

Is a Dead Body Conscious?

Ram (James Swartz)

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Manju: Dear James, here I have two questions about this chapter:

1. With reference to the paragraph on direct knowledge and inference:

Imagine that you are out in nature and instead of coming across a living person, you find a dead body lying at the side of the path. If you are a Vedanta-qualified person, wouldn't you have exactly the same ideas in your mind than if you had crossed a living person: "There is a body (observation) *and* there is consciousness (inference)"?

Because you know there would never be a body out there if there were no consciousness, the body (or object) being a subset of awareness, it doesn't matter whether the body is alive or not.

James: Yes, but it is a tricky business. The body in the example is standing up. Therefore you experience it as conscious. The body can't stand up unless it is permeated by consciousness. You cannot physically see the consciousness, you see its reflection in the subtle body, i.e. you see that it is alive and you infer the existence of consciousness from its reflection because wherever there is life there is consciousness. And wherever there is death there is consciousness, so you understand that consciousness is all-pervading, that it is free of life and death. You can't say there is death unless you are conscious of it. In fact, you can't say anything about any object unless consciousness is present.

You could "see" consciousness in a dead body if you understood that the existence in the dead body is the same as the consciousness in a living body. Most people don't make that connection but a Vedanta-qualified person knows that existence and consciousness are one. If the body exists, it is consciousness. It is not conscious without the subtle body, but it is consciousness and it is directly experienced.

Manju: Since you are awareness yourself, and this awareness enlightens your own senses and your subtle body, this is the reason why you see this body and have this inference, again, whomever and in whatever state the encountered person is.

James: Yes, you could infer that since it is a person and a body and you are a person who is awareness and a body, that the encountered person is also awareness. But you needn't infer it because you experience it directly both when someone else is present and when others are absent because it is your nature. You are always present whether your body is alive or dead.

Manju: So a Vedanta-qualified person will always link the object he gets through direct knowledge to awareness, which he knows through inference. It doesn't matter what he observes.

James: Yes. It doesn't matter what object is observed. All objects are connected to awareness. An enlightened person knows this.

Manju: It is an ignorance issue not to link whatever object to awareness, and it is more obvious to link a living person to awareness than a dead body, but in reality there is no difference. Is this statement true? Do I get it right?

James: Yes.

Manju: 2. With reference to the chapter on "I can't become more aware":

I can't become more aware because awareness does not grow or shrink, but depending on my dedication to self-inquiry, my level of ignorance and my way of living, *my identification to awareness can grow or shrink*. Is this statement true?

James: Yes, indeed. Awareness is non-dual so there is no space for it to grow into or shrink into. As my subtle body is conditioned by the *gunas*, reflected awareness grows and shrinks. When *tamas* clouds it, it shrinks. When *sattva* is dominant, it grows.

Manju: Looking forward to the webinar next Sunday! Thank you (and Sundari) so much for organizing all these possibilities to gain understanding and for your availability.

Have a wonderful weekend!