

Un-Illumined Matter?

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Hugh: I have a question that you might be able to shed some light on:

On page 39 of *How to Attain Enlightenment*, James writes, “Matter is inert. But when it is illumined by the self it becomes dynamic...” That suggest that matter can be un-dynamic and dynamic. I’m not sure what he means here. Isn’t a rock dynamic as it is, just sitting there? It’s full of atoms, which are energy, and energy is dynamic. It also suggests that matter can be un-illumined and illumined by the self; however, everything just IS the self if reality is non-dual. There’s no such thing as matter existing apart from the self.

Shams: You are right. Apart from you, matter couldn’t exist. It seems that you see the world because it is there. But as you know, matter is there because you see it. Without you, there is no matter. So your question is fair. If I say “when matter is illumined” it could imply that there is a time when matter exists without being illumined. So one can imagine that at one moment, matter is dynamic (when it’s illumined) and at another moment, matter is inert (when it’s not illumined), but it is always existing, which is clearly false.

One source of the confusion here is the word “when.” James decided to use this language to make another point (that energy is only an object). The truth is that matter doesn’t exist apart from you and it is always inert. The second possible source of confusion could be the differentiation between dynamic and non-dynamic matter but again, that is due to the context because when we talk about energy we commonly think about dynamic matter. All matter, more or less dynamic, won’t stop being inert. A thought is more dynamic than a rock because one is subtler than the other. That means that the thought is “nearer” to awareness (you can think about a rock but you can’t “rock” about a thought) and also has less *tamas* and more *sattva* and *rajas*. However, all matter, including thoughts and emotions (subtle matter), are just objects in you and need you to exist. All the field (which is *Isvara*) is illumined by the self, so there is no such a thing as an un-illumined object. It’s impossible. Only the self is un-illumined, because it’s the one that sheds the light.

We have to learn to that in reality there are no objects coming and going, although it seems so. There is only one object (*samsara*), and ignorance makes you believe in multiplicity. In fact, there is no object at all either because it is only yourself.