Why Do We Call It Nondual Wisdom?

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The word "nondual" means "not two" and we use it here because God and creation are One Reality, not two. This is the deepest core idea pointed to by this wisdom and we say this because the unseen Creator *arises as* the creation we see all around us. This is very much like an actor arising as a character so let's go into this metaphor right now.

Let's start by thinking of a Hollywood actor. Here it's easy to see that the actor is the source of the character. Surely it's not the other way around; the character is not the source of the actor. Furthermore, the character cannot go on the stage without the actor. And yet, the actor can drop the role of the character at any time. Because of this, it is wise to make a distinction between the *transcendent source* (the actor) and the *dependent construction* (the character).

And yet, *when* the actor comes forward as the character, they are one. If you are standing in front of the character and you want to find the actor, you do not need to dig into a deeper and deeper layer. No. When you look into the eyes of the character, you are looking directly into the eyes of the actor. They are one.

Every single quality or aspect of the character is truly a quality or aspect that is being exhibited by the actor. And every single action that appears to be done by the character is really done by the actor. What appears to be the will and power of the character are really the will and power of the actor.

The character is not the source of anything and has no substance of its own.

Of course you see what this metaphor is pointing to. God is the one *invisible* Actor who is coming forward as each and every *visible* character, as each and every *visible* person. All of creation is a spontaneous emanation that comes about when formless Source-Awareness (God) miraculously and paradoxically appears as the form that makes up not only our own physical world, but also all of our spiritual worlds. Ice doesn't just come *from* the water, it *is* the water, and so it is with God and creation.

God is not only infinitely intimate with all of creation, God is creation.

Even though God and creation are not separate, it is still helpful to make a distinction between the *transcendent source* (God) and the *dependent construction* (creation). The word "nondual" points to both this unity and this distinction.

If we constantly focus on the "Oneness" of everything, we might overlook some of the differences between people and things that we need to acknowledge in order to function well in the world. And yet, if we operate in the world without recognizing the One Essence of everyOne and everything, we would miss the big picture. This is what opens up the loving heart of enlightenment, so you see why it is so important.

Duality

Now let's consider the concept of duality, which brings to mind examples such as hot and cold, male and female, and the two sides of one coin. These examples demonstrate the three ways that duality can be expressed in our world. Obviously the coin has two sides and both sides must be present at all times. Gender, on the other hand, usually shows up for each person as either a male body or a female body, so this is quite different from the coin. And hot and cold demonstrate a third type of dualistic expression since an object's temperature will be somewhere along a continuum between two opposite polarities.

These three examples all exist in our physical world but there are also emotional dualistic pairs, such as happiness and sadness, and frustration and satisfaction. Yet no matter what, duality is always expressed in one of these three ways: as two complementary aspects seen one at a time, as something in-between two polarities, and as one thing with two inseparable parts. The ancient nondual texts call all of this "the play of the opposites."

Are "tree" and "non-tree" a well-matched dualistic pair?

I prefer to say that our world contains many dualistic expressions rather than saying that the world itself is dualistic or that everything in our world has a dualistic complement. For example, I don't think it's helpful to wonder what the dualistic complement of a tree could be, although some people do pursue this. They suggest that it is "non-tree" but I don't see how this completes a well-matched dualistic pair. Let's look into this a bit more.

While a tree exists as an object in our physical world, "non-tree" does not exists in the physical world. It is a concept and as such, it exists only as a thought within our minds. This is why I don't think "tree" and "non-tree" make a very well-matched dualistic pair.

All the dualistic pairs that ring true for me have both aspects in the same realm. Hot and cold are both physical, while happiness and sadness are both emotional. So "tree" (a physical object) and "non-tree" (a concept) seem poorly matched to me. But notice that it can still be helpful to use that concept in a statement such as "this is not a tree."

In a similar way, the concept of "not self" is helpful in the process of disidentification, which I talk about in my book. But the point I want to make here is that "self" and "not self" are also not a well-matched dualistic pair since you are not a concept but "not self" is a concept. This is true whether we are referring to your True Self (Source-Awareness) or if we are referring to the "apparent self," the person we see in the world, the person you call "yourself." Both of these exist without being a concept.

Multiplicity

Now, when it comes to trees, they are all unique so the concept of multiplicity is more applicable than the concept of duality. The same thing can be said about everything – cars, houses, rivers, mountains and so forth. People are certainly unique so the concept of multiplicity is again very helpful. Obviously, to function in the world, we need to distinguish between all the important qualities that make people and things different.

Here's a very short story to help underline this point. Imagine that you go out for breakfast and order some oatmeal. Minutes later your food arrives but instead of oatmeal, you receive a bowl of sawdust. You give the waiter a puzzled look and ask, "Hey, where's my oatmeal?" He just laughs and says, "Everything is God; sawdust is oatmeal." Not much help, eh? Just because everything has the same Divine Essence doesn't mean that everything is the same in form.

In form, we witness an endless display of differences but the whole story is that everything we experience is a unique and ever-changing expression of the One Divine Essence. This is why I like to say that our world contains both dualistic expressions and expressions of multiplicity and all of this is thoroughly divine without any exceptions at all.

Duality is not something you need to deny

Please note carefully that the concept of nonduality does not deny that dualistic expressions exist, which is a common misunderstanding. In our experience, hot and cold are real and different so it is wise to heed this experiential reality and not fall into any confusion about that.

