

shiningworld

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Greetings Shiningworld!

I am in South Africa awaiting the birth of my granddaughter and James is in Oregon preparing to join me. We send you our love. This newsletter is a bit of a mixed bag of interesting topics. Lesson Six of the ongoing Vedanta course can be found at the end.



Gratitude

A few months back we got polite complaint from an Indian person about James' and Shiningworld's relationship to the great Vedanta *sampradaya*. The idea was that we were not giving enough credit to India and particularly Hinduism. We pointed out that the truth, self knowledge, is not culture specific and that it would be hard to miss James' devotion to India and Hinduism. Although he is a WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) sometimes people ask if he is Jewish and he replies, 'No, I am a WASH, a White Anglo Saxon Hindu.' ☺ Anyway, we recently received the following email from another Indian—one who is familiar with his Hindu heritage—who greatly benefited from James' 'non-traditional' style of teaching Vedanta.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for everything that you have posted on your wonderful web-site. When I was younger I was a huge "Fan" of Swami Chinmayananda; but I was probably reading his works as much for a re-affirmation of our Indian Heritage as for learning and assimilating *Advaita Vedanta*.

I find your presentations so wonderfully clear and insightful. Though you are presenting it in

English and eschewing some of the more exotic Sanskrit terms I can deeply sense the love that you have for Vedanta. Sometimes it can give one a completely different perspective to hear something in a "Non-Traditional Format". Funnily though I had not understood anything about Vedanta before I went through the material in your site, I felt that I knew it all. My mother would study Vedanta with a gentleman who was once with Chinmaya and I would "clarify" her doubts. It is strange that inspite of going through the texts so often, I kept missing the forest for the trees.

I now read some of the traditional works with an entirely new vision and it gives me immense joy. Thank you! Thank you! and Thank you once again.

Suresh



Tooting Vedanta's Horn

If an enlightened person doesn't have a real teaching, he has to toot his own horn. We toot the impersonal trumpet of Vedanta because it makes non-egoic music. Don't believe us, just read the following email. This teaching works. We hope you dance to its tune.

The Life of My Dreams

Dear James,

Vedanta keeps doing its work as days go by... and as I look back I again realize that I am now freer, happier, more peaceful and satisfied. The conviction that my nature is full, whole and complete, that nothing, no object of experience can add or take anything away from me becomes firmer and steadier as the knowledge further recognizes and assimilates its limitless nature.

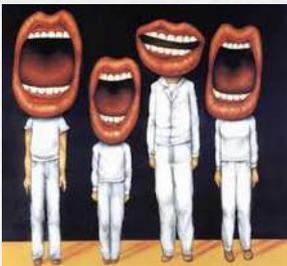
Today, having a walk with my wife while contemplating on the teachings, something clicked and I understood the difference between knowing that I am the light of consciousness and having the full understanding of the implications of that realization. What happened to me a couple of years back was the recognition that what I am is awareness, and that was a landmark event in the life of the *Jiva* at that time.

But that event was not supported by the complete knowledge (Vedanta) of the implied meaning of that realization. I did not have a clear understanding that to be Awareness means to be limitless, full, whole and complete and to indeed be free from desires and fears, free from dependence on objects.

For the *Jiva*, that event was an Aha! Moment: "I am pure consciousness! It is so simple! Now I can go and help others to recognize it too... I will become a teacher, get recognition from the world, and live a good life surrounded by students and a cozy *sangha*. I rapidly contracted the enlightenment sickness virus. You see, I did not really understand that the nature of Awareness is full satisfaction. Because the knowledge was not there I kept unconsciously looking for validation,

for something to make me feel more adequate, appreciated, loved, whole and complete. I thought that to know 'I am awareness' was basically going to make it easier for me to get what I wanted... to live the life of my dreams.

When I first met your book I felt a strong excitement and attraction. It was more like a kiss of death because I knew that it was going to strip away the ignorance leftover and leave me utterly alone, free from the dependence on people, things and circumstances. However, to be left alone in my whole and complete nature is the most blissful human experience there is. It almost feels as if I no longer live in this world... I never felt so peaceful, so free... wanting nothing, needing nothing in order to be truly content full and satisfied, and for this I am immensely grateful to you.



Speech Discipline

One of the most important Vedanta practices recommended for preparing the mind for self knowledge...and living happily in the world...is speech discipline (*vak tapas*). Here is a brilliant *satsang* by James on the topic. I don't think anyone has ever unfolded the relationship between the Causal and the Subtle Body in this wonderful manner.

"When we speak or write, the words have two meanings, one ostensible and one implied. These two meanings happen because the Unconscious Mind, the Causal Body, and the conscious mind, the Subtle Body, affect our experience of ourselves and the world simultaneously.

It is not incorrect to say that experience is a combination of these two factors. Nor is it unreasonable to say that experience takes place on two 'levels' at the same time, one level experienced directly and the other indirectly. In reality there are no levels. It is one. Only in Maya, the apparent reality, do they exist. But since we not only live as non-dual awareness beyond Maya but as apparent people in an apparent world it is helpful to understand the dual nature of experience.

It will probably come as a surprise to know that direct experience is simply the thought that is playing in the Subtle Body, the conscious mind, at any moment because we believe that thoughts are incidental to experience. Because the mind is one it cannot experience two thoughts simultaneously. Because we only experience one thought at a time we only have one experience at a time, so two streams of words do not come out simultaneously. Even if they did we could not hear both streams because incoming experience is controlled by the same rule that governs outgoing experience.

That the conscious mind speaks is known to us. We cannot speak unless the mind provides the

thoughts that form into the meaning of words. But words not only enjoy an ostensible meaning, they also contain an implied meaning, which is supplied by the Unconscious Mind, the Causal Body. So how does the Causal Body speak? Or to rephrase the question, “how does the implied meaning manifest?” It is encoded in the spoken or written words.

So when you are speaking without full attention i.e. when your mind is active (*rajasic*) or dull (*tamasic*) you are not aware that your words have two meanings and that the content of your unconscious is being revealed. And you are not aware that the Causal Body of the person to whom you are speaking is reading both your conscious and unconscious content and reacting to it. So in every communication there is a four-way, not merely a two way dynamic. The good or bad ‘vibes’ you immediately feel when you meet someone are your Causal Body’s reaction to them.

Most problems between people...and people problems are most of our problems...is due to the inability of the speaker and the listener, the writer and the reader, to discriminate between the ostensible and the implied meanings of words. If a speaker is unaware of the implied meaning of his statements and the listener is aware of the implied meaning, there is plenty of room for mischief. If the implied meaning of the speaker’s statement conflicts with the listener’s beliefs, opinions, likes and dislikes, conflict is inevitable. Good manners evolved to take care of this problem. If you have good manners and somebody makes a statement the implied meaning of which upsets you, you will not react negatively to it. You will feel it, but you will not react, so the karmic link between you and the speaker’s unconscious mind will be broken and you will remain clear and open.

Engaging an individual on the basis of their unconscious content rarely yields beneficial results because the content is not available to them so they don’t know what you are talking about, even though it is expressing through them all the time. And if it is available to them, usually they are not inclined to communicate about it, often because it does not cast them in the best light. Those aspects of our selves that contradict our own good opinion of ourselves are usually locked away in the basement of our minds and we prefer to leave them there.

One of the most important spiritual disciplines required to prepare the mind for enlightenment is speech discipline (*vak tapas*). What you think stays with you but what you say enters your environment and has the potential to agitate others which will somehow rebound back to you. The law of karma says ‘what goes around comes around.’ Knowing that your words have an implied meaning can give you considerable control of your karma because you can edit unacceptable implied meanings before they have a chance to pass your lips, thus averting agitating conflict.”



Isvara the Wolf

The Bhagavad Gita, one of the three main pillars of Vedanta, unfolds the teaching of the cosmic

order and the spirit of contribution (*yagna*) instilled by the Creator at the beginning of time that informs every sentient being. This attitude is meant to serve as a template for the practice of Karma Yoga, a practice that prepares the mind for enlightenment. The idea is that everything here is connected to everything else and every living being is meant to contribute his or her energy to keep the cosmos in balance. If you click this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q> you will see *Isvara* in action in the form of a small pack of wolves. An inspiring video.

