

# An Inquirer Needs to Be Qualified

Ted Schmidt

2015-02-26

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1988>

**Kaliana:** Dear Ted, you may remember that I wrote to you about a year ago, I think. I was then in a homeless hostel and talking about my unsuccessful life.

I started to come off antidepressant medication, which I feel has produced more psychological problems than it ever helped.

**Ted:** My first and foremost concern regarding your statement is whether or not you “came off” the antidepressant medication you were taking under the guidance of a licensed physician. From the information you have provided in this email, I have no way of knowing whether or not you need antidepressant medication, what type of medication might or might not be appropriate, what dosage may or may not be sufficient, etc. Before proceeding any further with regard to your inquiry, I want to make it unequivocally clear that I am a teacher of Vedanta, not a medical doctor or a psychiatrist. The comments I offer in response to your statements and questions align with the non-dual vision of Vedanta but are not meant to be taken as medical advice. I am not qualified to make medical or psychological diagnoses or advocate appropriate treatments based on those diagnoses.

I have addressed various statements you make concerning the issues that you currently face in light of the teachings of Vedanta but I want to make it utterly clear that those teachings are intended for qualified students. In other words, the teachings of Vedanta is intended for those who have resolved most of their “worldly” issues and whose minds are reasonably stable and contemplative, those who are able to think clearly and rationally. If one is suffering from clinical depression, mental illness or any severe psychological trauma, it is imperative that one get the professional neurological and psychiatric care one needs.

I’m not saying that you need antidepressant medication and/or psychiatric counseling. I don’t know and am not qualified to make that determination. What I am saying is that the comments I offer in this email reflect the traditional teachings of Vedanta, which are intended for mature individuals with mental and emotional stability. The teachings can easily be and are often misinterpreted by students who seek escape from their personal identity and worldly responsibilities rather than a proper understanding of the individual’s apparent nature and an effective means of actualizing self-knowledge within the context of the apparent reality.

**Kaliana:** And over the last few weeks my mind has (had) been incredibly clear and still.

**Ted:** Though you describe your recent state of mind as “incredibly clear and still,” that statement is a completely subjective evaluation, which I have no way of determining the accuracy of, especially in light of your following comments.

**Kaliana:** However, I am not sure which came first, the feeling of disassociation again (isolated in

the world, cannot seem to find my place, again no employment, stable home, no friendships and fear with that) or starting to feel there is something more... this calm still mind is not the end, and then thinking/reading about Advaita again.

**Ted:** You are right that the calm, still mind is not the end. But it is a good sign. It indicates that *sattva* is the predominant energy influencing the mind.

The three basic energetic constituents of which all objects, both gross and subtle, are composed are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* is of the nature of clarity, knowledge, balance, harmony and peace, and its essential power is revelation. *Rajas* is of the nature of passion, desire, activity and mutability, and its essential power is projection. *Tamas* is of the nature of dullness, inertia, confusion and apathy, and its essential power is concealment.

A certain degree of *tamas* is necessary in order to keep one grounded and practical, but too much *tamas* dulls the mind and renders it unable to “see,” or “sense” (i.e. understand), the extreme subtlety of one’s true identity as pure, attributeless, non-objectifiable awareness. Along the same lines, a certain degree of *rajas* is necessary to imbue one with both the ability to take care of one’s worldly responsibilities and the motivation to engage in self-inquiry, but too much *rajas* extroverts the mind’s focus toward objective phenomena and agitates it with myriad subjective evaluations and gratuitous desires that distract one from appreciating one’s whole, complete, limitless, non-dual nature.

Ideally, one wants a predominately *sattvic* mind, especially if one wishes to effectively engage in self-inquiry and ultimately assimilate self-knowledge. A *sattvic* (i.e. relatively calm, peaceful, clear, contemplative) mind is the necessary platform for self-inquiry, as it enables one to withdraw one’s extroverted focus from the objective phenomena, both the tangible items, people and conditions appearing in the “outer” world as well as the subtle sensations, emotions and thoughts arising in the “inner” world, or mind, and direct one’s attention “inward” toward the self, the pure “field” of awareness, in which both sets of objects appear.

I am by no means a neurological expert and thus cannot speak with authority concerning the efficiency or effective use of antidepressant medications. Essentially, however, antidepressants are synthetic chemical forms of *rajas* and *tamas* that are used in an attempt to balance the energies influencing one’s psyche and consequently one’s emotional demeanor. Though they can be useful, even essential and necessary, in helping correct severe imbalances in one’s neurology, it is obviously more desirable to cultivate psychological balance and internal harmony in a more natural way through various means of lifestyle management, such as diet, exercise, work and recreation habits, the character of one’s interpersonal interactions and relationships, etc. if possible (which, to be clear, is not entirely the case if one is suffering from a degree of neurological imbalance that requires chemical management through antidepressant medication).

This is not to say that taking antidepressant medication disqualifies one from practicing self-inquiry. The point is simply that one should manage one’s mental health in an honest, healthy and responsible manner in order to cultivate a mind stable enough to maintain an introverted focus and reasonable enough to conduct a dispassionate analysis of one’s life experience.

