

Science Is Not a Means of Knowledge for Awareness

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Markos: *Hari om*, Sundari. Firstly, thank you for taking the time to reply to my query. I hope you and James are well. ☺

Sundari: You are welcome, Markos. Yes, we are both extremely well.

Markos: Now, I get what you are saying simply because of my exposure to Vedanta for over 40 years (seven years with Swami Venkateshananda, a *gurubai* of Swami Chinmayananda (who I also met in Jhb), then another seven years with Swami Shankarananda and Swamis Krishnananda, Chidananda, Vimalananda, Padmanabanada, Narashimhulu, etc., all from the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh and South Africa). So yes, I have no problem with what you write.

Sundari: You have an impressive spiritual resumé. However, if you have understood the basic tenets of Vedanta then you will know that one cannot use *mithya* to explain *satya*. And what I write is not based on my opinion but on what the scripture says.

Markos: However, the question is of a different kind to what the answer was intended... You see, the world of science posits a brain first, then consciousness (absolute or otherwise). In other words, the opposite to what you and I understand from the Vedantic point of view. From the scientific (neuroscience) point of view, all the things you listed can be “explained” as brain functions. In fact specific regions of brain activity have been identified (see Todd Murphy, etc. on neurotheology!!) that correlate to many so-called “mystical” states.

Sundari: Vedanta is counterintuitive. To assimilate what it is saying the mind must be qualified and have faith in the scripture. If you are still looking for counterarguments in *mithya* then it is best that you put Vedanta on the back burner because it will not work for you.

Markos: I know, like you said, that existence is meaningless without consciousness, as it is even subtler than space, and all these questions arise in consciousness (even the idea of a brain, as if it is something that can stand apart on its own, which it can't).

Sundari: Existence IS consciousness, Markos. You cannot separate the two, because they are the same thing. You are right, the brain is just an idea in consciousness and does not stand on its own. Awareness/consciousness is what makes space, the brain – any object – possible. The brain does not actually think. It seems to think owing to the action of *maya*. As I said in my last email to you, what you are missing is the teaching on *maya* – understanding the identity between *Isvara* and the *jiva*.

Markos: It is also true that the absence of consciousness implies that there had to be consciousness present to know its own absence... but not to the scientific mind. For scientists, the brain comes first (there are some who don't hold this view but that is not the point). So what I was after was any ideas/information/experiments/experiential references that can be used to reverse this view, that brain comes before consciousness.

I'm not even sure that it's fair to be asking you such a question... even though I was hoping that James may have come across something along the lines I'd mentioned.

Sundari: It is very simple, Markos. As I said in my last email to you, which you clearly are still confused about: How do you know that you have a brain? The brain doesn't know you but you know there is a brain even though you never saw it.

The problem with science is that it represents the mind's best effort to figure out the objective truth of the material reality – within the confines of the apparent reality (*mithya*). It does not and cannot take *maya*, or *Isvara*, into account. Vedanta has no quarrel with science as a means of knowledge for objects. But it is not a valid means of knowledge for consciousness because science (like religion and philosophy) is flawed, a prisoner of a methodology that is based on perception and inference of objects alone. Even if science approaches understanding consciousness, it is still attached to its epistemology, the senses. It is limited to interpretations or assumptions inherent in its methodology. Thus it objectifies consciousness, seeing it as something we have instead of what we are. Consciousness is the only thing in reality that does not need proof. Did anybody ever tell you that you are conscious or that you exist? Nobody told you this because it is obvious. You – consciousness – know the brain but the brain does not know you. Did your brain ever communicate with you? If you are identified with the body-mind you will think it does. But the brain is a material instrument that executes thoughts, a machine, much like your computer. It is not capable of thinking. Thoughts arise in the mind, and thoughts are consciousness. Scientists are not their brains, they are consciousness under the spell of ignorance investigating subtle and gross matter. They are limited by their epistemology. There is no way perception and inference is going to reveal consciousness to them. But as I said, there is no need to do so because consciousness needs no proof whatsoever that it exists. The problem stems from the fact that the brain depends on consciousness but consciousness does not depend on the brain. Consciousness is reflected in the brain but they are in different orders of reality, that of the real and the apparently real. The brain, like science, is *mithya* and consciousness is *satya*.

