

# Vedanta Is Not an Intellectual Discussion

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**Timmy:** Dear Sundari, sorry to bother, I found your contact address at the ShiningWorld website.

I have a question, which I am hoping you or James could help me with.

I realize that it is somewhat intellectual, but it is somehow weighing regardless.

**Sundari:** Good to meet you, Timmy. I will answer your questions, but first I must ask you some questions. Vedanta is not theorizing about reality. It is not theory in practice either. Vedanta is a valid means of knowledge for consciousness, the self, assuming certain qualifications. If you are not qualified for self-inquiry and are having an intellectual discussion with someone who is also not qualified for self-inquiry, no answer is going to satisfy.

What does your *sadhana* consist of? Have you read our contact page and carefully followed the instructions we give before writing to us asking questions? If not, there is probably not much point in my replying to you. We love what we do and are happy to be of service, but we have a huge workload. We help people who are truly dedicated to self-inquiry because they have realized that life is a zero-sum game. If they do not have the requisite commitment and qualifications, we cannot help you, as much as we may want to. It is not our job just to satisfy “intellectual” interests or discussions. So please – let me know if you have followed the steps we have given.

**Timmy:** I was having a discussion with someone about realization. In particular, what can be truly known about what was before and what is after this life? His basic reasoning was the following:

Even the *jnani* can only know that they are awake (or that there is awakesness) because of the mind mechanism that allows for self-reflection/recognition.

**Sundari:** Our means of knowledge for objects are the senses, the mind/intellect. Without a functioning mind, it is not possible to be conscious of objects. But even without a functioning mind, consciousness is still there aware of the lack of knowledge of objects – like when you are in deep sleep. Who do you think knows that you are in deep sleep or a coma for that matter? Consciousness, what else? When you wake up from deep sleep, you know that you slept, not so? Consciousness is always conscious, it is never “awake,” because it never slept, therefore “awakesness” is a very bad term for consciousness, the self. Wakefulness – the state of “being awake” – only applies to the mind under the spell of ignorance, in which case it could be said to “wake” up from the slumber of ignorance to the fact that its true nature is consciousness. But only self-knowledge wakes it up.

We have no valid means of knowledge for consciousness other than the scripture – self-knowledge, or Vedanta – which is why you must have qualifications – faith in the scripture being the starting point, a burning desire for freedom from dependence on

objects being another. You cannot study or rationalize consciousness, because it is who you are. You must be taught because the mind is conditioned by *Maya*, beginningless ignorance, full of ignorant ideas, and only ever understands anything through the filters of its conditioning. Therefore without a valid means of knowledge wielded by a qualified teacher, the mind will interpret what it reads or hears and not assimilate the true meaning, so self-knowledge cannot obtain. The doer, or ego, cannot free the mind. Highly intellectual people especially are very attached to their point of view and tend to be vain about their intellectual abilities. Only by subjecting the mind with great dedication and humility to the teachings can self-knowledge itself remove ignorance, nothing else.

To say you do not know what was “before and after” your life as a person is not the point. The point of self-inquiry is to discriminate between *satya* and *mithya* – between what is real, what never changes and is always present (*satya*/consciousness), and what is only apparently real, not always present and is always changing (*mithya*, the world, the person and all objects, subtle and gross). If you cannot discriminate between your self, consciousness, and the objects that appear in you, you cannot be free of ignorance – the hypnosis of duality.

The only “proof” that there is a “before and after” is that there had to be something there to know “before and after,” which could only be consciousness. How do you know what you know or know what you don’t know? Consciousness, always present, never changing.

**Timmy:** Even if we are not the mind, body, persona – nevertheless, self can only be “known” via this mind-body mechanism.

**Sundari:** Yes, that is true. But the mind-body mechanism only appears conscious because the light of CONSCIOUSNESS illuminates it. The mind/intellect and body are objects known to you, consciousness. If something is known to you, it cannot BE you.

**Timmy:** A mountain is also an expression of the Absolute, but cannot know that it is.

In a similar way, if there is only self prior to taking this birth – and self alone cannot know itself – then are we not only speculating of what might be prior to and after this birth?

