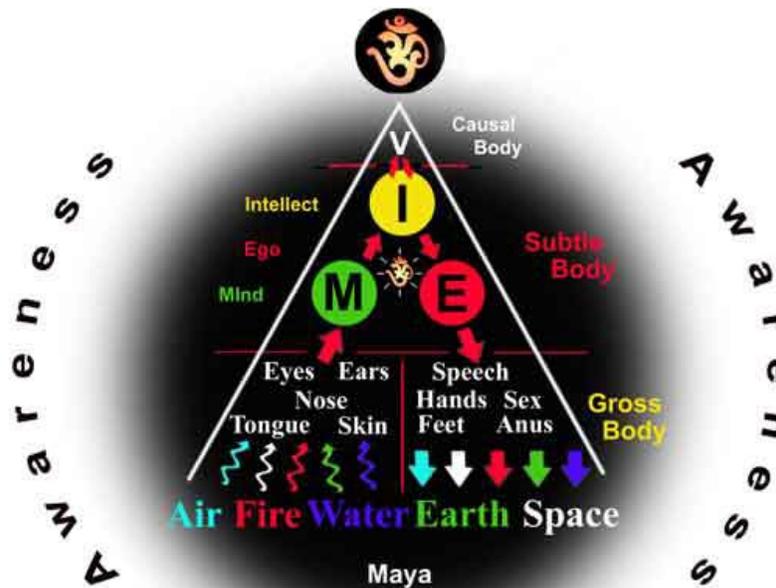


Discrimination between the Self and the Not-Self



Creation

No matter how obviously separate I seem from the objects of my experience and no matter how separate objects seem from each other, nothing, except the self, stands alone. The body, for example, is actually an aggregate of common elements drawn from various sources, a shifting sand bar across which the elemental ocean ebbs and flows, its constituents changing from moment to moment. Where does it begin and the world end? If reality is non-dual the barriers separating the mind from the body, the emotions from the mind, the individual from the Self, the body from other bodies and the elements can only be the result of a misperception or misunderstanding, an attempt to impose order on an apparently chaotic universe. Science assures us that we're living in an orderly universe evolving according to a vast cosmic plan, religion that our purposeful world manifested from the mind of a just and disciplined divinity. Are these far-fetched views or a sensible description of reality?

In spite of the apparent disorder things do seem to work out over time. Unseen laws of cause and effect allow us to venture forth with a reasonable expectation that we can find what we seek. Scientists aim probes at empty destinations which years later intersect planets millions of

miles away. Water is never dry nor sugar sour. The sun goes up and comes down with frightening regularity. Because we can count on everything to follow its nature, we can search for happiness. How frustrating it would be to come here with five fully functioning knowledge-gathering senses only to discover that a perverse Creator had neglected to provide sense stimuli. What a disappointment it would be to be the proud possessor of an intellect in a world bereft of ideas or a sensitive heart in a world without feelings.

Most of us are so busy chasing the things we want and avoiding what we don't, we haven't time to appreciate how skillfully we're put together, how neatly we dovetail into the universe. Rather than inquire into who we are, day in and day out we mindlessly steam down the tracks of life pursuing happiness, looking neither left nor right.

The complex process of experience is so instinctive, subtle and fleeting, we don't even realize how it works. From the individual's point of view life is one long experience broken into many small experiences. Information comes in from the world through the senses and I react. After enduring a seemingly endless procession of stimuli and an equally countless number of responses, the lights go out and I die. Although nothing can be done to change the mechanism of experience - even it was desirable to do so - it is helpful to analyze the way it works because it has a direct impact on the investigation of the self.

The reflected awareness that bounces off the tiny mirror of an individual intellect and makes perception and inference possible casts such a small penumbra of light that it is impossible for it to reveal the complete cognitive process. It may reveal those parts of the chain of experience that are less subtle than it but it cannot illumine the causal factors of which it is an effect. Modern psychology has developed an understanding this process, which Vedanta does not contradict. But, because it assumes that consciousness is an effect of matter, it does not understand the actual relationship between awareness/consciousness and matter and therefore is of no help in our inquiry into the self.

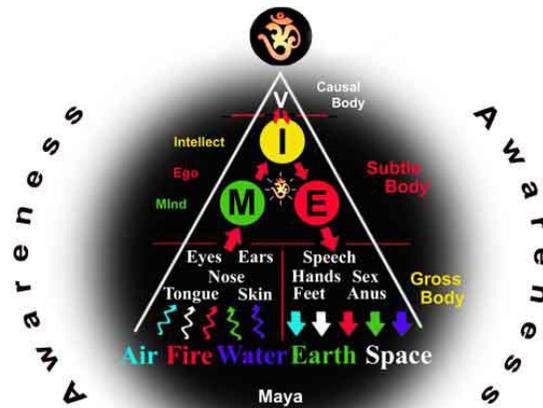
The Vedic idea that externally self-existing, indivisible, non-dual consciousness, the substrate of material and psychic reality, without requisitioning the material from another source, transforms itself into matter without compromising its original nature, intelligently divides into five elements which subsequently split and combine to create the infinite diversity of names and forms that confront our senses is incomprehensible to the materialist mind. Yet, if the ancients are correct, this (or something akin to it) seems to be what happened. Quaint as it may seem, the ancient model (see the graphic above) provides a useful explanation of the relationship between the Self and its three bodies, one that is essential

if we want to make the discrimination that will free us from dependence on gross and subtle objects.

At the expense of stating the obvious something cannot come from nothing. If the universe has a beginning as science, common sense and scripture claims, what was here first: consciousness or matter? According to Vedanta, the material universe evolved out of consciousness. Consciousness is both the substance of which the creation is made and the intelligence that shapes its names and forms and operates the laws that control the behavior of matter and the conscious beings in the way that a spider is both the substance of its web and the intelligence that shapes it.

To a mind tied to the senses this is tantamount to saying that something evolved out of nothing. Because Western material science is tethered to the senses it cannot experimentally verify the existence of consciousness because consciousness is subtler than even the most subtle material object. Even though consciousness is self evident and all material objects, gross and subtle, are revealed in its light and none reveal it, science is forced to incorrectly conclude that consciousness evolved out of matter. How this can happen is a complete mystery for anyone who understands the nature of reality because matter is inert. The obvious conclusion, one that seems to have escaped the brightest minds of our age, is that matter evolved out of consciousness.

