

Maya, the Creator and the Gunas

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Cormack: I am continuing to read and listen to James' talks. For me, as he says, it is a process of repetition in order to make the knowledge firm and to render the *vasanas* non-binding.

I find writing down my thoughts helpful in this process, but appreciate being corrected on any wrong understanding. Your responds to my previous questions were clear and helpful, so I ask again for your comments on the following topics:

- existence
- consciousness
- *paramatma*
- awareness
- is-ness
- *sat, chit, ananda*
- no space, no time, no action

Shams: Of course I'd be glad to share some comments about these words, but it's easier if you tell me the specific doubt about them.

Cormack: I have trouble understanding awareness as free from experience. I think of the self being self-aware, and that self-awareness being experience in the way the sun is self-illuminating. Help, please.

Shams: Maybe that's because you see self-awareness as an experience because you continue to maintain the notion that the self is an object. After all, only objects can be experienced. But, as we know, the self is not an object.

Then what is self-awareness? Why do we say the self is self-aware? We say that the self is self-aware because the self is self-evident, i.e. it automatically, naturally and inevitably knows itself. Note that we are talking about knowledge, not experience.

For example, how do you know that you exist? Descartes, the French philosopher, famously said that he knew he existed because he was able to think. However, that is not true, as you don't need your intellect or any other part of your mind or your body to know that you exist. You know that you exist just because – you exist. You don't need the intervention of an object. You just are. And you know it.

When we think in terms of the mind, we are used to the fact that knowing involves two factors: the knowing subject and the to-be-known object. This is the more useful way to think in the dualistic world because it's shaped from duality. However, from non-duality's view all divisions are nullified because we don't conceive a world of experienced objects and their respective knower or experiencer, nor can we think about experience.

When we say that the self (which is non-dual) knows itself, we don't mean that it (as

a knowing subject) would know itself (as an object to be known). Not at all. We only mean that awareness is self-evident.

The mind tries to find awareness as an object and it thinks about it as an object. However, the mind is just another object, so a radical change of perspective is needed. The real and only subject is awareness, and the self knows itself without the need of the mind. The mind doesn't have to discover a new object, it just needs to understand what has always been.

The metaphor of the sun and the moon is useful when we are talking about the relationship between an object and the self. But we need to be careful with this metaphor, as in reality awareness is not a great source of light (like the sun), which would also be an object.

Awareness is free of form. Awareness is existence. Why do you know that you are? Because you exist. You don't need the mind. You don't need an action. You just are. That is self-evident awareness.

Cormack: *Maya*, eternal, and therefore out of time and unfathomable, but understood to be an apparent power within consciousness/awareness/existence that, for unknown reason(s) to me, manifests or awakens, and *Isvara* exists.

Shams: Only you, awareness, are eternal. *Maya* is not eternal. We say that *maya* is "relatively" eternal because, compared to our human lives, the cosmos is "almost" limitless. However, from awareness's point of view, *maya* is only an apparent addition.

Maya is the illusion of duality. It is the idea that there is an object in front of you. But actually there is no object in front of you, it is only you! However, your apparent power makes you believe there is something more than you.

The object in front of you seems to be multiple and diverse, which is due to the creative intelligence that we call *Isvara*.

Cormack: *Isvara/maya* are interdependent and synonymous with three powers or attributes: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (design/intelligence, transformation and substance). This understanding or relationship is too subtle for my understanding.

It is before creation and out of time.

Shams: Although it is a subtle point, it can and must be understood.

Let's start from the beginning.

1. You are all that there is, non-dual awareness. And definitely you are whole, limitless and eternal. Besides, you are not manifest. You are not experiential. Because you are absolute, there is only you, the Real, and in reality nothing has ever happened.

2. However, by the fact that you are non-dual, and you include everything, you also include the possibility of the opposite: duality, limitation, finitude.

3. So we have this little paradox: if you had limits you would stop being limitless, but not having the possibility of limits would also be a limit!
4. The apparent paradox is solved with another apparent paradox: you will have limits, you will be dual, but only in appearance.
5. Remember that you, awareness, are the only one that IS, and you are free from every experience. And yet, now it seems that there is another: the object.
6. The apparent power that allows the appearance is called *maya*. *Maya* does not cause objects to appear, *maya* makes it appear as if objects arise, although everything is “made” of you, the self.
7. By this *maya* the subject appears to be in front of an object.
8. *Maya* does not create the world, for there is in reality no world. *Maya* makes it look “as if” there was an object, when in reality there is only the subject, awareness.
9. We call *maya* a projection energy because all its apparent creation is nothing but a reflection. Of what? Of you, awareness.
10. *Maya* makes it appear as if there was an object. Awareness plus the projective energy of *maya* results in the illusion that the object that is apparently in front of you is multiple and diverse, ordered and ruled by the Creator-creation.

Now, about the Creator-creation and the *gunas*:

1. The Creator-creation is ignorance in operation.
2. The Creator-creation, called *Isvara*, is necessarily an object, and we can also describe it as not-self.
3. However, *Isvara* (like all other objects) is one with awareness, so you will find that awareness is sometimes also called *Isvara*.
4. The Creator-creation (*Isvara*) is a single object, which is intelligence and its creation.
5. The Creator-creation (*Isvara*) is made up of three energies, called *gunas*: *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva*. This last *guna* is its basic nature.
6. The *gunas* are the blocks with which the field of creation is formed, so all objects are made of these three energies, and the same creative intelligence is conformed by the *gunas*.
7. The *gunas* make up the three bodies of *Isvara* (causal body, subtle body and gross bodies). This means they are beyond time (in the causal body), but they are also subject to time (in the subtle and the gross bodies).

