

Realization and Reincarnation

Ted Schmidt

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Kathy: Hi, Ted. I've been reading and contemplating many of your *satsangs*, interspersed with some other Vedic reading. It's great to have so much help. Your *satsang* with Daniel, "A Shift in Perspective," is particularly helpful. Trying to be honest about where I am, I know that I am not Kathy and am limitless awareness, but that is not totally understood or assimilated as yet. I couldn't honestly say that I always stand in awareness.

Ted: Don't worry. It takes a while to erase all the conditioning that veils our true nature. This conditioned ignorance has built up over lifetimes, so it won't go away overnight. Once you caught a glimpse of your true nature, however, its days are numbered. Of course the truth is that you are always "standing in awareness," so to speak, because you are awareness. But, yes, the point is to understand that fact beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Be clear, however, that even after the mind has fully assimilated the understanding of its true nature, it will still continue to function as a mind. In other words, the apparent individual you appear to be will still seemingly stand as the subject in relation to all the objects appearing around and within it. The trick is to be able to navigate back and forth between the real and the apparent orders of being. You will have to continue to play the role of the apparent individual you seem to be for as long as is warranted by "your" *prarabdha karma*, which is the *karma* that has already been set in motion and is slated to play out through the vehicle of the mind-body-sense complex with which you are presently associated, and thus the mind will experience the pains and pleasures corresponding to that role. But you will no longer believe yourself to be the person you seem to be, and thus you will not suffer. Life, then, will be more like watching a holographic movie that is not only presented in 3D, but also in what we might call "5S" in that it appeals to all five senses. You will have the experience, but you won't suffer from the burden of personal responsibility and self-identity that taints the experience of the self-ignorant. This is the freedom enjoyed by the *jivanmukti*, the one liberated while still in the body.

Though pain and pleasure may seem to be what causes us to suffer and enjoy, such is not really the case. The suffering and enjoyment associated with pain and pleasure actually arises from the sense of self-diminishment or self-enhancement that we believe comes from the painful or pleasurable experience. For instance, when I broke my arm and couldn't play baseball for an entire summer, the suffering I experienced was not due to the pain of the broken bone. I suffered because at the time my whole life was centered upon being a major league baseball player someday, and not only did I miss playing the game for the summer, but I feared that the break would weaken my arm and that I would never be able to achieve my dream. And if I wasn't a great baseball player, then who was I? Since my identity and self-esteem were wrapped up in being a certain character, the threat of losing my "personal profile" threw me into existential turmoil. The point is that it is not our experience that causes our suffering, but rather our identification with our experience. When we know that we are simply the "light" of awareness in which experience appears, then we are no longer bothered by experience. We understand that just as no object revealed by light has any effect on the light, so we as the "light" of awareness remain completely unaffected by any of the objects and experiences appearing within the range

of our illumination.

Kathy: One thing that bothers me is that I have a eureka moment and feel that I've really understood something as I've read and contemplated it, and then it's as if I've forgotten it or the Kathy personality has just covered it over again. Last night I absolutely knew and understood how totally liberating it is to do your best and be completely free of and grateful for the results whatever they are. This was in relation to *karma yoga* and quite strong symptoms of an illness I have, type-1 diabetes. I knew none of it was anything to do with me, I could just be aware of it and have an attitude of praised.

Ted: The attitude of gratitude to which you are referring means that you accept whatever results ensue from your actions as *prasad* (not "praised"). *Prasad* is a Sanskrit word that means "gift from God."

Kathy: Then it's almost like I've forgotten the intensity of that. I think I need to just trust it's assimilated, do I – is that right?

Ted: As mentioned, you have glimpsed (i.e. realized, or understood) your true nature as witnessing awareness, but you have not yet assimilated it. You know who you are, you simply don't stand fully convinced of your true identity at all times. This conviction is cultivated over time. Keep exposing yourself to the teachings over and over again, approach a qualified teacher for help with resolving all doubts, and then dwell on the teachings and apply them to each and every interaction, event, encounter and experience of your life until the lens through which you see yourself and the world has been wiped clean of all ignorance. This process is the meaning of self-inquiry. And it is through self-inquiry that self-realization is transformed into self-actualization. I no longer know the self in the sense of having once "seen" it and now remember what I "saw." Rather I am the self. I am pure, limitless, ever-present, all-pervasive, ordinary, attributeless, non-dual awareness. I am the awareness in which the knowledge that I am awareness takes place.

