

All Non-Dual Teachings Are Not Equal

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Alexandra: Hi, Ram. It's good to hear it put so directly, that inquiry is still a way of life after enlightenment. What better work indeed? And the mind certainly will find trouble without something high to focus itself on. I have plenty of Vedanta study to keep me busy for a long time. I had changed my lifestyle to a large degree already, but now it seems there is freedom to really go for it, to devote my time to study and inquiry rather than social things. It's a big relief.

During my seeking anything, "non-dual" was revered without much discrimination. I was introduced to Shankara and heard that Kashmir Shaivism was supposed to be pretty cool, and on and on. A woman teacher helped me out along the way, and she loved everything non-dual, from Meister Eckhart to Joel Goldsmith to *A Course in Miracles*. Even Christianity when looked at the "real" way can be seen as non-dual.

So all these things taken as a whole were supposed to somehow liberate me. But all it did was confuse me. I was left to decide which I like better, the idea of there being an apparent creation or nothing at all. One *guru* I had said *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)* was amazing and the same as the *Bhagavad Gita*, which I don't believe, mainly because I don't know a single person who ever woke up from *ACIM*, even people who've been at it hard for twenty-five years.

Ram: Yes, the American spiritual scene is more like a wow!-happening than systematic knowledge-driven inquiry: "Non-dual is where it's at, man! Super! Super cool. That Shankara cat and *A Course in Miracles* – they are so non-dual! Look at us. We are on the cutting edge – even the scientists are getting hip! So cool! Copacetic. Duality is so passé. The poor suckers think they are separate from things. Not us. We are one with it all."

One wonders where they will go for the next most incredible teaching. Non-duality is rather difficult to top. But as long as they are just trolling spiritual literature for the idea that reality is a non-duality they will stay firmly entrenched in duality as they ignorantly speak lovely non-dual words.

Alexandra: So I was really stumbling around in the dark American spiritual world that was masquerading as the light. I was at a disadvantage. No one thought the self could be taught. They talked about it, but that was all. I really stumbled around in the non-dual dark for many years until I came across your DVDs. They set me straight.

So I guess the point I'm making is that in my case it wasn't just the Neo people that hindered me; I didn't fall for their line. What hindered me was being told that "non-duality" was somehow going to free me if I just spread myself really thin and took in as much of it from as many different sources as possible, which I did.

There is a broad worship of "non-duality" out there, without the discrimination to ask, "What does that even refer to, and how will it help me be free?" I think people love to point out that many besides Advaitins have been talking about non-duality for years, so what makes Vedanta

special? Do you see what I mean? They put all non-dual writings in the same basket. They don't (as I didn't) realize that the difference is that there is a complete teaching of Advaita Vedanta, that it puts all the pieces of the puzzle together and that it (unlike *A Course in Miracles*) actually works to liberate people.

Ram: You hit the nail on the head, Alexandra. Even if there were coherent logical teachings in one source, they would not work, because someone who is seeking is by his or her own admission ignorant of the topic and said ignorance will cause him or her to misinterpret the words. There are too many apparent contradictions to resolve on one's own. The self needs to be taught.

Alexandra: I hope you don't mind my ramblings. I'm unraveling the hurdles with you so that hopefully I can help others avoid those same hurdles. I hope I'm not boring you!

Ram: Ramble on, Alexandra. I love it. It gives me a better idea of the whole modern seeking "movement." I honestly have had nothing to do with the Western spiritual scene. I am totally uninterested, because nothing comes even close to Vedanta. My sole source of information is people like yourself who have been in it and discovered the limitations and share them with me. It is good for me to hear this because one very important aspect of Vedanta is criticism. Oh, my God, did I say that? Criticism! How dualistic! I can't be enlightened! I am too judgmental. :-)
Seriously, not only do individual teachings need to be looked at critically but the assumptions underlying the whole spiritual scene need to be exposed. You cannot just read a bunch of supposedly enlightened people and then cobble the truth together out of it. We all know reality is non-dual, that the I is awareness, that the body and the mind are objects. A way is needed to make it crystal-clear what these teachings mean in terms of everyday life. Anyway, thanks for sharing, as they say.

~ Love, Ram