

Clarification Concerning the Nature of Consciousness

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1997>

Steven: So waking consciousness is an experiential state in which one perceives apparently real, forever-changing objects, subtle and gross, made evident by reflected consciousness?

Ted: Yes.

Steven: And pure awareness is the unchanging mirror “in which its reflection shines”?

I don't get this last point, Ted.

Ted: It is a bit confusing because usually the mirror in this analogy represents the subtle body, or mind, in which the reflection of pure awareness in the form of objects is seen. In this context, even the mirror is simply another object appearing within the scope of pure awareness.

In my explanation, I used the mirror to represent pure awareness simply to illustrate the point that awareness is the unchanging “arena” or “field” in which all objects appear or the immutable “screen” on which the movie of the manifest universe (i.e. the apparent reality) is projected.

In any case, awareness is the non-objectifiable, ever-present, all-pervasive, unchanging substratum that supports all objective phenomena and yet remains completely independent of such. In other words, while all objects are essentially nothing other than awareness, and thus are entirely dependent on awareness for their existence, awareness itself is self-luminous, and thus exists whether objects appear or do not appear within the scope of its being.

Steven: Just sitting here I can watch/experience my thoughts, emotions, actions, body, external objects... and thereby know my “self” is not these things. I can visualize this “self” as a screen with all these objects in it, meaning I am the screen. This is relatively easy for me to do, and is particularly easy when I meditate. (However, it is difficult to envision the screen as infinite.) Is what I consider to be my “self” here just reflected consciousness, even when meditating, or is it the “Self”?

Ted: The meditator is reflected awareness in the form of the apparent individual person referred to as Steven. That which is “witnessing” Steven meditate is the self, awareness, you. In other words, the “I” who is meditating is reflected awareness, while the “light” in which the act of meditation is taking place is pure awareness, which is the self, or the real you.

To put it simply, you will never “see” yourself. You are “vision” itself, so to speak. The sense you have of being the infinite “screen” on which all objects appear is what is called the *akhandakara vritti*, the “thought of limitlessness.” It is the subtlest thought-wave possible and appears in a mind that is sufficiently purified of agitating and extroverting desires (i.e. binding *vasanas*) to

consciously bear the semblance of limitlessness. Though it is still only a reflection of pure awareness, this “intuitive” understanding is the closest the mind can come to an experience or vision of the self.

Steven: Of course most of the time I “become” the thoughts, emotions, body, etc., i.e. get lost in them, when not contemplating it. In other words, I identify with “things.”

Ted: This is what happens as a result of *avidya*, personal ignorance. Keep meditating. Keep contemplating the “screen” of the self. One day you will “see” (i.e. realize, or understand) that you are the infinite “screen” of being and that your true nature is limitless awareness in whose “light” all objects are known.

In this sense you are the “knower,” so to speak. But this “knower” is not the relative subject (i.e. apparent individual person referred to as Steven) that knows objects. Rather this “knower” is the pure awareness that, to broaden your analogy, is the impersonal “screen” within the scope of which the holographic projection of the manifest universe in both its subtle/“internal” and gross/“external” aspects appears and yet which is entirely independent of the both the appearance and non-appearance of objective phenomena.

Simply put, you are pure awareness, and anything and everything that appears within or is known to you is nothing more than reflected awareness. All objective phenomena are made of, arise out of, abide within and subside back into you, but you are no particular objective phenomenon nor event, the collective whole of all objective phenomena in the sense that no discrete form, which by definition has identifiable boundaries and is thus limited, can comprehensively define, describe or delineate that which is limitless.