

Implied Misleading Notions

Arlindo Moraes

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“Once the moth touches the ‘flame,’ it does not have to go back and experience the burning again. It is burnt once for all! That is the taste of ‘Self.’ If you ‘experience’ the Self, that is the end. It is NOT a repetitive or revocable process. It is IRREVOCABLE.”

Arlindo: Statements and metaphors such as this one often sound very appealing, beautiful, poetic and definitely harmless. But in truth, these notions carry subtle “action/experience” implied meanings that permeate the collective subconscious mind of the spiritual world, consequently reinforcing one’s subconscious believe that the self IS an object of knowledge and experience, and that a proper action may produce the so called “enlightenment,” i.e. the final and permanent experience of the self as something other than oneself.

Every metaphorical referent to the self is limited by nature, but this metaphor in particular presents a subtle misleading idea. The full assimilation of self-knowledge definitely removes all doubts and suspiciousness to produce the unshakable conviction: I am the non-dual self rather than the aging, dying body, and consequently it produces the end of the search. Once this conviction is firm, hard and fast, one does not need to go back to remove the doubts and suspiciousness which no longer exist.

But the metaphor suggests that the *jiva* needs to “move” towards the self, and once it has accomplished such an “impossible action” ☺ it burns itself up (dissolution of the *jiva*) once and for all. There are two problems here: first, the *jiva* cannot merge with the self, because it is the self. Secondly, the *jiva* does not disappear once it knows for sure that it has always been the self. *Jiva* and self do belong to two orders of reality of the one non-dual reality. *Jiva* remains intact after self-knowledge is firm.

The other misleading connotation in this old *yogic* metaphor is that it implies that the self can be experienced, and that once you experience it your job is done – you will not need to experience it again. Do you see how subtle all these misleading notions confuse the minds of so many sincere inquires? The self cannot be experienced, and it does not feel or taste anything. The self is devoid of qualities and attributes, it does not have any color, taste, texture, form and so on. It is not an object of experience, and furthermore, it is not an object of knowledge. You cannot know it, but know that you are it as your very “knowing” consciousness.

Greg: I wonder if we have to differentiate between literal and implied meaning. If I take the moth analogy literally, then yes, it is misleading and keeps the seeker seeking. However, if I know Vedanta and see the example I can see some beauty in it without pursuing the quest for experience. Correct?

Arlindo: Yes, Greg, one can enjoy much of the action/experience, romantic/poetic literature available in the spiritual world without any harm, but only as long as one is well aware of the difference between knowledge and experience, and the way they relate to one another.

Just as an example, when I learned Ramji's books, I also went ahead and bought several books by Swami Chinmayananda. After some time, I wrote to Ramji, asking why Swamiji very often also used "action/experience" language in his teachings. Ramji told me that for that very reason he does not recommend Swamiji's books to his students; it reinforces this all-pervasive notion of experiential enlightenment. Secondly, he also told me that Swamiji knew what he was doing, and as well he knew how to reconcile the confusion.

My understanding is that if one uses an action/experience language, rather than a knowledge/identity one, many more people we will feel attracted to the teacher. "Action" and "experience" are the original *vasanas* of creation. It feels familiar to most everyone.

Important also to note is that, depending on the sentence and its context, it is nearly impossible to separate its literal meaning from its implied one because in most cases the implied meaning goes unnoticed by the vast majority of us. One swallows the implied meaning unconsciously, but with repetition it turns into hardwired, erroneous conscious notions.