

How *Isvara* and *Jiva* Are the Same but Different

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Mike: I am having just a little difficulty with this whole “God” thing due to my former contemplations in duality. I was “naturally” prone to non-dual thinking when I was very young, but Western religion crept in. I am now 52 years old and feel the “tug” back home to Eastern teachings.

Sundari: Good to meet you, Mike. Please see attached *satsang* called *Who or What Is God?*, as it deals with this topic extensively.

Mike: I have recently remarried, and my wife is Thai/Buddhist. I started back down the path through Buddhism. I can see *sunyata* in *anatman*, and *anatman* in *sunyata*, but I am getting off-topic (my apologies).

Sundari: The problem with Buddhism is that no one really knows what it teaches; there are so many different traditions and opinions about what it really stands for that it is totally open to interpretation. Buddhism was born out of Vedanta and it is referred to as “a chip off the tooth” of Vedanta. It split off from and disagrees with Vedanta as a valid means of knowledge, so it is called a heterodoxy.

When Buddhism speaks about “self” and says there is no self, does it speak from the perspective of the apparent reality, meaning the person, or from the perspective of the self? No one seems to be sure about this. In contrast, Vedanta is not open to interpretation, because the whole point of the teaching is to negate the doer, the ego that interprets according to its own beliefs and opinions, which are based in ignorance of its true nature as awareness, meaning that the doer interprets reality through the screen of the *guna*-generated *vasanas*.

Many Buddhist interpretations say that “no-mind” is the key to “*nirvana*,” but who is it that knows the no-mind or *nirvana*? If you know something, it can’t be you, can it? The knower and the known share the same identity as awareness, but they do not exist in the same order of reality, because the knower is the subject and the known is the object. The mind is an object known to you, awareness. One cannot get rid of the mind – and even if one could, there is no need, because the mind is not the problem. Identification with the mind and the doer is the problem. It also says that all is emptiness – but who is the knower of emptiness? It is the self, consciousness, the fullness that is the knower of the apparent emptiness.

Mike: I understand *Brahman* as absolute awareness, the Unmanifest.

I understand *Isvara* as *Brahman*, the manifest.

I understand “God” as *Brahman*, and “God” as *Isvara* (reality and apparent reality, but the same *Brahman*). I am under the conviction that the unmanifest *Brahman* becomes manifest *Brahman*

(*Isvara*), and then expresses itself through all other manifest existence and beings. Unmanifest *Brahman* (unmanifest God), being unchangeable, is without beginning, without end, without form, without existence.

Manifest *Brahman* (manifest God/*Isvara*), being is the eternal, all-powerful, omniscient, Creator of *maya*, creator of all existence.

All creation, being *Brahman*, is an expression (*maya*).

Sundari: This is basically correct. We don't use the term "*Brahman*" or "absolute" to refer to pure awareness/consciousness/the self, because there is the idea in the spiritual world that the terms refer to something special, extraordinary, "other than," transcendental, special. We prefer to use the term ordinary or "pure" awareness/consciousness because that is all there is. We are only ever experiencing awareness/the self, whether we know it or not. Even the qualification "pure" denotes duality because it implies impure, and the self is non-dual and has no qualities. It is the substrate of all life, what gives rise to *Brahman/Isvara* – awareness associated with *maya* – in the role of Creator.

Isvara as Creator appears when *maya* appears, and the creation follows. *Maya* is an eternal and beginningless power in awareness because to be unlimited awareness must have the possibility of being limited – not that it ever is limited. *Maya* makes it appear to be limited. But *maya* does not cover awareness, because it too is an object known to awareness. When *maya* manifests, it appears that the self identifies with objects (the subtle body), thinking that it is other than it, which is called ignorance, or *avidya* – personal ignorance. *Avidya* is not endless, because self-knowledge can remove it.

