

Stages of Self-Inquiry

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Sabastian: Hello, Sundari Devi. I thank you and your husband because while reading his article, watching his videos and after a long search of 20 years, I discovered my true nature.

A question: How do I now make the jump from Sebastian experiencing reality to reality experiencing Sebastian?

~ *Namaste*

Sundari: Hello, Sebastian. My apologies for the late reply. I have been in transit from South Africa to the West Coast of the US, where we have just finished a four-day seminar.

Your question, "How do I now make the jump from Sebastian experiencing reality to reality experiencing Sebastian?" is at the heart of self-inquiry. This is where the "work" of self-inquiry really begins.

There are four stages to self-inquiry:

1. *Sravana*: Listening, or hearing the scripture. This requires that you leave everything you previously believed or thought you knew temporarily on the shelf. You can take your beliefs back if self-knowledge does not work for you, but for now leave them on the shelf. This is very important; if you keep comparing Vedanta to all your beliefs and opinions and try to make it comply with them, forget about self-inquiry. Vedanta is a radical teaching, it is counter-intuitive; expect it to challenge everything you thought you knew.
2. *Manana*: Reasoning, contemplation. This is thinking about what the scripture is saying, examining the unexamined logic of your own experience. At this point you look at your beliefs and opinions in the light of what the scripture says, NOT the other way around. One determines if all the qualifications necessary for *moksa* are present, one examines and identifies one's conditioning, i.e. the *gunas*, in light of self-knowledge.
3. *Nididhyasana*: Applying the knowledge to your life; taking a stand in awareness as awareness. If the mind is still agitated by *rajas* and *tamas* because all the qualifications are not in place, one has to go back and re-qualify. There is no other way to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding in order that self-actualisation – the final "stage" – can take place.
4. Self-actualisation: Once the knowledge is firm, one sees everything from the point of view of awareness first, second as the *jiva*, and one never confuses the two again. This is discriminating the self, you (*satya*), from the objects that appear in you (*mithya*) at all times. Self-actualisation is the consistent, total application of self-knowledge to one's life. To be self-actualised 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-actualisation 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. In order for existential suffering to end and for awareness to be one's primary identity, the person needs to be free of the idea of being a person in order to live free as the self. What is the point of self-realisation if the mind is still under the tyranny of its likes and dislikes (*vasanas*)?

One can only fully actualise 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-realised people do not self-actualise. Understanding *Isvara* is the key. This is one of the most important teachings in Vedanta.

Again, if you need help with this, feel free to write, but also make use of the amazing resource you have at your fingertips at the ShiningWorld website.

~ *Namaste, Sundari*