

Awareness Only Seems to Become the Apparent Reality

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Nathanial: Hi, Tedji.

I have read in scriptures that *Maya* is a property in *Brahman*, awareness. Now, presumably this word “in” is used figuratively because awareness is *nirguna* (without attributes).

But it seems logically impossible for something to be within *Brahman*, *Brahman* being free of qualities, limitations. So the spatial metaphor does seem to stack up. I’ve also heard Ramji talk about how when the *jagat* is manifest, *Isvara* (being *Brahman* plus *Maya*) is acting on a small “portion” of *Brahman*.

I can’t seem to reconcile temporal and spatial metaphors with the fact that awareness is limitless and attributeless, yet contains this capacity for *mithya*, which is responsible for the manifest creation.

I’m aware that *mithya* is said to be both existent and non-existent (in the absolute sense), but feel I’m still missing something here.

Your clarification would be gratefully received.

~ Warm wishes, Nathanial

Ted: Hi, Nathanial.

The existence of *Maya* as an aspect of *Brahman* is inexplicable. Even the scriptures say so.

On the one hand, *Brahman* must be limitless, and thus without characteristics or attributes, for all objective phenomena, including time and space, which as known phenomena are themselves objects, necessarily depend on awareness for their existence. And if even time and space, the fundamental conditioning parameters by which all objective phenomena are measured, and thus identified as objects, then the “field” of existence in which they appear/exist must itself be beyond all limiting parameters, and therefore limitless. Moreover, since something – which in the case of *Brahman* is not an objectifiable thing, but rather conscious existence itself – cannot come from nothing, *Brahman* must necessarily be beginningless/unborn and endless/eternal (i.e. not of long duration, but altogether beyond the scope of time and space).

On the other hand, we cannot deny that we experience objective phenomena that seem discrete from other objective phenomena and the entire context of our experience in general is conditioned by the parameters of time and space. And since something can’t come from nothing, we are left to conclude that awareness as the fundamental reality is the source from which all objective phenomena spring.

In regard to the latter circumstance, it is actually more appropriate to say that awareness is the source within which all objective phenomena appear. The reason it is more appropriate to state it this way is that awareness doesn’t actually become the objective phenomena we experience.

There are two types of creation: *parinama upadhana karanam*, in which the source actually transforms and becomes the effect (e.g. milk transforms and becomes cheese), and subsequently cannot return to its original state, and *vivarta upadhana karanam*, in which the source only appears to become the effect (e.g. the rope appears to become a snake when mistaken in the dimness of twilight), and subsequently “regains” its original form when properly interpreted and understood. In the case of the manifest universe, the essential nature of awareness does not actually change. Just as clay can be shaped into many different forms yet the substance of the clay itself remains unchanged, so awareness can appear to be many different objective phenomena, both gross and subtle, yet is essentially ever the same awareness. For this reason, we can say that awareness is actionless and unchanging, even though it appears to undergo change when conditioned by *Maya*.

This of course brings us back to the question of what exactly is *Maya*. As mentioned, even the scriptures offer no satisfactory explanation. Perhaps the closest they come is to say that *Maya* is that which is not, which is to say that *Maya* is the aspect of *Brahman* that makes *Brahman* appear to be something it is not, namely the manifest universe, which is *mithya* (i.e. only apparently, or dependently, real). Though this definition/explanation does not satisfy the mind, it is really the only conclusion we can make concerning the how *Brahman* can appear to be objects. We know *Brahman* is actionless due to the fact that it is all-pervasive, and thus has no arena to act within or background against which to measure movement/change, which is the hallmark of action; impersonal, and thus has no goals to be accomplished by means of action; perfectly full, and thus has nothing to improve/enhance, and hence no motivation to act; and is a partless whole, and thus has no instruments with which to act or any other object to act upon. Still, we cannot deny that the manifestation exists, and thus has come from something. The best explanation Vedanta – or, for that matter, any scientific or spiritual tradition – can offer is to say that there exists an aspect of *Brahman* that makes *Brahman* appear to act (i.e. create, manifest or transform itself into objects), though in reality no action is actually taking place and, moreover, there is actually nothing other than *Brahman*, and hence, despite appearances to the contrary, the essential nature of reality is non-dual.

~ All the best, Ted