

9 Steps to Self-Inquiry

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

2016-11-11

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3027>

Samuel: Can you give me some guidance on how to go about self-inquiry, is there a particular formula I should follow?

Here is a FAQ written on the basic steps involved in self-inquiry:

9 Stages to Self-inquiry:

1. Sravana: Listening or hearing the scripture. This requires that you leave everything you previously believed or thought you knew, temporarily on the shelf. You can take your beliefs back if self-knowledge does not work for you. But for now, leave them on the shelf. This is very important; if you keep comparing Vedanta to all your beliefs and opinions and try to make it comply with them, forget about self-inquiry. Vedanta is a radical teaching; it is counter-intuitive; *expect* it to challenge everything you thought you knew. Without faith in the scripture (*shraddha*), self-inquiry will not work.

This is not blind faith like religions demand, but faith *pending* the results of your own inquiry.

2. Manana: Reasoning, contemplation. This is thinking about what the scripture is saying, examining the *unexamined* logic of your own experience. At this point, you look at your beliefs and opinions *in the light* of what the scripture says, NOT the other way around.

3. Qualifications: One determines if all the qualifications necessary for *moksa* are present. If they are not, **one has to develop them**. Self-knowledge will not stick in a mind that is not prepared and purified. There is no purifier like self-knowledge (*jnana yoga*) but there are other practices one can do, like meditation for instance—or even sitting in silence. But, meditation (or any other practice) is an **aid** to self-inquiry; it does not **equal** self-inquiry nor does it take its place.

4. Karma Yoga—negating the doer. *Karma yoga*, when practiced properly, is *dharma yoga* because every action you take is dedicated to *Isvara*; it is a consecration. It is understood that peace of mind only comes with the realization that you are not in control of the dharmafield, yet in taking the appropriate steps to act according to *dharma* and then relinquishing the results, peace of mind is produced. If you are not experiencing peace of mind by relinquishing results you are not relinquishing results. It's that simple—the doer is still there, afraid and small, still wanting a particular result because of its likes and dislikes, frustrated and afraid because it believes it needs the result to be safe or whole as it is not getting what it wants.

***Karma yoga* is not to destroy the doer. Karma yoga is simply to destroy the notion that we are doers, of 'doership'. Karma yoga is meant to clear the mind of enough likes and dislikes until it becomes composed enough to do sustained inquiry. Only inquiry removes the problem of doer-ship because it shows that you, the self, cannot be the ego (doer) that is known to you. When that is clear, the doer can appear in you, even with a trace of doer-ship, but you do not identify with it.**

5. Bhakti Yoga: We need to understand the definitions of God/*isvara* gradually and

systematically until we can see the full vision, the whole Mandala of Existence. The way in which I define God will determine my bhakti, devotion. In the first level of understanding, my devotion will be to a personified deity: a personal God. In the second level of understanding, I will worship the Lord in everything, including nature. In the final stage of understanding, I see God as the formless essence of all, both manifest and unmanifest. The final stage does not negate the previous two; it simply completes the full picture. When we appreciate Isvara as both form and formless, we can happily worship the Lord/God/Isvara as a personified deity, as the totality of nature and as the formless essence of all things. Just as quantum physics does not displace Newtonian physics, both understandings are valid at their respective levels.

The 3 definitions of God or **the three stages of understanding the nature of God** can be broken down further to four stages of devotion. **In the first stage God creates the world, in the second stage God is the world, and in the third and highest understanding we see that God appears as the world in its many forms, but does not become them.** Just like the spiders' web comes from the spider, is made of the spider, depends on the spider but is not the spider.

The first 3 stages of bhakti or devotional practice are called *dvaita bhakti*; all 3 involve free will and the jiva, the person, which is why these stages are called dualistic worship. The purpose of these stages of worship or bhakti is that these practices reduce subjectivity and neutralize vasanas—likes and dislikes as well negate the doer. **It takes care of the childish ego. The last stage and 4th stage of devotion, non-dual bhakti, takes place once the doer is negated, and is based on knowledge**

6. Triguna Vibhava Yoga: Once the mind is clear and established in karma yoga, the next step is to examine and identify ones' conditioning in the light of self-knowledge, i.e. the *gunas*. This means you take an objective view of the programmes (*vasanas*) that modify the mind and make up the *jiva's* "stuff". If you do not have a good understanding of the *gunas*, what they are and how they function, I recommend that you go to the ShiningWorld website and use the search function on this vital topic. All the Shiningworld writers have written extensively about this.

7. Establish a Prakriya: Vedanta offers several practices that can be used very effectively to negate the doer and render the binding vasanas non-binding. The most effective is to practice the opposite thought. Whenever a toxic thought arises in the mind, or a thought that contradicts your nature as awareness, immediately employ the opposite thought. For instance, if you have someone in your life that you have very bad thoughts about, think loving thoughts. If the toxic of self-negating thoughts arise about you, think the opposite thought. You keep up this practice for every thought that arises in the mind that is contrary to your true nature as awareness.

8. Nididhyasana: Self-realization is the full understanding of your true nature as awareness. This means you apply the knowledge to your life and take a stand in awareness as awareness. If the mind is still agitated by *rajas* and *tamas* because all the qualifications are not in place and binding *vasanas* still condition the mind, one must go back and re-qualify. There is no other way to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding in order that self-actualization—the final "stage", which is perfect satisfaction (*tripti*) can take place.

