

The Process of Vedanta

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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 the knowledge associated with it, you will have to go back to the previous level until you work it out. The three steps are hearing (*sravana*), reasoning (*manana*) and Self-actualizing, or assimilating (*nididhyasana*).

However, before you are qualified for Vedanta you need to have resolved several existential issues. First, you need to have assimilated the knowledge that life is a zero-sum duality, which means that no active worldly pursuit – security, pleasure, virtue, fame, power, education, etc. – will solve the problem of suffering.

If you have already realized the zero-sum nature of the world and have taken up a spiritual path, you will probably need to accept another disillusioning fact: enlightenment – liberation from the world – is not an epiphany, a special, blissful, non-dual experience. Your experiences of the Self, which you imagine are out of time, come and go because they are not out of time at all; freedom that begins inevitably ends one fine day. Until you accept this fact, you are condemned to the same frustrating merry-go-round of ups and downs that you experienced with worldly experiences.

The third qualifying factor is the realization that the ever-present, ever-experienced Self is always free of the world and that access to it can only be gained by removing ignorance about it.

The fourth qualification, which is the result of meritorious *karma*, involves accepting Vedanta as a means of Self-knowledge, accepting a Self-actualized teacher and appreciating the need for a disciplined qualified mind. A disciple of Vedanta is a disciplined person.

Each step is increasingly more difficult than the preceding step. Consequently a burning desire for freedom is required to get you through these qualifying steps of understanding.

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, is the end of an individual's spiritual work. It is, but only if the individual is perfectly satisfied with itself and the world once its Self-knowledge is unshakable. What is that knowledge? "I am the blissful, limitless, ordinary, unborn, ever-present, witnessing awareness, and not the body-mind entity that appears as an object in me." A rare few actually attain this state.

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 most Self-realized people declare themselves "finished," "cooked" or "enlightened" and even 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*). Sometimes individuals 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 an individual *jiva*. If the idea “I am the Self” 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 he or she hears the teachings, Self-realization negates the sense of doership, not the eternal *Jiva*, which is non-separate from the Self. 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 Self-realization gives it the capacity to exploit the teachings of Vedanta. Doers are motivated by desire for security, pleasure, power, status, recognition, etc. *Nididhyasana* addresses this issue and prevents this phenomenon.

These three stages are meant to be presided over by a living *guru* because a doer has a built-in tendency for self-deception, i.e. denial (*tamas*). Along with the “I am enlightened” idea comes the belief “I am an authority in my own right and therefore I don’t need a *guru*.” So a Self-realized doer with unfulfilled ambitions is happy to get rid of his or her *guru* or switch *gurus* when it is convenient. Usually it is convenient when the *guru* tells you something that you don’t want to hear or behaves in a way that contradicts one of your cherished beliefs. It is particularly difficult to hear that you are not finished with your spiritual work when you realize the Self. Sometimes people favor dead *gurus*, who can’t correct their understanding. If you claim to have many teachers, you will only confuse yourself because even Self-actualized teachers express themselves according to their natures and emphasize various aspects of the teachings according to their own experience. When the knowledge negates your doer, the teacher is negated too.

Nididhyasana removes the part of the mind that is subject to ambition (*rajas*) which initiates new projects, spiritual and otherwise, which in turn generate excessive activity, which leads to *tamas*. *Tamas* presents a Self-actualization problem that often affects people who have 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, because of the number of activities required. Excessive action generates *tamasic* qualities: sloth, procrastination, fantasy, exhaustion, depressing feelings, confusion and dullness.

The goal of Vedanta is *tripti*, complete *jiva* satisfaction. An apparent *jiva* remains until the body dies, but a Self-actualized *jiva* has no desire whatsoever for things to be different, inwardly or outwardly, from what they are at any moment. He or she is the most perfect human manifestation of the Self possible. Its state of mind is called *Isvara pranidanam*, surrender to *Isvara*, or non-dual devotion (*parabhakti*), which means that it never feels like it is acting as its body and mind act.

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; ten years for resolving doubts (*manana*) created by the teaching, and fifteen years for getting rid of a sense of doership.

I didn't suffer in the last 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 extreme disgust with the world, intense 18-hour *sadhana* with my *guru* for two years and intense *sadhana* on my own three years prior to it. When my *nididhyasana* ended I kept my doer hard at work studying scripture, writing commentaries and teaching Vedanta, which is the best *dharma* for it. To support myself I did hard physical labor for minimum wage until I was nearly seventy. Because I became disillusioned with worldly success before Vedanta appeared in my life, it was impossible to misuse it once Self-knowledge took place.

Swami Paramarthananda, a *guru* bother, 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 practice once Self-knowledge is firm.

It is available here in paperback: ([link](#)).

As a direct download here: ([link](#)).