotism and you end up with Adolf Hitler, you start with the *Vedas* and you end up with the caste system. As values are things that people literally value, whenever values operate in society, gospel outreach and defending the faith seem to invariably follow. It's hard to think of any set of values where their organisational demands have not led to dominance/submission and hierarchy eventually taking over. Do people live up to the values they profess? Most of the time, with most people, the answer has to be negative.

**Jim:** I don't know about this, Michael. Who cares what people, whatever that word means, do? I would say that people are nothing more than their priorities. Values are not what you do or have, they are what the person is.

**Michael:** There is actually a Vedanta-type reason for this. Because consciousness is essentially free, it doesn't really like being bottled up in the myriad rules of an ethical society. The more instructive a society, the more the repression of this essential nature. Zillions of laws have attempted to control human behaviour with the net result that the more laws there are, the greater the opportunity to transgress – hence the overflowing prisons. How many are incarcerated for petty drugs violations?

**Jim:** This is only partially true, Michael, because freedom includes the freedom to conform without agitation. Conforming is only a problem if you are actually bound. But you are not, so who is there to conform or non-conform? Furthermore, this may be true about laws imposed from without, but what about natural law, the laws that govern your behavior from within? The “you” that you are talking about in this paragraph transgresses natural law at its peril. There is no actual freedom for the doer – the Jim or the Michael – insofar as it is real – as the doer is always bound by something. Self-knowledge sets you free of the notion that you are a doer. It sets you free of values as well because it makes you appreciate the fact that you, meaning awareness, are the only value.

Furthermore, I think this is not correct because it ignores this fact: no more than two percent of the population of any society is incarcerated, which means that most follow the rules, not because they are stupid but because they have a rudimentary appreciation of the value of values in terms of social interaction. People are so self-centered and uncultured nowadays that you need rules to keep them from disturbing others.

**Michael:** For such reasons, I've had a saying going through my mind for sometime: “I'd rather be real than be good,” by which I mean that I wouldn't want to deceive myself or others that I'm a better person than I actually am were I to project an idealised Michael onto the cosmic background. In other words, the central concern: values distort reality in the way that one sees oneself and in the way that one sees the world.

**Jim:** Vedanta questions the view that you are a person at all, but let's accept personhood provisionally and ask if freedom from goodness opposed to reality. Is it a choice? You are good but not the goodness that is opposed to bad, as your statement implies. The word “*Shiva*” is a word that describes consciousness. It means “what is good in all times, places and circumstances.” Also your statement implies that you are a person capable of goodness or badness. If you are a person, a Michael, then the statement is true. But are you actually Michael? What is anyone meant to think when you tell them you are Michael? To what does that word refer? If it doesn't refer to consciousness, it can only refer to a projection, an idea abstracted from a series of interpreted experiences, real or imagined. An even if that identity is an actual identity, what values informed the interpretation?

**Michael:** There is an American narrative underlying the modern debate about values – the way that American culture projects its self-image outwards, the virtue of a value-conscious society or individual. This needs careful analysis – it should not be adopted on an unquestioning basis. A value-oriented approach plays to the American narrative – it's the Pilgrim Fathers all over again – crossing the oceans to find the Promised Land. Personally, I would prefer to see the debate about values for what it is and not pander to the assumption that goodness is necessarily good.

**Jim:** I don't know about American values as opposed to any other values. From the human perspective, values are universal; they are built into the human organism. The analysis of values should be only in terms of how they relate to the most fundamental human value: the need for freedom.

**Michael:** The fact that the *dharma/adharma* argument may theoretically support a values-based approach to life does not alter the facts on the ground, of what happens when values play out in everyday life. There can only be one conclusion: values are not actual reality.

**Jim:** Yes. But insofar as an individual is suffering, an analysis of values is an essential component of self-inquiry.

**Michael:** The notion of universal value, or universal ethics, is equally challenging and as a long-term upholder of the universal declaration of human rights, it is a notion that has always raised issues and which can hardly be taken for granted. The problem with universal values is that they can become so general as to be used or misused to justify anything. Imagine Jim or I or anyone drafting a list of universal values only for such a list to be used to justify *sharia* law, Islamic law, whatever.

**Jim:** I understand what you mean, but your statement "they can become so general," etc. misses the point of universal values. Anything can be misused by humans because they have free will. But there is no need to worry about it because anyone who contravenes a universal value will suffer because those values are built into the psyche. The real question is whether an individual is intelligent enough to understand the value of values with reference to his or her goal. The values issue is tricky because universal values are universal, i.e. abstract – you say general – and need to be interpreted. But what value informs one's interpretation of them? Religion is based on universal values but because it is a human institution, it often misinterprets them.

**Michael:** The problem with values is not the ones that everyone agrees with, but the ones that people disagree about – Buddhists fight Buddhists, Christians fight Christians, Muslims fight Muslims. The real purpose of democracy is to process disagreement about values and to pacify conflicts within societies. Notions and instruments of equality derive from this greater objective, from acknowledging that there will always be different values to deal with.