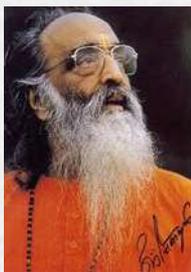
The Great Vedanta Sampradaya

*Sadashiva samarambaam
Shankaracharya madyamaam
Asmad acharya paryantam
Vande guru param param*

[Watch the video of Ram chanting it here](#)

*From limitless awareness, the first guru,
To Shankaracharya in the middle
And my guru at the end
I worship the Great Vedanta lineage of teachers*

Vedanta has been enlightening people for thousands of years. It is a perfected and complete means of self knowledge. Every generation of teachers standing on the shoulders of the preceding generation clarifies this eternal impersonal teaching for the next generation. We do not modernize it to pander to the tastes of the times...to do so would be to destroy it. Its purity, like the purity of the self, is never sullied.



Swami Chinmaya

My guru, Swami Chinmaya, revived Vedanta in India, much as Shankaracharya had done 12 Centuries before. Swamiji was a visionary. Early in the last century he could see that English would be the lingua franca of the world one day and he did something radical for India; he began teaching Vedanta in English. Today the Chinmaya Mission is the largest, most dynamic Vedanta organization in English worldwide. Perhaps one reason he took particular care to teach me had to do with the fact that I was educated and spoke good English and would carry the tradition into cyberspace. In fact, he once told me that at the beginning of the present century Vedanta would come into its own in the West, implying that I would somehow have something to do with it. His words were lost on me at the time but recently they have started to make sense.



Swami Dayananda

His disciple, Swami Dayananda, the foremost living Vedanta master today, continued the teaching in English. His greatest contribution to the tradition, in addition to his Bhagavad Gita Home Study course, a work of great clarity and genius seen only every few hundred years, was to re-establish the traditional meaning of Vedanta as a *pramana*, a means of knowledge, in face of an onslaught of experiential yogic ideas that sprang up around the beginning of the last century in the form of what was called 'New' or 'Modern' Vedanta. I became his disciple when I read a small pamphlet in which he clarified the meaning of Vedanta and attacked New Vedanta. The booklet is available through Arsha Vidya Grukulam. Here is the link <http://www.avrpt.com/teaching-advaita.htm> I gussied it up a bit and put it on Shiningworld. Here is the link [http://www.shiningworld.com/top/images/stories/pub-pdfs/Articles/\(1\) What is Advaita Vedanta.pdf](http://www.shiningworld.com/top/images/stories/pub-pdfs/Articles/(1) What is Advaita Vedanta.pdf)

My respect for both of these mahatmas knows no bounds. Sadly, neither was able to establish Vedanta outside of Hinduism. Both came to the West and achieved success with ex-patriot Indians but were not very well received by Westerners owing to Vedanta's association with Hinduism. Somehow, most Western people cannot see beyond the surface and were put off by the orange robes, strange Sanskrit words and accented speech. Transplanting something from one culture to another is always fraught with difficulty but Vedanta transplants well because, although it has always been associated with Hinduism, which incidentally I love, it is beyond every culture in so far as it is a body of revealed ideas communicated by an impersonal logical methodology. It is pure knowledge, "the knowledge that ends the search for knowledge."

Most of you know my story so I won't repeat it. Suffice it to say Vedanta is definitely coming into its own in the West, in no small part due to my almost fanatical love of these teachings. In addition to teaching the texts as the tradition dictates and relentlessly pointing out the limitations of Neo-Advaita as a vehicle for enlightenment it is my mission to make Vedanta accessible for Western people who have no particular connection with India. As mentioned above, I have been criticized by traditionalists who can't see the forest for the trees but my view that Vedanta is suitable for any mature person regardless of culture, race or creed has been certainly vindicated if the success of Shiningworld is any indication.



James, the One Man Band

Nothing succeeds like success but I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. The truth is that I am worn out. I can't keep up. I admit defeat. My darling wife has tried to take up the slack but even with her prodigious energy we are falling behind. The inboxes pile up, the phones ring off the hook, requests for satsang increase daily, everyone wants to 'hang out' with us, and my fishing rod sits unused in the garage next to my waders.

Isvara to the Rescue



James and Vishnudeva

I hope it is clear to everyone in the Shiningworld community that we are not in it for the money, not because we are so holy, but because when you are as full as we are, nothing in the world is attractive. We did not pay for the teachings and we do not charge to teach. Every dime that comes to Shiningworld goes into disseminating non-dual wisdom. For the last year we have been remunerating Christian Eberle for his devoted service to Shiningworld. If you have questions about the videos contact him at shiningworldvideo@gmail.com. Christian relieved much pressure from us. He has done a great job. Thanks, Christian. A few months ago *Isvara* sent Vishnudeva who... we hate titles...is a kind of general manager. If you have questions about any aspect of Shiningworld please contact him: inquiries.shiningworld@gmail.com Think of him as a mini-Ramji for all intents and purposes. We have been employing him part time for a couple of months and after the first of the year he will work full time for Shiningworld. The website upgrade meant that we had to hire a webmaster too whose name is Puran. The addition of these great souls has had a liberating effect on us. Ramji's energy has returned and he never felt better.



The Downside of the Upside

Well, if reality is non-dual there is no upside or downside, but Ramji seems to have inherited another dharma... worrying about money ☺ He is OK with it being the original *karma yoga* guy

but...and we are not begging, mind you...it would be very nice if all you lovely Shiningworld people saw it in your hearts to dig deep into your pockets and help Shiningworld to keep growing...no donation is too large or too small. The world will thank you for it. We have many ideas for expanding the publications and videos. We are working on a curriculum that will take you from the introductory to the advanced texts. Next year we will try to get non-profit legal status for Shiningworld and create a simple non-hierarchical structure to carry its agenda...the dissemination of non-dual wisdom...forward.

The freedom that has come from relinquishing so many Shiningworld responsibilities means that we can concentrate on things that we really love and are of most benefit to everyone: writing and teaching. So please help.

If you have editing and writing skills and would like to donate your time please contact Vishnudeva. It would be very helpful if you report broken links on the website and make suggestions to improve it. We want your feedback.

We are contemplating a subscription service for the Shiningworld videos in addition to the download and USB options. Shortly we will send out a form explaining the service to see if there is enough interest to warrant the effort.

Speaking of videos, the videos of the Berkeley seminar are now available in the shop for a special price. It was a great teaching and Ramji was in fine fettle.

Also Ramji will be giving four evening satsangs in Portland from 7:00-9:00 PM on November 1 through November 4 at 1919 SE 31st Ave. See events on the website for details

And for those of you who want an adventure and a nice break in the middle of winter don't forget the India talks at Tiruvannamalai from January 5-28. See Events on the website for details.

Finally, check out the upload of new satsangs. Ramji has 36. All are excellent but some are superb!

Webinar on Chapter 6: The Essence of Enlightenment

Finally, finally, Ramji will do a webinar on Chapter 6 of The Essence of Enlightenment: Beautiful Intelligent Ignorance, on Tuesday, November 11th in Berlin, Germany at 7 PM GMT +1

USA:

East coast: 1:00PM

West Coast: 10:00AM

South Africa: 7:00PM

Sydney, Australia: 4:00AM, Monday 8th

New Satsangs

58 New Satsangs from Ram and Sundari here:

http://shiningworld.com/top/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=29

Ultra Spiritual

Before Lesson 6...Beautiful Intelligent Ignorance...a good laugh...



It is sad that spirituality has become just another cool lifestyle. I suppose it can't be helped considering the superficial nature of modern life. As you know sometimes we get taken to task for poking fun at sacred non-dual cows but Ramji and I almost wet ourselves when we watched this video satire that drifted into the Shiningworld galaxy recently

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kDso5EIFRg>

Vedanta Course Answers to Lesson 5: Who Am I?

1) *Because the knowledge of my true identity is contradicted by my experience. Experience confirms the belief that I am limited.*

2) *A. Vedanta pramana B. My epiphanies (non-dual mystic experiences) and the epiphanies of others.*

3) *A. Because they are interpreted by egos whose minds are subject to contamination. B. Because no individual's interpretation of his experience amounts to a teaching that can resolve every doubt about one's nature. C. Because the self is beyond experience.*

4) *It is necessary to patiently set up the context in which self inquiry becomes meaningful. If you don't understand the qualifications for understanding you will not understand who you are when it is taught.*

5) *Indirect self knowledge is knowledge of the self gained though an ego's experience. The experience of objects is direct but the self is not an object so 'direct' experience 'of' the self is not liberation. Liberation is freedom from one's identity as an experiencing entity. "I am experiencing the self directly" is indirect knowledge. "I am the Self" is direct knowledge. It is direct because it does not imply experience of objects. Indirect knowledge depends on the belief that the experiencer is real and that the self is an object of experience.*

6) *A. Because stories are statements of one's experience and the self is not an experiencing entity. It has no story.*

7) A. Because reality is non-dual, there is only one self. Therefore it cannot be something special.
B. Ignorance of the self makes one feel very ordinary, just like everyone else. This kind of ordinariness, however, is not satisfying. The ego wants to distinguish itself, enjoy a more elevated status. Therefore it seeks enlightenment, which it believes is an extraordinary accomplishment. The word ordinary is meant to disabuse the ego of its grandiose notions of enlightenment.

