

# Is Consciousness Self-Conscious Without the Body?

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2019-05-18

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3880>

**Inquirer:** Hi, Arlindo. In your last *satsang*, you said:

“When the body dies, consciousness remains, but it cannot be expressed and experienced due to the absence of the vehicle or instrument. It ever exists, but cannot be perceived without its sentient instruments. Therefore we need the body-mind in order to realize the presence of consciousness and claim our identity as such.”

I just was thinking about this some more – and would like to ask you: If there are no body and instruments, then consciousness is not conscious of being conscious? Then it seems that consciousness would always be dependent on the body, senses and instruments of perception to know itself – that makes death seem problematic to me. If you can't be conscious of your existence without a body and senses, then it seems that would not be experientially different than non-existence. Please, could you clarify that? Thank you so much.

**Arlindo:** To see death as problematic is an indication of resistance to *Isvara's* natural laws. Everything that is born must die. Immortality is not possible for the *jiva*. Self-knowledge and *moksa* do not make the *jiva* immortal. The *jiva* is an apparent, transient, mortal, “experiencing” entity, and will always be so, regardless of how wise or enlightened it may be. Everything in *mithya* is bound by time.

As you have probably heard, in truth the Self is not an experiencing-knowing entity. “Experience” is only possible in the subject-object duality. But your true fundamental nature is non-dual (you and you alone, no otherness). Think with me: What is the need for the ocean to experience waves? None! Sometimes weeks and months go by without a single wave in the open ocean, and the ocean does not seem incomplete without waves. The ocean is a beautiful symbol of “fullness.” It is complete with or without waves.

Waves are not real; they do not have substantial existence. So is the case with you in your real nature and you in your apparent nature. “You” do not need to “split” into the subject-object duality and go about doing *yoga* (connecting with objects) in order to complete yourself. Trying to complete yourself in duality is called *samsara*, a product of *Maya*; it causes sorrow, grief and distress.

Using another analogy, you have electricity running through the entire building where you live and work. Can you see it? No. But you know that it is present every time you switch on the light or start the computers, the fan, air conditioning, etc. The electricity is always there but it can “only” be experienced and perceived through some vehicle, some functional equipment or instrument. But once you have the knowledge of electricity and how it works, you will know for good that it is always present, in and through the wires, even if all the instruments in your office are off. Self-knowledge works exactly in the same way. You know that you are not going anywhere, regardless of the presence or absence of a vehicle. Even after the most

intimate vehicle of yours, the one that wakes up in your bed every morning, decays and dies.

Consciousness is always present. It pervades the manifest and the unmanifest as the very substrate of existence. It can be more easily perceived as we observe ourselves and other *jivas*, the living sentient objects. It can be known and perceived in what we call God, the dynamic “miracle of life.” You/consciousness are very subtle – the scriptures say you are the subtlest of the subtle. It is not only invisible but also not subject to objectification and conceptualization. But it can be known as one’s very nature by carefully following the analyses presented by Vedanta.

Consciousness does not really need a *jiva* in order to exercise its consciousness-existence. It is always “shining,” or better said always fully “pervading” everything. In the absence of the universe, it remains self-conscious, self-luminous, self-knowing (with nothing to be known). But the trick played by *Maya* is such that whenever you/consciousness pervade certain objects – the ones with three bodies – it reflects and shines, creating a secondary order of reality called *pratibhasika satya*, a mentally superimposed reality called the *jiva*-soul. The *jiva* then clings to the body-mind and therefore suffers an afflicted sense of limitation and mortality.

Your question denotes a very common superimposition of *mithya* onto *satya*. The *jiva* body-mind complex belongs to *mithya*, the realm of duality, experience and knowledge. Nothing in *mithya* remains, because its nature is transience (coming, staying for a while, then gone). Such are *Isvara*’s natural laws. But YOU? The problem regarding death is only due to one’s misidentification with one’s nearest and dearest instrument, the body. In fact we have no problem with death. We see people dying all the time and it never really breaks us down emotionally, because we understand *Isvara*’s laws. But when it comes to the death of “my body,” one loses clarity and forgets *Isvara*’s natural laws.

The only solution to this emotional problem is to shift one’s sense of existence from the body-mind to the Self, or pure consciousness. *Moksa* is complete Self-knowledge: the knowledge “I am free, limitless, pure consciousness” plus the knowledge of *mithya*, *jiva*, *Isvara* and its laws.

Back to your question: “If there is no body and no instruments, then consciousness is not conscious of being conscious? Then it seems that consciousness would always be dependent on the body, senses and instruments of perception to know itself?!”

Consciousness does not depend on *Maya*, *Isvara*, *jiva* and *jagata*. Consciousness is free and independent of *mithya*, although *mithya* appears to exist, intimately and not separate from consciousness. Consciousness is not a conscious entity but conscious existence, the substratum, the limitless principle pervading the entire universe. Your difficulty is due to your identification with the experiencing entity who wants to remain after the dissolution of the body. Self-ignorance causes us to cling to the body.

*Jiva* is only a micro stream of consciousness. Once Self-knowledge is hard and fast, the micro stream has no objection with “merging” with the macro, the “ocean” of universal consciousness. The need for experiences here and hereafter is an indication of Self-ignorance. The one who intimately knows the truth in his heart no longer cares for experiencing anything, not even the ultimate *punya* of the celestial realms.

PS: There is no such thing as non-existence, because non-existence requires an

existent principle to testify to and validate the existence of “non-existence.”