

# Deprogramming and Reprogramming

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**Inquirer:** Hello, Arlindo. There are a couple of questions that have come up after reading Vivek's dialogues with James, and Chapter II of *The Essence of Enlightenment*, and *Knowledge and Experience*.

1. I'm having a hard time understanding awareness as something outside the realm of objects. Devoid of energy, intent or any relevant sensory information, I can still only manage to perceive/intuit awareness as an empty-silent-witnessing presence, which, as far as I can resolve, appears to be another object (albeit infinitely more subtle).

**Arlindo:** Hello, my friend. Awareness is the "inner" eternal invisible essence of everything: matter, mind, energy, *Maya*, *Isvara*, etc. With reference to the human *jiva*, it is called the "*jivatma*," the eternal, all-pervading existence, consciousness, limitlessness, which enlivens the body-mind. Because it is the essential nature of everything, it is called the "Self," the "is-ness," that which lends existence to everything.

Without the Self, we do not exist. A dedicated and persistent study and contemplation of the verses contained in the *Upanishads* will gradually facilitate the assimilation and retention of the bellow fundamental facts:

1. The Self is not a part, product or property of the body, therefore it is attributeless – attributes and qualities belong to the objects, not to the absolute subject.
2. The Self is an independent entity, which pervades and enlivens the body.
3. The Self is not limited by the boundaries of the body, but extends beyond it infinitely – it is space-like and invisible. Space is a substance, which pervades and accommodates everything; it is not emptiness but fullness – so is consciousness. Space is everywhere; likewise, consciousness is everywhere.
4. The Self survives the death of the body. Once the body medium is gone, the Self, consciousness, is no longer identified with the body, because the body is only a living medium bound by time – a mirror-like organism which reflects the Self/consciousness.
5. The Self is limitless (*anantam*), not limited by time and space.

The Self is the subtlest of the subtle. The "empty-silent-witnessing" presence which you experience is but a reflection of the Self in the *sattvic* mind. It feels good, but it is not the real Self, but the "reflected" self. But from the reflection you can identify and claim your identity as the Self. You only need to trace back the reflected "light" to the original "Light." This "tracing back" can only be achieved by knowledge/understanding, since the Self is not an object of knowledge/experience, and furthermore, it is always ever-present as the very consciousness of the inquirer.

But Self-realization is not just an intellectual knowledge, but a shift of identification, which reveals *jivatama* as equal to *Paramatma*. By negating reality of the apparent

self (the ego), the non-dual Self is revealed as non-separate from the ego (the not-Self). Contemplate until you understand your true fundamental and independent nature. And know that it will only bear fruits to the degree that it produces freedom from the sense of limitation imposed by beginningless ignorance, the erroneous identification with the false "I." *Moksa* requires work, dedication, much love – and only rare souls will persevere and succeed. Keep doing your good "homework" and persevere!

And don't hesitate to write back to any of us at ShiningWorld. And as Stan has mentioned to you, read James' book *The Essence of Enlightenment* "fully," and/or *How to Attain Enlightenment*. It is essential that you do, if you haven't done so already.

**Inquirer:** 2. I have maintained a daily meditation and Self-inquiry practice for the last three years, and while it appears that the mind is becoming more *sattvic*, I have issues with chronic pain that mean on certain days the mind is very busy and distracted by the pain. I have taken, and continue to take, the appropriate medical steps towards fixing and alleviating the problem, and am not consciously looking for a "spiritual" solution. But the nature of the pain means that it's inevitable, and there are times when I don't have medication to manage it. To sit in awareness as awareness, so to speak, seems largely hindered by the relative inability to still the mind in the face of consistent pain. Is this a matter of patience and persistence? Or is there something I'm missing that should render this situation useful and/or irrelevant in the context of Self-knowledge?

**Arlindo:** Meditation is good "medication" in any case and circumstance; it calms the mind and facilitates Self-inquiry so that the mind can "shift" its identification from the body to the Self. This shift of "focus" greatly alleviates physical pain, and it also prevents the mind from producing "suffering," which is a psychological, subjective experience that is often added to the physical discomfort. With old age and disease we all eventually meet sickness, pain and discomfort; it is part of life, and it is important that we learn to take this gift of life which was given to us with maturity, without false expectations.

A *sattvic* mind is a good mind. The main goal of any serious inquirer is to cultivate, develop and maintain a *sattvic* state of mind, not that a *sattvic* mind is our final destination, but our intermediary one. Keep addressing the pain at its physical, bodily level, and keep also working on your Self-inquiry until Self-knowledge becomes clear and firmly retained. Physical pain definitely makes the inquiry a bit more challenging, but if you've got it, it means that it serves a certain purpose. Take it all as *prasad* and work your way out of *samsara* into *moksa*. Let your physical pain serve the purpose of further motivating you.

**Inquirer:** 3. If desire for objects stems from Self-ignorance, how does one go about deprogramming this Self-ignorance in order to reveal Self-knowledge? Should each desire methodically be traced back to the ignorance as it comes up?

**Arlindo:** It is not really like that, in the sense that you can categorize desires in bulk and in that way efficiently neutralize their power to mobilize your mind. Desires are of four types: desire for security, desire for pleasure/recreation, desire for

virtue/*dharmā*, and the spiritual desire for freedom. Desire for objects as a means to gain satisfaction is impersonal and universal because *avidyā* (ignorance) is universal and beginningless. By “conforming” our minds to the scriptures on Self-knowledge, our desire for objects will be converted into a desire to know our limitless nature as the Self.

Desire for objects is the main cause of suffering because objects are essentially devoid of true value. But since we cannot live and grow without desire, the only “path” towards true satisfaction is by desiring freedom/*mokṣa* – desire to know the Self as your very conscious existence, the only source of limitless satisfaction (*anantam*).

But the first step is to develop a value for Self-knowledge. We need to develop a firm conviction that the Self is the only valuable “thing” in life, and for that we need to keep exposing the mind to the teachings of Vedānta. That is the only way to deprogram and reprogram the mind so that those ignorance-based thoughts are converted into *dharmic* thoughts and actions based on Self-knowledge.