8) Because consciousness is more commonly associated with mental and emotional activity... thoughts and feelings, beliefs and opinions, etc....than awareness.

9) Because it is so obvious and ordinary.

10) It means that I don't need any object to complete me. It means that the loss of any object does not change me.

11) It is the knowledge that I am whole and complete...full. It is satisfaction with this knowledge irrespective of what my ego experiences.

12) Belief that the fears and desires arising in one's self are real.

13) Confidently applying the knowledge "I am whole and complete fullness itself" to the mind when fears and desires arise.

14) Because we observe them. I cannot be what I know.

15) They inhabit different orders of the one reality.

16) Because the person is merely a reflection of awareness in the mirror of the Subtle Body. The self is conscious; the person is an illumined object.

17) Because you are yourself.

18) Because I was never born.

19) Because you are not made up of parts. You are whole and complete fullness.

20) *Because you are everywhere. Because you pervade everything. Because action is mithya, apparent. Because there is no reason to do anything because you are complete.*

21) *I am unique because there is only me. I am not unique because there is only me.*

22) *Partless. Whole and complete.*

23) *Because awareness is not affected by experience.*

24) *Because awareness doesn't change.*

25) *Because I am the light of awareness.*

26) *Because it negates the belief that I am a person. Liberation is freedom from the person I think I am.*

Lesson 6: Beautiful Intelligent Ignorance

A tsunami is a very big wave. Before we get to the topic of ordinary waves...me and you...we need to discuss the big wave in awareness we call the creation. Just as non-duality doesn't mean anything apart from duality and we don't mean anything apart from the creation, awareness does not mean anything without *Maya*...Beautiful Intelligent Ignorance.

Before we proceed I need to tell you that so far I have been careful not to introduce too many technical terms but this is about to change. If you are serious about liberation and you are convinced that Vedanta can set you free, you will need to understand the science of your nature in depth. You are not complicated, but certain subtle aspects need to be understood before Vedanta can work its magic on you. So take your time and memorize the meaning of these words because success depends on it.

Before objects appeared, there was only non-dual limitless consciousness. There are no divisions in it, no parts. Something that is limitless can be anything. If it can't apparently be something other than what it is...it is limited. This is why scripture says that consciousness is all-powerful. In a way it is not correct to say it is powerful because power implies duality. But it is precisely with reference to duality that the statement about its power becomes meaningful. The power to

create, which is inherent in consciousness, is called *Maya*. It is a word whose many meanings you need to know because it is the key to solving the riddle of existence.

The first thing we need to know about *Maya* that it is *only* all powerful with reference to the creation. We need to take a small verbal detour because most of us think of the Creator as God. You are free to use whatever word you want to refer to the Creator but if you want your understanding to line up with reality you need to know that God or *Maya* does not imply otherness...as we shall see. The popular notion of God as a SUPERBEING sitting somewhere outside the creation making it all happen is an understandable but primitive personification of the truth. It is true that *Maya* creates and sustains and destroys the universe, but not remotely. It is right here in you, right now, creating sustaining and destroying the objects that are forever appearing and disappearing in you.

The second thing to know is that while *Maya* is the cause of the whole creation, it is only a tiny flyspeck in awareness. It does not hide awareness.

This may be an upsetting idea for the doer because it calls into question attempts to discover it by efforts to experience it or by removing the stuff that separates the seeker from it, unless that stuff is ignorance. If you have stuff to get rid of, it does not exist apart from your knowledge of it and your knowledge of it depends on consciousness because you cannot have knowledge without consciousness, so you are definitely something other than your stuff long before you try to rid yourself of it. If you know who you are, your stuff is relatively unimportant. In a way, however, it is good news if you are qualified because if enlightenment is the removal of ignorance about who you are, it is relatively simple matter assuming you have Vedanta and a skilful teacher at your disposal.

Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, non-duality says that the world and everything in it...including us...is awareness. *Maya* creates in a very interesting way. If you want to make cheese you need to subject milk to a certain process. During the process milk no longer retains its nature as milk. It becomes something else altogether. If you want to get the milk back you cannot. So if awareness...let's call it *Isvara* in keeping with our tradition...becomes the world in this way we can't know it as it is...because it no longer exists!

The dualists don't think that creation happens this way. They think that God stays put in heaven and creates from there, never getting sullied by what It creates. We agree that *Isvara* is not sullied by Its creation but we don't accept that the creation hides *Isvara* so that the only way It can be known or experienced is to die and go to the heavenly place where God sits. We don't accept it because we know that *Isvara* creates in another way.

We know this because the whole creation can be destroyed without disturbing anything except ignorance. To introduce you to this idea slowly, first consider the deep sleep state. When this state is operational there is no world whatsoever and you are perfectly fine; you are full of bliss. It is important to understand this to dissolve your resistance to the idea that you might end up like a zombie when Vedanta removes the world for you. The next idea to consider is the dream state. In the dream state you are there and a whole world appears in you. Your dream ego functions in that world as if it was a real world. In fact there is no 'as if' for you because you actually take the dream to be real. It is only when you wake up that you see that it was a dream.

Isvara's creation is a dream creation. It is there as long as you are in it but it disappears when you wake up. Some people have experiences in *Isvara's* dream of life...this passing shadow...that wake them up but this kind of awakening is subject to a cruel irony. You awaken in another dream...the dream that you are awake. Liberation is much more than waking up. It is waking up from the waker *and the waking up* because the 'you' that waked up never slept. And this waking up is not an experiential awakening. It is not an awakening at all. It is simply self knowledge.

The Macrocosmic Mind and the Three Gunas

So *Isvara's* creation is a projection, a dream. From *Isvara's* point of view it is a lovely dream, beautiful and intelligent. We call *Isvara's* dream ignorance, not because *Isvara* is ignorant but because it is such a wonderful dream that it hides *Isvara* from us. We are fascinated by it and think it is real. *Isvara* is awareness plus pure *sattva*. Pure *sattva* is awareness in the form of a special substance that makes knowledge possible. The whole creation is intelligently designed. It is made up of knowledge. *Isvara* is awareness with all the knowledge that makes the creation possible. *Isvara* is tree knowledge, animal knowledge, people knowledge, matter knowledge, mind knowledge...knowledge of everything. But knowledge is not enough for a creation, so *Isvara* needs a substance to transform into all the objects in the creation. Because reality is non-dual awareness, the substance from which the forms are shaped has to come from *Isvara* too. So *Isvara* creates *Tamas* out of its own self. *Tamas* is matter. It is not conscious so it can't transform itself. And knowledge alone is not capable of transforming matter into forms so, realizing the need for another power, *Isvara* dreamed up *Rajas*. *Rajas* is the power of desire. It allows *Isvara* to create and destroy the forms in the creation according to knowledge.

This whole thing happens in the mind of *Isvara* in an instant...before one object appears in awareness. It did not take *Isvara* billions of years to think about whether or not It wanted a creation and a few billion more to cook up the idea of *Maya*. Once It had *Maya* figured out it did not labor for untold more millions of years on the *sattva-rajas-tamas* idea and then proceeded over many million more to evolve the subtle and gross elements, bang the gross world into existence, and wait until the conscious beings appeared and went about their funny dance so It could have a good laugh. The creation is a thought and like a thought, it takes place instantaneously. It may take a while to get your mind around this idea because it is completely contrary to the narratives foisted on us by both science and religion, but once you rigorously expose your mind to Vedanta, you will understand what it means when we say that creation is a thought...a projection... in you, awareness.

You may be surprised to know that the three *gunas* are not the whole story of the creation. We are just getting started. Remember, this all 'happens' before there is a you and a me and a world.

The idea of the Five Elements also occurs to *Isvara* at the same time that the idea of the *Gunas* appears. The elements are Air, Fire, Water, Earth and Space. We need not consider how they relate to the *gunas* because we are only interested in liberation and this topic is not directly related to it. When we think of the elements we think of material tangible things. But the mind of *Isvara* is pure formless intangible consciousness so to transform itself into the material tangible world an intermediate step is required. The first objects to appear are subtle elements in their pure form...they are called *tanmatras*...which combine and recombine according to a certain formula (*panchikarana*) to evolve the tangible material elements.

