

Actionless Awareness Is Not the Doer

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Felix: I have tried several spiritual paths (Advaita being the latest one) and I was always stopped in my search for this question: How does this path explain suffering? And I again repeat the same scenario with Advaita: Why does all-pervading, partless, actionless consciousness create, allow, dream of Auschwitz? This consciousness could not do better than this?

Thanks for your answer.

~ Felix

Ted: Dear Felix, your question is certainly understandable. It is the same question just about everybody has at an early stage in their spiritual understanding. It is based on a fundamental erroneous assumption we make about the nature of reality due to the conditioning we receive either directly from religion or indirectly from the religious beliefs that undergird the generally accepted perception of reality that informs the society.

Our mistaken assumption is that awareness is an anthropomorphic (i.e. human-like) entity who has some overarching personal agenda and is orchestrating or at least overseeing the activities and events transpiring in the world with a vested interest in their nature and results. But this is not the nature of awareness.

As you state in your query, awareness is all-pervading, partless and actionless. All three of these aspects of awareness preclude any possibility of awareness being a creator, doer or even an "allower." In fact, its all-pervasive nature alone renders awareness incapable of acting. Because there is nothing other than it and thus no location where it is not, awareness has no "arena" in which to move. Because it has no boundaries by which it can be distinguished as a discrete entity in contrast to a contextual background or any other entity, there is no way for it to undergo any change. Therefore since movement or change is the defining characteristic of action, its absence as an aspect of awareness makes awareness by definition actionless.

In addition, because it is partless, awareness has no attributes, organs or "equipment" with which to act. And what's more, due to the fact that awareness is all-pervasive, it is whole, complete, full and neither lacks nor needs anything. Thus awareness harbors absolutely no desire that could possibly compel it to act.

It is for these reasons that awareness is actionless, not because it is some entity that is choosing not to act.

Awareness simply is. It is the self-dependent, self-effulgent "light" by means of "whose" illumination all objects, both gross (i.e. tangible objects) and subtle (i.e. sensations, thoughts and emotions), are known. It doesn't try to illumine objects so that they can be known. Rather, its nature is illumination. It doesn't direct its "light" toward or turn its "light" upon anything. It simply is the all-pervasive, ever-shining "light" in which all things appear.

In fact, you can verify the actionless nature of awareness for yourself through a simple inquiry into your own experience. For you are awareness. THE awareness. Awareness is all-pervasive, remember, so reality is non-dual. Due to the limited mind-body-sense mechanism with which you, awareness, have associated in order to have a human experience, your scope is limited. But your essential nature is the same awareness as absolute awareness. Just as the space inside a pot is not different from the space surrounding it, your seemingly personal awareness is not different from universal awareness. So bearing that in mind, do you – not Felix, mind you, but the awareness to whom Felix is known or the “light” in which Felix appears – have to try to “shine” or exist? Do you have to try to know the objects that appear within the scope of your being (i.e. awareness)? Granted, there are things you in the guise of an apparent individual do inquire into or study or make an effort to experience or understand but that’s not the issue here. Here we are talking about the spontaneous perception of whatever objects present themselves within the scope of your (i.e. the apparent individual’s) perceptive organs and mind. For instance, when the sun is shining, you don’t have to try to see the sun. You “illuminate” the object of sunshine and spontaneously experience it. Such is the nature of pure awareness, though, to be clear, awareness itself is not even an experiencer. It is the “light” by means of which it is possible for the intellect of the apparent individual to experience and know objects.

The bottom line is that awareness itself doesn’t do anything.

However, within awareness there exists a power called *maya*, or ignorance. *Maya* has two powers: concealing and projecting. It causes awareness to apparently forget its true attributeless, all-pervasive, actionless nature, and then it projects the vast array of objects that comprise the manifest universe on the “screen” of awareness, thus making awareness seem to be all the objects, interactions and events taking place in the “creation.” The “creation,” however, is not real. It is simply a projection, an apparent reality that is no more real than a dream.

So to repeat, awareness itself isn’t actually doing anything.

When pure awareness “mixes with” or is conditioned by its own inherent power of ignorance, it seems to forget who it really is and assumes the apparent identity of *Isvara*, or God the Creator. Thus, blasphemous as it may sound, ignorance is actually the nature of God.

To be clear, ignorance doesn’t mean stupidity in the relative sense of not knowing facts and figures or being naive about “the ways of the world.” Rather, ignorance in this context refers to not knowing the true nature of reality, the essence of all the names, forms and functions that abound in the universe.

