

The Avatar Concept

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Kenneth: Dear Ramji, *Hari Om!* Hello to you and Sundari both.

I have been reading through the *Upanishads* as of late. In the *Brihadaranyaka* there is a verse about the death of a *jnani* that says, "But he in whom desire is stilled suffers no rebirth. After death, having attained to the highest, desiring only the self he goes to no other world. Realizing *brahman* he becomes *brahman*."

I know you talk about how when one knows oneself as the self, the identification with the body is broken and there is liberation here and now, *jivamukti*.

However, the *jiva* still appears in awareness owing to its *prarabdha karmas* that are still fructifying. Does the above verse mean simply that once the *karmas* have exhausted themselves and the *jiva* "dies," then there is no "rebirth," meaning that no more objects appear in awareness (body, mind, world) because there are no more *karmas* to create them?

James: No. The objects continue to appear. *Isvara* continues to project them. They disappear like the belief in a desert lake disappears when it is known to be a mirage. The negation, or sublation, brought about by self-knowledge does not change experience. It only changes the way experience is viewed.

Kenneth: Does awareness then just shine as awareness but illumining no objects? Or do the macrocosmic *vasanas* still generate objects but there is no more "individual" *jiva* appearing?

James: You get it in this one, more or less. I should have read this before I wrote the last paragraph. ☺ As far as the appearance of the *jiva* is concerned, it appears too. It is just an object, an idea, in you, awareness. You just know it isn't you. So you don't identify with it. It's fine to have a *jiva* and let it do what it wants.

Kenneth: Reading through some of the *Upanishads* with Shankara's commentary, it becomes clear how implicit his *shraddha* was in the complete veracity of the *Vedas*. He even uses such logic as, "This verse in this *Upanishad* means this and is true because this verse in another *Upanishad* says so." Honestly, this sounds a lot like logic that I've heard many Christian theologians use to prove the veracity of certain Biblical passages. They'll say, "This verse in Matthew is true because this verse in Isaiah says so." It's dicey logic and uses the unproven truth of other parts of the Bible to prove another unproven part of the Bible. It does not take into account who wrote the Bible or where it came from, etc.

James: This whole argument hinges on the meaning of the word "prove." The only way you can prove the meaning of Vedanta is to subject your mind to it and let it remove your ignorance because it is beyond the scope of all other methods of proof,

i.e. perception and inference. You need to consider Shankar's mission: to revive Vedanta. He is saying that the message of non-duality is consistent throughout the *Upanishads*. He is arguing against the Buddhist, Charvakas, Samkhyas, Yogis and the Karma Kandas, the followers of the ritualistic portion of the *Vedas*. He needs to establish Vedanta as a means of knowledge (*pramana*) for *moksa* that has one message: reality is non-dual.

Kenneth: So I've got some questions about *shraddha* and origins of the *Vedas*.

Now, the *Vedas* teach about the self, which can be taken with *shraddha* and verified without a doubt. Then the *shraddha* can be discarded. However, the *Vedas* talk about a whole lot more than the self. There is all kinds of talk about gods, demons, heavens and other realms, amongst others. None of this stuff can be verified but it's still in the *Vedas*. It seems like Shankara, possibly the greatest known Vedantin of all time (except for you, Ramji) did not take any of these things to be metaphorical as we often do in the West. While the self can be verified, is the rest of the subject matter of the *Vedas* meant to remain a belief and be taken with *shraddha*? Because it's hard for me to look at the *Vedas* and say, "Well, the *Vedas* are true, revealed knowledge... except that stuff. Don't pay any mind to that part."

James: Only the *Upanishads* are a valid means of knowledge for the self. For anything in *samsara* that one might like to know about – heaven and hell, *artha* and *kama*, etc. which are beyond perception and inference – the *karma kanda* of the *Vedas* is the means.

