

The Relative Witness Is Not the Real Self

Ted Schmidt

2013-12-15

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1248>

Brent: Hello, Ted. Your replies have been very helpful, and I wanted to keep them coming!

It seems recently some progress has been made, especially regarding the work *vasana*. There have been moments of joy, even at work, that do not have any relationship to objects/situations. Also, there was an interaction that took place between “my person” and a patient during which it was very clear that this was happening in me, and witnessing of this interaction was taking place as the communication was transpiring, with seemingly no input by me. It was all happening as it should, in what seemed like a dreamy, almost underwater, environment. Unfortunately, this was short-lived, as it seemed as though I went back into “my person” and continued on. The thought “This is an object arising in me and has nothing to do with me” seems a powerful tool.

Ted: This is a wonderful experience to have had, Brent, as it serves to show that you are actually “outside” the events that transpire within the scope of your being. And it no doubt was facilitated by your application of the teachings. Vedanta refers to this continual application of the teachings to every experience, encounter and transaction with any and all objects in your life as *nididhyasana*, or meditation. While we tend to think of the practice of meditation as characterized by a stable seated posture, closed eyes, a tranquil and ideally silent environment and perhaps an *upasana*, or object of attention, such as an image of a deity or a *mantra*, Vedanta expands this notion to encompass our every experience within the apparent transactional reality (i.e. daily life). Continually directing the mind to the awareness within which all objective phenomena, including the *upadhi* (conditioning adjunct) of the mind-body-sense complex that is referred to as Brent appear, is a necessary practice until one has assimilated the vision of non-duality and stands with unshakable conviction in one’s true identity as pure, limitless awareness (*brahman-atma*). So keep it up.

Eventually, however, you will come to realize that experiences such as that of being the dissociated witness of the events in which the apparent individual person (*jiva*) with which you have identified is taking part are nothing more than experiences albeit very subtle ones taking place within you. When we say that the self, which is pure, limitless awareness (*brahman-atma*), is attributeless and thus beyond experience, we mean just that. Even the witness is a subtle apparent identity. You can tell that the witness, at least in the way that you experienced it, is only an apparent entity by virtue of the fact that it suffered the same fate as all apparent objects. In other words, it ended. Though your experience as the detached witness ended, however, you have not ended. So, profound as the experience of disassociation was, the experience itself is not you. You are always disassociated. Actually, it is more accurate to say that you are always unattached. The words “disassociated” and “detached” both suggest that you were once attached and have now ceased to be so. In reality, however, you have never been attached. The self, which is pure, limitless awareness, is simply the field, so to speak, in which all objective phenomena appear. Though you witness these objects, you are in no way limited or defined or tainted to the least degree by them. Therefore the true understanding of the self as witnessing awareness is not as a subject, even a very subtle one, who witnesses objects but rather as the fundamental substratum (*adhishtanam*) of being that is the “substanceless substance” of which

all objects, even the most subtle such as time and space, are “constituted.”

As you can see, this understanding is very subtle. Virtually all seekers, even quite “advanced Vedantins,” continue to harbor the notion that there is some identity whose perspective they will assume that will remain a sort of floating, ghost-like entity that will observe the life of the apparent individual person (*jiva*) yet not feel or think or act of its own accord. And while in reality it is true that you are free of Brent’s thoughts and feelings and actions, the sense of being Brent does not disappear upon the assimilation of self-knowledge. In more precise terms, while your identification with Brent dissolves, your association with Brent and with it the experience of all of Brent’s thoughts, feelings and actions does not vanish. Brent will continue seeming to be Brent, and you will “continue” to be you whether you seem to be or feel like you are Brent or not.

The point of telling you this is neither to invalidate your experience of the witness state nor to suggest that you shouldn’t keep applying the knowledge that you, as the non-relative subject, are not the objects arising within you, but simply to indicate that you were not pure, limitless awareness during the experience and now are not pure, limitless awareness as a result of your having returned to “my person.” You ARE pure limitless awareness. Period.

Everything, even the notion and/or experience of being “my person,” is simply an experience or object arising within you. Keep applying the knowledge over and over and over again until you see this and stand with unshakable conviction in this knowledge.

Brent: Regarding the five sheaths teaching: would an example of this discrimination be when the thought “I’m hungry, I’m tired,” etc. be identification with the *manomyokosha*, which can then be discarded at that moment?

Ted: Yes, although technically the sensations of hunger and fatigue arise from the *pranamaya kosha*, or vital force sheath. But yes, your processing of the data arising within the scope of your being as awareness is correct. If the mind is *sattvic* (purified and peaceful) enough to identify these subtle objects for what they are, you can simply use it to flick them off.

Brent: With the *Mandukya Upanishad*, it always has a big impact if I listen to James Swartz’ lecture, but how to maintain? If you could give some practical examples, it would be helpful.

Ted: The way to become established in the knowledge of your identity as pure, limitless awareness (*brahman-atma*), or the “fourth factor” that is the ever-present, all-encompassing witnessing awareness in which all objects experienced within the three states waking, dream and deep sleep appear, is to practice the very discrimination we have been discussing throughout this exchange with regard to each and every transaction in which Brent seems to be involved. I’m not sure what you mean by “practical examples” because every apparent experience occurs within the context of these three states of experience. So essentially you simply analyze the apparent effects, whether positive or negative, wanted or unwanted, enjoyable or otherwise, of these experiences in terms of their impact upon the “fourth factor,” or the non-relative subject, or the pure, limitless awareness, in which they seemingly occurred and see if any of those effects actually changed you, i.e. awareness, in any way. Sure, they have impacted Brent in various ways and to various degrees, but has any waking transaction, dream

or the lack of objects in deep sleep ever changed the simple awareness in which they have appeared? Is not the simple awareness which is actually your true identity in which all the experiences that you as Brent have had in any of the three states the same now as it has always been? Are you as awareness not always the same awareness no matter what experiences have happened, are now happening or will happen within you?

Brent: Listening to Swami Paramarthananda's lectures on the *Mandukya*, he states: "Contemplation on *Om-kara* is contemplation on everything." Would this be through chanting, to fix the mind on the silence, as in the instructions for the *pratyahara* technique? How would one contemplate on *Om-kara*?

Ted: Concentrating on *Om-kara* as a symbol will do little good unless you first understand the meaning of *Om-kara* and then, bearing that meaning in mind, using your contemplation of it as a method of self-inquiry.

Essentially, *Om-kara* represents the three states of experience waking, dreaming and deep sleep as well as their associated bodies the gross, subtle and causal. While seated meditation that involves focusing on the meaning of *Om-kara* and might include chanting or silent repetition (*japa*) of the sacred symbol can be very beneficial for purifying the mind and accompanied with understanding of the meaning of the symbol can be a great means of conducting self-inquiry, the true meaning of meditation on the *Om-kara* is to see all states of being and the vast array of experiences had within the context of the three bodies as aspects of *Om-kara*. In other words, *Om-kara* is simply you pure, limitless, actionless, attributeless, non-dual awareness. This is what Swami Paramarthananda means when he says, "Contemplation on *Om-kara* is contemplation on everything."

Constantly discriminating between the objects/experiences appearing with you, i.e. awareness, and your true nature as awareness itself, and redirecting your attention to your true nature as pure, limitless awareness, is the real meaning of contemplating *Om-kara*.

Brent: Thank you in advance, Ted. Here's hoping you have great holidays!

~ Love, Brent

Ted: Happy holidays to you as well.

~ Love, Ted