



Satsang
with Advaita Master

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Consciousness is a Harsh Mistress

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I want to talk about the term “real” and “unreal” and “does not exist.” What did Robert and Ramana mean when they said you do not exist and the world is not real? Does it mean nothing exists? Does it mean things exist, but are impermanent, which is the Buddhist view.

Robert explained that everything in the world, including our bodies and minds, were appearances only, they had no solid and real existence apart from our minds. On top of that, our minds are not real; they are just a collection of thoughts without a thinker.

That is, there is consciousness, upon which our minds create names and forms, objects, and the internal and external worlds.

We discover that the world is unreal when we discover, through self-inquiry, that we are unreal. Since we are unreal, all other people and the entire world is unreal.

It is explained further in the *Sutras* that when one perceives the real Self, the world is unreal. But as long as one perceives the world as real, one does not find the Self. So, it's like a *Gestalt* thing; you either see one way or the other way. It's your identification whether you identify with consciousness, or you identify with an imaginary subject located within the body.

But I'll try to get into that experience a little more because this word seems to cause so many problems because people don't have the experience of the unreality of the world. Therefore, their minds spin, and spin, and spin, and spin, creating all kinds of psychological and moral problems about an unreal world and an unreal person, whether you can commit suicide, or whether you can commit murder, and whether you should do anything, and why do I teach if the world is unreal. Let me try to clarify the term a little bit.

One day I was taking a shower. I was feeling the water hitting my head and back. For the 10,000th time I looked inside myself with my inner eye, and saw for the 10,000th time an internal emptiness, the void which inter-penetrated all thoughts, all objects, my body and the world.

For the first time in 10,000 times, something happened. I saw that there was no internal entity, no inner "Eddie," who was the center, or witness, or thinker, or controller. That is, the word "I" did not point to anything. All that there was everywhere was emptiness, and I was that.

I was nothing. I was emptiness, not a thing at all.

I saw that everything in the world and everything in my mind was just a concept. The mind took some impression or other, and formed it into an object within the structure of an apparent human being looking out through apparent eyes, onto an apparent external world. Everything was idea. Without the mental thinking apparatus, all that existed was consciousness whose basic nature was presence, and emptiness or the void. Thought created names and forms.

My identity with my body totally disappeared. I saw that my body was really a concept, an inner image that brought together my visual experience of my body as seen from eyes located in my sentient, meatball head, with the tactile sensations I had of my body, touching against the environment, combined with inner feelings of pain or movement. The mind combined all of these disparate sensations and constructed a composite entity—my body, which only existed in my mind, but not in my inner experience of that body or the world.

This experience is what my emptiness "guided meditations" are supposed to teach. There is no body in one's experience without an inner, imaginary image to create the body form. Without that image, you experience yourself as emptiness with spots of existence spread over space – a tactile sensation here, another tactile sensation there . . . hearing some words . . . seeing your toes . . . and these are all combined together into a sense of "you" as a body. And then you identify with that for the rest of your life. And therefore you fear when the body dies because you feel "you" die.

The body, as a mind-created entity, was no longer my identification. Instead, I now identified with everything, but mostly the emptiness, the Void, within which everything was only an idea. I was no longer the body, but space itself. The center of my beingness was no longer on the body, but was the space that pervaded everything.

When I looked at any apparent object, immediately, the thought that created that image came into my awareness also, and I could see how that thought created every specific object.¹ None of those objects were real. They were appearances in nothingness created by ideas. Moreover, the ideas were not my ideas, but universal ideas shared by everyone. We all lived in the same world of shared objects created by shared ideas, yet the ideas had enough shaded meaning that no two people can ever be certain they are talking about the same experiences.

However, I was none of this. I was nothing. I did not exist. I was only an idea and had no existence except as an idea. I was not real, but therefore, nothing was real except the totality of consciousness, manifest as space populated by objects created by thought. Later, I was to discover even that totality of consciousness was not real.

At Mt. Baldy, I think within six weeks of intense meditation effort, many students were able to totally dissolve their “self,” the sense of existence, the sense of being a person and identify with the totality of consciousness which is a very different experience. It’s a kind of *samadhi*. I don’t know what the name of that specific *samadhi* is for, but it recurs over and over again. You begin to wonder which is the real reality. The real reality is either with thought or without thought. And it’s not a simple stopping of the mind. It’s got to be much deeper and much more intense than temporary stopping the thoughts. The mind has to drop down into the body, into the lower part of the body so that the energy gets out of the head and gets lower and lower. And when that happens, the barrier between you and the world disappears and you become one with everything in the world, but the things in the world no longer have name and form. And other than that, I can’t describe the state. You’ll have to experience it.

