

## Misplacing the Teachings

By Michael Langford

One of the pitfalls to be avoided could be called misplacing the teachings. The meaning of this is: To not understand the purpose of a teaching and then to try to use a teaching for a purpose it was not intended. It is being called misplacing the teachings because it is taking a teaching that belongs in one place and applying it to a place where it should not be applied.

Here is an example:

One might read a teaching that says , “There are no differences in the Self.” That teaching is true. There is also no world and no universe in the Self, as the Step Two quotes point out in *The Seven Steps to Awakening*.

Here is an example of how that teaching can be misplaced:

People think that because the Self has no differences they should not perceive any differences. Not perceiving differences in the illusion humans call life, or call the world, or call living a human life, is not the purpose of that teaching. The purpose of that teaching is just to tell you what the nature of the Self is.

The ability to perceive differences and to discern one thing from another is one of the most valuable tools you can have. It is one of the most valuable tools you can have both for your spiritual progress and for how to live in the worldly life.

Many people, when they are taught that the world is an illusion and that in the Self there are no differences, make the above described mistake of misplacing the teaching.

Although many people make that mistake on many different paths, one of the most common places where people make that mistake is in what is often called neo advaita, or the new nonduality. Although the example that follows has a *humorous aspect*, there is an important teaching here:

For those who say there are no differences and who say we should not perceive any differences, we should make a law that every morning for breakfast they have to eat a bowl of sand instead of a bowl of corn flakes. If there are no differences, or if we are not suppose to perceive differences, then what difference would that make?

If you are one of those people still attached to the mistaken notion that we should not perceive any differences in the world, please do not actually eat a bowl of sand for breakfast. It could be hazardous to your physical health.

This [example] has only been about one particular teaching that gets misplaced. Of course there are many other teachings that are misplaced.

The teaching that you are not the body is a very important teaching. It is misplacing the teaching to then conclude that one need not take good care of the body or that one need not seek treatment. It is very important both for spiritual progress and for a skillful worldly life to keep the body healthy.

There are a small number of quotes in *The Seven Steps to Awakening* about the importance of keeping the body healthy until the Self is realized. Quote 561 by Annamalai Swami is an example of that.

[Here is that quote:]

“Realizing the Self is the only useful and worthy activity in this life, so keep the body in good repair until that goal is achieved. Afterwards, the Self will take care of everything and you won’t have to worry about anything any more. In fact, you won’t be able to, because the mind that previously did the worrying, the choosing and the discriminating will no longer be there. In that state you won’t need it and you won’t miss it.”

Here are some more examples of misplacing the teachings:

The Self has no effort, no choices, no action, no decisions. That is a true teaching. The purpose of that teaching is to describe the nature of the Self.

How that teaching gets misplaced is people thinking that in the illusion humans call human life, the world, etc. that they should not make effort, not make choices, not have action, not make decisions.

For both one’s spiritual progress and skill in the worldly life, all four of the following are essential:

1. Wise effort.
2. Making wise choices.
3. Engaging in wise actions.
4. Making wise decisions.