

How the Mind Exists

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Gary: Hi, Ram. On the mind, the deeper question is perhaps, does the mind exist to begin with? As long as the seeker uses the mind to “establish” reality, then one is limited. So questioning the very existence of the mind to begin with is a way to “get beyond” the mind. As long as the mind is held to be real, so that “it” can affect “enlightenment” in any way, then one is bound, limited to what can be comprehended by the mind. One can also ask, does the mind know to get to the same “thing” (that is not a thing)?

Ram: Hi, Gary. Vedanta would agree that as long as the seeker uses the mind to “establish” reality, he or she will be limited in innumerable ways. But isn't the seeker the self identified with the mind, i.e. the notion that he or she is limited? It would have to be like this if reality is non-dual as scripture states and our epiphanies confirm. If the seeker understood he or she was the self, he or she would not be a seeker. It is the contention of Vedanta that the mind is the self seemingly ignorant of its true nature. So the seeker is not separate from the mind. It is the self identified with the mind. This is Ramana's view too. Self-inquiry is intended to remove the mind's ignorance about its nature.

You are right that the mind is not ultimately real, in the sense that it is unborn like the self. And in deep sleep it ends, for example, so it cannot be real, reality being what never begins or ends. And insofar as it exists in the waking state it ceases to be limited when it realizes that it is non-separate from everything, i.e. the self. It “becomes” the self because it was the self, i.e. awareness, all along like the wave “becomes” the ocean even though it is the ocean all the time.

As long as there is identification with it, it is real for the one who identifies. The self does not need enlightenment, because it is awareness, the “light.” It is conscious, whole and complete, so it does not seek. So if there is seeking, enlightenment would necessarily be for the self masquerading as the mind. If the mind is non-existent, how can it seek? If it is seeking and it is unreal, then why not just dismiss it and stop seeking? What would give you the confidence to do that except the knowledge that you are the self? It does not often happen that the seeking stops easily, because there is always some kind of belief that the mind's sense of limitation and its seeking are real.

This is a crazy and impossible situation when you think about it: there is only one self and it is always self-aware and limitless, and it somehow does the impossible and seems to be ignorant of its nature. This is called *maya* in Vedanta, making the impossible possible.

We cannot, as you say, allow the mind to establish reality, because its notion of reality is always dualistic, which leads to suffering. What then establishes reality, if there is a doubt about it? The words of the sages, the scripture. Ramana, for example, continually addresses the self in the form of the mind and tries to show it how to discriminate in order to end its attachment to the notion that it is a limited entity.

As far as the idea of establishing the unreality of the mind to get “beyond it is

concerned, how can you get beyond it if it is not existent? Real or unreal, existent or non-existent, you are already beyond it because you, awareness, are aware of it. Since you cannot be what you are aware of, you are other than it. This understanding is equivalent to liberation because its sense of limitation does not belong to you.

As I mentioned, Vedanta says the mind is apparently real and that its apparent ignorance can be removed with apparent knowledge, leaving the mind free of seeking. It is still there as an instrument that allows you, the self, to negotiate your way happily through the apparent reality. When we say “apparent knowledge” we mean that the self is beyond knowledge and ignorance, but you need knowledge to cancel ignorance.

Gary: I guess that I have been hearing and reflecting upon, and meditating on, *ajata* long enough that I find myself questioning the actual “existence” of any “thing” that is objective. Reality is with “he who knows,” always.

James: Yes, indeed.

Gary: That the article is something to be reflected on in this way says to me that it covers important material (that is, I think, not well written about in the West).

James: Yes, the modern instant enlightenment teachings don’t deal with it. Without any logic they expect you to dismiss the mind. It is usually turned into the enemy, when ignorance is the enemy, not the mind. And since they have no systematic way to remove ignorance, except to deny that the one who is ignorant, i.e. “the mind does not exist,” it is not a helpful teaching. I do not know how anyone can function here without a mind. Yes, this is a dream, but in a dream we need a dream mind.

Gary: I would be interested in your comments on this and the previous email before I publish the article. Maybe I can put our dialog at the end of the article?

~ Gary