

Outward Facing Path and Inward Facing Path

A Comparative Exploration



Introduction

In spiritual traditions, there is often discussion of two complementary approaches to self-realization: the 'outward facing path' and the 'inward facing path.' These paths are not mutually exclusive but offer distinct means of engaging with the ultimate truth. The outward path often corresponds to tantric practices, emphasizing the divinity inherent in the manifest world. The inward path, exemplified by Advaita Vedanta, directs the seeker to turn within, recognizing their essence as the source of all that is. While differing in approach, both lead to the same nondual understanding of reality.

The Inward Facing Path: Tracing Back to the Source

The inward facing path, central to Advaita Vedanta, guides seekers to trace back their experiences and identities to the ultimate truth, Brahman. This path involves introspection and discrimination practices such as *neti-neti* (not this, not this) and *Drg-Drśya Viveka* (the seer-seen distinction). By negating all that is transient and phenomenal, one arrives at the unchanging, formless awareness that is the source of all existence.

In this tradition, the world is often described as *mithya* (an appearance) and compared to the rope mistaken for a snake. The goal is to recognize the substratum—Brahman—underlying all appearances. As Swami Sarvapriyananda explains, this recognition is not a denial of the world but a shift in perspective, revealing that the same Brahman appears as the world.

Rupert Spira beautifully describes this inward journey: 'The presence of awareness is the only constant in all changing experiences.' It is this awareness, ever-present and unchanging, that the seeker comes to recognize as their true self.

The Outward Facing Path: Embracing the Manifestation

The outward facing path, as emphasized in tantric traditions such as Kashmir Shaivism, celebrates the divine as immanent in all aspects of life. Instead of negating the world, tantra embraces it as a manifestation of ultimate consciousness, often symbolized by Shiva (pure consciousness) and Shakti (dynamic energy). This path recognizes the inherent unity between the Absolute and its expressions, seeing every experience as an opportunity to connect with the divine.

Practices on this path include mantra chanting, visualization, breathwork, and meditative techniques like those found in the Vijnana Bhairava Tantra. These practices aim to reveal the divine within the everyday, merging the transcendent and the immanent. As Dr. Staneshwar Timalina highlights, the tantric view holds that even in suffering, the foundational bliss of existence is present, for life itself is inherently euphoric.

Kashmir Shaivism introduces terms like *prakasha* (light of consciousness) and *vimarsha* (self-reflective awareness), emphasizing that the Absolute is not only aware but also expresses itself dynamically as the manifold universe. This freedom and spontaneity are seen as intrinsic to the Absolute, making the world a sacred play (*lila*) of consciousness.

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Key Differences: Ontology and Approach

Aspect	Inward Path (Advaita Vedanta)	Outward Path (Tantra/Kashmir Shaivism)
Ultimate Reality	Brahman: pure existence, consciousness, bliss (sat-chit-ananda)	Shiva-Shakti: consciousness and dynamic energy as one
Worldview	World is an appearance (mithya)	World is a manifestation of divine consciousness
Goal	Realization of one's true self as Brahman	Recognition of the divine in all aspects of life
Method	Introspection, discrimination (neti-neti)	Rituals, visualization, mantra, and embodiment
Experiential Focus	Non-experiential knowing of awareness	Embracing and sanctifying all experiences

Common Ground and Integration

Despite their differences, both paths converge in their aim: the realization of nonduality. Rupert Spira contrasts these approaches: 'The inward path traces all experience back to its source. The outward path recognizes the same source shining through every experience.'

In practice, the paths often complement each other. The introspection of Advaita Vedanta brings clarity and detachment, while tantric practices deepen one's ability to see the sacred in the mundane.

Practical Insights: Bridging the Two Paths

1. The Role of Presence: Both paths acknowledge presence as fundamental. Whether described as light (prakasha), spaciousness, or awareness, presence remains the shared ground of all traditions. As Abu 'l-Hosian al-Nuri reflects, 'There was a light gleaming in the Unseen... I gazed at it continually, until the time came when I had wholly become that light.'

2. The Grace of the Absolute: Both paths recognize grace as pivotal. In Advaita Vedanta, grace inspires inquiry. As Shankara teaches, 'It is the Atman that chooses who will recognize it.' In tantra, grace is the ongoing flow of divine energy, like sunlight always shining.

3. Unity of Knowledge and Action: Advaita often emphasizes knowledge (jnana), while tantra highlights action (kriya). Kashmir Shaivism bridges these through spanda, the vibrational movement of consciousness that unites stillness and dynamism.

Conclusion: Two Pathways to One Truth

The inward and outward facing paths offer unique perspectives on the same truth. While one negates and turns within, the other embraces and celebrates the divine in all forms. Together, they provide a holistic approach to self-realization, affirming that the Absolute can be both transcendent and immanent.

As seekers, one may resonate more with introspection or engagement, but ultimately, both paths lead to the same recognition: the timeless, ever-present awareness that is our true nature.

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Invitation to the Temple of Silence

A Non-duality Zoom Group

Dear Friend,

You are warmly invited to join the **Temple of Silence**, an online Zoom group dedicated to exploring the essence of non-duality. In this gathering, we focus not on personal stories but on gently turning our attention to the boundless awareness that holds all stories and experiences within it—our true nature.

The Temple of Silence Mission Statement: *“The Temple of Silence Zoom group offers a decentralized space where friends gather, some seeking to realize their true nature, others resting in its recognition. Discussions focus less on fleeting personal stories and more on the reliable, wholeness of our True nature. Questions are welcomed, and when attention drifts into mental narratives, it is gently redirected to what never comes and goes. In this open space, all are invited to knowingly experience the oneness that underlies all appearances.”*

When: Open meeting on Wednesdays at 10:00 AM Eastern Time on ZOOM

Meeting ID: 935 829 6350

Passcode: tos

The Temple of Silence Zoom Group is not a therapy group, and there is no charge to attend the meetings. This document is part of “The Temple of Silence - From Knowledge to Experience” article series and was created as a public service. For those new to nonduality, this series of articles offers clear guidance into this profound understanding. We hope the content resonates with the deeper truth within you. We look forward to your presence in our next gathering.

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Please visit www.beingwalter.com for more nondual articles, poetry and information regarding Walter’s books *“Take Heart, Seeker”* and *“The Temple of Silence”*.