

How Can a Partless Whole Have Divisions?

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Ken: Hi, Sundari.

I've spent the past year working my way through the ShiningWorld beginners' and advanced courses (though I skipped some videos, I read everything), as well as other Vedanta material by other teachers, including Ted Schmidt. Could I please ask you a few questions about something I didn't find addressed directly in SW material, but only by Ted Schmidt?

About me: I've been into spirituality in my spare time since about the turn of the century or a bit before (my teen years), but only got into traditional Advaita since around spring last year. In years past, I had much more burning desire for freedom, but lately I feel as though I understand most of the Vedanta teachings I read/watch and feel quite peaceful most of the time (if a little bored), but would hesitate to say I'm "all done," *moksa*-ed out, nothing more to do. For one thing, I know I'm not in *sahaja samadhi* all the time.

I suppose it may just be a matter of discriminating more, not acquiring more concepts, but I'm really not sure. I meditate 45 minutes a day, and generally experience what I understand ShiningWorld at least calls *samadhi* for most of that time, most days.

Sundari: Self-inquiry is definitely not about acquiring more concepts but divesting yourself of ALL concepts. If you do not have faith in the scripture and insist on trying to make Vedanta fit into your worldview or experience, it will not work for you. Self-inquiry is also not about being in *samadhi*. *Sahaja* or *nirvikalpa* or any other kind of *samadhi*, while powerful experiences of the Self, are reflected awareness appearing in a clear mind. Both are experiential and take place in time, meaning they end. When the experience ends, unless the knowledge it imparts - I, the unchanging, the Self - is assimilated and the doer/mediator negated, the mind is back in bondage to its conditioning, seeking another experience of the Self. *Moksa* is not a state and it is not an experience. It is the knower of all states and experiences, never modifying to either. *Moksa* is the unchanging, ever-present, unshakable KNOWLEDGE that *moksa* (freedom from bondage, limitlessness) is your nature as the Self. It never ends and if it does, it's not *moksa*.

Ken: I feel like I can trigger it quickly and voluntarily, most times that I'm not feeling especially tired. I would also say that all the top ten experiences of my life (at least) have been in the last couple of years meditating, though I'm not sure how relevant that is to traditional Vedanta as taught by SW.

Sundari: The main problem with meditators and those who experience special states of mind is that they think they are "doing" it, and they think the point of doing is the experience. Vedanta requires a very different kind of practice, Self-inquiry. Vedanta encourages meditation as a means to purify the mind, but the basis of the teachings is that it is only Self-knowledge, not experience, that can remove

ignorance permanently. You, awareness/consciousness/existence, are already free and always have been. You just have an ignorance problem. Meditators generally do not understand *karma yoga*. It is imperative that you do, assuming you want freedom from the small-self identity. It is the only way to negate the doer and render binding *vasanas* non-binding.

Meditation is not a valid means of knowledge. Meditation is a tool to aid Self-inquiry, but it does not equal Self-inquiry. Unless one has realized that one is not the meditator but the one who knows the meditator, meditation can keep one stuck for years trying to have an experience of the Self. Which many meditators do have, but the problem is: the identification with the experiencer/meditator is still there.

In this way, the experience of Self-realization does not necessarily lead to freedom, *moksa* – which is why there are so many frustrated meditators around, trying to get the experience back. Even if they succeed, they will most likely “lose” the Self-realization once again, because the knowledge that they are that which makes all experience possible, i.e. awareness, escapes them. Meditation is no different from any other activity done to achieve a specific result – unless it is practised with *karma yoga*. No action the doer takes can produce Self-knowledge. This is because as the doer you are limited, and no action taken by a limited being can produce a limitless result, i.e. freedom/*moksa*.

Meditation and all states of mind, however exalted, are just objects appearing in you, allowing the reflection of the Self to appear in a still mind. However, seeing as no experience can take place without you, awareness, and because as awareness you are actionless, no special experience/state of mind is required to experience the Self. You are always experiencing the Self, whether you are meditating or not. You just don't know this.

The Self, awareness – YOU – is not an object of perception and cannot be known by the mind, because the mind is too gross and the Self too subtle. The object, or the effect, cannot know the subject, the cause. The Self is “beyond” the mind, and the only means of knowledge available to know anything is the five senses, allowing for perception and inference, which are suitable for knowing objects but not suitable means of knowledge to know awareness. Only Vedanta offers a complete and valid means of knowledge for awareness.

Although we can have an experience of the reflection of the Self in a pure, *sattvic* mind in meditation or *samadhi*, this is not enough to set us free of the doer. For this, we need to expose the mind to Self-inquiry and allow Self-knowledge to remove our ignorance (*avidya*). Although Self-inquiry is also an action, the result of Self-inquiry is Self-knowledge, which can produce a limitless result, meaning freedom from identification with the doer, or person, and negation of binding *vasanas*.

Self-inquiry is the application of Self-knowledge. Keeping this knowledge in mind and continually contemplating on it is Self-inquiry, which is why Self-inquiry is different from meditation. The knowledge is maintained by an act of will, whereas in meditation the knowledge appears during a particular experience, which ends.

