

I See From the Point of View of Awareness

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John: I can see, from the point of view of awareness, that self isn't the doer of action. Actions are appearing in my self/awareness, which doesn't have a sense of individual identity of doing but the doing goes on in the subtle and gross bodies. But you are right: for my *jiva*, there isn't the fruit of this self-knowledge of complete satisfaction. My devotion is to keep attention onto my unchanging self; also, my *jiva* surrenders its body-mind in service to *Isvara*.

My *sadhana* had been sitting meditation, which I did for many years. Then after self-knowledge was firm, I weaned the practice of sitting for hours a day. It didn't seem to really matter, because awareness is the steady flame of self that never changes, so sitting, standing or moving, I AM never away from self/awareness. So in this way I see this as my *sadhana*, which is a natural practice of withdrawing attention from objects. Once there was no more goal for a meditator, it's natural to fall away from meditation... of course the many wonderful mental states of meditation also went away without the formal practice. These states can still come and go at various times but I don't give them any great value of being something special.

Is "thy will be done, not mine (*jiva*)" the surrender to *Isvara* that turns the key of *nididhyasana* of devotion that is required for my *jiva*?

James: Yes and no. Yes, if you are the *jiva*. No, if you are the self, because John-*jiva* is not real (*mithya*) from the self's perspective. So surrender to *Isvara* means turning over John to *Isvara*, which means you know that John is just a projection produced by *Isvara/Maya* and that therefore John does not author any action, thoughts or feelings; and finally, that since John is not the author, he is not the owner either. It is freedom from John. Once this is understood, you can transform John into a *sattvic* John, keeping in mind that he will have some *tamasic* and *rajasic* remnants.

John: I often deal with body problems; at the moment my lower left side of my back is giving nerve pain. John accepts and doesn't accept the discomfort and curtailment of activity; it's a mixed bag. Usually it takes about a week to sort itself out, but sometimes I need to go see a therapist to make an adjustment. Can John-*jiva* get to such a place where he doesn't react to such discomfort? Is the surrender of this problem to *Isvara* the practice of devotional *nididhyasana*?

James: No. *Nididhyasana* is removing the obstacles preventing perfect *jiva* satisfaction once you are clear that the *jiva* is the self. I explain it below.

The Process of Vedanta

Vedanta is a three-stage process. You have to go through all three stages if you want to be radiantly happy. If you skip a step or only partially assimilate its knowledge, *Isvara* will send you back to the previous level until you work it out. The three steps are hearing (*sravana*), reasoning (*manana*) and self-actualizing or

assimilating (*nididhyasana*).

Stage 1 involves several steps which roughly conform to the chapters in *The Essence of Enlightenment*. The first step of stage 1 is assimilating the knowledge that life is a zero-sum game duality. It involves the realization that nothing you can do in this world will solve the problem of suffering.

When the full impact of this realization hits, disillusionment is inevitable, a “dark night of the soul,” that may last a year or two. It is particularly difficult if you are prone to epiphanies, glimpses of the reality beyond the world, because they give you hope and dash it at the same time. The second step of the first stage involves an other particularly galling fact: enlightenment – liberation from the world – is not a special kind of experience. Until you understand that it isn’t, you are basically condemned to the same frustrating merry-go-round that you experienced at step 1. Your experience of the self, which you imagine is out of time, it comes and goes, because it is not out of time at all.

This realization also produces disillusionment and frustration. The rare realization that happens in the third step of stage 1 involves accepting the idea that you have an ignorance problem, not an experience problem, and the fourth step of stage 1 involves accepting a valid means of knowledge, i.e. Vedanta. Each step is increasing more difficult than the preceding step. Consequently a burning desire for freedom and a lot of good *karma* is required to work your way through the steps of understanding. To help you we present the three stages in the form of the 5/10/15 rule.

The 5/10/15 Rule

A lot of people think that the end of seeking caused by firm self-knowledge – otherwise known as direct knowledge (“I am limitless, ordinary, unborn, ever-present awareness”) – is the end of the *jiva*’s spiritual work. It is, but only if the *jiva* is perfectly satisfied with itself when self-knowledge is firm. This state is extremely rare.

However, it is commonly believed that self-knowledge, or self-realization if you prefer, is the end of seeking, inquiring, ego, doing, teaching, etc. On the basis of this unexamined notion, which is grist for the mill of the next stage, *nididhyasana*, most self-realized people declare themselves “finished,” “cooked” or “enlightened” and set themselves up as authorities on the topic of liberation.