Although matter ultimately evolves from consciousness, it passes through an intermediate or subtle stage. The material elements are said to derive from the subtle elements, but where do the subtle elements come from? To find the answer we have to inquire a bit more. Just as a mighty oak potentially exists in a tiny acorn, the universe potentially exists in an invisible or unmanifest 'seed' condition, the finest level of existence. The 'seed' state, the macrocosmic causal body, is comprised of three basic energies. When these energies, light (*sattva*), activity (*rajas*), and darkness or substance (*tamas*), are undifferentiated there is no cosmos, a condition or state of perfect potential energy. When disturbed, for whatever reason, the subtle and gross elements come into being and unfold the universe.



Our discussion of the cognitive process begins with the apparently mysterious statement that the sense organs 'arise' from the elements. The five elements in order of subtlety are: space, air, fire, water, and earth. Their five corresponding properties give rise to the five perceptive senses whose instruments are: ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose. For example, the property of space is sound. The self, consciousness, the 'unstruck sound,' is beyond space and therefore soundless.

Although consciousness is non-dual is has the power to appear as subject and object, cause and effect or in religious language the creator and the creation. When you have duality you have tension, continual vibration. Assuming infinite matter superimposed on limitless consciousness, would it be reckless to speculate that over trillions of years, one day, when the mix was just right, the first tiny ear emerged from the cosmic soup and made it possible for consciousness to listen to itself in the form of matter?

The property of fire is light. The sun, for example, is a massive fire radiating light throughout the solar system making it possible for consciousness to evolve the organ of sight and its physical instrument, eyes, and visually enjoy its creation. Air causes the organ of touch and its physical instrument, the skin, to evolve and allows consciousness to calculate its proximity to itself in the form of physical objects and forces...heat and cold, for example. The power of taste relies on a tongue immersed in saliva so water is said to be the source of the organ of taste. A dry tongue tastes nothing. Finally, earth, the densest element, a composite of the others, emits smells which are transferred to consciousness through the nose. The sense instruments (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin) are located on the physical body and composed of gross matter, but the organs proper are located in the subtle body and are formed from the light component of the macrocosmic mind.

The creation is consciousness' way to 'involve' itself into the elements and eventually to 'evolve' back out of them. Vedanta says that the elements evolve before the psyche, or subtle body - generally called the 'soul' - an idea roughly coinciding with the view of modern science. In any case the idea that consciousness evolved the elements makes sense - if we assume that the universe was evolved so that consciousness could realize itself - because the soul would need a field in which to garner experience and reap the knowledge necessary to rediscover its source and realize freedom. Why consciousness would do this when it is eternally free is unanswerable because the intellect, that aspect of consciousness that knows, is an effect of pure consciousness. An effect cannot illumine its cause. It can only illumine objects on its own level of reality or those on a grosser level.

The subtle body, composed of the subtle components of the five elements, molds physical nature to serve its ends. If chemistry is destiny, a predominance of the subtle component of the earth element might lead to a practical nature, the predominance of fire to a passionate temperament, water to emotionality, and air to abstract thought. Moreover, a preponderance of a particular subtle element attracts the corresponding physical element into one's body. The permutations and combinations of the elements make for the immense variety of psyches and bodies comprising the creation. Animals and plants are rudimentary subtle bodies interacting with the elements. Air and fire predominate in hummingbirds, for example, while earth and water predominate in hippos.

The relationship between the psyche, the subtle body, and the material world makes experience and knowledge possible. If the creation was exclusively material and conscious beings absent, nothing could be known. For example, electricity is a form of energy. Though gross, a tungsten filament is nonetheless comprised of subtler particles: protons, neutrons, mesons, quarks, and what not. When electricity flows into the filament the energy excites subtle particles which subsequently excite grosser particles and light is produced. Similarly, when the subtle consciousness in the sense organ interacts with gross objects, knowledge - which might be called 'psychic light' - is produced.

According to Vedic science the elements evolved from subtle to gross. The most subtle element and first to evolve was space. Because it pervades everything, is unaffected by what it pervades and is intangible, it is often used as a symbol of consciousness. The invisible container of the other elements, we infer its presence by listening to sound vibrations arising in it. Sound doesn't exist without space. The self, consciousness, is soundless because it is non-dual. Sound cannot be seen, felt, tasted, or smelled. The feeling of sound vibrations is due to the skin's contact with air that has been disturbed by sound. Air, the next element, can be heard

by the ears and felt by the organ of touch. The smells in air come from earth particles carried by it, not from the air itself. Fire, the first element perceivable by the physical eyes, can be seen, heard, and felt. Water, number four, can be seen, heard, touched, and tasted. Finally earth, the element from which the nose evolves, can be smelled, seen, tasted, felt, and heard.

If five separate senses report five different stimuli in five separate theaters, why don't conscious beings enjoy five separate simultaneous experiences? Because consciousness evolved mind, a subtle instrument that combines five unique perceptions involving myriad bits of information into one cogent perception.

On the way to the supermarket a car ran a stop sign and came hurtling at me. I screamed, slammed on the brakes, and turned the wheel, narrowly avoiding an accident. Though such a situation had never before happened to me, why did I react so swiftly and appropriately? A speeding object emits stimuli which strike my retina and are passed on to the mind which is sitting behind the eyes. The mind sends a signal to my active organs and the accident is avoided. How did the mind know what to do?

In fact, the mind's command to the senses was the last step in a subtle process taking place at an even deeper level; the mind did not unilaterally make the decision, but merely executed a command coming from a higher center, the intellect. It not only executes instructions coming down from intellect but sends the unified sense stimuli up to intellect for a decision on how to respond. On the basis of what does the intellect make its decision?



Conditioning - The Causal Body

Imagine this situation. On the first day of creation a mountain shaped like a perfect cone thrust out of the earth and the first drop of rain struck the very tip of the mountain. In which direction would the drop flow? Because there is no precedent, each potential path is as likely as any other. Let's say the drop flipped a coin twice to determine its course and slid down the south side leaving an imperceptible little trail. After some time a second drop fell. What path would it take? High odds favor all paths, but marginally greater odds favor the south side. It followed tradition and etched the existing path a little deeper. After thousands of rain storms other paths developed and the mountain sported canyons, ravines and gullies all around. And the original path became a great river valley.

