

# No Guarantees Other than Self-Knowledge

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2016-01-18

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2475>

**Don:** Hi, Sundari.

If our mind is capable of making a catastrophic error in identifying the body-mind as the self, what's the guarantee that any formulations from the mind, including non-dual teachings, are not suspect?

Thanks!

~ Don

**Sundari:** The mind is capable of “making a catastrophic error in identifying the body-mind as the self” because it is under the spell of *maya*, the power in awareness to delude, hypnotising the mind into identifying with objects. The answer to your question is simple: there are no guarantees when it comes to the removal of ignorance from the mind. If the mind is not qualified, meaning sufficiently purified, it will still be under the influence of ignorance, which is hardwired and highly tenacious, therefore self-knowledge will not stick. Your question can only be asked in ignorance; it is ignorance itself speaking.

Without the necessary qualifications present in the mind, discrimination and self-inquiry will not be possible. The “formulations in the mind” is the mind interpreting whatever it is subjected to through the filters of its conditioning, the *vasanas*. Unless the non-dual teachings are unfolded by a qualified teacher to a qualified student, i.e. a purified mind, they will be interpreted and their true import lost or greatly diminished. An unqualified mind will be suspicious of the teachings, as it will not have the requisite faith in them to put aside its own opinions, biases and beliefs. Non-duality is not a formulation, it is not theory in practice, it is not a philosophy nor is it the fabrication of teachings based on a prophet or mystic.

Vedanta is called “*brahma vidya*,” which means the “science of consciousness.” It is an objective and scientific analysis of the true nature of reality – and your experience, based on the facts. Like any other science, it is not personal and it has a methodology – which, if followed with great dedication and commitment, will provide irrefutable knowledge that is *moksa*, if the student is qualified. Vedanta is simply the truth about you, not “your” truth or “my” truth or anyone’s truth: *the Truth*.

This is why Vedanta is called *apauruseya jnanam*, meaning not the philosophy or experience of one person, like a prophet or a mystic, as in the Buddha or Jesus. It is not a belief system or religion either. Vedanta (self-knowledge) predates all known religious or philosophical paths because it is simply how things are and have always been; it is the pathless path that underpins all other paths. It is an independent teaching, or *sruti*, which means “that which is heard.” Vedanta is revealed to the mind of man, not thought up by man or the result of any action on anyone’s part.

Self-knowledge, unlike object knowledge, is always true because it is true to the self, meaning it cannot be dismissed or negated by any other knowledge. Self-knowledge is different from knowledge of objects, which is object-based, not subject-based.

Knowledge of objects is not knowledge unless it is true to the object. If it is “my” knowledge, then it is my interpretation of an object (*pratibasika*), which is not necessarily knowledge. Ignorance (or my point of view) causes me to see or experience objects in a certain way because of “my” conditioning. People believe that ignorance is knowledge because they believe that what they experience is knowledge. It may be knowledge, but it may not be.

A good example of revealed knowledge is Einstein’s “discovery” of the law of relativity and gravity or Thomas Edison’s applications of electricity to his inventions. To discover means to uncover something that was there but previously unknown. Relativity, gravity and electricity describe how the world works according to the laws of physics, not according to Einstein or Edison. Gravity, relativity and electricity do not care if you believe in them. They operate the same way whether you understand what they are or not. It is the same with awareness. Awareness does not care if you have realised your true nature or not, because it is unaffected by knowledge or ignorance. Liberation from ignorance is for the apparent person who lives in the apparent reality. As awareness, you have always been free. This is why *moksa*, or freedom, is discriminating you, awareness, from the objects that appear in you; in other words, dis-identifying with Ron as your primary identity – AND knowing what that means so that self-knowledge translates into all areas of life. It is freedom from the person and for the person. This is why you can trust it.

Vedanta teaches that you cannot do anything to get enlightened, because the doer is the problem; no action taken by a limited entity can produce a limitless result, which is what liberation, or *moksa*, is. However, Vedanta is a complete teaching in that it is both a path of action, self-inquiry, and a path of knowledge. Although self-inquiry is an action, it is not the action itself that provides the results, but only self-knowledge that removes ignorance, not the one “doing” the self-inquiry. And the result that self-inquiry produces is a limitless result because it produces freedom from the limitation of identification with the doer – which is *moksa*.

