

Ramakrishna and Self-Inquiry

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Nicholas: Hello, Sundari.

I've recently devoured you husband's book *The Essence of Enlightenment*, videos and *satsangs* after a decade of seeking self-realization and became very fixed upon Advaita Vedanta as the correct way of going about this. I live in the Sacramento area. I recently met with Swami Prapannananda of the Advaita Vedanta Society of Sacramento. This was born out of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda lineage. Do you see this as a suitable environment for *moksa*? I have a burning desire, so any feedback is much appreciated.

Sundari: The Ramakrishna people are good people and they offer a peaceful environment for *bhakti*, which is helpful as an aid to self-inquiry, but it does not equal it. They do not teach self-inquiry. If you have a burning desire for *moksa* you need to have a proper means of knowledge for self-inquiry, so I suggest you keep reading James' books, watch the videos and read the *satsangs* at our website. You are welcome to write to us or book a Skype session if you need some face time with James.

Nicholas: Thank you for your guidance. I will continue reading the material and watching the videos. There is still some confusion about self-inquiry. It seems like all the questions just refer to the basic premise that I am whole, complete and ordinary awareness or just assert objects that aren't me, but are made of me. Are there others things I should be examining in the light of the self?

Sundari: The essence of self-inquiry is an investigation into the true nature of reality as a non-duality (as consciousness) as opposed to a duality (objects) and what this means to the *jiva* living in the world. *Moksa* is only for the *jiva* because the self is ever-free and always has been.

Moksa, freedom from limitation, is the ability to discriminate the real (that which is always present and unchanging, meaning you, awareness) from the objects that appear in you, that which is apparently real, meaning not always present and always changing. This is the main *prakriya*, called discriminating *satya* from *mithya*, or taking a stand in awareness as awareness and practising the opposite thought. If you have mastered this 100% of the time, never confusing what Nicholas thinks, feels or does or any of the objects subtle and gross that present themselves to the mind with awareness, the knower of Nick and all the objects, then you are free. You can go off to enjoy life free from suffering and limitation.

If this knowledge is not firm, as it is for most inquirers who come to Vedanta to start off with, then you need to do inquiry into the true nature of reality as it pertains to Nicholas. Who is Nicholas, and what is the world? To do this, you need a valid means of knowledge, which you have in Vedanta. You need a qualified teacher to unfold the teachings (or the ego will interpret them through the filters of the *vasanas*) and you need *mumukshutva*, a burning desire for freedom from suffering. As you have read

James' books, you must have realised that there is a progression to the teachings and a very distinct teaching methodology, starting with the qualifications. This is necessary because ignorance is highly tenacious and hardwired. Without a mind purified and prepared for self-inquiry, self-knowledge will not obtain.

If you are qualified for self-inquiry, at the very least because you have understood that the joy is not in objects and life is a zero-sum game, then you have come to the right place. Many qualified inquirers find it fairly easy to realise that their true nature is the self. It is obvious that you are conscious and you exist, after all. However, knowing what it means for the *jiva* to be consciousness so that self-knowledge translates automatically into its life at every moment is quite another issue. Self-realisation is where the work of self-inquiry begins. Self-actualisation can take years for some people. Self-realisation is what we call indirect knowledge, and it is not *moksa*. *Moksa* is the hard and fast knowledge (which is not a feeling or the result of any particular experience) that I AM awareness. This is direct knowledge.

So to actualise self-knowledge, we need to understand the *jiva*, deconstruct its conditioning in the light of self-knowledge to render its binding *vasanas* non-binding and negate the doer. There is no way to dismiss *mithya*, or the world, unless you first understand what it is and why the mind modifies to it. First and foremost, the most important practice is *karma yoga*, explained in detail in James' books and in many places at the website, especially the e-*satsang* section. You will not get very far with self-inquiry without *karma yoga*, so make sure you understand what it and how it applies to your life as a *jiva*.

Next you need to understand the importance of a devotional practice, also described in detail at the website. I have just written a detailed *satsang* on the issue, which will be posted this week at the website, but it is all described in detail in James' book *The Yoga of Love*. And lastly, *jnana yoga* or *triguna vibhava yoga*, the *yoga* of the three *gunas*. We are in the process of bringing out two books on this important topic, but again, there is much on this in all James' books and in videos, *satsangs* and other writings.

The short answer to your question, "Are there others things I should be examining in the light of the self?" is yes and no. Yes, if self-knowledge is still indirect, and no if it is direct.

~ Love, Sundari