

# Self-Inquiry

Tan

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**Tan:** Dear Sandra, my name is Tan and I am replying here on behalf of James. I will write my thoughts in between. To get a better understanding, Ramji has sent me as a background your conversation so far with him.

**Sandra:** Hi, James, I hope you're well. ☺ Well... I'm sure you're well!!

I've read quite a few times you mentioning that a person needs to inquire to find the truth. I know that Vedanta is self-inquiring. I just don't think I assimilate well this process, because every time I think of it it's like I need to use my mind.

And it's like I have someone narrating inside my head. It's still like that annoying voice that lives with me as long as I can remember.

**Tan:** Why is that voice annoying? It would be helpful to get your feedback on that. Is there a special theme or are there just too many thoughts going around in your head?

If that is the case, you are right, inquiry will be difficult, since it means that the conditioning (*vasanas*) is continuously rocking the boat and prevents a peaceful mind.

Self-inquiry works better when there is less turbulence in the mind. You will not see your reflection on the surface of the lake if the water is troubled and stormy. So if you really want to self-inquire, preparation is helpful.

There are two Vedanta tools that you can use to prepare yourself for self-inquiry:

1. Action *yoga*, or *karma yoga* – This is the number one *yoga* to get rid of these unhelpful tendencies (*vasanas*). It basically means to constantly apply an attitude of gratitude.

To authentically get this attitude, it is important to understand that the results of your actions are not up to you.

Even taking the action itself is only up to you for a fraction. Your skill for the action seems up to you. But the availability of the object that you want to do an action on and the status of the object is not up to you.

Let us take as an example that you have planned to sing a birthday song over the telephone as a surprise present for a friend of yours who has birthday. You want him to feel good, and you give him a call. For that action to be successful there are some requirements for you, for example, you have to be able to sing a good song. But also, your friend has to be at home when you call him. But even if he is at home, he might be not in the right mood to enjoy the song, because he feels old. So many factors have to work in your favor so that he is available and in the right mood to enjoy that tune.

But if you look further, also your ability to sing is not entirely up to you. What if you caught a cold just a day before your planned call and now your voice is gone?

So taking this into account you can see that there are always many factors at play of which you have no control whatsoever to make an action successful.

So the *karma yoga* attitude is to understand that and make your best effort, dedicate the action to *Ishvara/God*, or the field of existence, whatever you want to call it, and then accept the result of that action as a gift from the field. In Sanskrit this is called accepting the *karma phala daata* (fruit of the action) as *prasad* (a present from God).

Why do this?

If you apply this constantly, your mind will become peaceful, because it will stop worrying about actions and results that are out of its control.

A relatively peaceful mind is a qualification for successful inquiry.

2. Yoga of the three *gunas*, or *triguna vibhava yoga* – Now, if you have a relative tendency to be edgy and that is the reason you have so many thoughts in your mind, then the application of the three-*guna yoga* can help you, in addition to *karma yoga*.

Being edgy means that you have too much *rajas* in your life. *Rajas* is an energy that is dynamic and the source for aggression and too much worrying. The antidote is to change your life to become more *sattvic*. *Sattva* is the energy that is the source of clarity and understanding. You can add more *sattva* to your life by:

- Including more *sattvic* foods in your diet (vegetables, less flesh, sugar).
- Activities in the sun.
- The right amount of sleep (but not too much).
- Meditation.

Prayer – There are many more actions that you can do to increase *sattva* in your life. There is an in-depth article by Sundari at the *ShiningWorld.com* website.

You do not have to have a super-still mind to do successful self-inquiry, but it is helpful to work on the qualifications and prepare yourself.

Also, in addition you can start to discriminate between you and the annoying voice. If you can witness the annoying voice, then you are free of that voice. Then it can annoy the hell out of the world, it will no longer annoy you. This is already self-inquiry.

