

No Borders

Ram (James Swartz)

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George: I am struggling with duality and the idea of *maya*.

I know that no object creates lasting happiness nor is it permanent. I know that I am awareness and that is my primary identity but I'm not sure how I can come to know or verify non-duality and *maya*.

James: You cannot verify it with the means of knowledge at your disposal, because awareness cannot be objectified and your means of knowledge, the senses and the intellect, cannot verify it. Scripture is the means of knowledge for awareness and *maya*. If you understand how the teaching works most of the questions can be resolved.

You can verify non-duality by looking to see whether you are two beings or one. Non-duality means that there are not two selves. The very fact that you cannot see the non-dual nature of reality verifies *maya*. *Maya* makes it nearly impossible to verify. It hides your nature from you and projects a world that seems to be separate from you.

George: To begin with I want you to know I have examined the qualifications. Based on my understanding of them they are not a problem.

James: Your discrimination could use a bit of work.

George: If it is a requirement for *moksa* to suspend disbelief until all ignorance is removed then I could try to but since Vedanta is presented as a logical system and in fact requires discrimination then I would like to understand a few apparent conflicts, so I can be clear. I would be grateful for any help you can provide.

James: This statement presupposes that Vedanta is a logical system. It is logical but it is not a system in the sense that you can learn the system intellectually and think you know who you are. This is how we approach knowledge from the intellectual level. Science is a good example. Vedanta is not theory and practice either because the self is self-evident and nothing you can do can prove its existence insofar as it is there making whatever doings you do possible before do them.

It is only a simple means of knowledge. A means of knowledge removes ignorance, in this case, by revealing to you the unexamined logic of your own experience. It sidelines the intellect as the knower by destroying the ignorance that is clouding the intellect. So all the knowledge will eventually be rendered unimportant when the ignorance is gone. You already know you are awareness but this knowledge is not enough because it has not removed the remaining doubts in your intellect. When you expose your mind to the teaching the ignorance slowly disappears

leaving you – not knowledge – shining alone.

George: Here are some of my challenges of understanding: How do we know *maya* exists?

James: Because everyone thinks they are the body-mind entity and because people cannot see the non-dual nature of reality.

George: What is the purpose of *maya*?

James: It has no purpose except to apparently delude awareness. The one asking the question is a product of *maya*. If he knew he was awareness the question would not arise because there would be no *maya* for him or her.

If you know what it means that you are awareness and that awareness is your primary identity then *maya* will not be an issue because you won't feel constrained by the apparent limitations it imposes. Now you are feeling self-knowledge is limited.

George: If life is ultimately a conflict between the real and apparently real, is there a greater purpose to that conflict?

James: The real has no conflict with life. The real encompasses life. It is an object known to you, awareness. You are the real. It in no way limits you. If you take yourself to be an individual and you need to have life mean something then you can say that the purpose is freedom insofar as human beings spend every waking minute trying to remove the apparent sense of limitation imposed on them by *maya*. When you understand what it means to be awareness you cannot find a purpose for life because life is not real. It is often likened to a film. As Shakespeare says, "Life's but a passing shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

George: That's the negative view. But it is more than that: it (life) is a perfect reflection of the bliss of awareness.

Any knowledge developed in *maya* which could reject its nature as illusion could simply be argued to be itself an illusion.

James: Yes, indeed. But self-knowledge is not developed in *maya*. At best any self-knowledge developed in *maya* is indirect knowledge based on inference because from the *maya* perspective the self is apparently far away. Self-knowledge comes from beyond *maya*. It comes from awareness. It comes to individuals, i.e. awareness under the spell of *maya*. Self-knowledge is direct knowledge because the self is not beyond anything. The self is you. You are not somewhere else.

George: The whole approach requires that we deny everything we ever experience, everything we've ever known and anything verifiable. Our only means of knowledge is learning from experience. Therefore what theory could not be constructed based on denying everything that is as an illusion?

James: This is not true. Vedanta does not deny experience in any way. In fact we use experience to reveal the self. Experience occurs to someone – or something, if you wish. It happens in consciousness because you cannot have an experience unless you know you have an experience. You cannot know you have an experience unless you are conscious. So consciousness is present with each and every experience.

