

Vedanta Is Always Both/And

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Helmut: Dear Sundari, I have some need of clearance concerning the understanding of *jiva*, *Isvara* and awareness.

I heard James often say that the self (awareness) is limitless, i.e. it is not modified. Now I heard him say that the self is the knower of the limited and the unlimited, and so it is neither limited nor unlimited. Why is this not a contradiction?

Sundari: In Vedanta, it is always a both/and, never an either/or, because the answer to your doubt is dependent on which level you are doing inquiry, the non-dual level of awareness or the dualistic level as the *jiva*. There are seeming contradictions, which all resolve in the knowledge because they are not real, but only apparently real, contradictions. Everything resolves into awareness because non-dual means that there is only awareness.

Awareness is a partless whole, nothing limits it and nothing other than it is limitless. As for awareness being neither limited nor unlimited, it depends whether you are referring to pure awareness or to awareness plus *maya*, *Isvara*. Pure awareness (*Isvara* 1) is limitless – does not modify to the *gunas*. Although *Isvara* 2 (awareness plus *maya* in the role of Creator) is also not subject to the *gunas*, has all earthly powers, is omniscient and eternal with reference to the individual, or non-eternal *jiva*. *Isvara* 2 is limited because it is withdrawn at the end of the creation cycle. *Isvara/maya* are eternal principles, but they are not always manifest, whereas pure awareness is ever-present and knows the presence or absence of *Isvara*, *maya* and *jiva*.

The eternal *jiva* is also an eternal principle in awareness, but manifesting as an individual *jiva* it is very limited in that it is subject to the *gunas*, has limited powers, exists but for a short time and can only create its subjective reality.

As for who the knower really is, pure awareness is the unlimited, knowing principle which makes knowing, the knower and the known possible. Pure awareness (*Isvara* 1) does not “know” in the way *Isvara* 2 knows, because it sees only itself. It does not see objects as other than itself and it knows itself whether objects of knowledge are present or not. *Isvara* 2 is the only “knower.” The *jiva* has the power to know due to the power of awareness shining on it. It seems to be conscious but it is not actually – just like the moon seems to have its own light but shines by virtue of the light of the sun shining on it.

When *maya* appears, the power in awareness to delude, pure consciousness in association with *maya* “becomes” the Creator, or *Isvara*, and the apparent reality appears. When the world appears, there is something for awareness to be aware of, although as there is only awareness, that is all it ever “sees.”

It would be more appropriate to say that the self, knowing only itself, is that which knows the known with reference to the knower only when *maya* is operating. The self-aware self appears as a knower; but it never actually is a knower, unless knowing refers to its own self. When ignorance (duality) is operating, the *jiva* thinks

that the knower is different from the known, that the subject and object are different.

It is hard to ascribe any words to describe awareness because all words are dualistic and have ostensible and implied meanings. "Unlimited" implies limited, limitless also implies limited, but it is still a good word to describe awareness. As you have correctly understood, it is important to understand that because awareness is not a doer – it is the actionless, non-experiencing witness of all, by limitless we mean "does not condition to anything." *Isvara* 2 is the only doer, wielding the power of the *gunas* to create, sustain and destroy the world.

Vedanta is a valid means of knowledge for awareness in that if the mind is qualified, it has the power to remove ignorance and reveal the self in a purified mind to be who you are. But all the same, as a means of knowledge, Vedanta is *mithya* – it is an object known to you, awareness. It can only be so because anything known to you cannot be you – awareness. Both ignorance and knowledge are objects known to awareness. Vedanta is a dualistic teaching designed to destroy the notion of duality and, because all words are inherently dualistic, therefore open to interpretation, Vedanta is very particular about the words it uses to teach. When *moksa* has obtained, meaning when self-knowledge has removed all ignorance (duality), you no longer need the means of knowledge. You are the knowledge.

Vedanta puts us into a whole new world of perception because it is so insistent on the correct and conscious use of words – it teaches through the implied, and not usually the ostensible, meaning of words. For self-inquiry to work, where the ostensible meaning does not work, we must take the implied meaning, based on logic. For instance, if we say that there is an identity between awareness, *Isvara* and *jiva*, what do we mean? We can't work this out with the ostensible meaning of this statement, because for pure awareness there is no world, *Isvara* is consciousness plus the world, and *jiva* is consciousness apparently appearing as the world.

To get to the truth of all statements and teachings, we must take the implied meaning by removing all the **non-essential variables** to arrive at what is non-negatable. Once we remove the five sheaths (the three bodies), it is revealed that *Isvara* and *jiva* are limitless awareness because that is all that remains and cannot be negated.

Discriminating *satya* (that which is ever-present and unchanging) from *mithya* (not always present and always changing) is very difficult, some never get it because it is so subtle. Even though *Isvara* is awareness, if we don't understand the subtle but important distinction between *Isvara* 1 (pure awareness) and *Isvara* 2 (awareness wielding *maya*), *moksa* will not obtain. We get stuck there.

