

# How Do I Practice Knowledge?

Tan

2013-04-12

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1275>

**John:** How do I “practice knowledge”? I feel I need a course of some kind, a step-by-step training in this. I suppose that this is why people live in an *ashram*. But how do I do it on my own?

**Tan:** Dear John, I am Tan. James has asked me to answer your question. He has checked my answer and gave the thumbs-up.

Through Vedanta there is a time-tested method to hear the truth, understand the truth and integrate it into your life. The truth is the knowledge that you are consciousness, full, limitless, unconcerned, non-dual, actionless and ordinary.

The first step in this method is to hear the truth by listening to a teacher unfolding the scripture or by reading Vedanta scripture on your own. It is called *sravana* in Sanskrit.

Scripture here is Vedanta in all its forms such as books, DVDs and commentaries of James and other teachers in the same lineage of Swami Dayananda and Swami Chinmayananda or source texts such as *Tattva Bodha*, *Bhagavad Gita*, etc.

For many people just simply hearing the words is not an easy task, because they are not able to listen without filtering the words through a net of their preconceived ideas about spirituality or enlightenment.

That is why in the beginning it is better to hear the words of Vedanta through a qualified teacher than reading scripture alone. If there are still a lot of preconceptions about who you are or what enlightenment will look like, then the words will be read through that filter of ideas and become distorted and not trigger the necessary understanding required. So the first training step, if you will, is to work on being able to listen to words of scripture without judging, agreeing, disagreeing or commenting on them. The task is to “only” hear them.

The second step is reasoning and thinking about the words. This step is called *manana* in Sanskrit. Now the task at hand is to take the concepts that are presented and compare them with your beliefs and your conditioning so far. An example would be to take what scripture says, such as “you are limitless consciousness,” and compare it with current apparent beliefs. If you believe that you are a limited body, then you need to inquire into that statement and find out for yourself whether it is true or not. In this step having a teacher or spiritual companion at hand who supports in answering the arising questions is also beneficial. The goal is to understand the truth and erase all doubts and questions arising about it in your mind and your intellect. It is the task to erase all “yes, but...” thoughts.

The third step is to integrate the doubtless understanding and the truth gained in steps one and two into your daily life. This means applying the knowledge gained in every moment. This step is called *nididhyasana* in Sanskrit. Once you understand that you are limitless and always full, you can apply it to situations where negative feelings arise out of the belief that you are limited. Let us take as an example the

feeling and fear that you are not loved and that you are lonely. Such feelings would stem from the belief of being a limited person who needs love and companionship to be complete and full. Here the task at hand is to apply the knowledge gained and stand as awareness by applying the thought “I am full and complete.”

These three steps are a continuous cycle that needs to be repeated until all doubts are erased. When the knowledge of your true nature is firm, then you can just stay with step three applying the knowledge, but it does not hurt to do step one and step two once in a while when there is conditioning or doubt left that is hard to crack. Also, steps one to three will become a continuous flow later on while practicing knowledge.

Why is it necessary to continuously apply the knowledge even if you understood that you are limitless consciousness?

You have to apply these steps continuously, because you have a lifelong head start in believing and also being told by other persons that you are a limited person. It is like living in the same house for 65 years and then moving to a new address. Your intellect has been living in I Am a Limited Person Street for 65 years, and now it has moved to Truth Street (“I am non-dual awareness”).

Even if you know for certain that you are living at the new address and you know the way to drive there for certain, your intellect and your mind will still once in a while drive to the old address automatically. There is just a lifelong habit and orientation that has been built and that has to be rooted out with vigilance and continuous application of knowledge.

### **Tools for Step Three: Continuously Practicing Knowledge**

For step three there are several methods that Vedanta has given us that you can apply to integrate the knowledge into your daily life. Here are just a few ways to practice the knowledge and the truth: discrimination, action *yoga*, the *yoga* of the three *gunas*, and prayer and love.

Discrimination – An important practice is to continuously discriminate between what you are (limitless consciousness) and what you are not (all apparent objects arising in you). Why is it so important? It is so important because by discriminating you fundamentally inquire into the truth of yourself, and disidentify yourself with gross and subtle objects such as your body, your feelings and your thoughts.

You replace all these identities by applying the thought about your true nature: “I am consciousness, full, limitless, unconcerned, non-dual, actionless and ordinary.” If doubts have been erased in step one and step two, then this thought creates an immensely peaceful mind and intellect. The truth always creates a *sattvic* and peaceful mind, because it is knowledge which is always true.

