

Non-Duality and Non-Attachment

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Barton: Hello, Ted. It's me again, Barton. After much self-discrimination and reading the stuff you gave me as well as the *Bhagavad Gita*, I think I (Barton-jiva) FINALLY got it, and I want your confirmation. It's really simple: I'm just the watcher of this body-mind/ego entity named Barton who witnesses all his silly quirks, life experiences and daily actions/routine.

Ted: I understand that we are working under the constraints of language, which is an inherently dualistic device, and thus makes even clear understanding sound experiential, but since you are standing at the threshold of liberation (from the *jiva's* perspective, that is), it is important to pay close attention to the words you use to describe your understanding. Words are the foundation of both ignorance and knowledge, depending on how they are understood, for words denote and imply concepts, and concepts are the subtle tools with which *maya*, ignorance, conditions pure awareness and makes it appear to be something it's not (i.e. the dualistic apparent reality, or the manifest universe).

Bearing the *shakti*, power, of words in mind, let's examine your opening statements. While it is a severe symptom of spiritual pretentiousness to speak of oneself in the third person (i.e. if I were to say in reference to myself when ordering a cup of java at the coffee shop, "Ted will have the dark roast of the day," in an attempt to demonstrate how "spiritually evolved" and unattached I am from the person I appear to be), it is nevertheless important within the context of our inquiry to be clear that you are not Barton. You are awareness. So, when you say, "It's me again, Barton," you should do so with the understanding that the person you are announcing yourself as is not your true identity.

The reason I point this out is that this opening pronouncement is immediately followed by a declaration that "I... FINALLY got it." This statement is both true and not true, depending on the perspective from which it is understood. So it is vital that we clarify just exactly what understanding should be underlying the words when you utter them. In this regard, you correctly qualify "I" as the *jiva*, Barton, suggesting that you do understand the separation between you, awareness, and Barton, reflected awareness, which is good. Since awareness already "knows" itself (i.e. its knowledge not being of an object, but rather its essential nature as awareness) simply by virtue of being itself (i.e. it doesn't need to get "enlightened," for it is the "light"), it is true that *moksa*, liberation (which is the proper term for what is so often referred to outside the tradition of Vedanta as "enlightenment"), is for the *jiva*, the apparent person.

It is equally true, however, that the mind-body-sense complex/mechanism that constitutes the apparent individual, Barton, is nothing more than an amalgamation of causal, subtle and gross matter that only becomes operational when illumined and enlivened by awareness. The apparatus referred to as Barton is itself inert, insentient, and thus incapable of knowing, realizing or understanding anything. Barton per se will never "get it." Though the reflection of awareness does appear in a sufficiently purified mind in the form of the *akhandakara vritti*, or "thought of limitlessness," the intellect does not generate this thought or think this thought on its own. The mind is simply the "mirror" in which awareness "sees" itself and the forum in which takes place

the understanding that the apparent individual person is not actually an individual person, but only a projection that appears to be such and is essentially nothing other than pure awareness “itself.” It is in this sense that we can say *moksa* is not freedom for the apparent individual (how can an apparent phenomenon, a mere projection, get free?), but from the individual. Your third statement, in which you intimate that you are the “...watcher of this body-mind/ego entity named Barton who witnesses all his silly quirks, life experiences and daily actions/routine,” suggests that you have properly discriminated between the self, you/awareness, and the “not-self,” all the objects appearing within the scope of your being.

The final point that begs attention with regard to your identity as awareness is that the watching/witnessing that we often attribute to awareness is not an action that is performed by a personal entity – even one that is universal in scope, so to speak. This watching/witnessing is not an aspect of an interaction between a relative subject and object, as it is within the context of the dualistic apparent reality. As mentioned, awareness does not “know” itself as a relative subject (i.e. an apparent person) knows an object. Awareness simply is aware. You don’t do “knowing,” you simply know. You don’t do “being,” you simply are. By analogy, it is the “light” in which all relative objects and the relative subjects who know them, who are themselves objects, are illumined, and thus known to exist. In fact it is perhaps more appropriate to refer to awareness as existence. It is that which is, that on which the “is-ness” of all objective phenomena depends, that which is in fact “itself” the essential “is-ness” of all that is – “all” being actually only one “thing” (i.e. all-pervasive awareness). This understanding is important because it reveals that limitless awareness is your very nature, not something that you have to do or maintain – which is good news considering the fact that you, awareness, due to your all-pervasiveness, perfect fullness and immutability are incapable of action. You cannot lose yourself. You, awareness, are the one “thing” that is always present, the only “thing” in the absence of which nothing could or would be. Thus you don’t have to know a certain thing, remember a certain bunch of information (though of course assimilating the teachings of Vedanta is necessary in order for proper understanding of your true nature to occur) or be experiencing a certain state of mind/body in order to “know”/be yourself. You are yourself. You are awareness. At all times. In all places. Throughout – and “beyond” – all experiences. While all objects come and do, you always are.

Barton: The problem is that most people tend to think this body-mind entity is them and they don’t realize that they are already free of it as action-less, non-dual, complete, experience-less, unborn awareness.

Ted: Exactly. This is why *moksa* is not a matter of experience, but of knowledge.

Barton: The only way I can identify with this witness is to keep reminding myself that I am it when ever I get caught up with Barton and his life story.

