

Regarding ego, Illusion, maya and enlightenment ...

The word Maya is often translated as “That which is not.” So Maya is illusory, but it is also something. It is the ultimate paradox, because it has no real existence, but there it is, anyway. So it is a “that” and it is “not.”

But from the most expanded viewpoint, the universe is perfect, everything is as it should be, so Maya cannot be an accident.

The purpose of Maya is to capture consciousness in such a way that it imagines itself as individual, as separate, which of course, is an illusion.

However, from the illusion of individuality, arises the possibility of each individual consciousness awakening to appreciate its own true identity such that now there can be multiple infinities.

Through the agency of Maya, God can interact with Himself/Herself through all the myriad lives that, once captured in the illusion of separateness, can rise to appreciate each their own identity with God. So instead of one (perhaps boring) infinity, you have infinitely many, dynamic infinities. The Divine playing with the Divine. (This will be described variously in different traditions, e.g., as “Buddha mind,” “emptiness dancing,” “Bodhisattva consciousness,” etc.)

So Maya exists for a purpose. In the Gita, Lord Krishna referred to it as “My divine Maya,” even at the same time he said Maya is “difficult to overcome.”

Ego, of course, is at the center of Maya. It is the agency that maintains the illusion of separateness. It is the sense of the provisional “I” and “mine,” the agency within the personality that attaches itself to objects and identifies with them. “I am a man.” “I am a musical instrument maker.” “I am a significant person because I have this business, this car, this relationship, this reputation”

And of course, if something happens such that I lose my business, my car, my relationship or my reputation, the thought that comes up is, “I feel like I’m going to die.” And that’s a legitimate thought, since it arises from the provisional, small ego that really believes it IS whatever it has attached itself to. The small ego really DOES die every time it has to let go of whatever it has identified itself with.

And here is the crux of the whole thing with ego. Before awakening, ego thinks it’s the whole person, which is why there can be so much suffering before awakening. The little rowboat of ego gets tossed about on the high seas, smashed again and again against the rocks of never ending change. It can never escape this fate, because by nature, that is how it functions, that is where it dwells, where it belongs, in the realm of gain and loss, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain.

After awakening, the remaining, provisional ego still identifies with the various things it imagines itself to be. I will continue to identify myself as a musical instrument maker, but the musical instrument maker becomes just a part of the outer personality. The musical instrument maker is only part of the small ego identity, which serves the purpose of allowing one to continue in the world, to be able to enjoy the greater purpose, which is to be one with God and one with all of creation.

I don’t subscribe to the idea that ego can be slain, once and for all. Rather, there is a “thinning out” of ego through a process whereby one sees what the Self is, identical with the universal Self, (or, from another perspective, that the vast emptiness of “Buddha mind” is the ultimate reality) and thereby displaces the ego from its delusional position at the center. The true center comes into consciousness, or one sees that ultimately there is no center, and one knows and sees quite naturally, that ego is not the center.

In the light of this awareness, ego’s role changes completely, and life changes completely.

The purpose of ego is to take things up and let them go so that one may carry on a life in the world. And of course, its role is to identify with the body, protect the body, so life will be maintained for as long as it may serve a purpose.

As this territory becomes more and more familiar, the remaining, provisional ego becomes mature, and it becomes accustomed, not only to its purpose of taking things up, but also of LETTING THINGS GO. Because the ego doesn't only grasp. It also lets go, even though it experiences a dying with each letting go.

When one is awake to pure consciousness at the true center, the ego discovers it can let go and not be annihilated, even though it still feels a death with each letting go. It arises again when it is called to serve its purpose in taking up the next thing for the personality to become engaged with.

Rather than being annihilated once and for all, the ego, transformed and transmuted, but still functioning as ego, has a role to play as the whole person becomes enlightened. It transitions from being dominant, imagining itself to be the center, and it begins to function in service to the true center.

Ego is able to serve the greater whole by becoming malleable, by learning to participate in transformation instead of resisting. It becomes expert, not only in the taking up, but also in the letting go part of the transaction. The ego becomes the sacrificial offering in a Holy Eucharist that is taking place always and endlessly in every soul.

So it seems to me, there may be an over-emphasis on getting rid of ego, of the loss of ego as a hallmark of awakening. There may be times when ego seems completely absent, and other times when it seems active, depending on where one might be in any given cycle of taking up and letting go.

To my way of seeing this, the important piece is the awakening to infinite pure consciousness.

The impact of that awakening on the functioning of ego is revolutionary, in that it changes forever the position of ego in the structure of the person, and it transforms the ego from a source of suffering and an adversary in the process of liberation, to a participant in the ongoing process of transformation that is the nature of an awakened life.

So the ego ceases to be an issue at all. It's there, participating in its purpose of taking up and letting go, of holding material within the sphere of attention and thereby creating a mechanism for activity in the world, but it's just another part of the personality, to be observed with benevolence from the standpoint of a Totality that transcends and at the same time includes every aspect of individuality.

THE FOUR STAGES OF THE GAP

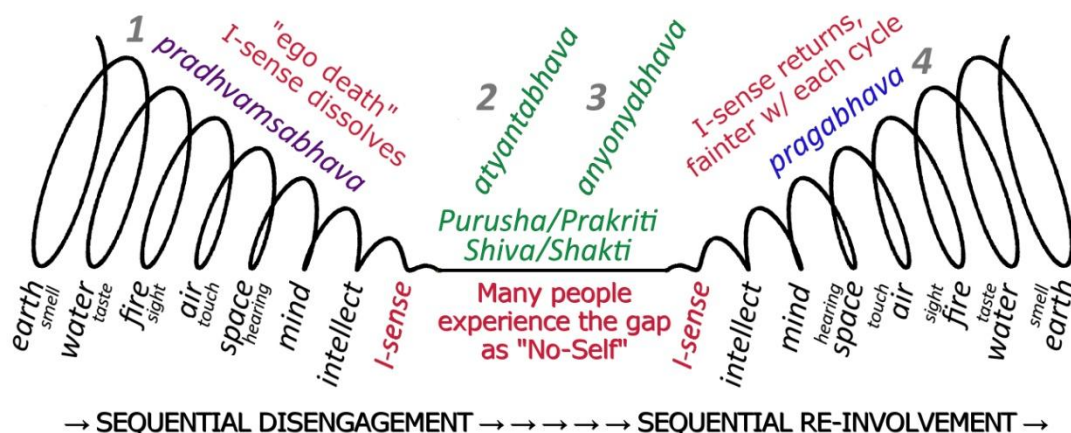
*How Life Flows Through Expansion & Contraction
(aka "zooming out" & "zooming in")*

1. PRADHVAMSABHAVA 2. ATYANTABHAVA
3. ANYONYABHAVA 4. PRAGABHAVA

1 Existing Stage Collapses • 2 & 3 The Gap • 4 Next Stage Emerges

→ → "Letting Go" → → → → → → → → → → "Taking hold" → →

Boundaries Dissolve • Boundlessness • Boundaries Return



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