As an example, if negative feelings such as loneliness or anger arise, you can discriminate that you are not those feelings, but that these feelings arise as objects in yourself and that you are the knower of those feelings.

After you discriminate and see that you are not the object but the knower of the object, you are free of the objects and you take a stand as awareness with the thought about your true nature as mentioned above.

There are several models in Vedanta that support the discrimination process and can help you to discriminate. Most of them are summarized in James' book *How to Attain Enlightenment* or in the source text *Tattva Bodha*.

A comprehensive way to use this line of discrimination is through the usage of the five sheaths teaching (*panca kosha prakriya*):

1. Food sheath: Are you your body?
2. Energy/air sheath: Are you your basic energetic desires? Are you hungry/thirsty?
3. Mind sheath: Are you your emotions and feelings?
4. Intellect sheath: Are you your thoughts?
5. Bliss sheath: Are you joy? (In joyful moments where there seems no doer/experiencer.) Or have you been able to witness and know the joy? If not, how do you know joy was there in the first place?

Another teaching that can be used for discrimination is to look at the three bodies, which is a variation of the five sheaths teaching.

1. Gross body: Are you your physical body?
2. Subtle body: Are you your thoughts, feelings, including the ego, the sense/feeling of doership?
3. Causal body: Are you your conditioning?

Action *yoga* – Action *yoga*, also *karma yoga* in Sanskrit, is an attitude of offering the actions and the results expected from that actions to a higher power (God, *Isvara*, life etc.). You accept the results of the actions as a gift from God.

This practices the knowledge and understanding that the expected results are not up to you. This frees the mind from attachment to the results of actions.

You then expand this practice by offering the whole world and all objects completely to God.

By doing this you practice that all the objects, and the interactions and the results among them, are an offering to *Isvara*.

What you can offer to God you cannot be.

This means that all offerings are just an appearance and that you are free of them. The actions, objects and results are all created by God (*Isvara*), and the creation and destruction of objects is just a play of *Isvara*.

By offering all the objects to *Isvara* you become free of them and you thereby practice the knowledge that you are free of all objects.

You can further expand the offering and not only include the world and all objects in it but you can also offer yourself, John, who apparently lives on this apparent planet, to *Isvara*.

What is the advantage of this? You practice that you are free of the whole world,

including John, the doer. You also confirm that you are not a doer.

The yoga of the three *gunas*, or *triguna vibhava yoga* – Another way of practicing the knowledge that you are awareness is analyzing and inquiring into the different states of mind known to you.

All states of your mind are dependent on a combination of three different *gunas*: *rajas*, which creates energy, agitation and aggressiveness, *tamas* is the source of unclarity, dumbness and depression, and *sattva* is the source of clarity and peace of mind.

These *gunas* are strengthened by many circumstances: sunlight, food, Exercise, amount of sleep, etc. By monitoring your personal dosages of sunlight, mix of foods, exercise levels and sleep levels you will see that these *gunas* manage the subtle body and thereby your mind, your intellect and your actions.

By understanding this you practice the knowledge that you are not your subtle body (mind, intellect and ego/doer). The *gunas* drive the subtle body.

If circumstances change, your mind changes: on a beautiful day with glorious sunlight your mind becomes *sattvic* and peaceful or after a heavy fat-and-flesh-laden dinner your mind becomes *tamasic* and is prone to depression.

Sundari has an excellent article on this practice at [ShiningWorld.com](http://ShiningWorld.com) which you can use to further understand that practice.

Love for the world/daily prayer (*bhakti yoga* in Sanskrit) – Any of the practices above will lead to an understanding that you are limitless consciousness and that all objects arise in you and their arising and their existence is dependent on you as awareness. At some point there is the realization that there is no distance between you and any of the objects.

No distance means love. Unconditional love.

The world, this universe, is you. After that understanding, love for all that you are will constantly flow.

You can practice that knowledge by making daily prayers a part of your life. What words you will use will come to you and you will be able to formulate your own prayers. As an example, the truth about your nature can become a prayer: “Dear Lord, thank you for all that you have given. I am your fullness. I am your limitlessness. I am your unconcernedness. I am your love. Thank you.” But this is just an example.

Also, many *mantras*, such as “*purnamadah purnamidam...*” can become prayers. You can also create your own prayer of love. The right words will come to you.

These are now several tools that should help you to learn, understand and integrate knowledge into your daily life.

Let me know if you have any questions and do not hesitate to ask.

~ Love, Tan