

Does Awareness Have Qualities or Not?

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Terry: Hi, James. This is what I was also getting at. *Nirguna* is the supreme being, awareness, to be characterized as without qualities (*nirguna*) or as possessing qualities (*saguna*).

James: It has no qualities. I think you realized this when you had that experience you mentioned, didn't you? It may not have been clear to you at the time. You may have seen it in a different light.

But it seems to have qualities when *maya* is operating. It is not really helpful to think of awareness as a "supreme" being. It doesn't rule anything, because there is nothing for it to be supreme over. Everything is awareness.

Terry: Did Sankracharya say "to describe *Brahman* even the words recoil"?

James: Yes, definitely, but that does not mean that words cannot reveal it. Vedanta is nothing but words that reveal the self. It is a *shabda pramana*, a word-means. But to reveal it you need to define it. If you say it is God, for example, what does that refer to? It refers to nothing that is present and available. If you say consciousness, this is something is always present and easy to know. The word and the object are one.

Terry: Is *brahman* "awareness/consciousness" in Sanskrit?

James: Yes, it is *chit*, *chaitanya*, *chetana*, in Sanskrit.

Terry: I read the four *mahavakyas*, or great statements, in the *Upanishads*: (1) *Prajnanam Brahma* – "Consciousness is *brahman*," (2) *Aham Brahmasmi* – "I am *brahman*," (3) *Tat Tvam Asi* – "That thou art," (4) *Ayam Atma Brahma* – "This self is *brahman*." Please correct me if I'm reading this wrong.

James: You are reading it right. *Prajnanam Brahma* means that "consciousness" – you – "is limitless." *Aham Brahmasmi* means "you are consciousness." *Tat Tvam Asi* means that "the individual you think you are is actually consciousness." And *Ayam Atma Brahma* means that "the self that you think is limited is actually limitless."