

# Throw Away Your Vedanta

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Mat:** Dear James, I am contemplating “appear/apparent” and still have some difficulty but will persevere.

The real: always exists, is never non-existent, is present in all places and at all times, never appears nor disappears, just is permanent, always here. This is *sat*. It is straightforward to intellectually understand (but not easy to realise!).

**James:** What is difficult about it, Mat? It is just you, that because of which you are aware. There is no realization, Mat. It is not an experience. Vedanta is not theory and practice. It is just you, awareness, what knows the apparent Mat person.

**Mat:** *Asat* is that which can never exist, is always non-existent, pure imagination, can never be, e.g. a circular square, the horn of a rabbit, the child of an infertile couple, etc., an inherent contradiction. *Asat* is easy to understand, easily negated.

The difficulty is understanding appear/apparent correctly. In common language, appear/apparent means “seems to be present but is not actually present, never really happened, never really existed at all, only an appearance, not a fact, not real, untrue, not true.” Such use of appear/apparent in common language suggests *asat*.

**James:** You are tying yourself up in knots, Mat. “Apparent” just means everything you think, feel, smell, taste and touch. It is just what is known to you.

**Mat:** I have to reconcile the ordinary meaning of “appear/apparent” with its use in Vedanta which is “appears and disappears, comes into being, stays for some time and ceases to exist, begins, exists and ends, temporary, transient, does exist but this existence is hollow, nothing to it, nothing to hold onto, an unreliable existence even though present, not the really true existence of *sat*.” I cannot say it does not exist, it does exist. It is not the absence and unreality of *asat*. Yet I cannot say it has real existence. It is not the true existence of *sat*. It exists but is not real. It appears to exist but depends on something else for its existence. It is not *sat* and also it is not *asat*. This is *mithya*, a particular existential status in between...

**James:** I can't see the doubt here, Mat, except this: you talk about *sat* as if it was an it, an object. *Sat* is you. You cannot be objectified.

**Mat:** ...a peculiar way of being, neither *sat* nor *asat*. Ordinary language does not have the concept of *mithya* and hence does not have a word for it.

**James:** Yes, it does. It is “apparent,” something that seems like something else. The objects that present themselves to you seem like something other than you. You are making this way too complicated. It is a simple discrimination that you must make every minute. There is you, awareness (*sat*), and the objects appearing in you (*mithya*). If you confuse yourself with them you are an *aviveki*, an indiscriminating person, and if you don’t you are a *viveki*, someone who doesn’t. There is nothing subtle, mystical or in any way profound about it. Forget all the words on “apparent” except the definition I gave above in sentence one of this paragraph. Then apply this definition on a moment-to-moment basis to your own experience.

**Mat:** My problem is understanding the difference between that which does not exist, seems to exist and does really exist, *asat* versus *mithya* versus *sat*.

**James:** That is not the point of Vedanta. Keep it simple. Just discriminate you from the objects appearing you, if you are not happy. If you are happy, just watch TV. I think you are missing the point.

**Mat:** There are some confusing qualities about *mithya* (appear/apparent).

**James:** The point is, are there any confusing things about you apart from your apparent confusion about the word “apparent”? *Mithya* is confusing because it is not real. You can’t understand it because it is not substantial. It is just the knowledge that what you see/experience is not real, meaning insubstantial, not to be counted on for your happiness.

**Mat:** Some things in *mithya* do not give me feedback, have no direct effect on me...

**James:** Nothing in *mithya* affects anybody, because it is *mithya*, unless the self thinks it is the subtle body, a person. If you are speaking as Mat then a *mithya*-person is apparently being affected by something that is only apparent. If you are the self you know the objects appearing in you have nothing to do with you. You are *asanga*, non-attached to them.

**Mat:** ...e.g. a mirage in the desert cannot quench my thirst. But it also cannot give me diarrhea, suffering. It doesn’t affect me at all... unless I go for it.

**James:** You are going for a mirage in a big way now, trying to figure out *mithya*. Be practical about this. Vedanta is just common-sense experience. You are *sat*, what you experience is *mithya*. These are just words that refer to your everyday experience.

**Mat:** If I was not thirsty and saw the mirage I would not be bothered by it. It would be a curiosity, an entertainment. The blue sky is present but not real = *mithya*. It is really colourless space. The blueness of the sky cannot colour the spaceship blue. The blueness is present but is not real =

conditioned superimposition. I superimpose what is not real onto that which is real.

**James:** Do you mean you actually do this? And if you actually do it, why? And if you consciously do it that is just fine because you know the difference. Or is this just a hypothetical?

