

# The Causal Body, Science and Vedanta

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2019-10-05

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3965>

**Mark:** Another question, regarding reincarnation and binding *vasanas*. What about the food *vasana*: Doesn't this basically remain binding for everyone, unless willing to starve themselves? If *karma* and rebirth stop only when the *vasanas* all become non-binding, wouldn't this one also need to be rendered non-binding to avoid reincarnation? Or perhaps we get around this because food is generally so readily available, and we aren't often challenged to test our knowledge in the experience of starving to death. Maybe the knowledge needs to be so well assimilated that even in the event you can't obtain food you still remain unattached and identified with the limitless Self. I think I just answered my own question, but please elaborate if you have anything to say about this one.

**Rory:** The need to eat is a physiological function pertaining to the body-mind-sense complex. It's just the nature of the instrument. Of course one will naturally develop preferences with regard to food and drink. Problems only arise when those preferences become binding; when one becomes unnecessarily obsessed with or addicted to food or conversely if one develops an eating disorder and a binding aversion to food. Both are symptomatic of underlying psychological issues that should be addressed.

Generally though, as long as properly managed, the body's appetites for food, sleep, rest, sex, etc. shouldn't in themselves cause *karmic* problems. Performing all actions as *karma yoga* helps neutralise any potential attachment, and self-knowledge negates the sense of doership altogether, and you see all action as generated by *Isvara* and belonging to *mithya*.

**Mark:** Regarding the causal body, I didn't mean to imply that it's out of whack with our current scientific understanding from a conceptual or practical point of view. But when I read that the causal body is made out of causal material, then I wonder, where did that come from and does that actually mean anything? I don't think science has an equal stance on the subconscious being made out of a certain subtle material.

**Rory:** This comes from the *panchikarana* teaching, the theory of how the universe is created from the top down, from the most subtle levels of matter to the grossest. The term for the matter principle is *prakriti*, and it's composed of the three *gunas*. *Sattva* is the subtlest, and it enables the "reflection" of consciousness, which sets the Creation alight much as electricity brings an otherwise inert light bulb to life. Hence we have *maya*. *Rajas* is the dynamic, creative principle said to "shatter" the mirror of *maya*, creating innumerable "shards" of seemingly separate consciousness. From this evolves the universe of gross forms, courtesy of *tamas*, the densest of the qualities.

Science is able to measure the gross level of matter, whether in the form of solid matter or energy. We have no direct way of measuring subtle matter, the realm of our thoughts, imagination and dreams, but these are available for our individual

perception. The causal level, being unmanifest, is utterly unavailable to scientific analysis. After all, unlike the gross and subtle bodies, the causal body isn't even evident to us. It can only be known by its effects, much as the roots of a plant cannot be seen but must, by deduction, be there.

**Mark:** This is something I read in the *ExploreVedanta.com* course; perhaps you could say more about what the teachings say in regard to the subtle material. To me this stuff doesn't really matter; do we really need to claim we know what type of material it's made out of? The point is that the concept helps us grasp where our thoughts come from and that the ego doesn't have authorship or claim to them.

**Rory:** You got it. For instance, no one's ever going to be able to isolate the *gunas* in a laboratory. The gross can never capture the subtle, and the causal isn't even manifest. The teaching is there to help us understand *maya*, which is frankly, in the words of the scriptures, "inexplicable"!

**Mark:** I sometimes think if the Vedantists offered this information to the world in terms of it being strictly a subjective route towards a life of freedom, it might sink in better with more types of people. Of course they say they aren't interested in changing the world, but people like James wouldn't write books if they didn't want some kind of influence. So far, whenever I've asked these questions, including in your response, I don't get the definitive answer that, "Yes, these things are absolutely true without doubt and we have proved it to ourselves; you just have to do the same." Like you said, "They're not the only model by any means, but I have yet to find better," and I would have to wholeheartedly agree with you about that. So I'm not suggesting to cherry-pick the key aspects but only to be brutally upfront and honest that certain aspects of this are only to help you grasp concepts that ultimately help you become free and perhaps eventually are proven to you, but only proven to you in your subjectivity. But who cares if they can't be proven outside of subjectivity? The point is they set us free from our formally identified limitation, I have no doubt about that, and that's really all that matters, in my opinion.

**Rory:** The key is the *satya-mithya* discrimination.

Vedanta works by a process called *adhyaropa apavada* – superimposition and negation. It provisionally acknowledges the world as having a tangible reality, and presents theories such as *panchikarana* to explain its Creation. Ultimately, however, when the student reaches a certain point, the rug is pulled from under their feet. This negation is that everything that is perceivable is *maya* and exists only in consciousness.

That's why it's best not to get too caught up in figuring out the fine details of Creation theories, etc. It's like trying to figure out what kind of snake you're seeing, whether it's poisonous and whether there's an antidote, when all along all that's actually there is a rope. The snake and the rope is Vedanta's ultimate metaphor for *maya*. The theories and *prakriyas*, teaching methodologies, are useful to a point, but they are a means to an end and are ultimately discarded.

**Mark:** I really have never understood why many "spiritual" types seem so desperate

to compete with science. Do you have any other thoughts on this subject?

**Rory:** As I said, Vedanta has no quarrel with the physical sciences. To the Vedanti, if anything, it's just not that important, because science is limited to *mithya* knowledge and is not a means of knowledge for *satya*, consciousness.

Vedanta is often described as "the knowledge that ends the need for further knowledge." It's not designed to explain in precise detail how the *mithya* world works. That's what science is for. There's no end to *mithya* knowledge, because the world of *mithya* contains uncountable objects.

Vedanta, however, can reveal the essence of all things.

If you think about it, we don't have to know all the rivers and lakes and puddles and drops of rain in the world to have knowledge of water. Similarly, we don't have to know every name and form in existence to know the essence of those forms.

It says in the *Chandogya Upanishad*:

As by knowing one lump of clay,  
We come to know all things made out of clay:  
That they differ only in name and form,  
While the stuff of which all are made is clay;

As by knowing one gold nugget,  
We come to know all things made out of gold:  
That they differ only in name and form,  
While the stuff of which all are made is gold.

A potter can create many pots, but the clay from which they are made is always the same. Therefore, if you examine one lump of clay, you then know the essence of all pots. By knowing *satya*, you know the entirety of *mithya* (not in form, but in essence).

That's why Vedanta recognises the relevance of science with regard to the *mithya* world, but ultimately sees it as irrelevant in terms of understanding the self, the cause and essence of the Creation. It can only do what it's designed to do, just as the senses have their respective objects and aren't able to perceive the self, which underlies and is subtler than the body, senses, mind, intellect and ego.

I enjoy learning about science theories and find it fascinating as our understanding of the universe grows. There's only so far science will ever be able to penetrate, however. One has to use the proper tools to get a job done. Science pertains to *mithya*. Vedanta is a means of knowledge for *satya* (and by extension, *mithya* in essence).