Knowing consciousness is difficult because *maya* apparently makes consciousness look at experience instead of looking at itself. It is not actually looking at experience, it is always only looking at itself, but when *maya* is operating it does not see (know) this fact. So the teaching methodology removes *maya* by revealing the unexamined logic of the deluded self's experience. When this happens the self realizes that when it was looking at *maya* and thinking *maya* was real it was really only looking at a dream picture produced by *maya*. It then becomes clear that it is what it always was – the seer. It then feels a great relief and a little sheepish because it missed the one obvious factor in experience without which experience is not possible – itself! So there is no denial of experience.

Learning from experience is not the only means of knowledge. In fact learning from experience without knowing who is learning is not learning at all. It is just ignorance interpreting experience. You are presupposing that your means of knowledge, perception, is unbiased, that it sees clearly what is. But perception is colored by ignorance. Your conditioning is completely personal, whereas reality is impersonal. So how can you know what is reality actually is? Reality for an individual is completely subjective. It can be anything when viewed from the individual perspective.

George: The fact that *maya* is said to exist within awareness may technically prevent reality from being called a duality. However, the fact that there is an apparent reality while at the same time there exists a not-real world made up within a real world that can never be experienced is almost the definition of duality.

James: The operative word in your statement is “almost.” It is almost duality (this is why we call it an apparent reality) but is not actually duality because if you investigate the nature of the not-real world you will find that it is nothing but the consciousness of which it is made. Why? Because your world is made only of your thoughts, and your thoughts are made of you. The made-up, apparent, “almost” world is experienciable but it is not real. “Real” means “permanent.” I think you believe that if you experience something it is real. That is what everyone under the spell of *maya* believes.

George: Moreover, if this apparent reality still exists in every way after enlightenment, just the faith in its reality is gone, and if I still command this body and mind and everyone else still believes that to be the extent of themselves then there is always a duality.

James: Yes, there is always duality experientially but there is no duality for you because duality is not an actuality. It is a concept. When you see water in the desert you do not try to drink it because you know it is only a mirage. The world remains when you know who you are but your relationship to it changes. You no longer find yourself in it, you see it in you. There is a world of difference, like night and day.

And you know that you do not command the body and mind – *Isvara* does. The sense of doership disappears when you know you are awareness. The doer appears as an object in you generated by *maya* and it's known to be a mirage.

Finally, duality is not a problem when you know you are awareness. It is constant source of amusement.

George: Claim: awareness had to be there before senses evolved. This comment refers to the development of senses from the five elements. I don't know how to verify this claim. Mutations are random, and ones that enable improved survivability become selected for as the organism breeds.

Is the five elements forming the basis of *maya* and all matter just an allegory or should I be able to fit this idea in with science?

James: It is not really an important issue because the purpose of that teaching is to reveal the fact that the stimulus-response mechanism set up by *maya* (creation) is generating experience, not the doer. Nothing in Vedanta contradicts science. We accept the findings of science. Even the idea of *maya* does not contradict science. It just explains the creation with reference to consciousness. If you believe that consciousness evolved out of matter you can go with that model if you want. Once you understand creation, however, you can no longer believe that matter is the substrate of consciousness. But it doesn't matter because no matter how the creation came about individuals suffer and Vedanta removes suffering. That is all we are interested in. The difficulty with science is that it cannot explain consciousness because it is hampered by its epistemology. We are not bound by perception and inference. We have a scientific method that science cannot understand. Scientists are almost exclusively materialists firmly rooted in their senses, mind and intellect. Our science is rooted in consciousness.

George: I understand that the meaning we put on objects can be illusory, and they themselves are made up of smaller components, and empty space is a component but there is no way to verify that it is consciousness.

James: I can see your confusion now; it has appeared two times already.

To understand you will have to contemplate on the connection between perceived objects and the knowledge of objects and the relationship between knowledge and consciousness. There is a completely logical connection, a cause-and-effect connection, that is inescapable. The effect is the cause in a different form.

Let me repeat: Who are you apart from what you know? Everything you know is made out of thoughts. Thoughts are consciousness appearing as knowledge. Your experience is not separate from your knowledge of it. You are not outside your body experiencing a tree, for example. You experience the idea of a tree in your mind. You do not experience your mind apart from yourself either. It is experienced as mind-knowledge in you. Are you conscious or not? How can what you are experiencing be anything other than you?

