

# WHAT IS NON-DUALISM?

By Shikhaa

Meditation is an ancient practice, and yet it is as relevant today as in any time since humans have been graced with the power to reflect and ask, "From where did all 'this' come?" And, "What is beyond what we know?" Long before we became a global community, meditation has been a means by which people sought to know the unobvious, the subtle, the source.

Mystics and sages from all cultures tell variations on the same revelation, the revelation that the intangible, non-objective ground of all that exists is identical with the ground of You. The great conundrum for human beings is that we don't identify ourselves as the unified ground, the oneness of all, because the sensory impressions and the functioning mind must perceive, for our physical survival, that this whole universe consists of a vast multiplicity of matter.

Perception through the senses only knows matter. The eyes are not designed to see consciousness, nor the ears to hear consciousness. But turning the mind's attention inwards, it is revealed that You – the Seer, the power of sight, the vehicle of seeing (the eyes) and what is seen – is One Consciousness. You – the listener, the power of sound, the ears and what is heard, is One consciousness. And so it is with all the senses, including the mind – the thinker, the power of thinking, the thoughts and the object of thinking – is One Consciousness.

The genius of enlightened perception throughout all time is the realization that Consciousness and matter are one and the same. 'One' with a thousand names! Pure Consciousness, Pure Being, God, Universal, the fourth dimension, Essence, Spirit, All-Permeating, to name but a few.

In the Vedic tradition, 'One' is described as non-dual (*Advait* in Sanskrit). Traditional non-dual teachings are the core of spirituality, as in the yogic tradition, the Vedic tradition, Buddhism, Kashmir Shaivism, Christian mysticism, Zen, Taoism, Sufism, Hinduism, and more. All are all based on non-dualism.

As many names as there are for the One, so too are there a thousand metaphors to describe that which has no form and is beyond description! All the five elements can be used as analogous of the indestructible, fundamental principle of existence. For example, when earth is moulded and baked into a jug, it takes on a name and a purpose, and so it has an individual identity. But earth and jug are *advait*, one and the same. If that jug gets broken, only the

jug's identity breaks, not the earth. Similarly, whether your identity is built up, cracked, or broken, You remain the same. Birth and death is of our identity, not of Consciousness.

The same point is illustrated by water. Whether water is in the form of ice, steam, a whirlpool, a river, a cloud, a drop or the whole ocean, water is one and the same. Similarly, whether your mood is high or low, turbulent or torpid, You are Consciousness. There are so many indicators to turn the attention of the mind to be released from its confined, form-oriented identity.

So how is the contemplation of these analogies relevant? How does non-dualism help us as human beings? In the misconception that All is made of only mind and matter, we then identify, "I am one separate part, different from, and in relation to, many other separate parts." This is a precarious predicament. It means we must gain a lot of stuff, or become someone significant, in order to feel secure.

What 'matters' to a human being are his things and his beliefs – his cultural identity; his integrity, status; accolades; looks, charming wit or noble character .... This list is endless. Then the human life is a defensive, fearful state of existence, in which security and satisfaction will continue to allude.

The struggle involving the sense of gain and loss ironically drives the search for stability in the belief that the addition of another part could complete you and heal your sense of division. We seek 'connection', but we are not just connected, we are ONE. We are made of the same spirit, the same presence. We make up one unity. There is no separation.

Just like the jug, you can feel broken from burdens laid upon you. You can feel broken emotionally. Your self-worth can be broken. You can feel broken in grief or in loneliness. You can feel broken from conflict with others, and more insidiously, from conflict within yourself. But to extend your identity that is limited to the jug in order to encompass the earth, the underlying Consciousness, is to be liberated from the struggle of "I am only a jug."

Just as the jug will one day break, your identity will break. But You remain because You do not die. Life is commonly thought of as opposite to death. But think of it! The opposite of death is birth. Life has no opposite! Otherwise, if life died when a body dies, all bodies would spontaneously die! It is not an individual Life. Life is One.

It is the potential of a human being to realise non-duality. I describe that potential as an immense gift. To awaken to the indestructible, undivided Consciousness is liberation from duality, which is liberation from pain.

In recent years there is a great enthusiasm in the study of consciousness. Searching for one source. But the scientist will not find Consciousness with a telescope. The biologist will not find Consciousness with a microscope. The spiritualist will not find Consciousness in their practices. A religionist will not find Consciousness in a particular God. The naturalist will not find Consciousness in forests or the ocean. Consciousness is the awareness itself, liberated from the obsessions and confines of our personal matters.

I am soon to fly south to New Zealand for the Kiwi winter! Very often, when I travel to talk about meditation, people ask, "What kind of meditation?" This is a question posed with the expectation that my answer should fall into the two main categories of meditation popular today – Buddhist or Mindfulness. It certainly would be easier to package myself in a one-word, globally recognized label, such as 'non-dualism' or even '*Advait*'. But a label is matter and meditation is the most precious enquiry into the limitless. Meditation is not merely a technique, meditation is who you are, when subject and object are known as One. Meditation cultivates the power to remain centred, so when the senses and the many thoughts are being drawn into small matters, you remain observing. I am reminded of a school-teacher who used to say, "Small things amuse small minds!" Meditation is a space of Being that answers our hungry quest to expand beyond the known, beyond the matter, the many, the differences, the labels, to be liberated from duality and reside in the One, non-dual.