



HOW TO ATTAIN

# Enlightenment

THE VISION OF NONDUALITY

JAMES SWARTZ

First Sentient Publications edition 2009  
Copyright © 2009 by James Swartz

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

A paperback original

Cover design by Kim Johansen, Black Dog Design  
Book design by Timm Bryson

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Swartz, James Bender.

How to attain enlightenment : the vision of non-duality / James Swartz. -- 1st  
Sentient Publications ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-59181-161-9

1. Vedanta. I. Title.

B132.V3S95 2009

181'.48--dc22

2009033858

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

## SENTIENT PUBLICATIONS

A Limited Liability Company  
1113 Spruce Street  
Boulder, CO 80302  
[www.sentientpublications.com](http://www.sentientpublications.com)

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. INQUIRY INTO OBJECT HAPPINESS

Security, Pleasure and Virtue

Subject and Object

Limitation of Object Happiness

Removing the Wall

Object Happiness Not Permanent

A Zero-Sum Game

The Fourth Pursuit – Freedom from Limitation

### 2. WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

The Path of Experience

The Path of Knowledge

The Value of a Means of Knowledge

Enlightenment Myths

*No Mind, Blank Mind, Empty Mind, Stopped Mind*

*No Ego, Ego Death*

*Nirvana*

*The Now*

*Experience of Oneness*

*Transcendental State*

*Enlightenment as Eternal Bliss*

*Levels of Enlightenment*

*Enlightenment Is a Special Status*

*Enlightenment as Energy*

*Fulfillment of All Desires*

### 3. THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

What Is Self Inquiry?  
Importance of a Teacher  
Listening, Reflecting, Contemplating

#### 4. QUALIFICATIONS

An Open Mind  
A Reasonable Mind  
A Discriminating Mind  
A Dispassionate Mind  
A Disciplined, Observant Mind  
Self Duty  
A Patient, Forbearing Mind  
A Balanced Mind  
A Motivated Mind  
A Believing Mind  
A Devoted Mind  
A Masculine Temperament  
The Teacher  
The Grace of God

#### 5. THE SELF

#### 6. OBSTRUCTIONS

Extroversion of Mind  
The Causal Body  
Microcosmic Ignorance  
The Subtle Body  
Ego and the Inner Enemies  
The Separation  
Desire  
Inner Conflict

#### 7. INQUIRY INTO KARMA AND DHARMA

There Is No Doer  
The Factors Involved in Action  
Knowledge Causes Karma  
Action in Inaction and Inaction in Action  
Karma and Dharma  
Three Kinds of Karma

Karma, Vasanas and Reincarnation

8. INQUIRY INTO PRACTICE

Karma Yoga

9. LOVE

Special Relationships

The Soul Mate

Marriage

A Different Kind of Marriage

Converting Emotion into Devotion

Spiritual Practice and Psychological Work

Devotion

Karma Yoga as Devotion

Devotional Dispositions

Devotional Conversion Identities

Primary Devotion

10. THE ASSIMILATION OF EXPERIENCE

The Ropes

Enlightenment and the Assimilation of Experience

How Can I Get a Pure Mind?

The Value of Values

11. LIFESTYLE

People, Food, Sex and Money

Money

Sex

Diet and Lifestyle

The Rajas-Tamas Complex

12. KNOWLEDGE YOGA

The Methodology of Inquiry

The Practice of Knowledge

Cause and Effect

The Real and the Apparent

Essential and Non-Essential

Change and Changelessness

Subject-Object

The Three States  
The Five Sheaths  
Why There Is Only You  
The Location of Experience  
Nothing Ever Happened  
The Opposite Thought  
Name and Form  
The Mirror of Awareness  
Something to Work Out

### 13. MEDITATION

The Arrested Mind  
Happy Thoughts  
Mantra Meditation  
Insight Meditation  
The Gap  
Meditation Practice  
An Excellent Technique  
The Breath  
The Silence

### 14. AFTER AND BEYOND ENLIGHTENMENT

Pseudo-Enlightenment or Enlightenment Sickness  
The Liberated Person  
More or Less Enlightened?  
Beyond Enlightenment

### 15. THE TEACHINGS OF RAMANA MAHARSHI

#### 16. NEO-ADVAITA

Multi-Path Confusion  
Ramana Maharshi, Osho, Papaji and the Rise of Neo-Advaita  
Neo-Advaita Versus Traditional Vedanta  
No Teacher, Seeker, Path, Knowledge or Ignorance  
Being Present, Dropping Suffering  
Qualifications for Enlightenment  
I Am Not the Doer  
Importance of Karma Yoga for Self Inquiry  
Devotion to God

Where's the Methodology?  
Seeking Emotional Fulfillment

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## INTRODUCTION

The knowledge contained in this book is a great secret that hides itself. Even when it is clearly presented, it is rarely assimilated, because you need to be prepared to understand it. Ordinarily we gain knowledge by experience, but the object of this knowledge lies beyond the scope of perception and inference, the senses and the mind. To know it, another means is required. There is such a means, but it is unlikely that you have come in contact with it...until now.

It is also a secret because it is extremely valuable. Things that are very valuable are not kept on the coffee table; they are locked away and are only displayed on special occasions. If you find yourself reading these words, it is an occasion to solve a problem that has been trailing you since the day you were born.

This knowledge is valuable because it eliminates suffering. This book will not tell you that you are free of suffering; it will prove that you are free. It will relieve you of your sense of smallness, inadequacy and incompleteness. When you appreciate what you are shown here, you will no longer try to be something you are not. You will no longer wonder who you are and why you are here.

The knowledge that you are about to be given is the king of all forms of knowledge because it is self shining. Other forms of knowledge do not shine on their own. But this knowledge—self knowledge—stands alone and rules all others because what you know depends on you, but you do not depend on what you know.

This rare knowledge resolves all divisions. All other forms of knowledge reinforce the duality of subject and object, the division of the knower/experiencer and the objects of knowledge/experience. It is the separation of the person you believe yourself to be and the objects of your experience—from which you gain knowledge—that causes you to experience yourself as a limited, incomplete and often inadequate being. When the knower is thought to be different from the known, each limits the other. If I do not understand that the knower is non-separate from the world, I will feel small...even though I am not small at all.

When I assume that things are divided, I become one of the divided things. I find myself as a distinct unique entity, qualified by any number of factors. From this



standpoint, I am forced to transact business in a vast complex world that does not always seem to have my best interests at heart. As the small person I think I am, I can understand a few things, but I can never understand everything I need to know to survive, much less to thrive. The assumption that I am separate from what I know creates many unnecessary problems. For example, although I am not actually subject to time, I believe I am mortal and see my life inexorably slipping away. I erroneously believe that I am limited by health, wealth, love, and many other things.

Knowledge is true to the object of knowledge. When you experience a tree, you know a tree, not a dog or a cat. When you know anything in this world, you are always different from it. However, you are not a known object. The knower of the self and the object of knowledge are the same. The knower/experiencer and the objects of knowledge/experience all depend on you. The knower is awareness with reference to what is known and knowledge is just thoughts manufactured out of you, awareness. They are not different from you, although they seem to be. When you understand this, the division between you and what you know is resolved, destroying all other differences.

Everyone here is a seeker of one of the four categories of knowledge: pleasure, security, virtue or freedom. When you pursue knowledge that depends on the subject/object division, there is always something that you do not know. In every type of relative knowledge, what you do not know is always greater than what you do know. What you think you know often turns out to be false when new information comes in, or when you look at the object of your knowledge from a different standpoint. But self knowledge cannot be falsified, because you are eternal and always present. It is not subject to negation.

Furthermore, no ordinary knowledge is ever complete. Because the universe is a whole, every piece of knowledge is connected to every other piece of knowledge. In the whole, how can you have a piece of knowledge and still call it knowledge? Knowing an aspect of something, you cannot say you know it completely. But self knowledge is complete, because you are a partless whole.

This book is more than a mere book. It is the ancient science of self knowledge. It is not the philosophy, beliefs or opinions of some musty ancient sages or the author, although you will find some of the author's opinions relating to the topic of enlightenment in it. It is the result of the realization of the non-duality of all things and forty years of study of the science of self inquiry. Do not read this book. Immerse yourself in it. Had you been able to solve the riddle of your existence on your own, you would have done so by now. Allow it to guide your investigation. It will certainly demystify the mystery of existence and awaken the realization of your non-separation from everything.

# Inquiry into Object Happiness



## Security, Pleasure and Virtue

Every living being responds to life according to its programming. Although barely conscious, plants unfold their complex and wonderful forms from within tiny seemingly intelligent seeds. Somehow they learned how to ingest water, turn towards the light and reproduce.

A hound hunting a rabbit does not question its own behavior. A force hidden deep within it interprets a scent and sends adrenaline flooding through its system, compelling it to bay loudly and salivate excessively as it moves relentlessly toward its prey. It sinks its sharp teeth into the soft flesh and happily wolfs down its meal without a trace of guilt. Whether its victim munched tender organic grass in the wild or fed on hay contaminated by agribusiness' pernicious chemicals is of no concern to it; it is not programmed to think.

In the never-ending search for the edge in the survival game, consciousness evolved the intellect. Somehow apes figured out that ants living in the trunks of trees could be extracted with the help of a blade of grass or a thin twig, providing them with an easy source of protein. Although incapable of understanding mathematics or composing symphonies, monkeys, dogs, cats and many other species have somehow developed a rudimentary capacity to think. Fido brings the evening paper to the master sitting in his easy chair after a hard day's work and is rewarded with a bone. A pair of dolphins guide a confused whale caught in a maze of delta waterways to the freedom of the open ocean.

Humans sit on the roof and crown of the pyramid of life, much to their undying satisfaction. In them intellect is more subtle and sophisticated and appears as free will,

the power to consider various alternatives and choose among them.

What we call reality is governed by the uncertainty principle. Because our source of food, animal or vegetable, is unconcerned about our need to survive, we are forced to either pursue it or cultivate it. Shelter does not simply happen on its own but requires effort to obtain. Caves may have been useful during mankind's infancy but make unsuitable dwellings today. Money is of little use in itself. It is neither edible nor a suitable building material. It does, however, provide various forms of material security. Security through power is another primary human pursuit. Most of us spend the lion's share of our lives trying to secure ourselves in an uncertain world.

Once my material needs are met and I am ensconced in a cozy home with money in the bank, I may discover that I am still not completely fulfilled. Time hangs heavy on my hands and I feel that I have earned the right to a little pleasure. I may pamper myself with luxuries: a vacation home, romantic holidays in foreign countries and expensive playthings, hoping to remove an uncomfortable sense of lack that bubbles up from within. I might begin dating, thinking that love will do the trick. Perhaps I discover the high in drink and drugs or extreme sports. No matter what brand of pleasure I pursue, I pursue it for a reason: I want to feel good. I want to feel whole and complete. But although the good feelings are intense as they happen, they are short lived. Consequently, I either become dispassionate because I see the futility of this pursuit or I pursue pleasure more ardently.