If freedom from limitation is truly your main aim in life, I highly recommend that you read James’ books if you have not done so yet. Read them slowly and do not skip. Combine that with reading the e-*satsangs* at the ShiningWorld website; you will find a wealth of the highest-level Vedanta teachings there in the form of question and answers. Watch as many of the videos of James teaching as possible. I have attached a chapter on what the qualifications are; make sure you know what they are and track yourself on a daily basis.

To assist you, here are the eight stages of self-inquiry as I have formulated them from the Vedanta scriptures:

### **Eight 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. 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 it believes it needs the result to be safe or whole, as it is not getting what it wants.

*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, as has James in his books.

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 the toxic self-negating thoughts arise about you, think the opposite thought. 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 (*sattya*), 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 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 of 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 criticise 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 as long as 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.

And lastly and very importantly – *nididhysana* never ends for the *jiva*.

While it is true that there is a definite “shift” in how one sees life and relates to objects once self-knowledge is firm, it is also true that the *nididhysana* stage never really ends for the *jiva*, because it is always changing and interacting with the field of existence – which is also always changing. The price of freedom for the *jiva* is eternal vigilance. Macrocosmic ignorance does not end when personal ignorance (*avidya*) ends and the *jiva* is always limited by *maya* (although no longer conditioned by it) even though its essence is known to be limitless awareness. If this were not true, the *jiva* would become *Isvara* “after” *moksa* – which clearly and irrefutably is not the case. The fine print on the enlightenment certificate that many miss is that there really is no “post”-*moksa* stage for the *jiva*, even though as awareness you are *moksa* and not the *jiva*. A *jivanmukta* by definition will have resolved all its condition through contemplation, assimilation of the knowledge and transformation of its

habitual patterns (*vasanas*); this is the essence of *nididhysana*. As Vedantins we never stop “working” on the *jiva* even though we do not censure it or expect it to change. Of course we follow *dharma*, personal and universal, without question, but not because we want to improve the *jiva* but only because we want to enjoy a peaceful mind.

A common myth in the enlightenment game is that enlightenment is another object to obtain, and when it has the *jiva* will be different, better. It may or may not be. It will still have its *Isvara*-given character and tendencies; it will still be a pain in the ass to itself and others sometimes. It will still suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, feeling joy, pain, loss, grief as well as the constant bliss of self-knowledge.

When *moksa* has obtained in the mind one may and usually does feel experiential bliss regularly, but one does not depend on it, because you know you are the bliss. The bliss of knowledge does not feel like anything. Experiential bliss is an object known to you and you are always blissful, whether or not experiential bliss is present. In fact you could be sick, in pain, half-dead, broke, jobless or stuck in a situation you do not enjoy but cannot change – and be totally blissful because who you are is not influenced by what is or is not going on in your environment. You feel blissful regardless of what is going on in the mind.

The subjective reality never ends for the *jivamukta* and it can and often does still project its subjective reality (*pratibasika*) onto *Isvara*. It will always have its particular way of relating to *Isvara* which will be unique to its *Isvara*-given *vasana* filters. The difference will be that a *jivanmukta* knows when it is projecting, instantly dissolves the projection in the light of self-knowledge and is instantly free of it, thus it does not create “new” *karma*. It keeps its *karma* like a little dog on a very short leash, right in front, no *karmic* drag, ever, no unfinished business or drama. Every moment of every day is complete. There is never another person involved in its interactions and transactions in the world of objects/experience. The *jivanmukta* knows in the moment that it is transacting only with itself because there is no “other.” There is only awareness.

Once the mind is purified humility is its natural response to everything in its environment (*Isvara*) because it understands there is only itself, awareness. It no longer sees “otherness” as awareness, even though it observes the *jiva* still apparently experiencing it. Duality is understood and appreciated for what it is – enjoyed, even. But as it is not expected to deliver something it is incapable of doing, i.e. happiness, duality is never a problem for the *jivanmukta*. This takes so much pressure off the *jiva* because there is no need to make it conform to some silly “spiritual” ideal. It is just known and loved for what it is: a reflection of the self in a mirror, which is also the self.

As the *jiva* is a product of the *gunas*, belongs to and is always subject to *Isvara*, the *jiva* is never going to be perfect. But you as awareness are free of the *jiva* and you know it arises from and depends on you, and not the other way around. Then life makes sense and it is possible to see beauty all the time, even when things are not pretty.