

Life after Death

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Randy: James, I attended your seminar on Sunday and was quite stimulated by it, but I want to know, how do you know what happens after death? How can anyone be so sure of something so intangible? I could follow the logical argument, but it seemed as though you had to assume some things at the start for the argument to have a base... Anyway, how sure are you? Would I ever get to feel sure or is it an ongoing process of questioning? The peacefulness must depend on you fully accepting it – questioning wouldn't be so peaceful.

James: Hi, Randy. Let me ask you a question. Are you intangible? I think you will say no. You are very present and very real. In fact you seem to quite like the idea of being around for a long time. You would not feel this way if you were intangible. Vedanta is about you, not some intangible mystical self. It is not about gaining some kind of special experience that is not available all the time.

In fact you have been around forever and will be around forever – just not as the “Randy” person that you take yourself to be. It is the contention of Vedanta that there is no actual evidence that you are the person that you take yourself to be. Even if there is, it is clear that that person will die one day. And there is no evidence that that person will live again, although the tendencies that brought him into existence in this life may bring forth another iteration of “Randy” in the next life, if there is such a thing as the “next” life, all of which depends on the notion that time is real and that it is linear, for which there is no evidence.

If I had time to teach you, I think you would see this. By a careful analysis of your own experience I think you would come to the conclusion that you are eternal.

Reincarnation is a very complex topic and requires a lot of thought to make sense of. In fact it is not in any way the main thrust of Vedanta. When you realize who you actually are, you would not be interested in the topic at all.

Vedanta does not say that Randy does not exist, like some modern teachings. Not at all. He obviously does insofar as you experience him, and you cannot experience something that does not exist. He does have a conditional existence, but he is not ultimately real, meaning enduring. What happens to him, for example, when you go to sleep? He is not there. If he is real, he would have to exist all the time. He could not come into being at one time and go out of existence at another and then pop back into existence. In any case, this is a subtle topic and requires considerable attention if it is to be properly understood.

You ask, how did I come to experience and know it? By exposing my mind to the teachings of Vedanta in a disciplined fashion, by investigating my idea of who I thought I was in light of the inquiries that make up Vedanta. I had a teacher, a sage, and I lived with him for two years, and it all became crystal clear. Although you have no way of knowing, I have not had a bad day in forty years. It would be impossible because I am not the body-mind that I seem to be.

Randy: Also, if enlightenment means that you don't come round again because there's no *karma* left to sort, nothing left to work on, so you sort of dissolve back into consciousness, which is what I think James said, then how can we know what that would be like? Would I want to not come round again?

I think I quite like the idea of having another crack at it... though obviously maybe not so much if I'd be a dung beetle or something... I've always rather thought that I'd float around for a while as my same energy but in some sort of spirit form – and that a person's energy is never completely lost – and found that idea quite comforting really...

James: I think you would resonate with the teachings of Vedanta if you like the idea of hanging around. It may not be as a kind of “energy” exactly, but you do hang around – forever. And yes, Randy's energy does hang around after he dies – in the minds and hearts of those who experienced him in this life. But Randy – well, what is “Randy,” actually? If he dissolves every day when you go to sleep – which is your experience – yet you do not cease to exist when he is not present, then who is he really? Isn't it possible that the same would be true for the “sleep of death,” to quote the Bard? Vedanta says that Randy is not the name for a particular body and mind, but it is a name for the real you, eternal consciousness.

But obviously, if you are enjoying yourself here in this life, Vedanta is not for you, Randy. In fact it has very little to do with the question of life after death, except indirectly. It is about removing the sense of limitation, incompleteness and inadequacy that most human beings feel every day. If you do not feel limited then you are enlightened according to Vedanta. If you feel secure here as you are, then you are enlightened. If you experience a steady sense of wholeness and completeness, an uncaused subtle bliss, then Vedanta is not for you, because this is the result of assimilating the teachings.

Anyway, I hope this was helpful. It would be ideal if you could attend both days of the seminar, but it would certainly be beneficial if you came on Sunday. I recap the teachings of the previous day, so there would be an entrée into the topic. The important thing to know about Vedanta is that it is not just another vague spiritual teaching that gets you all excited about enlightenment and comes up short when you want to make it real. It is a proven teaching that has survived, nay thrived, for thousands of years. It sets people free.

~ Sincerely, James