As if this was not enough to keep in mind, *Isvara* came up with the whole *mandala* of existence too. If you have had time to think about it you cannot help but appreciate the creation as an orderly and intelligently designed matrix, a *universe* of physical, psychological and moral laws.

The Three Bodies

The *gunas* and the elements all exist within a basic pattern, unseen gridlines that structure the whole field of consciousness that is the creation. I call it the *mandala* of existence or the *dharmafield*.

Although it is one beautifully designed intelligent *mandala* is it divided into three 'bodies' arranged in very logical way. These bodies belong to *Isvara* in its capacity as the Creator. *Isvara* outside its capacity to create is bodiless and is known as *Paramatma*, pure uncreated consciousness. The word body in Sanskrit...*sharira*...means 'that which is subject to change.' We also have three bodies that correspond with *Isvara's* bodies. In fact our bodies are just *Isvara's* bodies believed by us to belong to us. Before we reveal the identity of *jiva* and *Isvara* it is important to distinguish their respective natures. Its knowledge is limitless, ours is limited. Its power is limitless, ours is limited. Its desire is limitless, ours is limited. So far we have been talking about *Isvara's* Causal Body brought about by *Maya*. It is the ideas that lie hidden in consciousness that make everything that we experience possible. Because it causes the creation it is called the Causal Body. There is more to it, as we shall see when we get down to the microcosmic level, but for now this is enough.

The Subtle Body is made of *sattva*. It is reflective. It reflects pure awareness. You cannot see pure awareness or the Causal Body. The Causal Body is unmanifest. It exists in potentia. You can't say what it is although you can infer its nature from its effects. And it should be noted at this point that inference is a valid means of knowledge. The Subtle Body is the place where the Causal Body becomes known in the form of your thoughts and feelings experiences, perceptions, memories, dreams, desires, fears etc. that you think of as your life. *Isvara's* Subtle Body consists of all the apparently conscious beings in the creation and the thoughts that animate them.

The Gross Body

The Gross Body is...well...the gross body. Like the Subtle Body we know this one well. *Isvara's* Gross Body is all the matter in the creation. It is made of *Tamas*.

Two thirds of this *mandala* is experienceable; one third hidden. The Causal Body is hidden. It is important to know that this whole structure is inert. It is not conscious or alive. However, it seemingly springs to life when pure consciousness illumines it. It becomes a spinning whirligig of energy, maintained by the law of *karma*, which again was cooked up by *Isvara* before one event actually happened.

Although it seems as if the Creator's dream is real because it spins and dances as if it is real, it is not actually real. What a joke! It is like a Merry Go Round with its brightly colored horses going up and down, around and around as cheery music plays. What fun! But it is not alive at all. It is just a machine, seemingly living. It exists, no doubt, but it is truly a dream. The realization that life is a dream is usually a big shock. When it happens you are well on your way to liberation. The self...you, awareness...is real (*satya*) and *Maya's* projection, the world, is apparently real. We have a technical term for what is apparently real that you should remember, *mithya*.

It is quite the fashion nowadays to claim that you are enlightened. People say, "I am awareness" as if it was some kind of special status, as if it was the last word in all matters spiritual. We say, "Big deal, who or what isn't?" It is totally easy to be awareness because there is no other option. You may define enlightenment as the realization "I am awareness" but this is only one half of the knowledge. The other half...what makes self knowledge meaningful...is the knowledge of *mithya*, the apparent reality. We said liberation was complete knowledge, not partial knowledge. Complete knowledge is the knowledge of *satya* AND *mithya*.

When we talk about liberation we mean one thing and one thing alone: the discrimination between *satya* and *mithya*, awareness and the objects appearing in it. To understand it better we need to go back up to the causal level and talk about *Isvara* and *Maya* again. Because of the three *gunas*, *Isvara* has three powers: the power to veil (*tamas*), the power to project (*rajas*) and the power to reveal (*sattva*). These powers...energies if you wish...pervade *Isvara's* Subtle Body.

When the world is projected, *Tamas* covers the Subtle Bodies of all beings. This is why we don't know we are awareness and why we accept the fictitious identity that mom and pop dream up for us. We look out through the organs of perception and see a world and at that moment *Rajas* projects the idea that what is seen is reality. So basically, we come into the game of life with a stacked deck. We don't know who we really are and we take the person we are told we are to be a real person and we assume the world we see is real. It would be very funny if it weren't so sad. But what to do? This is what we are dealing with. From birth onwards we are trying to sort out this problem. When a little *sattva*, the revealing power, creeps in we start to question the whole illusion.

Superimposition

We live in ignorance of the nature of reality because of these two powers. Our whole life is confused. To use Vedanta terminology, we 'superimpose.' We don't know what is real and what is apparently real. We take ourselves to be the Subtle Body and identify with all the stuff that arises in it. Along with superimposition come certain beliefs that keep us firmly locked into our confusion. For example, as we pointed out in the beginning, we think the joy is the object. We think we can get what we already have by doing something. We think that the things that make us happy should last. We can't understand why good and evil sit side by side. Actually it is not quite fair to say 'we superimpose.' Superimposition is unconscious. It happens before we appear so you should not feel that you made a mistake. Of course you do, but that is one of the ironies of life. That very uncomfortable feeling of global guilt, unexplained guilt, free-floating anxiety...the Christian's call it Original Sin...is the result of superimposition. It is not your fault. Unfortunately, it becomes your problem until you remove it with discrimination.

A very nice story in our scriptures explains superimposition. It will help to cement this concept into your mind. A weary thirsty traveller sees a village at twilight and proceeds to the well to get a drink of water. He reaches down to grab the bucket sitting beside the well and spots a big cobra coiled next to it, its hood up ready to strike. He freezes, full of terror. At that moment a friendly bearded old man appears and asks what's happening. The traveller implores him to get a stick and kill the snake. The old man takes a look and laughs. "That's no snake," he said, "It's the well rope coiled up next to the bucket."

What happened to the snake when the traveller received the knowledge? It disappeared! It did not have a real head and tail and scales and so forth. It was just a projection. And when you understand that it is a rope, you cannot see the snake again. It has been destroyed by knowledge. You can understand how you made a mistake and took the apparent for the real, but you cannot make the snake return. This is what we call firm knowledge. Once self knowledge takes place, you will not accept yourself as your story and you are freed of it.

The most interesting part of the snake and rope story, apart from the fact that it illustrates how the creation is a product of Ignorance, is that this incident took place in twilight. Humans live in a twilight zone. If the man had come to the well in midday when the sun was shining brightly, he would not have seen a snake. If you have full knowledge of reality you cannot mistake yourself for the Subtle Body, the person with the story. If the man had gone to the well in the dead of night, no snake would have been perceived. When you are totally ignorant, like an animal, you cannot have a doubt about who you are. Only when there is twilight, when knowledge and ignorance sit side by side, can you superimpose individuality on the limitlessness of your own self. In the twilight of *Maya's* projection, the apparent reality, it's difficult to tell what is happening and it is easy to superimpose.

Another interesting aspect of this story is the symbol of the friendly old man. He represents Vedanta. Vedanta is your friend. It is inquiry. It strips away the projection that is causing your suffering by revealing your nature as awareness. When you see the underlying reality your existential fears go away. Not immediately perhaps, but the effects of ignorance remain for a while and gradually fade away as the knowledge does its work.

Superimposition causes suffering. We want to be free of it. There is no point thinking that there is some kind of special experience that will take care of this problem. Because the ignorance and the projection are hard wired, disentangling you from the objects appearing in you is hard work. It is hard work because the confusion seems so natural. We have lived indiscriminating lives since childhood and now we are asked to question the very assumptions on which our identity is based.

On a day to day level, how does superimposition work? It is very simple. There is not one person who has not said, "I think, I feel, I do." All three statements are fine examples of superimposition. Why is it ignorant to make such statements? Because there is only one non-dual 'I' and it has no body and mind so it does not think or feel or act. The thinking feeling and acting belong to *mithya*, the apparent reality. They belong to the Subtle Body, not to awareness. You, awareness, are always free of the Subtle Body. When we say that you are free we mean that it is something other than you. It is something other than you because it is known to you. You are not what you know. What you know is you, but you are not it. You are the knower.