We obviously cannot go back to the time when our psyches were perfectly clear like the consciousness of which they are a reflection but let's pretend we can. On the day the first mountain sprung up the first man strolled out of his cave and looked around just as the first hungry bear wandered out from behind the first tree, spied the man and decided to have lunch. They grappled with each other for a while but the man got the upper hand when he grabbed a big rock and hit the bear so hard it died. And, in life's first irony, the first man lunched on the world's first bearburger.

Was it a good or bad bearburger? Because it was his first burger experience he had no others with which to compare it so he could not say. As the day progressed the bear experience replayed in his mind several times, gradually diminishing in intensity and frequency. When evening fell it left his consciousness entirely and he dropped off to sleep.

On the second day the first man bumped into the first woman, one thing led to another, and they made the first love, a delightful experience. When he fell asleep after dinner, the memory accompanied him and cooked up delicious dreams. The next few days saw many experiences, some good, some not so good. One morning, a week later, he woke up, ate his porridge, and looked out the entrance to his cave to see the world's second hungry bear looking in. Suddenly an exciting and emotional replay of the encounter with the first bear flashed in his primitive consciousness and he understood what to expect if he ventured out. Each experience, no matter how trivial, leaves a trace in our consciousness, like an elementary particle carving a track in a cloud chamber. The deep memory that saves experience, unlike intellect's facts and figures memory, is the causal body, the unconscious mind, which not only retains the essence of each experience, but also the subjective reactions to it: the feelings, emotions and thoughts arising in the mind.

What a blessing to have the knowledge from his experiences stored out of his everyday consciousness and appear when he needed it! He could get

up in the morning, take his porridge and venture out into the light of day without having the past intrude, very much like the first day. But as time passed he noticed a change. One day, walking along without a care, he began to feel a little uncomfortable. It was a new feeling. Heretofore he didn't even know he had a mind. His attention was riveted on the pristine world outside. But now it became involved in this feeling. And then suddenly it made sense. A picture of first woman appeared in his mind and the experience of their tryst vividly flooded his consciousness. Because the memory was so pleasurable and first woman had run off with the second man he became unhappy. He wandered about in this state for several days when, as luck would have it, he met the second woman of the world and first man was happy once more.

After repeatedly cataloging the love experiences, the causal body realized it was running out of storage space and edited the extraneous details: the color of her hair, the cut of her garment, and her name, saving only important facts like the big moment when the world stopped. As more experience flowed in, it merged the experiences of many different women into the essence of woman, compacted myriad episodes into the essence of love, and created a file marked 'high priority.' Though the memories were meant to remain 'sub' conscious, the woman memory eventually took on a life of its own, popping into his conscious mind, the subtle body, with disturbing regularity. Moreover, each repeated memory deepened the scar in the pristine landscape of his subconscious until it resembled the great river valley on the side of the first mountain after millions of years of wind and weather.

Now, sadly, when first man awoke he had an agenda. No longer able to sit blissfully in front of the cave enjoying the scenery as he'd done before, he passed his days longing for a companion. Just as rain tends to flow down the mountain's deepest valleys, our hero's consciousness gushed wildly down the deep groove in the causal body, filling his conscious mind with desire.

His routine changed and he became increasingly indifferent to the practical details of life. Instead of enjoying random walks through the forest, staying home patching cracks in his cave or stocking winter stores, day and night he haunted the first bar hoping to find love. The more he thought about a mate, the more he thought about a mate. His emotional state was saved and recycled too. As he obsessed over the over the memory of love his longing increased. And with each wave of longing the 'I need love' channel in the causal body got deeper and deeper, flooding the mind with fantasies, tossing it hither and thither like a small boat in a storm.

Furthermore, he began to notice a strange connection between his all-consuming desire and the probability of meeting a first woman type. Were these the chance encounters they seemed? In the beginning outer life seemed to be creating his inner reality, but now his cravings seemed to be influencing his destiny. Eventually he reached a point where his inner reality became as vivid and real as the outer reality.

We'll leave first man and return to my drive to the supermarket. Although I'd never been in an accident, I knew exactly how to respond because the causal body, which contains both the personal subconscious (the impressions of personal experience) and the collective unconscious (the impressions of the experience of all beings) stored the memory of that or a similar situation and activated the chain reaction that resulted in an appropriate response to the threatening situation.

In a fraction of a second intellect, based on information it retrieved from the causal body, determined danger, passed on the information to ego whose identification with the gross body generated intense fear which caused it to force the hands and feet perform the appropriate actions and avoid the accident.

The five executive organs which evolve from the active aspect of the macrocosmic mind and correspond to the five information gathering senses are: speech, hands, feet, genitals, and anus. Speech, which evolves from the active element in Space, corresponds to the ears. Hands evolve from the active element in air and correspond to the skin. Feet, corresponding to the eyes, come from fire's active element and the genitals, born out of water's active element, correspond to the tongue. The earth element generates the anus which corresponds to the nose.



The Physiological Systems

To round out our model, five 'vital airs' (respiration, evacuation, circulation, assimilation and *udana*, the power to initiate thought and eject the subtle body from the physical body at the time of death, account for the autonomic processes that keep the physiological systems functioning.

The traces left in the Causal Body by repeated experience are called *vasanas*, impressions, in Sanskrit. When they accumulate, *vasanas* become *samskaras*, deep channels, and generate terrible internal pressure. Instead of waiting to see what comes, we try to make the things happen that will give us relief. *Samskara* means 'formation' and is similar to the psychological idea of a 'complex,' an amalgam of subtle tendencies that produce a particular mental/emotional condition.

The causal body determines the nature of the individual's experiences and the quality of those experiences - hence the word 'causal.' No thought, feeling, emotion, memory, fantasy, dream, desire or idea appears in the Subtle Body that has not sprouted from a causal seed.

Whether life is a spontaneous reaction to external factors, a subjective compulsion to manipulate external factors based on *samskaras* or a combination of the two, attention is always riveted on what I want or on that aspect of the field that is meant to satisfy my wants. Awareness, the self, is not directly involved in life processes. Just as the sun blesses earthly activities with its radiance but doesn't participate in them, awareness simply illumines the gross, subtle and causal bodies. These bodies are actually inert matter but they seem to be alive and conscious because they are illumined by awareness. Although the self is present as the substance of the subtle body and the modifications in it, it is not known because the *vasanas* extrovert attention into the thoughts arising in awareness and the material objects sitting in the field of awareness.

