

All-Pervasiveness Is Not an Experience

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David: Hi, Ted. I'm clear that I am awareness (and intellectually 90% certain that I am actionless).

Ted: It seems that you are standing right at the threshold, so to speak, of assimilating self-knowledge, David, so it's time to play a little hardball. I'm going to call you to task a little bit. I hope you don't let it ruffle your feathers but instead take it in the spirit in which it is intended. It seems like there is only one tick of the clock left until the alarm rings and you snap out of the dream once and for all.

If you are clear that you are awareness, then how can you be only 90% certain "intellectually" that you are actionless? I'm guessing that by "intellectually" you actually mean "theoretically," which would indicate that your knowledge is still only a belief. This is fine as a starting point; *shradda*, or faith, is one of the essential qualifications for self-inquiry but let's see if we can help you gain full clarity.

If you were clear that you are awareness, then you would be certain of your actionless nature. Your present circumstance might be likened to space, assuming it could think and talk, saying that it is certain it is space but is only 90% sure that it doesn't do anything. Space is the context in which doings are done but space itself doesn't do anything. It can't do anything. Within the context of the analogy, it has no attributes or characteristics with which to do and its all-pervasiveness leaves it no room in which to execute an action nor any other entity or object upon which to act or with which to interact. Moreover, since it contains all that exists, it lacks nothing and thus harbors no desire to obtain anything, which is the essential motivation behind all action and in the absence of which no action would be initiated.

You – pure, limitless, attributeless awareness – are the eternal "space" in which all, even space, obtains and thus are entirely incapable of action for the very same reasons just mentioned.

Since you have no attributes – no body and hence no active organs, no mind and hence no emotions, no intellect and hence no thoughts – you have no "tools" or "instruments" with which to execute an action.

Due to your all-pervasiveness, there is no context in which you can execute an action. Since you span – or to put it more accurately, are – the entire expanse of the universe in both its gross and subtle aspects, there is no larger "arena" within which movement can take place. Movement, however, is intrinsic to action. It is, in fact, its defining characteristic, for in the absence of movement or change there is no means by which to measure the occurrence of action and hence no action can be said to have happened. Moreover, the non-dual nature of your all-pervasiveness precludes the existence of any other entity or object upon which to act or with which to interact. Intrinsic to all action, however, is the existence of at least two objective phenomena, for as just pointed out the movement of the doer can only be measured in terms of its relationship to a second entity or object. What is more, since the seer, which is pure

awareness, can never be the seen, including the relative seer, which is the apparent person we take ourselves to be, who is nothing more than another object appearing within you, the “supreme” seer or pure awareness, you are ever “outside” all action that the apparent person you take yourself to be is apparently performing.

Finally, because you are the “container” of everything that is and, for that matter, everything that is not as well, you are whole, complete and perfectly full. Though the apparent individual person with which you are identified and through the “scope” of which you are viewing the manifest universe in both its gross or “external” aspect and its subtle or “internal aspect has limited knowledge, limited will/desire, limited ability to act/accomplish and limited existence in terms of time and space, you as the pure awareness within which that apparent entity, not to mention the whole host of objective phenomena comprising the manifest universe or apparent reality is appearing, are limitless.

David: And that I am viewing the world from only one point (David) at only one time (now).

Ted: Yes, this is true. As just mentioned, this is because you, pure limitless awareness, have are associated with the *upadhi* of a particular mind-body-sense complex and due to this association, which is the condition for incarnating as an apparent individual person, you are apparently limited by the scope of that *upadhi*.

An *upadhi* is a limiting adjunct, or conditioning agent, that causes the thing it is conditioning to apparently take on its attributes. The classic example used to illustrate this phenomenon is that of a clear crystal taking on the red hue of a rose that is set next to it. James uses the example of water appearing to be green when seen through a green tinted glass in which it is contained. In both cases, the conditioned object, the crystal and the water have not actually taken on the color of the conditioning agent but they seem to have due to their proximity to that agent.

It is in this way that pure awareness seems to become a limited, independent person. Through its association with the mind-body-sense complex, pure limitless awareness assumes the limited capabilities, knowledge and vision of the mechanism. This is all fine and good in itself, no different, you might say, than an actor playing a role. The problem arises and suffering ensues when the actor no longer simply associates with the role but identifies with it. In other words, when you, pure limitless awareness, buy into the self-induced (ironically, *maya*, or ignorance, is a power in you, after all) ruse that you are a separate, small, limited, inadequate, incomplete, perhaps even sinful, little person, then you suffer. Due to your identification with the limited scope of the mechanism with which you have associated, you forget that you are the limitless awareness looking through that scope.

