

Can Awareness Know Itself?

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Wynand: Dear Sundari, I'm back from a weekend with James in Amstelveen, near Amsterdam. It was the first time I met James. The seminar was intense but of a very high level. I'm very glad that I went – hearing the teachings “live” adds an extra dimension; the teachings penetrate even deeper than when reading the book or watching videos (which, of course, are very helpful too).

I have a question which appeared in my mind only afterwards. I don't know whether maybe it's too far-fetched, but anyway... here it is. James said, several times, that you cannot be what you can know. So, for example, we can know the body or the thoughts so we cannot be the body and thoughts. And so it is for all other “objects.” The only thing that can know all these objects is awareness.

But if you continue along this line, you can also ask the question: can awareness know itself? If you continue the logic that you (or “something”) cannot be what you (or “it”) can know... then would it not follow that awareness cannot “know” itself...?

I realise this question sounds a bit abstract. I'm not even sure I completely understand my own question. ☺

But still, I wonder...

Thank you in advance. I'm looking forward to the new book!

~ Kind regards, Wynand

Sundari: Hello, Wynand. My apologies for the late reply to your email; we have both been travelling and when we got back we had a ton of work to catch up on!

The answer to your question [“Can also ask the question: can awareness know itself? If you continue the logic that you (or ‘something’) cannot be what you (or ‘it’) can know... then would it not follow that awareness cannot ‘know’ itself...?”] is yes, if you are looking at it from a dualistic point of view, because you have a subject and an object. In duality it is impossible to be what you see. But this only applies the mind under the spell of duality, it does not apply to awareness because awareness IS what it sees. “Sees” means “knows.”

Awareness or consciousness is not an object, so it cannot be known by an object because an object is not conscious. Awareness is that which knows all objects, the “transparent” or non-experiencing witness. Awareness does not need anything to know itself because it is self knowing. It is always a witness. But awareness is a witness only with reference to whatever is seen. By itself it sees only pure consciousness. The self is a seer that never began or ceases and is the all-seeing eye, or “I” that sees only itself, because there are no objects for it to see.

Awareness is self-illuminating and there is nothing but itself. Remember that non-dual means just that: there is only awareness for awareness to see – not that awareness is a seer in the way the

jiva understands seeing. The person is the lens through which awareness apparently looks at objects, but seeing as all objects are reflected awareness and thus have a dependent existence on awareness, there are no objects for awareness to see. Awareness is that which makes seeing reflected awareness (i.e. all objects) possible.

It would be more appropriate to say that the self, seeing only itself, is that which knows the seer with reference to the seen only when *maya* is operating. The self-aware self appears as a seer but it never actually is a seer, unless “seeing” refers to its own self. When ignorance is operating the *jiva* thinks that the seer is different from the seen; in other words, that the subject and object are different. They are not different although they exist in a different order of reality. All objects are apparently real, meaning not always present and always changing. Awareness is that which is real, that which is always present and never-changing.

When *maya* is operating, *sattva*, *tamas* and *rajas* arise (ignorance) and awareness apparently becomes a subtle body, or person, deluded by *maya* and conditioned by the *gunas* (the self under the spell of ignorance). *Sattva* seems to be clear and pure – only with reference to the objects appearing in it, which are impure. *Rajas* (the energy of action, desire and extroversion) and *tamas* (the energy of matter, dullness or denial) form the basis of ignorance. *Isvara* is a name that refers to awareness plus *maya* and is the wielder of *maya*, but *Isvara* is never deluded by *maya* or conditioned by the *gunas*.

I have attached an article for you to read on the identity between *Isvara*, *jiva* and awareness. I hope this helps!

~ Many blessings and love, Sundari