

# Awareness Doesn't Happen

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**Robert:** Hi, Ted. Thank you for the very quick response. I live in South Wales, Great Britain. In relation to time I'm six hours ahead, so it was good to wake up this morning to an email from you which has answered a lot for me and provided a deep level of calmness and understanding, I guess is the only way to describe it!

I spent a good couple of hours reading your *satsangs* last night and they have really had a great impact on me, and they actually answered the questions regarding *vasanas* I had in the previous email. Although I've replied quickly this time I will take my time to study more, but I just felt compelled to write again.

Something I would like to ask though, as it does seem to be hindering my understanding of awareness. I have an intellectual understanding of awareness, that it has always been, that everything is happening "in" awareness, it is limitless and beyond attributes, and it simply IS. But I can't help but personalise the concept.

**Ted:** I understand, but there is nothing personal about awareness aside from the fact, of course, that it is you. But in that regard, awareness is not the apparent individual you, awareness, take yourself to be. You see, you, awareness, have fallen under the spell of your own deluding power of *maya*, or ignorance, and as a result have identified with the particular mind-body-sense complex referred to as Robert.

What happens is that for some unknown reason you, awareness, "wield" your power of ignorance on yourself. *Maya* (ignorance) has two powers: concealing and projecting. So when you cast the spell of ignorance on yourself, you forget your true identity as pure limitless awareness and you project the apparent reality (i.e. the manifest universe in both its subtle or "internal" and gross or "external" aspects) of names, forms and functions upon the "screen" of your being. Therefore you, awareness, are not really separate from any of the objective phenomena that you experience through your association with the mind-body-sense complex.

The mind-body-sense complex is simply a mechanism that allows awareness to transact within the context of the apparent reality. It is the vehicle through which the *vasanas* can express both in the form of thoughts and emotions within the mind and as actions through the gross body. It is essentially the machine that manufactures subjective experience.

In order to understand what I mean by this, you need to know that there are three "levels" of existence.

The "highest" level is that of pure, limitless awareness. At this level, nothing ever happens. There are no objects and thus no interactions and thus no experiences. As there is nothing other than awareness itself and awareness is not a happening, a point that we need to discuss in reference to some of the comments you make later in this email, no activity occurs. Awareness simply is. In Sanskrit this level of existence is called *paramarthika satyam*. It is the only level that we can refer to as real because it is the only level at which there is no change.

The next level is that of the empirical reality, the manifest universe. This level is what we often refer to as God's creation. It consists of all the seemingly separate tangible "outer" objects, including the body of the apparent individual one takes oneself to be, as well as all the subtle "inner" objects (i.e. thoughts and feelings) experienced by the apparent individual that constitute the "surrounding world" from the apparent individual's point of view. This is the arena in which all "worldly" transactions take place. It is characterized by limitation and changeability. Every object existing within its defining parameters of time and space has a limited shelf life and a limited range of power. In Sanskrit this level of existence is called *vyavaharika satyam*. This apparent reality is nothing more than an elaborate dream projected by the power of ignorance on the screen of pure awareness. Though pure awareness is attributeless, all-pervasive and perfectly full, thus incapable of action, when pure awareness "wields" its own inherent power of *maya* it assumes the role of *Isvara*, or God the Creator. Hence we say the manifest universe is *Isvara's* creation, which is referred to in Sanskrit as *Isvara shrishiti*.

With regard to the manifest universe being *Isvara's* creation, however, it is important to understand that *Isvara* is not a personal entity, or some grand grey-bearded cosmic king orchestrating events within his creation according to his own agenda. Though *Isvara* is personified as a benevolent entity watching out over the universe, the reality is that *Isvara* is simply a name we give to the universal, impersonal, inviolable set of physical, psychological and ethical laws that govern the cause-and-effect operation of the apparent reality. *Isvara* is essentially the *dharma* (collection of universal laws) that governs the *karma* (action) that takes place in the world. Contained within the physical laws of the universe are the blueprints, so to speak, for all the objects, both gross and subtle, that exist within its realm. These blueprints are basically *Isvara's* *vasanas*. In this context, we can think of *vasanas* as ideas for creation. And since ideas are essentially the foundation of desires (i.e. even at the individual level desire is rooted in our ideas of how things should be or how we would like them to be), we might say that the manifest universe is the outpicturing of *Isvara's* desire. Moreover, *Isvara* is both the totality of the creation itself and each seemingly discrete aspect existing within it. In other words, *Isvara* is at once both the universal and individual aspects of the apparent reality.

Be that as it may, *Isvara's* creation is quite obviously not under the control of the apparent individual. The apparent individual exists within the manifest universe and his life is governed by its laws of operation. Though pure awareness is beyond all limiting factors, when it pulls the wool over its own eyes, so to speak, and assumes association with a particular mind-body-sense complex it also assumes the limited scope of knowledge, presence and capability of that mechanism. In reality, pure awareness never loses its limitless nature, but in order to assume the role of an apparent individual within the context of *Isvara's* creation it seemingly forgets or "pretends" to forget its true nature and subjects itself to the limitations imposed upon it by *Isvara*, which is actually itself. All in all, it is simply one grand game of make-believe.

