

Self-Realization Not Necessarily Enlightenment

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Hi Sundari,

I went through your website and finished reading the basic course. I have been practicing Advaita and mindfulness for a few years since I already have some background on the subject. I am familiar with Bhagavad Gita and the teachings of Ramana Maharishi; they helped me a lot. Your website was also very helpful in refreshing my memory on some of the concepts. However, I struggled a lot in my path because I couldn't get hold of anyone who is enlightened to help me. I think you can help me with my questions.

Sundari: It seems you are serious about self-inquiry and have done quite a bit of work. The problem with Ramana is that although he was a Mahatma and a jnani, he was not a proper teacher of Vedanta and never claimed to be. He made many statements which were taken out of context. For instance, Ramana didn't make clear the distinction between Yoga and Vedanta (experience and knowledge) and their relationship to each other, so his devotees generally have a knowledge and an experience confusion, which clearly you do have. To remove this confusion, you need the *satya/mithya* teaching.

You have a valid means of knowledge, which is Vedanta, but the next is to determine if you are a qualified student. Please make sure you understand the qualifications for moksha, all explained in detail in James' books and on the website. Two more things are required before you can be taught. First, a qualified teacher. You cannot teach Vedanta to yourself. Reading books and listening to unqualified teachers does not work. It is natural to begin your journey in this way but there is an obvious downside: your ignorance will cause you to interpret what you read. The teachings will not work to free the mind of ignorance if you interpret Vedanta according to your ideas and beliefs.

An enlightened person is not necessarily a qualified teacher and a qualified teacher is not necessarily enlightened! If my teaching is nothing more than me and my enlightenment story, my experience, what I did, what happened to me, it is not going to work for you. My enlightenment and the conclusions I draw from it do not amount to a teaching because the problem is ignorance. Ignorance is hard wired and belongs to me. If you have removed yours, mine remains, unless you can show me how to remove it.

Finding a qualified teacher to unfold the teachings is essential and you have done so with me and James and the other teachers on Shiningworld. There is not a better teacher of Vedanta than James and Swami Paramarthananda (and a few other Indian Swami's), alive on this planet. It is not our teaching, it is the ageless wisdom of the Self. Non-duality is not theory in practice, it is not a philosophy nor is it the fabrication of teachings based on a prophet or mystic. Vedanta is called a "*brahma vidya*" which means the science of consciousness. It is an objective and scientific analysis of the true nature of reality and your experience, based on the facts. Like any other science, it is not personal and it has a methodology, which, if followed with great dedication and commitment, will provide irrefutable knowledge that is *moksha*, **if the student is qualified**. Vedanta is simply the truth about you. Not your truth or my truth or anyone's truth: The Truth.

Vedanta is also called *apauruseya jnanam*, meaning not the philosophy or experience of one person like a prophet or a mystic, as in the Buddha, Jesus, or Abraham. It is not a belief system or religion either. Vedanta predates all known religious or philosophical paths because it is the pathless path that underpins all other paths. It is an independent teaching or *sruti*, which means that which is *heard*. It is also called **self**-knowledge.

Shanmugan: First, I want to let you know about a shift that happened a few years ago so that you can help me to interpret what happened to me. I went through a series of epiphanies, realizations and just moments of empty awareness which resulted in this change. After that, it just removed the mental boundaries between me and the world. I don't feel that there is an 'other'. It is not sensed as a distinct feeling when I am with others. Also, it made me complete and removed the yearning that something is missing. It removed all the internal conflicts. I don't have any regrets at all about my life. But I can't really interpret what happened to me, I would rather let a person like you to tell me what happened. So, please let me know, what happened to me?

Sundari: You need to understand the difference between experience and knowledge, the satya-mithya teaching as mentioned above because this is the foundation of Vedanta. This topic is extensively covered in James book, 'How to Attain Enlightenment', **make sure you read it and understand it**. It is essential if you are interested in moksa. I have attached the chapter for you but you need to read the whole book.

Shanmugan: Second, I have a question regarding Self-realization vs enlightenment. I have read James making a distinction between the two. But I can't find any such distinctions in the scriptures. Please tell me where I can find in Upanishads, Gita or Shankara's works a description of clear distinction between these two. (so far, I have always understood that self-realization is same as enlightenment).

Sundari: Everything James teaches is based solely on the traditional teachings of Vedanta as taught by Shankara and all the Vedanta teachers in the sampradaya from the beginning of 'time'. He has simply put the teachings in a more accessible format, in a methodology which has never been done before, **and he has emphasized the vitally important difference between experience and knowledge**. As I said above, it is essential you understand this difference to fully grasp the answer to this question.

Self-Realization and Self-Actualization

Enlightenment is not an object or a state of being to attain. It is who you are. You cannot gain something you already have. In truth, nobody is enlightened or unenlightened, because our true nature is the Self, the source of Light and the knower of 'enlightenment.' But there is a big difference between enlightened (self-actualized) and self-realized.