Why I Don't Know Who I Am - Microcosmic Ignorance

Attention is riveted on the subtle and gross bodies because of ignorance. Until the *vasana* for love came, the first man was quite happy as he was. We can't say he was enlightened because he didn't know he was awareness but we can say that he was in his natural state: present and aware. As soon as he discovered the pleasure of love he developed a craving for a love object. We can call him ignorant because he didn't know that the pleasure he felt in love was just the pleasure of contact with

awareness, his self. Whether we are born with vasanas from previous births or whether we pick them up in this one, or both, they are caused by ignorance of our true nature.

Ignorance is the cause of the Causal Body. It has no beginning. For experience perceptive instruments, the mind, intellect, and senses, and objects of perception are required. Before experience is possible, therefore, two events have happened - one macrocosmic (the material universe has been projected), and the other microcosmic (the perceptive instruments have evolved), the interaction between them constituting an experience, the basis of time. Actually, time begins when the third perception/experience occurs, being the interval between the first and the second seen from the vantage point of the third. These two events, the projection of the universe and the evolution of the perceptive instruments by the conscious beings, are the result of a preceding non-event or Ignorance. Because it exists out of time it is beginningless.

Ignorance of the nature of awareness is called Maya in Sanskrit. The peculiar nature of Maya is mentioned in an Upanishad which says that before creation there was neither existence or non-existence but there was 'darkness' by which is meant ignorance or Maya. This does not mean that Maya exists independently of awareness but that it borrows whatever degree of reality it has from awareness. It is called ignorance or darkness because it has the power to apparently obscure awareness. Maya does not operate on the whole of the self but only on a small fraction of it. For example the power of the earth to produce clay pots only exists where clay exists. Although the self is a partless whole, the Upanishad speaks in terms of parts to make it easier to understand the partless non-dual nature of the self to someone who is accustomed to thinking in dualistic terms. With awareness as its substrate Maya creates the various objects of the world just as an artist draws pictures on a white canvas.

Maya has a peculiar ontological status. It neither exists nor does it not exist. From awareness' point of view it does not exist, but in so far as it is the cause of existence it does exist. It is neither real nor unreal. It is real in the sense that it causes the world but it is unreal because it can be destroyed by knowledge. Vedanta is the means of knowledge that destroys Maya. Maya causes the Causal Body which in turn causes the Subtle Body.



The Subtle Body

The Subtle Body, is composed of the instruments of experience: the ten senses, the five *pranas* (physiological systems), mind, intellect and ego. The ten organs are: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, hands, feet, speech, anus, and sex. The activities of the organs are controlled by the life force or *prana* which is responsible for health and vitality. The reflection of awareness in the Subtle Body allows the senses to gather knowledge. In its causal form as *rajas*, it functions as the active or karmic organs - the last five. Another active function of the life force is *apana* - the capacity of the organism to reject unwanted elements from the body (wastes, toxins, etc.). Thirdly, *prana* functions as *samana* in the digestive system transforming food into energy which is equitably distributed (*vyana*) according to the need of each part. If walking, more goes to the legs, if cutting wood, more goes to the arms. The *prana* in the form of *udana* is the power to eject the soul from the body, a kind of reincarnational time clock counting down to the moment of death.

The subtle body is the instrument of perception. The points on the physical body where sense perceptions seem to occur are not actually the sense organs. For example, the eyes are only "places of light" or windows through which the power of vision, a subtle body component, beams forth. Perception is only possible when the mind is behind the sense organ. The eyes may report visual stimuli and the organ of sight illumine them, but they have no meaning if the mind is occupied elsewhere - daydreaming, meditating, or thinking. Common experience shows that when communicating to someone lost in thought or otherwise preoccupied the communication does not register.

Mind, a counterintuitive term, is the 'emotional center' in the subtle body, the 'feeling function,' or the 'heart.' It has several functions. First, it integrates sense stimuli into one cogent perception and acts as a conduit, passing the information on to the intellect and receiving instructions from the intellect which it relays to the active organs. In this capacity it is called the emotions because it moves the physical body. Doubt is another function. The life that we take to be so real is actually a very cleverly constructed dream projected by ignorance on limitless awareness. Nothing is what it seems. Therefore it is very wise to doubt what you see with your eyes and feel with your heart until you can determine the nature of reality. Like the senses, which are nervously fixated on the material world, the mind, like a radio, tunes into happenings in the emotional world and constantly monitors negative impulses from hostile minds and tender sympathies from kindred hearts. It also projects an array of positive and negative feelings: anger, jealousy, possessiveness, kindness, love, sympathy, affection, etc. Identification with and attachment to the mind is caused by self ignorance and is one of the primary obstacles to self knowledge and freedom.

Intellection is another subtle body function. The intellect gathers knowledge, remembers, analyzes situations, inquires into problems, and discriminates between the relative realities of various appearances. It is the most subtle and important aspect of the subtle body from the enlightenment perspective because what we know or don't know about ourselves and the world determines whether or not we suffer.

Ego and the Inner Enemies

The third aspect of the subtle body is the ego. When awareness seemingly forgets its limitless nature, it identifies with the subtle and gross bodies and concocts a secondary and limited identity based on its subtle and gross experiences - which it calls 'I'. This imaginary 'I' thinks it is a doer because ignorance produces vasanas which cause action. Because the body acts it thinks it acts. And when action produces results it thinks it is an experiencer, suffering and enjoying accordingly. Faced with the apparent uncertainty of the unstructured oceanic reality of existence it passionately clings to the belief that it is real. When self knowledge arises as a result of inquiry it destroys this 'I', freeing the ever-free awareness from its apparent limitations.

The Methodology of Vedanta

In non-dual reality there is no knowledge and no ignorance, no bondage and no liberation; I simply do not exist as a unique individual. If I feel incomplete, separate and inadequate, simply reminding myself of this fact will not be helpful. This is why Neo-Advaita, the latest iteration of the

'instant enlightenment', idea is bound to fail. It takes more than a few negative affirmations - 'no path, no teaching, no teacher', etc - to solve my problem. I need a way to work myself out of my ignorance step by step. Vedanta's proven methodology is called superimposition and negation. It posits the existence of duality which coincides with the experience of everyone even though it is not true, and then proceeds to destroy duality by inquiry. The belief itself is not a problem but its effect – suffering - is . For this reason Vedanta is attractive. The negation arrived at by understanding the teachings of Vedanta is effective, unlike the mindless negations of Neo-Advaita, because it is backed up by experience, logic and reason. How is simply believing that I am awareness any different from believing in the existence of God? I need to know why I am not separate to give my belief in non-duality teeth.

