

The Reflection Theory

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Barbara: I have never understood the concept of reflected awareness and talk about mirror(s). I can understand the self being a screen. I can understand *satya* and *mithya*. Can you explain?

Sundari: There is original consciousness and reflected consciousness = the self and the *jiva* (subtle body). The *jiva* is awareness plus a subtle body, and takes itself to be conscious. The best metaphor to illustrate this point is the sun and the moon. The moon appears to be shining, but it is just a rock floating in the space with no light of its own. The sun is a flaming ball of fire and its light illuminates the moon, which is what makes it appear to be shining. Just like the light of awareness shining on the subtle body makes it appear to be conscious. People who think they are people think they are conscious, but they are borrowing consciousness from awareness.

Let's look at the screen and mirror metaphors:

It is true awareness is like a screen upon which everything manifests and dissolves. However, images on a screen are different from the mirror metaphor. There are two kinds of screens: one that reflects its own light, and in that light (like the light in a computer screen) objects appear and disappear. This screen has its own [emitted] light. Then there is a screen like a movie screen which is like the sun and the moon – i.e. the screen does not project its own light, but borrows its [reflected] light from the projector.

A mirror:

Everything reflects light, but a mirror reflects light clearly, as it is. The clearer the mind (reflective surface) the more distinct are the objects in it. Even though all objects arise in awareness, it is not as easy to see some objects as awareness, because they are obscured by *tamas*. The point is, if the mirror (mind, or reflective surface) is clear, the self as the object reflected in the mirror can be clearly known as an object of knowledge/experience. In non-dual reality experience and knowledge are the same. There is no obscuration in a clear mirror.

Another reflection metaphor is an image in a mirror. In a mirror objects are reflected because a mirror reflects light, so it is the source of the light in this metaphor. The question to ask is this: How far are objects from the mirror? Do they pop out, stand apart? No. The reflection in the mirror and the mirror are non-different.

The reflection theory is a big topic in Vedanta; Shankara brought it up and developed it. There are two basic theories about it: look up the Bhamati and Vivarana schools of Vedanta teachers.