

A Marathon Satsang for Vedantawallas

Ram (James Swartz)

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Bob: Some more loose ends to tie up (which shows I am not yet ready for membership in The Galactic Congress of Saints and Sages! 😊 You said there is just *atma* with apparent knowledge or ignorance of itself.

Apparent" here meaning temporary, in the status of *mithya*, as discussed earlier.

Do you mean there is just *atma* with temporary knowledge of itself or temporary ignorance of itself? You have said earlier that both knowledge and ignorance occur in *atma*.

I can understand temporary ignorance of itself. Ignorance is what normal human life begins as; it is my experience. With enquiry and self-knowledge, this temporary ignorance drops away leaving myself, *atman*, present.

But temporary knowledge of itself?? I don't follow. Isn't the very nature of *atma* awareness or knowledge, as in *sat CHIT ananda*? So how can there be temporary knowledge of itself?

By "knowledge" here I don't think you mean information or knowledge of objects. I can understand how in *atma* both knowledge of objects and/or ignorance of objects can exist. But knowledge of itself as *atman*? Surely such knowledge cannot be temporary/apparent but rather permanent/absolute, which makes it *sat*, not *mithya*.

I can see one possible answer. Could you be referring to the process of recognition or perhaps to the initial impact of recognition? Any process is temporary until the end result is achieved, which is recognition of myself as *atman*. When that happens, the process is not needed any more and drops away, temporary, apparent.

After the initial impact of recognition, that initial impact subsides and all that remains is the abiding stillness of myself, *atman*. Just as once I have started the motor car, there is no more starting, it drops off and the engine continues running. Hence the process and initial recognition, i.e. knowledge, are temporary. Is this what you mean?

James: You are confused by your understanding of *maya*. Think of it this way: there is only one self, awareness. It is self-knowing. When ignorance enters the picture, it apparently does not know what it is. Ignorance, *maya*, makes the impossible possible. It is impossible that the self not know itself, but it seems to happen. Thus the ignorance is not real. It can be removed by apparent self-knowledge. Knowledge is apparent too because it disappears when the self realizes itself. The subtle body is not conscious, so it cannot realize anything. But it is full of apparent ignorance as a result of its sojourn in the apparent reality. So Vedanta takes away the apparent ignorance, leaving the self free of apparent ignorance and apparent knowledge. At that time it realizes that it does not need knowledge to know itself, because it is self-knowing. *Moksa* is the self realizing it is self-knowing, i.e. free of both knowledge and ignorance.

Bob: Continuing on the soap opera entitled *Bob and Atman* (like a possible Shakespearan drama, *Romeo and Hamlet!!*). *Atman + upadhi + avidya = jiva*.

I know I am being very clinical here. Up to now, I took Bob to be *jiva*, i.e. the whole combination of *atman*, *upadhi* and *avidya*. Now I understand Bob to be only the *upadhi* and *avidya*. The *upadhi* is enlivened by the presence of *atman*, like a bulb is lit by the presence of electricity. Bob by itself is just a dress or lifeless puppet. *Atman*, the life-giver, is nameless, formless.

James: Bob is *atma* thinking it is Bob, owing to *avidya*.

Bob: This is why Bob cannot drop ignorance, it is an integral aspect of Bob. It is *atman*, associated with Bob, who falls under the spell of ignorance, and so it is *atman* who drops the spell of ignorance. Bob is just the field, *Kurukshetra*. The drama is only about *atman* with a spell or without a spell.

James: This is the answer to your question above about apparent knowledge and apparent ignorance. It should be with or without an apparent spell. Every object in you, awareness, is apparently real, meaning “not always present” like you and subject to change, unlike you. You are real.

Bob: Who then pursues the *purusharthas*? Who exercises choice and will? Who does *sadhana*?

Answer: since Bob is just a puppet, Bob cannot enquire. It is *atman* under the spell of temporary ignorance who enquires into its own nature through Bob.

James: Yes.

Bob: Putting it personally, I, *atman* under the spell of temporary ignorance, in my human form, enquire into my own nature. Bob is my instrument and the mind in Bob has to be made *sattvic* enough by reducing the *vasanas* and *samskaras* to manageable levels. So I, *atman* under the spell (of *avidya*), do *sadhana*.

James: Yes. *Atma* under the spell of apparent ignorance is Bob. It does *sadhana* because it thinks it is not what it is and therefore wants to know its nature.

Bob: Since Bob is only the *upadhi*, is *atman* a doer? Yes and no. Yes, in the relative sense, when *atman-plus-upadhi* does action through the *upadhi*.