¹ I’ll tell you something else. When you’re in that kind of concentration state, you can actually see thoughts. They have a form. I don’t know if any of you have “floaters” in your eyes because you’re nearsighted. They’re little internal “clouds” that obscure sometimes your vision and they float around. Well, thoughts have an appearance like that when you’re in an intense concentration state. You can find a specific thought, approach that thought, and suddenly when you get close enough, the thought disappears and you find yourself looking at the object. It’s a very unusual experience, not one you want to do all the time. It’s just something you should know about, and you could try to do it when you’re in deep concentration.

When the mind disappears, one becomes everything, all consciousness, without the forms or names, ever-flowing and electrically bright! The world becomes very intense. However, even then, later on we realize that this flowing consciousness itself is not real. It is only a concept and is impermanent.

This is what Ramana and Robert meant when they said the world is not real.

One can experience direct seeing of “reality,” thingness, without the intermediary of the mind, through intense meditation on nothingness. When the mind disappears, one becomes everything, all consciousness, without forms or names, ever flowing, and electrically bright. However, later we realize even this flowing consciousness is itself not real. It is only concept and it is impermanent.

Now for the main theme of this talk.

Robert began his spiritual journey after witnessing his aunt killing and beheading a chicken. He could not believe anyone could do such a thing and went into a deep depression for a long time. Then one day the answer came to him as a sudden insight, a mini awakening, and a cop out to be sure, but it laid the foundation for his awakening three years later.

He came to the conclusion that the world was not real. It could not be real, otherwise so much horror would be impossible to bear.

Robert’s constant message was to leave the world alone and not get involved in it. Over and over again he'd say that there have been gurus and reformers since the beginning of history, yet the world really has not changed much or become a better place to live. He used to call the world we live in the lowest of hells.

65 years ago World War II had just killed 50 million people worldwide in just six years. 2000 years ago, during the entire 600 year history of the Roman Empire, the Romans may have killed maybe 1 million people or less. Thus, the human race had progressed during 2000 years to the place where we killed people in wars 5000 times faster than the Romans. This is progress?

Just read the history of the last 50 years and we see endless wars, endless poverty, endless death by disease, and endless efforts at ethnic cleansing where whole ethnic groups try to annihilate other ethnic groups for one reason or another.

Then there are the earthquakes and tsunamis. Seven years ago an earthquake and tsunami killed a quarter of a million people in a few hours. Every few years and

earthquake kills thousands of people in Italy, Armenia or China. Death is everywhere.

Every year in the United States, 10 billion farm animals are slaughtered to feed a few hundred million people. That's billion animals, not million. These would be chickens, cows, turkeys, pigs, etc., not to mention the death toll amongst sea creatures such as fish and whales. This progress?

In our own country, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and all social welfare programs are under attack by Republicans who want all wealth to remain in the hands of a few who fight tooth and nail to prevent the rich from paying an additional 5% in income tax. Greed and increasing corruption are overtaking this country like it has all over the world, such as in Russia and more recently revealed in India.

Consciousness is excessively good at killing things, everything that moves, lives, or breathes. And before consciousness kills us, it makes us suffer. This was Robert's point of view, and also the view of Ramana who urged followers to leave the problem of the world's suffering to God to take care of, because it was his creation.

There was a recognition here that the individual can do little or nothing to ease suffering in the world. This is a kind of cultural fatalism of the Hindus and to a lesser extent of Chinese and other Asian cultures.

We must realize that consciousness has no intention to go the way we would like it to, towards a world of peace, love, integrity, and decreased suffering. In many ways the world appears to be going backwards, towards increasing violence and death.

So many new agers are of the opinion that we are on an upward spiral of consciousness, and awakening is happening all over the place, and soon we will be living in a golden age. But there is no evidence for any such evolution. I see absolutely no general progress towards a golden age.

Here is my view. The people that attend these Satsangs are exquisitely sensitive to suffering. They have felt it in their life, and they have seen it all around them for all of their lives. They want suffering to end but feel powerless to end suffering.

Then they read the teachings of Robert and Ramana, who say leave the world alone, attend only to your own inner experience, as the world is unreal, as are

you, and the suffering is unreal also. In these words they find relief. Turning within is a relief from suffering because you find that sense of presence inside of you which is blissful and happy. You also find that all the concepts that people use are ultimately empty and have no meaning. This is a kind of salvation, because you become more free from concepts, such as the American dream or a desire for great wealth or other security, realizing these are just imposed dreams, the fulfillment of which really do not change things much, and certainly do not yield much happiness.

Instead of finding happiness without, either by acquiring things as part of some dream, we become happier, finding peace, rest and happiness in our own inner sense of presence.

