

Superimposition

Ram (James Swartz)

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Kenneth: Dear James, is it possible to divest Vedanta of any kind of cultural, spiritual and religious associations and present it as a pure philosophy, pure knowledge, so that the mind cannot project any kind of identity onto it, conceptualise the non-conceptual or personalise the impersonal?

James: Yes. The original Vedic texts, the *Upanishads*, were not burdened with India and Hinduism, as they preceded both. Before India was India the Asian subcontinent was called Bharat, “the Land of Light,” meaning consciousness, by the *rishis*, who were “forest dwellers,” meaning hunter-gatherers. Hunter-gatherers won’t build temples in which you can install personified deities. When the Agrarian Age began, population centers developed and with them temples. At that time the natural forces – air, fire, water and earth – ended up playing second fiddle to personified deities. It is necessary to see people as spirit if you want harmonious societies. The *rishis* weren’t householders, and Vedic culture was called *sanatana dharma*, which means “the eternal truth,” or the eternal way, the means and the end being non-different.

The tradition of Vedanta definitely makes it clear that the Self is not an object, which means that it can’t be personified. It can only be revealed “by implication and reason,” which is to say the removal of ignorance.

But since Vedanta provisionally accepts duality before it destroys it, we recommend personification to develop the qualifications for the final teaching. Personification in Vedanta is a conscious practice. If you are aware that you are personifying, are you actually personifying? It can only be revealed “by implication and reason.”

Religious *samsaris* don’t personify consciously, because they are ignorant of their identity with consciousness. For them God is an object of worship eternally different from themselves. So, for them, personification is unconscious. Hence they attribute human attributes to the Self, which is free of qualities. Secular people don’t personify God, but they personify anyway. For instance, they attribute human qualities to animals and animal qualities to humans. The unconscious is pumping out projections all day long.

Superimposition works two ways. People can project qualities on God or God’s nature can be superimposed on us, which is not actually a lie, since our essence is God’s essence owing to the fact that reality is non-dual. It also works to superimpose divinity on the people you meet, even if some part of you only accepts them as finite human beings with all the implied imperfections. For instance, if you had consciously treated that woman you were courting as the Self and projected Selfness on Kenneth, the relationship would have unfolded very differently from the get-go. You may or may not have ended up with “a relationship” as Kenneth envisioned it, but you would have avoided the pain for sure. Actually, it is more likely that you would be successful, since people love to be worshiped. Of course in this situation this woman would not have understood that you were worshiping the Self in her, unless you told her that you saw her as a goddess, but it doesn’t matter, because people love receiving worship.

Most worldly people throw God away, owing to God's association with religion. And of course secular people have no interest in God at all. They are trying to make the world work for them. But Vedanta isn't religious or spiritual, although it appreciates the value of both God and the world. It is purely a practical analysis of experience and a method for removing ignorance about the nature of reality.

~ Love, James