

# Distinguishing Between the Self and the Subtle Body

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**Radha:** Dear Ted, how are things with you back in Minnesota and at school? I was wondering how the whole India experience was for you? India is usually a strong experience (either way!) for the first time, but maybe you don't have strong experiences anymore... I wonder...

**Ted:** Minnesota is fine, but India is divine. It was indeed a very strong experience. I could have stayed there for good. There is something about the energy of the place – the deep-rooted *bhakti* – that I really resonated with. I definitely plan on returning to India as soon as possible.

**Radha:** Thank you so much for more clarification on the delimitation theory/explanation. Again – very clear and much appreciated. My mind was so *tamasic* that day – I think I still have issues! I think it was the same day that you mentioned the “difference” between *brahman* and *atma* that is, I believe you said, that *atma* is the portion of awareness associated with the body-mind/sense complex. That really threw me, and then the delimitation thing even more. I just don't get how you can differentiate between *brahman* and *atma* when both are *satya*/non-dual.

**Ted:** There is no difference between *brahman* and *atman*. Just as the wave and the water are one and the same, so are *atman* and *brahman*.

**Radha:** I know you said a portion of awareness is not the same as a part of awareness, but “portion” does suggest some differentiation/delimitation, as does the pots/space analogy.

So is the delimitation explanation suggesting that awareness LOOKS like it's confined to the body-mind/sense complex as in pot-space but actually isn't, because there is only one undifferentiated space, i.e. it looks like I am the “indweller” as mentioned in the beginning of Chapter II in the *Gita*?

**Ted:** Yes. Regarding the pot-space analogy, bear in mind that the space inside the pot, the space the form of the pot occupies, and the space surrounding the pot are one and the same space. Only for the purpose of analysis or speaking of awareness as that which illumines the body-mind/sense complex do we use the terms *atman* and *brahman*. Both are undifferentiated awareness.

**Radha:** But isn't that confusing awareness with the subtle body, which of course is also awareness, but due to *maya*, has an apparent form and function such that the subtle body processes all the data/*jagat* (*jagat* being also awareness, under the influence of its own inherent power, *maya*), so it looks as if I am on the inside looking out?

**Ted:** *Atma* isn't doing any looking. *Atma* – the self – is not the subtle body (other than from the ultimate perspective in which everything is understood as nothing other than awareness). *Atma* is the “light” that illumines the mind/subtle body, and thus enables it to carry out the function of looking, seeing, processing data and so forth.

**Radha:** And the subtle body, being very *sattvic*, feels like the *jiva* is conscious, as the subtle body reflects awareness to a high degree? (Is that the reflection explanation?)

**Ted:** *Ahamkara*, the ego, is the thought in the intellect – which is of course part of the subtle body – that claims ownership, doership and enjoyership for itself. Hence when the subtle body is illumined by awareness, the ego says, “I am a conscious being.”

The sense of being a conscious entity is a consequence of *pratibimba vada*, the reflection explanation, but is not the same as the explanation itself. The reflection explanation is simply saying that, figuratively speaking, the subtle body/mind is a reflective instrument that is able to shine the “light” of consciousness on objects and make them known. Another way of putting it is that the subtle body/mind is a vehicle for consciousness. Consciousness itself cannot think, but when it illumines a mind that can “conduct” it or can act as a manifesting medium for sentiency, it lends that mind/vehicle/manifesting medium sentiency (i.e. makes it conscious), and thus enables it to carry out the functions that we call thinking.

**Radha:** But we are talking about appearances here, so how can *atma* be an appearance when the apparent reality is all *anatma*?

**Ted:** *Atma* is not an appearance (i.e. not an object), but rather undifferentiated awareness. The subtle body is differentiated awareness – that is, it is an object in awareness. *Atman* is simply the term we use to indicate awareness as that which illumines the subtle body. The point of using the term is simply to indicate that the awareness illumining the body-mind/sense complex, which everyone tends to think of as “my” awareness, is no different than the awareness within the scope of which all objects obtain and which is itself independently existent.

**Radha:** It only looks like awareness is delimited by the body-mind/sense complex or like there is a portion of *brahman* associated with a *jiva*?

**Ted:** Yes.

**Radha:** If undifferentiated non-dual awareness was actually apportioned to each *jiva*, then... and this is a long-time sticking point for me... then wouldn't we know each other's thoughts and sensations? I think Ramji says you can't really separate pure awareness from reflected awareness in the subtle body (which makes sense in a non-dual reality), so in that way, I guess, awareness/*atma* IS “in” the subtle body, but there would have to have been some apparent modification to create the *upadhi* or else wouldn't *jivas* be omniscient? So again, how can *atma* be in the order of *mithya/anatma*?

**Ted:** You understand it correctly. *Atma* is not *mithya*.

The *upadhi* of the mind-body/sense complex creates the appearance of an apparent individual entity within the unbroken “field” of awareness. And one of the conditions of the *upadhi* of the subtle body, which is associated with a particular gross body, is that it has a limited range of experience. Thus any particular mind can only know those objects that fall within its range of perception, emotion and cognition. The awareness that illumines the mind is not limited, but the mind’s scope of experience is.

**Radha:** Also, I wanted to check that awareness is not spatial, is it? It is all-pervasive, like space in that it is the substrate of all the forms – but the forms aren’t actually “in” awareness, are they?

**Ted:** Awareness is limitless, entirely beyond the parameters of space and time.

Moreover, awareness is the substrate of all forms. Thus, as you suggest, forms are technically not “in” awareness, but rather “are” awareness. In this sense *avaccheda vada*, the delimitation theory, is most accurately expressed through the wave-water analogy. Whereas in the pot-space analogy the pot is made of a different substance than space, in the wave-water analogy the wave is a form of water. This more accurately reflects the non-dual nature of reality.

The non-duality of awareness is established by the fact that consciousness and existence are inseparable and irreducible aspects of the fundamental reality. There are several factors that attest to this truth. First of all, the existence of any object can only be verified by means of awareness, and anything that is aware must exist. Second, all objects are necessarily conditioned by the parameters of time and space, which are themselves objects in awareness, and thus no object can exist outside a field of conscious existence. Third, consciousness obviously exists, and since something can’t come out of nothing, existence itself must be intrinsically conscious. Fourth, since all existent objects must necessarily fall within its scope of being, conscious existence must itself be “beyond” all parameters, and therefore must be limitless.

Given the fact that limitless conscious existence is non-dual, there is no second source upon which it could draw for the material with which to create the objects of the manifestation. Therefore consciousness/awareness must be not only the “field” of existence in which objects obtain and the “light” of awareness in which object are known, but also the material of which all objects are made.

**Radha:** I guess all analogies are going to fall short – like fingers pointing to the moon – as how do you convey something that is without qualities?

**Ted:** Yes. All analogies fall short. If the analogy actually correlated comprehensively with the things (or “thing” in this case) to which it was pointing, it would cease to be an analogy and would instead be the thing itself.

**Radha:** But could you say that there is a temporal aspect to the space/pots analogy in that it suggests simultaneity, which I think is helpful. I mean, awareness is simultaneously (under the influence of its own *shakti, maya*), lending sentiency/existence to all the forms in creation. I don't know whether this is correct, but I think of it like it's in awareness's/my nature to simultaneously/instantaneously lend sentiency/existence to all the apparent forms/*upadhis*, and due to the conditioning effect of subtle body *upadhis* – it looks to zillions of *jivas* like the conscious “I” is within the individual body-mind/sense complex – like there is a portion of awareness associated with each *jiva*, corresponding to the definition you gave of *atma*. But in reality/*satya*, there is no differentiation – there is one awareness/me that due to *maya* can simultaneously enliven all the forms. It's perhaps a confusion for me between the *upadhi* “I” and the real “I,” which cannot by its nature be differentiated or apportioned and is simultaneously taking on infinite apparent forms.

**Ted:** Yes. To be precise, it's technically not *maya* that enables limitless conscious existence (i.e. awareness) to enliven all forms. Limitless conscious existence is self-luminous and shines independently of *maya*'s influence. *Maya* is the factor that makes awareness appear to be something it's not (i.e. the innumerable forms – both subtle and gross – that comprise the manifestation), to appear to be something other than undifferentiated consciousness. Other than that detail, your understanding is correct.

**Radha:** Sorry to go a little round the houses, I am also trying to check my understanding of related concepts.

I'm really grateful for this interaction.

~ Lots of love, Radha

**Ted:** Much love to you as well.