In the twilight a thirsty traveler approached a village well. Reaching down, he recoiled in fear when he saw a big snake coiled next to the bucket. Unable to move for fear of being bitten, he imagined terrible things, including his own death. At that time an old man coming to the well noticed him standing there petrified with fear. "What's the problem?" he asked kindly. "Snake! Snake! Get a stick before it strikes!" he whispered frantically. The old man burst out laughing. "Hey!" he said, "Take it easy. That's no snake. It's the well rope. It just looks like a snake in the darkness."

Though he was never in danger, the misperceived rope produced intense fear. Our existential fears come from mistaking the self for the dualistic universe. The fear of the snake arose simultaneously with the misperception of the rope. What happened to the snake and the fear when the man perceived the rope? It vanished.

To make sure that the inquirer understands that the disappearance of the world is not exactly like the disappearance of the snake, Vedanta discusses two types of superimposition, conditional and unconditional. The snake and the rope is an example of unconditioned superimposition. Unconditioned superimposition means that once the rope is perceived it is impossible to take it to be a snake. You may understand how the mistake was made when you consider the conditions obtaining when it occurred but you cannot actually perceive a snake as long as you are looking at the rope. This means that as long as you know that the self is whole and complete and non-separate and that it is you, you will not take yourself to be separate, inadequate and incomplete.

To explain how it is experientially once self knowledge has destroyed duality Vedanta provides another example: a mirage on the desert. Even if you are dying of thirst and see a lake on the desert you will not try to drink the water because you know it is unreal. This is called conditioned

superimposition. The self is known but the world remains, apparently but not actually conditioning it. This means that you can go about your life as usual, minus the suffering.

Discrimination

Discrimination negates superimposition. Because the self is not known, the gross, subtle bodies and causal bodies are taken to be the self. Taking them to be the self causes suffering because they are not real. Reality is what is always present and never changes. It is the self. The three bodies are to be considered apparent realities or 'not self.' They are to be negated until identification with and attachment to them is dissolved. Identification and attachment to the unreal prohibits attachment to and identification with the real. Non-attachment is not merely the intellectual conviction that the states, bodies, and objects are unreal but the experience of freedom arising from the destruction of one's connection to them.

The three bodies are often spoken of as 'sheaths' in the sense that they hide or cover the self. In fact the self is self evident and cannot be covered by anything, but attachment to our thoughts and feelings and bodily sensations keeps attention firmly on them and not on the self. So they need to be separated from the self. Discrimination is not an experiential separation, astral travel or an 'out of body' experience. The self can't be taken out of the bodies because it was never 'in' them in the first place, although often when the self is realized it seems like an experiential shift because we are so deeply accustomed to take the physical body as a point of reference. The shift is purely in terms of knowledge. In fact, the bodies are 'in' the Self, in the sense that they are within the scope of awareness, not outside it.

To practice discrimination mindfulness is required. Mindfulness means keeping attention on the subtle body, the ego particularly, keeping up with the incessant stream of consciousness, following it through its ups and downs, dispassionately observing the quality, texture, and volume of thought and feeling, not with the idea of making it 'better' or solving ego problems, but simply to understand how it works. As the 'whys' become apparent unhealthy thought and feeling patterns drop off naturally. One of the benefits of observing the subtle body is that one slowly becomes aware of the observer. Awareness of the observer indicates that the mind is becoming subtle and raises a new question - who is the watcher?

Is it the ego? The mind? The intellect? The self? All or none of the above? Is the ego to be discriminated out of the picture? If so who will do it? If the Self is the discriminator, what will it discriminate, since from its

position nothing other than it exists? These and other equally weighty determinations need to be resolved.

Cause and Effect

The purpose of this discrimination is to show that the self is limitless and that the world is not separate from it. It presents awareness as the cause of the universe which enjoys a slightly different order of reality than awareness. An effect is dependent on the cause. The individual's body and mind are within the creation and therefore dependent on awareness but the individual itself is eternal awareness and the reality of everything. If the effect is just the cause in a particular form, then the cause and the effect are one. For example, although there are many different ornaments made of gold, from the standpoint of the gold they are all the same. If everything in the universe is fashioned by a single cause, limitless awareness, then everything in the universe is limitless awareness. Therefore if I know the essence of any one thing it is as good as knowing the essence of every other thing. To know salt water I needn't drink the seven seas; I need only take a sip from one. The recognition that I am limitless awareness and the whole universe is not separate from me is the result of this teaching.

The nature of something is what makes it what it is. For example, the nature of fire is heat. If you take away the essential nature of something it ceases to be what it is. Awareness is the nature of the self. It is not a quality that belongs to the self. The self is awareness and only awareness. Awareness is what supplies existence to the creation and all the things in it. It is the cause of what is. What we call existence is limited to things that change. But awareness exists out of time. You can also say that it has no limits and has no divisions in it. You cannot find a beginning or an end to it. Because it has no beginning you can say that it is unborn and non-dual. It is not created. None of these words say that awareness has a particular quality. In fact they negate all qualities. We call awareness, the cause, the higher nature.

To have a creation you need a cause. For example, to make a pot you need clay and a potter, someone with an idea and the energy to turn the clay into a pot. When we speak of the whole of existence we say that the cause is awareness. But our metaphor breaks down when we try to apply it to awareness and existence because awareness is non-dual. In our example the potter and the clay are two different things. One supplies the substance and the other the intelligence and the energy. But awareness cannot be split into two. So it has to create in another way.

It has to be both the cause and the effect, the potter and the pot. Normally, when we create something the substance undergoes a

change. If we want to make cheese we start with a sweet liquid, milk, and end up with a sharp tasting solid. But awareness creates by assuming another form without surrendering its nature as awareness. For instance when you dream you remain the same and you create the dream world out of your own awareness. You are the substance of the dream, you are the intelligence that creates the dream world you are the energy that makes the creation happen. You are both the subject and the object, the cause and the effect. The beauty of it is that because you are the cause you are not affected by the effect. It depends on you but you aren't affected by it. A spider's web is the spider but the spider is not the web. The clay is always free of the pot but the pot is not free of the clay.

