

Don't Mix Buddhism and Vedanta

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Ed: Dear Ram, I hope your holiday season is going well. I wanted to see if you have any thoughts about studying Vedanta for someone who is housebound. I have read your book *How to Attain Enlightenment* several times and think it is the most direct, helpful book I have read and am grateful for having found it. It's hard to single out a specific topic, but the concept of knowledge versus the experience-based approach to enlightenment is such a key concept. At times it blows my mind a bit such that after five years of intensive reading yours was the first book to make that very basic and crucial point clear, which lays the foundation for so much of what follows in the way one frames their studies and practice.

Ram: Hi, Ed. You are correct that the distinction between knowledge and experience is the key concept. As long as someone longs for his or her experience to be different from what it is, there will not be the single-pointed pursuit of inquiry that guarantees success.

Ed: The importance of having a teacher and not just reading scripture but having someone teach them seems like the component of my practice that is most difficult to pull together, since I am housebound. Most of the previous reading I have done has been in the area of Buddhism, and I had been planning to sign up for a home-study program. The format of this program seems like a great fit for my personal situation. They offer a lot of personal contact. From what I have researched, the teachings of the Mahamudra and Dzogchen traditions are some of the less dogmatic styles of Buddhism, and some of what they emphasize, formless meditation and recognizing the background emptiness of appearances, fits with Vedanta practice. The drawback of course is that of being pulled in a direction away from Vedanta, which from reading your book is the path calling to me. If I did sign up for the above course, I am thinking of trying to take from it what fits with Vedanta.

Ram: Well, you can imagine that I do not recommend Buddhism. If you do go for it, you should probably drop the Vedanta because there are a number of important issues that do not lend themselves to reconciliation. I understand your situation, but reading Vedanta alone will not work. Your ignorance will cause you to misunderstand the teachings. Vedanta really needs to be taught. Once the apparent contradiction between the real and the apparent are sorted and the method of self-inquiry is properly established in your mind, you can really progress.

Ed: Two other options I have found so far are *ArshaVidya.org/Bhagavad-Gita-Study-Group*, which is a *Bhagavad Gita* home study program based on talks give by H.H. Swami Dayananda Saraswati...

Ram: I suggest you go for it. It is an amazing teaching by a great sage. It is a bit Sanskrit-heavy, but it is a huge step forward in bringing Vedanta to the West because you get the whole thing in English. All of my more advanced students study

it.

Ed: ...and *ChInfo.org*, which has a home study program with 24 lessons over one year.

Ram: The Chinmaya Mission course is also excellent.

Ed: There are also a good number of non-dual teachers who will consult on the phone. I am having a hard time deciding how to proceed in seeking out a teacher and structuring my practice beyond what I piece together from books, websites, etc.

Ram: It is best not to seek out a teacher. Let one come to you. I have a video series, an introduction to self-inquiry, that is almost as good as having a living teacher. Some people prefer it to live teaching because they can rewind and go over a point that they missed. If you read my website, keep studying my book and get the videos, you will make rapid progress. I am happy to coach you once you have systematically covered the basic material, which should remove most of your doubts. Teaching works as good with email as it does in person.

Ed: I have been meditating on the silence and bringing to awareness that this background silence is what I am and noting this throughout the day at random times, usually when I slow down in my activities. From your book, I think it largely comes down to reducing distractions so one can be one-pointed in their application of the means of knowledge while keeping a pure mind by following the laws of *dharma*. If you have any thoughts about how I might proceed with my studies and practice of ideas that I am overlooking, they will be greatly appreciated! Happy Holidays!

Ram: You are correct. It is a matter of getting a contemplative lifestyle in place. When you are active you can use *karma yoga* and later when it has taken care of the extroverting *vasanas* you can apply knowledge in the midst your activities.