

Vedantic *Prakriyas*

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Ram: Dear Leyton, as part of our ongoing discussion of Vedanta and in response to your question about Vedantic practices as opposed to the teaching, here is a rundown of two practices: discrimination and applying the opposite thought. I hope this is helpful for your understanding.

As you know, Vedanta is a means of self-knowledge and a handful of practices designed to (1) remove the notion that the “I” is incomplete and (2) permanently fix in one’s understanding the knowledge that the “I” is whole and complete. The most famous technique, *neti neti* (not that, not this), is a process of discrimination. It is based on the idea that there are two identities operating in the mind, the self and the ego. One is to distinguish between the whole and complete “I” and the incomplete and inadequate “I.” These “I”s, or “voices,” appear as two distinct ideas. Self-thoughts are those based on the view that one is whole and complete, that life and one’s self is perfect as it is, that nothing needs to be changed to improve happiness or remove unhappiness. The ego voice tells you that you are incomplete, lacking, vulnerable, inadequate, separate, etc. To successfully practice *neti neti* one needs to constantly monitor the mind and not to identify with the thoughts of limitation. At the beginning of the practice one often loses concentration and finds his or her self caught up in the dramas of the limited “I.” He or she will experience anger, irritability, depression, etc. and attribute the discomfort to outside causes. The attempt to find external causes is called “projection.” But the actual cause is always only the identification with the limited “I” concept.

Accepting that one’s lack of spiritual discrimination causes suffering is difficult. Ego-thoughts produce agitation because they come from ego’s signature energies: fear (I don’t want) and desire (I want). Ego is the part of the mind that feels incomplete. So it wants things it thinks will complete it and it wants to get rid of things it thinks are limiting its happiness.

The practice of discrimination leaves the thoughts and their respective objects intact. One just notices the thoughts arising and falling. This robs them of their power and they play out, gradually becoming less frequent and intense. When one no longer needs to exercise restraint with reference to a given thought, it is said to be non-binding. The ego and its thought system can be dismissed because it is not real, meaning not enduring. Self thoughts are happy thoughts and need to be taken as one’s real mind. One appreciates and retains them because like the self from which they come, they endure.

The Opposite Thought

Another Vedantic practice we’ve talked about is called “applying the opposite thought,” *pratipaksha bhavana*. Like *neti neti* it is based on the fact that both the self-thought and the ego-thought operate continually in the mind – with a difference. When a thought arises one traces it back to its source. Trace a thought of wholeness back to its source behind the mind and you will experience the self – which should then become the object of one’s attention. Holding one’s attention on the self is called self-inquiry. The purpose of self-inquiry is to realize the limitless

nature of the self and identify with it.

If the thought is sourced in the ego it will be accompanied by denial and projection. One does not own these thoughts, because they do not fit in with one's view of oneself. So they are projected onto someone (my useless husband, my bratty selfish kids, my mean boss) or something (terrorism, the sorry state of the economy, the weather). If you look at any disturbing thought (my money is running out, I'll be on the street before long) it comes from a sense of vulnerability and lack or an inflated sense of self-importance. When you work past the denial and the projections and find the root, you apply the opposite thought and do whatever actions are necessary to reinforce it. If you are afraid to ask the boss for a raise, you ask the boss for a raise.

The opposite thought to ego is always the self-thought: "I am whole and complete. I am adequate. There is nothing lacking in any way. I am not the doer. I am the Light of the mind," etc. If you have a religious temperament you would think, "This is God's will. The Lord provides," etc. These thoughts neutralize the dark ego-thought. In your statement above you said that you had to deal with "dark shadows," the realm of ego. You felt something had been taken away from you. You became angry. But if you think about things clearly you will realize that "you" can never become angry, that nothing can be taken from you, that you are whole and complete.

Analyze the things you're thinking and feeling and see if what the mind thinks is true before you decide to make yourself miserable. What did you lose? Did you really lose it? Who feels that he or she lost it? Can you lose something that is real? Can you actually possess something that isn't real? The opposite thought kills the ego-thought and the mind regains its sense of peace.

~ Ram