

Meditation and Self-Knowledge

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Denise: What is the place of silent meditation in Vedanta?

Arlindo: Experiential meditation is an effort to change one's experience – and why one would want to have a different experience from one's simple ordinary experiences of life? Because of the ignorance of one's own nature as the ever-present, always whole, free and complete, limitless conscious existence. Such non-apprehension causes the misapprehension "I am the limited, small and incomplete body-mind phenomenon, and therefore I need extraordinary experiences in order to feel full and blissful."

The very nature of the meditator is limitless bliss, but because it identifies itself with the erroneous notions with regards to its true identity, it will mostly suffer its experiences. To want to meditate again and again for the pure sake of experiencing bliss is mostly going to reinforce one's own ignorance-based *vasana* for a subtle object as a means to feel happy. Scriptures refer to it as "stuck in *sattva*." Meditation without knowledge is equivalent to preparing an exquisite meal but never eating it.

Denise: I'm so grateful for this clarification. For many years, it seemed to me that meditating was some hidden and mysterious secret to nothing, as such. Nothing other than what the next person might be looking for in drug-taking, eating chocolate or whatever. A high, in other words. And yet it was shrouded in mystery and spoken of as the ultimate. But I often wondered: the ultimate what?

To appreciate silence as a state of quiet appreciation of truth and a reflection on the self that I am makes so much more sense. Can you please clarify that you see it as having no (or perhaps some?) value on the Vedantic path, in preparing the mind for concentration in order to be more qualified to assimilate the teachings?

Arlindo: Denise, seeking experiential meditation based on the knowledge that your true nature as the self is limitless bliss, peace and love, and that one can experientially enjoy "it" by keeping one's attention on its reflection in the subtle body is already a good step forward, besides the fact that it is a good purifier of the mind. It is definitely better than meditating thinking that the self is an object rather than oneself.

The only problem with that is that the experiential bliss obtained from the concentration on your own reflection requires effort, *sadhana*. Once *sadhana* is suspended the experience changes because the mind gets redirected to the world of apparent gross objects.

Knowing that states of mind always change, eventually one develops a positive disinterest (dispassion) for experiential bliss and develops a strong *vasana* for self-knowledge. Once the knowledge is clear and firm one navigates through life with full confidence in its eternal, limitless, conscious existence. This is the bliss Vedanta refers to.

Denise: Thank you, Arlindo, but how about shifting from intellectual knowledge to *moksa*, to actual firm knowledge. It seems that meditation can be useful for “preparing the field” so that the seeds of intellectual knowledge can turn into real plants. Your thoughts, please?

Arlindo: As we all agree, in the long run experiential meditation will purify the mind. I know that from decades of experience as a meditator. It may be painful and frustrating because the pleasant states produced by meditation always fade away, just like anything in the apparent reality. But sooner or later the unsatisfied meditator will come in contact with the direct knowledge “You are that!”

This is the turning point in one’s journey because it consolidates the understanding that anything that changes is of limited value, and that what one has been seeking is fundamentally the very nature of the individual “I,” the real self. Therefore the statement “you are what you are looking for.” From there on *jiva* becomes mostly interested in understanding/knowledge rather than experience. In Vedanta, meditation is synonymous with contemplation of the teachings, it is an effort into inquiry as presented by the scriptures, and the understanding with further assimilation of one’s true nature.

The question that follows is how to convert indirect “intellectual” (technical, theoretical, philosophical) knowledge into the direct self-knowledge, “*Tat Tvam Asi*” (I am that). At the initial stages *jiva* gets in contact with the fact that the self exists and that “it” is the only real source of joy and happiness there is. Later on, after some study and contemplation of the teachings, *jiva* understands that the self he/she is seeking is no other than the *jiva*-self in its essential nature. That is when one gets self-knowledge.

So intellectual knowledge is absolutely necessary since all knowledge only takes place in the intellect. But although all objective knowledge can be defined as “intellectual knowledge,” self-knowledge is not to be classified in the same way, because intellectual knowledge depends on the subject-object duality (the knower and the object of knowledge) and it is always subject to error and further correction, whereas self-knowledge does not require an object for its knowledge, and once it is known, it is known for good. It is the self, knowing itself to be the only self there is.

Self-knowledge does take place in the intellect, but only insofar as the self with the aid of a human subtle body (the experiencing entity) gets to know itself through its reflection on a subtle intellect. The next question would then be: How to convert self-knowledge into *moksha*? By the constant application of the Vedanta teachings the remaining of one’s binding *vasanas* (those hardwired pieces of ignorance still striving to survive), gradually dries up to give rise to a cool sense of limitlessness, confidence and satisfaction, regardless of circumstances and experiences.