

# The Brain of an Enlightened Person

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/852>

**Note:** In this email the word *jivanmukta* means “an enlightened person, someone whose self-knowledge – ‘I am whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, ever-present awareness’ – is unshakable.”

**Ted:** Hi, James. I hope the body is feeling better and better each day. By now Sundari may have shared with you my email about my own physical issues as of late. If so, then know that I am on the rebound. I had a knock-down, drag-out session with the ego and its endless control issues regarding food and it seems to have gotten the fucking message at last. Isaiah has been helpful as well. Anyway, I’m feeling great.

I guess I still have a little sentimental *vasana* associated with the Christmas holiday from my childhood. Such being the case, I just wanted to send my love to both you and Sundari. You are both amazing people and, of course, have blessed my life immeasurably.

Also, I wanted to ask you and Sundari’s opinion on something. I’m doing an interview via email with *Non-Duality* magazine. One of the questions asks for my take on certain scientifically verifiable objective criteria that might be associated with the brain of a *jivanmukta*. I’ve attached my response to the question, and the following link is to the article in which the criteria (enumerated on an easy-to-read chart at the end of the article) referred to in the question and the argument for them are laid out [here](#).

If you have the time I’d really appreciate it if you would read the article and my response to the question and let me know what you think.

Thanks, *om* and *prem*.

## Ted’s Reply to *Non-Duality* Magazine

**Q. 4:** Also, what is your take on Ramesam’s correlates of a *jivanmukta*? Do you have these traits, for example?

**Ted:** Theoretically, this list of correlates of a realized being (*jivanmukta*), or one who has attained liberation while still living in a body, would seem to provide us with a nice little tidy list of symptoms by which we could determine with certainty whether a person was enlightened or not.

Of course, the fundamental problem with that idea is that the person per se never does get enlightened. The realization simply registers in the intellect that the person, the intellect itself, indeed, the entire manifestation on both the gross and subtle levels, is nothing more than an object in awareness. So truly speaking,

awareness simply remembers, so to speak, what it always was, is and will be, not that awareness can be measured within the parameters of time and space since time and space are themselves only objects within its scope through the mechanism of the mind.

That point aside, however, let's grant that certain symptoms might obtain in the apparent individual person's (*jiva's*) brain, which is reflected awareness in a gross form as a result of the realization of its true identity registering in the intellect, which is reflected awareness in a subtle form.

Even so, though this list of correlates and measurable markers seems at first glance quite reasonable the correlates themselves are defined by subjective experiential interpretations some of which are quite illogical with regard to the qualities commonly associated with *jivanmuktas*.

The quality of universal love, for instance, is qualified as *maitri*, which means friendliness or kindness. And while it certainly is true that one who sees the entire manifestation as reflected awareness, or God (*Isvara*), and moreover as non-separate from oneself, will invariably hold an affectionate attitude toward all beings, it does not follow that the apparent personality of the *jivanmukta* will always be filled with compassionate, kind, loving thoughts and gushing with warmth.

The same holds true for the attitudes/feelings of equipoise, tranquility, happiness, fearlessness and detachment. These qualities will undoubtedly obtain in the subtle body of the apparent entity with whom the *jivanmukta* is associated, for each is a reflection of the nature of the self, but it is not necessarily the case that the *jivanmukta* will always appear relaxed, unconcerned and be perpetually grinning and giggling.

Though the *jivanmukta* is not a person, the mind-body-sense complex with which it is associated remains one and as such continues to be a vehicle for the *prarabdha karma* that is slated to play out through it. The apparent individual person (*jiva*) that the *jivanmukta* appears to be will thus continue to be subject to the whole gamut of human psychophysical experience. Certainly, the *jivanmukta* will neither process nor respond to such experiences in the same way as the *samsari*, which may be due to or associated with certain neurological activity or chemical levels in the brain. But what happens if the squirts of dopamine abate for a time? Does that mean that the *jivanmukta* ceases to be a *jivanmukta* for whatever time transpires until the next squirt occurs? Moreover, does this mean that the *jivanmukta* is only liberated when he or she is in a feeling friendly, calm, balanced, fearless, detached and happy? Were such the case, then it would seem that we could easily determine the realized beings by their behavior. Again, this sounds reasonable but doesn't take into account the aforementioned issue of *prarabdha karma*. To illustrate the point, we can consider the diametrically opposed personalities and behaviors of Nisargadatta Maharaj and Ramana Maharshi. Assuming that both these gentlemen were *jivanmuktas*, I wonder how similar their brain activity and neurochemistry was.