The Subtle Body is where experience takes place. It does not take place in awareness. It appears in awareness like a dream appears when you are asleep, but it does not affect awareness in any way. When you think that something happened to you it means that you lack discrimination. You have confused yourself with the experiencer, the Subtle Body, which is affected by experience. Liberation is not about making the experiencer 'detached' as many people believe, setting it free. It is always attached to experience. Liberation is the understanding that you are not the experiencer and that you are awareness, the non-experiencing witness. When that is clearly understood, suffering stops. Suffering is the mental and emotional disturbances you add to the events that make up your life.

The Subtle Body – ‘Me’

Before we continue I need to tell you that we are going to pretend that the Subtle Body and the world in which it lives is real because that is where we find ourselves. It is to Vedanta's credit that instead of just dismissing it as unreal and telling us to transcend it (how you transcend something that is not real is not clear), it patiently comes into our dream and leads us out of ignorance step by step.

Just as there are several facts to know about the Causal Body, there are several things to know about the Subtle Body. These functions do not belong to Maya or to Awareness. They belong solely to the Subtle Body. *Maya* instantly projects the creation and covers it with Ignorance. Awareness is the part of you...which is not a part...that doesn't change. It effortlessly illumines the activities of the Subtle Body. *Maya* and Awareness are very simple. The Subtle body is more complex, more mechanical.

Doubt

The first function built into the Subtle Body is doubt. When something happens you immediately have a doubt about how to respond. Everybody has doubts. We have doubts about where we're going to live, what we're going to do, whether we'll find love and who we are.

Isvara was actually very kind because It must have known that when It appeared here as a Subtle Body...a living being...it would need protection because in a dream nothing lasts and nothing is what it seems to be. To function in this dream you need to question things. Someone who takes things at face value and does not ask questions is asking for trouble.

For example, if you are lonely and want a Mr. or Mrs. Right to share your life and you get on a dating site and read the profile of prospective mates, you are a complete idiot if you think that what the profile says is true. There may be little bits of truth cleverly strewn here and there, definitely some exaggerations and probably a few outright lies. In these intimate personal games people lie because they are full of fears and desires and the truth is not always appealing. They want to get something so they present themselves in the best possible light. It is quite 'natural' but woe to the person who takes it seriously. Yes, you should trust but you should also tether your camel.

When you turn on the TV and the pitchman says I've got the deal for you, it actually means I've got the deal for me. Most of us think it is important to trust implicitly, but it is a mistake. Doubt is good in all matters *samsaric*...up to a point. But it is important not to fall in love with your doubts. A love affair with doubt is dithering. Ditherers are never happy. You need to be able to resolve your doubts.

Resolve the Doubt and Act

To resolve a doubt, you need information. Where is the information going to come from? *Isvara* to the rescue again! It evolved the intellect. The intellect is the Subtle Body in its determining, discriminating, inquiring function. The Subtle Body is very supple; it can do a lot of tricks. Its job is to ferret out the relevant information, make a determination and tell the ego, the doer, what to do and generate the emotion appropriate to the action so you can respond properly to the situation. It is your duty, your *dharma*, to respond appropriately to whatever happens.

But where is the information going to come from? Someone just said "I love you." Your intellect can't just get out a smart phone, go on the internet and google, 'What do I do when someone says I love you?' You respond according to your programming. If you have never been in this situation you will probably hem and haw and get flustered and not say anything. If you have been in this situation and you want to encourage said suitor, you will say, "I love you too." Actually you may not have been in that situation and still say, "I love you too," because you saw a similar situation on TV or this is what your friend said when it happened to him. In either case conditioning came to the rescue. If you don't love her but want to take advantage of her, you will lie because that is what you are programmed to do. Your programming is stored in your Causal Body. We will discuss programming presently.

So the intellect has the knowledge of what to do. The knowledge the intellect retrieves from the Causal Body instantly transforms the Subtle Body into a doer...the doer is actually just a thought... and produces the emotions required to activate the active organs...hands, feet and speech, etc... causing the body to do or say something. This produces a new situation that requires a response and turns the wheel of life over once more. From morning to evening, day after day, year after year it goes on. It is just *Isvara* impersonally operating the *Maya* dream. There is very little you can do to change it and changing it presents various problems too...but it can be changed. We will talk about what you can do presently. In fact the rest of the book is about what you can do. But you need to know that if you are qualified, the knowledge alone will be enough. Unless you are ready to surrender the doer you will be caught up in this monotonous cycle forever. This is why we need to discuss *Isvara* both with and without *Maya*. Once you understand how it works you can easily surrender the doer.

As we will see presently in the chapter on discrimination, the point of discussing the Subtle Body and identifying the thoughts and feelings and karma that belongs to it is to indicate that all of this stuff stays with the Subtle Body. It does not belong to you, awareness. Vedanta is not just passive knowledge, the knowledge that stops the seeking, it is the skillful application of knowledge to the Subtle Body that reveals the blissful fullness of awareness. You will need to apply the knowledge not only to stop the tendency to seek but you will undoubtedly need to discriminate once you have stopped seeking because the effects of ignorance...gratuitous desires and fears...remain. When the weary traveller realized that the snake was actually a rope it took a few minutes for the uncomfortable emotions to disappear. The intellect, which in a normal unevolved person is busy discriminating between various objects, is now given the task of discriminating the self from the objects appearing in it.

If you have understood what we have said so far, you have either been set free by the knowledge or you have the knowledge needed to set yourself free. You can put the book down and get on with enjoying life as it is or you can meaningfully start your spiritual work. The first option is unlikely, however, for a particular reason, which we will take up now.

The Seeds

Each Vedanta teaching is as important as all the others but the topic of *vasanas* is very important because it identifies both your allies and your enemies in the battle of life. When you are ignorant of your fullness, you pursue objects that you feel will complete you. You go for certain things and you shy away from certain others. Fear and desire motivate your actions. When you act from a feeling of lack (fear) and the desire that springs from it, the action leaves a very subtle trace.

When you are acting you do not realize that the action has unseen results beyond the immediate experience. The unseen result is called a *vasana*, a simple Sanskrit term that means 'fragrance' or trace. Like the smell emitted from flowers the actions you do carry on unbeknownst to you. My teacher used to call them 'the footprints of your actions.' You are walking down the pristine beach of life leaving tracks in the sand. They are behind you so you don't notice them. But they are not actually gone. They come back to you later. In the meantime they go to the Causal Body. The Causal Body is called the 'seed' body because it causes you to think and feel and act.

For example, you have sex and really enjoy it. When it is over physically it is not over. Nobody who had sex and enjoyed it did it only once. You may go about other business for a while but when you find yourself in a certain situation, you want it again. If sex completed you, you wouldn't be interested in it again. But you are interested because you still feel incomplete. The desires for objects that lie hidden in you and spring out from time to time are your *vasanas*. This applies to fears as well. If you have a bad experience, you will avoid that kind of experience like the plague. To make it very simple, we can say that your *vasanas* are your conditioning, your tendencies, the objects and activities that you are attracted to and repelled by.

Everything that moves in the apparent reality is driven by *vasanas*. *Vasanas* are not inherently good or bad. They are the seeds...the knowledge...that drives the creation. *Ishvara* invented them. Nothing stirs in the creation without a *vasana*. A *vasana* becomes a good one when it drives you into pleasant circumstances and it becomes a bad one when it drives you into an unpleasant situation. Drinking alcohol is a very nice *vasana* for certain people. It is a very painful *vasana* for others.

A *vasana* is the momentum from a past action, the tendency to repeat it. It is purely a technical term. I make this point to counteract the idea that *vasanas* are only negative. The belief that they are all negative has given rise to a frustrating enlightenment idea: enlightenment happens when all the *vasanas* have been removed. Enlightened people have *vasanas*. If you are alive you have *vasanas*. When the *vasanas* pack up, you die.

There is nothing right or wrong about repeating a particular pattern of behaviour. Certain habits are good and certain habits are not, depending on what you are trying to achieve. As discriminating inquirers we are interested in the psychology behind our behaviour, not the behaviors themselves, although certain behaviors are completely off limits, those that violate universal norms...injury, deceit, theft, etc. The basic psychology operating behind most of our unhelpful behaviors is fear, a sense of lack.