**Jim:** I know you care about societies but I can't seem to get my head around it because societies are just abstractions. In reality, there are only individuals responding consciously or

unconsciously to what life presents on the basis of their values.

**Michael:** If one postulates that consciousness looks at everything dispassionately and equally, non-conceptually, which as a self-reflective sense organism I can confirm, then the basic problem with values is that they instigate the structuring of consciousness to parcel up into concepts that which is essentially non-conceptual. And the structuring of consciousness through ethics, morals, etc. ends up as something of a devil's brew of values, emotion and identity. They all end up mixed in there with each other.

**Jim:** That's true, but this is a good argument for sorting them out with reference to what you want. I start from the idea that irrespective of what one thinks he or she wants, he or she really wants freedom from a sense of limitation and that values are only valuable insofar as they help or hinder the realization of freedom (both for and from the individual). In other words, self-knowledge.

In any case, your argument presupposes that there is a direct connection between consciousness and the world, but there isn't. Consciousness is always free of the world. The world, on the other hand, is not free of consciousness. So you can't legitimately superimpose the ever-free nature of consciousness on the dream we call the world. The rules that apply in the world are required to make it work and only indirectly relate to consciousness. Consciousness only affects the world indirectly in the form of *dharma*, universal values.

**Michael:** The issue of identity is that it seems virtually impossible for there to be values without there being attachment to them. Literally, it's what people value most. The lofty notion of the value of values is highly theoretical. To all intents and purposes, in the way that values play out in reality, your "supermarket of identities" is at root the supermarket of values. In day-to-day life people are inextricably attached to their values.

The pitfalls of the world of values are ubiquitous. The main conduits of values – politics, religion, laws, patriarchy/matriarchy – have a fairly mixed record. My view is that if one writes a chapter on "the value of values" then it should be immediately followed by one entitled "The Danger of Values." Less negatively, "The Value of Valuelessness."

**Jim:** The chapter on values is only with reference to how certain values aid self-inquiry, Michael. It is not about values per se. There is no downside to the values unfolded in that chapter because all of them lead to a pure mind, which is an important value for an inquirer insofar as it is a means to the highest value, freedom from limitation. I am not preaching values at all. I am saying look at your values in light of what you want and look into the value of what you want. In any case, how can you actually criticize that chapter if you haven't read it and understood where it fits in the logic of the book's whole argument?

**Michael:** This leads to the fact that the word "values" itself is an incredibly loaded term with so many subconscious fragrances and flavours attached to it as to totally defy the purposes for which the concept was originally intended. The tauter, cleaner, more technically accurate term to describe what one is talking about would be "principles." Perhaps the widely-touted concept of

values should be abolished from the current socio-politico-spiritual debate.

**Jim:** You can make just as much mischief with principles as you can with values. But I don't see the problem. Values are facts. Love is a value. Truth is a value. Non-injury is a value. Justice is a value. Beauty is a value. The only problem is how those values are understood and applied in life.

From my perspective, values are only valuable insofar as they set one free of the need for values. By that I mean that freedom – i.e. knowledge of one's nature as consciousness – obviates the need to worry about your values because your values will automatically align with universal values and you will not find yourself in conflict with yourself or with others.

## **Order / Disorder**

“The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible.” ~ Albert Einstein

**Michael:** Of course, there are elements of order in the universe and there are elements of disorder – so theories based on either order or chaos can easily be substantiated. As I understand it, the prevailing scientific point of view is of increasing disorder but, as that takes place over billions of years, it is largely irrelevant.

One has to look critically at the notion of *shrutis* – that consciousness is a revealed knowledge, waiting there to be discovered like the law of gravity or the speed of light. All the scientific evidence, the evolutionary record, points to the opposite: the fact that consciousness evolved, was conceived out of the womb of matter.

**Jim:** This statement assumes the materialist argument. It is a flawed argument because it is not possible for something sentient to evolve from something insentient. There is no logic to it. However, the opposite is possible. Vedanta actually has an explanation for how it happens – it is called *panchikarana*, the grossification of consciousness into subtle matter and the further splitting and recombining of subtle matter into gross matter, although accepting this idea is not required for *moksa*. Science is a prisoner of sense-organ epistemology which, on subtle topics like the creation, often produces unscientific inferences like the one you introduce above.

**Michael:** The notion that as soon as the first chlorophyll molecules started pumping oxygen into the earth's atmosphere it was inevitable that five billion years later an ape-like species would have mastered electromagnetism and gravity and be zipping techie devices all over outer space is absolutely not a given. There was no guarantee that this would happen at all.

**Jim:** It was not necessarily inevitable but it happened because consciousness was already present; it is prior to and unaffected by matter.

**Michael:** Those who are inclined to orderliness would find succour in some fundamental aspects of scientific order and would hear the sound of the universe in the way that one might listen to

Bach. But the fact that life, that creation, would play out in the exact way that it has – the reality of life as we know it – could not be deduced from its starting points.