The fundamental existential problem, i.e. suffering, arises when having forgotten its true nature awareness identifies with the mind-body-sense complex with which it is merely associated and takes the apparent person it appears as to be real, assumes the experiences (i.e. the interactions, sensations, emotions and thoughts) generated by the mind-body-sense mechanism to be its own and believes that it can actually be enhanced or diminished, helped or hindered, strengthened or weakened, improved or worsened, etc. by these experiences. This erroneous notion is the root cause of all the desires and fears that mire one in a perpetual feeling of existential angst and compel him to pursue objects that he hopes will complete him.

The final level of existence is that of the *jiva*, the apparent individual person. In Sanskrit this level of existence is called *pratibhasika satyam*. This level is the apparent individual's interpretation of *Isvara's* creation, which essentially determines the apparent individual's experience. It is based on the *vasanas*, the likes and dislikes, associated with and expressing through the mind-body-sense complex of that particular person. Outside of a few universal ethical values, all of which essentially boil down to the principle of non-injury, the manifest universe is value-neutral. No object within it is inherently good or bad, no experience intrinsically right or wrong. The judgment imposed on any object or experience is subjectively determined by each individual with regard to how it accords with his *vasana*-influenced values and goals. This superimposed interpretation of *Isvara shrishti* is referred to as *jiva shrishti*, or the individual's creation.

Thus Vedanta's assertion that the entire universe is a projection of the self does not amount to solipsism, i.e. the idea that the universe is nothing more than a projection of the individual's mind. Rather, awareness assuming the role of *Isvara*, who enjoys universal knowledge, will and power, creates one "level" of the grand dream of existence, and awareness having associated with a particular *jiva*, who enjoys limited knowledge, will and power, creates another.

Having said all that, you might now be able to understand the "hows and whys" of the impersonal nature of awareness, which is your own impersonal nature as awareness. In order to more fully assimilate the impersonal nature of your own being, which you say is now simply an intellectual understanding, you might engage in the following contemplation. You say that you know that awareness always is and that everything is happening within awareness. The validity of this statement can be verified by an examination of your own experience.

Look to see if you can find a beginning to yourself. It is true that the body began at a certain point and that the thoughts and feelings you identify as yours arise and subside within the scope of your being. But when exactly did you begin? This is a trick question in the sense that in order for you to say that you began at any given point you would've had to have been there prior to that point to identify it as the point at which you began. Thus, you, awareness, did not actually begin at that point. ☺ The point is that if you earnestly look and honestly assess what you find, you will find that you cannot find a point at which you began. In short, you can't find a point at which you began because there is no such point. You, awareness, always were, are and will be, not that you, limitless awareness, can be measured in terms of time.

Now take a look at the experiences taking place within the scope of your being. Having already established that you are not the apparent person you seem to be, "take a step back," so to speak, and adopt the broader perspective of pure, limitless awareness. From this perspective, you can see that the manifest universe, including the body of the apparent individual you take yourself to be, appears within the scope of your being. This seems weird at first, I know, because we are so conditioned to believing that we are looking out from behind the eyes of the apparent person we think we are. It may help if you can think of yourself as someone watching the movie of "worldly life" and through the technological miracle of *maya*-vision you are able to see everything from perspective of the main character, the apparent individual you seem to be, as if you were situated within him. If you contemplate this circumstance carefully, you will "see" that all the images and sensations, even those subtle thoughts and feelings that seem to occur "within" the apparent person, are actually appearing "before" or "within" you, awareness. You are the eternal subject, the seer. And one of the principle truths of existence within the apparent reality is that the seer can never be the seen, the subject can never be the object. Yes, you can see "your" body and "your mind" but we have already determined that those objects are not you. You are the non-

objectifiable, attributeless, limitless awareness in which all objects appear.

But don't take my word for it. Look and see for yourself if this isn't true. Once you see this truth for yourself, you no longer have to buy the line Vedanta is pitching. Once you see your true nature, you will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you are beyond all objects and untouched by all experience. Once you see, you are free.

**Robert:** It's difficult to explain, but I sometimes just know it, that it simply is, but other times I see it as a "thing" that shines its light on all things. I guess I'm still not seeing the full non-duality. Am I right in thinking that, putting it very crudely, awareness isn't there in the background watching creation/apparent reality, and when something is born it says, "Right, I have to put some awareness in that body!"

**Ted:** As previously mentioned, awareness is neither a doer nor does it have an agenda.

**Robert:** Instead, as everything exists in awareness, awareness is also happening at that time...

**Ted:** No, awareness is not something that happens. Awareness is.

This "is-ness" is not something that awareness does. Existence is simply the nature of awareness. If existence was an action that awareness executed, then awareness would eventually and inevitably end because all actions are inherently limited. The defining characteristics of action are that it begins, transpires and ends. Our direct observation or inference of this process is the only means by which action can be determined to have taken place. But we have already determined that you, awareness, don't begin. And since you don't begin you can't very well continue and then ultimately end. And even if you could, who would be the one observing this process? Would that observer be someone other than you? If so, how would you know? You see, honest inquiry into the experience you assume to be your own inevitably reveals the underlying reality, you/awareness, in which all such experience appears.