Helmut: Then I heard James say that *Isvara* is the causal body of the whole world. However, I just watched a video where he said that *Isvara* 2 is the causal body + subtle body + gross body + *maya*. Do these two statements fit together? Does the causal body contain the subtle and gross body?

Sundari: Yes, indeed. The causal body is another name for *Isvara* – awareness plus *maya* = the subtle body, *jiva*, or the world of creation, meaning subtle and gross objects. The subtle body (*jiva*) is the vehicle for the *vasanas*, or *karmic* load, to incarnate and appear as a seemingly unique individual, but the subtle body is

actually eternal with reference to the *jiva* (but not with reference to pure awareness). Please read the attached *satsang* on the *Isvara/jiva* identity – AND read *Inquiry into Existence* by James, very important.

Helmut: Then I heard James say that the *jiva* is only responsible for the way her mind interprets her experiences. But what about *karmas*? Choosing an action is not merely an interpretation, is it?

Sundari: Everyone is responsible for their own interpretation of their world, their subjective reality, or *pratibasika*. The *jiva*, or individual, can only create its own world (*jiva srsti*) in accordance with how it responds to or understands the world it lives in – i.e. *Isvara*/the Field of Existence (*Isvara srsti*). How you think is how you will experience. We have an intellect and free will, so we can make choices that are not in harmony with *dharma* or the opposite. But our choices (values) and free will are governed by the *gunas*. To be free of the *gunas* we need to understand what they are and how they function or our “free will” is not that free.

All actions chosen by the *jiva* will be based on their subjective likes and dislikes (*vasanas*/conditioning/filters). *Karma* itself is value-neutral. It is just action and its results. It only becomes meaningful when we evaluate it. We either like it, don't like it or are indifferent to it. Only in the minds of bound and ignorant human beings does action become “*karma*.” *Karma* is either meritorious or deleterious, based on how pure or impure it renders the subtle body, because a pure subtle body is the instrument for attaining *moksa*.

Helmut: I'm also uncertain about the question of who is experiencing, the *jiva* or the self.

Sundari: Therein lies all you will ever need to know to be free, and if you can answer that question definitively and effortlessly, 24/7, that means you are discriminating between *satya* and *mithya* – and *moksa* has obtained. Please read the attached email on the nature of objects.

Helmut: I heard James say that it would be a dumb idea to get rid of the ego (the subtle body) because who would be enjoying life then? This would mean that the *jiva* is the experiencer. But I heard James also say that the self was there to experience. What did I get wrong here?

Sundari: You have a *satya-mithya* confusion. Please reread the teaching above on *satya* and *mithya* and make sure you read the *satsang* on *Isvara/jiva* attached. Every time you use the word “I” ask yourself these three questions: Who is talking here? Is it the *jiva* identified with the *jiva* and its world? Is it the *jiva* who knows about awareness but does not know what it means to be awareness (self-knowledge is indirect) or is it the *jiva* who knows it is awareness and knows what that means, i.e. self-knowledge is direct and translates into all areas of its life?

If you are alive, you are experiencing, but the self is the non-experiencing witness, which makes experiencing possible for the *jiva*, so you could say that the self is indirectly experiencing because no experience can take place without it. When you

know who you are, when self-knowledge has removed all ignorance and *moksa* has obtained, you remain the *jiva* who experiences but you then know you are the knower of the experiencing entity, you no longer identify with the experiencing entity or the experience. The *jiva* is the lens through which awareness apparently has contact with objects. You no longer confuse yourself with the lens or with the objects, you know you are the one awareness on which everything depends, but you depend on nothing. Direct knowledge is: the world is there because I see it. Indirect knowledge is: I see the world because it is there.

As for the ego, you cannot get rid of it, because it belongs to *Isvara* and not the *jiva*. You can only understand what it is with reference to self-knowledge and in so doing negate it as apparently real. Please read the attached email on the nature of the ego.

Helmut: Thank you very much for your work. It has been a huge source of inspiration to me since I started to read James' book last Christmas. I want to listen to James this April in Cologne. I am really looking forward to that and your answer to this email.

Sundari: I am so happy for you that you found Vedanta and ShiningWorld, Helmut, you are on the Vedanta bus now. Keep up the good work, keep subjecting the mind faithfully to the teachings and they will work to remove ignorance. Vedanta is counter-intuitive and very subtle, although it is really very simple. Please make sure you read the *e-satsang* section carefully before you write to us, as every question you asked has been answered there in countless different ways. It is an invaluable resource and also has a search function.

You need to do the work. Please also make sure you watch as many videos as possible and read *Inquiry into Existence*. It is an advanced text, but if you go slowly with it, corroborating with the other books, particularly *The Essence of Enlightenment*, you will get there. It is very important that the teachings are correctly unfolded for you and not interpreted, and we can help you when you get stuck, but you must try to work things out as much as you can on your own. That is the purpose of self-inquiry.

~ Love, Sundari