

The Third Factor

Ram (James Swartz)

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Michael: Hi, Ram. I have come across your website via the recommendation of a friend. I have found the teachings at your site very helpful especially compared to other Advaita Vedanta teachings I have been exposed to. I plan on purchasing your book too as another recommendation from a friend. I was hoping you would be able to clear something up for me that has been somewhat of a “roadblock,” so to speak, in my realization process.

I had my initial awakening about five months ago after years of “seeking.” I had meditated for a number of years. It was only until I saw myself as the “witness” that everything sort of changed in my life. Ever since then I have been attempting to attain the full realization of non-duality. Yet I find some confusion; granted, I understand this taking place in mind.

Ram: This may come as a bit of a shock, I suppose, but what you call the mind is not a problem. Your statement implies that full realization (another idea that needs inquiry) somehow takes place beyond or in spite of the mind. You need to read my book, particularly Chapter II, with reference to the paragraph above because what I am about to say needs considerable supporting logic and Chapter II provides it. This issue is presented to me regularly and I haven't time to repeat it in toto here. In any case, full realization takes place in the mind. It is the mind that has the problem, that thinks the self is not realized. In fact there is only one non-dual self and it is always realized. I think you think that Michael is going to get fully realized now that he has had the witness experience, that there is more to come. Non-duality means that there is only awareness/consciousness and that you are awareness/consciousness under the spell of what we call *maya*, ignorance, and this makes you think you are a unique special being named Michael who now wants full realization. The idea that you are Michael and not limitless, non-dual, impersonal awareness exists in that part of awareness that thinks – the mind – and it is this idea that needs to be investigated, not the mind itself. The mind is a wonderful tool. Vedanta is an effective means for investigating this idea. It is an idea that upon analysis does not hold water.

Michael: After searching through Buddhist teachings of “emptiness” and traditional non-duality teachings of Advaita Vedanta, I found your website to describe it in the most concise manner, which resonates most with my experiences.

Understanding that the “senses” are the segue to experience, so to speak, I have had this debate with other friends about what is “out there,” meaning what is outside of the sensory, granted understanding that's all in awareness/consciousness. The thing that confuses me is this: I have been under the impression from other teachings that the “mind” is the filter/projection of “*maya*,” or the physical reality we experience. The mind is what “creates” the reality we experience. Is this not true?

Ram: No. The senses and what is experienced by the senses is not created by the individual mind. It is created by *maya*, the macrocosmic mind. Whether the apparent individual called Michael experiences it or not, it is there available for experience.

When we speak of an individual's experience, we mean interpreted sense data, not the sense data itself. There is a filter in you, the person – basically the likes and dislikes picked up since you were born – that interprets what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch. This is your creation although you are not conscious that you are creating it. It takes place because of ignorance but you don't know that, so you own it. It is entirely subjective and differs from individual to individual. You don't find it in other sentient beings, like animals even though they are consciousness and have senses and are ignorant of their natures. The senses, the elements, the mind and the unconscious are all objective factors created by the macrocosmic mind. They are the same for everyone. It is ignorance of your nature as awareness/consciousness that causes you to identify with your conditioning and take your creation – your experience – to be real.

Michael: Therefore how do we explain “happenings” that take place outside of the sensory/mind where there are no other sentient beings. For example, if there is a picture frame hanging up on the wall of my apartment and vase underneath it. If I leave the apartment one day and come back later on and the picture frame is on the floor with a broken vase underneath it, it is inferred that the picture frame fell while I was out but yet, there was no experience of this. So the question is, does *maya* still run even when mind is not “there,” whether there are no sentient beings around, or perhaps something that took place in a bedroom while the mind/body is in sleep.

James: Yes, indeed. As I mentioned, there are two minds: the individual mind and the macrocosmic mind, or God.

Michael: How do we explain occurrences/happenings that seem to take place outside of mind/sensory?

James: The macrocosmic mind is eternal. It keeps projecting and sustaining and destroying the creation for billions of eons. Whatever happens outside of the experience of a particular individual is experienced by *Isvara*, the macrocosmic mind. You understand the idea of yourself as an individual and the reality of yourself as consciousness but you don't understand the third factor in the equation: what connects awareness to the individual, i.e. *Isvara*. *Isvara* is consciousness PLUS *maya*. Understanding it is the key to freedom.

Michael: Because my interpretation has been that *maya* is only here because me (as consciousness) is experiencing it, yet there is obviously stuff seemingly happening when there are no sentient beings around. That would leave the question of what is the role of mind then. Does mind not create this reality?

James: Your understanding is correct and not correct. It is not correct because there is no *maya* from your – consciousness's – point of view. *Maya* is a standalone principle that causes awareness to think it is a person, to think there are sentient beings when there is only awareness appearing as sentient beings. It is correct because it is true that *maya* cannot exist without awareness but this has no meaning because *maya* has no effect on awareness. Awareness is the uncontaminated witness of *maya* and all that *maya* creates. *Maya* and the apparent

experiential reality created by *maya* that individuals take to be real is not real. We know this because inquiry resolves *maya* and the individual into awareness. What seems solid and real is anything but solid and real. *Maya* is very difficult to understand because it has no self-nature – it is the non-apprehension of consciousness, not an existent object that you can know.

There is no realization for Michael because Michael is not real. If Michael is not real – just a projection brought about by *maya* – then whatever happens to Michael is not real either. The witness experience was not real in the sense that it went away, causing an awakening, a change in your understanding of who you are. But it did not change your understanding enough. Had the effect of the witness experience been the hard and fast knowledge “I am the witness, and not Michael, the witnessed” it would have ended your seeking. But it didn’t. It made you think that Michael experienced himself as the witness whereas it was you – limitless awareness – that experienced Michael as an experienced object. It is always only that way with everyone but *maya* makes it seem as if awareness is a limited sentient being. It makes awareness think that awareness is an object to be experienced or realized.

If you say that “stuff is obviously happening when there are no sentient beings around,” how do you know this fact? There is always you – sentient being – around, but existence does not depend on the existence of sentient beings. However, to speak of the meaning of anything implies the existence of *maya*, the force in awareness that produces the material world and the apparently sentient beings that inhabit it. In fact the sentiency in beings belongs to awareness, not to the beings. You need to read my book carefully because it presents the whole science of existence. Once you have assimilated Vedanta it will all make perfect sense, your doubts will be resolved and you will see that you do not need to experience anything as the witness because you are the witness that exists prior to experience. For now you have to take my word for it.

Michael: I would love to get your take on this, and I apologize for the length of the email. I know you are very busy, so I understand it might take time to hear back from you, but I do hope to hear from you and I thank you for everything you provide in your teachings. I have read many of your *satsangs* and your articles and have found them to be more helpful than any other teaching I’ve encountered in the time period that I have “awakened.” Thank you again.

Ram: You are welcome, Michael. However, you should know that these are not my teachings. I teach traditional Vedanta. It has nothing to do with me. I was taught it and it set me free of the notion that I am only an individual but that is all. It is virtually impossible to realize your true nature if you follow the teachings of individuals. They may inspire you to seek and they may be somewhat helpful insofar as they provide a kind of context for seeking, but people and their experience is not to be trusted. People always have an agenda and they always interpret what they experience in light of their experience, not in light of impersonal awareness. Vedanta has nothing to do with individuals. It is an impersonal, time-tested science of consciousness, i.e. everything that is. You will never figure it out on your own. You may have experiences and gain insights but you will never cobble together your experiences and the knowledge you have gained from them – which after all is just interpreted (read biased) knowledge – into the complete vision of non-duality. I just teach Vedanta.

~ Love, Ram