

What Really Happened?

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Tom: James, I've been reading your first book on meditation online and listening to your talks from last year in Berlin. A few questions have arisen.

When talking about the reasons to be able to trust Vedanta, you said that is revelation. The *rishis* "saw" or "heard" the *mantras*. I was wondering how this was different than a mystic or prophet seeing or hearing a voice or vision like those of the Bible or Quran. I have no reason to doubt Vedanta as of yet, it's just a big sticking point for me because I have always doubted the authenticity of Biblical teachings because they inevitably come through faulty human beings. I know you said that the *rishis* didn't channel the *mantras* through themselves, but I didn't understand how anything that they heard or saw couldn't be channeled through them or have to be processed through their own experience and perception. Ultimately, to me, where Vedanta came from doesn't necessarily matter as long as it works. But for the sake of argument, if someone takes me to task over it I like to have my ducks in a row.

James: It really doesn't matter where it came from if it works. The point of this discussion of the provenance of Vedanta is that it is not a philosophy or a religion or based on mystic experience. I explain it a bit differently in my book *How to Attain Enlightenment* so as not to scare Western skeptics and materialists and anti-religious types. Once you get into it you will see that it is not mysticism or religion or a philosophy but simply a means of inquiry based on pure knowledge.

Tom: In your meditation book you talk about the self developing a process to involve itself into the elements and world and then evolve itself back out it. What I take from that is that the self developed a way to experience (objectify) itself and then realize itself again.

James: Well, there are two basic creation theories, the gradual evolution theory and the instantaneous projection theory. The whole idea that it would forget itself and then go to all the trouble of remembering itself is definitely a stretch. It doesn't really matter, because the method of inquiry removes the notion that the creation is reality irrespective of how it came about.

Tom: I guess I just wonder why that whole process would even take place at all. It makes it seem like the SELF had some desire or motivation to "create" the world and experience itself.

James: There is no reason. *Maya* is described as "what make the impossible possible." It didn't forget and it didn't remember. It just seems to.

Tom: Here's a *Gita* question: Why does it seem like the opening verses of the twelfth chapter are saying that it is better to contemplate God with form instead of formlessness? This always has confused me and made me feel like I need to think of God in anthropomorphic terms. While

thinking of God that way is emotionally comforting, it always makes me think of God as some THING or BEING that is outside of myself.

James: It is some being outside yourself if you think of yourself as a human being. Most people, like Arjuna, think they are human beings, doers, so they need to use forms to symbolize the self until their minds become subtle enough for them to meditate on the formless by contemplating the implied meaning of the words of Vedanta. If you have a contemplative temperament, you don't need forms. You can meditate with knowledge only.

Tom: In one of the *satsangs* you discuss the demise of Osho with someone. They in turn ask you about the unpleasant demise of Ramana, Krishna and Jesus. In part of the reply you ask why the person has inquired about the demise of Krishna because it is allegorical. I just want to get something straight: Do you think there ever was a man named Krishna who existed and taught the *Gita*?

James: Yes and no. If you are in the *pratibhasika* state of reality – the dream state – it happened. If you are in the empirical reality – *vyvaharika* – it may have happened. There is some “evidence” that such a war did happen, but nothing conclusive. The *Mahabharata*, in which the *Gita* is inset, is called an *ithasa*, not a *Purana* which is purely mythological, because some think it actually was an historical event.

The materialist mind somehow can only accept something if it “actually” happened. But the “actual” happening that the materialist mind needs to give it a sense of reality didn't actually happen either if you look at reality from the point of view of awareness. Reality for an individual is only the state of mind that it is in. The dream state is as real as the waking state. So let the *swamis* have their *Gita*. It is true for them. In any case the truth of the *Gita* has nothing to do with what happens in either the dream or the empirical world. It doesn't matter if it happened or not, because the purpose of the *Gita* is for *moksa*, which is freedom from the belief that what happens is actually real.

The dream state is just as “real” as the waking state when you look at it from the point of view of awareness. If a person sees an angel it is there and it is real for them. So the question of what is real depends on one's state of mind.

Tom: Or are all of the *ithasas* just *Puranic* legends designed to bring truth in story form?

James: That is my view.

Tom: I only want to ask because I have always had trouble believing they were authentic events, but Chinmaya *swamis* swear they are factual truth. As a sidenote, I thought it was interesting that you gave a reply about the fate of Jesus as if it really did happen. Do you feel that the Biblical stories are actually historically-based?

James: It happened if you think it happened. These are just eternal ideas in consciousness. They have meaning whether they happened in the empirical reality or not. I don't need to know whether something happened or not. I only care if the meaning of the story somehow relevant to what I am seeking. We are after knowledge here. Knowledge is beyond the world of happenings.

Tom: I got your book *How to Attain Enlightenment* today in the mail. I also got a copy of Dayananda's *Gita* (translation only, no commentary) for daily reading. Sometimes I get going in too many directions, so I was thinking about doing this: for the time being I would stop reading your meditation book and *satsangs* and just read *How to Attain Enlightenment* while occasionally listening to your Berlin talks. Do you recommend doing anything differently?

James: No. You can read my *Bhagavad Gita* translations without commentary. Read it out loud and identify with Krishna.