

# Non-Dual Awareness Does Not Focus Attention

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**Nelson:** Hello again, Ted. I wrote earlier asking how we can be sure that the existence of the physical world requires awareness. After reading the document you sent it seems that the essential piece of the puzzle is the assumption of non-duality. If non-duality obtains, then the physical world, including space-time, exists as an object in awareness and has no existence outside awareness. From my point of view, this is mainly a statement about how sweeping the assumption of non-duality is.

**Ted:** It's not merely an assumption. Think about it. What could possibly exist outside awareness? We're not talking about the scope of one's personal perception or even the collective consciousness of all sentient beings. We are talking about pure awareness – the illumining factor that lights up the mind and allows it to know what it knows and what it doesn't know. Awareness is not the knowledge gained by means of perception and inference. Nor is it even the functions of perception and inference themselves. Awareness is the factor that illumines the mechanism of the mind, and thus enables it to perform the various functions of perceiving, integrating, discriminating and deciding that we call knowing.

The essential nature of reality must be conscious existence because something can't come out of nothing, and therefore existence, which is self-evident, must be conscious – not conscious in the sense of being a giant mind that knows objects (that macrocosmic reservoir of intelligence is what we refer to as *Isvara*, or God, or the Macrocosmic Causal Body), but conscious in the sense of being the factor that lends sentiency to the subtle body and is the basis of the intelligent design or universal order of the manifestation.

The materialist assertion that matter could somehow exist “outside” or independent of conscious existence – not to mention the notion that it could spawn consciousness – simply doesn't withstand logical analysis. Even a scientific materialist would admit that every object or phenomenon must have a cause. Thus *Isvara* must exist. That is, there must be a Creator. Now, given the facts that (1) intelligence exists in the universe and (2) the universe is not a random hodgepodge of factors but rather a cohesive mechanism composed of interdependent parts, all of which have an underlying structure or intrinsic design that makes it what it is and enables it to serve a particular purpose within the overall operation of the manifestation, we must conclude that the Creator is intelligent. And since that intelligence cannot have come out of nothing, we cannot avoid the conclusion that not only must the Creator be intelligent, but also that its very nature must be intelligence-as-such (i.e. pure awareness), for the intelligence informing the manifestation can have no other source. That is, the Creator must bear within its being the principle of knowledge that imbues the mind with its capacity to know and, moreover, be the container of all knowledge in order for it to have created all objective phenomena, and since this knowledge cannot exist in a vacuum, it must exist within a “field” of awareness, otherwise there would be no source of illumination by means of which the individual's mind could be enlivened and thereby perform the function of knowing the objective phenomena appearing within it.

In addition to being the *nimitta karanam* (i.e. intelligent cause) of the universe, awareness itself

must also be the *upadana karanam* (i.e. material cause) of the manifestation, the “substanceless substance” out of which the Creator fashioned the entire cosmos, for prior to creation there could be no other source from which any material could be drawn.

The only alternative to the conclusion that *Isvara* is *abhinna-upadana-nimitta-karanam* (i.e. both the material of which the manifestation is made and the “mind” that shapes it) is the logical absurdity of *regressus ad infinitum*. Thus the essential nature of reality must be non-dual.

**Nelson:** How necessary is this point of view with regard to obtaining freedom? After all, I can only know what is in awareness, so anything outside awareness is irrelevant.

**Ted:** Ironically, it is imperative to recognize the non-dual nature of reality if one is to realize one’s inherent freedom from objects. Only when I see that all objects are essentially nothing other than me am I able to assimilate the fact that no object can change my essential nature. By analogy, though gold may be shaped into myriad ornaments, each with a different character and function, the gold itself is never enhanced or diminished in any way. Or while light can be modified to appear as any manner of objects on a movie screen, the light itself is never affected in any fundamental way.

**Nelson:** Is it a spiritually lethal proposition to suppose all awareness is non-dual and simply not worry about whatever else might be?

**Ted:** No. It is the only reasonable conclusion one can reach. Why worry about what cannot be? Until you realize that nothing can exist other than awareness, however, you’ll never gain freedom, for will always lurk somewhere within the mind the suspicion that there could be something more, better or different that is more, better or different, and that something would necessarily impinge upon your being and limit you, which by definition would render you not free.

**Nelson:** There is another nagging question, if you don’t mind. It has to do with the notion that awareness is actionless. In particular, is it the case that awareness can focus attention on a particular object? For instance, at this point in time I appreciate myself as the witness to perception. Sensations, thoughts and feelings are objects that appear within me. Is this me I know I am now awareness?

**Ted:** Yes and no. In the grandest sense, everything is awareness. But here you are confusing awareness with the perception/experience of the mind. You are taking the mind and awareness to be synonymous, which they are not. The mind is essentially the name we give to a process of functions that constitute the operation of the subtle mechanism we refer to as the mind, which produce the effect that we call knowing. Pure awareness, however, is not the functions of the mind, but rather the “light” that both imbues the mind with the capacity to function and illumines the *vrittis* (i.e. thoughts) that arise within it.

**Nelson:** If so, it certainly seems that I am acting in the sense of focusing attention.

**Ted:** The mind has the capacity to focus attention. Awareness-as-such is actionless, and thus has no capacity to perform the action of focusing.

Awareness is all-pervasive. Nothing other than awareness exists. Therefore awareness cannot change, which is the defining characteristic of action, nor can it direct itself toward any other object, for nothing of the sort exists.

**Nelson:** The alternative seems to be that my experience is wholly outside the control of awareness.

~ Many thanks, Nelson

**Ted:** Experience is indeed outside the control of awareness, so to speak. That is, awareness has nothing to do with experience. Experience is awareness – for what else could it be? – but awareness is not experience in that no limited experience can comprehensively define or delineate that which is limitless. Action apparently occurs due to the holographic projections *maya* casts within the three-dimensional “screen” of awareness, but no change – which, again, is the defining characteristic of action – to the essential nature of awareness is actually taking place. Due to the conditioning influence of *maya*, the mind enjoys a degree of free will that allows it to play a contributing role in the chain of cause and effect that characterizes the operation of the grand mechanism of the manifest universe. But awareness itself exerts no personal influence on experience – it is not, after all, a personal entity – and its essential nature remains entirely unaffected by any and all experience.

~ All the best, Ted