

Who You Think You Are Is Not Conscious

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Ken: Dear Ramji, I read and contemplate your last email again and again. Yes, I have taken the stand of awareness instead of Ken. Thank you for pointing that out. It does make a difference. I must have a very strong thought-*vasana* that I am the *jiva*, Ken. Yet I am the awareness that knows this thought. What a conundrum! My experience is confirming the fact that being aware that I am awareness makes the binding *vasanas* non-binding or less binding and so manageable. This awareness is what I have always been but did not know to this degree, just talked about! I feel like I tripped over my own foot and got hurt as I hit the ground! Silly me!

Ramji: It makes all the difference to know that you are actually the awareness that knows Ken. Good for you. Taking a stand as awareness and not Ken will slowly reduce the tendency to think of yourself as Ken, which – assuming this tendency produces suffering for Ken – it probably does or Ken wouldn't be interested in spirituality.

Ken: I have been reading and re-reading Chapter V, "The Self," in your book *How to Attain Enlightenment*. It is a crucial chapter. Just some loose ends to clarify, please. I am not being pedantic. I just want to understand very clearly.

1. About the subtle body:

On page 88, top line: "The subtle body is insentient consciousness that seems to be sentient." Isn't the term "insentient consciousness" an internal contradiction, like a "circular square"? Consciousness implies sentience. What do you mean by insentient consciousness?

Ramji: We are back to the *satya/mithya* discrimination that we discussed before, Ken. Reality is non-dual consciousness, meaning everything is consciousness. When *maya* is operating, consciousness apparently loses sentience. A rock, for example, is insentient consciousness. It does not know itself. When *maya* is operating, a subtle body appears. It seems to be conscious, i.e. sentient, because it reflects consciousness. When you, consciousness, identify with the subtle body you think you are a limited sentient being, i.e. Ken. But Ken is not conscious. He is just an inert, insentient image of consciousness reflected in the subtle body. The sentience that you attribute to Ken is just the sentience of pure, limitless consciousness. This is why Ken is not going to realize the self. The self, under the spell of *avidya*, is going to realize itself when its ignorance is removed. From that point on there is no Ken, not that there ever was. You were always and only sentient consciousness.

Ken: Paragraph 1, line 2: "...the light of pure awareness as it reflects on the subtle body..." By "reflects on" do you mean associates with, permeates, imbues, exists with, appears in, sustains, etc? Usually, the phrase is "reflects off," e.g. sunlight reflects off glass, giving a glare. What do you mean by "reflects on"?

Ramji: “Makes it seem as if” the subtle body, Ken, is alive. (See above.)

Ken: About pure consciousness, page 88, bottom paragraph, line 6: “...eternal true ‘I’...” By “I” do you mean pure awareness unassociated, like the big *OM* above *maya* in your chart?

Ramji: Yes.

Ken: “...reflected apparent ‘I’...” By “I” here, do you mean awareness associated with the subtle body and overcome by ignorance? Like the small *OM* in the subtle body in your chart?

Ramji: Yes. “Apparently” overcome by ignorance. It is not something to be “overcome,” because it is not conscious. But, yes.

Ken: Pure awareness and awareness-associated-with-the-subtle body are not two awarenesses but one partless whole. The former is ever-unaffected while the latter, associated with a form, is affected by ignorance and experiences the life of an average human being. Is this what the metaphor of the two birds in the *Mundaka Upanishad* refers to?

Ramji: Yes.

Ken: So while with this form called Ken, I-awareness-associated, temporarily overcome by ignorance, recognise my nature is really pure awareness, unassociated, always free, unaffected by ignorance or knowledge. Is this correct?

Ramji: Yes, given the reality of Ken, the subtle body. But as I pointed out above, Ken is not conscious. So it is awareness recognizing itself as awareness. But it seems like Ken knows and it seems like Ken is free – which is good enough for the apparent Ken because to feel free in the apparent reality is as good as it gets for Ken and his ilk.