When we say that God created the world, what we are really saying is that ignorance veiled the true nature of non-dual awareness and projected upon the “screen” of its being the dualistic universe. Therefore ignorance, not awareness, is the “cause” of both the bad and the good, the dark and the light, the positive and the negative, the beautiful and ugly, the kindness and the cruelty that are intrinsic to dualistic existence. Awareness is neither executing nor sanctioning the actions occurring within the “movie” of the apparent reality. Awareness is simply the “light” that illumines the projection.

Even ignorance, or God, is not a volitional anthropomorphic entity orchestrating events according to some personal agenda, or worse, testing the allegiance of individuals by subjecting them to a battery of alluring temptations and then severely punishing those who disobey his rules or succumb to his enticements.

God is simply the set of impersonal and inviolable *dharmas* (i.e. universal physical, psychological and ethical laws) that govern the cause-and-effect functioning of the apparent reality (i.e. manifest universe). There is no personal agenda involved. Awareness has no volition and is incapable of doing, and so it doesn't try to delude itself. Ignorance is an insentient object, power is an object, for it can be observed and experienced, thus has no personal will and so it doesn't try to condition awareness. It is simply the way it is. *Maya* conditions pure awareness and thereby projects the dualistic universe, which operates according to impersonal laws that maintain its overall harmony, balance and well-being.

Admittedly, from our perspective as apparent individuals, it doesn't always seem as though what is happening is serving the best interests of the total. But earnest and honest scrutiny does bear out the fact that life is essentially a zero-sum game. For every pleasure, there is a pain. For every loss, there is a gain. Thus while ignorance is responsible for seeming injustice and consequent suffering, it is also inherently self-corrective and infallibly sustains the cohesive functioning of its projection.

Essentially, the apparent reality is a gigantic mechanism that is capable of continuously reconfiguring itself in order to accommodate any action executed within itself in such a way that will serve the best interests of the total mechanism. In other words, all actions are integrated into the *dharma*-governed chain of cause-and-effect that sustains the functionality of the mechanism. Its laws are impersonal and inviolable. For instance, fire burns, so if you stick your finger in a flame it will get burned. In terms of ethical values, a sense of *dharma* (i.e. right and wrong) is part of our programming, so to speak. If we lie, cheat, steal or otherwise injure someone, we feel guilty and experience an agitated mind. Thus all deeds meet with their just rewards, so to speak. This is the basis of the saying that what goes around comes around.

Though this understanding does not warrant turning a blind eye to moral atrocities or failing to address ethical transgressions, it does help alleviate the unbridled umbrage, existential angst and inconsolable suffering that ensues from believing the world to be inherently unjust. When we understand that the apparent reality is taking care of itself and, moreover, that the apparent reality is just that, only an apparent projection within awareness and thus has no effect on the essential nature of awareness, it enable us to do our best in any given circumstance to uphold *dharma* while simultaneously accepting things as they are. In short, while pain persists (and indeed calls upon us for an appropriate response), suffering ceases.

Upon analysis, we realize that all ethical transgressions and existential angst are rooted in self-ignorance. As has been shown, awareness is neither executing nor sanctioning injustice and it is not the cause of suffering. Instead, ignorance is the culprit. Because we are ignorant of our true identity as whole, complete, limitless, all-pervasive, ever-present, non-dual awareness and believe we are limited, inadequate and incomplete, we pursue objects that we hope will complete us and thereby provide us with lasting happiness and permanent peace. When our desire or perceived need for these objects becomes too strong, we are compelled to seek them at all cost even if we have to violate the universal value of non-injury. If you contemplate this point, you will see that on both the microcosmic (i.e. personal) level and the macrocosmic (i.e. societal or global) level this basic ignorance is invariably the cause of all the unethical and immoral behavior in the world.

Though unethical and immoral behavior will never be eliminated from the world, for they are intrinsic to the dualistic nature of the apparent reality, one's personal suffering can be alleviated

by the removal of self-ignorance through the assimilation of self-knowledge. Understanding the true nature of reality enables one to bear the pain that is an integral and unavoidable aspect of worldly life without being swept away by feelings of anger impotence and/or grief. And understanding one's own true nature frees one from the compelling desire to seek fulfillment through objects and the endless frustration caused by their inability to provide lasting satisfaction. Thus one neither continues to wallow in a state of self-pity nor compound one's own suffering as well as that of the world through the execution of deviant actions. Knowing one's true nature to be both whole and the whole, one plays one's role within the grand drama of the apparent reality to the hilt while simultaneously reveling in one's own inherent peace and happiness.

~ All the best, Ted