

Trace the I-Sense

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/954>

Vivek: Dear Ram, I have read your last book again on your advice and pondered on your online *satsangs*. Two questions:

I noticed that you never mention the main focus of Ramana's and Nisargadatta Maharaj's teaching, which is to trace the I-sense back to its source. Personally, I found this teaching very useful and I am curious to know why it is not mentioned in Vedanta. I don't think I could have understood what you were teaching if not for this fundamental teaching. From our discussions, you rightly point out that the I-sense is a reflection of the self and will ultimately disappear like a mirage. I am curious to know why this is not mentioned in your book on enlightenment.

Ram: Tracing the I-sense can be a useful teaching, as you know, but Vedanta does not teach it – although it fits in as a *sadhana* – because it gives the impression that you can gain *moksa* by action, i.e. tracing the source of the I-sense, and it implies experiential enlightenment, meaning that you will experience the self once you find the source. One problem with this is that the one who is doing the tracing is already the source, i.e. awareness. It also implies that the source is not known. But awareness is known to you. It is you, the “tracer.”

However, if by “tracing” you mean thinking logically back to what supports the I-sense, then this is a Vedanta teaching. There is no I-sense without you, awareness. Vedanta says that the I-sense is just an idea in the intellect that, “I exist,” that, “I am.” Apart from the simple fact that no thought of I is necessary for you to be awareness, it can be only known by awareness. So all a proper teaching has to do is to reveal the fact that you are awareness. If tracing the I-sense does that, then it is Vedanta. Anything that reveals the self to be limitless awareness is Vedanta.

A problem with Ramana's teaching, which is not actually a teaching, only discrete statements made to different people at different times, is that it does not reconcile the experiential notion of enlightenment – *yoga* – with Vedanta. He presents both *yoga* and Vedanta as equally valid means of *moksa* without unfolding the obvious downside of *yoga*, which I do in the second chapter of my book. The statements of a *jnani* do not amount to a teaching unless they coincide with scripture and unless they include the supporting logic. Without the supporting logic they will be inevitably be misinterpreted.

Kumar: I have been doing some research on what Maharaj meant by “the state prior to Consciousness.” I think what Maharaj describes as this state is the Absolute. This would be variously described as consciousness at rest or consciousness in deep sleep. In meditation it appears as a dark void. Some people also describe it as “deep sleep, but awake.”

James: I don't think so. I think by “Consciousness” he means the subtle body and by “the Absolute” he means pure consciousness. This statement is responsible for more confusion in the spiritual world than almost any other. I have several recent *satsangs*

posted at the website that explain this “teaching.”

Kumar: I am also beginning to suspect that even though the self is the substrate on which everything happens, there is a relationship between the substrate and different levels of consciousness in the mind. I think this relationship leads to different mystical states and altered states of consciousness, and various clues on how to burn the *vasanas*. Yes, this awareness is the template/substrate through which the world arises, but the interplay between this awareness and the mind I am not clear about.

James: Awareness, the substrate – i.e. you – are present at every level of the mind and when any mystical state is happening. You are the witness of any state. The “interplay” between awareness and the mind is not intuitive.

The mind is dependent on awareness, but awareness is free of the mind. The “interplay” is *sattva*. When the mind is in a *sattvic* state mystical states can happen. When the mind changes from *tamas* or *rajas* to *sattva* it is generally referred to as an “altered” state.

~ *Om* and *prem*, James