

Personal Independent Philosophies

Arlindo Moraes

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Gary: Hi, Arlindo. I have followed Ramji for around eight years, and have been well-prepared for Vedanta by an immersion of 30 years in an organized group in the Gurdjieff Foundation. Elements of *karma yoga* and knowledge *yoga* are in the Gurdjieff teachings also. My question is with reference to what Gurdjieff calls higher energy, or what other traditions call *shakti* (not *kundalini*, but just receiving higher energy in the body).

Other traditions, like Kashmir Shaivism, say that Shiva and Shakti [the personification of divine energy] are inseparable. And Ramji says in a footnote to one of his commentaries that *shakti* is both one with and separate from awareness. So does this mean *shakti*, or higher energy, is just another object of experience or is it more like being “aware of awareness”? Thanks for any help you can provide!!

Arlindo: Hello, Gary. Sorry for my late reply.

To begin with, I want to mention that the manifest cosmos is composed of two factors: consciousness/awareness and energy/matter; these are only these two factors at play in the manifest universe. Matter is energy “grossified,” whereas invisible energy is but matter in its potential state. The most subtle of all energies is called *Maya*; it always exists, but as the seed of the cosmos.

The initial “modification” that occurs in awareness is called *Maya* (it is not really a modification, since *Maya* eternally exists as potential). But although beginningless, *Maya* is not equal, not the same, and not even of the same order of reality as awareness, *satya*. *Maya* is the primordial “mirror-like” power or “talent” with the potential to bring into existence out of awareness the three energies in their macrocosmic causal formations: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

The *sattvic* aspect of *Maya* is also referred to as *Isvara*, the knowledge-intelligence principle in which beginningless records of all manifest universes are contained. The *rajas* aspect of *Maya* is made up of a very dynamic *shakti*, with the momentum to project the cosmos into manifestation. The *tamas* aspect is also called *prakriti*, and is the primal matter of the cosmos.

Maya and its three aspects are eternally present, or in other words, are beginningless. It is difficult to explain *Maya*, because it is not really real. Its existence is borrowed from awareness. It has a dependent existence. It is also difficult to discuss it, because its existence cannot be objectified and perceived by the intellect. We know of *Maya* thanks to the *rishis* and *Isvara's* revealed scriptures. But fortunately we can infer and know its apparent existence by its effects.

Gary: The Gurdjieff tradition says the higher energy is the permanent self, which, if I am understanding Vedanta correctly, is not the right way to put it; I think a Vedanta teacher would say that higher energy, like peace, stillness, etc. is a reflection of the self in a quiet or *sattvic* mind.

Arlindo: You are correct! All subtle energies belong to *mithya*. You are *satya*, the limitless consciousness-existence in which all energies are experienced and known. *Sattva* is the “highest energy,” to use your language. It is the subtlest of all energies. It comes into existence by *Maya*, the mirror-like principle that reflects awareness. *Maya* is like a “reflector” which reflects awareness to produce *Isvara*, *jiva* and *jagata*. You are right, *kundalini shakti* and all forms of coiled and uncoiled, subtle or gross energies are only “things,” transient objects of knowledge and experience; they arrive and they depart. They are not real, but an only an appearance, such as the mirage in a desert. You are the only reality.

Gary: What the Gurdjieff teaching also says is that the three portions of the subtle body: mind, ego and intellect, have to come together or be in harmony before higher energy can be received by the body. Would you clarify this matter for me?

Arlindo: The subtle body needs to be purified by *yoga* before it develops a dominance of *sattva guna*. A larger portion of *rajas* and *tamas* needs to be converted to make room for more *sattva*. *Sattva guna* is the energy responsible for mental clarity, concentration, focus, mental expansion, emotional balance, strength, mental resistance, etc. Yes, the subtle body needs to be harmonized by *yoga* before *sattva guna* can be gained and retained. But *sattva shakti* is not the higher Self; it is not awareness.

With reference to Ramji’s footnote, “*shakti* is both one with and separate from awareness,” it only means to emphasize that energy, or *shakti*, is beginningless. The entire cosmos is “eternal” and not separate from awareness, in the sense that its apparent existence is an effect or projection produced by *Maya* on the all-pervasive screen of awareness. All is only awareness, but awareness is neither matter nor energy. *Shakti* is only a primal state of matter which occurs in awareness. It is non-separate because everything depends on awareness. All phenomena are only happening within the scope of “your” conscious, limitless existence.

My advice is that you do not try to compare and conform Vedanta to other independent philosophies. All spiritual philosophies have their roots in the scriptural Vedic knowledge. It would be better for you to put aside what you have learned in the past and stay with Vedanta. Once you develop Vedanta’s vision of reality, you can go back to whatever you have learned and heard in the past. Only then will you be able to understand their connection to *Isvara*’s revealed scriptures, as well to discern the ignorant “part,” which in most philosophies is inevitably mixed with the fragments of *Isvara*’s pure knowledge.