

The Apparent/Real Confusion

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Pierre: Hi, James. How is Parajetset Guruananda doing? I've read a few of your most recent *satsangs* and you say, "Everyone wants a piece of me." Well, I guess that was bound to happen, even if the teaching points in the opposite direction. Spiritual people almost irremediably cling to teachers and want to make them out to be gods. Little do they know the veritable *avatar* they are in the presence of!

Anyway, jokes aside, as I'm still going over certain things for the piece I'm writing for ShiningWorld, I noticed that I had never read the very last chapter of your book concerning Neo-Advaita. I'll cut to the chase. You write: "This discrimination between what is real and what is apparent is the signature of an enlightened person." Fine. This, with the discrimination between the experience-based litany and self-knowledge, is where I originally "clicked" from scepticism to an openness to Vedanta. Two lines later you write: "When you superimpose the notion of non-duality on multiplicity you add a belief that will eventually have to be discarded at some point. This kind of spiritual belief, which is just ignorance, is exceedingly hard to investigate if it is taken to be the truth," (pages 308 to 309). I observed, in the past few months, that my whole delirium concerning "integration" was completely erroneous. Indeed, how can awareness possibly integrate itself on the relative level? Awareness is just awareness. It can't be integrated unless one separates oneself from it (which the subtle body wants to do and if possible uphold and maintain). In other words, the notion of integration is just another misguided experience-based delusion.

James: That is correct, Pierre. The integration happens in the sense that when you no longer identify with the subtle body, the existing *vasanas* play out automatically and there is a gradual increase in the *jiva's* sense of well-being - more peace, clarity, etc. You might call this "integration" but, as you rightly state, awareness is not going to integrate into anything. Whatever it might integrate into is not real. It is just a dreamlike appearance, the product of ignorance. So "integration" is not the right word, because it makes it sound like there is somebody doing something. You might say that the effect of self-knowledge on the subtle body is that it brings peace, contentment, etc. simply because the *vasana* pressure is released. It is like *karma yoga* without a doer. Or you could call it "purification" for want of a better term, although all these ideas only offer to explain it from the level of the *jiva*, which is reasonable insofar as the *jiva* is not non-existent.

Pierre: You say: "Non-duality, non-difference, does not mean sameness. It means that from the self's perspective there is no difference, but from the level of the body and mind there are only differences," (page 308). I follow you 100%.

However, I'm not entirely sure that I follow the former quotation. When you write, "When you superimpose the notion of non-duality on multiplicity, you add a belief that will eventually have to be discarded at some point," I interpret that you are aiming at the "everything is consciousness" pseudo-teaching touted by the Neos. Notwithstanding that everything is consciousness, the problem with the Neos is that they use this teaching at the outset in an attempt to cancel out effort, doership and

any common-sense value on the relative level. They are putting the cart before the horse, so to speak, very often to consolidate their fatalistic perspective that in turn justifies their “anything goes” form of pseudo-morality. So, do I read you correctly?

James: Yes. They have no *sadhana*, no means of attainment, so they have to pretend that this world does not exist. It exists all right, it just isn't real. They do not understand the *satya/mithya* concept. The whole Neo-Advaita thing just evolved without any inquiry. None of their inspirations – Krishnamurti, Osho and Papaji – were scripturally astute. They read scripture but they interpreted it according to their own ideas. None of them were taught. So there was no intellectual rigor in their teachings. The Westerners who listened to them were not properly qualified for *moksa*, lacked real discipline and just interpreted what they read and heard according to their own ideas, and this crucial point seems to have been completely missed. It is not an obvious point. Although I routinely teach it and people get it quite easily, it is not something that one would come up with naturally. So the question of how to behave in the apparent reality is unresolved. They just say nothing exists, do what you want.

Pierre: What I'm uncertain about is that “everything is consciousness” is a superimposition of non-duality on multiplicity. What I read is that though everything IS consciousness, you mean it in the context of self-knowledge as opposed to behaviour (or action) in *maya*, correct?

James: That is right. When you don't understand what it means to be awareness you may use the idea that it is all awareness to justify your behavior. Self-knowledge seen from the point of view of the apparent individual naturally inclines one to follow *dharma*. You do not see the idea of *dharma* in the Neo teachings. By “*dharma*” I mean the dependence of the individual on the field. They just dismiss the field and want to act like irresponsible little gods in the apparent reality. The idea is that it's all okay because “I am not here” or reality does not exist. Krishna addresses this issue in the *Gita* when he says, “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” This means that the individual will naturally have as much concern for others as he or she has for himself or herself – because there is no difference.

Pierre: But why is it a belief that will have to be eventually discarded?