What interests me is why you care what scientists think. About the topic of consciousness, they are ignorant. They will never accept Vedanta *pramana*. Why waste time thinking about them?

Markos: Below are some more comments in cursif and bold, only to distinguish them from your writing.

Markos (from previous email): How can it be shown that everything covered in the Vedanta literature (yours as well as in traditional texts) does not come to an end when the brain is no more? This is the age-old question of how to show that all we talked about, re absolute consciousness, is not a brain phenomenon.

Sundari (from previous email): How do you know that you have a brain? The brain doesn't know you but you know there is a brain even though you never saw it.

Markos: Technically, the I is a product of brain activity... and this has been studied extensively. That I don't have a brain is true, as much as the I arises in a brain is true.

Sundari: See above. The "I" is not a product of brain activity, it is the other way around. If you understood what I said in my last email you would not be making this statement. With all your many years of exposure to Vedanta, you still seem to lack faith in the scripture and your discrimination needs some work. We have no interest in arguing with you if you insist on using science as your means of knowledge.

(From previous email): First of all, we prefer not to use the term "absolute" to qualify consciousness, as it implies that there is a special consciousness "beyond" consciousness. As this is really a non-dual reality, there is only consciousness seemingly appearing in form. Vedanta is the logic of existence and cannot be argued with because it confirms the unexamined logic of your own experience.

Markos: I agree... absence of consciousness implies consciousness to know its absence.

Sundari: If you agree with this statement then why the confusion?

(From previous email): The main aim in Vedanta is to discriminate the self from the objects that appear in it, meaning the real from the apparently real, *satya* and *mithya*. "Real" is defined as "that which is always present and never changing." Nothing in the apparent reality fits that definition.

Markos: "*Brahma satyam, jagat mithya... Brahma jivo evo na paraha,*" ~ Shankara. (Excuse the spelling.) However, to science consciousness means the waking state or even dream, as in sleep we are "unconscious." Then there are any number of unconscious and subconscious phenomena that can be demonstrated to "show" that consciousness is an evolute of brain activity. So the word "consciousness" is used in a different sense. Some use the term "non-localised" consciousness in a way similar to what we do, but still...

Sundari: See above.

(From previous email): How can the mind – or the brain (which is simply an instrument for perception, and the mind is not confined to it), being a gross object...

Markos: THAT IS THE CRUX OF THE MATTER: HOW TO SHOW THAT MIND IS NOT CONFINED TO THE BRAIN? Science will not say what it is and mind is like software, much like a computer has hardware and software (see Stephen Pinker).

Sundari: See above, Markos.

(From previous email): ...know something which is far subtler than it, awareness? Awareness, or consciousness, is not an object of perception and cannot be known by the mind, which is only capable of knowing objects.

Markos: This does not resolve the question, “Which is primary?” Brain functioning results in consciousness, they will say; brain not functioning = unconsciousness! Some use the word “sentience” as an indescribable something which has not been explained fully yet by brain processes... (see Stephen Pinker, *How the Mind Works*).

Sundari (from previous email): Awareness is not a “brain phenomenon.”

Markos: The question is, how to show that???

Sundari (from previous email): As stated, the brain is just gross matter, it is inert.

Markos: That is an assertion that has no foundation in science...

Sundari (from previous email): Without consciousness illuminating it, it is lifeless jelly.

Markos: Brain is not a thing that can be explained other than to say that when the mystery that is appearing as matter combines in a particular way only then consciousness manifests; before that there is no consciousness at all, in other words, nothing knows that anything exists and everything happens in “non-awareness” until brain takes place and then perception begins; not human brain, by the way, it could be those of single-cell organisms.

