



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

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Big Questions #8

## What is Consciousness?

By Gurudevi Nirmalananda

Science tells us every sub-atomic particle is aware of every other sub-atomic particle. Some physicists now theorize that the whole universe is conscious. The yogic sages do agree, having explained it thousands of years ago. But they went a step farther, saying that it's all Consciousness. It's not merely conscious; it's Consciousness. What is Consciousness?

Consciousness is that which sees, but cannot be seen. Consciousness has become all, yet is beyond becoming. Consciousness is that which knows, but without thought. Consciousness does all, yet without efforting. Consciousness is you, but you don't know you are Consciousness.

Are you confused yet? I hope so, for the reality of Consciousness is more than your mind can contain. The words I use are like a finger pointing at the moon. Don't look at the finger! Look to see where it is pointing. Yoga shows you how to get there. But there is here. You have to explore within yourself or you'll never find your own Self.

"Conscious" and "Consciousness" are not the same thing. The word conscious means you are awake and taking in information through your senses. In deep sleep, you are unconscious, while in dreams or reverie, you're experiencing your subconscious mind. Yoga defines these as the three states of mind: conscious, subconscious and unconscious. While you have a mind, you are more than your mind. You are Consciousness-Itself.

Consciousness is awareness. While Consciousness gives your mind the ability able to be aware of things, your awareness extends beyond your mind's limits. You are even aware that you are aware. You see that you see. It is the human being who has this capacity to know that you know. This capacity is called Consciousness.

Yoga is the science of Consciousness. Like any science, yoga uses proven methodologies to explore the boundaries of its realm. Its realm is Consciousness, which has no boundaries. You are the laboratory in which this magnificent experiment is conducted. You use your body, breath, mind and senses to explore what you are made of. And you prove what has always been true, there is only One Reality — Consciousness, which is who you are, in your deepest essence.

Chaitanyam-aatmaa.

— Shiva Sutras 1.1

Your own Self is Consciousness-Itself.

This is an ecstatic declaration, a shout unto the heavens and beyond. It is the beginning point for all yogic teachings. You may have learned it in our first level of training, Foundations of *Svaroopaa*® Yoga course. The discourse ends with us chanting the sutra aloud, everyone's arms upraised while shouting at full voice, "Chaitanyam atma!" Bliss arises within. That's the point.

The bliss of Consciousness is a promise given in every yogic text. The promise is actually bigger, that you will live in the bliss of Consciousness all the time, not just when doing yoga. The practices repattern your body and breath while reprogramming your mind, attuning you to bliss. Most importantly, they open the doorway to the source of that bliss, your own Self, also called svaroopaa.

*Svaroopaa*® Yoga is often called Bliss Yoga. We teach yoga poses that decompress your spine, opening up this all-important conduit of Consciousness within your body. You naturally experience bliss when energy flows through your spine. Better yet, Shaktipat awakens a more profound dimension of that inner energy, the arising of the energy of enlightenment.

*Svaroopaa*® Vidya Meditation teaches meditative processes, which decompress your mind and heart. Of course you experience bliss when you see and feel your way inward. What will you find in there? The Truth of who you already are, your own Self.

My favorite way to introduce you to your Self is to point out that you exist. While you can see that your body exists, the being who lives in your body exists. That being is you. Regardless of the condition of your body or mind, the "you" who lives in your body is whole, full, complete, perfect and

Divine. When you acknowledge your own existence, consider who is doing the acknowledging. That is you. Your own existence is a Self-knowing existence. Your own Self knows your own Self. In Sanskrit, your existence is called Shiva, also described as Beingness. Your inner knowing of your own Beingness is called Chiti, Consciousness. Chiti is also translated as Self-Knowingness. Beingness is Self-Knowing. Shiva is Chiti. Like water is both wet and cool, the One Reality is both Shiva and Chiti.

Shiva becomes the universe and all that is in it by taking on contraction. This is why energy contracts to become matter. This is how you come into being. You are a form of Shiva, like a snowflake is a form of water. In the human being, the contraction shows up in your limited knowing of yourself. You don't know your Divinity. You feel yourself to be small, separate from God and others, individual and alone. Yet you are Shiva, who is masquerading as an individual — you.

It's right there in the Sanskrit terminology. You are jiva, an individual. Shiva is the Divine Reality that is being all. This means that Shiva is being jiva. Why? So jiva can become Shiva. The whole point is that you become conscious that you are Consciousness-Itself.

I studied and even taught these cosmic principles for fifteen years before I realized that I didn't understand the meaning of the word "Consciousness." Yet it turns out to be very simple.

Consciousness is awareness. If you look at a window, you are aware of the light shining through. Then turning your attention to a wall, you are aware of the wall. Next you might focus on a thought or worry, so you are aware of that thought in your mind. Whatever you are aware of, you are using your awareness to be aware of it. There is you, the object and your awareness of the object.

Awareness is what you use to be aware of whatever you choose. You can even have awareness of being aware. When this happens, you've begun to look inward. As you explore your own awareness, you can find the source of awareness inside — which is your own Beingness, Shiva.

Yoga distinguishes between awareness and mindfulness. The English dictionary also makes this distinction for us:

Mindfulness: ...awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.

Awareness: the totality of conscious states of an individual, the quality or state of being aware.

While "mindfulness" is awareness of your mind, "awareness" includes your mind and extends beyond it. The sutras explain it by describing your mind as a contracted form of Consciousness:

Citireva cetana-padaad avaruu.dhaa cetya-sa.mkocinii cittam.

— Pratyabhij~nah.rdayam 5

Consciousness descends from the plane of pure Consciousness  
to become the mind,

by contracting in conformity with the objects perceived.

Consciousness becomes your mind. How? By contracting. Your mind contracts in conformity with the objects you perceive. As you study these expansive teachings, your mind begins to uncontract. Especially when you meditate, your mind expands until you can direct it toward Consciousness-Itself. Where do you look to find Consciousness-Itself? Inside, for Consciousness is being you.

Your brain is a major center of Consciousness, but not the only one. Another important center is your heart. The most powerful center is located just below the tip of your tailbone. This is the one unlocked in Shaktipat, so the energy of Consciousness can arise within you, to show you — you.

When you realize who you really are, you expand into seeing that everyone and everything is the same Consciousness. Then you live in the constant experience of being Consciousness, who is seeing Consciousness in all. Now, that's truly bliss!

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, "BIG QUESTIONS"

To reach our teachers or to learn more about Svaroopaa® Yoga & Meditation, contact

Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram ♦ www.svaroopaa.org ♦ info@svaroopayoga.org ♦ 610.644.7555