James: Because the apparent reality and awareness are not equal. One does not cancel the other. They are saying that awareness cancels *maya*, so *maya* does not exist. But *maya* exists all right. They are in *maya* saying *maya* does not exist. If they were the self it would be apparent what the relationship between *maya* and awareness is, and there would be no need to deny it. The proof of their ignorance is their indifference to *dharma*. Vedanta says *Brahma satyam, jagan mithya*. *Mithya* (apparent) does not mean non-existent. “All is consciousness” means that the world is actually consciousness. This does not mean that the world does not exist. This means that whatever existence it has is borrowed from consciousness. Any quality inherent in the clay will appear in the pot. It will not belong to the pot. It will belong to the clay. To say that the world is awareness means that it is a consistent, lawful creation because the self is one. All the patterns, the principles (*tattvas*), that make it up are just the self appearing here. Freedom is not license. Freedom is the

knowledge of the relationship between the self as self and the self as the apparent reality. This implies a sense of responsibility. When Eli, Gangaji's husband, got caught with his pants down and the whole cooked-up Gangaji lineage was exposed as the hypocritical business that it is, it shows that they did not understand the relationship of awareness to this world. Gangaji got inspired by an idea and inspired others and they just went on parroting the half-assed nonsense that she picked up from Papaji without thinking about it. Neo-Advaita is a self-perpetuating, incestuous little world of its own. It looks like the truth, it sounds like the truth, but it is only a half-truth. It is good enough to snare some neophytes, but that is about it. However, it is not the kiss of death, because people eventually realize that the emperor has no clothes and move on. If Papaji had been a proper teacher this would have never happened. These export *gurus* in general are not *gurus* at all. They get inspired by some kind of epiphany, start spouting off, collect people and pass on their ignorance as if it was understanding. The fact that the only thing that Papaji is revered for is that he could induce an epiphany by verbal *shaktipat* and not for his wisdom speaks volumes.

Pierre: Or do you mean in the sense that before enlightenment there are rivers, valleys and mountains and after enlightenment there are rivers, valleys and mountains (or something like that)?

James: Yes. The world does not cease to exist. It just exists in a different light.

Pierre: Am I just getting lost in words or is there something that I'm missing?

I'll put this in another context. In the first of your most recent *satsangs* (November) you emphasise to a seeker that we live in a benevolent universe. I can only agree from my true/real perspective. From Pierre's eyes, however, it seems the complete opposite. (I'm not disputing that my needs are all taken care of and that I'm extremely fortunate in this and other respects. It's what Pierre sees as plague upon plague of human misery around the globe that I would be hypocritical if not naive to qualify as benevolent. To take Haiti as one small example is to witness the endless accumulation of insult upon injury. Are their needs taken care of? Can we just brush it under the carpet and classify it as *karma*?).

From the level of *mithya*, just about everything – work, relationships, you name it – appears to be governed by opposition (hence duality), not to say an underlying subtle sense of war. (Even on the astronomical level, the black holes of galaxies are constantly devouring each other as the process of creation, maintenance and destruction never ceases. In fact, from all level of relative life, each creation ends in destruction, whose fruits are in turn the seeds of the next creation. That this is the natural order of life, and that some see this as serving the self – I have trouble with this too: How can the self be served? Or integrated? – the self is just the self and anything we come up with is an interpretation (like *lila*) – is all nice and fine, but tell that to an *ajnani* who is dying of hunger, cholera and lying in squalor in Cite Soleil [Haiti] or Calcutta).

A sense of benevolence can only come from the bigger picture, which is ultimately the perspective of *satyam*. Again, am I reading you correctly? (Please feel free to destroy the above with your comments if I'm off the mark, James).

James: This is true, but this does not mean that awareness is responsible. The creation is pure and perfect as it is because it reflects the nature of the self. Ignorance is responsible for this problem. Ignorance means not understanding the self. When you don't see what is (the rope) you see a snake, i.e. a dangerous, threatening world. As soon as the rope is known, the world is revealed in all its beauty.

James: Finally, I know you're extremely patient, but if I'm taking (and will take) so much time in writing the piece for ShiningWorld, it's because there are many nuances that I want to be clear about before writing any old rag. This brings me to what you write about (beginning of the same chapter) concerning the confusion surrounding Vivekananda's arrival in the West and the so-called *yogas* popularized as *bhakti*, *karma*, *dhyana* and *jnana yoga*. I had also come to the same observations from past readings. Though I am aware of the same classifications as some sort of accepted truth in the contemporary world of *yoga*, I still don't understand how *jnana* can be accepted as *yoga* from the standpoint of Vedanta. Maybe a path or teaching... but a *yoga*? *Yoga* is for doers, and *jnana*, or the process of self-inquiry, is an understanding, *n'est-ce pas*? Or do you simply mean *yoga* in the sense of the self-enquiry techniques that are suggested by Vedanta?

James: "*Yoga*" has two meanings. One is "to connect," or join. This is for doers. It also means "topic." This is for doers who are seeking knowledge (*jignasus*): the topic of knowledge, the topic of *karma*, etc. If you will notice at the end of every chapter of the *Gita* it says, "Now the *yoga* of *karma*, *bhakti*, suffering, the *gunas*, knowledge, etc. has been unfolded in the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna."

Pierre: I know I'm getting technical, but what the hell, if one is to get a correct understanding... furthermore... wishing you all the best, James. Don't let them make a meal out of you.

James: Not to worry. I have it all under control.

~ Love, James