

# You, the Attributeless

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**Nick:** Hi, Arlindo. I hope that you're doing well. Thanks again for responding to all my questions. I'll try not to be too wordy here, but I have a few more things I can't seem to get past in my inquiry into Vedanta. Though I'm reading *satsangs* every night, and hoping repetition will help. I still can't wrap my head around what it means to BE awareness, especially since you say it has absolutely no attributes, does not experience anything, does not need or want anything. If this is true, why would it bother with *Maya* and projecting this apparent reality?

**Arlindo:** Hello, Nick. When we analyze our own experience by carefully following the logic presented by Vedanta with the help of a competent teacher, in due course we understand and agree that "I" – non-dual, limitless awareness, the one without a second – am the imperceivable essence, the unaffected substratum of *mithya*, and therefore completely free of all attributes and qualities inherent to *mithya*. *Mithya's* attributes do not even touch me. But it takes some work until one develops this clear "vision."

Attributes are only to be found in objects (something other than the subject). Awareness is pure, with no inclusions, no parts and no qualities. It is one with no "inclusions" to it. If you look at awareness as the subject, you will see that it is "you," the Self "behind" the mind.

In order for awareness to "apparently" experience objects It needs the "subject-object" duality, and the tricky part is that duality exists, but only as a mirage (not real). Duality is what we call a seeming superimposition on awareness. Objects have attributes and qualities because they are "compounds." They are "things" formed by a union of various elements or parts. The three *gunas* plus the five elements apparently "paints" awareness with numberless names, colors and forms – all distinct in their properties and qualities.

The fundamental nature of awareness, our very existence as the subject (call it the Self, the substratum, or pure consciousness) is always independent and not affected by the objects appearing in it. It possesses no attributes, although all attributes of *mithya* borrow and enjoy their existences from awareness. Space is the most subtle element in the manifest. It's free and not affected by the objects it accommodates, but yet it possesses two properties: accommodation and sound. Awareness is the subtlest of the subtle, therefore it possesses no qualities or attributes, although it enlivens all objects, which are defined by their name, color, form and attributes.

Objects of experience do not change you or even touch you, and that is the hardest knowledge to gain and retain, due to awareness' subtlety, and *jiva's* hardwired misidentification with the body-mind complex defined by its qualities. But the body-mind complex is but an object, and you, awareness, are the attributeless subject. The good news is that Self-knowledge, the understanding and assimilation of one's true nature as the attributeless subject, is very possible once one's *karma* is cleared and the mind purified.

As far as *Maya* goes, we will never understand why *Maya* came into place and

projected this “mirage-like” apparent reality called the universe. It is inexplicable! Why *Maya* came into existence and why it develops its power to project and conceal our true nature as pure consciousness is beyond any sort of knowledge. The “why” question is also irrelevant, because the mind is only the effect. Awareness is the causeless cause, and not even by inference is the effect able to objectify and know the motives behind its cause, awareness in association with *Maya*.

The effect and the cause do not belong to the same order of reality. A more legitimate question is “how,” not “why.” How *Maya* affects my experience in the world and how to remove the universal beginningless ignorance which conditions my experience. The only way to understand *Maya* and the Creation is by understanding that it is not real. That is the purpose of the scriptures on Self-knowledge: to reveal you, awareness, as the only reality.

**Nick:** It would seem to me that *Maya* is completely necessary for awareness to even exist or be able to realize itself, which I have read is not true. Isn't this illusory world “everything” to awareness, since without it it basically does, sees, feels, understands and hears nothing? How could it be self-aware prior to the apparent universe? It's like saying there was existence before any existence. How do we know? And how do we know that there aren't multiple apparent realities or universes? Does that mean that awareness exists on a different level of reality and can “experience” or at least be self-aware in other non-human ways? How can the subject be a subject with no object?

**Arlindo:** How could the very conscious principle which allows *jivas* to perceive and experience objects (i.e. to be conscious of objects) not be made of pure “self-conscious” awareness? How could consciousness not be self-conscious, since “consciousness” is its very fundamental nature? The difficulty in understanding this fact is because the mind always thinks in dualistic terms, and therefore imagines that consciousness is only conscious if presented with apparent objects. Do you see the joke? It is like saying that sunlight is only “luminous” when it reflects off some physical object.

