

Awareness, the Knower and the Known

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Elmore: Hi. I have some questions related to the subjects of awareness, knower and known:

1. Awareness knows itself. Awareness does not need mind to know itself. How does awareness know itself?

Ted: Awareness knows itself by virtue of being itself. That is to say that awareness is knowledge, the knowing principle, the consciousness that “lights up” the mind and makes knowing possible.

When we say that awareness knows itself, we do not mean that awareness knows itself in the same sense that the mind knows objects. Since awareness is both attributeless and non-dual, it is inherently non-objectifiable. Moreover, awareness is not an entity endowed with a mind conditioned by an ego, or sense of individual “I-ness,” by means of which it distinguishes itself as a unique object that can be known. Therefore since it has neither a mind nor any delineable boundaries or characteristics, awareness cannot recognize itself as an object.

The nature of awareness is indicated as *sat-chit*. *Sat* means “existence,” “being,” or “is-ness.” *Chit* means “consciousness.” *Sat-chit* therefore means “conscious existence” or “conscious being.” Though consciousness might at first appear to be a descriptive adjective, such is not the case. Existence and consciousness are synonyms. Existence implies consciousness, for the existence of any object can only be established by means of its appearance within the “field” of consciousness, whether it be an already-known object or a phenomenon as yet undiscovered and unnamed, and consciousness implies existence, for that which is conscious obviously exists.

While there are existent objects that are not themselves conscious, such as rocks, minerals and metals, these objects do exist within the context of universal conscious existence. They simply have no subtle body, and thus no “reflective” capacity by means of which consciousness can manifest (i.e. find expression through the thoughts, feelings and/or physical actions of a sentient *jiva*, or individual living being).

Elmore: 2. Awareness is not the knower of objects, and it is mind and intellect that is knower of the objects? And the objects are known by our mind and intellect.

Ted: Yes, that is correct. Just as the physical body is a mechanism composed of gross matter, the *antahkarana*, or mind, is simply a mechanism composed of subtle matter. It is designed to perceive objects, process thoughts and feelings, make decisions and initiate actions. Awareness is the “light” that illumines the mind and intellect, and thereby enables the mechanism of the mind to carry out its various functions, all of which are aspects of knowing. Thus we might say that the mind is the knower, while awareness is the conscious principle (i.e. knowledge as such) that makes knowing possible.

Elmore: 3. Who is the knower of the void? Only awareness?

Ted: Yes, though actually there is no void as such. Technically, a void is “nothingness,” which implies total absence or emptiness. However, there is no such thing as nothing, for awareness is eternally existent.

What we call “the void” is simply the absence of *vrittis*, mental modifications, or thought-waves, arising in the mind. Awareness shines, but no discrete objects are available for illumination. Or we might say that the void is the reflection of unmodified awareness appearing in the mind, and is thus an object itself, albeit an extremely subtle one. In any case, the void is known. And in the absence of the relative knower-subject (i.e. the apparent individual person), the “knower” can only be pure awareness.

Elmore: 4. Who is the knower of the creation of the universe? Is it only *Isvara*?

Ted: Yes. Understand, however, that *Isvara* is not an entity like a person. Though *Isvara* is sometimes referred to as *uttama purusha*, the universal person, such is only a figurative reference. There is no big person in some celestial realm who is orchestrating the creation of the universe and governing it according to some personal agenda. *Isvara* is simply a figurative personification of *dharma*, the universal set of physical, psychological and ethical laws that govern the *karma*, the operation, of the universe.

When pure awareness is apparently conditioned by *maya*, the *sattvic* aspect of subtle matter, it is rendered omniscient and omnipotent, all-knowing and all-powerful. Thus pure awareness “becomes” *Isvara*, or God the Creator, the reservoir of the entire body of knowledge that underlies all the objective phenomena that comprise the manifest universe.

Elmore: Best regards.

Ted: *Namaste*.