Self-realization is an **experiential** term. ***It is also where the work of self-actualization begins.*** Self-realization is an experience, and because all experience occurs in time, no experience can become permanent, all experiences will end. Experience is therefore not real in the light of Vedanta's definition of what constitutes real, being that which is always present and never changes. Only Awareness fits that definition. Meaning one can 'lose' one's self-realization, if the knowledge "I am whole and complete, actionless, unchanging, unlimited, **ordinary** Awareness" is not fully assimilated and you ***understand what that means for the jiva***. It is one thing to know that your true nature is Awareness, which is called **indirect** knowledge. It is quite another to live free **of** the person and **as** the self.

We are always experiencing something. In fact, we are only ever experiencing Awareness but if ignorance clouds the mind we think Awareness is something we must gain, so we seek experience. We then chase after objects (experience is an object) because we believe we are incomplete without it. This is the cause of all suffering. Vedanta states that only self-knowledge and **not experience** can remove ignorance. Knowledge can be gained through experience if the knowledge experience is meant to impart is understood and assimilated. For this reason, epiphanies and other religious or transcendental experiences can become a hindrance, not a help. Unless the experience is understood in the light of self-knowledge, it will be interpreted by one's conditioning and the knowledge it offers will be contaminated. This leaves one endlessly seeking freedom through experience, a fruitless endeavour because you are what you are seeking.

Self-knowledge makes it clear that one is the Self, not the experiencer because the experiencer is an object known to you. When you understand this fact clearly your desire to experience the Self dies because you see that you have always only ever been experiencing your Self.

Self - actualization is the consistent, total application of self-knowledge to one's life. To be self-actualized means (1) that one has fully discriminated the Self (consciousness) from the objects appearing in it (all objects, meaning all gross objects as well as one's conditioning, thoughts, and feelings—all experience) and (2) that that knowledge has (a) rendered the binding *vasanas* non-binding and (b) negated one's sense of doership.

Unless self-knowledge translates fully into the life of the person it cannot be said that self-actualization has taken place because the person will still be identified with certain aspects of being a person. In other words, binding *vasanas* and the sense of doership or egoic belief in separation will still be causing agitation in the mind. To repeat: For existential suffering to end and for Awareness to become one's primary identity, the person needs to be free *of* the idea of being a person to live free *as* the Self. What is the point of self-realization if the mind is still under the tyranny of its likes and dislikes (*vasanas*)?

One can only fully actualize self-knowledge when you have understood the identity between Awareness, *Isvara* and the *jiva*. This is where most people get stuck (or come un-stuck) in their self-inquiry and it is why many self-realized people do not self-actualize. Understanding *Isvara* is the key. This is probably one of the most important teachings in Vedanta. *Isvara* is your environment and everything in it, including you. For more on this teaching, please read 'Inquiry into Existence' by James, based on Panchadasi.

Also, very helpful is to remember this: There is only one person or Subtle Body, appearing as many; it appears **as if** there are individuals who are all different. However, the one individual appears as basically three **types** of individuals or *jivas*:

1. The *jiva* who thinks it is a person with a name, a history and an address. This *jiva* is called the doer or the human being, the one identified with objects (including all experience).
2. There is the *jiva* who knows **about** Awareness, but it does not know what it means to **be** Awareness. This *jiva* has indirect knowledge and is often called a self-realized *jiva*. This *jiva* has had an experience of being Awareness but has not actualized self-knowledge, so the knowledge is not firm and ignorance is still present. This is the one who re-identifies with objects or still seeks experience because the *vasanas* are still binding and doership has not been fully dissolved.

3. And finally, there is the *jiva* who has permanent direct knowledge because he/she knows that their true identity IS Awareness **and** they know what it means to be Awareness while still apparently manifesting as a *jiva* or individual. This means that self-knowledge translates fully into ALL aspects of the person's life. This is the *jivanmukta*, the Self no longer under the spell of ignorance or the self-actualized *jiva* or person.

Another big problem in the spiritual world is that seekers believe that self-realization or enlightenment will make the person limitless. It will not. As Awareness, you are and always have been limitless. **As the person called you are and always will be limited.** Removing ignorance of your true nature does not mean that you change as a person, or that you must become perfect or "holy". The person never leaves the apparent reality and the apparent reality is limited. The person is fine the way they are; they do not need to be perfected. And *Isvara's* world is perfect the way it is, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. The person just has an ignorance problem: it thinks it is the person.

To repeat: Being fully self-actualized means that you know that the apparent reality is not real, only you are, so you no longer seek objects to complete you and you no longer seek to change yourself or the world. It means the doer had been negated and all binding vasanas have been rendered non-binding.

As a *jivanmukta*, a self-actualized person, if you do make changes it is from the standpoint of peace of mind, not because you are looking for more, better, or different. You are already whole and complete. An object is anything other than you so your contact with objects is all that changes. You no longer do anything **for** happiness. You do what you do happily because you are already happy. It does not mean that life is always wonderful or great; it is not. It is what it is and how it is, is not up to you as the person, even when you know that you are really Awareness and unlimited. Your life belongs to ***Isvara and Isvara's creation continues as "before" your enlightenment.*** As Awareness, you take what comes as *prasad*, dispassionate about results. This is because ***Isvara in the role of Creator or the Field of Existence***, (Awareness plus *Maya* or the *gunas*) takes care of the Total, not the *jiva* and not pure Awareness, *Paramatman*. *Moksa* is freedom from the idea that you are the *person*, knowing you are really Awareness, irrespective of what is happening or not happening in person's life.

Om and prem, Sundari