Ken: Same paragraph, line 1: “Pure consciousness is not the knower...” Then who is? The subtle body is inert and cannot know by itself. So only awareness is left to know. As awareness, isn’t my nature knowingness itself? I, awareness, know my thoughts. I am a knower of my thoughts. So if awareness is not the knower, who or what is? The only answer I could come up with is: pure awareness unassociated is not the knower but awareness associated (me, I) is the knower. Is this correct?

Ramji: Yes. Good thinking. But for pure awareness there are no thoughts. It is only aware of itself. This is why I said it was not a knower – of objects. However, when *maya* is operating there are objects, and then awareness becomes a knower.

Ken: Isn't the one who sees the same as the knower? Is there a difference or contradiction with line 1?

Ramji: All contradictions are apparent contradictions. *Moksa* is a both/and, not an either/or. Both a thing and its opposite are true in reality – when viewed from the standpoint of consciousness. It is the one who sees, but what is seen? If it sees objects and takes them to be real it is ignorant of itself. If it sees objects and knows they are unreal it actually sees itself in the form of objects. In the absence of objects it sees itself. Consciousness is self-luminous, self-knowing, self-existent, etc.

Ken: 3. Is it correct to say the following? Awareness is looking out of my eyes right now, hears through my ears, smells through my nose, tastes through my tongue, touches through my skin, thinks through the mind.

Ramji: Yes. This is the *Kenopanishad*.

Ken: It is not Ken but awareness associated with the subtle body experiencing and knowing these perceptions and sensations. Ken is out of the equation because Ken is the name for the subtle body through which experiencing happens. Pure awareness unassociated (the big *OM* in your chart) is a non-experiencer. But awareness associated with the subtle body (small *OM*) is an experiencer. So awareness is simultaneously both a non-experiencer and an experiencer. Is this correct?

Ramji: Yes. Good. You worked out the answer to your first question without knowing it. The distinction between pure awareness, the non-experiencing witness, and reflected awareness, the experiencing witness, is the essence of Vedanta. It is *moksa*.

Ken: One step more: pure awareness by itself is a non-doer. But awareness associated with the subtle body is the doer using, through my body-mind-intellect instrument. Ken is out of the equation because Ken is the name for the subtle/gross bodies through which doing happens and so cannot be a doer. So who is doing? Awareness, by associating with the body-mind and enlivening it, so that the *vasanas* and *gunas* can express themselves in the mind-body. Thus it can be said that doing happens, meaning Ken is not the doer. But awareness-associated is a doer through its presence in the form. Is this correct?

Ramji: Yes.

Ken: "Action in inaction and inaction in action." Action with reference to awareness and awareness with reference to action. (From your *Bhagavad Gita* DVD 4). Here inaction means awareness. Correct?

Ramji: Yes. Awareness is *akarta*, actionless.

Ken: What is not mentioned and implied is the form in which action happens. Ken is out of the equation, as Ken is the field in which action occurs and is therefore a non-doer. I take my stand as awareness, not Ken. Thus I am active through the body-mind while remaining as actionless awareness, and as actionless awareness I trigger action to happen through the body-mind. Have I understood you correctly?

Ramji: Yes. You “trigger” it indirectly by your presence, not actively as a doer. *Maya* is the trigger. It is something altogether different. It is neither awareness or not awareness. It makes awareness seem to move.

Ken: 4. Sometimes the word “*jiva*” refers to just the inert subtle body and sometimes to awareness with the body-mind instrument and overcome by ignorance. Which one does “*jiva*” refer to?

Ramji: Both. You have to determine the meaning by the context.

Ken: I hope you and Sundari are enjoying Europe. I know you are busy, so whenever you can manage the time...

~ With gratitude, Ken

Ramji: Thanks, Ken. We are in South Africa now, enjoying ourselves in the form of “South Africa,” which, like “Europe,” is just a word that makes “us,” which is not an “us,” look like normal *jivas*. I am sorry for the delay. It was unintentional. This email just didn’t make it into the queue. I was cleaning up some folders on my hard drive and found it. I was not sure if I had replied. Things are moving very fast these days. The interest in Vedanta is growing by leaps and bounds, and we cannot really keep up. Some things fall through the cracks.

~ Love, Ramji