

# The Nature of “Enlightenment”

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**Ingrid:** Hi, Ted. How are you?

I wonder how usual it is to be enlightened and how usual it is to think one is. To me it seems like many think they are liberated, but it cannot be just an intellectual understanding, like in indirect knowledge.

**Ted:** That is true.

**Ingrid:** It is a shift in perception, yes? But to say I am awareness does not necessarily imply that one is enlightened. I wonder how one can be really sure, if it is very rare occurrence.

**Ted:** As you indicate, self-realization (i.e. enlightenment) is different than self-actualization. Self-realization occurs when you apprehend your true nature as limitless conscious existence. Even after realizing this truth, however, the mind will continue its habitual tendency to believe that one is the limited apparent individual one seems to be. This is why *nididhyasana*, or continuous contemplation of and meditation on the teachings until such time as one is as sure that one is limitless conscious existence as one previously was that one was an apparent individual person.

The certainty that is the fruit of *nididhyasana* is not simply a “replacement brainwashing,” however, but is the result of meticulous inquiry through which the reality – not existence, mind you, but reality (reality being that which is unchanging and non-negatable) – of all objective phenomena is mentally negated. In other words, a painstaking analysis of one’s own experience in light of the teachings of Vedanta leads to the conclusion that no objective phenomenon, or even the entire host of all objective phenomena combined, comprehensively defines or represents that which is limitless. And once you apprehend the fact that you (i.e. awareness, or limitless conscious existence) are that being in the scope of which all objective phenomena appear, then you not only believe – which is essentially what having an “intellectual understanding” that one is awareness amounts to – that you are limitless conscious existence, but know that you are so, and thus can stand with unshakeable conviction in this undeniable truth.

**Ingrid:** I also wonder about negation of the unreal. When all is real, does not *sat-chit-ananda* include existence, as in the manifest awareness, as well? I mean everything is *Brahman*. How can awareness really be seen apart from the manifest? How can it exist on its own apart from creation and prior to it when all is eternal?

**Ted:** *Brahman* is eternal in that limitless conscious existence is the substrate of the manifestation. *Brahman* is that which cannot be resolved into a subtler or more pervasive substrate. This is what is meant by awareness existing “prior to” the manifest. It is not a matter of

time, for time is an object, whereas non-objectifiable awareness is not.

Having said that, however, awareness can and does exist in the absence of the manifestation. The manifestation is not eternal. Scripture tells us it comes and goes. At the time of *pralaya*, or the cosmic dissolution, the manifestation resolves into a state of dormancy, or seed form, within the Macrocosmic Causal Body. Then at the time of the manifestation, it is projected again. The potential for the manifestation is eternal, but its appearance and disappearance is cyclical.

**Ingrid:** How do we know it is not just an idea, when the manifest is “God’s body” or extension or projection? People say they are limitless or pure awareness, but the *jiva* says it. And how do they know if pure awareness is ever on its own?

**Ted:** Is the fact that you exist just an idea? The apparent individual person you seem to be is an idea, but the fact that you exist and are conscious is not an idea. If it were, where would the idea be appearing, of what would it be made and how would it be known? The manifestation is an idea within the “mind of God,” but even the “mind of God” depends of existence. And there can be no such thing as non-existence, for if there were, non-existence would then be the fundamental reality, since existence could resolve into it. But if non-existence were the fundamental reality, then nothing could have ever come to be in the first place, because something can come out of nothing. Hence the fact that limitless conscious existence is the fundamental reality is not just an idea.

**Ingrid:** I know that the light of awareness is beyond this *jiva* and beyond creation. But seeing this crisp light exist, being shown it in dream, does not make me enlightened. Reading about it does not either. Seeing it because of a *sattvic* mind is also just an understanding. The “I” that writes this is still and always will be a *jiva*, or individual, although I know I am not separate from anybody or anything and just live as/in a partless whole. There is *satya* and *mithya*, but to go around saying I am limitless awareness would be the same as saying I am *satya* when I am *mithya*, so it is an idea, is it not? The intellect knows the *jiva* is conscious, yet it is not *satya* itself.

**Ted:** We’ve gone over this several times in previous emails. Vedanta is not an “either-or” understanding, but rather a “both-and” one. Self-knowledge is complete knowledge. When you have assimilated the teachings of Vedanta, you understand your true nature is limitless conscious existence, and you also understand that limitless conscious existence informs the apparent individual person you seem to be and whose apparent life is taking place within the scope of your being and is experienced by virtue of the fact that you (i.e. the “light” of awareness) illumine the mind and thereby enable it to know objects.

**Ingrid:** And what makes people with Vedantic knowledge stand out from others?

**Ted:** People with self-knowledge don’t stand out from others. They simply know the true nature of reality. In fact self-knowledge is the understanding that you are no different from others, for everyone is essentially the same limitless conscious existence.

**Ingrid:** Are they more compassionate or kinder people?

**Ted:** Not necessarily. There are no rules for how a *jnani* (i.e. one with self-knowledge) should act. Everyone has a different set of *vasanas* informing their preferences and personality – even the person who knows that his/her true nature is free of *vasanas* – and thus the *jnani* will live in accord with his/her personality and uphold his/her unique *svadharma* (i.e. personal duty as determined by personality, proclivities, profession, skill set, social standing, etc.).

The purpose of Vedanta is not to make you a better person, but rather to free you from the idea that the limited person you appear to be is your true identity, the virtue of which is that this understanding eradicates suffering.

The *jnani* tends to be a kind and compassionate person for three fundamental reasons. First, he/she is inclined to treat everyone with love because he/she sees that the true nature of everyone is the same self and it is against our nature to hurt ourselves. Second, because he/she has attained self-knowledge only after years of suffering, he/she understands the angst that others feel, and feels a natural inclination to help them get free of it as, again, suffering is against our nature. Third, he/she tends to behave in accord with *dharma* (i.e. moral or ethical norms) because due to the fact that one knows that one is already whole and complete as one is and that the presence or absence of any object will enhance or diminish his/her essential nature, he/she is not inclined to break the rules in order to get what he/she wants.

At any rate, you don't need Vedanta in order to be a compassionate and kind person. If that's the goal, then simply use common sense (i.e. follow the "Golden Rule") and be nice to people.

**Ingrid:** So who are really enlightened and how do we know we are not just frauds?

**Ted:** Only you know if you know who you are or not. Only you know if you are free.

Perhaps the strongest indication that self-knowledge is not fraudulent is that the presence or absence of any object has no power to enhance or diminish your essential sense of well-being (which doesn't mean that the apparent person can't still have non-binding preferences). If such is the case, then it's quite likely that you are free.