Emanuel: Yesterday in satsang someone asked me, “What is Vedanta’s understanding in regards to the famous quantum physics experiment involving the observer and the apparent particle behaving as energy wave as well as particle matter, according to the expectation of the observer?” I began by pointing out the fact that reality is non-dual and objects are not separate from the observer and that the particle-object appears in the mind of the observer according to its own knowledge because the knowledge of an object is not different from the object itself… but since I was not confident or satisfied with my answer, I told the person that I was not sure on how to answer the question, and that I was going to pass it over to you. If either you or Sundari would have the time and energy to elaborate on that we would appreciate it.

Sundari: Your answer is pretty good, very close. They key issue is that the self is not in the same order of reality as the observer – the subject – and the observed particle – the object. The self is unaffected by the observation of matter, and matter is unaffected by the observation of the self because, as you point out, this is a non-dual reality and there is only the self. In the apparent reality, it appears as if the seer, or individual consciousness, has an impact on or is affecting (and is affected by) matter because they are in the same order of reality. Consciousness does not affect reality; it is always free of the apparent reality. It is maya, or the gunas, manipulating the seer and the seen, making it look like there is an effect. But when you look at it from the self’s point of view, there is no effect. The key is always which level are you looking at it from.

Science objectifies consciousness, taking the observer to be real; it thinks consciousness is something the observer has instead of being its true nature. It has no way to discriminate the real from the apparently real, as the only means of knowledge it has is the senses.

The confusion is between satya and mithya, the real with the apparently real, or the experiencing witness with the non-experiencing witness, the seer and the seen, nirguna brahman with saguna brahman. The seer and the seen are also called the witness and the witnessed, what is called the “opaque” and the “transparent” witness. The opaque witness is the jiva with qualities, looking at awareness through its conditioning (vasanas). The transparent witness is pure awareness with no qualities conditioning it – and it is the witness of the opaque witness, the ultimate subject.

It would be more appropriate to say that the self, seeing only itself, is that which knows the seer with reference to the seen only when maya is operating. The self-aware self appears as a seer, but it never actually is a seer, unless seeing refers to its own self. When ignorance is operating the jiva thinks that the seer is different from the seen: the subject and object are different. The seer, Isvara, is also known as saguna brahman, and because it operates maya (the gunas) it is never deluded by them, i.e. it is pure sattva.

Quote from Dayananda: “Talking of the ‘witness’ should not lead to the idea that there is a witness and something else apart from him that he is witnessing. The ‘witness’ really means the light that illumines the seer, the seen and the process of seeing. Before, during and after the triads of seer, seen and seeing, the illumination exists. It alone exists always.”
~ Much love and gratitude, Sundari