For what it's worth, my own personal point of view is that life on earth and the human creation is a complete fluke. This makes the creation infinitely more amazing and fascinating to me than confining it to the inevitable.

**Jim:** It is probably a fluke but I can't see the value of the notion that it is a fluke. You don't understand Vedanta's point of view on this one, Michael. Maybe you think I am under the spell of some kind of philosophy or mystic experience. Or maybe that Vedanta is unscientific and unaware of science.

Revelations do need to be examined and supported by logic, which Vedanta does in a very comprehensive and sophisticated way. Again, however, accepting the idea of revelation as a source of Vedanta is not necessary for *moksa* because the *prakriyas*, the investigations of consciousness and matter, do what they claim they do: remove ignorance of the nature of consciousness.

## **Awareness / Experience**

**Michael:** Intuitively speaking, one can see that *shrutis* became central to the spiritual tradition because if consciousness was not an objective factor waiting to be discovered then that meant that it had evolved – in other words, was compiled through a process of experience. This, of course, would bring into play the notion of the experiencer – that consciousness was not impersonal and objective but very much depended on the physiological evolution of the individual creature, in our case, the human biological evolution.

**Jim:** Vedanta's argument is the complete opposite. I find it much more reasonable than the scientific argument for the reason I stated above. Consciousness is the only objective factor there is because it is unaffected by subtle and gross matter. I think your belief that reflected consciousness, the subtle body, is pure consciousness is making the mischief. I don't believe you understand the reflection (*pratibimba*) teaching.

**Michael:** Take a central tenet of the notion of the experiencer: the purpose of the universe is for the experiencer to experience it and thus become liberated (Patanjali).

As I understand it, the notion of the experiencer is rejected by Advaita Vedanta and the problem I have with this is that the schools of duality and non-duality both exist, are both manifest and therefore need equal consideration – that there is both awareness and experience. That the one does not necessarily exclude the other.

**Jim:** The experience is not rejected at all, Michael. It is a fact. Vedanta just reveals the context in which the experience experiences and discusses.

There is always awareness, Michael. It is not opposed to experience but yes, duality and non-duality – which are not schools – need to be understood with reference to *moksa* alone insofar as

failure to understand the distinction will prevent *moksa*. Again, you do not understand the knowledge and experience argument, Michael. I suggest you read my booklet entitled *Knowledge and Experience*. I haven't time to explain the whole argument to you and to contextualize it for you in terms of the means of knowledge.

It may not have occurred to you that if reality is non-dual awareness, then everyone everywhere is already experiencing awareness. Patanjali's idea is based on the appearance of reality, not on the nature of reality. He is a dualist, addressing the doer. His whole idea is based on the idea that the subject is something other than the object, i.e. the self. Vedanta in the form of Chapter 2 of my book debunks Patanjali's experiential sidea with reference to *moksa*.

**Michael:** Even if one were to say that awareness is actually the experiencer and not the individual *jiva* deluding itself into thinking that it is the experiencer, then the only way that awareness becomes known is through the sense organs of the *jiva*, which returns the reality of what is happening back to the human, to the experiencer.

**Jim:** Untrue. Completely untrue. The sense organs cannot report awareness. They report matter vibrating at frequencies that they are attuned to. Awareness is beyond their scope. The senses are known in the light of awareness.

Furthermore, Vedanta does not say that awareness is an experience or an experiencer. It says awareness is a non-experiencing witness. Reflected awareness, the subtle body, is the experiencer. It is not experience either. It is the essence of experience.

**Michael:** Vedanta, and the spiritual tradition in general, does an unambiguously great service for humanity in deconstructing the conceptual architecture that every *jiva* is born into and has to contend with – in returning consciousness to an original state...

**Jim:** You can't return consciousness to its original state, Michael. Consciousness is the original state. What you mean by "consciousness" is what we call "reflected consciousness," the subtle body. Even it cannot be returned to anything. It can, however, have its ignorance about consciousness removed since it is the locus of knowledge and ignorance.

**Michael:** ...in understanding the processes of our minds, in affirming that social conditioning can be transcended. Certainly the way that people normally identify with themselves and the world around them can change dramatically. Although those identities would certainly have been limiting factors on an individual, that does not necessarily mean that the removal of those limitations creates a limitless person – limitlessness may well operate at a universal level, but it is life, death and taxes that operate at a human level.

**Jim:** That's right. You cannot create limitlessness by action. And limitlessness does not apply to a person. Vedanta does not set out to make the person limitless. Trying to make the person limitless is called "superimposition" in Vedanta. It is ignorance. The only limitlessness that Vedanta speaks of is the limitlessness of consciousness, the self.

**Michael:** The removal of normal, everyday, as-American-as-apple-pie limitations and the ensuing realisation of what consciousness is can be so liberating and can dispel so many illusions that it may well seem that all that is left is an increasingly rarified field of transpersonal energy. For a person wrapped up in everyday limited identities and situations, the relief in finding a free inner self must be palpable, huge. It is at this point that the depersonalisation of the personal takes centre stage.

