

Is Ignorance Real?

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Raj: Sir, I want to ask question about ignorance. A *jnani* knows that nothing ever happened. Creation seems to apparently happen because of the ignorance. Then why must the ignorance exist?

James: No answer to that, Raj. The one who is asking is an effect of ignorance. The effect cannot comprehend the cause. We can only say that it is and accept it as a mystery.

Raj: What happens if ignorance never existed at all?

James: Nothing happens. You need ignorance to get happenings. Ignorance is the creator of objects.

Raj: When did ignorance happen?

James: Ask yourself when you became ignorant of anything. You cannot say. It is beginningless, *anaadi*, because it is a power in awareness and awareness is beginningless. When we say it is "in" awareness we do not mean that it is identical with awareness nor can we say it is separate from awareness because you cannot have ignorance without awareness. If it was identical with awareness it would not be ignorance. It would be awareness and there would be no creation and nobody to experience the creation. So it has its own peculiar status.

Raj: Who did create it?

James: No one created it. It is uncreated.

Raj: Or is ignorance, like the creation, also apparently real?

James: Yes.

Raj: But wouldn't it become an infinite regress? If the ignorance is real then we would have a duality issue (awareness, *brahman*, and ignorance).

James: If it was real there would be a duality issue because there would be two real principles. You could not say which one came first. But this is not possible because "real" means "non-dual." But ignorance is not real because it ends. Awareness is real because it does not begin and end.

Raj: Or is the substance of ignorance is also *brahman*? How to explain it?

James: Ignorance is not a substance. It is a power at the disposal of awareness that makes it seem as if awareness is something other than awareness. Awareness has to have this power or it would not be limitless. Ignorance is the power of awareness to apparently forget that it is limitless. If it was a real power awareness would not be able to know itself once it had become ignorant. But it can know itself once it has fallen under the spell of ignorance because ignorance is not real. It disappears in the wake of self-knowledge. Vedanta is the means for that knowledge.

Raj: Thank you very much, sir, for helping me.