

# Real and Reflected Awareness

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2016-01-18

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2477>

**Roberto:** Dear Sundari, I hope you are well and that you enjoyed the Christmas holidays. If you do not mind, I just wish to ask you for quick clarification on a few issues.

**Sundari:** Thank you, Roberto, and the same to you.

**Roberto:** I read in one of the online *satsangs* at the website that awareness is the unchanging, ever-present “knowing” in every experience, of every object. In another article it is written that “Awareness is that which makes consciousness possible in that consciousness is reflected awareness.”

Could you please clarify the difference between pure awareness and reflected awareness, pure awareness and consciousness as described in the sentence quoted above?

**Sundari:** Consciousness and awareness are synonyms for the self, which is that which makes it possible for the *jiva* (reflected consciousness) to appear to be conscious or aware. Without the presence of consciousness/awareness it is not possible for the *jiva*, or person, to know anything. Remember that reflected awareness, or body-mind (*jiva/person*), is inert. The *jiva* seems to be conscious because the light of awareness shines on it. It is a lens through which consciousness has contact with objects. The lens is made up of and arises from awareness, but without awareness it does not exist, which is why we call it reflected awareness.

**Roberto:** Is reflected awareness just awareness in the presence of objects (i.e. when awareness is present as the knower of objects, when *maya* is operating, and could you kindly elaborate briefly? Sorry if I seem ignorant. I want to be absolutely sure I understand the terms being used.

**Sundari:** Awareness knows itself whether or not objects are present; it is self-luminous and does not require anything to know itself. The way you word your question implies that awareness appears when objects appear, but awareness is always prior to everything. When *maya* manifests and the creation appears, **awareness in the role of Creator (*Isvara*)** appears and knows objects, which it sees as non-different from itself because there is only awareness as the knower and the known. There is one awareness, or consciousness, which is why we call it ordinary. If you have two or more, one could be different from the other, but of course they cannot be. This original awareness does not change and is called *bimba chaitanya*. The confusion arises because *maya* creates a subtle body, which reflects awareness onto objects, like sounds, forms, etc. It is called *pratibimba chaitanya*, or reflected consciousness.

Reflected awareness is the original ordinary awareness reflecting on the subtle body. Being in *maya* (and owing to the action of the *gunas*) the subtle body is subject to change and identifies with objects, thinking that awareness is something other than it.

The subtle body modifies when sound and light stimuli reflect in it – and therefore awareness *seems* to change. At the same time that the subtle body is changing, it is known by original ordinary awareness, which does not change. You know that the subtle body is experiencing things but original awareness doesn't experience. It witnesses. It always remains the same. It is unaffected by what the subtle body experiences.

As you know, there are basically only two orders of reality: (1) the subject, or that which is real – awareness – and (2) the object, that which is only apparently real – the individual – who is not conscious, but appears to be because awareness shines on it. The third “order” of reality is not really an order, as it is the (apparent) “buffer” between the two orders: ***Isvara* – awareness in the role of Creator associated with *maya*. The creation has two orders or ontological categories: the cause (subject) and the effects (objects) – *satya* and *mithya*.**

The effects change **and modify** each other, but the effects do not modify the cause. The gross cannot change the subtle, but the subtle changes the gross (these are apparent modifications of course). If *jiva* is an effect **of** *Isvara*, then it cannot have an effect **on** *Isvara*. *Jiva* depends upon *Isvara* but *Isvara* does not depend upon *jiva*. Therefore they are never co-creators. As *Isvara* and *jiva* are in different orders of the same reality, whatever happens in *maya* does not affect the cause of *maya*, i.e. *Isvara*. ***Isvara* is conscious because with the appearance of *maya*, there is something for awareness to be conscious of, i.e. objects.** *Isvara*, like “pure” awareness, is not conscious in the way *jiva* is conscious, because it is not a person; it is unaffected by the *gunas* and the creation – i.e. the effects, or *mithya*, even though the effects arise from *Isvara* (awareness).

Some good metaphors:

1. Sun and moon metaphor: 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.
2. The screen metaphor: it is true awareness is like a screen upon which everything manifests and dissolves. However, there are two kinds of screens: one that emits its own light, and in that light (like the light in a computer screen) objects appear and disappear. This screen has its own light. Then there is a screen, like a movie screen, which is like the sun and the moon – i.e. the screen does not emit its own light but borrows its light from the projector.
3. The mirror metaphor: everything reflects light, but a mirror reflects light clearly, as it is. In a mirror objects are reflected because a mirror reflects light, so it is the source of the light in this metaphor. 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. 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. Therefore although the objects (reflection in the mirror) are non-different from you, awareness, even though they are inert and do not exist without you, although you exist without the reflection in the mirror and are prior to everything.

**Roberto:** I also wish to ask, just briefly, when the creation appears, where does it appear? Obviously, within awareness, but does it appear in *Isvara*, the supreme personal God? I ask because you mentioned this in a previous email response, but I didn't fully understand.

**Sundari:** You still don't understand what *Isvara* is. Please see above. *Isvara* **is** awareness appearing in the role of Creator when *maya* appears. *Maya* only "covers" a small portion of awareness because awareness cannot be covered and is the knower of *maya*. There is no time or spatial context for creation, because it is not real - it is a projection on the screen of awareness - and there is nowhere that awareness/consciousness is not. It is beyond time and space.

**Roberto:** Lastly, I have read that *Isvara* (as Creator) is described as the sum total of everything created. How or rather why is this so?

**Sundari:** I will recap what we have discussed before and is stated above:

The apparent reality (*mithya*) is a union of *paraprakiti*, or higher reality ( *Isvara*, or *Brahman*), and *aparaprakiti* (*jiva*), lower reality. Their common identity is *uparaprakriti*, "pure" awareness. *Isvara* (awareness plus *maya*) is both the intelligent cause, that which shapes the materials into form (without ever losing or modifying its own nature), and the material substance, meaning the effect from which the forms are created, like the spider's web emerges from the spider and is made up of the spider. As consciousness is non-dual, there is no "real" world. When *maya* appears, awareness plus the *gunas* becomes *Isvara*, the Creator, and the apparent creation appears. ***Isvara, or Brahman, is the name for all forms, not of a particular form.***

**Roberto:** Thank you so much in advance and best wishes to you both for the new year!

~ Blessings always, Roberto

**Sundari:** Thank you and the same to you.

~ *Om*, Sundari