

Self Experiences the Ego

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Seeker: Dear James, firstly, thank you for making yourself available to answer questions. I have just finished reading your excellent book *How to Attain Enlightenment*. I have been studying Vedanta for about forty years, inspired by C. Saravanamuttu, who had sat in the old hall with Ramana Maharshi, and all that you wrote resonated with my understanding and experience – except for one paragraph, the last paragraph on page 308 which finishes on page 309. In fact I felt a momentary sickness when I read it.

Do you mean what you describe there to be a temporary phase necessary to attain enlightenment or as the final way of experiencing non-dual reality? For example, it may be useful to teach seekers that the world is a dream or illusion to wean them away from the tendency to look outwards rather than inwards, but when the self is realised and there is no inner/outer distinction, where is the dream then? Ramana said, “What is *maya*? It is only reality. *Maya* is used to signify the manifestation of the reality. Thus *maya* is only reality.”

After reading the section I refer to I went for a walk in a nearby forest. There was wholeness and peace without a boundary separating non-dual awareness from a dualistic world.

Have I misunderstood what you were trying to impart in this paragraph?

~ With every good wish...

James: I am glad you like the book. Appreciation is always appreciated.

Yes, it is a temporary phase. If you think the dream is real you need dream teachings that wake you up. Once you wake up to your nature as limitless awareness *maya* remains, but it is known for what it is and has no power to bind. *Moksa* is the removal of *avidya*, the *jiva's* ignorance. It does not remove *Isvara/maya*. This is called “conditioned superimposition” in Vedanta. A good example is a mirage. A child does not know that the water on the desert is an illusion, but an adult does and will not try to drink it, no matter how thirsty.

There is no “final” way of experiencing non-duality, because there is only non-dual awareness and you are it. And insofar as you are an experiencer you have always been experiencing it. Non-duality is not an object of experience. It is the nature of the subject, you. You cannot be objectified. If you are habituated to thinking that you are the experiencing entity, the subtle body, you will project the self as an object of experience and think that non-duality is a particular experience opposed to duality. But there is only one self, which appears as an experiencing entity. When you understand that you are limitless awareness, the experience of duality remains for the experiencing entity, but from this moment onward it is known to be apparent, not real. The apparent does not condition the real.

Even when you are ignorant of your nature as limitless awareness, you are actually awareness “experiencing” the ego experiencing the world. But *avidya* makes you

think that you are the ego, hiding your nature from you. When the *avidya* goes you see that the experiencing entity is an object, not the subject, and your identification with it stops. The experiencing entity and the objects don't vanish, because they are projected and maintained by *Isvara*, awareness operating *maya*. So there is no conflict between duality and non-duality. They are just two orders of awareness. The wave does not contradict the ocean. It is always just water. It depends on the ocean but the ocean does not depend on it.

~ Love, James