

Eat Your Cake

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Vedanta: the science of having your cake and eating it.

When you realise yourself to be unborn, ordinary-actionless-non-dual awareness, and that you, awareness, is everything that is, it does not result in a sudden “poof” and there goes the world. The world remains...but with the understanding that there is nothing real (substantial) about it/in it. In other words, you spiritually grow up – and hopefully become smart too.

You grow up because you come to terms at the initially shocking-sad fact that you can't depend on anything in this world for real (always available) happiness. You become smart when you start to shift your attention onto something that is reliable – something that you can depend on. Vedanta's definition of “real” is something that “never ceases to exist or change.” And that something is you, awareness.

A fashionable enlightenment notion circulating in the spiritual market is that an enlightened person becomes like a zombie or something, and that there is nothing for him/her to do. This modern “teaching” called Neo-Advaita is easy to get suckered into as it is both true and not true. It does state that you are not the body-mind-ego entity, and that you are non-dual awareness, both of which are in harmony with Vedic tradition, but it attempts to close its eye on the existence of the apparent reality (*mithya*). The word “apparently” is used because existence doesn't equal realness.

The Neo teaching basically only sees and presents from one aspect – the eye of awareness. Because this is a non-dual reality and only awareness exists, this statement is true, but nonetheless, this does not offer the inquirer (*jiva*) much help to negotiate the play of duality in which he/she finds himself/herself needing to consult. It is important to repeat that freedom is for the *jiva* and not for awareness. You, awareness, have never not been free.

As James Swartz puts it, “Non-duality, non-difference, does not mean sameness. It means that from the self's perspective there is no difference, but from the level of the body and mind there are only differences.”

Not taking into account the apparent reality is like trying to quench your hunger by eating a juicy hologram. Not very filling. It leaves the person stranded in the chaotic ever-changing-impersonal world of *samsara* – minus a practical toolkit for operating in it. In addition, this teaching often creates a lazy and *adharmic jiva* attitude. If you fall in the grips of this teaching, best get out.

The sunny side up is that many get fed up with this teaching and find themselves stumbling onto a complete methodology, the fleshy science of Vedanta. Yum.

Enough with the Neo thing. Let us bite into a proper teaching, Vedanta. Once self-inquiry has revealed the non-dual reality of your true nature, awareness, it does not mean that the person becomes invisible on this apparent island of duality. It is true, however, that once self-knowledge is firm the identification with the action figure (*jiva*) is defused and the experience of this world is understood to be no more real than a dream – but the play continues. Besides, duality is totally cool if ya know it ain't real!

As you, awareness, ever-presently and effortlessly shine, everything gets lit up. The mind and body equipment have no choice but to continue to dance like a puppet under the strings of its master.

Indeed, there are self-realized people who choose not to practice *guna* management (*triguna vibhava yoga*) and who don't bother much about cultivating an attractive snug/*sattvic* lifestyle. Some are able to dispassionately take whatever comes without a concern to improve their environment. This is fine. But why not have your cake and eat it?

Before we get too excited, let us clarify something. The cake in the apparent reality indeed exists. One half is a delicious, creamy, vegan-friendly, organic chocolatey serving, whereas the other half is made from something not so nice – let's say, fishy maggot paste. Where there is yum – there is also a not-yum. In the world of duality there is no escape from the play of opposites.

Let's get back to the more attractive idea of "have your cake and eat." This win-win is attained when the knowledge, "I am awareness," is firmly grounded and understood. This is fruited by the continuous application and contemplation on the science of self-inquiry, Vedanta being the means.

A qualified person who is fit for self-inquiry does not deny the experience of duality nor does he/she get overwhelmed with a sense of disappointment when biting into the other half of the cake – as the bad taste does not linger.

As James Swartz puts it, "The knowledge renders *vasanas* non-binding and destroys one's sense of doership. When this knowledge is firm, it infuses the mind with a sense of authenticity, wholeness and rock-solid confidence. Henceforth the individual knows that it can weather any existential storm. When you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are awareness, you no longer desire to feel good, because you know you are the source of goodness.

"When you know yourself to be awareness, this does not mean that there is no action to be done by the person (*jiva*) on the apparent level. It is just that now you do *sadhana* knowing who you are, not to know who you are. It is true that once self-knowledge is firm, the compulsion to do stops and you don't do what you do for happiness, you do what you do happily."

Freedom is not for you, awareness, as you are never not free. Freedom is **from** this apparent person who thinks of itself to be a doer. Enlightenment occurs in the mind (intellect) as hard and fast knowledge.

The word "from" is bold because there is a subtle sound-tweak – yet a potent difference with the sentence "freedom is not for the individual but **from** the individual." Contemplate on this for a bit.

Nothing changes on the apparent level – only the negation of its reality. Life continues the same as before minus the sense of incompleteness. You perform your *jiva-duty* (*svadharma*) and take part in this play just as you did before – but without identifying as a doer. Wood is chopped, water is carried – but you know very well that you are not doing any of the chopping or carrying.

When you know yourself to be non-dual awareness, you understand that the play is you but you are free from the play. It's like having your cake and eating it. Vedanta, what a teaching!