

# All Objects Are the Self but the Self Is Not the Objects

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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**Christopher:** Hi, Sundari, I hope it's okay to send you a question. I've been watching James' *Practicing Vedanta* series at *YouTube* and I'm hoping to understand the teaching that everything is awareness, i.e. self.

**Sundari:** This is the fundamental principle of Vedanta, as this is a non-dual reality. Have you read *How to Attain Enlightenment*, James' book?

**Christopher:** At the moment, my understanding is along the lines of recognising that formless awareness allows me to perceive all objects as they all arise in it. Also, my experience of them is conditioned by my *jiva's vasanas*.

**Sundari:** You are correct that the *jiva's* perception is governed by its *vasanas*, which are in turn governed by the *gunas*, or *Isvara*. So ask yourself, "Who is the 'me' that perceives?" Even though you seem to be objectifying the *jiva*, Christopher, you are also objectifying awareness.

The definition of *jiva* is "awareness with a subtle body." *Jiva* is a principle, a *tattva*, not a specific person. It is actually pure awareness, *paramatma*. When it is deluded by *maya* pure awareness apparently identifies with objects and takes itself to be the doer, or body-mind, believing that awareness is something gain.

There is really only one person, or subtle body, appearing as many; it appears as if there are individuals, who are all different. However, the one individual appears as basically three types of individuals, or *jivas*:

1. The *jiva* who thinks it is a person with a name, a history and an address. This *jiva* is called the "doer," or the human being, the one identified with objects (including all experience).
2. There is the *jiva* who knows about awareness but it does not know what it means to be awareness. This *jiva* has indirect knowledge and is often called a "self-realised" *jiva*. This *jiva* has had an experience of being awareness but has not actualised self-knowledge, so the knowledge is not firm and ignorance is still present. This is the one who re-identifies with objects or still seeks experience, because the *vasanas* are still binding and doership has not been fully dissolved.
3. And finally, there is the *jiva* who has permanent direct knowledge, because he/she knows that their true identity IS Awareness and they know what it means to be awareness - while still apparently manifesting as a *jiva*, or individual. This means that self-knowledge translates fully into ALL aspects of the person's life. This is the *jivanmukta*, the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, or the self-actualised *jiva*, or person.

**Christopher:** So in a way awareness is aware of my *jiva's* waking dream, and this dream can be informative regarding the *vasanas* that may be operating.

**Sundari:** Not “in a way,” Christopher. You, awareness, are always aware of all objects that appear in you and the conditioning that governs them, “their” *vasanas*. Awareness does not require the presence of objects to be aware, as it exists prior to all 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.

From the *jiva's* point of view the only way to dissolve its conditioning is to understand it in light of self-knowledge. This is the teaching on the *gunas* and the *Isvara-jiva* identity.

**Christopher:** However, I still have the idea that this is projected onto materiality and I believe the teaching says that matter is also self. Is it enough to contemplate that matter arises in awareness?

**Sundari:** What is the “this” that you are referring to? Duality is a projection. It is a superimposition onto non-duality brought about by the appearance of *maya*. When one first undertakes self-inquiry the most important qualification is the ability to negate all objects. One has to have fully understood that there is nothing to be gained through objects, because they are value-neutral. The joy is not in the object, it is “in” you, awareness. There is no real “in” or “out” of awareness, as it (you) pervade(s) every atom of existence. Existence and consciousness is the same thing. Once you know this you stop chasing objects, things, experiences. You realise that awareness is not going to be gained through experience but only regained by the removal of ignorance through self-knowledge.

This is called discriminating *satya* from *mithya*, the real from the apparently real, which is the crux of Vedanta. “Apparently real” is “that which is not always present and does not last,” “real” being defined as “that which is always present and never changing.” Permanently discriminating the one from the other is the essence of enlightenment. As stated, to begin with all objects have to be negated as not-self but once you make progress with self-inquiry you have to turn it around and see that all the objects are you, awareness. They arise from you, are made up of you and depend on you but you do not depend on the objects.

All objects are a reflection of you, awareness, but they are not you because they are not real, meaning objects are not conscious and do not last, just like you know that your reflection in a mirror is you and comes from you but it is not you. All objects exist in a different order or reality to awareness: *mithya* – apparently real. Only you, awareness, are real. This is a non-dual reality, there is only awareness here – apparently in form but the form is not conscious. Only you are.

**Christopher:** I hope this makes sense, as I’d like to resolve my difficulties regarding “awareness is everything.”

**Sundari:** It makes sense, Christopher. Here is an excerpt from a *satsang* James

gave to an inquirer recently:

**James:** There is one awareness. This is why I call it “ordinary.” If you have two or more, one could be different from the other. This original awareness does not change. It is called *bimba chaitanya*. The problem comes because *maya* creates a subtle body, which reflects awareness onto objects, like sounds, forms, etc. It is called *pratibimba chaitanya*. The subtle body, being in *maya*, is subject to change. It modifies when sound and light stimuli reflect in it. The reflected awareness is the original ordinary awareness, reflecting on the subtle body. But because the subtle body changes owing to the action of the *gunas*, awareness seems to change. When you identify with the subtle body you say you are going through “changes.” At the same time that the subtle body is changing it is known by original, ordinary awareness, which does not change. You know that Paul, the subtle body, is experiencing things. Original awareness doesn’t experience. It witnesses. It always remains the same. It is unaffected by what the subtle body experiences.

**Paul:** And how can the subtle body, which is an object and known to me, be an experiencing entity or something that knows/experiences? It all seems totally contradictory. Maybe this is all hair-splitting but I want understand myself, and experiencing and knowing seem very close – identical in fact. The word “entity” is also confusing since at any given moment the subtle body is only one fleeting thought, one perception, one intention, etc., gone in an instant.

**James:** Good thinking, Paul. The subtle body does not actually “experience.” It seems to experience owing to the action of *maya*. Experience is just original awareness experiencing itself, but it looks like the subtle body is an experiencing entity. We speak as if the subtle body is an experiencing entity at the beginning of the teaching because everybody thinks he is the subtle body. You can’t tell a person that he is not experiencing. He will think you are crazy. You are right, it is not an entity, only a stream of discrete thought/events.

Yes, experiencing and knowing are one. If reality is non-dual it has to be that way. But we need to distinguish them or the apparent person will try to experience awareness. It is a joke because the apparent person is actually awareness already and always.

**Christopher:** Many thanks for taking time to read this. If you have time I’d really appreciate any pointers or recommendations of books that explain this part of the teachings, particularly to the Western mind.

~ Best wishes, Christopher Wallace

**Sundari:** You are most welcome, Christopher. This teaching is the essence of Vedanta and all the teachings deal with this in one way or another. I would recommend you read James’ book *How to Attain Enlightenment*, and if you have already, re-read it slowly. All of James’ teaching is aimed at the Western mind, and you will not find a better teacher. His new book *The Essence of Enlightenment* is now available through the website and at *Amazon.com*. It is the same material as his previous book, simplified. Watch as many videos as you can, all of them are good.

We recommend that everyone read the *satsang* section at the website. There is now a search function available where inquirers can search by topic and teacher.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari