

Non-Existence Doesn't Exist

Ram (James Swartz)

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Ravi: Thank you, sir. First question:

I have read the teaching of Vedanta about the “real and unreal,” and the teachers give the examples of the non-existent, or the unreal (*tuccha*), the son of a barren woman or a square circle, for example. They say the unreal cannot be perceived or experienced.

I want to add another example of the non-existent: it is the visual data gathered by the ears (and sense organs other than the eyes). The eyes are the only equipment to grasp the visual attributes of objects, the ears cannot replace the eyes' function. If I try to use my ears or my hands to see then I won't have the visual image. The visual data gathered by my ears and hands doesn't exist at all.

When I sit in the pitch-dark room it is the light of consciousness that makes me know darkness because the light of consciousness is not the opposite of darkness. The light of consciousness illumines everything, including my ignorance (I know that I don't know, meaning my ignorance is also an object of knowledge).

I learned that the existence of objects is not separate from the knowledge of the objects.

I can have the knowledge about the non-existent (I know that square circles don't exist); does that mean non-existence exists?

James: No. There is no such thing as non-existence because everything is consciousness. Why? Because, as you say, objects don't exist without knowledge of them. And knowledge depends on consciousness. Existence exists because it is awareness but non-existence exists only as an idea in consciousness.

Ravi: It seems contradictory. But the Vedanta teachers give the examples about the non-existent (son of a barren woman, etc.), so it means they can differentiate the existent and the non-existent, proving that the non-existent exists, but it is indescribable.

James: The differentiation is only between concepts, not between existence and non-existence, because non-existence is not existent.

The purpose of this teaching is to refute the idea that the self is non-existent because it is not an object of perception. Many people say – Buddhists, particularly – that the self does not exist because it cannot be perceived. They do not realize that it is the self that is saying that it doesn't exist. It is subtler than the perceiver and “perceives” though the perceiver, the subtle body.

Ravi: So if existence exists and the non-existent also exists then only the existence is left therefore the existence is limitless. Is that true, sir? Please correct my

understanding when I make a fallacy.

James: No. I repeat: the non-existent does not exist. If you can find non-existence you can't have non-existence because you have to be there to find it, meaning that there is no non-existence. Everything real and unreal is an object of consciousness – which is existence.

The existence in existence is only awareness because you cannot have an object – existence – without knowledge of it, and the knowledge of it – as I said above – is not possible without awareness. So all objects are just awareness in the form of thoughts, i.e. knowledge.

This is basically a useless inquiry because it is obvious that you exist and that your existence is awareness. The only real issue is whether or not you understand that you are awareness and whether that knowledge destroys your sense of doership.

Ravi: Second question: I know that I exist because reflected consciousness exists, making it possible for the consciousness to know its existence. When there is no reflection at all, how can the consciousness know about its existence? (It happens in the *videha mukti*.)

James: You will find this very hard to accept because you erroneously think you are the subtle body. Reflected consciousness cannot know pure consciousness. Reflected consciousness – the subtle body – is inert. It does not know. It only reflects consciousness. Only consciousness knows. It does not require an instrument to know itself. To know objects it requires a subtle body, which *maya* supplies.

Consciousness is self-knowing. What effort are you putting forth to exist, to know? None. You are effortless awareness. When you identify with the subtle body you think knowledge is an action, something that is happening. You try to know, as you are doing now, by studying Vedanta. But you know that you are trying to know, so you – awareness – are not trying to know. Knowing, you, is eternal. It is effortless.

Ravi: ...and when someone “achieves” the *videha mukti*...

James: No one “achieves” *videha mukti*. *Videha mukti* means that liberation is knowledge, that the self is free of the body. “*Vi*” means “without” and “*deha*” means “body.” Even if you say that *videha mukti* is death, no one “achieves” it.

Ravi:when will this saying in *Taittiriya Upanishad*, “Let me be many, let me be born,” happen again? When will the consciousness want again to be appear as many? What is the meaning of “Let me be many, let me be born,” is it the pure consciousness who said it? Because I also read the consciousness cannot do anything and cannot want anything.

James: It is just personification, Ravi, symbolism. It is not meant to be taken literally. Consciousness is not a person with a will. *Isvara* – consciousness plus *maya* – is the Creator but the Creator is not a person with a will. It is just the power of

ignorance. The statement means that all objects arise (are born) out of consciousness.

Ravi: Thank you very much, sir.