

What “I Am” Means

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Kevin: Hey, Ramji.

So when I am confused about something I remember to tell myself “I am whole, non-dual awareness.” The key seems to be checking that statement against my beliefs. I had a strong confusion mixing that idea with the “self-inquiry” propounded by the Ramana people.

Ramji: Well, there wouldn’t be a problem if you could actually talk with Ramana, because he would have set you straight, but what do the Ramana people know? They project their own ideas of inquiry on translated words of others, usually some equally dead devotee of Ramana, and you get an unhelpful “teaching,” meaning no teaching at all. If you had stuck with Vedanta as I teach it, you wouldn’t have got into that trap. I attached a copy of a commentary on Ramana’s *Sat-Darshanam* that will show you what Ramana’s idea of self-inquiry actually is.

Kevin: But I still don’t know how that helps all the time when I’m not really sure what that might mean.

Ramji: It means that you keep the idea that you are whole and complete in mind until it dissolves your beliefs and opinions. In this way you purify your mind of the effects of ignorance. The only thing keeping you from the blissful freedom that you are is a belief or opinion about yourself or the world.

It means that you confront your fears and desires with this knowledge until it destroys them. It means that nothing can be added to or subtracted from you, that getting what you want or avoiding what you don’t won’t change you. If you think it will, you have the wrong idea of who you are.

Kevin: I’ve been thinking about it, and since awareness can’t be objectified and is everything, how does trying to really “get” that instill the right knowledge?

Ramji: It destroys wrong knowledge. You’re operating from wrong knowledge, so you need to operate from right self-knowledge if you want to be free. You have to kill the ignorance.

Kevin: I guess something associates with it, but I know I’m still holding it as a mixed concept – so I say, okay, what knows “that,” what “sees”? But I just get “introverted,” I guess, and “feel aware” – does that work to clean up the *tamas* and *rajas* or whatever is the confusion?

Ramji: You aren’t going to “feel” aware ever, Kevin, because you are awareness. When scripture says that awareness cannot be objectified it means that it is not

something you can see, smell, taste touch or feel.

Yes, you have a mixed concept because you have been hopping all over the spiritual world for years instead of sticking with Vedanta. If you had stuck with it and been properly taught, you wouldn't have wasted so much time. But then you couldn't have known that anyway, so you had to shop around until you realized that you actually need a proper means of knowledge and a living teacher to help you recognize bad ideas.

Kevin: One feels light in doing that, buzzed and partly inspired, I guess, but is that what meditation is for, to quiet the mind more and focus without holding onto the thoughts that might buzz around?

Ramji: Meditation is consistently keeping the teachings of Vedanta in mind and discarding erroneous self-notions like "I am a limited person. I don't know who I am. I am seeking enlightenment. I am doing self-inquiry, etc." It is difficult, subtle work. The jury is not out on who you are. You can quit trying to figure it out and experience it. You are limitless existence/consciousness. Now you need to apply that knowledge over and over until you no longer think otherwise.

Kevin: I'm confused about what knowledge is and how that gets a hold – and why it's said, well, you know you're alive and that is knowledge – how that makes the leap to reality is the self.

Ramji: Knowledge is "I am the self" and it is unknown because ignorance is built into every *jiva*. So you have to remove it if you want to be free.

Just as you don't need to be told that you are alive, you don't need to be told that you exist and that you are conscious. You know it already. But you don't know that knowing what it means is liberation. It means that you are limitless, ever-free. It means that you are bliss. So if you don't always feel a palpable current of bliss running in the background and if you are not indifferent to the pull of objects, you don't know what it means. Maybe after all these years you are almost ready to hear Vedanta because it seems that you are starting to ask the right questions.

Kevin: Okay, I see where my confusion lies. Before, I also didn't know I was hopping much when I looked into stuff I thought a lot related to Vedanta even if indirectly to catch the symbols through osmosis, didn't have the clarity about the important differences and the whys of certain beliefs were wrong in other sects saying they were related to Hinduism. I'll try to give a real close read to the document that you sent, thinking about reading it with the *dharma* combat article you had also discussing subtleties on these things. But besides that to continue with Vedanta, should I slowly read the scriptures and other texts all relating to it?

James: Yes. Start with the course on home page of the website. Read the texts in order. When you find something you don't understand make a note and think about it. If you can't figure it out write me or one of the other teachers. Inquiry has to be a consistent discipline. You can't read your way to *moksa* unless you have a *guru* to point out the inconsistencies in your thinking.

Kevin: When I read before I didn't know which were preliminary and advanced, so kind of read through a lot in no particular order, skimming by the parts that sounded the same or were seemingly explained away by other texts as not necessarily necessary.

I'll keep up with your books and try and listen to more audio. Besides that, emailing and asking like I do - does that count as being properly taught by a living teacher?

James: Yes.

Kevin: I do have trouble, I guess, with applying inquiry into things, about what's true and confronting, as you mention. I don't really feel the need or it always seems that confronting it is just made up stuff in my head. I get things from either past experiences or instinctual things, so I just lump it all as psychological bullshit or find that I don't seem to see where motivations really come from. Most are pop-psychology-learned things. For instance, people always say, well, obviously you do this for that reason or whatever, and so stop trying to find sources of what might be sorrow, because it all seems beyond really the importance of it.

James: You should take everything your mind thinks seriously and look at it in light of the teachings, and then negate those thoughts that contradict scripture. But this implies that you know the teachings as they are intended to be understood, which means that you need to be taught what they mean. If you knew who you were you wouldn't require scripture, and if you require scripture it means that you don't know who you are.

It's true that the mind is basically all bullshit if you haven't learned to deliberately think along scriptural lines. But the idea that it should be dismissed as bullshit is foolish until you know why it is bullshit and you understand how much of its bullshit you believe. You can't get the mind on your side by dismissing it without inquiry. If you just write it off as "thinking," which *tamasica* people are inclined to do, then it will continue to mess up your life. You have to systematically examine every idea and see if it makes sense from both a practical (*vyvaharika*) point of view and the self's point of view (*paramarthika*). If it doesn't you need to dismiss it whenever it arises until it doesn't come back. In this way you purify your mind and grow spiritually.