The effect, the creation, is called the lower nature. It is made up of the *vasanas*, mind, intellect, ego, the five pranas, the ten senses and the gross elements. It is in a state of constant flux and if you find yourself caught up in it you will definitely suffer. If you try to get out of it by doing something you will not get out because it is like a dream. It is not really there. So you are not actually in it, although you believe you are. The upside is that if you know that you are caught up in a dream you can wake yourself up by making an inquiry into the problem that is bothering you. If you allow the teachings of Vedanta to guide your inquiry you will resolve the problem into its cause and its cause into awareness. All problems are apparent problems, never real problems.

The Real and the Apparent

Another teaching is the discrimination between the real and the apparent. An object that on analysis can't stand alone or that can be resolved into another object or the self should be considered 'not-self' and therefore apparent. Nothing that the ego identifies with is real. This teaching should expose ego's false identifications. Something that is apparent is unsuitable as the basis of an identity. Apparent doesn't mean that an object isn't experienciable. It means that it isn't substantial. If my sense of well being depends on something insubstantial and non-eternal I won't be happy when it changes or I discover that it isn't what I think it is. The self, awareness, is the only object that stands alone. Hence, if I am the self I am free of objects. To make identification with the self possible I need to free myself of unsuitable identifications. Because my goal is freedom I need a standalone identity.

For example, although it seems to be real the physical body can be resolved into awareness. The physical body is made up of five subtle and gross elements: air, fire, water, earth. If we remove any one of the four the body will no longer exist. Do the elements stand alone or do they depend on something else? They depend on much smaller units of apparently real substance, let's call them atoms. How real are they? If we

analyze the atoms we find that they are space and electrons, protons and neutrons. We can now discard the atoms. As we move even deeper in our investigation we come on mesons, quarks and neutrinos and see that the spaces between them are as vast as the spaces between galaxies. In any case we can now dismiss the electron level. At this point a new factor enters our analysis. What seem to be substantial particles suddenly lose their shape and become waves of energy. Now we have waves of energy playing in space. If we keep concentrating on energy we find that it seems to come out of space and disappear back into space. So space is the reality, the substrate, and energy is the apparent reality. Discarding energy we are left with space and awareness. We cannot resolve awareness into space because it does not depend for its existence on space. Space, however, depends on awareness because without awareness space cannot be perceived. Therefore we can resolve space into awareness. From the level of the gross body all the way down to the level of infinite space all existent objects are only names and forms. They have no existence apart from their substrate. Now, try to resolve awareness, the substrate. It is impossible because awareness is non-dual and cannot be objectified. To turn awareness into an object there would have to be a second awareness somewhere that was subtler than the first awareness. But this is not possible because awareness cannot be split up into layers or levels or parts. It is irreducible. The final stage of this discrimination is to determine whether or not awareness is different from you. It obviously cannot be different. Therefore you are awareness and not the body.

This inquiry can be applied to any object, including the subtle and causal bodies. Do my thoughts and feelings stand alone? If they do I can take them to be me. But analysis shows that the content of the subtle body is wholly dependent on the causal body, the seeds of my past actions. And the causal body, the source of my fears and desires? Does it stand alone? The causal body is dependent on ignorance of who I am. Ignorance of my identity is not who I am either because it depends on awareness. If I am not aware how can I be ignorant?

All subtle body phenomena depend on each other, the mind a rich tapestry of interwoven interdependent psychic threads. So the self can't be a thought or a feeling. Ego, the 'I notion' and a major subtle body component, depends on self ignorance. Ego is also unreal because it doesn't exist in deep sleep where all differences are dissolved. Ignorance is destroyed by knowledge because it ends when knowledge arises. Knowledge depends on awareness. You cannot know anything unless you are aware. Therefore I am not what I know. Thinking depends on the intellect, the thinker. The thinker depends on awareness. Thought depends on the vasanas and the vasanas depend on experience and

experience depends on awareness. So I can't be what I think or experience. Without me, awareness, nothing exists.

Identification with time is an obvious source of suffering and can be removed by analysis. As we increase the units from nanoseconds to milliseconds to seconds and on up to years, centuries, ages, etc. the space between the units increases until time eventually runs out and only space, which on analysis turns out to be nothing more than a concept, remains. Space is a concept because it depends awareness witnessing it. Concepts can be further reduced to mind and mind to awareness. Awareness is not reducible because before you know of the existence of an object you have to be there as awareness. There is nothing outside of awareness to reduce it to something else.

Or if this analysis seems too abstract, consider that time is different for every individual. One hour in a Saudi torture chamber does not equal one hour at an exciting movie. Time, like space, is dependent on the desires and attachments of the one that experiences it. Attachments and desires are only transitory phenomena. In deep sleep they don't exist.

That everything on any level of existence is merely apparent is difficult to accept. The teachings of Vedanta are not meant to become objects of faith but are intended to encourage us to think about reality in a radical way. When we discriminate the apparent from the real the inner worlds defrost and the rigid barriers that make life painful break up like ice in spring. If the intellect no longer makes uninformed judgments about an apparent reality or fritters away its time gathering objective knowledge but turns upon itself and discriminates carefully our responses to life become natural and spontaneous. And ultimately, although discrimination means we must face continual disillusionment, in the end we are paradoxically led to the realization that everything on every level of existence is real - because it is the Self.

Change and Changelessness

If the discrimination between the real and the apparent is too difficult the discrimination between change and changelessness is another way to separate the self from the not-self. Experience takes place when the ego, motivated by the vasanas, uses the gross and subtle body to contact or avoid contact with objects in their respective fields. In spite of the unhappy fact that the bodies and their objects are in constant flux, it has somehow been led to believe that hooking the bodies up to objects will resolve its sense of limitation. But because all transactions, even the good, are perishable this approach is bound to fail. If something changes it is not real and can be dismissed as not-self.

Subject - Object

Subject-object is another basic discrimination. That physical objects are perceived is easy to grasp. For example, I see my hand. My hand is certainly me, but I am not my hand. I perceive my hand but my hand doesn't perceive me. It should not be too much more difficult to understand that emotions are also perceived objects even though they are subtler than physical objects. It is only marginally more difficult to see that thoughts are perceived objects. But it is more difficult to see the thinker as a perceived object because we think we are the thinker. For the same reason it is almost impossible to see the ego as an object. This discrimination is based on a simple fact: I cannot be what I perceive.

