

Self-Knowledge and Intellectual Knowledge

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What is the difference between ordinary knowledge of phenomenal objects and knowledge of the self? What differs self-knowledge from the theoretical/mental/intellectual knowledge of the logic presented by Vedanta scriptures? And why is self-knowledge called direct knowledge?

The difference between knowledge of objects and self-knowledge is that for knowledge of objects to take place one needs: (1) awareness/self, (2) the knowing entity: the intellect, or the instrument of knowledge and (3) an object of knowledge.

In the case of self-knowledge, there are only two factors: (1) awareness and (2) the intellect (the knowing entity), the very same intellect we use to know objects. An object is not involved in this equation, because the self is not an object of knowledge or experience. But if both types of knowledge occur in the intellect, what is the difference then?

Of course when we begin the search for the self we always do so in duality (“I, the intellect, and the self”). In order for the self to be objectified, it needs to be symbolized by a body of ideas and notions we have collected about the “real” self so that we can try to experience, know and become “it.” But as we all know, trying to capture the self within the scoop of the sense organs and the intellect is an exercise in futility – a meaningless mental action due to the fact that the self is the subtlest of the subtle, and therefore not available for objectification.

The search for the self will never end as mere intellectual knowledge, because intellectual knowledge will always depend on duality (knower and an object of knowledge). All spiritual dualists in the world insist on saying that they experience the self and that the self can only be known by experience. But they fail to understand that what they experience is NOT the self, but only a subtle object of experience which they somehow have taken to be the self. There is a long list of such objects – here are a few: silence, peace, sentimental love, no-mind, deep sleep – among a long list of epiphanies and altered states of mind.

For as long the self is represented by an object of experience, the *jiva* in contact with such objects will be experiencing only a symbol of the self. We call it “indirect knowledge,” but it is not absolutely correct to call it that, because what they experience is NOT the self, but some qualities they somehow consensually attribute to the self. But as the *Upanishads* say, the self is attributeless.

When we say that the self is *sat chit ananda*, it does not mean to say that those are the attributes of the self, but the attributes of “self-knowledge.” Self-knowledge is a phenomenon occurring to human *jivas*. Human *jivas* are a combination of awareness/self and matter (five elements + three energies). Once *jiva*’s subtle body firmly understands its true essential nature as awareness, *jiva* naturally begins enjoying the attributes of pure existence, pure consciousness and pure limitlessness. Only then will *jiva* live a cool and happy life.

What is the difference then? Why do we say that it happens in the same ordinary intellect? Why do we say that it is not a mere intellectual knowledge? Why do we

say that self-knowledge is direct knowledge?

Although the intellect cannot grasp the self, we still need a very pure, subtle and contemplative intellect if this knowledge is meant to occur directly and independently of any object of experience. Moreover, a *sattvic* mind is a “must” if direct knowledge is meant to become firm (hard and fast), and therefore always available.

The intellect is the only instrument of knowledge there is, and in order to gain knowledge of things it needs to be well-balanced within its three energies: *sattva* (clarity of mind), *rajas* (the necessary energy to discern, determine, discriminate) and *tamas* (the energy that will keep it grounded in its pursuit rather than engaging in unfounded, meaningless fantasies). When the intellect is balanced, creative knowledge occurs.

Self-knowledge also requires the intellect but it occurs in a different way. Once the intellect understands the futility of trying to get, acquire, know or experience the self, it somehow relaxes, and in a fraction of a moment, due to a strong predominance of pure *sattva*, it shifts its standpoint from the experiencing/knowing individual entity (*jiva*) to the self, or pure awareness. I sometimes refer to it as a moment of pure *sattva*, pure and clear reflectivity with no extroversion, where the self “shines” and knows itself as itself without any need for an object of experience to validate, testify or endorse itself.

Self-knowledge is direct knowledge because it is the SELF experiencing and knowing itself, regardless of the presence or absence of objects. In this sense, self-knowledge is the only direct knowledge there is because it requires no other factor to reveal, prove or disclose its self-effulgent nature. It is self-evident, self-existing, self-knowing and self-revealing because it ever reveals itself to itself. Once the *jiva* knows “I am the self,” this knowledge will be always available, never forgotten, just like the knowledge you have of being a human and not a dog.

It is not intellectual knowledge, because intellectual knowledge depends on the individual knower and an object of knowledge. Self-knowledge does not belong to the *jiva*, and it does not depend on any object of experience/knowledge in order to know itself. Self-knowledge is the very nature of knowledge of existence, consciousness. It is the knowing/conscious principle ever-existing in its limitlessness essential nature, recognized and known by the itself with the aid of an apparent intellect.

The intellectual knowledge of the logic presented by Vedanta does not necessarily translate as self-knowledge. Our methodology is an indirect means to self-knowledge because the self cannot be revealed directly, because IT is ever always revealed as oneself – never not present.

The self can only be “revealed” indirectly by the removal or neutralization of one’s apparent self-ignorance (one’s wrong notions about who and what we are, as well of the nature of reality.) The purpose of Vedanta is only to cancel one’s self-ignorance, by gradually presenting/following/analyzing the logic of the scriptures to the qualified student. When the last pieces of wrong notions are removed, self-knowledge is more like a shift in one’s sense of identity from the limited to the limitless. It is that simple.