

The Proof Is in the Pudding

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Mark: It seems to me that the teachings can be split into two groups, one group of teachings that have immediate practical and positive use regardless of truth (*karma yoga*, meditation, *vasana* awareness, developing the four qualifications and *dharmic* values, seeing the limitations in controlling the material world, etc.) and the second group that deals with the “truths” of how reality was/is created and works (mostly referring to the law of *karma*, reincarnation, Creation, casual -> subtle -> gross, etc.).

Rory: Yup, the initial teachings are geared to *antahkarana shuddi*, purifying the mind in order to make it a fertile field for self-knowledge. When the student is ready, this knowledge then takes the form of the three stages of Vedanta: *sravana* (listening), *manana* (reasoning) and *nididhyasana* (integrating). The subject matter thus moves from *karma yoga*, *dharma*, qualifications, etc. to the nature of the self, *Isvara* and *jiva*.

Mark: Can anything in that second group actually be known with certainty? Do enlightened beings think that self-realization has proven the truth of the second group teachings?

Rory: Well, as they say, the proof is in the pudding.

The whole objective of Vedanta is *moksa*, which means freedom. So the teaching is “proven” by its fruit – i.e. freedom. Alas, no one else can validate your enlightenment for you. Only you can do that, and that is a matter of whether or not you are happy, complete and satisfied in yourself or whether you are still bound by psychological dependence on the world of objects.

In short, the teachings are validated solely by their results: the removal of the *jiva*'s suffering.

Mark: Even if they were derived from reasonable logical deductions, as honest and objective minds seeking truth, we must accept that a logical argument is not proof, at best is it not merely a reasonable theory, in the same manner that “the theory of evolution” will remain considered a theory, despite being based on an enormous amount of concrete fact based analysis? And if we are being completely honest, the evidence for evolution far surpasses what evidence the *Vedas* give for causal bodies, yet the biologist still has the maturity to call it a theory; should modern Vedantists not also be willing to say when something is clearly a theory? Or am I missing something? Can you honestly tell me these parts of the teachings are more than theories?

Rory: Vedanta uses words to reveal what is beyond words, and necessarily employs duality to unfold a vision of non-duality.

Vedanta's two main topics are the self and the Creation. When it comes to the self, we have numerous *prakriyas*, teaching methodologies, that should, when properly employed, reveal the nature of oneself to be the self – pure awareness.

That's the fundamental truth and purpose of Vedanta.

It's designed to prove to you that you are changless awareness and that anything and everything experientable is an object appearing in you. This goes beyond theory and is an undeniable fact, verifiable by our own direct experience. That said, the *ahamkara* (ego) is hardwired to identify with body, mind, thoughts and a conditioned self-concept, so the battle against ignorance is not a one-time affair. (It's no coincidence the *Bhagavad Gita* was set on a battlefield!).

The second aspect of the teaching is understanding *mithya*, the Creation – specifically, *Isvara* and the *jiva* – in relation to the self.

This is where we enter the realm of what some might consider more speculative or conceptual. There are aspects of the teaching understood as theoretical in nature, such as the Creation theories (of which Vedanta, hedging its bets, provides more than one). In this respect, Vedanta provides a model for understanding *mithya*.

It should be noted that Vedanta is in no way opposed to science. The purpose of both is knowledge. I'm quite interested in certain fields of science and have found that, on the other side of the Newtonian paradigm, many aspects of *Upanishadic* teaching can be correlated with the latest current scientific understandings.

Crucially, however, Vedanta reaches beyond the limits of the physical sciences. The physical sciences are a means of knowledge for the physical universe. Vedanta is a means of knowledge for the self – and this by extension includes the self as it appears as the world of objects. Science seeks to understand the dream within the dream, which it is equipped to do. But it cannot penetrate beyond the dream, because that is beyond its scope as a means of knowledge. A means of knowledge is always specific to that knowledge. Just as the eyes are a means of knowledge for sight and not for sound, the physical sciences are a means of knowledge for the world of *mithya* rather than *satya*.

The scope of Vedanta's teaching is classified by many as “metaphysical.” Yet, in seeking to understand the phenomenal (the effect), when we fail to account for the noumenal (the cause), we can only ever have incomplete knowledge.

You mentioned the causal body and seemed to imply that it may be out of whack with our current scientific understanding. I wouldn't be so certain. At a microcosmic level, the causal body equates with what psychologists call the unconscious, and at the macrocosmic level it is the seed state out of which matter and form arises. It's invisible, so cannot be objectified, but its existence can be inferred by its effects. According to Vedanta, from this causal seed state, the universe eternally cycles into and out of manifestation. (As far as I know, the idea of a cyclical Creation is in line with scientists' theories). Again, being unmanifest, the causal cannot be quantified, but it logically must exist because every effect requires an ultimate cause (hence the term “causal”).

Mark: James' definition of enlightenment is “the hard and fast knowledge that you are the Self, unlimited boundless awareness.” This definition does not specify knowing anything about the Creation or causal bodies. Can't a *jiva* realize that they

are non-dual limitless awareness without “knowing” anything about how the Creation happens?

Rory: Certainly! The problem is that one needs to contextualise this realisation. In many ways, the easy part is the realisation “I am awareness.” A simple examination of our immediate, everyday experience can reveal this. The difficult part is integrating this knowledge and figuring out how this self, this awareness, relates to the apparent person and the apparent world appearing in it. In some ways, the realisation “I am awareness” is just the beginning of the journey. I know it was for me. I remember reading books by Eckhart, Adyashanti and Gangaji years ago and being totally sold on the fact that I was awareness – but I didn’t really know what that actually meant.

Many of the Neo-Advaita teachings focus exclusively on knowing one’s nature as awareness, which is certainly good, but without an adequate means of explaining and understanding the apparent Creation, i.e. the *jiva* and *Isvara*, questions arise and confusion is inevitable.

I certainly don’t think it’s necessary to spend decades studying every nuance of Vedantic teaching, unless of course one wants to (I happen to enjoy doing so) but the basics are necessary just to provide a grounding and orientation. You do need “the whole enchilada” as James puts it. I learned the hard way that cherry-picking key aspects of the teaching just doesn’t work. It’s like taking a map and cutting out only your favourite parts of it and then wondering why you got hopelessly lost.

I think the main problem with the Neo approach is they leave *Isvara* out of the equation entirely. They talk about the *jiva* and the self, but miss out the middle rungs of the “ladder” completely. Understanding *Isvara* is what bridges all seeming division between the *jiva* and self.