

The Heart Is the Whole

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Quill: *Namaste*, Ted. I have been studying Advaita Vedanta for a year and only got to Ram's (Jim's) site a few weeks ago. I've been reading and viewing all of his work that I could get my hands on. Anyway, I read your essay on Ramana and Nisargadatta. Just to clear up one point about the heart and the self, here is the quote from Ramana:

The Heart Is the Self

D: Sri Bhagavan speaks of the heart as the seat of consciousness and as identical with the self. What does the heart exactly signify?

M: The question about the heart arises because you are interested in seeking the source of consciousness. To all deep-thinking minds, the enquiry about the "I" and its nature has an irresistible fascination.

Call it by any name, God, self, the heart or the seat of consciousness, it is all the same. The point to be grasped is this: that Heart means the very core of one's being, the centre, without which there is nothing whatever.

D: But Sri Bhagavan has specified a particular place for the heart within the physical body, that it is in the chest, two digits to the right from the median.

M: Yes, that is the centre of spiritual experience, according to the testimony of sages. This spiritual heart-centre is quite different from the blood-propelling, muscular organ known by the same name. The spiritual heart-centre is not an organ of the body. All that you can say of the heart is that it is the very core of your being. That with which you really are is the self.

~ *Maharshi's Gospel*

Ram explained this really well in his 2011 discussion on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter VIII. I hope to catch up with one or both of you in person sometime. I was going to try to see Jim in Berkeley, but it's a long drive from Los Angeles, and I couldn't find any available campsites up there for this weekend (motels are too expensive in the Bay area.)

By the way, terrific website. Thanks so much for all your work.

~ Regards, Quill

Ted: Hi, Quill. Thank you for your kind words regarding the site. You seem to have caught the

Vedanta bug.

I don't know that you were asking a question regarding the heart and the self, but since you referred to clarity on the issue, I thought I'd offer something for you to contemplate.

As Maharshi states, the heart to which Ramana refers is not the physical, blood-pumping organ. As is also mentioned, however, Ramana did specify that the "spiritual heart-centre" is located within the chest cavity on the right side of the torso. This reference has been a point of confusion for more than a few seekers – which is not to imply that you, personally, are confused about it.

I cannot speak for Ramana of course, but I'm pretty certain that his reference to a physical location for the self was intended to provide the person asking the question with a focal point on which he or she could place his or her attention during meditation. The self is the "field" of pure conscious existence that is the *adhishthanam*, or substratum, of all objective phenomena, both subtle and gross, and as such is necessarily limitless. Attributes, characteristics, qualities, boundaries or edges are the means by which objects are identified. Were it to possess any of these, the self (i.e. consciousness, or awareness) would be reduced to nothing more than an object appearing within and supported by a greater or more fundamental reality and thereby lose its status as the self, which by definition is the irreducible essence of one's being. Because limitless consciousness cannot be defined in terms of any particular object or even the collective of all objects obtaining within the larger scope of its being, it is obviously non-objectifiable, and therefore cannot be located in a specific place.

Notwithstanding the fact that the self is not specifically located within the right side of the chest, however, focusing one's concentration on this particular spot can serve the purpose of helping one withdraw the mind from its ordinary preoccupation with objective phenomena – that is, the sensations gathered from the surrounding world as well as the emotions and cognitions arising within one's mind – and render it still enough to accurately reflect one's unmodified nature. It is in this way that one's true limitless self can be "seen" or recognized, and thus known.

The self is often said to reside within the *hridaya*, the heart of one's being, or to be recognizable within one's heart. While the literal meaning of the word *hridaya* is "heart," however, the term should be understood as referring to *buddhi*, the intellect. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* states, "The *purusha* [the self], which is identified with *vijnanamaya* (intellect) and is in the midst of the organs, is *hridyantajyotihi*, the [self-effulgent] light within the heart," (4.3.7). In his commentary on this *mantra*, Shankara clarifies the meaning of "heart" as follows: heart is primarily the lotus-shaped lump of flesh; here it means the intellect, which has its seat in the heart.

The intellect is the instrument of knowledge, and it is only in the intellect that the self is known. Though the self is not an object, it is self-evident as the very basis of one's existence. The mind is the manifesting medium for pure awareness. That is, pure awareness illumines the mind and thereby makes it capable of knowing objects (i.e. the *vrittis*, or thought-modifications, arising within awareness). An analogy that is traditionally used to illustrate this point is that of water in a bucket. The bucket itself represents the body and the water represents the mind. If the water's surface is rippled by the wind, the reflection of the sunlight shining on it will appear to be a collection of glinting forms. If the water's surface is still, however, an accurate reflection of the sun's true nature can be seen. Similarly, if the mind is agitated by thoughts, the "light" of the self will appear in the form of those thoughts and will not be recognized for what it is. If the mind is sufficiently still, however, a more accurate reflection of the self's unmodified, limitless, attributeless nature will be "seen." The self won't be seen as an object, but rather it's true nature

will be understood. The analogy falls short of course, in the sense that the water is different than the light it is reflecting, whereas in non-dual reality awareness is both the material and the illumination by means of which the material is made evident. If properly assimilated, the recognition of the limitless nature of the self in a sufficiently still mind will afford one the understanding that pure awareness is the content of all thought-forms (i.e. the “substanceless substance” of which all thought-forms are made), and therefore even when thoughts subsequently arise again within the mind – as they inevitably will – their essential nature will be recognized as nothing other than the self.

Bear in mind, however, that while thoughts – and for that matter, all objects – are the self, the self is not the thoughts. That is, no limited objective form or even the collective whole of all objective forms can comprehensively define or delineate the self, which is of the nature of pure, limitless awareness. Whether objects appear or do not appear, such as is the case in deep sleep, the self always is. Subject to neither temporal nor spatial limitation – for even time and space are objects obtaining within the “field” or “illumined” scope of awareness – the self is eternal and infinite.

In this sense it can be said that the heart is the whole.

~ All the best, Ted