A *vasana* for food is natural. It is *Ishvara* maintaining the body. I eat to live. But when I feel emotionally upset for any reason and I use food to calm me the *vasana* becomes a problem because it masks my real motivation. I now live to eat. If my mind is clear I can understand that I am using food to solve a problem that cannot be solved by food and I can look for the solution elsewhere. But if my mind is not clear and food works...always only temporarily...I will repeatedly use food to manage my emotions. When a *vasana* is repeatedly repeated the behaviour associated with it becomes binding. When I keep responding habitually to life boredom sets in. It is not pleasant to behave like a robot when you are actually a conscious being. At this stage the *vasana* driven habit becomes an obsession or a compulsion, which finally morphs into an addiction. We call these states of desire and attachment 'binding' *vasanas*. At this point you are not eating food; the food is eating you. In case you haven't figured it out, 'food' represents any *vasana*-driven behaviour meant to make you feel good.

Vedanta does not work for people with addictions and compulsions...unless the addiction has caused the person to 'hit bottom.' Hitting bottom means that there is no longer the slightest desire to defend the addictive behaviour and there is a burning desire to be done with it. If a person has not hit bottom, he or she will not be open to the spiritual solution. He or she may talk freedom but persist in the behaviour that masks the fundamental problem, absence of self knowledge. This is why our scriptures say, "Let not the wise unsettle the minds of the ignorant." It is a waste of time to lecture those whose minds are under the spell binding *vasanas* because their minds belongs to the *vasana* in play at the moment. For example, if you have conversation with a drunk, it can be all very wonderful and meaningful at the time, but if you try to build on the relationship the next day, you cannot because the sober person you are talking to today is not the drunk you were talking to the preceding evening. Actually, you were not talking to the person at all. You were talking to the alcohol *vasana*. And unfortunately *vasanas* are not conscious.

Dharma

A binding *vasana* is like a deep ravine or gorge in the Causal Body, the Unconscious. Consciousness is forced to flow down it. If we stick with the ravine metaphor we can expand the meaning to include another important fact about ourselves, *svadharma*. We all exist in the mind of *Isvara* as conscious beings and within that designation there are human beings and within that designation there are many types. Each human type is a branch on the tree of *samsara*...*Isvara's* mind...and the roles it plays are the twigs.

As mentioned, *svadharma* means your relative nature, the type of person you are. Astrology and the Enneagram are attempts to describe various types of people. We have no quarrel with what these very soft 'sciences' say about people...in so far as people are real...but we are not interested in the details. If your primary goal is to figure out who you are as a person, Vedanta is not for you, because although you do have a certain kind of conditional personal identity, knowing it doesn't solve the existential problems that you face. That you think of yourself as a unique person is primary problem you face. Furthermore, without knowledge of the consciousness in which the person operates, he or she is subject to any manner of problems.

Having said that, if you don't know what your relative nature is, you will not behave in harmony with it and your mind will be very unsettled. If your mind is unsettled you will be unable to understand who you really are. So we need to know our *svadharma*...but it is not our goal. This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

In any case, a *samskara* is the result of the clustering effect of several *vasanas*. They are responsible for the roles we play and they make up the very fabric of our relative natures. Human beings are complex, unlike animals. Animals are more or less an aggregation of two or three rudimentary *vasanas*. They are programmed with eating, sleeping and sex *vasanas* and not much else, although animal lovers project all manner of amazing qualities on them. Monkey is a word that describes a certain program with a very limited range of behaviour. If I am a monkey I will never behave like a dog. Dogs and cats and birds are other programs, *samskaras*. To stick with our valley metaphor, they are like a river in a small valley with a few feeder streams. A microcrobe is a *samskara* too. It is a very simple program, a tiny puddle of water with no feeder streams whatsoever. All of these beings follow their *svadharma* without question; they are true to what they are.

Your Nature – Svaharma

'Human being' is a unique program. Actually we are just animals with the ability to think. But in terms of our metaphor we are big rivers served by many large tributaries fed in turn by many smaller streams. What makes us so complex is intellect, the ability to think and choose.

This implies that something other than discrete *vasanas* condition us. Another doorway to this idea is this: why don't all newborns turn out the same way? One becomes a scientist, another a musician, a third a politician, etc. There seems to be some deeper force determining the choices we make and the actions that flow from them.

The creation itself is one vast program within which are millions of conscious beings stamped by *Isvara* with unique programs intended to serve the needs of the total. All conscious beings share one life. As long as every being follows its program life works nicely. A tree puts out oxygen and consumes carbon dioxide and everything is fine. Birds follow bird nature and flies do what flies do and life goes on. Humans, it seems, have been given various natures according to the needs of the total and are meant to perform certain functions necessary for the smooth functioning of the whole.

In every system there is something that belongs but doesn't belong, a fly in the ointment, so to speak. Human beings are the fly in *Isvara's* ointment. That doesn't mean that we are 'bad' and should be eliminated from the beautiful intelligent creation. It just means that with ointment comes flies. We make an otherwise beautiful but monotonous creation interesting because we have somehow been given intellect, self consciousness. Cows are not self conscious. They do not know they are cows. They are just consciousness, *Isvara*, in a particular body acting out a particular program. They are not going to write symphonies, teach the Vedas and invent airplanes and internet. The intellect is responsible for culture and also makes it possible to choose one thing over another, 'free' will. Of course we are not free when you look at it from *Isvara's* point of view, because *Isvara* creates and controls everything. But as apparent human beings in the apparent matrix of life we apparently have free will. Free will can be a blessing but it can also be a curse because it means that we can chose not to go with our relative nature and act out of an idea that is contrary to it. It means that we can break the rules if we so desire.

If you have the nature of an accountant and you try to become a poet it will not work for you. If you have the nature of a saint and you try to become a criminal it will not work. If you are a homosexual and you try to be heterosexual it will not work. If you have an entrepreneurial nature and you pump gas for minimum wage you will be going against *dharma*, your nature. To be happy you need to follow your nature.

Universal Values - *Samanya Dharma*

We call the creation 'the *dharma* field.' It is made up of physical laws and psychological laws and programmed conscious beings. There is also a moral dimension to the creation. The moral dimension is based on the non-dual nature of consciousness. This means that there is only one conscious being here appearing as many and that built into the creation are certain mutual expectations, all of which derive from the most fundamental *dharma*, non-injury. These universal expectations or values are called *Samanya Dharma*, about which more will also be said in Chapter 8. I don't injure you because I know how it feels to be injured. I don't lie because I don't like to be

lied to. I don't steal because I value what I have and appreciate the fact that you value what you have.

Samanya dharma is built into our human program. It is a *dharma* that you violate at your peril. It is sometimes called 'conscience.' It is often argued that criminals don't have this programming, but they do. Every thief locks up his loot. Hit men carry guns to protect themselves. Actually there is no such thing as a criminal, there is one self taking itself to be incomplete and identifying with some kind of *adharmic* behaviour.

*Svadharm*a is *Isvara* and *Samanya dharma* is also *Isvara*. If you go against it, it will go against you. And this is not a battle you will win because *Isvara* is the will of the Total.

Situational Ethics - *Visesa Dharma*

Certain people seem to have a lock on *dharma*. It is very natural to them. In every situation where they are called upon to respond they respond appropriately; they rarely break the rules. Consequently, in general they are very healthy people. When you follow *dharma* impeccably, you accumulate merit and that goes with you everywhere in the form of a kind of self-assured glow accompanied by an easy successful life. When you break it you have 'bad energy' and are unhappy and things never go well for long. The result of breaking *dharma* is called demerit.

But it is not always given to us to know what universal values demand. Life is not an ideal and situations come in various shades of grey. Sometimes violence is necessary. If you have a bad tooth, it is going to take a violent action to remove it. There will be pain involved. When an unpalatable truth will cause needless emotional harm sometimes a white lie is the way to go. How we interpret *Samanya Dharma* is called *Visesa Dharma*. You could think of it as situational ethics.

Ordinary Dharma - Everyday Dharma

As if life were not complex enough, there are innumerable every day *dharmas*: social, political, economic and legal rules. If you abide by them in general you will not suffer. Contravening them is not the kiss of death but you will usually suffer in some way if you do. Sometimes, however, following man-made *dharmas*, which in general...but not always...are based on non-duality, can run counter to your *svadharm*a, requiring considerable thought before venturing to act.

Body Dharma

The physical body is also *Isvara*. It operates according to the *dharmas* controlling the body. In so far as the mind is required for inquiry and it is connected to the body, it is necessary to avoid actions that contravene the *dharma* of the body. Consequently scripture counsels against actions that injure the body: alcohol, smoking, excessive exercise etc. It also encourages habits that are conducive to health.