If I find that wealth and pleasure are unable to satisfy me in a meaningful way, I may seek consolation in religion. Every religion entertains the notion of heaven and hell. Because hell is not desirable, I opt for heaven and commit to doing good deeds, which requires virtue. To attain virtue, my sins need to be removed. I believe that once I am pure I will be happy, both here and hereafter.

Even if I already count myself among the virtuous and eschew religion, I may be deeply troubled by the lack of virtue in the world and set out to make a difference. I reason that if the world is a better place, I will be a happier person. But whether the object of my efforts is the salvation of my own soul or the salvation of other souls, my primary motivation is the removal of the sense of limitation. Most of us are engaged in the pursuit of any or all of these three goals, or some variation of them, throughout our lives.

## **Subject and Object**

Although life is one seamless whole, for the purpose of our analysis it can be divided into two categories: subject and object. The gross and subtle things that I pursue are objects. Objects are known to me through perception, inference and other means of knowledge. Even the faculties of perception—the senses, mind, and intellect—are

objects from my point of view. Objects include physical forms, activities, situations, environments, sensations, feelings, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, opinions, memories, dreams and states of mind. All experiences, solicited and unsolicited, are objects. Anything that I desire or desire to avoid is an object. Objects are not conscious, but the subject, that which I am, is conscious.

Life is the pursuit of objects, by conscious beings, for the happiness that seems to reside in them. When I take a job, fall in love, read a book, eat a meal, go to the dentist, pray or meditate, I expect the activity itself or its results to make me feel better than I do at the moment. No matter how good I feel, I can always imagine a state of greater happiness. If I am miserable, my actions will be calculated to remove or lessen the misery and bring about an increase in happiness. When a better state is inconceivable, I refrain from activities that might compromise the one I'm in. The world's tropical beaches are packed with happy people lying flat on their backs, not moving a muscle.

Several facts need to be considered when we pursue objects for the happiness we think they can provide. First, I want to be happy all the time. Bits and pieces of happiness spliced between periods of unhappiness is not good enough. What I need is an object that contains limitless happiness that I could possess and enjoy every minute of my life.

Leaving aside the question of whether or not such an object exists, let us consider the way experience works. Experience is the continuous interaction of a subject with objects. Nothing can be done about it. I am here and the world of objects is there and we are somehow inextricably bound to each other. The proof lies in the fact that I am always experiencing something. Even deep sleep is an object in which I experience limitlessness and bliss.

Also, everything in the world of experience is in a state of change. As part of that world I am never the same from one moment to the next. One minute I feel good, the next minute I do not. One moment I want this, the next moment I want that. The objects around me and within me that I depend on for my happiness are also in a state of flux. When I connect to or obtain the object of my desire, the happiness or satisfaction lasts as long as the connection lasts.

At first glance it would seem that happiness resides in objects. I purchase a house and a new car and I feel happy. I go on vacation and I feel happy. I jog, garden, meditate or ski and I feel happy. Literally millions of apparently happiness-producing objects and activities fall within the categories of security, pleasure and virtue. But if happiness is inherent in an object or activity or a particular state of mind, the object or activity or state of mind would produce happiness for everyone equally. A pair of Nike running shoes makes a jogger happy but provides little joy for an amputee. A granny who knits for fun will not take pleasure in bungee jumping. Giving away millions makes philanthropists happy, yet letting go of a dime is anathema to a miser.

A man divorces his wife because he sees her as the source of his misery. Before the ink is dry on the divorce decree, he finds her in the arms of another who sees her as his darling bundle of joy.

Some try to attain happiness in subtle and abstract ways. Poets, writers, artists and actors find it by interacting with thoughts and ideas, feelings and emotions. Academics, convinced that it can be gained through knowledge, subject themselves to years of disciplined study. Religious types seek happiness in prayer and ritual. Spiritual questers seek fulfillment in meditation, chanting and mystic techniques that are meant to give them access to higher states of consciousness. The psychological world maintains that happiness can be attained by removing subjective obstacles: disturbing memories, self limiting concepts and unforgiving thoughts lodged in the subconscious mind.

## **Limitation of Object Happiness**

Both approaches, the physical and the psychological, share the belief that effort can alter the objective and subjective factors inhibiting happiness. Conventional wisdom supports this view, and the kernel of truth it contains probably accounts for the universal pursuit of happiness through objects.

Why do we feel happy when we get what we want? The pursuit of happiness in objects is driven by a two-faced monster: fear and desire. A desire hides behind every fear and behind every fear lurks a hidden desire. If I do not get what I want I will be unhappy. Avoiding what I do not want makes me happy. So the fear of unhappiness is just the desire for happiness. These two primal psychic forces, which cause our attractions and repulsions, attachments and aversions, color every aspect of our lives. They are caused by ignorance of the nature of the subject.

Because fear and desire are uncomfortable feelings, I have a strong need to be free of them. I need to be fulfilled and happy. When I say that I want a new car, a new relationship, a better job or a vacation abroad, I do not want the object for its own sake. I want the happiness apparently wrapped up in it. If there was a permanent happiness pill, I would quickly forego my desires for objects.

## **Removing the Wall**

Why does happiness seem to come from objects? When desired objects are attained or feared objects avoided, the wall of fear and desire separating me from the subject—the source of happiness—dissolves, and happiness fills me.

How does this work? When a fear or desire is removed, the mind associates the happiness with the object, rather than with the removal of the subjective limitation. If this fact were clearly understood, people would discontinue the search for happiness in objects and directly remove their fears and desires. Unfortunately, what I want and do not want does not seem to be under my control. Desires appear in my mind from an unknown source and more or less command me to scurry off into the world in search of the relevant object.

While there are myriad objects that human beings pursue in the quest for happiness, the familiar belief that happiness lies in relationships with people is a good example of how the mechanism works. I find someone to love and if that person returns the love, it makes me happy. But what happens when the love object no longer satisfies my desire for love? The feeling of love disappears and now I believe that the removal of the love object will make me happy. Why does the love dry up? Because the idea that it was coming from the object acted like a switch and closed the door between the desirer and the desirer's true nature. Although the desirer's true nature is love, he or she does not know it.

That switch, the belief that the joy is in the object, can also open the door. For instance, loneliness causes fantasies of an ideal someone who will bring happiness. When life presents an approximation of the fantasy, the dam encompassing the inner ocean of love is breached because the desire has found its object and love cascades freely into the heart, producing the experience of intense happiness. Because the process is unconscious and love appears miraculously in the presence of the object, I assume that the love is coming from the object or my interaction with the object, but they are only catalysts that trigger the inner switch.

You may wish to argue that if love is everyone's nature, I can get love from someone else. It is possible, but getting love from conscious beings is difficult because their likes and dislikes, which are not under their conscious control, operate their inner switches and whimsically turn the love on and off. Giving love is equally difficult for the same reason. Even if I am fortunate enough to be loved unconditionally, my conditioning may prevent me from appreciating the object's love. To avoid this trap I should understand that although love is in everyone, I can rely on it only when I have realized that it is my own nature. To accomplish this, I need to sacrifice the fears and desires separating me from my own nature.

## **Object Happiness Not Permanent**

The fly in the ointment of the belief in object-dependent happiness is the fact that life is impermanent. All objects, including the minds and emotions of every subject, are in a state of continual flux. Additionally, if permanent happiness is attainable by

possessing and enjoying objects, the desire to have another object would never arise once the desired object was attained. Conversely, if permanent happiness was attainable by removing an object, it would never have to be removed again. But experience shows that getting rid of an unwanted object does not prevent it from reappearing. Additionally, the desire for objects continues, often increases, when they are possessed and enjoyed. I may want more of a particular object, less of it, or something else altogether. The satisfaction of my desires and the removal of my fears do not leave me permanently satisfied.

For instance, people who associate happiness with a certain object, say a drug- or alcohol-induced state of mind, try to achieve that state over and over, up to and often beyond the point where it no longer yields pleasure. Nobody is ever permanently satisfied by a successful sexual encounter or any other supposedly happiness-producing object or activity. In fact, happiness-producing objects and activities often suddenly produce unhappiness. It is common knowledge that what I want changes when I get what I want, causing me to no longer value the object. Or even if my value for the object does not change, the object will eventually change and rob my happiness.

## **A Zero-Sum Game**

The lid on the coffin of the object happiness business is the sad fact that life is a zero-sum game. It is a zero-sum game because it is a duality. You cannot win. Every upside has a downside. For example: the way to remove my sense of being bound by time is to fulfill my desires because then my sense of time limitation disappears, but desires are endless and fulfilling them takes time; I need money for security but my desire to spend—what good is it if you can't spend it?—makes me insecure. The more pleasure I get, the more pleasure I want. Wanting is not pleasant; I want power to be free of my sense of inadequacy and smallness but power depends on circumstances not under my control, causing me to feel powerless. I want to be perfect, but the more perfect I become, the more hidden imperfections come to light.

## **The Fourth Pursuit – Freedom from Limitation**

If you think about it, the common denominator in all pursuits is freedom. Each pursuit is meant to remove a sense of incompleteness and inadequacy, but they all fail to deliver. Does this mean that I should abandon my quest for freedom? Or does it mean that I am barking up the wrong tree? Perhaps my problem has nothing to do with the world at all. Perhaps there is something I do not know about myself.

A careful study of the voluminous and ancient body of literature that deals with the topic of freedom reveals two distinct but not unrelated paths to freedom: the path of experience and the path of knowledge.



# What Is Enlightenment?



## The Path of Experience

Existence is consciousness. From the human point of view it is experienced as three states: waking, dream and deep sleep. Sleep is the absence of differentiated experience. Dream is similar to waking in that the subject-object distinction obtains. Waking state consciousness can be divided into two substates: *samsara* and *nirvana*, to use two Sanskrit terms.<sup>1</sup> Samsara describes the experience of life as we know it. It is conceived of as a whirlpool or a wheel, a state of mind that goes around and around more or less forever. A whirlpool is difficult, if not impossible, to escape. Desires and fears emerge from an unknown source, disturb the mind for a while and disappear, only to reappear and disturb it again. We do actions intended to remove them but the actions only serve to reinforce them. As the wheel of life goes around and around we go up and down, elated one minute and depressed the next. Samsara is an entropic perpetual motion machine that never takes us anywhere, slowly wears us out and eventually sends us on.