Self-inquiry is superior to meditation because the doer does not need to maintain a particular state and wait for the knowledge. He or she has the knowledge already and applies it continually. Meditators do not know the value of knowledge, whereas inquirers do. That is why the meditators are meditating. Knowledge may arise in meditation or it may not. If it does, we say meditation is a “leading error.” But even

if meditation does lead to knowledge of the “unbroken I-thought” (*akandakara vritti*), the knowledge does not always stick, as I point out above.

Ken: Lastly, I admit I have had some psychological problems in the past (psychosis) but am currently on medication that suppresses them and has me feeling somewhat listless. I don't feel like this has prevented me from understanding anything I've been reading, and I hope this message shows I'm not suffering from any lingering effects or irrationality.

Sundari: You sound rational and pretty clear in this email, although being on drugs makes the mind *tamasic*, which can make it harder to assimilate subtle concepts. We have several inquirers who have made it through mental illness to heal the mind of psychosis and have come off all drugs. What is your diagnosis?

Vedanta is not a magic pill that will help you resolve your painful conditioning and emotional suffering. It requires a clear and purified mind which has realized that life is a zero-sum game, that there is nothing to gain through experience. Self-inquiry is your only real option, but without the qualifications for Self-inquiry present in the mind, Self-inquiry will not work. If the mind is mentally disturbed or ill, it will not be capable of Self-inquiry.

Ken: I haven't yet noticed any comments on this subject in ShiningWorld material yet, but my question has to do with the degree to which *Brahman* is divided versus the degree to which *Brahman* is unified, with minds being divided.

Sundari: You have not seen any comments on your question because they are completely contrary to Vedanta, which states that this is a non-dual reality, that there is only one principle in operation, the partless, limitless, unchanging, ever-present Self/consciousness. How can a partless whole thus be divided? And while it may seem like there are many minds operating in the Field of Existence, there is really one, run by the *gunas* – *Isvara/Brahman*, the Creator of the world of objects.

As for the term “*Brahman*,” what do you think it refers to? If it refers to the one Self, it is an indivisible, partless whole. If it refers to awareness in association with *Maya*, it refers to the Creator, or *Isvara*. It too is partless whole because it is actually pure awareness, and unaffected by the *gunas*. I think you have missed the whole teaching, central to Self-inquiry, which is the relationship/identity between awareness (Self/consciousness, same thing) and *Isvara/Brahman/Maya* with *jiva* – the individual. This teaching is vital if you want to discriminate between *satya* and *mithya*, that which is real and that which is only apparently real. See the definitions below.

Ken: Ted Schmidt says: “Though the drop knows its nature is the same as that of the entire ocean, such knowledge doesn't turn the drop into the entirety of the seven seas.” First of all, do you agree with this?

Sundari: Yes, but its meaning depends on the context and your interpretation of it. If this statement is understood from the point of view of the *jiva*, it means that understanding you are the Self (the ocean) does not make the *jiva* omniscient (the

entirety of the seven seas). But if you know you are the Self, then you see no difference between the drop and the ocean because there is only you. The drop is the ocean, but the ocean/seven seas is not the drop. To follow this reasoning, we remove all the variable factors to get to the one invariable factor. When you talk about the ocean, the drop (or the wave) are both the ocean. What do the drop and the wave have in common with the ocean, which is the one factor that cannot be removed? Water. You can remove the drop and the wave and ocean is still the ocean, but you cannot remove the water or there is no ocean. So it is with consciousness.

As an individual *jiva*, your essence is the Self and thus everything exists because of you and depends on you, but you depend on nothing. But as long as the apparent entity, or the *jiva*, is still embodied in the apparent reality, enlightened or not, it is subject to *Isvara*, the Creator, and it is subject to the natural laws that run the Creation. This is an intelligently designed, lawful universe. Only *Isvara/Brahman* controls *Maya* and creates all objects, and is omniscient. As the individual, or “drop” of the ocean, you control nothing other than your subjective reality.

The definition of *jiva* is consciousness with a subtle body. *Jiva* is an eternal principle, a *tattva*, not a specific person. It is actually pure consciousness, *paramatma*. The individual *jiva* is created by *Isvara*, but its essence is the same: consciousness.

The point is, who is asking this question? Are you asking as the *jiva* identified as a person or as consciousness? There is essentially no difference between *jiva* (the individual, or “drop”) and *Isvara* except in their capacity to create. Because *Isvara* controls *Maya*, it creates the objective world, and *jiva* creates its subjective world, its world of thoughts and feelings – which also come from *Isvara*, the *gunas*. *Isvara* creates all objects, subtle and gross, and the *jiva* only knows the objects it has contact with. It cannot create a flower, the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Isvara is not a person with likes and dislikes like the *jiva*. And neither *Isvara's* Creation nor *jiva's* creation hides consciousness. It is always present prior to the Creation and prior to the birth of individuals. You can't have a macrocosmic creation without consciousness. Something had to exist before *Isvara* could “bang” the Creation into existence. That something we call *paramatma*, pure consciousness, free of both *Isvara* and *jiva*. If this is true, which we know it is, then we can eliminate both *jiva* and *Isvara* as real, and take ourselves to be consciousness – the Self.

