

Is the Self Self-Conscious?

Ram (James Swartz)

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/477>

Martyn: Greetings, James, I hope that all is well at your end. I have two inter-related questions for you to which I could not find an answer in your book or website (for both of which I continue to be ENORMOUSLY grateful). I trust they will be of interest to your other readers too.

Is the self self-aware or does it need to go through objects to experience itself? In your book (and briefly in response to another questioner at the website) you fleetingly answer in the affirmative, but I would greatly appreciate it if you could elaborate in as much detail as time allows you. By self I specifically refer to the unmanifested, primordial self (awareness, in Nisargadatta's terms).

James: Yes, it is. All experiences take place in awareness, but awareness is free of them. It is self-revealing. The self is like the sun. It doesn't need another source to illumine it. It is "self-illuminating." It shines whether objects are there or not. It is like the space which accommodates all objects. The objects are pervaded by space. But space is unaffected by the objects appearing in it. Space is a good metaphor for the self because it pervades everything but remains unpervaded, unaffected. The metaphor, however, is not perfect, because space is not conscious. The self is conscious and is beyond words, so you cannot describe it. You can only point to it. The self is like "conscious space." It is pure knowledge, pure consciousness.

Martyn: If the self has always been self-aware, what was the need for this physical world in the first place? There seems to be a relevant section in your book (page 95) which I personally found inscrutable.

James: There are three questions which cannot be answered, because they are like a dog trying to catch its tail.

Where did it begin? When did it begin? And why did it begin?

Why is it not possible to answer these questions? If you cannot figure it out, I will help you. It's a great contemplation.

~ Love, James