

Confusing the Real with the Apparently Real

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Sundari: Hello, Simon. Good to hear from you again!

Simon: If you do not wish to respond to this email that's fine. I have no desire to overtax you or take too much of your time. I thank you for that which you have already given me.

Sundari: I am very happy to be of service and you are not overtaxing me at all.

Simon: The eyes give rise to visual consciousness. The nose gives rise to olfactory consciousness. The mouth gives rise to temperature-texture-taste consciousness. The ears give rise to auditory consciousness. The skin also gives rise to temperature and texture consciousness. Without sensory input there is no consciousness of anything.

Sundari: And what gives rise to the five senses? The five senses, like the five organs of action and the five *pranas*, the mind, ego and intellect, are all objects known to you, awareness. You are saying that consciousness, awareness, needs the organs of perception to be aware of itself. This is not correct as awareness is self-luminous and self-knowing; it exists prior to the subtle body and therefore independently of the senses. It is the witness of the subtle body and of the five senses.

When *maya* is operating the subtle body, or *jiva*, appears; we call this the self under the spell of ignorance. Awareness then identifies with the subtle body and erroneously believes that it is limited and incomplete, that it needs objects to complete it, that awareness is something other than it and needs to be "gained." When awareness is identified with the subtle body it appears as if awareness needs the senses in order to experience anything.

However, it is the presence of awareness that makes experience possible, not the senses. The senses are purely instruments of experience. They are not real (not present and always changing) and they are therefore not reliable because they are totally subjective. This means that they are governed by "your" conditioning which is generated by the *gunas*. Awareness is the non-experiencing witness and exists prior to the subtlebody - with or without the senses of perception.

You said in your last email to me that you know what non-duality is. This is called indirect knowledge. Direct knowledge is knowing that YOU are non-dual. When we speak of non-dual vision what we mean is that you see everything as non-different from you, awareness. If you had direct knowledge you would have said "I am non-dual awareness."

Your question above is spoken as the *jiva* who knows about awareness, identified with the subtle body. You are not yet clear about what the *jiva* is and you are superimposing the real on the apparently real, *sattya* onto *mithya*.

Ask yourself once again: Which I is speaking here?

There are three “types” of *jivas*. There is the *jiva* who thinks it is a person – this *jiva* is often called the doer. There is the *jiva* who knows about awareness – this *jiva* is often called a self-realized *jiva*. And then there is the *jiva* that knows it IS awareness. This is the *jivanmukta* – the self no longer under the spell of ignorance.

Simon: I like the analogy from dreamless “delta” sleep: one is unaware of anything except bliss. But it is only an analogy, not to be pressed too hard.

Sundari: Who is unaware of anything except bliss? The analogy of deep sleep serves to prove that you cannot be the experiencing entity. Dreamless sleep is known as the deep sleep state, or the bliss sheath, *ananda-maya-kosha*. In moments where there seems to be no doer/experiencer, have you been able to witness and know the joy/bliss to be coming from you? If not, how do you know joy/bliss was there in the first place? How can you say that you did not know anything while you were asleep unless awareness was there to witness the absence of knowledge? Therefore you cannot be the lack of knowledge, or ignorance, and you cannot be the experiencing entity. Deep sleep is called experiential bliss because it ends, like all experiences do. The bliss you are after if you are seeking *moksa* is the bliss of self-knowledge, which never ends (*anantum*) because it is your true nature.

You need to inquire into the teaching on the three states, which is called the “king” of the *Upanishads*, the *Mandukya Upanishad*. It is very well described in James’ book.

I have attached an article on this teaching, which also explains the *jiva*, the three bodies and the five sheaths.

Simon: The conventional self is merely a construct of memory. The brain receives all of the above input over a period of years and over time it takes some memories and constructs an abstracted idea of itself that is more real to it than the present moment!

Sundari: By “conventional self” I take it you mean the *jiva* identified with the body-mind, the doer – and by the present moment you must mean you – awareness?

There is no such thing really as the present moment if we are talking about awareness because awareness is beyond time. “Past,” “present” and “future” are all just concepts.

If reality is non-dual awareness then there is nothing other than awareness “in” it. Time is the measurement of the interval between events, it is a subjective measurement relative to one’s likes and dislikes. It is hard to give a precise unit to time because nothing is experienced in the past or the future, only in the present.