James: *Atma* seems to be a doer when *avidya* is operating.

Bob: No, in the absolute sense. The nature of *atman* is pure witnessing, as in *sat chit*. *Atman* is inherently a non-doer.

James: Yes.

Bob: Like, is the sky blue? Yes and no. Yes, in the relative sense of perception, and no, in the absolute sense of colourless space.

Bob by himself cannot do any action. Bob appears to be doing action simply because of being enlivened by *atman*. It is *atman* who is the real doer. Therefore *atman* is the experiencer and enjoyer, *bhokta*, in the relative sense. But in the absolute sense, *akarta*, non-doer. *Atman* is both *bhokta* and *akarta*. This applies even to a psychopath. Wow!

James: Here you have Bob and *atman* as two conscious entities, but there is only one conscious entity, *atma*. Bob is just a name for *atma*. The subtle body, the experiencer – which is not conscious – is the doer at the behest of the *gunas*. The *gunas*, not *atma*, is the doer, although the *gunas* cannot cause action unless they are illumined by *atma*, so *atma* is an apparent doer.

Bob: The plot thickens; there is a subplot. There is an *ahamkara* which claims doership. What is *ahamkara*? A crystallised collection of thoughts, situated in the subtle body, about myself, based on the qualities of the physical body and subtle body, e.g. “I am fat/thin, I am clever/stupid, I am angry/calm,” etc. The push for action is based on *vasanas*, *samskaras* and their subsequent desires. So in the ordinary person it feels like the *ahamkara* is the doer and the *upadhi* is the vehicle for action. In actual fact it is neither *ahamkara* nor Bob but *atman*, under the spell of ignorance, who is the doer.

James: Who seems to be a doer.

Bob: What is the difference between *vasanas* and *samskaras*? I am not sure, but it feels like *vasanas* are deeper and more powerful, the product of many lifetimes. *Samskaras* seem to be less powerful and developed in this lifetime. Sometimes they are used interchangeably. Either way, they are trouble!!

James: *Samskaras* are deep formations of related *vasanas* that make up your character, your *svadharma*.

Bob: The road map seems to be: *BRAHMAN* ----> *atman* --- plus *upadhi* ----> *jivatman* ---> plus *avidya* ---> *jiva*, “Bob,” *atman* under the spell of ignorance minus *avidya*, minus *upadhi* equals *jivanmukta*.

James: Awareness minus apparent ignorance equals *moksa* for awareness. I get the gist, but the way you put it is unnecessarily complicated.

Bob: An interpretation of *rajju-serpa*: *atman* - Bob = rope - snake.

James: Awareness minus ignorance is freedom.

Bob: *Atman* is always awake, first under the spell, then freed from the spell when it drops away.

Bob is a puppet, neither awake nor asleep, insentient, until enlivened by *atman*.

Problem: the rope, under the spell of ignorance, mistakes itself to be snake = *atman* under the spell of ignorance mistakes itself to be Bob. Or another metaphor: colourless space mistakes itself to be blue.

To extend the metaphor of rope-snake, if there is a fire, it is the rope which gets burnt, not snake. Similarly, with the fire of knowledge, *atman's* spell gets burnt away, and in a manner of speaking, *atman* shakes its head, clears the ashes away, opens its eyes and sees again. But not Bob. The burning by self-knowledge involves *atman*, not Bob.

James: Again, there is an assumption that Bob is conscious. Bob is just a name given to *atma*. There is only *atma* with apparent ignorance or apparent knowledge.

Bob is just a name for awareness under the spell of Ignorance. There is no actual Bob. There is just awareness plus three bodies or five sheaths. Let's leave Bob out of it. There is nothing personal going on anywhere.

Bob: What happens at death? The *upadhi* drops off. The gross body returns to the gross realm, disintegrates and gets recycled. Did you see the movie *Dead Poets Society* with Robin Williams? In the old school scene there were photos of previous students who were dead and he described them as fertiliser for daffodils!!! The subtle body returns to the subtle realm, also disintegrates and gets recycled. Some poor guy in the future will get my residual *vasanas/samskaras*, both positive and negative! The causal body returns to the causal realm and who knows what happens there! Thus *viswa* to *Virat*, *tejas* to *Hiranygarbha*, *prajna* to *maya*.

But *atman*, freed from ignorance, does not go anywhere, does not move, just remains as is. *Atman* without an *upadhi* is known as *brahman*. *Aham brahmasmi*. Like space. The multi-storeyed house falls apart. But space does not move, it just remains as total space, Ramana's famous last words to mourners around him: "Where can I go?"!!!