**Jim:** Yes, indeed. Eloquenty said, Michael.

**Michael:** Starting with the end of the argument first, if Vedanta says that democracy and human rights, etc. are illusions on the grounds that "Sorry, old boy, but actually there's no such thing as the person," then I think that this is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Of course, the person, the experiencer continues to exist. That person may well be a radically different entity through spiritual realisation but the person, the human, the experiencer is irreducibly there.

**Jim:** Vedanta does not say that there is no person. It says that there is an apparent person living in an apparent reality. That person is actually the self and is capable of exercising its right to act. The apparent person exists alright; it is just not real. It is a dream living in a dream, which it thinks is reality.

**Michael:** One therefore has to look critically at the process of the depersonalisation of the personal, into the origin of ideas like the Self or, as varied in enlightenment, the self.

**Jim:** I don't know why a critical look is required. It is a liberating process. Enlightenment is liberation from identification with the personal self. The self is not an idea. It is the one writing this letter to me and it is the one responding. There is only one self. This is a matter of experience but not of a particular experience.

**Michael:** In contemplating the nature of consciousness, it is not hard to see why the notion of the Self derived from the very nature of looking at things objectively.

**Jim:** The idea of the self did not derive from the nature of looking at things objectively. Looking at things objectively is the nature of the self. Honestly, Michael, with reference to your understanding of Vedanta, you are not qualified to make these statements because you have never subjected your mind to the means of knowledge in a rigorous way, as I have already mentioned. To be objective about Vedanta you need to suspend Michael's views long enough to actually gain clarity. Then, if you understand the value of Vedanta and wish to have it work its magic on you, you need to jettison the Michael-ideas that don't line up with the truth and retain those that do. In this document I see certain statements that are undeniably true and others that are undeniably not true and I see that the writer does not know the difference between them.

This is typical of the intellectual approach to Vedanta, thinking it is a philosophy or several

schools of thought. There is no law against looking at it in terms of one's own values, beliefs and opinions, but this approach misses the point entirely. Nobody criticizes his or her eyes because the eyes are useful instruments, assuming one wants to see objects. In a similar manner, you cannot criticize Vedanta because it reveals your limitlessness, assuming you understand the value of limitlessness. It is just a means of knowledge. Since the latter part of the 19th century, when Western intelligentsia became aware of Vedanta, the idea that it is a philosophy or a school of thought arose. It is nothing of the sort. So you cannot legitimately evaluate it from the idea level. It is not a body of ideas, the contention of an individual or a group of individuals. It looks like it if you haven't been initiated, but it isn't. Once it has worked, you are idea-free for good.

**Michael:** Yes, there is a collective conscious in much the same way that Jung posited a collective unconscious. But in so doing I'm not sure that Vedanta hasn't saddled itself with a very difficult concept.

**Jim:** Again, this is simply ignorance, Michael, because it is based on the idea that Vedanta is a philosophy. All the teachings reveal the fact that there is one self and it is limitless. The whole teaching is a throwaway, Michael. When you drink a Coke, you throw away the bottle. Vedanta wants to be discarded because it is only a means to an end – the vision of non-duality.

Vedanta uses the idea of the collective unconscious and the collective conscious to explain the origin of an individual's experience. It is an essential concept insofar as understanding the macrocosm is equivalent to the death of the myth of duality and doership.

**Michael:** Put it this way: Vedanta exactly as it is, as a theory of mind or the nature of consciousness, a hundred out of ten. But as the science of self-knowledge? The introduction of the impersonal Self complicates matters exponentially.

**Jim:** It is a science because it is based on observation and analysis whose object of knowledge is consciousness, not matter. Its *prakriyas* are experiments that any qualified scientist can apply that prove its theory that reality is non-dual awareness and that the world is an apparent reality.

**Michael:** Why personalise the impersonal by calling it a Self? Why was there any need to do this? The impersonal is the impersonal and the personal is the personal – surely this is okay just as it is?

**Jim:** "Self" just means essence, the nature of consciousness. It is neither personal nor impersonal; it is the awareness of the personal and the impersonal, which are just concepts insofar as reality is non-dual consciousness/awareness.

**Michael:** Of course, one can see this in terms of Vedanta's *jihad* against the ego/experiencer and the fact that the experiencer operates on a strictly subject-verb-object basis. This would suggest that non-duality needed to negate the personal experience and subsume it into an objective personality such as the Self. In this sense, the Self is an overstatement of the point that it is trying

to make about the nature of consciousness. However spiritually advanced the *jiva*, there will always be a subjective element in awareness, in action. There will always be an element of subject-verb-object. Might this be called a subject-verb-object-lesson?

**Jim:** Duality does not need to negate personal experience because duality is not a conscious system of thought. Personal experience is negated, but not destroyed, by non-duality. Non-duality is a fact. It is not a belief. Vedanta proves this fact.

