

Self-Inquiry Techniques

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Brian: Thank you for your beautiful response, and apologies for taking so long to reply. I wanted to let your answers settle first. Each time a question appeared, it seemed flawed in its assumptions, so this what remains... and is probably still flawed.

It seems like there is only one fundamental problem (even though from awareness there is no problem) and that problem is a mistaken identity caused by an assumption/belief that I am Brian instead of awareness. It seems obvious, and is caused by the knowledge that I am awareness being firm and direct. What can be done for this knowledge to be firmed, made direct and permanent?

Sundari: I think you mean in your statement above that this is caused by the knowledge “I am awareness” not being firm and indirect or you would not be asking this question. Until self-knowledge removes the ignorance of your true nature and the knowledge is firm, you must continue the practice self-inquiry. This is where Vedanta differs from other paths. Vedanta is both a means of knowledge – a pathless path – and a path of action, meaning that it provides tools and the instructions how to use them, which when applied rigorously and with dedication will remove ignorance and its effects. It will set you free, as there is no purifier like self-knowledge.

The most important practice recommended by Vedanta to prepare the mind for *moksa* is *karma yoga*. I am confident in saying that it is almost impossible to achieve *moksa* without *karma yoga*, as it is the best way to neutralise the *vasanas* and negate the doer. There are two parts to it: first, consecrate everything you do, say and think on a moment-to-moment basis to *Bhagavan*, knowing that the results of your actions are not up to you. Second, and just as important, take whatever results do come as *prasad*. *Prasad* means “a gift from God.” *Karma yoga* is a religious attitude of worship, prayer and gratitude. This is not to say that Vedanta is a religion, far from it; but a religious attitude is necessary to purify the mind, preparing it for self-inquiry.

Bhakti yoga, an attitude of love and devotion, is also necessary to purify the mind. Meditation is also a good tool to prepare the mind for self-inquiry.

Another valuable practice is *triguna vibhava yoga*, careful observation and monitoring of the *gunas*, how they come into play in the mind and what are the effects on the subtle body. This practice is also the best tracking device to uncover and reveal where you are still invested in your story and what psychological issues have not been cleared up, as well as where your likes and dislikes operate, i.e. what *vasanas* are still binding.

A further valuable practice is applying one of the many *prakriyas* that Vedanta offers, like applying the opposite thought (*pratipaksa bhavana*). When you catch yourself feeling small, assert your limitlessness to yourself. Or whenever you have a thought or a doubt about anything, dismiss it with the knowledge, “if it changes, it is not me.” Another powerful technique which helps to distinguish the self from the not-self is to press “pause” every time you find yourself saying “I” and ask yourself, “Which I is speaking?” In this way you can develop discrimination

between the self and the subtle body, the not-self.

Ask who asked the question you posed in this email. Brian is just a word, a notion in you, awareness. He is the self under the spell of ignorance. In reality there is no difference between Brian and awareness, there is only one self, not-two. It is not Brian who needs to be enlightened, it is the self that IS the light that seemingly needs to have the ignorance of its true nature removed. *Moksa* is the self apparently liberating the self from its apparent imprisonment in apparent ignorance.

There is no easy way to remove the ignorance; it takes dedication and a burning desire for freedom. Ignorance is hardwired. I strongly suggest that you read James' website and all the *e-satsangs*, as they contain most of the questions and answers anyone could need in their quest to gain liberation. You most likely have read his book, but if you have not, that is a must too. Read the *e-satsangs* at the ShiningWorld website, as new ones are posted regularly. Keep writing if you have questions, and we will do our best to help you.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari