

Deeper Knowing Won't Help

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Ram: Hi, Ted. It doesn't make sense that spontaneous inquiry happens for no reason, particularly since this is a conscious, purposeful universe. The purpose of inquiry is to get knowledge – in this case self-knowledge. You are in the spiritual world and have been associating with *mahatmas* and doing *sadhana* for a long time. By your own admission you have a desire for liberation. And as Ramana and Shankara and the *Upanishads* and any *mahatma* worth his salt says, "By knowledge alone is the self to be realized." So here we have you asking a question (or the self presenting a question to you) and you not only say that no answer is needed, you say it doesn't "feel" that an answer is needed. May I respectfully ask why?

Ted: Yes, thank you for asking. The reason it doesn't "feel" necessary to answer the question is precisely because it's the intellectual part of the mind (*buddhi*, I believe it's called) that wants to know. So in trying to satisfy *buddhi*, I simply create another object for the mind to identify with, and essentially another obstacle to "overcome" in the end, or another veil to see through.

Unless I'm really off base, I think most sages would agree that the truth cannot be objectified. So by saying "no answer is needed" I'm really saying, "I'm okay with the mystery of it, until It reveals Itself in a deeper way, beyond the *buddhi* mind: essentially, a way of knowing that goes beyond our usual way of knowing – i.e. *buddhi* mind." Ramana himself said more than once that when one does self-inquiry (*vichara*) not to expect an answer, but that "what am I?" was more of a pointer that directs one's gaze inward, if you will. In looking "inwardly" one sees that there is nothing to see – emptiness, the void. The "little me" – Ted – disappears in this case. There is only the emptiness, the void, awareness, waking up to Itself. And this is what I am!

Ram: This does not make sense to me if, as scripture and Ramana say, "By knowledge alone is the self to be realized." The reason one searches is because of an intellectual (yes, "*buddhi*" is the right word) conviction that one is not enlightened. A person will take this belief to be true and go through a long and difficult *sadhana* and much suffering to try to resolve it. If there is no need to answer the "who am I?" question, then why not dismiss the belief that one is not enlightened in the first place and save oneself all the trouble of seeking?

If somebody asks you what your name is, you say, "Ted." You did not have to sit down and meditate to experience Ted and then give the name to the experience of Ted and then tell the person who you are. The knowledge of Ted was right there all along and instantly available. The request for information did not create an obstacle to identify with and overcome at all.

Ted did not create this doubt about who he was. It is there prior to Ted. It motivates Ted to seek enlightenment. And the way to "call off the search" – which is presumably what one is trying to accomplish by seeking enlightenment – is to honor this doubt and remove it. Once it is removed it does not come back, just as your doubt about Ted does not come back.

In *Panchadasi* Vidyanaraya Swami says, "If you think you are enlightened, you are enlightened. If

you think you aren't enlightened, you aren't enlightened." This does not in any way invalidate experience but it does indicate that that problem is the *buddhi*, the intellect. Enlightenment is for the *buddhi* and for nothing else. You, the self, are already enlightened. When you are under apparent ignorance you need apparent knowledge to neutralize it.

If you think that there is a special kind of "knowledge" that is not "intellectual" you are not correct. All knowledge is intellectual. The idea that lets you dismiss the question "who am I?" is intellectual. It's a shame that "intellectual" and "knowledge" have got such a bad name in the spiritual world. It is understandable because most people come at spirituality through an orientation toward experience. And somehow it is believed that one's thought life is different from one's experiential life. So the idea that you see in Yoga and the *shakti sadhanas* is that the intellect is the enemy to be stopped, transcended, ignored or destroyed. But you can make a strong case that one's thought life is the essence of one's experience. If this is true then one needs to take the doubts that arise seriously and answer them. There is an answer for every doubt that will lay that doubt to rest once and for all, an answer based on knowledge of both the subjective and objective realms and backed by experience and logic. This is why inquiry is recommended by the scripture. Inquiry is for the purpose of knowledge, in this case self-knowledge. Your statement, "And this is what I am," is direct, intellectual knowledge.

Okay, you can say that what you are seeking comes from a deeper knowing but this deeper knowing is not something that will happen to you. It is going on all the time. It is the nature of the self to know the self. As the scripture says, it is "self-revealing, self-illuminating." Enlightenment is when this "deeper" knowing becomes "shallow" knowing. And it doesn't become shallow knowing on its own. It requires a certain subtle effort to bring it into the intellect where it will root out the doubt that is motivating the search. What good it is if it doesn't destroy the intellect's doubt about the nature of reality? Until this deeper knowing reaches the intellect, identification with the doer continues and one is forced to wander here and there looking experientially for something that one can only attain through knowledge.

This teaching that the self cannot be objectified should not be taken at face value. Yes, it is true assuming that the intellect does not have a valid means of self-knowledge. But Vedanta argues that the self is the only truly objective thing there is. Only the self is real. Things in *maya*, relative reality, can be known, but the knowledge of them is only relative and apparent because knowledge is true to the object of knowledge. But the self is eternal, always present and always experienced. Therefore it only, the self, can be known with certainty. Do you have any doubt that you exist? You do not. It is absolute knowledge based on experience. Yes, as I mentioned above the self knows itself with certainty but this does not help us, because we believe we are not it. And the self is not going to magically do something to relieve our ignorance – because it has no problem with ignorance – unless we begin to inquire.

The acquisition of knowledge is merely the loss of ignorance. So to remove this doubt about who I am we need a valid means of knowledge, something that will remove the belief that I am not enlightened. And Vedanta *pramana* is such a means.

Ramana's statement that "who am I?" is simply an indicator, like the teaching that the self cannot be objectified and therefore must remain unknown, should not be taken at face value either. With any teaching you have to consider the context, the person to whom the teaching is being given and the intention of the teacher. If you read *Ramana, Shankara and the Forty Verses*, on page 13 Ramana says, "By *jnana*, or spiritual knowledge, alone is this bliss (the self) to be realized, and

jnana is achieved through *vichara*, or steady inquiry. In order to learn this method of enquiry one should seek the grace of a *guru*.” This statement is lifted bodily from *Vivekachoodamani* by Shankara and translated by Ramana in his own hand into Tamil.

Yes, one should appreciate the value of the question “who am I?” but one need not sit around waiting for an answer, because the jury is not out on this question. One’s epiphanies and the scripture make it abundantly clear: “I am whole and complete, limitless, non-dual, actionless awareness and not this body-mind entity I think I am.” I know this. So why do I keep seeking? I keep seeking because I don’t have confidence in this knowledge.

The thing about confidence is that just as the deeper knowing does not automatically become shallow knowing, confidence does not come out of the blue one fine day to bless me. Confidence comes from operating from the knowledge that I am the self. Every day when the intellect tells you that there is something to be gained, you refuse to listen to it. You tell it that you are whole and complete as you are, that no experience can change you, and you sit tight. And by sitting tight you see that you are just fine as you are. And this gives you confidence. Eventually you destroy the belief that you are not the self.

~ Love, Ram