Both *Isvara* and *maya* go "unmanifest" when the creation is withdrawn back into consciousness at the end of the *kalpa*, or creation cycle, but they remain as eternal principles in awareness, as does the universal *Jiva* (as opposed to personal, "small" *jiva*). The whole point of Vedanta is to reveal that although the creation has an apparent existence, it is not real, meaning not always present and always changing. Therefore neither *jiva* nor *Isvara* as the Creator are real in that neither of them are always present. Although there is essentially no difference between the *jiva* and *Isvara*, because they share a common identity as awareness, there is a big difference in their capacities (see below).

The term *Isvara* or *Brahman* can refer to both pure awareness and reflected awareness, meaning *Isvara/Brahman* in the role of Creator. In the role of Creator, *Isvara* is reflected awareness and "becomes" the reflecting medium (the Field of Existence) for the *jiva*, or subtle body, to appear. As Creator, *Isvara* is therefore only relatively real with reference to the *jiva* because although it is not modified by ignorance (the *gunas*) it only is manifest as long as there is an "apparent" reality. Though the creation is not eternal, it lasts for an untold length of "time," whereas the personal *jiva* exists but for a brief moment in "time." There is no time or space for awareness, they are both objects known to it. So *Isvara* is not real with reference to pure awareness, which is always present, whether the creation is manifest or not – and even if it is, there is no creation from awareness's point of view, because being non-dual means just that – awareness sees only itself. It is the unchanging substrate, making the knower – *Isvara* as Creator – and the *jiva*, the apparent creation, possible.

Mike: Question 1: Am I “okay” with these convictions, and would it be “appropriate” then to “devote” my life to *Isvara* through applying correct *dharma*? Or should my focus be primarily on *Brahman* (awareness) during devotional worship? Or does it matter?

Sundari: You need to be clear what all the terms you use refer to, as you think they refer to something other than you, awareness, the self. *Isvara* or *Brahman* in the role of Creator are principles – we use the terms to explain the creation. They are merely ideas appearing in you, pure consciousness.

You never experience an *Isvara/Brahman* apart from the thought of them. They are objects known to you, so they cannot be you. The whole problem starts with the identification with the body, which makes it look like the world is out there, that you are dependent on it and that whatever is in charge of it is controlling you, which it is, until self-knowledge obtains in the mind. But it never controls you as the self. It only (apparently) controls the self under the spell of *maya*, ignorance = the *jiva*, or person. Once ignorance is removed, devotion to *Isvara* as the Field of Existence in which the *jiva* lives continues. But it is devotion to *Isvara* in the form of the self, not to external object, deity or set of beliefs. The *jivanmukta* (free person) follows *dharma* unflinchingly, not because it is trying to be a “good” person, but because it values peace of mind above all else.

And yes, it does matter and is extremely important that we surrender the *jiva* and “our” lives and actions to *Isvara* with *karma yoga*. It is the only way to end limitation and negate the doer, the one who owns experience and interprets reality according to its subjective reality, or *vasanas*. We encourage devotion to *Isvara* for this purpose, to negate the childish ego. The *satsang* I attached also deals with this issue.

Isvara’s creation is a lawful universe, run by natural laws which we ignore at our peril, enlightened or not. *Isvara* is the both the intelligent cause, that which shapes the materials into form (without ever losing or modifying its own nature) and the material substance, meaning the effect from which the forms are created, like the spider spins its web from its own body but is not the web, although the web is the spider. If *Isvara* had to become one with the apparent reality, there would be no possibility of ending ignorance, because it would be real, meaning permanent.

Mike: Where I have some “trouble” is in the statements of “self.” I am uneasy with worship of self.

Sundari: Please read the attached *satsang* explaining the need for *bhakti*, devotion to the self, and the stages involved in its progression or maturation. It is clear that you are confused about what the self is or the purpose of *bhakti*.

Mike: I have seen “self” stated as being awareness (*Brahman*) and then considered “above” God (as *Isvara*). I can understand self being “above” *Isvara* (in a sense), as ultimately unmanifest (back into source, *Brahman*).

But if *Brahman* is *Isvara*, but *Isvara* is not *Brahman*...

and *Isvara* is self, but self is not *Isvara*...

then it would seem to follow that self cannot be *Brahman*.

But self is awareness?

IS THIS CORRECT?

