

The Self Is the Not-Self

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Claudia: Dear Ram, tonight the thought arose that there actually cannot be a not-self, because everything I experience (“I” in terms of the reflected self) is an expression of the self, which is the same I... and I am the self – this is what I learned.

Ram: This is correct. If this is a non-dual reality then there is no not-self. I explain the self/not-self teaching later in this letter.

Claudia: There is a source and there is water. The source is different from water. The source is like a door between the unmanifest and the manifest. Out of the source water is flowing into the world. If there weren't, no water could be poured. So let's say the source is the potential that gives form. The source pours out the world which reflects the source in its limitless potential. Can one assume the womb to be the substance/essence, the source to be the potential of manifestation and the permanent flow of life (ever-changing birth-death pattern) to be the reflected manifestations of the substance?

Ram: The idea is almost correct. It is an attempt to explain the relationship between the self and its manifestations as cause and effect. Check back to an email I wrote a week or two ago where I differentiated awareness from reflected awareness. In that case awareness would be the source of the light and the world would be the reflector of the light. The important teaching here is that the world does not stand alone. It depends on awareness for its existence. So if you think you are the subtle body (the mind-intellect-ego entity) you are not free – you depend on something else for your awareness. You do not see yourself as the source. Remember, we are going for freedom, *moksa*. Freedom means that you do not depend on anything.

But while this “cause and effect” teaching is satisfying to the mind, it is not the highest teaching. Let me explain the highest teaching. It may take some serious thinking to understand it.

The source, the self, is not different from the world. It is apparently different, that is, it seems to be different until it is investigated. “Source” is a dualistic word. It implies something else, in this case a world. But there actually is no world. There is only the self appearing as a world. Why does it appear as a world? Because we are looking at the self through a mind that is caught in time. It thinks in terms of cause and effect. So by investigation you discover that the light, awareness, is not a source and the world does not reflect the light. This frees you of the self/world duality.

This idea of “no source” is called *ajatavada*, the idea of non-creation. So if there is no world, there is no bondage and therefore there is no suffering. If there is no bondage there is also no liberation, because the idea that “I am not free” depends on the notion that the things that I am attached to are real.

Claudia: Or in other words, the Absolute is the substance of all, self/awareness is the potential of

all, manifestations are the reflections of all?

Ram: This is not correct. Awareness and the Absolute are synonyms. Awareness is absolute because there is nothing other than awareness. "Absolute" is another problem word because it implies relative. From a dualistic perspective awareness is absolute because everything depends on it. All these word problems come because speech in is *maya*.

Claudia: I was always wondering whether Absolute and awareness are synonyms or not, and Sri Nisargadatta said something (couldn't find it) about this issue that has left the vague idea of a distinction.

Regarding the above thesis from this perspective one can conclude all manifestations being not-self, but reflections of the Absolute by means of the self. The wave is not the ocean, but the ocean is within the wave by means of water, so wave and ocean is one. The "I" doesn't look like the self, but the self is within the I by means of awareness, so I and self as well must be one.

Ram: Yes, all manifestations are not-self (see my explanation below of the self/not-self teaching). The "wave/ocean" is an important, powerful teaching and you need to get it right. The purpose of the teaching is to show that the manifestations of awareness are not fundamentally different from awareness. The ocean is saltwater and the wave is saltwater. They are both the same. The only thing that differs are the names. The wave is saltwater in a form and the ocean is formless saltwater. If you take away the names and forms they are exactly the same. The self is formless awareness and the world is awareness in a form. Self-realization is called *viveka* which is simply the power to see that everything is awareness in spite of the appearance of things to the contrary.

Another good analogy that might help to understand non-duality is the "gold and ornaments" teaching. You have a gold ring. How much of the ring is a ring and how much is gold? There is no ring apart from the gold. If you melt the gold the ring disappears, but the gold does not disappear. So the ring is totally dependent on the gold, but the gold is completely free of the ring. The gold is so free that it can become a necklace, ring, a tooth or anything without sacrificing anything.

Claudia is the ring and you are the gold, awareness. Claudia is you, but you are not Claudia.

Claudia: The term "not-self" suddenly triggered some irritation, therefore I had to work it out in my way of thinking. It is probably used to distinguish the objects in their separated, independent appearances as not-self, and when you put in the knowledge you realize the object as not separated from their cause, the self.

Ram: Yes. This is correct. Good thinking. When a person starts the path of self-realization he or she is identified with the thoughts and feelings in his or her own mind. These ideas are so important they are actually taken to be one's self. If a feeling is hurt or a thought is challenged the person thinks he or she is hurt or attacked. Obviously, this is not a situation that is conducive to freedom. So this person is told that the thoughts and feelings, etc. are not-self. This is to objectify them and help the person develop *viragya*, dispassion. At the same time the person is taught

what the self is and told that the self is real and is encouraged to think about the nature of the self. It is not good psychology to give the mind exclusively negative instructions. It should also be given a positive direction in which to turn. When the self is realized one realizes that the self is non-dual and that the not-self is also the self.

Claudia: This is the tricky mind pattern taking one thing out of the whole – took the term out of its relation of a whole sentence – which is taking place all the time and conditions the belief in separation in all areas. I'm glad to see this dynamic so clearly now and maybe it was just for that.

And though I've already understood this lesson, the mind confuses me again and again. Good to know that it is also an expression of the self and see the "good" side: we were not able to discriminate if this pattern didn't exist, so that the self couldn't be self-revealing. Right or did this fellow blow me out now?

Ram: Well, it's pretty good reasoning, but it's not quite right. You are right that we can't discriminate without the idea of a self and its expressions, or forms. So if you see a world then you need discriminating wisdom to neutralize your attachment to the belief in the world as the giver of happiness.

But you are not right about the self-revealing idea. The self does not need a world to reveal itself. It seems to be hidden and unseen and it looks like it only comes into being when there is a mirror to reflect its light. But this is not true. Do you need a body and a mind to exist? You do not. Your body and mind are gone in deep sleep, but you continue to exist. The problem in this case – as in every other case – is words. The word "reveal" is dualistic. It means that there is something that is hidden and something that reveals what is hidden. The teachings of Vedanta reveal the self, which is hidden behind a cloud of ignorance, for example.

But this teaching says that the self is self-revealing. What does this mean? It means that nothing else is required to reveal it. This is called non-discriminating wisdom. Don't feel bad if you can't understand it. Discriminating wisdom is just as good a non-discriminating wisdom because both free you of dependence to objects. The classic illustration of this teaching is the mirage. You are in the desert and you see water on the horizon. You do not try to drink the water, because you know that it is not water. You understand that the mind is creating water where there is no water.

~ Love, Ram