This last point is especially important. Many people believe that when they realize their true identity as limitless awareness they will suddenly become omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, that they will know everything, including the thoughts in other people’s minds, and will be able to do anything, even deeds that defy the physical laws governing the manifest universe. This is pure fantasy. The *upadhi* of the mind-body-sense complex with which you are associated will ever maintain its limited nature. And as long as you are associated with it in order to play the particular role a particular constellation of *vasanas* emanating from the vast reservoir of *vasanas* within your being requires in order to play out, you will be subject to those limitations. Though you are the awareness which “contains,” “surrounds” and “pervades” all that is, in fact,

simply put, is all that is through your association with the mind-body-sense complex, you seem to be separated or cut off from the rest of yourself or the entirety of your being. By analogy it is like the space within a pot thinking it is different than the space inhabited by and surrounding the pot. Space is limitless space no matter what obtains within it. It is not made of parts. There is no “this space” as opposed to “that space.” Space is space. Similarly, awareness is awareness. There is no “small, separate, individual awareness” as opposed to “big, inclusive, universal awareness” though it seems there is.

The bottom line is that through your association with the mind-body-sense complex referred to as “David” you are limited to the scope of “David’s” mechanism. You can know your true identity as limitless awareness but you will only experience “David’s” thoughts and emotions and you will only be capable of doing the deeds of which “David’s” mind and body are capable.

The freedom that is the goal of self-inquiry, i.e. *moksa*, is not a matter of being of the apparent individual being able to know everything and do anything. The freedom comes with the realization that as pure, limitless awareness one is not a knower or doer at all. The apparent individual person apparently knows things and does things. Or more accurately, the mind-body-sense mechanism manufactures sensations, emotions and thoughts, i.e. experience, when set into motion by awareness, i.e. you. You – pure, limitless awareness – are simply the illumining factor that enlivens the machine and the “light” in which the machine itself as well as all its products are known. Moreover, while all the objects and experiences, all the “products,” so to speak, depend upon you for their existence, you are self-illumining and thus ever free of all objective phenomena.

This you can see for yourself through a close analysis of your own experience. You can begin the analysis from the perspective of the apparent individual person you seem to be. Look to see if you have ever experienced or known anything outside your own awareness. Once you realize that you have not, the idea may arise that the apparent individual person you seem to be is the creator of the entire universe, that everything is only a projection of that particular person’s mind. But this is not how it is. Remember, you are not the person. You are awareness. Though you may not, cannot, know the contents of another apparent individual person’s mind due to your association with the mind of the apparent person you seem to be, you are nevertheless the awareness in which all minds, and by extension their contents, obtain.

This can be a bit tricky because we so closely associate, most often identify, with the mind. That is, we believe the mind is an essential part of us. The mind, however, is only an object within us that is, within awareness. What makes the circumstance even trickier to untangle is the fact that it is the mind that thinks, not awareness. Awareness simply is. Even though we sometimes call it the “supreme knower,” which is different from the “relative knower” who is the apparent individual person we take ourselves to be, such is only a term used to imply or indicate its nature due to the fact that no inherently limited word (for words can only denote definable objects) can accurately and comprehensively describe it. Because we take ourselves to be the knower, however, we think that knowing our true nature should give us access to all the knowing instruments, i.e. every apparent individual’s mind, at once. But this is not how it is. By analogy, though it is all-pervasive space, the space inside the pot can only know the contents of the pot.

Now because it is only the mind that thinks, when we say we know the self, or know our true identity as limitless awareness, it is not actually awareness registering the thought. The thought is a reflection of awareness appearing as a thought in the mind. Awareness “sees” or illumines

the thought but is not the thinker of the thought or the thought itself. The apparent individual person is the “thinker” or “relative knower” of the thought. That is, the thought, i.e. the knowledge or understanding, is exclusive to the mind of the particular apparent individual experiencing it. Any apparent individual’s realization of his or her true nature is thus known only to him or her. Were this not the case, one person’s realization would immediately cause the occurrence of self-realization in everyone.

The point is that the “patch” of awareness associated with a particular mind-body-sense complex is only going to “know” the experience of that particular mechanism. Thus the apparent individual who understands that he or she is actually limitless awareness, and thinks that he or she should therefore transcend the limitations of his or her own apparent individuality, is only an apparent individual due to those apparent limitations. When those limitations are transcended, as they are, for instance, in the state of deep sleep, the apparent individual ceases to experience himself or herself as such. The conscious recognition within the intellect of the apparent individual of his or her true identity as limitless awareness can therefore only occur through awareness’s association with a particular intellect, and thus no apparent individual will ever consciously transcend the limitations of its defining mind-body-sense complex and become experientially omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.