Sundari: I can see you have been trying to make sense of Vedanta without having the teachings properly unfolded for you by a qualified teacher. You are on the right track though. The apparent reality (*mithya*) is a union of *paraprakiti*, or higher reality (meaning *Isvara* or *Brahman*, take your pick), and *aparaprakiti* (*jiva*/subtle body), lower reality, spirit and matter. Their common identity is *uparaprakriti*: awareness.

Because the self – PURE CONSCIOUSNESS – has no qualities, is always present and unchanging; it is “beyond” *Isvara/Brahman* in the role of Creator – which is awareness associated with or “wielding” *maya*. *Isvara* as Creator is dependent on awareness to exist, but awareness depends on nothing. It is existence itself. Everything arises from awareness, is made up of awareness and dissolves into awareness. It is not an either/or. It is a both/and because the two orders of reality, duality (the apparently real) and non-duality (the real), are not in conflict with or in opposition to each other.

Duality is a superimposition onto non-duality. Ignorance is the misapprehension of the true nature of reality, which is taking duality to be real, the cause of all suffering. When we know what duality is and we know it is not real, it does not disappear, but it no longer causes suffering. We simply don't take it seriously anymore, because our primary identity is consciousness, the self, the substrate. *Samsara* ends for us, even though macrocosmic *maya*, being eternal, continues. This is *moksa*, freedom from limitation or “smallness,” identification with the doer entity, with objects. You are free of objects because you know you are the fullness that knows all objects.

Mike: Or would the following contemplation be correct?:

Brahman is (awareness/God) unmanifest.

Isvara is *Brahman* (awareness/God) manifest, *maya*.

Jiva is *Isvara* (awareness/God) manifest, *maya* and *vasanas*, with subtle body, gross body, etc.

All is eternal (without beginning or ending).

Sundari: *Brahman/Isvara + maya + subtle body or eternal Jiva = God, pure awareness, unmanifest (satya) and manifest (mithya/world of objects, including non-eternal jiva), but pure awareness is free of Brahman or Isvara (as you prefer) + maya/eternal Jiva/God. All is eternal, except for mithya, the effect of ignorance (personal jiva, vasanas, gross objects), which is non-eternal.*

Mike: I can understand the cycle of *Jiva* in *maya*.

But why would we want to ultimately “merge” back into *Brahman*?

This is too similar to annihilation (even though there is no annihilation of *Brahman*, there would

be an annihilation of *Jiva*); annihilation/transformation... same thing, right? Why cannot we simply understand that we are awareness, that it is in apparent existence... eternally? If we are “awakened” to this fact, wouldn’t this be enough to end suffering? Why ultimately merge back into pure awareness, after many rebirths?

(Is this question being asked simply because I am still wanting to hang onto the self?)

I think so. Did I just answer my own question?

Could you possibly illumine these thoughts?

I would be so very grateful. I am “wading back in” after many years of deep study of the Abrahamic religions.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sundari: You did and did not answer your own question; you are going in circles. There is a progression and methodology to Vedanta which must be followed religiously or you will end up chasing your tail, as you are doing here. You are asking this question because you don’t properly understand what the self is, what the apparent reality is, what *Isvara* is, what the *jiva* is, and you are unclear about their common identity. You have what we call a “*satya-mithya* confusion.”

Just as there is no awakening, because consciousness never slept, there is no “merging back” into awareness, because it never emerged! This is a prevalent belief in the spiritual world, based in duality. You cannot merge back and you cannot become more conscious or more “awake.” You can only become less ignorant. How can you hang onto the self if you are the self? You are the knower of the one who wants to “hang onto the self,” thinking that the self is something other than you, an object to be obtained. But it cannot be obtained, because you already are it. You are whole and complete, non-dual, ever-present, unchanging, unconditioned, unlimited, ordinary awareness, or consciousness – that which gives rise to everything, on which everything depends, but is always free of all objects.