The other problem is the proximity between the mind (reflected consciousness) and pure original consciousness. In truth, *jivas* are not conscious. *Jivas* are made up of inert physical and subtle material. Due to its sophisticated subtle body, the ***jiva*** reflects consciousness, and by doing so it imagines itself to be self-conscious. There is only one self-conscious principle: original consciousness, and that is our true nature/identity. This is the discrimination proposed by Vedanta: discriminating the original universal consciousness from its reflections in *jiva*'s mind. I understand your difficulty, because it is the subtlest exercise of discrimination.

Existence is not equal to the universe. The statement that the universe exists is completely off the mark. The truth is that existence “universes” (appears as the universe). The existence-nature of things does not belong to the things but to “existence” itself, and there is no difference between consciousness and existence.

On another note, I suggest that you subject your mind to the scriptures first, that you go through the whole program as presented at the ShiningWorld website. That would allow you to gain a bit more scriptural knowledge first. That way you would develop a wider vision of Vedanta. To pick up bits and pieces of it will not do the job. You will need the full picture of reality. You have a sharp mind, a mind fit to the

inquiry into the nature of *Maya* and awareness, but it would make it easier if you do some more homework first.

**Nick:** Is *Isvara* just an abstract concept used to describe the combination of natural laws and all of the reflections of consciousness in the universe? Or is *Isvara* actually a macrocosmic, intelligent, conscious entity that can and should be worshiped as such? It's hard for me to worship something that is not real and is really only a diluted projection within myself. This is where I get stuck with *karma yoga*. How do I have gratitude for something that I'm told over and over isn't real, and only exists out of ignorance? It kind of makes the day-to-day just feel like a set-up instead of a blessing. I think I could be missing the teaching here though?

**Arlindo:** You do not need to be a devotee of *Isvara* if that is not in your *jiva*-nature. In this case, be the inquirer, analyze your experience, discriminate, etc. As your understanding evolves you will assimilate the fact that life is made up by pure knowledge/intelligence and that this intelligent principle manifests itself as a "system" (a body of laws and rules) governing the manifest universe. When we mention the word "*Isvara*," we refer to this self-propelled intelligent system.

It takes a certain temperament to relate and worship *Isvara* as the "Lord of the apparent universe," but it is easier to understand its power and develop a positive attitude of gratitude and contribution for the "miracle" of life which was given to us. After all, we owe our existence and the operation and maintenance of our mental, physical and physiological systems to this pure, universal intelligence.

As your knowledge develops, you will also understand that *jiva*, *Isvara* and the world are not real, although from the stand point of the *jiva* their existence cannot be negated. *Jivas* are not real, but for the most part they apparently suffer their apparent experience. Self-realization is for the apparent *jiva* living in the apparent world, because the Self is always ever-realized.

**Nick:** Do you have suggestions for rendering *vasanas* non-binding? I have picked up on a few of my own that I was not completely aware of, which maybe is Step One?

**Arlindo:** Yes, we have suggestions regarding neutralization of binding *vasanas*, but again, it requires more than a few sentences or paragraphs – it requires the complete teaching. The problem is not just related to the "binding" nature of some *vasanas*, but more like the "moral/ethical" nature of some *vasanas*. What needs to be given up are those binding *vasanas* based on Self-ignorance, which almost invariably are in violation of *dharma*. Self-ignorance compels the *jiva* to want things to complete itself (to feel satisfied for some time), and when the desire is very strong, *jiva* tends to cut corners, lie, manipulate, deceive, etc.

Vedanta suggests that the inquirer should develop a binding *vasana* for a contemplative mind and Self-inquiry because those are the *vasanas* conducive to mental purification and eventually to Self-realization.

**Nick:** Do the scriptures say that there is some kind of "higher" existence for awareness beyond the apparent reality, like before or after the *jiva's* life? Or does consciousness just keep getting recycled through *Maya* until it goes to deep sleep

for a period of time? This also confuses me as it relates to reincarnation. How can we say my individual projection of the Self will reincarnate when there is only one Self?

How can we say that the nature of awareness is bliss, when bliss is just a human feeling? I would think if we could say the nature of the Self is happiness and bliss, then we have to say the nature of the Self is also misery? Doesn't bliss imply misery?

**Arlindo:** The above are good, legitimate questions, and I will get into those in the next days. You are a good thinker in possession of a good mind, and I enjoy replying to your questions. Talk to you later.

~ Much love, Arlindo