

# The Opaque and Transparent Witness: The Seer and the Seen

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**Cheryl:** Is not the self the only witness (*sakshimatra*)?

Quote from Ramana Maharshi:

“The Seer and the Seen is also called the witness and the witnessed. There are two witnesses, what is called the ‘opaque’ and the ‘transparent witness.’ The opaque witness is the *jiva* with qualities looking at awareness through its conditioning; the transparent witness is pure awareness with no qualities conditioning it... and it is the witness of the opaque witness.

“THE WITNESS REALLY MEANS THE LIGHT THAT ILLUMINES THE SEER, SEEN AND THE PROCESS OF SEEING

“Witness is applicable when there is an object to be seen. Then it is duality. The truth lies beyond both. In the *mantra*, *sakshi cheta kevalo nirgunascha*, the word *sakshi* (witness) must be understood as *sannidhi* [presence], without which there could be nothing. See how the sun is necessary for daily activities. He does not, however, form part of the world actions, yet they cannot take place without the sun. He is the witness of the activities. So it is with the Self.

“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.”

I have been reading Swami Dayananda’s *Vivekachudamani*, and it clarified the reflection/reflector and opaque/transparent witness for me. He says on page 24: “*Atma* is already self-evident and it is *alupta-drk*, a seer that never ceases, it never even winks. It is always a witness. But it is a witness only with reference to whatever is seen. By itself it is in the form of consciousness. This self-evident *atma* is *brahman*, that is the teaching.” Dayananda has such a clarity – a clarity Ram equally possesses – that it’s unbelievable at times. That quote clarified the distinction of *saguna* and *nirguna brahman*.

**Sundari:** Yes, I this is a great quote. I would say that the self is a seer that never began or ceases and is the all-seeing eye, or “I,” that sees only itself because there are no objects for it to see. It is self-effulgent and there is nothing but itself. It is also not “in the form of consciousness,” it is consciousness, *brahman*. This is why it is impossible for the ego to see the self; as you point out further down, the effect cannot know the cause. I like the story of Meenakshi, the fish-eyed goddess. Ramji worked out that the fish eye symbol works as a symbol for the self because fish cannot blink.

**Cheryl:** So *saguna brahman* (the words opaque and translucent witness are appropriate, up to a

point, but in reading Swamiji's quote above, the witness isn't even an appropriate term, for simple awareness is apparently influenced by *sattva*, and as the mind is *sattvic*, the witness seems to be clear, and this clarity, or pureness, is what people assume to be holy?

**Sundari:** Yes, correct. One has to drop all these terms, even *nirguna brahman*, because that implies *saguna*. 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* but because it operates *maya* (the *gunas*) it is never deluded by them, i.e. it is pure *sattva*. When *tamas* and *rajas* arise in *saguna brahman*, then awareness apparently becomes a *jiva* and is deluded by *maya*. *Sattva* is clear and pure – but only with reference to the objects appearing in it, which are impure. *Isvara* is the wielder of *maya* but is never deluded by *maya*. Purity and holiness are projected by the *jiva* when it is under the spell of *sattva*.

**Cheryl:** But as you've stated below, and as my experience actually confirms, awareness is without parts; being part-less, purity and impurity are dualisms. Yes, they are experienced and continue, because the *jiva* never leaves *maya*, but aren't real.

**Sundari:** Yes, they may appear but are known to be unreal. When *avidya* is removed and your nature is known to be non-dual, duality is no longer an issue although it still appears in you – until it doesn't.

**Cheryl:** This is the collapse of it all... which implies a "final" enlightenment, and that this is an event. As I state below, that's not the case. And as you wrote in our last email, there isn't even a collapsing. The self isn't a doer, so it can't collapse anything. And *Isvara* doesn't rule over the self, because the cause is untouched and subtler than the effect. It's the simple dropping of ignorance vis-à-vis self-knowledge.

**Sundari:** Correct, as you know. The big deal and hype around enlightenment and turning it into a goal is a very common trap in the spiritual arena. Both are experiential terms. Vedanta says that there is nothing to collapse or drop because the one who is doing the collapsing and dropping has been negated by self-knowledge.

**Cheryl:** This is a very important fact, and it really is all so simple and easy to miss. The king of secrets, as the *Gita* says. Who knows purity and impurity? Who knows the witness? Who is aware that I'm witnessing (or not witnessing)? ME! Who knows all the states of existence, bodies, or *koshas*? ME!

**Sundari:** *Jai Bhagavan!*