Kathy: Then moving on to a question I've been pondering for a long time, and it came up again still unresolved, when reading your *satsang* "Let *Karma Yoga* Be Your Comfort," would you please clarify what happens when your body dies and you are fully enlightened and what happens if you are not enlightened? Before coming to Vedanta, I thought as per my understanding from Advaita, Hindu teachings, that realization would free you from the wheel of rebirth, but if unenlightened you would be reborn again. Please, would you explain the Vedanta teaching on this? I understand that the self, which is who I am, is eternal and unchanging, and there is no birth nor death... But if I am not enlightened when I die, I won't know that!

Ted: I understand what you mean when you say that if you die unenlightened, then you, the apparent person, won't know your true nature as eternal, unborn awareness. But still, I have to call your attention to the irony of your statement. You say that you understand that you are the self, but yet worry that if you die without discovering your true identity as the self, then you won't know who you are. What? Ignorance, once removed, does not return, so not to worry, my dear. You've already solved the riddle.

I do get where you're coming from though, if I am assuming correctly. You are lamenting, it would seem, that presently you have an intellectual understanding of your true identity, but haven't yet wholly assumed your stance in awareness as awareness, as my teacher is fond of saying. As explained, however, the penny will drop if you stick with self-inquiry. Anyway, it is not really a choice. Speaking to the true you, now that you've heard your name called, so to speak, you will not give the apparent person you seem to be any rest until she discovers you. As for the apparent person, Kathy, since the nature of the self is the very happiness-fulfillment-satisfaction you seek through every single action you execute, you will not rest until you've found what you're looking for. At any rate, fear not. As Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, no spiritual effort goes to waste.

Which brings us to your question concerning realization and reincarnation.

You are totally unaffected by *karma*. Awareness is simply the "light" in which all *karma* occurs and is known.

The person you appear to be, however, is affected by *karma*. In fact the person you appear to be is a product of *karma*. The word *karma* in its most fundamental sense simply means "action." In a broader sense, however, *karma* refers both to the particular experiences that constitute our lives and to the quality and texture of those experiences, which is the consequence of the nature of our actions.

Our actions leave *vasanas*, impressions of pleasure and pain, in the causal body, or what we might think of as our subconscious mind, which sprout as desires and fears, attractions and aversions, in the subtle body, which is the conscious mind. These desires and fears of course are the impetus of our actions. And these actions reinforce the existing *vasanas*, and thus keep the wheel of *samsara* spinning round and round. In this way the apparent individual accumulates a vast store of potential *karma*, or desire-inspired action, whose expression requires the vehicle of a mind-body-sense complex, which, impersonal as it may sound, is essentially nothing more than a mechanism that processes and produces experience.

As this store of *karma* grows it becomes impossible for it to find expression within the span of a single lifetime. Also, certain desires may require a completely different set of physical and mental qualities than those with which the present mind-body-sense mechanism is imbued and/or a completely different environment for their expression. Consequently, those *vasanas* and associated *karma* that have not yet sprouted and found expression at the time of the demise of the mind-body-sense complex with which they are currently associated transmigrate to another mind-body-sense complex and find expression through it. This of course is the phenomenon referred to as reincarnation.

This is also the reasoning behind the idea that *karma* creates one's current body. Whether you want to think of this "creation" in terms of *karma* actually determining the make-up of a mind-body-sense mechanism that would suit its needs as one would design a house or think of it in terms of a particular *vasana*-bundle and its associated store of *karma* migrating to a mind-body-sense complex whose character and circumstances are appropriate for its expression make little difference. In either case, our past *karma* has determined our present circumstances.