How long is the present? A year, month, minute, millisecond? The moment you try categorize time, time has already passed. Time therefore isn’t any specific measurement. What is it then?

If you think about it, time is the space between experience or change. The essence of the experience of events is stored in and by the mind. Memory is simply

catalogued and categorized events. Could you actually say an event took place previously if your mind didn't record that event? You could not. Time is the distance between a memory of an event and another memory or current experience. It is an illusion.

If time is the space between memories formed by the mind, what sees the presence of the memories and "time"? Awareness sees time. Awareness sees memory. Is awareness affected by any function of the mind? NO. Does awareness actually have anything to do with the mental illusion called time? Would time exist if awareness weren't there to see it? NO.

This is precisely what we mean when we say that awareness is "out of time" or "timeless." Vedanta doesn't say that awareness exists in an ever-existent flow of time. It is saying that awareness isn't a factor in the production of time - experience and memory are the factors. And experience and memory are dependent on you, awareness, because awareness has to be there for time (or memory) to exist. That is why time and memory depends on you but you don't depend on time. You, awareness, see time, it doesn't see you. You are the seer unaffected by time. You are free of time. Nothing ever happened. Therefore you will never change, age, decay or die.

You still seem to think the brain is real, that it is conscious. It is not. It is as inert as any other object. Awareness shines on it as light illumines a dark empty room, making it appear conscious. The brain is a tool for the *jiva*, or subtle body, to process and store information, it is a function of the mind. The subtle body is just a conglomeration of *vasanas* and appears one fine day, programmed at birth by its conditioning, which is given to it by *Ishvara*. In other words, the conditioning is generated by the *gunas*. The subtle body, or *jiva*, will have a predisposition towards certain likes and dislikes. These will be reinforced by the environment the *jiva* is born into and a part of, which then strengthens these *vasanas*, creating new ones as well.

The *guna*-generated *vasanas* are what record the likes and dislikes and solidify the identification with body-mind, also called the self under the spell of ignorance. This is all explained in detail in the two articles I sent you, the one on the work of Daniel Kahneman as well as the article on *Ishvara-jiva-jagat* and the *gunas*. I explained to you in detail why this teaching is very important because if you do not understand who and what *Ishvara* and the *jiva* are it will be very difficult if not impossible to actualise self-knowledge.

Simon: For most people, if one were to be born without any senses, not even a sense of movement or cold or warmth, can there be a little self present? There is certainly no little self present.

Sundari: Same confusion here, Simon. If you (who?) were born without senses, as a *jiva* you would not be alive but awareness is always present whether the *jiva* is present or not. Awareness is unborn and never dies so your question is not relevant to it - so no, you cannot have a "little awareness." Awareness cannot be quantified as it is prior to everything and subtler than the senses, not subject to time or space, and it has not parts and no qualities. Awareness cannot be more or less aware, with or without senses. As a subtle body you can only be more or less ignorant of your true nature.

Simon: The fact is that we are prisoners of the five senses.

Sundari: Who is a prisoner of the five senses? This is true if you take yourself to be the subtle body, the *jiva*, or doer.

Simon: We only know things via the five senses, the testimony of others (which is sensory input), mental activity and intuition.

Sundari: Who is “we”? Same confusion as above; you need to ask yourself who is making this statement.

Simon: Intuition is a mental activity that takes place unconsciously.

Simon: Intuition is simply the instinctive working out of your likes and dislikes, the conditioning given to you by *Isvara*. It is totally subjective and unreliable therefore it is not a valid means of knowledge for the *jiva*.

Simon: Our five senses can be augmented by scientific instruments but it is still sensory input. We are prisoners of subjectivity and all knowledge is arrived at subjectively.

Sundari: Again, this is true if you take yourself to be the *jiva*, or person.

Simon: I do not see how objective knowledge is possible given the nature of physical existence because all one can do is report on one’s subjective experience. Or knowledge is arrived at subjectively via the senses, testimony (which we read or hear) and mental activity such as inference and deduction. When I hear or read claims of “objective” facts I squint my eyes and shrug my shoulders. The subjective nature of the universe is a given in physics. We experience our subjective universe via the senses, testimony, inference, intuition.