Duality only talks about a particular quality of some things while nonduality talks about the Essential Divine Nature of all things. In this way, duality and nonduality are both valid and useful concepts.

In my opinion, the correct understanding is that dualistic expressions themselves are not the cause of any trouble or dissatisfaction. Yet some dissatisfaction can arise if there is some emotional rejection of the conditions at hand. In the deepest way, dualistic expressions are not problematic precisely because they are all an expression of the One Divine Essence, and God is never a problem. But even so, you still might want to work on certain things to bring about what you prefer in an unselfish way.

When dualistic expressions are correctly understood, you see that they are not a problem that you need to resolve or overcome.

Good and bad

Now let's talk about good and bad and let's do so by continuing with the example of getting sawdust instead of oatmeal for breakfast. How would you feel about that? Would you add a strong emotionally charged judgment to the mix? Perhaps. But most likely you wouldn't be too upset and instead, you would simply ask nicely for a bowl of oatmeal rather than sawdust.

Notice that you would not directly experience the bowl of sawdust as intrinsically bad. In your direct experience, you have simply received a bowl of sawdust, which is neither good nor bad but is instead completely neutral. It is only when your unmet desire for oatmeal is followed by your emotionally charged judgment of dissatisfaction that you would then experience a "negative" emotion.

Now, I certainly think it is okay to have wholesome (unselfish) desires and preferences. Without desires, nothing would happen. But how you handle your unmet desires is the key. Notice that even if the situation is not what you want, saying so would not necessarily imply that you are not

at peace with it. Saying that something is unwanted or "bad" can be done with or without a strong emotional charge, and obviously leaving out the emotional charge allows you to enjoy the peace that is available in every moment.

So when things become challenging, see if you can practice being at peace. This is often called "acceptance" but please let me clear up a common misunderstanding. This is very important. While it is wise to drop the emotionally charged pushback against "what is," it is also wise to actively work on making things better. Don't just sit in a "bad" situation and say, "Oh well, I guess this is all that God is going to give me." Calmly evaluate both your situation and what you can do about it. Don't just go hungry or eat the bowl of sawdust just because it's all you have. Instead, ask nicely for some oatmeal. I bet someone will gladly bring it to you. Maybe the first waiter will be pleased to see that you calmly adapted to his playful stunt.

When you learn to not cling to what we commonly call "good" in a needy way or push back with anxiety against what we commonly call "bad," you become free from dissatisfaction. The key is to assess things without these charged emotions. This allows you to emotionally accept things in a peaceful way while still working to make them better. I've heard this called "glowing with the flow" and I talk about it more in my book.

With this balanced attitude, you can now use words like "good" and "bad" in a helpful way. So our nondual wisdom does not forbid these words. Instead, it simply points out that we can remain at peace when we use them without any harsh judgment. In my opinion, this point is often misunderstood.

Always work for the good

Good and evil are the two polarities of the quality of morality. Of course people have forever debated the moral code, but even without settling that question in a way that will satisfy everyOne, good people are motivated in their own unique and wholesome way to do good things and work for a "better" world, as seen from their own perspective. They are fully engaged in life, offering loving kindness and compassion to everyOne, without being entangled in selfishness or self-centered desires. They are in the world but not trapped by it.

So paradoxically, even though our nondual wisdom advises us to emotionally accept what we commonly call "evil" without any harsh judgment, it does not suggest that we simply ignore it or deny that it exists. As much as possible, in our own unique way, we always work for the good.

Some additional thoughts

I also want to mention that it is perfectly fine to speak from the perspective of our ordinary world and say things such as "I love you." Yet some people loudly protest that this statement presents a dualistic understanding and therefore should be thrown into the trash can.

Can you imagine a philosophy that forbids you from expressing your love for another person? Thankfully, the full nondual wisdom encourages these expressions of love since this is how the One Divine Essence shows kindness and compassion for those that are dear to us. How beautiful.

So we see that it is fine to speak from the perspective of either the One or the many. In fact, when it comes to getting things done in the world, speaking from your perspective as a person is an excellent way to be practical. What good is a philosophy if it prevents you from being practical?

By the way, when we speak of the One Awareness, we are emphasizing the idea that this Awareness is always whole. It cannot be broken into pieces, whether those pieces are disconnected or connected, nor can it branch out like the branches of a tree. This Awareness never has any divisions or parts and yet, through the mystery of creation, this one formless Source-Awareness comes forth in our world of form as that which appears to be the many. How magnificent!

It is God who is arising as everyOne and it is God who is doing everything.

When we celebrate both our divine uniqueness in form and our divine unity as Source-Awareness, we find the deepest inspiration that opens up our loving hearts to everyOne. It is only through the many that we can share the One Love of God.

Since God is completely invisible, it looks like creation stands alone without any Creator at all. And yet, the Creator and the created are One! This is what our ancient nondual wisdom points to.

Nonduality: God and creation are One Reality, not two!

The End

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This essay is the second chapter of my book.

Thanks for reading my essay! I hope it cleared up some common misunderstandings. If it did, perhaps I can inspire you to check out more of my free essays where you can learn about enlightenment and spiritual awakening. And since this wisdom unfolds more freely when there is a dynamic two-way conversation, please feel free to get in touch with me via email from my website.

In truth, I honor your divine nature.

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My mentor is Timothy Conway. His website is here:
enlightened-spirituality.org

There are over 75 hours of completely free audio recordings of some of his satsangs here:
Free Satsang Audio Recordings