

Memory, Studying Vedanta and *Nididhyasana*

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Dan: One issue that makes this more challenging is that my memory looks like it is failing. I can read something and immediately afterward I cannot recall what I'd just read. In the case of Vedanta, it may be that I just didn't get it and it requires your reminder that we've talked about it already or that the memory is not there. I know James and you have said that once the knowledge is gained it is not lost, so that is why I say the *vasanas* are so strong. This too is fodder for my practice. Identification with memory is a very deeply rooted *vasana*.

Sundari: Although memory is a useful function in the assimilation of knowledge, it is not what does the "work" of assimilation, the reason being that Self-inquiry is not about memorizing all the teachings, it's the removal of ignorance, and only Self-knowledge can do that, no function of the mind.

It is true that memory plays an important function in the assimilation (learning) of knowledge. However, there is a fundamental difference to learning about objects and Self-inquiry. The whole point of Self-inquiry is to understand the mind and the environment it is a part of in light of Self-knowledge (not the other way around) to establish your true nature as the Self, and to negate the doer. So while the "learner" is useful, it is not by learning or memorizing that Self-knowledge obtains in the mind. It is by negating the doer/learner that Self-knowledge obtains in a purified mind.

Learning and memory inextricably work together. For example, we learn a new language by studying it, but we then speak it by using our memory to retrieve the words that we have learned. Thus memory depends on learning because it lets us store and retrieve learned information. But learning also depends to some extent on memory, in that the knowledge stored in our memory provides the framework to which new knowledge is linked by association and inference. This ability of humans to call on past memories in order to imagine and to plan future courses of action is given to us by *Isvara* as a vital function of the subtle body and is a hugely advantageous attribute in our survival and development as a species.

Memories (experiences) are all thoughts which appear in the subtle body. However, we have much faith in our memories, but they are extremely fickle. The memory function records events according to our conditioning, which does not often tally with exactly what happened. It tends to "cook" the facts. If you take yourself to be the person, you identify with the thoughts/memories/experience, taking them to be real and to be "yours." This is the hypnosis of duality and how most people experience life and the world. As you know and bears repeating, once ignorance has been removed from the mind by Self-knowledge, knowledge of who you are is not a function of memory, because as the Self you are not bound by time. You do not need to remember who you are, because you are who you are. You are the knower of the mind and of its memories. It does not matter if you cannot remember the teachings; the point is – did they do their job? If they did and Self-knowledge is firm, you can discard the teachings as objects known to you.

Therefore we say that you cannot study Vedanta, because the subject matter is you.

All the same, before the doer is negated and the language/terminology used by Vedanta is new, Self-inquiry does at first rely to some extent on the function of memory because nothing can be retained in the mind without it. Knowledge of anything (other than the Self) depends on four things: (1) the presence of an object, (2) functioning sense organs and subtle senses, (3) a functioning mind behind the senses, (4) the subject – consciousness. If the mind is impaired by malfunctioning sense organs (blindness, muteness, deafness, etc.), mental or physical illness or injury, then knowledge of objects will most likely not be true to the object, making learning or understanding difficult or impossible.

However, even if one is able to memorize and learn Sanskrit and Vedanta verbatim by “studying” the terminology, without a qualified mind, Self-knowledge will not obtain in the mind. Purely cognitive understanding is only a precondition for Self-knowledge; it does not necessarily lead to *moksa*. We have seen a number of Self-realized (but not Self-actualized) people go down this rabbit hole – believing that by becoming proficient in the language and texts relating to Vedanta by proxy this makes them “enlightened” or, at the very least, superior to those who have not studied Vedanta. Unfortunately, it’s a fallacy the ego enjoys when the doer has “survived” *moksa*, or not been negated.

As you say, binding *vasanas* undeniably stand in the way of assimilation, which is why we say the “work” of Self-inquiry really begins with Self-realization, and the last stage of Self-inquiry, *nididhyasana*, is the hardest and the longest. Below is an excerpt from James’ teaching on this difficult subject.

Self-Realization and *Nididhyasana*

Self-realization is not *moksa* unless you were qualified when you realized who you are. The two subsequent stages (the disappearance of the doer/thinker/feeler – the *jiva*, which in most cases is alive. If the fruit of *moksa*, perfect satisfaction with your Self is firm, the *jiva*, the world and the doer’s role in it are noticeable by their absence.

If your primary *svadharma* is inquiry, and you know you are the Self but are not experiencing the radiant, guilt-free happiness that Self-knowledge implies, then you are not following your nature properly. Even though you may have *karma yoga* pretty well sorted, but strictly speaking, *karma yoga* is not Vedanta. It is preparation. If you are pretty level-headed and objective about your *jiva* self and are not hiding anything, what you don’t see is that something is hidden from you.

The stage after *karma yoga* and Self-realization is *nididhyasana*, Self-actualization, seeing that your life is synchronized with your identity as the limitless, ever-present existence/awareness, which in short means taking a stand in the Self as the Self, is the “hidden” factor. As what? As the knowledge of *jiva*. If you look at a photograph, you don’t see the camera in it, yet the picture doesn’t exist without the camera. There simply cannot be a *jiva* without the presence of the Self. This presence is completely ignored in most people’s narrative, yet it is the Self, *Dharma* with a big D, that makes the narrative possible. The *jiva* that the narrative focuses on is not an actual person. It is an abstraction, a story.

So the sixth stage of enlightenment (Self-realization is the fifth) is taking a stand in awareness. How else is the *jiva* going to reclaim its true limitless nature? The *jiva* – the eternal individual – is non-separate from the Self; that is the non-dual

teaching. Obviously, the story-*jiva* can't claim anything, because it is just a conceptual person. But the sentient person, the eternal person who is telling the story, can own up its true identity and gain the fruit – perfect satisfaction – if he/she does their *svadharma*, i.e. applies Self-knowledge. What does this look like? It looks like dismissing the limited notion of yourself with the correct notion, which is, “I am not *jiva*; I am limitless, unborn, non-dual, unconcerned, actionless, ever-present awareness.”

In other words, including your Self, *Dharma* with a big “D,” along with *jiva* and her story, which is just a bunch of thoughts. The Self-thought should be the dominant thought as an inquirer. Obviously, it is hard work, and the fact that it is hard work, i.e. eternal vigilance, what you are supposed to do spiritually, i.e. following the *svadharma* of an inquirer. If you don't follow through with this *dharma*, it creates a depressing sense of malaise, which incidentally will not be ameliorated by a bunch of healthy supplements or anything else. In short, *tamasic* thinking is the enemy. The good news is that at least you don't have enlightenment sickness.

Dan: As another example of what I do in the morning: today I was reading the last pages of Eckhart Tolle's *A New Earth*, a book that a few years ago made such an impression on me in order to share some words for my daughter that I thought might be helpful to her, and I read his words through the filter of James' teachings on the Self. It was interesting to see how James' teaching has altered my understanding of what Tolle was saying in his book.

I would like to have that discussion, but I have nobody that is interested, so I'll shovel snow and play hockey.

Sundari: Yes, it's amazing how most things fade out in the light of Self-knowledge. The thing with Vedanta is that it is so powerful and its logic so flawless that nothing stands up to it. At the same time, it's not a dogmatic philosophy or way of thinking; Vedanta underwrites all truth because it is the pathless path that makes all paths possible. Wherever you find the principles of non-duality shining through, that's Vedanta, meaning Self-knowledge. Where you don't, and the thinking is instead dualistic, you find ignorance. So an investigation of other ideas is important as Vedanta is a critical tradition – but it criticizes bad ideas, never people.

~ Much love, Sundari