

How to Love God If I Do Not Know What It Is?

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Mike: I've found some of your *satsangs* at ShiningWorld to be very helpful! The way you worded things seemed to be the most easily digestible for me, so I figured I would send this question to you in case you are able to shed some light. I'm still struggling with a few of the core teachings.

We have spoken a bit on Facebook. I'm a professional musician, a life with exciting highs and very low lows. I'm self-employed, so my *rajas* can sometimes be out of control, which leads to potentially indulging in excess *tamas* as well. There are those real moments of connecting with people through music where I feel very *sattvic* and *karma yoga* comes easily. Then there is also so much time spent on the business side or just going through the necessary process to earn a living when it's much more difficult, especially taking the entire let-downs that come with the business as *prasad*. It's a life of big ego-boosters, and then even bigger ego-killers. But to me music has been my whole life and I truly love it. Like anything else, some aspects are great, some are terrible, but life is a zero-sum game anyway, so I know I need to learn to take both sides as *prasad*. I'm very blessed to earn a modest living at it.

Arlindo: You seem to be gifted with good *karma*, Mike. The guy before you (past birth) must have done some meritorious *karmas* around art, which have given you the disposition for music you have now, which is a privilege, we could say. Most successful artists stop at the enjoyment of their *punya karmas* as they develop big infantile egos. But you have moved into self-inquiry, which is the highest disposition *jivas* can acquire because it leads to permanent freedom and full satisfaction.

Mike: I'm finding it confusing to get a big picture of reality, and to realize to what or whom I should have divine devotion to and profound love for.

Arlindo: The biggest picture of reality is that all there is in the phenomenal universe of "multiplicity" is the non-dual self/consciousness, and its nature is existence-consciousness-limitlessness – and most importantly, "You Are That." This is the knowledge that eventually frees the *jiva* from the changing world of people, places, things, events, circumstances, etc.

As far as the dualistic disposition we call love and devotion towards God, we would need to get first a clear picture of what God/*Isvara* is. I understand the difficulty in directing one's love/devotion to something which is not clearly defined in one's mind. The personification of God as a "deity" makes it much easier, therefore most devotees worship their own image/symbol of God.

But the devotion of the *karma yogi* does not require an objective symbol, because it is a by-product of pure understanding of the laws governing the phenomenal universe. It is not "objective" in that sense, but "subjective" because it is a state of mind – an attitude of love, gratitude and appreciation, which the devotee naturally experiences towards all dualistic

expressions of life, death, pleasure and pain, etc. But this is only possible once the knowledge of the “cause-effect” mechanism of Creation is firmly and clearly assimilated. A new vision is developed which allows the *karma yogi* to see perfection through duality. This “hard and fast” knowledge of Creation produces love/appreciation of all expressions of life, or if one prefers, love of God/*Isvara* since *Isvara* is not apart from Creation.

Mike: And also, what of my relationship should be to my direct “apparent” reality, which even though is apparent is the most “real” thing to the *jiva*, right?

Arlindo: The relationship between the *karma yogi* and the “apparent” world is similar to the one of the lover to his/her most beloved: full appreciation! Full gratitude because all is a gift – and it is even more easily perceived while we are exhausting our *punya karma*. As you said, taking everything as *prasad* is the key to happiness.

Mike: I need some things to visualize to help when doing *karma yoga*, especially when we hear over and over how objects, nature and the world aren’t real, because they are not everlasting.

Arlindo: It is important to have a clear understanding of *satya* and *mithya*. The ultimate work of a qualified inquirer is to deny reality to all phenomenal objects (*mithya*), and by doing so one keeps the mind focused on one single concept: *satya*, or consciousness/self, the absolute subject, as the only “absolute” reality. But that alone is advisable only when the mind is highly qualified. Until then, the study, contemplation and meditation on the *karma yoga* scriptures is a “must,” and that can be done as one also does one’s *satya-mithya* discrimination. And one needs to know the difference between the two *sadhanas*: one prepares the mind, the other finishes the work by revealing “*satya*” to be the only absolute reality, and most importantly, the *jiva*-self (*jivatama*) as no other than the Self (*Paramatma*).

Mike: So the only thing I should really believe in is the formless invisible reality of awareness? Or in other words, the formless life force, knowledge or substratum of all objects and the world?

Arlindo: Yes, but belief is only as good as it fructifies as firm knowledge. Awareness is more than just “life force,” which is but energy (*mithya*). “Knowledge” and “substratum” are better analogies.

Mike: Since matter can’t be created or destroyed, did matter always exist just like awareness has?

Arlindo: Yes and no. It exists as the manifest Creation or as unmanifest “potential” (macrocosmic causal body of Creation). It is always there, but sometimes it is “apparently” out of existence.

Mike: Are the atoms, space, laws, energy and everything a real part of pure awareness (web to

the spider) or merely objects appearing within it?

Arlindo: Not really. The spider-web analogy refers to *Isvara* (Creator-Creation). All atoms, space, laws, etc. are like a mirage appearing from time to time within the scope of you, awareness. Awareness is real, therefore it cannot create the “not-real.” *Maya* does it and it does so because *maya* is as unreal as Creation. They both belong to the same “apparent” order of reality: *mithya*. It is like a magic trick. Important to understand is that although “not-real” *mithya* does exist, just like a mirage in the desert.

Mike: Or is awareness only the formless force that creates and molds that space and matter? Or is the space itself just awareness itself? I got confused because I read a *satsang* in which James said matter and even the *jivas* are eternal.

Arlindo: Yes, *maya-Isvara-jiva* (*mithya*) is eternal because it always exists, either as apparently manifest or as a potential in the “apparent” macrocosmic causal realm of Creation.

