

A Masochistic Theory of Creation

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Martin: Hi, Ram. Well, it is good just to know you are still out there, or is it in Here? Anyway, I think most of my ignorance stems from odd corners of the Vedic world where I have not read or been informed of some peculiar facet of Reality and reality. Anyway, I am interested in how the *Vedas* describe how the self actually sees/understands *maya* and the recycling of the *jivas* through the *gunas*; do we have any information in some obscure Vedic text on what everything looks like from the self's perspective or are parts of this consciousness unavailable to the human mind ?

Ram: Yes, there is plenty of information in the *Upanishads* and all the major Vedantic works about the nature of the self. Basically, there are two teachings on this subject. The first is called *advaita* (non-duality) and it says that the self (awareness) alone exists. This means that there is no *maya* from its point of view. Everything is just self. The second teaching, *vishistadvaita* (qualified non-dualism) is a compromise position. It says that there is only the self but that there is also an imaginary position, called the human position, which is caused by ignorance of the self.

From the self's point of view even if this ignorance (*avidya*) is operating the self, understands it and knows that the projections it makes possible are just self, it has no problem with them. This is the condition of the *jivanmukta*, the one who is liberated while alive.

The state of *avidya*, or *dvaita* (ignorance, duality), applies to the human mind. It is synonymous with the human mind. The human mind does not know that that everything is awareness. It takes what it sees with its senses and what it believes (its projections) to be reality. In its most primitive form it thinks that it is the body and the universe is only matter. But because it has no existence apart from the awareness, it is subject to epiphanies and these suggest to it that there is some other principle, i.e. the self, operating. This is the "in-between" state of human consciousness, a state of doubt about the nature of reality. Carefully wielded by someone who knows "I am the self," the teachings of Vedanta remove the doubt about who one is and the nature of reality.

Martin: And now from the completely dualistic perspective... I guess I am still a bit bourgeois, but I find great difficulty with the efficiency of the model that the self creates *maya* out of itself to experience itself as the other, allows itself to be identified with the mind and ego (products of *maya*), apparently forgetting its own nature, and creates a plethora of objects (also products of *maya*) to which the senses and mind get attached and result in suffering, before retracing its steps back to where it started from. It's almost masochistic. I know, tell me I am bourgeois, I do not have the apparatus to fully understand the cause, but wow, look at all that illusory suffering millions of bits of itself are undergoing (tell that to the mothers in South Russia). It's not efficient, and the ignorant need a charter. There, I've got it off my chest.

Ram: Indeed you should have great difficulty with this notion because it is a rather poor attempt to explain the relationship between the self and the world, and I am sorry to have occasionally

purveyed it over the years. It's a hangover from my days with my *guru* who was a tad dramatic and liked miserable stories.

One of the problems with the idea of self-ignorance is that the truth is pretty subtle. So for the common person a number of half-truths have evolved, attempts to explain intellectually something that it is better to grasp directly and intuitively: the relationship between the self which they wish to know but cannot see and the world which they do know and want to escape.

The idea is that suffering has a useful purpose in that it can generate inquiry, which can lead to self-realization. If you don't see suffering this way you have to take the dualistic position, that there are two opposing factors in the universe, God and the Devil, and that human life is an endless struggle between the two. It is a popular idea because this is how life seems to people who are unable to see through their perceptions. I should note that the masochistic "teaching" you refer to is not really a proper Vedantic teaching. But it is better than the dualistic position, unless you believe in heaven, because there is no way out of it. The dualistic idea says that there is a God (which you don't know is you) locked in eternal combat with a Devil (which you don't know is you). And the problem is that this is all going on somewhere outside yourself and you feel powerless to change it. The eternally awake self "becomes the world so it can suffer and wake itself up" idea at least has a happy ending insofar as there is no mention of eternal damnation.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Ram