**Mat:** Yet other things in *mithya*, e.g. my body and mind and life, do give feedback, have an effect on me...

**James:** Why do you imagine that they have an effect? They cannot have an effect unless you think you are something you aren't, which you obviously do or you would not say that they have an effect. You are not Mat, the one who is trying to understand Vedanta. You are the one observing Mat read these words and wondering what Ramji is trying to say.

**Mat:** ...e.g. pleasure and pain, comfort and discomfort, gain and loss, etc. I have experienced them. I cannot deny such experiences. Such experiences do exist even if they are temporary and unreliable. Applying this principle to ignorance,...

**James:** It does not apply to ignorance. It is ignorant to think that what you experience is real, meaning permanent. There is nothing more to it than that.

**Mat:** ...the teaching says ignorance is *mithya*.

**James:** No, it is something altogether different from *satya* and *mithya*. Ignorance causes *satya*, you, to appear as Mat (*mithya*). Taking yourself to be Mat is ignorance. There is no way Mat is going to figure this out, Mat.

**Mat:** It does exist, even if its existence is hollow. It has a feedback, a direct effect on me, suffering.

**James:** How is this possible? Even if you are hollow it will have no effect on you. You witness the suffering. Suffering is an object. You imagine that it affects a Mat which you have constructed as some sort of real person. Ignorance has caused you, awareness, to think it is Mat and then to take apparent suffering to be real suffering.

**James:** My experience is that I did forget myself.

**James:** Think what you want but I say this is not true. You are the knower of the thought "I forgot myself." Are you not always present? How can you forget yourself? You need to take a stand in awareness, Mat. Taking a stand in Mat is not working. Aren't you fed up with it yet?

**Mat:** I experienced being under the spell of ignorance and did suffer.

**James:** With all due respect, Mat, this also is not true. You are the knower of the thought “I experienced being...” etc. Even if we allow you to be this fictional Mat and he suffered, so what? That is what the self apparently does when it apparently misidentifies itself as a person. If the suffering is not here now it was only apparent suffering anyway. If it is here now it is only apparent suffering because it will not be there later.

**Mat:** That is why I began my search for freedom from suffering, for happiness. I cannot deny that experience of ignorance and suffering even if it is hollow.

**James:** Okay, you suffered and you began to seek freedom from suffering. That is what every apparent entity in the apparent reality is doing 24/7. That is your lot when you take a stand as Mat.

**Mat:** But the teacher and teaching state: I did not really forget. I appeared to forget. I apparently forgot. I seemed to forget. I was always and now still am free of ignorance. The ignorance and suffering are *mithya*, i.e. existing but temporary, hollow.

What they mean is that I am temporarily under the influence of ignorance. I am temporarily ignorant. Ignorance does exist for some time and does affect me. Ignorance is *mithya*, not *sat* nor *asat*. They are not denying my ignorance, not that it didn't happen. They are stating that it did happen, it does exist but is temporary. This means I did forget, even if temporarily. So why are they saying that I did not forget, that I only appeared to forget?

**James:** It does not mean that you did forget, Mat. It means you mistook yourself for some sensations in your body and mind and you thought you were something other than what you are. While you were there apparently forgetting you were there observing yourself temporarily forget. It sounds to me like you are trying to find a chink in Vedanta's armor. This cannot be a real question. What does it matter what they say? Look at your own experience. Were you ever not present? If you were then you forgot. But you cannot find a time when you were never not present, so you never forgot. You are trying to figure out who you are from the Mat perspective. You cannot do this. You have to take a stand as awareness and dismiss these thoughts from there. They are all dismissible with a simple teaching. They are not-self. It's time to practice *viveka*, Mat. No more philosophizing.

**Mat:** Because they are applying a different meaning to the word “appear/apparent” does exist but temporary, apparently real, hollow. This is the use of appear/apparent in Vedanta.

**James:** So your meaning is better? You have to accept the meaning of the *sruti*, Mat. I already made it dead simple. Screw Vedanta. There are two things: awareness – you – and the objects appearing in you. *Moksa* is knowing which is which and therefore not confusing the two. You are

taking an object, Mat, to be you. This is superimposition, confusion. Mat is not you. So you can throw Mat and all his thoughts about the teaching, and everything else – out the window. It seems you want *moksa* for Mat. *Moksa* is freedom from Mat. You are already free of Mat but you don't know it. You think you are Mat. This whole line of reasoning is barking up the wrong tree.