**Sundari:** We do not use the term the “Absolute” to describe consciousness, because it is the language of hyperbole. We use the terms awareness or consciousness to refer to the self, the non-experiencing knowing principle, or witness of the experiencing entity, i.e objects.

All objects, whether subtle like thoughts and feelings or gross like a mountain or the body, are reflected awareness. They are the image in the mirror, which is the reflecting medium. The reflecting medium is the Field of Existence, also called *Isvara*, *Maya*, or the apparent reality. A reflection does not know itself. Does your reflection in the mirror know you? No. But you know it. Thus it is with consciousness, who seeing only itself because there is only consciousness, knows everything to be self. All objects exist because of consciousness, but consciousness depends on nothing to exist, just like the ocean and the wave depend on water, but water is free of the wave and the ocean.

Consciousness needs nothing to know itself – it is self-effulgent and always existent. It always knows itself and DOES NOT require objects to do so. When *Maya* appears, objects appear and there is apparently something for consciousness to be aware of. But because there is only one principle because reality is non-dual, for consciousness there are no objects. Duality is simply a superimposition onto non-duality when *Maya*, the power in consciousness to delude, appears. Duality is not real, though it gives rise to apparently real objects – just like a mirage on the desert floor gives rise to the illusion of water.

**Timmy:** It can be assumed or deduced that the one self is there before and after – but we cannot truly know for certain, as even with deep realization we can only honestly speak about what is known from this living reflective mechanism.

**Sundari:** Incorrect. What does “deep realization” mean? Self-realization is not the result of assumptions or deductive reasoning. It is the result of self-knowledge working on a purified mind removing the ignorance (duality) preventing it from knowing its true identity as the self. You are speaking here as a person who thinks they are a person, an ego, stuck in *Maya* trying to figure things out from within *Maya*. It cannot be done. You can only understand the true nature of non-duality by stepping out of *Maya*, duality, through self-knowledge. Though it is true that you need a functioning and qualified intellect to understand the very subtle teachings of Vedanta, it is never the mind itself that figures it out, because it cannot. The mind is just subtle matter – it is only conscious by virtue of consciousness illumining it. When the mind is purified, qualified and prepared for self-inquiry, self-knowledge can obtain, not before.

The only means at our disposal for understanding anything are perception and inference, the senses, which are too gross to understand consciousness. The object can never understand the subject. Consciousness is the knower of the senses, the five sheaths and the organs of action, i.e. the doer, ego, or *jiva*. Consciousness is not an object of perception. It is that which by virtue of its presence makes perception, inference and all experience possible.

**Timmy:** Even experiences which we may assume are of past lives or future lives cannot be verified for certain, and may only be the product of an active imagination.

**Sundari:** All experiences are objects known to consciousness. What does it matter if as a *jiva*, or person, you lived “before”? Before what? As consciousness you are unborn and you never die, so how can you “reincarnate” when you never incarnated in the first place? The whole issue of reincarnation is a *mithya* topic – meaning it is duality. The subtle body, or mind, gets subsumed into the macrocosmic causal body when the body dies – and as *Isvara* is *karma phala datta*, the giver of *karma*, and the Field of Existence exists for *jivas* to work out their *karma*, the particular *vasana* load that incarnated as a seeming individual may or may not return as another *jiva*. But you, consciousness, never incarnate. You simply witness the apparently real world of objects (much like you would watch a movie) seeing only yourself, the self.

**Timmy:** I have tried to summarize his argument. I would appreciate if you or James could comment on this from the Advaita Vedanta perspective. And/or perhaps from

a “What would Ramana say or Nisargadatta Maharaj say or others that you resonate with?” Thanks for your time and patience.

**Sundari:** This is the Vedanta, or non-dual, perspective. Ramana was a true *mahatma*, but he was not a qualified teacher of Vedanta and never claimed to be – even though he even wrote scripture. He made many confusing and seemingly contradictory statements. What we teach in is line with the age-old teachings of the *sampradaya*, it is pure Vedanta, self-knowledge. Please read my instructions above carefully before you reply because you do not know how to discriminate between *satya* and *mithya*. Your thinking needs work. We are only willing to assist you if you are prepared to do your part, which is commit to self-inquiry.

~ *Om tat sat*, Sundari