Sometimes, however, we are granted a reprieve and lifted out of the samsaric state of mind. One is never sure how or why it happens. *Grace* is the only word that seems applicable. During these episodes we feel open, expansive and free. Typically, we observe our minds and bodies as objects. Perhaps we feel connected to everything. Maybe we melt into the world or experience a radiant inner light or the peace that passes understanding. It may feel as if we are not there because the ego has temporarily dissolved. Fear and desire, our more or less constant companions, are conspicuous by their absence. Hence, this transcendent otherworldly state is called

*nirvana*. Nirvana literally means *without flame* or *extinct* and symbolizes a desireless, fearless state of mind or the extinction of the sense of separateness. This state is invariably accompanied by wonder and bliss. These epiphanies vary from a few seconds to minutes, days and occasionally weeks or even months. Eventually we come back to *samsara*, the everyday state of mind.

When we get back we long to return because a vacation from the monotonous uncertainties of life is a great relief. A few serious epiphanies and we are tempted to drop out and head for India. Epiphanies are the basis of all religions and give their doctrines of divinity an experiential foundation. They are sometimes called visions of God or revelations and are highly valued. Many ardent prayers are offered to invoke them.

These experiences, large and small, happen infrequently but are so compelling they cannot be discounted. At a certain point in an individual's evolution they become intense and frequent. Over the course of human history they have been catalogued, discussed and analyzed and these studies constitute a large body of literature. In due course a science of meditation evolved from them.<sup>2</sup> Meditation makes it possible to experience nirvana, the transcendental state or God consciousness, with enough certainty to give it a scientific basis.

Meditation is often conceived of as a flight, a journey to the beyond. It takes considerable practice to master, but eventually the meditator is able to transcend the mind more or less at will. As the practice becomes routine, the meditator spends increasingly longer periods in nirvana, where there is no suffering, and less time in the *samsaric* state where there is. Eventually the state is meant to become effortless and continuous so that the individual can even go about daily life in nirvanic consciousness, i.e., fulfilled and happy.

The last word in terms of freedom from *samsara* is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*, a state of absorption that erases duality.<sup>3</sup> The subject and the objects merge into one experience that lasts for some time. It is the opposite of deep sleep because the mind is awake. In deep sleep duality is erased because the knower-known-knowledge division is gone. When the duality of subject and object does not obtain, freedom obtains. This state does not destroy the ignorance that causes the *samsaric* state of mind, because the one who has the ignorance has been absorbed into awareness where no duality obtains. If you achieve this *samadhi* it indicates a high degree of mastery of the mind, which may be useful once you are back in *samsara*.

It comes up short in terms of lasting freedom, however, because when you leave the *samadhi* and enter *samsaric* consciousness the inbuilt dualistic orientation, the subject-object distinction, returns. Unconscious tendencies begin interpreting experience and the same old problems resurface. And one important fact needs to be taken into account when we are considering the pursuit of this kind of enlightenment:

all experiences are in time so nirvana or samadhi can never become a permanent or continuous experience.

The theory of experiential enlightenment does not explain why we are caught up in samsara. It takes for granted that the solution to samsara is exclusively experiential and offers to convert samsara into nirvana. The bible for the proponents of this view of enlightenment is the Patanjali *Yoga Sutras*, written a few hundred years before the Christian era. It informs us that our conditioning stands in the way of the experience of nirvana and instructs us how to remove it so that we can experience freedom. It is a dualistic doctrine based on the apparent reality of subject and object. I, the subject, am limited by my state of mind. Because limitation is not acceptable to me I would like to free myself of it. I practice some form of meditation and gain mastery of my mind by removing the thoughts that obstruct the experience of limitlessness. My experience of limitlessness is the object. Buddha's Eightfold Path and Ashtanga Yoga are the traditional methods for gaining experiential freedom. Buddha did not bring God into it but Patanjali did, saying that surrender to God is an indirect aid for attaining freedom.

Success in meditation does not destroy duality. I am still me, the subject, but I now experience freedom. Patanjali does not put it exactly this way. He says that once the mind is brought under control, "the seer dwells in its own nature" and "the indweller shines forth as pure consciousness," words that amount to freedom but do not take into account the fact that the seer, awareness, dwells in his own nature and shines forth irrespective of the condition of the mind. Nor does it take into account the fact that the meditator is consciousness, i.e., free already. In any case, enlightened or not, a mind free of desire is certainly not undesirable for anyone seeking happiness. The Eightfold Path is also an experiential journey that is said to end with enlightenment. This view is fairly reasonable and would not have endured for two thousand years if there was not some truth to it, but it is a very arduous path requiring an austere lifestyle and many years of rigorous practice.

When passion is king and instant gratification is queen, the mind becomes agitated if more than a few minutes are required to satisfy its desires. Fortunately, the samsaric state of mind is its own worst enemy, and sensitive individuals seek a way out. Invariably, the first enlightenment view that presents itself to them is the experiential view. From womb to tomb, life is one long series of experiences, so it is natural to become attached to experience and define ourselves by our experiences. Who would I be without them? The idea that we do not need experience to be happy never occurs to us. Although it is a natural and inevitable experience, death terrifies us as it seemingly spells the end of experience.

Experience obviously takes place in time. It is clear that experienced objects change, but what about the experiencer—me? I change too. Can I honestly say that I have not changed since the day I was born? Absolutely everything about me changes: my body, my feelings, my thoughts and ideas. I am never the same from one day to

the next. Time is having its way with me and there is nothing I can do about it. If experience did not modify me, what would be the point of experience? And because experience is dualistic it is sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Positive is fine, but negative is not fine, so I am open to suggestions that might free me of the negative and generate the positive. In fact, a significant fraction of my energy goes into calculating which course of action will make me feel good and which will make me feel bad. As I cannot know for sure what the results of my actions will be, I often find myself hopelessly confused and unable to do anything at all.

If somebody says that there is a special kind of experience that feels good and never ends, I am ready to sign up. If I have an experience of uncaused bliss, one that is not dependent on an outside event, I may be even more inclined to accept the idea of experiential enlightenment. Perhaps I reason that I can make the experience permanent, even though every time it happens, it ends. When the great sage Patanjali says that all I have to do to make it permanent is to remove my thoughts, I am ready to become a yogi. How hard can it be?

This is wishful thinking because samsara, the world of experience, is change. There is no special experience in samsara that does not change. The experiencer, me, is in time, and the objects of experience are in time, including all states of mind. How is it possible for two things that are constantly changing to produce a state of mind that does not change?

The experiencer changes because he or she is limited. Even deep sleep changes the experiencer because he or she wakes up rested. The experience of oneness also changes the experiencer because he or she wants to experience it again when the effects wear off. If it had no effect, the desire to regain it would not occur. To experience changelessness, there would have to be an unchanging experiencer outside of samsara that could experience it, assuming there is something beyond samsara. But where there is no change there is no experience, so what is the point of trying to become another experiencer even if it is possible?

If you believe that through a yogic technique or willpower or some other way, the experience of limitless freedom could be made permanent, who would make it permanent? The experiencer could not do it, because he or she does not even know what his or her next state of mind will be. No state of mind is under the conscious control of the experiencer. Even if the experiencer could control its state of mind or the thoughts in it, what happens when he or she loses control? To maintain control, concentration is necessary. What happens to the experience of limitlessness when I get sick and lose my concentration? It seems that my enlightenment is going to disappear along with my health.

Furthermore, the experiencer would have to be limitless to keep the mind permanently under control. But I am definitely limited. If I were limitless I would not be concerned about enlightenment as I would not be limited by suffering. It is

precisely because I feel limited that I am interested in freedom. How can an action—concentration, meditation or any other action—by a limited entity produce a limitless result? Freedom is limitless and cannot be the result of any action.

Finally, the idea that I can obtain the experience of enlightenment means that I am not experiencing the self—the light of awareness—now. It so happens that the non-experience of the self is impossible because consciousness is eternal and omnipresent and non-dual. It is everything that is. How can I get what I already have by doing anything? If I am going to get what I already have, I am going to have to lose my ignorance of who I am. This is not to say that meditation, epiphanies, or other spiritual practices are not valuable. We will later argue that epiphanies are very helpful as they give us an idea of what we are seeking. And we will also argue that spiritual practice is essential, not because it produces enlightenment, but because it prepares the mind for enlightenment. Without a prepared, qualified mind, enlightenment will not happen.

## **The Path of Knowledge**

To attain enlightenment I need to know what it is. The experiential view of enlightenment is based on the idea that reality is a duality. I am here, the world is there. I am here, enlightenment is there. But what if reality is not a duality? What if it is actually non-dual consciousness?<sup>4</sup> Would I try to experience the self through meditation or some other method?

If I have a mystic experience like a non-dual epiphany, it is unlikely that I will think about its meaning as it unfolds. The experience itself will be so strange, welcome and exhilarating that I will just get into it and enjoy. As it happened unexpectedly—perhaps I was just walking to the post office with many mundane things in my mind—the cause is unknown to me. If I take LSD and my mind is blown, the cause is obvious. But non-dual experiences, melting into everything in love for example, come unsolicited. They can only be chalked up to the grace of God. And in the absence of the knowledge of the nature of reality, I have no way to evaluate their overall meaning. Even if they tend to come with regularity, each one is unique, making it difficult to divine the meaning. Experience usually needs to repeat over and over, in the presence of an inquiring mind, before its secrets are revealed. Epiphanies may temporarily motivate me to change, which oddly enough is not desirable, or they may make me think I am quite exceptional, perhaps enlightened, but usually they simply produce a strong craving for more. The attempt to re-experience the self is futile because the experiencer thinks the self is not presently experienced. But ironically it is present when I want it because it exists prior to the experiencer. It is not prior to the experiencer in time, in which case it would not be present. It is prior in terms of understanding. It is present and apparently hidden.

Experience, worldly or spiritual, is only raw information that has no meaning apart from the way it is interpreted. What if the purpose of experience is not experience but knowledge? What if experience is just an envelope containing messages from consciousness about our identity? What if experiences are not telling us what to want or to avoid in samsara? What if they are telling us who we are?

Just as there are scriptures that tout experiential enlightenment, there are scriptures that tout enlightenment as self knowledge. If you find yourself suddenly disinterested when you hear the word *knowledge*, keep reading. Please do not succumb to the strong anti-intellectual bias that pervades the spiritual world. If you think enlightenment is all about heart or a special experience and that knowledge is merely intellectual, keep reading. Knowledge is not opposed to sensations or emotions or any experience. In fact, what you feel is enhanced by understanding. What is about to unfold could very well move you along on your path. If you react unfavorably to the word *knowledge*, substitute the word *understanding*.