**Mat:** Think of ring and gold... the ring does exist. That is why I can put my finger through it. I cannot put my finger through a lump of gold. But if gold is removed ring ceases to exist. What kind of existence is that? Temporary, an appearance. Gold appearing as ring, apparently ring, temporarily ring. The ring's existence is *mithya*. The crunch is: Which will I trust? How will I reconcile the difference? I need to let go of believing my experience as real, as the yardstick or the final criterion of reality. Also, let go of the usual meaning of appear/apparent...

**James:** You can't do that unless you know you are awareness. A child will cling to its tricycle until a bicycle appears. You have to take a stand as awareness. This is *sraddha*. You don't have *sraddha* because you want Mat to trust. You have to trust that you are not Mat. Then proceed as if you are awareness. As awareness you are suddenly Mat-free and therefore problem-free. Try it. You will like it – or not. If you don't then you are not dispassionate enough and you will have to keep tormenting your poor mind with useless inquiries.

**Mat:** ...distinguish between the ordinary use of appear/apparent (not real at all, never existed, *asaṭ*) versus the meaning used in Vedanta (temporarily real, apparently real, *mithya*). Trust the teacher and teaching and their meaning of appear/apparent: I did forget but temporarily. I appeared to forget.

I apparently forgot. The forgetting/ignorance appeared, exists for a while and will disappear = *mithya*.

**James:** Yes. I am sorry to be so stern with you, Mat, but you are on the wrong track. Making a big story of *satya* and *mithya* – it has been going on for a long time now – is a waste of your precious time. Sometimes it seems as if you understand and sometimes it is clear you don't. This is one of those times. Are you really suffering? It seems you have a very good life. Why set yourself up for a lot of hard work? Taking a stand as awareness is where the rubber meets the road spiritually. It is hard work. You are a very bright guy but you cannot figure it out this way because you are assuming that you know something, that the knowledge you garnered from your experience is actually knowledge. Is it? It isn't according to Vedanta.

**Mat:** I am not fully clear yet.

**James:** If you are clear that you are not clear, are you not clear? By that I mean that if you know the thought "I am not clear" you are clear, meaning awareness. It is very simple, Mat. Very, very simple.

**Mat:** ...understand that apparent/appear is a way of trying to understand my ignorance of myself

and the ensuing suffering.

**James:** No, it isn't. You cannot understand ignorance or suffering. It is a way to distinguish yourself from the objects appearing in you, i.e. your thoughts, etc. You are taking your thoughts to be real. Ignorance is just a thought. Suffering is just a thought, "I" is just a thought. *Satya/mithya* is an understanding that needs to be applied on a moment-to-moment basis. It is just winnowing, rejecting.

**Mat:** Perhaps the difficulty outlined above cannot be reconciled because the usual meaning of appear/apparent in ordinary language is *asat* and different from its use in Vedanta, *mithya*. With ordinary language every answer leads to another question.

**James:** No. Language is not to blame. Vedanta is ordinary language. The reason I am a successful Vedanta teacher because I put Vedanta in ordinary language. Using the Sanskrit is confusing. I will repeat it again. There are two things in existence: you and the objects appearing in you or to you. See the truth of this. You cannot get to square one spiritually until you see the truth of this. It is a matter of common-sense experience. Once you have seen this then – if you are suffering and want to be free of it – you need to separate yourself from the objects, since confusing them causes suffering. This is what Vedanta says.

**Mat:** But finally, it does not matter.

**James:** Okay. Then take "finally" as the final word. Throw away your Vedanta studies and enjoy yourself as awareness.

**Mat:** Ignorance and the attempts to understand it can ultimately be dropped.

**James:** The operative word here is "ultimately." It means that you haven't dropped it. Dropping it means giving up the notion that you are Mat. I suspect this is going to be a bit of a grunt, Mat. You seem to be quite in love with Mat. ☺ Drop it now. Say "I know what ignorance is. It cannot be dropped because it has nothing to do with me. I am not a doer, a dropper. Ignorance goes when knowledge comes. There is no dropping."

**Mat:** Why? Because I am awareness. I already am awareness.

**James:** This is true. But why write all that stuff above about *satya* and *mithya* and make poor old Ramji teach like a demon if it is true for you? It is only true as an idea. It is theoretically true.

**Mat:** The teacher and teaching repeatedly state I am awareness, always was, am right now and will be.

**James:** So when are you going to accept it? How many times do I have to say it before it becomes true for you? What do you think has to happen to make it true? The answer is you have to assert it as your nature. Otherwise, it means that you are waiting for the penny to drop. If the penny has not dropped by now it is not going to drop. You need to quit this thinking business and start practicing *viveka*. It is the only way.

**Mat:** This realisation is the focus of Vedanta, not the understanding or reconciling of ignorance. Ignorance is just a way of explaining my confusion and suffering but ultimately is not relevant. It can be dropped.

Persevere with what the teacher and teaching state: I am awareness. I appeared to forget, i.e. I forgot temporarily. Remain as awareness and happily live life through my form which is *mithya*. End of discussion!!!

**James:** As I just said, why go through this long line of thinking to come to this conclusion? You have been in the Vedanta world for quite a long time. You must have known this a long time ago. Why are you talking about it now? Your *shraddha* needs work.

**Mat:** James, you said that the self never forgets. You mean pure self, not associated.

**James:** I mean you. There is only one self. Are there two of you? Look at your own experience.

**Mat:** But self associated with form, whether as reflection or as permeation, seems to be affected, seems to forget. Like pure space and cup-space: the former never is affected, the latter does seem to be affected.

**James:** All due respect, Mat, but are you serious? Why are you asking the same question over and over and over? This is like whipping a dead horse. Tell me what suffering you have, apart from torturing yourself with Vedanta. I can't repeat myself anymore or it will look like I am an idiot. The teaching is simple (see above). My recommendation is that you throw out your Vedanta books in the fire – have a book-burning party.

A hundred years ago the railroads were the most powerful dynamic institutions in America. They didn't know they were railroads, they had a job and they did it. When they got successful they forgot what they were doing and became railroads and lost their way, their vitality. Vedanta is not about Vedanta and teachings and all that stuff. It is not like the Catholic church. It is just *viveka*, discriminating the subject from the objects. If you can objectify Mat with this method you can save the poor bugger a lot of work. Unfortunately, there is a whole world of Vedanta that has forgotten its core mission and fallen in love with its trains. Vedanta is very simple. It is about you. Who are you?

The rest is more of the same. There is no need to comment further. Please don't be offended. There is nothing personal in it. It is just my job as a teacher of Vedanta to tell the truth. As much

as I like you, Mat, I cannot go on with this. It is too much. All due respect but this is just intellectual – how can I say it without being indelicate? – okay, masturbation. You know very well who you are. You cannot keep pretending you don't.

**Mat:** Thank you for your reply and for putting in the hard work repeatedly. I am sorry I put you through all this effort and I understand your feeling of enough is enough! But THANK YOU sincerely.

Yes, I do know I am awareness. Yes, I am happy. No, I am not pretending that I don't know I am awareness nor am I trying to find a chink in Vedanta.

I was trying to understand why I, awareness, apparently forgot who I am and took myself to be a *mithya*-person, Mat (your words).

**James:** Ignorance has caused you, awareness, to think you are Mat and then take apparent suffering to be real suffering. That is what the self apparently does when it apparently misidentifies itself as a person.

**Mat:** WHY?

I will re-read your reply many times and contemplate your words.

Anyway, I have taken up too much of your time and you have a heavy workload. It looks like there are vestiges of identification with Mat, and I am attempting to understand real and apparent as a Mat. As you said, this will fail.

I will take your advice and keep it simple: I stand as awareness, real, *satya*. I understand that everything I experience is apparently real, *mithya*. Everything is an object appearing in me and is known to me: thinking, feeling, hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling.

I will do this discrimination continuously, moment by moment.

Enjoy myself.

Thank you so much, Ramji. There is no need to reply. I hope your book is coming along well. See you in Tiruvannamalai.

Love to you and Sundari.

**James:** Hi, Mat. Thanks for taking it the right way. There is no answer to why. It is a fruitless line of inquiry. This is the point of the teaching about *maya*. There is no reason for *maya*. It is what causes you to ask why. The effect cannot know the cause. It is impossible. This is why scripture says it is unknowable from the point of view of the intellect. You need to just accept that there is no reason for consciousness or for the world. They are just facts to be considered. The "why" is an object appearing to you. It should be dismissed as "not-self." You want to know that you are fullness, not why you think you aren't. If you can find a proper answer to why ignorance you will be no closer to your own fullness. The answer is "I am fullness." It takes care of all the "whys."

The right inquiry is “Am I limited or am I limitless?” This can bear fruit if you surrender to the logic of the *sruti*. If you accept the logic of the teachings, which should destroy your sense of limitation, then take it on faith and deal with every thought from “I am fullness.” It will destroy the ignorance. Krishna says, “There is no purifier like self-knowledge.” He does not say that knowing why you are ignorant is *moksa*. That you are not free is only a belief. Why do you believe it? It is just as logical to believe you are free as if you aren’t. You have a choice how to see yourself. Even if you can’t understand, don’t worry. Operate from that belief and you will see amazing changes. The changes will convince you that it is true. Think about this and get back to me. No big, long arguments, just a simple reply.

~ Much love, James