In any case, it is true that antidepressant medication itself does not offer a permanent solution to the fundamental problem that plagues the human psyche – self-ignorance. In fact no object can offer the lasting fulfillment and sense of wholeness, adequacy, peace and happiness that we

seek. The truth is that we are already whole and complete as we are. So strongly identified are we with the limited apparent individual person we seem to be, we simply do not appreciate our true nature as limitless awareness. Thus no limited object or action can give us something we already have or transform us into something we already are. Only self-knowledge can eradicate our erroneous notions about ourselves and thereby enable us to “see” (i.e. understand) and ultimately stand with unshakable conviction in our true identity as limitless awareness.

**Kaliana:** But anyway, a huge fear came and a feeling of disassociation (disconnected to my body, life around me).

**Ted:** Who is it that knows the fear and the feeling of disassociation? Interestingly, you refer the body as yours and to life as a phenomenon that surrounds you. Who is it to whom the body belongs and whom life surrounds? And if this being is both in possession of a body and surrounded by life, then how disassociated from these phenomena is it actually?

Considering this experience from another perspective, you might regard the feeling of disassociation from the body and the surrounding world as a reflection of your true nature as pure, limitless, attributeless awareness. The essence of Vedantic self-inquiry is *atma-anatma-viveka*, the discrimination (*viveka*) between the self (*atma*) and the “not-self” (*anatma*); between the real and the apparent; between the limitless, attributeless and thus non-objectifiable subject and all the limited objective forms, including the relative subject, or apparent individual person we seem to be, that appear within the scope of its being. Though the ultimate truth is that the nature of reality is non-dual and thus all objects are essentially nothing other than awareness and so non-separate from the self, the discrimination between the self and the “not-self” (i.e. awareness reflecting in the subtle body in the form of objective phenomena) is a provisional distinction that enables one to initially break one’s identification with the body and its concept that objects can enhance or diminish one’s being. In this regard, the ability to observe one’s disassociation from the body and surrounding world can lend itself to a deeper understanding of one’s true limitless, ever-free nature.

**Kaliana:** But it is also confusing, as long-term antidepressant use can cause these altered states, and therefore I am reluctant to seek further help in the medical/psychological model.

**Ted:** This may or may not be wise. I can understand your reluctance to embrace these forms of treatment but it is out of my jurisdiction to offer advice on this matter.

**Kaliana:** I am finding it difficult to read, concentrate on the information on Advaita due to this fear but keep being drawn back to it nevertheless.

**Ted:** Perhaps my preceding explanation of the discrimination between the self and the “not-self” will help alleviate your fear. What exactly do you fear about feeling disassociated from the body and world? As my initial questions regarding this issue were meant to imply, you (who?) are obviously still functioning through the vehicle of the body and within the context of the world, so it is obvious that the disassociation does not leave you floating in some nebulous realm of

“nothingness.” So what exactly are you afraid of?

**Kaliana:** But I also worry that concentrating on Advaita allows me to bypass problems.

**Ted:** Vedanta does allow you “bypass problems” in the sense that it reveals that “problems,” which are only conflicts rooted in one’s subjective interpretation and evaluation of the objects/experiences that one encounters within the context of the apparent reality (i.e. manifest universe), in both its subtle, or “inner,” and gross, or “outer,” aspects, are nothing more than apparent objects that have no affect on one’s essential nature as pure awareness and thus are not actually problems at all, so to speak. This is a subtle understanding, however, that in no way negates the existence of the apparent individual person one seems to be or gives one license to shirk one’s worldly responsibilities or avoid dealing with one’s personal issues without consequence within the context of the apparent reality.

**Kaliana:** I wonder what your advice would be and what practice would be most appropriate to start?

**Ted:** The best thing to do initially is read *How to Attain Enlightenment* by James Swartz, which provides an overview of Vedantic self-inquiry. It is important to read the chapters of the book in the order they are presented and to sign on to the logic of each chapter before moving onto the next because the teachings follow a logical progression in which each point can only be properly understood in light of the preceding points.

To be perfectly honest, however, it sounds like you may still be in need of some therapy before you are qualified to undertake self-inquiry. I have no way of knowing your present level of qualification and mental stability. But based on some of the issues you face and the fact that you have only recently stopped taking antidepressant medication, I strongly urge you to embrace therapy along with beginning your foray into Vedanta by reading *How to Attain Enlightenment*.

**Kaliana:** Also, I would like to add that this feeling of disconnect also produces a feeling/thoughts of fear that there are no answers to be had, no one has any answers (on the human level), although I have always been this way to some extent, seeking answers from others and feeling that I have no inner compass, no strong sense of self to navigate life.

~ Thank you, Kaliana

**Ted:** Vedanta does provide answers to life’s deepest questions. But to reiterate, one must be psychologically qualified in order to effectively practice self-inquiry and properly assimilate the self-knowledge that is its fruit.

~ All the best, Ted