

Seeing the Ego as an Object

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2596>

Connie: Hello, Ted, my name is Connie. I'm in my fifties and would like to ask a question concerning working with Vedanta. I got your email from the ShiningWorld website.

All I want to know is what is it like to exist seeing yourself (ego) as an object. I ask this because I have caught myself hesitating to go forward in this, as the ego begins to react to being seen from another perspective.

I hope this is not inappropriate to ask and appreciate any feedback.

Thanks for your time.

~ Connie

Ted: Hi, Connie. It's nice to make your acquaintance.

In a word, seeing the ego as an object is ultimate "inner" freedom. You – i.e. pure awareness – recognize that the ego is simply a pseudo identity. The ego is actually nothing more than a thought arising in the mind that lays claim to the sensations, emotions and cognitions occurring within the mind.

Vedanta divides everything in the world into two categories: subject and object. To put it in more practical terms, there is me – i.e. the apparent person I take myself to be in this case, rather than pure awareness, which is my true nature – and everything else. Every experience involves a relationship between a subject and an object.

Though this dichotomy seems pretty cut and dried, what is interesting is the fact that the person I appear to be and whom the ego claims as "I" is always part of every experience. The fundamental principle of experience, however, is that the subject and object are always separate entities. In personal terms, I cannot be what I see. So the question arises, who is the subject in relation to the object that the ego claims to be me?

Upon analysis, we discover that anything and everything that is perceivable or conceivable is not me – including the apparent person I seem to be. I am the witnessing awareness by "whom" all objects are known. Or to put it more accurately, I am the limitless conscious existence in "whose" self-luminous "field" (existence) of "light" (consciousness) all objects are illumined and made known. What's more, given the non-dual nature of reality, I am also the "substanceless substance" of which all objects are made. In this sense then we could say that the subject and the object are essentially one and the same, for pure awareness is the essential nature of both. But it is equally true that no particular object or even the total of all objects comprehensively defines or delineates that which is limitless, which is what I truly am.

I don't appear to be limitless, because through my own inherent power of *maya* a portion of my limitless being has become associated with an apparent body-mind sense complex.

Consequently that portion illumines only those objects that fall within the limited range of the particular mind with which it is associated.

One object that appears in the mind is *ahamkara*, the ego, the I-thought. Though it is nothing more than a thought, it is the factor that establishes the sense that one is an independently existent volitional entity, or individual person. Again, we know that the ego cannot actually be me, because the ego is a known object. In every experience, the ego is the part of the experience that says, "I am having this experience." It is the idea that I am thinking this or feeling that or doing whatever.

There are three aspects to the ego.

The first aspect is the ego's identification with experience. This identification is said to be natural because, as was previously explained, every experience is characterized by the relationship between a subject and an object. This aspect of the ego remains intact, so to speak, until death. If this identification were to disappear, one would have no experience. Even enlightened beings – i.e. those who have gained self-knowledge and thereby attained freedom from the ego – continue to experience objects, however, so the destruction of the ego that is so highly touted in the spiritual world cannot equate with the end of experience.

The second aspect is the ego's identification with the body. This identification is the result of *karma* because the *prarabdha karma* (i.e. the *karma* that is slated for immanent fructification within the next lifetime) determines (or calls forth from *Isvara*, so to speak) an appropriate body-mind sense complex for its expression. This aspect of the ego also remains intact until death, for if it did not one would have no vehicle by means of which to navigate through and transact its business within the arena of the apparent reality. Obviously even enlightened beings think and feel and interact with the world, so the destruction of the ego also cannot equate with the dissolution of the body.

The third aspect is the ego's identification with consciousness. This identification is the result of *avidya*, self-ignorance. While the ego is essentially nothing other than consciousness, consciousness is not the ego in the sense that consciousness is neither the relative knowing subject nor the known object that the relative knower stands in relation to. In other words, consciousness is not a personal entity with a mind that knows objects; consciousness is the limitless conscious existence in which both the relative knowing subject and all known objects – one of which is the relative knower itself – obtain (i.e. appear or exist). The ego then is nothing more than an object (i.e. a known thought) illumined by awareness rather than awareness-as-such. Therefore while the ego exists (i.e. is experienced), it is not real. It is a pseudo entity that claims itself to be conscious when actually it is only a product of the mind and claims itself to be the doer and the experiencer when actually it is nothing more than an experienced object. This is the aspect of the ego that is problematic, for it causes identification with the body-mind sense complex and experience where there is only association. That is, experience is taken to be happening to me as a result of my having taken myself to be the apparent person I seem to be when it is actually only happening in me – i.e. limitless conscious existence. Because of this mix-up, I am drawn into the experience of the body-mind sense complex and feel that whatever is happening to it is happening to me, and consequently I suffer. This is the aspect of ego that needs to be destroyed. The destruction is not the annihilation of ego altogether, but simply the negation of its reality as an independent entity. That is, it is still experienced and utilized for the purpose it is meant to serve within the context of the apparent reality (i.e. the world), but it is no

longer taken seriously. I know just as the character of the waves arising within the ocean do not change the essential nature of water, so the character of the objects/experiences arising within the scope of the body-mind sense complex with which the ego is associated can neither enhance or diminish my essential nature as pure awareness. Though the body-mind sense complex still experiences life, I see the ego as the object – i.e. the pseudo experiencer – that it is and remain ever free of it.

I hope that helps.

~ All the best, Ted