

Engineering Themes Month: SAE Electric Car Demonstration



Photos by Nick Caldwell

Vedic Vision Society: Reality vs. illusion

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What is reality? Is it the truth, objective, based on perception? What about illusion? Is it a dream, an intangible projection of our minds? We explored these questions on Friday's seminar, "Escaping the Reality Illusion".

Speaker Nityananda Pran began with a brief meditation session, with students quietly chanting the Hare Krishna mahamantra.

After this, he began the discussion on the topic by explaining that we operate within two levels of reality: 'Absolute' and 'Relative'. According to the Vedas, the Absolute reality is not immediately perceivable. The Relative reality, on the other hand, is the reality that we perceive through our senses.

The speaker went on to describe the senses that we use to interact with our environment. We have five 'gross senses': eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. These senses correspond to five sense objects: vision, sound, smell, taste, and touch. But we also have five 'working senses' and 3 'subtle senses'. The working senses are the hands, legs, mouth, arms, and genitals; and the subtle senses are the Mind, Intelligence, and (False) Ego.

Nityananda Pran went on to explain that the mind interprets reality through perception. Intelligence is defined by two features: discrimination and discerning. And the ego, or sense of "I am", directly affects the way we perceive reality and apply the features of our intelligence.

Though we rely on these senses to gather information about our environment and make decisions, the speaker explained that there are four defects arising from our senses: 1) the senses are limited, 2) we therefore make mistakes, 3) mistakes lead to illu-

sion, and 4) illusion leads to "cheating" (in which we are convinced that what we perceive is true, even when that might not be the reality). An example was given of six blind men who were all touching various parts on an elephant. Some described the form of an elephant to be like a tree (the legs), others described it being similar to a snake (the trunk), and another was convinced an elephant to be like a wall (the torso), etc. In this case, all of the men are right in their conceptions, but the understanding is incomplete – because of their limited perception, they could not see the whole reality.

The speaker further explained that direct perception gives us only limited truth. From direct perception comes deduction (e.g. where there is smoke, there must be fire). In turn, this deduction gives us a predetermined sense of cause and effect. But such assumptions can be faulty, at best leading to an incomplete sense of how things are.

Nityananda Pran concluded the seminar by briefly introducing us to the "Ascending System of Knowledge". In this system, we make assumptions, gather data, and accept/reject the assumptions based on the data gathered; this is also known as the Scientific Method in today's world. For every assumption (or hypothesis) studied, there is always a margin of error. Such errors are scientifically indicated with words and phrases such as "maybe", "perhaps", "suggests that", etc. When new situations arise and challenge these hypotheses, they are then rendered useless and new ones are formed. In the Relative Realm, we are groping about in the darkness – what to speak of finding the Absolute Truth?

Next week, this discussion will continue with the "Descending System of Knowledge". All discussions are video-recorded and available on the facebook.com/vedicvis.

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