Sundari: There is no mystery to matter, Markos. It is all perfectly logical, and scripture unfolds the teaching on the five elements with irrefutable logic. It seems you have not grasped it. And you are forgetting the most important factor: awareness/consciousness – YOU – exist prior to objects and do not require objects to be aware. Awareness is self-aware and does not depend on anything to know itself – it is self-effulgent. There is no such thing as “non-awareness,” and if there was awareness would be aware of the apparent non-awareness. In fact for awareness there ARE NO objects. There is only awareness. It would be more appropriate to say the self, seeing only itself, is that which knows the seer with reference to the seen only when *maya* is operating, because with the appearance of *maya* there is something for awareness to see (be conscious of), i.e. objects.

This statement of yours above is made entirely from the perspective of the *jiva*, the doer, limited to *mithya*, deluded by *maya*, trying to understand awareness from the point of view of the *jiva* using a limited means of knowledge. It will not work.

Sundari (from previous email): It appears to think and compute because the light of awareness shines on it – just like the moon appears to shine because the light of the sun shines on it. If you are identified with the body-mind the brain definitely comes to an end, so you believe you do. But there is no evidence that you die – and if there is then you would have to be there to know it, not so? Therefore all objects (the brain included) arise from awareness, are made up of awareness and are dependent on awareness to exist but you – awareness – are free of all objects. You are *adjata* – unborn – and you never die.

Markos: I agree, but how to start from the other point of view and arrive at this conclusion?

Sundari: See above, Markos. You are wasting your time because your thinking is based on a limited methodology. Why not trust the scripture, as it is based on self-knowledge, which is unlimited?

Sundari (from previous email): As awareness you do not need anything to know yourself because you exist whether objects are present or not. When *maya* appears the creation manifests and the self apparently under the spell of ignorance appears as a subtle body, identifies with objects and believes that awareness is something it needs to gain. This is called ignorance.

Markos: I agree but science does not, as mentioned above.

Sundari (from previous email): This is why we need Vedanta, which is an impersonal means of knowledge for awareness. When the qualifications are present and the mind is faithfully subjected to the scripture...

Markos: To science, scripture is unfounded dogma, invalid...

Sundari: I rest my case, Markos.

Sundari (from previous email): ...self-knowledge removes the ignorance present in the mind obscuring the true nature of the self. The person still remains but they are no longer identified with being a person. This is called *moksa*, freedom.

Markos: To science, that is termed “schizophrenia.” There is a person called Thomas Mertzinger in Germany who treats persons that suffer from a displaced sense of self (not what you are talking about, but that is how what you are talking about is interpreted by neuroscience)... I know exactly what you are saying but we are coming from a different starting point!

Sundari: It get tiresome to keep repeating myself, Markos, but I will do so once again: if you are going to use science as your means of knowledge you are not going to get very far because its epistemology is limited to the senses. It is a means of knowledge to know objects, not consciousness.

Markos (from previous email): If you wish to refer me to any of your material in response to the above question please do, as I have a copy of all the videos and writings on the hard drive you gave me.

Sundari (from previous email): This teaching is the essence of Vedanta. The key to understanding it is the teaching on *maya* and the *Isvara-jiva* identity. All the teachings deal with it in some way or another. Read (or re-read) James' book *How to Attain Enlightenment* carefully and slowly. His new book is soon to be available at the ShiningWorld website as well. The video on *Panchadasa* deals with the *Isvara-jiva* teaching, although it is a very advanced text.

Markos: Thank you, I am familiar with *Panchadasa* and will revisit...

Sundari: We have several renditions of it available on video. I recommend the Trout Lake 2015 version.

Markos: I don't think I have this one, as I got James' lectures on video at about 2011/12. I hope to hear from you.

~ Warm regards, Markos

Sundari: You need to persevere in self-inquiry, constantly subjecting the mind to the scripture. Your discrimination needs to develop, so make sure you understand all the qualifications required for *moksa*.

I hope to hear from you.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari