

No NDEs for Non-Dual Awareness

Ted Schmidt

2013-08-14

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1220>

Marlon: Hi, Ted. I've been reflecting on what you sent me. It's very convincing – as is most of Vedanta. I'm new to it but I did become acquainted with the *Bhagavad Gita* a long time ago when I was in my teens. Somehow I was drawn to this study once again.

So of course I understand that I am not Marlon the personality mind-body-sense complex that you describe, if only intellectually. I know this is not enough, or else why would I be searching or questioning still after all these years? ☺

Please bear with me on the following and give me a chance to show my ignorance, if that's what it is.

What I wanted to ask Ram or bring up in the *satsang* was more along the lines of us being energetic beings and being able to remember past lives.

Ted: I'll give you that “we” as apparent individuals are energetic beings, but you as pure awareness are not an energetic being. All energy as well as anything apparently composed of it is simply an object in awareness.

Marlon: Is this something that you think is hocus pocus, and that people that get zapped with an extra jolt of electricity around the time of trauma and go through an NDE are hallucinating? Is *maya* playing with them?

Ted: No one is getting zapped with anything. Getting zapped implies the reality of both a zapper and a zappee. But since reality is non-dual there is, fundamentally speaking, no such separation. There is an apparent separation, which is related to the hocus-pocus you mention and the notion that *maya* (ignorance) is playing around with us. Though ignorance is not actually a volitional entity, in the present context of our discussion we'll speak of it as such and say that yes, indeed *maya* is playing around with all of us. Vedanta defines *maya* as that power “which makes the impossible possible.” The magic spell she casts or the hocus-pocus she works makes non-dual awareness appear as the vast array of gross and subtle objects that comprise the “inner” and “outer” worlds of existence. Moreover, by means of this magical ignorance limitless awareness appears to forget its true nature and identify with myriad mind-body-sense complexes through which it experiences, though it is technically not an experiencer, life as an apparent individual.

Now, within this apparent reality, the dualistic field of experience, which comprises all that appears as and in both the “inner” and “outer” worlds, any and all experiences are possible. Within this context, however, it is important to bear in mind the fact that the individual with whom awareness is identifying is not real. Yes, it exists, but it is not real because it is both impermanent (e.g. if an actor can take off his costume at the end of the performance, then the character he was playing cannot be said to be his true identity) and wholly dependent upon awareness for its existence.

In fact every aspect of the apparent individual body, mind, intellect and the *vasanas* are nothing other than gross and subtle manifestations of awareness. An NDE experience therefore is simply a matter of awareness viewing the subtle body's temporary disassociation with the gross body in which it is housed, so to speak. Even this is a trick of *maya*, however, because actually the gross body is nothing more than a projected notion within the subtle body. Moreover, all such experiences and objects are nothing more than projected concepts within pure awareness.

Virtually all of the issues with which you are struggling and have given voice to in this email are based upon the erroneous assumption that you are the apparent individual you appear to be. Individuals have NDEs. Individuals experience various states of mind. Individuals are said to reincarnate.

Individuals forget their past lives. Or so the story goes. You, however, are not the individual. You are pure awareness. As long as you take yourself to be an individual then these doubts will persist. As mentioned, any experience is possible on some level of the apparent reality. The range of experience, you might say, is limited only by the scope of any given apparent individual's imagination. By "imagination" I don't mean simply one's capacity to daydream, as it were, but the capability one has to act as a vehicle for the gross and subtle outpicturing of the *vasanas*, the desires and fears, likes and dislikes, that essentially constitute one's programming and determine the circumstances and experiences of one's life as an apparent individual. The range of one's imagination, however, is not under one's control. One's imagination after all is essentially *Isvara's* (God's) imagination. In other words, it is part of the universal spell of ignorance through which the world is "created." The apparent individual, you might say, is just along for the ride. Or to express it more accurately, the individual is the vehicle fueled by awareness and driven by *Isvara/God/maya/ignorance* (which are all basically synonyms) that is wending its way along the road of life.

Marlon: Come on, science has come a long way, and people even two to three hundred years ago, if they saw us pull up in a Segway with iPhones and any newer technology, would think we were devils or gods.

I'm not knocking the 5,000-year-old tradition of Vedanta, but even in the Christian Bible there are lots of things that are plain wrong and superstitious. So in the spirit of mature inquiry, I am asking certain things. I know that the guys in white coats (scientists) have nanobots that can go in and annihilate cancer – but they won't do it due to monetary/political pressure since it's good business to continue to treat the diseases. There is no possible way that I will read all the literature available, but I just need to find what works and what doesn't.

Ted: Works for what is the essential question, Marlon. If you want a scientifically proven explanation for the apparent "creation" and all the phenomena that appear within it, Vedanta is not the answer. In fact you will ultimately find no answer because the substratum of the apparent reality, pure awareness, can be neither objectified nor measured. The conclusions drawn from the inherently limited scope of modern scientific experimentation point to the same non-dual nature of reality proclaimed in the *Vedas*, but no limited experiment will ever comprehensively verify the limitless truth.

Vedanta is not concerned with either verifying the existence of awareness, for awareness is self-evident, or with justifying the reality of the apparent phenomena arising within it, for all such

phenomena enjoy no independent reality of their own.

Vedanta is a means of knowledge that removes one's ignorance and thereby enables one to "see," or realize or understand, one's true identity as whole and complete, limitless, actionless, ordinary, unborn, ever-present, all-pervasive, non-dual awareness. Vedanta does not validate the individual, but rather frees one from the erroneous notion that one is such a beast.

Marlon: I guess what I'm looking for is a bridge between the *Vedas* and current modern science but not a shortcut. Obviously I still have the unease that the Buddha had when he left his palace, and now that I'm in my fifties, the kids are gone and I want to get back into this and see what is my *dharma*, or whatever you want to call it.

I agree that one can meditate for 84 years and not go anywhere. So how does one get the knowledge that you guys speak of?

Ted: Through self-inquiry, by exposing oneself to the teachings of Vedanta.

There are basically three stages to this process.

The first is called *shravana*, or listening. In order to listen properly one must set aside for the time being all of one's preconceived notions and previously garnered understanding. If one's mind is clouded by everything else one has heard, most, if not all, of which is erroneous, otherwise one would already have been set free, one will not be able to actually hear or take in what is being said.

The second stage is called *manana*, or contemplation. This is the point at which one takes back all the previously garnered beliefs and ideas one had set aside and reconsiders them in light of what one has heard. This is the phase during which one expresses all one's doubts concerning the teachings and resolves them with the help of a qualified teacher.

The third stage is called *nididhyasana*, or meditation. Meditation in this context does not mean formal sitting meditation, though such is a good practice for purifying one's mind, but rather the continuous, moment-to-moment application of the teachings to each and every situation, circumstance, encounter and experience of one's life. It is only through such diligent application of the teachings that one's intellectual understanding solidifies into hard and fast, unshakeable knowledge.

Marlon: Also, what is it like?

Ted: You enjoy complete freedom. You are no longer bossed around by binding likes and dislikes, desires and fears. The true litmus test is that you no longer want anything. You know that you yourself are the source of all the joy you seek through your various worldly and spiritual pursuits, and such being the case you no longer feel compelled to chase objects and experiences of any kind.

Other than that, life goes on pretty much as normal. You will still have preferences and you will still "want" things, but you won't think that they will add anything more to what you already are.

You will still have moods and experience emotions, and you will still think thoughts and have opinions and even convictions, but you will know they are nothing more than subtle objects, ephemeral phenomena, appearing in you, limitless awareness. You will still have a body and responsibilities and the world will continue to seemingly whirl around you, but you will know that these too are nothing more than objects appearing in within you.

There is a Buddhist saying that expresses this idea wonderfully: “Before enlightenment I chopped wood and carried water. After enlightenment I chopped wood and carried water.” In other words, nothing necessarily changes and everything is different from what you had formerly taken it to be. Even though a mirage will continue to appear on the desert floor, once one has realized its illusory nature he or she will no longer seek to slake one’s thirst by means of it. Just so, though worldly life rife with all its phenomenal enticements continues as before, one is no longer fooled by the false promise that lasting happiness can be procured from it. The source of all peace and happiness is known to be oneself.

Marlon: I just observe and watch purportedly enlightened individuals and they “never” talk about it. Sure, you can cop out and say, “Oh, it’s indescribable, beyond words, you have to just shut off the conceptual mind, etc., etc.” That’s a bunch of lame answers – come on, just say what it’s like and get on with it. Like the Brits like to say, there’s gotta be one guy/gal who just tells it like it is.

Ted: I just did.

But just to be clear, know that self-knowledge, self-realization, enlightenment, liberation, whatever you want to call it, is NOT an experience. Any experience, no matter how mind-blowing or spiritually profound, is nothing more than an object appearing in you, awareness.

Always ask, “How or by whom is this experience known?” Moreover, as Krishna implies in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “enlightenment” is not a matter of walking, talking, eating, sleeping, etc. any certain way. It is not characterized by a particular behavior. “Enlightenment” is simply the knowledge that “I am not this apparent mind-body-sense complex appearing within me, I am pure, limitless awareness.”

Marlon: Here’s where I need some major input from you: I’ve been under the impression all my life (since I found out about the subject) that yeah, there’s apparent life revolving around me and I have some limited control to choose things, but I KNOW that there’s a non-dual, electromagnetic field that’s really in charge. LOL.

I could say that one of my goals in this life is to be aware – regardless of time/space instantiations – meaning that it makes sense to me that one who is awake/enlightened, aware of being free, should be able to be aware regardless of whether one is in different brain states, alpha, delta, theta, etc. I don’t know if you’ve heard of Dr. Eben Alexander, the neurosurgeon who supposedly survived a near-death experience with the pre-frontal part of the brain shut off. I know he’s controversial, but if what he claims is true then there’s one example of being able to be aware without a physical instrument – the main one required to live in this world.

Is this possible, in your understanding?

Ted: Yes, awareness is self-evident. It doesn't require a mind to know itself. It knows itself because it is itself. That is to say, it knows itself not as knower, or mind-body-sense complex, knows objects, but simply because it is aware. Awareness is self-aware. Contemplate your own experience and see if this is not true. Are you ever not aware? Even if you say you are not aware in deep sleep, your own experience proves the falsehood of this claim. How could you know you had slept soundly unless you had been there to know that you were sleeping soundly? You can only remember what you have previously experienced. Think about it. Carefully examine your own experience rather than simply saying it's all bullshit. Admittedly, this is a difficult task. That is why you need a teacher. *Maya* is ignorant, but not stupid. It knows every trick in the book concerning how to fool you into believing you are a separate, independent individual living in the context of dualistic reality.

Marlon: I mean, Krishna does say that while the world sleeps the *yogi* is awake. I read that when I was 16 and I've held onto it up till now. Can't I take that statement literally?

Ted: No. Vedanta relies on the implied meanings of words to convey its wisdom. Here Krishna is simply using an analogy to point out that while a *samsari*, or worldly person, takes the world to be real, the *yogi*, or knower of truth, realizes that the world is only an apparent reality whose substratum is limitless, all-pervasive, non-dual awareness.

Again, look into the logic of your own experience. Vedanta puts no stock in the mystical, magical, "spiritual" experiences that so many misguided people espouse as the truth. Even the Buddha said, "Believe nothing you have read or anything you have heard even if I have said it unless it corresponds with common sense and reason." So consider honestly, can you be awake and asleep at the same time? This is where I'll insert an LOL.

Marlon: Also, you state that reincarnation is a romantic idea created by the ego. Then why the hell is it in the texts? Shouldn't it be modified? Let's be honest here.

Ted: If I remember correctly, I already addressed this in the last *satsang*.

First, no apparent individual can reincarnate, because the apparent individual who would supposedly be reincarnating is only apparent. So who would be going from one body to another?

Second, what does transmigrate are the *vasanas*, the likes and dislikes, desires and fears that "seek" (though to be honest, they are not volitional entities) expression through the vehicle of a mind-body-sense complex. Those *vasanas* that are not neutralized through understanding that they are not real continue to seek expression in another body.

Third, the fundamental teaching methodology of Vedanta is superimposition and negation (*adhyaropa-apavada*). Rather than bashing the student over the head with the non-dual truth, which the student is not yet ready to assimilate, Vedanta meets the student at his or her present level of understanding. In order to do this Vedanta provisionally asserts some erroneous concepts and then gradually and systematically dismantles these concepts until the student is able to see the underlying non-dual reality.

Marlon: It follows that if one can be aware while in the delta or other state, AND if what this Dr. Alexander has just demonstrated to the world is true, then it makes sense that if one can be objective while undergoing the death experience, that one can continue to be aware of reality – NOT as the personality that one was here, but as just pure consciousness and can transition to the next plane of existence. In other words, survive dying and know it. I've never met anyone who's died, so I can't say either way.

Ted: I've never met anyone that has died either. But again, consider the perspective from which you are expressing this doubt. Everything you say comes from the mouth of the apparent individual. But that is not who you are. You as an individual are not going to survive your death. Individuals die. But the truth of the matter is that you are not an individual. You are not going to die. There is no such thing as death. Yes, bodies come and go, but you don't. Marlon is on the way out, to be sure, but you are not. You are wasting your time if you as an apparent individual entity, even a disembodied one, are going to try to survive the death of Marlon. I know you said that you would be transitioning "NOT as the personality," but your whole approach to the matter implies that you are still identifying with some sort of subjective entity that will experience an afterlife or in-between life or enjoy rebirth in another body. The "you" you take yourself to be, that is, the subtle body, is not going to remain intact in the sense of remaining as a sort of subtle actor entity that sports one body-mind-sense costume after another. I know that scripture describes it this way, but I just explained why that is the case. In order to be free, you will eventually have to let go of the notion of being some sort of independent entity, whether it be on the gross or subtle level of the apparent reality.

I mean, fear not, if you want to identify with another body-mind-sense complex that appears within you and continue the cycle of birth and death, joy and sorrow, you can do so. It's all awareness anyway. But you, awareness, will reach a point where you will see through the illusion and simply toss in the towel on apparent individualistic existence. There is nothing to gain or lose except freedom and the inviolable peace and happiness that are your true nature.

Marlon: One other point regarding this. As for the mechanics of being born, I know we are born out of the world and not into it – since our bodies are organic/electrical – so the issue is why can't people know their original face (as the Buddhists say).

Ted: Because their "original face" is not an object. But actually, you know your "original face" in the sense that was earlier addressed. Awareness is your "original face," and so the simple fact that you are aware that you are aware is knowing your "original face." See how simple it really is?

Marlon: Can you point me to some scripture that deals with this?

Ted: Read James' translation of *Panchadasi* and if you can afford it buy the video or audio that goes with it. All of these resources are available at the ShiningWorld website.

Marlon: I mean, come on, the body gets created, you pop in or otherwise, then the body matures.

Ted: The body is not created. Even science affirms that energy cannot be created or destroyed but only transformed. The gross body is simply an assemblage of the five elements.

Marlon: Why does the awareness also have to mature if we're limitless and not located anywhere in space-time?

Ted: Awareness doesn't mature. Awareness doesn't do anything. When the mind-body-sense complex is illumined by awareness, action seems to take place. From the individual's point of view, there exists the condition of ignorance and the eventual liberation through knowledge. From awareness's point of view, nothing ever happened, for there exists nothing other than it and therefore it undergoes no change, which is the defining characteristic of action, transformation and/or maturation.

Marlon: This harks back to the life-after-life deal again. And you're saying it's not true?? There are currently seven billion beings on this planet that have gone through this. What a waste.

Ted: Why is it a waste? What is being wasted? There is nothing but awareness, and awareness cannot be diminished or enhanced or in any other way affected by what only from one point of view appears to happen within it. Think of it this way: Is it a waste that you dream at night? Are those appearing in your dream wasting their lives because they don't exist outside the parameters of the dream?

Why does it have to be a waste? Why does there have to be a purpose? Why not just enjoy the drama for what it is and at the same time know who you really are and remain free of all the suffering that comes with thinking it so real.

Marlon: The upshot of all this babble is that when the body dies, if one is situated in a certain relationship to the whole creation, that one can realize what is happening and even be conscious of being in the unmanifest (in terms of this physical universe of course). My MAIN problem is the issue of the Big Eraser that God uses – supposedly. They say he does it out of mercy so you don't remember your previous lives, but I think that's bullshit. PLEASE, PLEASE elaborate on this if you can.

Ted: I've covered the reincarnation piece, but if you are still convinced that "you" are going to reincarnate, then so be it. If such is the case, then it is worth knowing that God is not a volitional entity or some cosmic king who extends mercy to his subjects. God (*Isvara*) is simply a personification of the field of experience, or apparent reality. As you've probably noticed, there are physical, psychological and moral laws that govern the apparent reality. This is what is explained by the concepts of *karma* (action and the fruits that accrue from it as long as one takes oneself to be an independent doer) and *dharma* (the law that governs the apparent reality). Simply put, for every action there is a reaction. Every action one performs impacts the whole to a greater or lesser extent and this impact sooner or later affects the one who initiated the action. Thus *karma* is not a matter of pleasing God but rather the result of a completely impersonal chain

of cause and effect that is part of the inherent “design” of the apparent reality.

As far as the erasure of memory is concerned, you can either think of it in terms of it as part of the *karmic* design. Or you can take it as a confirmation that, as previously explained, “you” are not the one who goes through the process of transmigration and reincarnation.

Besides, what would be the purpose of knowing your past lives anyway? If the individual you presently take yourself to be is not real, what would be the virtue in terms of liberation, or self-realization, of remembering the experiences of yet another unreal entity?

Marlon: I know I’ve rambled a bit here, and like I said, I’m just getting back into this study. So I have lots to learn and I am starting by reading the previous *satsangs* and blogs at the website.

Ted: I am happy to dialogue with you, Marlon, but if you haven’t already done so please read James’ book *How to Attain Enlightenment*. Many of your questions will be cleared up if you just read that book. Then we can work on tidying up any loose ends that might still remain rather than spending so much time focusing on the concerns that are not essential to the self-knowledge that will set you free.

Marlon: Thanks so much for your valuable insights. I also got a reply from Isaiah Sanders which also cleared up some things for me.

~ Sincerely, Marlon

Ted: It is my pleasure to work with you, Marlon. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

~ Take care, Ted