Consciousness (me) is never affected by *Isvara's* Creation or by *jiva's* creation. It is the knower of both.

Or you can look at it this way: it is clear that *jiva* is conscious. It is also clear that *Isvara* is conscious because the Creation is consciously designed. Inference tells us that, and inference is a valid means of knowledge. We do not have to meet *Isvara* (*Brahman*) in person (not that *Isvara* is a person) to know that it is conscious. So if the *jiva's* consciousness depends on *Isvara's* consciousness, and *Isvara's* consciousness depends on *paramatma*, pure consciousness, then both *jiva* and *Isvara* are pure, limitless consciousness. If you don't depend on the world or on the person, you certainly can't be either one of them. An effect (*jiva*) is just the cause (*Isvara*) appearing in a form.

We can't apply the same logic to *Isvara* except loosely, because consciousness does not “cause” *Isvara*. *Isvara* in association with *Maya*, Beautiful Intelligent Ignorance, is something altogether different. *Isvara* is not an effect, but it is a cause with

reference to the Creation. To repeat: there is only one consciousness out of which everything arises and depends upon. But consciousness is always free of the objects. Consciousness is *adjata*, unborn. Vedanta is the path of the unborn because it reveals that although there appears to be a Creation, nothing ever really happened, from consciousness' point of view.

The world we know is called "apparently real" because it is not always present and always changing – called *mithya*. The world of objects/*jivas* (the wave or drop) can be removed and consciousness remains. The one principle that is "real," which cannot be removed ever is consciousness – *satya* – because it is unchanging and ever-present. We know the world is not real because when you analyze it, it resolves into empty space, and space resolves into consciousness as far as you cannot know space without consciousness. It is an object known to you. There is just you, consciousness, in which the *jiva*, or person, appears in a particular *a priori* environment, i.e. *Isvara*.

The *jiva* looks out through the body, identifies with the senses, perceives a world and thinks that it is seeing what is actually there. It knows it didn't create it, but it sees itself as separate, incomplete, so chases objects to complete itself.

Ken: Second of all, does this mean that *Brahman* is divided into "portions," and each of us only has direct access to "our" portion? Doesn't this mean that we really are separate and isolated (though we may be reunited with the mother sea upon death of the mind-body)? Does each *jiva* get its own "portion" of consciousness that stays consistently with that *jiva* throughout its life, and may unite with the total at that *jiva's* death (like the space inside the pot and the universal space around it)?

Sundari: No, it definitely does not mean this. You are confused. See above.

Ken: I suppose I'm asking if the entire "empty space/awareness" of the universe knows each "pot/*jiva*" or if it's only the space around the pot that knows the pot.

Sundari: Space is often taken as a synonym for the Self because space is all-pervasive and the container for all objects; but space is still an object known to awareness. The Self sees only itself, there is nothing else for it to see, because there is only one principle operating here, as already stated. Duality – the appearance of something other than or separate from awareness, is an illusion created by *Maya*, ignorance – the power in awareness to delude. It is NOT REAL. See the definition of "real" and "apparently real" above. *Isvara*, or *Brahman*, awareness in association with *Maya*, also sees only the Self because it is the Self. But when *Maya* is operating, there is something for consciousness to be conscious of, i.e. the Creation. At this point consciousness apparently surrenders its status as consciousness and becomes a conscious Creator. So from pure consciousness/existence's point of view, *Isvara* is just *Maya*, an inert mirror (*pratibimba*) in which all created objects appear – the reflected medium in which *jivas* can experience their *karma*. But from *jiva's* point of view, *Isvara* is the conscious, intelligent designer, creator, supporter and destroyer of the Creation.

When *Maya* appears, *rajas* and *tamas* are suppressed, and consciousness appears as pure intelligence endowed with the blueprint for the Creation and all the powers

necessary to construct the apparent reality according to the specifications of the blueprint. It wields *Maya* just as a potter wields his or her idea of the pot to create a pot. When *tamas* comes to the fore, the material world evolves, and when *rajas* comes to the fore, the myriad *jivas* appear.

The *jiva* is awareness plus *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. And because the light of consciousness shines on the *jiva*, it appears conscious, but it too is reflected consciousness. Because *tamas* and *rajas* predominate, the *jiva* is ignorant of its nature and takes itself to be one among many. So the *jiva* is under the spell of *Maya*, whereas *Isvara* controls *Maya* and is never under its spell. Speaking as *Isvara*, Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "By my *Maya*, I delude all these beings."

Ken: Incidentally, I emailed a version of this email to Ted Schmidt, but he hasn't gotten back for a few weeks now. Do you know if he's still answering mail?

Sundari: I have no idea. Ted is no longer a teacher at ShiningWorld.

~ Love, Sundari