

# Eight Stages to Self-Inquiry

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**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. Without faith in the scripture (*shraddha*), self-inquiry will not work.

This is not blind faith like religions demand, but faith *pending* the results of your own inquiry.

**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.

**3. Qualifications:** One determines if all the qualifications necessary for *moksa* are present. If they are not, **one has to develop them**. Self-knowledge will not stick in a mind that is not prepared and purified. There is no purifier like self-knowledge (*jnana yoga*) but there are other practices one can do, like meditation, for instance – or even sitting in silence. But meditation (or any other practice) is an **aid** to self-inquiry; it does not **equal** self-inquiry nor does it take its place.

**4. Karma yoga - negating the doer.** *Karma yoga*, when practised properly, is really *dharma yoga* because every action you take is dedicated to *Isvara*; it is a consecration. It is understood that peace of mind only comes with the realisation that you are not in control of the *dharma* field, yet in taking the appropriate steps to act according to *dharma* and then relinquishing the results, peace of mind is produced. If you are not experiencing peace of mind by relinquishing results you are not relinquishing results. It's that simple – the doer is still there, afraid and small, still wanting a particular result, frustrated and afraid because they believe they need the result to be safe or whole and they are not getting what they want.

***Karma yoga* is not to destroy the doer or in some cases even its sense of doership. *Karma yoga* is meant to clear the mind of enough likes and dislikes until it becomes composed enough to do sustained inquiry. Only inquiry removes the problem of doership because it shows that you, the self, cannot be the ego (doer) that is known to you. When that is clear, the doer can appear in you, even with a trace of doership, but you do not identify with it.**

**5. Triguna vibhava yoga:** Once the mind is clear and established in *karma yoga*, the next step is to examine and identify one's conditioning in light of self-knowledge, i.e. the *gunas*. This means you take an objective view of the programmes (*vasanas*) that modify the mind and make up the *jiva's* "stuff." If you do not have a good understanding of the *gunas*, what they are and how they function, I recommend that you go to the ShiningWorld website and use the search function on this vital topic.

All the ShiningWorld writers have written extensively about this.

**6. Establish a *prakriya*:** Vedanta offers several practices that can be used very effectively to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding. The most effective is to practise the opposite thought. Whenever a toxic thought arises in the mind or a thought that contradicts your nature as awareness, immediately employ the opposite thought. For instance, if you have someone in your life that you have very bad thoughts about, think loving thoughts. If toxic self-negating thoughts arise, think the opposite thoughts. You keep up this practice for every thought that arises in the mind that is contrary to your true nature as awareness.

**7. *Nididhyasana*:** Self-realisation, which is the full understanding of your true nature as awareness. This means you apply the knowledge to your life and take a stand in awareness as awareness. If the mind is still agitated by *rajas* and *tamas* because all the qualifications are not in place and binding *vasanas* still condition the mind, one has to go back and requalify. 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.

**8. 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, regardless of how the person is feeling**. 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 unstuck) in their self-inquiry and it is why many self-realised people do not self-actualise. Understanding *Isvara* is the key. This is probably one of the most important teachings in Vedanta.

These steps are not necessarily linear; one can jump around a great deal until self-knowledge has removed all ignorance and the knowledge is firm. Many inquirers go through a stage when the knowledge is on or off, what we call the “firefly” stage. They get disheartened and start to criticize or feel bad about themselves when the knowledge is not constant or they “slip up.” Don’t get discouraged by this, as it is a pretty normal stage for everyone to go through. Lifetimes of ignorance will take what it takes to dissolve. And *prarabdha karma* (the momentum of past actions) will play out as long as it plays out. It is not up to the *jiva* but to *Isvara*. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance – so day by day, brick by brick allow self-knowledge to do the

work of removing every last vestige of ignorance.