The stage after firm direct knowledge is called *nididhyasana*. Vedanta is very clear about the importance of this stage, as it removes residual desire (*rajas*) and fear (*tamas*).

We see many young people who gain direct knowledge infected with the seemingly benign desire to teach others. Usually, their spiritual tendencies (*vasanas*) kept them away from deep commitments to the world – careers and families – and they just got by doing odd jobs, living off family money or the dole and/or taking up short-term relationships for emotional satisfaction and abandoning them when they proved difficult, etc.

Sometimes they complete stage 1, hearing, and stage 2, removal of doubt, and gain direct knowledge, but ignore stage 3, self-actualization, or assimilation, usually because they have not done proper inquiry on the idea “I am free.”

The self will never make this statement. It only means something to a *jiva*. If the idea “I am enlightened” has not been removed and the *jiva* has been led to self-inquiry without having properly succeeded or failed in the world, the temptation to achieve worldly success behind the idea “I am enlightened” often arises, which shows that the doer has survived self-realization.

If a seeker is properly qualified when firm self-realization happens, the doer is negated. Negation means that the doer’s unresolved issues are laid to rest once and for all. They do not remain and subliminally influence its decisions going forward. Self-realization presents a particularly difficult problem for the self-realized doer who does not appreciate the importance of the third stage, self-actualization, because it has the capacity to use the teachings of Vedanta to suit its purposes. Unfortunately, it wants the same things all *jivas* want: security, pleasure, power, status, etc. *Nididhyasana* addresses this issue and prevents this phenomenon.

These three stages are meant to be presided over by a living *guru* because the *jiva* has a built-in tendency for self-deception, i.e. denial (*tamas*). Along with the “I am enlightened” idea comes the belief that I am an authority in my own right and therefore I don’t need a *guru* anymore. So we see that a self-realized ego with unfulfilled ambitions is happy to get rid of his or her *guru* when it is convenient. Usually, it is convenient when the *guru* doesn’t give you what you want or tells you something that you don’t want to hear. It is particularly difficult to hear that you are not finished with your spiritual work when you realize the self.

I don’t write and teach for my benefit. Writing and teaching are topical responses to situations that occur daily in my relationship with people that come into my life. In the last few years, I have supported the teaching tendencies of several young (-ish) people in spite of the danger of enlightenment sickness and withdrew my support when I felt that I had somehow lost their respect.

In our tradition, we don’t want to monitor the lives of our students. We try to present the purity of the tradition and comport ourselves in such a way that they don’t lose sight of the nobility of the teaching and consequently consider all their actions in light of the tradition itself. I don’t claim to be a saint – far from it – but the respect that I feel for Vedanta has been transferred to thousands of people over forty-seven years of teaching. There are many humble people worldwide quietly propagating the teachings according to their innate tendencies and taking care of themselves financially without reference to the teaching. So the few instances where I was called on by my association with my office as a senior lineage-holder to rap an occasional disciple on the knuckles does not in any way mitigate against the purity of my motives, nor does it change in any way the love I feel for them. Parents, for instance, don’t cease to love children who misbehave.

This *satsang* was occasioned because I recently withdrew my support from a young man who said I was his *guru* but who didn’t maintain the proper relationship with me. Perhaps I bear some responsibility, but the only way forward when so many are teaching Vedanta is to trust the discrimination of my disciples. It was very clear that he did not gladly accept my withdrawal of support, which would have been the appropriate response if he was a proper *karma yogi* and if I was actually his teacher. Why should the gratitude that he expressed over the years suddenly evaporate, considering the fact that at the behest of my wife, Sundari, I have supported him as a teacher for several years.

Teacher is an office filled by *Isvara*, so whatever comes from the teacher comes

from *Isvara*, not from a fickle ego. So for love of *Isvara* a proper disciple takes his or her disappointments with grace and dignity as they are opportunities for growth.

One of my *gurus*, Swami Dayananda, kicked me out of his Vedanta class a long time ago, and I love him and *Isvara* for it. It was the best thing that could have happened to me at the time. I recently taught a group of 70 in Spain with his picture on the altar. Removal of dualistic *guru bhakti* is a sign of spiritual maturity and another important purpose for *nididhyasana*.