Knowledge cannot be dismissed or negated. For example, when scientists want to send a spaceship to Neptune, they do not aim it at Neptune but send it toward another planet in the opposite direction. You say, "Hey, Neptune is over there!" But they do not listen. When it arrives it circles around planet X, picks up momentum and is shot off into the depths of space where there is nothing for a zillion light years. You cannot believe what they are doing because Neptune is presently a bit to the left of planet X. You politely mention it but they do not care. A few months later it enters the orbit of planet Y, picks up more momentum and is again shot off in a direction that has nothing to do with the present position of Neptune. After a year or two it meets up with Neptune right on schedule. You cannot count on personal experience as it is conditional and can be dismissed. If you relied on personal experience you would never get to Neptune. The odds of stumbling upon enlightenment are a million to one if you rely solely on your personal experience and the knowledge you extract from it.

Knowledge is object-dependent, not subject-dependent. Two plus two is four, no matter how you personally see it. Objects accelerate at thirty-two feet per second whether you are a Christian, Muslim or an Australian Aborigine. It has nothing to do with you. It is like sleep; a king sleeping on his silk sheets in the palace has the same experience as a drunk sleeping in his vomit in the gutter. When you realize the truth, you realize what everyone else realized. The idea that there is my truth and your truth does not work, because knowledge is object-dependent and there is only one self. Knowledge is valuable because nothing in this world is what it seems to be. The world of time, experience, is a world of appearances. If you take it to be real you will suffer. It does not exist apart from awareness. It seems to be real because you do not know who you are.

Awareness, you, is always here. You are always the same. You are what is real. You are the truth. Without you the world of appearances does not exist. Self

knowledge—I am awareness—is always good because the self is always free, and it is most desirable because freedom is our most cherished value. You can count on it because it never changes. You cannot dismiss it, because you, the object of knowledge, are always present and cannot dismiss yourself. If this knowledge “stands under” you, you are free. Hence, the path of understanding.

The scriptures that tout enlightenment as self realization or self knowledge are based on the contention that reality is non-dual, unlike the scriptures that tout experiential enlightenment. Non-dual reality means that there is only one principle operating in reality, not two or more, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. It means that the subject and the objects are actually non-different, although they seem to be different. Unlike experiential enlightenment, self realization is a hard sell because experience seems to completely refute it. We cannot be faulted for unthinkingly interpreting the information we get from our senses to mean that the subject is different from the objects. We are born into a world where everyone has unwittingly made this assumption. We are conditioned by it every minute of our lives because we accept our senses as our only means of knowledge.

Just as the scriptures on Yoga offer methods for experiencing the self, the scriptures on knowledge use a sophisticated methodology to reveal the self. This method, which will be unfolded throughout this text, is called self inquiry. We inquire because we want to know something. There is no contradiction between these two methods. Experience is not good and knowledge is not bad. Nor is experience bad and knowledge good. If the relationship between them is clearly understood, a great obstacle to enlightenment has been dismissed.

From the point of view of consciousness there is no difference between knowledge and experience. Knowledge is experience and experience is knowledge. What you see you know and what you know you see, because consciousness is all there is. But from the point of view of an individual seeking freedom, experience and knowledge are quite different. This is so because the individual experiences objects through the mind, which makes them seem to be something other than the mind, and the mind, based on past experiences, interprets what it sees as knowledge whether or not the knowledge is actually true to the object.

If we look at the claim of the proponents of the experiential view of enlightenment from the non-dual point of view, the attempt to gain the experience of consciousness, however I formulate it, is unnecessary. Why? Because, if there is only one self and it is everything that is, then everything I experience at any time or place can only be the self including me, the experiencer. In short, I am experiencing awareness because I am awareness. And because awareness is limitless it is always free. And because there is only awareness, I am already free. I do not need an experience to set me free. Therefore, the attempt to get a discrete experience of the self is gratuitous, like going out for a hamburger when you have a filet mignon in the refrigerator.

This may sound like the negative teachings of the instant enlightenment schools—there is nothing to do, no path, no teacher, no scripture, no this, no that, you are already enlightened—that have muddied the spiritual waters since time immemorial. The view from the self does negate everything, but negation is only the preliminary portion of the self inquiry story, as we will see. Neo-Advaita,<sup>5</sup> the latest iteration of the instant enlightenment idea, makes it the whole story because the teachers, all Westerners, never actually exposed their minds to the teaching tradition of the science of self inquiry<sup>6</sup> in a disciplined way. They kept a Western orientation and picked the easiest self serving teaching—not this, not this—from a guru who neglected to teach the complete science of consciousness, if he knew it at all, passing it off as the whole loaf. In fact the guru explicitly stated that he did not give the whole teaching as his disciples were not qualified.

In any case, one of the most important functions of the statement that reality is non-dual awareness and that if you exist, which you do, you can only be awareness, is to convince you that you do not have an experience problem as far as enlightenment is concerned. In fact, you cannot actually experience awareness as an object, because you are awareness. The best you can do is to experience its reflection in a pure mind. This can be a help or a hindrance, depending on what you make of it.<sup>7</sup> What use is it to try to experience awareness, if in fact everything that you experience within yourself and beyond the body is it?

If I am experiencing awareness all the time because it is me, then I have a knowledge problem, not an experience problem. If you do not realize that you have a knowledge problem, then unfortunately you will have to keep groping around in the experiential wilderness until you do realize it. “By knowledge alone is the self realized,” says Ramana Maharshi and innumerable texts of the science of self inquiry. When this fact has been properly assimilated, you are qualified for self inquiry.

So what is the knowledge that constitutes enlightenment? It is the hard and fast conviction based on direct observation that I am ever free awareness and not the body-mind. It is the understanding that I am everything that is. It is the rock solid conviction that no matter what happens, good or bad, I am completely OK. This knowledge frees the self from the belief that it is an individual, limited being and destroys its attachment to objects as defined in chapter 1.

The words *hard* and *fast* mean that binding fears and desires have been neutralized by the knowledge and that the pursuit of security, pleasure and virtue is no longer active. If you say you are enlightened but continue to chase and cling to objects in samsara, you are not enlightened. You may know who you are intellectually but you do not actually know who you are.

Enlightenment is the unassailable understanding that because you are eternal, you are completely secure. Wealth cannot make you more secure. It is the bedrock



knowledge that the pleasures available in the world of appearances are but dim reflections of the pleasure that you are. It means that you need not strive to be virtuous, because you are goodness itself.

## **The Value of a Means of Knowledge**

If you are in the middle of a non-dual epiphany, the self<sup>8</sup> does not suddenly appear and say, “Yo! Seeker! Pay attention. What you are experiencing is you, although it seems to be an object. I am telling you this so you will not try to repeat this experience once it ends. If you are wondering what to make of this experience I will tell you now. It means that you are whole and complete actionless awareness, just like me. It means that henceforth you will not desire or fear anything, because nothing can be added to you or taken away from you. If, when this experience wears off, you set out to get it back or do something with it, you have not properly assimilated the meaning of my words. Good luck.”

The self will not say this, because it sees you as whole and complete consciousness. The beliefs and opinions you picked up in life will not help interpret your epiphanies either, because you picked them up when you were ignorant of whom you are. You will see them as you want to see them, not as they are. Knowledge is seeing things as they are, not as how they appear to you. So to gain enlightenment you need to shed self ignorance and to do that, you need a proven means of self knowledge. It will help you make sense of what happens to you spiritually and otherwise.

Epiphanies are useful if they are accompanied by self inquiry. Self inquiry does not mean asking “Who am I?,” because the answer is known. If you have a doubt, a glance at scripture will set your mind at rest. You are awareness, not the person you have been led to believe you are. Self inquiry is a systematic body of proven knowledge that looks at experience and knowledge, from the point of view of consciousnesses and from all the basic samsaric reference points. It does not summarily dismiss experience and knowledge as illusion. It shows you that you are the big picture and if you cannot see yourself that way, it shows you how you fit into the big picture. You need an impartial guide, not your own interpretation of experience, because ignorance can make what is false seem to be real. You are the last person who should be an expert on who you are.

## **Enlightenment Myths**

If you can see that the question of freedom is due to a lack understanding, you will be open to a means of self knowledge. A means of self knowledge does not actually give you self knowledge, because everyone actually does know who they are, as will become apparent as we proceed. Unfortunately, there is usually a lack of clarity about the nature of the self, which impedes the full appreciation of it. This lack of clarity manifests as ill considered beliefs and opinions, particularly the belief that the self is limited. If you expose your mind to a time-tested, experienced based means of self knowledge, it will patiently strip away these beliefs and clarity will return. When the last vestige of ignorance is removed, you will realize that you knew who you were all along. You will find it amusing that you went through so much seeking to find out what you already knew.

We are going to accept the contention that reality is non-dual and examine a number of popular enlightenment teachings from the non-dual perspective. If they come up short as means of enlightenment, it does not mean that they have no value. Indeed, there is some truth to all of them and they may be useful in some form as practices that prepare the mind for self knowledge. If you find yourself attached to one or more of these beliefs, it will benefit you to consider them from the non-dual perspective. Ultimately, you will have to determine the nature of reality through your own investigation, but if your inquiry is disinterested, you can only come to one conclusion: "I am ever free awareness."

### *No Mind, Blank Mind, Empty Mind, Stopped Mind*

The experience of deep sleep and waking state epiphanies, characterized by an arrested mind, are probably responsible for the no-mind theory of enlightenment. In both cases no objects are present, or have been neutralized, so the mind—which is only capable of experiencing objects—is not there to own the experience. When the mind is reconstituted, it has no memory of the experience.

Because reality is non-dual the mind is actually the self, awareness, under the spell of ignorance. On the absolute level awareness knows that it experiences itself when the mind is both present and absent, but when it tries to express this at the mental level, all it can do is represent the experience as an empty or blank mind. This causes a problem because a blank mind is an object, albeit a subtle one. Therefore, to get back the experience of itself, the experience that it never lost, it thinks it needs to get a blank mind to experience what it is!

A simpler explanation for the idea that liberation is the elimination of all thoughts is the fact that the scriptures that comprise the science of self inquiry describe the self as thought free. But between two thoughts there is a tiny gap, an absence of thought. If the absence of thought for a split second is not enlightenment, the absence of thought

for an hour or two will not amount to the liberating knowledge “I am whole and complete actionless awareness.”

The most obvious defect of this theory is the fact that all enlightened beings think. As long as the mind is awake, it thinks. If you cannot accept this, the way around it would be to simply go to sleep as the mind is non-existent in sleep. But this kind of enlightenment is not terribly useful, because you always wake up.