All this is to say that while you will know yourself to be limitless awareness, you will still experience “David” as a limited person.

David: Per Vedanta, self includes all points and all times.

Ted: Yes, all objects appear in you. Not David, of course, but you, pure awareness.

David: While I am a singular viewpoint, I am clearly not present to myself as that Self. I experience myself as a minute, located, part of the awareness of the cosmos.

Ted: Yes. As explained, this is because of the *upadhi*, or limiting adjunct, with which you, pure awareness, are associated as a condition of assuming the role of a human being.

David: Is there an experience of being all-self that has led Vedanta to assert that “I am all”? Or is there an argument for this?

Ted: We’ve covered the basic argument. All the *prakriyas*, or teaching methods, of Vedanta make the same essential argument that you are both whole and the whole, that you are pure, limitless, actionless awareness and through the irrefutable logic of *adhyaropa-apavada*, or the analytical methodology of superimposition and negation, they remove all possible limiting conditions and reveal your true identity. All the methods are variations of *atma-anatma-viveka*, or the discrimination between the self and the “not-self,” which is the essence of self-inquiry and the key to self-knowledge. The most famous of these methods of analysis are the discrimination between the seer and the seen, the analysis of the three states of experience, the analysis of the five sheaths and the discrimination between the cause and the effect. Each of these methods, as

well as several others, are described in detail in the “Knowledge Yoga” chapter in James’ book *How to Attain Enlightenment*.

Though you, the attributeless self, cannot be objectified, it cannot be known directly as one would know an object. However, its reflection can be “seen” in, or its limitless nature can be known or understood by, a pure, still mind. While this understanding spontaneously will dawn upon one through repeated exposure to, meditation upon and application of any of the teachings of Vedanta, one particular method that is highly effective in giving one a sense of his or her limitless, all-pervasive nature is the analysis of the “location of objects.” The basic logic of this analysis is laid out in James’ book in which he walks you through it, at some point, usually several times, in virtually every series of talks that are available at the ShiningWorld website. What the location of objects analysis reveals is that all the objective phenomena that seem to exist “outside” you are actually appearances within your mind and thus there is no separation between the objects and the mind. And since there is no separation between the mind and consciousness, there is actually no separation between the objects and you. The objects seem to be other than you when you adopt the mind- body-sense mechanism, or the apparent individual person you take yourself to be, as your reference point. But when you realize that even the person you take yourself to be, the whole complex of body, emotions and thoughts, is nothing more than an object appearing within you, pure awareness, then you “experience” or understand your all-pervasive, non- dual nature. And the best part is that when you “see” this, you no longer have to take it on faith. Despite all appearances, you know without a doubt that you are limitless. Thereafter, just as the image of a mirage continues to obtain even after you know it contains no water, so the apparently dualistic reality will continue to appear as it always has and you will continue to experience the limitations of the mind-body-sense complex in the same way as you always have. No longer will you think the apparent objects are separate from each other or from you, however, and no longer will you identify with the mind-body-sense complex even though you will remain associated with it.

The initial hurdle is getting over the idea that you are the apparent individual person you seem to be and ceasing to view things from that perspective.

The next hurdle is getting over the idea that you are going to experience all-pervasiveness, or non-duality, as you would an object. You will not ever experience all-pervasive awareness as an object because by its very nature it is non-objectifiable. It is subtler than all objects as well as the instrument of the mind with which they are perceived and by which they are known.

Ultimately, you will know limitless, all-pervasive awareness, i.e. recognize or “re-cognize” yourself, not as an object but as your own self-evident existence. Due to the limitations of the *upadhi* of the mind-body-sense complex, you are not going to know all the objects obtaining everywhere at once. That is the province of *Ishvara*, or God, i.e. the macrocosmic or total mind. You will simply know that your very nature is the “light” by which all objects are known and thus upon which all objects depend for their existence but whose own self-luminous nature ever “shines” independent of the presence or absence of objects.

In the simplest and most practical terms with regard to the experience of the apparent individual person, it is simply that by which you know what you know and know what you don’t know.

It seems to me that you “get it,” David. You just need to let go of that one last hankering for experiential enlightenment. Re-read the chapter on knowledge *yoga* in *How to Attain Enlightenment* and keep contemplating the logic. Eventually, it will produce a shift in your

perspective and you will see that you are not David looking at awareness or even attempting to look from the viewpoint of awareness but that you are awareness looking in at and having adopted the limited scope of David viewing the “surrounding” world from David’s perspective. Then you will “see” or know without the slightest doubt that everything is within the limitless awareness that you are.

David: Thanks, Ted!