Sundari: We have discussed this in our last email, the difference between knowledge of objects as opposed to self-knowledge. I will repeat it in much greater detail here again:

The Nature of Objects

All *jivas* experience all objects (whether subtle or gross) “in” the mind, meaning in consciousness, and interpret them according to their *guna*-generated conditioning, i.e. *vasanas*. All objects, including intuition and memory, thoughts and feelings of the individual, are made up of awareness and have a dependent existence on awareness. They also have an apparent existence apart from the individual *jiva*’s perception and interpretation of them. A “physical” object is just the thought of a physical object and no different from a subtle object. This is because a physical

object has no meaning apart from the knowledge of the object and the knowledge of the object is conditioned by the *jiva's* interpretation of the object. This interpretation in turn is conditioned by the *jiva's* self-knowledge or lack thereof.

Any knowledge is object-based, not subject-based. It is not knowledge unless it is true to the object. If it is "my" knowledge, whether this knowledge is immediate or based on memory, then it is my interpretation of an object, which is not necessarily knowledge. Ignorance (or my point of view) is causing me to see or experience whatever it is as though it is actually there. People believe that ignorance is knowledge because they believe that knowledge is subject-based, i.e. they believe that what they experience is knowledge. It may be knowledge but it may not be.

Self-knowledge depends on the nature of the self, not on knowledge gained through personal experience or memory. Self-knowledge is not memory-based because it is always good; all other knowledge is subject to change. In other words, you can always rely on self-knowledge. On the basis of self-knowledge the individual can retain or reject the knowledge gained through his or her personal experience.

The most important reason that objects can be known to be objects is because they are not the subject. The very fact that you can know something means it is an object. This applies to everything other than you, awareness. Awareness is the subject and the one that knows the object. Without awareness, no knowledge can take place; without awareness, no objects, which include knowledge and ignorance, exist.

Awareness is not an object of knowledge and cannot be known by the mind, which is an object known to it. This is because awareness, the subject, is subtler than all objects. The valid means of knowledge available to the *jiva* to know anything, perception and inference as well as the testimony of a competent witness, are too gross to perceive awareness. Therefore awareness "developed" (in a manner of speaking) Vedanta, which is the only valid means of knowledge for awareness. Only by exposing the mind to self-knowledge can the ignorance that is covering awareness be removed. This is why the qualifications are so important as awareness can only be revealed in a purified, *sattvic* mind.

When we say the world would not be there without the mind (subtle body) we mean the *jiva's* interpretation, its projection, would not be there. It does not mean that the material world, the senses, subtle body and the *vasanas* (*Isvara srsti*, or creation) would not be here. We call the *jiva's* creation "*pratibhasika satyam*," the subjective reality. There is only one *jiva* and he/she sees things a certain way owing to his or her conditioning. *Isvara's* creation is called "*vyavaharika satyam*," the objective world. This is the world of science, the objects and the laws which are not under the control of any *jiva*.

We need this teaching so the *jiva* does not confuse its creation with *Isvara's*. The *jiva* is in *Isvara's* creation and is required to respond to it. This is called *dharma*, appropriate response. If the individual responds properly to what *Isvara* wants it will be in harmony with *Isvara*, the creation, meaning its environment. But if the *jiva* is living in its own world, gets a request from *Isvara* and responds according to its fears and desires, likes and dislikes it is quite possible and very likely that it will run afoul of *Isvara*, meaning its circumstances - and therefore suffer.

This teaching makes the *jiva* aware of the difference between the subjective and the objective realities, the real and the apparently real. If it is clear which is which it can

choose to follow *dharma*, not its own desires – in case they are different. There is no problem with *jiva's* desires as long as they conform to *dharma*.

In order to understand non-duality one first has to understand the identity between pure awareness, awareness operating as the Creator, or *Isvara* (the *dharma* field, or apparent reality), and the individual, or *jiva*. As all objects are experienced in the mind of the *jiva* (the self under the spell of ignorance), how objects are experienced depends on whether the *jiva* knows its true identity as awareness or not. Through self-inquiry, discriminating the self from the objects appearing it, self-knowledge negates all objects and reveals that they have only an apparent reality, i.e. they are not real, even though they do exist because you can experience them.