You cannot verify the subject, consciousness, with an object. Objects are not conscious. Only consciousness is conscious. It verifies objects. The mind and body are objects. When you say “verify” you imply the existence of something other than consciousness, a conscious being – a person – who you believe is conscious. The body-mind cannot verify. Your eyes don’t verify forms, you verify the forms your eyes present to you. This person is an object and it is not conscious.

Even if you were a conscious person you could not verify consciousness as an object because your means of knowledge is limited and consciousness is limitless.

It is difficult to understand because from Day One we have been told that we are people when we are actually consciousness. The person is just reflected consciousness but it seems to be conscious because of *maya*. Claiming that people are conscious is no different from saying that the moon generates its own light. The consciousness in the apparent person is actually pure, impersonal consciousness.

If you want to sublimate or negate the person think about it this way: a person is only what you think a person is. It can be anything. If it can be anything it is not real. If it can be anything I perceive or believe it to be life would be a total chaos and science would be meaningless. Science is based on the idea that life is totally impersonal – which it is. Unfortunately, material science cannot account for the subjective reality. Yet we cannot deny the existence of the subjective reality because we experience it. Vedanta accounts for the subjective dimension (*jiva sristi*) and consciousness – as well as the objective (*Isvara sristi*) reality.

George: An assertion is made that to be conscious of something means it is consciousness. Despite something appearing in our consciousness, to say that necessarily means it must be consciousness depends on believing non-duality...

James: Yes, this is the assertion but it does not depend on believing in non-duality. It proves non-duality. Ask yourself where you experience objects. You can only say “in me.” If you go to a place where people are experiencing football match, for example, the tens of thousands of fans are not flying around on the field taking in the action, bumping into each other, etc. They sit perfectly still and the image of the match appears in their consciousness. It is not floating in from a separate reality somewhere like a bird, circling around looking for a place to land. The objects look like they are out there because *maya* is causing consciousness to identify with the senses which project dimensionality. Reality is flat, non-dual. Believe it temporarily and investigate. It may take some time for you to work this out.

George: ...but since that is the proof for non-duality, how can the proof depend upon the faith?

James: The proof depends on careful contemplation of this teaching. At some point it will make perfect sense.

George: Also, here to say that there is only one consciousness is a logical leap, and I am not sure how that can be known. It is logical to say we all have consciousness, but how can we know that those consciousnesses are not independent and equal but actually united?

James: Again, by patient reasoning. You will probably not just get it all of a sudden. Vedanta is difficult for bright people who understand objects and the relationships between objects quickly because what it is saying is counterintuitive. For example, is the life in you different from the life in me? How much of a leap is required to see that life is one? How much of a leap is required to see that your mind and my mind are one? Everyone who is born has a mind. The mind behaves the same way in everyone. It is *Isvara's* creation. If it is not obvious it is because a person confuses the content of the mind with the mind itself. Mind is more than thoughts. It is the substance of which thoughts are made. Here is an analogy: electricity is one everywhere. Yet when it flows through a radio it becomes sound, through a heater heat, through a light bulb light. All three manifestations are just electricity conditioned by the instrument through which it passes. Consciousness is one but it is apparently cluttered by the myriad experiences that appear in it. Even if you look at the instruments, which seem to be different, you can see that they are just matter in different permutations. Just as matter is one – science tells us that too – consciousness and matter are one as well.

Or look at it this way: Can you find any line between yourself and your experience? Is there a border, a sign that says, "You end here. Present your passport. The world of experience begins on the other side of the border"? Can you find a barrier between your perception of objects and the objects themselves? No. It is one seamless continuum. The only borders between things are beliefs that there are borders. In reality no such borders exist. This is a matter of common-sense experience. But when consciousness has been conditioned by *maya* it no longer sees reality as it is. It starts believing in borders, limits, separation. This belief is picked up at a time when the child is totally without discrimination, and usually continues unquestioned until the day you die.

George: I know these are very difficult questions. I do not ask them because I am looking for reasons to discount Vedanta; rather, I hope this can be resolved. Sorry for the hassle but I appreciate any help you can provide.

James: Yes, I can tell by the tone of your letter that you are not arrogant, that you are actually a seeker of truth.