There is no subjective element in awareness. Reflected awareness contains subjective elements which are rendered objective by an appreciation of the causal body, the collective unconscious. Collective “unconscious” is not a very good word but it will have to do in this context. You have obviously never understood the distinction between pure awareness and reflected awareness, which is the essence of Vedanta. If you did, we would not be having this discussion.

**Michael:** Whether “*Om Mani Padme Hum*,” “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me,” or “Allahu Akbar,” I have always railed against the use of *mantras* as mind-control techniques. Although presumably directly translated from a Sanskrit *mantra*, the same goes for the depersonalisation of the personal implicit in the *mantra* proposed in enlightenment: “I am awareness.”

**Jim:** The rant above is so ill-informed that I wonder if I should even answer it because *mantras* are not mind-control techniques. The *mantras* used by Vedanta are statements of fact that need to be contemplated on, once their meaning has been unfolded by the teacher. Assimilation of the knowledge “I am awareness” will control the mind but not in the way you imagine. It will pacify the mind and fill it with bliss.

**Michael:** Is it either correct or desirable to state that a person does not exist?

**Jim:** To repeat: Vedanta does not say that there is no person. It says that there is an apparent person living in an apparent reality. That person is actually the self and is capable of exercising its right to act. The apparent person exists alright; it is just not real. It lives in a dream which it thinks is reality. What you call reality is not real by Vedanta’s definition.

## Duality / Non-Duality

**Michael:** I used to define spirituality as the direct personal experience of one’s own universality. I now define it as the direct personal awareness or experience of one’s own universality. In this the totally impersonal and the totally personal become equivalent, interchangeable. At a certain level of refinement of the *jiva*, both exist and are non-mutually-exclusive.

**Jim:** Yes, but they are non-mutually exclusive whether or not the *jiva* is refined.

**Michael:** Perhaps the matter can be put scientifically, taking the description of matter as  $E = MC^2$

2. For awareness, one might advance the theorem:

$C = ME^2$  where C = consciousness / M = memory or mind / E = experience.

**Jim:** This is only true of reflected consciousness, the subtle body, not of pure consciousness, the self. But then you are talking from the level of reflected consciousness, assuming that it is conscious, which it isn't. It does, however, seem to be conscious owing to *maya*. It may come as a surprise to you but Michael is not conscious. Awareness is conscious. What you call Michael, and take to be yourself, is actually limitless awareness. This probably sounds like an airy-fairy concept, one tailor-made for satire, but it isn't. To understand, you need to have the science systematically unfolded for you.

**Michael:** Admittedly, the  $ME^2$  part of the equation might prove a tad seductive for the spiritual narcissists in our midst, but that's no more than what they would be inclined to do anyway.

The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle enters at this point, by which I mean that whilst matter can be viewed as mass (particle) or as wave (energy) but not as both at the same time, this is merely to say that if one is observing the colour of someone's eyes then one cannot simultaneously observe the colour of their shoes. The limitations of observation do not negate the fact that there is both mass and energy.

In the same way, one might look at consciousness as either awareness or experience, as we would not be able to begin to comment about the nature of consciousness without the experience of it.

**Jim:** One would be wrong if one thought that consciousness was either awareness or experience because consciousness is non-dual. It is true, however, that one cannot speak about the nature of consciousness without the experience of it. So the question then becomes "Who is experiencing it?" It can't be an individual because it doesn't have instruments capable of experiencing consciousness apart from its experience of objects. Your statement, however, assumes that the individual can experience it. It can't because consciousness is the very nature of the experiencer. It never becomes an object of experience. However, it does appear as objects when *maya* is operating.

Having said that, if you are experiencing anything you are always experiencing consciousness because it is you and you are never not present. What else would you be experiencing? If you analyze perception using Vedanta's location-of-objects teaching, you will see clearly that you are always experiencing consciousness, apparently as an object, but actually as your self. You are consciousness. It's rather sad to see someone who is so close to understanding but so far away at the same time. It's too bad that Vedanta is only one of your many interests. If you pursued it professionally, you would be deeply rewarded.

You are what we call "stuck in *sattva*." You have a good life, a bright mind and a certain conceit that you know something. The conceit belongs with the *sattva*, so not to worry. ☺ You do know something but you don't know everything. If you understood Vedanta you would know everything – but not in the way that you understand the word "everything." The *Vedas* say, "What is it, knowing which, everything is known?"

**Michael:** Whatever, consciousness and experience, the Self and the experiencer, action and the awareness of that action, are inextricably fused and at a certain point become one and the same thing. I therefore see awareness and experience as two sides of the same coin.

**Jim:** It is amazing that you come up with a factual statement at the end when the reasoning that leads up to it is so confused. We call this situation “a leading error.”