As the self is always enlightened, the idea that “no mind” is enlightenment implies a duality between the awareness and thought. To say that the self is not experienceable when the mind is functioning means that the mind and the self enjoy the same order of reality, like a table and a chair. But experience shows that this is untrue. Do you cease to exist when you are thinking? Is there thought without awareness? In fact, thoughts come from you but you are much more than a thought. They depend on you but you do not depend on them.

Or, let us put it in a slightly different way. Let us say that you are awake and the mind is stopped. For you to know that it is stopped, you would have to be aware. Now, let us say that the mind is thinking. You would also have to be aware to know that it is thinking. In both cases, with and without thought I, awareness, am present. If I am aware when it is stopped and when it is thinking, I am not hidden by thought nor am I revealed by no thought. Whether they are present or absent, you, the ever-free, ever-present self, can always be directly known.

However, if I define enlightenment as an experience that is different from my waking, dream or deep sleep state experience, it can easily be hidden because it is not always present. Experience is always present because experience is the self even though the self is not experience, but the subsequent or next experience, mystic or otherwise, will always be hidden when the present experience is taking place.

Awareness, the self, is always present. It is self evident. It reveals itself. It is self experiencing. There is nothing you can do about it except know what it is and look for it. If your mind does not want to cooperate with your investigation, you may have to do some work to get control of it and direct it to the self. Nothing hides you from you, except ignorance. Action, removing thoughts, will not remove ignorance because action is not opposed to ignorance. It is ignorance of who I am that causes me to believe that I am hidden from myself and attempt the actions that I believe will stop my mind.

Ignorance exists as beliefs and opinions in the mind. It can only be destroyed by knowledge. Knowledge only takes place in the mind because the mind is the instrument of knowledge. So the mind needs to make an investigation to get rid of its ignorance. Just because awareness is subtler than the mind does not mean that the mind cannot, with the help of scripture, investigate it.

In fact, scripture is the result of the disinterested and successful investigations of untold numbers of minds over thousands of years. If you deny the existence of the

mind, then how can you even say that enlightenment is no mind? However, using the logic of its own experience, the mind can discover its inherent limitations and no longer support them. When ignorance is no longer supported by beliefs and opinions, it collapses under its own weight.

Thought is not the devil; it can reveal the truth. Self inquiry does not ask you to kill your mind and destroy your thoughts. It gives you the right self thought, and shows you how to use it, assuming you are seeking freedom. The right thought is *I am awareness*. The *I am awareness* thought is as good as awareness because when you think a thought, the mind goes to the object of the thought. The object of the *I am awareness* thought, the “I,” is awareness and it has to be present or thought cannot happen. So when you think *I am awareness* it turns the mind away from other thoughts, the mind goes to awareness and awareness is revealed. Try it.

It certainly makes sense to eliminate thoughts that are not in harmony with the nature of reality as such thoughts cause suffering. But it remains to be considered whether all thoughts are a problem. Must I get rid of kind, positive, compassionate, happy thoughts too? The thoughts that cause happiness do not stand in the way of enlightenment because a happy mind is perfectly suited for self inquiry.

The upside of this teaching: a modified version of the no-thought idea is very useful and will be discussed in detail later, but it is not enlightenment.

### *No Ego, Ego Death*

This popular so-called teaching vies with the no-thought teaching for top spot on the list of enlightenment myths. Before considering its value, we will be well served by exploring four definitions of the word *ego*.

The first definition is *that which identifies with any activity*. It is called the doer and its relationship to the self and enlightenment is explained in detail in chapter 7, “Inquiry into Karma and Dharma.”

The second definition is *embodied consciousness*, a conscious being with a body. Animals, insects, microbes and humans are embodied beings. You can even make a case that plants are embodied beings. Embodied beings are sometimes conceived as rays or emanations of formless consciousness, man cast in the image of God, and they seem to be separate from their source, consciousness. They seem to be separate if they are viewed from the point of view of their bodies, but viewed from the self’s point of view, they are non-separate. They do not stand in the way of consciousness because they are consciousness in form, just as waves do not stand in the way of the ocean. Humans are the only egos that think, although certain members of the animal kingdom seem to be evolving the capacity to think.

All embodied beings are the self, but an embodied human being can be enlightened or unenlightened. An enlightened being is one that knows, appearances to

the contrary notwithstanding, that it is not separate from consciousness, assuming as always that this knowledge has neutralized its binding likes and dislikes. An unenlightened being is someone who takes the appearance of separation to be real and is at the mercy of his or her binding likes and dislikes.

The third definition of ego, the “I” notion, relates exclusively to human beings because they are the only embodied beings that think. Dogs do not know they are dogs. They do not think they are better or worse than other dogs or any other embodied beings. Human beings, on the other hand, entertain all sorts of ideas about who they are. “I am rich, poor, gay, straight, intelligent, stupid, good, bad, Republican, Democrat,” etc. The list of identities that humans are capable of concocting is virtually limitless. All these identities are limited and fall under two categories: I am a knower or I am a doer/enjoyer. The doer is someone who identifies with an activity and thinks it is solely responsible for its actions, gross and subtle. The doer is a doer for the sake of the results of its actions—which it wishes to enjoy. When a doer enjoys the result of its actions, it becomes an enjoyer. The knower is the one who identifies with what it experiences and knows.

Aside from the fact that there is no evidence that such an “I” exists, the destruction of the notion that the “I” is limited is a restricted formulation of enlightenment because the absence of a limited identity does not equal enlightenment. If it did, plants and animals, even microbes, would be enlightened. And you would be enlightened in deep sleep because you are not an ego there. For enlightenment you need the hard and fast knowledge of who you are in the waking state. If you conflate ego death with enlightenment, you may very well find yourself a void. The life of a void is not particularly pleasant.

Assuming there is an ego that is standing in the way of enlightenment, the ego death teaching is still unworkable because it asks the ego to kill itself. If the ego is the embodied being, it would only kill itself if it thought that it would derive a benefit—such is the nature of egos—but most egos are smart enough to realize that if they do not exist, no benefits will accrue.

Also if ego is the “I” notion, it cannot kill itself, because it is not conscious. So on both counts, the idea comes up short. This leaves the Hollywood ending: the ego remains, gets the permanent enlightenment experience and enjoys endless experiential bliss.

In actuality, enlightenment is freedom from the “I” notion, not the embodied being. The embodied being is actually limitless consciousness with an incorrect understanding of its nature. For it to free itself from erroneous self notions, it should expose itself to the means of self knowledge and contemplate the teachings dispassionately. The death of the “I” notion happens as a result of self knowledge, not something you do.

What is self knowledge with reference to the ego? It is the knowledge that the embodied being is me but I am not the embodied being. This is tantamount to ego death because it shifts the ego from the center of consciousness to the periphery where it belongs, not that consciousness has a periphery. Self knowledge is the best of both worlds, not that there are two worlds, as it allows you to live freely as embodied consciousness, without suffering the results of actions.

Pride, the final definition of ego, does not relate directly to the question of enlightenment but bears mention nonetheless. Pride is willful ignorance of the fact that everything you take to be yours is actually borrowed from the world. If you are proud of your good looks, you need to realize that you had nothing to do with it. If you have a particularly brilliant mind, it was not created by you. If you are proud because you accomplished something, it was only because the world provided the opportunity. Pride is a problem for seekers because it supports the ego's notion of specialness, uniqueness and duality. Its absence, however, is not enlightenment. Many humble people have no idea who they are.

### *Nirvana*

This idea, explained above, is another negative formulation of enlightenment. *Nir* means *not* or *without* and *vana* means *a flame*. Fire is a common symbol of passion or desire so nirvana, which is meant to be enlightenment, is said to be a desireless state. Desire makes samsara go around and around. Desire includes fear, its kissing cousin. Fear that I won't get X equals desire for X. Desire to keep X equals fear of losing X.

This view is based on the idea that desire is suffering. It may take a while for the ego to completely assimilate this truth but it is obvious: if you want something, it means that you are not happy with what you have. If you are happy not being happy, fine, but normally people are not happy with unhappiness.

The same criticism raised against the no thought mind applies to the desireless mind. Desireless mind is an oxymoron. When, except during sleep, do you not want something? Even at the end of life you want to continue living, if life is still good, or to die if it is not.

On the surface the logic makes sense, but what is the cause of desire? Is it self-caused or is it the result of something else? If it is self-caused, then eliminating desire should eliminate suffering. But what if desire is an effect of self ignorance? Will removing the effect remove the cause? Will ignorance collapse when it is no longer supported by desire? Or will it just keep manufacturing more desires? In mythological literature there are many examples of the difficulty of removing desire, the Hydra for example. Cut off one head and another grows back, sometimes more than one. However, unreasonable it is as a definition of enlightenment, the upside of this idea is discussed in chapter 8.

It remains to be seen whether desire is only suffering. It is possible to entertain a desire and not be agitated by it. In fact, if desire disappeared altogether, the world as we know it would disappear, not that that is necessarily a worst-case scenario. It seems desire is the cause of much good and much evil. If I desire to develop a cure for cancer and enjoy my work, is this desire a problem? If I am building a bridge across a river and fear that it may collapse and take extra care to see that it is properly reinforced, is it a bad fear? Desire is just awareness functioning as the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. As long as my desires do not cause me to violate the physical and moral laws operating in the creation, why should I remove them? And finally, if I accept the contention that desire is suffering, how will I remove my desires without the desire to remove them? Why should the desire to remove them be less painful than the desires themselves?

You need not get rid of your desires to realize the self. You will have to get rid of the gratuitous desires that prevent you from making a dispassionate inquiry, but without a burning desire to know who you are, you will not have the perseverance necessary to overcome the many obstacles to self realization. When you realize who you are, you know that objects cannot complete you.

### *The Now*

Not to put too fine a point on it, the basic idea of the “now” teachings is: I am enlightened when I am present. Living in the past and the future means I am unenlightened. Aside from the fact that there is no time in our non-dual reality, let us inquire into this idea.

Does the word *now* refer to a period of time, which it certainly seems to, or is now a symbol for something else? If it refers to time, is there such a thing as objective time? If now is a period of time sandwiched between the past and the future, when does the past end and the now begin? When does the now end and the future begin? It is impossible to determine because time is relative to the desires and fears of individuals and to the relative intervals between experiences. If my desires are being met and I am enjoying, time passes quickly. If I am suffering terribly, time passes slowly. If different experiences occur in a rapid sequence, time passes quickly with reference to the observer. If the distance between two experiences is great, time passes slowly.