James: There is no death, because there is only awareness and awareness was never born. Your explanation is only from within the apparent reality. Death is just a symbol of apparent change. "The one who sees action in inaction and inaction in action is indeed wise." This means that there is no real death, i.e. change. Death is just a metaphor for change.

Bob: What it feels like now is...

James: Don't trust your feelings, Bob. There is nothing experiential about this. When

you say “now” you imply that something is different from what it was before. But *moksa* is simply knowledge, understanding what is. What is does not feel like anything. So ask yourself, feels to whom? It does not feel like anything to you, awareness. There is a feeling in the subtle body that awareness observes.

Bob: I, *atman*, being bigger than Bob, a presence around and in and through Bob, enfolding Bob, looking within and seeing a Bob there, feeling a Bob within, Bob is in me. Bob moves according to how the *gunas* push the *upadhi*, while I, *atman*, watch.

James: Reality is non-dual, Bob. There are not two conscious selves. There is only awareness under the spell of *avidya*, thinking it is Bob. We need to get Bob out of all this. Bob is just a name for ordinary, non-dual, actionless, unconcerned, unborn awareness.

You are imputing experience to *atma*. *Atma* is not a doer, a looker, an intentional seer. Bob doesn't move. Bob is just an idea in awareness. And even if there is a Bob that moves, it is only an apparent movement, not an actual movement. Nothing ever happened.

Bob: Such a viewpoint is a flip from the ordinary viewpoint of Bob searching for *atma*.

James: See the two-self view here. Bob cannot search. Awareness apparently searches when it is under the spell of apparent ignorance. There is only awareness.

Bob: This is all that *moksa*, the dropping of ignorance, is, and does the flip in *atman* from *atman* plus ignorance to pure *atman* without ignorance. Bob continues, until its allotted time of death, with *atman* associated till then.

James: *Moksa* is the realization that there is no Bob to continue. There is only awareness plus three bodies with or without apparent knowledge/ignorance. There is nothing to continue, because nothing started in the first place. Your explanation is all from within the dream of ignorance.

Bob: “They are in Me, but I am not in them,” says Krishna in *Gita IX.4*.

James: This means that objects appear within the scope of awareness, but there are no objects in awareness.

Bob: However, there are statements to the contrary suggesting the reverse: “I am in the heart of all beings... *hrdsu vasatim*... in the heart, the size of a thumbnail...” Ramana pointed to his chest. What do these mean? How do we correlate these views and statements with the above expanded vision of my self?

James: There are no degrees of self-knowledge, Bob. You cannot have an expanded

or a diminished view of yourself. Ask, who is talking here? The vision of non-duality cannot be partial, just like a woman cannot be a little bit pregnant.

Bob: Is it just to help the seeker initially to focus on *atman* until they reach the true meaning of *moksa* and *atman*? Then they make the flip from *atman* is in Bob to Bob is in *atman*? I think this is the case.

James: Yes.

Bob: Where did ignorance come from? It is *anadhi*, beginningless. So it can come only from one source: *brahman*. So from *brahman* both *maya* and *Isvara* arise. Amazing how ignorance can arise from the Absolute.

Somewhere in the texts, the example of the eighteenth elephant is used. This elephant is a metaphor for an instrument or concept used to explain something that cannot be explained. So the existence of ignorance is explained in this way. Is this true?

James: Yes.

Bob: More about this ignorance: *atman* comes under the spell of ignorance at the micro level into *jiva*. Can we say that *brahman* comes under the spell of *maya* at the macro level into *Isvara*? Even at the micro level, *atman* is after all another name for *brahman* in one *upadhi*, hence *aham brahmasmi*. So ultimately it is *brahman* in an *upadhi* who comes under the spell of ignorance????

James: Yes. *Atma* and *brahman* are the same. If apparent ignorance applies to one it applies to the other. *Atma* and *brahman* are just concepts appearing in you, awareness. You are the knower of both. You are the knower of *atma*, *brahman* and Bob. These are just words known by you, awareness.

Bob: In my limited reading of the *Upanishads* and *Gita*, there seems to be no specific mention that *atman* comes under the spell of ignorance. *Jiva* is said to be influenced, while *atman* is referred to as always shining. Could you please clarify? If there are texts that state *atman* comes under the spell, could you please give me the references? I will read up on them.

James: *Jiva* is *atma* with three bodies or five sheaths. If there is apparent ignorance it has to belong to *atma/brahman* because there is only awareness. In fact it belongs to neither awareness nor to the apparent reality. It is something altogether different. It is not even an "it." It is just an explanation for something that is inexplicable.

