

Is Ordinary Awareness Different from Original Awareness?

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(This is a conversation between two Vedanta inquirers.)

Clancy: The problem with this logic is that “you/ordinary awareness” is actually not the original “awareness.” If it was just as simple as knowing that your daily awareness is “non-dual, unconditioned awareness” then everybody would be enlightened.

I actually think that the biggest delusion is comparing “everyday awareness” to the original unborn, unconditioned awareness. I am 100% sure that our daily awareness is not the unborn, unconditioned consciousness. Our daily awareness is actually conditioned by our associations with the mind-body complex. At best, it’s a weak proxy.

Why do self-inquiry if this was so easy? Ramana was very clear when he said one needs to dive and grasp the original I-thought and cut it at the source. If it was a simple matter of knowing that you are everyday awareness, Ramana would have said that. The fact that he did not say that means it was not a simple matter of knowing that you are awareness.

Reply: I assume you haven’t reverted to Samkhya dualism. If you have, then this is not the conversation for you.

There is only one awareness, but we can agree that *jiva* can have two dramatically different perspectives on what this seeming-existence signifies, and that difference of perspective will, when deeply assimilated, have huge implications for the existential life of the *jiva*. So I take it that you are contrasting ordinary (“daily”) understanding of “who I am” (this burdened, limited human) with *brahmavidya* (“original”) understanding (*ayam atma brahma ~ Mandukya*).

That difference is not merely conceptual, to put it mildly! It is the difference between Thoreau’s “quiet desperation” and a sublime releasing of the asphyxiating bondage of “me.”

There are lots of delusions in this sphere, and there are many folks who consider themselves higher beings because they have conceptually assimilated some sophisticated spiritual ideas of transcendence. Still, there is only one awareness. Daily existence dominated by *avidya* is certainly radically different in fundamentally meaningful ways from an existence in which there has occurred a pervading assimilation of *brahmavidya*. Still, there is only one awareness in whose light all these permutations play out.

One of James’ most uncompromising adjectives for “absolute” consciousness is “ordinary” – for a reason. Don’t look elsewhere. The treasure is right there.

Ramana was (it seems to me) generalizing from his own realization experience, assuming it could help others. His mind turned inward and realized (understood) that the me-concept had nothing to do with the “Eternal Spirit” he realized himself to be. So he said to others, “Turn inward and look for who you really are.” The same consciousness, but vastly different “habitations” for the *jiva*, however, more than a palace versus less than a hovel.

Did anyone say this was easy? This entire *sristhi* is the empire of beginningless *maya*.

One awareness. One consciousness. Two understandings. And thereupon hinges the only important thing for us all.

Salutations to your sincerity.

James: Here are my comments on this *satsang*.

I read your exchange with interest. As you say, there is only one awareness and it can only be “ordinary” because for it to be extraordinary there would have to be at least two (or more) awarenesses. Owing to *maya* this one ordinary awareness appears as a reflection, a *jiva*. Clancy is wrong, because the reflected awareness, the *jiva*, or the “I-sense,” is the Original Pure Awareness appearing to be a separate self. But Shankars says awareness is real (*satyam*), and reflected awareness (*mithya*) is non-separate from it (*Jivo bramaiva na parah*). He [Clancy] doesn’t understand *mithya*. He is assuming that *satya* and *mithya* are actually different. He thinks the pure original consciousness and the reflected are different based on appearances. They certainly seem to be two different things. But the word *mithya*, apparent, means that there is actually no difference.

Here is Clancy’s original paragraph: “The problem with this logic is that ‘you/ordinary awareness’ is actually not the original ‘awareness.’ If it was just as simple as knowing that your daily awareness is ‘non-dual, unconditioned awareness’ then everybody would be enlightened.”

The first sentence is categorically incorrect. Ordinary awareness is ACTUALLY original awareness. His second sentence is more correct. The problem with it, however, are the words “as simple as knowing.” He is right, it is not as simple as knowing ordinary awareness, original awareness plus the subtle body (i.e. the *jiva*). What he doesn’t seem to understand is that while everyone knows “simple ordinary awareness,” almost nobody knows WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ORDINARY AWARENESS in terms of (1) original awareness and (2) the objects appearing in its reflection (ordinary awareness). When he says it is not as simple as knowing ordinary awareness he means a simple intellectual knowledge of the fact that “I am aware” is not *moksa*. *Moksa* is understanding in what sense original consciousness and ordinary awareness are the same but different. I think he knows what the difference between them is, but not how they are the same (*na parah*).

Maya is “*sat-asat vilakshanam*.” It is a most difficult teaching. If you get it, you are free. If not, not. It means “the same but different.” To understand it, the intellect has to be capable of non-dual thought because in reality, which is non-dual, a thing and its opposite can both be true because they are both non-dual consciousness – in essence.

I suggest that you tell Clancy that you asked me to clarify this point and forward him my reply. Or if you like, tell him that I will send him my reply. He listens to me – more or less. Your reply is correct as far as it goes. But we need to bring in *maya* to explain the problem. He actually is “reverting to dualism.” Clancy has been obsessed with Ramana and Nisargadatta for a very long time, and while they were both *jnanis*, neither of them taught Vedanta properly. Now that he has come to Vedanta, he should let go of the ideas he picked up there and go all in with Vedanta. But people who have so much invested in their *sadhana* often have a very difficult time letting go of their interpreted knowledge. He is very bright, a bit arrogant and terribly stubborn, although it

seems he does know who he is.

~ Love, James