

# Self-Inquiry Is Not Self-Improvement

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Ian:** Dear James Swartz and Sundari, thank you again for your book. I'm rereading it, as usual. I have a few more questions, which I would be happy for you to answer if you can.

Part of the book states that questions can often be answered by common sense, what we instinctively know to be right, and failing that, scripture can be referenced. I have a couple of personal questions, one small, one big (seemingly anyway, and they could be switched, as the "small" one sometimes seems bigger at times), and my common sense doesn't quite kick in so easily regarding them. "Scripture" seems to be a bottomless well too, so I'm not sure where I might go for that little bit of advice that would be the tipping point for the answer to either question. Any suggestions?

I sometimes have difficulty discerning pride and honour. They seem to go hand in hand. For example, I see an old man who seems very at peace and dignified, who seems to hold a sense of honour. I'm not sure if this is a positive attribute or not. It seems to be. Yet there's also the pride aspect. Perhaps he's holding onto some definition of himself (something that comes and goes and therefore is not the true self, awareness) which gives him that dignity. Is there a difference?

When reading through the section on diet, I seem to get caught up in "doing" and what is apparently real. Even reading your book is the world of *samsara*. I seem to be doing this for self-improvement. Is there a good attitude to take towards this? I can just let it happen, knowing that it's not ultimately the self that's doing it.

**James:** Hi, Ian. I think the question about pride and dignity is related to the self-improvement idea. Self-knowledge is not about self-improvement, except indirectly. By that I mean that the person who does the improving is not the one that should be doing the "improving," because he or she is not objective. If any change in the ego is required it should be done by the knowledge, "I am whole and complete, pure and perfect," not by the ego.

The idea underlying the notion of self-improvement is that there is something wrong with you in the first place. We do not accept this. It may be that character defects motivate one's search, but the search should be for the truth of one's true nature, not a quest to be a perfect person. You are perfect already.

If you do not address the belief – and it is only a belief – that you are imperfect, you will never become perfect no matter how much work you do on yourself. There will always be room for improvement. To what end? You will die one day, and like everyone else you will die with imperfections. What will have been gained? So if you want to be happy you need to learn to live with your supposed imperfections. Yes, if you are a child molester or a strong-arm robber you need a bit of work, but otherwise normal, healthy people like yourself should take time to smell the roses, not fix something that isn't broken. If this does not seem reasonable, then chalk up the dignity and the pride to *Isvara*, take it as a gift and don't worry about it. I hope this has been helpful.

~ Love, James