As I said above, the eternal *Jiva* exists as a principle in pure awareness – the non-eternal or personal *jiva* (ego) does not. It comes and goes with the birth and death of the body/personality (*vasana* load) it inhabits for that incarnation. So if you are identified with the body, ego, or personal *jiva*, sadly, that does come to an end. The ego or personality dies with the death of the gross body, but the *vasana* load continues. The subtle body/eternal *Jiva*, being an eternal principle, gets subsumed into the causal body until *Isvara* assigns that *vasana* bundle another incarnation. As Krishna says to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “Indeed, certain is death for the born, and certain is birth for the dead; therefore over the inevitable you should not grieve.”

The self cannot be figured out by the ego, as it cannot be known by our means of knowledge, perception and inference, because it is subtler than both. How can the effect understand the cause? For this, we need a valid means of knowledge for awareness, which needs to be taught to us by a qualified teacher. If not, we will interpret it according to our conditioning, and ignorance of who are will not be removed.

Here is one of the greatest of all great sayings in Vedanta because it captures the essence of the teachings: *Brahma satyam jagan mithya jivo Bramaiva na parah*. Memorize it. It means “I, the self, am limitless consciousness, and the *jiva* is non-different from me.”

Here is a summary of how *Isvara* and *Jiva* are the same:

As stated, *Isvara* and the universal *Jiva* are never annihilated; they are eternal principles (or concepts) in awareness which manifest whenever *maya* manifests, which is also an eternal principle or power in awareness. There is essentially no difference between *Jiva* and *Isvara* except in their capacity to create. *Isvara* creates the objective world, and *Jiva* creates its subjective world, its world of thoughts and feelings – which also come from *Isvara*, the *gunas*. *Isvara* is omniscient, creates all objects, subtle and gross, and the *jiva* only knows the objects it has contact with. It cannot create a flower, the sun, the moon and the stars.

Isvara is conscious because it is the self plus *maya*, the creator of *jiva*. The *jiva* appears to be conscious because consciousness shines on the subtle body, which is why Vedanta says *Isvara* and *Jiva* are “essentially” the same. *Isvara* is not a person with likes and dislikes like the *Jiva*. And neither *Isvara*’s creation nor *jiva*’s creation hides consciousness. It is always present prior to the creation and prior to the birth of individuals. You can’t have a macrocosmic creation without consciousness. Something had to exist before *Isvara* could “bang” the creation into existence. That something we call *paramatma*, pure consciousness, free of both *Isvara* and *Jiva*. If this is true, which we know it is, then we can eliminate both *Jiva* and *Isvara* as real and take ourselves to be consciousness – the self.

Consciousness (me) is never affected by *Isvara*’s creation or by *Jiva*’s creation. I am the knower of both.

Or you can look at it this way: it is clear that *Jiva* is conscious, albeit it indirectly, like the moon which receives its light from the sun. It is also clear that *Isvara* is directly conscious because the creation is consciously designed. Nothing comes from nothing, no matter how hard the scientists try to prove that it does. Inference tells us that, and inference is a valid means of knowledge. We do not have to meet *Isvara* in person (not that *Isvara* is a person) to know that it is conscious. So if the *Jiva*’s consciousness depends on *Isvara*’s consciousness, and *Isvara*’s consciousness depends on *paramatma*, pure consciousness, then both *jiva* and *Isvara* are pure consciousness. If you don’t depend on the world or on the person, you certainly can’t be either one of them. An effect (*Jiva*) is just the cause (*Isvara*) appearing in a form.

We can’t apply the same logic to *Isvara* except loosely, because consciousness does not “cause” *Isvara*. *Isvara* in association with *maya*, Beautiful Intelligent Ignorance, is something altogether different. It is the uncaused cause of everything. *Isvara* is not an effect but it is a cause with reference to the creation. There is only one awareness out of which everything arises and depends upon, but awareness is always free of the objects. Awareness is *adjata*, unborn. Vedanta is the path of the unborn because it reveals that although there appears to be a creation, nothing ever really happened, from awareness’s point of view. As stated, all objects are made of awareness and dissolve back into awareness in that they appear in the mind, and the mind appears in awareness. The mind/*jiva* (subtle body), like all objects, is an object known to you, awareness. The thoughts that appear in the mind belong to the *gunas*, *Isvara*.

