

A Dissolved Mind... So What?

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Seeker: Hi, James. David Godman just posted this at *Facebook*. I'm not sure why it took so long for people to figure this out. ☺ I don't agree with what he calls "self-enquiry" but at least he tells what self-inquiry is not.

Question: In my experience there is a tendency among many people to convert the "Who am I?" technique into a *mantra* and repeat it. Is this a good method?

David Godman: "In World War II American troops took over an isolated Pacific island that had never been exposed to Western civilisation before. They built a runway and flew in a vast amount of supplies for their military personnel. The locals, some of whom were still hunter-gatherers, ended up with many of the leftovers.

"When the war was over the Americans departed, leaving behind a runway and some abandoned buildings. The local tribals wanted the American bounty to continue but they didn't know how to bring it about. They were clueless about geopolitics and technology. They had seen large birds descend from the sky and deposit an unimaginable amount of goodies on the runway. They had never really bothered to find out why these strangers were on their island or how these exotic goods were manufactured and brought to the island.

"They set up altars on the runway and started to perform their own religious rites there in an attempt to entice the big metal birds back to their island. These practices became a kind of religion that anthropologists labelled 'cargo cult.'

"I mention all this because many people try to do self-enquiry without really understanding how it works and why it works, and this lack of understanding leads them to do many practices that are not real self-enquiry, and which consequently will not produce the desired results. If I may pursue this analogy a little further, there is self-enquiry and there is cargo-cult enquiry, and to understand the difference between the two you have to know how and why self-enquiry works.

"In self-enquiry one is isolating the individual 'I' and by doing so one is making the mind, the individual self, sink back into its source and vanish. Any technique that encourages the mind to associate with objects or thoughts is not self-enquiry and it will not make the mind disappear. On the contrary, it will make the mind stronger. When you repeat 'Who am I? Who am I?' the subject 'I' is concentrating on an object of thought, the phrase 'Who am I?' This does not lead to the disassociation of the 'I' from its thoughts; it keeps it enmeshed in them.

"The same comment can be made about practices that associate self-enquiry with concentration on a particular place in the body. A lot of people have this misconception. If you are focusing on a place in the body you are associating the subject 'I' with an object of perception – whatever spot you are concentrating on.

“This is not self-enquiry, and you will never cause the ‘I’ to vanish in this way. Any technique that puts attention on a thought or a perception or a feeling that is not ‘I’ is not self-enquiry. If you think it is you are practising cargo-cult enquiry. You are following a ritual or a practice that derives from an incorrect understanding of how the mind comes into existence and how it can be made to disappear. Your likelihood of success will be the same as the islanders who tried to entice planes out of the sky with religious ceremonies.”

Question: But doesn't faith and devotion have a role? What about the people who are doing things with deepest devotion and faith but perhaps don't have a good idea of what needs to be done (or undone, in this case)?

David Godman: “I'm not criticising faith or devotion here. I'm simply saying that there's an effective way of doing self-enquiry and an ineffective way and that one understands the difference by understanding Sri Ramana's teachings on the nature of the 'I': how it rises and on how it can be made to subside.”

James: Yes, it is true as far as it goes but the problem is the idea that the mind is meant to be made to vanish or dissolve. This is a big fantasy. The mind does “dissolve” but only momentarily, then it returns. Furthermore, if the mind is not there, how can it get self knowledge? This notion is just a variant of *yoga*. It may produce the inferential knowledge (when the mind returns) that the self exists when the mind is not present but it is only marginally more useful than deep sleep because David does not understand that self-knowledge, which is for the mind, is liberation, not the cessation of thought. It is quite strange because Ramana distinctly says by knowledge alone is liberation gained.

If I knew I was the self it would make no difference if the mind was present or absent. It is quite amazing that people like David who have such a strong spiritual *vasana* get caught in a belief like religious people and stop thinking clearly. The problem is that you cannot read your way to *moksa* and if your “teacher” is not actually a teacher but just someone who knows who they are, like Ramana, you can easily confuse yourself because the “teachings” are just isolated statements made at different times in different situations and there is no big picture, no resolution of apparently conflicting statements. If you are under the thrall of the experiential view of enlightenment you will find statements that confirm that view and reject statements to the contrary. It is easy to resolve the issue of knowledge and experience but only if you are open to Vedanta, which, as far as I know, is the only teaching that does so.

What David doesn't get – along with the rest of the Neos – is that self-inquiry is not a question about one's identity at all. There is no doubt about it. It is the application of the knowledge of one's wholeness and completeness to the mind which believes otherwise. As long as the self in the form of the mind thinks it is incomplete and actually believes incompleteness to be the truth it is subject to the seductive belief that it can bring about its enlightenment by dissolving the mind by applying some technique. Yes, applying knowledge is done by the doer too but in this case the doer has the right idea – that ignorance is the problem, not action, the application of some technique that is meant to produce some kind of experiential change. Self-knowledge doesn't change one's experience, it changes one's relationship to the doer/experience by bringing about identification with awareness. It does so by destroying ignorance. The inquiry aspect is ferreting out the ignorance – looking behind your fears and desires – and destroying it with the knowledge, which usually takes a lot more than just asserting the fact that you are whole and

complete awareness. Usually, you need *manana*, the logic of various *prakriyas*, teachings, to lay waste to ignorance-borne thinking patterns.

And for that you need to be taught. If you are highly qualified, intelligent and can actually read without prejudice maybe you can pick up the teachings on your own and apply them and remove your own ignorance but it is much easier and more effective to let a sage teach you. When you are properly armed then you wade into the arena and do battle with ignorance.

The problem with David is that he picked up the experiential notion of enlightenment and, it seems, never actually did inquiry on it because if he had he would see the fallacy to the dissolved-mind teaching. It is totally simple and obvious why dissolving the mind doesn't work. If it did then we would all be enlightened – because who hasn't slept? So he is actually like the cargo cult natives he mentions, caught up in a belief which he takes to be knowledge. In the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king.

~ James