

Body-Mind Hijacker

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Burton: Ted, when I realize my true nature and I see the body-mind acting according to the three *gunas*, especially in the quiet mornings before I have to go out, I see the body-mind as a type of hijacker because it thinks it's of its own making.

Ted: Good discrimination, Burton. You're right on the mark. By "body-mind" I'm gathering that you are indicating the ego – that is, the sense or belief that "I am the body-mind-sense complex." As your words accurately indicate, the ego is nothing more than a thought. The Sanskrit term for the ego is *ahamkara*, that which makes (*kara*, which is derived from the word *karana*, or "cause") the "I am" (*aham*).

The body-mind-sense complex is simply an object projected by *maya* within the "field" of pure awareness (i.e. limitless conscious existence). Thus, as an object, the body-mind-sense complex does exist. However, it is not who I am; it is not my true identity. I take myself to be the body-mind-sense complex only because the thought that I am such arises in the mind. This thought is what we might call one of *maya*'s fundamental tricks. It is essentially what constitutes *avidya*, self-ignorance.

Maya is the power inherent in pure awareness to project the vast array of objective phenomena – both gross and subtle – that constitute the manifest universe in both its "inner" and "outer" aspects. *Avidya*, self-ignorance, is the affect of *maya* on the mind of the *jiva*, the apparent individual. *Maya* projects the world because that's what *maya* does. And there is no fundamental problem with the fact of this projection. The problem of suffering only arises due to the affect of *avidya*. *Avidya* causes me – pure awareness – to take the world to be real and to take myself to be the body-mind-sense complex with which I'm associated. Thus it is not association but identification that is the problem.

When the mind is able to recognize the ego as a pseudo-identity due to association, the ego doesn't cause suffering, but instead serves its purpose as the navigational tool that enables the body-mind-sense complex to interact with the world and the apparent person to have experiences. When the mind is under the spell of *avidya*, however, and takes the ego – the I-thought that claims identification as the body-mind-sense complex – seriously, then the apparent person believes himself to be an incomplete and inadequate individual, and suffering ensues.

The whole point of self-inquiry is to make this discrimination and thereby free oneself not of the ego per se, but the deleterious affects of taking it to be real.

Burton: Awareness is lighting it up, even though it doesn't really know it, and says, "Ha! I'm alive and I am that."

Ted: I'm assuming that the phrase "it doesn't know it" refers to the mind-body not knowing that awareness is lighting it up and is not meant to indicate that awareness doesn't know it is lighting

up the mind-body, but is claiming itself to be alive. I only make this clarification because it is important to know that awareness doesn't know or claim anything. Awareness is not a personal entity with a mind that knows; awareness is wholly beyond experience. Even the "lighting it up" (i.e. illumining) that we attribute to awareness is only to be taken figuratively. Illumining is simply another means of indicating that awareness is intelligence-as-such and is the factor that lends sentiency to those entities that possess a subtle body and, moreover, is the "field of consciousness" in which all objective phenomena exist. Thus illumining is not an action performed by awareness, but rather the essential nature of awareness.

It is important to understand this subtle distinction because one of the final sticking points for most people is the sense that awareness is a knower in the same sense that we think of the mind as being a knower. Though awareness is often referred to as "the knower," this reference should be understood to indicate that it is what we might call the "knowing principle" (i.e. consciousness) that makes knowing possible – that is, that lends the mind sentiency and thereby enables it to perform the functions we call thinking and knowing. When one understands that just as the light illumining the objects and events in a room remains totally unaffected by the character of those objects and events, so the "light" of awareness illumining the mind remains totally unaffected by the character of the objects arising within the mind, then one is free.

Burton: It doesn't know it's trying to claim possession of something it already is.

Ted: Exactly. This *avidya*, self-ignorance, is the effect of *avaruna shakti*, *maya's* power of concealment or obscuration. Once *avaruna shakti* has obscured the mind's appreciation of its true nature, then *vikshepa shakti*, *maya's* projecting power, is able to cast all manner of objects on the three-dimensional "screen" of consciousness, which are in turn taken to be real. This is the opening of Pandora's Box that produces all our problems.

Burton: At least that is what I see during the quiet times. Awareness of my true nature comes and goes. It is not always as obvious when I'm out working in the world engaged in the labors of providing. Know what I mean?

Ted: Yep. That's why we say that the price of freedom is constant vigilance. Keep up the good work, my friend.