In this process, there are three types of *karma* at play. *Prarabdha karma*, as mentioned, is the *karma* that is slated to play out through the mind-body-sense complex with which you are currently associated. *Prarabdha karma* can be likened to an arrow that has already been shot

from a bow. Since it is already in flight, it cannot be recalled. It is going to hit the target toward which it is speeding. Just so, the *karma* that has “created” the current body with which you are associated is going to play out through that body until the *karma* is exhausted, at which point the body will die.

The second type of *karma* is *sanchita karma*. *Sanchita karma* is the store of accumulated *karma* that is waiting for expression through an appropriate vehicle set within appropriate circumstances. You might conceive of *sanchita karma* as your *karmic* bank account.

The third type of *karma* is *agami karma*. *Agami karma* is the *karma* that is generated within the context of the present lifetime. Some of this *karma* finds immediate expression or is exhausted within the present lifetime, but most of it is not, and consequently is added to the store of *sanchita karma*.

With regard to these three types of *karma*, the point of practicing *karma yoga* is to exhaust *prarabdha karma* in a way that does not create *agami karma*, and through eventually canceling the sense of doership, ultimately erases *sanchita karma*.

The key to eradicating *karma* is ending the erroneous notion of doership. As long as the mind harbors the notion that the apparent individual is an independent volitional entity who performs actions and the ego, which is simply the notion of being an individual “I,” takes credit for those actions, the apparent individual accumulates *karma*. Thus the truth of the matter is that the whole concept of *karma* and transmigration-reincarnation is nothing more than an elaborate mind game. By analogy, as long as you take yourself to be the character in the movie you are watching, you seemingly assume the character’s qualities, seemingly execute the character’s actions, and seemingly accumulate the *karmic* consequences of those actions.

These actions produce two kinds of results that manifest either immediately or in the future. Depending on its nature and, more importantly, the intention with which it is executed, every action produces either *punya karma*, which is merit, or *papa karma*, which is demerit. These merits and demerits then manifest as both *drishta phala*, “seen” or immediate results, and *adrishta phala*, “unseen” or future results. The immediate results of *punya karma* are an internal sense of peace and accomplishment and positive external effects. The future results are either good fortune within the context of the present lifetime and/or a pleasant afterlife experience in *svarga*, heaven, or some other “angelic” realm. The immediate results of *papa karma* are an internal sense of guilt, anger, failure, inadequacy, etc. and negative external effects. The future results are either misfortune within the context of the present lifetime and/or an unpleasant afterlife experience in *naraka*, hell, or some other “demonic” realm. In either case, however, since all actions and their results occur within the parameters of time and space that condition the apparent reality, whatever results ensue from one’s actions are limited, and thus temporary. Therefore whether one enjoys heaven or suffers in hell, once the store of merits or demerits that have placed one in the appropriate realm are exhausted, the subtle body once again associates with a mind-body-sense complex appropriate to its current *karmic* slate.

This whole *karmic* lollapalooza, however, hinges on the ego’s sense of being a *karta*, doer, and a *bhokta*, enjoyer/experiencer. As long as one believes oneself to be an independent doer, one will remain bound to the wheel of birth and death, desire and fear, joy and sorrow. Once one realizes that one is the actionless awareness that is ever unaffected by experience, then one is free from the fetters of *karma*. At this point, the remaining *prarabdha karma* will play out, but no *agami karma* will accrue. Moreover, due to the fact that there will remain no apparent individual to whom

any *karma* could stand credited, the *karmic* account previously associated with the apparent individual one had erroneously believed oneself to be will be closed and all of the *sanchita karma* stored within it will resolve into the unmanifest state in the macrocosmic causal body, or the universal pool of pure potentiality.

So to sum up in simple terms, as long as you remain self-ignorant, you will continue in the cycle of birth and death until such time as you fully assimilate your true identity as whole, complete, limitless awareness. Once you have assimilated your identity as such, you will “attain” *moksa*, the ultimate inner freedom that is now, has always been and will always be your true nature.

Kathy: I hope these questions are not too silly. Sometimes it's hard to know when you only have yourself to bounce them off!