

A Ramana Quote Analyzed

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2010-11-29

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1790>

Charles: Dear Ram, I thought you might enjoy this statement by Ramana. I find it very clear.

“All this [the world] appears whenever there is mental activity, that is, in the dream and waking states; not only does it not appear in deep sleep, but it does not appear in the Transcendental State, where the Self is alone, and the mind is at rest; therefore it is unreal.”

Ram: Dear Charles, yes, if you read it uncritically it seems correct. But if you think clearly about the way the words are used, a number of confusions can arise from it.

First, it refers to the self as a “transcendental state,” but the *Upanishad* does not say that the self is a state. The word “*avasta*” (state) is not used with reference to the self. The *Upanishad* refers to it as “the fourth,” meaning the fourth factor, awareness. If awareness is non-dual it can’t be a state, since states are subject to change by definition. Some get around this by calling it a permanent state, but this is an oxymoron, so on this account it does not jibe with *sruti*.

Another problem with this quote is “where the Self is alone.” “Alone” is another difficult word because it implies something other. Granted, the teaching operates by projection and negation, so it is acceptable on those grounds, but it should be phrased “the Self alone is to dismiss the idea of otherness, not where the Self is alone.”

And the word “where” makes it seem as if the self has a particular location, i.e. in the transcendental “state,” but this is not true insofar as the self pervades every state yet is not limited by the states it pervades. Even “pervades” needs explanation because it implies duality, which is only acceptable if you understand the projection/negation method Vedanta employs.

Also, the way the last sentence reads makes it seem as if only a mind resting in the self is *moksa* – which makes *moksa* experiential. But *moksa* is the hard and fast knowledge “I am limitless, non-dual awareness.” The idea suggested by the verse is that when you get to that “state” your mind will rest, which may be true, but is not necessarily true. The journey metaphor – which is essential *yogic* – is misleading at best. It so happens that mental agitation does not affect a *jnani*’s knowledge. Even a *samsari* does not forget his or her name when the mind is angry or depressed, so why would a *jnani* forget the self, because the self is ever-present and unaffected by mental agitation?

The word “world” needs commentary because it can give the impression that thinking has to stop to realize the self. This is patently untrue. This verse, in my opinion, should read something like this: “There are mental projections in the dream and waking states, but none in the deep sleep state. Awareness, the invariable factor – because of which the states are known – is non-dual and free of thought. The mind that knows this is no longer affected by mental projections and does not seek fulfillment in the waking and dream states.”

The verse would also benefit from a discussion of *Isvara* and *jiva sristi*, since it is possible to think that *Isvara sristi* (the creation, the world) has to disappear when the self is realized. Even

jiva sristi (the individual's world doesn't disappear experientially. It is, however, negated by *jnanam* – which is as good as an experiential disappearance, but still allows *jiva* to function in the world.

The way the word “appear” is used buttresses the experiential view of *moksa*. Vedanta would say that although the waking and dream states seem to be real, they are apparently real. They are projected by the *vasanas* and taken to be real by someone who does not know that he or she is the awareness illumining them. The self, non-dual awareness, is real, meaning unchanging. When the *buddhi* knows that it is awareness it no longer identifies with projections and takes refuge in the knowledge that it is the self. The word “mind” also stands in need of commentary. Is it simply the flow of thoughts or is it the self in a state of apparent ignorance?

In any case this kind of quote needs to be understood in the context of a complete means of self-knowledge, like Vedanta, not just taken at face value, because it can be very misleading. This is why the traditional Vedanta community questions Ramana's status as a *srotriya*, a teacher. That he was a *brahmanistha*, a realized soul, is undeniable but these teachings need contextualization and to my knowledge Ramana never did resolve the apparent contradictions in many of his statements. Not that he would have, because he didn't think of himself as a teacher. He just responded to inquiries on an ad hoc basis.

Finally, the idea that the world is unreal is not actually correct either. It is *mithya*, apparently real. It is not non-existent – which is the implied meaning of “world” in this statement – but it is not eternal either. The verse uses the word “apparent” in an experiential sense, but without a full appreciation of its meaning as “temporarily existent and dependent.”

Nonetheless, if it is not taken as gospel, it is useful because it helps to distinguish the mind from the self.

~ Ram