

# Comparing Vedanta to Other Teachings

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2019-10-20

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3969>

**Chris:** I believe I am by now fairly acquainted with Vedanta. I did not watch the particular material you listed but I've completed 15 hours of systematic lessons about Vedanta by Swami Tatadmananda from Arsha Bodha Center and many videos from Swami Sarvapriyananda. I got chills from realizing how it all makes sense.

But there are still some items that I do not fully see how they work, like the questions I've asked.

Another important influence in my understanding is the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. I've actually only heard about Vedanta through his writings, in which he praises the *Upanishads* as the greatest wisdom in the world. He developed a metaphysical system based on what he calls will, which is the same will in all of us and the entire world. The same source of all physical forces is the same as what drives us. He discovered Vedanta after he already built this system, which has striking similarities with Vedanta. But will is not *sat chit ananda*. It is actually blind striving for everything and is more demon-like than god-like. Consciousness is secondary to it and only serves its animal purposes, otherwise it's operating in dark.

The problem for me is that both make sense, and I am trying to find a middle ground to reconcile both because I cannot wave it away and jump to Vedanta.

I find that they both answer problems left unanswered by the other, but they cannot easily be forced together.

As for my understanding of Vedanta, I can know what the teaching is, but I am being intellectually honest in saying that certain points remain unclear to me or seem to jump to a conclusion I do not find plausible. My questions come from an honest place, rather than blindly accepting what is being told to me.

I believe I have the capacity to understand. After all, what sparked my initial search for answers was an intuition that came upon me on its own, realization of continued, eternal and gapless consciousness, which led me to a philosophical position called "open individualism," which, without being tied to Vedanta (or anything else), says that I am every person in the world.

These are difficult questions, and I think paradoxes are inevitable. I have found great comfort in Vedanta and at times felt indescribable bliss when everything clicked into place, but the details still need to be fleshed out if I am to enjoy lasting results of realization.

**Sundari:** I have no doubt you are very sincere, and your questions and doubts are very reasonable. Vedanta is a radical teaching and counter-intuitive. While I understand your attraction to other ideas, especially philosophical thought systems, the reason you are stuck is that you are trying to tie Vedanta together with other thought systems. While there will be similarities, because most teachings are a mixture of ignorance and knowledge, unless you have a valid means of discrimination between *satya* and *mithya* you will not be able to tell the difference.

To be free of *mithya*, you need to understand what it is and why it affects the *jiva* the way it does, which is where you are stuck with the questions you are asking.

I have already given you the answers, but they do not make sense to you. Instead of taking the word of the scripture over your ideas or doubts, you continue to cast about for answers elsewhere. Vedanta is the knowledge that ends the quest for knowledge. It is the end of the road, where a qualified inquirer ceases to be a seeker and becomes a finder, permanently. Vedanta answers all questions and removes all doubts. But, as I said in my last email, all the qualifications for Self-knowledge must be present or Self-knowledge will not obtain.

You are stuck because you do not have the requisite faith in the teachings, you are not committed to Vedanta. And because you lack qualifications, have not been properly taught and you have not been systematic in your Self-inquiry. Reasoning and doubt, the *manana* stage of Self-inquiry, are important but must be guided by a qualified teacher or you will interpret the teachings according to your own ideas, which you have. While many great thinkers, philosophers and religions come close to understanding parts of the whole, nobody else has the whole picture and a valid means of knowledge (a toolkit, as it were) with which to remove ignorance through discrimination.

I have also been a student of philosophy, but it pales in comparison to Vedanta. The birth of philosophy is one of the origins of doubt and fulfills a necessary function. When empirical, rational thinking becomes a goal unto itself, people need a system for checking whether an idea has a foundation outside plain faith. The problem with philosophy though is that while it may not be dogmatic like religion, it is not rigorous science either. While philosophy was closely connected to the investigation of our origins from antiquity, secular philosophy in general enters the messy sphere of opinion and belief nonetheless. Many philosophers offer their ideas of truth with brilliant arguments but do not offer truth that stands alone and independent of their views.

Knowledge of objects in the world of duality, "in the box," is qualitatively and immeasurably different from Self-knowledge, non-duality, which is outside the box and explains everything inside the box. Unlike knowledge of objects, Self-knowledge never changes; it is always true because it is independent of everything. Without Self-knowledge, we are still bound by ignorance of our true nature and believe we need to do or get something to be complete. So, even if there were happiness in knowing what is going on in the box, we aren't completely satisfied. Wisdom without Self-knowledge fails because, in our attempt to find wise solace, we find our thoughts, no matter how philosophical and refined can only moderately affect our emotions, i.e. our conditioning. We remain the limited person we think we are.

The high-level questions about what we should do with life in philosophy come to no agreement; all the philosophers have tastes and ideas of their own. Philosophers diverge greatly in what else to do with life other than to examine the pillars of thought. There is a never-ending list of options to believe in, all of them dependent on objects for happiness, even if the objects are your own thoughts, feelings or good deeds.

Vedanta (Self-knowledge) has a completely different approach. It is a critical path in that it investigates ALL ideas in light of Self-knowledge, not our own ideas or beliefs. It points out what is missing and provides indisputable evidence of ideas that do not stand up to the logic of existence. Constrained as most are by our own opinions and

conditioning, are we really the best person to know what is objectively true about ourselves or anything? We say no, you are not, no matter how logical and rational your thinking seems to be. If you have only your ideas and the ideas of others to contend with, the truth can only be subjective no matter how vigorous the thinking, which is where you are stuck, the reason being that there will always be things about yourself you cannot know by digging into your mind or the ideas of others who think their ideas come from them.

To truly know thyself, you need the tools to fully step out of your mind. Philosophers of old and new have no independent and proven means of knowledge, offered in a methodology that works to remove ignorance of our true nature if the mind is qualified and correctly taught and the knowledge applied. They only have their own ideas about life.

Many people have tried to interpret the sacred texts of Vedanta. The *Bhagavad Gita* – “The Song of God” – is one of the world’s most important spiritual documents insofar as it is the essence of the *Upanishads*, humanity’s most ancient extant texts on the science of life. The *Gita* was written about 300 years before the birth of Christ and provides a timeless solution to the existential crises that we all face at some point in our lives, IF it is properly taught and understood, which it rarely is. The *Upanishads* are revealed texts, not the philosophical contentions of individuals or groups of individuals or the visions of mystics, which are often the basis of various religions.

Most inquirers, like yourself, who come to Vedanta have a ton of indoctrination from other teachings to work through. It’s not that there is anything wrong with other teachings, but most are unclear about what the Self is, nor are they able to explain the apparent reality, other than through their own experiences or beliefs. There are no fail-proof tools taught for discrimination, because none of the teachings outside of Vedanta fully understand awareness, *Isvara*, *Maya* and the *jiva* – and most importantly, what the relationship is between all three.

There is no other teaching available that has a completely independent and valid means of knowledge capable of revealing the Self and what the world is by removing duality, ignorance. Some teachings, like Buddhism, Neo-Advaita and even some philosophers and religions, have understood aspects of non-duality, but ignorance is woven in fine with knowledge. If you cannot tell the difference, which you cannot, you will swallow ignorance along with knowledge. And get stuck.

Unlike any other teaching, religion, philosophy or school of thought, Vedanta tells you right up front that you are that which gives rise to God, you are the non-dual Self, consciousness. You cannot gain the Self, because you are the Self. You are what you seek. You have a problem and suffer because your mind is under the spell of ignorance, duality. The ego is trying to “get enlightened.” Vedanta teaches that you cannot improve the person nor get rid of the mind (ego), because they are not real and – not the problem.

Identification with the person, the mind and desire is the problem. It is neither possible nor necessary to get rid of the mind; it can only be understood to be not-Self through the removal of ignorance by Self-knowledge. Once the true nature of the mind is known to be the Self, binding *vasanas* are rendered non-binding and the sense of doership is negated. But the mind remains – and is no longer troubles the *jiva* anymore. *Moksa* is freedom from and for the *jiva* because as the Self you are already free.

