

Can't Know Maya, but Can Know Maya

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Kevin: Dear James, in one of your videos you mentioned that the *jiva* cannot know the cause of *Maya*, because the *jiva* is the effect of *Maya* and the cause cannot know its effect. This I understand.

However, at the same time you mentioned that the *jiva* is actually awareness because the *jiva* is reflected awareness and is in itself inert. Awareness is the light that shines on the subtle body, which creates the idea of a person in the form of a thought. Because of *Maya*, awareness confuses itself with the "I-thought," and thus it thinks that the experience of the "I" is actually itself. Because experience is limited, it sees itself as a limited being. While it's true that experience is me, it's not true that experience is limiting me, because I am not it. This I also understand.

James: Understanding that the "I," awareness, is not limited by experience is the essence of Vedanta.

Kevin: But why then can't I see *Maya*? Because I am awareness and not the *jiva*.

James: Yes, there is no *Maya* from the standpoint of awareness. The keyword is "see." I take it to mean "know," not "experience." You, awareness, can "see" *Maya* by inference – when you appear as a *jiva*. You can't experience it, because it is not an object. It's an unseen potential. You can't see potential, but you can understand that it exists and see what it does by observing its effects, the world. You can see the thought that the experience is real. *Maya* makes you think that when something is happening it is really happening, but it isn't, because it has no effect on the self and there is only the self.

Kevin: And *Maya* is an effect of awareness.

James: No, it isn't. Awareness doesn't cause anything. It seems to cause the world, but it doesn't. *Maya* causes the world, but the world is not caused by awareness. It is a power in awareness that makes the world possible. It is like the relationship between an artist and the artist's power to create. They are the same, but they aren't the same. The power doesn't affect the artist, but the artist can use it to create. The metaphor breaks down with *Maya*, however, because awareness doesn't "use" *Maya*, because awareness is not a doer. If awareness causes *Maya*, then it is not actionless. But awareness is non-dual, so there is no question of action. Action is caused by *Maya shakti*. But it's not real action, because the changes caused by *Maya* don't change awareness or anything else, for that matter. Things that change are never the same from one instant to another. You can't even say what they are, because they are one thing one minute and something different the next minute. *Maya* is very difficult to understand because it isn't real, yet at the same time it creates objects that seem to be real. *Maya* and the objects it creates exist alright, but they are as good as non-existent because they don't affect reality.

Kevin: So I should know *Maya*, but how can I know it, how does *Maya* appear?

James: Assuming your question is not rhetorical, you (meaning *jiva*) know it through scripture. Or you see its effects – suffering – and you infer the existence of a cause, ignorance. But you wouldn't know suffering wasn't natural unless you were informed by scripture. Well, you would, but you wouldn't know what to do about it. Scripture says bliss is natural and suffering isn't. It also tells you how to get rid of it. There is no scripture for animals, because they don't think suffering is unnatural, because they don't have intellect.

Kevin: And to use the “moon and sun” story, I think that it's correct to say that I am the sun and not the moon, but in terms of experience you always say that enlightenment is just understanding and you cannot become more aware, but sometimes you say that you can get closer to experience yourself in a clear mind than in a dull mind. How to understand this if everything is the self and there is actually no way to get closer to yourself?

James: You are the sun, and not the moon, but the moon is you.

Anyway, you can look at the self from two standpoints: from the self's point of view or from the *jiva's* point of view. The self can't become more aware, because it doesn't change. It is unborn and it is everything that is. It is a fullness that you can't add anything to or subtract anything from.

But when you take *Maya* into account, the self appears to be the *jiva*. The *jiva* is awareness identified with the subtle body, which creates experience for the *jiva/self*. The subtle body is made of the three *gunas*, so because the self is identified with the subtle body, it seems to be less aware when *tamoguna* is predominant and more aware when *sattvaguna* is present. If you do *karma yoga* and *jnana yoga* you will make the subtle body more *sattvic*, so it will seem that the self is getting more aware.

Kevin: I know you are busy at the moment, but I am getting the hang of Vedanta and really want to know everything there is to know. 😊

James: Good for you! Keep it up.

~ Love, James

James