Still, even after we see through all the lies, corruption, and misguided efforts of mankind and want no part of it, we still secretly suffer because of the suffering around us, and we feel helpless to make it end. We don't know how.

Robert, despite constantly urging Satsang goes to leave the world alone, to withdraw from the world, would always encourage me when I was reaching out to make some change in the world, either rescuing animals, or taking on deluded and corrupt politicians in Santa Monica. He would even mention at Satsang that it was good that someone was doing something. As Mary Skene said about this to me, "Ed, Robert saw in you that you had the intelligence and power to actually change things, and he encouraged you to do that."

She was right. Robert's general teaching to leave the world alone was directed to those who were overcome with suffering, anger, fear and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. He said turn away from this world and go into yourself, go deeply into yourself and find peace and happiness. Leave the world alone, let the power that knows the way take care of it. That was his message for those overwhelmed by suffering. He gave them a path of peacefulness and relative happiness.

But what I took out of Robert's encouragement of my efforts to make positive changes, at the same time telling everyone else to ignore the world and only turn within to escape suffering, was that once you come to a place within yourself where you are no longer overwhelmed by the vastness of the suffering and pain of the world, but have acquired some peacefulness, happiness and most of all, self confidence and courage, then you should look around yourself, evaluate yourself and your abilities, and make a decision as to what small things you could do to improve your immediate world.

For me, I saw the suffering of animals, and vowed to make a difference in this arena, not only in the life of the animals that live with me, but animals throughout the city. That's when I founded a blog in Los Angeles that explored animal issues within the city, and found out what governments were doing about animal sheltering, and advanced an effort to move all shelters towards being no kill shelters.

I also addressed the plight of the 1 to 2,000,000 homeless cats in the streets of Los Angeles. Even this limited venue is too large for one person to make much difference, but I try, and I have had some success in making the city a more humane and loving place towards animals.

For you, after you turn within, inquire into yourself, into the depths of your psyche and inner world, and find some peace, understanding, and most of all, self-confidence and power, I urge you to continue to take note of the suffering in the world around you, and make a decision, in your own small way, to relieve that suffering however you can.

In his small book, self-knowledge and self-realization, Nisargadatta states that upon awakening, the Sage becomes an embodiment of a sense of justice, of the right versus wrong, and also develops the power to do something about it. Why this is, I don't know and he does not say. It just happens this way.

Rajiv after awakening is now finding his own mission in the world involving homeless and poor children in India. Many of you already have a well-defined personal mission of somehow improving the world. You have a vision, you have intelligence, have power, and I urge you to go do it.

Like I've said many times, not everyone is slated to awaken in this life, and in the grand perspective, including that of your life, there may be things more important than self awakening, and that is to share your compassion with the world. Make this a better place to live for all sentient beings before they are slaughtered by consciousness.

In a sense, I think of us here as being shepherds for all sentient beings. We take on the mission of taming consciousness from her current way of being a Harsh Mistress. You might say we are the vanguard of a movement of conscience and compassion within the tumult of a suffering consciousness.

There have always been people who are driven by a sense of compassion and love for all others, and have strived to help all sentient beings. They have seen their

efforts sometimes accomplish very little, yet it is their acts that inspire all of us to do more.

I once had one mentor, a woman named Wilma, who loved cats.

Wilma was disabled, and had emphysema which was gradually crushing the life out of her. But she was always by her phone answering questions put to her by various rescuers and clients of the veterinarian she worked for, about how to take care of cats and dogs. Wilma was one of the most knowledgeable and caring persons that I ever knew. She lived alone in a studio apartment with 14 rescued cats, always worried that the landlord would find out how many she had, as she was allowed only three by her lease. She would adopt out perhaps a dozen cats a year, maybe more, and never had less than 12 cats in her apartment.

One time, the city of Santa Monica was after me because I was feeding a colony of 13 cats in a very wealthy area of the city, and had been doing so for several years, but some new neighbors moving into these mansions after the 1994 earthquake had damaged them, objected to me feeding cats near their property, stating the cats were pooping on their lawns, etc.

The city was after me. They sent a detective to harass and lie to me. They had animal control give the neighbors traps to trap the cats, after which they would have been taken to the city's animal shelter and been destroyed because they were feral.

And I fought them. I arrived at five in the morning to feed them very generously, and then again at night after the neighbors had gone to sleep. The cats were so well fed none of them went into traps, and none were caught. The neighbors complained to the city that I was feeding them too much food, and the cats were not going into the traps.

Some of the neighbors even had friends bring dogs and release them near where I fed the cats to chase them right in front of me. The detective was even telling neighbors that animal control was going to come in with dart guns, to capture the cats and kill them.