However, to be free means you need to understand what it means to be the Self and not the *jiva*. Purely cognitive understanding does not remove suffering. To repeat: to understand what Vedanta teaches, qualifications are necessary or discrimination between what is real – you, the SELF/*satya* – and the objects that appear in you, that which is apparently real – *mithya* – will not be possible. Therein lies the rub.

Many people who are close in their understanding of *Isvara/jiva* and awareness objectify the Self, thinking it is something other than them, a kind of solipsism. Or they personalize the Self, thinking that by “the Self” we mean the reflection of the Self in the mind, the *jiva*, or person. The Self is the source of the reflection, which is caused by *Maya*. Taking the reflection to be the Self is indirect knowledge, as I explained before. You know about the Self but do not understand what it means to BE the Self. Direct knowledge is the permanent, unshakeable knowledge: I AM THE SELF, not the *jiva*. The *jiva* and all objects subtle and otherwise are known to ME. They are me, but I am not them.

*Brahman/atman*, or *Isvara*, are both terms for awareness, consciousness, or the Self. They are just words, a finger pointing to the moon – but we must understand what they are pointing to. To do so, we need a means of knowledge capable of deconstructing *mithya*. We must understand who or what the *jiva* is, what *Isvara* refers to and why, and what is the same and what is different about both, as stated but bears repeating. For Self-knowledge to translate into the life of the *jiva*, *mithya* must be understood in light of Self-knowledge, not in light of our own subjective or limited understanding or any other teaching. *Mithya* may not be real, but it is not going to disappear just because you have realized your true nature to be the Self, the source of all.

Self-realization is where the “work” of Self-inquiry begins. Self-actualization is a whole other matter.

As I have said repeatedly now, without all the necessary qualifications present in the mind, the mind or ego will be suspicious of the teachings or confused, as it will not have the requisite faith in them to put aside its own opinions, biases and beliefs. It will keep comparing them to other thought systems. Non-duality is not a theory in practise, it is not a philosophy nor is it the fabrication of teachings based on a prophet or mystic. Vedanta is called a “*brahma vidya*,” which means the “science of consciousness.” It is an objective and scientific analysis of the true nature of reality and your experience, based on the facts. Like any other science, it is not personal, and it has a methodology which, if followed with great dedication and commitment, will provide irrefutable knowledge that is *moksa*, if the student is qualified. Vedanta is simply the truth about you, not your truth or my truth or anyone’s truth: the Truth.

Vedanta is also called *apauruseya jnanam*, meaning “not the philosophy or experience of one person” like a prophet or a mystic, as in the Buddha, Jesus or Abraham. It is not a belief system or religion either. Vedanta predates all known religious or philosophical paths because it is the pathless path that underpins all other paths. It is an independent teaching, or *sruti*, which means “that which is heard.” It is also called Self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge, unlike object knowledge, stands on its own and is always true because it is true to the Self, meaning it cannot be dismissed or negated by any other knowledge. Self-knowledge is different from knowledge of objects, which is object-based, not subject-based. Knowledge of objects is not knowledge unless it is true to the object. If I am looking at a dog and my eyes and mind are functional, I will

not see a cat. If it is “my” knowledge, then it is my interpretation of an object (*pratibasika*, or subjective reality), which is not necessarily knowledge. Ignorance (or my point of view) causes me to see or experience objects in a certain way because of “my” conditioning. People believe that ignorance is knowledge because they believe that what they experience is knowledge. It may be knowledge, but it may not be. Self-knowledge is neither confirmed or negated by anyone’s opinions or experience.