The world we know is called “apparently real” because it is not always present and always changing. As long as the apparent entity, or the *jiva*, is still embodied in the apparent reality, enlightened or not, it is subject to *Isvara*, the Creator. We know the world is not real, because when you analyze it, it resolves into empty space, and space resolves into consciousness, as far as you cannot know space without consciousness. It is an object known to you. There is just you, consciousness, in which the *jiva*, or person, appears in a particular a priori environment, i.e.

Isvara.

Isvara creates, sustains and destroys the whole universe. 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 an 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." When Vedanta says the world would not be there without the mind (subtle body), we mean *jiva's* interpretation, its projection, would not be there, not that the material world, the senses, the five sheaths, or subtle body and the *vasanas*, would not be here. We call the *jiva's* creation "*pratibhasika satyam*" or "*jiva srsti*," the subjective reality.

There is only one *jiva*, who manifests as many and seemingly sees things a certain way owing to his or her 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 it responds appropriately to what *Isvara* wants, it will be in harmony with *Isvara*, the creation, meaning its environment. But if it is living in its own world, 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* (its circumstances) and suffer. Thus this teaching makes it 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*.

The *jiva* looks out through the body, identifies with the senses, perceives a world and thinks that it is seeing what is actually there. It knows it didn't create it, but it sees itself as separate, incomplete, so chases objects to complete itself. The saying "the world is there because I see it" is true from the point of view of awareness, not the *jiva*. The *jiva*, which is actually awareness, can't perceive a world unless *Isvara* has already done its job as Creator. The *jiva* is seemingly responsible for its external creation, as far as it doesn't exist (for it) unless it perceives it. However, it should be clear from the example of deep sleep that the *jiva* doesn't create the world, because there is no world for it when it is asleep. Yet the world is there for other waking *jivas*. That shows that some other factor, and we call it *Isvara*, is the creator.

Your knowledge seems pretty good on the whole, so I have answered each question carefully, but I need to ask you a few questions. If you have read our contact page, you will see that we have some requirements for inquirers to follow before we reply to questions. Have you read them and followed them? We recommend that everyone read James' book *The Essence of Enlightenment*, which is available on the website as a 12-month teaching course, with all the correct questions and answers accompanying each chapter. We also ask that inquirers watch as many of James' videos as possible and read the e-*satsang* section on the ShiningWorld website, which covers every question you ask in your email and any you could come up with, in many ways. There are thousands of pages of the highest-level Vedanta possible, freely available.

Like you, most inquirers who come to Vedanta have a ton of indoctrination from other teachings to work through. It's not that there is anything wrong with other teachings, such as Buddhism, but most other teachings are unclear about what the self is, nor are they able to explain the apparent reality, other than through their own experiences or beliefs. There is no other teaching available

that has a completely independent and valid means of knowledge capable of revealing the self and what the world is by removing duality, ignorance. Some of them, like Buddhism or Neo-Advaita and even most religions, have aspects of non-duality, but ignorance is woven fine with knowledge.

Buddhism is based on *yoga*, and its primary aim is to improve the person and end desire by getting rid of the mind through meditation and good deeds. All religions teach that God is a bigger, better, albeit it “divine,” person, separate from you, whom you must obey or else. Vedanta teaches right up front that you are that which gives rise to God, you are the non-dual self, consciousness. You cannot gain the self, because you are the self. You are what you seek. You have a problem and suffer because you are under the spell of ignorance, duality. It teaches that you cannot improve the person nor get rid of the mind, because they are not real – and not the problem.

Identification with the person, the mind and desire is the problem. It is neither possible nor necessary to get rid of the mind; it can only be understood to be not-self through the removal of ignorance by self-knowledge. Once the true nature of the mind is known to be the self, binding *vasanas* are rendered non-binding and the sense of doership is negated. But the mind remains – and is no longer troubles the *jiva*. *Moksa* is freedom from and for the *jiva* because as the self you are already free.