Therefore although the terms *maya*, *Isvara* and *gunas* refer to similar things, they actually point to different situations. I suggest you keep checking this until you have complete clarity about it.

Cormack: *Isvara*, or *Bhagavan/maya*, is the mechanism of creation dependent upon or sustained by consciousness, having the ability to superimpose name and form on

consciousness through its power/*shakti*/attributes.

Shams: Good. Let's say that this power, or *shakti*, consists precisely in making awareness appear to be divided into names and forms, when in reality there is only awareness.

Cormack: Instantly, the Big Bang, apparent duality (consciousness and matter), appears. The subtlest matter, space, "begins" time. When I think of consciousness and the apparent world of matter I think of the analogy of the spider and its web. The web is of the spider, but the spider is not of the web.

Shams: The analogy of the spider and the web refers to the Creator (the spider) and the creation (the web), so it is not very useful when we point to awareness, because the spider is a doer, like *Isvara*, the great Doer. But awareness is not a doer.

Cormack: Matter ranges from subtle to gross: from space and thoughts to rocks, and in Vedanta these are all knowable, and as such are objects to awareness.

Shams: Yes.

Cormack: Matter can be pure *tamas*, totally non-reflective existence, a black hole, or it can be mixed with *sattva*, which has a reflective quality and can appear as sentient or conscious. Matter is totally inert, incapable of change unless mixed with *rajas*. All matter is a combination of these three qualities or attributes, but is dependent on consciousness/existence.

Shams: Yes.

Cormack: From a worldly, materialistic, evolutionary or creationist perspective, humans have evolved a belief that they are a body that contains a brain, that somehow gave rise to consciousness, and this constitutes reality. Humans worry and doubt because they have self-awareness and egos with some knowledge and some ignorance, unlike other sentient and insentient objects. Consequently humans feel isolated, limited and fearful. Why this happened is unknown because apparently it has not happened to other sentient beings.

Shams: On the contrary, all sentient and non-sentient beings are blinded by ignorance. This means that everyone is identified with the objects in the apparent dualistic world.

The difference for the human being is that it possesses an intellect. The intellect, under the spell of ignorance, makes the self believe that it is the mind, from which we obtain many limiting conclusions. When an effective means of knowledge is applied in the intellect, ignorance can be removed. This means that, thanks to the intellect, humans are capable of seeking and attaining *moksa*.

Why is this so? That we will have to ask *Isvara* directly. But first, let's focus on realizing our true identity.

Cormack: The human subtle body has enough *sattvic*-quality matter that reflects – like a mirror – awareness, consciousness, making it appear as if it is conscious (which it is, but not in the way it thinks it is).

Shams: Yes, the human being, as an object, is not conscious. It's only conscious because its true identity is awareness, which, by the way, is the situation for all the objects.

The nature of the mind is *sattva*. Because *sattva* in the mind reflects awareness, we tend to believe that the mind is conscious itself, when in reality it is only an object reflecting it.

Cormack: This is all the result of *maya* working through *Isvara*, creating an apparent reality which Vedanta names *mithya*.

Shams: Okay.

Cormack: For Vedanta, that which is real is nameless, unmanifest, indescribable, ungraspable, without attributes, but nevertheless for teaching purposes has been called the self, *paramatma* (pure, limitless consciousness) and other names, the essence of which has been described as that which does not change, is whole, non-dual, limitless and actionless. In Vedanta a human is a *jiva*, a living being, with gross, subtle and microcosmic causal bodies created by and sustained within the macroscopic causal body of *Isvara*.

Shams: Good.

Cormack: *Isvara* is dependent upon consciousness, while *jiva* is dependent upon consciousness and *Isvara*. *Isvara* creates the world of name and form in which the *jiva* exists. The *jiva* creates its own world within the world of *Isvara* through its likes and dislikes, creating conditioned tendencies, or *vasanas*. All its thoughts come from its stored *vasanas* within the mechanism/laws of *Isvara*. I have no idea how these *vasanas* started for the *jiva*.

Shams: It is true that human tendencies and conditionings are due to *vasanas*. But *vasanas* are, in addition, the programming that orders the whole universe. *Karma* is action, and all action is motivated by *vasanas*. Therefore every action (*karma*) of the *jiva* is due to *vasanas*. Breathing, talking, walking, etc. – everything depends on *vasanas*.

Since *vasanas* are programming, and *karma* the action, we can say that the *jiva* is no other thing than *vasanas* and *karma*. When did the *vasanas* began for the *jiva*? The answer is that in fact there can be no *jiva* without *vasanas*, so *vasanas* literally created the *jiva*.

Cormack: When the *jiva* knows itself as whole, limitless, actionless consciousness, and neutralizes the binding *vasanas* through the discrimination of *satya* from *mithya*, it abides in *satchitananda* (where *ananda* means fullness rather than experiential bliss).

Shams: Yes, as long as it becomes clear that “*satchitananda*” is not a special experience. It only refers to knowing that you are the self, a knowledge that frees you from believing that you are a limited object.