Vedanta is revealed to the mind of man, not thought up by man nor the result of any action on anyone’s part, therefore you can trust it. So, what do we mean by “revealed”? Don’t all religions claim this? What Vedanta means by revealed is simple. A good example of revealed knowledge is Einstein’s “discovery” of the law of relativity and gravity or Thomas Edison’s discovery of [applications of] electricity. To discover the means to uncover something that was there but previously unknown. Relativity, gravity and electricity describe how the world works according to the laws of physics, not according to Einstein or Edison. Gravity, relativity and electricity do not care if you believe in them. They operate the same way whether you understand what they are or not.

It is the same with awareness. Awareness does not care if you have realized your true nature or not, because it is unaffected by knowledge or ignorance. Liberation from ignorance is for the apparent person who lives in the apparent reality. As awareness, you have always been free, which is why *moksa*, or freedom, is discriminating you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you; in other words, disidentifying with the person as your primary identity – AND knowing what that means so that Self-knowledge translates into all areas of life. Vedanta is freedom from the person and for the person.

You will not proceed with Self-inquiry without faith in the teachings of Vedanta, and as long as you compare them to other teachings. By “faith” we do not mean blind faith. We mean faith pending the outcome of your investigation. The basic message of Vedanta is that you are the ever-full, unchanging Self, whole and complete, ever-present. Bliss, or non-dual love, is your nature. That is all. But what does that mean for the *jiva*? That is where all the teaching takes place.

To proceed with us as your teachers, and you definitely need to be properly taught, you need to sign on to the logic and stick with the methodology. You cannot read your way to *moksa*, because it is impossible for the *jiva*, or ego, to “get enlightened.” Vedanta removes the ignorance of your nature through Self-knowledge; nothing the ego does can achieve that, because the ego, or “doer,” is the problem. You need to put on the shelf ALL your other ideas, at least temporarily. If you like them much better, you can always take them back. We are not invested in what you do or do not believe in. But to teach you, you must be committed or you are wasting your time and ours.

My suggestion stands. You need to start at the beginning of the teachings, as I explained to you yesterday. Have you even read what I sent you without thinking you know it all already? Begin by conducting a fearless moral inventory: What do you really want? Next, make a list of all the qualifications and track yourself on them on a moment-to-moment basis. We have tons of material available for you on our website, most of it free. Follow the instructions for Self-inquiry, if you decide you want to remove ignorance of your true nature above all else.

Accept the scripture as the boss, nothing else. Then I can teach you.

**Chris:** I forgot to mention I have read *Bhagavad Gita* with commentary by Shankara, some of the *Upanishads* with his commentaries and currently I am reading *Vivekachudamani*, which brings me great joy to read, as it is very poetic and insightful.

I have also followed Rupert Spira for a while, but I find Neo-Advaita to be dry and sort of a one-trick pony. I definitely prefer traditional teaching.

I will continue to read and learn about Vedanta, but to be honest, I would rather just throw it all away and forget everything because I feel like I will drive myself crazy thinking about all this. I don't think I will be able to just drop everything and return to regular ego-centric materialistic life, but I sure sometimes feel like doing so, just to retain sanity.

Thank you for your help and guidance.

**Sundari:** I am glad to hear that you are reading and enjoying the scriptures. To me, it seems that the problem is not that you are not familiar with the scriptures but that you are not fully on board with Vedanta. You have not understood what Self-inquiry entails. I repeat what I said in my last emails.

You cannot read your way to *moksa*; it will not work unless you are highly qualified, which is very rare indeed. You need to be taught properly by a qualified teacher, and to start at the beginning. We can help you, but we cannot do so unless you are committed.

You will not find all the answers to your doubts in other teachings. Neo-Advaita teaches the Self but has no teaching for *mithya*. Unfortunately, you cannot just jump over to the Self and pretend *mithya* does not exist. It may not be real, but it does exist because you experience it. You need to be taught what that means.

Certainly, you can give it all up, that's easy. But nothing else will satisfy you, of that you can be certain. Self-inquiry is hard if freedom from limitation is what you are really after. But if you stick with it, the rewards are beyond price. There are no shortcuts. If you continue the way you are going, you will continue to frustrate yourself. The choice is yours.

I am happy to help you.

~ Much love, Sundari