Are the past, present and future actual divisions in consciousness or only conceptual divisions? If time is objective, then everyone would be able to determine just when the past ends and the now begins. Furthermore, when I am in the now, how long does the now remain the now? Is it one second? Two? One minute? More? Assuming I am in the now and want to remain enlightened, I should have this information because when it ends, I need to avoid travelling into the future. Perhaps I

need to hop up out of the time continuum just before the end of the now and jump back into it just before the past appears, keeping in mind how much time passes until I have to hop out again. Even if I am sitting still in the now I need to worry about the past and the future creeping into it. It doesn't take an advanced degree to understand that in reality the past, present and future are just concepts that help individuals who are caught up in their desires and fears navigate through an apparently changing world.

Let's assume that there is only now. Am I ever out of it? Experience only takes place in the present. How can you experience the past if it is not here? You can experience a memory but the experience of memory does not take you to the past. The memory appears in awareness and is experienced now. The experience takes as long as it takes and means whatever it is interpreted to mean. The same logic applies to the future. Nothing is ever experienced in the future. You may think about something that you imagine will take place at another time but if it happens, it only happens in the present, when it appears in awareness.

Time is not linear. Objects appear in consciousness, last as long as they last with reference to your desires and then disappear back into consciousness. When they appear in that part of awareness called the mind, they seem to change, but in reality it is only the mind that changes.

If this is true, maybe *now* is a code word for the self, awareness. It is the humble opinion of the author that *now* is a misleading and inaccurate term for the self and should be banned from the spiritual debate because it is not helpful to refer to something that is eternal and out of time with a word that conveys a sense of time.

However, if now is a synonym for awareness, you still cannot be in the now because you are the now. Aside from the obvious duality of "in" and "out," to say that you are not in the now means that you are paying attention to a present thought that represents either of these two fictitious time periods and not to the one to whom these thoughts appear. And to say that you are not in the now, means that you take yourself to be something other than the awareness that you are. When I am "out" and want to be "in" effort is required, but awareness cannot be gained by action, so being in the now is not enlightenment or a valid means of enlightenment.

To complete this inquiry we need to ask what the word *in* means. To say that I am in or out of my self means that there are two selves, me and myself or, if you insist, the now. Experience shows that reality is non-dual, so there cannot be two selves. So who exactly is going into and out of the self? By taking reality to be a duality and using inaccurate words, we are simply confusing ourselves.

We need not dismiss this teaching completely because it has value as a practice for someone who thinks he or she is caught up in time, takes his or herself to be a doer, and is trying to gain a certain degree of mastery of the mind.



## *Experience of Oneness*

This idea suffers the problems of other experienced based teachings. The science of self inquiry uses the location of objects inquiry to show that there is no need to experience oneness with yourself or anything else—if you see otherness—because you are already experiencing oneness with yourself and everything.

How so? You are already experiencing oneness with everything because reality is non-dual. You are awareness and the objects are awareness. It is all you. If it seems that there is something other than you, consider this: how far is a wave from the ocean? How far is a gold ring from gold or a clay pot from clay? Every object is just awareness-consciousness in a particular name and form. A name and form cannot be separated from its substrate. How can you separate the pot from the clay?

There is no need, however, to take scripture and the author's contention about the non-dual nature of reality. Investigate on your own. Ask yourself where you experience objects. Do you experience them out there in the world or do you experience them in your mind? I experience them in my mind. How far is the object from your mind? Is it floating off the surface of the mind? No, it is not. Where is it then? It has merged into the mind and the mind has taken the shape of the object. The mind is formless, like water or air, and can take any form, just as gold can become any kind of object, a ring a bracelet or a necklace.

How far are you from your mind? Is your mind floating above the surface of your awareness? Is there a gap between you and your mind? Do you need a bridge to travel over the gap? Catch a flight, perhaps?

I do not. Why? Because my mind is me. It is awareness. If this is true, then what you experience is not only in awareness but it actually *is* awareness. The objects in awareness and the subject awareness are one. If this is true, then why do I need to experience oneness? I am already experiencing oneness with everything.

I want to experience oneness with everything when I am already experiencing oneness because I have identified with the thought of separation, which causes suffering. Instead of trying to remove the want by experiencing a particular situation, I should inquire into the thought of separation. Is it true? Am I really separate from myself? Or do I already have the bliss that the object is meant to deliver?

## *Transcendental State*

The mind is sandwiched between pure awareness and the material world. It is an interface or buffer through which awareness interacts with itself in the form of the gross elements.<sup>9</sup> It is awareness but awareness in a form called *chitta*. The *chitta* makes it possible for awareness to think, will, feel and remember. The mind is capable of a wide range of states, from the gross feelings associated with the physical body up

to the most mystical and sublime samadhis of Yoga. All states are in the mind and all change because they are in the dream of duality.

The self is non-dual and therefore it is out of time. It does not, nor can it, change. It is that because of which the mind's many states are known. It is conscious but states of mind are not conscious. They are subtle material energies capable of reflecting consciousness but they are incapable of thought or action.

The higher you go in the mind, the more ethereal and luminous the states become because they are further removed from the gross level. When you get to the interface between the self and the mind, the mind stuffs so refined and the self so close, that radiant light and intense bliss is experienced. It is very easy to mistake these higher states of mind for the self and think enlightenment is an amazing heavenly state or a state of endless experiential bliss. Experience belongs neither to the self nor to the mind. It occurs when awareness shines on the mind. Awareness and mind is the most fundamental duality.

It may seem like splitting hairs to distinguish these pure states of mind from the self but if you are chasing freedom, you can easily get sidetracked in the blissful mystic states because you become attached to them. Attachment to bliss is a problem because the mind, the instrument of experience, changes. Just when you are settling in for a nice long blissful experience, it morphs into another state. Nothing can be done about it because the states are governed by factors beyond human control.

So, enlightenment is not a transcendental state, a higher state, an altered state, the fourth state beyond waking, dream and deep sleep or any other kind of state. It is simple, unchanging awareness and cannot be directly experienced as an object as it is subtler than the mind, the instrument of experience. A subtle object can illumine a gross object but a gross object cannot illumine a subtle object, a fact that seems lost on the proponents of the experiential view. However, the self can be experienced indirectly as a reflection in a pure mind. It is possible to gain knowledge of the self through indirect experience with inquiry. This topic is discussed in detail in chapter 12.

### *Enlightenment as Eternal Bliss*

When someone accustomed to identifying with the ever changing content of the mind wakes up to non-duality, the awakening is interpreted as a very positive event. When the mind reasserts itself, agitation and dullness reappear; when agitation and dullness are no longer acceptable, the mind becomes a seeker. The feeling of peace and bliss, which is an interpretation of non-duality by the mind, is brought on by the absence of suffering and not because awareness feels good. If you have been suffering a toothache for days and the tooth is extracted, it is the absence of pain that feels good,

not the bliss of the extraction. You have actually just gone back to normal, not attained an exceptional state.

Enlightenment does not feel like anything. It is simply the hard and fast knowledge that I am limitless, partless awareness. When this knowledge is firm, it has a very positive effect on the mind but it does not convert the mind into an endless bliss machine. However, it infuses the mind with a sense of authenticity, wholeness and rock solid confidence. Henceforth the individual knows that it can weather any existential storm. When you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are awareness, you no longer desire to feel good because you know you are the source of goodness. This is not to say that a more or less constant feel good happiness is not possible. It can be attained by the consistent application of self knowledge to the mind or by the practice of the yogas discussed in subsequent chapters.

When enlightenment or self realization is touted as the experience of limitless bliss, it is usually believed that the bliss of the self is superior to the transitory bliss encountered in daily life. But all experiences of bliss, whether they are born of sensory experience, the discovery of some unknown object or spiritual practice like meditation, are the fullness and limitlessness of the self reflecting in the body-mind. The bliss belongs neither to the self nor to the body-mind. It belongs to the relationship between them.

### *Levels of Enlightenment*

If the problem of happiness is ignorance of my nature, and enlightenment is the hard and fast understanding that I am limitless, whole and complete, actionless, ever-free awareness, to say that there are stages of enlightenment is like saying that a woman can be a little bit pregnant. Everything is the light and the light falls equally on everything, so there is no standard for comparison.

Duality provides a basis for judgment, evaluation and comparison. When you are in duality you do not know who you are, so you are forced to evaluate yourself with reference to objects. You can compare yourself to an idea of what you want to be, to what you were yesterday, to other people or to absolutely anything. Seekers, worldly people dressed in spiritual clothing, evaluate themselves with reference to their idea of enlightenment as they perceive it to be embodied in themselves or in others.

An enlightened being is just the self functioning through a mind whose self ignorance has been removed. But the removal of self ignorance does not automatically remove the tendencies in the mind, although it eventually renders them non-binding, since they bind only because of self ignorance. Because all the mind's tendencies are equal from the self's point of view, it has no preference concerning the type of tendency it illumines. Therefore, it expresses through the existing tendencies. If you view clear water through a colored glass, it appears to be colored. If you view the self

through the mind, it appears to be a person with various tendencies. If the individual has been blessed with a very pure mind from birth, has had many epiphanies, is particularly single pointed in his or her pursuits or lives an austere and disciplined life, he or she will have radiance or charisma.

Radiance is awareness reflected on a pure mind. It so happens that many enlightened people do not have radiance, although many do. It is also a fact that many unenlightened people have radiance and many do not. Additionally, the quality of radiance is in time and is conditioned by two other qualities that render the mind less than radiant.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, because an individual is radiant, brilliant, powerful or compassionate, does not mean that he or she is enlightened. So while it is natural to associate radiance with enlightenment and try to correlate relative degrees of enlightenment with relative degrees of radiance, it is not a sign of enlightenment. Enlightenment is just the hard and fast experience-based knowledge “I am awareness.” Knowledge does not show and is therefore impossible to evaluate directly.

## **ENDARKENMENT**

To say that there are no levels of enlightenment is not to say that in samsara there are no stages of enlightenment. The first stage might well be called endarkenment. We come into this life experiencing limitlessness and oneness with everything but, because the intellect has yet to develop, we do not understand the nature of what we experience. When the intellect does develop it is trained to think of the self as a limited, incomplete, inadequate creature and encouraged to solve the problem of inadequacy by picking up experience in life. At a certain point, the individual comes to realize that no matter how much experience he or she can garner, the experienced objects and activities do not solve the happiness issue. This is usually an unpleasant realization and often results in profound disillusionment. It is frequently referred to as the dark night of the soul in religious literature or hitting bottom in popular culture.

Most react to this existential crisis by sinking into distracting habits, ingesting mind numbing substances or pursuing frivolous entertainments. But for unknown reasons, a few are blessed with a variety of peculiar and invariably confusing religious or spiritual experiences that lead them to the idea of God or the pursuit of the inner light or a higher state. At some point during this period the person becomes convinced that he or she can find happiness within or in a relationship with God.