If inquiry is going to bear fruit it should continue during periods of happiness. If the one feeling wonderful at the moment wasn't previously feeling so good, the inquiry has objectified the ego. When the ego is objectified the expectation that happiness will last disappears because the ego is nothing more than the self identifying with ever changing fears and desires. Happiness is an object and should be understood to be not self. Discriminating the subject from the objects is difficult because conditioning binds us to 'perceived objects', subtle and gross. The ego need not be weaned from its attachment to happiness or helpful objects. It will always be attached to something. As long as the object is spiritually beneficial like the practice of knowledge, prayer or meditation attachment is useful. The point of discrimination is to objectify the ego i.e. to see it as a perceived object. A non-attached ego is not liberation. Liberation is freedom from the ego. The goal is to realize that the self is already and always separate from everything. Once the self is owned the perceived objects are all seen to be non-separate from the self.

The Three States

One of Vedanta's most sophisticated discriminations involves an analysis of the three states of consciousness and their experiencing entities. The first entity is the waking state ego, the primary identity of everyone. When I say 'me' in conversation, I am referring to the waking state entity. The belief that I am a waker comes with the conviction that the waking state's physical, emotional, and intellectual objects are real.

The waker's consciousness is turned outward, awareness shining through the senses, mind, intellect, illumining their respective objects. The waker is a consumer of experience. Vedanta calls it 'the one with thirteen mouths.' The 'thirteen mouths' refer to the ten senses, mind, intellect, and ego. These instruments are hungry mouths that aggressively eat experience. The physical body consumes matter, the five elements in various combinations. The mind devours emotions; the intellect nibbles

ideas; and the ego gobbles any experience it believes will make it feel whole, adequate, and happy.

The dreamer's consciousness turned inward, awareness illumining a world similar in some respects to the waking state world and radically different in others. In the dream state awareness illumines the *vasanas* playing out as images on the screen of awareness. In the waking state the *vasanas* express as the waker's thoughts and feelings. The waking world is not distorted like the dream world because the senses structure it. Like the waker, the dreamer believes he or she and his or her world is real. The dreamer is equipped with the same instruments for experience as the waker: dream senses to consume dream objects, a dream mind to emote and feel, a dream intellect to think dream thoughts, and a dream ego to go about the business of experiencing the dream life. In Sanskrit the dreamer is called *tajjaisa*, the 'shining one,' to indicate its nature as awareness. Dreams appear in light, even though the waking senses are inactive, because the awareness shines through the dreamer, just as it shines through the waker.

Sleep is defined as the state, saturated with happiness, where doesn't desire external objects, doesn't illumine internal objects, and is self ignorant. The sleeper is called *prajna* or mass of consciousness. In the other states consciousness flows outward and inward but in sleep it is formless. The sleeper ego is extremely subtle, its presence indicated by the fact that we experience limitlessness and bliss. In the waking and dream states bliss is sporadic because it is broken by many divisions of thought and feeling. We know of the sleeper's experience because it reports a good sleep after transforming into a waker. Were the waker actually a different ego from the sleeper, or the dreamer, it wouldn't recall the experience of sleep or dream.

The deep sleep state is free of both waking and dream egos and objects because the *vasanas* projecting them have become dormant; hence it is referred to as the 'seed' state. When the seeds sprout, the sleeper becomes a waker or a dreamer and experiences the appropriate world.

Because the waking ego is transformed into a sleep ego we don't think we are conscious in deep sleep. This has lead metaphysicians to conclude that deep sleep is a void. But it is actually the womb of creation because the waker and the dreamer and their respective worlds emerge from it. When you wake up in the morning your whole life is neatly laid out consistent with the day before which indicates that the experiencer had simply entered a dormant state. The sleep state is called the causal body and contains the *vasanas* of every living being.

The sleep state is the gateway between the waking and the dream states functioning as a kind of closet with two doors opening on two adjacent rooms where the dreamer can don the guise of the waker or the dreamer ready to appear on their respective stages. Though a minor point, even in cases where one seems to be awakened directly out of a dream by a noise, for example, the dreamer passes through the sleep state. A motion picture image of a stationary object is actually dozens of individual images passing so fast they seem to be a solid object. Similarly, we can't trust our experience in this case because the change is so fast we don't notice it.

Because of its association with one of the three states of consciousness non-dual awareness appears to be three distinct entities. Associated with the waking state, it 'becomes' a waking state personality, suffering and enjoying the limitations of its world. The dreamer suffers the limitations of the dream world. And the sleeper suffers self-ignorance and limitless bliss.

These three states and egos are known to everyone and constitute the totality of experience. Once this analysis has been established the inquiry begins. If I'm the waking ego, which I'm convinced I am, what happens to me when I become a sleeper? I willingly surrender everything essential to my idea of myself (my body, mind, intellect, and all my physical possessions) and turn into a mass of limitless awareness. Yet, in spite of the pleasure of sleep I'm not content because I sacrifice my sleep identity to suffer and enjoy the worlds created by my *vasanas* in waking and dream states. My identity as a dreamer is obviously unsatisfactory because I consistently leave it to become a sleeper. So my status as any one ego or ego aspect is limited and my true identity open to question. Furthermore, if I identify with experiential happiness I have a problem because the happiness experienced in sleep disappears in the waking state. Dream happiness dissolves on waking, and waking happiness does not transfer to the sleep or dream states.

The answer to "Who am I" is: I am not any of these ego entities. If I'm real I have to exist all the time. I can't suddenly be one thing one minute and something else the next. I experience life as a simple conscious being.

In fact the three ego entities are non-dual awareness identified with the particular state they are experiencing. Awareness is the witness of the three states.

It is easiest to understand awareness when we consider the dream state because the physical senses are inactive. The dream is playing on the screen of the mind like a movie and even though physical light is absent and the eyes closed, the dream ego and the events in which it is participating are clearly illumined. The dream light is awareness temporarily functioning as the dreamer, 'the shining one.' However,

identification with the dream ego and its doings prevents us from properly appreciating the dream light as the self.

The self is unknown in the waking state for the same reason. Preoccupied with the happenings in our worlds and minds, we are completely unaware that both the sense objects and our thoughts and feelings are bathed in the light of awareness.

In deep sleep the ego/intellect is dissolved into its source, the dormant seeds of its past actions, so it isn't aware of either the self or anything external. Yet awareness is there making the experience of bliss possible. And when we wake up we know that we slept even though we were not there as the waker because awareness was there.