## Non-Dual Duality?

**Michael:** Of course, not being a victim of one’s own distortions is a daily battle – the straightening out of one’s thoughts, emotions and situations. Apart from that, I observe myself as a fairly cleaned-up, conscious person. Along the way I seem to have jettisoned the whole gamut of identities, attachments and addictions. I appear to be the most un-nostalgic person I know. I’m entirely satisfied with life progressing as it has done and for it to continue to be open field. I don’t hanker after a Golden Age of the past or a fantasy paradise for the future. As for reward and achievement, my response to the absurd honours system in Britain would be: “What greater honour can there be than to be alive and to be conscious of it?”

Of course, all of this is subject to the limitations of life, death and taxes so neither am I attached to any projections of myself into the future, nor to whatever happens after me. And when I die, I want all trace of my existence to be wiped out (Marat/Sade).

**Jim:** All traces of your existence are already wiped out, Michael. You only imagine that you are leaving traces. Every action, thought and feeling dissolves into you, awareness, as it arises. There is no future, no past. There is however an apparent you, a Michael, who perhaps believes that he is leaving traces. Michael and his traces are *Isvara* making small apparent waves in the infinite ocean of Its unchanging being.

## Words Are Important

**Michael:** I have done some cursory Vedanta reviewing and it immediately threw up what I think was the problem with the issues in Sat Chat. I still think that the questions are the right questions to ask but I accept that they were framed in terms that wouldn’t make any sense to the Vedanta tradition. So I accept your comment that I needed to go back to basics, to ask the questions in the appropriate manner. The terminology I was using was abstraction of abstraction of abstraction over a long period of thought and time... and had become too lay, too journalistic, too loose.

**Jim:** I think that is true, Michael. It is often very difficult to understand what you mean, not just on spiritual topics, but on other topics as well. I can tell that it makes sense to you, that you have thought it out, not always correctly, but it doesn’t always make sense to your listener. A few others who have met you have remarked about this. Vedanta is words. It is a *shabdha pramana*, a word means of knowledge. There are very specific definitions of words. For example, a person is a particular kind of *jiva*. “*Jiva*” has several meanings, all of which are necessary if the knowledge of the self is to be revealed. One meaning is “awareness ( *satchitananda*) plus a

subtle body ( *sukshma sarira* ).” Then “subtle body” has a very precise definition as well. It is “mind, intellect, ego” and the perceptive, not the active, organs. And each one of these words is further defined. For instance, “mind” has three functions: integrating sense information, doubting and generating emotions. Learning the terminology is extremely important because the teacher and the student need to be on the same page when they are discussing a particular topic.

Remember, Vedanta is not meant to be read outside of the teaching situation. If it is, it will be subject to interpretation. But someone who has not been educated with the terminology and who does not understand the ultimate purpose of inquiry will invariably ascribe meaning to various words/ideas according to his or her own experience. In this case, Vedanta will not do what it is intended to do. Western people in general lack spiritual rigor. They are very much like tourists who go to India, pick up a few interesting and exotic ideas and try to fit them into their own intellectual system, which inevitably is not systematic at all. It is just unexamined beliefs about the nature of reality. You cannot read your way to *moksa* even if you are very intelligent and highly committed, much less if Vedanta is seen as just another intellectual system. It doesn't work because whatever ignorance you have is not known to be ignorance and it subtly influences your interpretation of the words.

When I teach a seminar, I don't allow questions until the second or third day. By that time people have learned the definitions and know what kind of questions are appropriate and which aren't. I also spend considerable time explaining how to listen because most people interpret as they listen, which does not work. I notice that, when I present an idea to you in conversation, that you have formulated a response before I have actually finished my statement. This causes a miscommunication. Vedanta is not subject to interpretation because it is not a philosophy. It is a very simple means of knowledge with a very limited purpose.

Assuming you want to see, you cannot criticize the eyes. They do what they are intended to do. You can only discover how they work. Vedanta is a science in that it is free of human intervention. This is not to say that humans don't try to make of it what they want and this is why part of the duty of a lineage-holder is to defend Vedanta against attacks. If it is just another philosophy it will end up in the dustbin of history like the rest of them. It has retained its purity to this day. I am so dedicated to keeping the tradition pure that I have been forced to point out one area where one of my *guru's* teachings was not strictly in line with the tradition. It pained me to do it, but it was necessary to keep the tradition pure.

**Michael:** For example, the question of values and reality might be rephrased as something like “*dharma* is necessary because *dharma* is not the same as *brahman*.”

**Jim:** Okay, this statement can be discussed. It is partly true and partly not true. It belies an incomplete understanding of both *brahman* and *dharma*. They are one but not the same. *Dharma* is *brahman* but *brahman* is not *dharma*, and it is also true that *brahman* is *dharma* and not *dharma*. To understand you need to have it explained. A discussion of the word “necessary” needs to take place to clear up its implied meaning.

**Michael:** If *dharma* is the point or a point at which consciousness “interfaces” or interacts with “the world,” could you illustrate how the relationships between *dharma/adharma* and Brahma work in the context of the current American political scene ?