## **SELF REALIZATION/SELF INQUIRY**

The second stage could be termed the seeking or questing phase, which heads off in two apparently different directions. The religious path leads to the development of a personal relationship with God, who is usually conceived as a pure and perfect

someone other than one's self. The idea of the self as inadequate, incomplete and separate is retained and the self is thought to be corrupted by sin. Salvation is meant to lie in invoking the grace of God through prayer and the study of scripture as well as working hard here on earth for a place in an afterlife far from this vale of tears. The religious life offers a positive, if somewhat intellectually challenged, alternative to the belief in the world as a source of meaning.

The other branch of the road leads in a less doctrinaire and belief-laden direction to the experience of the inner world and an investigation of the self. In its worldly form, it may incline one to the study of psychology but it can as well lead to various epiphanies that give rise to the conviction that the truth dwells within, as the higher or inner self or as a transcendental state of consciousness. The changes that take place in an individual's world view during this phase are often referred to as awakening.

Although the experience of the inner self is invariably uplifting and intensifies the quest, it is always confusing because the knowledge gained from these experiences challenges the view of oneself as a needy, incomplete, inadequate isolated creature. Many of these experiences can accurately be described as the experience of oneness with all things, limitlessness, and transcendent bliss.

During this stage, which might also be called the meditation stage, the mind, formerly riveted on happenings in the outer world, turns inward and fixes itself on the self, the light within, and at some point, usually after intense investigation, realizes the self. This realization is invariably formulated in experiential terms and is thought by many to be the end of the search, the ultimate state. But the science of self inquiry says that while this is a welcome and enjoyable state, it is not the end, because there is still a sense of separation between the experiencer and the object of experience, the self. When there is separation there is doubt, and the doubt is always that this state, like all states, will end, plunging the experiencer back into darkness. This fear is invariably fulfilled as the experience is not the direct experience of the self, which is impossible for reasons already discussed, but a reflection of the self in a still mind. No blame. However, the mind is subject to change, so the experience inevitably ends.

This doubt is due to the failure of the experiencer to understand that what is experienced is just his or her own self, in which case it could never be lost, because when do you not exist? The failure to convert the experience to knowledge is usually caused by the twin beliefs that knowledge is merely intellectual and that there is such a thing as a permanent experience. Experience is permanent in samsara but discrete experiences are not. So when the experience happens, the intellect is submerged in the bliss, peace and radiance, switches off, as it does in most intense sensuous experiences, and stops inquiring.

To enter the final stage, which is not a stage, inquiry must continue during the experience of the self. In ordinary perception, a thought wave arises in the mind corresponding to the nature of the perceived object. You see a tree and you know it is

a tree because the self, awareness, illumines the tree thought as it arises in the intellect. Similarly, when the ego experiences the reflection of the self in a pure mind, a thought corresponding to the nature of the self, an unbroken “I” thought, arises, and this thought needs to be owned. When it is taken as one’s own, the “I” thought, backed by experience, destroys the notion in the mind that it is limited, incomplete and separate.

## **ENLIGHTENMENT**

At this point, due to inquiry, everything stops and there is a subtle shift. The ego and the self switch places. The self, which heretofore had mistakenly been seen as the object of inquiry, “becomes” the subject, and the ego, which had mistakenly been taken to be the subject, “becomes” the object. This knowledge/experience never changes, because it was obtained through the realization that although what I experience is me, I am always free of what I experience. In other words, I “become” the self. Unlike a discrete experience of the self, self knowledge can never be lost, because it is not separate from me, awareness, the basis of everything. In fact, there is no actual transformation of the ego into the self because the ego cannot be transformed in so far as it is only a belief that the self is limited. The becoming is in terms of understanding and the understanding transforms your understanding of the relationship between the subject and the objects. It confirms the actual truth of experience by destroying the false belief that the self is an object. You see that there are no objects, that there is only the self.

But we said that reality is non-dual. If it is non-dual and enlightenment is non-dual wisdom, how do we account for the subject-object distinction when one is enlightened? We said that the object becomes the subject and the subject becomes the object and this never changes. There should be no subject and no objects.

When you view water on the surface of the desert you know that it is not water. It is experienced as water but you will not try to drink it because you know it is apparent water. When you realize who you are, subject and object remain but they are known to be apparently real. It is only when you take the subject-object distinction to be real that you pursue happiness in samsara and suffer accordingly.

## **SEVEN STAGES OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

Within this general outline seven stages can be delineated: ignorance, obscurity, superimposition, indirect knowledge, direct knowledge, the cessation of grief and the rise of perfect satisfaction.

Ignorance of the self causes obscurity and superimposition. Obscurity is the self identified with the belief that there is no self and revealed by the fact that the individual pursues happiness solely in the world of objects, even though the self itself

*image  
not  
available*

In these chronocentric times, it may be hard to believe that a solution to the fundamental problems of existence has been with us for thousands of years. It is hoped that the reader will overcome any resistance to this wisdom because of its seemingly foreign origin. In fact, self inquiry evolved long before the nation state existed and before the ideas of East and West had meaning. Self inquiry is the science of consciousness. Consciousness is everything that is. It transcends time and space. If you believe that the ancients were intellectually and spiritually primitive and concerned only with parochial interests, exposure to self inquiry will quickly disabuse you of that notion. You may rather conclude that *we* are intellectually and spiritually challenged.

In a footnote at the beginning of the last chapter, I pointed out that Sanskrit arose out of the need of untold numbers of subjective scientists to communicate the nature of consciousness to others and that it has an established terminology for expressing their findings. Having said that, I have employed Sanskrit terms only when an English equivalent is obviously insufficient. I also explain these terms in English as I go, to give the reader a clear idea of the topic under consideration.

In any case, self inquiry looks like a philosophy or a school of thought because it is comprised of a body of ideas that originated in the Vedas, about which more will be said presently. Intellectuals to whom the self had never revealed itself assumed that self knowledge was just another philosophy and attributed differing interpretations about the nature of reality to different teachers, and so it became several schools of thought for them. Had they understood that self inquiry is simply a means of self realization, this misconception would not have arisen. In any case, at some point self inquiry was divided into several schools: dualism, qualified non-dualism and non-dualism.

Contrary to the prevailing belief, the word *non-dual* is not an adjective meant to modify a particular type of self inquiry; it is a word that describes the nature of the self. Keeping in mind that words are always symbols, although non-dual implies dual, it is more appropriate to refer to the self as non-dual than as one because one is a number that implies two, many, and even zero, nothing. Furthermore, it would be inappropriate to label self inquiry, which is merely a means of self knowledge, as non-dual, as it is a dualistic device operating in a dualistic situation, one that ironically delivers non-dual knowledge. If you take self inquiry to be a philosophy, then you might count yourself as a follower of one of its schools or some other path altogether. But a means of knowledge is not a belief or dogma that an individual follows; it is a tool that makes understanding possible.

Because of the cryptic nature of the statements that contain the ideas of self inquiry, the subtle nature of the subject matter—awareness/consciousness—and the fact that a single Sanskrit word often has many possible meanings, it is possible for



people to interpret the statements of self inquiry's source texts<sup>12</sup> differently. Over the course of time, a number of teachers have interpreted them in different ways. But this does not amount to different schools of thought, because all of them accepted self inquiry as a means of self knowledge.

So if self inquiry did not come from the minds of humans, how did it get here? In the beginnings of history did somebody stumble on a capsule from outer space, sitting in the Himalayan snows, that contained the teachings with a note, "This is the truth. Pass it on to human beings. It will set them free."?

If it did not come from the human mind, then perhaps it came through the human mind. This idea is equally problematic. Clean water passing through a dirty pipe will be contaminated by its passage through the pipe. Invariably, when someone claims to be a channel for the truth, some of the channel's ignorance wears off and pollutes it. It is not clear who wrote the Old Testament, but it is a good example of truth and ignorance sitting side by side. God, "The Eternal," kindly leads the Israelites out of the darkness. However, when Moses asks him what to do about another tribe that is getting in the way of their march to the "land of milk and honey," which is a symbol for freedom, he says to kill them. Evidently, The Eternal is an "us and them" kind of god. Channeled information also presents the same problem that philosophies present. Channel A sees it one way and channel B another.

If it did not come from humans and it did not come through humans, how did it get here? It was "seen." It was "heard." It was revealed. It came from an objective source. It came to me, not from me or through me. I saw it. I heard it. The people to whom it was revealed are called seers. It is important to understand that these seers were not mystics. They were ordinary people who were called mystics by other ordinary people who didn't understand what the seers saw or heard. It was a mystery to them. Seer is not an identity. Mysticism is not an occupation. Seeing happens. It can happen to anybody, anywhere.

If the truth does not come from us but to us, then it is possible for everyone to whom it has been revealed, assuming there is nothing wrong with their minds, to agree on what it is. This is how the science of self inquiry developed. Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of minds experienced consciousness, the self, with and without objects, and verified the knowledge of the previous generations. Because it is objective, personal views that inevitably try to gain a foothold stick out like a sore thumb. Consequently, they are easy to identify and reject. If Einstein saw the truth of relativity and said it was  $E=MC^2$ , and others did the calculations according to the rules of mathematics and arrived at the same result,  $E=MC^2$  is the truth. If a scientist, using his or her own rules, claims that  $E=MC^3$  is the truth, we can take it only as a belief or an opinion. If self inquiry says consciousness alone is real and the world is an apparent reality and it has been confirmed independently by countless individuals over

millennia, it is true. As is true with any science, individuals who have realized the truth and understand the importance of keeping the science pure become its guardians. They continually refute erroneous notions with reference to the original non-dual vision: thus the science retains its purity.

Different minds may see the truth from different angles and express it in different ways, but this only enriches and enhances the means of knowledge, as long as the fundamental vision conforms to tradition and the nature of reality. It is important to know this about self inquiry because it gives an objective standard by which an individual can evaluate his or her experience. Nowadays you have many individuals claiming to be enlightened who rain down what they call the truth, without so much as a nod to the grand tradition of self knowledge, perhaps because they are unaware of it; although it seems more likely that personal motivations are at work.

Everyone is awareness, but not everyone understands this fact and its importance. Even a person who actually does know who he or she is will be an ineffective communicator if his or her words do not conform to tradition. Undeniably any Tom, Dick or Harry who has had a major non-dual epiphany, which is just consciousness recognizing itself, is attractive and inspired, at least for a while. Without reflection and without considering how the words stack up against an impartial source, the individual may believe that he or she speaks the truth. People are lifted up by the inspiration and fail to detect the ignorance that inevitably contaminates the words. They will suspiciously check their bank statements to make sure they have not been cheated, but will swallow the inspired words of so-called enlightened beings without question.