**Sandra:** It is quite clear to me that I don't need an experience, because I can lose it, so what's the point? I know that I need knowledge, I need to know something. I can recall that when I had a clear mind, I was completely impartial to what was happening. And it was like I was blind. I couldn't, neither did I want to, know what was coming next. I was perfectly happy in the moment.

**Tan:** That is good. It is important that you have really understood the fallacy of experience, the fallacy of objects. Experience, even a spiritual high, a mind-blowing super-*samadhi* staying for weeks, will eventually end. I know what I am talking about. 😊 What happened in your experience that you describe above is that your mind was clear because it was undisturbed by any desire for objects. When that is the case, you, the self, shine on a subtle body without disturbances. This is experienced by the ego as a very peaceful, free, limitless and impartial state. Nothing is right nor is anything wrong. That is the nature of yourself.

You experience that peaceful, limitless state every night in deep sleep, because there are no objects in deep sleep. But you do not necessarily gain self-knowledge.

Now, I would be interested to understand what you mean by knowledge. How do you know that you need knowledge? It would be helpful to get your feedback on these questions to gauge which tools are helpful on your path.

In your statements above it sounds more to me that you equate knowledge with a clear mind. A clear mind is an object in you, awareness. As I said earlier, a clear and peaceful mind supports self-inquiry, but it is not self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge is not an object (such as a clear mind) that you will get by doing self-inquiry. It is not an object that you will get by doing an action. You are the subject of that knowledge. You are self-knowledge.

You already have self-knowledge, because you are the self. The knowledge is just covered by ignorance. That ignorance will be removed through self-inquiry, because wrong notions (ignorance) about yourself will be understood to be untrue through self-inquiry and Vedanta. Self-knowledge is the firm, doubtless understanding of your own limitless nature. Nothing more. Nothing less.

**Sandra:** Now, this self-inquiry process... I don't think I am quite sure of what I am supposed to do... not that I have to do anything, but I think you know what I mean.

**Tan:** There are several flavors of self-inquiry, but the general idea is one of discrimination and understanding what you are and what you are not.

The basic principle is called *atma-anatma viveka* in sanskrit.

Inquiring or discriminating (*viveka*) what I am (*atma*) and what I am not (*anatma*). Vedanta scripture helps us with several methods or teachings, for example:

Subject-object discrimination – An example would be, are you your thoughts or are you the non-experiencing witness of your thoughts? If you are the subject who can witness the thoughts (an object), then you are independent of your thoughts. You exist when thoughts are not. So thoughts are dependent on your existence. You are free of them.

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

1. Food sheath (*anna-maya kosha*): Are you your body or are you the witness of your body?

2. Energy sheath (*prana-maya-kosha*): Are you your basic energetic desires? Are you hungry/thirsty or are you the non-experiencing witness of hunger/thirst?
3. Emotion sheath (*mana-maya-kosha*): Are you your emotions and feelings or can you witness them?
4. Intellect sheath (*vijnana-maya-kosha*): Are you your thoughts? See the logic of inquiry above.
5. Bliss sheath (*ananda-maya-kosha*): Are you joy (in moments where there seems no doer and no experience) or have you been able to witness and know the joy? If not, how do you know joy was there in the first place?

There are many other powerful inquiries, such as the inquiry into the three states of existence (*avastha traya prakriya*) such as waking state, dream state and deep sleep state.

If you have access to the basic DVD of James (*Self Inquiry*), many of them are explained in great detail there.

A constant application of the basic discrimination of the subject (yourself) and the objects (everything else) is the base of self-inquiry. This has to be completed with the statement of who you are: "I am limitless, unchanging, unconcerned, everyday, non-dual awareness. I am not the objects appearing in me: body, feelings, thoughts, etc."

That means taking a stand as awareness during your inquiry.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of what Vedanta offers. Vedanta is a complete and comprehensive teaching. It has all three major areas covered: yourself, God and the world.

**Sandra:** When you have some spare time, and if you want to, I would be happy to hear from you...

~ Love, Sandra

**Tan:** Let me know if this works and do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions.

~ With love, Tan