9. Self-Actualizations: Once the knowledge is firm, one sees everything from the point of view of awareness **first**, second as the jiva and one never confuses the two again. This is discriminating the self, you (*satya*), from the objects that appear in you (*mithya*) **always, regardless of how the**

person is feeling. Self-actualization is the consistent, total application of self-knowledge to one's life. To be self-actualized means (1) that one has fully discriminated the Self (consciousness) from the objects appearing in it (all objects, meaning all gross objects as well as one's conditioning, thoughts and feelings—all experience) and (2) that that knowledge has (a) rendered the binding *vasanas* non-binding and (b) negated one's sense of doership.

Unless self-knowledge translates fully into the life of the person it cannot be said that self-actualization has taken place because the person will still be identified with certain aspects of being a person. In other words, binding *vasanas* and the sense of doership or egoic belief in separation will still be causing agitation in the mind. For existential suffering to end and for awareness to be one's primary identity, the person needs to be free *of* the idea of being a person to live free *as* the Self. What is the point of self-realization if the mind is still under the tyranny of its likes and dislikes (*vasanas*)?

One can only fully actualize self-knowledge when you have understood the identity between Awareness, *Isvara* and the *jiva*. This is where most people get stuck (or come un-stuck) in their self-inquiry and it is why many self-realized people do not self-actualize. Understanding *Isvara* is the key. This is probably one of the most important teachings in Vedanta and why we call this jnana yoga, knowledge yoga.

These steps are not necessarily linear; one can jump around a great deal until self-knowledge has removed all ignorance and the knowledge is firm. Many inquirers go through a stage when the knowledge is on or off, what we call the fire-fly stage. They get disheartened and start to criticize or feel bad about themselves when the knowledge is not constant, or they “slip up”. Don't get discouraged by this as it is a pretty normal stage for everyone to go through. Lifetimes of ignorance will take what it takes to dissolve. And *prarabdha karma* (the momentum of past actions) will play out as long as it plays out. It is not up to the *jiva* but to *Isvara*. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance—so, day by day, brick by brick; allow self-knowledge to do the work of removing every vestige of ignorance.

And lastly and very importantly...Nididhysana Never Ends for the Jiva

While it is true that there is a definite 'shift' in how one sees life, and relates to objects once self-knowledge is firm, it is also true that the nididhysana stage never ends for the *jiva* because it is always changing and interacting with the field of existence—which is also always changing. The price of freedom **for the jiva** is eternal vigilance. Macrocosmic ignorance does not end when personal ignorance (*avidya*) ends and the *jiva* is always limited by *maya* (although no longer conditioned by it) even though its essence is known to be limitless awareness. If this were not true, the *jiva* would become *Isvara* 'after' moksa...which clearly and irrefutably is not the case. The fine print on the enlightenment certificate that many miss is that there is no “post” moksa stage **for the jiva** even though **as awareness** you **aremoksa** and not the *jiva*. A *jivanmukta* is someone who has resolved all its condition through contemplation, assimilation of the knowledge and transformation of its habitual emotional/thought patterns (*vasanas*) into devotion for the self. This is the essence of nididhysana. As Vedantins we never stop “working” on the *jiva* even though we do not censure it or expect it to change. Of course, we follow dharma, personal and universal, without question; but not because we want to improve the *jiva* but only because we want to enjoy a peaceful mind.

A common myth in the enlightenment game is that enlightenment is another object to obtain and when it is, the *jiva* will be different, better. It may or may not be. It will still have its *Isvara* given

character and tendencies; it will still be a pain in the ass to itself and others sometimes. It will still suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, feeling joy, pain, loss, grief as well as the constant bliss of self-knowledge.

When moksa has obtained in the mind one may and usually *does* feel experiential bliss regularly, but one does not depend on it because you know *you* are the bliss. The bliss of knowledge does not feel like anything. Experiential bliss is an object known to you and you are always blissful, whether experiential bliss is present or not. In fact, you could be sick, in pain, half dead, broke, jobless or stuck in a situation you do not enjoy but cannot change...and be totally blissful because who you are is not influenced by what is or is not going on in your environment. You feel blissful regardless of what is going on in the mind.

The subjective reality never ends for the jivamukta and it can and often does still project its subjective reality (*pratibasika*) onto Isvara. It will always have its way of relating to Isvara which will be unique to its Isvara given vasana filters. The difference will be that a jivanmukta knows when it is projecting, instantly dissolves the projection in the knowledge and is instantly free of it. Thus, it does not create “new” karma. It keeps its karma like a little dog on a very short leash, right in front. No karmic drag, ever. No unfinished business or drama. Every moment of every day is complete. There is never another person involved in its interactions and transactions in the world of objects/experience. The jivanmukta knows **in the moment** that it is transacting only with itself because there is no “other”. There is only awareness.

Once the mind is purified humility is its natural response to everything in its environment (Isvara) because it understands there is only itself, awareness. It no longer sees ‘otherness’ as awareness, even though it observes the jiva still apparently experiencing it. Duality is understood and appreciated for what it is—enjoyed even. But as it is not expected to deliver something it is incapable of doing, i.e. happiness, duality is never a problem for the jivanmukta. This takes so much pressure off for the jiva because there is no need to make it conform to some silly ‘spiritual’ ideal. It is just known and loved for what it is: a reflection of the self in a mirror, which is also the self.

As the jiva is a product of the gunas, belongs to and is always subject to Isvara, the jiva is never going to be perfect. But, you as awareness you are free of the jiva and you know it arises from and depends on you and not the other way around. Then life makes sense and it is possible to see beauty all the time, even when things are not pretty.

Love, Sundari