Revelations of non-duality cause a problem. Once the revelation is over and you return to your normal state of mind, doubts arise. “Is it really true that I am non-separate from everything? Is it true that I am not this body-mind assemblage? Perhaps that experience was just a hallucination.” If you expose your mind to the means of self knowledge, it will either validate or invalidate the conclusions you have come to as a result of your experience. If it validates your understanding, you gain confidence. If it does not, you have been saved from a mistake. Unfortunately, individuals who have seen the light tend to entertain grandiose ideas about their self worth and are usually loathe to subject their visions to scrutiny.

When self inquiry actually began is anybody’s guess. It may have begun when the inner eye of the first human opened and saw the whole luminous creation sitting in the Heart Cave shining “like a city in a mirror.” Somehow the wonder of it—that this whole universe lives in me, that it is me!—inspired the words necessary to communicate it to others. It must have happened like that, because the science of self inquiry says that the world is there because I see it. To our everyday way of thinking this view is patently absurd, although on investigation it turns out to be true. We are quite convinced that we see the world because it is there.

*image  
not  
available*

## Knowledge Yoga



Devotional yoga transforms emotion into devotion, action yoga exhausts subconscious tendencies, the yoga of the three gunas transforms anything on any level, and knowledge yoga utilizes the intellect's power of discrimination, analysis and inquiry—guided by scripture's proven teachings—to separate awareness and the objects appearing in awareness. As long as confusion between the self and objects obtains, the individual remains bound to objects. Freedom is freedom from dependence on objects.

As we know, knowledge—not experience—destroys ignorance. Experience of the self in the form of its reflection in an arrested mind will result in enlightenment, assuming the knowledge “I am whole and complete, actionless awareness” arises and is completely assimilated. Unless you understand that enlightenment is self knowledge however, you will probably not take the self as your primary identity. The spiritual world is little more than hundreds of thousands of individuals whose sense of limitation has survived epiphanies too numerous to mention. Knowledge born of inquiry is not a one-off. It requires constant practice, until the last vestiges of duality are removed.

Because the intellect is the self's subtlest function, it is the most influential. Emotion and action proceed from thought, because the mind and the body are down line from the intellect. Even impulsive, emotionally inclined individuals, who seem to react irrationally at every opportunity, are motivated by ideas. They do not realize it, however, because their attention is extroverted, making them incapable of introspection. Self ignorance manifests first as confused and unrealistic thinking. It subsequently trickles down to disturb and delude the emotions and eventually contaminate the individual's contact with the world. Because it eliminates incorrect,

When the knowledge that friction is caused by an improper understanding of the nature of reality and is a symptom of self ignorance becomes established in the mind, our daily sufferings become an instruction to turn our attention to the self. Any point of conflict is an opportunity to practice knowledge. When you really understand that self ignorance is the cause of suffering, you become powerless to act, think and feel in any way that is contrary to the truth of who you are. If self knowledge is merely intellectual, it is certainly superior to any other kind of knowledge.

Self knowledge is not “intuitive” knowledge either. Self knowledge cannot be negated because the object of knowledge is always present and eternal. But intuition, which is a subtle perception, is unreliable because it is subject to error. It may tell you one thing about an object one moment and something else later. Although the notion of predetermination is as old as the hills, recent studies have shown that your mind is made up before you make it up. In some way you know what is going to happen—or the nature of a particular object—before you think you know. When the mind is particularly still, it may present this unconscious determination to the conscious mind as a flash of insight or as a very subtle attraction or aversion. The value that an individual places on intuition is often connected to anxiety about what is happening or about to happen. If the karma yoga attitude is in place, any outcome is acceptable, because the goal is not to obtain a particular result, but to neutralize likes and dislikes, in this case the anxiety about what will be. Knowledge of reality is required to make sense of our intuitions. Finally, the karma yoga attitude is based on incontrovertible hard and fast knowledge of reality: the doer is not the giver of results.

To gain the vision of non-duality, words are extremely helpful. The argument that enlightenment only happens in silence is untrue, because silence is not opposed to ignorance. If inquiry takes place in silence, it may result in enlightenment. But words are much more likely to result in enlightenment, because they can function as vehicles for knowledge. Only knowledge cancels ignorance.

Self inquiry uses many negative words to reveal the self, because awareness is not an object of a given word. It is the awareness in which words arise. It is simultaneously everything and free of everything, so what word can describe it? To say that it is beyond everything is not correct, because awareness is everything. It has no qualities or attributes, so what can be said except that it has no qualities or attributes? We cannot use words to directly describe awareness, because it is not the ostensible meaning of any word.

Even though words need objects and the self cannot be objectified, words can be used in such a way that their implied meaning reveals the self. Because the perceiver cannot see the self, words are required to reveal it. The words of scripture come from awareness. Awareness knows itself and knows that some part of it does not know. Because it is limitless, it has the power to seemingly not know itself and to evolve the teachings that can remove its seeming ignorance. In any case, certain experiential

things cannot be described in words, like love. The only way it can be known is through experience. But experiential knowledge does not apply to awareness, because it is the essence of every experience and as such, cannot be turned into an object.

Therefore, how are you going to see awareness? You cannot see awareness just as you cannot see your eyes, because whatever self is seeing now is awareness. The fact that you see means that you have eyes. All that can happen is that awareness recognizes itself. The right words can bring about recognition. So when we say that awareness cannot be described, it can only be the implied meaning of a word, not the direct meaning. For instance, as you read the words on this paper, it seems that you are only experiencing the words, but if you investigate the situation you will see the existence of words implies the existence of paper. The paper provides the context for the experience of the words. They are separate from the paper, but they are also not separate from the paper either, because they cannot exist without the paper. It is important to understand this point, because if awareness is not available through words, what is the point of the scriptures that make up the science of self inquiry?

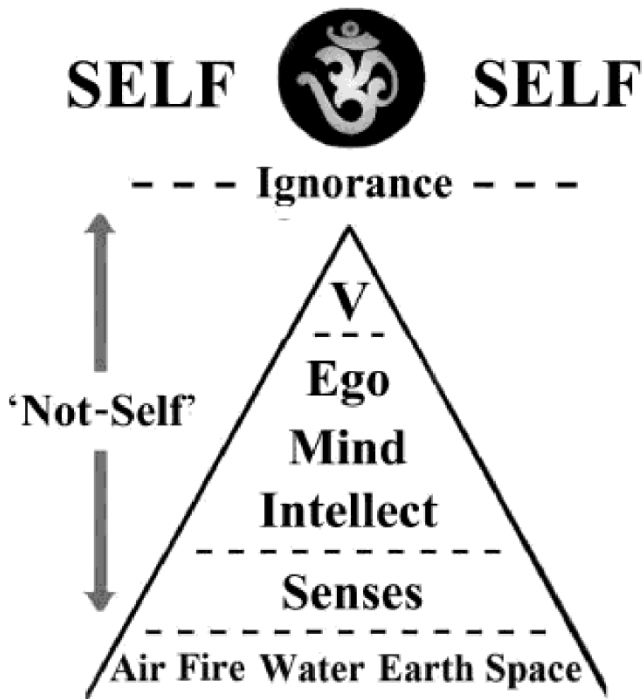
Perhaps you would like to argue that the implied meaning of words cannot give direct knowledge. If a black dog is chasing its tail next to a black chair, and you say “the black is chasing its tail,” I understand by the context that the black dog, not the black chair, is chasing its tail. In this case, direct knowledge is delivered by implication, even though the word *black* refers to a color, not a dog. Scripture says that the self is neither near, nor far; that it is neither inward turned consciousness, nor outward turned consciousness, nor a mass of consciousness. This does not describe it directly but by contemplating the words, the implied meaning becomes clear.

Words convert experience into a language that can be helpful for negotiating the body and mind through life. Ideally, we would understand the abstraction involved and not take the words to be accurate descriptions of what is experienced. But we often imagine that the way the mind describes experience is true to experience. When consciousness, under the spell of ignorance, perceives an object, it creates a word, an “I,” that is apparently separate from the object. The statement “I see you” is not the experience of seeing you. The experience of seeing you is the experience of the self seeing the self in the form of an object. It is therefore assumed that the mind is the problem, as far as the realization of the self is concerned. And since the currency of the mind is words, it is assumed that both the mind and its words are the problem. But they are not the problem. The concepts that it has abstracted from its experience are in conflict with what is actually experienced. Experience will not rid the mind of erroneous notions. Only knowledge will. And knowledge comes in the form of words. So we need words that destroy ignorance. We need a word mirror that destroys belief or converts beliefs to knowledge and reveals reality as it is.

Even if you are dying of thirst and see a lake on the desert, you will not try to drink the water, because you know it is unreal. This is called conditioned superimposition. The self is known but the world remains, apparently, but not actually, conditioning it. In other words, you can go about your life as usual when you know that you are awareness, minus the suffering that was brought on by the confusion between the self and objects.

## **The Practice of Knowledge**

The practice of knowledge is discrimination. Discrimination negates superimposition. Because the self is not known, the gross, subtle and causal bodies are assumed to be real. To take them to be the self causes suffering, because they are only apparently real. Reality, awareness, is always present and never changes. The three bodies are “not-self.” They are to be negated, until identification with them and attachment to them is dissolved. Identification and attachment to the apparently real prohibits identification with the real. Non-attachment is not merely the intellectual conviction that the states, bodies, and objects are unreal, but it is the experience of freedom arising from the destruction of one’s connection to them. Of course they are not “not-self,” because reality is non-dual, but some part of you does not appreciate this fact, so you have to go through this process until you do, assuming you want to be free.



The three bodies are often referred to as sheaths, in the sense that they hide or cover the self. In fact, the self is self evident and cannot be covered by anything, but attachment to thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations keeps attention on them and not on the self. To reuse an example, although I cannot actually read the words on this page without experiencing the page, my focus on the words keeps me from appreciating the presence of the page. To know the background of my experience, my perceptions, sensations, thoughts and feelings need to be separated from it. Discrimination is not an experiential separation of the subject from the objects, astral travel or an out of body experience. The self cannot be taken out of the bodies because it was never in them in the first place, although often when the self is realized, it seems like an experiential shift, because we are so deeply accustomed to take the physical body as our point of reference. The shift is purely in terms of understanding although inquiry is also experiential, in so far as effort is involved and there is a positive result every time the not-self is dismissed. In fact, the bodies are “in” the self, in the sense that they are within the scope of awareness, not outside it, even though they appear as objects.

Discrimination is not intellectual; it is experiential. But ironically, it works only if experience is negated. To negate experience, you have to have had enough experience to have become disillusioned by experience. If you still entertain doubts about the