This was all done to intimidate me into stopping feeding so that the neighbors could trap and have the cats killed. Such was the mentality in Santa Monica, and such as the mentality in most places in United States.

This is where Wilma stepped in. She began organizing a campaign to stop the city from hounding me and the cats. She called her friends, who were rescuers, each

of whom ran a rescue group and each of whom had a mailing list. Each of them called their friends, and together they all called City Hall, the city manager and the city attorney, telling them to leave me and the poor cats alone.

The first day the city manager received over 300 phone calls telling them to leave me and the cats alone. Over the next two or three days they received another 400 to 500 calls.

The city manager at that point threatened in a very sinister manner, that I had better use my time trapping the cats and getting them out of the city as opposed to mobilizing a public effort to get the city to leave the cats alone. They ordered me to get the cats out of town or they would capture and kill them.

To make a long story short, because of Wilma's efforts, the city finally gave in and stopped harassing me and the cats. They were overwhelmed by 1000 phone calls from all over the United States and the world during a one-week period of time telling them to stop harassing me and the cats. The city attorney even sent me a letter stating that feeding the cats was not illegal and that they would not be coming after me. All this was due to Wilma, a 74-year-old, gravely ill woman, living alone in a room with 14 cats and a telephone, and who had hundreds of friends who also loved animals.

Wilma died a few years later, virtually unknown as the saint she was except to a few hundred rescuers and a few hundred clients of that veterinarian where she worked part-time as a receptionist, before emphysema made her totally housebound.

Wilma taught me the power of publicity and having lots of friends with a common interest, and in this case, a love for animals, and anger towards a system that favored the wealthy and their desires, over the lives of 13 homeless and beautiful sentient beings.

In the end, many of those little kitties found homes, several with me, some died in the streets. Such was the suffering I saw, and I continue to see every day. Even given the vastness of the suffering I continue to see, I do my small part to help with the lives of a few hundred cats every day in every way that I can, and help those people who help cats.

One person asked me once, Ed, why do you put so much importance on animals when you realize that the world is not real?

My answer is, do you stop going to movies even though you realize they are not real? Your apparent body is going to live another 30-40 years or so, so what do you do? Nothing? Stop eating and allow yourself to starve to death, or do you participate? Ramana and Robert mostly chose to withdraw, but to withdraw or participate is up to you.

In the same vein, the more you are aware of your inner sense of presence, the happier you become, and the more compassionate you become, which frees energy and confidence, which allow you to actually do something in the world.

Combine that with the growing sense of justice that Nisargadatta talked about, and many who are realized feel an obligation to engage in the world.

The unreal world exists totally within that sense of presence, and that sense of presence is itself filled with love and is love. It is almost automatic that a person immersed in that sense of presence acts compassionately and with love in all actions.

We can all regard ourselves as part of a movement of conscience within consciousness that has always been there, and whose focus has been to reduce suffering everywhere.

In fact, ending suffering was the single goal of classical Buddhism. One of four vows says, "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all." The act of saving is an act of supreme happiness. You are saving your beloved, and in that saving you find more love.

You are my spiritual family, and I wish you all very well. I love you all, and hope you find some peace and well-being in your life through spiritual practices. Then, when you feel ready, look inside your heart to find out who you are, and then look outside to find **how** that movement of conscience and compassion within the greater envelope of consciousness as a whole, is directing you to serve as a shepherd for all sentient beings.

Some of you gratefully have already defined your mission as working with me. Jo-Ann and Alan in building a Satsang family. Others by building websites for Robert's teachings or my teachings. Others transcribe these talks, while still others compose music for Satsang. Others propose making a movie that would bring Robert's teachings to all people as a transmission of compassion. Others want to help me help cats. Others make donations to the animal work and to Satsang. Such is how that movement of conscience and compassion is acting in its own way to tame that Harsh Mistress of consciousness.

May we as a family continue to grow in this “togetherness effort” to bring more love, light, and compassion to the world. The world, consciousness, needs us.

We are a small movement that in some way is contributing to making the world an easier place to live in for all beings, for all time. May the world remember that there was a spark of compassion that was lit here, by Ramana, passing through Robert, through me, and to all of you.

One of the most beautiful chants in the world is Jyota Se Jyota. It was composed for Muktananda, but is very fitting for us, now.

It goes like this:

*Kindle my heart's flame with Thy flame.
Sadguru, kindle my heart's flame with Thine.
May Thy Light banish darkness forever.
Sadguru kindle my heart's flame with Thine.
O Lord of yoga, Lord of all wisdom!
O Lord within all, O Lord above all!
Kindle my heart's flame with Thine.*
