

# Confusing Mind and Consciousness

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**Enrique:** Hi. I have a question about the definition of mind and consciousness.

In my dialogues with people, they seem to be mixing the definitions of mind and consciousness as if they are the same. Vedanta is very clear about the difference.

What are the main reasons for the confusion in the West about the definitions of mind and consciousness?

~ Best regards, Enrique

**Ted:** Hi, Enrique.

The reason for the confusion about the difference between the mind and consciousness in the West is that Western psychology has equated consciousness with what Vedanta refers to as the “subtle body” rather than understanding it as the pure “light” of awareness that illumines the mind, and thus enables it to be conscious of objects.

According to Vedanta, the mind itself is not conscious. Just as the brain, which is the “hardware” through which the functions of the mind are conducted, is a part of the physical body and is composed of gross matter, the *antahkarana*, or “inner instrument,” which is the technical name for the group of functions referred to generally as the mind, constitutes the subtle body and is composed of inert subtle matter. Strange as it may seem, the mind does not think on its own. The mind is nothing more than a subtle machine capable of carrying out its designed function of generating thoughts when it is illumined by consciousness.

Though the subtle body, or mind, is a singular entity, for the purposes of analysis and understanding it is divided into four functional parts. *Manas*, or mind (not to be confused with the more general use of the term “mind” to indicate the composite functions of *antahkarana*), is the non-discriminating mind and is responsible for the functions of perception, integration of sensory stimuli into a coherent whole (i.e. rendering the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, gustatory and olfactory data into a singular experience), doubt (i.e. wondering how to respond to the objects it encounters by means of the perceptive organs) and emotion. *Buddhi*, or intellect, is the discriminating mind that also perceives, and in addition is responsible for deliberating over the sense data with which it has been provided, determining the identity and nature of the perceived object, deciding how to respond to it and providing direction to the mind concerning what action should be taken. *Chitta*, or memory, is the storehouse of impressions gathered from past experience, and is responsible for establishing the sense of there being a continuous stream of experience or a biographical timeline that constitutes the individual’s lifetime. *Ahamkara*, or ego, is the I-sense that is responsible for the apparent person’s sense of being a separate, limited, independently-existent, volitional entity.

The subtle body is a “reflective” substance, or a manifesting medium, for pure consciousness. Thus when illumined by consciousness the subtle body is rendered sentient, or becomes

enlivened, as it were, and in its association with the gross body assumes the identity of the apparent individual person who serves as the relative knower within the dualistic context of the apparent reality. In other words, the subtle body, or mind, becomes the knowing subject in relation to known objects.

Failing to have understood that the mind is actually nothing more than inert subtle matter, the West has further failed to distinguish between the functions of the mind and the illumining nature of pure awareness. Consequently consciousness and the mind have become fused into a single entity referred to as the conscious mind, or conscious person. It is quite clear, however, that these two – consciousness and the mind – are not the same, for even in the absence of the mind (i.e. the function of relative knowing) in such states as deep sleep and *nirvikalpa samadhi*, or thought-free meditation, consciousness doesn't cease to exist. If it did, one would neither awaken – for something can't come out of nothing, and if consciousness were to have ceased to exist it would have by definition dissipated into nothing – nor remember that one had slept soundly – for one can only remember something that one has previously experienced.

I hope that clarifies the issue.

~ All the best, Ted