The self-realised *jiva* knows that all objects are value-neutral and incapable of delivering anything; the joy comes from them as awareness. So they do not seek objects to complete them. Until such time as ignorance is removed by self-knowledge the *jiva* takes itself to be a body-mind and sees all objects as real and separate from it. So the *jiva* seeks objects to complete it and this is why *moksa* is freedom from dependence on objects.

There are no real “others” once one really understands non-duality. There is only one awareness manifesting as many apparently different *jivas*. These apparent others appear to have an impact on us and us on them. As the liberated *jiva*, or the self no longer under the spell of ignorance, we continue to have interaction with others as “other,” knowing that all objects are *Isvara*, and we experience them according to “our” conditioning, meaning the *guna*-generated *vasanas*.

When your true nature is known to be awareness you no longer project your interpretation of objects onto “others” even though you may still experience your interpretation of so-called others. Your interpretation is an object known to you because all binding *vasanas* will have been rendered non-binding and are therefore not a problem for you, awareness. Everything dissolves in the light of self-knowledge.

Simon: My study of physics has led me to the subjective conclusion that the universe is *maya*. It is a trick of misperception and misdirection; a loose analogy is the illusions of magicians. The universe is here but is not real and we do not perceive it as it really is. Our senses give form, texture, taste, sound, smell to what is essentially just space-time vibrating at various frequencies. There is nothing here, in the old Newtonian sense. All is One (or reality is non-dual) so the mere act of observing an experiment affects the outcome because all is one.

Sundari: *Maya* is that which makes the changeless appear to be changing, it is a superimposition of duality onto non-duality. It is beginningless ignorance because it is a power, or *shakti*, that exists in awareness or awareness could not be unlimited. It is not endless because although macrocosmic ignorance is endless it does end for the *jivanmukta*, the self no longer under the spell of ignorance. I urge you once again to carefully read the article I sent you on *Isvara-jiva-jagat* and the *gunas*.

Your statement above is correct and your deductions are in line with scripture. However, your knowledge of awareness is still indirect or you would not have confused the subtle body with awareness in the statements you made in the first half of this email.

Simon: The Supreme Reality is all that is. In what sense is it conscious? It is conscious of bliss, of its own nature, which is bliss.

Sundari: We do not use the word "Supreme" because it has the dualistic connotation of "better than" or "other than." This is the same with the words like "ultimate" or "Absolute." We call it the language of hyperbole and it is to be avoided. Even the beautiful word "*brahman*" can be used to imply something other than you. The precise use of words is very important in Vedanta because words can be extremely misleading. Incorrect words are based in ignorance and as such are the source of much confusion and suffering.

It is also not entirely correct to say that pure consciousness (*paramatman*) is conscious – because that implies that it can be unconscious, which it cannot. Awareness is without qualities, it is the non-experiencing witness and although it gives rise to all objects, who are not conscious, and *Isvara*, who is conscious, awareness is not conscious in the way *Isvara* is conscious. Awareness is that which makes consciousness possible in that consciousness is reflected awareness. Like *Isvara*, awareness is not a person either; conscious and unconscious objects (*Isvara* and *jiva* respectively) arise when *maya* (ignorance) appears.

Essentially what you say in the statement above is correct. Now substitute "the Supreme Reality" for "In what sense am I conscious? I am conscious of bliss, of my own nature, which is bliss."

Simon: These are some of the matters that I bring to the table in my study of Advaita Vedanta. You are my sole teacher at this point, Sundari. I submit my understanding to you.

Om and prem!

~ Simon

Sundari: A word about the term "Advaita" Vedanta: *advaita* means "non-dual," and it is a misnomer because there really is no such thing as non-dual teaching. Teaching by definition requires two principles: a teacher and a student. We do not use the term "*advaita*" in conjunction with Vedanta. We only use the term Vedanta because it means the knowledge that ends the quest for knowledge. Vedanta is a set-up using dualistic methods to negate duality to prove that your own nature and therefore your own experience is non-dual.

I thank you for your trust and remind you that there is only one teacher and one student, and that is *Isvara*. I hand over the torch of self-knowledge as taught to me by my teacher Ram, which was taught to him by his teachers Chinmayananda and Dayananda. We uphold the great tradition of Vedanta with our devotion to the *sampradaya* but we are no different from you. We are you. You are talking to yourself.

~ Namaste, Sundari