Mike: Is it accurate to say the term “God” is most closely associated with the term “*brahman*,” or pure formless awareness? Meaning the life force that had the knowledge and ability to create *jivas*, trees and the world before any of the objects actually existed, before actual space or the Creation that we experience existed?

Arlindo: The term “God” is better associated with the term “Brahma,” the creator, governor, maintainer and recycler-destroyer of all forms. Awareness is not the life force, the three *gunas* are. They are the building blocks of Creation. Yes, they exist in the unmanifest (causal) before it manifest as *jivas*, trees etc.

Mike: *Jiva*'s consciousness experiences objects using the senses, and it is said to be just a reflected consciousness. But as I understood, it's not the same as original consciousness?! If that's true, how could I ever realize that awareness is not just an idea?

Arlindo: The light reflecting off a mirror is essentially no different from the direct light coming from our sun. The essence is the same: light rays. The subtle body is the reflector (mirror-like apparatus), but you (the *jiva*) are more than just the three bodies; you are “reflected light” which is no different in its essence from original light (light ray). That is why self-knowledge is possible: because fundamentally you are the self.

Awareness cannot possibly be “just” an idea, because for any idea to exist there must be a witnessing conscious principle to which the idea appears. The existence of any idea is irrefutable proof of the existence of consciousness/awareness to produce and capture it.

The initial concept or notion of awareness as an object of knowledge is merely an idea like any other, but it contains the potential to reveal awareness to be the constant, ever-present, limitless, conscious principle pervading all causal, subtle and gross objects.

Mike: Just by identifying myself with the electricity instead of the machine? But the reality is I am the machine even if my true nature is the electricity. Right? God clearly created *jivas* for a reason. Aren't we what makes the realization of existence possible?

Arlindo: In this analogy, the subtle body is the machine and electricity is awareness. The subtle body converts universal/impersonal awareness into *jiva's* awareness. You are not the subtle body, but awareness with the faculty of knowledge and experience – you are awareness appearing as reflected awareness. Only reflected awareness can experience self-ignorance and gain self-knowledge. Universal, pure awareness is “beyond” knowledge and ignorance.

Mike: Then *Isvara* is basically God/awareness plus all of the abilities to create and the field of existence itself (*maya/mithya*)? So *Isvara* is not real, or everlasting, it's just another object appearing in awareness which awareness created? YES, *Isvara* is not really real.

But does it exist? YES.

Or is it just an idea appearing in awareness? YES.

If that's true, couldn't there be *Isvaras* operating on several different planes of existence? So *Isvara* doesn't really have a consciousness of its own any more than a *jiva* does, so why am I looking to *Isvara* as God?

Arlindo: *Isvara* is not a conscious experiencing entity like *jivas*. *Isvara* is the entire system or field of action we call Creation. *Isvara* is not an entity with a huge subtle body. *Isvara* is the knowledge-intelligence (pure *sattva*) which projects all objects, including *jiva's* three bodies.

Why to look up to *Isvara*? *Isvara* is the one delivering the result of all *jiva's* actions. Knowing that we are all linked together and that the system (*Isvara*) is what brings about whatsoever *prarabdha karma* human *jivas* are meant to experience – *Isvara* is the “all-knowing” principle determining all our destinies. Therefore it is advisable to pay respect, appreciation and follow its *dharmic* and psychological rules.

Mike: It sounds more like *Isvara* is God's messenger or just a collection of rules and laws that *brahman* lays out for existence. Am I getting this?

Arlindo: You can choose to see it this way, but provisionally as your understanding evolves.

Mike: How do “enlightened” people look at nature, everyday life and this direct experience? Do they practice a form of mindfulness and drink in every experience of life with gratitude, enjoying all of the pleasures of the world while keeping detached and not bound to them? Or do they just not really enjoy or take pleasure from any life experiences because it's all not real, and pleasure would be a *vasana* they have already destroyed? If all that's true, why would God even go through the trouble of creating this world?

Arlindo: The *jivamukta* (*jiva* with self-knowledge) experiences a sort of joy which is more like a contentment derived from the self-confidence: “Nothing can really affect me.” They enjoy what they like and they are totally okay with what they don’t like. Self-knowledge neutralizes bidding likes and dislikes to produce a natural sense of dispassion towards objects of experience. He/she knows that objects are deprived of joy/value. They know that the real joy/value depends on the subject, i.e. a mind conditioned by a predominance of *sattva guna*. All experiences are in *mithya* (not really real), yet *jivas* cannot avoid experience, therefore why not to be an “enjoyer” rather than a “sufferer”? Scriptures make no mention about why Creation came into place – only “how.” We can only infer the “how,” since Creation is a phenomenon in *mithya*.

Mike: Any *karma yoga* suggestions? I find it easy to figure out my *dharma*, what I ought to do based on my talents, work and position in life. And what I have in front of me which I know needs doing. So when I’m doing what I know I ought to do, whether it’s just playing my guitar for myself or for a thousand people, taking care of my son, helping someone in a direct way or even just doing the dishes or mowing the lawn, I need to fill my heart with gratitude for the opportunity to act, and perform the task with total concentration.

What about when I’m doing something for pure enjoyment? Going for a walk? Listening to music, spending time with family? I keep getting stuck on “the world isn’t real,” I might be mistaking it as “don’t cling to, don’t experience.” Maybe I’m having a hard time understanding the true meaning of discrimination versus merely wishful/magical thinking or just a way to escape the pain of the world and calm my ego.

Arlindo: Keep up with the good work, Mike. Expose your mind to the scriptures on *karma yoga* and self-knowledge on a regular basis, and feel free to stay in contact. I am happy if I can be of help. The more you give, the more you get. That’s the basic law governing our human experience. You have a good mind – your self-knowledge will grow rapidly. Have faith, Vedanta is the ultimate means of self-knowledge which eventually brings about the end of psychological suffering.