Appropriate Response

As you can see from this discussion on *dharma*, life in *Isvara's* apparent reality is not simple. It is in this reality that I am seeking happiness. We said that universal *dharma* and *svadharm*a are built in but are not always available to influence my responses. When it is not clear how to respond to a given situation we default to our conditioning, which may be *dharmic*, *adharmic* or some combination of the two. Our conditioning, our *vasanas*, comes from the world around us. My life

is just the way my conditioning interacts with what happens in the apparent reality moment to moment. If I have the good fortune to grow up in a *dharma*-oriented society I will appreciate how my life fits into the world around me and I will respond accordingly. But if I grow up in a desire-oriented society my desires and fears will basically determine how I respond. Very often the situations in which I find myself will require a response that is not in harmony with what I want. What do I do then? Do I go against the demands of the situation or do I conform?

Law of Karma - A Spinning Whirligig of Energy

Isvara's mandala of existence is a spinning whirligig of energy. The famous Buddhist word *anitya*, impermanent, is useful in certain contexts but simply does not do it justice. We have already pointed out that on its own it doesn't move. Yet, illumined by awareness, it springs to life. The movement belongs neither to awareness nor to the *dharma* field.

The movements that take place in the field...nothing takes place outside the field...are governed by the law of karma. Karma just means action. If something moves or changes, it is karma, a leaf falling off a tree, for instance. A thought is karma, a feeling is karma. If an action is initiated by a *vasana* in conjunction with a particular Subtle Body that action will have an effect because everything is connected to everything else. There is nothing particularly hard to understand about the law of karma...except one thing. You can never know for certain what the result of a particular action will be, although in the material dimension of the *dharma* field the results are fairly predictable. If you apply heat to water it will boil when it gets to a certain temperature. If you spit an atom it will cause a certain known reaction.

Karma itself is value neutral. It is just action and its results. It only becomes meaningful when we evaluate it. We either like it or don't like it or are indifferent to it. There is no karma for animals because they do not evaluate the things that happen to them, in them and around them. Only in the minds of human beings does action become 'karma.'

Karma is meaningful for us because, owing to ignorance of our limitless and complete nature, we want to gain certain experiences that we feel will complete us and avoid those that will increase our sense of isolation. Karma is suitable for creating something, getting rid of something, cleaning or changing something or getting something that one does not have. The problem, however, apart from the fact that objects obtained through karma don't supply lasting happiness, is that as just mentioned we never know when and if we will get what we want. If getting what we want is instrumental to our happiness, we are going to find ourselves subject to considerable suffering because there are many other *jivas* competing for the same things and the supply of relatively valuable things is always limited.

Maya creates the three Bodies and deludes awareness into thinking it is a limited individual. In the following discussion, for all intents and purposes the Subtle Body is synonymous with the *jiva*, the individual. When you don't know you are awareness you take yourself to be the Subtle Body. Before we take up the next topic, we need to look into the nature of the Causal and Subtle Bodies and their relationship to each other to determine how they impact on self inquiry.

The Causal Body is an impersonal power of awareness that creates, controls, regulates and governs all the forces, processes and ideas that make up what we call reality. When an object presents itself to you...an event, for example...it triggers an instant, effortless and automatic reaction in the Causal Body. The Causal Body 'thinks' but it does not think deliberately. It instantly takes the

circumstance in the external world into account along with the individual's *samskaras* and provides the Subtle Body with apparently logical and definite information that determines the Subtle Body's response. Depending on the condition of the Subtle Body, the information is either clearly understood and deliberated on (*sattva*), instantly put into practice without thought (*rajas*) or ignored (*tamas*). In nearly everyone the Subtle Body is not aware that the Causal Body is thinking for it, programming it to act. It assumes that the impulse determining its actions originated in it.

Unbeknownst to the Subtle Body, the Causal Body ties together disparate bits of information from the past into a seemingly believable causal narrative that comprises your identity and determines how you see the world. Because there are many forces impinging on us that require quick responses, the Causal Body also simplifies things for the Subtle Body, reducing the complex picture of reality to manageable formulas. It is not prone to doubt like the Subtle Body. It uncritically selects information from a given situation and generates an immediate response. It has a flare for the dramatic in so far as it is prone to exaggerating the probability of unlikely and extreme outcomes. You cut your finger with a kitchen knife and find yourself thinking of a long stay in the hospital and perhaps even...death! As mentioned, it is the repository for the *vasanas* which appear as the Subtle Body's likes and dislikes. It reads what are popularly called 'vibes', the content of the Causal Body of others and generates an immediate reaction in the Subtle Body. It unwisely urges the Subtle Body to interact with others on the basis of this information, which generally causes denial in them, in so far as nobody likes unsolicited and unknown information about a part of themselves that they are completely unaware of.

The Causal Body is not bothered by a paucity of information; it concocts its narratives on the basis of the most flimsy evidence. It is in a hurry, so first impressions are quite enough for it. It is in love with appearances. It instantly cooks up reasons that evoke a range of positive and negative emotions on the fly. It is opinionated and overconfident and seems to know what is happening irrespective of the indeterminacy of a given situation. The Subtle Body is less confident owing to its doubting function and it will usually allow the dogmatic and hastily constructed intuitions of the Causal Body to determine its reactions.

The Causal Body looks like a memory in so far as it recycles experience, but it has no memory. It is incredibly present and aware in so far as it is ever-present eternal awareness in its original form.

Because it is the source of desire and fear it causes the Subtle Body to jump to conclusions. When you desire or fear something you want to quickly rid yourself of the discomfort so you are prone to act on the basis of incomplete information. The Causal Body is 'intuitive.' Whereas intuition is much prized by spiritual types it is dangerous to trust it because it is wrong as often as it is right.

It also stereotypes and creates prototypes. Profiling is based on the Causal Body's ability to immediately recognize patterns. It is not interested in justice and noble Subtle Body ideals. It causes as much pain as pleasure. Its basic function as far as human beings are concerned is to provide the Subtle Body with a simple and handy survival manual as it tries to respond appropriately to the complex circumstances generated by *Isvara*. Another is to manage the individual's karma.

Much of the modern research into the relationship between Subtle Body and the Causal Body, which incidentally tallies with Vedanta's knowledge on the topic, is summarized in a brilliant book by Nobel Prize winning author Daniel Kahneman entitled "Thinking, Fast and Slow." The Causal Body, which he calls 'System 1,' thinks 'fast' and the Subtle Body, which he calls 'System 2' thinks

‘slow.’ About the Causal Body he says, “It continuously monitors what is going on inside and outside the mind, and continuously generates assessments of various aspects of the situation without specific intention and with little or no effort.”

We have no choice about action. Awareness illumines the Causal Body and life happens. Activity is the signature of life. *Isvara* brings the *jivas* into an ever-changing dynamic field and whether or not they succeed depends on the appropriateness and timeliness of their actions. Because there is so much going on, particularly these days with the tremendous stress produced by a greedy and ever-expanding population trying to survive on a seemingly shrinking planet, we are too busy to carefully analyze every situation and produce well considered and appropriate actions. *Isvara* designed the Causal Body to help us by simplifying things, providing seemingly useful answers to the problem of action. This necessary simplification process, the reduction of information to approximate and manageable data, is called heuristics in psychology. Although it is difficult not to, allowing the Causal Body determine your likes and dislikes, moods, beliefs and reaction to events mitigates unfavorably for inquiry because inquiry is a deliberate action.

Maya produces a need to assign meaning to life but there is no need for ‘meaning’ if you understand reality as it is. ‘Meaning’ is compensation for ignorance but ignorance does not need to be compensated for. It needs to be known for what it is. The Causal Body is a sense making organ. It makes us see the world as more tidy, simple, predictable and coherent than it really is. But this tendency conflicts with the truth and fosters overconfidence and a sense of invincibility in the Subtle Body.

The Subtle Body is ‘slow’ in so far as it is that part of the self that can make deliberate calculations and comparisons, plan and choose and look at itself objectively. It is not ‘slow’ when *rajas* dominates it; it responds almost as quickly as the Causal Body. It is too slow, meaning dull, to respond appropriately when it is dominated by *tamas*, but when *sattva* is present it can behave consciously and rationally. It imagines that it is in charge of its life but because life is not easy it acquiesces and endorses the dominating impulses imposed on it by the Causal Body.