However, to be free means you need to understand what it means to be the self and not the *jiva*. Purely cognitive understanding does not remove suffering. To understand what Vedanta teaches, qualifications are necessary or discrimination between what is real – the self, or *satya* – and the objects that appear in it, that which is apparently real, *mithya* – will not be possible. Therein lies the rub.

You are close in your understanding of *Isvara/Jiva* and awareness, but you also seem to have objectified the self, thinking it is something other than you, a kind of solipsism. Or you have personalized it thinking that by “the self” we mean the reflection of the self, the *jiva*, or person. The self is the source of the reflection, which is caused by *maya*. As I said above, *Brahman* or *Isvara* are both terms for awareness, consciousness, or the self. They are just words, a finger pointing to the moon – but we must understand what they are pointing to. To do so, we need a means of knowledge capable of deconstructing *mithya*. We must understand who or what the *jiva* is, what *Isvara* refers to and why, and what is the same and what is different about both. For self-knowledge to translate into the life of the *jiva*, *mithya* must be understood in light of self-knowledge, not in light of our own subjective or limited understanding. *Mithya* may not be real, but it is not going to disappear just because you have realized your true nature to be the self, consciousness, the source of all. Self-realization is where the “work” of self-inquiry begins. Self-actualization is a whole other matter.

I suspect that you have some of the qualifications, but do not fully understand what Vedanta is. It is the knowledge that ends the quest for knowledge. Once you are on board with self-inquiry, you can no longer call yourself a seeker. But without all the necessary qualifications present in the mind, the mind or ego will be suspicious of the teachings or confused, as it will not have the requisite faith in them to put aside its own opinions, biases and beliefs. Non-duality is not theory in practise, it is not a philosophy nor is it based on the teachings of a prophet or mystic, as in the Buddha, Jesus or Abraham. Vedanta is called a *brahma vidya*, which means the “science of consciousness.” It is an objective and scientific analysis of the true nature of reality – and your

experience, based on the facts. Like any other science, it is not personal and it has a methodology – which, if followed with great dedication and commitment, will provide irrefutable knowledge that is *moksa*, if the student is qualified. Vedanta is simply the truth about you, not your truth or my truth or anyone’s truth: The Truth. Vedanta predates all known religious or philosophical paths because it is the pathless path that underpins all other paths. It is an independent teaching, or *sruti*, which means “that which is heard.” It is also called self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge, unlike object knowledge, stands on its own and is always true because it is true to the self, meaning it cannot be dismissed or negated by any other knowledge. Self-knowledge is different from knowledge of objects, which is object-based, not subject-based. Knowledge of objects is not knowledge unless it is true to the object. If I am looking at a dog and my eyes and mind are functional, I will not see a cat. If it is “my” knowledge, then it is my interpretation of an object (*pratibasika*), which is not necessarily knowledge. Ignorance (or my point of view) causes me to see or experience objects in a certain way because of “my” conditioning. People believe that ignorance is knowledge because they believe that what they experience is knowledge. It may be knowledge, but it may not be. Self-knowledge is neither confirmed or negated by anyone’s opinions or experience.

Vedanta is revealed to the mind of man, not thought up by man or the result of any action on anyone’s part, therefore you can trust it. So what do we mean by “revealed”? Don’t all religions claim this? What Vedanta means by revealed is simple. A good example of revealed knowledge is Einstein’s “discovery” of the law of relativity and gravity; or Thomas Edison’s discovery of electrical applications. To discover the means to uncover something that was there but previously unknown. Relativity, gravity and electricity describe how the world works according to the laws of physics, not according to Einstein or Edison. Gravity, relativity and electricity do not care if you believe in them. They operate the same way whether you understand what they are or not.

It is the same with awareness. Awareness does not care if you have realized your true nature or not, because it is unaffected by knowledge or ignorance. Liberation from ignorance is for the apparent person who lives in the apparent reality. As awareness, you have always been free, which is why *moksa*, or freedom, is discriminating you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you, in other words, dis-identifying with the person as your primary identity – AND knowing what that means so that self-knowledge translates into all areas of life. Vedanta is freedom from the person and for the person.

