

Who Is the Witness?

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2015-02-27

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2077>

Amy: Dear Ramji and Sundari, I would like to ask you to help me understand a subtle point and perhaps even name it. I love the Sanskrit words and find them very helpful in that they make the intangible very distinct and clear for setting straight my understanding. In my years of meditating I became so familiar with the witness. I came to see that thoughts, feelings, etc. were objects just the same as rocks and trees. For some time I identified my “self” as this witness. However, the witness was blown away in that experience I shared with you in my first letter (when I was with the horses in the field). Then I saw that who I am is the one aware... of all, including that witness. I could see that the witness is not the *jiva*, and it's not Me (self). Today I can distinguish the *jiva* and the witness, and know they are objects apart from, yet in... Me. My question is: What is that witness? Is there a name in Sanskrit for it? The witness is still a bit vague in my understanding, and I may have heard Ramji mention it, yet perhaps I missed it. Wishing you both all happiness.

~ With love and gratitude, Amy

Sundari: Hello, Amy, lovely to hear from you again. ☺

There is really only one witness, this being a non-dual reality, and it is always the self – you, witnessing either in self-knowledge or self-ignorance. But I understand your confusion and perhaps this will help:

The self-aware self appears as a witness, or seer, but it never actually is a seer, unless seeing/witnessing 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* because it operates *maya* (the *gunas*), though *Isvara* is never deluded (conditioned) by the *gunas*, i.e. *Isvara/maya* is pure *sattva*. The *jiva*, whose true nature is also *sattva*, however, is deluded by *maya* with the appearance of *rajas* and *tamas*. But like *jiva*, *Isvara* is only a seer with reference to the self because without awareness no seeing would be possible and there is nothing to see. No *Isvara*, no *jiva* and no *maya*. Non-dual vision makes it clear that this is indeed the case, as everything you “see” is you, awareness.

For teaching purposes, the seer and the seen are also called the witness and the witnessed.

The Two Witnesses

There are two witnesses, what is called the “opaque” witness (*saguna brahman* – with qualities) and the “transparent witness” (*nirguna brahman* – without qualities). 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.

Quote from Ramana:

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

Bhagavan: “‘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.”

Swami Dayananda says in his commentaries on *Vivekachudamani*: “*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 sees only pure consciousness. This self-evident *atma* is *brahman*; that is the teaching.”

The quote above clarifies the distinction of *saguna* and *nirguna brahman*. 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. *Saguna brahman* is apparently influenced by *sattva*, and as the mind gets *sattvic* the witness seems to be clear, and this clarity, or pureness, is what people assume to be holy. One eventually has to drop all these terms, even *nirguna brahman*, because *nirguna* 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, because with the appearance of *maya* there is something for awareness to see, i.e. objects.

I hope this helps!

~ Much love to you, Sundari