I think it is best if you give up the Sanskrit terminology. It is just confusing you. Apart from a few Sanskrit words like *upadhi* and *gunas* and *maya* and a handful of others, the rest of these terms are gratuitous. I think you were not taught properly. Or perhaps you are self-taught? You are making this much more complicated than it is. It is going to be hard to teach you because of the way you understand the words.

It has taken me several hours to try to figure out what your doubt actually is. It is best if you come and hear it. It may be difficult for you because of the way you understand the words of Vedanta. If you are proud of your knowledge it will be hard.

Non-dual, ordinary awareness is the self. If it thinks it does not know who it is, it is apparently ignorant. When the ignorance that it is limited is removed, it sees that it is self-knowing awareness. Vedanta is just a throwaway. It removes the ignorance and then it disappears.

Self-inquiry is not about knowing Vedanta. It is about knowing you. You are very simple and immediate.

Bob: About devotion: a form is used to direct my attention and devotion to that form, the ultimate purpose being, through the form to the formless. Shankara was an intense devotee of Divine Mother.

When I know clearly I am *atman*, what do I do with the form, how do I relate to it? Who am I being devoted to, really? The *ishtadevata* I was given is Meenakshi, and I chant Shankara's *Meenakshi Panchakam* twice daily. I now see Meenakshi as a feminine, maternal representation of *atman-brahman* that I can connect with from the heart. But *atman-brahman* is myself. I now see myself. I feel I am singing to myself. The *ishtadevata* has served its purpose. Now it is up to me: I can cease or I can continue expressing my heart to Her. I have chosen to continue.

I suppose it is similar to Vashistha continuing to be a fire-ritualist even after his *moksa*.

James: Yes.

Bob: Still, a puzzle: during all these past years of *shravanam* and *mananam* I laboured under the misunderstanding of the word "apparent" as *asat* rather than *mithya*, as discussed earlier, which brings me back to my first email to you: Why would Swami Dayananda say that *atman* cannot come under the influence of ignorance? Is that his opinion? Is it based on *shastra*?

He wields the texts superbly, with great insight and erudition. I have the greatest respect for him. I accepted that statement, but struggled with it.

I am still puzzled why he said that. To me, there is no doubt that *jiva* is *atman* under the spell of ignorance. Could you comment, please, and if you prefer, this matter can be kept strictly private between us.

James: You are still stuck on the distinction between *satya* and *mithya*. It is the most difficult thing to understand. Even great *adhikaris* are confused by it. That statement was spoken from the standpoint of *atma*. When *maya* operates it comes under the spell of apparent ignorance. It is apparent ignorance, not real ignorance, because it can be destroyed by knowledge.

Sometimes the texts speak from the standpoint of *atma* and sometimes from the standpoint of *jiva* under the spell of *avidya*, i.e. the doer-enjoyer-experiencer entity. When you understand the distinction between *satya* and *mithya*, you will be free.

Moksa is *atma/mithya viveka*. "Apparent" means "experienciable, not real."

The discrimination that is *moksa* is: limitless awareness is real, i.e. you. The world (three bodies, five sheaths) is apparently you. "Real" means "unchanging." The sheaths are you, but you are not the sheaths. The sheaths are you, but the part of you that apparently changes. It is very simple. *Brahma satyam jagan mithya*. This is all you need to know.

Vedanta needs to be taught, not learned. It is only a means of knowledge that knocks off ignorance. It seems you have been learning Vedanta, not yourself as awareness. *Sravana* is very difficult owing to the tendency of the ego to interpret the meaning of words according to its *avidya*. If you get most of your knowledge by reading or from occasional teachings it is quite possible that your *avidya* will cause you to misunderstand the true meaning of the words.

Bob: We will definitely be in Tiru just to sit with you. Will you complete *Panchadasa* in the two weeks? Which chapters of *Gita* will you do? I will read up on Swami Dayananda's *Home Gita* before we come.

James: I doubt it. It depends on who comes and their level of understanding. *Panchadasa* is a huge text. I have been teaching it here for 18 hours and we are not quite a quarter done with it. I may teach a truncated version. I don't know.

Bob: We would love to see you in person, even just for a handshake!!! Perhaps a *shaktipat* may energetically electrocute us into timeless oblivion!!! Who knows, you may even present your magic certificate then. Will you speak at the GCSS?

Much gratitude for being my *guru*. I was led to you in an unexpected way, somewhat painful, but truly a blessing. Will explain later. I have taken enough of your time.

Much love and big hugs from both of us.

~ Bob

James: You are welcome, Bob.

~Much love, James