The Causal Body is the source of our tendencies and biases. For example, one of the most common biases is called the ‘anchoring effect.’ In a given situation it ^{causes} the Subtle Body to focus on the first impression when making decisions and to evaluate everything with reference to it. For example, the initial price offered for a used car sets the standard for the rest of the negotiations, so that prices lower than the initial price seem more reasonable even if they are still higher than what the car is really worth. If you go to a *satsang* and see a guru sitting on a stage surrounded by adoring devotees you will assume he or she is wise and enlightened even though there is no evidence of wisdom or enlightenment. If you read the guru’s books you will assume that everything he or she says is wise. The anchoring effect makes the Subtle Body far more gullible and suggestible than it should be.

The Causal Body’s tendency to cook up a story to explain reality is called the narrative fallacy. The mind focuses on the most dramatic events and fails to take into account the myriad uninteresting factors that went into producing a particular outcome. For example, those of you who have read my autobiography will imagine that I had a fabulous life because of the many dramatic and bizarre events that happened. But 99% of it was filled with unremarkable events.

The Subtle Body is lazy because learning and understanding takes considerable effort so it would rather believe a plausible story than investigate things as they are. But stories are only

explanations for things it does not understand. It tends to follow intuitions because they require less work...matching predictions to the evidence...and therefore feel more natural. Belief without investigation is dangerous.

Another pernicious tendency is called the availability heuristic. For example, if you have had a lot of bad experiences in love you will judge the uncertainty in a given present situation negatively because of the ease of retrieving the uncomfortable experiences from memory. If you have had three or four failed relationships and you meet a potential fifth partner, you will be extremely suspicious, even if the next candidate for your affections is a saint.

Another bias is the priming effect. You had substandard meal at your favorite restaurant and decided not to return, even though, unbeknownst to you, the bad meal happened on the regular chef's day off. In a movie the hero wears a shirt with a Nike swoosh that you do not notice because you are absorbed in the plot. The next time you are shopping you buy a hat with the Nike logo.

An interesting tendency is the backfire effect. When it is in play you will increase the intensity of your belief in the face of reasonable evidence to the contrary. A devout Christian farmer in Wyoming found a dinosaur skeleton on his property and most members of his church took it as evidence of the Devil's work and intensified their belief that the world was created five thousand years ago. It is similar to the conservatism bias, a tendency to insufficiently alter one's opinion when presented with credible new evidence. Both of these biases are caused by *tamas*.

Drawing different conclusions from the same information, depending on how or by whom that information is presented is a bias called the framing effect. The empathy gap is the tendency to underestimate the influence or strength of feelings, in either oneself or others. A belief bias is the tendency to see oneself as less biased than others. A confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, focus on and remember information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions.

The Causal Body can produce incorrect associations: you are a neat and tidy person and whenever you enter your wife's messy dressing room you think a negative thought about her. You take the clutter to be a character flaw even though she has a lovely personality and does not see the room as cluttered. You criticise her when she momentarily leaves the keys on the table on her way back to retrieve something from the room before going out to the office. Yet there is no connection whatsoever between keys and her character.

You are walking down the street and pass an acquaintance with a frown on his face who is deeply lost in thought and doesn't see you. You associate the frown with his feelings for you when the frown is related his thoughts about a fight he just had with his boss. As a result your next meeting with him will be tense and awkward.

Because of its need for coherence, the Causal Body sees causal links where none exist. The previous evening you quarreled with your wife. In the morning she burned the breakfast toast. The toast burned because she was called to the phone. You became angry and created the story that she burned it because she doesn't love you. There is no actual connection between burned toast and anger or love. If there were, burned toast would cause anger in everyone. The anger was in you and because of past experiences, burned toast provides an opportunity to relieve it.

Without describing them in detail, here are a number of additional functions of the Causal Body drawn from Kahneman's research. It (1) links a sense of cognitive ease to illusions of truth, pleasant feelings, and reduced vigilance (*tamas*); (2) neglects ambiguity and suppresses doubt (*tamas*); (3) is biased to believe and confirm (*tamas*); (4) exaggerates emotional consistency (*rajas*); (5) focuses on existing evidence and ignores absent evidence (*tamas*); (6) thinks more than necessary (*rajas*); (7) substitutes easier questions for more difficult ones (*tamas*); (8) overweights low probabilities (*tamas*); (9) responds more strongly to losses than to gains (*tamas*); (10) no big picture: frames problems narrowly in isolation from one another (*tamas*); (12) is prone to exaggerate (*rajas*) the consistency and coherence of what it experiences; (13) ignores the indeterminacy of results of action (*tamas*); (14) sees patterns where none exists (*rajas*) and (15) stereotypes and thinks in categories.

Wikipedia lists 90 decision-making, belief, and behavioral biases, 26 social biases, and 47 memory errors and biases! As you can plainly see obstacles to successful inquiry abound. Finally...and encouragingly with reference to self inquiry...there is a bit of good news: the Causal Body, *can be programmed by System 2*, or to use Kahneman's phrase "reset System 1 on the fly." Vedanta's methods for resetting the Causal Body begin with Chapter 8.

You can see why we need to include a discussion of the Causal Body when we speak of discriminative wisdom, separating the truth from appearances. Self inquiry is a deliberate and judicious Subtle Body function. The essence of inquiry is maintaining constant vigilance in the face of the daunting onslaught of proclivities and biases cascading down from the Causal Body. When you become aware of a particular bias you are well on the way to neutralizing it. But self inquiry is fighting these tendencies with the logic of the teaching until the Subtle Body no longer projects and denies, or at least until you are conscious of its influence on your mind and no longer act reflexively to it. Its purpose is to convert the Subtle Body to a thoughtful and rational, not an impulsive and emotional, instrument. Unexamined biases produce cognitive dissonance i.e. suffering.

Lesson 6: Beautiful Intelligent Ignorance – Questions

- 1. The word Maya means 'that which is not.' It is the creator of the world. From the samsaric perspective it is not possible that something exists and does not exist simultaneously. So what does it mean to say that Maya exists but does not exist?*
- 2. Maya is roughly equivalent to the idea of God, the Creator of the world. Is it located beyond the world? If so, why. If not, why?*
- 3. Yoga and other spiritual philosophies believe that Maya hides awareness. Vedanta says that awareness is not hidden by Maya. Why?*
- 4. There are two kinds of change; real change and apparent change. Give an example of both. What kind of change does Maya produce?*
- 5. Every experience is just consciousness plus a thought. Yoga says that to realize consciousness, you need to remove the thought. Vedanta does not agree. Why?*
- 6. Isvara/Maya creates with the help of three powers. What are they? Briefly explain how they work.*

7. *How long did it take Isvara/Maya to create the world?*
8. *You can see Isvara's Physical body (sthula sarira) and its Subtle Body but you cannot see i.e. experience Its Causal Body. Why? If it cannot be seen, how is it known?*
9. *The three bodies of Isvara and the three bodies of Jiva are inert. Why do they seem to be conscious and alive?*
10. *Liberation is not just knowledge of the self, awareness. It is knowledge of awareness and another factor and its relationship to that factor. What is that factor and what is the relationship between them in one sentence?*
11. *In this context, what is Vedanta's definition of liberation?*
12. *Which gunas hide awareness from us and why?*
13. *Confusing the self with the objects that present themselves to it is called superimposition. Why do we not need to feel guilty for it?*
14. *The snake and the rope story illustrates the idea that creation, the snake, is a projection, a product of ignorance. What does the old man represent?*
15. *Why are these statements ignorance? "I think. I feel. I did."*
16. *Awareness has no mind. What makes it possible for it to think?*
17. *Why did Isvara evolve the Subtle Body's doubting function?*
18. *The intellect resolves doubts. What information does it use to resolve them?*
19. *Vasanas are the seeds of our past actions. What effect do they have on the Subtle Body?*
20. *Your relative nature is called your svadharma, your self nature. What is it composed of and what does it control.*
21. *Why is it important to follow your svadharma?*
22. *The small self dharmas of individuals exist in the context of a vast web of impersonal law and values. What happens when an individual's values differ from the values of the total (samanya dharma)?*
23. *What is the one value on which all other values are based and what principle is it based on?*
24. *Interpretation of universal values in terms of one's programming (svadharma) is called situational ethics (visesa dharma). Why is it often difficult?*
25. *What is the law that governs the actions dispensed by the dharma field and why is a source of frustration?*

26. *Why is the individual not in control of the thoughts and feelings that appear in the Subtle Body?*

27. *Why does the controlling nature of the Causal Body usually create a sense of low self esteem?*

28. *Why is the Causal Body necessary?*

29. *What is a downside of the Causal Body's simplification mechanism?*

30. *Why is the Causal Body is the enemy of self inquiry?*

31. *What can be done to remove the biases from the Causal Body?*

