

# The Reflection Is Me, but I Am Not It

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2018-04-20

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3567>

**Joan:** Dear Sundari, greetings to you and Ramji.

I (*jiva*) don't understand clearly the difference between awareness and reflected awareness. I do understand the metaphor that I heard in person from Ramji about how the moon reflects the light of the sun and doesn't have light of its own. I don't know how to apply the metaphor in the waking state when interacting with surroundings. I would appreciate any clarification.

**Sundari:** Awareness is *satya*, that which is real/non-dual, meaning "always present and unchanging," the non-experiencing witness, YOU. Reflected awareness is apparently real/duality/*mithya*, the subtle body, or the experiencing witness, the world of objects, subtle and gross, i.e. always changing and not always present. An object is any other than you, awareness. If you know something, it cannot be you.

Assimilating the meaning of the *satya-mithya* teaching and applying the knowledge to your life as a *jiva* is the essence of *moksa*, which is discriminating *satya* – the Self, you – from the objects that appear in you.

The metaphor of the sun and the moon unfolded is this: the moon is just a rock floating in space with no light of its own. The sun is a flaming ball of fire, and its light symbolizing the Self; and it 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 identified with the body-mind think they are conscious, but they are "borrowing" consciousness from awareness. To live identified with the body-mind is total duality and the essence of suffering.

Another reflection metaphor is an image in a mirror. In a mirror, objects are reflected because a mirror reflects light, so the mirror is the source of the light in this metaphor.

Everything reflects light, but a mirror reflects light clearly, as it is. Awareness can also be seen as the 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. 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 light from the projector.

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. It is the same with awareness and reflected awareness, but to understand how and why they are the same but also different is *moksa*. When you do, you live free of the *jiva* and its conditioning, as the Self. Ignorance and suffering are over for you.

**The clearer, more *sattvic* 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 (such as a chair or a rock), 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.**

Applying this teaching to your life means taking a stand in awareness as awareness and seeing all the subtle (thoughts/feelings) or gross (material) objects that arise in the mind as not-Self. It means disidentifying with the body-mind as your primary identity and identifying with the Self. The holding of the mind upon the reflection of the Self in a *sattvic* subtle body is a direct means to Self-knowledge by virtue of the fact that if the mirror is pure the reflection is perfect.

We have direct knowledge of the Self when ignorance is removed, and Self-knowledge is firm. Self-knowledge means that you know that although the reflection is you, you are not it. The reflection of the Self, even though just a reflection, is actually always perfect because the Self is always perfect, no matter the state of the mind/mirror. However, if ignorance (impurity/duality) clouds the mirror/mind, we do not see the perfection of the Self, the source of the reflection, and cannot know that what we experience all the time is the Self; it is who we are.

Because of the deluding power of *Maya*, we see only a distorted reflection and take it to be who we are. A reflection of the self, the subtle body, although it comes from the Self, reflecting off the reflecting medium (awareness plus *Maya* = *Isvara* = *gunas*) is neither real or unreal, no matter how pure the mirror of the mind is. It is apparently real. The reflection is known to you (awareness), so cannot be you.

The source and the reflection are the same, but they are different, like the light of the moon comes from the sun but is not the sun; or the wave is the ocean, but the ocean is not the wave – *sat asat vilakshanam* – something that is other than the Self but is not the object either. Self but not-Self, a trick of light caused by *Maya*. This is probably the most important teaching in Vedanta.

*Sattva* is the nature of the mind and our ability to experience it depends on the balance of *rajas* and *tamas* present in the mind, which will be different for everyone due to their *karma* and conditioning. You can experience a more or less perfectly *sattvic* mind through *guna* management, especially when all the *vasanas* are rendered non-binding and the doer negated, but *moksa* does not depend on *sattva*, and neither does the enlightened person. A mind may be very *sattvic* but still in ignorance of its true nature as the Self. Conversely *rajas* and *tamas* may be expressing in the mind of a Self-realized person and not affect them at all, because they know they are *trigunatatita*, beyond the *gunas*.

As the *jivanmukta*, you know who you are and experience the bliss of Self-knowledge regardless of how the *gunas* are playing out in the mind. Getting hung up on *sattva* is as much an obstacle to *moksa* as too much *rajas* and *tamas*. We call it the “golden cage” of *sattva*. All the *gunas* are objects known to you. And it is impossible to achieve (and maintain) a totally *sattvic* mind due to the ever-changing nature of the *gunas*, which are always present together, with one usually dominating.

Thus the reflection of the Self may differ for everyone due to the way the *gunas* express and how much ignorance remains, but the experience of the Self is the same for everyone because there is only one Self and we are all it.

**Joan:** Words can't express my gratitude for all the knowledge you and Ram have shared on *ShiningWorld.com*, the books and videos.

**Sundari:** We are so happy for you that the teachings are working; stick to your *sadhana* and trust *Isvara* to reveal to you all you need to know.

~ Much love, Sundari