

Subjective Realities and Disembodied *Jivas*

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Simon: Dear Sundari, thank you very much for this very helpful response. There is still much to study and understand and I am eager to understand. My question had to do with those who – I am speaking in a dualistic manner – are not knowers of the truth. What I am trying to do is understand ghosts/spirits within the context of Advaita Vedanta teachings. Ghosts/spirits have been my and my wife's experience since we were children. Every culture, bar none (even Buddhists who deny the *atman*), have ghosts in their cultural lore.

Thank you again for your help, Sundari.

~ Simon

Sundari: Hello, Simon. I am happy to hear that I could be of assistance to you and it is a great pleasure on my part. I am not too sure what you mean by your question having to do with those who are not knowers of the truth. I don't understand how this line of inquiry fits in with your previous email. If you could give me more to go on it would help.

As for ghosts, angels and other disembodied beings, Vedanta is unambiguous about this topic. As there is only awareness and all objects have a dependent existence on it, disembodied *jivas* of whatever ilk are not much different from the supposedly embodied *jivas*. As reality is non-dual, they are objects that arise in you and are known to you, awareness. The apparent reality is all a dream within a dream; none of it is real. "Real" being defined as "that which is always present and never changes." Only awareness fits that definition.

Disembodied beings are *jivas* too and have a subtle body; they still have great attachment to the world of gross objects, just like embodied *jivas* do. It is desire that keeps them attached, so they are driven by their *vasanas*. But *vasanas* cannot be directly seen whereas the subtle body can be seen, even if it is not seemingly attached to a gross object like a physical body. Some people can see subtle energies such as disembodied *jivas* of whatever nature more clearly than others and are called sensitives or psychics. It is just the ability to tune in to a different bandwidth, so to speak, much like tuning in to a different TV or radio channel. It is no big deal.

This ability to perceive the subtle realm of disembodied beings is the stuff of mythology and mysticism. It does have some benefit in that it can give one the understanding that there is something outside of the information available through the normal organs of perception. The insights available in such cases are much like the insights a drug-induced high or an epiphany can provide. The problem comes in when more import is given to these insights than they actually hold. Like all subjective experiences, experiencing disembodied beings is of little use unless it delivers knowledge – and the knowledge is understood and assimilated.

As I explained to you in my last email, all knowledge is true to the object and not the subject therefore subjective knowledge may or may not contain truth whereas self-knowledge is not dependent on the object – it is self-revealing. Vedanta calls the

subjective realm of experience *pratibasika*, which means “apparently real,” and the information obtained from this is dependent on interpretation. Everyone will experience this realm differently, through the filters of their conditioning, meaning their *vasanas*.

Vyavaharika refers to the realm of empirical reality such as Newton’s world of billiard balls and clocks. This realm is apparently predictable and relatively stable. If we are both looking at a mountain, we will probably both agree that it is a mountain. But I might find it a scary mountain and you might find it a peaceful mountain which will be a result of our subjective view of the mountain. Lastly, one has the realm of *paramarthika* – the perspective of awareness. This is non-dual vision, where everything is seen as awareness, as you. It means that which is real, meaning “always present and never changing.”

The *Vedas* have a body of literature called the *Karma Kanda* which deals with the different realms in the apparent reality, all the *lokas* and the myriad *jivas* that inhabit them, from angelic to demonic, as well as many rituals for *jivas* who think they are doers and who believe they can supplicate and propitiate the gods to fulfill their desires. Much mystery, importance and hype has been attached to this by the spiritual world. It is dualistic, desire- and fear-based.

Vedanta – *veda* means “truth,” *anta* means “end” – means the truth that is at the end of the *Vedas* or as we like to say, the knowledge that ends the quest for knowledge, says very clearly: “So what? What difference does it make if it is a *jiva* with or without a gross body? What difference does it make if you can see subtle energies? If you do not have self-knowledge, you are still ignorant.” At best it may be a leading error in that it makes you realise there is something more than what you think you know or can perceive with the tools available for perception. As Vedantins we are interested in *moksa*, not silly rituals or the so-called arcane and mysterious world of spirits, channeled information or ghosts, because we are engaged in self-inquiry in order to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding. If you know that your true nature is awareness and therefore non-dual, you do not supplicate *Isvara*; you appreciate *Isvara* with the *karma yoga* attitude of gratitude because you know that although as awareness you are beyond *Isvara* – as a *jiva*, enlightened or not, embodied or not, you live in the apparent reality and so you are subject to the laws that run the *dharma* field.

It is so simple, really. The spiritual circus, which for the most part has no idea what non-duality really is, likes to make a big deal of this subjective reality of seeing disembodied beings. But seeing them has no more inherent import than seeing a bus going past in the road, a stranger crossing the street, a cat sitting on the neighbour’s wall. It has the meaning you read into it. Vedanta is about common sense.

Only self-knowledge sets you free of it all. And when you have self-knowledge, all of these things that so fascinate the ego fall away and are seen for what they are: distractions. They make no difference to awareness whatsoever.

I hope this helps!

~ Warm regards to you and your wife, Sundari