The idea of the absence of a sense of self is another ambiguous indicator. On the one hand, it is true that the one who realizes the non-dual nature of reality will no longer harbor the sense of separation or individuality. On the other hand, however, though understanding it to be only apparently real, the apparent person with whom the *jivanmukta* is associated will retain the sense of personhood and continue to function as a volitional being within the context of the apparent reality. Despite some of the erroneous notions circulating in the spiritual world, the *jivanmukta* can

still answer to his or her name, participate in relationships with others and will have to execute certain actions simply to keep the mind-body-sense complex in good working order.

As for the idea of remaining aware while in the state of deep sleep, this is rather illogical. If the word “aware” refers to the essential reality that is awareness, then it is true that the *jivanmukta* and everyone else, for that matter, remains aware during deep sleep, for, as the *Mandukya Upanishad* points out, the state of deep sleep is nothing more than an object appearing in awareness. If, however, the word “aware” is meant to indicate some kind of conscious processing of subtle data then the claim the claim makes no sense. If the *jivanmukta* were processing subtle data then he or she would either be in the dream state or what we might call the dream aspect (i.e. realm of subjective thought) of the waking state.

Finally, the idea that the *jivanmukta* is always in the now is somewhat silly. As mentioned earlier, the apparent individual person with whom the *jivanmukta* is associated continues to experience psychophysical phenomena just like anyone else. He or she still retains an intellect capable of ruminating on the past and projecting ideas about the future. He or she is free and thus is not going to be confined to the prison of the present moment, so to speak. How would he or she ever make a decision or function in the apparent reality if the intellect had no access to impressions retained from past experiences?

I don't mean to completely discredit the list of markers but simply want to point out that using objective indicators to determine self-knowledge is a bit of a tricky issue. Such is acknowledged in the article by Ramesam himself, so let's just say that the theory is interesting but inconclusive.

As for whether or not I have any of these traits, I'll just say that, on the one hand, I don't have any traits and, on the other, I haven't undergone any neurological testing to measure the chemical activity in my brain so I can't say one way or the other.

### **James' Comments on Ted's Reply to the *Jivanmukta* Question**

Lovely to hear from you, Ted! Your reply is excellent. You might mention that the *Bhagavad Gita* deals with the issue of how you tell a *jivanmukta* by enumerating various qualities of mind. The brain is just an instrument for executing impulses coming from the *vasanas* through the mind. The whole argument about the brain, however, is specious because the chemistry of the brain is constantly changing, there is no direct access to it and the only valid markers are behaviors which can be easily misread by an outsider, *maya* being the great deceiver that it is. The way Vyasa has Arjuna formulate the question is meant to point out the fact that a *jivanmukta* tends to enjoy certain qualities – lack of a sense of doership, for example.

How you would evaluate the absence of doership chemically is beyond me.

The mind is nothing but the *gunas* and therefore the brain is nothing but the *gunas* and no object in awareness is devoid of any *guna* so the mind/brain of a *jivanmukta* will have all possibilities. This fellow has no idea about *Isvara*. He takes *jiva* to be real and the brain to be real.

Finally, the *jivanmukta* is actually just awareness and awareness is not bothered with the chemistry of the brain and how it correlates to various states of mind –

kindness, etc. And only awareness knows that it is awareness, not some apparent individual who is “enlightened.” The very idea of a *jivanmukta* is a concession to ignorance, a projection of *satya* on *mithya*. Even if there is some kind of unique chemistry associated with *jivanmuktas*, so what? This is the old “chemistry is destiny” argument dressed up in spiritual clothing. For the life of me I cannot understand why it is interesting and what practical utility it has. Finally, as you point out, the whole idea is based on the idea that enlightenment is some kind of experiential state and not simply knowledge of the nature of the I.

Ah, yes, those pesky *vasanas*. I don't envy you. But it seems that Vedanta saves the day once more. Your appreciation is much appreciated, Ted, and we wish you all the best.

Sundari points out that the brain investigation reeks of the idea that a *jivanmukta* is somehow a special superior person whereas a *jivanmukta* has the vision of non-duality, which implies no difference. In fact the whole idea is bogus because reality is just one awareness operating through one gross, subtle and causal body. I think this bears including in your reply.

~ Love, James