Mike: First of all, I would like to thank you for taking so much of your valuable time and responding in such detail. Your words have helped me tremendously; however, I guess the journey of losing this ignorance will be an ongoing path for me.

I have purchased and read *The Essence of Enlightenment*, which led me to your website. I earnestly seek to be free of illusion/suffering, and will read more at your site in order to be guided in the right direction. Unfortunately, I am unable to acquire the help of a qualified teacher (in person), but your website is an invaluable resource of teachings.

I am “new” to Vedantic understanding, and any advice is truly appreciated.

I just want to say thank you again, from the “bottom of my heart.” You have truly provided me with

inspiration and helped to clarify, for me, the teachings.

Your genuineness, dedication and kindness in taking the time to write back to me is definitely heartfelt.

~ With sincere thankfulness and gratitude, Mike

Sundari: I am happy to be of service to you, Mike, and to pass on this invaluable knowledge. I have updated the requirements for inquirers at our website, as I see it had been removed for some reason by our IT manager.

It helps to be “in the presence” of the teacher, but it is not a prerequisite for *moksa*. The qualifications for *moksa* are prerequisites though. As I made clear, Vedanta has a very specific methodology which will work to remove ignorance if the mind is qualified and a qualified teacher wields it for you. Although not all the qualifications need to be present, they need to be understood and developed. So both qualifications and a qualified teacher are not negotiable, assuming *moksa* is the aim. It does not hurt to stress that there is a very good reason why Vedanta stresses the importance the qualifications and of a qualified teacher. Ignorance, or the non-apprehension of the true nature of reality as non-dual, is hardwired and very tenacious. As the mind is conditioned to think a certain way and non-duality is counter-intuitive, unless the mind is guided in its exposure to Vedanta it will interpret Vedanta according to its conditioning, or *vasanas*, and self-knowledge will not obtain. There are apparent contradictions within the teachings which are not real contradictions and need to be resolved by a qualified teacher. Teachings and teachers abound who teach according to their methods and experience, but this is always flawed and limited. Unless a teaching is independent of the teacher, it will be contaminated by his or her beliefs, opinions and experiences, no matter how lofty or “enlightened” they claim to be.

Although it is beneficial to be in the presence of a qualified teacher, there is no real boundary between you and the *guru*, because *guru* literally means “one who dispels the darkness,” and in doing so reveals that the self is the only *guru* because this is a non-dual reality. You do not need to lean on a genuine Vedanta teacher, and if you do, we are not doing our job. We are just mouthpieces for *Isvara*, for the Truth. It is not our truth or based on our experience, although it confirms both. We do not want disciples or followers, because we do not teach the ego, we teach the self.

Whether we are physically with you or connecting via technology, the knowledge is wielded in the same way by us because we are qualified teachers of Vedanta. We see you as the self, as non-different. Vedanta is a teaching tradition based on friendship and equality. If the mind is prepared and qualified and you are firmly dedicated to self-inquiry, self-knowledge will do “the work” of removing ignorance. We are all here to help you with any questions that arise, but we cannot remove your ignorance. Only *Isvara* can do so. James and I have taught thousands of people around the world and helped many find *moksa*, most of whom we never meet.

BUT – we cannot do “the work” of self-inquiry for you. You must follow the instructions I gave you and are present if you want to be taught by us. It takes a burning desire for freedom to commit to self-inquiry. As James is fond of saying, Vedanta is the court of last appeal for those fortunate souls whose *karma* prepares them for *moksa*, freedom.

When you need us, we are here for you. We are extremely busy, and it is essential that you first do some groundwork to establish an understanding of the teachings so that you know the right questions to ask. And all questions are answered by the teachings, in due course, if you are doing self-inquiry properly. Make use of the enormous resources on the website. Even though it is essential that Vedanta is properly taught and that you follow the methodology meticulously, it is not our place to explain every aspect of the teachings to you, and it is not beneficial to you if we do. Self-inquiry requires that you do the work and we assist you when you genuinely cannot find the answer to questions that arise on your own.

~ Love, Sundari