So awareness doesn't happen with experience. It is the "container" of all experience, though "container" is a bad word to use since limitless awareness has no outer "shell," so to speak. As you stated earlier, awareness is simply the eternal "light" by means of which all objects and experiences are known. However, it must be understood that shining is not an action that awareness performs. Shining is not something awareness does, but rather is a word that implies what awareness is.

**Robert:** ...it all happens in that given moment, awareness isn't waiting for it to happen. Awareness, action, all happens simultaneously.

**Ted:** As previously explained, awareness doesn't happen. Neither is it an entity that could be "waiting for it (experience? awareness? shining?) to happen." Awareness is. So being, it is the arena in which action occurs. Awareness doesn't happen simultaneously with experience, not only because it isn't a happening, but also because awareness exists "prior to" any and all

experience. It is the *adhishtanam*, or substratum, of all objects and experiences. It is their support. It is the limitless existence or “is-ness” upon which all objects depend for their apparent existence, but which itself is entirely independent of all objects. In other words, whether objects appear or do not appear – think of the deep sleep state, for example – awareness always is.

**Robert:** So as I try and “look” for awareness, it can’t be grasped...

**Ted:** True. Awareness is subtler than the means of knowledge that human beings have been endowed with. Because awareness is attributeless (limitlessness precludes any definable qualities, characteristics or attributes), it cannot be objectified. However, both direct perception and inference, the two basic means of knowledge available to human beings, only work in reference to objects. Thus pure awareness cannot be seen or otherwise experienced directly. The best we can do is experience or “see” the reflection of awareness in a pure mind. Hence as we discussed in your previous email, the reason *yoga*, or spiritual practices intended to purify the mind by neutralizing the binding *vasanas* that cause it agitation and extrovert its attention, are so important.

**Robert:** ...it’s just happening at this very moment because it is what I truly am.

**Ted:** ...awareness ain’t happening but, yes, it is who you truly are.

**Robert:** But I can’t feel it, or even sense it, I just am it!

**Ted:** Yes, awareness, i.e. you, knows itself simply by virtue of being itself. In other words, you know yourself because you are yourself.

Again, contemplate this matter. Do you need any proof that you exist? No, you know that you exist because your existence is self-evident. If you were to be doubting that you exist, who is it that would be doubting? Or more to the point, to whom would such doubts be known? In what “light” would such doubt appear? Thus it is not that you don’t know you exist. You are simply ignorant of the true nature of your existence. You think you are the apparent individual with whom you, awareness, have apparently identified when in reality you are the limitless awareness in which that particular individual, as well as the entire manifest universe, appears.

And in anticipation of the next question that always arises, which is “If I am limitless awareness, how come I don’t know what other people are thinking and can’t do everything and am not everywhere at once?,” let me add that the only reason you don’t experience your limitless nature is due to the limitations you have assumed through your association with the *upadhi*, or limiting adjunct/conditioning agent, of the mind-body-sense complex of the particular apparent individual person you seem to be. In other words, in order to play the role of an apparent individual, you have to temporarily forfeit the full scope of limitless awareness in order to see and experience things as an individual. In fact, given the fact that you are limitless, non-objectifiable awareness, the only way of experiencing things is by means of the mind-body-sense mechanism. You, awareness, don’t have a mind and body that processes experience. You simply are. As we have

previously established, you don't need a mind or body to experience yourself. But you do need this equipment to experience the apparent world of objects. Hence in order to experience yourself as objects you enliven the mind-body-sense mechanism and set it into motion manufacturing/processing experience.

It is for this reason that no individual will ever experience the omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence of *Ishvara* nor the limitless scope of pure awareness. Experience can only be had by a limited individual, and a limited individual can only experience limited objects. When the individual, i.e. the subtle body, which is basically what constitutes the experiencer we take ourselves to be as an individual, has resolved into the causal body during deep sleep, the "experience" of limitless is had. But it isn't exactly the individual who experiences it. Moreover, since the intellect is in a state of dormancy, there is no knowledge gleaned from the experience. Hence when the intellect resumes functioning upon waking up, the individual is just as ignorant about his true nature as before he went to sleep.

The bottom line is that experience is only worth the knowledge that is gained from it. *Moksha*, liberation, ultimate inner freedom, is for the intellect. Awareness already knows who it is. It is only the apparent individual who needs to understand his true nature. When the apparent individual knows that he is really limitless awareness and that as such he is eternal and inviolable, that nothing can enhance or diminish his essential being in the least, and that his very own nature is permanent peace and happiness, then he is free to enjoy the world without forever vainly attempting to squeeze a few drops of temporary joy from its various fruits.

**Robert:** Ha, ha, I seem to have gone off on a rant. I do apologise and hope this makes sense!

**Ted:** I followed the argument but, as I hope you now see, it didn't make sense. ☺

**Robert:** Many thanks. Great website, by the way!

**Ted:** Thanks again for your kind words, Robert. And please feel free to contact me if further questions arise.

~ Love, Ted