

Three States of Perception

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Benjamin: Hello, Sundari.

I know how busy you all are, so will get right down to my question.

James says it's very important to get one element of the teaching before proceeding to the next.

I'm just at page 15 of his last book, and everything is crystal-clear so far except the concept that objects have no independent existence other than through my awareness.

I can see that objects have no relevance for me separate from me, and for all practical purposes they don't exist for me unless my awareness is involved.

But even while I'm asleep someone may bump into what I call my chair and that would appear to be independent verification (or at least a shared experience) of an object of a certain size, color, etc. Two different subjects of awareness would seem to share the same "objective" experience of the chair. They would both agree that the fabric is soft or whatever...

Can you elaborate? What is the difference between this teaching and saying objects are a figment of my imagination?

Sundari: Hello, Benjamin. This is a good inquiry and an important one. The question can be answered with a question: Who is asking the question?

As you probably know, there are basically only two orders of reality: (1) consciousness, the subject, or cause, that which is real (unchanging and always present), also called *satya*, and (2) the object, or effects (*mithya*), that which is only apparently real (not always present and subject to change) – the individual, who is not conscious but appears to be because the light of awareness shines on it. The third "order" of reality is not really an order, as it is the (apparent) "buffer" between the two orders: *Isvara* – awareness in the role of Creator associated with *maya*. *Maya* is the power in awareness to delude, to make the unchanging appear to be changing.

The effects "belong" to *Isvara* and are unchanged by how the *jiva* sees them – i.e. the chair is a chair, a tree a tree whether the *jiva* is looking at them or not. This is called *Isvara srsti* – *Isvara's* creation. How the *jiva*, or person, relates to the creation is called *jiva srsti* – the subjective reality, which is determined by the *vasanas* of the particular person.

The effects are really awareness appearing in form, and how we perceive objects depends on who we are identified with.

Is it (1) the *jiva* who thinks it is a person identified with the body-mind? Or (2) the *jiva* that knows about awareness but not what it means to be awareness (indirect knowledge) – or (3) the *jiva* that knows it is actually pure awareness, i.e. has direct

knowledge.

There are three states of perception available to the *jiva*, enlightened or not.

Pratibasika is the subjective reality perceived through the filters of your values, likes and dislikes, in other words, the *vasanas*. This can create an entire world of seemingly real realities, from the different hell realms, or *lokas*, the world of angels and demons, to the everyday world of how you perceive another person or any object. This perception will be unique to the apparent person or at least seemingly unique. All knowledge is true to the object and not the subject; therefore subjective knowledge of any object may or may not contain truth, whereas self-knowledge is not dependent on the object; it is self-revealing. Vedanta calls the subjective realm of experience "*pratibasika*" because it means "apparently real," and the information obtained from this is dependent on interpretation.

Vyavaharika: the second realm, refers to the realm of empirical reality, such as Newton's world of billiard balls and clocks. This realm is apparently predictable and relatively stable. If we are both looking at a mountain, we will probably both agree that it is a mountain. But I might find it a scary mountain and you might find it a peaceful mountain, which will be our subjective interpretation. You will see the chair, for instance, through these filters and either like, dislike or be indifferent to it. But the chair has an apparent existence whether you see it or not because it belongs to *Isvara's* creation.

Paramarthika: lastly, one has the realm of the perspective of awareness. This is non-dual vision, where everything is seen as awareness, as you. It means that which is real, meaning always present and never changing. As awareness you will see only awareness even when you are looking at an object like a chair, even though the *jiva*, or person (who is also an object known to you), apparently experiences the chair as "separate" from them. Awareness will know of the apparent separation because all objects arise from awareness, are made up of awareness, dissolve into awareness and have a dependent existence on awareness –and are only ever experienced in the mind, nowhere else. Without awareness neither the existence of objects nor the knowledge of their existence is possible for the mind, which itself is an object known to awareness.

I hope this helps.

Benjamin: Yes, it helps very much. Very clear and beautiful!

I realize I had vaguely expected to come into a perspective where I would realize the Creator as another object, just like His creation.

But I love this phrase, that "the effects belongs to *Isvara*." I don't have to resist or feel guilty about the power of *maya*. It is the power of the Creator! I can "legitimately" witness the wonder of creation. I only have to come into *paramarthika* where as awareness I "will see only awareness even when I am looking at" creation.

One question. You say there are three states of perception available to the *jiva*, enlightened or not.

But isn't *paramarthika* the state of perception in enlightenment?

Sundari: What an excellent way to see *Isvara*! There is no way to be free of the *jiva*

and to live free as a *jiva* without understanding *Isvara* – and you have it. Well done! *Moksa* is for the *jiva* after all, as awareness is and always has been free.

Yes, all three states are always available to the *jiva*, although when self-knowledge has obtained in the mind, *paramarthika* is the predominant one. It is just knowledge and who you are. However, the *jiva* with its tendencies never disappears. Although one understand the tendencies to be not-self and is not bound by them, they still play out to a certain degree. The *jiva* is made the way it is made and it is that way because of *Isvara*. The *jiva*, remember, is eternal, it is an eternal principle, or *tattva*, just like *Isvara*, even though it is only apparently real. This is so because the common identity between *jiva* and *Isvara* is awareness and even when neither manifest, they exist as a power in awareness. There are basically two kinds of *jiva*: awareness with a subtle body free of ignorance and a *jiva* with a subtle body bound by ignorance – both are awareness.

And *Isvara's* creation, or macrocosmic *maya*, continues as “before” enlightenment even when personal *avidya* has been removed by self-knowledge. *Isvara's srsti* (*vyavaharika*, or empirical reality) is not affected by your enlightenment or ignorance. The tree remains the apparent tree, chair the apparent chair – etc. *Jiva* will always be limited because that is the nature of the apparent reality. It is a common myth in the spiritual world that the *jiva* somehow gets perfected and somehow magically transcends itself and everything around it once “enlightened,” but this is never the case. *Nididhysana* never ends for the *jiva*, because it is always changing and so is the environment it lives in. And it often takes quite a while after self-realisation before all the ignorance is removed – *parabdha karma* will play out as long as it plays out because it is not in *jiva's* control. But as the essence of the *jiva* is awareness and you are no longer identified with it, one loves it unconditionally and simply sees it as *Isvara* playing out – i.e. the *gunas*. And even though one no longer projects *jiva srsti*, or *pratibasika* (subjective reality), onto *Isvara*, as awareness one is aware of the apparent subjective reality, knowing it is not real.

This gives such freedom to the *jiva* because one can really finally accept itself as it is and stop censoring itself, trying to live up to some stupid idea of what it is “supposed” to be or do – expecting it to be different. Of course one always follows *dharma* at all times, not because you want to perfect the *jiva* but above all to have peace of mind – the whole point and main aim of self-inquiry after all.

~ Much love, Sundari