Obviously, you would be much more familiar with it than I, but there seems to be an almighty ethical log jam between various parties all equally convinced that they are “right” and the system has ground to a halt to the detriment of all. Why isn’t *dharma* sorting this out automatically and where is Brahma in all of this ?

**Jim:** You mean *brahman*, not Brahma, but this is another topic and an example of the terminology idea we have been discussing. Brahma is *brahman* associated with *maya*. *Brahman* does not create. It needs *maya*. In its role as Creator it is called *Isvara*. It is a very subtle point, one that requires considerable explanation. Understanding it is tantamount to enlightenment.

In any case, *brahman* – limitless awareness – is *Dharma* with a capital D. It is beyond *dharma* and *adharma*. The reason politics/the world/ethics, etc. does not get sorted out is because individuals have free will and can contravene *dharma*. Awareness does not know there is an America or a political scene or that things are log-jammed. The log jam is in Michael’s mind. There are many individuals who are very happy with the way things are politically. They benefit from it being this way.

Consciousness does not interface with the world. It is always detached from the world. The interface idea implies duality. The world appears in it like a dream appears in a dreamer’s mind. Consciousness and the world are two different dimensions of the one reality. Awareness is free of the world but the world is not free of awareness because you have no world without the knowledge of the world and you have no knowledge without awareness (*brahman*). I have attached a chapter from my new book that summarizes the whole *dharma* question very nicely. It should sort you out. Sorry, if you want to know, you have to receive teaching. ☺ There is only a problem with the American political scene because there is an idea in your mind that it should be different from what it is. From *brahman*’s non-dual point of view it is just Brahman, perfect in every way.

When *dharma* with a small “d” gets out of whack and *adharma* gets too big for its britches, it generates a reaction in the world and there is a correction and the balance is restored, World War II, for example. From the point of view of the Total ( *Isvara* ) – awareness is beyond *Isvara* although the *dharma/adharma* issue is the same from both *Isvara*’s and pure awareness’ point of view – *dharma* and *adharma* are always totally balanced, but from the point of view of an *adharmi* or a *dharmi* it always seems to out of balance. Both *dharmis* and *adharms* have an incomplete view of reality. They look at it through their own limited minds.

Your question indicates that you are a *dharmi*, a person who values *dharma*. The world will never be acceptable to a *dharmi* because there is always *adharma* in the world, the apparent reality. *Dharmis* tend to be messianic – because they can’t stomach conflict, they think some kind of utopia is possible and it irritates them that the rest of world doesn’t cooperate with their programs to set everything right. I never understood why you were so interested in politics. It is not going to be spiritualized in zillions of years. At best it is a big joke.

Having said all that, the interface between Brahman and the world happens with an individual realizes he or she is Brahman. In this case, his or her actions synchronize with *dharma* – because the self is *Dharma* – and he or she has a *dharmic* impact on society. Obviously, the millennium is going to be delayed a bit insofar as very few individuals pursue *moksa*, preferring instead to remain in the world, retain their limited identities and expect the world (or themselves) to be different.

Please read the chapter on *dharma* carefully and if it does not answer your question, write me.

**Michael:** The question of the impersonal self and the personal self might be rephrased: “While it may be that the Self is never born and never dies, as the *jivatman* eventually ceases to exist, it is therefore different from Brahman.”

**Jim:** Again, this statement is partly true and partly untrue. It reveals a lack of a clear understanding of both *jiva* and Brahman. In fact, it is more untrue than true. All the *mahavakyas* state that *jiva* and Brahman are non-different. Furthermore, “non-different” needs to be carefully unfolded because non-different does not mean that they are the same. You are in the ballpark but you are swinging at thin air, Michael, or as they say, “Close, but no cigar.”

**Michael:** Of course, there is a huge difference between the didactic approach of Vedanta and an intuitive, non-didactic approach, as outlined from the website.

**Jim:** There is nothing intuitive about Vedanta. In fact, we roundly take the piss out of intuition because it is not a valid means of knowledge. Vedanta is a totally didactic tradition. If you haven't been taught you may think you know something, but you basically know very little. In Vedanta 99% knowledge is still not knowledge. It is like water and steam. Water is still water at 211 degrees. It becomes steam at 212 degrees. Until you understand the big picture, you will keep on seeking to know. Remember, you know you are enlightened when you have no need to know anything.

**Michael:** I don't believe in changing the world and other people. If people arrive at a profound personal moment of their own volition and the travel, or the activity, acts as a positive catalyst, then fine. The study of cultures can certainly play a part in offering conduits, doorways, openings. Travel can perform a Vasudeva role – ferrying people across the river – but when they get to their “other side” they either know what to do with their lives or they don't.

**Jim:** I agree with the meaning of this paragraph but to stick on the topic of language, your use of the word “Vasudeva” is a case in point. You use it as a proper name that you got from reading some Buddhist(?) literature.\* The word “Vasudeva” is a common name but it is an essential term in *brahma vidya*, the science of Vedanta. It means “consciousness, the one that illumines the senses and the mind.” So using it as an adjective is incorrect.