You need to understand that Vedanta talks to the person on his or her level of understanding. We know very well that *mithya* is *mithya*, but a person in *mithya* thinks *mithya* is *satya*. So we give him or her what he or she needs at the moment. The *karma kanda* section of the *Vedas* is very cool because it keeps mentioning *Isvara*, the self, while the *vedika*, the *samsari*, goes about his or business trying to make *samsara* work. *Samsara* works better with *Isvara* involved. Eventually, by following *Vedika dharma*, which involves worship of the deities and a strictly religious lifestyle, etc. the message of Vedanta starts to seep in and inquiry develops. Yes, it is indirect knowledge, but that is all that *samsaris* are capable of.

Kenneth: About the origin and revelation of the *Vedas*: When we say awareness revealed the *Vedas*, what are we saying? I know you talk about it not coming through people but to people. That makes enough sense. But, as awareness is a non-doer, then how is this accomplished? When we say awareness revealed the teachings, do we mean awareness as the macrocosmic mind revealed the *Vedas*?

James: Yes. Remember, awareness as *Isvara* has all powers, including the power to think and act. No human being could put this all together. My book is probably unique in the world of Vedanta because it reveals the big picture in one brilliant snapshot. If you consider the way the logic organizes the content you can very well understand that it did not come from a person or persons. Plus, and this is not something you might know nor need you believe it, but when you get to a certain stage, meaning once the knowledge has obliterated your person, you are effectively *Isvara* minus the omnipotence and the knowledge of all the facts. So a *rishi* is not really a normal person who has stopped seeking and realized his or her identity with

awareness. That story is gone. He or she is *Isvara*, an *avatar*, the self in a body, that knows it is the self in a body and is so much the self in a body that it does not think it is the self in a body. The wankers that call themselves *avatars* are not *avatars* at all, because they call themselves *avatars*. There is still someone there to be something. As it is understood, it is just a status in *samsara*.

There is no *samsara* for *rishis*. You only understand this when you are ready to understand it, when it happens to you. Vedanta was revealed by *rishis*, who are *Isvara*. There are always *rishis*. It is an institution in awareness, an office like president. People stop being people and then they are capable of filling the office. But they do not have to run for re-election. ☺ We only have to make this point about the origins of Vedanta at the beginning to assure *adhikaris* (who have been following the teachings of individuals like Nisargadatta and Ramana, who were men of integrity, and the lesser modern luminaries in the so-called Advaita world) who have realized that the teachings – such as they are – cannot close the sale. I am working on a new book now, and one title that came to me the other day – I probably won't choose it – was *Awaken from Awakening* because Vedanta is basically for people who have tried everything or tried one thing until it became clear that personal teachings and teachers teaching from their experience can't close the sale. They get you going, introduce you to the concepts but when it comes to *moksa* they don't work. The means of knowledge needs to be impersonal. There needs to be a methodology. Once you are hooked you can see very clearly that it is a science, that it can only come from consciousness, like every great thing can be understood to be much more than the creation of an individual.

In any case signing on to the party line about the origins of Vedanta is not necessary. If you expose your mind to the teaching it will gradually improve your life, and if you stick with it you will become free at some point.

Kenneth: And lastly, one more picky question: What is the real deal with *avatars* and incarnations? I know you really avoid this question because it can sidetrack people into a spiritual sinkhole when they should really be going for *moksa*. But again, the concept is in the scripture. And I love the scripture, and want to know. People like Shankara seem to refer to it as being real. Is it just a balancing of the creation? Causal forces creating a particular kind of teacher for a particular situation?

James: I tried to explain it above. The people who bring this knowledge have to have bodies, so they are *avatars*. An *avatar* just means “incarnated.” The effect of the knowledge is to destroy ignorance which is the source of *adharma*, so it establishes *dharma*. Yes, I don't like the idea, because it makes Vedanta look like it is a mystical thing. The way to look at it is as a literary device, although you are right about the Indians. They take it literally. It works that way too. But you have to more or less be born into the Indian *pratibhasika* spiritual realm for it to work. From the *vyavarika* realm it just creates confusion. This is why I stay away from it.

~ Lots of love, James