

A Few Questions about Awareness

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Tariq: Thank you so much.

I understand the chart a lot better now. I have a few questions about awareness.

I understood when you said that if awareness did not have the power to apparently delude itself then it would be limited. But awareness is unlimited, thus it can appear to delude itself.

1. But can awareness really delude itself or only appear to delude itself?

Ted: Awareness only apparently deludes itself. Awareness always “knows” itself simply by virtue of being itself. When apparently conditioned by *maya*, ignorance, it not only associates but identifies with the mind-body-sense complex, and through the vehicle of the limited intellect seems to forget itself.

Tariq: 2. Where does awareness come from?

Ted: Awareness doesn't come from anywhere. It is ever-existent, or eternal, not in the sense of being characterized by long duration but rather by being altogether beyond time and space. It is difficult for the *jiva* to grasp this truth since the *jiva*'s entire existence is marked by time and every object within the context of the apparent reality has a beginning and an end. Awareness, however, is simply the limitless “field” of existence in which all objects, including time and space, which are the two most subtle objects, appear.

Tariq: 3. Is awareness impersonal?

Ted: Completely. Awareness is universal, limitless. When it illumines the mind-body-sense complex, it seems to become personal through that association. But awareness itself is all-pervasive. We can liken it to space and a collection of pots within its expanse. Though the space “within” each pot seems to be particular to that pot alone, space itself actually encompasses all the pots and only seems to be “personalized” because of its association with a specific pot. The limitation of this analogy is that it might seem that though space is all-pervasive, the pots themselves are separate. In regard to awareness, however, even the mind-body-sense complex, which is symbolized in the analogy as the pot, is awareness. Given that reality is non-dual, there is no “substance” out of which anything can be fashioned other than awareness. The fact is that the mind-body-sense complex is not actually an object in the sense of being a separate three-dimensional entity. It is actually a projection, like a hologram, whose apparent form is simply the effect of the integrating function of the perceptive organs and mind.

Tariq: 4. Does awareness have any qualities? I have heard awareness described as: changeless, formless, non-dual, ever-present, eternal, impersonal.

Ted: Awareness is limitless and attribute-less, and thus it has no qualities. The idea of *saguna brahman*, or awareness with qualities, is simply a provisional understanding that allows the student to digest the fact that all objects are essentially nothing other than awareness, and thus awareness would seem to have qualities. The correct understanding, however, is that while all objects (and their qualities) are awareness are essentially nothing other than awareness, awareness is not the objects. There are two basic reasons for this. First, all objects depend on awareness for their existence, yet awareness exists whether objects are present or not, such as in the state of deep sleep. Second, as mentioned, objects are not actual entities but rather holographic projections that are essentially nothing other than awareness, and thus from awareness's point of view, there are no objects or qualities but only awareness. Thus awareness is always and ever free of all objects.

Tariq: 5. Is there ever a time when *maya* is not operating? If so, when?

Ted: Yes, during the *pralaya*, or the withdrawal of the universe. It is said that a "day" of *Brahman* lasts for something like 432 billion years. During this time, the manifest universe is projected due to awareness being conditioned by *maya*. This is followed by a "night" of *Brahman*, which lasts equally as long (though I don't know how time is measured outside of the limiting parameters of time and space that only obtain in relation to the manifestation). During this time, awareness remains unconditioned by *maya* (i.e. *maya* abides in a state of dormancy within awareness, so to speak). The problem that self-inquiry tackles is not the existence and influence of *maya* per se, for *maya* is simply the means by which the apparent reality is manifested. The appearance of the universe itself is not the problem. The problem arises when the *jiva* takes the objective phenomena constituting the apparent reality to be real and falls prey to feelings of separation, incompleteness and inadequacy. This delusion is referred to as *avidya*. *Avidya* is the personal aspect of *maya*. It is *avidya* that is eradicated through self-inquiry. Once self-knowledge has been assimilated and *avidya* removed, the universe continues to appear as it always has, but rather than taking it to be real the *jiva* knows it is simply a projection and that its true nature is actually awareness, and thus is no longer troubled by it. The *jiva* understands that the entire apparent reality is simply a holographic movie appearing on the "screen," or within the "field," of his being, and thus no longer feels a sense of lack, for he knows he is both whole and the whole.