(\*Editor's note: Vasudeva is a character, a ferryman, in Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*.)

**Michael:** I knew you wouldn't pass up the opportunity to weigh in on the failings of various of my activities.

**Jim:** This is an unkind statement, Michael. It is not true. Your activities are only failings if you think they are failings. If you look at your spiritual efforts of the last ten years from a business

point of view, I don't know how you can conclude that they were successful. If you look at it with the *karma yoga* attitude it can only be considered a success if it taught you something about your (Michael) self and/or the limitless self, which are non-separate. My point was that if it was a spiritual endeavor, it seems rather odd to make a business out of it. My personal view is that because your mind is so *rajasic*, you needed something to do when you retired from the family business, insofar as it provided a field of activity that kept you distracted. Distraction is the life blood of *rajas*. Perhaps now you are happy – a bit of weariness too, perhaps? – and don't need a lot of activities to distract you. You might ask "Distraction from what?" and I would say that I don't know specifically, but the need to be insanely active is always somehow related to some old, usually buried, wound that is too painful to face and is thus subsumed in a very extroverted life. *Karma* is a long and painful slog, not without its rewards, however.

**Michael:** I am not in the least bit interested in Michael, in what he says or does or feels, so to all intents and purposes, as far as "I" am concerned, Michael does not exist.

**Jim:** That is so cool! Good for you.

**Michael:** Obviously, I do have to process personal situations as and when they arise but apart from that my attention is directed firmly outwards into the world and what is happening out there. I maintain my vessel and my faculties for that purpose.

**Jim:** That your attention is firmly directed into the world is my point with reference to your statements about Vedanta. Vedanta firmly directs one's attention to consciousness. Because of your orientation, your use of words does not apply to Vedanta. Your words are adequate for the world, not for the self. Having said that, Vedanta is not otherworldly either. It is not against the world. In fact, its sole purpose is to make an individual's experience of the world a joyful one. But its approach is apparently counterintuitive for worldly types. It seems as if Vedanta eschews the world. It certainly doesn't. It reveals the world for what it is in light of the self. This belief is due to the fact that the public takes Vedanta to be solely a monastic tradition, but it isn't. The *rishis* were householders and *karma yoga* – which is for worldly people with a spiritual inclination – takes pride of place in the teaching.

**Michael:** Please don't overstate the "generalist" idea; it was merely using the concept in contradistinction to that of the specialist. I don't identify as a generalist or a Renaissance Man – it's not like I'm going to rip open my shirt to display it with a large capital "R."

**Jim:** ☺ I understand, but Vedanta only works if it is one's only preoccupation. We call it *mumukshutva*, burning desire for freedom. If your interest is piddling, you get piddling results; if middling, middling results.

**Michael:** In fact, I don't seem to have much of an identity at all. Others will, of course, project their conceptual identities onto me but that's the problem of their limitations, not mine. What is important to me is to be able to think freely and without restriction, and to allow the creative,

intuitive side to flourish.

**Jim:** I think it is true that there is not much Michael there. You have done good work. When others indulged their projection about Michael I always said that you were not what you appeared to be. My issue is never with people. I get along with everyone. I like people, the weirder the better, and Michael is pretty weird. I always only see the self shining in everyone and everything. I do have an attachment to Vedanta and I don't particularly love ignorance; however, it has its humorous upside. My irritation was not with you; it was with Michael's understanding of a topic that I am rather attached to.

Maybe you think that you don't have much of an identity at all but you do. You are limitless, ordinary, non-dual, actionless, unconcerned awareness or you could not make this statement. It may not seem like much of an identity but I assure you it is. It is the only identity worth having, it is the only identity there is.

**Michael:** Thank you for taking the time to deal with these issues. The topic of ethics and the way people use or misuse them interests me. Just the one chapter on *dharma* is user-friendly so I will read it in due course.

**Jim:** I imagine that "in due course" probably means never but I'll give you the benefit of the doubt.  
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**Michael:** You are at a much greater level of intensity than formerly so it is fiendish stuff you are coming up with. It needs a great deal of thought so I'm going to take my time.

**Jim:** I have always been an intense person, Michael. Although there was ample opportunity to challenge your views over the years, I kept my mouth shut preferring instead to encourage your interest in Vedanta. Your Sat Chat forced me to challenge you.

**Michael:** Your time has not been wasted on me this week but I am conscious that it is a valuable commodity at this juncture in your career, and I would not want to take any more precious energy away from your students and fellow Vedantins.

**Jim:** That's considerate but I suspect this is not the real reason insofar as I have plenty of time. I think your interest in other topics is more intense. It is probably better that we only talk Vedanta if you are willing to take it more seriously.

**Michael:** So I come to visit with no further agenda – and will take the flow of ideas and subjects as it happens.