This incident also confirmed what I already knew: that he did not appreciate the value of the *nididhyasana* stage, probably owing to the sympathy, respect and support he was receiving from the people with whom he was communicating the teachings, which indicates the value of Vedanta in the first place and his skill as a communicator secondly. Teaching is a skill that builds ego like nothing else, insofar as people hate ignorance of every sort and respect people who can remove it. If you allow yourself to get stuck in enlightenment, enjoy the fame and think of Vedanta as career, you deny yourself the opportunity to become a truly noble soul. It doesn't take an exceptional person to achieve success in the modern spiritual world, only a clever ambitious one.

If doership survives direct realization, the doer needs to practice *nididhyasana*, which removes the part of the self that is subject to ambition (*rajas*), boredom and depression (*tamas*). Residual emotional dissatisfactions should be removed if you love the *sampradaya* and if have compassion for your *jiva*.

Vedanta's basic formula is encapsulated in the 5/10/15 rule. Of course it varies from individual to individual, but thirty years is not too long to commit yourself to Vedanta, five years for *sravana*, hearing the complete teaching with an open mind and appreciating the logic of each step, 10 years for resolving doubts (*manana*) created by the teaching and 15 for getting rid of *jiva*-hood, i.e. the sense of doership. The goal of Vedanta is *tripti*, complete *jiva* satisfaction. An apparent *jiva* remains but it has no desire whatsoever for things to be different, inwardly or outwardly, from what they are at any moment. It is called *Isvara pranidanam*, surrender to *Isvara*, or non-dual devotion (*bhakti*). Of course it is quite possible to dismiss your ambitions as non-existent because you are the self, but you are fooling nobody but yourself.

Non-dual devotion means that you put the needs of others, in this case your *guru*, ahead of your own needs. My number-one need is to protect the purity of the teaching tradition. Showing verbal *guru bhakti* to your disciples to convince them that they should be devoted to you and failing to consult your *guru* when you involve yourself financially with your disciples is not *guru bhakti*, as it creates dependence, which is the antithesis of Vedanta's purpose. Even if your need is legitimate, it is absolutely necessary to protect Vedanta from even the appearance of impropriety in these excessively materialist times, particularly if your disciples exist in cyberspace. In the old days, you had physical access to your *guru* so you could see where the donations went. If you are a proper teacher, you will not have to solicit money, because people whose lives have been transformed by your teaching generously support you unasked.

If my disciple had taken time to really understand the purity of my commitment to the tradition, he would not have solicited donations in the name of ShiningWorld. Consequently, I will no longer endorse a self-realized teacher unless he or she has an independent means of support.

Tamas presents another self-actualization problem that usually affects older self-realized people who have had families and/or careers. Jobs and families solve the problem of financial and emotional security, but they don't take care of the doer problem, so the tendency to act has no place to go when you realize the zero-sum nature of life, except into a depression, because you cannot in good faith distract your doer with mindless *samsaric* pursuits, i.e. jobs, entertainment and endless family events.

I didn't suffer that phase, because I went from firm self-knowledge directly to perfect doer satisfaction because I was totally qualified when self-knowledge was firm, owing to the intense *sadhana* with my *guru* and intense *sadhana* on my own the three years prior to it. I never had a career or a family or any interest in worldly things after age 25. At the same time, I kept my *rajasic* doer hard at work studying scripture, writing commentaries and teaching Vedanta, which is the best *dharma* there is for a doer. To support myself, I did hard physical labor for minimum wage until I was nearly 70. Because I was successful in both love and money before I took to Vedanta, it was impossible to misuse it, once self-knowledge took place. I sincerely hope that Vedanta students who want to teach will take these words to heart. Teaching is not a career. It is a sacred duty for whose values stands in direct proportion to the sacrifices you are willing to make on its behalf. It owes you nothing, because it gives you everything.

Swami Paramarthananda, a *guru* brother, calls *nididhyasana* "requalifying." You never know when, during the *manana* phase, firm self-knowledge will take place and you never know how long *nididhyasana* will take. In fact, if self-knowledge makes you a perfect spontaneous *karma yogi*, it doesn't matter, because time doesn't exist for you. So if you don't experience perfect *jiva* satisfaction when self-knowledge is unshakable, you need to remain humble and keep up the practices that qualified you for understanding, as they will eventually remove the obstacles to limitless bliss.

Enlightened or not, the human mind needs to be committed to something other than the doer and its projections. It needs noble work until its dying day. Serving the world should fill the gap that serving the doer formerly filled. If you want to know more about the nature of non-dual devotion and the stages of spiritual development explained by Vedanta, please read *The Yoga of Love*, as it makes clear what a non-dual devotee is and the reasons for keeping up one's *sadhana* once self-knowledge is firm.