

Experiencing the Non-Experiencing Witness

Ram (James Swartz)

2016-11-09

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2993>

Jason: Ramji, can you please help me sort out these two words: witness and experiencer?

I have heard you say that the body does not experience. Okay, makes sense. The body is just matter. But I also heard you say that the self does not experience anything. If the the *jiva* is really the self in essence, then who is experiencing?

Could it be that by using the word “experience” we are really talking about the self when it is in the state of identification with the body?

Ramji: Yes. Experience is just awareness plus a thought, in this case the body.

Jason: So really what we mean by experiencer is the belief that I am the body and the sensory input the body is receiving applies to me as an individual?

Ramji: Yes. When the self identifies with a thought – the body-thought in this instance, it “becomes” an experiencing entity.

Jason: And if so, isn't it just as fair to characterize the self as an experiencer? Or would it be okay to refer to the self as the Witness? It seems like a phrase I might have heard you utter, the “non-experiencing witness”?

Ramji: Yes and no. Yes, if you understand that the self is not modified by what it experiences. No, if you think that the self goes through changes. The self is a non-experiencing witness, but when ignorance (*maya*) is operative, it appears to be a changing, experiencing witness. The witness aspect of the self and the *jiva* are identical. This is why the *jiva* is actually the self.

Jason: I realize that we run the risk of characterizing the self as a Big Entity running around experiencing lives, but maybe then we are talking about *Isvara*?

Ramji: The concealing aspect of *Isvara*, macrocosmic *tamas*, hides the non-experiencing witness – the self – from itself, and macrocosmic *rajas* causes the self to falsely identify with the gross and subtle bodies so it thinks it is an experiencing entity subject to change. Vedanta exposes *maya*, *Isvara*, as the culprit. All our problems can be traced to the fundamental confusion caused by *maya*. Everyone thinks of himself or herself as a doer subject to time, so they wear themselves out with ceaseless activities. If they knew they were the self, they would take it easy because they would be immortal, untouched by change.