

## Neti, Neti: An Intermediary Step

### Rupert Spira

#### I. The Neti Neti Principle

“Neti, Neti” (Sanskrit, “not this, not this”) is a useful preliminary or intermediary step towards the full feeling understanding that I am everything.

Neti, Neti refers to *path of exclusion* whereby a subject distinguishes himself from the mind-body, thereby establishing what he essentially is, namely awareness. Through this process, the subject realizes “I am not my thoughts; I am aware of my thoughts,” “I am not my feelings; I am aware of my feelings,” “I am not this sensation; I am aware of this sensation.”

However, this process does not establish the nature of awareness. To know that I am awareness is one thing; to know the nature of this awareness is another matter.

So the first step is taken to realize that we are the witnessing background of experience, and then we pause and move on to explore the experience of ourselves, that is, awareness’s experience of itself. We ask: Does awareness have any experience of itself coming and going? Does awareness have any experience of a limit to itself? The goal of the second step is to realize through this inquiry the ever-present and unlimited nature of awareness.

Finally, having realized the unlimited nature of awareness, we make a return to the world of objects and see all objects as made out of awareness. This is the *path of inclusion*. Yes, I am my body, thoughts, etc., but not exclusively these things. I am also the world itself.

#### II. Why is the Intermediary Step Needed (for Many People)

The world as we normally conceive of it is an illusion, only Brahman (infinite awareness) is real, and Brahman is the world. The discovery after *neti neti* is that the world is made out of Brahman or infinite awareness.

Hence, *neti neti* brings attention to the subtle subject, what we essentially are, and the subsequent inquiry brings attention to the multiplicity and diversity of objects that are manifestations of the subtle subject, more precisely as that which is made out of the awareness that is the subtle subject. Hence, we see that all that there is is our experience of infinite awareness. It is only because I am not *a thing* that I can be *everything*.

Also, it is natural to begin with *neti neti* because our self-understanding informs our view of the world. The reason we think there is an outside world made out of matter is because we believe there is an inside subject made out of limited awareness. The world appears in direct correlation to our understanding of our self. Maharshi: “The I-thought is the mother of the world.” Limited self => limited world.

Unlimited self => world is made out of unlimited stuff. Premise: everything we know is known through and in direct correspondence to awareness. Hence, the inside world gives birth to the outside world.