

Self-Realization Is Just the Beginning

Ram (James Swartz)

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Vinod: Dear James, I realized that my delusion goes far deeper than I thought, that this process of identification with the body-mind complex is the source of all my problems.

The initial insight might help you see how deeply the patterns are entrenched but actualization is a lifelong process. It's a good thing I didn't decide to become a teacher and try to save the ignorant. ☺ The I-sense is another identification that needs to be understood and relinquished.

On analysis, I actually think self-inquiry and *nididhyasana* are one and the same. This is what Shankara and Suresvara say below. Ramana uses slightly different language, but he is saying pretty much the same thing:

“Reflection (*manana*) is a hundred times superior to listening (*sravana*); meditation (*nididhyasana*) is a hundred times superior to reflection; *nirvikalpaka samadhi* is infinitely superior.” ~ Shankara

“*Nididhyasana* is so called when instruction about the uniqueness of the *Atman* is justified by [proper] reasons viz. the *Sruti* [the instructions of] teachers and [one's own] experience [of the same].” ~ Suresvara

“When the discriminating one becomes detached and, giving up the idea that one is the body, single-mindedly enquires, the churning of the channels takes place.” ~ Ramana

James: Hi, Vinod. I very much respect your spiritual integrity. Sometimes lesser mortals take self-realization as an opportunity to quit inquiry – which means that the doer has not been negated – but self-inquiry goes on one's whole life; it is *Isvara's* nature; *jiva* has no say in it. It can only recognize the value of *nididhyasana* and participate gladly. Writing and teaching Vedanta is my *nididhyasana*. By *nirvikalpa samadhi* Shankara means self-actualization, not the *yogic* state. Ramana's word “channels” is *yogic* and confusing. It means discrimination, churning the thoughts with the idea “I am awareness” until the bliss of awareness is continually manifest. The bliss of awareness is likened to butter, which is obtained by churning milk. The mind is often referred to as “the milky ocean” in the Vedic tradition. He is not talking about a special *yogic* state.

Vinod: Thanks, James. I am finally understanding what *karma yoga* entails and what actually submitting to *Isvara's* will entails. Until the doer has been completely negated, self-inquiry has to continue.

I didn't know about the mind/awareness and churning milk part. I thought Ramana was metaphorically referring to the churning of the ocean of milk by *devas/asuras*.

James: The metaphor of the *devas* and the *asuras* churning the ocean of milk is a symbol of

inquiry, Vinod. The *asuras* are the thoughts generated by an ego that doesn't know it is ever-free awareness. The *devas* are the "opposite thoughts" (*prati-paksha bhavana*), the teaching of Vedanta, i.e. self inquiry. When the ocean is sufficiently churned by *manana*, the causal body gives up its poison – negative *vasanas* brought on by identification with the body – and self knowledge, i.e. Shiva, drinks it and neutralizes it – puts it in a place, the neck, between the head and the heart, where it can't contaminate one's thinking or one's love. This is why Shiva is called *nilakanta*, blue-necked. In another *Purana* story the poison comes up as Kalika, a vile serpent, and Krishna, the self, subdues it and dances on its heads, the ten senses.

Vinod: Fascinating. I never knew that the *Puranas* are actually talking about self-knowledge. I like these stories much better and I think people relate to stories a lot easier than dry Vedantic texts.

Honestly, *Panchadasa* is about the only text other than the *Gita* that I can read without falling asleep. I am sure you already know this, but Vidyaranya was a devotee of Kali and a *tantric* adept. Ramana was also a big fan of *Puranic* texts.

I think I am getting the beginning of a framework to communicate Vedanta more easily to the common man. Unfortunately, the common man doesn't care. ☺ It's like being a king with no subjects. That is okay too.

I look forward to meeting you in June.