Ted: Yes, this is the phase of self-inquiry called *nididhyasana*, the constant, incessant, continuous, conscious application of the teachings to every aspect and in every moment of ones’ life. Repetition is the way we learn. Or more accurately in this case, the way to break the old, habitual, erroneous thought patterns that have conditioned our understanding of the true nature of reality. We have to keep recording new – and true – material over the old idiotic declarations that

have been resounding throughout our subtle body over the course of many lifetimes. This takes focused effort. This is the “doing” part, the apparent action executed by the apparent doer that ultimately leads to the total destruction of doer-ship.

Barton: There’s no need to focus myself to look behind myself.

Ted: Right. There is no “other” you behind you. You are all that is.

In this regard, it is important to understand that Vedanta includes a variety of apparent contradictions, or paradoxes, that are resolved by means of one’s ability to see reality from various perspectives. The teaching methodology of Vedanta (i.e. self-inquiry) is essentially the practice of *atma-anatma-viveka*, or the discrimination between the self and the “not-self.” Hence I am constantly separating myself as awareness from the objects appearing within the scope of my being. This separation is important in order to break my identification with the mind-body-sense complex, which is the nearest and dearest object to me (one in fact that initially I actually think of as my fundamental identity), and my attachment to, desire for, and fear of the host of other objective phenomena that I believe can somehow enhance, diminish, help, hurt or otherwise affect me. There comes a point, however, at which I realize the non-dual nature of reality and “see” (i.e. understand) that all the objective phenomena appearing to and “within” me are actually nothing other than me. Still, I realize that no particular object or even the collective whole of all objects can comprehensively characterize, define or describe me. Thus I understand that while all objects are me, I am not the objects, for even if all objects were to vanish, as they do in deep sleep or thought-free meditative states (and actually, even in the “space” between each thought that arises in consciousness), I will still be. Moreover, from the perspective of the apparent individual, the objective phenomena that comprise the manifest universe will always obtain. Even after the apparent person gains self-knowledge, *maya*, the macrocosmic ignorance that “creates” or manifests the entire universe, will continue to make pure awareness appear to be something other than what “it” is. Hence the apparent person will have to continue to function as an apparent person with the context of the apparent reality while at the same time understanding its true nature as awareness. Awareness, however, will “see” nothing other than itself. So despite all apparent conditioning, awareness remains ever free.

Barton: I just need to keep reminding my intellect.

Ted: Yep. Again, this is the “work” of self-inquiry, reprogramming the software that governs the functioning of the iBarton.

Barton: I am always free of all experiences that are playing on the movie screen projection set up by *maya*. And it’s not an attainment of some form of merit or action, although ironically it is (*karma yoga*, self-inquiry, meditation).

Ted: *Moksa* itself is not an attainment that results from merit or action, for no limited action executed by a limited entity can produce a limitless result, which is what freedom is by definition. *Karma yoga*, self-inquiry and meditation are simply practices that help cultivate a pure, quiet and

dispassionate mind that is capable of assimilating the knowledge to which discriminative inquiry inevitably leads. So yes, it would seem that liberation is the result of action. But the truth is that these actions are only indirect means of gaining self-knowledge. The assimilation of the knowledge itself is what constitutes freedom.

Barton: Which begs the question: Is the understanding of non-duality prior to this realization a tool that is meant to arrive to this conclusion or am I suppose to realize that I am the unattached witness to know about why reality is a non-dual, reflected projection of awareness with its myriads of forms? Which one of the two are the quintessential concept of liberation that one is meant to know to qualify as “*moksa*” that can be used to serve on a practical day-to-day basis?

Ted: If I understand you correctly, it works both ways. Understanding the logic that reveals the non-dual nature of reality helps one more readily adopt the *karma yoga* attitude, which serves to both neutralize binding *vasanas* and ultimately cancel the sense of doer-ship. In this way the understanding of non-duality helps prepare the mind for the assimilation of self-knowledge. Understanding that I am the unattached witness of all objective phenomena serves the same purpose, but also reflects a more refined degree of understanding. Even when you understand the non-dual nature of reality, there can still remain a sense of attachment to or identification with the apparent individual. Adopting the point of view of the unattached witness, however, can serve as a more effective means, practically speaking, of assuming one’s true identity as awareness.

On another note, there is no answer for “why” reality is non-dual or for “why” it appears to be plural. It simply is the way it is. *Moksa* will not provide an answer for why things appear the way they do (remember, from awareness’s point of view, they don’t even appear to be anything other than “itself”). It simply frees you from believing they are real (i.e. lasting, permanent, independently-existent) or can affect your true nature in any essential way.

Barton: The scriptures constantly remind us to focus on the self and forget about the external environment distracting the senses. So does this mean that, although I know that reality is non-dual, knowing that I am the detached witness is the a main goal?

Ted: Knowing that you are free of all objective phenomena is what grants you freedom. Understanding the non-dual nature of reality is an inextricable aspect of this knowledge. They work together. But I suppose it could be said that whether reality is dual or non-dual doesn’t really make a difference if you know you are free of it no matter what its nature is. Still, you will most likely only really understand why you are free and what freedom truly means (i.e. that it is rooted in understanding, not produced through the denial or destruction of objects or defined by experience) when you “see” the non-dual nature of reality.

Barton: Regardless, the *jiva* has realized that anything it tries to gain by the projected extroversion of the senses is a zero-sum game. So, as Ramji said, reality is non-dual... so what???? Also, I apologize if you can’t understand what I’m trying to ask here. If you need me to clarify what I’m trying to say, please tell me what specific idea you need to me reiterate upon.

Ted: I think I understood what you were trying to say. If my answers don't clear up your doubt, let me know. But it sounds like you are "getting it," my friend.

Barton: Thanks.

Ted: My pleasure, as always.