The three ego's are called limiting adjuncts, in Vedanta. A limiting adjunct is something that apparently conceals the nature of something else. If I put clear water in a colored glass, the water, seen through the glass, appears colored. Similarly when I look at myself through my waking, dream, and sleep personalities, I seem to be three distinct personalities. However, when I remove the adjunct I can see what I really am. The removal or negation of the three experiencing entities is accomplished by simply knowing they are unreal. In the wake of this understanding I am free to assume my true identity as awareness because it is the only other option.

The waker over time becomes fractured into many sub-identities, adjuncts within an adjunct, so that it is possible to be confronted with a confusing array of selves, none of which are real. Remember, 'real' means enduring, unchanging, unlimited. Because something is experienced does not make it real, the blueness of the sky or a mirage on a desert, for example.

With reference to my son, I'm a father. With reference to my father, a son. With reference to my wife, I'm a husband. To my boss I'm an employee. I'm a devotee with reference to God and a taxpayer with reference to the government. With reference to myself I'm a success, failure, victim, victimizer, sports fan, audiophile or any of the thousands of ready-made identities available today. The many often conflicting roles we play as waking egos are limited by each other, other selves playing similar or different roles, and our ideas about the meaning of these selves. Caught in this thicket of identities, is it any wonder I suffer? In the end, spiritual life, no matter what the path, always boils down finding out who one is minus all one's roles and experiences.

Playing a role is fine as long as you know you are playing. Society only functions efficiently when our roles are well-defined and we play them

impeccably. But when we identify ourselves completely with our roles we suffer. Spiritually, identification with the role, not the role itself, is the problem. For example, though an actress identifies herself with the character she plays, she seamlessly returns to her original identity when the curtain falls. Even though the audience completely believes her illusion, she remembers her real self throughout.

After patient analysis I can see I'm not any of my roles. What am I then? The limitless I. And what is the limitless I? The limitless I is called the substrate in Vedanta. A substrate makes the error that I'm limited possible. The rope in the example of the snake and the rope is a substrate, something whose nature makes it possible to mistake it for something else. The fact that I'm formless Consciousness makes the playing of myriad roles possible. It is very easy to identify with conditioned roles because awareness cannot be perceived by the senses or the mind, making a perfect substrate, one that can support any identity.

A substrate is also the essence, a form reduced to its ultimate nature. For example, a ring, a bracelet, and a necklace are three forms into which gold can be crafted. If the three are melted down, their forms are destroyed but nothing substantial is lost because the gold, their essence, remains. Inquiry into the self merges the waker, dreamer, and sleeper into the substrate, leaving awareness shining as the innermost self of the seeker.

When I inquire into the substrate I find that I am whole and complete. I see that nothing is missing. Because nothing I am free of desire and because I am free of desire I am peaceful. I see that I never change. When I look into my self I see that it is free of all the forms appearing in it. The freedom of self realization is blissful like deep sleep but I enjoy it consciously. When I inquire into bliss I discover that I am pure love.

If I am awareness why would I identify with anything else? Even when life requires that I play a role I will never get caught up in it if my self knowledge is firm. Freedom is not a mind-blowing mystical state. It is simply the condition of someone abiding in his or her real nature. To suppose that one needs to experientially transcend the three egos and enter the 'fourth state' is incorrect, although it is a common belief. The enlightened sleep, dream, and carry on a normal waking life - minus the feeling of limitation bedeviling the unenlightened. Free of the expectation that experience should bring lasting happiness, they never deny duality, only its reality, because, like the snake in the rope, it isn't actually there.

The Five Sheaths

This is a variation of the three bodies and the three states teaching. It is meant to point out the universal errors in self understanding that occur at each of the five levels of experience. The non-apprehension of the self as oneself gives rise to five misconceptions about its nature. These misconceptions are called sheaths because they apparently hide the self and need to be removed if the self is to be known as it is.

The most obvious self misunderstanding is 'I am the body.' The notions that 'I am mortal', 'I am fat' and 'I am male/female' indicate an association of the self with the matter. Association of the I with the physiological systems causes one to say, 'I am hungry', 'I am thirsty', when in fact the I, awareness, does not experience these sensations. The universal statements, 'I am happy' and 'I am sad' show that the I has been confused with the mind, the emotional body. When a person says 'I did this' it means the self has been confused with the ego. It is untrue because the self is non-dual and can't act. If someone says 'I know this' it means that he or she that has confused the self is confused with the intellect. When you say 'I feel good' you have confused the self with the causal body, the bliss sheath.

The application of this teaching follows a certain type of logic. First the self is introduced as the gross body, a common belief. Then it is shown that there is another subtler body, the feelings and emotions, which also are thought to be the self. When one's feelings are hurt one will instinctively say, "I was hurt by what she said." This 'self' negates the previous self because for a self to be a self it cannot be two, modern theories of multiple personalities notwithstanding. The word 'self' means essence, that which is not made up of parts. Once the belief in oneself as the physical body is dropped and one accepts oneself as the emotional body, the teaching brings in the intellect 'self' which shows up in experience as the concept 'I am the doer' or 'I am the knower' which is meant to remove the notion that one is only the feelings and emotions. When one can see that he or she thinks of his or herself as a doer or a thinker and understands the limitation inherent in that concept, the idea of the bliss body is introduced. The 'bliss body' is responsible for pleasure and its companion concept 'I am an enjoyer.' The doer and the thinker will give way to the enjoyer in every case because doing and thinking are for the sake of enjoying but enjoying is not for the sake of doing and thinking. Finally, the self is introduced as the source of bliss. I cannot enjoy anything unless I am there prior to the onset of the enjoyment. Thus by tracing the 'I' concept from the gross to the subtle one is led to the self, the fundamental I. The realization of the whole and complete I negates all the lesser selves, meaning one lets go of them and embraces the unlimited identity.

The teaching works when it becomes clear that the association of the I with these five basic but conflicting concepts is absurd, since we know

experientially that we are only one being. The renunciation of limiting self concepts is tantamount to 'gaining' or 'realizing' the self because although it shines on all concepts it is easy to recognize with all concepts are gone.

One corruption of Vedanta related to this teaching is the idea that the 'sheaths' actually cover the self and therefore a technique to transcend the mind is needed to gain experiential access to the self is required. Even if such techniques work, one would only enjoy an experience 'of' the self and because experience is impermanent transcendence provides no lasting solution to the problem of limitation.